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Classics of British Literature

Scope:

This course could as properly be titled *A History of British Literature*, in that it is sequential and essentially “historical”—historical, that is, in two senses. It follows the trajectory of literary achievement from earliest to latest times in a progressive line, and its basic presupposition is that literature cannot be (and *should* not be) examined outside the historical circumstances in which it came into being. Of course, great literature is timeless. That is one of the main connotations of the word *classic*. Shakespeare, for example, is “for all ages.” But it is vital, while appreciating that universal, transcendent, and classic quality of literature, to appreciate, as fully as one can, the conditions that gave birth to these works of literature, to reinsert them, that is, back into history. This is one of the principal aims of this “historical” course.

Literature, as an object of study, is dependent on texts—vehicles that give the literary work permanence. We can understand oral literature, the pre-textual literary universe, only insofar as it has been preserved through time and ultimately inscribed. English literature (a deceptively simple term) begins with the transcription (three centuries or so after its composition) of the great Anglo-Germanic epic *Beowulf*. This magnificent poem (authorless, from our perspective) exemplifies one of the foundational principles of this course: namely, that we can find “classic” quality at any point along the 1,300-year arc from *Beowulf* to the present day.

The dawn of British literature is obstructed by Anglo-Saxon—the early English dialect in which *Beowulf* is written. Nonetheless, enough of the essence of the work comes through in translation for us to appreciate it. There is no such obstruction with the true father of English literature (it will, alas, be some centuries before a mother appears), Geoffrey Chaucer. With Chaucer, a keynote is struck: the idea that great literature is supremely enjoyable, indeed, laugh-out-loud enjoyable, even after half a millennium. But how, given the cultural, social, and national turbulence of the 14th century could such a masterwork as *The Canterbury Tales* happen? To ask the question and investigate the issue is to enrich still further one’s appreciation of the work.

Edmund Spenser, it is fair to say, could never have written his great chauvinistic epic *The Faerie Queene* did he not have Chaucer on which to build. Likewise, Shakespeare could not have created the plays that are commonly regarded as

the highest ever achievement of British literature did he not have Chaucer, Spenser, the early “Miracle” street drama, and above all, Christopher Marlowe from which to work.

Classic literature will always strike us as unique, but it has its roots in earlier literature, and it responds, livingly, to the world around it. Shakespeare’s drama, for example, is as much a product of London, the London stage, and the extraordinary florescence of the English language as it is the sole creation of a glover’s son in the provincial town of Stratford.

The early modern period, a period in which England (an insignificant, small, cold island off mainland Europe) was establishing itself as a world power, saw the birth (or renaissance) of a world-significant literature. The creators of this literature fondly believed that it could rival the achievements of ancient Rome and Greece and excel the current achievements of Italy and France.

Jewels in the English Renaissance literary crown feature the King James Bible (to this day, the most read work of English literature); the work of the so-called Metaphysical poets, who raised wit to hitherto unscaled heights; and Milton’s supreme religious epic, justifying the “ways of God to men,” *Paradise Lost*. For this poem, Milton created a diction that is both idiosyncratic and artistically necessary. *Paradise Lost* exemplifies another basic tenet of the course, that we must labor (pleasurable labor that is) to read these works on their own terms.

Lecture One

Anglo-Saxon Roots—Pessimism and Comradeship

Scope: We begin this course with a brief look at some of the ideas embodied in the phrase “English literature.” Of course, literature existed long before England did and before printing. The texts we will read in this lecture largely come from a tradition of oral poetry. We’ll look at the characteristics of Anglo-Saxon poetry, specifically, alliteration, half-lines, and a pattern of four stresses per line, as we read *Caedmon’s Hymn*, *The Seafarer*, and portions of *Beowulf*. This poetry also gives us some idea of the overriding mood of Anglo-Saxon oral literature, a worldview of tough pessimism tempered by the virtues of comradeship. We close with an in-depth look at *Beowulf*, the foundational text of English literature and a text that we modern readers can enjoy and connect with, centuries after it was written.

Outline

I. The phrase “English literature” is so familiar that we rarely feel impelled to unpack it. But if we pause to consider what we mean by English literature, it’s anything but simple.

A. Of course, literature existed before England. Literature also existed in the form of oral epics, elegies, and ballads before these things were printed in books.

B. English literature is not the same thing as literature in English. American literature, for example, is not simply English literature written and published in the United States.

C. In 2005, the listeners of the BBC radio program *Today* voted William Shakespeare the greatest Briton who had ever lived. It was believed that he most embodied the soul of Britain.

1. Linguists have said that a language is a dialect with an army behind it, and one might adapt that quip by defining literature as writing with a national state behind it. More importantly, literature is embedded in the nation, as the heart is embedded in the body.

2. In the wide-ranging remarks found in these lectures, it is not merely the words on the page that we shall be considering, but the United Kingdom itself in its most revealing aspect, its inner self, its soul.

D. In *The Poetics*, Aristotle, our first great literary critic, makes the claim that literature is truer than history. History, the chronicle of events that actually happened, is shackled to the accidental and incidental. Literature, however, can penetrate to the heart of the human condition. It can generalize. It can extract the truth.

II. Our course will begin with the first milestones on the long, winding path of English literature—primarily the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* but also some other works of poetry.

A. Karl Marx wondered how a society as primitive as Periclean Athens could produce literature as

sophisticated as *Oedipus Rex*.

1. Marx offered by way of explanation his law of uneven development. Primitive, preindustrial communities can produce perfect works of art, as perfect as anything we can produce.
2. Most people coming to *Beowulf* experience a similar reaction. We wonder how such a complex and, in its own terms, perfect work of literary art could be produced by a primitive tribal community.

B. Much ancient English literature has been lost or exists only in fragments, but we can recover some aspects of how it was put together.

1. The greatest work of the early period of English literature was the creation of minstrels or *scops*.
2. Early literature was sung, recited, or spoken, not written or printed.
3. Oral literature is fragile, and it presumes a different author-audience relationship. It is literature of the ear as much as the eye.
4. Typically, oral literature is a communal, not a private, experience.

C. The first text on which the structure of English literature rests—*Beowulf*—dates from around the 6th century, during the Dark Age that fell after the exodus of the Romans from the British Isles. This period was too chaotic for literature, which requires a certain stability.

1. The Romans left, however, one monument behind them, the Latin language, used by the one beacon of light and learning in these dark times, the church. The church was tolerant, although not entirely sympathetic, to pagan literature.
2. During this same time, England was under invasion by the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Danes, and Vikings. These newcomers brought with them a tribal, oral literature.
3. Of course, the Christian missionaries who came to England brought with them the Bible, and inevitably, long-rooted pagan traditions collided with Christian orthodoxies.
4. The result was a kind of clash of civilizations that would energize and cross-fertilize language and literature up until 1066, when the Normans came to England.

III. The church was the foundational institution in these early centuries, based on monasteries and abbeys.

A. These communities encompassed farms, schools, and vineyards and were supported by taxes or tithes. Within their walls, monasteries were sites of higher learning. Above all, these communities were, until the bureaucratic Normans came in the 11th century, the nation's chroniclers.

B. The institutional language of the church was Latin; nonetheless, the primal text in English literature, *Caedmon's Hymn*, is in the vernacular.

C. The Venerable Bede (672/73–735), a monk at the Northumbrian monastery of Saint Peter in the 8th century, tells us about Caedmon in his *Ecclesiastical History*.

1. Caedmon was an Anglo-Saxon herdsman, working in the fields around the monastery at Whitby. He was illiterate and ignorant of the art of song. After supper, when the harp was passed around among the herdsmen to entertain one another, Caedmon would slink away.
2. According to Bede, Caedmon was given the art of song in a dream. He went on to become a zealous monk and an inspirational religious poet in his own Anglo-Saxon tongue. The hymn we have is his only surviving work.

D. How could the Dark Ages produce something so impressively literary as this hymn? Further, how could it be produced, not from the mouth of some privileged noble or prince of the church, but by an ordinary laboring man, who had no claim to education at all?

1. Anglo-Saxon literature is principally poetic, largely because its continuity depended on the *scop* or the singer.
2. This poetry does not use rhyme, nor does it obey the complicated metrics of Latin prosody. It is composed in half-lines, units that make memorization easier, and these half-lines are divided by a silent pause or *caesura*, a “cut.” The poetry is alliterative, meaning that the first letter or consonant of every word meets with the next consonant of the next word.

3. This poetry is organized around stress, not syllables.

a. Consider the line “This is the house that Jack built” from an English nursery rhyme. In reciting the line, an English speaker will stress two words and understress the rest: “This is the *house* that *Jack* built.”

b. A 10-syllable line (pentameter), as spoken in English, will divide naturally into two half-lines, each containing two stresses. For example: “To *be* or not to *be*, that is the *question*.”

c. Half-lines and organization by two stresses per half-line are found in both English and American poetry to the present day. These features give the poetry its “Englishness.”

IV. The poetry of Anglo-Saxon England, the period roughly from the 8th to the 11th centuries, falls into distinct genres, or styles, including hymns or secular songs; elegies, that is, short poems of poignant loss; riddles and other minor works; and of course, epics, such as *Beowulf*.

A. Elegies are less heroic than stoic. They celebrate suffering nobly borne. In two of the greatest of them, *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, the singers are men who have lost their ring-givers (*thegn*, or chief), and with that, their communities.

1. The great modernist poet Ezra Pound gave us a beautiful translation of *The Seafarer* that is true to both the alliteration and the two-stress half-line of the original.

2. In this translation, note the compound “bitter breast-cares,” the technical term for which is a *kenning*. As we’ll see, these are a prime feature of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

B. As the lines from these poems testify, the invaders who came from Friesland and northern Germany brought, along with their swords and chain mail, a somber view of life, a kind of tough pessimism.

1. A line in *Beowulf* sums up this overriding mood: “*Wyrd bith full aread*,” “Fate will be fulfilled.”

2. For these pioneers, life was a constant battle against the elements, monsters, their fellow men, and nature. But in that battle, it was believed, the greatness of humanity would shine brightest.

3. We see this view in the late heroic Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Battle of Maldon*, which recounts an 11th-century invasion by the Viking heathens. The English are defeated in this battle, but they go down with defiance and courage.

C. Not all Anglo-Saxon verse was somber. We have a whole library of verse riddles from what must have been an Anglo-Saxon joke book.

1. Riddle 82, written in verse, asks readers to identify a creature with one eye, two feet, 1,200 heads, a back and a belly, two hands, two arms, two shoulders, one neck, and two sides.

2. What was this strange creature? A one-eyed garlic seller.

D. This poetry had more than one mood, but the strongest moods are found in the epic narratives, which also convey an overwhelming sense of the virtue of comradeship, based on the sword.

V. We have *Beowulf*, the only surviving Anglo-Saxon or Germanic epic, in something like the form in which it was first recited as a result of an almost miraculous series of accidents.

A. *Beowulf* was composed for recitation, probably in the 6th century, by pagan newcomers from the northeast. It was handed down through generations of minstrels until it was transcribed by a monk, who couldn’t resist interpolating Christian doctrine at various points.

B. The 3,000-line narrative is divided into two parts; the first part is twice as long as the second.

1. Beowulf is a Geat, a member of a tribe in what is now Sweden. He is a mighty warrior, not yet a king but destined to be one.

2. In the first part of the epic, Beowulf comes to Denmark to help Hrothgar, king of the Scyldings, whose great hall has been terrorized by a monster, Grendel, for 12 years. Beowulf defeats both Grendel and the monster’s mother, and there follows feasting, drinking, and treasure giving before Beowulf sails back to his own people.

3. In the second part of the epic, which takes place many years later, Beowulf is king of the Geats, but now his kingdom is being terrorized by a dragon. Beowulf slays the dragon but is mortally wounded, and

the poem ends with Beowulf's burial.

C. Readers who come to *Beowulf* for the first time usually have two very different reactions. The first is incomprehension; the language is so foreign that it jars. The second reaction is just the opposite. Even for someone who has not read the poem, it seems familiar, largely because of the echoes of the work we see in the writing of J. R. R. Tolkien.

D. The opening three lines of the poem appear below, first in Anglo-Saxon English, then in Seamus Heaney's 2002 translation. Keep in mind the features of Anglo-Saxon poetry discussed earlier: half-lines, alliteration, and the four stresses per line.

Hwæt! We Gardena / in geardagum, þeodcyniga, / þrym gefrunon, hu ða æþelingas / ellen fremedon.
So. The Spear Danes, in Days gone by And the kings who ruled them, had courage and greatness. We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.

1. The first word in the Anglo-Saxon, *Hwæt* is our word "what," used here to attract attention and impose silence.
2. The "Spear Danes" tells listeners what tribes are involved in the story. This will be a historical chronicle, recounting great deeds in the past, among a society known, if only by reputation.
3. We know that the audience is upper class from the references to *æþelingas*, "princes," and their "heroic campaigns."
4. Most impressive in these lines is the poetry. In the first line, the word *geardagum* (meaning "yore-days" or "days of yore") contains the essence of Anglo-Saxon verse. Anglo-Saxon compresses into one compound noun, or *kenning*, a concept that Heaney must translate into four words.
5. The rugged economy of Anglo-Saxon represents its highest linguistic achievement, along with its ability to create new words, neologisms. The creative writer, we may say, remakes language. And in so doing, he or she serves a vital function for society as a whole. It is thanks to such writers that language lives in its best and most precious form.

E. Clearly, the *Beowulf* poet, whoever he was, was talking to people who were part of his own community. There was common ground between them—just as there is for us, to some extent, in reading the poem hundreds of years later.

1. Literature is a time machine. It can take us back and connect us with people who are no longer here. It is, in the best sense, a conversation with the dead.
2. In fact, this is the reason we read and study literature and the reason that it lives for us.
3. This living quality of literature—the fact that it is still animated over centuries—makes it worth our time and effort and makes a historical approach to literature valuable.

Suggested Reading:

Anonymous, *The Seafarer*.

Aristotle, *Poetics*.

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*, chapters 1–3.

Chickering, *Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition*.

Crystal, *The Stories of English*, chapters 1–4.

Drabble, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (for all lectures).

Heaney, *Beowulf*.

Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what sense can literature be said to have a "history," and what value to us, as modern readers, is the reading or study of "old literature"?
2. We think of early society as, in many ways, "undeveloped," even "primitive." Is early literature similarly "primitive"?

Lecture Two

Chaucer—Social Diversity

Scope: Much changed in the regional kingdoms and fiefdoms of Britain during the half millennium that separates *Beowulf* from *The Canterbury Tales*. The British Isles were subject to invasion by the Vikings and, of course, the Norman Conquest of 1066. In the wake of the Norman Conquest, significant changes took place in the English language that enable modern readers to understand writing from this period more readily. With this background in mind, we can begin our discussion of *The Canterbury Tales*, written by Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14th century. In this lecture, we'll look at some elements of the *Prologue*, the setting, and the diversity of the pilgrims who tell the tales.

Outline

I. In the years between the transcription of *Beowulf* and the writing of *The Canterbury Tales*, the kingdoms of Britain experienced repeated attacks by Vikings, followed by the invasion known as the Norman Conquest.

A. The Scandinavian language infiltrated English with the Viking incursions but never fully took hold. As late as the 11th century, Anglo-Saxon, that alien tongue that we encountered in *Beowulf*, was still the language of literature.

B. By the 1390s, however, in the wake of the Norman Conquest, the English language had changed significantly, to the point where modern readers can generally understand the famous opening lines from the *Prologue of The Canterbury Tales*:

When that Aprilis, with his showers swoot, The drought of March hath pierced to the root, And bathed every vein in such licour, Of which virtue engender'd is the flower;

1. Chaucer is essentially speaking our language here. We are also familiar with this verse form, rhymed iambic pentameter.

2. Such changes were the result of the invasion of England by the Normans in 1066 and the defeat of the Saxon king, Harold, at Hastings on the English coast.

C. The French invaders brought with them a unifying mission—to bind into national unity the tribal and ethnic enclaves that had, to this point, made up Britain.

1. The Norman invaders unified Britain, installing a language and a system of law, a class system, Parliament, and other institutions. The Normans also conducted a vast census of the country, the results of which are recorded in the *Domesday Boke*.

2. The Normans brought with them an organic connection to Europe, which included the rich Latin heritages of Italy and France. Part of this cultural baggage also included rhyme and syllabic verse.

3. We can still hear the stress systems of Anglo-Saxon literature underneath the syllabic superstructure of Chaucer's lines.

II. A close look at the *Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* tells us something about Chaucer's audience.

A. The poem opens with an *apostrophe* to spring, a direct address to the moment in the year when the world is reborn. This was also a favorite theme of the Italian poet Petrarch and of many Romantic poets since.

B. Chaucer's audience, we assume, was cultivated. His readers probably knew Petrarch and were acquainted with the 14th-century science of astrology. Chaucer's poetry draws on the kind of institutional learning that would eventually become concentrated in universities.

C. Some knowledge of Latin is implied in these opening lines by the reference to Zephyrus, the Roman god of wind. We also find some French: *corage* ("courage") and *pilgrimage*.

D. The tone of the verse is civilized, imbued with what Chaucer would have called *gentillesse*. There are urban, cosmopolitan forces at work here, with none of the primitivism that we saw in Anglo-Saxon verse.

1. Nature, which is a significantly important element in English literature, is not cruel as it was in *The Seafarer*. Here, the rain is sweet, not harsh.

2. A new worldview emerges through this poetry, and the poetry itself emerges from this worldview.

III. Despite the poem's title (given later, not by Chaucer himself), the action is not set in Canterbury, the site of the cathedral of Thomas à Becket in Kent. We don't know, in fact, if the pilgrims ever actually reached Canterbury.

A. The poem opens in London in April 1389. The pilgrims, including Chaucer himself, are gathered at the Tabard Inn on the south bank of the Thames, across the river from Saint Paul's Cathedral. (*Tabard* is a French word meaning "drum," as one would beat a drum to gather a group of people.) The pilgrims' guide is Harry Bailey.

B. This band of pilgrims intends to travel by horse the 100-odd miles to Canterbury to the tomb of Thomas à Becket, martyred in his cathedral. The purpose of the trip is as much social as religious.

1. The pilgrims travel in a party for safety because brigands and highwaymen lurk outside London.
2. The journey to Kent will probably take them about four days.

C. Harry Bailey decrees that each of the 29 pilgrims shall tell two tales on the way to Kent and two on the return trip. The best storyteller shall win a prize. This framework recalls Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a similarly bundled collection of tales with which Chaucer was obviously familiar.

D. Chaucer's London is still recognizable under the surface of modern-day London.

1. By Chaucer's time, London had become the engine of a thriving England. It was located on a great tidal river that served as the country's main port. Chaucer spent a large part of his working life in the port and met people there from throughout Europe.
2. London was also the site of the monarchic court, the legal courts, Parliament, and the great cathedral at Westminster. All the main components of a modern state were in place.

E. The dialect of London was inexorably becoming the national standard, although literature was still being produced in other anachronistic or regional dialects.

1. The poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* wrote his Arthurian romance in an Anglo-Saxon dialect.
2. *Piers Plowman*, an epic of working-class life written in the dialect of the west of England, is almost incomprehensible to us.
3. Many languages existed in England, but they were gradually being subordinated to the English of London, and Chaucer was a main actor in this standardization process.

IV. For modern readers, the most striking feature of the pilgrims of *The Canterbury Tales* is their social diversity.

A. Anglo-Saxon poetry was generally restricted to three classes: thains, warriors, and peasants. Women were largely invisible. These three classes are represented in Chaucer's pilgrims, along with others. Moreover, we perceive in Chaucer's pilgrims a stratified class system or hierarchy that is similar to our own.

B. The person of highest status in Chaucer's company and the first tale-teller is the knight. He is of a noble class and possesses gentle manners. His tale is told in high literary style, permeated with the subtle codes of courtly love and the stoical Boethian philosophy.

1. Courtly love decrees that love is not merely an emotion but a set of moves by either party to bring the game to some conclusion, perhaps marriage or adultery. These moves were codified, refined, and popularized in medieval romance.
2. Boethius was a 5th-century Christian Roman philosopher, who enjoined an acceptance of the fickleness of fortune. According to his *The Consolation of Philosophy*, to know that fortune was fickle was the best defense against its fickleness. Chaucer translated this work of Boethius, which explains the tone of worldly gloom we often encounter in his writing.

C. At the bottom of the social heap are the cook, the reeve (a land agent), the miller, and a shipman. A notch above them are the merchant and the franklin, members of the emergent bourgeoisie. Of the same class are the doctor of physic and sergeant at law.

D. Also among the 29 are a host of ecclesiastics and churchmen, and women, friars, monks, nun-priests, nuns, summoners, pardoners (whom Chaucer despises), and a parson.

1. The parson offers what may be the least interesting tale in the set, a series of sermon-like biblical precepts, and the monk's tale offers a catalogue of great people who have fallen from fortune.
2. Generally speaking, the best tales come from the least interesting people or the worst people in the company.

E. Some would say that the most interesting pilgrim is the businesswoman, Alisoun, the Wife of Bath, owner of a denim factory. She has had a string of husbands and profited by all of them.

F. The academic in the company, the clerk, possesses 20 books, a huge library. He can read and write and has mastered the arts of rhetoric and logic. He is meek in character but formidable in intellect, and he will cross swords with the Wife of Bath on the subject of a woman's place.

G. Each of these pilgrims is identified by his or her trade, profession, or station in life and, thus, socially stereotyped. But in each case, the social stereotype is shot through with ironies and individualizing touches that run against the grain.

1. The nun-prioress is a good example of this cross-grained quality. She has a senior position in her holy order and is described as very devout, but Chaucer slyly subverts that description with a portrait of a woman who possesses some qualities that may be at odds with her nun's vocation. She wears, for example, a bracelet with the inscription "Love conquers all."
2. Chaucer does not voice any criticism in his description. The unspoken verdict is clear but affectionate: The nun-prioress is, like the reader, human.

H. In bringing these people together, Chaucer is making a point about the social inclusiveness and elasticity of the Christian religion. It can contain all types, even those who are not excessively Christian. Chaucer is also giving us a sense of the dynamism and complexity of English society.

1. The pilgrims' tales reflect the pilgrims and, in the process, offer a microcosm of a complex but familiar world to us.
2. The 18th-century poet John Dryden said of *The Canterbury Tales*, "Here is God's plenty," by which he meant that the poem offered readers the world.
3. It seems almost miraculous that Chaucer can make these connections with us across time and, in the process of writing about his world, reflect our own.

Suggested Reading:

Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (original-spelling edition).

———, *The Riverside Chaucer*.

Pearsall, *The Life of Chaucer*.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways can we consider Chaucer the first "modern" writer, in "modern" English?
2. We know little of Chaucer's life, and never will know much. What can we reconstruct about him from his writings?

Lecture Three

Chaucer—A Man of Unusual Cultivation

Scope: What kind of man was Chaucer, and how did he come by his extraordinary knowledge of human nature and his skill as a writer? Little is known of Chaucer's life, but we can reach some conclusions about him based on the writing he has left us. We then turn to some of the tales themselves, noting particularly their order and the way in which they interact with one another. We'll see what the tales say about the characters who tell them and how they may still speak to us today.

Outline

I. The poet we know as Chaucer was born Geoffroy de Chaucer (c. 1342/43–1400). His family name is derived from the French word for "shoemaker," *chausseur*.

A. The Chaucer family had risen well above the level of cobblers and moved away from their French origins.

In Geoffrey's lifetime, they had connections with, and received favors from, the court.

B. The literature he left shows us that Chaucer was a man of unusual cultivation. He had a phenomenally busy career as a businessman, soldier, government official, scholar, and author. He was also the father of English verse, called by later poets *Dan*, Spanish for "Don" or lord.

C. Chaucer was probably born c. 1342/43 in London. His family was prosperous and, as members of the middle class, saw the value in education in order to rise higher in rank.

D. Chaucer's father was in the import/export wine trade. This profession involved intimate connection with France, which was, then as now, the center of the world of wine. We may assume that the Chaucer family's lifestyle was cosmopolitan and cultivated.

E. Geoffrey was lucky to pass the formative years of his life in the reign of Edward III. England was experiencing a period of climatic warming and was more or less at peace, despite such uprisings as the Peasants' Revolt and the never-ending hostility with France. England was also poised to achieve a leading role among Western European states.

F. We know very little of Chaucer's youth. He may have attended one of the two great universities at Oxford or Cambridge, or he may have received his higher education from house tutors. In any event, he was highly educated, bookish, and well read in several languages.

II. Chaucer did not follow the scholar's path into the church or academia. He seems to have wanted more from life than the monk's cell or the study. He may have toyed with the idea of going into law, but from his father, he probably inherited a propensity for business.

A. Little is known about the dates and sequence of Chaucer's various works, other than the fact that *The Canterbury Tales* is a late creation. He probably wrote from an early age, but as a young man he also craved adventure; thus, he embarked on a military career in 1359.

B. In that same year, Edward III invaded France for the third time in a campaign that went disastrously wrong. Chaucer was taken prisoner by the French and ransomed. This incident may have resulted in his affection for the imprisoned philosopher Boethius, whose stoical theories of life he would popularize, notably in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

C. On his return from France, Chaucer married and settled down; his wife, Philippa, was nobly born and, presumably, well dowered. Chaucer's sex life is a matter of debate. A charge of rape was later brought against him, but we do not know if he was guilty. From his more erotic and bawdy writings, however, we can assume that Chaucer was no celibate.

III. Chaucer had powerful friends and patrons, including Edward III, who in 1367, settled upon Chaucer a life pension of 20 marks for his service as "our beloved Valet."

A. Today, we would call Chaucer essentially a civil servant. In the early 1370s, he was employed in the king's service abroad, traveling to Genoa and Florence. He may have met Petrarch in Padua. Italy, at this point, was the literary capital of the Western world, and Chaucer brought what he learned there back with him to England.

B. In 1374, Chaucer was appointed controller of the customs in the port of London for the lucrative imports of wools, skins, and tanned hides. These were good years for Chaucer; he lived well, traveled widely, and hobnobbed with interesting people.

C. *Troilus and Criseyde*, a courtly love epic shot through with Boethian gloom and set during the siege of Troy, dates from this period. Unlike *The Canterbury Tales*, it is written in stanzas in a stylized, difficult poetic idiom.

D. In the 1380s, Chaucer, now a widower, fell into difficult circumstances. His patrons were temporarily out of power, and he was pressed for money and short of favors from the court. In this slack period, he retired to Kent and devoted his time to writing *The Canterbury Tales*.

E. Chaucer died in 1400, probably around the age of 70 or 71. As a mark of his literary eminence, he was

buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

IV. *The Canterbury Tales* has come down to us in manuscript form. We do not have a full text of the poem, and the portion we have has been reconstructed from various versions, none of which is in Chaucer's hand.

A. Chaucer's original design called for 116 tales, two from each of the 29 pilgrims on the way to Canterbury and two on the return trip. What survives is only about 29 tales, some of which are fragmentary.

B. *The Canterbury Tales* was written and transcribed in scriptoria or copy shops some 100 years before printing was introduced. The poem was initially written for recitation and, undoubtedly, was learned imperfectly by some reciters who passed on their corrupted renderings. Manuscript versions would have been available, but very expensive to purchase.

C. The poem was widely circulated and had a significant effect on the emergence of standard English. The language we speak today owes a good deal to Chaucer, perhaps most of all to *The Canterbury Tales*.

V. The tales we have play against each other in interesting ways.

A. To understand how the tales interact, imagine the tellers in a candlelit tavern, raptly attentive, eager for some after-dinner entertainment.

B. The sequence opens with the knight's tale. He is the pilgrim of highest standing and embodies "truth, honor, generousness, and courtesy." His tale is one of courtly love and fraternal rivalry. It is high literature, set in ancient Greece, with a tournament and appearances from the gods.

1. The opening of the knight's tale stresses high estate, warfare, and love. One of its main characters is Theseus, a duke, a warrior, and a great lover.

2. None too subtly, the knight is holding up a flattering mirror to himself in his description of Theseus.

C. The knight's noble romance is followed almost immediately by a *fabliau*, or bawdy tale, told by the miller. The miller is drunk and convinced that he, too, has a noble tale to tell. Harry Bailey tries in vain to stop him, but the miller launches ahead with his story of bawdy sex.

1. The vulgar tale ends hilariously, with a couple of the characters sticking their bottoms out of windows to be kissed by an unwitting lover on a ladder, who expects to kiss his beloved's sweet lips.

2. Chaucer describes Alisoun, the young wife of an old carpenter, whose prettiness provokes the comic mayhem. The fact that she is as "supple as a weasel" hints at trouble to come.

D. The miller and the reeve, who follows as the next storyteller, share a mutual animosity. The reeve maliciously tells a story of a doltish miller who is cuckolded and whose daughter is "swyved," that is, seduced, by two students from Cambridge. The reeve is not nearly as nice as the miller, and his is a very unpleasant narrative.

E. Chaucer varies the tone of this collection of tales wonderfully; the tales themselves modulate according to the status and character of the teller. Chaucer sets up each of the stories with a prologue, usually delivered in the pilgrim's own voice and character.

F. The longest, most garrulous, and most interesting of the prologues is that of the Wife of Bath, Alisoun. She is more interesting as a character than for the story she tells.

1. Alisoun is what Chaucer and Shakespeare would have called a shrew. She has been married five times and has used marriage to gain the property of her husbands, who die suspiciously often.

2. She has no children but has focused her energy on making pilgrimages and profiting from her textile business. She manufactures *toile de Nîmes*, denim, and has made her industry quite profitable in Bath.

3. Alisoun has been on three pilgrimages to Jerusalem, perhaps seeking divine intervention to cure her infertility or perhaps simply as a mark of her status.

4. In her prologue, she tells us that she has learned from life, not books. She has had a difficult life, marrying first at the age of 12 and burying five husbands. She has certainly been beaten by one or more of her violent husbands and, as a result, has lost her hearing in one ear. She directs her comments of finding woe in marriage to the gentlemen in her audience, not the ladies.

5. Alisoun's theme in her prologue and tale is a central one in *The Canterbury Tales: maistrie*. The meaning of this word can be summed up in the proverbial question: Who wears the pants in your house? When the woman is being wooed, she has the power in a relationship, but once she is wed, she must become obedient. The Wife of Bath, from the depth of her experience in the politics of marriage, asks why this should be so.

6. The wife takes the privilege of telling a tale as more than just entertaining the company; she challenges her fellow pilgrims.

G. In his own day, Chaucer's listeners probably got the most out of "The Parson's Tale," which is full of advice about how to live a good Christian life. But for us, the poem has different resonances, and Chaucer, in fact, seems to be speaking, not just to his own time, but to all time.

1. As Dryden said, all life is here; every generation can get something new out of Chaucer.

2. In writing *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer established literature in the middle level of society; after him, literature would become an important element in the emergence and progress of what we know as England.

Suggested Reading:

Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*.

Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales*.

Questions to Consider:

1. *The Canterbury Tales* is constructed around a pilgrimage to a holy shrine. Does that make it a "religious" poem?
2. Does Chaucer, as evidenced in his major poetry, have a problem with his women characters?

Lecture Four

Spenser—*The Faerie Queene*

Scope: Literature can be a corrupting or a civilizing influence on society; in its civilizing function, it articulates the elements and core values that hold a society together. We can perhaps point to no greater example of literature that fulfills this function than Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser was a courtier and politician who wrote this poem as a literary gesture of devotion to the court. The subject of the poem is England itself, and it embodies the moral virtues of the nation in a band of knightly heroes. We'll explore the "big three" literary devices—allegory, irony, and ambiguity—that help us understand English literature. For Spenser, allegory was paramount. Spenser was also an innovator in poetic diction and left a legacy of elevated, ornamented language to poets who would follow him for the next 500 years.

Outline

I. Literature has many functions: It can entertain, educate, and even corrupt us.

A. Exactly which works of literature are corrupting has been much disputed throughout the centuries; Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is a work that has been both censored and prescribed at different times.

B. If literature can corrupt, it can also civilize or at least contribute to the civilizing process by articulating the elements that hold a society together. Literature defines the core values on which a civilization founds itself.

C. This discussion brings us to Edmund Spenser's magnum opus, *The Faerie Queene*, arguably the greatest poem composed during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. *The Faerie Queene* is dedicated to the monarch who inherited a reformed England and who, during her 45-year reign (1558–1603), transformed a small northern island into a world power.

D. Spenser (1552–1599) was a courtier, a soldier, a political player, and a poet, and the values that formed his sense of a civilized society descended hierarchically from the fount of England's honor, the queen.

1. The English honor system runs throughout England to this day but was at its most dynamic during the reign of Elizabeth I and received its finest literary celebration in *The Faerie Queene*.

2. Along with its stature as a great poem, Spenser's work is a literary gesture of devotion to the court, as we see in its dedication.

II. Spenser was not a professional writer; no one will be able to claim that description until many years later. His pen was not his main source of income in life, and it was not his main ambition in life to be a writer.

A. Spenser was the son of a prosperous cloth-maker and was educated at the Merchant Taylors' School and at Pembroke College, Cambridge.

B. As a young man, Spenser was an assistant to the provincial governor in Ireland. His job there was to enforce martial law and root out sedition and rebellion. He outlined his authoritarian views on governing the Irish in pamphlets and, as a reward for his services, was given an Irish estate.

C. Spenser had ambitions to advance his career at court and, with that in mind, conceived *The Faerie Queene*. The poem won him a small pension but not the great favors he craved. Subsequently, his life was marked by disappointment.

D. Spenser's castle was burned down by Irish rebels in 1598. He may have lost his wife and children in that attack, and he certainly lost his status in the colony. In 1599, he moved back to London, where he died in distressed circumstances, at age 46.

E. His career as a politician had been unsuccessful, but his reputation as a poet was outstanding. His tomb is next to that of Geoffrey Chaucer in Westminster Abbey.

III. The subject of *The Faerie Queene* is England itself. The epic was initially intended to run to 12 books, but Spenser completed only six.

A. *The Faerie Queene* addresses itself to six great virtues, which are anatomized in six books, arranged in 12 cantos per book, and made up of rhymed stanzas that came to be called "Spenserian stanzas." The number 12 is an apostolic number, and numerology underlies the work.

B. The virtues that Spenser covers are holiness, temperance, chastity, friendship, justice, and courtesy. These moral virtues are embodied in a band of knightly heroes.

C. The knights in the poem include five men and one woman, all in armor and all on quests to set the world to rights.

1. The female knight, Britomart, in Book III is, like the Virgin Queen, the embodiment of militant chastity.

2. Knights are warriors, but they also hold values that go beyond merely slaughtering their adversaries. Their battles are battles for virtue, as well as for victory. Spenser points out that life is often too complex for even the best-intentioned, purest knight.

D. The opening image of the first book, devoted to holiness, is stereotypical: A noble knight, wearing a red cross on his chest, gallops across the plain in search of "fierce encounters."

1. This crusading young knight is called Red Crosse, named after the shape that serves as the basic constituent in the British national flag, as well as the symbol of Christianity.

2. This knight will later be identified as Saint George, the patron saint of England, who conquers the dragon, representing paganism, and brings civilization to England.

E. Spenser was a major innovator in poetry, and the techniques he invented would be passed on to other poets. His "Faerie" land is anything but the happy world we might imagine; it is a dangerous realm of magic, a literary zone where the poet's imagination creates an alternative universe. The result is sometimes threatening and terrifying.

IV. The "big three" literary devices that help us understand English literature are allegory, irony, and ambiguity.

A. Allegory is, essentially, saying something by means of saying something quite different. A simple form of allegory is the simile: "My love is like a red, red rose."

1. In general, allegory goes beyond simile into systematic parallelism. Consider, for example, Shakespeare's meditation on kingship in *Richard II*. Here, one gardener instructs another in the care of plants, but he is really talking about the running of a country.

2. This gardener allegorizes the state of England in terms of a garden, and by implication, the king becomes the grand gardener, appointed by God to keep the nation well tended.

B. Irony is saying one thing and meaning its opposite. Our example here comes from the most accomplished of literary ironists, Jonathan Swift.

1. In 1729, Swift, then a clergyman resident in Ireland, penned a savage satire on English maladministration of the province entitled *A Modest Proposal*.

2. The pamphlet purports to be written by an economist confronted with the contradiction that the Irish peasants were both starving and producing numerous children. To the economist's mind, the solution is easy: The peasants should eat babies.

3. Swift, of course, believed quite the opposite: That the English government should accept its responsibilities toward its colonial territory and stop starving the Irish people.

C. Ambiguity (or polyvalence) is saying two things simultaneously.

1. Shakespeare's Sonnet 129 contains the famously ambiguous line: "Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame." On the surface, the line refers to the expenditure of one's talents to no good end.

2. If we unpack the line, however, we get a sly double entendre: *Spirit* can mean liquid. *Waste* means garbage, but *waist* is a part of the body, below which, according to Lear, everything belongs to Satan. *Expense* means expenditure but can also mean expending effort.

3. In short, while speaking abstractly about degradation, the sonnet also conveys a subversive sexual image, the sexual act with an unworthy partner.

V. We'll encounter these three literary devices many times on our journey through English literature, but with Spenser, allegory is paramount.

A. The cross on the chest of Red Crosse symbolizes Christianity, and it is red because it is by the blood of Christ that we are all redeemed.

B. The other knights in the Spenserian troupe have new armor, but Red Crosse's armor is battered and beaten. Why?

1. The fact that the metal is dented recalls the great battles of Christianity fought for us by our forefathers.

2. We did not have to suffer persecution, martyrdom, deprivation, or crucifixion to assert our faith because those who came before us did so. The armor we inherit and that protects us has been worn in blood-spattered battle by our victorious predecessors.

C. The personal virtue that the Christian must cultivate is humility; hence, the opening passage notes that Red Crosse is "solemn sad."

1. For the Christian, the principal adversary is oneself, one's pride. The enemy is inside.

2. This will be a recurrent theme in Red Crosse's subsequent career in arms. He will almost come to grief in the House of Pride and in combat with the giant Orgoglio, which is Italian for "pride."

D. The guiding principle of Red Crosse's quest is unity, which is embodied in his patroness, Una. His most seductive enemy is her look-alike, Duessa, or duplicity. There is, in other words, only one religious truth.

E. In the opening episode of Book I, Red Crosse thinks he has found his enemy, the dragon, inside the cave of Error. He finds, instead, a great worm that looks like a dragon.

1. The description of the creature in the cave as half-monster/half-woman hints that sex may be a problem for those who are holy.

2. Red Crosse's "glistening armor," the light of religious teaching, gives him a little illumination but not enough.

3. Error later catches the knight in his toils, vomiting books and papers, and Red Crosse can only escape when he heeds Una's advice to rely on faith and avoid trying to reason with error.

4. When we first meet Red Crosse, he is young; it is only when he becomes older, wiser, and wearier that he will meet and overcome his dragon, which is partly himself. We are baptized Christians, but we only become Christians in our maturity.

5. Red Crosse must learn in this early episode that one cannot engage with error on a rational level. Avoid the cave entirely, Una advises. Rely on faith, not reason.
6. A different theme is followed in the fifth book of *The Faerie Queene*, on justice. In this legalistic world, subtle logic chopping, rational discussion, and weighing of alternatives are essential.
7. Where religious faith is concerned, however, we must be single-minded. This is the first foundational virtue, which is why it's the first book in the poem.

VI. Poetic diction is another feature of Spenser's work that is critically important in the evolution of English literature.

A. Spenser established the principle that the language of poetry is not the language of ordinary people. It is elevated, or beautifully antique, or Latinate.

B. The history of English literature has seen recurrent moves to return poetry to the language of everyday men and women. But these corrective initiatives never succeed. Poetry retains its own special language and subtly revitalizes the language of everyday speech.

C. Such poets as Spenser remake the English language for their own purposes, creating a distinct idiom. Spenser's personal tendency, like that of Sir Philip Sidney, is toward ornamentation. He describes, for example, the beautiful "bower of bliss" that tempts the knight who embodies temperance, Guyon.

1. In this description, Spenser recycles the poetic truisms of mutability, vegetation, and decay.

2. For this knight who requires self-control and discipline, the richness of Spenser's language makes the temptation of despair in the face of mutability almost irresistible.

D. Spenser's poetic diction is one of his great bequests to the poets who follow him. The Spenserian line—its richness, its poetic artificiality, its high diction—runs through the body of subsequent English fiction like a vein of gold. Other writers create works, but Spenser created a whole field of literary endeavor. He mapped out poetry, we may say, for 500 years of poets to follow.

Suggested Reading:

Neale, *Elizabeth the First*.

Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*.

Questions to Consider:

1. If *The Faerie Queene* is a great "national" epic, what vision, or "idea" of the English nation does the poem project?
2. Why did Spenser "invent" a poetic diction for his poem, and does that diction work?

Lecture Five

Early Drama—Low Comedy and Religion

Scope: In the late 15th and early 16th centuries, the world of literature saw the emergence of both printing and modern theater. Although drama is a universal human endeavor, its modern form in England evolved from the mystery or miracle plays. These productions, staged by guilds, communicated to the largely illiterate populace the stories of the Bible. We'll look in depth at one such mystery story, the *Second Shepherds' Play*, which successfully combines low comedy with religious teaching. We'll also briefly explore the reputation of theater itself in England, always viewed with suspicion by "respectable folk." The mystery stories undoubtedly influenced such dramatists as William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, creating the framework in which these giants could write their masterpieces.

Outline

I. At some point between the 15th and 16th centuries, we mark two major occurrences in the world of literature.

A. The first of these was the emergence of the printed book. It would be sometime before printed works became dominant, but the existence of printing was changing literature at the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th.

B. The other major occurrence was the emergence of theater as we now know it. English drama, like drama in other countries and cultures, began on the streets of English towns, with townspeople for actors. It was open to all, not just to the few people who were literate.

C. Drama, as Nietzsche pointed out in his work *The Birth of Tragedy*, is as universally human a practice as praying or, for that matter, playing.

D. Drama originated in folk literature, coming up from below rather than trickling down from above.

II. Theater in England in its modern form began with the so-called mystery or miracle plays.

A. In the medieval period, the most important story was the Bible itself. Given that the population was largely illiterate, how could the narrative that runs from Genesis to Judgment Day best be communicated?

B. England was undergoing urbanization during the late 15th and early 16th centuries, and in the growing towns, the guilds and craft associations were very powerful.

1. In the Middle Ages, the word “mystery” was connected with the French word *metier*, which means “trade or profession” but had overtones of secrecy.

2. The early industries that evolved in the medieval period, such as goldsmithing, glass-blowing, and so on, required mastery of tools and skills, but these abilities were kept as jealously guarded secrets and passed on only through a system of apprenticeship and guilds.

3. The guilds, or *metiers*, became rich and powerful and took it upon themselves to spread the word of Christianity, the mysteries of the greatest story ever told.

4. Annually, usually at Easter, dramatic cycles would be staged, in which each of the guilds would sponsor a wagon or a float. Typically, each guild would choose an episode from the Bible that fit with its profession. The carpenters, for example, would tell the story of the crucifixion; the bargemen might tell the story of Noah.

5. The church was generally tolerant of this activity. Indeed, some clerics, who were usually the most literate members of society, may have helped write the scripts. At the same time, the church probably maintained an oversight function of the productions.

C. The mystery plays were extremely popular and probably influenced future dramatists, such as Shakespeare and Marlowe.

1. Hamlet, for example, instructs the players who are visiting Elsinore not to “out-Herod Herod.” This line is an allusion to the figure of Herod in the mystery plays, who was traditionally played to the gallery, with crowd-pleasing ranting and roaring.

2. Noah’s wife was usually played as a scold who nagged her husband constantly.

D. The guilds kept lavish costumes, the inventories of which survive, along with certain business papers and scripts. Written copies of the plays were necessary when new actors came into the plays. We have the texts of a number of the major city-based cycles, including those of Coventry, Leicester, York, and Wakefield.

III. The *Second Shepherds’ Play* comes from the Wakefield cycle.

A. Wakefield is a town in what is now Yorkshire that was prosperous in the 14th century. From earliest times, it was famous for two things: its wool production and its piety. Given the town’s principal industry, shepherds were important and respected members of the community.

B. It’s impossible to date the *Second Shepherds’ Play* accurately, but it was probably composed around 1475 and performed with various elaborations for many years afterward. The Wakefield cycle encompasses 30 plays, beginning with Creation and ending with the hanging of Judas. The cycle has two shepherds’ plays, both of which are centered on the adoration of the newborn savior, Jesus.

C. In addition to being responsible for much of the wealth in Wakefield, shepherds also have a strong symbolic character in Christianity. Christ is allegorized as a shepherd and the Christian congregation is his flock. Pastors are Christ’s deputies, and “pastor” means “shepherd” in Latin. As we will see, the *Second Shepherds’ Play* undercuts this image to a degree with its irreverence and parody.

D. The *Second Shepherds' Play* opens during the period of the nativity in the area around Bethlehem. Three shepherds are on the hills, watching their sheep by night, when they learn that the savior is about to be born.

1. The first shepherd angrily bemoans the bitterly cold weather and the oppressions, including taxes, that poor folk like themselves must bear while the rich are snug, well-fed, and warm in their beds. He would prefer to trade in his current occupation for farming, which would generate more money, enable him to relax in the winter, and allow him some rest at night.

2. Rebellions were fairly common in the medieval period (the most famous of which was led by Jack Straw), but the play doesn't continue along this radical line. The second and third shepherds are more patient with their lot in life. Their attitude is more one of Christian submission. The mystery plays were often didactic in this way, but they did give a voice to protest.

E. After this prologue, the character Mak enters; he is a rogue who steals one of the lambs that the other shepherds are guarding. He and his wife Gil then attempt to hide the lamb as a baby in a cradle so that no one will know what they've done.

1. The other shepherds come to Mak's cottage to give the new baby a silver sixpenny piece. A humorous exchange follows, with Mak trying to keep his fellow shepherds away from the "baby."

2. When the shepherds finally discover Mak's trick, they put him in a bag and beat him.

F. The play then reverts to familiar religious orthodoxy. The angel of the Lord appears and instructs the three good shepherds to worship the babe in Bethlehem, who is lying between two animals.

1. We see now that the business with the lamb is a parody, verging on the blasphemous in its association of the newborn Christ with an animal of the field. Only the comedy of the scene ensures that we're not offended.

2. Stealing a sheep or a lamb was a hanging offense, but given that the play revolves around Christmas, a time of forgiveness, and that Christ came into the world to forgive, Mak gets off with a beating.

3. The lamb in the cradle also reminds us of the degradation of the savior's birthplace, in an animal manger. The audience members would not have been able to read the details of Christ's birth in the Bible, but they would have been open to learning them after they had laughed at the comic business taking place in front of them.

G. Above all, the *Second Shepherds' Play* is of and for the people. Although we will never know the name of the master who wrote it, he (or she) had a clear connection with the audience.

IV. Historically speaking, the English theater has had a difficult career.

A. It originated on the streets, under an uneasy license from the church. But the Puritans, who wanted to refine religious practice and became increasingly powerful, never approved of what they called "mummery" or "imitations."

1. As Nietzsche pointed out, drama and paganism are close relatives. There was always the suspicion that drama was somehow pre-Christian and dangerous.

2. Decent, "respectable folk" never approved of the theater or theater people, who were thought bohemian and immoral.

3. As a result of Puritan pressure, English theater was controlled and censored from the 18th century onward for 200 years.

B. Nervousness about drama has been built into the institutions of England almost to the present day. As late as 1960, every play produced on the English stage had to be approved for performance by the Lord Chamberlain, who rigorously excluded references to royalty, blasphemy, and sex.

C. This nervousness carries through to the current licensing and rating of films. We still have an anxiety about public performance. Even Shakespeare found himself in trouble when his play about deposing kings, *Richard II*, was performed during a rebellious period.

D. Nonetheless, the street theater we've explored in this lecture is the entryway to a golden period in English drama in the 16th and 17th centuries. The "unrespectability" of theater is part of that heritage.

E. An important and entertaining cultural influence in the late medieval period, the mystery plays created the framework within which our next great talents, William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, would write their masterpieces.

Suggested Reading:

Anonymous, *Everyman and Other Miracle and Morality Plays*.

Beadle, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*.

Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays*.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what sense are the mystery plays genuinely “of the people”?
2. What, other than religious devotion, motivates the mystery plays?

Lecture Six

Marlowe—Controversy and Danger

Scope: Drama, as it evolved, took its most dynamic shape in the largest city in England, indeed, probably the largest city in Europe, London. Today, the reconstructed Globe Theatre in London gives us a context for the great plays of Shakespeare and his contemporary Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe was murdered when he was only 29 years old, probably the victim of political intrigue. In his short life, he gave us four great tragedies, all of which deal with the theme of overreaching and all written in blank verse. We touch briefly on three of the plays in this lecture, then close with a more detailed look at one, *Doctor Faustus*. With these works, Marlowe left us a small treasure of dramatic innovations and set in place the foundations of Shakespearean theater.

Outline

I. Drama began to take on its modern form in the playhouses of London in the 16th and 17th centuries.

A. The Globe Theatre, the playhouse most closely associated with Shakespeare, encompassed all of life. As part of the mercantilist revolution that was taking place in London, there was now a price of admission. Such theaters as the Globe or the Rose were capable of containing thousands, mostly “groundlings.”

B. The great London theaters of the late 16th and early 17th centuries are best understood in terms of the recently reconstructed Globe on the south bank of the Thames.

1. The large, polygonal theater is constructed of timber planks and plaster. The raised stage, called a proscenium, comes forward into the audience, allowing the theatrical equivalent of a close-up for the actors.

2. Behind the rudimentary scenery are flues and exits to the front and back. Overhead is the sky with stars painted on it. There is also a trapdoor for ghosts and devils to pop out of and villains to fall into.

C. Shakespeare and his contemporaries lacked the effects, the props, and the machinery of the modern stage, but they did have luxurious wardrobes, the inventories of which survive.

D. The richest property of Elizabethan theater was neither furniture, nor dress, nor makeup, but language. The English language was undergoing an explosive expansion during this period. Examples of neologism can be found in almost every scene and speech of Shakespeare.

II. In 1593, a mysterious scuffle took place in a house on the south bank of the Thames, not far from the theater and brothel district, in which a 29-year-old man, probably Christopher Marlowe, was stabbed to death. Had Marlowe lived, he might have become an even greater poet than Shakespeare.

A. In his short life, Marlowe (1564–1593) wrote four plays that changed literature and, more importantly, drama forever. He bequeathed to Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and writers to this very day English literature’s great literary instrument known as blank verse.

B. Marlowe was born in Kent, the son of a shoemaker. Like Shakespeare, he was a descendant of the guild system. Those two facts alone tell us that literature was moving out of the upper classes to become the property of the lower classes as well.

C. Marlowe was university educated and seems to have had an ambivalent relationship with Catholicism.

1. Religious uncertainty was dangerous: Recusants, those who did not accept the new Protestant regime that had been established by Henry VIII, were likely to be burned at the stake or hanged, drawn, and quartered for treason.

2. We find a persistent hint of atheism in Marlowe's plays, a risky theme because atheists were dealt with as harshly as heretics.

D. If religion was a serious business in the late 17th century, so were politics and diplomacy. England was becoming a world power, and Marlowe probably served his country in France as a spy. Espionage was also a hanging offense, another dangerous game played by Marlowe.

E. Evidence points to the supposition that Marlowe was gay. His play *Edward II* strongly supports this notion, and he is quoted as having said, "all they that love not tobacco and boys are fools." Further, he remarked that Saint John the Baptist and Christ were lovers.

F. Everything about Marlowe was controversial and dangerous, including his death. For centuries, it was said that he was killed in a drunken brawl in a tavern over a woman of the streets. Only later has it emerged that he was probably assassinated because of some political intrigue.

III. In a theatrical career that spanned a mere five years, Marlowe left us four great tragedies, all of which share two features in common: They all deal with the theme of overreaching, that is, man's attempt to become greater than himself, and they were all written in blank verse.

A. Marlowe's first dramatic triumph, *Tamburlaine the Great*, was staged in the late 1580s. The hero of the play is a semi-mythic Asian shepherd, who, according to contemporary playbills, becomes a mighty emperor, defying almost death itself. We see the tinge of atheism in the playbills' description of Tamburlaine as the "scourge of God." The play introduced a repertoire of humanistic themes, linguistic creativity, and moral daring into the world of drama.

1. The moment when royal ambition begins to stir in *Tamburlaine* serves as an example. He has been watching the Persian king Mycetes and wonders why he, too, should not be a king. He turns to his yes-men and asks, "Is it not passing brave to be a king, / And ride in triumph through Persepolis?"

2. One sycophant answers that kings enjoy powers and pleasures even gods do not have. The message, a seditious one, is that even an illiterate peasant like Tamburlaine, unanointed by God, can usurp the powers of a king if he has the will to do so.

B. Even a short sample from the play reveals the suppleness and fluidity of Marlowe's blank verse. This is, essentially, the 10-syllable iambic pentameter that we encountered in Chaucer: "Is it not passing brave to be a king, And ride in triumph through Persepolis?"

C. Blank verse is unrhymed, which suits English, a language that is poorer in rhyme endings than most European languages. The unrhymed quality also situates blank verse in a borderland between high poetry and conversational English. It allows a slightly elevated style of speech, but not one that is cramped and formal.

D. *Tamburlaine the Great* is Marlowe's first performed play and has the weaknesses of an opening effort. Principally, it lacks plot. It is the simplest form of tragedy, called *de casibus*: the irresistible rise, followed by the inevitable fall.

IV. In his next plays, Marlowe became a more interesting playwright, one who could handle increasingly complex themes.

A. In *The Jew of Malta*, for example, he explored Machiavellianism. That doctrine, also considered seditious at the time, asserted that rulers were political players in the fascinating game of statecraft. *Edward II*, one of Marlowe's later plays, is about a king who is destroyed by his homosexual love for a favorite courtier.

B. Marlowe's most famous work, however, is *Doctor Faustus*, whose tragic history is known to many who have never read the playwright's text. Marlowe's version subtly transforms the "overreacher" theme.

C. The play opens with a magnificent soliloquy, a dramatic device perfected by Marlowe. Here, the hero lays

out the main theme of the play: What, precisely, would you sell your soul for?

1. For Faustus, the answer is easy: knowledge, that forbidden fruit that tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Knowledge is power and Faustus wants it.
2. More importantly, Faustus wants an exciting new power, what we would call science and he calls necromancy.

D. The action opens with Faustus in his study at the University of Wittenberg. He has mastered rhetoric, philosophy, and theology, as well as law and medicine. He knows everything that a university can teach him, but he now seeks the knowledge contained in necromantic books, that is, books of the black art.

1. Faustus calls up Mephistopheles, who offers a warning of sorts to the doctor—"Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it"—but Faustus doesn't heed him.
2. So voracious is Faustus for knowledge that he signs a contract in blood with Mephistopheles, by which he will get 24 years of service from the devil. No doors will be closed to him. He'll have power and knowledge that no mortal man has previously enjoyed, after which his soul will be forfeit to Satan.

E. Faustus wastes his omnipotent years on self-indulgence, most magnificently when Mephistopheles supplies him with Helen of Troy as a bed partner. The soliloquy that ensues when Faustus sees this beautiful woman is Marlowe's most famous. Ironically, the woman isn't Helen but a succubus, a soul-stealer.

F. In the end, Faustus is betrayed, not by his intellect, but by his flesh. So powerful are Marlowe's verse and speeches, however, that one feels almost that the world, even one's soul, is "well lost" for such a sublime experience as a night of love with Helen of Troy.

G. Marlowe was, in many ways, still an apprentice dramatist while writing *Doctor Faustus*. Magnificent as the play is, it includes quite a bit of clumsy comic relief, and the author never tells us exactly what kind of knowledge it is that Faustus craves. We don't have a complete text of *Doctor Faustus*, but the play nonetheless has irresistible power.

H. Perhaps most powerful of all is Faustus's final soliloquy, delivered during his last hour on earth.

1. Faustus commands the "spheres of heaven" to stop so that his doom will be postponed. He watches as sunset begins: "See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament! / One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah, my Christ!"
2. Suddenly, a demon appears and tears at Faustus's flesh. He cries, "Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!" In fact, Christ probably could redeem him, even at this moment, if he truly repented and accepted the pains that the savior suffered on the cross, but he's too much of a fleshly man to do that.
3. As night falls, Faustus is doomed. The fact that he speaks alone on the stage is a daring dramatic move on Marlowe's part, but the playwright's powerful language carries the scene.
4. Faustus's last words are: "I'll burn my books!—Ah, Mephistophilis!" This message would have been particularly pertinent in a time when books had only recently become available. Books enabled people to teach themselves, as opposed to teaching coming from such institutions as universities or the Church.

I. The larger theme is that overreachers must die. We do not feel any satisfaction from Faustus's eternal damnation; we admire his ambition, his God-defying rebellion against the sterile doctrines of old learning. Why, then, did Marlowe not celebrate Faustus's rebellion?

1. Quite simply, Marlowe could not end the play atheistically. At most, he could make us admire Faustus, then fall into line and concur that such overreaching must surely be punished.
2. An outright glorying in Faustus's antireligious, antiauthoritarian career would have brought down the apparatus of censorship to control Marlowe. Thus, he was obliged to end his play with the moralistic message that overreaching does not pay.

V. What might Christopher Marlowe have achieved had he not been killed so young?

A. Shakespeare might well have had to tussle for the crown of England's greatest dramatist.

B. What Marlowe left us is a small treasure trove of innovative early drama. He created some of the foundation stones on which the great edifice of Shakespearean drama would erect itself.

Suggested Reading:

Levin, *The Overreacher*.

Marlowe, *Complete Poems and Translations*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What, in terms of prosody, or verse mechanics, did Marlowe bequeath to his successors in drama?
2. How heretical, blasphemous, or atheistical is Marlowe's drama, and how important is that element in our appreciation of his achievement?

Lecture Seven

Shakespeare the Man—The Road to the Globe

Scope: Shakespeare was born into a respectable family in the early years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, a period of stability in England. He attended grammar school, where he obviously read ancient authors and perhaps later worked for his father in the glove-making trade. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he would have three children. We know nothing about the years of his young manhood; some scholars have speculated that he worked as a schoolteacher or tutor, and others, that he joined a troupe of traveling players. By 1594, he had risen to the top of London's theatrical world as a playwright as well as an actor. Critics have grouped his plays into categories, including histories, comedies, tragedies, Roman plays, problem plays, and romances. In this lecture, we'll explore a history, a comedy, and a Roman play from among Shakespeare's early works.

Outline

I. William Shakespeare (1564–1616) was born about six years into the reign of Queen Elizabeth. England was experiencing a period of stability under Elizabeth, although there were still echoes of the turmoil of the reign of Bloody Mary.

A. Under Mary, it had been dangerous to be Protestant. Under Elizabeth, it was dangerous to be Catholic. Many English people, including Shakespeare's family, prudently kept both irons in the fire.

B. The late Tudor period, ushered in by Elizabeth, was one of growth and relative stability. There were no great foreign wars or invasions and no civil war to tear the country apart, although the memory of the Wars of the Roses remained frightening.

C. During the years of Elizabeth's reign, there emerged a growing sense of national greatness, tempered only by the question of succession, given that Elizabeth was, famously, a virgin queen.

1. The most significant political question in Shakespeare's plays is: How is one king replaced with another? He explores regicide in *Macbeth*, usurpation in *Richard II*, and inheritance in *Henry IV* and *Henry V*.

2. Shakespeare returns to this question up through his last play, *Henry VIII*, but he never comes up with a definitive answer.

II. Shakespeare's father was a prosperous glove-maker and an alderman in Stratford-on-Avon, a beautiful town in England's West Country, about 150 miles from London.

A. His mother, Mary Arden, was higher born than her husband, and her son's aim in life was to rise to the condition of the gentry. He aimed to leave life at a higher social station than he had entered it.

B. Young William attended grammar school, where he read Holinshed's English histories, Plutarch's classical histories, and Ovid (the latter two probably in translation). Ben Jonson, a fellow dramatist, would later observe that Shakespeare had little Latin and less Greek. By our standards, Shakespeare was highly educated.

C. On leaving school in his early teens, he probably worked for his father, learning the techniques and tools of working with leather that would later appear in his plays. He may also have been arrested for poaching.

D. At the age of 18, Shakespeare married a local woman, Anne Hathaway. She was older than he and three months pregnant. The marriage would produce two daughters and a son, Hamnet or Hamlet, who died in

infancy.

1. Many have speculated that the marriage was unhappy based on the fact that Shakespeare, in his will, left Anne his “second-best bed.”
2. The recurrence in the plays of difficult, cold, and domineering wives, such as Lady Macbeth, is also read as evidence of an unhappy marriage, but we have no real knowledge of the conditions of Shakespeare’s married life.

E. Between 1585 and 1592, the formative years of his young manhood, we know nothing about Shakespeare’s life. He may have left Stratford and found employment as a country schoolteacher.

1. Another hypothesis offered for these “lost years” is that he was in the north of England, working as a private tutor to the children of a Catholic family. Access to a good library in a wealthy home might explain the otherwise mysterious intellectual sophistication of even his earliest work.
2. Yet another theory is that Shakespeare joined a traveling group of players. His membership in such a group would explain the mature stagecraft displayed in his drama, even in his early works.

F. By 1592, Shakespeare had become a prominent figure in the London stage, writing plays and incurring resentment from rival playwrights. By 1594, he had risen to the top of the theatrical world; he was an actor and a shareholder in the Chamberlain’s Men, as well as an author.

G. He would go on to live many years in London, dabbling at times in commerce and adding substantially to his net worth. In his 20-year career in London, he penned some 38 or 39 plays, as well as the sonnets and other poetry.

1. The sonnets were written mainly in the 1590s; they offer insight into Shakespeare’s mind and his sexuality.
2. Many of the sonnets are clearly addressed as love poems to a young man, the fair lord; others, to a possibly married woman, the dark lady. It’s possible that Shakespeare may have been bisexual, just as he was both Catholic and Protestant.

III. The sonnets can be dated with some degree of confidence, but it’s much more difficult to establish the chronology of the composition and first performance of Shakespeare’s plays. We can say, however, that his evolution moves through several easily identified phases.

A. Earliest in that evolutionary process is the first trilogy of *Henry VI* history plays, set during the Wars of the Roses. These are high-action works. Arguably, the first mature play is *Richard III*, to which the date 1593 has been assigned, when Shakespeare himself was not yet 30.

1. The opening soliloquy of *Richard III* is deservedly famous. Richard, the speaker, is physically malformed, but he has performed heroically in the civil wars that destroyed the house of Lancaster and brought the house of York to the throne.
2. The Yorkist king, Edward IV, is weak, and Richard resolves to become king himself. Richard hates the peace but will occupy himself by killing the king.
3. Richard proves himself a glorious villain, winning the crown by marriage to a woman whose husband he has killed and other acts of cold-blooded unscrupulousness. Remarkably, though, this first speech—indeed, the whole play—is shot through with humor.
4. We can’t help liking this seductive scoundrel, especially compared to the dullards, second-rate villains, and even some of the virtuous people whom he treads down. When he finally dies on the field at Bosworth, we feel regret at the loss of this antihero.
5. The dramatic competence evident in this early play is breathtaking. We should note, however, that Shakespeare could not have written it without Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*, with its seriocomic treatment of Machiavellian heroism, or *Tamburlaine the Great*.
6. The historical Richard III was nothing like Shakespeare’s villain. His history here is pure Tudor propaganda, written partly to please Elizabeth and her court.

B. Shakespeare’s plays have been grouped by critics into histories, comedies, tragedies, Roman plays, problem plays, and romances. The year after *Richard III*, he produced *The Taming of the Shrew*, a comedy perhaps best

known to us in its musical version, *Kiss Me, Kate*.

1. The play is set in Italy, a favorite location for Shakespearean comedy, as well as the site of the tragedy *Othello*.
2. In this play, Petruchio, a well-born Italian gentleman, marries the daughter of a prosperous Paduan merchant, Katherine, who desires to be in charge in the marriage.
3. Petruchio's motive in marrying Katherine is purely mercenary—he wants her dowry, and he wagers his male friends that he can tame her. After the marriage, he embarks on a systematic campaign of humiliation of Katherine. He starves her and doesn't allow her to sleep, all in the guise of caring for her well-being.
4. Petruchio's strategy works and, in the final scene, he wins the wager. Not only does Kate submit to her lord, but she proudly philosophizes on the theme: "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee."
5. It's fair to assume that most modern audiences of either gender find uncomfortable both the speech in which Petruchio lays out his intentions and the speech in which Katherine submits. The Elizabethans, too, may have seen the irony in the fact that they were ruled by a woman of whom it was boasted that she had the heart of a man.
6. In another of Shakespeare's comedies, *Much Ado about Nothing*, the feisty Beatrice is triumphant. Other strong women in the plays include Lady Macbeth, Volumnia in *Coriolanus*, Regan and Goneril in *Lear*, and Cleopatra. Shakespeare is anything but rigid on the subject of gender.

C. Shakespeare was also fascinated with the Roman Republic. The first of his Roman plays was *Titus Andronicus*, a bloody story of revenge.

1. The action in this play opens with Titus, a general, returning to Rome after 10 years campaigning for the empire. The emperor has died, and Rome is faced with a succession crisis. Titus has brought with him captives, the Goth queen Tamora and her lover, the Machiavellian Aaron, who is a Moor.
2. In the succeeding scene, Tamora's sons meet the noble Roman maiden Lavinia in a wood and rape her over the body of her slain lover. They then cut out her tongue and cut off her arms so that she cannot identify her assailants by speech or writing. Improbably, Lavinia learns how to write holding a stake between the stumps of her arms and writes the names of her assailants.
3. Incredibly, the play gets even more violent, culminating in a "Thyestean scene," as it's called, in which Tamora is tricked into eating a pie containing the meat of her two rapist sons.
4. Shakespeare did not pursue this level of violence in his later drama, although we do find scenes of blood and horror in the tragedies. In this later work, Shakespeare is more interested in the process by which the tragedy unfolds, what Aristotle called the necessary and the probable, that creates the climactic effect of catharsis.
5. *Titus* is a young dramatist's play, an exploration of just how far the dramatic art could go. Shakespeare's world was a violent one, and this work perhaps draws on the appetite of its audience for blood.

D. Shakespeare became a much more sophisticated dramatist as his career progressed. He never stayed in the same genre, moving through at least five or six kinds of mastery toward what is perhaps his greatest achievement, the tragedies.

Suggested Reading:

Shapiro, *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare, 1599*.

Weis, *Shakespeare Revealed*.

Wells, *Shakespeare and Co*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How important is it that we know anything about Shakespeare, other than the plays he wrote?
2. How did Shakespeare "happen"?

Lecture Eight

Shakespeare—The Mature Years

Scope: Every one of Shakespeare's plays is a masterpiece, but the greatest of his works are those of his maturity. At the height of his career and while he was still in his 50s, Shakespeare gave up writing and retired to Stratford. Prospero's final speech in *The Tempest* is commonly thought to be Shakespeare's own explanation for this decision—that all life is drama and all drama must end. Shakespeare's later plays show increasing complexity of language and plot. We'll touch on several of these plays in various genres, including *Measure for Measure* (comedy); *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* (Roman plays); and *Henry V* (history). The most outstanding achievement of Shakespeare's life can be found in four great tragedies, *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*. In these, we'll see Shakespeare's gift for stimulating our minds, as well as gratifying our sensibilities.

Outline

I. So wonderful are Shakespeare's middle- and late-period plays that some skeptics ask how a man who left school in his early teens could possibly have written them.

A. Some have asserted that the plays must have been written by Francis Bacon, the earl of Oxford, or even Christopher Marlowe. Such nonsensical speculation thrives because we have so little evidence of Shakespeare's existence.

B. Most authorities believe that the plays were written by Shakespeare, but we may still ask: How did he do it? How did Shakespeare happen? We'll never have definitive answers for those questions, but we can see how Shakespeare's work evolves and develops.

C. The genres that he produced in his maturity—comedies, histories, tragedies, problem plays, and romances—show a gradual progression in language and plot complexity. He was obviously interested in making his plays more challenging from a literary standpoint.

D. Shakespeare gave up comedy fairly early, and his latest comedy is the darkest he wrote in that genre, *Measure for Measure*. He would return to a version of comedy in later problem plays and romances.

E. In 1610, at the height of his career and while he was still in his 50s, Shakespeare decided to retire from writing and to live out the remainder of his life as a prosperous member of the gentry in Stratford. He died in 1616 of disease, possibly syphilis or typhus.

1. Prospero's final speech in *The Tempest*, perhaps the last great play in the Shakespearean canon, is commonly supposed to be a version of the dramatist's own farewell to the London theater.

2. Prospero tells us that all life is drama and all drama ends. All drama is fiction and we, too, are just figments. Like Faustus, Prospero—and his creator—seem to ask: What is the worth of knowledge or power when one is faced with death? Both Prospero and Shakespeare will withdraw to contemplate their final days.

3. Prospero, a supreme ruler with magical powers, makes this decision from strength of mind, not terror, as Faustus did. He could have retained his power and, perhaps, achieved immortality. But having freed Ariel and made a man out of Ferdinand, his daughter's future husband, Prospero breaks his staff and vows to return to the world, giving up all comforts for a hair shirt, a monk's cell, and thoughts of death: Will he die well and at peace?

4. It is, perhaps, pleasing for us to think that this is Shakespeare himself speaking to us, explaining why he will write no more plays. It's also frustrating to the world of literature that Shakespeare retired while still at the top of his game.

II. The mature comedies and problem plays contain many powerful moments.

A. In *Measure for Measure*, the young man Claudio has been condemned to death by Angelo, the ruler of Vienna at the time. The only thing that will save him is if his sister, Isabella, will sleep with Angelo.

B. Claudio urges his sister to prostitute herself by describing the sheer horror of mortality in an

overwhelmingly powerful speech.

C. The fact that the play is a comedy is an assurance to the audience that all will end well, but Claudio's lines hang ominously in the mind even after the curtain has fallen.

III. Shakespeare's Roman plays pivot on relevant dilemmas for his own time.

A. For instance, *Julius Caesar* asks if Brutus, the noblest Roman of them all, is right to commit the supremely ignoble act of political murder to save Rome. Can assassination, even in a good cause, ever be justified?

1. Recall that in this play, Caesar is threatening to make himself a king, to overthrow the republic, and Brutus believes that Caesar must be stopped.

2. But how can Brutus stop Caesar, the conqueror of the world, from achieving his ambition? The only answer is to kill Caesar, but is that right? Can one do the right thing for the wrong reason or the wrong thing for the right reason?

B. *Coriolanus* presents a similar dilemma. Is Coriolanus right to invade Rome in order to save it? Where does morality stand when great affairs of state are at stake? How dishonest must a great ruler be in the interest of preserving the well-being of his country?

C. This issue is also explored in the mature history play *Henry V*. Henry orders the massacre of 1,500 French prisoners because he can't achieve victory at Agincourt if he is burdened with keeping them.

1. The French have surrendered themselves with the expectation that they will be safe, but they're killed so that Henry can win his great victory and conquer France.

2. Was Henry right to have ordered these deaths, or should he have protected the prisoners and lost the battle? Is Henry V a war criminal or a realistic battlefield commander?

3. Shakespeare is a master at highlighting such moral issues, as well as the problems of rulership and leadership.

D. The grandest of Shakespeare's Roman plays is *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which Mark Antony throws away the empire for love of Cleopatra.

1. As she prepares for her own suicide after the death of Antony, Cleopatra launches into a magnificent eulogy for her dead lover and husband.

2. Cleopatra's words stake a claim that Antony's "bounty" (his goodness, grandeur of spirit, nobility of mind) vindicates what history would see as his gross irresponsibility.

3. Shakespeare himself may have had second thoughts about this message. After Cleopatra's rhapsody of praise for Antony, she turns to her servant Dolabella and asks if such a person as she has just described could ever have existed. Dolabella replies that the queen is exaggerating.

4. This subversive exchange sums up the fascinating complexity of Shakespeare's mature drama. The audience is left in two minds—not confused but thoughtful. Do we admire Antony or not? In losing an empire for love, was he a great man or an idiot?

5. Such questions remind us that Shakespeare is dealing with the complexity of life itself, in which decisions, dilemmas, and defining acts are rarely neat and tidy. Shakespeare stimulates as much as he gratifies our sensibilities and our minds.

IV. The towering achievement of Shakespeare's life can be found in four tragedies, *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*, each so different in subject that they might have been written by different authors.

A. These works were composed in the darkest period of Shakespeare's life and are permeated by a profound sense of gloom.

1. Consider, for example, Macbeth's response when he is informed that his wife, a woman who once meant more to him than even the throne of Scotland, has killed herself. He says, "She should have died hereafter"; that is, she would have died later anyway.

2. Macbeth stoically goes out to meet his own death on the battlefield against the fearsome Macduff, the man who is destined, as the witches have prophesied, to kill him. But before he does so, he delivers the most eloquently pessimistic description of the human condition to be found anywhere in the 39 plays:

“[life] is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing.”

B. In *Lear*, another great tragedy from this high point of Shakespeare’s career, an aged king with no male heir decides to divide his kingdom among his three daughters, but chaos ensues.

1. The king, once the highest man of the land, finds himself a mad beggar, roaming the heath and ranting; he sees the institutions that he has superintended for decades as hollow, cynical shams.
2. Lear realizes too late that there is no justice in the world. The rich are subject to a different kind of law than the poor. Is he right, or is this merely the delusion of a deranged mind? Is society really corroded to the core by moral rot?

C. Hamlet delivers himself of the finest testimony we have to the humanist conception of man. He is “a piece of work,” “infinite in faculties,” and in his actions, “like an angel,” yet he is also the “quintessence of dust.” Again, we’re of two minds: Is man within reach of the angels, or is he closer to dirt? And is this depressing view Hamlet’s or Shakespeare’s?

D. *Othello* is about a man destroyed by love (or at least that’s what the protagonist would like to think). The Moor has an almost magical way of speaking, marked by what has been called “Othello music.”

1. His last great soliloquy takes place when he realizes the enormity of his crime against his innocent wife, Desdemona, and faces the men who have come to arrest him for her murder.
2. With this soliloquy, right before his suicide, Othello sloughs off the dominance of Iago and regains mastery of himself. We cannot, however, fully accept his verdict for himself: “one that loved not wisely but too well.”
3. He is both a fool, as Iago’s wife has told us earlier in the play, and somehow noble and heroic. We don’t quite know what to think when we finish the play, but we are mysteriously elevated by the experience of reading it.

E. It’s said that Shakespeare contains all life; further, life is encased in Shakespeare in a literary greatness that has never been equaled and probably never will.

Suggested Reading:

Dobson and Wells, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*.

Evans and Tobin, eds., *The Riverside Complete Shakespeare*.

Kastan, *Companion to Shakespeare*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What lines of development does one see in Shakespeare’s drama, over the course of the two decades of his stage career?
2. What, insofar as it is extractable from the drama, do we take to be Shakespeare’s “worldview”?

Lecture Nine

Shakespeare’s Rivals—Jonson and Webster

Scope: Needless to say, Shakespeare was a hard literary act to follow, but in this lecture, we turn to two writers, Ben Jonson and John Webster, who gave Shakespeare a run for his money. Both of these writers reflect the more somber national mood of England during the Jacobean period. Jonson, who saw himself as more intellectual than Shakespeare, wrote comedies that typically accommodate the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action, but his plays are also firmly rooted in his own time, vividly depicting 17th-century London and dealing with an overriding theme of the era—money. As we’ll see in *The Alchemist*, for Jonson, money is not just the root of all evil but the root of all human foolishness. In contrast to Jonson, John Webster was a tragedian; his most famous play, *The Duchess of Malfi*, is an extremely dark reflection on the most savage aspects of the human character. With these two writers, a great period for the English theater came to an end; English drama would not come to the fore again until the 20th century.

Outline

I. In this lecture, we turn to two late contemporaries and, arguably, rivals to Shakespeare, Ben Jonson (1572–1637)

and John Webster (c. 1580–c. 1634).

A. Both of these writers were born a few years after Shakespeare, and both were major dramatists, although Jonson wrote primarily comedies and Webster, tragedies.

B. Both writers are also imbued with the darker tinge associated with Jacobean England. James I succeeded Queen Elizabeth when she died in 1603 and would reign for more than 20 years. He was a literary man himself, but some of his policies were heavy-handed, and his reign lacked the liveliness and national enthusiasm associated with Elizabeth.

1. How do we account for this mood of Jacobean gloom? Partly, the new era was a let-down from the effervescence of the Elizabethan age. Further, the succession had been somewhat difficult.

2. At the same time, James was politically much more contentious than Elizabeth and unable to unify the country. The Gunpowder Plot, the attempt of Guy Fawkes to blow up Parliament, took place in the early years of James's reign. England experienced social discontent at this time as new class energies were released.

3. D. H. Lawrence attributed the gloom of the Jacobean era to the prevalence of syphilis and the fact that biblical scholars of the time had calculated the approaching end of the world.

C. Whatever the reasons for this more somber national mood, English drama was blacker as well.

II. Ben Jonson was one of Shakespeare's greatest admirers, and much of what we know of Shakespeare comes from Jonson's comradely reminiscences.

A. Jonson related for us Shakespeare's method of writing: He worked in conjunction with his actors and, it was said, "never blotted out a line."

B. Jonson was a university-educated man and probably believed that he was more intellectual than Shakespeare, while Shakespeare was a more natural kind of genius. Jonson was very learned, but he wore his learning lightly. His plays are not characterized by scholasticism as much as wit.

C. Nonetheless, Jonson's comedies typically accommodate to the neo-Aristotelian unities. According to this doctrine, the events of a play must be contained in a single day (unity of time); the events must take place in one location (unity of place); and the play must not contain subplots or digressions (unity of action). Only one of Shakespeare's plays, *The Tempest*, is unified in this neo-Aristotelian sense.

D. Jonson knew and learned from ancient dramatists, and his so-called comedy of humors was directly derived from Classical sources.

1. The humors were the four constituents of the human personality: phlegm, yellow bile, black bile, and blood.

2. For Jonson, psychology was one dominant personality trait. Thus, if, as Jonson said, Shakespeare had little Latin and no Greek, he was more of the common people; Jonson, who knew those languages fluently, was an intellectual.

E. Even though he was a Neoclassicist, in such plays as *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson depicted contemporary London with a documentary vividness that is not found in other dramatists. One can almost smell the wood-burning fires and sewage of early 17th-century London. Jonson brings us into a world we know from nursery rhymes, with *London Bridge* and church bells ringing throughout the city.

F. The early 17th century, as Karl Marx observed, was the birth of the capitalist era, and Jonson's major theme was money. Jonson did not approve of the new mercantile focus of society, and the foundation of his play *The Alchemist* is a satire on the rush for wealth. He believed that the contemporary stampede for money was akin to the promise of the alchemist's stone to transform base metals into precious metals.

III. *The Alchemist* was first performed in 1610. The play is set in fashionable residential London during one of the city's recurrent outbreaks of plague.

A. Such epidemics occurred regularly in the summer months, spread by rat fleas, though at the time it was thought that the plague was carried in the air. Daniel Defoe, writing a century later, tells us that perhaps

200,000 people fled the city during the summer months, mainly the wealthy, leaving their servants behind to look after their affairs and take their chances with illness.

B. The setting of the play ties in with a kind of diseased moral climate, as well. It's not just that the epidemic is a physical illness, but it's something that goes deep into the fabric of the age.

C. In Jonson's play, a wealthy man, Lovewit, has left his townhouse in the care of his *maestro domo*, the master of the household. This man, named Face, exhibits different faces depending on what the situation requires. Face conspires with a conman, called Subtle, who pretends to be an alchemist. (Alchemy was sometimes called a process of subtilizing, or refining.) The third member of this conspiracy is a prostitute named Dol Common.

D. This trio sets out to run a scam on the fools left in the city. They will let it be known that Subtle has found the philosopher's stone and has mastered the process of transmuting base metals into gold. The grand mystery of alchemy will, in fact, be available to anyone who pays for it.

E. Puritans, shopkeepers, respectable citizens, and aristocrats all line up to get rich, while the tricksters compete to be the best "shark." Face, Subtle, and Dol encourage their victims' wild fantasies of wealth. One example, Sir Epicure Mammon, serves to illustrate the theme.

1. The name Epicure indicates this character's addiction to pleasures of the flesh, and "mammon" means money. Sir Mammon wants to be rich, and he wants to indulge his appetites on a gigantic scale.
2. Mammon imagines the wonderful universe of self-indulgence he will inhabit once he gets the fool's gold. His speech here is reminiscent of a speech by Marlowe's Faustus, when he has Mephistopheles call up Helen of Troy for his bed partner.
3. Jonson outdoes even Marlowe in the lavishness and cloying richness of his blank verse. But most of all, this speech conveys a biting satire on human greed. Money is the root, not just of all evil, but of all human foolishness.

F. *The Alchemist* ends with a wonderfully ironic stroke of theater: Out of the blue, Lovewit, the master of the house, returns and witnesses the criminal activities that have been going on in his household. Does he punish the wicked trio and return the victims' cash? No, he laughs good-naturedly, congratulates Face, and pockets the profits. Human nature, Jonson tells us, is the same from top to bottom. Cash is God.

IV. In contrast to Jonson, John Webster was a tragedian. His corpus of work is fairly small, with only four plays that have lasted, but all of them are powerful tragedies, carrying on the mood we find in the darkest of Shakespeare's works. Webster, as T. S. Eliot said, was much obsessed with the "skull beneath the skin."

A. Before we look at Webster's greatest tragedy, *The Duchess of Malfi*, we should note that the Jacobean loved reversals of conventional romantic plots. John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* takes the *Romeo and Juliet* scenario, but the star-crossed lovers in this play are brother and sister.

B. *The Duchess of Malfi* is similarly perverse. A rich widow in Italy, the Duchess, falls in love with a respectable but lower-born man. The two marry secretly and have children. The duchess's brother finds out about the marriage, however, and brutally kills the husband.

1. Ostensibly, the brother is protecting the name of Malfi, but his real motive is that he is incestuously in love with his sister. He wants her as his lover and he is going mad under the pressure of his lust.
2. His is a gothic form of madness: *lycanthropia*. The brother believes that he is a wolf, and in this wolfish aspect, he tortures and kills the Duchess horribly on stage.

C. As this gothic tragedy unfolds, a spectator, Bosola, the brother's principal henchman, passively observes the action. He is not a bad person but will do bad things when commanded. One actor who played Bosola observed that the play reminded him of the world of the Mafia: Normal morality is suspended, and the darkest, most savage, wolfish aspects of human character are loosed.

1. One of Bosola's speeches conveys the bleak amorality of Webster's worldview and gives some sense of the brilliance of Webster's turn of phrase.
2. Bosola essentially tells the duchess not to resist the torments of her brother, that is, to accept her own

death: "'Tis now full tide 'tween night and day; / End your groan, and come away.'"

3. Using only the basic constituents of English, these lines are effective and beautifully melodic.

Unfortunately, in Webster's tragedy, such lines rarely combine to create any larger dramatic effect of the kind we might expect from Shakespeare.

V. With Webster and his fellow Jacobean dramatists, a great moment in English literature came to an end.

Increasing pressure from the Puritans eventually brought about licensing and, later, even closure of the theaters.

Apart from a brief florescence during the Restoration, there would be no supremely great drama again until the 20th century. The curtain had come down on the British stage, and it would not rise again for 200 years.

Suggested Reading:

Jonson, *Five Plays*.

Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*.

Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do the post-Shakespearian dramatists take drama forward or lose their way?
2. What are the characteristics of Jacobean gloom, and how can one account for it?

Lecture Ten

The King James Bible—English Most Elegant

Scope: The King James Bible takes the prize as the most read work of English literature in history. The project of translating the Bible into English was motivated chiefly by the desire of James I to pacify the Puritans and supply a central text for Protestantism that would stand in contrast to Rome's Latin Bible. Although the King James translation was written by a series of committees, it rests largely on the work of one man, William Tyndale, from almost a century earlier. Tyndale, a follower of Luther, believed that nothing should stand between Christians and their scriptures. His work on an English translation of the Bible and a falling out with Henry VIII resulted in his arrest and execution. In this lecture we sample one story from this version, the book of Job, noting both its terse style and its intriguing look behind the scenes at the interaction between God and Satan.

Outline

I. Although we might not usually think of it as literature, the King James Bible is the most read work of the English literary canon. The King James Version, published in 1611 in the same period as Shakespeare's tragedies and Ben Jonson's comedies, stands as an example of the English language at its highest pitch of eloquence, subtlety, and beauty.

A. Another reason we tend not to think of the King James Bible as a work of literature is because it was written by committee, although there was a single-minded genius behind what we call the Authorized Version.

B. The publication of the Bible in English was a project motivated principally by politics. This new version of the Bible would consolidate the Reformation by supplying a central text for Protestantism in contrast to Rome's Latin Bible and liturgy. It would also widen the gulf between London and Rome.

C. The King James Bible is a translation of a translation and, possibly, many more translations beyond that. The New Testament was immediately translated from the Greek. The Old Testament was translated from the Masoretic Hebrew text.

1. Latin, Greek, and Hebrew were tongues that only a handful of scholars had mastery of in the 16th century, which made the Bible very remote.

2. Martin Luther, who published the first vernacular version in German in 1522, believed that the Bible should be the property of all men and women.

3. English translations followed Luther's, the most significant of which was by William Tyndale in 1525. Tyndale was a devout follower of Luther and believed there should be no barriers between Christians and their scriptures. For his beliefs, he was strangled and his body was burned at the stake by English

authorities.

D. Henry VIII, in his reforming break from Rome, endorsed the Tyndale Bible, which included, essentially, the New Testament and the Pentateuch.

E. Between Tyndale and the King James Bible, there intervened the rule of the fanatically Catholic Bloody Mary. The five years of her reign, from 1553 to 1558, ushered in a period of religious terror as she sought to return England to Catholicism. The reign of Mary's half-sister, Elizabeth, saw a return to the Protestantism of her father, Henry VIII.

1. Protestantism, in its Anglican version, has the secular monarch, not the pontiff, at its head. Church and state are one.

2. Tyndale's version of the holy writings, as enlarged by refugees during Mary's reign—the so-called Geneva Bible—became current again in Elizabeth's reign.

II. James, who ruled Scotland as James VI before taking over the English throne as James I, had for some years wanted to authorize a version of the Bible in English. The increasingly powerful Puritans also called for a Bible to which they could have access in their own language.

A. From James's point of view, an English Bible would be a safety valve, making society more stable. The Puritans would, to some extent, be defused by having their own Bible. Thus, the project for the new Bible was outlined at the Hampton Court Conference, convened in January 1604 with the principal aim of scholarly accuracy.

B. The new translators didn't seek to interfere with the text of the Bible, just the way in which it was articulated. Certain key terms, such as the word "priest," had not been translated precisely in the Tyndale-derived versions. Marginal notes offering interpretation of the Bible were also at issue.

C. From James's point of view, it was important to create an orthodox Authorized Version. This authorization was not by virtue of a sect, or the Church, or the universities, but by the king who was head and patron of the established church.

1. In England, the Bible was to be a state-owned text, as much the property of the Crown as Buckingham Palace or Regent's Park.

2. Unlike in the United States, authorized versions of the Bible may be printed in England only under license from the Crown; that license has traditionally been awarded to Oxford and Cambridge. The Authorized Version has never been in the public domain in the United Kingdom.

3. This fact creates a significant axis of institutional power among the throne, the church, Parliament, and the academy—the establishment in Britain.

D. The Authorized Version was the work of six committees using the expertise of 50 scholars, most of them men of learning from Oxford or Cambridge. Nonetheless, 80 percent of the King James New Testament is verbally unaltered from Tyndale's earlier translation.

1. This percentage is probably comparable to estimates scholars would give of the extent of authentic Shakespeare in our possession today.

2. Despite all the committee apparatus, the mind of William Tyndale stands behind most of the King James Bible, and Tyndale may have been a creative writer of equal stature to even Shakespeare.

3. A reading of the opening lines of Genesis translated by Tyndale and from the King James Bible shows obvious echoes in the Authorized Version from that written almost a century earlier.

III. Who was William Tyndale?

A. Little is known of the early life of Tyndale, who was probably born in 1494 and died in 1536. Even his surname isn't certain; he sometimes appears in documents as Hichens. He was a student at Oxford and, after his graduation in 1512, enrolled to do advanced study in theology.

B. He became a tutor in a noble household but was soon in trouble for heresy. Early on, he developed two dangerous aspirations: to defy Rome and to translate the scriptures into English. His aim, he said, was that

even the ploughmen of England should know the scriptures.

C. Tyndale went to Germany and may even have met Luther in the 1520s. He was on the continent when Luther's vernacular Bible in German was published, a text that was promptly prohibited in England. Over the years, Tyndale worked on his own translation abroad.

D. He fell out with the king on the issue of Henry VIII's multiple divorces and was captured, brought back to England, tried for heresy, and strangled and burned. Reportedly, his final words were: "Oh Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

IV. We could sample the Authorized Version anywhere for its literary quality. The book of Job gives us a complete and fascinating narrative:

A. In the opening of the book of Job, note the solidity of specification, what we would call the exposition if this were a novel. We know the hero's name and place of residence; we have an exact inventory of his property; and we know his character—excessively devout and sensible, rather dull even, and very cautious. Suspecting that his sons might have sinned, he makes offerings for them.

B. The most extraordinary feature in this exposition is the conversation between God and Satan, in which they make a wager, effectively, that Satan will visit his evil upon Job as a test. As the story develops, many tribulations fall on Job, but he survives and remains faithful.

C. Allegorically, the meaning is simple: Even in the extremity of hardship, one must hold the faith. God will, in the fullness of time, reward those who remain faithful.

1. The back story here is fascinating, particularly the free hand given to Satan.

2. God does not seem to be a particularly noble protector of mankind. He is prepared for Job to lose all that he has; it is part of his divine intention and plan to allow Job to suffer the sharpest and cruelest of pain. Why? To win a bet with Satan, who seems, in some sense, an equal player with God.

3. Like other great stories, the more we read the Book of Job, the more curious and perplexed we become. Above all, it is the wonderfully terse, gritty style that captivates us.

D. Note in the literary expression of this story the stress on monosyllables. The last line, for example, reads: "And Job died, an old man, and full of days." The line contains nothing more than the simplest constituents of English language. Note, too, that the line is in iambic pentameter, recalling the blank verse of Marlowe.

E. In all the literature that we'll look at in the following lectures, the Authorized Version is there. It's not always visible, and it's not always audible, but it's always present.

V. In addition to making the Bible accessible, the Authorized Version achieved all the goals that James had for it.

A. It created one of the structures of the established church in England, which was one of the great foundational elements of what would become the English state.

B. The King James Bible also created a version of the English language that was heard by the population every week.

1. In listening to weekly sermons, the people of England gained the power of understanding complexity through the ear rather than the eye (listening rather than reading), and this ability conditioned the kinds of work produced by poets, dramatists, and writers of prose.

2. The weekly lessons read from the Authorized Version permeated the intellectual fabric of England, particularly its writers, for the next 200 years.

3. This cultural core is attributable to the enlightened act of James I in organizing the authorized translation.

C. But we must not forget William Tyndale, whose words still echo throughout our literature. For 200 years, he was almost equal to Shakespeare as one of the great formers, one of the people who produced the raw material for the authors we'll look at in coming lectures, including John Donne and John Milton.

Suggested Reading:

Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence*.

———, *William Tyndale: A Biography*.

Prickett and Carroll, eds., *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*.

Tyndal, trans., *Tyndal's New Testament*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What problems do we confront in reading the Bible “as literature”?
2. What claim does the Book of Job have to be the first sophisticated prose narrative in Western Culture, the “proto-novel”?

Lecture Eleven

The Metaphysicals—Conceptual Daring

Scope: The Metaphysical poets were a group writing in the early and mid-17th century for educated, cultivated elite. They were deeply learned and concerned above all with wit. Their poems were often based on unique or daring conceits, as in John Donne’s “The Flea” and “The Sun Rising.” Modern readers sometimes find the language of Metaphysical poetry difficult, and earlier readers were put off by its farfetched conceits and naughty sexuality. But for these poets, there were no such things as poetic subjects and no subjects beneath the dignity of poetry. In this lecture, we also look at the poetry of George Herbert and Andrew Marvell, both perhaps less pugnacious and seemingly simpler than Donne but no less clever. Many modern scholars consider the conceptual daring of the Metaphysical poets to be the highest achievement in English verse.

Outline

I. At the beginning of the 21st century, we have 1,500 years worth of English poetry to read and enjoy. Looking over that treasure trove, many scholars, readers, and poets themselves might say that the work of the Metaphysical poets constitutes the highest achievement in English verse.

A. The Metaphysicals were a school of poets writing in the early and the mid-17th century. Their work circulated in manuscript form among educated elite. Several versions of their poems exist in some cases, making it hard to assign dates to them.

B. Metaphysical poetry was a highly cultivated branch of literature for the highly cultivated. One had to be able to write, in a sense, to qualify as a reader.

C. The Metaphysical poets were familiar with, and adept in, foreign styles; deeply learned; and above all, witty. Wit, meaning smartness or cleverness, was the essence of the Metaphysical project.

1. The Metaphysical poets cultivated a particular form of wit that they called the conceit, meaning a daring idea or concept. They valued originality, uniqueness, and sometimes the farfetched.

2. Some of the conceits were so daring they almost defy imagination, such as that used in “The Flea” by John Donne (1572–1631).

II. “The Flea” is a love poem addressed by the poet to his unnamed lover.

A. The young lady to whom the poem is addressed is a virgin, and she is steadfastly resisting the poet’s urgent and wittily seductive request that she remain a virgin no longer. For his part, the poet is using all the resources of his poetry as an instrument of seduction.

B. Donne compares the size of his request—that the young lady sleep with him—to a flea. He tells her that the flea has sucked on both their bodies, and their bodily fluids have come together in this way.

1. Christ’s blood, the mark of redemption, is daringly alluded to here, as is the breaking of the virginal hymen.

2. The sucking flea has joined the lovers as a minister might join them in the holy union of marriage.

C. The poem is riddled with parody and jammed full of strange, heterogeneous ideas. It’s so farfetched in its wittiness as to verge on the surreal. Yet clearly the poem is designed not just to impress but to seduce. The poet may have used these same arguments, even though he may not have originally formulated them in poetic language.

III. With the Metaphysicals, the short lyric poem became a dominant mode in English literature. Another poem in this mode is Donne's "The Sun Rising."

A. This poem again finds the poet in bed. Here, he has woken up after a night of lovemaking alongside a woman who is not his wife.

B. In the opening lines, the poet addresses the sun as "thou," used at the time as an informal, even contemptuous form of address, almost as if the sun is a servant who has come to empty the chamber pot. English verse has a long tradition of hailing the dawn as a beautiful moment of the day, but here, Donne turns that convention on its head.

C. The poet continues, telling us that love doesn't have to obey the movements of the clock or the sun through the heavens. As he contemplates time, his poem becomes more metaphysical and witty.

D. As his companion wakes up, he begins to compliment her, telling her that she is richer than all the riches of the Orient. He goes on: "She's all states, and all princes I; / Nothing else is." The poet has become solipsistic, closing out the universe beyond himself and the woman.

E. The poem ends with lines addressed to the Sun: "Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere; / This bed thy center is, these walls thy sphere."

1. At first Donne addresses the Sun as an irate householder might curse his alarm clock. But then, by a kind of intellectual glide, the poem becomes the supreme lover's compliment.

2. The poet and his paramour have become heavenly bodies, equivalent in cosmic significance to the Sun, the Moon, and Earth.

F. The poem moves by a series of conceits from a comic, low-life scenario, through hyperbole, through overstatement and fantastic exaggeration, to something extraordinarily stimulating intellectually. And it has carried us along with it, or has it?

1. The poem is, in fact, extremely complicated. As mentioned in the last lecture, 17th-century audiences were much better at understanding things through listening than we are. Modern readers often have to wrestle with the words of this poetry.

2. The other problem with Metaphysical poetry at the time it was written was that not everyone liked its farfetched conceits or its naughty sexuality. Censorship was very real in the 17th century, and the Puritans, in particular, hated this "libertine poetry."

3. Samuel Johnson said of Metaphysical poetry: "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together." For Johnson, this tendency was indecorous; he believed that poetry should follow certain rules. The Metaphysicals were somewhat out of fashion when Johnson was writing, but he does have a point; the extravagance in this poetry offends some readers.

IV. Despite such objections, the reputation of the Metaphysicals rose over the centuries. They were regarded as increasingly significant, not just in themselves but in the influence they had on successive poets. It was T. S. Eliot, the greatest poet of the 20th century, who most effectively celebrated and vindicated the work of his 17th-century predecessors.

A. A poet such as Donne had what Eliot called an "undissociated sensibility."

1. For the Metaphysicals, there were no such things as poetic subjects. A poet could write about a flea as well as he could write about the dawn, and he could write about the flea very differently from the ways in which it had been traditionally regarded.

2. There was no such thing as a subject beneath the dignity of poetry or as poetic diction. Everything was grist to the metaphysical mill. All human experience could be put into the poetic mix.

B. We saw in "The Sun Rising" how the poet moves from waking up in a tussled bed with a woman to imagery of the spheres that is clearly derived from the Aristotelian view of the universe. Erotic love and astronomy are not usually yoked together, but this learned poet combines them effectively. In "The Flea," theology and verminous infestation are similarly yoked together.

C. Eliot valued Metaphysical poetry most for its willingness to transmute and refine into high poetry any area

of human life.

V. Donne's poetry is marked by a restless intellectual energy that constantly borders on the violent.

A. Even in later life, when he was a respectable, married dean of Saint Paul's, Donne's sacred verse is marked by a breathtaking pugnacity or violence of intellectual argument.

B. In perhaps his most famous sonnet, "Death, Be Not Proud," Donne personifies death, then conquers it. The idea of death itself dying is a magnificent conceit, as is the catalog of abuse that precedes it.

VI. George Herbert (1593–1633) was a Metaphysical poet of almost equal stature with Donne.

A. Herbert, too, was a churchman, although only a humble pastor. Herbert was less pugnacious than Donne, less prone to take on the great adversaries of the Christian universe.

B. Herbert's poetry is marked by a simplicity that works by way of economy and deceptive subtlety; it is no less clever in its conception, in its "conceitedness," than Donne's.

C. Herbert's *The Temple* is a structured collection of verse, in which he lays out the church in architectural form. It's an early example of concrete poetry, and all the poems in the collection correlate with an architectural feature of the church.

D. One poem from this collection, called "Vertue," addresses death but less in a spirit of aggressive confrontation than in submission to the universal facts of vegetation and decay. Everything that lives must die, but we can view that fact as both positive and negative.

1. The first two lines of the poem read: "SWEET day, so cool, so calm, so bright, / The bridall of the earth and skie."

2. The use of "bridall" here illustrates the Metaphysical poets' love of puns. It can mean a horse's bridle, something like a leather strap that holds the earth and sky together, or bridal in the sense of marriage.

3. The title of the poem, "Vertue," also plays with the Latin root of that word, which means "strength." The poet is asking: What is the strength of the world? What holds the world together?

4. The gentleness and lyricism of this poem are suddenly transformed in its powerful last stanza: "Onely a sweet and vertuous soul, / Like season'd timber, never gives; / But though the whole world turn to coal, / Then chiefly lives."

5. These lines allegorize suffering in the human context. The poet tells us that the more we suffer and the unhappier we are, the stronger and more virtuous will we be as individuals.

VII. "To His Coy Mistress" by Andrew Marvell (1621–1678) is another poem of seduction.

A. The lady in this poem is not yet the poet's mistress, although he wants her to be. She is a woman of his own class who is capable of understanding complex and witty verse.

B. Marvell tells the lady that time is their enemy; she should sleep with him now, before she dies and "worms shall try / That long preserv'd virginity." The poem is another version of the *carpe diem* theme but with a wittily subversive motive.

C. It's not coyness but virtue that makes the woman hesitant, but Marvell won't celebrate that quality, as Herbert did, because calling attention to it might prevent him from getting what he wants.

VIII. The most enduring qualities of the Metaphysical school and its bequests to subsequent schools of English poetry are its go-for-broke linguistic and conceptual daring and its reckless yokings of high and low, its relish for twisting language and ideas into new shapes. The sheer cleverness of the school is a sheer wonder.

Suggested Reading:

Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*.

———, ed., *Marvell: A Critical Anthology*.

Donne, *John Donne: The Major Works*.

Herbert, *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems*.

Marvell, *Andrew Marvell: The Complete Poems*.

Norbrook and Woudhuysen, eds., *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse, 1509–1659*.

Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What did the Metaphysicals understand by the term “wit”?
2. Why is this particular school of poetry regarded by many modern commentators as one of the very highest points achieved in the long history of English literature?

Lecture Twelve

Paradise Lost—A New Language for Poetry

Scope: John Milton’s purpose in writing *Paradise Lost* is explicitly stated—“to justify the ways of God to men”—but how would the poet tackle such an ambitious undertaking? In choosing between Latin and English for the language of the poem, Milton compromised by inventing a new dialect for poetry, one that is removed from the language of natural speech. Milton also faced the question of whether to write a tragedy or an epic, the two great literary genres defined by Aristotle. He thought about writing a dramatic tragedy, including a speech by Satan that eventually found its way into Book IV of the epic poem. Milton’s own life and times may also have presented challenges for him in writing *Paradise Lost*, and the resulting undercurrents continue to fascinate modern readers. How could this rebel Puritan not have a degree of sympathy for the arch-rebel Satan? And how could a scholar such as Milton believe that the tree of knowledge should be forbidden to mankind? Milton’s role on the edge of events during the traumatic period of the English Civil War introduced into English literature the question: To what extent should the poet and his subjects be subordinated or antagonistic to the order of society as it is?

Outline

I. What was John Milton’s (1608–1674) purpose in writing *Paradise Lost*? The blind epic poet gives us the answer to that question in his prolegomenon: to explain the ways of God to man.

A. Just like the English builders of cathedrals, for whom their buildings were not architecture but concrete acts of worship, Milton’s motives in writing his great poem were religious, and we do him a great injustice if we don’t appreciate that fact. Most of us do not read *Paradise Lost* as its author intended us to read it. For us, it is a great literary text, not Genesis poeticized or explained.

B. *Paradise Lost* is an immensely ambitious poem, bringing together the epic project of Homer and the text of the Bible. Milton faced both strategic and logistical problems in writing it. How could he achieve such a massively difficult undertaking with the tools at his disposal? What language should he write in, Latin or English?

1. Milton could write in Latin as fluently as he could write in English, but he was also an English Puritan, and he wanted to make his poem accessible to his coreligionists.
2. Milton compromised brilliantly on the language question by inventing a new language for poetry that was halfway between Latin and English.
3. In the opening lines of Book I, we hear diction, vocabulary, rhythms, and syntactic structures that are wholly alien to the language of everyday life, then and now. Note the suspension or delay of the key verb *sing*, which doesn’t appear until the sixth line. This is a wholly Latinate construction.
4. T. S. Eliot said, although he later changed his mind, that this Miltonic poetic idiom divorced poetry from the language of men. It’s true that Milton went farther than most poets in re-crafting the language in the interest of his art; indeed, he invented a new dialect for poetry.

C. Milton’s second technical problem related to genre. In *The Poetics*, Aristotle defined the two great literary genres as tragedy and epic. These two forms had intrinsic nobility, but which one should Milton adopt for his great poem?

1. Tragedy, as Aristotle defined it, is unified. Milton’s poem *Samson Agonistes* was created along strict

Aristotelian lines. It rigorously obeys the unities of place, time, and action; has a classic catharsis; and avoids all scenes of blood or violence.

2. Epic, again as defined by Aristotle, is loose, episodic, and digressive. It is narrative, not dramatic, in its organization. Whereas the material in tragedy is carefully structured, beginning strictly at the final, conclusive moment, epic typically begins *in media res*, “in the middle of things.”

3. Milton toyed with the model of the epic poets Homer and Vergil and with that of the tragedian Sophocles. He made detailed plans for the dramatic tragedy he thought of writing, tentatively called *Adam Unparadised*.

4. One great speech from Satan in *Adam Unparadised* was later grafted into Book IV of *Paradise Lost*.

a. As the enemy of mankind, Satan debates with himself about his intent to bring sin into Eden: Will doing so damn him, or is it justifiable in his rebellion?

b. In the end, “Disdain forbids” him from submitting to God. He is too proud.

c. Faustus’s last soliloquy is clearly echoed here, as is the line of Mephistopheles “Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.”

5. Even though Milton decided not to write a drama, he retained a dramatic conception of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. The best speeches in the poem are Satan’s.

a. The speech in which Satan dooms himself to fall would have occurred at a key moment in the drama, what Aristotle termed the *peripeteia* or “turning point” in the play.

b. This is the irredeemable moment for Satan. Up to this point, he could have saved himself, but by committing himself to the destruction of Adam and Eve, he also destroys himself.

II. The poet William Blake observed that Milton was “of the Devil’s party and did not know it.” At its heart, the poem *Paradise Lost* is morally conflicted.

A. Milton himself was a rebel and a Puritan who had taken up his pen against the king. How could he not have some sympathy for the arch-rebel Satan? Deep countercurrents in *Paradise Lost* drive against the poem’s biblical orthodoxies and make the poem more complex.

B. Milton was a firm believer in the doctrine of *felix culpa*, “happy sin,” the belief that man was greater, potentially, because of the fall and redemption than he had been before. The loss and regaining of paradise, each individual’s struggles in life, had the capacity for making us, given that we are possessed of free will, greater than we would have been if we were happily vegetating in Eden for all eternity.

C. How could a scholar like Milton think that the tree of knowledge should be forbidden to mankind? In the poem, he gets around this problem rather elegantly.

1. The forbidden fruit, the apple, represents nothing but a test of obedience; it does not relate to sex.

2. Adam is learned enough to debate on equal terms with the Archangel Raphael before the fall, but he hasn’t gained mastery over what the Puritans called the old Adam, the propensity to rebel, sin, and break rules.

D. Another countercurrent that has particularly worried modern readers is Milton’s misogyny, his apparent hatred of women. The poem is very focused on the fall of man; woman is there, not as a partner, but as a subsidiary cause.

1. Eve was created out of one of Adam’s less important bones, a rib, and it’s clear in the poem that while Adam is for God, Eve is for the God in Adam.

2. When Satan gets his first look at his two future victims, he sees two magnificent specimens, but he says of Adam: “His fair large front and eye sublime declared / Absolute rule”; the implication is that he has absolute rule over Eve.

3. When Eve succumbs to the serpent’s seductive wiles, her error is really Adam’s because he has not exercised his authority over her.

4. When Eve returns, having eaten the apple, Adam’s duty is clear: to spurn her. But he doesn’t because his carnal desire for her is greater than his godliness. The old Adam cannot be suppressed.

5. Adam offers the shabbiest of excuses to God: “The woman tempted me and I did eat.” He goes on to

ask God why women—“this fair defect / Of nature”—need to exist at all.

6. Both Milton’s life and his poetry reflect the spirit of his time, which from our point of view seems chauvinistic. Romantic myth holds that Milton, the blind poet, dictated his work to his daughters. In reality, he kept his daughters in ignorance; at least two of them probably could not even write.

7. Milton’s unhappy first marriage to the 16-year-old Mary Powell most likely led to his famous pamphlets in favor of divorce as a means of assuring liberty for men.

III. It’s impossible to make sense of *Paradise Lost* unless one sets it in the context of the English Civil War.

A. Milton had served the Commonwealth during its years of domination and civic power in the mid-17th century, in part by writing anti-episcopal tracts.

1. Bishops were an obnoxious relic of Rome and a main bone of contention during this period, as was subservience of the Church of England to the Crown of England.

2. The rebellion made it clear that one had to oppose the king in order to oppose the church, and the goal of doing so was to create religious liberty. The Puritans maintained that God did not serve any king; individuals had a personal relationship with God, not one that was mediated through bishops or monarchs.

B. With the parliamentary victory in the Civil War, culminating in the beheading of Charles I, Milton used his pen in defense of republicanism and against monarchic rule. In return, he was awarded a high position in the Commonwealth, Secretary of Foreign Tongues.

C. After the Restoration in May 1660 and Charles II’s accession, Milton went into hiding, fearing for his life; a warrant was issued for his arrest, and his writings were burned. (*Paradise Lost* did not yet exist.) Despite the issuance of a general pardon, Milton was nevertheless arrested and briefly imprisoned before influential friends intervened.

D. *Paradise Lost* was composed between 1658 and 1664 (and published in 1667 for the fee of £5 or \$10). From the Puritans’ point of view, the Civil War had failed, and from the larger point of view of the English nation, the war was one of the most traumatic events in modern history.

IV. Two main problems remain for successive generations coming to *Paradise Lost*.

A. The first problem is this: Is the poet compelled to re-create language so drastically if he or she is to write great poetry? Could one not draw, instead, on the reservoirs of natural speech?

B. The other question is not specifically poetic, though it reverberated through literature for the next 300 years: To what extent should the poet and to what extent should the subjects that the poet deals with be subordinated or antagonistic to the order of things as they are?

1. In a famous essay, George Orwell said that the writer should be “outside the whale,” because otherwise, the state or society could swallow the writer up, as the whale had swallowed Jonah. The writer should maintain a position on the edge of things, looking in, but not contained by what he or she is describing.

2. Milton was on the edge of things during the time he was writing *Paradise Lost*, and that edginess gives the poem much of its power.

C. *Paradise Lost* is a work of literature that requires us to educate ourselves in order to make sense of it. It is an extraordinary achievement that has challenged readers of every generation.

Suggested Reading:

Milton, *John Milton: The Complete Poems*.

———, *John Milton: The Major Works*.

———, *Paradise Lost*.

Waldock, *Paradise Lost and Its Critics*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is Milton secretly, subversively, or unconsciously “of the devil’s party” in *Paradise Lost*?

2. T. S. Eliot commented that, with his Latinate diction, Milton had erected a Chinese wall around English poetry,

sealing it off from the language of the people. How just a criticism is this?

Lecture Thirteen

Turmoil Makes for Good Literature

Scope: The mid-17th century in England was torn apart by the war of the Puritans and parliamentarians versus the royalists. For a brief period, the king's forces were overthrown, and a Commonwealth was established under Oliver Cromwell. A few years later, however, the monarchy was restored, and the old order was reestablished, with certain democratic modifications. Literature played a part in this turmoil, as we see in this lecture in the work of Thomas Hobbes and John Bunyan. Hobbes's *Leviathan* argued that human beings in society will continually fight one another unless savagely restrained from doing so. He called for forceful top-down control, and his views are still seen in the law-and-order platform of the Conservative party in England. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan gives us another image of man as similarly embattled but perhaps salvageable. In this well-known allegory, Christian makes his way from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City with only Faith, Hope, and the Bible as his guides. At the same time that Bunyan was writing, John Wilmot produced the most debauched poetry to be found in English literature. In looking at these examples of Puritan and libertine literature, we can see that the Restoration was, perhaps, the most divided period in English history.

Outline

- I.** The mid-17th century in England was torn apart by civil war, a war focused on religious, intellectual, and social freedom.
 - A.** Historians often observe that England has never had a revolution along the lines of those seen in France, Russia, or America. The closest England has ever come to a revolution was the turmoil experienced in the last half of the 17th century.
 - B.** The Puritans had become a strong political party, and the royalists, many of them with Catholic roots, felt the need to repress this dangerous new force. An explosion was inevitable, with Oliver Cromwell, known as the Protector, as the detonator. The king's forces were defeated, and a Commonwealth or English republic was established.
 - C.** Cromwell's moral illiberality and defiance of Parliament led, in a few years, to the restoration of the monarchy in the person of Charles II and the return of the court from its exile in France.
 - D.** The old order was reestablished with certain modifications: More power was given to the people, specifically, to the middle classes, and to Parliament. These constitutional modifications were confirmed with the importation from Holland of William and Mary in 1689, chosen because it was believed they would follow the desires of the nation.
 - E.** The long era of characteristically English liberal democracy was thereby inaugurated, with a balance of forces among the Crown, Parliament, elected governments, and the people. This balance of forces exists to this day.
 - F.** Literature rode out this turmoil, and in fact, as typically happens, turmoil made for some very good literature. Pamphlets, for example, played a major part in the conflict between the parliamentarians or Puritans and the royalists.

- II.** The Civil War, which had broken out in 1642, elicited Thomas Hobbes's (1588–1679) *Leviathan*, a grim and powerfully written political treatise. *Leviathan* was published in 1651, only two years after Charles I had been executed by the English people.
 - A.** *Leviathan* was also the name used by Milton to describe Satan in Book I of *Paradise Lost*. When we're first introduced to Satan, who has been exiled from heaven, he is basking like a vast whale in a fiery lake. For both Milton and Hobbes, *Leviathan* is a monster.
 - B.** Hobbes, in his *Leviathan*, also pictured society as a monster, made up of innumerable small units, with each small unit a human being. In Hobbes's view of human nature, these tiny components of society will constantly

fight each other unless savagely restrained from doing so. The body politic—society as a whole—can only be organized and controlled by force.

C. Without that forceful top-down control, society was, in Hobbes's best known phrase, a "war of all against all." And civil war reduces society to its simplest, irredeemably belligerent, homicidal elements. It breaks down the body politic.

D. For Hobbes, this is the natural condition of humanity. Not even Darwin, with his universal struggle for survival, had such a harsh view of the human condition as did Hobbes. A famous line from Hobbes's description of civil war tells us its result: "And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."

E. Hobbes's view of the human condition and the social contract in *Leviathan* is jaundiced in the extreme, but it has been influential over succeeding generations. The Conservative party in England, for example, still retains a strong Hobbesian bent, particularly in the idea that society needs binding forces, what we now call law and order.

F. As Hobbes saw it, new structures would be needed to create the necessary stability on which civilization could found itself, but beyond forceful authority, Hobbes offered no suggestions for what those structures would be. Nonetheless, his beautifully written work infused his views into literary political discourse for generations to come.

III. Another image of man put forth in this period was similarly embattled but ultimately more hopeful than Hobbes's. This optimistic response to the Civil War was current among the Puritans and given literary expression by John Bunyan (1628–1688).

A. Bunyan was born to a working-class family in the town of Bedford, in the midlands of England. He was largely self-educated, steeped in Tyndale's Geneva Bible and Puritan polemic.

B. Bunyan espoused a militant Protestantism and was himself a Christian soldier, serving in Cromwell's Roundhead parliamentary army. His service is recalled in his spiritual journal *Grace Abounding*.

C. In adult life, Bunyan became convinced that he was one of God's elect. He would go to heaven, not necessarily because he was a good man, but because that's what God had decided. From 1655, he spoke to various congregations, despite the schismatism that was affecting even Puritanism at this point.

D. Bunyan's belief that he had been saved sustained him throughout his difficult life. In 1660, with the return of Charles II from France and the downfall of the Commonwealth, he was imprisoned for preaching without a license. Indeed, Restoration Puritans would have a hard time of it unless they conformed, but for Bunyan, conformity meant damnation. He spent 12 years behind bars as a prisoner of conscience and, during that time, wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

E. This book was eventually published in the late 1670s in two parts and became the most popular work in prose fiction in the English language. Along with the Bible and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, a catalog of people who suffered for their faith, *Pilgrim's Progress* would take its place on the mantelpiece of every respectable lower-class family for generations.

F. The full title of Bunyan's great work is: *The Pilgrim's Progress FROM THIS WORLD TO That which is to come: Delivered under the Similitude of a DREAM Wherein is Discovered, The manner of his setting out, His Dangerous Journey; And safe Arrival at the Desired Country.*

1. Puritans were inveterately suspicious of fiction, but Bunyan justified the imaginative aspect of his allegorical work with an epigraph from the book of Hosea: "I have used Similitudes."

2. The Bible approved the use of similitudes to communicate religious truths.

G. The story of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is as well known: Christian leaves home and the City of Destruction, where he has lived all his life, to undertake a long journey to the Celestial City. He has been inspired to take this journey by the Bible.

1. Christian's journey is made harder because of a burden on his back—sin, the old Adam—which he cannot slough off until he gets to the Celestial City.

2. On his journey, Christian discovers that the majority of mankind is sinful and destined for inevitable damnation.
3. He undergoes various trials and ordeals, encountering the Slough of Despond, the Hill of Difficulty, the Valley of Humiliation, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and Doubting Castle.
4. Christian is accompanied on his pilgrimage by his friend Faithful to the city Vanity Fair, which is London, where Faithful is put on trial and executed as a martyr. Faithful dies and, thus, takes a shortcut to the Celestial City.
5. Christian plods on, with his new companion, Hopeful. After many trials, the two pilgrims cross the River of Death to Mount Zion and the Celestial City. It is Hope who keeps Christian going during the most dispiriting periods of their journey. Once they arrive at their destination, their burdensome packs drop away; they are free of sin.
6. The second part of the book, dealing with Christiana, Christian's wife, is a parallel story of trial, ordeal, and salvation. There are no passengers on her journey. Everyone must save themselves, even wives, husbands, and children.

H. Bunyan's allegory is mechanical and, compared to Spenser's, for example, primitive, but the texture of the prose, nourished by vernacular English and the Geneva Bible, is as pure as crystal.

1. The opening of the book describes Bunyan's vision of Christian in a dream at the moment in Christian's life when he decides that he must save himself.
2. Bunyan sees a man clothed in rags reading from a book. As he reads, he weeps and trembles, finally crying out, "What shall I do to be saved?" Evangelist appears and points to the book Christian is reading, telling him that he must "fly from the wrath to come."
3. Everyone must find individual salvation; seekers cannot even take their loved ones with them, but they have a book as a guide. It's by reading that one will be saved.

IV. In complete contrast to Bunyan, we turn to John Wilmot (1647–1680), Earl of Rochester and the most depraved poet in all of English literature.

- A.** Rochester was active and writing while Bunyan was in prison, but he was a member of the royal court, as well as a libertine. While the Puritans believed in repressing the flesh, the libertines believed in expressing it.
- B.** Rochester's poem "To His Mistress" uses religious imagery for starkly irreligious ends. His salvation is not found in the Celestial City but in the fornicator's bed.

V. Looking at the Puritan and the libertine literature produced simultaneously during this period, it's safe to say that never has English society been as split as it was in the Restoration period.

- A.** After the brief experiment with republicanism and the Commonwealth, the court returned from France, willfully intending to annoy and affront the Puritans, who had killed the king. This effrontery reached its highest pitch in Restoration comedy.
- B.** Such dramatists as William Congreve, William Wycherley, and George Etherege deliberately offended Puritanism and middle-class sensibility with witty depictions of cuckoldry, seduction, and indifference to common morality.
- C.** These excesses eventually led to the virtual extinction of drama. The Puritans and the middle classes would win, and the English theater would be a casualty of their victory for at least 200 years.
- D.** William and Anne, who came to the English throne in 1702, were monarchs who embodied middle-class virtue, Protestantism, and parliamentary democracy; their reign inaugurated a stable England.
- E.** John Dryden, reviewing the tumultuous years from 1640 to 1700, wrote: "Thy wars brought nothing about; / Thy lovers were all untrue. / 'Tis well an old age is out, / And time to begin a new." We will look at that new age in the next lecture.

Suggested Readings:

Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution*.

———, *Puritanism and Revolution*.

———, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*.

———, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628–1688*.

Hobbes, *Leviathan*.

Johnson, *A Profane Wit: The Life of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*.

Rochester, *Rochester: Complete Poems and Plays*.

Sharrock, *John Bunyan*.

Zwicker, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1650–1740*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is literature itself at war in this period? If so, what weapons can literature effectively use?
2. How far can the “virtue” or “vice” of a writer influence the reader’s response to literature, and how does such a response vary over time?

Lecture Fourteen

The Augustans—Order, Decorum, and Wit

Scope: The 18th century in English literature is known to critics as the “peace of the Augustans.” England was now prosperous and on its way to becoming the leader of Europe in commerce, science, and diplomacy. At the same time, literature aspired to match the cultural achievements of Rome under Augustus to reflect the emerging greatness of Britain. The Augustan writers loved order and decorum and took, as one of their hallmarks, the heroic couplet, a rhymed form that lends itself well to epigram. The Augustans also loved wit and detested dullness, as we’ll see in this lecture with selections from Alexander Pope and John Dryden. Pope specialized in Horatian satire, considered more conversational and relaxed in tone than its counterpart, the angrier, moralistic Juvenalian satire. We close with an example of this form by Samuel Johnson, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. Despite its theme that human triumph always ends in disappointment, this poem reminds us of one of the aims of reading literature: to become better people for having done so.

Outline

I. A distinctive mood settled over English literature in the 18th century, known to critics as the “peace of the Augustans.”

A. England was no longer in a state of civil war; the country was now prosperous and could see itself as the leader of Europe in commerce, science, and international diplomacy.

1. Under Marlborough, the brilliant general who took the British army into mainland Europe, Britain would establish itself as a major military power.
2. Of course, the navy was more important than the army. As James Thomson’s 18th-century anthem put it, Britannia ruled the waves.
3. The Hanoverian dynasty, the German monarchs who were now on the throne of England, created a strong Protestant leadership at the top of society.

B. Literature in this period was moving inexorably toward cultivation and civilization. The aspiration was to match the great cultural achievements of Rome under Augustus, which is why writers called themselves Augustans. Literature should be polished and should reflect the values of the great emerging British civilization.

C. Old English masters, such as Chaucer and Shakespeare, were polished into 18th-century styles of correctness. John Dryden’s *All for Love*, for example, attempted to improve upon Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*.

1. Shakespeare gives to Enobarbus, a minor character, a speech describing the beauty of Cleopatra as she sails down the Nile. The poetry is rich but still conversational and sinewy.

2. Dryden's version of the same speech is cool, correct, and in comparison to Shakespeare's, anemic.

D. The English Augustans loved rules, order, and decorum. It's no accident that Samuel Johnson's great dictionary was produced in this century, when organization was paramount. In architecture, Sir Christopher Wren built huge Neoclassical structures after the Great Fire of London. Chastity of design, purity of form, and reverence for style were the orders of the day.

II. The theater still enjoyed royal patronage, but it was strictly licensed. Words on the page dominated the world of literature, and one literary genre dominated all others: satire. In poetry, one small component dominated: the heroic couplet.

A. Unlike blank verse, invented earlier by Marlowe, the heroic couplet rhymes. This form had been brought back by the court literati from France after the Restoration, modified with 10 feet (syllables), not 12.

1. The strong, or masculine, final rhyme syllable in a couplet creates closure, as we hear in the first two lines of Samuel Johnson's poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes*: "Let observation with extensive view / Survey mankind from China to Peru."

2. Another recurrent feature in the heroic couplet is the *caesura*, or cut, which creates a half-line silent pause.

3. The heroic couplet lends itself to epigram and closed statements. It's not as successful with long narrative because it breaks ideas down into linear units.

B. In terms of diction, 18th-century poetry was addicted to *periphrasis*, which means high-sounding circumlocution. A school of fish, for example, might be a "finny tribe."

C. At the same time, poetry and satire of this period were equally addicted to generalized abstraction. Again, think of Johnson's line "Let observation with extensive view," rather than "Let observers with extensive view."

III. Another quality valued by the Augustans was wit. In this period, "wit" implies knowledge or learning in its most elegant form.

A. The poet Alexander Pope (1688–1744) gave a classic definition of wit in his treatise poem *An Essay on Criticism*: "True wit is nature to advantage drest; / Which oft was thought, but ne'er so well exprest." The poet takes what we think and makes it more polished, striking, and epigrammatic.

B. Conversely, the Augustans detested dullness. Pope wrote a Miltonic-length mock epic against dullness that he called *The Dunciad*, the great epic of duncery, in which he attacked his personal enemies for their lack of wit.

C. A smaller, equally effective squib on dullness was penned by John Dryden (1631–1700).

1. Dryden was, for entirely personal reasons, antagonistic toward one of his fellow poets laureate, Thomas Shadwell.

2. Dryden tended to be flexible about such issues as Catholicism, shifting with the winds of change and producing poems for whatever party seemed to be in power. Shadwell had satirized Dryden for his much-turned coat.

3. Such satire was dangerous, however, because Dryden was an infinitely greater poet. He turned the tables on Shadwell with a poem that pictures a mock coronation in which Shadwell succeeds as king of dullness Richard Flecknoe, an obscure poet of significant dullness himself.

4. Dryden's poem embodies an appeal to Classical Augustan standards, a genuflection to wit, and a satirical ad hominem venom in its wonderful final couplet: "The rest to some faint meaning make pretence, / But *Shadwell* never deviates into sense."

IV. Even more masterful than Dryden with the couplet and in personal satire was Alexander Pope.

A. Pope was afflicted by bodily disfigurement, and his life, as he put it in one of his verse epistles, was "one long disease." Enemies loved to portray him as a hunchback, dwarfish ape.

B. He was born and brought up Catholic, which exacerbated his sense of being on the edge of his world, never

able to join elegant society. He was educated at home because he was too frail to go to school or university. He was, however, precocious and wrote exquisitely accomplished verse in his early teens.

C. Although his life was short, Pope's works were long and many. His corpus includes bestselling translations in couplets of Homer and Vergil; an edition of Shakespeare; and philosophical treatises, particularly those written in verse, such as the *Essay on Man* and *Essay on Criticism*, all of them in couplets. His works were extremely popular with an increasingly literate public, but it is his satires that have preserved his name as, arguably, the greatest poet of the 18th century.

D. Lighter in touch and more representative of Pope's genius than the two versions of *The Dunciad* is his mock epic *The Rape of the Lock* (1714). The poem revolves around a petty quarrel in English upper-class life.

1. In a country house, Ingatestone Hall in Essex, a beau had cut a lock of hair from the head of a belle without her permission, creating a huge fuss between the two families, both, incidentally, Catholic. Pope satirized the pettiness of the quarrel by casting the event in a mock heroic mold, but he did it so diplomatically that the satire served to heal the rift between these two warring families.
2. Pope describes for us Belinda (known in life as Arabella Fermor), whose locks will be ravished. She is a somewhat featherbrained beauty, but she is described in Pope's poem as if she were a Homeric goddess.
3. Underlying the apparent tribute to this paragon of beauty is a subversive note of criticism, an element of bathos. The reference to "patches" among Belinda's cosmetics, for example, implies that she might use these faux beauty marks to cover syphilitic sores. It leads us to wonder if her love letters are of equal importance to her scriptures.

V. The kind of satire and heroic couplet that Pope specialized in was called Horatian after the Augustan-era poet Horace. Horatian satire is conversational and relaxed in tone; it flows effortlessly off the page. Another variety of satire popular in the period was called Juvenalian after the post-Augustan poet Juvenal. This satire, although still decorous, is harsher, more moralistic, and angrier than Horatian satire.

A. The master of the Juvenalian genre was Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), and his masterpiece was *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, an imitation of Juvenal's 10th *Satire*.

B. Following his Classical model, Johnson surveys human greatness in all its multiple examples, illustrating the fact that, inevitably, any triumph always ends in decay and disappointment.

C. Interestingly, Johnson turns the satire in this poem on himself, the scholar who spent decades laboring on the first dictionary in English. Johnson had worked his way through university, toiled for years to produce his monumental work, and finally, it was dust in his mouth.

1. Johnson gives us a long list of obstacles that opposes scholarship, and if one manages to surmount these, the scholar's life is summed up as "Toil, Envy, Want, the Patron, and the Jail."
2. Johnson had a bad time with patrons, particularly during his 20 years of hard labor on the dictionary. Lord Chesterfield refused the obscure dictionary-maker's help at the beginning of his project but later, after Johnson was already famous, offered assistance in return for a flattering dedication. Johnson retorted with a magnificently contemptuous refusal.
3. Surprisingly, *The Vanity of Human Wishes* is not, ultimately, a depressing poem.
 - a. Johnson's Christian stoicism—the idea of putting up with one's lot in life—comes through in the poem, and indeed, echoes of this doctrine can be found in Juvenal's original.
 - b. But in the climax of his poem, Johnson turns away from Juvenal's pagan nihilism to Christian acceptance. It is the divine plan, he suggests, that our great achievements in life should end in failure.
 - c. We would do well to take Johnson's message to heart. However much we love to read literature, we should not forget also to live.

D. In reading Johnson, we admire his facility with words, but we also feel that enshrined in his poetry is a truth. We read literature to be entertained and, perhaps, because we hope that we will be better people for having read it.

Suggested Readings:

Dryden, *John Dryden: The Major Works*.

Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy, eds., *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*.

Mack, *Alexander Pope*.

Nokes, *Raillery and Rage*.

Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope: A Reduced Version of the Twickenham Text*.

Richetti, ed., *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*.

Rogers, *The Alexander Pope Encyclopedia*.

———, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*.

Zwicker, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden*.

Questions to Consider:

1. The English Augustans aimed at “polish” and “refinement” in their verse. Did they go too far?
2. Which of the Classical styles suited English genius best—Horatian or Juvenalian?

Lecture Fifteen Swift—Anger and Satire

Scope: As it was with poetry, the 18th century in English prose was also a period of refinement and cultivation, but when we read the work of Jonathan Swift, the subject of this lecture, we forget good manners and note mainly the anger seething beneath the simple diction of his satire. Swift, who was born and spent much of his life in Ireland, may be the first great Irish writer in English literature. He excelled as a scholar but traveled to England to become a secretary to a nobleman in hopes of advancing his career. He eventually earned a doctorate, became an ordained priest in the Church of Ireland, and was given a series of parishes but was disappointed that he didn’t receive more patronage from the court. As the dean of Saint Patrick’s in Dublin, Swift fired off a series of radical Tory pamphlets, the most famous of which is *A Modest Proposal*. In the 1720s, he began writing the work for which he is most remembered, *Gulliver’s Travels*. In the four books comprised in this work, Swift satirizes the English court, the scientific community, and most powerfully, his own species, the human race. In the end, *Gulliver’s Travels* leaves the reader uneasy, even frightened: We question the worth of ourselves, our species, and our accomplishments.

Outline

I. In the last lecture, we looked at how English poetry refined itself in the 18th century. In this lecture, we’ll see that English prose, as much as verse, also cultivated itself during the Augustan period.

A. We find, in this period, a new generation of essayists, who are writing what we would now call higher journalism for magazines and in a language more cultivated than ever before.

1. Such essays were often addressed to the woman reader, and the presence of women raised the tone of literature.
2. Addison and Steele, in *The Spectator* magazine, introduced a new civilized voice into the already many-voiced English literature.

B. In the 18th century, we also find one great satirist who wielded the sharpest and most savage pen in the English language—Jonathan Swift (1667–1745). When we read Swift, we forget good manners and cultivation. Anger seethes underneath his pure and sublimely simple prose. Swift held up a model of plain writing that has been followed by innumerable disciplines, notably, the great 20th-century writer George Orwell.

II. Swift can claim to be, among his many other achievements, the first great Irish writer in English literature.

A. As we know, England has oppressed Ireland, and in return, Ireland has given England some of its greatest literature: Richard Sheridan, the dramatist; Oscar Wilde, the greatest wit in English literature; Bernard Shaw, arguably the greatest 20th-century dramatist; Samuel Beckett, who challenges Shaw for that title; and the Nobel laureate, Seamus Heaney.

B. Swift was born in Dublin seven months after the death of his father. He was a Protestant in a predominantly Catholic country and a member of the Ascendancy, that is, one of the privileged class who were supported by the English to run their colonial property, Ireland. The oppression of Ireland was at its most intense during the period when Swift was there.

C. Swift received his higher education at Trinity College in Dublin. He excelled at university and might well have become a university teacher, but the Revolution of 1688 and the importation of William and Mary to the throne of England forced him to come to the mother country if he wanted to get ahead in the world.

D. In England, he became a secretary to a nobleman and a diplomat, Sir William Temple. Through Temple, Swift was introduced to the court and given access to the king. During his three years of service with Temple, Swift became politicized.

E. During this same period, Swift was closely involved with one of the two women in his life, to whom he would give the pseudonyms Stella and Vanessa. He also, at this time, began to show signs of the mental illness that would, in late middle life, spiral into full-blown madness.

F. In the meantime, Swift earned a doctorate from Trinity College and became an ordained priest in the Church of Ireland. He was given a series of parishes and enjoyed a comfortable income.

G. Swift was bitterly disappointed, however, that he didn't receive more patronage from the court, and this disappointment stoked his anger. Around the turn of the century, his serious writing career began, nurtured by that anger.

H. On various trips to England, Swift formed a friendship with Alexander Pope, and together, they founded, in 1713, the Scriblerus Club. The members vied with one another to see who could write the wittiest satires. It was in the context of the Scriblerus Club that *Gulliver's Travels* found its genesis.

III. Swift was always, unlike Pope, the most political of the 18th-century satirists. As the battles between the Whigs and the Tories (liberals and conservatives) evolved, he fired off pamphlets from a radical Tory position.

A. Swift's services to the Tory party did not bring him the rewards he craved. Queen Anne didn't like him, and the best position his friends at court could secure for him was the deanery of Saint Patrick's in Dublin.

B. As the Whigs came into ascendancy, Swift returned to Ireland, to live, as he said, "like a rat in a hole." From Dublin, he fired off the most powerful of his pamphlets demanding justice for Ireland. The most famous of these pamphlets is *A Modest Proposal* (1729).

C. The pamphlet is written in the persona of an English economist, who is imbued with the rational principles of Adam Smith and free enterprise. This social scientist has turned his mind to the perennial problems of Ireland—hunger and overpopulation—and come up with an ingenious solution: state-sponsored cannibalism.

D. Swift's anger bleeds through in his detailed plan for breeding Irish children and selling one-year-olds as meat "at an entertainment for friends; and when the family dines alone. ..." We are horrified by the proposal, but we also find it funny. Satire was never more powerfully relevant to man's inhumanity to man.

IV. Around the 1720s, Swift began putting into shape the work for which he is most well known, *Gulliver's Travels*.

A. After the death of Stella, one of the pseudonymized women in his life, Swift became increasingly melancholy and began to show clear signs of madness. In 1742, he appears to have suffered a stroke, losing the ability to speak and realizing his fears of becoming mentally disabled. At his death, his fortune was left to found a hospital for the mentally ill.

B. In the 1720s, however, working on *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift gave the book a great pseudo-authenticity. In fact, the original readers were fooled, at least for the first few pages, that they were reading an actual account of exotic travels.

C. *Gulliver's Travels* encompasses four books, or voyages, the first of which is to Lilliput, where the people are tiny. Here, Swift satirizes the court around Queen Anne. Despite their size, the characters fondly imagine

themselves to be people of consequence.

D. The second book takes Lemuel Gulliver to Brobdingnag. Here, the inhabitants are rural giants, and the hero himself is doll-sized. Brobdingnag is the most pleasant of the imaginary countries created by Swift, who hated progress, because it is the most traditional.

E. In the third book, Gulliver travels to Laputa (Spanish for “whore”), a scientific utopia. We should note that Swift also loathed science, which he thought contrary to religion and unnecessary. Here, he pictures the advanced scientific thinkers of his age as geeks, laboring, for example, to extract sunbeams from cucumbers. The third book also contains the Struldbrugs, who live forever and decay forever, suffering an eternity of pain and mental infirmity as they fall to pieces but cannot die.

F. The fourth book takes Gulliver to Houyhnhnm Land, the pronunciation of which represents the neighing of a horse. Here, the rulers are horses, and *homo sapiens* are horrific apes. In this final book, Lemuel Gulliver seems to go mad; his madness takes the form of believing that the horse people are wholly admirable and his own species, the Yahoos, as they’re called, are nauseatingly disgusting.

1. The narrative of Book IV begins with Gulliver, the captain of his vessel, cast adrift by his men. This is an important detail because it indicates the cruelty of man to man. Gulliver sets out to find the “savages” in this strange land but will encounter, instead, a civilized species.
2. As he walks, he notices several animals in a field, partially covered with hair and standing on their hind legs. They are able to climb trees and leap with tremendous agility, but their appearance is disagreeable, and Gulliver feels contempt toward them.
3. The reader begins to realize, before Gulliver does, that these creatures are human beings, *homo sapiens*, in a sense, but more along the lines of *homo excrementus*. The scene in which these animals rain feces down on Gulliver from the trees is an excremental vision of humanity.
4. The horses, given that they eat grain and grass, have less offensive bodily wastes, and they live lives of utter rationality. Gulliver turns away from the distorted version of humanity to this species.
5. Of course, horses have no technology, no institutions, no culture, and no literature. Where, then, is the satire in the fourth book of *Gulliver’s Travels* going? It is sometimes suggested that the Houyhnhnms are themselves being satirized; they’re deists, super-rational thinkers similar to the economist from *A Modest Proposal*.
6. We can’t be sure of this conclusion because the satire is unstable in the fourth book. Although the book is very powerful, we can’t seem to organize our response to it, except to feel the same nausea and disgust that Swift himself feels for his own kind.
7. When Gulliver returns to England, he becomes a strange sort of satirized figure himself. He can’t bear his wife and family and goes to live in a stable. Five years after his return, he is able to have his wife and children in his presence but much prefers the company of his two horses.
8. Has Gulliver gone mad, or should any rational human being, as Swift suggests, hate the human race? When one reads the fourth book of *Gulliver’s Travels*, one feels that one’s own sanity is teetering.

G. *Gulliver’s Travels*, like everything in Swift’s life and writing, is both terrifying and wonderful. The book makes us wonder with genuine anxiety what we are, what we have done, and whether our accomplishments as a species are as worthwhile as we’d like to think. Much of the literature of the Augustan period entertains and even instructs us, but Swift frightens us.

Suggested Readings:

Fox, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*.

Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*.

———, *The Writings of Jonathan Swift*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is Swift’s satire too savage?
2. How different is the fourth, and last, book of *Gulliver’s Travels* from the previous three books?

Lecture Sixteen

Johnson—Bringing Order to the Language

Scope: In this lecture, we return to Samuel Johnson, although we'll focus less on his achievements as an author and more on his larger achievement of bringing order to the English language. Johnson had an authority over his subject matter that few other writers have matched, and in undertaking his great dictionary project, he established a foundation for English language and literature that is still with us. For Johnson, there was much in life "to be endured, and little to be enjoyed," but art and literature could "sweeten" one's existence. Nonetheless, art and literature must adhere to certain principles if they are to be worthwhile. For his dictionary, Johnson turned to the greatest writers in the English language to show how words evolved, a practice that is still used in dictionaries to this day. We are indebted to James Boswell for his magisterial portrait of this great lexicographer in the *Life of Johnson*, and we are indebted to Johnson himself for organizing our language and freeing the profession of writing from the tyrannies of aristocratic patronage.

Outline

- I.** Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) is always referred to as Dr. Johnson, his title bringing with it a sense of discipline and literary authority. Dr. Johnson's achievement was to bring order to the English language and English literature.
- A.** Few people have had more direct authority over their subject matter than Johnson. His contemporaries and successors might rebel against his constraints—and many did, including Wordsworth and Coleridge—but Johnson established a bedrock for English literature that still exists to this day.
 - B.** In terms of style and preferred ways of writing, Johnson ranks as the most authoritative Neoclassicist in our survey. He believed that in order to be a proper literature, not just an effusion, English literature needed three elements: principles, cataloging, and tradition. Those were the foundations on which a great national literature could be erected and on which native English genius could flourish.
 - C.** Classicism, as Johnson conceived it, did not imply elitism. What Johnson's classicism demanded was an architecture, a shaping principle to the literary project. He believed that one could no more create literature without critical principles than one could improvise the building of a cathedral.
 - D.** We've already looked at Johnson's Juvenalian theory and practice of satire in our examination of his greatest poem, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. In this lecture, we will turn to his achievements in lexicography.
- II.** Few authors and critics have been as farsighted as Johnson was. Other critics have judged literature in terms of touchstones or golden lines, fragments, but for Johnson, the essence of literature was not in fragments.
- A.** The famous 11th chapter of Johnson's novel *Rasselas* is relevant here. The novel is a kind of prose version of *The Vanity of Human Wishes*.
 - 1.** In the book, Prince Rasselas goes out into the world only to discover that all human aspiration is doomed to disappointment; he then returns to where he started, the Happy Valley. In the process of being in the outside world, Rasselas learns that stoical acceptance is the only rational response to the inevitable disillusionment of living.
 - 2.** Life, said Johnson, is a condition "in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed." One has to live one's life, but art and literature can soothe or "sweeten" one's existence.
 - 3.** Art and literature, however, must adhere always to certain iron principles if they are to aspire to greatness or even to worth. These principles are explained early on in the narrative of *Rasselas*.
 - 4.** The character Imlac, Rasselas's teacher, who is based on Johnson himself, explains that the poet "must write as the interpreter of nature and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations, as a being superior to time and place."
 - B.** Such authority was also needed to embark on Johnson's project of organizing the English language. He would create the laws of literature.
- III.** Johnson's commanding influence comes through on nearly every page of the magisterial *Life of Johnson*, written by James Boswell (1740–1795).

A. In Boswell's description of his first encounter with the great man, we note Johnson's schoolmasterly tone, followed by the detail that the two men drank "a couple of bottles of port." Boswell's portrait of Johnson's personality is sublime.

B. The other quality that comes through in the *Life of Johnson* is the doctor's vast commonsense.

1. In one conversation, Boswell records that he asked Johnson, a former teacher, what he thought were the best subjects for children to learn first. Johnson's reply was that it didn't matter: "Sir, while you are considering which of two things you should teach your child first, another boy has learnt them both."

2. On another occasion, the two men were discussing the idea that matter does not exist and everything in the universe is "merely ideal." Boswell observed that this theory couldn't be refuted, but Johnson responded by kicking a large stone and saying, "I refute it thus."

C. Why was Johnson so fond of this romantic young Scot, Boswell? Johnson tells us that he prefers the company of young people for pragmatic reasons: First, he doesn't like to think of himself as growing old; second, young people won't outlive him and leave him friendless in his old age; and finally, young people have "more generous sentiments in every respect" than old men.

IV. Johnson's life was undramatic but interesting, as everything about him was interesting. And thanks to Boswell, we know that life in great depth.

A. Johnson was the son of a poor bookseller in Lichfield, a small town in central England. He would be surrounded by books and poverty all his life. He was educated at grammar school and proved to be a student of unusual ability. He went on to earn a place by merit at Oxford University but couldn't afford to stay for more than a year.

B. Like many great writers, life for Johnson was financial hardship and struggle, but he wrote in spite of these circumstances. For a while after leaving Oxford, he eked out a living as a schoolteacher and even started his own school. One of his pupils would later become famous as the greatest actor of the age, David Garrick.

C. As a young man, Johnson married a 54-year-old woman; the union was likely based on affection at best and Johnson's need for money. His married life was probably less than blissful. Once widowed, Johnson enjoyed the company and friendship of women but nothing more.

D. At age 28, Johnson set off for London with the hope of making his way in literature. He found work as an essayist, editor, hack writer, poet, and journalist, all the while developing his distinctively authoritarian literary style and manner. An essay in *The Idler* from this period stands as an example of Johnsonian sentiment (humans would be happier if unencumbered by memory) and style.

E. In 1745, Johnson embarked on his magnum opus, the *Dictionary of the English Language*. This project would take him 10 years to complete and would ruin his eyesight. It was undertaken without any financial assistance, although Johnson applied in vain to Lord Chesterfield for patronage at the outset of his task.

F. Late in life, the dictionary and Johnson's growing body of work finally brought him fame and a modicum of prosperity. He was awarded a government pension of £300 per annum for his work, appropriately enough because the dictionary was for the English nation as much as it was for the English language or literature. It was a national monument.

G. Fame in his later years brought Johnson the adulation of "young dogs," such as Boswell, and those years were much more comfortable than his early ones. By the 1760s, Johnson was probably the most famous man of letters in literary London.

1. People traveled from abroad to take tea with him, and he became an institution in coffee houses. Joshua Reynolds painted his portrait.

2. In 1773, Boswell took Johnson on a "jaunt" to the far western Hebridean Isles, what Boswell thought of as a glorious wilderness. Johnson, always the Neoclassicist, saw it merely as a wasteland.

H. Johnson is buried with his literary peers in Westminster Abbey. His career was a landscape marked with mountainous infrastructural projects. In addition to the dictionary, he compiled a complete edition of

Shakespeare and wrote *Lives of the Poets*, the first account of the literary tradition of England.

V. The *Dictionary of the English Language* preoccupied Johnson from 1745 to the late 1750s.

A. When it was published, the dictionary was the size of a small coffee table. It contained more than 40,000 words with definitions and, as the most innovative feature, a historical set of usages.

1. Johnson cited such writers as Shakespeare and Milton to show how words evolved. In this way, the dictionary was as much a work of linguistic archeology as it was of current correct usage.

2. This practice has since become accepted as standard for all dictionaries.

B. The principles on which Johnson worked are clearly laid out on the title page. The dictionary was to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. In other words, the meanings of words would be rooted in how people actually used the words rather than how they ought to use the words. As mentioned earlier, Johnson was always on the side of the public.

C. Johnson's definitions are infused with his inextinguishably egotistic spirit. He is the most personal of lexicographers.

1. The definition of lexicographer, for example, reads as follows: "a writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge that busies himself in tracing the original and detailing the signification of words."

2. His definition of oats is: "a grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people."

3. Obviously, Johnson believed that dictionaries need not be dull.

VI. Another achievement of Johnson's was the professionalizing of the trade of writing. Along with Pope, he freed literature from the tyrannies of aristocratic patronage.

A. As you recall from an earlier lecture, Lord Chesterfield had refused Johnson assistance at the beginning of the dictionary project, then offered money when the dictionary was complete in the hope of receiving a complimentary dedication. Johnson's letter in response to Chesterfield was a declaration of independence for English literature.

B. Writers are rarely rich, even in the present day. But Johnson's letter to Chesterfield asserts the dignity of the profession and frees the writer to answer only to the public.

C. From the 18th century onward, booksellers and book buyers would support the writer, including those whom we will discuss in lectures to come. Aristocratic patronage, which is also a kind of aristocratic ownership, would become a thing of the past.

D. Johnson was by no means a revolutionary; he believed in the English class system, in stability, and in order. Nonetheless, one of his greatest achievements was in giving writers a new sense of liberty.

Suggested Readings:

Bate, *Samuel Johnson*.

Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*.

Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: An Anthology*.

———, *Samuel Johnson: The Major Works*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What claim does Samuel Johnson have to be considered a great writer, as opposed to a great critic, lexicographer, and conversationalist?

2. What view of life does the reader come away with from a reading of *The Vanity of Human Wishes*?

Lecture Seventeen

Defoe—*Crusoe* and the Rise of Capitalism

Scope: We have so far covered about 1,000 years of English literature, but we have yet to encounter the novel. We can date the emergence of this form almost precisely with the publication of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719. Many theorists have noted the close connection between the rise of the novel and the birth of

capitalism, and in this lecture, we'll see that Defoe's hero is, indeed, *homo economicus*, an economic man. The novel has also been called the "bourgeois epic," meaning that it takes as its subject the middle class. In fact, the middle class was rapidly becoming the driving force in society in the early 18th century and desired its own literature to express its values. Thinkers have also noted that the rise of capitalism was closely connected with Puritanism and Protestantism, with an emphasis in both society and religion on individual responsibility and achievement. We see this theme, too, in Defoe's work with Robinson's return from the island as both a good Christian and a wealthy man. *Robinson Crusoe* is a great novel in its own right, reflecting the dynamic time in which it was written; perhaps more importantly, it also created a genre that still inspires greatness and innovation to this day.

Outline

- I. During the 1,000 years of English literature that we have so far covered, we have not yet encountered the novel.
 - A. The novel is the one major literary form whose emergence we can date almost precisely. We can see the modern form of the novel developing from traditional forms of narrative at the beginning of the 17th century.
 - B. Narrative storytelling is as old as literature is itself; indeed, it's probably as old as humanity itself. Together with song, narrative is what the ancients called the *primum materium*, the basic substance of one of the most important traditions in literature.
 - C. We should note that a novel is not the same thing as a story. *Beowulf*, for instance, tells a story. *The Canterbury Tales* tell many stories, as does the work of Shakespeare. But none of the storytellers who wrote those works was writing a novel.
 - D. In this lecture, we'll look at the first great novelist in English literature, Daniel Defoe (1660–1731), and the archetypal work of fiction that came from his pen, *Robinson Crusoe*.
- II. Why did the novel "happen" at this particular time (1719, to be precise) and in this particular place (London)? To help answer those questions, we can point to another occurrence in that time and place: the birth of capitalism.
 - A. Robinson Crusoe is *homo economicus*, a new kind of man for a new kind of economic system. One of the features that makes this novel so fascinating is that it describes a world with which we are familiar, even though, in fact, that world is now 300 years old.
 - B. The critic Ian Watt, in his classic study *The Rise of the Novel*, ties together the rise of the novel and the rise of capitalism.
 1. Watt sees the novel as inextricably connected with what was going on financially in the city of London—in the counting houses, banks, shops, warehouses, and markets on the Thames.
 2. Everyone was a moneychanger, and the moneychangers had, in biblical terms, taken over the temple. This was an age of capitalism and entrepreneurship.
 - C. Entrepreneurship depends on an idea of society as made up of individuals, each with his or her own store of property and each eager to acquire more property. Through acquisition, these individuals rise in the world. The class system becomes fluid because the more money one has the better chances one has of promotion.
 - D. Social mobility is part of this complicated system. Worth, at this point in history, is not something that is inherited but something that can be made or earned.
 - E. One way of looking at this kind of society, as Adam Smith did, is as an aggregate of individuals coming together. The principal and most dynamic factor in capitalism is the accumulation of individual, not communal or collective, wealth.
- III. The story of *Robinson Crusoe* is familiar, even to those who have never read the novel.
 - A. A merchant seaman, Robinson, goes to sea to trade; among the goods that he will deal in are slaves. Robinson's vessel is wrecked, all the crew is lost, and he is marooned on an island for 28 years.
 - B. We can learn a good deal from the title page of *Robinson Crusoe*; for example, it lists the name of the publisher but not the author. Why was Defoe's name omitted?

1. The answer is that this book purported to be an authentic tale of travel and adventure. Many first readers assumed there was a real Robinson Crusoe who spent 28 years in total isolation on an island off the mouth of the Oroonoko River in South America.
2. With the novel, we encounter for the first time a convention of literary representation known as realism. Is this a true story, or is it a factual fiction? This creative confusion is compounded by the fact that we're not told what kind of book this is.
3. Four years before *Robinson Crusoe*, a similar account of a sailor marooned on an island had become a bestseller. The gullible reader in 1719, looking at Defoe's title page, would have no way to know that *Robinson Crusoe* wasn't the same kind of book.
4. Literature changes and so do reading practices. Today, we are more sophisticated readers, but the novel was only just emerging in the early 18th century, and not all readers would understand the "doublethink game" (the balance between a real story and a fiction of knowing) that is the essence of literary realism.

C. The prosaic opening paragraph of the novel doesn't offer any clues that we are not reading an authentic autobiography. Thus, the novel, we may say, is a genre that looks like something else, a chameleon genre.

1. Recall that *Paradise Lost* proclaims Milton's intention to "sing" from the very beginning. The reader knows exactly what literary form to expect.
2. Defoe, by contrast, is deceptive. This story may be fact, he insinuates, or it may not, but the reader must actually be in that state of confusion to get the maximum benefit from the novel.

D. The opening paragraph of *Robinson Crusoe* reads like journalism, and in fact, Defoe was a journalist for 30 years.

IV. The novel is sometimes called the "bourgeois epic," meaning that it takes as its subjects characters from classes in society that have generally been beneath the interest of literature, except for comedy.

A. Unlike Shakespeare's Henry V or Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders, the heroine of Defoe's next novel, are ordinary people with whom we can identify.

B. At the beginning of the book, Robinson describes himself to the reader, pulling us in. We have a sense of his life in a way that we do not with Dr. Faustus. Further, the fact that Robinson is not a hero but an ordinary fellow impresses us.

C. Why should the bourgeoisie, the ordinary middle class, require an epic? In the dynamic mercantile world that was emerging in England at this time, the middle classes were the driving force.

1. The middle classes were, as Marx says in *The Communist Manifesto*, the "revolutionary class" in this period, transforming the world around them as the proletariat would do in 1917 in Russia.
2. As the dominant class in society, the middle class wanted its own literature to express itself and to enshrine its ideals in literary form. The middle class was riding high, and the novel was its form.

D. Robinson leaves from home, not because he wants adventure, but because he wants to make his fortune. He must make his own way in the world as an individual, starting from nothing. Life as a merchant seaman presents the prospect of getting rich.

V. As the story progresses, Robinson has a series of adventures: He is almost drowned, he's captured by pirates, he's enslaved by Arabs, and he becomes a wealthy plantation owner in South America. In the process of making even more money, he finds himself alone on an island, having lost everything.

A. On the simplest of narrative levels, Robinson's story is exciting. How will he survive against the elements, wild animals, and cannibals without supplies or other people?

B. Below the narrative surface, however, Robinson is *homo economicus*. He is an economic man, making it himself in the world, without any assistance other than what he has, what he is, and what he does. Money remains the main purpose of his existence, along with the acquisition of more money.

1. Shortly after the wreck, Robinson makes several trips back to the ship before it breaks up to bring back whatever materials he can find, and he gives us an exact inventory of what he has scavenged.

2. At one point, he finds about £36 and, while noting that it is useless to him on the island, takes it anyway. The incident is amusing yet also offers insight into what the novel is about: Money is important.

C. Over the next 28 years, Robinson uses what he scavenges from the ship to sustain himself, and gradually, he cultivates the island. Everything on the island, all that he grows and can plunder from it, is his property. Thus, we see this novel also as an allegory of empire and of England, which at this time was taking great chunks of the world as its property.

D. After many years, Robinson acquires a companion, a native from a neighboring island, who has escaped from cannibals. Robinson names his companion Man Friday, teaches him English, and makes him a servant. More importantly, Friday becomes his chattel. Here, the allegory is of slavery.

1. In the sequel to *Robinson Crusoe*, Robinson sells Friday. This, too, is an allegory of English colonialism in the 18th and 19th centuries.

2. As Britain acquired more and more of the globe, it was transformed into the largest empire the world had ever known. Its vast territories, however benignly or malignly they were ruled, were, in the geopolitical sense, property of the English Crown.

3. Robinson refers to himself as the sovereign of his island and all that it contains, including Friday. Robinson converts his companion to Christianity but retains Friday as his property, and of course, Friday exists principally in Robinson's terms to turn a profit.

VI. It's interesting to note that many thinkers, such as Marx, Max Weber, and R. H. Tawney, have argued that the rise of capitalism is intimately connected with Protestantism and Puritanism.

A. Just as capitalism stresses the individual acquisition of wealth, so do Protestantism and Puritanism stress the individual's private, personal relationship with, and responsibilities to, God. The individual has credit with his maker and must earn his salvation.

B. On his island, Robinson, who began his adventures as a version of the prodigal son, gradually becomes a devout and God-fearing Christian. Fear is the key word here. When Robinson finds a single footprint on the shore—not Friday's—he is terrified. This is a key moment in his moral and religious growth because his terror turns him toward God.

C. Robinson was swept up on the island a godless fellow and destitute. He leaves the island, by a series of adventures, rich and a good Christian. As readers, we are to understand that this was God's plan for Robinson. God clearly loves him, and he is finally saved by the rescue vessel and in his soul.

VII. Defoe's life was long, eventful, and full of literary achievement.

A. He was a pamphleteer, a government spy, and the father of English journalism. Born around 1660, he lived in turbulent and dangerous times, more so because he was a dissenter. He found himself in the stocks at one time for having offended the authorities in his writing.

B. Defoe was never well off and downright impoverished in his last years, but it was in those last years that he invented the English novel.

1. Over the next three centuries, the English novel will become a major form, one of the principal arenas in which literary talent will express itself.

2. *Robinson Crusoe* is, in its own right, a great novel, but more importantly, it creates a genre. It's rare in literary history that we can see things happening with this clarity, and it's a great privilege because we understand the novel better as a result of our understanding of its origins.

Suggested Readings:

Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*.

Earle, *The World of Defoe*.

Richetti, *Defoe's Narratives*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can one explain a work as influential on the subsequent course of English literature happening in 1719?

2. *Robinson Crusoe* is commonly seen to mark “the rise of the novel” in England. Why?

Lecture Eighteen

Behn—Emancipation in the Restoration

Scope: We’ve arrived, in our travels through English literature, at the 18th century, where much of what we see is familiar to us. Many of the country’s institutions, such as the Crown, Parliament, the Church of England, and the press, have emerged in modern form. Among these institutions is the new profession of authorship, but here, we are missing one important modern element—the participation of women in the making of literature. Aphra Behn, the subject of this lecture and a female author on a par with any male writer of the Restoration period, fills this gap. Behn was a product of the Restoration, which brought with it the relaxation of England after the Commonwealth, the reopening of the theaters, and the emergence of Restoration comedy on the stage. Behn wrote a number of such comedies, largely concerned with female independence and choices, but her masterwork is *Oroonoko*, the story of an African prince enslaved and ultimately killed by whites in a colony off the coast of South America. Although this work lacks complex narrative machinery, it is nonetheless a powerful and readable tale.

Outline

I. Much of 18th-century England that we see in literature is familiar to us; many of the country’s modern institutions were, at this time, in place.

A. The 18th century in England saw the emergence in modern form of the Crown, Parliament, the political parties of the Whigs and Tories (known now as the Labour Party and the Tory Party), the Church of England, the Bank of England, the fourth estate, the educational institutions of Oxford and Cambridge, and the ever-growing empire of Britain itself, kept in line by the Royal Navy.

B. Among these new institutions and entities also emerged the profession of authorship called “Grub Street,” because writers had to grub for money like maggots.

1. Professional authors in the 18th century were working a commercial trade in which literature was manufactured as a popular commodity—the book—sold at retail or borrowed from libraries.

2. Literature was no longer circulated in manuscript among an elite group. There was now a reading public and, with it, new forms of literature to satisfy its gargantuan appetites.

C. The one element missing from this general account of the modern state in the 18th century is women.

1. Although women were a passive presence in the 18th century, they were an important component of the reading public. Many writers were aware that their readership included females; in fact, the novel would not exist in the form that we have it if it were not for women readers, because the novel is a domestic form.

2. Women are also present in literature as subjects, from Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath*, through Shakespeare’s *Cleopatra*, to Defoe’s heroine *Moll Flanders*.

3. Literature pays its dues to the other sex, but where are women actively in the making of literature?

D. English society can be read, from the woman’s point of view, as a long history of oppression, subjugation, and exclusion.

1. It was not until the late 19th century, for example, that women in England had full property rights, which effectively liberated them from being men’s property themselves.

2. Women could not even sign a literary contract until the early 19th century. Jane Austen needed her brothers to handle this kind of business for her.

E. In this lecture, we’ll look at the first wholly independent woman’s voice in literature, that of Aphra Behn (1640–1689), a female author who can hold her own with any male writer of her time.

II. To understand Aphra Behn, we must first understand her time: the Restoration. We discussed this period earlier, but let’s return to it briefly, keeping in mind Behn’s position within that upheaval in English society.

A. After the Civil War and the execution of the king, Cromwell went on to overrule Parliament and set up a

republic known as the Commonwealth. He also imposed on the country an iron Puritan dictatorship, backed by the formidable army of the Protectorate.

B. While Cromwell held the country down for 11 years (1649–1660), King Charles’s son, who would later come to the throne as Charles II, took refuge with his court in France, enjoying that country’s sophisticated pleasures.

C. Meanwhile, in England, Cromwell and his regime were ferociously moralistic. Many taverns were closed, along with the racecourses, cockfight pits, houses of prostitution, and theaters. The printed word was rigorously censored, and any hint of light morality or blasphemy was sternly punished.

D. Eventually, pressure from below for more liberty brought about the restoration of the monarchy. Charles II returned from France, a compromise was reached on the issue of religious toleration, and Cromwell’s corpse was exhumed from Westminster Abbey and torn into fragments.

E. England, in 1660, breathed freely. The theaters, brothels, and taverns reopened under royal and noble patronage. Charles loved the theater, and the court brought with it from France styles of drama that included new definitions of wit, cleverness, politesse, and gallantry. Women, for the first time, became theatrical players in a number of senses.

1. In Shakespeare’s theater, female characters were played on stage by young boys whose voices had not yet broken. But during the Restoration, women played women and became stars on the stage for the first time.

2. Women on stage were portrayed as fiercely independent and powerful. Restoration comedy clearly makes the point that women aren’t playthings of men; they are agents in their own right. For example, Millamant, in William Congreve’s great comedy *The Way of the World*, dominates high society.

3. The principal subject matter of Restoration comedy is, in French style, cuckoldry or adultery. For the women in Restoration comedy, adultery is frequently a way of evening up the score with the tyrant sex, man.

a. William Wycherley’s most notorious Restoration comedy, *The Country Wife*, involves such a situation among a merchant called Pinchwife; his young, virtuous wife; and a rake named Horner.

b. The Puritans, although they were no longer politically dominant, were infuriated by this kind of drama, which in turn, was designed to affront them.

F. Aphra Behn took full advantage of this new emancipation in the world of the theater, writing a number of plays in the Restoration period.

1. The titles of Behn’s plays give us some idea of their content and of the female twist they typically contain: *The Forced Marriage*, *The Amorous Prince*, *The Dutch Lover*, *The Revenge: Or a Match in Newgate*, and *The Woman Turned Bully*, all of which were comedies.

2. In 1676, Behn tried her hand at a tragedy, *Abdelazer*, which flopped. Wisely, she returned to comedy with *The Town Fop* and, a year later, her most famous and much revived work, *The Rover*.

a. *The Rover* is a rather conventional plot about a woman who has two suitors of different kinds—one old and rich, one young and poor—neither of whom she wants.

b. The play is about marriage dilemmas, but on a deeper level, it’s also about female independence and choices.

III. If we look at Behn’s life, it’s not hard to see why she was such an accomplished dramatist.

A. She was born Aphra Johnson near Canterbury. We know little about her upbringing, but while she was still in her teens, her father was appointed lieutenant general of Surinam, a British colony off the South American coast.

1. Behn’s father seems to have met the fate that often accompanied such unfashionable postings, dying of fever. Surinam would be the setting of Behn’s later work *Oroonoko*.

2. Behn scholars argue about whether she spent time in the colony in her early 20s, but it seems, from the accuracy of her descriptions and the vividness of her depiction of life in a slave colony, that she must have

been there.

B. Around the age of 24, Aphra Johnson seems to have married a Dutch or German merchant named Hans Behn. We know nothing about him, and indeed, Aphra may have invented him so that she would be seen as a respectable married woman. If he existed, Hans Behn died within a couple of years, leaving Aphra a young widow and a free agent.

C. In her later 20s, Aphra served as a spy for the newly returned Charles II in Antwerp during the war between England and Holland. Although she did good work in this endeavor, she seems not to have been paid and, in 1668, found herself in debtors' prison. Behn managed to be released from debtors' prison and wrote her way out of hardship.

D. Occasionally, Behn's plays got her into hot water, but she also wrote poetry and, late in what would be a short life, turned to fiction, of which *Oroonoko* (1688) is judged her masterpiece.

E. Behn died almost simultaneously with the end of the Restoration, and it's not clear that she would have thrived in the post-Restoration period. She is buried in Westminster Abbey, the first woman writer to be so honored.

IV. The full title of Behn's masterpiece is *Oroonoko: Or The Royal Slave. A True History*.

A. We can learn much from the book's title page, not least that Behn was well enough known to have her name listed as an enticement to purchase. Kings, of course, were of great interest during this period, and the paradox of a "royal slave" would have stimulated curiosity. Calling the work "a true history" gives it the veneer of authenticity.

B. *Oroonoko* is the story of an African prince, who is brought to Surinam as a slave, along with his wife, Imoinda. The story is narrated by a young English woman, the daughter of the new deputy governor, who has just died. We can easily assume the narrator to be Aphra, and her detailed description of the island lends credence to the supposition that the young author had indeed been there.

C. The narrator befriends Oroonoko and Imoinda and learns their story. Like Charles II, the African prince can speak both French and English. The narrator is struck with their native beauty, their nobility, and their moral innocence.

D. *Oroonoko* is definitively not an abolitionist work. Behn seems, indeed, to be much more interested in the divinity that resides in kings—the qualities of moral, spiritual, and human superiority—than she is in the oppression of Africans.

E. Early in the story, we get a flashback to western Africa and the first meeting of Oroonoko, a prince, and Imoinda, the daughter of a general who has just died saving Oroonoko's life. The king, Oroonoko's grandfather, is also taken by Imoinda's charms and orders her to join his harem.

1. Imoinda is locked away for the king's private enjoyment. Oroonoko breaks into the harem but is discovered by the king. He is forced to flee, and Imoinda is sold into slavery. Oroonoko is told that she has been executed.

2. The British colonists now arrive, looking for slaves. Oroonoko is tricked, captured, and taken to Surinam to work on a plantation. As a prince, he feels the humiliation keenly. He discovers, however, that Imoinda is also a slave in Surinam, and the two marry.

3. Imoinda becomes pregnant, but Oroonoko does not want his son to be born into slavery. He organizes a revolt, and the narrator herself flees at this point. Oroonoko is foiled in his attempt to escape and cheated into surrendering. When he realizes the end is near, he kills Imoinda; Oroonoko is executed sadistically by a white slave-owner, who is infinitely below him in moral worth.

F. Thus ends the novella *Oroonoko*. Although it lacks complex narrative machinery, it is nonetheless a good tale, a powerful and readable work.

Suggested Readings:

Behn, *Oroonoko, The Rover, and Other Works*.

Questions to Consider:

1. *Robinson Crusoe* or *Oroonoko*? Which claims first place, and why, in the history of English fiction?
2. According to Virginia Woolf, Behn gave women for the first time in literary history the right to speak their minds. What specifically womanly aspects do we find in Behn's work?

Lecture Nineteen The Golden Age of Fiction

Scope: The late 16th and early 17th centuries can fairly be called a golden age of drama, and the early 18th century is often labeled a golden age of satire. In the same way, the middle and late period of the 18th century can be seen as a golden age of fiction. Several factors combined to bring about this rise of the novel, the form developed by Daniel Defoe, including a new mass literacy, urbanization, and technological advances in printing. In this lecture, we'll gain some sense of the multiplicity and richness of the century's fictional output by exploring what can only be called the postmodernist work of Laurence Sterne, the romance of Samuel Richardson, and the realism of Henry Fielding.

Outline

I. The late 16th and early 17th centuries might be labeled a golden age of drama. Similarly, the early 18th century was the golden age of satire. In this lecture, we'll explore the material and cultural factors that combined to make the middle and late 18th century the golden age of fiction.

A. One of these factors was the growth of new mass literacy. The fact that large numbers of people could read, especially women, was an essential precondition for the emergence of the novel.

B. Other factors included urbanization and technological advances in printing. With these came an infrastructure in the book trade that facilitated manufacture, distribution, and purchasing. Contingent entities, such as reviewers and reviews, which subject books to critical judgment, also played a part in the rise of fiction.

C. The novel is, physically, the longest literary form we have encountered and the most expensive to produce and purchase.

1. A work such as Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, for example, ran to about 1,000 printed pages. Even in its first printing, hundreds of copies were simultaneously produced and made available.

2. The size, scale, and speed of that operation dwarfs anything that had come before, and it presupposes a large audience that can read a work of that length.

D. London and, to a lesser extent, Edinburgh and Dublin were the only cities capable of sustaining a fiction industry. This industry was, in the mid-18th century, a huge, empty, inviting field for literary talent and innovation.

II. Let's review some of the works and some of the movements that emerged in the field of fiction, bearing in mind that every great novelist of the 18th century was a pioneer. The originality quotient of literature has never been higher than it was in fiction in this period, especially in the work of Laurence Sterne (1713–1768).

A. Sterne was perhaps the most mischievous, eccentric writer of fiction, not merely in the 18th century but in the whole of English literature. He was a North Country parson and was renowned as one of the most stylish and rhetorically brilliant Anglican preachers of his time.

B. The son of an army officer, Sterne was university educated; he spent most of his life as a vicar in Yorkshire. He contracted tuberculosis as a young man and would die at the age of 54. He married and, at the same time, pursued what he called "spiritual adulteries" with ladies outside his marriage by exquisitely written correspondence.

C. Sterne began writing his great novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, to supplement his income as a churchman. *Tristram Shandy* began to appear in 1759, then continued in serial publication over successive years. The novel was hugely successful, not least for its naughtiness.

D. Sterne's favorite work of fiction was *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, and he called his style of writing "Cervantick." The impossible quest, like the don's impossible quest, is the basic joke in *Tristram Shandy*. One can never do the things in life that one sets out to do. Life is always too complex and seems always to defeat the individual.

E. Sterne, in the person of his narrator-hero, Tristram, sets out to tell the whole story of his life. He begins with the comical moment of his own conception, in which his father is interrupted by his mother's question: "[H]ave you not forgot to wind up the clock?" Squire Shandy curses her for her silly question and, at the same moment, fathers Tristram; our hero's unlucky life has begun.

F. After this daring introduction, the novel rambles on for nine volumes, published over 10 years. The great joke is that the novel is supposed to be the story of the whole of Tristram's life, but it's logistically impossible for Tristram to write it. No matter how many volumes he produces, the novel can never contain everything that happens to him.

G. As Tristram observes, narrative has two axes, one of which he calls the *progressive* and the other, *digressive*.

1. To write that a man enters and walks across a room is progressive. To note the wallpaper in the room or the color of the man's tie is digressive.
2. For Tristram, the digressive—what he calls the "sunshine" of the narrative—keeps getting in the way of the progressive. At one point, he calculates that it takes him a year to fully narrate the events of a single day. He will never catch up with himself.
3. This self-reflexive work of literature obviously brings us into postmodernist territory, 150 years before the term "modernism" even came into existence.

III. A quarrel between two major practitioners of fiction in the mid-18th century laid down the main tracks that the form would follow over the ensuing centuries. These two practitioners were Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) and Henry Fielding (1707–1754).

A. Richardson began writing fiction late in life, but he was involved in the book trade as a printer and publisher. He knew what the public wanted, particularly that silent component in the public, the woman reader.

B. Richardson's three great works of fiction are *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), *Clarissa: Or, The History of a Young Lady* (1748), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), written to prove that Richardson could produce a novel with a female at its center.

C. All of these were epistolary novels, novels written in the form of letters. This form solves the problem of creating suspense in the novel by giving the appearance of "writing to the moment," rather than relating events in the past tense.

D. The two narratives of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* concern young women protecting their virtue. *Pamela* is successful in this endeavor; *Clarissa*, not so, although both win through, ultimately, to a kind of marital happiness. The epistolary form gives both novels their immediacy and impact.

1. *Clarissa*, for instance, is drugged and raped in a brothel. Of course, in her letter written before these events, she doesn't know what will happen, so the rape comes as a surprise to the reader, too. Its impact is shocking because it is unexpected.
2. In a letter written after the rape, *Clarissa* describes the drinks that were given to her that led to her loss of purity.

E. The letter form solves the immediacy problem but introduces other problems related to the narrator. Is it likely, for instance, that a recently raped woman would sit down to write composed and intricate letters? Further, wouldn't an 18-year-old girl lack sophistication and narrative skill? In some sense, *Pamela* and *Clarissa* become puppets for Richardson's own voice.

F. Nonetheless, *Pamela* was vastly popular. Armies of female fans, who called themselves "Pamela-ites," formed reading groups to share their enthusiasm for the novel.

IV. Henry Fielding was no Pamela-ite. His career in fiction began as a contradiction to everything that Richardson set out to do in his novels.

A. Fielding believed that the moral of Richardson's story—be good and you'll be rewarded—was nothing more than a sermon coated in fictional sugar. It lacked realism, which Fielding thought was the primary purpose of fiction.

B. Fielding's background was very different from that of Richardson. His family was country gentry and had aristocratic connections. Fielding received a classical education at Eton and wrote a few plays in a gentlemanly amateurish spirit.

C. Professionally, Fielding was a lawyer and a magistrate. One of the advantages of this career was that he came to know life and people, particularly rogues. His fictional career began with *Shamela*, a spoof or burlesque of Richardson's *Pamela*.

D. This work was developed into a more thoughtful satire on Richardson, *The History of Joseph Andrews* (1742); the hero in this book is the brother of Richardson's Pamela Andrews, an invention of Fielding's.

1. Like Pamela, Joseph Andrews is a servant, and his virtue, too, is under assault from a lecherous mistress, Lady Booby. Shortly after her husband dies, Lady Booby summons Joseph to her bedroom, where she tries her best to tempt him, but like his sister's, Joseph's virtue is invincible.

2. Joseph loses his position in Lady Booby's house and makes his way back home. The narrative then begins to remind us of *Don Quixote*, a work that Fielding admired as much as Sterne did.

3. The novel spoofs Richardson hilariously, mocking and contradicting his notion of virtue.

E. Fielding's career in fiction would, after this anti-Richardsonian launch, develop significantly. In the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding ruminates on Aristotle and asserts that comedy can achieve the same greatness as epic and tragedy. He seems to suggest that the novel can be a respectable literary venture.

F. In his masterwork, *Tom Jones*, the story of a foundling, Fielding gives us a novel that is confident in itself and confident in the power of fiction. It continues, but in a much less polemical way, the quarrel with Richardson.

1. Tom Jones begins life as an illegitimate child; adopted by Squire Allworthy, he grows up to become a scoundrel. He has a good heart, but can't stop himself from getting drunk, brawling, and wenching. He is no Pamela or Joseph Andrews but a human being.

2. By the end of the novel, Tom wins his love, Sophia, and discovers the identity of his parents. He settles down as a good English squire and magistrate. He will administer justice and look after his estate.

3. Fielding's point, made with great artistry and irresistible humor, is that virtue is not something to be hoarded. Pamela preserves her virtue, but she does so by not doing anything. Virtue, Fielding demonstrates, is something that one must earn by living, by experiencing life. It must be achieved, not preserved.

G. Both Richardson's and Fielding's doctrines founded great fictional traditions—romance for Richardson and realism for Fielding.

V. We could explore numerous other works in 18th-century fiction, from the delicate pornography of John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, to Oliver Goldsmith's wonderfully sentimental *Vicar of Wakefield*, to Tobias Smollet's Quixotic picaresques and the work of a host of women writers. Suffice it to say that the novel took off during this period and would continue to soar for the next 200 years.

Suggested Readings:

Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones*.

———, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*.

Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson*.

Rawson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*.

Richardson, *Pamela: Or Virtue Rewarded*.

Rivero, ed., *New Essays on Samuel Richardson*.

Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*.

Questions to Consider:

1. In which different directions do Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne take English fiction?
2. How justified is the term “bourgeois epic” for fiction of this 18th-century period?

Lecture Twenty

Gibbon—Window into 18th-Century England

Scope: The subject of this lecture is Edward Gibbon’s great historical work on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, but how can we justify an exploration of this work of history in a course on English literature? As we’ve seen, the 18th century in literature has been termed an Augustan age, and Gibbon’s work begins with the rule of Augustus in Rome. From his point of view, this period was the high point of the empire, after which Rome was doomed. In this lecture, we’ll explore some of the explanations Gibbon offers for Rome’s decline, as well as the biography and literary style of the man himself. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was a key text of the Enlightenment and comes to a shocking conclusion: The Roman Empire fell as a result of moral corruption and loss of civic virtue, and Christianity rose, not because it was God’s plan that it should rise, but because it was uniquely suited to thrive on the decay of the empire that preceded it. Whether we agree with him or not, the literary quality of Gibbon’s work endures and gives us a window into 18th-century England as it became an empire in its own right.

Outline

- I. Because we have been discussing the Augustan literature of the 18th century, we can perhaps justify a brief digression into the discipline of history to look at Edward Gibbon’s great work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.
 - A. Gibbon’s history begins with the rule of Augustus, the first Roman emperor, from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14. Thereafter, for reasons that Gibbon describes at great length, the empire deteriorated. In this lecture, we’ll examine some of the causes that Gibbon perceived for Rome’s decline, principally, Christianity.
 - B. Gibbon’s initial description of the high point of the empire in the time of Augustus forecasts everything that follows and chimes exactly with the idealism of English literature in the middle of the 18th century.
 - C. Gibbon notes that the first seven centuries of Rome’s rise do not interest him. He is interested in the high point and why that high point did not last.
 1. He discusses the decline as a rapid series of “triumphs,” but notes, “it was reserved for Augustus to relinquish the ambitious design of subduing the whole earth, and to introduce a spirit of moderation into the public councils.”
 2. The Augustan period achieved greatness because Augustus didn’t overextend Rome. The early centuries of Rome were those of expansion, but under Augustus, Rome turned away from the project of global conquest.
 3. Instead, Augustus turned toward the project of Rome civilizing itself, creating its great institutional and cultural monuments. Did this, in some sense, doom the empire? This is the enigma that accompanies our reading of the history.
 - D. A second justification for our foray into history is that, at the time that Gibbon’s great work was conceived, composed, and published, the fences between disciplines were lower than they are today.
 1. One of the most striking features of public discourse in the 18th century was that everything—sermons, writing on science, political speeches—was literary.
 2. Edmund Burke’s speech to Parliament on conciliation with America a year before the American Revolution stands as an example of such high literature.
 3. Dictionary definitions, such as those devised by Dr. Johnson, were also literary in the heyday of the 18th century. If we credit Boswell, even coffee house conversation was literary in a way that our interchanges

today aren't.

4. This trend was nowhere more in evidence than in the field of history. Gibbon himself was a literary artist, as well as a great historian.

II. Let's begin with a look at the life of Edward Gibbon (1737–1794).

A. Like Fielding, Gibbon was born into the landed gentry. From childhood on, his health was poor; thus, he devoted himself to study and books. He was educated at Oxford, but the main source of his intellectual growth was the European and, to a lesser extent, the Scottish Enlightenment, both based on the notion that the universe was comprehensible by human reason.

B. In 1753, Gibbon converted to Roman Catholicism; a year later, after travel in Europe, he reconverted to Protestantism. Thereafter, he seems largely to have been a skeptic about religion. During the same period, he fell in love with a Swiss girl, but the relationship did not last, and Gibbon would never marry.

C. While taking the Grand Tour of Europe, Gibbon first visited Rome and experienced a sense of history among its ruins.

1. In Gibbon's lifetime, England was elevating itself to a Roman level of imperial power. His *History* would stand as a reminder that even the greatest empires fall.

2. Gibbon claimed that on October 15, 1764, he resolved to write a history of the decline and fall of Rome while watching a group of friars sing vespers in the temple of Jupiter. The injection of Christianity here marks one of the sub-narratives in the *History*.

D. In his late 20s, Gibbon's father died, and the young man set himself up as a rich scholar in London. There, he came to know such figures as Dr. Johnson, who would become his first readers.

E. Gibbon's standing as a landowner allowed him to slip easily into Parliament as an MP in the Whig party, mildly progressive but unenergetic. This position involved no duties, responsibilities, or vexatious calls on Gibbon's time.

F. The first volume of the *History* was published in 1776, while America was falling away. The next two volumes appeared in 1781, and the final volume was completed for publication in 1788.

G. The effort of this vast enterprise exhausted a frame that had never been strong. Gibbon moved between Switzerland and England as his health failed in his last years. He died in 1794.

III. *The Decline and Fall* is hailed as a key text of the Enlightenment and Gibbon himself as “a giant of the Enlightenment.”

A. Gibbon took history beyond mere chronicle into a much more philosophical realm. What conclusions, he asked, can we draw from our contemplation of history? What is the “big picture” that only the reflective mind can see?

B. Research, for Gibbon, did not involve digging into hitherto unvisited archives and primary materials. For Gibbon, the practice of history was to apply the powers of his mind to the facts, then to express his conclusions in clear prose of the highest eloquence.

IV. Gibbon's subject was large and so was his conclusion. The most explosive reflection in Gibbon's great history of Rome from A.D. 1 to the 15th century concerned the other Rome, the Catholic Church, which erected itself on the ruins of the first Rome.

A. Gibbon decided that the first Roman Empire fell as a result of moral corruption, self-indulgence, and the loss of civic virtue. It lost what had once made it great, the raw energy of its early conquests and the civilized moderation of Augustus. Christianity rose, not because it was God's plan that it should rise, but because it had just those qualities that, over time, the first Roman Empire had lost.

B. What Gibbon called “the pure and austere morals of the Christians” gave them eventual victory. Christian Rome retained its spiritual hardness, forged in persecution and martyrdom, while Imperial Rome went soft.

C. Christianity also, after it gained a foothold under Constantine, corroded the militancy of Rome. “The Jewish

religion was admirably fitted for defence,” writes Gibbon, “but it was never designed for conquest.” It could survive the decay of the Roman Empire and thrive on what was decaying underneath it.

D. This conclusion was not flattering to orthodox sensibilities in England in the late 18th century. Christianity, as Gibbon saw it, could never create an empire; it could only inherit one. The Christian virtue of passive suffering was, as Gibbon saw it, disastrous to ancient Rome.

E. This analysis and skeptical appraisal of Christianity are contained in the 15th and 16th chapters of the first 1777 volume, leading Gibbon to be branded a heretic and his work banned.

F. Chapter 15 opens with a reference to “rational inquiry.” Gibbon tells us that we must exclude faith, hope, and authority and shine the light of reason on the facts. What follows in chapters 15 and 16 is incendiary. Even to a modern audience, it reads, at some points, like Swiftian satire.

1. Gibbon, civilized cosmopolitan that he was, had little affection for the ruggedness of the Jewish people, and anti-Semitism is one criticism that is frequently leveled at his work. Why, he asks, would a rational deity not choose the English or even the French instead of the Jews?

2. On the subject of miracles, Gibbon is at his most deadly satirical. Why did God reserve proof of his existence—miracles—“for the convenience” of the Israelites alone?

3. Further, why is it that none of the historians or philosophers of the early empire observes any of the extraordinary social and cosmic events recorded in the New Testament? Gibbon assumes a mask of mock amazement in his “rational inquiry” into this conundrum.

4. Gibbon uses a range of high literary effects to make a historian’s point, which is: Where is the evidence? The gospel asserts, but it gives no evidence, and if we look for collateral evidence, we cannot find it. Even the account of the crucifixion, Gibbon implies, may not stand up to reason.

5. Whether we agree with Gibbon or not, we cannot but admire the sinewy strength, the sheer rhetorical elegance, and the forensic force and rhythm of his prose.

G. We have later, more thorough and more reliable scholarly accounts of what happened in Rome, but the literary quality of Gibbon endures. His work also tells us much about the world of the 18th century and its literature, a literature of great confidence.

1. The English truly believed that they were creating something equivalent to what Augustus had wrought in the early years of the Roman Empire. At the same time, a sense of unease accompanied their great imperial achievements—the knowledge that their empire was also fragile and could fall.

2. Thus, Gibbon’s text provided a needed *memento mori* to the Augustans of the 18th century.

Suggested Readings:

Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

McKitterick and Quinault, *Edward Gibbon and Empire*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are the specifically literary characteristics of Gibbon’s historical work?
2. Why, in Gibbon’s analysis, did Rome fall? And what lessons might subsequent empires learn from that fall?

Lecture Twenty-One

Equiano—The Inhumanity of Slavery

Scope: In this lecture, we encounter our first major black author, Olaudah Equiano, a slave from the age of 11 until his early 20s, whose works are as important to British literary history as the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and others are to American literary history. Equiano’s most significant work is his autobiography, which we’ll explore in depth in this lecture. Probably one of the most well-traveled people of his time, Equiano was sold on numerous occasions and spent time in the British West Indies, as a sailor onboard an English ship, and in America. His descriptions of his experiences embody the Augustan style of his period but tell a fascinating and disturbing tale of the inhumanity of the slave trade. The light cast by Equiano’s true history renders the fictions of Defoe and Behn, fine as they are, momentarily shabby.

Outline

I. In our earlier lecture on Aphra Behn, we noted the paucity of women in the history of English literature, but that vacancy would gradually begin to fill in during the 18th and 19th centuries. Of course, there is another vacancy in the literary chronicle of English that would be even slower to fill in, that of writers of color.

A. We have seen some glimpses of black figures in literature, including Othello, Man Friday in *Robinson Crusoe*, and the prince in *Oroonoko*. The first major black author we encounter whose background is that of the enslaved masses and who writes about them on an equal standing with any other writer of the period was Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745–1797).

B. Equiano merits our attention primarily by virtue of his talents as a writer, principally an autobiographer. His story is both gripping in its narrative outline and wonderfully told.

C. Equiano’s account of his life and experiences was widely circulated in the abolitionist movement, which successfully ended the slave trade. We should note, however, that the use of slaves, principally in the West Indian colonies, was not abolished at this time.

D. Equiano’s major publications were not generally known to later generations, even in Britain, until a group of academics publicized them in the 1960s. These works, principally the autobiography, are now regarded as classics.

II. Equiano, who was also known as Gustavus Vassa (although this was not his birth name), was born around 1745 in what is now the Ibo region of Nigeria. In his autobiography, he calls the area Essaka; it was then a part of the Abyssinian Empire.

A. Equiano’s father was a village elder and a slave-owner, but after the fashion of the country, he was a kind master. By his own account, Equiano was brought up in a condition of rural simplicity and happiness with his siblings. His home was removed from the upheavals that were shaking Europe, the Indian subcontinent, and North America during the second half of the 18th century, when the “civilized world” was reorganizing itself dramatically.

B. In the early description of his childhood, Equiano notes that his village society had little use for money and stresses the high standards of virtue, cleanliness, abstemiousness, and decency they obtained there. In this, he opposes the conventional images of savagery, such as we find in *Robinson Crusoe*, where the natives are bloodthirsty cannibals.

C. When he was about 11 years old, Equiano was kidnapped while playing with his sister and carried off to be a slave. The description of his capture gives a good idea of the overlays of high Augustanism in his literary style and, at the same time, the extraordinarily powerful and moving tale he has to tell.

D. Initially, Equiano was an African slave among his own people, but he was ultimately taken to the coast and put aboard a slave ship. His first encounter with white people inspires one of the most vivid sections in the narrative: He assumes the white monsters are cannibals and fears they will eat him. It is they who are the inhuman savages, not Equiano. He faints from shock, fear, and despair.

E. The description of the middle passage is the most affecting and horrifying in the book. The stench and noise are overwhelming, and Equiano becomes sick; as he writes, “I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me.”

III. For white traders in black human cargo, slavery was a profitable—and necessary in economic terms—line of international commerce.

A. At the time of the American Revolution, British forces were moved to the West Indies to protect the plantations there, which were worked by black slaves, from the French. The calculation was made in London that the plantations of these islands were worth more to the Crown than what would eventually become the United States of America.

B. What made the West Indian colonial properties so valuable was slave labor, which produced the sugar and other commodities for which there was a huge demand in Europe. Thus, the financial base of the British

Empire was built on human exploitation.

IV. Equiano was sold a number of times, eventually purchased by white slavers, and transported to Barbados.

A. He ultimately found himself in the colony of Virginia, where he was bought by a Royal Navy officer, Michael Pascal. Pascal renamed his slave Gustavus Vassa in honor of Gustavus I, the king of Sweden, who had been, to some extent, a liberator of that country. The irony here seems to have escaped Pascal.

B. Equiano was the personal slave of Pascal and, thus, traveled extensively. He became a trained, able-bodied seaman under the royal flag of England and fought the French, manning the ship's guns.

C. Equiano endeared himself by loyal service to his master. When they made port in England, Pascal sent him to school to learn how to read and write in English. Clever as well as good-natured, Equiano learned English better than most of the English population at the time.

1. Pascal's actions were highly unusual and generally considered, by slave-owners, to be dangerous.

Literacy was, like a sword or a knife, an edge tool. It rendered slaves restless, discontent with their lot, and potentially rebellious.

2. In Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, it is the prince's superior mind and intellect that inspires him to start an uprising. Ignorance was seen as one approach to keeping the slave population under control.

D. During this period, Equiano also became a devout Christian and persuaded his master to allow him be baptized so that he might go to heaven. Church registers record that Equiano was duly baptized in a church near Westminster in February 1759.

E. Heaven might be possible for Equiano when he died, but freedom in life wasn't, nor was he given his share of the money from captured ships, which was usually divided among the crew.

V. Equiano was inevitably sold yet again, this time into the Caribbean, the jewel in England's imperial crown.

A. Equiano possessed remarkable skills: He could read and write English and, if necessary, navigate a ship. Given his abilities, he was too valuable to work under the overseer's whip in the sugar fields.

B. He gives us a graphic firsthand account of the extraordinary mixture, not merely of brutality and callousness, but of calculation and commercial ruthlessness with which the slave trade was conducted, particularly in the British West Indies.

1. This was the most profitable and extreme of the slave-driving colonies; its inhuman practices were actually written into law as the *West India code*.

2. Under this code, no plantation owner could be held guilty for whatever he chose to do to his slaves, and as Equiano tells us, these slaves might easily be his own children.

3. Equiano also gives us a beautifully written and poignant description of the parting of slave husbands and wives, children and parents, as they were sold off to other islands.

4. Reading his autobiography, we get the sense that Equiano is much more human than his owners. Slavery, he intimates, brutalizes the slavers more than it brutalizes the slaves.

C. In 1765, when he was around 20 years old, Equiano was bought by a Quaker merchant, Robert King of Philadelphia, who had many uses for Equiano's unusual abilities, principally in matters of inventory.

1. The Quakers were an enlightened sect, and King promised that if Equiano could repay his £40 purchase price, he would receive his freedom.

2. A good master by the standards of the time, King further educated Equiano, instructed him in the Christian faith, and enabled him, by trading, to earn the necessary sum for his freedom.

D. Equiano resolved that it would be unwise to remain in the American colonies as a freed black man. Such men were at risk and generally resented. Equiano was almost caught himself and carried off again to be a slave in the southern region of the colonies.

VI. Equiano was an accomplished merchant or trader in his own right; he traded for a number of years—possibly even in slaves—before he allied himself with the emergent abolitionist movement in England.

A. This movement was sponsored by evangelicals, nonconformists, and Quakers, whose idiom Equiano knew well. Women were also a major force in the abolitionist movement in Britain, as well as in America.

B. Now in England, Equiano gave speeches and preached; he also married, in 1792, an English woman, Susannah Cullen.

1. He became a leading figure in the abolitionist movement, not by virtue of having suffered, but by virtue of being able to articulate the suffering of slaves with great eloquence and literary skill.
2. It was Equiano who publicized the case of the slave ship called *Zong*, in which 133 slaves were thrown overboard to drown in their chains for the insurance money.

C. In 1789, with the help of patrons, Equiano published his great work, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. The book enjoyed lively sales and set Equiano up for life. It was the first important slave narrative in English literature, with a style evocative of Dr. Johnson and the Augustans.

1. Recent scholarship has rendered parts of Equiano's autobiography dubious. It has been suggested, although this is a matter of great dispute, that he might have been born in the American colonies, in what is now South Carolina.
2. This debate may be worth conducting in the context of Equiano's insistence that his story is genuine. From the point at which he becomes Pascal's slave, however, Equiano's experiences can be authenticated by documentary record.
3. Even if the early descriptions of his childhood are secondhand, those descriptions were true for thousands of others taken by force from Africa to work in the British colonies.

D. Equiano's married life was evidently happy, and he became a celebrity in England. His success in middle age may have served as some compensation for the suffering that had been inflicted on him earlier.

E. His marriage resulted in two daughters, but his wife, Susannah, died in 1796, at just age 34, and Equiano followed her a year later, probably at about age 52. It is not known where he is buried, although he did leave a sizable fortune to his surviving daughter.

VII. Britain has appropriated Olaudah Equiano for English literature, although many anthologies include him as an American writer by virtue of his long periods of enslavement in that country. Of course, by origin and as the early sections of his history make clear, he is a Nigerian writer.

A. The fact that we have this awkwardness about who "owns" Equiano is testament to one of the cruelest, most indelible, and most objectionable aspects of slavery, which is that it robs humans of the basic fabric of their identity.

B. Equiano's book is, as its title tells us, "interesting." He writes in the highest manner of literature current in the 18th century, unquestionably handling his prose instrument, the English language, like a master. In literary expression, no writer of the period is less the slave.

Suggested Readings:

Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*.

Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives*.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what sense is Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* interesting literature?
2. A number of national traditions can claim Equiano's remarkable text as their own: It has variously been identified as an "African" work and a work of "American" literature. Can it authentically be classified as a work of 18th-century English literature?

Lecture Twenty-Two Women Poets—The Minor Voice

Scope: In this lecture, we continue our study of writers who are on the fringes of English literature by looking at several women who wrote what we might think of as quiet and private lyric poetry. Short, lyric poems lend themselves particularly to domestic composition, and we can trace a line of female writers in this form from

the 17th century to the 20th. Here, we'll explore the poetry of Queen Elizabeth, Anne Bradstreet, Margaret Cavendish, Katherine Philips, and Anne Finch, all unique voices and all, in some sense, expressing the private consciousness and experiences of women in this characteristic form.

Outline

I. In the last few lectures, we have looked at writers who have been relegated to the edge of English literature. In this lecture, we'll continue that trend with poetry that is self-consciously minor and typically private, written by women primarily for women.

A. Women have always found it difficult to write for the stage because it's so public. The theater requires women to display themselves, and the conventions of society, almost through to the 20th century, forbid that. At the same time, epics are too big for women. They require some large presence in the outside world, a public grandeur that has historically been denied to women.

B. Some forms of literature do lend themselves to the private domestic arena, where women can feel comfortable and express themselves.

1. In the 19th century Elizabeth Gaskell (known as Mrs. Gaskell), wrote her novels at night, after she'd put the children to bed and the house had been tidied up.

2. Jane Austen often wrote in the drawing room amid company, who might assume that she was merely writing a letter. If someone came close enough to read her work, she might push the paper out of sight because she wasn't ready to share it.

C. The short lyric poem also lends itself to domestic composition, and we can follow the line of female writers in this form from the 17th century through to the 20th. Some of the poems of Sylvia Plath can be connected to the writing of women 300 or 400 years earlier.

II. We'll begin with a surprising example from Queen Elizabeth (1533–1603).

A. Elizabeth was a remarkable orator. Her most famous speech is the one she gave at Tilbury on the eve of the invasion of England by the Spanish Armada. Her words are as rousing as those of Winston Churchill when he addressed the nation at a similarly perilous moment.

B. The Tilbury speech represents the public Elizabeth, but in private, Elizabeth, like her father, Henry VIII, also wrote poetry. Skill in writing poetry would have been akin to talent in dancing or proficiency in horsemanship for a woman of Elizabeth's station.

C. The poem "On Monsieur's Departure" records a moment when its author was left by a lover. (Despite furious speculation, the existence or identity of a lover for Elizabeth is unknown.)

1. In Elizabeth's case, she feels the loss, but she cannot, out of pride of position and rank, display her emotion. It must be bottled up, to be released cathartically in a private poem.

2. The poem is wholly unexpected if compared to the rousing speech at Tilbury. There, Elizabeth had the heart and stomach of a man; here, she is "soft and made of melting snow."

III. In the United States, Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672) is generally regarded as the first great American poet. In Britain, she is seen as standing in a line of British Metaphysical poets.

A. She was born Anne Dudley in Northampton, the daughter of a steward or land agent, who served an aristocratic estate owner. As a result, young Anne had access to books and a superior library.

B. She was fascinated by the then-fashionable style of Metaphysical poetry. As you recall, in the early 1700s, such poets as Donne, Herbert, and Marvel were writing intricate, clever poems based on elaborate conceits.

C. At age 16, Anne married Simon Bradstreet. Both her father and her husband would later serve as governors of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Anne went to the colony with them in 1630 and stayed there for the rest of her life. Nonetheless, her literary pedigree remained English.

D. Life was hard in 17th-century New England. Mortality rates were high, and the amenities of life were lacking. To some extent, Anne had to adapt to a new lifestyle, and in this, she was helped by religion.

E. Anne contracted smallpox and later tuberculosis, both of which were chronic and debilitating medical conditions. Both her hardship and her joys were increased by giving birth to eight children.

1. In 1666, her house burned down and, with it, her large, treasured personal library.
2. Anne wrote a poem on that occasion, “Verses upon the Burning of Our House, July 18th, 1666,” in which she grits her teeth and gives thanks to God, in simple Anglo-Saxon diction.

F. Of course, losing children is much harder than losing books, and Anne also experienced this tragedy, but she consoled herself that they were in a better place. Her poem titled “In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Anne Bradstreet, Who Deceased June 20, 1669, Being Three Years and Seven Months Old” is almost unbearably poignant.

1. The poem is written, Anne says, with a “trembling hand” and a “troubled heart.”
2. The poet likens her granddaughter to “a bubble, or the brittle glass, / Or like a shadow turning as it was.” She seems to be thinking of an hourglass with the sand running through it.
3. As with the poem of Queen Elizabeth, there is an element of privacy here. This is a woman talking to herself about intensely personal subjects.
4. The poem is a classic meditation, which was a standard Puritan exercise, as well as one of the bases of Metaphysical poetry. Such a poem purifies the spirit through introspection and articulating the results of that introspection with a subtle use of language.
5. The simplicity of Anne’s expression, when combined with her complex similes, creates an amazingly understated effect.

IV. The next poet we’ll turn to is Margaret Cavendish (1623–1673).

A. Cavendish was high born and, in adult life, would bear the title duchess of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. In early life, she was a courtier attached to the queen of England, and members of her family, the Lucases, were prominent royalists during the English Civil War.

B. Cavendish went into exile in France with the king and his court. She also wrote prolifically and, like Aphra Behn, published under her own name. Her works include prose fantasias, such as *The Blazing World*; a memoir called *A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life*; philosophical treatises; and a good deal of poetry.

C. Unlike many other women writers, Cavendish was a known figure in the literary world, although that world was not always kind or polite to her. She was resented by male writers, many of whom regarded her as aggressive and self-advertising.

D. Cavendish had no children, which gave her greater opportunity, with her prosperous lifestyle and access to the booksellers of London, to pursue a literary career than almost any other woman of the time, with the possible exception of Aphra Behn.

E. One poem from early in her career, “A World made by Atomes,” is clearly Metaphysical in style. It’s one of a cluster of *atomic poems* written by Cavendish, this one dealing with what we would today call particle physics.

1. Cavendish uses the atom as a conceit, and she does well with it, although John Donne probably would have done better.
2. The poem is also interesting in that it inaugurates Cavendish as the first *bluestocking* (female intellectual) in English literature. She launches a line that we can follow from such figures as George Eliot to Iris Murdoch.

V. Another private poet of the period was Katherine Philips (1631–1664), known also by her pen name, the Matchless Orinda.

A. Katherine was born in London, the daughter of a nonconformist merchant. The household was excessively pious. Katherine is recorded as having read the Bible from cover to cover before she was five years old and to have learned several languages in childhood.

B. In her teens, Katherine turned royalist, probably in a spirit of rebellion, and at age 16, married a Welsh MP,

James Philips, almost 40 years her senior. The two moved to Wales, where Katherine set up a salon of likeminded people, particularly women writers.

C. Philips earned a reputation for herself as a writer from her Welsh base. There is some speculation that some of her poems addressed to fellow females may be, under their veneer of literary affectation, Sapphic or lesbian. We see in an example in “A Retir’d Friendship.”

1. Philips beckons her friend to a bower, where lovers traditionally enjoy their bliss. But the poet here insists on innocence, or is that merely a convenient mask or disguise?
2. What’s interesting about such poems is the sly use of male love conventions. The writer intrigues us by forcing us to question the poem’s innocence.

VI. High in this female poetic company is another aristocrat, Anne Finch, the countess of Winchilsea (1661–1720). She was one of the first women poets to make it into print under her own name.

A. Finch’s father, Sir William Kingsmill, had the unusual belief that women should be educated. Thus, her poetry, like Cavendish’s, is clever, witty, and well controlled.

B. Finch’s enigmatic poem “Glass” is based on an interesting conceit. Glass is, paradoxically, something one looks into to see one’s reflection and looks through to see the world outside.

1. In the poem, Finch both addresses the window in her living room and alludes to the looking glass in her bedroom.
2. The poem lists the range of things one can do with glass, focusing mainly on household objects, the things a woman would see about her every day: a mirror, a window, or a vase.

VII. We could look at other female poets, such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Joanna Baillie, or Hannah More, but the point is, however repressed women may have been, literature, specifically a characteristic kind of poetry, forced its way through the barriers. If we listen to this poetry, we always hear voices that are interesting, different, and womanly.

Suggested Readings:

Greer, *Kissing the Rod*.

Lonsdale, ed., *Eighteenth Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*.

Todd, ed., *Be Good, Sweet Maid: An Anthology of Women and Literature*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Is it relevant to think of these writers as women poets? Are they not merely poets?
2. How did early women writers make a space for themselves to create literature in? Was there any available space in the normal life of women in these times?

Lecture Twenty-Three Wollstonecraft—“First of a New Genus”

Scope: Mary Wollstonecraft stands in contrast to the poets we explored in the last lecture; her voice is anything but quiet and private. Her great work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, still speaks loudly across the centuries. In this lecture, we look in depth at the life of this remarkable woman, who was largely self-educated and, at age 28, determined to make herself “the first of a new genus,” a pioneering woman author. Mary trained herself through traditional writer’s hackwork, cranking out translations and reviews, and in the process, she read Enlightenment philosophy and met the leading radical philosophers of the day. She moved to France during the most turbulent days of the revolution but was forced to return to England when the atmosphere in France turned ugly. She ultimately married William Godwin but died after the birth of their daughter, who would become the writer Mary Shelley. Feminists of the 1960s saw in Wollstonecraft’s work a pugnacity and a ferocity that was perceived as necessary in the fight for independence for women. Today, we perhaps most admire her for the common sense that shines through in her writing.

Outline

I. In the last lecture, we looked at the quieter female voice as it was expressed in essentially private poetry. In other lectures, female characters have also spoken “soft, Gentle and low,” but Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) speaks loud, clear, publicly, and wholly unmuzzled.

A. Few writers of her time have spoken across the centuries to our time as clearly as she does, mainly, in Mary’s case, to other women. Her voice carries wonderfully and with undiminished potency across the years.

B. The title of her great work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, implies combat. She is not defending her position but vindicating it. Further, her writing is directed toward men, those readers of Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man*, for example, who might assume, as the title of Paine’s work seems to, that half the human race has no rights at all.

C. The works of Mary Wollstonecraft warrant consideration as literature on two counts: First, they are powerfully written. It was a matter of pride to this author to write as well as or better than any man. Second, Wollstonecraft’s works are instrumental in clearing a space in the arena of literature in which women could operate. Her own daughter, Mary Shelley, could never have written *Frankenstein* had her mother not paved the way for that novel.

II. Let’s look at the life of this remarkable woman.

A. Mary Wollstonecraft lived a brief 39 years. She died of an infection contracted while bringing her daughter into the world. She never lived to see the outcome of the French Revolution, the greatest social experiment in history and an event about which she had written a history. Mary saw herself as a revolutionary, a woman of the barricades, as much as a social philosopher.

B. The main argument of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is simple: Women are not genetically inferior to men. They are made inferior to man by being denied, principally, education. It is “circumstances” that make woman the inferior sex. They are genetically or naturally as rational, as intelligent, and as creative as men or potentially so.

C. Wollstonecraft was born in London, the daughter of an investor. The family’s condition, which was initially prosperous, declined precipitously as she was growing up. As she entered womanhood, Mary’s expectations, particularly her financial expectations (which were important if she wanted to make a good marriage) diminished catastrophically.

D. Mary had more than one reason for harboring resentment against the father who, by injudicious speculation, had ruined her financial prospects. He was in other ways unreliable, as well as a drunk and a wife beater, and Mary seems to have learned well the lesson that men were not to be trusted.

1. This view was confirmed by the domestic crisis of her sister, Eliza, whom Mary helped to escape from an unhappy marriage.

2. Unfortunately for Eliza, freedom proved to be as unhappy as marriage. Alternatives were few for women seeking refuge or alternative lifestyles at this time.

E. Mary’s most formative early friendships were with other women of an intellectual bent.

1. These women would read and hold intelligent discussions. They attended lectures on natural philosophy and history. They educated themselves because there were no institutions offering education to women.

2. One such friend of Mary’s, Fanny Blood, was particularly influential. Although only two years older than Mary, Fanny, who was cultivated in the fine arts, served as her mentor. One of Mary’s great themes would be that women could help women; they did not need to be dependent on men. She enlarged on this theme in her later treatise *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*.

3. Even in her early relationship with Fanny Blood, Mary exhibited signs of a volatile, self-destructive personality, which may have been indivisible from the energies that drove her intellectually.

F. At 19, Mary took a job as a lady’s companion in Bath, a sort of wealthy retirement community. She was not by nature submissive, and her two years in Bath were unhappy. She returned home to care for her ailing mother, who died shortly thereafter, and Mary left home for good.

G. Mary went to live with Fanny Blood in the Blood household, but as close as the women were, this arrangement didn't work out. Inevitably, some modern critics have inquired as to whether there was a lesbian aspect to the relationship. It seems more likely to have been a kind of feminist utopianism, an experiment in a monosexual society.

1. After an unsuccessful attempt at setting up a school together, the relationship between Fanny and Mary cooled, and Fanny left to marry. Her health, never strong, had been undermined by tuberculosis, and she died as a consequence of pregnancy.

2. The friendship between the two was renewed when Mary returned to nurse Fanny. This experience fed into Mary's first novel, *Mary*.

3. Into this short, rather amateurish novel, Mary poured the strong emotions that had been generated by the deaths of her mother, her father, and Fanny. The novel is interesting primarily for its conclusion, which contradicts the conventional happy ending in which the heroine marries.

H. With Fanny gone, Mary took a position as a governess in Ireland. Although she was good at the job, it was beneath her abilities. Out of this experience, she wrote a children's book.

III. At this stage of her life, Mary was without financial resources, but she had by now made contacts in the London literary world.

A. The publisher Joseph Johnson, who was a big player among radical thinkers of the time, particularly liked her work and liked her personally. Astutely, Johnson realized that there was a market for Mary's writings, and he cultivated her.

B. Mary resolved, as she told her sister Everina in 1787, to make herself "the first of a new genus"; she would be a pioneer woman author.

1. Mary trained herself for this career as a woman author by the traditional writer's apprenticeship of hackwork, but at the same time, she educated herself.

2. She became proficient in French and German and did translation commissions. Among the works Mary translated were philosophical treatises of the Enlightenment, through which she picked up interesting ideas and ways of communicating ideas.

3. Mary also did a good bit of reviewing, particularly for Johnson's house magazine, *Analytical Review*.

4. Through this work, she was learning the tricks of the writing trade, and through Johnson, she also met the leading radical philosophers of the day in England, Thomas Paine, author of *The Rights of Man*, and William Godwin.

C. She would later marry Godwin, but their initial contact wasn't particularly friendly.

1. At the time, Mary was in a tempestuous relationship with the Swiss artist Henry Fuseli. The fact that Fuseli was married did not deter Mary, who saw no reason to respect the institution she despised by any kind of self-denial.

2. This was also the period when Mary was beginning to write her great work, *A Vindication*, which was published in 1790.

D. Fuseli ultimately broke off the relationship, and Mary traveled to France to join in the revolution. The work that brought her fame was, paradoxically, not her work on the rights of women but a polemic she wrote at this time, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, in response to Edmund Burke's criticism of the French Revolution.

E. In the 1790s, Mary was resident in France during the most enthusiastic and turbulent phase of the revolution. There, she embarked on a passionate relationship with an American, Gilbert Imlay.

1. Their love affair ran against the Wollstonecraftian theory of male/female relationships outlined in *A Vindication*. There, Mary insists that men and women ought not to "love each other with passion"; instead, reason should be sovereign in all things.

2. Mary became pregnant, but she and Imlay did not marry. In 1794, Mary gave birth to her first child, a daughter named Fanny.

3. Now, the revolution turned ugly; Britain had declared war on France and was fearful that the

revolutionary virus would spread across the Channel. Disguising herself as Mrs. Imlay, Mary was obliged to leave France.

4. Although he returned to London with her, Imlay was in the process of detaching himself emotionally from Mary.

F. Back in England in early 1795, Mary attempted suicide. She credited Imlay with saving her life after she'd taken an overdose of opium, but the relationship was doomed. She attempted suicide again, leaving a note for her lover, before jumping into the river Thames. This time, she was saved by a passerby. Mary had been wronged by Imlay, but her attempts at self-destruction worked against the ideals of fortitude and rational independence advocated in her writing.

IV. Mary gradually recovered her spirits and rejoined the London literary world, where she was by now a prominent and respected ornament.

A. At this point, she renewed her acquaintance with William Godwin, a leading social philosopher and radical. The two fell in love, and this time the union was of the mind, of political sentiment, as much as it was physical.

B. Mary found herself pregnant again, and despite the couple's free-thinking doctrines, they resolved to marry for the sake of the child. The two lived separately in adjoining houses. Sadly, the marriage would be short. After the birth of her second child, who would later become Mary Shelley, Wollstonecraft died of postpartum complications.

C. In a memoir, Godwin revealed many details of Mary's dramatic life, which was thought scandalous at the time. After all, a woman writing was one thing; a woman sympathizing with French revolutionaries and bearing illegitimate children was something quite different.

D. In the 1960s, Wollstonecraft was elevated to the highest of plinths of the feminist movement in Britain and America. Feminists see in her work a pugnacity and, at times, a ferocity that is sometimes perceived as necessary if chains are to be broken. One cannot win independence by simply suffering.

1. In the final stanza of "The Masque of Anarchy," Percy Bysshe Shelley says that if enlightenment is spread, the chains that hold oppressed people down will drop away like the "morning dew." History demonstrates, however, that they don't.

2. As Rousseau, one of Mary's idols, said, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." Mary believed the same of women: They were enchained, and the enchained or incarcerated female, particularly the wife, is one of her recurrent images.

E. It's important to note that there is much more in the writing of Mary Wollstonecraft than in-the-male-face polemic. It is, perhaps, the good sense that shines through *A Vindication* that impresses us most. For example, she advocates exercise for young girls and encouragement to be brave. This is the keynote of *A Vindication*: common sense, uncommonly well expressed.

Suggested Readings:

Craciun, *Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: A Sourcebook*.

Johnson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*.

Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*.

Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what sense is Mary Wollstonecraft writing "literature" in her great *Vindication*?
2. In what ways does Wollstonecraft redraw the cultural map of England?

Lecture Twenty-Four

Blake—Mythic Universes and Poetry

Scope: In this lecture, we'll look at the life and work of William Blake, a writer who created an entirely new method of poetry that requires us to learn his highly individual system in order to understand it. Blake was born into a family on the lowest respectable rung of society. He received little education, although his artistic

talent was recognized and he attended drawing school for three years. He was apprenticed to an engraver, where he picked up radical ideas and became imbued with the revolutionary spirit of his age. As a young man, Blake was influenced by advanced thinkers, and the strands of his thought came together in the series of poetry books he produced. The essential dynamic in Blake's work is the dialectic, the conflict and ultimate synthesis of two opposing forces. We'll look at this way of thinking in *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and Blake's comments on one of his obsessions, Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Outline

I. In a proclamation of his extremist individualism, William Blake (1757–1827) once said, “I must create my own system or be enslaved by another man's.” What he laid out for himself was the invention of a whole new method of poetry.

A. For Blake, this new system would involve the creation of mythic universes. In more practical, materialistic aspects, it would involve the making of an entirely new form of illustrated poetry book.

B. To read Blake requires, first of all, to learn how to read Blake; once that trick is mastered, few writers in English literature are so rewarding.

II. Blake's life tells us much about his work.

A. Blake was born in 1757, which puts him in the first generation of the Romantic Revival. Like John Keats, Blake was a cockney, and the son of a humble but decent tradesman, a draper in central London. The influence of social rank can be important in studying literature.

1. Some Romantics, such as Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley, came from the upper tiers of society; William Wordsworth, Sir Walter Scott, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were born into families of the respectable, professional middle classes.

2. Keats and Blake were on the lowest respectable rung. Beneath them, amid the working classes, was a place where no poetry was possible.

B. Blake had minimal schooling, but by the age of 11, his extraordinary artistic skills were already recognized, and he had three years of training at a drawing school.

C. At the age of 14, he was apprenticed to a London engraving firm that produced illustrations for books and pictures to decorate middle class homes.

1. At the time, printers were notoriously radical. They were literate and politically aware and saw a good deal of radical literature as it passed under their professional eyes.

2. From his teens onward, Blake was imbued with revolutionary spirit. He admiringly observed both the French and the American revolutions. In later life, he would write majestically prophetic poems about those earthshaking events.

3. Blake was, at the same time, enthusiastically religious, although nonconformist. Here, as elsewhere, he made his own systems. He was influenced by Unitarianism and excited by the way in which it freed the Christian system from the Anglican Church.

D. In his 20s, Blake set up his own shop in London, which failed. By now, however, he was moving in radical circles and was influenced by the thinking of William Godwin, Thomas Paine, and Mary Wollstonecraft.

III. The strands of Blake's artistic, philosophical, and metaphysical life came together in a novel series of books of poetry.

A. Blake made these books by means of illustration and invention of new systems of religious allegory; he then merged the pieces into a highly innovative ensemble.

B. In this early, most accessible period of his poetic career, a period when the French Revolution was at its most idealistically revolutionary, Blake produced the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. English literature had seen nothing like them.

C. These two works were followed by the first of the great prophetic books—vast, symbolic poems and

interlinked designs—*The French Revolution* (1791), *America: A Prophecy* (1793), and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793). These are geopolitical works and difficult to understand, unless one understands the Blakean system.

D. Blake continued to write, design, and agitate. At one low point in his life, he was even tried for treason. Few of his contemporaries, least of all contemporary poets, were aware of him. His paintings did not sell, and his books were produced only in small batches.

E. Blake lived obscurely for much of his time in Soho, where a broken plaque among the city's brothels and drinking dens commemorates his residence. He died in 1827 and is buried in an unmarked grave.

F. As we've just seen, Blake's was a life without educational or social advantage. The Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, and the engraver's tools were placed in his hands, together with the most exciting political ideas of his time, and out of this mix, animated by his genius, he made poetry.

IV. Let's now turn to two of Blake's works that may give us the key to the Blakean system. The first of these is *The Songs of Innocence and Experience* and the second is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

A. The titles of these works alone tell us much about the essential dynamic of Blake's poetry, which can be summed up in the word "dialectic," meaning two forces coming together in conflict to produce a third, higher force.

1. Blake gives us a classic definition of *dialectic* in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. As he says, "Without Contraries is no progression."
2. Blake can be seen, along with Hegel, as one of the fathers of Marxism, a political theory founded on the dialectical triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

B. Innocence and experience are, clearly, moral contraries. In the two collections of *Songs*, Blake opposes examples of innocence and experience from natural creation, from history, and from society. His question is: Can an individual who is innocent (inexperienced) be truly good, or does the achievement of goodness require experience?

1. If we believe that someone who is innocent is truly good and if we believe that only the good go to heaven, we would rejoice when a baby, the incarnation of innocence, dies at birth.
2. We don't because there is more than blank purity to life. This is one of the points stressed by Blake, although he doesn't argue it as a philosopher might.

C. To demonstrate how this complexity operates in Blake, let's consider two opposed lyrics. The first is "The Lamb" from *Songs of Innocence*.

1. The poem is as simple as a nursery rhyme, a token of childlike, lamblike innocence. As indicated, the lamb is one of the conventional symbols of Christ.
2. The lamb is innocent of sex, but the mature ram is sexual. Blake was well aware of the complications of carnal desire, which he discusses frequently in his poetry.
3. The poem is pivoted on a question, but the larger question is unanswered: God made the lamb, but why did the innocent lamb have to be sacrificed? Think of Abraham and Isaac and the ritual sacrifices of lambs in many of the world's great religions.

D. The partnering poem in *Songs of Experience* is "The Tyger." The text here is not as simple as in "The Lamb."

1. The tiger is, of course, the antitype of the lamb. In the design he made for this poem, Blake has an image of the tiger smiling as if it has eaten a lamb for lunch.
2. Where the force of destruction is involved, the answer is not as simple as "Did he who made the Lamb, make thee?" The answer, yes or no, is not forthcoming.
3. The answer Blake hints at is that without the destructive tiger—without crucifixion, to allegorize it in Christian terms—the innocence of the lamb would be nothing. It would be literally bloodless. And it is the blood of the lamb, not the innocence of the lamb, that the Christian William Blake believes will save us.

V. Blake's poetry takes us into strange territories, and typically, we emerge less certain of things than we were

when we entered. Always in his poetry, it is the unanswered questions that are, mysteriously, the pathways to higher understanding.

A. We see an example in a short, simple poem, “The Sick Rose,” from *The Songs of Experience*.

1. As we know, roses wither and die, but the rose in this poem is not merely conforming to the eternal laws of vegetation and decay; it is sick. What is the nature of that sickness?

2. What’s killing the rose is a worm, and in the Bible, the worm is an image of Satan. It’s also a phallic image.

3. The crucial word in this poem is *secret*: “his dark secret love / Does thy life destroy.” How different would the poem be if it read “Its insatiable love / Does thy life destroy”?

4. Blake, we must remember, was a sexual anarchist. He believed that love destroys only when it is furtive and ashamed of itself, not if it is open. This is the nature of the sickness.

5. One can agree or disagree with that proposition, but it is one of the foundational elements in the poet’s idiosyncratic system.

B. Blake was also attracted to, and fascinated by, the poetry of Milton, specifically, *Paradise Lost*.

1. As you recall, that poem was founded on a great opposition between two mighty adversaries, God and Satan. But Milton, as Blake believed, wrote “in fetters.” His imagination perceived something that his reason would not fully let him know.

2. Blake was the first to make the much-repeated critical observation about the moral contradiction at the core of *Paradise Lost*. As he wrote, “The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it.”

3. Blake didn’t mean that Milton was a Satanist. He meant that a part of Milton understood that Adam and Eve could never have fulfilled their destiny without Satan, without the fall, and without the responsibility of regaining paradise. Without contraries, that progression would never have been possible. Therefore, and perversely, Satan was the instrument of religious progress.

4. Satan was a necessary component in Blake’s system and in Milton’s, too, but the earlier poet could not write what he inwardly knew because the fetters of Puritanism were too strong at the time.

5. Blake wrote and rewrote *Paradise Lost*, although he didn’t call his poems that, throughout his career. Time and again, he revisits the questions that Milton’s poem posed.

6. Despite the ferociously authoritarian voice tone of his poems, Blake never quite worked out the answer to the Milton problem, but the problem itself is both clearer and more beautiful for his investigation of it.

VI. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is another early work of Blake that offers us a gateway into his system. Here, he uses the term “marriage” as a synonym for synthesis; the work is about the fusion of the two contraries.

A. The section titled “The Marriage” does not strike us as a poem at all; it seems to be a grab bag of manifesto, proverbs, blank verse, and epigrams. Much of it is in prose, and it seems to contain hundreds of Mosaic commandments.

B. One section states the devil’s philosophy as a series of truths, and here again we see that Satan is a vessel of truth.

C. A particularly revealing trove of Blakean truth is found elsewhere in the poem, in the section called the “Proverbs of Hell.” The allusion, of course, is to the Book of Proverbs in the Bible. Examples of these hellish proverbs include: “The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom” and “A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.”

D. Blake wrote *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* at a time when he was most intensely under the influence of the radical theologian Swedenborg. Although he outgrew that phase, members of the sect still regard him as one of their most important prophets.

VII. Over the next 15 years of his life, Blake progressed further down his own idiosyncratic path.

A. He remained deeply connected to the traditions of English literature. For him, the Bible was the greatest of

literary books, as well as a vessel of divine truth, as was poetry.

B. Unlike Wordsworth, Blake never compromised with his early radical, republican, revolutionary beliefs. He is also probably the most misread or misunderstood poet in the language, and nowhere more so than in the poem “Jerusalem.”

1. The poem alludes to the legend that, in the lost years of Christ between his childhood and his 30th year, the savior visited England and preached at Glastonbury.
2. The poem, as it has been popularized, is an extravagantly chauvinistic patriotic anthem, but that sentiment is not at all what Blake had in mind when he wrote it.
3. The “dark Satanic Mills” are not, as is often asserted, the new and exploitative textile factories of the early Industrial Revolution but, more probably, the established churches, which Blake loathed as prisons of the soul and mind. His “arrows of desire” refers to sexual desire.
4. In short, this poem isn’t a celebration of traditional England, a “green and pleasant Land,” but a vision of the Blakean anarchist utopia, a place of complete freedom of belief and free love.

C. Although the poem is widely misunderstood, the popularity of “Jerusalem” has installed Blake where he never was during his life, at the center of English life and culture. He is arguably one of the giants of the Romantics. And if he demands that we learn his system in order to appreciate his achievement, we should do him that service.

Suggested Readings:

Blake, *The Complete Poems*.

Eaves, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why was Blake so unappreciated in his own time?
2. What does Blake understand by the terms “innocence” and “experience”?

Lecture Twenty-Five

Scott and Burns—The Voices of Scotland

Scope: This lecture turns to two writers, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns, who were not English but Scottish. Scott was a patriot and nationalist with strong Tory connections and a deep desire to see England and Scotland as truly a united kingdom. Although he gained fame for writing narrative poems, it is perhaps his historical fiction that most advanced his cause. *Waverley*, for example, explores the contradictions in the political makeup of Scotland but was published at a time when Britain, too, was struggling to define its identity as a nation. Robert Burns found the identity of Scotland in its common people and their songs, transmuting these ballads into poetry. He is perhaps best known for “Auld Lang Syne,” which tells of the displacement of the Scottish people but urges us, in the end, to put our troubles aside for a “cup o’ kindness.”

Outline

I. In this lecture, we’ll turn to two writers who are not, strictly speaking, within the purview of English literature. Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), called the Wizard of the North and the Great Unknown, and Robert Burns (1759–1796), the poet of peasant origins, were both thoroughly Scottish.

II. In Scott’s time, Edinburgh was called the Athens of the north. To this day, a train station there is named after his *Waverley* novels, and a visitor can see other Scott landmarks around the city.

A. Scott was a great patriot and nationalist, as well as the greatest writer that Scotland has produced. He created the modern form of the novel—that is, a story that has an intimate connection with the realities of life for the middle classes of the 19th century.

B. Scott was born in Edinburgh’s Old Town. The city is constructed on a series of volcanic mounds, and the Old Town is a cluster of tenements on a hill that leads up to the castle.

1. Scott was brought up amid the vibrant, lively culture of the people compressed into these tenements, but he also contracted polio there, which handicapped him for life.

2. His father, also called Walter Scott, was a writer to the signet, an attorney.

C. Scotland had an uneasy relationship with England. The two countries had been joined by the Act of Union in 1707, which was followed, in 1745, by an attempt to disjoin violently. By the time Scott came on the scene, however, the union was reforming.

1. The legal system of Scotland was one of the ways in which the relationship with England was cemented.

2. Writers to the signet and advocates (lawyers) were allowed to plead in court and to prepare legal documents. They were at the forefront of a very edgy relationship with the larger power to the south.

D. Scott did not regard himself as fulfilling our modern stereotype of a Scot, although ironically, he invented much of the paraphernalia of stereotypical Scottishness, such as the kilt, tartans, and so on. He played up these Scottish symbols to set the scene for a visit of the monarch George IV to Edinburgh in 1822.

1. Monarchs had not traditionally traveled to Scotland because it was considered dangerous; the Scots were usually in a state of uneasy alliance with their neighbor.

2. Partly because he was a Tory, a conservative, Scott worked against that perception. He wanted to create a truly united kingdom, with no division between England and Scotland.

3. Scott saw himself as a Saxon, believing that his ancestors had been pushed north by the Normans in 1066. He did not acknowledge a link to the Scotland of the Celtic highlands, the image we associate with the film *Braveheart*.

4. Scott, like many of his lowland professional class, eventually became reconciled to the highlanders, but his main interests were always to the south of the border. He saw himself essentially as a North Briton and loyal to the Hanoverian crown.

E. Scott's family believed that he would follow in his father's footsteps to become a writer to the signet, but from his early days, his romantic, literary disposition came through.

1. His disability may have played a part in this; as a child, books were his recreation, and he was exposed to the oral culture around Edinburgh. He learned the lowlands dialect and many ballads.

2. Scott attended Edinburgh University, which was then the home of the Scottish Enlightenment. Thus, in addition to learning the old culture of Scotland, he also became a European Enlightenment intellectual. At the same time, he worked as an apprentice in his father's law office.

F. Scott secured a series of sinecures in the Scottish legal system and made a prudent marriage to the illegitimate daughter of a prominent English peer. His powerful Tory friends established for him a lifelong security that enabled him to concentrate on his first love—literature.

1. Scott traveled into the borderland between Scotland and England, collecting and recording ballads. He eventually put together an anthology of ballads, of which "The Battle of Otterbourne" is one example.

2. At the same time, Scott became involved in the Edinburgh book trade, investing as a silent partner in a publishing house.

3. These years were devoted to what Scott called the making of himself. He even served as a captain of yeomanry in the military.

G. Any number of anecdotes testify to the fact that Scott was a lovable man. Fame came to him in 1805 with a long poem called "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," with *lay* meaning a song or narrative. The poem is about border warfare, and it is sung by the last of the balladeers. It is written in English, not in the lowlands dialect, and is beautifully fluent.

1. Scott's poem became a bestseller in London, as well as Edinburgh, and changed the popular image of Scotland. The Scottish tourist industry was created with such poems as Scott's *The Lady of the Lake*.

2. Despite their popularity, Scott's narrative poems are not regarded today as important works of literature.

3. Scott himself realized that Byron had outdone him in the field of narrative poetry with *Childe Harold* in 1812 and wrote no more long poems.

H. Scott turned, instead, to an idea he had been playing with for sometime—historical fiction. This genre was

popular, but it generally struck a false note. Scott wanted to write a historical novel that would be relevant in the present.

1. He took as his subject matter Scotland, a country built on contradiction. Historically, Scotland had changed more than any country in Europe because of the rebellion of 1745. It had come almost overnight from the age of Elizabeth into the current age.

2. Scott's great historical novel *Waverley* is about a young man, Edward Waverley, who wavers. He starts life as an English officer, but he is posted to the Scottish lowlands, where he falls in love with the daughter of his host, a girl called Rose.

3. Young Waverley is then dispatched into the highlands, where he falls in with the rebels. He forms a fraternal relationship with a clan leader called Fergus and falls in love with Fergus's sister, Flora.

4. Waverley is of two minds. Is he a Jacobite fighting for Prince Charles, who is trying to conquer England, or is he a Hanoverian fighting against the rebels?

5. Scott is enacting here the contradictions in the makeup of Britain, as well as Scotland, and the novel's publication in 1814 was timely. The British were fighting Napoleon, and many Britons were struggling to define an identity for themselves and their nation. Scott gave the country its greatest political history lesson.

I. The remainder of Scott's career is sad. He wrote a succession of novels, which made him money, but in 1825, a trade crash in England bankrupted Scott's publishing house. He died trying to write his way out of debt.

III. Unlike Scott, Robert Burns came from the lower classes. He keeps alive that vein of what we think of as indigenous Scottishness through the language and his balladry.

A. Scott was aware that ballads were dying, but Burns believed that the national identity of Scotland could be kept alive with the songs of the country. He transmuted into poetry the ballads of his own people.

B. Burns was famously an immoral man. He may be the only writer in British literature who is commemorated by a party, Burns Night. Of course, Burns is also associated with New Year's Eve through his great ballad "Auld Lang Syne."

1. The poem is essentially a toast to the days of the past. It brings to mind old ideas of vegetation, mutability, and decay; the old year giving way to the new; and various pagan relics of contemporary culture. The ballad, of course, is the poetry of the people.

2. We find, in Burns's work, certain kinds of eternal truths expressed in the simplest of forms. In this poem, he tells us of the displacement of the Scottish people.

3. As we know, "Auld Lang Syne" ends with a call to put aside the troubles of the past and lift another "cup o' kindness."

Suggested Readings:

Buchan, *Crowded with Genius*.

———, *Sir Walter Scott*.

Burns, *The Canongate Burns: The Complete Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*.

Daiches, *Sir Walter Scott and His World*.

Douglas, *Robert Burns: The Tinder Heart*.

Scott and Hook, ed., *Waverley*.

Sutherland, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott: A Critical Biography*.

Wu, ed. *Romanticism: An Anthology*.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what sense is Scottish literature anything other than English literature written in Scotland?

2. How important, in assessing their literary achievements, are the social class origins of Burns and Scott? Is literature "above" such considerations?

Lecture Twenty-Six

***Lyrical Ballads*—Collaborative Creation**

Scope: The period from 1770–1830 saw both political and literary revolutions. In literature, the revolution of the period is termed the Romantic revival, and two of its initial insurgents were William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. With their volume *Lyrical Ballads*, these two writers overthrew the verse establishment that had been founded by the Augustans and took poetry in new directions. Their program was to eliminate inflated diction and return poetry to a primal, natural state. We'll look at selections from both Wordsworth and Coleridge to see the differing approaches of these two Romantic revolutionaries.

Outline

I. The period between the 18th and 19th centuries saw what is known as the Romantic revival in literature, although it might be more accurate to call the period the “Romantic Revolution.”

A. Historically, it was an age of revolution. The literary timeline that we're looking at in these lectures was materially bent and redirected by what happened in the years 1770–1830.

B. In general, revolutions presume certain conditions and share certain features. First, they involve violent resistance to intolerable oppression. Second, they are movements of the people, and third, they generally have a program, typically utopian, relating to some idealized future state of social existence. These three elements will help us understand what happened to English literature, with explosive effect, around 1800.

II. Let's begin by looking at the revolutionaries we will study in this lecture, William Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834).

A. In *Lyrical Ballads*, these two writers achieved something quite rare in English literature—a collaborative work of creation.

1. English literature from Chaucer forward is rooted in the individual sensibility, but in this volume, two geniuses merged gloriously.

2. At the time they produced *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge were also part of a larger group called the Lake Poets.

3. Nature and redefinitions of nature are at the heart of the Romantic revival, and nature itself is, perhaps, nowhere more beautiful than in the region of England known as the lake country.

B. Wordsworth was born in the Lake District; both his parents died when he was still young. According to his autobiographical poem *The Prelude*, William was allowed to run wild in nature, which became for him a kind of mother. Throughout his poetry, we see a pantheistic refrain: God inheres in the natural world around us. God is in nature.

C. William was educated at grammar school, but he tells us in *The Prelude* that there was much loneliness in his childhood. We note in this poem what Keats called the “egotistic sublime”; Wordsworth was obsessed with himself, but this obsession is part of the Romantic project.

D. Wordsworth's early circumstances rendered him extraordinarily introverted, and solitude was a vital element in his psychological makeup. Another of his most famous poems, “Daffodils,” opens with the line “I wandered lonely as a Cloud.”

1. Loneliness and creativity are at the heart of Wordsworth's poetry, and loneliness, for him, is a creative state.

2. Reconnecting with society is one of the great problems in the Wordsworthian view of the poetic role because the poet, of course, cannot stay forever alone.

E. Wordsworth attended Cambridge University and experienced his first major intellectual stimulus on a visit to France, at the crest of the early revolutionary period in 1790.

F. In the early 1800s, Wordsworth settled in the Lake District with his sister and muse, Dorothy, and began to devote himself seriously to poetry. In 1795, he had met Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose muse was both more philosophical and wilder than Wordsworth's: opium and Immanuel Kant, the great German philosopher fed

that imagination.

G. The fruit of the relationship between Coleridge and Wordsworth was the collaborative volume *Lyrical Ballads*, first published in 1798. It was reissued with a manifesto preface by Wordsworth in 1800 and again with an expanded introduction in 1802.

1. Although it's a slim volume, *Lyrical Ballads* may be the most influential book of poetry in English literature. It acted as a bomb under the sedate establishment of verse, which had been erected so formally and carefully by the Augustans.
2. The book was originally published without names, as if it were a production, not of individual talent, but of the spirit of the time.

III. Coleridge was also living in the Lake District at this time, close by Wordsworth.

A. Coleridge's personal life, unlike Wordsworth's, was sexually chaotic. Wordsworth's famous one-line definition of poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings from emotions recollected in tranquility." Coleridge supplied the "spontaneous" power, while Wordsworth offered the "tranquility," the reflection.

1. A perfect example of Coleridge's spontaneity is found in "Kubla Khan," the short poem he began (but never finished) under the influence of a narcotic dream.
2. Among Coleridge's utopian projects was his failed "pantisocratic" community, based on free love and philosophical ideas.

B. Wordsworth's later life was tranquil; Coleridge's, catastrophically unsettled. Wordsworth married in 1802; thereafter, his career followed a quieter track to fame. In later years, he formed a more conservative political view of the world and was honored as poet laureate.

C. Coleridge, in contrast, left in his chaotic wake a collection of fragments, short works, and prolegomena.

1. Like Wordsworth, he compiled an autobiography—prose, in his case—*Biographia Literaria*, the biography of a literary sensibility. The work fuses Coleridge's towering intellect, extraordinary powers of criticism, and feeling for poetry.
2. Coleridge was, among his other achievements, a great theorist and critic of English literature. He died, wrecked by addiction, years before Wordsworth, in 1834.
3. His greatest complete poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, was composed during his collaborative years with Wordsworth.

IV. Let's turn now to that explosive volume, *Lyrical Ballads*.

A. Ballads, as mentioned in the last lecture, are poetry of the folk. They do not, historically, have single authors but are the products of a communal voice. Lyrics may be thought of as similarly authorless.

1. Ballad revival took fire across Europe in the late 18th century as that period rediscovered the primal, pre-literary energies of literature.
2. The ballad revival also marked a desire to return to cleansing simplicities, away from the industrialization, institutionalization, and bureaucratization that were transforming the world.

B. The belief that poetry could return to the primal level of its history at the dawn of the industrial age was, of course, a fallacy, but Romantic literature thrives on fallacies.

1. The "pathetic fallacy" is perhaps the most famous of mistaken ideas: the notion that nature cares about us.
2. An offshoot of this is the idea that an untrammelled state of nature is recoverable, such as Coleridge's Edenic pantisocracy.
3. Despite their falsehood, these fallacies were ideologically necessary in the Romantic revival and had sublime literary results.

C. Consider, for example, Wordsworth's greatest anthem to pantheism, "Tintern Abbey."

1. The poet, after an extended absence, has returned to the country around the river Wye. We understand that this return to nature is a homecoming. On his return, the poet, standing by a ruined abbey, has a

moment of transcendent vision of the unity of all things.

2. At the same time, he notes the smoke from charcoal fires, the fuel that would kick-start the first wave of the Industrial Revolution. The poet creates a fiction that the smoke is innocent, natural.

D. In the first edition, the poems of *Lyrical Ballads* were offered without any surrounding explanation and without the authorial names. Later editions carried names and Wordsworth's pugnacious poetic manifesto. In that manifesto, we find the three revolutionary elements mentioned earlier: resistance to oppression, populism, and utopianism.

1. What was the oppression that Wordsworth and Coleridge opposed? It was, as Wordsworth contemptuously put it, "gaudy and inane phraseology," in other words, the poetic diction of the Augustans.

2. In an appendix, Wordsworth gives an example of such phraseology from Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, comparing it to the passage from Proverbs in the Bible from which Johnson drew.

E. To draw a broad distinction, in the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth took on the political agenda, and Coleridge explored the primitive supernaturalism associated with balladry.

1. Wordsworth's political poetics were, as he said, "to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men."

2. Admittedly, Wordsworth had to make compromises with this approach. He says that the poet is a "man of more than usual organic sensibility." Such a man could not always confine his poetic expression to the language of the streets or the rural village.

F. At its best, Wordsworth's poetry is of stunning purity and power. One example comes from the "Lucy" poems, included in later reprints of *Lyrical Ballads*. Breathtakingly simple and with only eight lines, the poem nonetheless conveys compelling emotion.

1. We can see in this poem what Wordsworth was looking for in ancient balladry: a primal energy by which the simplest words come alive.

2. Only one word, "diurnal," stands out in the poem as "gaudy and inane phraseology." We forgive the contradiction of the poet's philosophy here in the face of the beauty that he produced.

G. Coleridge's agenda was different. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the first work in *Lyrical Ballads*, he compacts into short-lined, four-line stanzas an amazingly pregnant and mystical narrative of the condition of man in an incomprehensible natural universe. A religious order exists in this universe, but it is an order that is enigmatic, although, mysteriously, meanings may be sensed.

1. In writing this poem, Coleridge drew on gothic fiction and an extraordinary range of reading in theology, philosophy, and travel. His descriptions of the arctic regions are almost photographic.

2. The narrative of *The Rime* is simple. The poet is going to church to attend a wedding, but he is stopped on the way to hear the story of the ancient mariner.

3. As we learn, the mariner shot an albatross, a sea bird with a huge wingspan that is often taken as symbolic of the crucified Christ. It is, as sailors' superstition has it, bad luck to kill an albatross. The mariner's act has terrible consequences.

4. The ship is marooned in a windless ocean; the sailors thirst horribly; the sun blazes. Even the sea seems to rot around them. Eventually, all the sailors die, except for the mariner and the million "slimy things" in the ocean.

5. Finally, after strange visitations, the mariner has a spiritual conversion. He blesses the slimy sea things around the vessel and is miraculously free. The bones of the albatross, which other sailors have put around his neck, drop from him, and he is reborn. But he is reborn as aged and wizened.

6. Before he dies, he must pass on his vision, and here, he becomes a version of the Romantic poet. He must accost the wedding guest, who also becomes older and wiser by the end of the poem. The guest's experience is an allegorization of how poetry works.

7. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* indicates the new directions that poetry would take over the next two centuries. A revolution had taken place and, arguably, is still taking place in English literature as a result

Suggested Readings:

Ashton, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*.

Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries*.

Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*.

Roe, *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*.

Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*.

Questions to Consider:

1. *Lyrical Ballads*, a stereotypical “slim volume” changed the course of English literature. How?
2. What is distinctively Wordsworthian, and what is Coleridgean, in *Lyrical Ballads*?

Lecture Twenty-Seven Mad, Bad Byron

Scope: Born into the nobility, George Gordon Byron had a scandalous reputation. His privileged life was marred by a club foot that may have driven him to overachievement, and a stormy relationship with his mother that may have accounted for his cavalier treatment of women. He wrote fluent poetry as a schoolboy and published an early volume, *Hours of Idleness*, which was not well received by critics. In response to reviewers, he wrote a satire titled “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,” in which he found his true poetic voice. Perhaps Byron’s most well-known poems are *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*. In the first, he developed the world-weary, misanthropic Byronic hero, and in the second, he displayed a talent for wit unseen since the Augustans. In later life, Byron was forced into exile from England by his numerous affairs but took part in wars for freedom around the Mediterranean. He died in Greece, assisting in the fight for Greek independence from Turkey.

Outline

I. George Gordon Byron (1788–1824) was considered in his day “mad, bad, and dangerous to know.” Although he was a literary genius, he reveled in outrageous utterances: “Every day confirms my opinion on the superiority of a vicious life—and if Virtue is not its own reward I don’t know any other stipend annexed to it.”

A. Byron was born during the height of the French Revolution. Despite the fact that he was of the nobility and a Tory to the core, he would become the most actively revolutionary of all the Romantic poets. He served as a commander in the Italian revolutionary organization known as the Carbonari in its struggle against Austria, and he died fighting with the forces of Greece for independence from the Turkish imperial oppressor.

B. Byron inherited the family title at age 10, and with the title, he also inherited a fortune and the right to sit in the House of Lords. With all these advantages came one handicap for Byron: a club foot. Perhaps this disability prompted him to overachievement throughout his life.

C. Byron received the standard education for an English gentleman, even though his earliest years were passed in Scotland. He attended Harrow School and Trinity College, Cambridge. His childhood and adolescence were deformed emotionally by a stormy relationship with his mother, which may have formed what would be a cavalier and predatory attitude to women throughout his life.

D. As a schoolboy, Byron already wrote fluent verse. His earliest collection, *Hours of Idleness*, identifies in its title an early fascination with what the French call *ennui*, or “boredom,” but a boredom that, like Wordsworth’s solitude, is perversely creative.

1. This early volume is not particularly good, but it prefigures attitudes and moods that are found later, more artistically handled and evolved, in his mature work.
2. A sample from *Hours of Idleness* is fairly substandard, but it’s noteworthy that Byron retained much of the standard Augustan diction in this early verse.
3. Groundbreaking Romantic that he was, Byron did not throw overboard—as Wordsworth and Coleridge

had done—Alexander Pope or Dr. Johnson. Of all the Romantics, he retains most loyally a link to the great writers of the 18th century, perhaps again, because his of innate conservatism and reverence for the past.

4. *Hours of Idleness* was subjected to savage review from Scottish critics in Edinburgh, which was then, with its quarterly magazine the *Edinburgh Review*, a center of literary authority.

5. Combative, even at this early stage of his life, Byron fired back with an equally savage and hilarious verse satire called “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.”

6. This altercation was the making of Byron, shunting his style from lofty, pompous, and attitudinizing to colloquial, ad hominem, light verse. His poetic retort is absolutely correct: Much reviewing consists of phony omniscience, low rhetorical tricks, and unearned loftiness of tone.

E. Even at this early age, Byron was sexually hyperactive. He was also bisexual, a dangerous preference in this period, when a man could still be hanged for sodomy. His public reputation for Don Juanism would be his eventual downfall.

F. From 1809 to 1811, Byron went on the Grand Tour, traveling to the Mediterranean and the Levant, where his wide-ranging sexual tastes were more likely to be satisfied. He would become the most traveled writer in English literature to date, a fact that enlarged his view of life immensely.

1. No poet before Byron could write such exquisite verses about foreign places as he does.

2. With the “Isles of Greece,” the reader doesn’t feel that Byron has merely visited Greece but that he truly knows the isles of which he writes. His poem paints a picture of great beauty and, at the same time, reminds us of the oppression of Greece by the Turks.

II. On his Grand Tour, Byron began to write the poem that would make him famous and transform him into literature’s first celebrity. The poem is *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, a work very different from Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

A. Epic in scale, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* is, in essence, an exercise in pose or image—the image of the poet/traveler.

1. That image, which we associate specifically with Byron, came to be called the Byronic hero.

2. One of its elements is *ennui* or world weariness, summed up in the lines “No more, oh never more on me / The freshness of the heart can fall like dew.” Byron was only 28 years old when he voiced this sad valediction to the pleasures of life.

B. Another element in this Byronic pose is misanthropy, which expresses itself in a desire for solitude and a contempt for the world: “There is pleasure in the pathless woods, / There is a rapture on the lonely shore, / There is society, where none intrudes ...”

C. In spite of his pose of happy solitude, Byron was indefatigably social. Further, there is a good deal of rather fictitious scene-painting in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, such as his famous apostrophe to the sea: “Roll on, thou deep and dark Ocean—roll! / Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain; / Man marks the earth with ruin—his control / Stops with the shore;—upon the watery plain.” It sounds magnificent, but the lines are empty of meaning.

1. Note, however, Byron’s use of enjambment (avoiding a grammatical break at the end of a line). This technique creates a wonderful fluidity in his verse. No writer is better than Byron in handling the tempo of his poetic instrument.

2. It’s not always easy to see what of any importance is being said or constructed by Byron’s verbal magniloquence, but it doesn’t seem to matter. It’s the poetic voice, the poetic stance, the poeticizing that creates the effect and persuades one that something significant has been uttered.

D. In terms of literary history, with *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Byron achieved an enlargement of perspective for English literature. *Childe Harold* is a European poem, perhaps even what we might call “world literature.” More significantly, it looks forward to the post-Napoleonic era—Britain’s century—and the liberation of British travelers.

E. Byron did not, of course, invent the style and technique of *Childe Harold*. Like other Romantic poets, he returned to two great literary sources: Milton and Spenser.

1. From Milton, specifically Milton's Satan, the perpetual exile and rebel, Byron took many constituents of the Byronic hero.
2. From Spenser, he borrowed diction and stanza form, the materials of his verse. The opening of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* clearly reveals the Spenserian debt of Byron.

F. John Murray published the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* in March 1812. According to Byron, he woke up the next morning and found himself famous. A bestseller, *Childe Harold* provoked a huge sensation; it somehow caught the mood of the time. Two more cantos of *Childe Harold* followed, consolidating Byron's success and continuing to build the Byronic mystique.

III. On his return to England, Byron took a stab at respectability, taking up his seat in the House of Lords and making some powerful antiestablishment speeches, but his private life was irredeemably scandalous.

A. His affair with Lady Caroline Lamb became particularly notorious when, besotted with him, she stalked him, threatened suicide, and blackguarded him as a sodomite. Even more dangerously, he had an incestuous relationship with his married half-sister, Augusta, and probably fathered a child by her.

B. He married in 1815, disastrously, and in 1816, he found himself with the poet Shelley and his 18-year-old paramour, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, the author of *Frankenstein*.

C. Another woman, Claire Clairmont, also bore Byron a child. After 1816–1817, his life would be that of an exile, although he was actively involved in the wars for freedom around the Mediterranean.

D. Byron didn't make the possibility of a return to respectability any easier by writing such poems as *The Vision of Judgment* on the death of King George III.

1. The poem is a satire on a feeble effusion by the then-poet laureate, Robert Southey, a Lakelander whom Byron particularly detested. Southey's work piously imagines the dead king going straight from his state funeral to be welcomed at the pearly gates.
2. Byron's poem uses the same scenario, but his King George receives a very different reception in heaven, and the poem itself offers some bitter reflections on monarchy and the British establishment.

E. During this period, Byron took on the longest lasting of his innumerable mistresses, the Countess Guiccioli, who promptly left her husband for the irresistible English lord.

IV. Byron believed that he had been hounded out of England by straitlaced, blue-nosed English morality. The English couldn't abide a sexual libertarian, a free man in his private life, such as Lord Byron. This would become the theme of his great new verse narrative, *Don Juan*.

A. Of course, this hero is legendary. The Spaniard is a great lover, so adept in his seductions that no woman can resist him. But Byron, hilariously, turns the legend on its head. In his version, women victimize the innocent Juan, who, like Byron, is forced into exile by scandal.

B. *Don Juan* is one of the longest poems of the Romantic revival. It was unfinished at the time of Byron's death, and was probably unfinishable. As Byron said, "I had not quite fixed whether to make [my hero] end in Hell, or in an unhappy marriage, not knowing which would be the severest."

C. Seventeen cantos in length, each canto the length of a small book, *Don Juan* would be much censored and suppressed by the Victorians. Byron, although he was loved by 19th-century radicals because of his activities as a freedom fighter, was a dangerous poet long after his death.

D. Among its other extraordinary qualities, *Don Juan* is the wittiest production of the Romantic revival. That quality, wit, so revered by the Augustans, wasn't much cultivated by the other great Romantics. Their humorlessness was something for which Byron constantly chided them. We'll close with one example of Byron's wit.

1. In the last cantos, Don Juan, by an incredible series of accidents, is dispatched as an ambassador to England. This part of the poem is the occasion for much satire on Byron's homeland, as well as that

peculiar kind of rueful rumination that may be the most engaging aspect of the Byronic persona.

2. In the opening of the 12th canto, note the liberties Byron takes with the venerable Spenserian stanza, along with his modulation of his own earlier pretentiousness: “Of all the barbarous middle ages, that / Which is most barbarous is the middle age / Of man ...”

E. In addition to writing great satires and picaresque narratives, Byron should also be remembered for some of the loveliest lyrics that came out of the Romantic Movement. “So, We’ll Go No More A-Roving” is one example.

F. Byron died of a fever in 1824 while serving with the Greek rebels against the Turkish occupation. His body was embalmed and his heart buried under a tree where he died in Greece. His remains were sent to England for burial in Westminster Abbey, alongside the great poets and writers of England, but the abbey refused to accept him.

Suggested Readings:

Byron, *Lord Byron: The Major Works*.

MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Can one separate the characteristically flamboyant “Byronic” lifestyle from Byron’s poetry—or are the two inextricable?
2. What, precisely, is Byron’s quarrel with England?

Lecture Twenty-Eight Keats—Literary Gold

Scope: The poetic career of John Keats spanned only about five years, but in this brief period, he produced a small cache of literary gold. Keats was among the most romantic of the Romantics; like Wordsworth and Coleridge, he sought to skip backward over the Augustans to reconnect with earlier poetry. Unlike Wordsworth, however, Keats’s poetic diction and themes are closer to what one finds in Edmund Spenser and John Milton, rather than a “man speaking to men.” His poem “La Belle Dame sans Merci” is both beautiful and mysterious. It asks questions about the relationship of love to self-destruction but leaves us with no definitive answers. With Keats, perhaps the only certainty is that beauty exists in the world: “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

Outline

I. “Keatsian” is an adjective used to describe poetry that is like that of John Keats (1795–1821), but what does that mean?

A. He left us a series of “Keatsianisms” that express the essence of his poetic project, such as: “Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by singularity.” Perhaps the most Keatsian of all his statements was: “If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all.”

B. Before we begin to unpack these Keatsianisms, let’s define a term we have been using for several lectures, “Romantic.”

1. The term is applied, loosely speaking, to all literature, irrespective of genre, content, or intent, produced between the 1790s and the first reform bill of 1832.
2. The *romance*, from which the term “romantic” derives, is an antique form of literature, such as the legends of the Knights of the Round Table. This old literature element is also an active ingredient in the term romantic. One of the projects of the Romantic Movement, as we’ve seen with Coleridge and Wordsworth, was to leapfrog back over the Neoclassicism of the Augustans and reconnect poetry with the primal energies of literature.
3. This Romantic revivalism produced a weak imitation of antiquity at its worst but provided a transfusion of real vitality when it worked.

II. Let’s begin by looking at one such retro-literary experiment, “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” by Keats.

A. The poem was composed in 1818, conceived in appropriately romantic circumstances in a Devon coastal town, Teignmouth, an area that contains some of the most beautiful landscapes in Britain. It was also a landscape alive with medieval associations.

B. Legend has it that “La Belle Dame,” a poem that centers on what seems to be an after-death experience, was the last major poem by the 23-year-old Keats, who was already terminally ill with tuberculosis at the time of its composition.

C. When he wrote this ballad, Keats was the age of an average graduating college student, but he had already compiled a body of work that would secure his place in the canon of English literature. According to Keats, knowledge of imminent death heightened his senses to an almost unbearable level that gave him a poignant awareness of the simultaneous beauty and transience of the world.

D. “La Belle Dame sans Merci” opens, ballad style, with an anonymous poet who has been miraculously transported back to medieval England. The poet meets a disoriented knight who has become enthralled with the belle dame and lost any sense of his quest.

1. The poem is beautiful, but what does it mean? Should we even ask that question? Why not let the poem, with all its mysterious suggestiveness, remain like a melody in our heads? Why need it mean anything at all?

2. Clearly, the action described by the forlorn knight in the poem combines two of Keats’s great themes: death and beauty. The poem is also clearly erotic. The belle dame is, literally, a *femme fatale*, a deadly woman. Is Keats meditating on his own love life, which we know to have been unhappy?

3. The poem was written in homage to Spenser, in a consciously and anachronistically archaic style. In 1818, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing, and the world was governed by sensible utilitarian principles. Why, then, are we reading about knights? Is the poem nostalgic? Does it express a desire to escape a present that was hurtling too fast into modernity?

E. The poem may have greater subtlety than these interpretations suggest. Why, we may ask, is fairyland so horrible, yet once one is exiled from it, so longed for?

1. In *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser creates an alien realm in which he allegorizes the moral virtues. Keats seems to be doing something more elusive but along the same Spenserian lines.

2. Keats’s fairyland is an imaginary place in which the unconscious, the irrational, can be probed and examined.

3. The poem asks: What is the relationship between love and the urge to self-destruction? Why do men and women let themselves fall in love, knowing that it will mean certain suffering? How much is great love worth? Is it worth one’s life?

4. Keats’s poem intimates that life and the great experiences of life are mysteries to which we’ll never know the answers. The only thing we can be sure of is that there is beauty in the world.

III. To return to our definition of “Romantic,” the term is also used to mean glamorous, and the Romantic poets fulfilled that sense of the word. They were personally glamorous in a way that Pope and Johnson, their great literary antitypes, were not.

A. Consider, for example, the young revolutionary Wordsworth, prepared to fight with the Sansculottists on the barricades of Paris; the opium-addicted genius Coleridge; the mad, bad Lord Byron; and his colleague in the “league of incest,” as it was called, Percy Bysshe Shelley. Arguably, the most romantic of the Romantics was John Keats.

B. Keats came from nowhere, with none of the birth privileges of, say, Byron and Shelley. He flared brilliantly and briefly; in a career that spans barely five years, he contrived to leave behind him a bequest for posterity of literary gold.

C. Keats’s father was the manager of a livery stable in London, where the young poet was born and brought up. The fact that he didn’t come from the upper classes led to his insulting nickname, the “cockney poet,” later in life. His father died in 1804, and John’s mother remarried, unsuccessfully. The family experienced recurring

money problems and moved constantly from lodging to lodging.

D. In 1815, Keats was entered as a student in Guy's Hospital, with a view to a career in medicine or as an apothecary. His poetic break came in 1816, when he had a poem accepted by the radical editor Leigh Hunt for Hunt's magazine, *The Examiner*.

1. Hunt was himself a poet and a cultivated man of letters; he set himself up as Keats's patron.
2. The connection with Hunt associated Keats with political radicals, which would lead to unremitting and wounding attacks from the powerful conservative quarter.
3. Legend has it that Keats's life was cut short by a particularly savage review of his first volume of verse in *Blackwood's Magazine* in August 1818. Although he was, of course, killed by tuberculosis, Keats was abnormally sensitive to criticism on class grounds.

E. One of the themes that recurs in our survey of 19th-century literature is the fact that many of the greatest writers, including Dickens, Brontë, and Hardy, effectively taught themselves, and Keats belongs to this literary company. One of his greatest poems, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," records the experience of discovering for himself the classics of literature.

F. Keats left medicine and published his first volume of poetry in 1817. The book proved controversial, not because it was lacking in literary quality, but because it carved out a new style by going back to Spenser, and, less directly, to Milton, reconnecting with earlier English poetry.

1. Keats's project was quite different from Wordsworth's "man speaking to men." What Keats offered was a poet engaging with great English poets—his literary peers—not his readers.
2. The crucial element in this engagement was diction, the words that one would only ever discover in poetry.

IV. Keats had early premonitions that his time on earth was limited. If he was to join the pantheon of great poets, he would have no time for a long apprenticeship.

A. Keats watched his brothers die of tuberculosis. The poet lived in a world, as he said, "where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies." We should note, parenthetically, that the mysteriously symbolic "La Belle Dame" can be allegorized as Madame Tuberculosis. The poem could well be seen as a hallucination in the last stages of that disease.

B. Keats embarked, too early perhaps, on grand, epic ventures: *Endymion* and *Hyperion*, for which, as he knew better than any *Blackwood's* critic, he was not yet ready, but he would never be granted the years to come to that readiness.

C. The political opposition scoffed at Keats as an uneducated cockney scribbler. On Oxford-educated writer noted, "The errors of Keats's character,—and they were as transparent as a weed in a pure and lucent stream of water,—resulted from his education; rather from his *want* of education." Keats, however, has lasted, and his critics have not.

V. Our knowledge of Keats's life has a number of frustrating gaps.

A. He may have contracted venereal disease, exacerbating a natural tendency to melancholy. He experienced an *amour fou*, a "wild love," for Fanny Brawne, about which we have just a few references in his letters and some exquisite but uninformative love poems.

B. Keats kept the wolf from the door through small inheritances and donations from friends. The year 1819 was his *annus mirabilis*, "wonderful year," in which, dying, he produced his greatest work.

C. We'll close with just one example from the *annus mirabilis*, "Ode to Autumn."

1. The essence of an ode is spontaneity. Such a poem is written to catch the glints of the rainbow as it fleets by. An ode interacts with the moment in ways that other poetic forms don't.
2. In Keats's ode, we get an overpowering sense of something supremely rich coming to an end. The autumnal reaper is not just a symbol of harvest but of death, as well.

D. Keats died in Italy at the age of 25, his last days recorded by a friend. He once said, "I would sooner fail

than not be among the greatest,” and we can say that he most certainly achieved that goal.

Suggested Readings:

Keats, *John Keats: Selected Poems*.

Motion, *Keats*.

Strachan, *John Keats: A Sourcebook*.

Wolfson, *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Keats brought an entirely new tone and style to English poetry. How best can one describe it?
2. How would Keats have developed as a poet, assuming he had been granted another 50 years of existence (as was Wordsworth)?

Lecture Twenty-Nine

***Frankenstein*—A Gothic Masterpiece**

Scope: Many people are familiar with the circumstances surrounding the writing of *Frankenstein*: The novel was the result of a storytelling contest held in a vacation home in Switzerland among Lord Byron, Mary Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and a man named Dr. John Polidori. Readers today judge that the 18-year-old Mary Shelley won the contest readily with her masterpiece of gothic fiction. It may be difficult to imagine that this novel is the product of an 18-year-old mind, but we should note that with Mary Wollstonecraft as her mother, William Godwin as her father, and Percy Shelley as her lover and husband, Mary was, perhaps, genetically and environmentally destined for literary greatness. *Frankenstein* opens itself to a number of interpretations, perhaps the most convincing of which is as an exploration of postnatal depression. For Mary, birth may have had terrifying associations, and her protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, finds that his creation, too, is horrifying.

Outline

I. Let's begin this lecture with a look at the setting in which *Frankenstein*, written by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851), came into existence.

A. In the summer of 1816, several people were gathered for a holiday at a luxurious villa on Lake Geneva in Switzerland. Among those present were Lord Byron; 18-year-old Mary Shelley, the partner of Percy Bysshe Shelley; Shelley himself, and a man named Dr. John Polidori. The gathering had the air of a commune, with free love as one of its tenets.

B. Mary Shelley had inherited a strong sense of morality from both her parents and was not comfortable with the sexual communism practiced on the lake in Switzerland. The English public didn't like it either and had nicknamed the participating writers the “league of incest.”

C. The literary outcome of this holiday was the result of miserable weather, which prevented the vacationers from leaving the villa.

1. In other circumstances, some of these Romantic writers might have liked bad weather; Shelley, for example, wrote a wonderful “Ode to the West Wind.”

2. The Tambora volcano had erupted in 1816, leaving Europe essentially without a summer. Switzerland was particularly badly affected.

D. To relieve the boredom of being cooped up inside, the group began to read gothic novels and tell ghost stories. Ultimately, they decided to have a competition to see who could write the most horrid and imaginative ghost story.

1. Mary Shelley, still a teenager, came up with *Frankenstein*, which would be published two years later, in 1818. Literary history has awarded her the trophy in that writing competition.

2. Dr. Polidori, possibly with the assistance of Byron, wrote *The Vampyre*, which was published in 1819 and would be the inspiration for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, published 80 years later.

3. The effort of Percy Shelley wasn't as good as the others, but he probably had some input into Mary's

story and helped revise it.

E. The 20th century produced some 200 *Frankenstein* or vampire movies, none of which would have come about had the sun been shining in Switzerland in the summer of 1816.

II. The novel *Frankenstein*, the creation of Mary Shelley, is as amazing in its way as the creation of the young scientist Victor Frankenstein. How did an 18-year-old girl come up with this masterpiece?

A. Mary Shelley wrote a novel that is universally regarded as the best of its kind at a time in her life and with a background that would make such an achievement seem unlikely. Part of the explanation may be genetic; as the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, the greatest philosopher of his time, Mary was born to literary greatness.

1. Godwin was the architect of what we think of as liberalism. Some would have seen him at the time as an anarchist or a free thinker. He was radical, almost revolutionary, along with the French *philosophes*, such as Rousseau.

2. Mary's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, died a few days after her daughter's birth in 1797, also an ominous year in other ways. It was a period of revolution and national conflict in Europe. Maps were being redrawn; societies were reorganizing.

3. Mary had eloped with Shelley, much to Godwin's disgust and rage, in 1814 at the age of 16. By the age of 18, she had imbibed high culture and advanced ideas from both her father and her husband.

4. Percy Shelley was physically beautiful and effortlessly creative. He, too, was a radical, and it was an intellectual sympathy that had drawn him into the Godwin circle in the first place. His marriage to Mary was a union of minds, in a sense, as well as being a physical relationship.

5. From birth, Mary was surrounded by the best and most adventurous minds of her time. We can't imagine a better education for a writer.

B. Despite the debased adaptations that it has been subjected to, the original *Frankenstein* is a work of high culture. We can see in it elements of Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Shelley, as well as great writers of the past.

1. The full title of the novel is *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Prometheus was the god who gave mankind fire and was punished for it. He was, perhaps, the father of science.

2. *Frankenstein's* epigraph is a line of Adam's from *Paradise Lost*: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me man? Did I solicit thee / From darkness to promote me?"

3. From the title page onward, Mary Shelley establishes the literary company she intends her work to keep.

C. We might ask why, if Mary wanted to ponder such issues as human nature, did she not write an epic, like Milton's, or a verse tragedy, like Percy's *Prometheus Unbound*? The reason is, quite simply, gender. Grand poetry, like high tragedy, was a strictly male enclave.

1. One looks in vain over the first 1,000 years of English literature for a female writer of epic verse or noble drama. Those who tried their hands at these genres, such as Joanna Baillie with *Plays on the Passions*, were laughingstocks in their own day and are almost forgotten today.

2. Because fiction was regarded as a low genre, however, the field of the novel was open to women.

3. The novel is sometimes called the bourgeois or the domestic epic. Like the literal domestic arena, the home and its kitchen, the novel was a site in which women could express themselves, free of male oppression.

III. The narrative of Shelley's horror story is intricate; she had picked up intuitively a number of tricks of the trade from German writers.

A. *Frankenstein* has an epistolary frame. It begins with a sailor writing to his sister from Saint Petersburg in Russia. As we'll see when we come to *Wuthering Heights*, epistolary frames have the effect of cooling off a hot narrative. They defuse the narrative so that it's not as sensational as it might otherwise be.

B. The initial setting of the novel is also literally cool. It opens in the frozen north, on the ice floes. A ship is locked in by icebergs, but the captain sees, in the snowy distance, a gigantic figure being pulled on a sled by

dogs. This is the first sight we have of the creature made by Victor Frankenstein in his laboratory.

C. The back story emerges gradually, as it must in horror fiction. Shelley's narrative is a cunning one, increasing but not satisfying the appetite of the reader. The story is convoluted but irresistibly gripping.

1. The brilliant Swiss student Victor Frankenstein becomes fascinated by the galvanic power of electricity. If electricity is run through a dead body, the body twitches; it lives again. As Prometheus gave mankind the double-edged gift of fire, so Victor will bestow on mankind the awesome power of electricity. With its use of technology, *Frankenstein* has also been hailed as the progenitor of modern science fiction.
2. Victor exhumes body parts, including animal parts, from morgues, graves, and slaughterhouses and puts them together in what he calls "my workshop of filthy creation."

D. When the creature is finally given life, Victor is horrified at its appearance. As we know, when God made Adam, he found his creation good; why, then, is Victor disgusted? Does he feel that he has committed an act of heresy in becoming a creator rather than a creation? This interpretation is unlikely.

1. The story can be allegorized in different ways. One attractive hypothesis is that Mary Shelley, the political philosopher's daughter, intends us to think of the French Revolution.
 - a. Wordsworth had said that to be young and present at the beginning of the French Revolution was "bliss."
 - b. Ten years later, however, after the Terror and the subsequent war with England, that bliss had turned into something horrible.
 - c. Is Mary Shelley allegorizing the idealism of the young revolutionary, who almost inevitably grows disappointed?
 - d. Of course, a good literary text is polyvalent; it carries many meanings. The French Revolution interpretation may not fully account for the nausea one feels at Victor's creation.
2. We might find another explanation in Mary's biography and certain facts about her relationship with Shelley.
 - a. Percy Shelley was an adamant believer in free love and sexual communism, but Mary wasn't. She was a young, idealistic girl. She began to have sexual relations with Percy when she was very young and had given birth to two children by the time she was 18.
 - b. Her first child, Clara, died a few months after birth, plunging Mary into postnatal depression. Clara's death, coupled with the death of her own mother, must have meant that birth brought horrible associations for Mary.
 - c. The second child, William, had been born in January 1816, but his father and mother were abominated by the respectable classes in England, and Mary's father had disowned her.
 - d. The creation in *Frankenstein*, then, may suggest to us postnatal depression, rendered more acute by the instability of Mary Shelley's domestic circumstances.
 - e. Victor, in fact, has given birth to this creature—he is a mother—and motherhood was, for Mary Shelley, a complex and painful circumstance. That complexity is caught in the striking genesis moment of the novel.

E. The monster thereafter has a sad career. Although he is not criminal by nature, he is made criminal by the fact that he is thrown out of his domestic environment. This is a very liberal, Godwinian notion—that criminals are not inherently evil but are driven to crime by life circumstances.

F. After *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley went on to write other novels, but none of them was as good as her first. Her own circumstances disintegrated with the death of Shelley, who drowned on a lake in Italy. She found herself a solitary woman and never again achieved the creativity of that wonderful summer of 1816.

Suggested Readings:

Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*.

Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*.

Shelley, *Frankenstein*.

Questions to Consider:

1. *Frankenstein* is often described as the most strikingly original work in English literary fiction. Wherein does that originality lie?
2. Why do we have ambivalent feelings about Frankenstein's "monster"?

Lecture Thirty

Miss Austen and Mrs. Radcliffe

Scope: Along with Chaucer and Shakespeare, Jane Austen is one of the three true giants of English literature. We know little about her life, other than the fact that she was born into a clergyman's family, lived and wrote at home, and died unmarried at age 41. Her novels focus on moral maturity and the paths that will be taken by her heroines. Austen was a theorist about fiction and had an interesting view of the function of the novel: to serve as a source of moral authority and instruction. In this, she differed from another woman writer of the time, Ann Radcliffe, who wrote bestselling gothic fiction. Austen was familiar with and enjoyed Mrs. Radcliffe's novels but viewed them as corrupting and addicting. In this lecture, we'll look at Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, in which gothic fiction plays a significant role, and *Mansfield Park*, an exploration of the important questions in the lives of women.

Outline

- I. Of the writers we have seen in this course, three are, perhaps, true giants of English literature: Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Jane Austen (1775–1817).
 - A. We know little about Austen, who jealously guarded her privacy. She was known, as far as her publishers and her first readers were concerned, only as "a Lady." She was also, although we might not think of her in this way, a thoughtful theorist about fiction.
 - B. Austen, like the Brontë sisters, "cooked" her fiction in the home. She composed her narratives and read aloud early drafts to her family, whose responses, particularly those of her brothers, mattered to her.
 - C. Austen was raised in a respectable clergyman's family and never really left home. She was born in a rectory and died, unmarried, at the age of 41. She is buried in Winchester Cathedral, which she probably would have preferred to the Poets' Corner in Westminster.
 - D. Austen's life is easily summarized because we don't know much about it. We can assume, however, that nothing much happened in her life other than the writing of her novels.
 - E. Unlike her contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft, Austen seems not to have held fierce views on the rights of women. She accepted the world into which she had been born and the status of women within it.
- II. Let's begin by profiling the Austen heroine; although this heroine changed over the 20 years that Austen was writing, she retains some residual characteristics. We'll look first at the heroine of an early Austen novel, *Northanger Abbey*.
 - A. The heroine of this book, Catherine Morland, is just 15, growing from a tomboyish adolescence into womanhood. She is one of 10 children of a country parson, a man not unlike Austen's own father, comfortable but not rich. The Reverend Morland is more interested in the future of his older sons than in any of the girls in his family.
 - B. In the novel, Catherine is taken off to Bath by a rich, childless friend of the Morland family. Bath is both a spa and a marriage market. The Morlands, fond as they are of their Catherine, aren't particularly sorry to have at least this one child off their hands.
 - C. In Bath, Isabella Thorpe adopts Catherine, and her odious brother, John Thorpe, sets his cap for her. Isabella is a veteran of the Bath season and a striking woman, but the fact that she has been "left on the shelf" makes us rather suspicious of her.
 - D. More to Catherine's liking than John Thorpe is Henry Tilney, a prosperous clergyman in his mid-20s. He is in Bath to find an innocent girl whom he can shape into his mold of an ideal wife. Henry is not particularly concerned with finding a girl who has a dowry, although his father, General Tilney, believes that Catherine is

an heiress.

E. The plot of *Northanger Abbey* revolves around the question: Who will Catherine marry, and how will she get to the altar? The theme, however, focuses on a different question: What is it to be grown up? What is it to be morally mature? How does one become the kind of person who can deal with the complicated issues of life?

1. Austen intertwines that question with another question: What, in the process of growing up, is the function of the English novel?
2. Austen believed that the novel could help readers mature; it could serve as a moral instructor, with a similar role as the weekly sermons the author would have heard in church.

F. In Bath, Catherine is introduced to gothic fiction, which is romantic, addicting, light-headed, and corrupting.

1. The most well-known author of gothic fiction was Mrs. Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823), who wrote *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.
2. The classic gothic situation is a young girl, scantily dressed, finding herself alone in a mysterious castle or haunted house. We never ask why she is foolish enough to explore the castle's secret passages because the gothic novel carries us along on its stream of excitement and sensation.
3. Ann Radcliffe was an important figure in English literature, but she has been totally eclipsed by Austen and Austen's style of fiction. One of the problems for modern-day readers of *Northanger Abbey* is that most of them haven't read *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and without that background, something of Austen's narrative is lost.
4. The gothic novel was a late and bastardized offspring of the Romantic revival that came to England via Germany. Mrs. Radcliffe enjoyed phenomenal, if short-lived, success in this genre in the last years of the 18th century and the first years of the 19th.
5. Mrs. Radcliffe's two most popular gothic novels were *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1796). The first of these centers on a horrid mystery of something shrouded by a black silk veil. The opening paragraph gives us a sample of Radcliffe's scene-painting skills.
6. Mysteriously, Mrs. Radcliffe gave up writing with *The Italian*, perhaps directed to do so by her husband. Nonetheless, Austen knew Radcliffe's work well and clearly suspected that bad novels poisoned the mind and corrupted fiction.

G. To return to Austen's work, when Catherine Morland is invited, with a proposal of marriage in prospect, to the Tilney's home, Northanger Abbey, she assumes it will be another Udolpho. She fantasizes a Radcliffian plot in which General Tilney, a widower, has murdered his wife, and she sets out to crack the mystery.

H. In a climactic moment in the narrative, Henry, the man who intends to marry Catherine, realizes the preposterous turn that her imagination has taken and confronts her.

1. In a long speech, Henry brings Catherine back from her gothic universe to the real world. Fiction, we deduce, must accommodate to that real world, as Miss Austen's does, but Mrs. Radcliffe's doesn't.
2. Catherine grows up, amid tears and consternation, on the spot, shocked into maturity by Henry's outburst. Thereafter, she is a mature woman with a realistic view of the world.

I. Jane Austen was, of course, aware of the fact that she would be lumped together with Ann Radcliffe in the popular mind. Is she not fouling her own nest in *Northanger Abbey* by satirizing, criticizing, and downgrading other fiction?

1. This question is, perhaps, complicated by the fact that Austen herself actually liked gothic fiction.
2. The point for Austen, though, is how fiction is used and, more importantly, the relationship of the novel to moral maturity and growth.
3. In another early novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen pondered, in the characterization of the two Dashwood sisters, which was the road to maturity—sense and rationalism, as embodied in the elder sister, Eleanor, or sensibility and passion, as embodied in the younger sister, Marianne? In typically English fashion, the answer lies in the middle road.

III. In a later novel, *Mansfield Park*, probably composed around 1810, Austen debates a central issue for her: Should a woman marry for love or for interest, prudently, that is, with an eye toward finances?

A. The ironic opening of *Mansfield Park* recalls the decisions on this all-important question of three sisters of the Ward family.

1. None of the marriages of the three quite works, although that of Frances, who married for love, fails more spectacularly than the other two. She ends up with a drunken, savage husband and 10 children.
2. The second sister, Mrs. Norris, marries a clergyman and, although comfortable enough, never achieves the social status she craves.
3. This sister becomes a hanger-on of the third sister, Lady Bertram, who has become a landed, titled lady but a discontented, neurotic mother, whose affections are lavished on her pug dog rather than her daughters.
4. The novel tells us that there is no magic formula for happiness.

B. This opening sets the stage for the novel proper, the story of Fanny Price, the namesake daughter of Frances, adopted from her impoverished house in Portsmouth to Mansfield Park, a grand estate, where she is never quite accepted. In the course of the novel, Fanny manages to resist pressures and make the right marriage choices. She becomes the mistress of Mansfield Park and a leading figure in society.

C. These are the questions that Jane Austen asks: sense or sensibility, love in a cottage or love in a castle, marriage or independence?

1. Time is an enemy here; a woman has only a few years in which to make these important choices.
2. In Austen's last complete novel, *Persuasion*, the heroine, Anne Elliott, at age 28, has lost her bloom. Will she be able to marry at her age?

D. In her novels, Austen asks the most important questions in a woman's life. How does any woman determine the course that her life will take? Such decisions depend on the situation in which the woman finds herself. For Austen, novels, particularly great works of morality such as her own, can help women negotiate these paths.

Suggested Readings:

Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*.

Copeland and McMaster, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*.

Garner, Butler, and Chandler, eds., *Romanticism and the Gothic*.

Miles, *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress*.

Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

Tanner, *Jane Austen*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Radcliffe and Austen pioneer two distinct streams in the course of English fiction. How would one best describe those streams?
2. What, may one deduce, were Austen's feelings about Radcliffe's gothic romance?

Lecture Thirty-One

***Pride and Prejudice*—Moral Fiction**

Scope: In this second lecture on Jane Austen, we'll focus on *Pride and Prejudice*, chosen by the British people in 2007 as the greatest book in English literature. The novel is an in-depth exploration of marriage and the questions surrounding the marriage decision. Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of the novel, receives two marriage offers that would be disastrous for her to accept. As we will see, however, our judgments about the soundness of her decisions are not easy to come by; Austen forces us to question Elizabeth's choices and provides no quick answers. The plot of *Pride and Prejudice* is complex, and its list of characters lengthy, but Austen's deft handling of her fiction leaves us pondering how the narrative might continue and what will happen in the lives of the characters long after we have finished reading.

Outline

- I. In 2007, the British people chose Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as the greatest work of English literature.

Why is this novel so acclaimed?

A. Few readers would have concurred with this choice in 1813–1814. At the time, Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and Scott’s *Waverley* were popular, while Austen’s novel sold only a few hundred copies.

B. Perhaps one reason that *Pride and Prejudice* was chosen in 2007 is that Austen’s work was then riding a wave of popularity; every one of her six great novels was adapted for television or cinema in that year.

C. *Pride and Prejudice* was originally published anonymously by a small London firm in 1813. The more famous third edition, which came out in 1817, was reprinted by John Murray, Byron’s publisher.

1. The reader for Mr. Murray reported that the novel was a “pretty thing,” without the gothic touches of Mrs. Radcliffe.

2. In 1881, Anthony Trollope nominated *Pride and Prejudice* as one of the best novels in the language, greater than the works of Scott or Dickens. But his statement was regarded as a typically cross-grained judgment by a man who was known for running against the current of popular opinion and common sense.

II. *Pride and Prejudice* was written in 1796–1797, initially for the delectation of the author’s family, under the title *First Impressions*.

A. The title stands as the central theme of much of Austen’s moral fiction. She believed that serious attachment needs many impressions. First impressions—love at first sight, for example—are untrustworthy.

B. The motto of Austen’s universe might be: “Marry in haste, repent in leisure.” In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Bennet bitterly regrets his impetuous marriage to Mrs. Bennet.

C. Every one of the major Austen heroines, with the possible exception of Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, receives a marriage offer that would be disastrous for her to accept.

1. Consider, for example, Emma Woodhouse and Reverend Elton in *Emma*. An eligible, handsome, well-educated clergyman would not be a bad option for Emma, but if she had accepted his proposal, she would have realized, during the course of her marriage, that she had made a terrible mistake.

2. With Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, it is John Thorpe who makes the first offer, which must, if the heroine is to fulfill her destiny, be declined. With Marian Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, the offer comes from Willoughby. The main point is that one should beware of first impressions. They’re treacherous.

D. With Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*, the first offer comes from her distant cousin, the Reverend Mr. Collins. On the face of things, the match would be eminently suitable.

1. As a result of an earlier legal settlement, the house in which the Bennets live must go to a male heir. The only available candidate is the distant cousin, Mr. Collins.

2. Austen examined a similar situation in the opening chapters of *Sense and Sensibility*. In that novel, the Dashwood women are evicted from their home as a result of the inheritance laws of England, rendering them, effectively, genteel vagrants.

3. The legal status of woman is one of the issues Austen engages in her fiction and one of the features that makes her fiction—despite its apparently unworldly plots—socially and historically relevant. She doesn’t protest against those laws but looks at the complications they produce.

4. In *Pride and Prejudice*, a marriage between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Collins would keep the family home in the family and secure the future of the Bennet women in the event of Mr. Bennet’s death.

5. Elizabeth can see, however, that Collins is a snob; he is also stupid and dull, cardinal sins in Austen’s universe. Elizabeth is morally right to turn him down.

E. Hours later, Collins, angry from Elizabeth’s rejection, makes his offer to her best friend, Charlotte Lucas. Elizabeth’s reaction to Charlotte’s acceptance results in an illuminating exchange on the subject of marriage, one of Austen’s central concerns.

1. Elizabeth is astounded that her friend has agreed to marry Collins. She asks Charlotte how a woman of sense could make such a commitment. Charlotte replies to Elizabeth’s objection with an eloquent speech that suddenly changes our perspective.

2. Charlotte is the incarnation of good sense, but she is also older than Elizabeth, and her marriage options are narrowing quickly. A marriage to Collins, she believes, will secure her future.
3. Charlotte's arguments are imbued with good sense, a valued quality in Austen's moral universe. Has Elizabeth, we wonder, been too rash in turning down an acceptable suitor? She has only £2,000 settled on her, which will scarcely support her comfortably if she opts for spinsterhood. Her rejection of Collins puts her in danger of being evicted from her home by the laws of inheritance.
4. Austen's narrative does not close off these questions, nor does it predicate automatic answers.

F. At a later moment in the novel, Elizabeth refuses Mr. Darcy, one of the richest and handsomest men in England.

1. She is right in this refusal also, but she is playing a risky game by putting her moral instincts ahead of rational decision making.
2. Austen may have been through a similar situation. In 1802, she accepted the proposal of Harris Bigg-Wither, only to reject the young man the next morning, consigning herself to spinsterhood.

III. If we unpeeled the complexities of Austen's novel, at the center we would find marriage and the decisions associated with marriage—how to make the right choice and what happens if one doesn't make the right choice.

A. Only the most intelligent of us, Austen implies, will be qualified to negotiate this tricky area of life successfully. Austen is elitist, and her novels are uncomfortable places for the many characters who do not possess a high level of moral intelligence.

B. Of all the novels, *Pride and Prejudice* is the one that is most intensely concerned with the marriage question, partly because it contains so many marriageable front-line women characters: five Bennet girls, Charlotte, and Georgiana Darcy, Lady Catherine de Burgh's daughter.

C. The novel's theme is stated in the first sentence, probably the most famous opening line in English fiction and a highly ironic truism: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

1. This sentiment, we apprehend, is Austen ventriloquizing someone whom she does not admire.
2. It is the thinking of a predatory mother with daughters to dispose of, such as Mrs. Bennet.

D. Austen doesn't usually write dramatic openings in which a dialogue takes place, but in *Pride and Prejudice*, she does so. The novel begins with Mrs. Bennet telling Mr. Bennet that a nearby estate has been let to an eligible young man with £10,000. The scene is dense with important and complicated information.

1. The sardonic husband, Mr. Bennet, is obviously much more intelligent than his husband-hunting wife. As we shall see, however, he is not a good father or spouse.
2. Even in this first scene, moral judgments form in our minds, disallowing easy responses.
3. Mrs. Bennet is acting as a good mother in a way, but she seems rather too interested in netting some luckless young man.

E. From the first paragraphs onward, the novel becomes increasingly complicated, with a long list of dramatic personae.

1. The narrative is finely dispersed among various members of the Bennet family while keeping a close focus on the heroine, Elizabeth, a character who matures as the novel progresses.
2. Elizabeth moves away from the limiting attitudes of pride and prejudice to a more balanced system by which she can make her life choices. She has embarked on a journey of moral growth.

F. We should note that Austen's families are not particularly warm.

1. Often, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, siblings or spouses dislike each other. Elizabeth despises the intellectual sister, Mary; Mr. Bennet has nothing but contempt and sarcasm for his wife.
2. Everyone in the family, however, likes the beautiful sister, Jane, who will, after much suffering and humiliation, win Mr. Bingley, the tenant mentioned in the opening paragraphs. But Jane is rather dull; unlike Elizabeth, she has no wit.

IV. The plot of *Pride and Prejudice* is highly complicated.

A. The story takes place in wartime, although as always with Austen, war is not a major concern for the female characters.

1. In the 1790s, the time period of the novel, Britain feared invasion by the French, which explains why the militia is active near the Bennet estate. The younger Bennet girls view the militiamen as potential husbands.
2. Mr. Bingley and his sisters are *nouveau riche*; we assume that he was a profiteer in the Napoleonic Wars.

B. Bingley is unsure of his social status, and he doesn't know how to use his money to become a gentleman, but he has in attendance a blue-blooded friend, Mr. Darcy.

1. Darcy is handsome, rich, and much traveled. He is unimpressed by provincial, untraveled women, such as Elizabeth.
2. Bingley is attracted to the beautiful sister, Jane, but his catty sisters and Darcy persuade Bingley to jilt her; Jane suffers terribly.
3. Elizabeth is vengeful on her sister's account and hates the man, Mr. Darcy, who has been the cause of Jane's misery.

C. The Collins subplot comes and goes in the narrative. There is also a villain—the handsome Wickham. He seduces one of the Bennet girls, Lydia, in a subplot of shocking sexual frankness.

D. Ultimately, both Darcy and Elizabeth break through the mutual barriers of pride and prejudice that have kept them apart. They have learned life's lessons and are finally fit to be each other's mates.

E. The novel is overhung with the period in which it was first conceived and written: Soldiers and unmarried women were everywhere in evidence on the home front. Austen was just 21, Elizabeth Bennet's age, when she created the novel. By the time the novel was published, she was in her late 30s and a confirmed spinster.

F. Let's conclude with the moment in the novel when we realize that Elizabeth has achieved the ultimate state of growth in Austen's world; she has become capable of standing up for herself against strong pressures to conform.

1. The scene is wonderfully comic: Lady Catherine de Bourgh, a rather ridiculous character, comes to the Bennet home and tells Elizabeth that she must not marry Darcy. Lady Catherine has designs on him as a husband for her own daughter.
2. Fully matured, Elizabeth replies to Lady Catherine: "I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to you, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me."

G. *Pride and Prejudice* is a fine novel that leaves us thinking about its characters long after we have finished reading it. What will happen to Lydia? Will Jane be happy with Bingley? Will the Byronic Darcy make a good husband? Austen has a wonderful ability, possessed by only the greatest writers, of making our minds fizz and continue to fizz when we have left the novel behind us.

Suggested Readings:

Nicolson and Colover, *The World of Jane Austen*.

Sutherland and le Faye, *So You Think You Know Jane Austen?: A Literary Quizbook*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What qualities in this, historically, tiny drama of everyday life have given *Pride and Prejudice* such enduring literary importance?
2. What, on the basis of *Pride and Prejudice*, may we take Jane Austen's thinking about love and marriage to be?

Lecture Thirty-Two Dickens—Writer with a Mission

Scope: The young Charles Dickens exploded onto the literary scene in England under the pen name "Boz." After the enthusiastic reception of his comic novel *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens resolved to use fiction as an

instrument for social reform. He believed that novels could shed light on the hardheartedness of the age toward the less fortunate and that they could bring about change. His second novel was *Oliver Twist*, which took on the 1834 Poor Law Reform Amendment, a cruel piece of legislation that drastically revised the old parish system of social welfare. Dickens chose for his protagonist a child, an innovation in fiction up to that time and a stroke of genius for his attack on the Poor Law. *Oliver Twist* is melodramatic and sentimental, and its plot goes awry in places; nonetheless, it defined the genre of the novel-with-a-purpose and stands as an outstanding achievement in English literature.

Outline

I. Literature is a hothouse in which individual genius can come into flower more brilliantly, more fully, and earlier than in almost any other field of human creative activity.

A. In the mid-1830s, a young writer exploded on the literary scene in England, writing initially under the pen name “Boz” rather than his real name, Charles Dickens (1812–1870).

1. “Boz” was the infant Charles’s mispronunciation of his family nickname, Moses.
2. Moses, found in the bulrushes, was a motherless child, a situation that Dickens would return to again and again in his fiction.

B. Dickens’s own childhood was wretched. His father, John Dickens, was an improvident clerk. The family was constantly on the move, and at age 11, Charles was sent out to work for a few shillings a week in a factory. He recalled his childhood with shame but maintained a lifelong sympathy for abused and suffering children.

C. The novel with which Dickens introduced himself to the British public was *The Pickwick Papers*. Initially, the publishers had conceived the *Papers* as a series of comic episodes centered on a cartoon. Young Dickens was hired to write the text.

1. Very quickly, Dickens upstaged his collaborator, the artist Robert Seymour, who later committed suicide.
2. Dickens took control of the project and, with another illustrator, Hablot Browne, made the monthly serial a bestseller.
3. *The Pickwick Papers* remains one of the great comic novels in British literature, but it is, as Dickens himself knew, light and episodic. It has no structure, bouncing from one comic situation to another.

II. Having captured his public, Dickens, still under 25 years old, embarked on a mission inspired by the great sage Thomas Carlyle, who saw England as a society fractured by urbanization, the Industrial Revolution, and universal heartlessness.

A. Dickens resolved to use the novel as an instrument of political and social reform. Bear in mind that “reform” was a pregnant word in Victorian discourse. It was the Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867 that extended the franchise in Britain to full democratic proportions (although women would not get the vote until 1917). Reform had transformed England.

B. Dickens believed that his personal reforming mission could be accomplished in two ways.

1. First, he needed to cast light on current abuses, hardheartedness, and the epidemic malaise of the time, which Carlyle had diagnosed. Dickens would focus particularly on the hardheartedness that came from above, from the lawmakers in Parliament.
2. Second, Dickens would focus on changing hearts. George Eliot, a novelist whom we’ll meet later, defined the novel as a tool for “extending sympathy.” For Dickens, the novel could make readers aware of the pain and needs of others.
3. In the current literary world, this confidence that the Victorian novelists had in their literary form may seem naïve, but such idealism drove Dickens’s fiction to its greatest achievements. He did, in fact, bring about change in his world.
4. The significance of Boz, “the Great Inimitable,” as the Victorians called him, was that he could penetrate the minds of his readers and change them. His readers left his novels different people from who

they had been when they entered them.

C. Dickens set off on his mission with his second full length novel, *Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy's Progress*. Like its predecessor, *Oliver Twist* was serialized in a monthly magazine, but it was quickly reprinted as a three-volume novel, available in local libraries.

D. Unlike *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist* has a structure. It has a plot, suspense, and a surprise ending. Dickens was aided in this new sense of structure by collaboration with the greatest illustrator of fiction in the 19th century, George Cruikshank.

1. Cruikshank's later claim that he was the author of *Oliver Twist* is preposterous, but it's true that his collaboration with Dickens was an uneasy alliance of powerful equals.
2. The famous scene in which Oliver asks for more gruel at the workhouse calls to mind Cruikshank's etching as much as Dickens's description.

III. Like *Robinson Crusoe* or *1984*, *Oliver Twist* is a novel that most people know, even if they haven't read it. What is not generally known, however, is the political context in which Dickens was writing.

A. A cruel piece of legislation, the 1834 Poor Law Reform Amendment, had come into force a couple of years before the publication of *Oliver Twist*. It was a drastic revision of the old social welfare system, in which the needy and destitute went "on the parish"; that is, they were supported by the community.

B. The parish system presumed a stable local population, but with the Industrial Revolution, the British population lost its roots. In *Oliver Twist*, the young hero's restless movement from place to place is symbolic of the migratory shifts of population taking place in England in the first half of the 19th century. London alone doubled in population every 10 years.

C. The old welfare system could not work with this mass upheaval and was replaced by the 1834 Amendment Act, which was based on the thinking of Jeremy Bentham, the father of utilitarianism.

1. The essence of Benthamism was that human beings organize their lives around the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.
2. It was, his political disciples thought, rational to apply this calculus to the country's welfare crisis: Make the necessity to live on public charity sufficiently painful, and human beings would choose the less painful option of work and economic independence.
3. Recall the scene in *A Christmas Carol* in which two gentlemen visit Ebenezer Scrooge in the hopes of getting a charitable donation from him. Scrooge proves himself to be Benthamite to the core.
4. Dickens saw this line of rational social policy for what it was: cruel and heartless, and he would use fiction to oppose it. He would change hard hearts to sympathetic hearts, as Scrooge's heart is softened in *A Christmas Carol* by the narratives of the spirits.

D. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens made his arguments with an innovation that was daring in its time: He made the hero of his novel a child. The Victorians were unaccustomed to fiction that inhabited the child's universe or showed the world from the child's perspective.

1. Children figure in Shakespeare, for example, as victims or mischievous imps. There was no major work of fiction, drama, or poetry preceding Dickens that featured the child as a central figure.
2. The one great exception to this rule would be found in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, but that poem wasn't published until 1851, a decade after *Oliver Twist*.
3. The credit for constructing a long narrative about a child's adventures through the prism of a child's psychology goes to Dickens alone.
4. The fact that Dickens chose an innocent, suffering child as his protagonist for an attack on the iniquities of the 1834 Poor Law Act was a further stroke of genius.

IV. The story of *Oliver Twist* is, in many places, pure melodrama, which was much loved by the Victorians, particularly melodramatic death scenes.

A. *Oliver Twist* opens powerfully. A vagrant woman comes, heavily pregnant, into a small rural town, Mudfog. She gives birth to her child in the workhouse and immediately dies. The nurse is drunk; the surgeon,

careless; the world is wholly indifferent to this birth. The mother's death, described in detail, is moving. With her passing, any prospect of discovering her identity or that of her child is lost.

B. The boy is named Oliver Twist and consigned to be brought up in the workhouse, under the discipline of the beadle (parish official), Mr. Bumble, and his ferocious wife. The prospects for advancement in his life are not promising. When he reaches boyhood, Oliver is farmed out as an apprentice to the local undertaker, having narrowly escaped the even less attractive career of chimney sweep.

C. Oliver runs away to London, where he meets a street urchin, the Artful Dodger, who introduces him to the thieves' kitchen run by Fagin, a Jew who receives stolen goods. The depiction of the thieves' den is vivid, but the anti-Semitism in the description of Fagin is offensive to the modern sensibility.

D. As one of Fagin's gang, Oliver becomes a pickpocket on the London streets. Later, much against his will, he is used by the brutal robber Bill Sykes to assist in a burglary. During the break-in, Oliver is shot and, incredibly, is nursed back to health in the household he and Sykes set out to rob, where he discovers that he is a blood relative.

E. We gradually learn that Oliver has been systematically criminalized by a vindictive half-brother, Monks, to keep him out of his inheritance. He's not a parish boy at all but an heir to a middle-class destiny.

F. The plot, from this point, unwinds somewhat ineffectively but with some magnificent set-piece scenes, such as Fagin's last night in prison before he is to be hanged. Oliver, thoroughly gentrified and rather priggish, visits Fagin and advises the old rogue to pray; Oliver then returns to the comfortable mansion where he now lives.

G. Recall that Dickens was still in his mid-20s when he wrote *Oliver Twist*; his analysis of the British class system would become more subtle as his career advanced.

V. Later in life, Dickens became obsessed with giving public readings of his fiction, which earned him vast amounts of money and seemed to have filled a deep psychological need. He almost certainly shortened his life by giving such readings, but he was always excited to share with audiences the scene depicting the murder of Nancy from *Oliver Twist*.

A. Nancy is the burglar Bill Sykes's "fancy woman." Although a prostitute, she is good at heart and kind to Oliver. Nancy betrays the secrets of Oliver's birth and makes herself a victim of Sykes, who is furious that she has told Oliver's family who and where he is.

B. In retaliation, Sykes, egged on by Fagin, batters her to death. The scene is the acme of brutality and high melodrama, but it was, for Dickens, probably the most powerful moment in his fiction.

1. As Nancy's head pours blood, she draws out a white handkerchief given to her by Rose Maylie, a respectable woman to whom Nancy has confided the details of Oliver's whereabouts. The handkerchief symbolizes Nancy's own residual goodness.

2. Dickens was angered by the suggestion of Thackeray that London streetwalkers and prostitutes were, in general, a lot less virtuous at heart than Nancy. Dickens, who believed in the intrinsic goodness of humanity, insisted that he had not sentimentalized this woman.

C. We can stack up various criticisms of *Oliver Twist*—it's sentimental, the plot creaks in places, there's a persistent surrender to melodrama, Oliver is far too genteel—but nonetheless, it remains one of the outstanding achievements of English literature and the gateway to Dickens's later immense achievement as the greatest novelist of the 19th century.

Suggested Readings:

Ackroyd, *Dickens: Public Life and Private Passion*.

Dickens, *Oliver Twist*.

House, *The Dickens World*.

Jordan, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*.

Schlicke, ed., *The Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is Dickens angry about in *Oliver Twist*?
2. Why did Dickens choose a child as his protagonist in this novel?

Lecture Thirty-Three

The 1840s—Growth of the Realistic Novel

Scope: Various forms of literature seem to flourish during particular historical periods, and in the 1840s we see the growth of the realistic novel. This decade also witnessed a wave of revolutions in Europe and a trade depression in England that threw millions into unemployment. English fiction of the period addressed these social problems and asked questions about the direction the country was taking. Several factors combined to bring about the flowering of fiction at this time, including an enlargement of the literate audience, the emergence of libraries and inexpensive reprints of books, and the development of the railroad in England. In this lecture, we'll look at four novels from this remarkable period: *Dombey and Son* by Dickens, *Mary Barton* by Mrs. Gaskell, *Sybil* by Disraeli, and *Vanity Fair* by Thackeray. Each of these works made statements of importance in a decade when fiction truly mattered.

Outline

I. A theme running throughout these lectures is that various forms of literature bloom and flower during particular periods, grown in the soil, so to speak, of specific times, places, and socio-historical circumstances.

A. The 1840s saw a spectacular growth of one branch of English literature, the realistic, or as the Victorians called it, the matter-of-fact novel.

B. The 1840s was also a dynamic decade, associated with a second wave of revolution in Europe that took place in 1848. In England, trade depression threw millions into unemployment. Fiction noted the hard times experienced by the working and lower classes.

C. The novel did much more than isolate social problems in the 1840s. The great thinker of the Victorian period, Thomas Carlyle, coined another term that aptly covers the large enterprise of 1840s fiction: “the condition-of-England question.” What direction was the country taking?

1. Readers of the time believed that novels were important; fiction mattered in the 1840s in a way that it hadn't before and rarely has since.

2. Benjamin Disraeli, a future prime minister, even outlined his vision of a Tory-led England in his *Young England* trilogy of the 1840s. It is a mark of the prestige of the novel during this period that it could be used to define a political program.

II. A number of socioeconomic and cultural factors combined to produce this flowering of fiction and its dominance at this particular moment.

A. In mid-Victorian England, the reading public was greatly enlarged. By 1845, fiction had become a mass-market commodity.

1. The novel is an expensive commodity to produce and distribute. It presupposes a large, literate audience that will make publication a worthwhile financial proposition.

2. It is also true that fiction is a complex literary form that encompasses the idea of intertextuality—that is, to respond intelligently to a novel, one needs to have read many other novels.

B. In the 1840s, the great circulating libraries were founded and began to dominate the distribution of fiction in England's cities. At the same time, cheap reprints began to appear, which made fiction accessible for relatively small amounts of money.

C. The main factor in the remarkable flowering of the novel in the 1840s seems, however, rather unexpected: the railway. The mid-1830s to late 1840s saw a vast and rapid growth in England of a national railway network. As it had led the Industrial Revolution, Britain led the way globally in the age of steam transport.

1. Britain had certain advantages in this leadership, including the fact that the steam engine had been invented there. Britain is also a compact landmass with a concentrated population.

2. Huge wealth had been generated by the industrial powerhouse of the English north, Manchester, as well as in London. Some of that money was invested in municipal construction, but the bulk went into rail transport, the infrastructure that would turn Great Britain into the United Kingdom.

III. With this background let's now turn to four novels of the 1840s: *Dombey and Son* by Dickens, *Mary Barton* by Mrs. Gaskell, *Sybil* by Disraeli, and *Vanity Fair* by Thackeray. We begin with *Dombey and Son*, originally serialized from 1846–1848.

A. The cover of *Dombey and Son* clearly reveals one of the main themes in the novel, capitalism; the title also points us in that direction.

1. The title is double-edged. Superficially, it refers to the way in which dynastic firms advertise themselves to the consumer. But the subversive theme in the novel is hinted at by the words *and Son*, indicating family relationships.

2. Everywhere in the 1840s, we see the thinking of Thomas Carlyle; among his arguments was that England must replace the “cash nexus”—the strictly financial relationships that capitalism sets up between people—with something more organic and familial.

3. Society, as Carlyle saw it, was not an aggregate of buyers and sellers but a gigantic family or clan, with responsibilities and emotional ties among people. The story of *Dombey and Son* pivots on this Carlylean theme.

B. Mr. Dombey is the proprietor of a large and thriving import/export firm. We never know exactly what type of merchandise the firm deals in; it could even be opium meant for export to China. We do know that Mr. Dombey is pride incarnate, and inevitably, pride betokens a fall.

C. The narrative opens with the birth of a son. It matters little to Mr. Dombey that his wife dies giving birth or that he has a daughter, Florence. He has, at last, a son, Paul, to carry forward the Dombey dynasty. Sadly, Paul dies in a heart-wrenching scene.

D. Mr. Dombey, desperate for another young wife, goes hunting for a mate in the marriage markets of the English spa resorts. He marries a coldhearted woman, Edith, who accepts his offer out of cash nexus motives. She subsequently elopes with Dombey's villainous chief clerk, Carker, who has embezzled from the firm.

E. Mr. Dombey is financially ruined and emotionally shattered. Finally, he realizes the true worth of his daughter and learns that family matters more than commerce.

F. A vivid passage from *Dombey and Son* relates to the railway boom mentioned earlier: After the death of his son, Paul, Mr. Dombey goes by train to Leamington Spa in search of a new Mrs. Dombey. The Great Western Railway is brand new.

1. Dickens captures perfectly the Victorian sense of hurtling along at the unimaginable speed of 50 miles per hour. But where was this speed, this awesome machinery, taking the Victorians? Where was it taking England? This is the great Carlylean question.

2. In prose that mimics the rhythm of the train, Dickens gives us his answer to the question: The train is moving toward death.

IV. *Mary Barton: A Manchester Story* is a less sophisticated but equally powerful novel of the same period. It was written by Elizabeth Gaskell, (1810–1865).

A. Mrs. Gaskell, born Elizabeth Stevenson, was brought up in London in comfortable circumstances. She married a Unitarian minister, William Gaskell, and moved with him to Manchester in the industrial north.

1. Manchester was the cauldron of the Industrial Revolution, the “workshop of the world.” It was also, in the 1840s, in the throes of industrial recession.

2. Workers were starving; there were strikes, moves toward trade unionism, and a protest movement called “Chartism.” *Mary Barton* deals with these events from the working class point of view.

B. Mrs. Gaskell declared her intention to give a voice to the working classes. She would articulate in fiction their plight and advocate connection across class lines between rich and poor, employer and employed. The

novel's epigraph is from Carlyle on just that theme.

C. Mrs. Gaskell's original intention was to call the novel *John Barton*, but her publishers persuaded her to skew the narrative toward John's daughter, Mary, and the complications of her love life.

D. In the story, John Barton is a mill worker in a textile factory, but when the trade depression hits, he is thrown out of work and his wife dies. He joins a trade union and goes on the Chartist demonstration to London. When it fails, he returns to Manchester embittered. He takes to opium and, finally, murders the son of a factory owner, an act of class revenge.

E. The novel is melodramatic and, in its conclusion, highly romantic, but it also has power, chiefly in the depictions of poverty.

1. In one scene, Barton and a friend walk through streets filled with trash and human excrement to reach the home of a fellow worker. The experience predisposes Barton to his act of assassination.

2. Sympathy and horror mix in such depictions; something, Mrs. Gaskell's novel urges, must be done. Of all the so-called social problem novels, *Mary Barton*, amateurish and mawkish as parts of it seem, may be the most affecting.

V. *Sybil, or the Two Nations*, written by Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881), is another social problem novel and another vivid snapshot of mid-Victorian England.

A. *Sybil* is the middle segment in the Young England trilogy, in which Disraeli outlined his political philosophy. Disraeli was less interested in changing hearts than in changing a political party and, through that, the power structure of England.

B. Disraeli's novel depicts many of the same concerns as *Mary Barton*—the distress of the working classes in the industrial north, the great Chartist rebellion—but Disraeli is more analytic. His analysis of the need for radical change in the British class structure is still potent in the political party he led for 30 years.

C. In *Sybil*, a young lord, Egremont, decides to see what England is really like. He changes his name to that of a commoner, Franklin, and goes into the world of factories and commerce.

1. A symbolic scene takes place on the grounds of a ruined abbey. Franklin has an instructive conversation with a trade union leader, Walter Gerard, who tells him that England is really two nations—the rich and the poor.

2. Ultimately, Egremont makes a marriage that joins the classes, but readers know that society will have a harder time of unification.

D. British politics has been energized ever since by Disraeli's diagnosis—that connection must be found between the haves and the have nots and that the Conservatives have a responsibility in making this connection.

VI. Let's conclude by looking at William Thackeray (1811–1863), a novelist whose range and vision are much more panoramic than those of Disraeli and Mrs. Gaskell.

A. The title of Thackeray's first novel, *Vanity Fair*, comes from Bunyan's name for London in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. For Thackeray, the title refers to all of England and the century up to the point when he was writing, the mid-1840s.

B. The story follows two heroines whose lives are intertwined: The first, Becky Sharp, is clever, astute, and when pushed to it, criminal. The second, Amelia Sedley, is not clever, but she's a good woman.

C. As we follow them from schooldays to middle age, Thackeray gives us a satirical portrait of an England permeated with snobbery. "Ours," he observes, "is a ready money society." But it is also one that is distorted by the class system.

D. *Vanity Fair* is a radical novel, but ultimately, it is world weary rather than a book that demands change. Nonetheless, the tone of Thackeray's fiction is beguiling. His view of life is large and tolerant and tinged with a sardonic wit. He, of all the writers we have seen in this lecture, had a sense of the largeness of the novel if it was used to its full extent.

E. The ending of *Vanity Fair* is one of the most unexpected and beautiful in all of 19th-century fiction: “Ah! Vanitas Vanitatum! which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?— come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.”

VII. The novel, we understand, is not merely entertaining; it instructs us in how to live our lives well.

A. The authority to make such pronouncements and have them taken seriously is something that even the greatest novelists rarely achieve, but in the 1840s, a whole generation of fiction writers did just that.

B. The 1840s was a decade when fiction mattered, and even though it doesn't speak directly to us, we can still enjoy and respect the fiction of that period.

Suggested Readings:

David, *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*.

Dickens, *Dombey and Son*.

Disraeli, *Sybil: or the Two Nations*.

Gaskell, *Mary Barton*.

Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*.

Tillotson, *Novels of the 1840s*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why did the novel become “serious” in the 1840s?
2. What are the different worldviews of these novelists?

Lecture Thirty-Four *Wuthering Heights*—Emily's Masterwork

Scope: In the 19th century, women novelists began to break through the glass ceiling in the world of literature. Along with Jane Austen, two other writers in particular were dominant, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, whose fiction is deeply rooted in their family background and the district of Yorkshire where they grew up. More so than her sisters, Emily Brontë was influenced by the wild, harsh landscape of the Yorkshire region. We see this elemental influence in both her characters, such as Heathcliff, and her own tough, private personality. As we'll see in this lecture, Emily's *Wuthering Heights* is a masterwork of romance narratives, written in a sophisticated framework and showcasing characters of deep psychological complexity.

Outline

I. In the 19th century, women broke through the barriers that had been in place in literature for 1,000 years, specifically in the form that dominates creative expression in that century, the novel. Three names in particular stand out, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and the subject of this lecture, Emily Brontë (1818–1848).

A. Emily Brontë's reputation rests on just one novel, *Wuthering Heights*. We must ask, again, how did a woman in her 20s, who had seen virtually nothing of the world and had been largely educated at home, produce this work of towering genius? Further we might ask, what might Emily have produced had she lived longer than 29 years?

B. To answer those questions, we must go back a generation. The Brontës' fiction is deeply rooted in two sustaining soils: their family background and the region of England in which they grew up. Of all writers, they most need framing, that is, setting into their unique and tragic context.

1. The family name was originally Prunty, derived from the name of the village in Northern Ireland, Pronteagh. Emily's father, Patrick, was born into a poor farming family, but he showed remarkable intellectual abilities and, in 1802, began attending Cambridge University.
2. After the bloody uprising in Ireland in 1798, the English viewed the Irish with mistrust, so Patrick prudently changed his name to Brontë to distance himself from his Ulster origins.
3. The plan succeeded, and in 1820, the Reverend Patrick Brontë was appointed to the comfortable living

of Haworth in the West Riding district of Yorkshire, a wild region of barren moors and savage winds. In the following year, Patrick's wife, Anne, died, worn out by childbearing.

4. Two other reasons have been suggested for Patrick's choice of Brontë for his new name: First, it is an Anglicization of the Greek word for "thunder," and second, one of the titles of Lord Nelson was Duke of Bronte.

C. The four surviving Brontë children were consciously or unconsciously influenced by their father's and their own name change.

1. The children were clustered together in an eight-year bracket. Their father had a good library, and in the hours of their childhood, they composed long sagas around various superheroes, including Nelson, Wellington, Byron, and Napoleon. Both Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* and Rochester from *Jane Eyre* can be traced back to the strong men favored in these fantasies.

2. The connection of their surname to the word "thunder" also seems to have seeped into the daughters' novels. Both Charlotte and Emily loved elemental names: Their characters include Jane Eyre, Helen Burns, Saint John Rivers, and of course, Heathcliff.

3. As we will see in this lecture, *Wuthering Heights* is dominated by Heathcliff, whose name alludes to the cruel world in which he is brought up.

D. *Wuthering Heights* was published in 1847, and the narrative opens in 1801, a significant date for the Brontë family. This was the year in which Patrick Prunty made the long journey from the bogs of Ireland to the towers of Cambridge University.

1. Heathcliff is a foundling, discovered as an infant in the gutters of Liverpool. We never know where he came from.

2. Readers and critics have speculated that he might be of mixed race, a gypsy, or even an illegitimate child of someone in the narrative.

II. Before we explore the novel, we should look briefly at its author and the region where she grew up, Yorkshire.

A. Charlotte and Emily were the two eldest daughters. Branwell, the brother, also possessed literary talent, but he dissipated himself in drink and sexual delinquency. His character is seen in two classic depictions of alcoholism: Hindley in *Wuthering Heights* and Arthur Huntingdon in Anne Brontë's novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

B. The Brontë sisters grew up in Haworth, Yorkshire. In 1824, they were enrolled at the Clergy Daughters' School in nearby Cowan Bridge. Charlotte gives a venomous depiction of the school in *Jane Eyre*.

C. The girls wrote poems, which they published privately under gender-neutral names: Ellis (Emily), Currer (Charlotte), and Acton (Anne) Bell. They also wrote realistic fiction with powerful romantic surges beneath the surface.

D. Charlotte, still writing as Currer Bell, had her first novel published by one of the best publishers in London, George Smith. The other two Brontë/Bell authors were published by the most unreliable and dishonest publisher in London, Thomas Newby. Emily would die a few months after *Wuthering Heights* was wretchedly published, to few reviews, while Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* became a bestseller.

E. What we know of Emily's life comes mainly from Mrs. Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Like Charlotte and Anne, Emily spent a short period as a family governess and, like her sisters, hated the occupation. Together with Charlotte, she also spent a year teaching in Belgium. While Charlotte fell in love with the married principal of the school there, Emily seems to have had no sexual life whatsoever.

F. Emily's constitution had been weakened by the Clergy Daughters' School and by the pulmonary illnesses that were epidemic at Haworth. She died of a chill; in line with other self-punitive aspects of her character, she refused any medical assistance.

1. Emily died as she'd lived, private and tough to the end. That toughness can be seen as an outgrowth of the wild Yorkshire where she had lived and that she seems to have loved.

2. In *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Mrs. Gaskell gives a vivid description of the people of Yorkshire, who

display a “peculiar force of character” and a “remarkable degree of self-sufficiency.”

III. Let's now turn to the plot of *Wuthering Heights*.

A. A soft southerner named Lockwood has come to the north to nurse a broken heart. He's something of a fop and wholly ignorant of Yorkshire. He has rented a large mansion, Thrushcross Grange, in which to spend a quiet winter. His landlord, Heathcliff, lives a few miles away in a large, forbidding farmhouse called Wuthering Heights.

1. Intending to be a good neighbor, Lockwood tramps across the freezing moors to call on Heathcliff, but the reception he receives at the Heights is colder than the moors.
2. Trapped by the snow, Lockwood spends the night at Wuthering Heights. In the bedroom, he finds some odd inscriptions in a book of sermons, referring to a young Catherine and Heathcliff.
3. Lockwood falls asleep and has a terrible nightmare. In his dream, he hears a knocking on the window pane and gets up to silence it. He puts his hand through the window, thinking that he will grasp a fir bough on the outside but instead wraps his fingers around the cold hand of a child. The child begs to be let in, but Lockwood, terrified, rubs its wrist along the broken glass.
4. The next day, having returned to Thrushcross Grange, Lockwood falls ill from a chill. He is nursed back to health by a housekeeper, Nelly Dean, who tells him the back story connecting the two houses, Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights.

B. Heathcliff was found, an abandoned babe, by the old master of the Heights, Earnshaw, who brought him back to be raised with his own two children, Hindley and Catherine.

1. Hindley hated the interloper, but Catherine became his spiritual mate. They roamed the moors together.
2. When Earnshaw died, his heir, Hindley, degraded Heathcliff to the condition of a farmhand. To make Heathcliff's lot worse, Catherine fell in love with and agreed to marry Edgar Linton, a rich young gentleman then living in Thrushcross Grange.
3. In angry despair, Heathcliff ran away. Three years later, he returns and methodically plots his revenge. He wins ownership of Wuthering Heights from the now alcoholic Hindley by gambling. In fact, we suspect that he murders Hindley to take possession of the property and, further, that he seduces Catherine, now married. She dies of fever, self-starvation, and probably guilt.
4. As the final move in his campaign, Heathcliff forces Catherine and Edgar's daughter, also called Catherine, to marry his sickly son. Earlier, he had seduced Linton's sister into marrying him, then beat her so savagely that she ran away.
5. When Lockwood appears on the scene, Heathcliff owns both great houses. But he will never have the only thing he ever wanted, Catherine, because she is dead.
6. Towering over Nelly's story of cruel revenge and frustrated love is the Byronic figure of Heathcliff, a man indifferent to the laws of man or of God. Lockwood realizes how out of place he is in the wilds of Yorkshire and goes back to where he belongs.

C. A few months later, Lockwood returns to Wuthering Heights and finds that all is changed. Heathcliff has recently died, haunted to death by the same ghost whose little hand Lockwood sawed on the broken glass until it bled, the first Catherine.

1. Catherine and Heathcliff are now finally united. Heathcliff died at the window, reaching through it to try to touch a world beyond.
2. The novel ends with Nelly telling Lockwood about a little boy she encountered on the moors who had been frightened by the appearance of Heathcliff and a woman.
3. As Lockwood strolls home, he pauses at a churchyard and sees the graves of Edgar Linton, Heathcliff, and Catherine. Under the benign summer sky, he wonders “how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.”
4. The novel ends on a note of quivering uncertainty. Are Heathcliff and Catherine united in death? Are they still disturbed, haunting souls unable to leave the ground where they suffered?

IV. As we said, the novel also leaves us with the question of how Emily learned to write in such a sophisticated

way.

A. The narrative within a narrative—Nelly’s story as told to Lockwood—is the most complex of techniques. Of course, it also has the effect of cooling the gothic aspects of *Wuthering Heights*.

1. Such expertise in storytelling is usually something that writers manifest much later in their careers.
2. Can we attribute Emily’s mastery to the tale-telling of the Brontës’ childhood? Or did she write and destroy an earlier trial work, as she is supposed to have burned her second novel after the poor reception received by *Wuthering Heights*? We’ll never know.

B. The other great mystery of the novel is why we are so drawn to Heathcliff, a murderer, a wife beater, and an abuser of children.

1. One answer can be found in a passage in which Nelly overhears him talking to himself at the height of his ruthless campaign to become master of both houses.
2. Heathcliff says of himself: “I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teething; and I grind with greater energy in proportion to the increase of pain.”
3. The word “teething” reminds us of a baby biting down on a teething ring to relieve its own pain. The same may be said of Heathcliff. Without Catherine, life is agony to him; we might even suppose that he suffers more than he makes others suffer.

C. Generations of awed readers of *Wuthering Heights*, whether they forgive Heathcliff or not, have come together in their wonder and admiration for this greatest of romance narratives.

Suggested Readings:

Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*.

Frank, *A Chainless Soul: A Life of Emily Brontë*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why do we have ambivalent (and even, perhaps, admiring) feelings toward the villain of the piece, Heathcliff?
2. How important is regional setting to *Wuthering Heights*?

Lecture Thirty-Five

***Jane Eyre* and the Other Brontë**

Scope: Charlotte was the only one of the Brontë sisters to live long enough to build up a small body of work. Her book *Jane Eyre* was the most popular novel of the high Victorian period. This novel, which is a type of narrative known as a *Bildungsroman*, follows Jane from childhood to maturity as she relies on her intelligence, morality, and spirit to navigate a world dominated by men. Many elements of feminist thinking can be found in Jane’s story. In this lecture, we’ll explore that story in detail and ask if *Jane Eyre* has another heroine as well—Rochester’s mad first wife, Bertha.

Outline

I. *Jane Eyre*, written by Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855), was the single most popular novel of the high Victorian period.

A. What makes *Jane Eyre* so important to us as a novel today is its heroine, Jane, whom we follow from childhood through adolescence to maturity. She makes her way in a world dominated by men through sheer force of intelligence, high morality, and indomitable pluck.

1. In the mid-19th century, women did not have the vote or property rights. They were often treated by their male guardians as a higher kind of chattel or concubine.
2. In *Jane Eyre*, when Rochester offers to make Jane his mistress—after she learns of Mrs. Rochester in the attic—she runs away. To Rochester, there’s little difference between a wife and a mistress, but to Jane, the difference is clear.
3. The feminism at the heart of *Jane Eyre* is summed up in four words that are found at the novel’s conclusion: “Reader, I married him.” As the syntax and transitive verb insist, it is Jane who is in charge.

4. Much of what we now consider feminist thinking can be located thematically, if not as articulated theory, in Jane's story.

B. The mid-Victorian novelists, including Charlotte Brontë, were fascinated by a form of narrative known as the *Bildungsroman*.

1. This word translates into English as "portrait novel," or more precisely, the life-story of a protagonist from childhood through a series of trials to maturity. Such novels as Dickens's *David Copperfield* or George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* are examples.

2. Like Dickens in *Copperfield*, Charlotte Brontë told her *Bildungsroman*, *Jane Eyre*, autobiographically, using "I narration."

3. As later novelists, such as Henry James, argued, I narration can be somewhat crude. It ties down the point of view to one consciousness, and it renders suspense artificial. But I narration has what Charlotte Brontë particularly wanted: force and urgency.

II. Charlotte was the eldest of the Brontë sisters and lived longest of the six children, although she died at only age 39. Unlike Emily and Anne, she was granted sufficient years to build up her *oeuvre*, which consists of five full-length novels and a quantity of lyric verse.

A. When Charlotte was four, her father, the Reverend Brontë, was appointed perpetual (tenured) curate at Haworth in Yorkshire. The parsonage in this large north England village would be Charlotte's domestic center throughout almost all her life.

B. The Haworth parsonage was very close to the church graveyard, which meant that the Brontë children would have seen coffins and funerals as part of their everyday lives. We can only imagine what effect these sights had on the impressionable young sisters.

C. The Anglican Church was a significant influence on Charlotte.

1. The Christian missionary in *Jane Eyre*, Saint John Rivers, wants to marry Jane but is denied that fulfillment. He then goes off to India to convert its population to Christianity.

2. It is he who piously utters the last words in the book: "Jesus Christ."

D. Charlotte's father was not a conventional priest, and the household at Haworth cannot have been easy for him to manage.

1. Branwell Brontë was a particularly wayward son, whose wild character, dissipation, and sexual amorality feeds, we imagine, into Rochester and Heathcliff.

2. Charlotte's mother died when she was only five. None of the children knew her well, nor was there any softening maternal influence in their lives. *Jane Eyre*, too, is a motherless child.

3. The eldest four Brontë girls were sent to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge in Lancashire. Charlotte would later portray the school as Lowood in *Jane Eyre*; the abominable conditions there led to the deaths of two of the Brontë daughters.

E. When the girls were brought back to at the parsonage, they wrote sagas of the imaginary countries Angria and Gondal. These narratives chronicle the deeds of superheroes based on military figures of the day. The main literary influence seems to have been Sir Walter Scott.

F. At age 16, Charlotte spent a year at a different school where, like *Jane Eyre*, she taught for a while. She also served as a governess.

G. The transforming experience of Charlotte's life occurred in 1842, when at age 26, she and Emily went to Brussels to work in a boarding house run by the charismatic Constantin Heger and his wife, Claire.

1. Charlotte remained in Belgium for two years, and her experience there is directly recalled in two of her novels, *The Professor* and *Villette*, and indirectly reflected in the romance plot of *Jane Eyre*.

2. In Belgium, Charlotte fell hopelessly in love with Heger. As far as we can tell, her feelings were not reciprocated.

3. Charlotte's unrequited love inspired the longing relationships at the center of many of her narratives, not least *Jane Eyre*'s mad love for her employer, Rochester.

H. When she returned to England in the mid-1840s, Charlotte and her sisters produced a vanity publication of their poems, which sold only two copies.

I. At about the same time, fatal illness swept through Haworth parsonage. Branwell, the only son of the family, died of chronic bronchitis and alcoholism in September 1848. Emily and Anne both died of pulmonary tuberculosis in December 1848 and May 1849, respectively.

III. Only Charlotte would live to see the name Brontë become famous.

A. Her first novel, sent to the eminent London publisher George Smith, was politely turned down with the suggestion that she should write something longer, more exciting, and perhaps, more womanly.

B. Under the pseudonym Currer Bell, Charlotte produced *Jane Eyre* in six weeks. Victorian readers at once apprehended that Currer must be a woman. The novel was a huge success; Charlotte was suddenly famous and remained so for the rest of her short life.

C. Charlotte continued to live on at Haworth, writing a string of successful works, including *Villette* and *Shirley*. She also had her sister's novel *Wuthering Heights* published by a respectable firm.

D. In June 1854, Charlotte married Arthur Bell Nicholls, her father's curate. A few months later, at the age of 38, she became pregnant. Her health declined rapidly during this time, and she and her unborn child died on March 31, 1855.

IV. As we have said, *Jane Eyre* presents itself as a recollection of the heroine's early life, from childhood to marriage.

A. The narrative opens with an uncompromising straightforwardness, giving us our first picture of little Jane standing up for her rights.

1. When the orphaned Jane fights back against her bullying cousin, John Reed, she is immediately taken to the "red-room," the room where corpses are laid out when someone dies in the Reed family.

2. Jane doesn't take her punishment quietly. She fights "like a mad cat" as she is being carried away. Locked in the red-room, Jane thinks she sees a ghost and screams loud enough to wake the house.

3. This scene prefigures the central theme of *Jane Eyre*, that of the "madwoman in the attic" or, perhaps, the rebel woman.

4. It's not just the Reed home that imprisons women it considers to be out of line; this is the condition of womanhood in the 19th century. *Jane Eyre* tells us that women must fight back.

B. Jane is ultimately sent to a hellish boarding school, Lowood. There, she befriends a girl named Helen Burns. Before Helen dies of maltreatment, she instructs Jane in the necessity of stoical suffering. Her message seems to be that women must suffer if they are to endure.

1. Jane describes the brutal conditions at Lowood. Her persecutor there is the tyrannical evangelical minister Reverend Brocklehurst.

2. Brocklehurst believes that all children are the offspring of Satan and must be disciplined into Christian virtue by physical suffering. Jane's only friend on the staff of the school is Miss Temple.

3. We later learn that Brocklehurst has been embezzling school funds to support his family's luxurious lifestyle. As a result, the pupils are malnourished, freezing, and prone to dangerous illness.

4. A typhus epidemic strikes the school, killing many of the students, and the Reverend Brocklehurst is finally disgraced and removed.

C. Miss Temple's gentler regime takes over, and as she passes through adolescence, Jane herself becomes a teacher. At age 18, she applies for a position as governess at Thornfield Hall.

1. There, Jane is charged with tutoring a young French girl, Adele, the illegitimate child, we assume, of the absent master of the house, Mr. Edward Rochester. Jane finally meets her employer in typically melodramatic circumstances.

2. The young governess is out walking, when she suddenly hears the sound of a galloping horse. The rider, Rochester, falls off the horse, sprains his ankle, and swears.

3. Significantly, this figure of manly strength needs the help of a woman to get back to Thornfield. The moment is powerfully symbolic and prefigures a pattern that will recur as part of the master narrative design.

D. Rochester plans to stay at Thornfield while he looks for a wife. Ultimately, he falls in love with the plain governess, Jane. Rochester proposes and Jane accepts.

E. Strange phenomena occur at Thornfield: screams, mysterious fires, and the destruction of Jane's bridal veil the night before the ceremony. At the ceremony itself, a voice from the back of the church protests, "Mr. Rochester is already married."

F. Rochester takes Jane back to Thornfield and up the stairs to the attic, where the first Mrs. Rochester, named Bertha, is confined in her madness. Rochester was tricked into marrying her when he was an innocent young man. The description of her is horrific.

G. Rochester then asks Jane to be his unmarried paramour, his mistress, but her virtue will never permit such an arrangement. She runs away, in a state of near breakdown.

H. By incredible coincidence, Jane collapses on the doorstep of an unknown relative, Saint John Rivers, a clergyman, and his sisters.

1. They take her in, and she discovers that she is not an orphan after all but an heiress, kept in ignorance by the villainous Reeds.

2. Saint John Rivers falls in love with Jane and asks her to join him in his missionary work in India. She is tempted, but late one night, she hears the voice of Rochester calling to her.

I. Jane returns to Thornfield and discovers that Rochester's mad wife has burned the house down and died in the fire. Rochester, like Samson, has been blinded and has lost an arm, like Nelson. Now that he is widowed and tamed, Jane can accept his offer. She utters the words "Reader, I married him."

V. Two images remain in our minds after reading *Jane Eyre*: little Jane, locked and maddened in the red-room, and Bertha, locked and mad in the attic at Thornfield.

A. Women readers, particularly, have been astute in discerning that the real heroine of *Jane Eyre* is not just the narrator-governess but Bertha. Jean Rhys, a 20th-century novelist, wrote a novel on the subject called *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which tells the story of *Jane Eyre* from Bertha's point of view.

B. *Jane Eyre* has survived and triumphed for 150 years, not merely because it's a good melodrama, but because it is a great novel of womanhood, one that is both sympathetic to, and critical of, the age and society in which it was born.

Suggested Readings:

Brontë, *Jane Eyre*.

Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What female qualities, on the basis of *Jane Eyre*, do we assume Charlotte Brontë principally admires?
2. Is the "madwoman in the attic" the true heroine of *Jane Eyre*?

Lecture Thirty-Six Voices of Victorian Poetry

Scope: For most readers today, Victorian poetry is not as compelling as the fiction or even nonfiction prose of the age, but the Victorians revered their poetry and poets. In this lecture, we'll look at three voices from the period that have stood the test of time: Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Tennyson represents, perhaps, the culmination of Romanticism. Like Shelley and Keats, he was interested in the music of the English language and was a master of his instrument. Browning, more rugged and experimental than Tennyson, takes us to the cusp of Modernism with his dramatic monologues and the quality of intellectualism in his verse. With Hopkins, poetry becomes fully Modern; he sought to create poetry around stress, what he called "sprung rhythm," rather than meter, and saw the future of English verse in the

possibilities for experimentation with language within the form of the short lyric poem. These three poets represent a bridge for us from high Romanticism to Modernism, paving the way for the achievements to come in 20th-century poetry.

Outline

I. We tend to regard Victorian poetry as not as outstanding a literary achievement as the fiction of that age or even the nonfictional prose, such as that by John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, or Walter Pater.

A. Walter Pater, an Oxford don and a patron of aestheticism, famously recalled the grandeur of the Renaissance and suggested that it should be incorporated into modern life: “To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.”

B. Even though we do not regard their poetry as highly as they did, the Victorians revered poetry in all its manifestations, from the music hall song and street ballad to the lofty utterances of the poet laureate. In fact, when the laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson died, he was given what amounted to a state funeral.

C. In the Victorian era, poetry was a bestselling commodity. Tennyson’s narrative poems, such as “Enoch Arden,” “Maud,” or *Idylls of the King*, sold as well as any novel of the 1850s.

1. The Victorians read these works like novels, although we have lost that knack. Elizabeth Barrett Browning actually composed a verse novel, *Aurora Leigh*, which is generally regarded as the best of its kind.

2. George Meredith’s sonnet sequence *Modern Love* is a narrative of the gradual breakdown of a marriage.

D. The Victorian age had a galaxy of talent in poetry, including many names that we don’t remember, although most readers are familiar with Christina Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Emily and Charlotte Brontë.

E. In this lecture, we’ll look at three great voices in Victorian poetry: Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. They represent the bridge from high Romanticism to Modernism.

II. Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) carries to its furthest extent the quest of Keats and that other great Romantic, Shelley. The music of the English language has never been more skillfully composed into verbal melody and harmony than under Tennyson’s hand.

A. Tennyson was obsessed with the *Odyssey*, but where other poets concentrated on the battles and ordeals, Tennyson was much more interested in the feelings of melancholy, world-weariness, and spiritual lassitude of Odysseus and his men.

B. The Victorians exhibited an astounding dynamism and confidence that allowed them to build much of the infrastructure of modern Great Britain, but the reverse side of this was the melancholy that Tennyson eloquently captured.

C. The “Lotus-Eaters” episode from the *Odyssey*, in which those who ingested the plant were overcome with lethargy, fascinated Tennyson. His poem titled “The Lotos-Eaters” opens with Ulysses exhorting his sailors to have courage and gives a beautiful description of the land they discover.

D. Tennyson knew, from early life, that he wanted to be a poet. He achieved the pinnacle of his career when he became poet laureate, in succession to Wordsworth, in the 1850s. Tennyson was crowned again when Queen Victoria, who loved his poetry, made him a baron in 1884.

E. Tennyson’s output was vast. Critical opinion would probably nominate as his greatest work the poem of religious faith and doubt, “In Memoriam,” that he wrote on the death of his friend Arthur Hallam.

III. Another famous poem of Tennyson’s, “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” demonstrates the public side of this poet.

A. In 1854–1855, Britain was allied with France against Russia in the Crimean War.

1. This conflict was the first to be covered by war correspondents and photographers, who brought home

the blunders of the war to the population in England.

2. *The Times* published a report of the futile charge of the English cavalry—what was, effectively, a suicide mission—that took place on November 13, 1854. This report included the words “someone had blundered,” which also appear in Tennyson’s poem.

B. The command had been given to charge the Russian guns, which were firing into the cavalry as the men galloped forward. The guns were eventually taken, but 118 cavalymen were killed, 127 were wounded, and 400 horses were destroyed.

C. Tennyson’s famous poem was read by hundreds of thousands of people in England while the event was still reverberating, and he made no attempt to vindicate the military stupidity that led to the slaughter. Military history in Britain has repeatedly shown that commanders are unworthy of the men they lead.

D. The poem is also striking for its connection with new media. Dispatches were telegraphed in from the field, and the poem was published in a newspaper a couple of weeks later, with accompanying photographs.

IV. The partnering giant to Tennyson is Robert Browning (1812–1889), although these two figures were polar opposites in some ways.

A. Browning is a more rugged and experimental verse-maker than Tennyson was. His early poem *Sordello* is so difficult that the Victorians liked to say that only God and Browning knew what it meant, and the poet had forgotten.

B. If Tennyson put music into poetry, Browning put thought into it, a quality of intellectualism. He did unusual things on a large canvas. *The Ring and the Book*, for instance, his great novel in verse, looks at a 17th-century murder in Italy from 12 different viewpoints.

C. Browning’s major bequest to successive poetry is the dramatic monologue, a voice-driven poetic form. One famous example is “My Last Duchess,” from his collection titled *Men and Women* (1842).

1. Note the ambiguity of the word “last.” Does it mean my late wife or the most recent in a long line of duchesses? This question hovers over the monologue that follows.

2. The poem is based on a 16th-century aristocrat, the Duke of Ferrara, who may or may not have been an uxoricide, a wife killer, but was certainly a great patron and connoisseur of the visual arts.

3. In the poem, the duke is showing off his art collection to an unidentified visitor. Suddenly, he pauses at a particularly fine portrait and explains that it is his former wife.

4. As we read, we learn that the duke was insulted by what he sees as a lack of respect for himself from his duchess; we come to believe that he had her killed. At the same time, he has had her immortalized in a wonderful portrait.

D. On one level, the poem seems to say that art is more important than love. When we study the Italian Renaissance, do we care that the Borgias were murderers given the riches produced by their patronage? At the same time, many might say that the duke is merely a sociopath, although the poem doesn’t make it clear that he had his wife killed.

1. “My Last Duchess” makes us think, and this is Browning’s great achievement as a poet. He introduces thoughtfulness into his poetry and induces thoughtfulness in his reader.

2. If Tennyson looks back to Shelley and Keats, from Browning, we can trace lines of connection forward to Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, and T. S. Eliot.

3. His command of voice and creation of what became known in Yeats’s terms as *persona*, the mask through which the poet writes, would be important instruments in the 20th-century verse.

V. The last poet in this trio, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889), takes us forward unequivocally in a great leap into Modernism.

A. Hopkins, a Jesuit priest, was unknown to the public as a poet until 20 years after his death. His literary resurrection was thanks to his friendship with the 20th-century poet laureate Robert Bridges, who himself has now faded into obscurity.

B. Working by himself, but with an awareness of the techniques devised by Tennyson and Browning, Hopkins broke through Victorianism into Modernism.

1. If we compare Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters," for instance, with the lushness of one of Hopkins' descriptions of landscape, we can see both his influences and his innovations.

2. The Hopkins poem "That Nature Is a Heraclitean Fire" contains one such description: "CLOUD-PUFFBALL, torn tufts, tossed pillows ' flaunt forth, then chevy on an air- / built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs ' they throng; they glitter in marches."

C. Hopkins sought to create poetry around stress, what he called "sprung rhythm," not meter. He freed English poetry from the chains of the pentameter: de-dum / de-dum / de-dum / de-dum / de-dum.

D. Hopkins also realized that the form of the future would be the short lyric, which allowed for interesting effects in the English language.

1. Poetry must return to the short lyric, and it must conduct experiments with language while retaining a sustaining link with tradition, in this case, the subject matter.

2. Hopkins wrote, as many poets through the ages have written, about the natural world around him.

E. Hopkins's group of poems known as the "Terrible Sonnets" record the dark night of the soul, a well-known trial of Catholic conscience. Here, the poet feels some of the pains of Jesus, but can he endure them? Can he call on patience, a word that literally means "suffering," to get through his trials and become stronger, as Christ did on the cross?

1. The poem "No worst, there is none" recalls Lear on the heath with the line "comfort serves in a whirlwind"; Prometheus on his rock, harrowed by harpies; and most of all, Christ.

2. What is the cause of this pain? Sexual temptation or frustration? Religious doubt? Innate melancholy?

3. The poem is a superb articulation of mood, but we don't know where that mood originates.

VI. These three poets constitute a line connecting the Romantic to the Modern period of literature. Victorian poetry, as we have seen, is not a static thing, but an entity, a continuum, a thoroughfare, taking literature 100 years forward and making possible the great achievements of the 20th century.

Suggested Readings:

Armstrong, ed., *The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations*.

Bristow, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*.

Browning, *Robert Browning: Selected Poems*

Ricks, *Tennyson*.

Ryals, *The Life of Robert Browning*.

Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Tennyson and Browning, the two great poets of the age, have distinctly different poetic voices. How would one best describe those voices?

2. Why was poetry so overwhelmingly popular with the Victorians?

Lecture Thirty-Seven Eliot—Fiction and Moral Reflection

Scope: George Eliot's *Middlemarch* took the novel beyond the achievement of Charles Dickens 30 years earlier. Unlike Dickens, Eliot did not see the need to "coerce" emotional responses from her readers or to tie together the loose ends of her characters' lives; like life itself, *Middlemarch* is a vast canvas marked by ambiguities. Eliot was born Mary Ann Evans but wrote under a pseudonym to preclude association of her work with women's romance fiction and to avoid causing embarrassment to her family. Largely self-educated, she became the leading woman intellectual of her time and moved to London to embark on a career in journalism. A freethinker but also a strict moralist, Eliot's personal philosophy was strongly influenced by the thinking of

Auguste Comte, the pioneer of sociology. Her great theme is reform, and her fiction asks: How can society and people be made better? She takes Realism to its fullest extent, demanding a lot of the reader in the process.

Outline

I. Virginia Woolf once said that George Eliot's *Middlemarch* was the first novel in English for "grown-ups," meaning for morally mature adults.

A. In the 30 years between the publication of *Oliver Twist* and *Middlemarch*, the novel had come a long way.

1. Dickens had called on melodrama and sentimentality to "coerce" the reader into certain kinds of emotional response. He also felt the need to tie all the threads of his story together, inevitably leading to certain improbabilities.
2. George Eliot helped bring the novel beyond that neatness; with Eliot, fiction can be as messy, in many ways, as life is.

B. Henry James was perhaps less flattering than Woolf when he lumped *Middlemarch* together with other fiction leviathans of the Victorian period as a "great baggy monster."

C. For modern readers, *Middlemarch* is both a great novel and a big novel, too big, perhaps, for our hurried lives. The narrative is not as tightly compressed as in the world of Dickens, and that looseness means that the story sometimes falls apart. Part of the reason for this lack of coherence is that *Middlemarch* began as two separate novels that were combined at a late stage of conception.

II. *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* was published initially in eight bimonthly parts over the years 1871 to 1872 and, subsequently, as four massive volumes. The author listed on the title pages is George Eliot, but of course, that name is a pseudonym for Mary Ann Evans (1819–1880).

A. Why did Mary Ann Evans, a female chauvinist if there ever was one, write behind the protection of a male mask?

1. The author, whom we'll call Eliot, did not want to be associated with the mass of "silly novels by lady novelists," women's romance, that is. She wanted to write fiction of ideas, the ideas that were making and reshaping Victorian society and culture.
2. Eliot may also have been inspired in her choice of name by the great female French novelist George Sand and by Charlotte Brontë, who launched herself in the world of literature as Currer Bell.
3. Given that she came from a rural, provincial, evangelical background, Eliot may also have wanted to avoid embarrassing family members, who may have had suspicions about fiction.

B. Many readers of *Middlemarch* hear the voice of a man.

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the best of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.

C. Eliot's background was extraordinary and wholly un-Victorian. She was nonconformist to the core. Least of all did she conform to the historical age into which she was born and which, in *Middlemarch*, she examines with an intelligence that puts her in a class of her own.

1. Eliot was a philosopher-novelist, a prophet of what she called the "religion of humanity," a moral code that would fill the hole left by a lack of confidence in religious formulas. Such formulas were no longer adequate in the modern world.
2. Eliot believed that novels could, like religion, make us better people, and for this reason, they were necessary. For Eliot, fiction has the power to dissolve egotism and make us more sympathetic to our fellow human beings. Novels make us realize that other people have what Eliot called "an equivalent centre of self."
3. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot uses a striking image to illustrate the egoism that conditions our view of the world: A mirror may have minute scratches that run in all directions, but placing a lighted candle on the mirror will make the scratches seem to arrange themselves in a series of circles. As Eliot says, "The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent ..."

4. Fiction had a higher mission than mere entertainment for Eliot, nor was she averse to making her readers think—to engage in moral reflection.

III. Eliot was born and brought up in the environs of Coventry, Warwickshire, the region described in *Middlemarch*.

A. Eliot's father was a steward, or estate manager. She idolized him but, ultimately, could not subscribe to his strict Christianity. She gives us an idealized portrait of her father as Caleb Garth in *Middlemarch*.

B. As a girl, Eliot read avidly. Her father's position gave her access to a good library, and there was an active, self-improving, intellectual life in the nonconformist communities of provincial towns like Coventry. The nonconformist low Anglicanism in which Eliot was born was less prejudiced than society at large against education for women.

C. Eliot, who was largely self-taught, became the leading woman intellectual of her time.

1. She taught herself foreign languages and entered the theological disputes of the time, notably what was called "higher criticism," the theory that the Bible was metaphorically rather than literally true.

2. She was introduced by friends to the writings of such contemporary sages as Herbert Spencer, Thomas Carlyle, Harriet Martineau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

3. On her father's death, Eliot embarked on her career. Her first major literary effort was the translation from the German of David Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, a classic text of higher criticism.

D. Eliot moved to London and became a leading journalist. In critical writings of this period, she formulated her personal philosophy, which was strongly influenced by the work of the pioneer of sociology, the French philosopher Auguste Comte.

1. According to Comte, society progressed through stages from primitivism to a scientific organization of itself.

2. The final stage would transcend religion, but it could be morally conditioned. Something would replace the religion that had been lost in earlier stages of evolution or development.

E. Eliot was a freethinker but also, throughout her life, a stern moralist. Her thinking on such matters was strongly influenced by the man whom she chose to live with, George Henry Lewes.

1. Like Eliot, Lewes was a leading light in London's higher journalism. He was a popularizer of science, an editor, and a Comtean.

2. He was also married but, true to his freethinking philosophy, allowed his wife to live with another man. Keep in mind that divorce in this period required an act of Parliament.

3. Eliot was 35 years old when she and Lewes became partners.

F. In 1857, at Lewes's suggestion, Eliot began to write short stories. These were published in *Blackwood's Magazine* under the title *Scenes of Clerical Life* and were well received. She went on to publish a long novel, *Adam Bede*, which came out in 1859 in three volumes.

1. The novel is set at the turn of the 19th century during the Methodist revival, a period of evangelism that would vitalize and morally reform England during the next 100 years.

2. *Adam Bede* is powerful in both the quality of its thinking and its story line. It concerns a country carpenter who is in love with a woman named Hetty Sorrell. When Hetty is seduced by the squire of the manor, the hierarchy of Adam's world is destroyed. He becomes susceptible to reforming influences, which come to him from another woman, Dinah, a Methodist preacher.

G. Over the next few years, Eliot would go on to write other great novels: *Middlemarch*; *Felix Holt, the Radical*, a study of early trade unionism and proletarian revolt; *Romola*, a historical novel, set in the Florence of the time of the fierce moralist Savonarola; and *Daniel Deronda*, a complex study of marriage, morality, and Zionism.

H. Eliot never married Lewes, who died in 1878. In later life, she married a disciple 20 years her junior. She wrote no fiction after Lewes's death, devoting herself instead to putting his papers in order. She is buried in Highgate Cemetery in an area that is reserved for religious dissenters, next to Lewes, whom she loved.

IV. Middlemarch is the name of an imaginary town, based on Coventry, in the period of the late 1820s to early 1830s. This was the time just before the first Reform Bill, and reform is Eliot's great theme.

A. Eliot asks: How can society be made better? And her answer is: not by passing bills to allow people to vote but by making people better. That, as the novel suggests, is tricky. How can people be made better? How can people be reformed?

B. *Middlemarch* is a vast canvas, but it carries two main plotlines. One of these follows a young medical scientist called Lydgate. He's brilliant and intends to revolutionize his discipline, but he fails when he fatally chooses an unworthy partner.

C. The other plotline concerns Dorothea Brooke, a young idealist who dreams of being a helpmeet to genius. She wants to subordinate herself while doing something important in life.

1. Disastrously, Dorothea identifies Edward Casaubon as the man of genius to whom she will dedicate her life. Casaubon is a desiccated scholar whose great project is as intellectually sterile as he is.

2. Dorothea sees herself as a latter-day Saint Theresa, a woman who will change the world, but on her honeymoon in Rome, she realizes her terrible mistake. She has thrown her life away.

3. The romance novels that Eliot despised typically end with a happy marriage. *Middlemarch*, in contrast, effectively begins with an unhappy marriage. When Dorothea realizes her mistake on her wedding trip, she experiences a feeling of desolation and detachment, almost as if she has been traumatized by rape.

4. The destruction of Dorothea's ardent idealism, however, is a necessary step to growth, rebirth, and eventually, after many trials and much suffering, to regeneration and fulfillment.

5. At the end of her life, Dorothea, widowed and happily remarried to another man, realizes that she was never meant to be Saint Theresa. Indeed, the 19th century has no room for Saint Theresa; it is too crowded, bureaucratic, and complicated.

D. As we said earlier, with Eliot, the novel had come a long way from Dickens, who would never have ended his novels on a less-than-happy note or with any loose ends. Eliot was too honest to take that easy route.

1. *Middlemarch* ends with a description of Dorothea's future that leaves the reader with mixed feelings:

But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

2. This wonderful conclusion leaves us unsatisfied; we want Dorothea to live happily ever after. Eliot will not give us that ending because life doesn't work that way. In this, she has taken realism, the innovation introduced by Jane Austen, to its farthest extent.

Suggested Readings:

Ashton, *George Eliot: A Life*.

Eliot, *Middlemarch*.

Haight, *George Eliot*.

Questions to Consider:

1. *Middlemarch* is routinely praised for being the first "grown-up" novel in English literature. In what sense can it be thought to raise fiction to new levels of maturity?

2. Eliot subtitled her novel *A Study of Provincial Life*. What is her verdict on the English provinces and the life that can be lived there?

Lecture Thirty-Eight Hardy—Life at Its Worst

Scope: At the time of his death, Thomas Hardy was universally recognized as the grand old man of English literature. His career encompassed a 30-year period as a great novelist and an even longer span as a poet. He set his novels in the West Saxon region of England, his birthplace, which he called Wessex. Against that

backdrop, he explored the demise of prosperity, brought on by the removal of trade protections favoring British farmers, and the increasing urbanization of England. Hardy's fiction is marked by a pervasive gloom that can be traced back to the death of Wessex and its culture and the uprooting of the Wessex people. *Jude the Obscure* is his most autobiographical novel and his most pessimistic. Jude dreams of a better life for himself as a scholar, but circumstances—the British class system, Jude's own weakness for alcohol, and society's lack of acceptance of freethinking morality—lead to the deaths of his children and of Jude himself. Hardy gives us a full look at life at its worst, with the aim of giving us a better sense of what we are and what it is to live.

Outline

I. When he died in 1928, Thomas Hardy (b. 1840) was the undisputed Grand Old Man of English literature, towering over his fellow writers.

A. After his death, Hardy's remains were separated, his heart buried in the area of England he called Wessex and his ashes interred in Westminster Abbey. This separation symbolizes the role that Hardy occupies in English literature—as a great national writer as well as a regional writer.

B. Hardy was both a great novelist and a great poet, his writing career falling neatly into two chronological segments. From the 1860s until the late 1890s, he mainly wrote fiction. From the turn of the century until his death, he was principally a poet.

C. Hardy's poetry properly belongs in the Modern period, while his novels are quintessentially of the 19th century. The novels are not Victorian in the conventional sense of that term, however. From the first novel onward, Hardy's fiction offended "Mrs. Grundy," the mythical embodiment of Victorian morality.

1. In the volume form of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, for example, the heroine is raped, but in the newspaper serialization, she is tricked into marriage, not violated but cheated.

2. In his early career, Hardy was frequently imposed on by editors who felt that his fiction was too grim. The editor who first serialized *The Return of the Native*, for instance, insisted that the novelist paste onto the narrative, which calls out for a tragic conclusion, a conventional happy ending.

3. By the end of his fiction-writing career, Hardy felt that he could no longer conform, and with his last great novel, *Jude the Obscure*, he took his farewell from fiction.

II. Hardy's own life and career are obliquely depicted in *Jude the Obscure*.

A. Hardy was born in a village called Little Bockhampton in the county of Dorset, the heart of what he would later call Wessex. Later in life, he recorded that the midwife who delivered him initially thought him to be stillborn, and he rather liked the idea that he was somehow between the conditions of birth and death.

B. At the time of Hardy's birth, the West Saxon region, known as the breadbasket of England, was quite prosperous. On the basis of that prosperity, a distinct regional culture had been constructed over the generations, but that would change with a momentous political reform.

1. In 1846, Robert Peel's Conservative government, a government imbued with principles of free trade, reformed the Corn Laws, removing protections for British cereal farmers. The granaries of North America were free to export to Britain at competitive prices.

2. Free trade had contributed heavily to the growth of Great Britain as a whole, but the influx of cheap food and raw materials meant inevitable decline for Wessex. Hardy would grow up in a region that was still vital with old community values but doomed. It was, like himself, between birth and death.

3. Hardy commemorated the high point of Wessex before its collapse in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, which is set around 1846.

C. A number of elements contribute to Hardy's pervasive gloom: the Darwinist contradiction of the faith (Hardy was a staunch convert to Darwinism), the failure of his early love affairs and first marriage, and the suicide of his best friend. Nonetheless, the slow historical death of Wessex and the uprooting of the Wessex people seem to be the principal elements in his lifelong melancholia.

1. Hardy believed that, at their most fulfilled, human beings exist in an "intelligent relationship with nature." Increasingly, however, the heroines and heroes of his fiction, such as Tess and Jude, are forced to

immigrate to towns.

2. Urbanization was one of the great engines of Victorian progress, but inevitably, the migration to cities entailed a terrible loss of deep identity and links to one's ancestry.

D. Hardy received a good education in Dorchester but left school at age 15. There would be, throughout his life, a clearly self-educated, at times almost comically aspiring aspect to Hardy's intellectual character. He loved, for example, high-flown diction and literary allusion.

E. Young Hardy was apprenticed to a local architect, and architecture, particularly church architecture, would be a passion throughout his life. Although he was a Darwinist, he loved the structures, liturgy, and music of religious devotion.

1. His first successful novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, concerns the replacement of the old church orchestras by the new mechanical harmonium.

2. In 1898, Hardy wrote a moving poem, "The Imprecipient," on his love of the church and the church structure and his tragic inability to believe in the religion that the church promulgated.

F. In 1862, Hardy went to London to make his fortune as an architect, but toward the end of the decade, he turned to writing. After some setbacks, he hit the mark of popular taste in 1872 with the first of his Wessex novels, *Under the Greenwood Tree*. There followed enough Wessex fiction from Hardy to comprise a massive saga, with each novel representing a small area of a huge canvas.

III. The last of those novels, *Jude the Obscure*, is the most autobiographical of Hardy's works and the most pessimistic. Of all the great novels produced in the 19th century in Britain, *Jude the Obscure* most clearly ranks as a tragedy of Shakespearian greatness.

A. Jude Fawley is born and brought up by an aunt in the small, rundown Wessex village of Marygreen. Dark mysteries—incest, suicide, and alcoholism—are hinted at in his background. The Fawleys, his aunt grimly informs him, "are not made for wedlock."

B. Young Jude has been inspired by the village schoolteacher, Mr. Phillotson, to become a scholar.

1. He dreams of teaching himself classics, being accepted by Christminster University (Oxford), and becoming a great don.

2. Self-help and self-improvement were articles of Victorian faith: If a young person had talent, industry, and virtue, there was nothing he or she could not achieve. Hardy had a more pessimistic outlook.

C. Initially Jude's life is hopeful. Like Hardy, he leaves school at around age 14 and takes up work as a stonemason, a respectable and skilled craft. Still, Jude wants more out of life than working-class respectability. By night, he studies by the light of his candle, unaware of the obstacles that will impede his dream of going to university.

1. One of these obstacles is the British class system, and another is sex, introduced into Jude's life by a pig's scrotum thrown at his ear as he walks along daydreaming of his future life as a bishop.

2. The maiden who throws this most ironic of Cupid's darts is Arabella Donn, who had been butchering a pig when she sees the handsome Jude walking by with his head in the clouds.

3. Arabella traps Jude into marriage with a fake pregnancy, and his dreams at that point are ended. His dreams revive, however, when Arabella, who finds Jude lacking in male energy, leaves.

D. Jude then goes to Christminster, working as a stonemason, hoping eventually to gain some higher education. In the city, he falls in love with a cousin, Sue Bridehead, a freethinking young woman. She is "neurotic," intellectual, beautiful, and something of a Marxist.

1. A series of accidents and Jude's weakness for alcohol, which is gradually taking him over, lead to their parting. Sue marries Jude's old schoolteacher, Phillotson, whose life dreams have also come to nothing.

2. Eventually, both Jude and Sue divorce their partners, but they cannot bring themselves to marry. Living together, they have children of their own and raise a child, nicknamed Father Time, sent to them by Arabella. The boy is wizened, precocious, and preternaturally gloomy; he is a metaphor for the dying century.

E. The novel builds to a tragic climax. During a thunderstorm, Sue and the children have difficulty finding lodgings; she is pregnant, and the landlords of whom she inquires guess that she is unmarried. Finally, they find a place to take them in, but Father Time can stand the situation no longer.

1. As Jude is cooking supper, he hears Sue scream. She has discovered the hanged bodies of her own two children and Father Time. A note written by Father Time explains: “Done because we are too menny.”
2. Sue miscarries, and she and Jude part. She returns, lovelessly, to Phillotson, and Jude, equally lovelessly, to Arabella. Society has proved too strong for their rebellion.
3. Weakened by a final visit to Sue in a rainstorm and by his chronic drinking, Jude finally dies. As Arabella and Sue stand over his coffin, a joyous noise is heard in the distance, Oxford students celebrating their degree awards.

F. *Jude the Obscure* is an immensely powerful novel. It also raises a question that we can trace all the way back to Aristotle: Why do we enjoy tragedy?

1. One answer is that it is not the suffering that we admire but the artistry with which that suffering is depicted. And few can portray the complexities, hazards, and miseries of modern life in a more masterly fashion than Hardy. Paradoxical as it seems, he creates beauty out of suffering.
2. Another answer can be found in one of Hardy’s poems: “If way to the better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst.” We must look at life as it really is if we’re to live fully.
3. *Jude the Obscure* certainly gives us that full look, but the nobility, the struggle, the inextinguishable decency of Jude in the face of pitiless circumstances and vast, irresistible ironies point to where “the better” might be. Hardy, like all great writers, gives us a better sense of what we are and how we can live. That knowledge of what life is makes life, if not worth living, at least understandable.

Suggested Readings:

Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*.

———, *Selected Poems*.

Kramer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*.

Sutherland, *So You Think You Know Thomas Hardy?*

Tomalin, *Thomas Hardy: The Time-Torn Man*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are the origins of Hardy’s characteristic pessimism?
2. Is Hardy’s “regionalism”—his devotion to “Wessex”—a strength or a liability?

Lecture Thirty-Nine

The British Bestseller—An Overview

Scope: Popular fiction is often neglected in literature survey courses, but in some ways, this type of writing endures as well as works that are acknowledged as classics. In this lecture, we’ll look at popular fiction by Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, and H. G. Wells, a pioneer in the world of science fiction. Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories initially ran in installments in the *Strand Magazine*, where they were devoured by a newly literate population of young people, products of the 1870 Universal Education Act. Doyle himself developed the technique of close observation used by his detective while a medical student training under Dr. Joseph Bell. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is an example of Doyle writing at the top of his career; the novel is suspenseful, melodramatic, and although perhaps overwritten, still skillfully plotted. H. G. Wells also began his career in magazine writing for an audience of newly educated young people, with which he had much in common. In the spirit of the age, he used science to explain the premises of his imaginative stories. Wells was influenced by Darwinism, but as we will see in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and *The Time Machine*, he had a less optimistic view about the progress of science and the outcome of evolution than others of his time.

Outline

I. One of the problems with a survey such as this one is that it typically leaves out the vast realm of popular fiction. Much of the raw energy of literature, however, comes from popular works, written to entertain a mass readership and make money for its creators. In this lecture, we'll explore some classics of popular fiction by Arthur Conan Doyle and H. G. Wells.

A. The market for fiction received a boost and some pressure toward bringing high and low literature closer together from the 1870 Universal Education Act, which required all British children to attend school until the age of 14. By the 1880s and 1890s, the act had spawned a new literate population.

B. As the 20th century neared, the wealth of the population had generally increased; these new readers had some small amount of disposable income and were hungry for reading matter that would entertain them.

1. The partnership of the *Strand Magazine* (launched in 1890 by George Newnes) and Arthur Conan Doyle perfectly satisfied this new appetite for smart fiction produced in installments.
2. The *Strand* was illustrated on coated paper, which made it look expensive, but it cost only about a nickel in U.S. currency. Queen Victoria read the *Strand* and, indeed, once wrote an article for it.
3. The star attraction in the magazine was the amateur detective Sherlock Holmes. A new Holmes story was capable of increasing the already large circulation of the *Strand Magazine* to a half million copies.

II. The creator of Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) was born in Edinburgh, of Irish and Catholic background. Holmes, however; his brother, Mycroft; and his companion, Watson, are thoroughly English.

A. As a young man, Doyle trained to be a doctor at Edinburgh University, then the best medical school in Europe. He was impressed by one of his teachers, Dr. Joseph Bell, who examined his patients for what he called clues before making any diagnosis. Dr. Bell further believed that medical students should be trained in observation.

1. We see the influence of Dr. Bell on Doyle in a scene from *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), in which Dr. Mortimer describes to Sherlock Holmes the mysterious footprints surrounding the corpse of the recently deceased Sir Charles Baskerville.
2. Before this meeting, Holmes has created an uncannily accurate image of Dr. Mortimer merely by examining his walking stick. Holmes even correctly identifies the breed of the doctor's dog, who is in the habit of carrying his master's stick in his mouth.
3. Perhaps the most important aspect of the Holmesian forensic technique is observation, which is in line with the scientific spirit of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Even Darwin launched his theory based on the observation of birds in the Galápagos Islands.
4. Holmes is much less an amateur detective than a forensic scientist, and as such, he is Victorian through and through.

B. Doyle was a moderately successful doctor, but in alliance with the *Strand Magazine* and its vast readership, he was among the most successful and popular authors of his age.

1. So successful was his creation, Sherlock Holmes, that he threatened to take over his creator. Famously, Doyle killed the detective, along with his great foe, Professor Moriarty, only to be forced to bring Holmes back to life by popular demand.
2. Doyle always believed that his historical novels were what posterity would most admire. He also had a higher estimate of his Professor Challenger novels, such as *The Lost World*. But it is Sherlock Holmes that remains his great bequest to literature.

C. Doyle began writing short stories in the late 1880s, and he joined the *Strand* in 1891, partnering with the illustrator Sidney Paget. The lean, cadaverous face and the famous deerstalker hat were Paget's, not Doyle's, inventions.

III. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is vintage Holmes, written when Doyle was at the top of his game.

A. Dr. Mortimer calls at Baker Street with a perplexing mystery for Holmes to ponder: In Devon, a land of mists and threatening quicksands, a rich aristocrat, Sir Charles Baskerville, has been found dead.

1. The Baskervilles are haunted by an ancestral curse: Two hundred years earlier, Sir Hugo Baskerville

raped and hunted to death, with his hounds, an innocent maiden. He had his throat ripped out by a gigantic, spectral hound in revenge for this atrocity. So, it is decreed, will perish all who carry that ominous title, Baskerville.

2. Now, large canine footprints have been found near the body of Sir Charles, who seems to have died of sheer terror.

3. At this point in his story, Doyle removes Holmes from the narrative; the detective won't return until much later for the necessary denouement. Instead, Watson is sent down to Devon.

B. Later in the story, as the intrepid trio of Holmes, Lestrade (the bumbling police inspector), and Watson venture into the windswept, barren moor, they finally see the hound of hell with their own eyes.

1. Watson's description of the moment would have had the novel's young audience shuddering with excitement, although it may seem melodramatic and overwritten to modern readers.

2. Although the writing may strike us as overdone, Doyle still pulls the strings of the plot skillfully. The suspense in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*—the artful withholding of information as to who the villain is and the anything-but-supernatural nature of the “gigantic hound”—is as effective today as it was 105 years ago.

C. Doyle remains a master technician of the genre, and one who passed on his techniques to those who followed him.

1. Agatha Christie, for example, picked up the country house, upper-class milieu for the setting of her detective novels.

2. Holmes himself, the cocaine-addicted, violin-playing, mysteriously tortured, solitary genius remains a remarkable conception. What is the dark secret in Holmes's background that drives him to drugs and the necessary stimulus of “the chase”?

IV. The 1890s saw the emergence of other genres of popular writing, including science fiction, pioneered by H. G. Wells (1866–1946), who termed the genre “scientific romance.”

A. Wells wrote innumerable other kinds of fiction, including political novels, comic novels, fables, utopias, realistic works, and romances, but it is his science fiction, conceived when he was still a relatively young writer, that has endured.

B. Wells's mother was a servant, and his father, a shopkeeper. Wells left school early and worked as a sales assistant in a draper's establishment, a phase of his life immortalized in two comic novels, *Kipps* and *The History of Mr. Polly*. He attended a technological school in London, where he came under the influence of the leading Darwinist of the age, T. H. Huxley, but he decided that he was not cut out to be a scientist.

C. Wells began writing short stories for magazines at this early stage of his life for a readership much like himself, that is, young people who had some education and were curious about the world.

D. Wells was one of the great popularizers of science and had an incredibly fertile scientific imagination.

1. *The Invisible Man* (1896), one of his most famous stories, is remarkable not just for its gimmick but for the extraordinary explanation Wells offers of how one might become invisible.

2. The novella was published during the same period when Roentgen was working with x-rays, and Wells incorporates the idea of seeing through things as an authenticating device in *The Invisible Man*.

3. Similarly, in *The First Men in the Moon*, Wells invents a kind of metal that can defy gravity.

4. In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Wells, anticipating stem-cell research, asks how evolution might be harnessed and controlled. The technique to speed up this process, invented by Dr. Moreau in the novel, goes sour. Dr. Moreau himself, incidentally, has a rather Faustian, gloomy view of what science can ultimately accomplish.

V. *The Time Machine* was originally based on a short story by Wells called “The Chronic Argonauts.”

A. The Time Traveller in the story, whose name we never know, summons a group of friends to hear about his great invention and his experiences. A similar narrative framework was favored by Henry James and Joseph Conrad, as we will see in *Heart of Darkness*. Such a device cools the narrative down and makes it seem more

believable.

B. The Time Traveller has been on an amazing voyage that has taken him tens of thousands of years into the future.

1. There, he discovers a kind of grotesque Eden. Earth has become a garden, but humanity has evolved into two bipolar species.
2. One of these species is the Eloi, pretty, little creatures, and the other is the Morlocks, who are subhuman and subterranean. The Morlocks supply the Eloi with delicate foods, then devour them.

C. As mentioned earlier, Sherlock Holmes was a logical product of the scientific and medical developments of the 19th century. And just as the Holmesian forensic technique can be connected to the age, so can Wells and *The Time Machine* be connected to the 1890s.

1. This decade saw the emergence of a decadent, precious aestheticism, and Wells's Eloi are the aesthetes taken to their logical conclusion.
2. At the same time, the 1890s witnessed the formation of trade unions and the Independent Labour Party. The workers, or proletariat, are the Morlocks.
3. Wells, who was a rather gloomy social thinker, saw no convergence of these two types of humanity: the ultra-civilized and the brawny. Brain workers and hand workers, as the Victorians called them, would never meet, but the balance of exploitation would turn. In the future, it would be the workers who exploited and, literally, consumed the upper classes. Conflict between the classes would continue until the heat death of the universe.

D. The Time Traveller goes as far forward as he can before the universe ends. He discovers that the earth is cooling down. All life has died out, except for the last creatures on what used to be planet Earth in its glory.

1. The traveler gives a vivid description of the death of the planet as he looks out from his machine. He stops on a desolate beach and looks around. Earth is not quite dead but moribund.
2. He then sees what life has become. There are no more Eloi or Morlocks and certainly no more Victorians. The traveler sees something that he recognizes as “a monstrous crab-like creature.”
3. Evolution is taking us back to the primal soup, but without the hope that we will see any progress from that point onward.

E. Wells's science fiction is a political parable, forecasting a grim future for mankind. Other evolutionists perceived a more optimistic future for humanity, but Wells's novels put his ideas powerfully into circulation.

Suggested Readings:

Bergonzi, *H. G. Wells*.

Conan Doyle, *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes: 2 Vols. in One*.

Lycett, *The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes: The Life and Times of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*.

Mackenzie, *H. G. Wells: A Biography*.

Wells, *The Complete Short Stories of H. G. Wells*.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what sense, if any, do the Holmes stories belong in the select company of “English literature” as opposed to “popular entertainment”?
2. What do H. G. Wells's “scientific romances” reflect about the 1890s and early 1900s in which they were conceived, composed, and eagerly read?

Lecture Forty

Heart of Darkness—Heart of the Empire?

Scope: During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Britain acquired and ruled over a vast empire; by the second half of the 20th century, however, that empire was virtually gone. Literature recorded the British attitude toward empire, both the arrogant pride seen in such works as Rudyard Kipling's “The White Man's Burden” and the shameful indictment in the subject of this lecture, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In 1890,

Conrad, a Polish exile who had joined the British merchant marine, made a trip up the Congo River; the experience proved transforming. Conrad witnessed the mindless extraction of natural resources and inhuman exploitation of native workers as the “civilized” world rushed to harvest ivory and rubber on the African continent. *Heart of Darkness* tells a similar story of a young mariner sent up the river to learn the fate of a company agent who seems to have gone insane in the jungle. But, as Conrad’s protagonist discovers, “There was a touch of insanity” to the whole colonial enterprise in Africa. The interpretation and reputation of *Heart of Darkness* has changed more than once in the century since it was written, but however we read it, it forces us to examine the truths and, perhaps, the prejudices held in our own hearts.

Outline

I. The subject of this lecture is Joseph Conrad, but in a larger sense, the subject is the British Empire.

A. During the 19th and 20th centuries, Britain acquired and ruled over an empire that stretched from the median line at Greenwich, to Australasia, Palestine, the subcontinent of India, and Africa. By the second half of the 20th century, that empire was virtually gone.

B. As we’ve seen in these lectures, literature is a sensitive recorder of social change, registering both facts and emotions. The British frame of mind regarding the empire was touched equally by pride and shame.

1. Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden” (1899) stands as an example of imperial pride. In it, Kipling laments the suffering of Britain in maintaining imperial domination.

2. Some critics have argued that Kipling’s poem is essentially satirical, designed to subvert imperial arrogance, but he seems to stand sentimentally behind the poem.

3. Kipling believed that in its military actions and occupations of the Philippines at the end of the 19th century, the United States was offering to share the responsibilities of empire with Britain. In fact, the poem addresses America and was first published there.

4. The idea of the poem is clear: Empire is the imposition of a white civilization on a savage world, with no thought of personal gain, or exploitation of natural resources, or military advantage, and most poignantly, with no expectation of any reward nor any gratitude from those lucky enough to be colonized by the white man.

5. Today, we find the poem racist and grotesque, but it was met with approval in its day, in both Britain and America.

C. In this lecture, we’ll look at Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, a work that came out in the same year as “The White Man’s Burden” but offers us the other side of the colonial coin.

II. Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) was born in Poland as Teodor Korzeniowski.

A. Teodor’s father was a patriot, an aristocrat, a poet, and a rebel against the Russian occupation of his country, which meant that his son would not be able to root his life in his native Poland. Exile and cosmopolitan culture would be Teodor’s destiny. Later in life, he became an officer in the British merchant marine and changed his name to Joseph Conrad.

B. In the 1890s, while in his mid-30s, Conrad turned to literature. His experiences at sea and in countries he had come to know as a sailor furnish much of his later writing, including *Lord Jim*, *Nostramo*, *Youth*, *The Shadow Line*, and of course, *Heart of Darkness*.

C. In 1890, Conrad made a trip up the Congo River, an experience that proved transforming.

1. The Belgian Congo was one of the most extreme examples of colonial crime in the 19th century.

2. Under Leopold II, the territory had been opened to rampant commercial exploitation for ivory and rubber. Licenses were sold by the Belgian government for the extraction of natural resources, and no remuneration was required for the indigenous peoples.

3. What is now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (then the Congo Free State) may never recover from the crimes committed against the country by the European West.

4. The manual work of plundering was done, not by Belgians, but by natives of the region. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad gives us a brief glimpse of six such workers, near starvation and chained together at the

neck, as they carry out their task.

III. Conrad was a proponent of artful narration. Like his friend Henry James, Conrad held that how a novelist told a story was as important as the story itself. *Heart of Darkness* is constructed as a story within a story.

A. The novel opens on the mouth of the Thames, gateway to London and the heart of the British Empire. As his small boat bobs on the water at sunset, the skipper Marlow, who will be the hero-narrator of the tale that follows, reminisces about his first command of a vessel.

1. He is inspired by his memories and by thoughts of all the great explorers and mariners, from Sir Francis Drake onward, who have navigated the Thames.
2. Suddenly, Marlow is struck by a different sentiment: “And this also,” he says, “has been one of the dark places of the earth.” At the root of all imperial conquest is crime.

B. The story proper begins in Brussels, but neither that city nor the Congo is mentioned by its geographical name. They are, respectively, the “White City,” with a sarcastic overtone of the biblical “whitened sepulcher” metaphor of hypocrisy, and the “heart of darkness,” an allusion to the heart shape of the African continent.

C. The “Company,” that is, Leopold II’s Union Miniere, contracts the young mariner to voyage up the Congo River to the inland station, where the current agent, Kurtz (meaning “short” in German), is posted.

1. Kurtz has apparently gone mad; even worse, he has “gone native,” sunk into savagery. To some extent, he has lost that important sense of division between a colonizer and the colonized.
2. Marlow’s journey is a pilgrimage of enlightenment to the depths of darkness to which the human condition can descend.

D. Conrad has a poetical power of imagery and gives us many vivid depictions of the violence and futility of the European imperial enterprise as Marlow makes his way from Europe to Africa. All Europe, Marlow says at one point, went into the making of Kurtz, and one feels that power of generalization about all empires.

1. As his ship approaches the African mainland, Marlow sees a French warship anchored off the coast, pointlessly shelling the bush. “There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding,” he writes.
2. But there is more than just a touch of insanity here. Three men a day are dying onboard the battleship.

E. When Marlow finally reaches Kurtz, he is revealed to be wholly mad and corrupted. But we are led to believe that Kurtz’s madness is the only sanity possible in this insane place.

1. A manuscript written by a younger Kurtz shows that he was once an ardent idealist, who came to the Congo with the intention of bringing the torch of enlightenment to the natives.
2. The manuscript trails off, however, with Kurtz’s final, terrible injunction: “exterminate the brutes.” Genocide is the final solution of the imperial enterprise, wherever and however nobly it starts. After exploitation, there will be no further use for the natives, as much brutes and as expendable as the elephants.
3. Kurtz dies exclaiming, “The horror!” He has looked deep into the heart of darkness and seen what that darkness contains.

F. Marlow, who has himself looked into the darkness, disposes of Kurtz’s body. He returns to Brussels and tells Kurtz’s fiancée that Kurtz died with her name on his lips. Unlike Marlow, she lives in a world of what Henrik Ibsen, elsewhere during the same period, called “life lies.”

G. Marlow’s attitude toward Kurtz, the avatar of imperialism, is complex. He asserts that Kurtz was a remarkable man, despite the fact that he had slipped into madness. Marlow even wonders if all wisdom and truth are compressed into the moment when “we step over the threshold of the invisible.”

H. It has been said that tragedy, by showing humanity at the extremes of existence, brings out the essence of human greatness.

1. It’s not easy to align Kurtz with the tragic heroes we’ve seen, such as Shakespeare’s Lear or Hardy’s Jude Fawley. He is, after all, indirectly responsible for that hideous chain gang in what Marlow calls the garden of death.
2. But in a world of falsehood, ideology, and self-serving sentimentality about such things as the “white

man's burden," Kurtz's life and his death are tokens of truth.

3. His death is, necessarily, solitary. As Conrad says, we die as we dream: alone. That is part of the darkness that we must look into.

IV. *Heart of Darkness* has always been a popular text, but its reputation has been altered remarkably over the century.

A. In the early 1900s, it was regarded in Britain as a scathing indictment, not of colonialism in general but of Belgian colonialism.

B. In the post-imperial period, from the mid-1950s, the reputation of *Heart of Darkness* changed dramatically. It was elevated to the condition of a post-colonial classic text and read as an indictment of empire in general.

1. Generations of college students in the United States and Britain read *Heart of Darkness* in this light. Such blurring of the specific into the general often happens when a book is canonized.

2. For example, we read *1984* as a classic denunciation of totalitarianism, but what Orwell had in mind when he wrote it was an attack on the then-ruling Labour Party in Britain.

C. In 1975, the reputation of *Heart of Darkness* changed again. The Nobel Prize-winning novelist Chinua Achebe, one of the great writers of our time and an African, denounced Conrad's novel as "bloody racist."

1. Achebe noted that Africans existed in this narrative as nameless décor, such as Kurtz's jewel-bedecked princess concubine. They were just part of the color black, the continental dark. They weren't human beings; they were pigments.

2. Why, Achebe asked, should the suffering inflicted by Europe on a whole continent and hundreds of millions of people be relegated to background for one European's nervous breakdown and another European's discovery of the "meaning of life"?

3. The Eurocentricity of *Heart of Darkness* is what one might call higher racism. Thus, we must learn to read the novel in a different light yet again.

4. Achebe's onslaught, initially delivered as a lecture at an American campus, has been influential in how the current generation reads the book and even in having it banned in various places.

D. Whether or not we agree that *Heart of Darkness* is a great novel, it is a novel that matters and has conditioned the thinking of millions of people over a century.

1. A work such as this, particularly if one sees it in the context of the controversies and the historical situations that surround it, can help create the critical apparatus that is needed to understand literature.

2. No one wants a great work of literature that is like a pill to be swallowed to obtain a certain effect. We want works of literature that leave us more uncertain after we've read them than before.

3. Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden" confirmed the prejudices of its time for its readers. But the same is not true of *Heart of Darkness*; we come away from this novel not knowing quite what to think but nonetheless thinking very hard indeed.

Suggested Readings:

Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and the Congo Diary*.

Meyers, *Joseph Conrad: A Biography*.

Stape, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*.

Questions to Consider:

1. The distinguished African novelist, Chinua Achebe, has attacked *Heart of Darkness* for its "bloody racism"? How just is this criticism?

2. Why did Conrad make Kurtz the hero of his narrative?

Lecture Forty-One Wilde—Celebrity Author

Scope: Oscar Wilde does not rank with such writers as Shakespeare or Milton or Byron, but he was, perhaps, the first authorial celebrity. As far as his writing is concerned, he is known for one masterpiece, *The*

Importance of Being Earnest; a gothic novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; some poetry; and his confessional memoir, *De Profundis*. More important to his reputation is the notoriety he earned in his personal life and his embodiment of the bohemianism of the 1890s. Wilde was a follower of Walter Pater and a proponent of the doctrine of aestheticism (art for art's sake), which he attempted to enunciate in his work "The Decay of Lying." Wilde's career reached a high point when he began to write drama, a form that showcased his famous wit. His late play *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a delightful comic satire on Victorian seriousness and moral orthodoxy. Shortly after the play was produced, Wilde was accused of "offenses against public decency" and sentenced to two years at hard labor in prison. Upon his release, he fled to France, where he died in the final year of the Victorian era. His witticisms, his aesthete's guise, and his persecution have become enshrined in our memories and help to sustain Wilde's position in the canon of English literature.

Outline

I. The subject of this lecture is Oscar Wilde, both the man himself and the work he produced, which is somewhat overshadowed by Wilde's image.

A. The study of Oscar Wilde prompts us to ask: Why write? Writing is hard, tedious work; badly paid; and typically unrewarded by reader admiration. In his poem *Lycidas*, Milton said, "Fame is the spur," and Byron modified that observation centuries later with the addition of two other factors: money and the love of beautiful women.

B. We might distinguish these reasons for writing from celebrity, in which the author's reputation hinges more on glamour and glitz than on the literature he or she produces. Many people might identify mad, bad Lord Byron as the first authorial celebrity, but Byron's place in the pantheon of literature is assured by his literary output, rather than his dashing, amoral lifestyle.

C. A celebrity author is one whose public image is better known than his or her works; the works may be minimal or peripheral, but their insignificance in no way detracts from the image that the author has left to posterity. We can sum up this definition in two words: Oscar Wilde. Wilde himself liked to assert that his major work of art was himself.

D. Wilde has one undisputed masterpiece to his credit, the play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. He also has one gothic novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, interesting largely because of its gay subtext, but it's not what we would call a great work.

1. This novel depicts a Faustian pact with the devil, by which the hero, Dorian, remains forever a golden youth—while a portrait of him, secreted in the attic, withers and degenerates.

2. As a study in the corruptions of aestheticism, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* does not rank with similarly daring works by Marcel Proust or Thomas Mann.

E. Wilde also wrote a body of poetry, of which only the maudlin, self-pitying "Ballad of Reading Gaol," written by prisoner C.3.3, the author formerly known as Oscar Wilde, is much read today.

F. Wilde wrote a confessional memoir, *De Profundis* (Latin: "from the depths"), after he had been disgraced and thrown into prison. The work has considerable biographical interest and is well written, although again, not in the same class as the works of Shakespeare or Milton.

G. These writings would have secured Wilde only a minor place in literature, but his status is elevated by his notoriety. The dangerous game he played in life puts Wilde among the 50 or 60 important writers we study in surveys of English literature.

II. Wilde's heyday was the 1890s, a period when Victorianism was winding down. New literary, cultural, and artistic influences, notably from France, were eroding old English certainties.

A. Bohemianism was rampant and, with it, the notion that artists and writers were not the sages of mankind or incarnations of morality but denizens of an underworld with mores different from those of the majority. Such artists and writers were experimenters with life and, often, exponents of dangerous alternatives.

B. This clash is found everywhere in the 1890s as artists sought to shock the society in which they worked.

The motto of literature in this decade was *épater le bourgeois*, “affront the middle classes.” It was the artist’s duty to rebel against previously sacred orthodoxies.

1. George Bernard Shaw turned this conflict to comedy in such works as *Man and Superman*, playing with dangerous, foreign doctrines of Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Wagner.
2. The conflict finally wore down Thomas Hardy; after all the fuss about *Jude the Obscure*, he gave up the struggle and turned to poetry.

C. Wilde danced in the no man’s land between respectability and outlawry and, in the last phase of his life, criminality, as his sexual practices were then defined.

III. Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) was born in Dublin in a highly cultured milieu. His father was a distinguished surgeon, and his family was Anglo-Protestant; Wilde converted to Catholicism on his deathbed.

A. Oscar was a brilliant young man and read classics at Trinity College, Dublin. He then received a scholarship to Magdalen College at Oxford, where he came under the influence of the doctrine of aestheticism and its prophet, Walter Pater.

B. The aim of art, according to Pater, was to recover the aesthetic glories of the Renaissance and transplant them into 1890s England. Art for art’s sake was the doctrine of the aesthetes.

1. This doctrine was given an extreme expression in one of Wilde’s famous witticisms: “All that I desire to point out is the general principle that life imitates art far more than art imitates life.”
2. Wilde wrote in “The Decay of Lying” that lies are preferable to truth because “Lies are more beautiful than truth.”

C. “The Decay of Lying” is a work in favor of lying as a high form of creative artifice. The work depicts two young aesthetes having a relaxed but high-toned conversation. The more radical of the two, Vivian, is clearly Wilde himself.

1. Vivian enunciates three doctrines: that life imitates art far more than the reverse, that nature also imitates art, and that lying is the proper aim of art.
2. Wilde’s revolutionary doctrine involves wholesale repudiations of the spirit of the age. It is the reverse for example, of what George Eliot stood for—Realism. For Wilde, artifice—lying—raised art above mere Realism, which he despised.
3. Wilde comes close here to the philosophical theory that was later called phenomenology: It is through the forms of art that we understand the formlessness of the natural world into which we have been plunged.
4. It is our perception of the world that is conditioned by art—not the world itself—but without art, we cannot make sense of the world.

D. Wilde had the best scholarly credentials of almost any great writer since Milton, yet no one wore learning more lightly than Oscar or wore his poet’s garb with more panache.

1. He threw himself into the London literary world and was a prominent figure in Paris and America. Above all, he threw himself into the world of publicity, gossip sheets, newspapers, and photography. All these enhanced the Wildean image.
2. The green carnations in the buttonhole, the elaborate dress, the flowing hair, the cosmetics—all were justified as a cult of Hellenism, which Wilde had studied. He was the embodiment of what was called “gilded youth.”
3. Women have an ambiguous role in Wilde’s world, although in his outrageous and much-banned play *Salomé*, Wilde depicted the Bible’s most notorious femme fatale and was quite interested in the seductive aspects of femininity.

E. One of Wilde’s most extravagant and meaningful epigrams is: “I would number Jesus Christ among the poets.” Everything must be translated into art.

F. The outrageousness of the 1890s is reflected in the opening of *Dorian Gray*, probably the best part of that rather mechanical narrative.

1. As in “The Decay of Lying,” three fashionable young men, one of whom is the golden youth, Dorian, are in an artist’s studio. Wilde’s description of the studio bombards the reader with wonderful scents and sounds and visions. It is clearly fantastical, artificial, but the artificiality is the reason for what Wilde is doing.
2. As Wilde continues the opening scene, he gives us little pictures, clues, and leitmotifs, but there is no drive to the narrative.
3. The gay subtext of *Dorian Gray* remains of interest to us today.

IV. The years after *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) were the high point of Wilde’s career, when he wrote drama, a form that allowed him to incorporate his wit.

A. We know that Wilde was one of the great conversationalists of English literature. His witticisms were tossed out in conversation or lectures or, on one disastrous occasion, in the courtroom where he was on trial for “offenses against public decency.”

1. Wilde once said, “The English have really everything in common with the Americans, except, of course, language.”
2. On the face of it, this statement is nonsensical, but if we examine it, we find it contains a grain of truth.

B. Wilde’s masterpiece is his late play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It is a delicious satire on Victorian seriousness, moral orthodoxy, and earnestness. Almost every page contains dazzling verbal exchanges, and it has a wonderfully farcical plot.

C. Perhaps the funniest moment in the play is the clash between Lady Bracknell, who represents high Victorianism, and Jack, the hero of the play who wishes to marry Lady Bracknell’s ward. Played well, the fast-paced dialogue elicits uproarious laughter from an audience.

V. The last phase of Wilde’s life is well known, coinciding with the triumph of *The Importance of Being Earnest* in the West End theaters at the time. Overnight, he became a figure of disgrace.

A. Wilde was accused by the father of his young lover, Lord Arthur Douglas, of being a sodomite. Wilde filed a slander suit, which he lost, and was then prosecuted for “offenses against public decency.” He was found guilty and imprisoned with hard labor for two years.

B. On his release, he took refuge in France, without his wife and children. He died, as he jested, beyond his means, in 1900, the final year of the Victorian era.

C. One of Wilde’s innumerable witticisms was: “To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.” Another was: “One can survive anything nowadays except death.” Death and persecution have enshrined the memory of Wilde and made him a great celebrity. He was also a great writer, but Wilde himself might have seen that as one of the less important of his lifetime achievements.

Suggested Readings:

Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*.

Raby, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*.

Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the characteristic quality of Wildean “wit”?
2. Is Wilde a Victorian, or an anti-Victorian writer?

Lecture Forty-Two Shaw and *Pygmalion*

Scope: In this lecture and the next one, we’ll look at writers who illustrate the strong Irish voice to be heard in English literature. George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin just after the great famine that killed half of Ireland’s population. He moved to London in his 20s to make his fortune, but he disparaged the English, and a vein of Anglophobia runs throughout his work. Shaw became radically antiestablishment, espousing socialism,

feminism, and evolution in his work, yet he was revered by the British and wildly successful almost from the moment that his plays began to appear on stage. In this lecture, we'll look at *Pygmalion*, Shaw's statement about language and the class system in English society. The play does not end on the same happy note as its popular musical adaptation, *My Fair Lady*. Although Eliza marries an upper-class gentleman, Shaw leaves open the possibility that the injustice of the class system cannot be eradicated with simple solutions.

Outline

I. The Irish voice is very strong in English literature. Ireland has spawned literary giants from Swift to Wilde to the subject of this lecture, George Bernard Shaw.

A. The Irish contribution is dependent on the complicated relationship between the two nations—rebellious on one side and, at times, brutally repressive on the other.

B. Until the 1920s, Ireland was an English colonial possession, and the segment of Northern Ireland called Ulster is still tied to the United Kingdom. The borderland between north and south Ireland and between Ireland and England has been important to a number of writers, including the poet Seamus Heaney.

C. Nonetheless, the cultural roots from which literature in Ireland springs are not English; Irish literature has a different character or personality.

D. This lecture and the next will deal specifically with the Irish connection, beginning with the great playwright George Bernard Shaw.

1. Shaw used the London theater as a bully pulpit for himself as both an Irish and a British writer, and he used the comedy of manners as a vehicle for what may more properly be called the drama of ideas. In Shaw's case, these ideas included Marxism, evolution, feminism, even vegetarianism.

2. Shaw was radically antiestablishment on every front, a characteristic that ties in easily to the protest element in the Irish literary heritage.

3. The ideas popularized in his plays stemmed from Ibsen, Wagner, Nietzsche, and Marx. The English public, which is by nature resistant to foreign ideas, responded by installing him as an institution.

4. As an amused Shaw complained, the English came to revere him as much as they revered their bishops, and they paid his sermons—his plays—as little attention as they paid those of their bishops.

II. George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was born in Dublin, the capital of Ireland, in the aftermath of the famine of the late 1840s, a catastrophe during which Ireland lost half its population.

A. Shaw called his homeland “John Bull's Other Island.” John Bull, the mythical representation of the worst aspects of England, had never looked after its other island and had never more shamefully neglected it than in the period just before Shaw was born. A vein of Anglophobia would run throughout Shaw's drama.

B. Shaw was educated in Dublin as a modestly privileged child of the Protestant ascendancy. His family life was unhappy, and his parents separated when he was 16; families and family relationships would mean nothing to him thereafter.

1. Shaw came to see marriage as nothing more than licensed prostitution: Every marriage was a marriage of convenience, a view illustrated in his play *Getting Married*.

2. In another of Shaw's plays, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, rather than buy into the marriage scam, the resourceful heroine becomes an enlightened brothel keeper.

C. School was not much to Shaw's taste. He often said that schools were “prisons” in which children were kept to prevent them from “disturbing” their parents. He moved to London in his early 20s to make his fortune in the world of literature and the theater.

D. In London, Shaw educated himself in the British Museum Library and wrote mediocre novels. He also became a Fabian socialist; Socialism was one of the radical doctrines of the time, taking shape as what we now know as the Labour Party.

E. Shaw wrote brilliant criticism of music and drama and, eventually, turned his hand from drama criticism to plays. Almost from his debut on the London stage, he was highly successful and became wealthy. He remains

the only person to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize (1925) for his contribution to literature and an Oscar (1938) for the film version of *Pygmalion*.

F. Shaw's first play, produced in 1892, was *Widowers' Houses*. It is a satire tracing the corrupt capitalist income—in this case, rents from slum properties—that allows the liberal middle classes to pursue their comfortable lifestyle in good conscience. Respectable English society, Shaw demonstrates in the play, is founded on exploitation of those classes it chooses to call unrespectable.

G. Shaw's early plays, like those of his fellow Irishman Oscar Wilde, tend to be playful. *Arms and the Man*, for example, explodes Carlylean notions of heroism, and *The Devil's Disciple* turns upside down conventional myths about the American Revolution.

H. Shaw would write for production more than 60 plays, but as his career progressed, his themes became larger. In *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898), he turned his satirical eye to that most sacred of British cows, empire. In *Man and Superman* (1903), the subject was heaven and hell. Shaw was adversarial in every aspect of his life.

I. His most ambitious venture was *Back to Methuselah: A Metabiological Pentateuch*, based on the five basic books of the Bible. Here, he takes on Genesis, expounding at length his eccentric views on evolution. Man, Shaw believed, would not realize his potential until he transcended sex and achieved a lifespan of a century.

III. Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (1912) is much imitated and adapted; its best known knockoff is the musical *My Fair Lady*, which probably would have amused and pleased its author.

A. It was Shaw who spoke the famous witticism (and typically Shavian paradox): "England and America are two countries separated by a common language." In *Pygmalion*, Shaw sees English society itself as divided by a common language. The play is about class, speech, and accent and what one learns from the ways in which words are pronounced.

B. In America, accents are more related to region than class, but a reading of Hamlet's soliloquy in both an upper-class and a working-class accent demonstrates the difference in English society.

C. The title of Shaw's play comes from Ovid's poem *Metamorphoses*, meaning "change or rebirth," which is what *Pygmalion* is concerned with.

1. In Ovid, Pygmalion is a sculptor who falls in love with the statue he has made of a beautiful woman. The statue then comes to life.
2. Pygmalion generates a human being by his art. Thus, humanity achieves what is usually reserved for the gods—the creation of another human being.
3. The allegories are obvious and play into many sexual relationships in which the male forms or adapts the woman he loves. Recall, for example, Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, who makes Catherine Morland his ideal mate.

D. *Pygmalion* has a modern setting, but it was first performed in 1913, just at the moment before England would be turned upside down by World War I. When the play was written, it seemed that English society would last forever.

E. The hero of *Pygmalion* and the Pygmalion figure is Henry Higgins, a professor of phonetics. Higgins makes a playful bet with a friend, Colonel Pickering, that he can take a cockney flower seller, Eliza Doolittle, off the streets and, by teaching her to speak "proper," pass her off as a lady and introduce her into high society.

1. The play opens in Covent Garden in central London, the location of the flower market, as well as the Royal Opera House and some of the city's finest restaurants. It's a place where the classes mingle. Shaw's stage directions for the scene are detailed and sophisticated, written with the same care as a novelist might describe his setting and characters.
2. Higgins and his party are trying to get a cab in the rain. At the same time, Higgins is taking notes on the speech of a flower girl, but she believes that he is a policeman preparing to arrest her for prostitution.
3. Higgins has no sympathy for the flower girl's hysterics: "A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live ..."

4. He then makes his wager with Colonel Pickering, vowing to school the girl, Eliza, in a variety of English that will allow her to pass as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party.

F. The comic highlight of the play is an exchange between Eliza, who is now entirely gentrified by virtue of the voice training she has received, and Freddy, the man she will eventually marry. With the words "Not bloody likely," Eliza lapses into her native cockney, causing a sensation in the theater and spawning a catchphrase that would be used in England for decades.

G. Unlike the musical *My Fair Lady*, the ending of Shaw's play is not conventionally happy. Eliza is by no means grateful to her "maker"; she rebels violently, and Higgins strikes her.

1. Her response, dictated by Shaw's instructions, is "defiantly non-resistant." But she threatens to expose the experiment Higgins has conducted with her.

2. At this crucial moment, Higgins is at a loss for words. Finally, however, he accepts the fact of her independence from him.

3. For this brief moment, *Pygmalion* teeters on the edge of Ibsenite tragedy, but the comedy prevails, if with a slightly bitter aftertaste.

H. Eliza goes on to an upper-class marriage with Freddy Eynsford-Hill, a weak gentleman whose fortune she will make, but her life, it is forecast, will not be smooth. Shaw leaves open the possibility that voice training alone will never resolve the inequities and injustice of the English class system, based as it is on dynastic wealth, privilege, and entrenched power.

Suggested Readings:

Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: The One-Volume Definitive Edition*.

Innes, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*.

Shaw, *Pygmalion*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What serious points about English society does Shaw's comedy make?
2. Shaw liked to see himself as the equal of Shakespeare. Does he belong in that company?

Lecture Forty-Three

Joyce and Yeats—Giants of Irish Literature

Scope: James Joyce and W. B. Yeats, two giants of Irish literature, rejected Victorianism and pioneered new forms and themes for the writers who followed them. Joyce was born a Catholic in Dublin to a family in declining circumstances; his religion would play an important role in his literary creations. For most of his life, Joyce lived in self-imposed exile from Ireland, yet his works, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Dubliners*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*, are all deeply concerned with the country of his birth. Joyce's masterpiece, *Ulysses*, is a complex and influential achievement. It is a mock Homeric epic that follows the middle-aged, insignificant Leopold Bloom through the course of a single day in Dublin. Ultimately, with its dazzling array of styles and innovative techniques, the novel seems to be "about" the project of writing a novel itself. Unlike Joyce, Yeats was not an exile, and over the course of his life, became a political poet, meditating on the tragic history of Ireland in his work. The Easter Uprising of 1916 in Ireland inspired Yeats's poem "Easter, 1916" and served as the springboard for his engagement with the world of events. Thereafter, he sought to forge a meaningful relationship between Modernist poetry and reality.

Outline

I. In this lecture, we turn to two other giants of Irish literature, James Joyce and W. B. Yeats.

A. The poet W. H. Auden said of Yeats that he was less an influence on the writers who followed him than their "climate." Yeats rewrote the rules of the literary game, as did his contemporary James Joyce, even more drastically.

B. These two writers wrenched literature into new forms. Modernism would have been impossible without Joyce and Yeats.

1. Just as the Romantic Movement violently repudiated Augustanism, so Modernism repudiated Victorianism.
2. Historically, both Yeats and Joyce were born Victorians, but they left a post-Victorian—even anti-Victorian—literary legacy.

II. James Joyce (1882–1941) was born a Roman Catholic in Dublin. His religion was as important in his literary creations as was Yeats’s Irish Protestantism.

A. At the time of his birth, the Joyce family lived in “shabby genteel” circumstances; during James’s boyhood and young manhood, those circumstances eventually became downright destitute. Joyce gives a vivid picture of his early life in his autobiographical novel, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).

1. At the opening of the novel, the artist, Stephen Dedalus, is only three years old. Joyce broke new ground by writing the opening through the eyes of a very young child. The age of the child comes through in both the vocabulary—“moocow”—and the perspective.
2. Young James Joyce was nervous, chronically shortsighted, fascinated by theology, and baffled by the world around him. That bafflement, too, emerges in these opening paragraphs.

B. Joyce was educated by the Jesuits at a boarding school called Clongowes, an experience he re-creates in *Portrait*. Nonetheless, Joyce declined to accept the doctrines of Catholicism, although they were so deeply embedded in his being that he never quite expelled them.

C. The young Joyce left Clongowes when his father could no longer pay the fees. He went on to University College Dublin in 1898, where he studied modern languages.

D. During the next six years, Joyce became a Dubliner, accumulating the raw material for his later fiction. He met and married Nora Barnacle, a chambermaid with whom he was passionately in love. He also met the original of Leopold Bloom, the middle-aged, Jewish, cuckold hero of *Ulysses* who becomes a father figure to Stephen Dedalus, a character carried over from *Portrait of the Artist*.

E. In 1904, Joyce and Nora exiled themselves from Ireland effectively for the rest of their lives. From this point on, Joyce would be an Irish author writing about Ireland outside of Ireland.

1. After a stay in Switzerland, the pair went to the strangely anomalous state Trieste, which is neither Austrian nor Italian. This would be Joyce’s home and literary base for a decade.
2. Trieste’s characterless-ness suited Joyce. It was an outpost from which he could write, engaged but detached, about Ireland.

F. Joyce returned briefly to Dublin in the summer of 1909 to visit his father and to work on getting *Dubliners*, his first collection of short stories, into print. Realistic in mode, *Dubliners* offers snapshots of the city. The most powerful among them is the last, called “The Dead.”

1. The hero of this story, Gabriel Conroy, is a newspaperman and a West Briton, that is, an Irishman who has “sold out” to England.
2. After a Christmas party, Gabriel experiences what Joyce called an “epiphany” or awakening, realizing for the first time that his wife may have once loved another man more than she loved him.
3. At the end of the story, Gabriel falls asleep, thinking of life; love; marriage; Ireland; that first man whom his wife loved, who is now dead; and all the other dead. He fears that he, too, may be in some sense dead and must come back to life. As he drifts into sleep, snow falls over Ireland, blurring everything.
4. This conclusion looks forward to the ending of *Ulysses*, in which Molly Bloom, the unfaithful wife of Leopold, drifts off to sleep, erotically recalling her first sexual experience when she was a girl in Gibraltar. Molly’s section of the novel is called “Penelope,” after the faithful wife of Ulysses. Its stream-of-consciousness form encompasses only a few sentences that go on for pages.

G. When *Dubliners* was published, after difficulties, in 1914, it shocked the establishment and Joyce’s fellow writers.

1. E. M. Forster, a Bloomsbury writer, complained that Joyce covered everything with mud.
2. The collection is not technically Modernistic, but it transgressed the normal conventions, not least in its

daring subject matter and its attack on the city of Dublin.

H. In 1915, with war over mainland Europe, Joyce moved to Switzerland again, where he met his great patron, the rich heiress who supported him for the next 25 years, Harriet Shaw Weaver.

I. After the war ended, Joyce moved to Paris, where his major works would be published, free from the censorship.

J. After the publication of *Ulysses* in 1922 and for the remainder of his writing career, Joyce worked on his most demanding book, *Finnegans Wake*. This difficult “novel” represents the outermost boundary of the Modernistic project.

III. Joyce’s *Ulysses* remains a vastly influential achievement; what makes it so?

A. *Ulysses* is a circadian narrative, meaning that its action is circumscribed within 24 hours. As the mock-epic title indicates, the novel plays with an intricate pattern of allusion and ironic evocation of Homer.

B. The center of consciousness in *Ulysses* is mainly that of Leopold Bloom, an insignificant Jewish clerk in Dublin. From time to time, the center shifts to Stephen Dedalus, a thinly disguised younger version of Joyce, and Leopold’s wife, Molly, who is currently having an affair.

C. The action moves from lavatory, to street, to home, to brothel, to pub, and finally, after the father/son (Ulysses/Telemachus) bonding between Leopold and Stephen, to sleep.

D. *Ulysses* moves dazzlingly among a range of styles, all innovative and some so experimental that most readers need assistance in making their way through the novel. The opening paragraphs of the scene in which Stephen first wakes up stand as an example.

1. Joyce gives few clues about the setting. Ultimately, readers determine that the scene introduces three students, Mulligan, Dedalus, and Kinch, living in Martello Tower, an abandoned structure built by the English during the Napoleonic Wars.

2. As the students get ready for the day, Mulligan performs a mock communion service. Such blasphemous scenes were among the reasons that *Ulysses* would be banned everywhere in the English-speaking world, longest of all in Ireland.

E. The main project in *Ulysses* and in all of Joyce’s work is the exploration of technique: How does one write a novel?

1. Like other Modernists, Joyce does not merely love technique, but he makes love to technique.

2. After reading *Ulysses*, all other literature seems somehow different. As Auden said, this novel makes a new climate for others to write in.

IV. Unlike Joyce, William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) was not an exile. At his death, he was a senator and a winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, and his roots were sunk deep into Ireland.

A. Yeats was born in Dublin to a Protestant family of distinguished lineage and a high level of cultivation. Later in life, Yeats, like others of his class, would become a man of divided loyalty—devoted to both the union with England and his native Ireland.

B. Yeats’s childhood and young manhood were passed in London and Dublin. He knew from the start that he was to be a poet.

1. His early poetry was post-Romantic in character, with Shelley as a strong influence. The early poetry was also strongly influenced by the pre-Raphaelites and the Decadents.

2. Yeats’s poetry at this stage had a tinge of what is called “Celtic twilight,” a dreamlike quality, a sense of the narcotic. The Ireland this early poetry celebrates is mystical, prehistoric, and elemental, anything but political.

3. One of Yeats’s most famous lyrics, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” serves as an example of his early work. The poem, inspired by Thoreau’s *Walden*, seems to waver between engagement and disengagement. Is the poet trying to go somewhere, or is he trying to get away from everywhere?

4. The sound of this early poetry is velvety soft, but Yeats’s style would ultimately move in the

completely opposite direction, to a knife-edge hardness.

C. A primary influence on Yeats's change of style and subject matter was the American poet Ezra Pound. Another influence was sex. For most of his early manhood, Yeats was in love with a beautiful woman, an heiress and a nationalist, Maud Gonne. The love was passionate on his side and wholly unrequited from her side.

1. Until he was in his 50s, Yeats was largely celibate. He subsequently married, but not to Maud Gonne. He was 51 when his proposal was accepted by the 24-year-old Georgie Hyde-Lees.
2. Pound came into Yeats's life as a mentor in London in 1913. Until 1916, the two men were constantly in each other's company.
3. Pound's influence drastically revised Yeats's view of Ireland, which swiveled from Romantic to anti-Romantic. This shift was aggressively proclaimed in the poem "September 1913," with its refrain: "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone, / It's with O'Leary in the grave."

D. After 1916, Yeats became a political poet, absorbing a maelstrom of national and global issues into his poetry. The times, of course, were turbulent. The nations of Europe were engaged in World War I, while Ireland experienced the Easter Uprising in Dublin in 1916.

1. While England was preoccupied with fighting the Germans in France, a band of Irish nationalists decided to mount a coup and seize independence from the mother country.
2. The symbolism of the uprising (Easter being the moment of spiritual rebirth in the Christian calendar) and the quixotic heroism of it resounds through all subsequent Irish history. As a political act, however, it was disastrous.
3. The action began on the morning of Easter Monday with a street demonstration by some 1,000 nationalists. The British garrison moved quickly and, with heavier armament and more skilled men, crushed the rebels.
4. The government in London regarded the uprising as a stab in the back. Martial law was declared in Dublin, and the leaders were tried and sentenced to death in secret. Their deaths were publicly announced only after their executions.
5. Militarily, the operation was a success for the English, but the huge number of civilian casualties, the wanton destruction of some of the most beautiful parts of the city, and the ruthlessness of the punishment did what the rebels had themselves been unable to do: The Irish independence movement was hereafter unstoppable.
6. Yeats's poetic meditation on the events, "Easter, 1916," is powerfully moving. Earlier, as an intellectual and an artist, he had himself above politics and might have even considered the rebels fools, but he now realizes they are heroes.
7. The poem was completed in September 1916, while the events were still fresh. It concludes with words that should be inscribed in every assembly of lawgivers on the face of the earth:

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
...
All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

E. From this point forward in Yeats's career, he is reengaged. He doesn't become a propagandist but a politician, what he called a "smiling public man." In poetry, he tried to position himself from the remote outpost of Modernism to a meaningful relationship with the real world.

F. Yeats went on to produce great poetry, using the events of 1916 as a springboard. His stature was certified with the award of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923.

Suggested Readings:

Attridge, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*.

Ellmann, *James Joyce*.

Foster, *The Apprentice Mage, 1865–1914*.

———, *W. B. Yeats: A Life Volume II: The Arch-Poet 1915–1939*.

Howes and Kelly, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats*.

Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

———, *Ulysses*.

Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why could Joyce not write about Ireland in Ireland?
2. What does Yeats see as the poet's role in a country emerging into full national identity?

Lecture Forty-Four Great War, Great Poetry

Scope: Paradoxically, World War I produced a flow of great poetry in England, spawned not just by the conflict between European nations but by that within England itself. Angry war poets, such as Siegfried Sassoon, attacked the established values and morals of England, which they believed had led to incompetence and decadence in the military. Wilfred Owen was another angry poet, although perhaps more sensitive and focused on suffering than Sassoon. In “Futility,” the poet contemplates a dead comrade, still lying where he has fallen, and asks whether life is worth living if death is so meaningless. Rupert Brooke showed a different sentiment in his patriotic poetry, but Brooke died in the first year of the war, before it had descended into bloody stalemate. Over the next three years, the fighting men realized that war was neither glorious nor heroic. The truth of war was closer to the image expressed by Isaac Rosenberg in “Break of Day in the Trenches”—a rat feeding on English corpses. And, as Robert Graves would tell us, only the soldiers know the truth—not the politicians or the generals—and only the poets will tell it.

Outline

I. This lecture looks at poetry during a critical moment in English history.

A. The stream of great poetry ebbs and flows. It hit high levels with Milton and the Metaphysicals; with the Augustans, including Dryden, Pope, and Johnson; and during the Romantic Revival. It dropped somewhat during the Victorian period when the novel was ascendant.

B. Total war does not usually coincide with great literature of any kind, but World War I saw the emergence—during the hostilities—of another period of superb poetry in England.

C. The question in this lecture is: How and why did this happen?

II. The Great War, as it was called, was not different merely by virtue of its scale, the unprecedented lethality of its weapons, or its vast numbers of battlefield casualties, but because it involved conflict both between and, in a sense, within great nation-states.

A. Poetry of the period articulated the idea that England was partly in conflict with itself. The enemy was not just the Kaiser but a system of obsolete and illiberal moral codes and civic values that had made up old England—jingoism, home-front warriors, incompetent generals, a decadent establishment, and profiteering.

B. Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967), the angriest of the war poets, illustrates the conflict of England versus England in “The General.” Here, two ordinary soldiers on their way to the front are greeted by a general on a fine horse. The general will return safely to the officers' quarters in the rear lines, but as the poet tells us, “Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead.” Who is the enemy in this poem?

1. Recall Tennyson's “Charge of the Light Brigade” from an earlier lecture. With a botched plan of attack, a general in that engagement caused the deaths of 300 of his men, but Tennyson does not criticize the army command or his country. Instead, he praises the bravery of those who rode into the barrels of the Russian guns.

2. Sassoon, of course, has a much different attitude. His poem was written in 1916 and published in 1918, while the subject was still white hot. Sassoon himself was a ferocious fighter, nicknamed “Mad Jack” by his comrades. There was no taint of cowardice in his conduct during the war.

III. Let’s begin with a brief outline of World War I.

A. The war began with an obscure street crime: the assassination of Emperor Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, in the Balkans, in late June 1914. The Austro-Hungarian Empire, a huge construct at the time, almost immediately fell apart.

B. A succession struggle ensued, and complex international alliances were invoked. Any number of treaties and agreements were called into play. The dominoes began to fall. By August 1914, war was inevitable.

C. Many thought the war would clear matters up quickly. Three great powers were involved: Germany, which after Bismarck’s reforms, was the mightiest military state since Rome; England, mistress of the seas and colonizer of vast tracts of the globe; and Republican France.

D. On August 3, 1914, Germany declared war on and invaded France. Britain, linked by treaty to France, sent an expeditionary force across the channel. Russia, against which Germany had also declared war, was defeated, opening the way to revolution and the establishment of a Soviet state in 1917. The whole of Europe, it seemed, was falling apart, and to the side, the Ottoman Empire was also an active player engaged in this deadly game.

E. The great age of kings, kaisers, and czars was coming to an end, but what would replace it? The answer in the short term was: stalemate.

1. The German advance was stopped short of Paris, and three and half years of bloody trench warfare ensued.

2. The stalemate was broken by the entry of America into the struggle in 1917 and the bleeding of Germany by manpower losses, a British naval blockade, and new killing technologies, notably the tank, which supplied the answer to the hitherto invincible machine-gun nest.

F. The carnage was fearful. Blood was spilled in great quantities in the trenches, in close-quarter combat. The British and French fatalities totaled some four million, magnitudes more than in World War II.

G. The Armistice, which was humiliatingly oppressive for Germany, was finally signed on November 11, 1918. The 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month is still observed with two minutes’ silence in England as a memorial to the terrible losses of those four years.

1. The greatest poet produced by the war, Wilfred Owen (1893–1918), was killed on Armistice Day. Owen was as angry as Sassoon but more sensitive and experimental in his techniques and more focused on suffering.

2. Owen, like Sassoon, was an infantry officer and was decorated for gallantry. It was the responsibility of officers to write letters of condolence to and, if possible, visit the bereaved families of men killed under their command. But how to communicate the awful truth of war?

3. In “Futility,” the poet contemplates a dead comrade, still lying in the snow where he fell. The poem, which shows the clear influence of Keats, has an emotional warmth that borders on the erotic. We sense anger certainly, but also a kind of defeated love.

4. Technically, Owen is a much better poet than Sassoon, and his anger is less blazingly hot. “Futility” is a subtly nonconformist sonnet, with uneven lines and half-rhymes. Invoked throughout are the words from Ecclesiastes, “ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” and the poet’s anguished retort: “Was it for this the clay grew tall?”

5. Was life worth living if this is what dying is? The poem forces us to confront significant questions but gives us no answers.

IV. Not surprisingly, war poetry did not begin on this supremely angry, disillusioned note.

A. Kipling-like patriotism and fine sentiment was the poetic mood of 1914, as the nations marched to war. The

principal exponent of that early phase is Rupert Brooke (1887–1915).

1. Brooke was a very handsome young man and gay. He had close connections with the Bloomsbury group and was a poet of genius, but compared to Owen, his was a conformist genius. Brooke was the laureate of the innocent pride in country and flag that propelled Britain, unaware of the consequences, into war.

2. He volunteered for service, although he was slightly overage, and died in the first year of the war. He never lived to see the disillusioning stalemate mentioned earlier, dying from an infected mosquito bite. This inglorious demise has its own irony.

B. Brooke's reputation as a war poet rests on five War Sonnets. The use of the antique sonnet form is another of his conformities.

1. The fourth of these sonnets, "The Soldier," is wonderfully sonorous and familiar to most readers.
2. Its sentiment, that dying for one's country is beautiful, was later contradicted by Owen's poem "Dulce et Decorum Est."

C. Brooke's poem highlights a distinct difference in American and British thinking about war.

1. In Britain, master of an empire over which "the sun never set," dying abroad for king and country was honorable. It staked a British claim on the planet, as did the planting of the Union Jack on Everest by Sir Edmund Hillary in 1953.

2. America, by contrast, leaves no man behind and will go to almost any length to bring its fallen heroes home. The notion of a corner of a foreign field being forever American is wholly alien to that country's thinking about its war dead.

D. Brooke's poems, together with the fact of his death, were immediately recruited as pro-war propaganda by the British government.

1. On Easter Sunday 1915, Dean Inge, the most celebrated churchman in England, read "The Soldier" from the pulpit of Saint Paul's, the highest pulpit in the Anglican Church.
2. Winston Churchill, then first Lord of the Admiralty, wrote Brooke's obituary in the *London Times*.
3. To this day, innumerable war memorials across England quote Brooke's notion of living forever in death.

V. The romantic sentiments of Brooke's anthem to British patriotism clashed bloodily with the facts of war over the next three years. War was not glorious or heroic; it was, most fighting men believed, pointless.

A. The general anger and disillusionment of war were given their sharpest and, paradoxically, most beautiful expression by the soldier poets. Perhaps the most exquisite poem from World War I was written by Isaac Rosenberg (1890–1918).

B. Rosenberg was Jewish and from the working class. His family had recently emigrated from Russia, fleeing the czar's pogroms, and lived in London's East End, then a Jewish ghetto. Isaac left school at 14 to become an apprentice engraver. He displayed precocious artistic and literary talent from childhood on.

C. Young Isaac was also chronically ill with lung problems and physically small. Despite these handicaps, he volunteered for the military, was accepted, and went to the front in 1915. He was killed in hand-to-hand combat in April 1918, as the war was drawing to its close.

D. His most well known poem, "Break of Day in the Trenches," is called an *aubade*, a "dawn poem." Hailing the new day is traditionally a joyous act but not for the soldier in 1917. By military regulation, soldiers stand to at dawn because this moment of the day is most favored for attacks.

1. Rosenberg's bitter aubade begins with an image of a rat feeding on English corpses and moving freely between the English and the German trenches.
2. The poem contains anger, bitterness, irony, and, above all, accuracy. Rosenberg had an artist's eye for detail and composition.

VI. English literature bore a lasting wound from the hostilities of 1914–1918.

A. Not all the poets died. Sassoon lived on, although he wrote no more memorable poetry after 1918. Robert Graves (1895–1985), a friend and comrade of Sassoon’s, also survived and wrote the best prose memoir of the conflict, *Good-bye to All That*. The experience of the war is also indelibly present in Graves’s poetry, including his seriocomic lyric “The Persian Version.”

B. When it comes to war, Graves tells us, the enemies at home—the establishment and the generals—will always tell lies. The truth cannot be found in the words of politicians, historians, the press, or the universities. Only soldiers know the truth, and only poets will tell it.

Suggested Readings:

Akers, *Beating for Light: The Story of Isaac Rosenberg*.

Egremont, *Siegfried Sassoon: A Life*.

Hibberd, ed., *Poetry of the First World War*.

———, *Wilfred Owen*.

Jones, *Rupert Brooke*.

Walter, ed., *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why did World War I, unlike most other wars, produce so much good poetry?
2. Which poet, among those examined in the lecture, creates the greatest war poetry?

Lecture Forty-Five Bloomsbury and the Bloomsberries

Scope: The Bloomsbury group came together during the period of World War I; its members were a civilized set of writers, thinkers, artists, and political theorists who played a major role in the reshaping of English society, culture, and literature in the aftermath of the war. From a literary standpoint, the two leading figures to emerge from the group were Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster. Woolf suffered from mental illness from an early age, but her marriage to Leonard Woolf brought her a degree of freedom in her personal life and her writing. She is perhaps most well known for her use of the stream-of-consciousness technique, which attempts to capture the ephemerality of experience in narrative form. This innovative style can be seen in Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. The project of E. M. Forster, the other great literary figure to emerge from the Bloomsbury group, was summed up in the epigraph to his novel *Howards End*: “Only connect.” His work criticized the mentality of empire and sought to penetrate English life with European culture and civilization. For modern readers, the word “only” seems ironic; we are still waiting for that connection.

Outline

I. As we’ve seen earlier in the course, groups are important in English literature. In this lecture, we’ll look at the Bloomsbury group, whose members are known as Bloomsberries.

A. The Bloomsberries were a set of writers, thinkers, artists, and political theorists who had a significant impact on 20th-century English literature.

B. The key text for the Bloomsbury group was the satirical treatise *Eminent Victorians*, written by the group’s founding member, Lytton Strachey. Strachey wrote his book in 1918, at the end of World War I, and published it shortly after.

C. Another founding member of the Bloomsbury group, Virginia Woolf, declared, not entirely seriously, that human nature had changed “in 1910, on or about December 10.” That, she thought, was the day that Victorianism died and a new order arose.

D. Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* is anything but a tribute to the generation that preceded the Bloomsberries.

1. The book focuses on four leading figures of the Victorian period: Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Thomas Arnold, and General Gordon. These figures represented, not eminence to the sardonic Strachey, but hypocrisy, false values, pomposity, sexual timidity, bourgeois prejudice, and

philistinism.

2. Against that, the Bloomsberries asserted what we might call intellectual liberalism, a doctrine derived from John Stuart Mill via the Cambridge ethical philosopher G. E. Moore.

3. The Bloomsbury code of liberalism was given shorthand expression in the novelist E. M. Forster's belief that it is more honorable to betray one's country than to betray one's friends.

4. The Bloomsberries came together during World War I but were obviously not imbued with patriotic sentiments. Both Strachey and Virginia Woolf expressed their disdain for the war.

II. What would become the Bloomsbury group began at Cambridge University with, among others, two sisters of Virginia Woolf (née Stephen)?

A. The group also included the philosophers Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore. Loosely attached to the group was the economist John Maynard Keynes, who would become well known during the 1930s.

B. The group took its name from the Stephens' house, originally owned by Leslie Stephen, Virginia's father, in the Bloomsbury quarter of central London. Along with a few other figures, such as the artist-critic Roger Fry, an arch-advocate of Postimpressionism, the members formed a salon that met in homes in Bloomsbury.

C. As Fry's great Postimpressionist exhibition of 1910 indicated, the Bloomsberries clearly looked toward Paris; the reason that human nature changed for Virginia Woolf in 1910 was related to that exhibition. The hearts of the Bloomsberries were inscribed with one sentiment: "We are not Victorians."

D. The Bloomsbury district is home to London's finest architecture, museums, and theaters, and the writers, artists, and thinkers meeting there remained a cultural force for more than 20 years.

1. They inspired artistic colonies in the provinces and acted as a force for the liberalization of divorce law and legislation affecting homosexuality and moral censorship.

2. The main impact of the Bloomsbury group was seen in the 1920s, as England rewrote its social, cultural, and literary rules in the aftermath of World War I.

3. The two leading literary figures to emerge from the group were the novelists E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf.

III. Virginia Woolf (1882–1941; married to the journalist and economist Leonard Woolf) was born Virginia Stephen and brought up in Bloomsbury in a domestic atmosphere of high culture.

A. Virginia wrote from an early age and demonstrated remarkable precocity. Her mind was troubled and refused to follow conventional channels. She had her first nervous breakdown at age 13; such breakdowns would recur through her life, finally fatally.

B. Virginia made a marriage of convenience with Leonard Woolf at age 30. Her passion, however, was reserved for her lesbian relationship with Vita Sackville-West.

1. Paradoxically, marriage brought independence to Virginia. "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction," she believed, and marriage secured for her those two necessities.

2. The Woolfs set up the elite Hogarth Press publishing house in 1917, which brought freedom to Virginia. She could write as she pleased, not at the dictates of publishers or even readers.

C. Woolf began publishing full-length novels, alongside a mass of critical reviewing, with *The Voyage Out* in 1915. Thereafter, novels came at regular intervals, subtly imbued with Woolf's feminist convictions. She was also an experimental writer; the technique with which her writing is inextricably associated has been labeled "stream of consciousness."

1. The stream-of-consciousness technique tries to capture the ephemerality of experience as it is experienced. It's a literary version of Impressionism or Postimpressionism.

2. "Life," declared Woolf, "is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." Capturing that "halo" was her major endeavor in fiction.

IV. Woolf's innovative narrative style can be seen in what is perhaps her greatest novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925).

A. The story takes place in a single day in the life of the middle-aged wife of a Conservative member of Parliament, Clarissa Dalloway, as she makes preparations for a party. Although Woolf projects herself into this other woman, Clarissa is decidedly not Woolf.

B. The novel begins as Clarissa decides to walk across central London to buy the flowers for the party herself. Her mind reverts, almost unconsciously, to a man she loved much earlier in her life and almost married, Peter Walsh, who will appear later in the story.

1. Note in the excerpt how the narrative line jumps here and there, following the moves of a mind in motion. The fact that the day is fresh and beautiful leads Clarissa to thoughts of the beach, where she had her relationship with Peter Walsh.

2. The opening of the novel illustrates its reason for being written, which is, quite simply, the way in which it is narrated. It is otherwise quotidian and undramatic.

3. Nothing much happens in *Mrs. Dalloway*, but how it happens or doesn't happen is all important and, in terms of the evolution of the English novel, revolutionary. With Woolf, the stream-of-consciousness technique became embedded in literature.

C. “How queer,” Woolf once said, “to have so many selves.” Another seemingly un-Woolfian character in *Mrs. Dalloway* is Septimus Warren Smith, a shell-shocked survivor of World War I. Like Woolf, however, Smith eventually kills himself. The author drowned herself in a river in Sussex during the darkest hours of World War II.

V. Edward Morgan Forster (1879–1970), the other great novelist to emerge from Bloomsbury, was born and raised in an upper-middle class, liberal environment. His father was an architect and his mother had a strong influence on his emerging character.

A. Forster's intellectual character was formed at Cambridge, as was his connection with Bloomsbury. He recalls his Cambridge experiences in the opening chapters of *The Longest Journey*.

B. Forster was gay and knew it early in life. His initial difficulties with his sexuality are recalled in his posthumous novel, *Maurice*. Forster kept his private life, however, strictly private, to avoid the fate of Oscar Wilde. Most of his readers were unaware of his sexual orientation.

C. Forster traveled widely in the early years of the 20th century with his mother. He was acutely alive to European culture and civilization and the failure of those values to penetrate the coarser fibers of English life. This idea found expression in one of the finest of his novels, *Howards End*. The famous epigraph to this work is “Only connect.”

1. The novel tells the story of two sisters, Helen and Margaret Schlegel, rich, highly cultured, and philanthropic. They take on a self-improving clerk, Leonard Bast, but their culture and his lack of culture stand in the way of any connection.

2. Even less beneficial is the Schlegels' attempt to connect with the world of “telegrams and anger”—that is, the business world, represented by the Wilcox family in the novel.

3. Mrs. Wilcox, a strangely mystical mother figure, actually leaves the family home, Howards End, to Margaret Schlegel. But the Wilcox family suppresses the will; their actions are unethical but legal.

4. Finally, after much suffering, including the murder of Leonard Bast at the hands of Charles Wilcox, the connection proclaimed in the epigraph is achieved. Margaret marries the widower Mr. Wilcox, and Helen bears the dead Bast's illegitimate child.

5. The novel ends at the country house Howards End with Margaret as the new Mrs. Wilcox. Prose and poetry, culture and commerce, England and Germany are finally connected.

6. As we know, the connections didn't last. A war that would split the world of the Germanic Schlegels and the Anglo-Saxon Wilcoxes was only four years away when the novel was published in 1910.

D. Forster visited India for long and life-changing periods before and after the war. The vision of personal fulfillment that he glimpsed there inspired him to write his last great novel, *A Passage to India* (1924).

1. *A Passage to India* is a radically anticolonial work, set in a period 25 years before India's independence in 1947. It's important to keep these dates in mind to appreciate the potency of Forster's criticism of the

British Empire and the mentality of empire.

2. The story is dramatic: A young girl, Adela, comes to India to marry her fiancé, a colonial administrator. She befriends a handsome young Muslim doctor, Aziz, who invites her on a picnic and a visit to Malabar Caves, a place of deep religious symbolism.

3. In the caves, Adela may or may not be sexually assaulted; we never really know. Nonetheless, a trial is held, in which the English are determined to punish Aziz to the full, brutal extent of the law.

4. Aziz is defended by a dissident Englishman, Fielding, who knows that the doctor is innocent. Fielding, we deduce, loves Aziz; perhaps a sexual relationship exists between them. Aziz is eventually cleared, but the friction between the colonized and the colonizers boils up, riotously.

5. Years later, Fielding returns and meets Aziz again. Both have married, not entirely happily. Aziz is still bitter and believes that no connection is possible between the Indians and the English.

6. The novel ends with Fielding embracing Aziz and asking why they can't be friends. The answer seems to be that nature itself is against the relationship.

7. This ending is a version of the Hindu definition of God: not here, not here, not here, but everywhere. It's also a poignant and unforgettable image of what Forster was grappling with, at the highest artistic level, throughout his career—to connect.

8. England, however, must disconnect as a colonial power before any personal connection can take place. Ironically, we are still waiting for the connection to occur.

Suggested Readings:

Bradshaw, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster*.

Forster, *Howards End*.

Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life*.

Lee, *Virginia Woolf*.

Prose, ed., *The Mrs. Dalloway Reader*.

Roe and Sellers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*.

Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What, on the basis of the texts discussed in the lecture, is the political philosophy of the Bloomsbury group?
2. What innovations do Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster bring to the practice of fiction?

Lecture Forty-Six

20th-Century English Poetry—Two Traditions

Scope: This lecture looks at two broad streams in English poetry of the 20th century: what we might call the traditional, with Thomas Hardy at its headwaters, and Modernist, steered by T. S. Eliot. Hardy's poetry is marked by a simplicity that can be traced back to Wordsworth, and although he experimented somewhat, he retained the old disciplines of rhyme and meter. His short, often ironic verses created a norm that was followed in English literature by W. H. Auden, Philip Larkin, and Seamus Heaney. The other dominant voice in 20th-century English poetry is that of T. S. Eliot, whose poetry, in contrast to Hardy's, was written in free verse and embraced complexity rather than simplicity. Eliot wrote his grand statement on modern culture, *The Waste Land*, while in a state of personal breakdown, but there is nothing personal in the poem: Eliot believed fervently that the man who suffers must be strenuously separated from the poet who creates.

Outline

I. English poetry has boomed in the 20th century, but it is no longer possible for poets to live by the pen.

A. The greatest poet of the century, T. S. Eliot, was obliged to support himself as a bank clerk while writing his masterwork, *The Waste Land*. Perhaps the second greatest poet of the century, Philip Larkin, was a university librarian. Despite this bleak economic outlook, vast amounts of poetry have been produced in the 20th century.

B. To map out the mass of 20th-century poetry, we can identify two broad streams of the period: traditional, associated with Thomas Hardy, and Modernist, associated with T. S. Eliot.

II. As we saw in the earlier lecture on Hardy, his novel-writing ended in the mid-1890s, after which he devoted himself almost exclusively to poetry.

A. The separate burial of his heart and his body after death tells us much about the reverence in which Hardy was held by the English. His body was cremated and interred in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

B. Hardy's poetry can be summed up by the familiar motto "keep it simple." His technique can be traced back to the *Lyrical Ballads* of Coleridge and Wordsworth, recalling, for example, the sublime simplicity of Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems.

1. The Modernists opted for free verse, but Hardy retained the old disciplines of rhyme and meter, although he experimented with them. He was, to some extent, an innovator but within fairly rigid confines, metrically and episodically.

2. Like Wordsworth, Hardy was also influenced by folk songs, ballads and even, in Hardy's case, music hall songs. Latched onto these influences was the self-educated man's reverence for polysyllabic words.

C. We might guess that Hardy's favorite poets were Sir Walter Scott and Homer. Disastrously, he even attempted a Homeric epic, *The Dynasts*, focused on the hero figure of Napoleon. Prominent on Hardy's bookshelf was Darwin's *Origin of Species*, which he read as a tragic contradiction of religion. The point is that Hardy had big ideas, but he was at his best when he put them in tiny, beautiful containers.

1. In the earlier lecture on Hardy, we touched on "The Imprecipient," a poem in which he pictures himself, poignantly, as standing outside a church, entranced by the beauty of the structure, by the music within, and to some extent, by the faith of those who believe. Hardy himself felt excluded from belief.

2. Lyrical simplicity and a kind of stoical pessimism—these are the active ingredients in Hardy's verse.

D. One of Hardy's most characteristic poems is "The Convergence of the Twain." The title alone points to Hardy with the combination of the polysyllabic word *convergence* and the dialect word *twain*.

1. On April 15, 1912, the *Titanic*, the pride of Britain's merchant marine, struck an iceberg and sank, with significant loss of life.

2. Hardy saw this event as both tragic and emblematic of human pride and its inevitable fall. It demonstrated to Hardy the truth of his vision of life—the Darwinistic truth, a sense that the "Immanent Will" was hostile to man, and the idea that one should confront that fact bravely, which is what the poem does.

3. The poem lingers on the image of the fatal iceberg, growing to its full size, at the same time as the great liner is being built in the British shipyard. Pride and its fall are simultaneously conceived by fate, the "Immanent Will."

4. As the poem continues, the ship lies at the bottom of the seabed, a luxurious graveyard and a symbol of what Johnson earlier called *The Vanity of Human Wishes*.

5. Note that Hardy uses the difficult verse form triplets, three-line stanzas of variable length with the same rhyme word.

III. Hardy's example created a norm, namely, that the principal verse form in English poetry was the short lyric, complete on a single printed page, and often ironic in tone. That influence can be traced in the work of one of the other giants of 20th-century English poetry, W. H. Auden (1907–1973).

A. In his late 30s, Auden became an American citizen, but the earlier English Auden was a confessed disciple of Hardy, with an admixture of his own original styles, derived in part from Freud and from the alternative Modernist tradition.

B. Thanks to the popular British film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, Auden has most recently been renowned for his elegy "Funeral Blues."

1. In the first stanza, note the architecture of Auden's verse and recall Hardy's obsession with form.

2. The insistent rhyme and symmetry seem to control the energy of the verse and the novelty of Auden's

vision.

3. Despite the surreal juxtapositions (phones, juicy bones, drums, and coffins), readers are drawn into the poem by its transparent simplicity. We understand the poem effortlessly.

C. We can also see Hardy's pessimism in Auden's verse.

1. "Their Lonely Betters" pictures the poet sitting in a chair in an English garden. It is summer, and a robin is singing, but not in language, in pure sound.

2. The poem goes on to ask whether language brings us together or isolates us. Language enables us to articulate, define, and differentiate ourselves from others and, in so doing, makes us lonely. It is both a privilege and a curse.

3. Auden was strongly influenced by Freud's essay *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in which the great psychoanalyst argued that the more civilized we become, the unhappier we become; we are further removed from our instinctive animal selves by our brains and advanced linguistic skills.

4. Auden's lyric ends on a pessimistic note. The birds, with only song, not language, are not just happier but more blessed by God.

IV. The Hardy line in 20th-century English poetry also extends to the greatest of his disciples, Philip Larkin (1922–1985).

A. Larkin started literary life as one of the "University Wits" of the 1940s, whose stance toward life was ironic, amused, and superior. The group developed into what was known as the Movement in the late 1950s, with Larkin as its laureate. The Movement, irritated by the obscurity of Modernism, urged a return to the simplicity and "Englishness" of the likes of Thomas Hardy.

B. Larkin's hallmark volume of poetry was his third, titled *The Whitsun Weddings*. Interestingly, this volume was published in the early 1960s by the prestigious publishing house Faber and Faber, when the firm's director was the Modernist T. S. Eliot.

C. The poem "Whitsun Weddings" finds Larkin in his typical stance as an observer of life, not a participant. No great writer of the century has been less inclined than Larkin to immerse himself in what Conrad called the "destructive element," in other words, life.

1. A man of great intellect and literary ability, Larkin chose to follow the career of university librarian at a series of unfashionable provincial institutions.

2. In "Whitsun Weddings," Larkin is taking a train to London. Many of his poems record his looking out of train windows as the engine—like life—carries him like so much passive cargo toward his final destination. Like Hardy, he was very conscious of death.

3. At various stations on the journey, the poet notices numerous wedding parties on platforms and excited, working-class brides and grooms embarking on the train, off on their honeymoons.

4. He realizes that the couples are taking advantage of a tax break offered to those who get married before the end of the year. The motive for the rush to the altar is financial rather than religious.

5. Larkin himself never married; for him, marriage would have meant "dilution, not increase."

6. In the poem, Larkin wonders, admires, and tenderly exalts this spectacle. As the train thunders into its London terminus, the poem ends with a magnificent jubilation. Its final image of an "arrow-shower" has inspired a vast amount of critical speculation.

V. The other dominant poetic tradition of the 20th century is Modernism, and its originating voice is that of T. S. Eliot (1888–1965).

A. Born in the United States, Eliot Anglicized himself in early manhood. He became a royalist, a Tory, and in religion, an Anglo-Catholic.

B. Eliot's epoch-making poem is *The Waste Land*, published in 1922. If the motto of the school of Thomas Hardy was "keep it simple," the motto of the Modernists was "embrace complexity."

C. Eliot was in a state of personal breakdown when he composed *The Waste Land*, but there is nothing personal in the poem. Eliot believed fervently that the man who suffers must be strenuously separated from the

poet who creates.

D. Eliot was as rigorously international as Hardy was English.

1. *The Waste Land* has key references to Dante, Wagner, Hindu philosophy, and the ancient Greek and Roman classics. To read it is to hear echoes of myriad cultures, ages, and literatures.
2. Organic culture, the poem says, is no longer feasible. We inhabit, not a green world, but a waste land. But culture still exists, and we must do our best to assemble or recompose it for the present.
3. Consider the famous opening lines of the poem, which recall Chaucer's opening to *The Canterbury Tales*: "April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain."

E. Eliot's poem suddenly becomes more complex, with a vignette of tourists sledding in the German mountains. Critics have tried, but no one has been able to explain what this means.

1. For *The Waste Land*, it is not what the poem means but what it is doing that matters.
2. This is not merely free verse. The movements are wholly unpredictable, working by an order that reminds us of cinematic montage rather than any kind of logical connections.

F. Nonetheless, the poem does have organizing themes, such as rebirth.

1. One of the myths of rebirth is that of life coming out of the ocean; we "drown into life." This theme appears in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, and Eliot deals with it in the fourth section of his poem, titled "Death by Water," which centers on a figure called Phlebas the Phoenician.
2. The Phoenicians were known as traders on the sea, but Phlebas has evidently drowned, and his corpse has been bobbing on the waves for a fortnight. He has forgotten, the poem ironically notes, the details of his profit-and-loss columns. Modern capitalism and its critique are also themes in the poem.
3. Will Phlebas, like Ferdinand in *The Tempest*, "drown into life"? The poem gives no answer but poses the question exquisitely.

G. Eliot's achievement in *The Waste Land* is breathtaking, but the Modernist thread has not taken deep root in English literature.

VI. The poet who currently carries the standard of British verse is the Nobel Prize-winning Seamus Heaney (b. 1939).

A. Heaney was born and brought up on the border of Ulster and Eire, a Catholic in a Protestant country. His themes have further developed those we saw in Yeats's "Easter, 1916": How can a poet engage with and participate in the great events of history? Should he stand back or intervene? And if he intervenes, what good can a mere poet do?

B. *North* was the title of an early bestselling collection of Heaney's verse, which means, in the context of post-1969 British life, Northern Ireland. Never were Irish affairs more brutal than in the decades between the Derry Marches of the late 1960s and the recent Good Friday Agreement. The violence and suffering in the period were horrific.

C. Heaney ponders the violence beautifully and honestly. The poem called "The Early Purges" asks: How does one confront violence yet avoid having one's heart turn to stone or, worse, mush?

1. What is Heaney thinking about when he uses the word "purges"? Is he thinking of the civil wars and anticolonial rebellions that have shaken Ireland for 400 years? The answer is no. He is thinking about the drowning of three superfluous kittens in a farmyard.
2. For many young children, the drowning of kittens is a traumatic experience, their first introduction to death. The poet, it emerges, was just six when he witnessed a man named Dan Taggart put a litter of three newborn kittens into a pail and drown them.
3. The poet describes the animals: "Soft paws scraping like mad," trying to live, hopelessly. Young Seamus is wretched for days afterward, but as time passes, he sees Dan exterminate rats, rabbits, and even puppies, and he becomes callous.
4. Of course, his heart has been turned to stone. For Heaney, this is also what has happened in Ireland.

The drowning of three kittens reflects all the killing that has stained his country for centuries.

Suggested Readings:

Allen, ed., *Seamus Heaney*.

Auden, *Collected Poems by W. H Auden*.

Corcoran, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry*.

Eliot, T. S. *Eliot Collected Poems 1909–1962*.

———, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*.

Heaney, *New Selected Poems, 1966–87*.

Larkin, *Collected Poems by Philip Larkin*.

Mendelson, *The English Auden*.

Moody, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*.

Morrison, *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s*.

Motion, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*.

Raine, *T. S. Eliot*.

Vendler, *Seamus Heaney*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Has English poetry gone backward or forward in the 20th century?
2. Is Philip Larkin the “true” English voice of 20th-century English poetry? Who are the other contenders for this title?

Lecture Forty-Seven

British Fiction from James to Rushdie

Scope: In this lecture, we look at the realm of quality fiction in the 20th and 21st centuries, a field that has grown remarkably since the heyday of the novel in the Victorian era. Henry James established what we might call the primary elements of quality fiction: a focus on how a novel tells its story; the need for novelists to show, not tell; and an emphasis on form and coherence. The British critic F. R. Leavis traced what he called the “great tradition” (meaning the “moral tradition”) in a line that included James from Jane Austen through George Eliot, Joseph Conrad, and D. H. Lawrence. For these writers, the novel was an instrument used to examine moral complexity. Although Leavis saw the end of the moral, realistic tradition with Lawrence, it has been sustained in English literature by, among others, the Catholic novelists Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh. The mood in fiction in the middle of the 20th century grew dark, as we will see in the work of George Orwell, William Golding, and Anthony Burgess. We close this lecture with yet another direction in quality fiction, the *magic realism* of Salman Rushdie. The achievement of all these writers is that they have created fiction that matters to modern readers and makes the study of literature worthwhile.

Outline

- I. The field of English fiction has grown remarkably in the 20th and 21st centuries. The “house of fiction,” as Henry James said, now encompasses any number of genres, including the subject of this lecture, what we might call the literary or quality novel.
- II. Henry James (1843–1916), born an American, had a significant influence on the literature of his adoptive country, England.
 - A. Jamesian theory encompassed three primary components.
 1. First, James believed that what created a worthwhile novel was less what the novelist depicted than how he or she depicted it.
 2. Second, he instructed novelists to show, not tell, with his famous injunction “Dramatize it, dramatize it!”

3. Finally, he took from the great French masters the sense that form—spatial elegance—was important. He wrenched English fiction away from what he called the “great baggy monsters” produced in the infancy of the genre.

4. Of course, “baggy monsters” continued to be produced by such writers as Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and even H. G. Wells, but James challenged British novelists to write more artistically and to set their aim higher than it had been earlier.

B. What James meant by the first element of his theory—how, not what a novel depicts—is demonstrated in his famous ghost story, *The Turn of the Screw*. This story is narrated autobiographically by a governess who has been hired to look after two children in a country house.

1. The house may or may not be haunted. A corrupt former employee, Quint, seems to be spectrally present, and he may somehow have possessed the children. The reader is never quite convinced, however, of the version of events given by the governess.

2. James’s narrative concludes with the governess determined to exorcise Miles, one of her charges, from the evil spirit of Quint; she holds him in her arms, shaking him violently. Just before Miles dies of shock in her arms, he asks if the presence of Quint is in the room and speaks the words “you devil.”

3. Is he talking to Quint, whom the governess never sees, or to the governess herself, who has tormented Miles until his heart stops from sheer terror? James creates an exquisite and delicate ambiguity that is as horrifyingly thrilling as any slasher movie.

III. The line of James is a distinguished thread that runs through the whole course of fiction written after him. James himself was both a master of narrative and the most influential critic of his time.

A. A principal disciple and friend of James was Joseph Conrad, whom we looked at in an earlier lecture. Conrad is firmly in what the British critic F. R. Leavis called the “great tradition” of the English novel, by which Leavis meant the moral tradition.

B. As Leavis mapped it, this tradition began with Jane Austen and moved through George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad, terminating with D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930).

C. Lawrence summed up the essence of the great tradition when he called the novel “the one bright book of life.” It is a bible for an age that, thanks to Darwin, had outgrown or grown beyond its predecessor, the original Bible. Undeniably, for the novelists in the great tradition, the novel is an instrument for the analysis of moral complexity.

1. The novel is situational; it doesn’t work with simple, abstract moral axioms, such as “Thou shalt not kill.” In Lawrence’s novel *Sons and Lovers*, for example, the situation makes it right for the hero, Paul Morell, to kill his terminally ill mother.

2. Another basic axiom is “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” but again, in Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, it is absolutely right and moral for Mellors and Connie to commit adultery.

3. Thus, the novel is a wonderful diagnostic tool for depicting the infinite moral complexity of life.

4. The novel, too, is particularly delicate. Only the novel, Lawrence argued, can catch the “shimmering rainbow” of human relationships, the extraordinary motility and volatility of, for example, love. This is the major enterprise in Lawrence’s two greatest works, *The Rainbow* and its sequel, *Women in Love*.

D. The motto that sums up Conrad’s projection of fiction comes from his novel *Lord Jim*: “in the destructive element, immerse.” In other words, one has to have experienced life before one can truly respond to life.

1. In *Lord Jim*, the hero is an officer on board a passenger vessel in the Indian Ocean. The ship is about to sink, and most of its passengers, who are religious pilgrims, are doomed.

2. Jim finds himself on deck with a lifeboat below him. If he jumps, he will live, but it is his duty to get the passengers off first or go down with the ship. For reasons even he doesn’t understand, he jumps to the lifeboat.

3. Miraculously, the ship does not sink. Jim is disgraced and stripped of his office; he spends the remainder of his life atoning for that one leap. He has always been a good man and is not, by nature, a coward. But until his plunge into the “destructive element,” the test or ordeal, he does not realize how

hard it is to do the right thing.

E. Conrad's most enduring work over the last 100 years, as we saw earlier, is *Heart of Darkness*, a story told with Jamesian subtlety.

1. The story narrates the passage of Marlow upriver through the Congo to make contact with Kurtz, an employee of a company engaged in looting the Congo of natural resources.
2. Marlow tracks Kurtz down and looks into the blackness at the center of the African continent, thereby seeing the darkness of the human condition.
3. Kurtz, it transpires, is wholly mad. But he is living in the lunatic asylum of European colonialism, and perhaps, the only response possible in that asylum is also to be mad.
4. Marlow ends his story with the affirmation that Kurtz was a remarkable man. The words spoken by Kurtz—"The horror! The horror!"—have, for Marlow, candor, conviction, and the ring of truth.
5. *Heart of Darkness* says something that can only be said in a novel: A historian looking at European colonialism will arrive at historical judgments. A moralist looking at colonialism will arrive at moral judgments. But a novelist looking at the same subject arrives at complexity rather than hard-and-fast conclusions.

F. *Heart of Darkness* is central to the evolution of what is called *postcolonial fiction*. As mentioned in the earlier lecture, the novel has also been attacked by Chinua Achebe (b. 1930) as a racist text.

1. Achebe himself is a Nobel Prize winner and the author of an extraordinary rewrite of Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Achebe's novel is called *Things Fall Apart*, a quotation from W. B. Yeats. It's interesting that Yeats, Hardy, and to a degree, Conrad have come together in Achebe.
2. Survey courses tend to slice literature up into single texts, but in fact, literature is always in conversation with itself.

IV. Neither Modernism nor Postmodernism has taken deep root in England. Instead, the moral, realistic tradition has been the main avenue through which English quality fiction has evolved over the last century. One interesting compartment in that tradition is the Catholic novel.

A. George Orwell said that there are no good Catholic novels, only good novels by Catholics. The Catholic novel incorporates a system of values that is often in conflict with the larger, established system.

B. The most important Catholic novelists are Graham Greene (1904–1991) and Evelyn Waugh (1903–1966). Greene's weaving of religious dilemma into his fiction is evident, for example, in *The Heart of the Matter*, published in the post–World War II era.

1. This novel also echoes Conrad; it is set in the Dark Continent, in Sierra Leone, a colonial possession during World War II.
2. The hero of the novel is Scobie, a district commissioner whose responsibility is to uphold and administer justice in the territory. Note here the similarity with *A Passage to India*.
3. Scobie is scrupulous and a Catholic; he is also unhappily married and falls in love with a young woman. His personal life becomes increasingly tangled and compromised.
4. Scobie calculates that the only way to solve his problems is to kill himself and make it seem a natural death so that his insurance money will be paid. But suicide, he knows, is the one unforgivable sin in terms of his faith. He nonetheless kills himself, and the narrative leaves the reader profoundly unsettled.

C. Evelyn Waugh was probably a more devout Catholic than Greene, but he was also more of a satirist. As with Greene, Waugh's fictional universe is irredeemably fallen—it's hell. And Waugh's fiction asks us: How can one act honorably in this hellish, fallen world?

1. This is the theme of Waugh's great postwar trilogy, the *Sword of Honour*, which follows the career of an officer in World War II.
2. Ultimately, the hero, who entered the fray with the idealism of a medieval knight in armor, like Edmund Spenser's Red Crosse, realizes that all he can do is save a handful of refugees.
3. In the 20th century, there are no great causes, only personal acts that may, perhaps, make things better or may enable us to hold onto the little that is worthwhile that has survived from the past.

D. It's significant that one of Waugh's bitter prewar novels, *A Handful of Dust*, takes its title from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*; Waugh's modern England is as bleak as that portrayed by Eliot in his poem.

1. Brideshead, the great country house at the center of Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, is also a ruin at the end of that novel, occupied by Philistines who have no idea of the grand cultural idealism that went into the making of Brideshead.
2. The light of the chapel, however, still burns at Brideshead, a faint glimmer of hope or, perhaps, merely an ironic will o' the wisp.

V. A different kind of waste land is depicted in George Orwell's futuristic dystopia, *1984*, or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* a jaundiced depiction of 1948.

A. Orwell (1903–1950) was dying of tuberculosis when he wrote this novel. He had seen the future, and it was more totalitarian than Nazi Germany or the USSR.

1. As it turns out, Orwell was wrong about the future, but he identified certain tyrannical features in the new technologies of oppression that seem to be genuinely prophetic.
2. The future, as an interrogator tells the novel's hero, Winston Smith, is "a boot stamping on a human face forever."

B. An equally dark picture is painted by William Golding (1911–1993) in *The Lord of the Flies*, which turns on its head R. M. Ballantyne's optimistic fable of 19th-century colonialism, *Coral Island*.

1. In Golding's novel, as in Ballantyne's original, a party of schoolboys find themselves on an island in the Indian Ocean.
2. In a few months, Golding's island has become *Heart of Darkness* all over again. The children revert to savagery of the worst kind.

C. This same bleak tendency is found in Anthony Burgess's vision of a welfare state dominated by youth gangs, *A Clockwork Orange*. Burgess, interestingly enough, is another Catholic, and in the English version of the novel, the young gangster Alex is redeemed and grows up to survive the "destructive element" of his youthful criminality. We see here the Catholic notion of progression from sin to virtue.

D. Equally as dark but quirkier is J. G. Ballard's *Crash*, which came out in the early 1970s. It's a fable of automobile apocalypse, the human race crashing itself to extinction.

VI. Of course, there are other moods in 20th-century fiction, including comic novels, such as those of Kingsley Amis, and the many voices of fiction heard in female novelists, including Ivy Compton Burnett, Iris Murdoch, Daphne du Maurier, Muriel Spark, A. S. Byatt, and Margaret Drabble. We'll conclude this lecture with perhaps the greatest living novelist, Salman Rushdie (b. 1947).

A. Rushdie was born in India, brought up in Pakistan, educated in England, and now lives largely in the United States. He is nomadic postcolonial literature incarnate. More importantly, he has made the novel matter in our time.

B. Rushdie made his name in 1983 with *Midnight's Children*. The children of that title were all born at the exact moment in 1947 when India became independent.

1. The novel fantasizes a telepathic link that connects these children. It is a fable that evolves into a complicated and highly satirical chronicle of India's postcolonial history.
2. The genre in which *Midnight's Children* is written is called *magic realism*. It borrows from science fiction but has a realistic surface; the mixture seems to work powerfully.

C. In February 1989, the Ayatollah Khomeini in the Islamic revolutionary state of Iran issued a *fatwa* against Rushdie, who was born a Muslim but had lapsed, for the alleged blasphemies of his novel *The Satanic Verses*.

1. The crucial offense occurs late in the novel. Salman the Persian is taking down the text of what will become the Koran as it is being dictated by Mahound the prophet, who has received it from Allah.
2. For his own amusement, Salman starts making mischievous alterations to the holy text. The prophet does not notice, and Salman asks: "But, good heavens, if my poor words could not be distinguished from the Revelation by God's own Messenger, then what did that mean? What did that say about the quality of

the divine poetry?”

3. What it says, of course, is that the words are poetry, not revelation. Put another way, the Holy Writ is actually the work of some creative “Salman” of the same kind as will write a certain novel 1,300 years later called *The Satanic Verses*.

4. Rushdie is not saying that the Koran or the Bible or the Talmud are fictions, but as Lawrence put it, that fiction can aspire, in the hands of great novelists, to be the “one bright book of life.” In short, fiction matters.

D. That he has made fiction matter is Rushdie’s great achievement and the achievement of those who came before him in the last century.

Suggested Readings:

Edel, *Henry James: A Life*.

Fernihough, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to D. H. Lawrence*.

Fletcher, ed., *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*.

Hastings, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography*.

Hitchens, *Why Orwell Matters*.

Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor, *William Golding*.

Leavis, *The Great Tradition*.

Selden, *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within*.

Taylor, *Orwell: The Life*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How have tradition, and innovation, come together in 20th-century English fiction?
2. How relevant is modern English fiction to the real world in which it is produced and consumed?

Lecture Forty-Eight

New Theatre, New Literary Worlds

Scope: As we have seen throughout this course, the story of English literature is a series of breaks with tradition, revolutions, and new beginnings. In the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, it is English drama that has come to the forefront in breaking barriers. In this lecture, we’ll look at the history of theater since the early 20th century, focusing primarily on the geniuses of anger and absurdity, Samuel Beckett, John Osborne, and Harold Pinter, and closing with the greatest theatrical wit since Ben Jonson, Tom Stoppard. The project of all these writers is, in a sense, “unraveling” and, in doing so, creating the possibility of another new beginning in literature.

Outline

I. We have reached the end of our lecture series, but not, of course, the end of English literature. The story of that literature is a constant series of breaks with tradition, revolutions, and new starts.

A. The rejection of Augustanism by Wordsworth and Coleridge and the subsequent Romantic Revolution is a prime example of the way in which literature advances—by rejection, contradiction, and radical innovation.

B. Right now, English literature is yet again on a new threshold, one that may be just as exciting as that heralded by the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. In this lecture, we’ll speculate about what this new beginning might be.

C. Despite all the threats from new media, literature is as vital as ever in the first decade of the 21st century, an organism that is itself evolving nationally, socially, spiritually, politically, and morally.

D. One of the main justifications for studying literature is that it is an excellent register of changes in society. We read literature because it gives us a better understanding of our world and our lives.

II. We’ll end our survey by returning to the stage. English theater began with the miracle and mystery plays,

dramatized stories from the Bible, giving us a sense of the deep roots of literature in the common people of Britain.

A. In the years 1590–1610, English theater reached sublime heights with Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson. Thereafter, drama fell under the iron rule of Puritanism and middle-class moralism. Apart from the work of a few comic dramatists, drama withered.

B. English drama was a vacuum in the 18th and 19th centuries, and it remained so for the first half of the 20th century. Part of the problem was censorship.

1. In England, the Lord Chamberlain was charged with seeing that nothing offensive was performed on the stage.
2. Plays could entertain, as did those of Oscar Wilde, but they could not break boundaries.

C. T. S. Eliot wrote for the stage in the later half of his career, but his plays, notably *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), are essentially poems.

1. This play centers on the murder in 1170 of Thomas à Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, at Canterbury Cathedral. Becket's throat was cut by knights acting on the wishes of King Henry II.
2. The conflict was not one of personality between Henry and Becket, but of church and monarchy. Who should govern a modern state?
3. Becket could have preserved his life and good relations between church and Crown by compromising. In Eliot's play, a quartet of tempters tries to induce Becket to surrender his obstinate principles, but he casts these tempters aside.
4. The play is wonderful, but as mentioned, it is closer to poetry than drama, and it doesn't fill the gap where we would expect to find great dramatists in the early 20th century.

D. During the 1920s and 1930s, the London stage was dominated by Noël Coward (1899–1973) and similar playwrights, who produced drawing-room comedy and melodrama. At the time, of course, escapism was in order.

1. Coward broke into fame in 1924, in the aftermath of World War I, with his “shocker,” *The Vortex*. This play offered a daringly drug-addicted and, perhaps, homosexual hero, Nicky Lancaster.
2. Coward never really broke out of the drawing room, nor did he want to. He went on to huge success with such frothy comedies as *Blithe Spirit* and *Private Lives*. He is best remembered in Britain for his script for David Lean's film *Brief Encounter*, a story of doomed middle-class love in the 1950s.
3. Coward was a wit of the same class as Oscar Wilde, but his work does not represent lasting literary achievement.

E. A slightly higher achievement is represented by the plays of Terence Rattigan (1911–1977). Two tyrannies lie heavily on Rattigan's drama: that of the drawing room and that of the Lord Chamberlain.

1. His last great play, *Separate Tables* (1954), is a story of fraught relationships in an upper-class residential hotel.
2. *Separate Tables* marks the end of an era. It came out on the eve of the destruction and liberation of the traditional theater world that Coward and Rattigan had ornamented so elegantly. They would be swept away and, with them, the Lord Chamberlain, whose tyranny ended in 1960.

III. The new era in theater can be said to have begun precisely on the evening of May 11, 1956, in a small West End theater. Because this theater required club membership, it was beyond the reach of the Lord Chamberlain.

A. On that night, *Look Back in Anger*, written by John Osborne (1929–1994), was first performed. The play was a foreshock signaling the big quake still to come. A number of artistic forces were at work in the emergence of this play, notably, anger and absurdity. One originated outside the United Kingdom, and the other, inside.

B. The pioneer and genius of theater of the absurd was Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), a literary giant claimed by France, Ireland, and Britain.

1. Although born in Dublin, Beckett was a Parisian and a hero of the French Resistance during World War II.

2. He was a disciple, secretary, and friend of James Joyce. Beckett imbibed from Joyce the all-important rule for the great 20th-century writer: to create works in “silence, exile, and cunning.”

C. Beckett’s breakthrough play, *Waiting for Godot*, was first performed at another London theater club in August 1955. The play opens with two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, by a roadside. We don’t know who or where they are; they talk throughout the play, but nothing happens.

1. There is, in fact, no purpose or reason for their existence; they are in an absurd universe. We look for meaning in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, but there is no meaning to be found.
2. *Waiting for Godot* is repetitive; the two characters cycle through certain exchanges. They have quarrels, and they become affectionate at places. We may even suspect that there is something sexual between them, but we don’t know because that would represent something happening.
3. As it transpires, the two tramps are doing something—they’re waiting for a mysterious person or entity called Godot. Is this God?
4. Toward the end of the play, a boy tells the characters that Godot isn’t coming today; they will have to keep waiting. Estragon asks Vladimir if they should leave, and Vladimir replies, “Yes, let’s go.” And yet the final stage direction is: *They do not move*.
5. On one level, Beckett’s play is a witty game with the propositions of existentialism, a philosophical school that held that meaning in life is created by action, not essence. If one does nothing, existentialism proposes, then life is meaningless, absurd.
6. Further, if God does not exist, then the universe is meaningless. Literature must make itself out of that cosmic emptiness. It must extract the meaning of meaninglessness.
7. Beckett creates a world in which there is no heroism, no society, no superhuman agency—none of the furniture with which we are familiar in literature. We are all stateless tramps, on a road to nowhere. It’s impossible to exaggerate the impact that *Waiting for Godot* had on English theater and culture in the mid-1950s.

D. Osborne’s play *Look Back in Anger* opened another front in the theater revolution.

1. At the time of its performance, in 1956, the British Empire was writhing in its death throes. The nation was about to embark on a colonial war against Egypt to retain ownership of the Suez Canal that would result, in October 1956, in humiliation. The great empire would be blown away by what Prime Minister Harold Macmillan called “the winds of change.”
2. Osborne was a leading member of a movement called AYM, or Angry Young Men, who were disgusted with the British class system. The hero of his play is Jimmy Porter, a university-educated man who nonetheless maintains a working-class lifestyle.
3. Jimmy lives with Alison, the daughter of a colonel who was a colonial administrator in India before the subcontinent gained its independence in August 1947. Jimmy is anger personified, and he discharges his anger on Alison, whom he both loves and despises, hating her because she is an offspring of empire.
4. The theater critic Kenneth Tynan called *Look Back in Anger* a “minor miracle” that “presents postwar youth as it really is.”

IV. Beckett and Osborne, absurdity and anger, created the biggest shock in the British theater since George Bernard Shaw and opened the way for new talent. Perhaps the greatest participant in this new, liberated theatrical era is Harold Pinter (b. 1930), a dramatist who artfully combines the energies of anger and absurdity.

- A. Pinter’s breakthrough play was *The Caretaker*. The action is set in a seedy lodging house with three main characters, two brothers and an outsider, a tramp named Mac Davies, whose brain has been destroyed by electroconvulsive therapy.
- B. One brother, Aston, offers Mac a bed to share in his squalid attic room. He has plans to build a garden shed, but thus far, he has only acquired a few planks for the project. On his side, Mac is constantly intending to get his papers, documents that will give him some identity.
- C. Aston’s brother, Mick, is a petty criminal. He believes himself to be a smart fellow, and he plans to decorate the derelict building they’re living in. None of the three, of course, will carry through with their plans, any

more than Estragon and Vladimir will move along their road.

D. The dialogue in the play is reminiscent of Beckett, but Pinter also demonstrates a unique use of silence. The breaks in dialogue are somehow menacing.

E. The three figures in *The Caretaker* have the potential to create a community, but it never develops. Aston's bumbling good intentions will never succeed in creating a family because Davies is unresponsive and Mick is a psychopath.

F. Pinter's art is found in implication, particularly the implications created in his silences. His is an art of the eloquently unsaid.

V. In closing, let's look at Tom Stoppard (b. 1937), the wittiest dramatist to work on the British stage since Ben Jonson.

A. Stoppard's first major play was *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, first performed in 1967. The action revolves, with dazzlingly clever dialogue and scenic paradox, around the most famous work of literature in the English language, *Hamlet*.

B. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are fellow students of Hamlet and will eventually be killed by him. They are characters of no significance in Shakespeare's play, but they are central to their own worlds.

C. As we've seen throughout this course, the works that we have discussed have something important to say to us, but to understand what they are saying, we must first understand what they are doing. What many of these works of literature are doing is "unraveling."

1. Beckett unravels religious structures that have held society together. Osborne unravels sociopolitical certainties about class and empire. Pinter unravels our reverence for family, community, and togetherness. And most daringly, from the literary point of view, Stoppard unravels Shakespeare.

2. How is "unraveling" anything more than destructive, nihilistic contradiction? It is creative because it clears the way. It makes possible what literature is always, at its best and in the hands of genius, doing: It is creating the possibility of yet another new start.

Suggested Readings:

Heilpern, *John Osborne*.

Kelly, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Tom Stoppard*.

Pilling, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*.

Raby, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*.

Taylor, *Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does one account for the explosion of genius in the late 20th-century English theater?

2. Where, precisely, did "anger" and "absurdity" lead? Into the wilderness?

Timeline

c. 350 B.C.....Aristotle, *Poetics*.

c. 700–800.....Oral version of *Beowulf* arrives, with immigrants, from Europe.

991.....Battle of Maldon.

c. 1000.....First extant manuscript of *Beowulf*.

1066.....Norman invasion and conquest of England.

1337.....Hundred Years' War with France.

c. 1343.....Geoffrey Chaucer born.

- c. 1350–1352.....Boccaccio, *Decameron*.
- c. 1367–1377.....William Langland, *Piers Plowman*.
- c. 1380.....First translation of the Bible into vernacular English (Wyclif).
- c. 1385.....Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*.
- c. 1387–1400.....Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*.
- c. 1400.....*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.
- 1400.....Chaucer dies.
- 1476.....Caxton publishes a printed *Canterbury Tales*.
- 1525.....William Tyndale's New Testament published in Germany.
- 1533.....Elizabeth I born.
- 1536.....Tyndale executed.
- 1558.....Elizabeth I comes to the throne.
- 1564.....William Shakespeare born; Christopher Marlowe baptized.
- 1572.....John Donne born.
- 1588.....Defeat of Spanish Armada; Hobbes born.
- 1590.....Marlowe, *Tamburlaine*; Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, books I–III.
- 1590–1592.....Shakespeare's *Henry VI* history plays.
- c. 1591.....Shakespeare, *Richard III*.
- c. 1592.....Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*.
- 1593.....George Herbert born; Marlowe dies.
- 1596.....Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*.
- 1599.....Shakespeare, *Henry V*; Globe Theatre opens.
- 1601.....Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour*.
- 1602.....Shakespeare, *Othello*.
- 1603.....Elizabeth I dies, King James I accedes to the throne.
- 1604.....Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure* and *King Lear*; Hampton Court conference on a new English Bible.
- 1606.....Shakespeare, *Macbeth*.
- 1607.....Jonson, *Volpone*.
- 1608.....John Milton born.

1611.....Shakespeare, *The Tempest*.
1612.....Jonson, *The Alchemist*; Webster, *The White Devil*.
1616.....Shakespeare dies.
1621.....Andrew Marvell born.
1623.....First (folio) printing of Shakespeare's plays; *The Duchess of Malfi* published.
1631.....Donne dies, his *Poems* published 1632; Dryden born.
1633.....George Herbert dies; *The Temple* published.
1638.....Milton's *Lycidas*.
1640.....Donne's sermons published; Aphra Behn born.
1642–1647.....First English Civil War.
1647.....John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, born.
1649.....Execution of Charles I.
1651.....Hobbes's *Leviathan* published.
1652.....Cromwell becomes Protector.
1660.....The Restoration (Charles II King); John Bunyan imprisoned; Daniel Defoe born.
1665.....The Great Plague in London.
1665–1667.....War with the Dutch.
1667.....*Paradise Lost* published (two later books published in 1674); Jonathan Swift born.
1673.....Behn's play, *The Dutch Lover*.
1674.....Milton dies.
1677.....Behn, *The Rover*.
1678.....Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* published (second part published 1684); Hobbes dies; Marvell dies, his poems published three years later.
1680.....Earl of Rochester dies.
1682.....Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* published.
1685.....James II accedes to the throne.
1688.....The Glorious Revolution. James II abdicates; Bunyan dies; Alexander Pope born.
1689.....William and Mary accede to the throne; Behn

dies; Samuel Richardson born.

1700.....Dryden dies.

1701.....War of Spanish Accession; Queen Anne accedes to the throne.

1704.....Swift, *The Battle of the Books*.

1707.....Henry Fielding born.

1709.....Samuel Johnson born; first (“Queen Anne”) copyright act.

1713.....Laurence Sterne born.

1714.....Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*; George I accedes to the throne.

1719.....Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* published.

1722.....Defoe, *Moll Flanders*.

1726.....Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*.

1727.....George II accedes to the throne.

1728.....Pope’s *The Dunciad* (first version).

1729.....Swift, *A Modest Proposal*.

1731.....Defoe dies.

1735.....Pope, “Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot.”

1737.....Edward Gibbon born.

1740.....Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*.

1742.....Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*.

1744.....Pope dies.

1745.....Swift dies.

1747.....Johnson’s “Plan” for his Dictionary; Richardson’s *Clarissa*.

1749.....Fielding, *Tom Jones*; Johnson, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*.

1754.....Fielding dies.

1757.....William Blake born.

1759.....Mary Wollstonecraft born; Robert Burns born; first volumes of *Tristram Shandy* published.

1760.....George III accedes to the throne.

1761.....Richardson dies.

1763.....Johnson meets James Boswell.

- 1764.....Ann Radcliffe born.
- 1768.....Sterne dies.
- 1769.....Napoleon born.
- 1770.....William Wordsworth born.
- 1771.....Walter Scott born.
- 1772.....Samuel Taylor Coleridge born.
- 1775.....Jane Austen born.
- 1786.....Burns, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*.
- 1788.....Byron born.
- 1789.....Blake, *Songs of Innocence*.
- 1791.....Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*.
- 1792.....Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; Percy Bysshe Shelley born.
- 1794.....Blake, *Songs of Experience*; Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.
- 1795.....Thomas Chatterton, *Poetical Works*; John Keats born.
- 1796.....Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*; Burns dies.
- 1797.....Radcliffe, *The Italian*; Mary Shelley born.
- 1798.....Coleridge and Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*.
- 1800.....*Lyrical Ballads* revised and enlarged.
- 1804.....Napoleon crowned emperor, Benjamin Disraeli born.
- 1804.....Scott, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*.
- 1806.....Elizabeth Barrett born.
- 1807.....Byron, *Hours of Idleness*.
- 1809.....Tennyson born.
- 1810.....Scott, *The Lady of the Lake*; Elizabeth Gaskell born.
- 1811.....William Makepeace Thackeray born.
- 1812.....Robert Browning born; Charles Dickens born; Byron's *Childe Harold, Books I and II*.
- 1813.....Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*.
- 1814.....Austen, *Mansfield Park*; Scott, *Waverley*.

1815.....Battle of Waterloo; Austen, *Emma*.

1816.....Coleridge, *Kubla Khan*; Charlotte Brontë born; Mary Shelley writes *Frankenstein*.

1817.....Keats, *Poems*; Jane Austen dies.

1818.....Austen, *Northanger Abbey*; Emily Brontë born.

1819.....Scott's *Ivanhoe*; Byron's *Don Juan, Books I and II*; George Eliot born; Victoria born.

1820.....George IV accedes to the throne; Keats, *Hyperion*; Ann Brontë born.

1821.....Keats dies, Napoleon dies.

1822.....Percy Bysshe Shelley dies.

1824.....Byron dies.

1827.....Blake dies.

1828.....Henrik Ibsen born.

1830.....Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*.

1832.....Scott dies.

1834.....Coleridge dies.

1836–1837.....Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*.

1837.....Dickens, *Oliver Twist*; Victoria accedes to the throne.

1840.....Browning, *Sordello*; Thomas Hardy born.

1842.....Dickens, *American Notes*; Tennyson, *Poems*.

1843.....Wordsworth named Poet Laureate; Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*; Henry James born.

1844.....Elizabeth Barrett, *Poems*; Gerard Manley Hopkins born.

1845.....Disraeli, *Sybil*.

1846.....Marriage of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett.

1846–1848.....Dickens, *Dombey and Son*.

1847–1848.....Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*; Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey*; Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*; Emily Brontë *Wuthering Heights*.

1848.....Gaskell, *Mary Barton*.

1848.....Emily Brontë dies.

1849.....Anne Brontë dies; Dickens, *David Copperfield*.

1850.....Tennyson, *In Memoriam*; Wordsworth dies.
1851.....The Great Exhibition.
1852–1853.....Dickens, *Bleak House*.
1854.....Crimean War; Tennyson, *Charge of the Light
Brigade*; Oscar Wilde born.
1855.....Charlotte Brontë dies.
1856.....George Bernard Shaw born.
1857.....Joseph Conrad born.
1859.....Arthur Conan Doyle born.
1861.....Elizabeth Barrett Browning dies.
1863.....Thackeray dies.
1865.....Mrs. Gaskell dies; Rudyard Kipling born;
William Butler Yeats born.
1866.....H. G. Wells born.
1870.....Dickens dies.
1871–1872.....*Middlemarch* serialized.
1871.....Hardy's first novel, *Desperate Remedies*,
published.
1877.....James, *The American*.
1879.....E. M. Forster born.
1880.....Eliot dies.
1881.....Wilde, *Poems*.
1882.....James Joyce born; Virginia Woolf born.
1885.....D. H. Lawrence born; Ezra Pound born.
1886.....Siegfried Sassoon born.
1887.....Rupert Brooke born.
1888.....T. S. Eliot born.
1889.....Doyle, *The Sign of Four*; Robert Browning
dies; Hopkins dies.
1891.....Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*;
Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.
1892.....Tennyson dies; Kipling's *Barrack-Room
Ballads*.
1893.....Wilfred Owen born.
1894.....Yeats, *The Land of Heart's Desire*.

1895.....Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*; H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*; Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

1897.....Wells, *The Invisible Man*.

1898.....Hardy, *Wessex Poems*; Wilde, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

1899.....Boer War; Noel Coward born.

1900.....Conrad, *Lord Jim*; Wilde dies.

1901.....Queen Victoria dies; Edward VII accedes to the throne.

1902.....Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*; Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

1903.....George Orwell born; Evelyn Waugh born.

1904.....Graham Greene born.

1905.....Doyle, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

1906.....Samuel Beckett born; Ibsen dies.

1907.....W. H. Auden born; Kipling awarded Nobel Prize.

1910.....George V accedes to the throne; Forster, *Howards End*.

1911.....William Golding born; Terence Rattigan born.

1913.....Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*.

1914.....Joyce, *Dubliners*; World War I begins.

1915.....Brooke dies; Lawrence, *The Rainbow*; Woolf, *The Voyage Out*.

1916.....James dies; Easter Rising in Dublin; Shaw's *Pygmalion*.

1917.....T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock*; Russian Revolution.

1918.....World War I ends; Owen killed; Hopkins, *Poems*; Sassoon, *Counter-Attack*.

1919.....Hardy, *Collected Poems*.

1920.....Lawrence, *Women in Love*.

1921.....Irish Free State established; Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*.

1922.....Eliot, *The Waste Land*; Joyce, *Ulysses*; Yeats, *Later Poems*; Philip Larkin born.

1923.....Yeats awarded Nobel Prize.

1924.....Forster, *A Passage to India*; Coward, *The Vortex*; Conrad dies.

1925.....Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*; Shaw awarded Nobel Prize.

1926.....General Strike cripples Britain.

1927.....Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*.

1928.....Hardy dies; Lawrence publishes *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

1929.....John Osborne born; Woolf publishes *A Room of One's Own*.

1930.....Auden publishes *Poems*; D. H. Lawrence dies; Conan Doyle dies; Harold Pinter born.

1932.....Waugh, *Black Mischief*.

1933.....Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*; Yeats, *Collected Poems*; Hitler becomes German Chancellor.

1934.....Waugh, *A Handful of Dust*.

1935.....Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*.

1936.....George VI accedes to throne; Kipling dies; Spanish Civil War breaks out.

1937.....Tom Stoppard born.

1938.....Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*.

1939.....Joyce publishes *Finnegans Wake*; Yeats dies; World War II breaks out; Seamus Heaney born.

1940.....Greene, *The Power and the Glory*.

1941.....Woolf dies; Joyce dies.

1943.....T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*.

1945.....Orwell, *Animal Farm*; Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*; World War ends.

1946.....Wells dies.

1947.....India and Pakistan gain independence; Salman Rushdie born.

1948.....Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*; T. S. Eliot awarded Nobel Prize.

1949.....Orwell, *1984*.

1950.....Shaw dies; Orwell dies.

1951.....Greene, *The End of the Affair*.

1952.....Elizabeth II accedes to the throne; Waugh, *Men at Arms*.

1954.....Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*; Terence Rattigan, *Separate Tables*; Golding, *Lord of the Flies*.

1955.....Larkin, *The Less Deceived*; Waugh, *Officers and Gentlemen*.

1956.....Osborne, *Look back in Anger*; Suez Crisis.

1957.....Osborne, *The Entertainer*.

1958.....Pinter, *The Birthday Party*.

1960.....Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* cleared for publication in the UK; Pinter, *The Caretaker*.

1964.....Larkin, *The Whitsun Weddings*.

1965.....T. S. Eliot dies.

1966.....Waugh dies.

1967.....Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

1969.....Beckett awarded Nobel Prize.

1970.....Forster dies.

1972.....Heaney, *Wintering Out*; Stoppard, *Jumpers*.

1974.....Larkin, *High Windows*.

1977.....Rattigan dies.

1978.....Greene, *The Human Factor*.

1979.....Golding, *Darkness Visible*.

1981.....Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (Booker Prize for fiction).

1983.....Golding awarded Nobel Prize.

1985.....Larkin dies.

1988.....Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*.

1989.....Ayatollah Khomeini issues *fatwa* against Rushdie; Samuel Beckett dies.

1991.....Greene dies.

1993.....Golding dies; Stoppard, *Arcadia*.

1994.....Osborne dies; Rushdie, *East, West*.

1995.....Heaney awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

2005.....Pinter awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Glossary

- absurd(ity):** The term is borrowed from the French Existentialist philosopher, Albert Camus (1913–1960), to describe the only rational description of a universe without meaning. It became current in literary critical circles to describe the theater which, following Beckett, took off in the 1950s.
- apocalyptic:** Describes a premonition of the imminent, and unavoidable, end of the world. Derived from the “signs of the apocalypse”, or the coming final judgment, in the book of Revelation. It also implies a power of reading those signs. Whole schools of literary activity (Jacobean tragedy, for example) can be tinged with apocalypticism.
- aubade:** From the French, a poem celebrating the arrival of the dawn. Antithetical to “nocturne.”
- Augustan:** Term borrowed, principally, by writers in the 18th century to describe their work—presuming that it rivaled that of the golden era of Rome, under the emperor Augustus, which could boast Vergil, Ovid, and Horace.
- Baroque:** Lavish or extravagantly ornate in style—often opposed to “chaste.”
- bathos** (adj. **bathetic**): A lapse or drop in tone, for artistic or comic effect. Often used in 18th-century mock-heroic verse. Pope is a master of bathos.
- belles-lettres** (**English, belletrism**): French for “fine writing.” Often used as a term of deprecation.
- Bildungsroman:** German loan word for a biographical novel, which follows a hero/heroine from childhood through youth to adulthood. Dickens’s *David Copperfield* is an example.
- blank verse:** Characteristically English poetic meter: unrhymed iambic pentameter (i.e., 10 syllables, alternately strongly and weakly stressed).
- Bloomsbury group:** Also known as the “Bloomsberries.” A coterie of writers and thinkers (notably Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, E. M. Forster, the economist Maynard Keynes) based in the area around Bloomsbury in central London, where Woolf lived. They were notable for the Liberal values they espoused on life, literature, and ethical philosophy.
- burlesque:** Broad comic parody of a higher literary form. Henry Fielding’s *Shamela*, for example, burlesques Samuel Richardson’s novel *Pamela*.
- cadence:** The rising or falling “lilt” of a line, or part of a line, of poetry.
- caesura:** Latin term for cut, or break, which creates a silent stress, or gap, in the middle of a line of poetry.
- canto:** Italian for “song,” used to indicate a subdivision in, typically, long narrative poems such as Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*.
- carpe diem:** Latin for “seize the day”—used to indicate poetry (usually) which meditates the shortness of human life and the mutability of human affairs.
- catharsis:** From the Greek, in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. It describes the final “purging” effect of tragedy on the audience.
- chronicle:** Narrative which strictly follows the order of time—as, for example, in Shakespeare’s history plays.
- coda:** End piece or, in narrative, epilogue.
- codex** (**plural, codices**): Book-form printed, or manuscript material (unlike, say, the papyrus, or vellum, scroll).
- collage:** From the French. Work composed of scraps of other works.
- comic relief:** Therapeutic intrusion of comic, or light, material into serious literature. Typically used about drama.
- consonance** (**consonantal**): Repetition of the same, or similar, consonants for effect in poetry (usually).
- coup de théâtre:** French for “stroke of drama”—a surprise effect in a play.

courtly love: The elaborate codes of love, and lovemaking, in medieval romance—as, for example, the relationship of Troilus and Criseyde in Chaucer’s poem.

deconstruction: Modern school of criticism which explores the infinite indeterminacy or “ambiguity” of literary expression.

demotic: Greek—“of the people”; medieval “mystery” plays are an example.

dialectic: Of the same Greek root as “dialogue,” indicating the clash, or merging, of two forces, ideas, or arguments.

diction: Words specifically fitted to literature—as in, for example, “poetic diction” (i.e., language which would normally be found only in poetry).

dirge: Song of lamentation.

dissonance (dissonant): Harsh clash of sound, especially in poetry.

double entendre: French for “double meaning” or “pun.”

dystopia (dystopian): Opposite of “utopia,” or idealized future state. Orwell’s *1984* is a dystopia.

elegy: Poem lamenting the death of (usually) a friend, relative, or admired personage. Milton’s *Lycidas* is an elegy for his drowned fellow poet, Edward King.

ellipsis (elliptical): From the Greek, indicating a word, phrase, or passage which is missing. Elliptical denotes a terse style of writing.

encomium: Work of praise, or eulogy. Dryden’s “MacFlecknoe” is a mock encomium of Thomas Shadwell. Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* is a genuine encomium of Queen Elizabeth.

enjambment: From the French. It describes two lines of poetry, in which the sense runs over from one to the other without any punctuation.

epic: Long, typically ancient poem commemorating the acts of heroes. Loosely used in modern critical discourse to describe something grand, large, or impressive.

epigram: Short pithy poem or statement.

epigraph: Meaningful quotation placed at the head of a work of literature.

epistolary novel: Novel written in the form of letters, or exchange of letters.

epitaph: Literally the inscription on a tomb—extended to mean poetry suitable for that purpose.

epithet: Adjectival term used to typically describe a hero or thing; e.g., Othello’s (ironic) repeated use of the term “noble Iago.”

euphuism (euphuistic): Elaborately ornate style of writing.

exposition: Opening section of a narrative, giving the reader (or audience) the necessary information to understand what follows.

fabliau: From the medieval French—bawdy tale in verse. Much favored by Chaucer.

fin-de-siècle: From the French, meaning “end of century”—invariably the 19th century.

flyting: Abusive exchanges of verse (medieval).

folio: From the Italian, meaning “leaf.” A large sheet of paper indicating a similarly large book. “Quarto” (i.e., a sheet of paper folded into four), “octavo” (eight) and “duodecimo” (12) indicate progressively smaller sizes of paper and book.

free verse: Translation of the French *vers libre*; poetry that does not conform to the rules of rhyme and conventional meter. Favored in the 20th century.

genre: From the French: a style, or form of literature—often within a larger form. Thus “science fiction” is a genre within the larger domain of the novel.

Gothic fiction: Fictional romance with dominant element of “terror” and “suspense.”

Grub Street: Metaphorical term (originally an actual London street name) for writing of a low, journalistic kind. Current in the 18th century (viz., Alexander Pope’s *The Dunciad*).

Hellenistic: A term derived from classical Greek literature, describing literature which aspires to that quality.

hermeneutics (hermeneutic): The theory and practice of literary interpretation.

heroic couplet: A pair of lines in poetry, of regular 10-foot meter, ending in a strong rhyme, with an implication of closure at the end of the second line. Current principally in the 18th century.

hubris: Greek term for overweening pride, often associated with tragic heroes, impelling their fall.

humours: Originally applied to the four physiological elements believed to combine in the body to create personality or temperament.

icon (iconic): Literally an image or object which attracts, or demands, admiration or adoration. (Hence “iconoclastic”—literally the breaking of images; literature which is contrarian or controversial.)

idiolect: The language, or style of language, used by a particular individual and no one else.

in media res: From the Latin meaning “in the middle of things,” describing narrative that jumps into the story (e.g., *Paradise Lost*).

intertextuality: A modern term describing the relationship which literary texts have with other texts (e.g., *Paradise Lost* and the *Odyssey*).

Jacobean: As in “Jacobean tragedy,” a term indicating work produced during the reign of James I of England (1603–1625).

jeremiad: A lamentation, often of an exaggerated kind.

jeu d’esprit: French term literally a “game of the mind”; i.e., a playful work of literature.

juvenilia: From the Latin, indicating work produced by an author during their youth.

kenning: In Old English verse, a poetic compound which in modern usage would require a number of words: e.g., *geardagum* / “days of yore.”

lacuna: From the Latin, “gap” or “vacancy” in a text or narrative.

lampoon: Insulting personal attack.

leitmotif: From the German; a repeated phrase, or theme, introduced meaningfully at intervals.

literati: Literary or educated people. Often used contemptuously.

litotes: Literary effect which depends on deliberate understatement.

lyric: Originally (via the instrument the lyre) meaning something musical. In modern poetry, it has come to mean the short poem.

Machiavel: Used in Renaissance tragedy to indicate a ruthless villain, supposedly inspired in his villainy by the Italian political writer, Niccolò Machiavelli.

magic realism: A 20th-century term describing fictional narrative which embeds fantastic elements in an otherwise literary narrative.

melodrama (melodramatic): Originally drama dependent on song, but now meaning literature which is extravagantly emotional or sentimental.

metonymy: A device by which the part stands for the whole; e.g., “all hands on deck.”

mimesis: From the Greek, meaning “imitation”. According to Aristotle, in *The Poetics*, the starting point of all literature.

mise en scène: French meaning the “set up,” or initial staging in drama, or narrative.

mock-heroic: Literature whose principal effect is the parody of epic (“mock epic”) or heroic works. Current in the 18th century.

motif: Meaningful feature, common to a number of works, styles, or literatures.

mystery play: Medieval street theater, or pageants, sponsored by guilds.

mythopoeia (mythopoeiac): The making, or invention, of new myths in literature.

Naturalism: “Tough” realism, typically applied to a school of 20th-century fiction.

Neoclassicism: The adoption of antique classical styles in modern literature. Current in the 18th century.

Neologism: Newly invented word or term.

nom de plume: French for “pen name” (e.g., “Boz”/Charles Dickens).

novella: Work which is midway in length between a short story and a novel proper. Not to be confused with “novelette”—a short novel of a worthless kind.

occasional verse (or poem): A work inspired by a particular occasion (e.g. Byron’s *Vision of Judgment*, inspired by the death of George III).

ode: A poem ostensibly spontaneous, and deeply felt, in origin.

oeuvre: From the French, meaning an author’s whole body of lifetime work.

ottava rima: From the Italian, 8-line stanza (or verse) poetry. Favored by, among others of the period, Byron.

parataxis (paratactic): Poetry, usually, in which the usual connections of syntax are missing.

pastiche: From the French, stylistic imitation of another work—often, but not always, for comic effect.

pathetic fallacy: The notion that nature has feelings, and can respond intelligently to us and our feelings.

pentameter: As in iambic pentameter; a 10-syllable line with five strong stresses in it.

peripeteia: Term used by Aristotle, in *The Poetics*, to describe the downfall of a tragic hero: e.g., King Lear reduced to vagrancy on the heath.

picaresque: Originally a term from the Spanish, for literature with a rogue or scapegrace hero. Often extended to mean a narrative with loose, wide-ranging action.

polyvalence: Like “ambiguity,” multiple meaning.

Postmodernism: Literature that consciously moves forward from 20th-century avant-garde styles.

prosody: The study of versification, particularly meter.

quatrain: Stanza, or verse, of four lines only.

Renaissance: Now more often termed the “early modern period,” the centuries in which ancient learning and literature was rediscovered, leading to a cultural “rebirth” in Europe.

Restoration literature: Literature produced in the late 17th century, after the downfall of the Commonwealth (i.e., English Republic) and the restoration of the king of England, in 1660.

rhetoric (rhetorical): Language used to produce a particular response from the reader/listener. Opposed to the “expressive” use of language, in which response is not a paramount concern.

roman à clef: A French term for fiction which has a thinly veiled reference to real, or historical, situations and characters.

roman à thèse: French term for “fiction with a purpose.”

Romanticism: As a period term, literature produced from the late 18th century through the 19th century. It also indicates literature of that period strongly conscious that it was breaking away from old styles of literature.

satire: Literature that sets out to correct vice (often by holding it up to ridicule) and commend virtue.

scald (or scop): Old English term for minstrel or poet.

semantics: The study of the meaning of words.

sensibility: The capacity to respond, sensitively, to the world around oneself, and the feelings of others. Much cultivated in literature of the 19th century, and by the Romantics.

Shavian: Pertaining to the works, styles, and wit of the dramatist George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950).

soliloquy: A character’s speech, aloud, ostensibly to himself with no auditor.

Spenserian stanza: Pioneered by Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*, a verse of nine, intricately rhymed, iambic lines. Much used by Keats and Byron, among others.

stream of consciousness: Applied to fiction (of Virginia Woolf, or James Joyce, for example) that sets out to convey the thoughts of characters, in all their randomness and spontaneity.

tragic flaw: The character quality, or defect, which brings down a tragic hero (e.g., ambition in *Macbeth*).

unities, the: In Aristotle, the dimensions of time, place, and action to which, ideally, drama should adhere. Much followed in the 18th century.

verisimilitude: The aim of creating likeness to life in literature.

Zeitgeist: From the German, “the spirit of the age.”

Biographical Notes

Part I

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.): Born in Macedonia, he studied under Plato, in Athens, for 20 years, developing his own (in some ways anti-Platonic) philosophy. He was tutor to the young prince who later became Alexander the Great. His “peripatetic” (i.e. teaching while walking around) method favored debate, discussion, and argument over dictatorial instruction. Aristotle’s works, which cover logic, rhetoric, aesthetics, and ethics were, as they have come down to us, probably lecture and seminar notes. His *Poetics*—of which only the coverage of tragedy survives—remains the finest short treatise on how literature works, and how the “fictional” can be “real.” With the European Renaissance, “neo-Aristotelianism” was a major force in the aesthetic theory of that period. His thinking remains as relevant today as it was in Periclean Athens.

Beowulf Poet: Neither the author(s) of the original oral epic (usually dated around the 8th century), nor the (presumably) monastic, or clerical, scholar who transcribed the text of the work in the 10th century (presumably), interpolating Christian elements, can be identified. Nor can the anonymous *scops* and reciters who, over the centuries, added their own improvements. A recent scholar, Richard North, in his monograph *The Origins of Beowulf* suggests that the epic “was composed in the winter of 826–827 as a requiem for King Beornwulf of Mercia on behalf of Wiglaf, the ealdorman who succeeded him.” The place of composition, North suggests, is “the minster of Breedon on the Hill in Leicestershire” and the poet is identified as the abbot, Eanmund. North’s thesis has been found controversial, but it indicates how speculative identification of the *Beowulf* poet necessarily is, and how fascinating it is, as well. We hear a voice in the poem—but whose?

William Caxton (c. 1422–1491): Pioneer English printer, publisher, and bookseller. Born in Kent, Caxton served his apprenticeship in London, before spending 30 years trading in the Low Countries (modern Holland and Belgium) where he picked up the new art of printing. Caxton set up the first English press, in Westminster (outside the abbey) in 1476. He published, among other primal texts in English literature, the works of Chaucer and Malory.

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400): The son of a London wine-merchant, of distantly French origin, Chaucer—after trying out the various careers open to a clever young man like himself—served as a soldier. He was with Edward III’s invading English army in France, in 1359, where he was taken prisoner and ransomed. On his return from the wars, he married (probably in 1366) Philippa, the high-born daughter of Sir Paon Roet. This union brought useful patronage in his subsequent careers. Those careers were diverse. He served the king in a number of capacities and travelled abroad as a diplomat. On his travels, he may have met French and Italian men of letters, such as Boccaccio and Petrarch: Both of whom would be influential on his own writing. In 1374, Chaucer was appointed controller of customs in the Port of London. He was a “knight of the shire” in Kent in the mid-1380s, and spent his last years in that county (whose county town is Canterbury). Chaucer’s earlier literary works (all of which were intended for recitation and manuscript circulation) include *The House of Fame*, in the 1370s, and *Troilus and Criseyde*, in the mid-1380s. It was in Kentish retirement and relative obscurity (his star having waned at court and his patrons no longer smiling on him) that he wrote what is considered his greatest work, *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer is buried in Westminster Abbey, the first occupant, of many, in that holy place’s Poets’ Corner over which he has always, rightfully, presided as the father of English poetry.

John Donne (1572–1631): Donne was born into a devout Catholic family, a distant descendant of the Catholic martyr, Sir Thomas More. His father, a leading merchant in the City of London, died when John (one of six children) was four. Hardship and persecution (for the Donnes’ Catholic belief) made his childhood difficult. As a small child he was educated by Jesuits. Donne’s inwardness with the subtleties of theology would assist him both in his later career as churchman, and poet. He went on to study at both Oxford and Cambridge universities but could not, given the religious oaths required, graduate from those Anglican institutions. In 1592, he enrolled at Lincoln’s Inn, to study law. The following year his brother Henry died in prison, having been arrested for harboring a Catholic priest. The next few years are largely blank—other than that we know Donne began questioning, and gradually recanting, his Catholicism. He saw active military service with the Earl of Essex and Sir Walter Raleigh in Spain. In his mid-20s, Donne evidently sought a career in diplomacy and acquired useful positions with patrons. This plan encountered a total set-back when he secretly married his principal patron’s very young niece, Anne. It provoked his witty observation: “John Donne, Anne Donne, Undone.” It was no overstatement. Donne was briefly imprisoned for his marital imprudence. He and his wife lived quietly for some years thereafter, he working as a lawyer for small fees. The family needed income. Anne would bear him eleven children, before dying in her early 30s. Donne had evidently been writing poetry, much of it wittily erotic, all of it daringly “Metaphysical,” throughout his young manhood. In the early 1600s, his fortune gradually improved. Patrons, impressed with his verse (privately circulated in manuscript), were inclined to help him. He was elected a Member of Parliament in 1602. By 1610, he was rigorously and publicly anti-Catholic. King James urged him to become a churchman. Eventually he did so, in 1615. This, and the death of Anne in 1617, ushered in the second great phase of his writing career—the Divine Poems (notably the “Holy Sonnets”) and his sermons. Donne was regarded as the best preacher of his age, and his prose is as distinguished, in literary terms, as his verse. By 1621, Donne was dean of Saint Paul’s, in London—a senior post in the church. He was later chaplain to Charles I. He had his portrait drawn, as he

was dying, in his burial shroud—the image, as he expected, of his resurrected self. His last sermon, “Death’s Duel” (as he himself was fighting death) is among his most famous. Donne died, as he had lived, dramatically. Underrated at the time, and for centuries after, his reputation soared in the 20th century, as did that of the whole Metaphysical School, of whom he is the acknowledged leader.

George Herbert (1593–1633): Born into a Welsh family with aristocratic connections (and, through his mother, friendship with John Donne), Herbert was educated at Westminster School and at Cambridge University. He was publishing accomplished poems, in Latin and English, in his early teens, and was regarded as a rising scholar at the university, where he was appointed orator. In the early 1620s he was elected to Parliament and may have toyed with a political career. He was a favorite of King James, in that monarch’s last years. But in the mid-1620s (and after the king’s death in 1625), Herbert settled on the Anglican Church as his vocation. He had inherited wealth and used it to restore the church where he was, for the rest of his short life, a rector (a lowly post), near Salisbury. He died of consumption only three years after taking orders. Herbert wrote religious, or “divine,” poetry of crystal clarity and simplicity, but using the full resource of Metaphysical Wit. The most modest of poets, he left his major collection of verse, *The Temple*, to be published if it might be of help to any “dejected soul.” It survives as one of the greatest poetry collections of the century.

Ben Jonson (c. 1572–1637): The son of a clergyman (who died before his son was born) Jonson was educated at Westminster School. The school gave him an excellent education, and steeped him in the classics. On leaving school, he was for a time a manual laborer in his step-father’s employment. He then turned soldier, and saw active service in Flanders. He subsequently took to the stage, as an actor, playing star roles in such hits of the 1590s as Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (a play which had a strong influence on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*). In 1598, Jonson killed a fellow actor in a duel, and was for a while imprisoned. During this period he temporarily converted to Catholicism. He began producing his comedies in the late 1590s: works such as *Every Man Out of His Humour* were hugely popular (the “comedy of humors” would be Jonson’s trademark). Over the period 1605 to 1610 he produced what are considered his major works, *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair*. Convivial (and famously bibulous) by nature, Jonson was a friend of Shakespeare, and it is through him that one knows most about what the other dramatist was like in life. Jonson received honors in later life (including a degree from Oxford), and was (unofficially) the first poet laureate—in the service of the monarch, James I. His later stage works, “masques” or pageants, were much admired at the time (not least by King James). In his later years, as a poet and man of letters, Jonson gathered around him a group of disciples, the so-called “tribe of Ben”. His influence on drama of the late 17th century is profound. He is buried in Westminster Abbey, his gravestone reading: “O rare Ben Jonson.”

Thomas Malory (d. 1471): Very little is known of Malory’s life: not even if he was, actually, the author of the hugely and perennially influential Arthurian Cycle work, *Le Mort d’Arthur*. It is, however, probable that Malory wrote this seminal work in prison, having been convicted of robbery and rape (hardly Camelot). The work, as the title suggests, may have had a lost French original. Who Malory actually was, and what he did in his life, is one of the great conundrums of English Literature.

Christopher Marlowe (“Kit,” 1564–1593): Marlowe was born the son of a shoemaker in Canterbury and attended school in that city before going on to Cambridge University. At university, he may have converted to Catholicism—one of the many antiauthoritarian acts in his short and rebellious life. Even at this early stage of his life he may have been a spy in the service of the government. Marlowe was already writing proficient verse at university, and consorting with leading literary figures. His first, and sensationally successful, play for the London theater was *Tamburlaine the Great* in 1587. This tragedy patented, in precocious maturity, Marlowe’s mastery of blank verse—the so-called “mighty line”, which would be the main literary vehicle for the great dramatists who succeeded him. *Tamburlaine* (particularly the second part) also introduced his “overreacher” theme: the heretical proposition that men could challenge the gods, and defy religion. The order in which Marlowe’s other plays were composed is uncertain, but the most mature of them are taken to be *Edward II* (a play which introduces frank homosexuality into the downfall of the monarch) and *Doctor Faustus*. Unfortunately no complete text of this last work survives, although enough does survive to establish Marlowe’s genius. His later years are shrouded in mystery, much of it sensational. He was arrested in 1592, in Holland, for counterfeiting coins. No charge resulted. He was murdered in 1593, in a tavern brawl. It may have been a squalid crime, fuelled by drink and sexual jealousy or—it is suggested—Marlowe may have been assassinated on government orders,

although for what reason is obscure. He was in trouble with the Privy Council, and his atheism (and plays) had rendered him notorious and, arguably, an enemy of the state. He was buried in an unmarked grave, in Deptford, on the South Bank of the Thames, not far from the playhouses where his work had been so successfully given to the world.

Andrew Marvell (1621–1678): Marvell was born in Yorkshire, the son of an Anglican churchman. The family was well off, and after graduating from Cambridge University in 1639, and his father's death in 1641, Andrew's education was finished with four years in Europe. This was the period of the Civil War (1642–1647), and Marvell may have remained abroad to avoid the worst of it. He had divided loyalties, and it is not clear whether his heart was with the Royalists or the Commonwealth (this uncertainty permeates the greatest of his political poems, "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland"). On his return from Europe, Marvell took employment as a personal tutor in York. His affiliation was to the Parliamentarians, under Cromwell (although many of his friends were of the other party). This period saw the publication of the complex poem, "Upon Appleton House" (essentially a meditation on England). It was also at this period he wrote his best known work, the erotic love poem, "To His Coy Mistress". Marvell subsequently took a number of official positions, carefully negotiating his positions between opposing political forces. In the late 1650s, he was helpful to the now blind John Milton in the years of his greatest distress. In 1659, Marvell was elected to Parliament for a constituency in his native Yorkshire. It was a post he held, conscientiously, until his death. Known in his own time as, principally, a writer of polemical prose and satire, it is Marvell's lyrical Metaphysical poetry which posterity has seen as his great achievement.

John Milton (1608–1674): Milton was born in London, the son of a scrivener (i.e., clerk) and musician. He was educated locally at Saint Paul's school, and thereafter at Cambridge, graduating in 1632. While at university he began to write verse in Latin and in English (the two languages would mix, creatively, in the poetry of his mature period). On leaving Cambridge, and taking up residence again in his father's house, Milton dedicated himself to a career in poetry; although he may also have thought of eventually taking holy orders. For six years he read widely and intensely, mastering half-a-dozen languages, always aiming to perfect his extraordinary literary talent. His elegiac poem, *Lycidas*, expresses his aspiration to be the English Homer. In the late 1630s, Milton traveled—notably to Italy. Contact with the literature of that country would have a profound effect on his own composition. As the Civil War broke out, in 1642, Milton pamphleteered on the side of the Parliamentarians, and Cromwell. In the same year, 1642, he married 16-year-old Mary Powell. The marriage temporarily broke down, inspiring Milton's powerful tracts on the legitimacy of divorce. The furore they provoked led to his even more famous tract against censorship, *Areopagitica*. During the period of the Commonwealth, Milton enjoyed privileges and occupied official positions with Cromwell's administration. By 1654, however, his eyes—afflicted with glaucoma—had failed. He was now like Homer in more than one way. Among his amanuenses, to whom he dictated prose and poetry, was Andrew Marvell. After Cromwell's death, in 1658, and the imminent Restoration in 1660, Milton refused to trim his now dangerous political beliefs. He was forced into hiding, and his writings were burned. Marvell again helped him. The twice widowed, wholly blind, Milton now married for a third time, and in the relative peace of his final years published *Paradise Lost*, in 1667. Indifferent to wealth, or anything but literary fame, he sold the copyright for £10. Other major poems followed (*Samson Agonistes*, *Paradise Regained*) before his death in 1674.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): Shakespeare was born in Stratford-on-Avon (Avon being the river running through the Warwickshire town), the son of a glover and local merchant. His father, John, may also have been a Catholic at a period in history when it was unsafe to profess that faith. William's relationship to Catholicism is much debated and argued over. Shakespeare's mother, Mary, was of higher social standing than her husband, and may have inspired her eldest son to rise in life above the station of a glover. He was educated at the local grammar school and, as is evident from his drama, exceptionally well educated there. What he did in his late teens, after leaving school, is not known. He may have been in trouble from the law, for poaching. What is clear is that he had access to the best books available at that period. In 1582, aged 18, he married a local woman, Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior and pregnant at the time of the ceremony. The couple had a daughter, Susanna, shortly after marriage, and twins, Hamnet and Judith in 1585. Thereafter come what are known as "the lost years." What Shakespeare was doing in the years immediately following his marriage, and his first making his mark on the London stage, in the late 1580s, is not known. He may have been a country schoolmaster. He may have been a tutor in a Catholic household, in the north of England. He may have been a

traveling player, in a theatrical company. The relationship with Anne is the subject of much speculation. Whether or not he was happily married, will never be known. The sonnet sequence, written in the mid-1590s, suggests bisexuality. From the late 1580s onwards, with his first cycle of history plays, Shakespeare was a rising star in the London theater, principally associated as he was with the Globe playhouse and Lord Chamberlain's company of players. His family, in his most active decade artistically, the 1590s, remained in Stratford. In addition to his stage work (which may have included acting and directing) Shakespeare speculated in various commodities, establishing himself as a wealthy and successful citizen. His only son, Hamnet, died in 1596—arguably inspiring the tragedies of which the greatest is *Hamlet*. Although precise dates are unascertainable, Shakespeare moved through a series of modes, or genres exhausting their literary potential as he went: history plays, comedies, problem plays, Roman plays, romances, tragedies, tragi-comedies. He mastered each and all. Shakespeare's was not merely the greatest genius in English literature, but also one of the most restless. Over the years of his London triumph, and particularly after the death of his father in 1601, he was buying land in Stratford. He retired and died in his home town, prematurely: from typhoid probably. He had, at the time of his death, achieved his aim of becoming a member of the English landed gentry: this may well have meant more to him than his literary achievements.

Sophocles (496–406 B.C.): One of the three greatest tragedians ancient Athens produced (the others being Aeschylus and Euripides) little is known of his life. Seven of his works survive. Sophocles's most famous tragedy, *Oedipus Rex* is the main example Aristotle draws on, in his *Poetics* and the play's influence is formative on Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Edmund Spenser (c. 1522–1599): Born into a family enriched in the cloth trade, Spenser was born (probably) in London, and educated at the Merchant Taylors' school, and at Cambridge University. He began writing poetry in his undergraduate years, influenced principally, by the Italian poet, Petrarch. Little is known of Spenser in his early 20s: other than that he was a supplicant for, and the recipient of, patronage of various kinds, serving as he did in various capacities in various noble households. Among his early acquaintance was the sonneteer Sir Philip Sidney (to whom Spenser would dedicate his pastoral poem, the *Shepheard's Calendar*, 1579). Spenser married, probably in 1579, and in the same year began writing *The Faerie Queene*. In 1580, he was posted to Ireland as Lord Deputy, acquiring for himself a castle in County Cork. In Ireland, he began writing in earnest, whilst administering the severe colonial discipline on the local populace expected from servants of the English crown. The first three (of a projected 12) books of *The Faerie Queene* were published in London, in 1589. They were very successful with readers, and did Spenser no harm at Elizabeth's court, although he would never receive the patronage from the monarch that he evidently aimed for with this hugely complimentary work. The following three books of his (forever incomplete) poem were published (alongside much else in this decade) in 1596. His star had waned in London, and in 1596 (or possibly the following year) his castle was burned in Ireland, in a general uprising by natives in the region. Spenser was obliged to flee, with his family. He died in London, in financial hardship. He is buried alongside Chaucer, in Poets' Corner, in Westminster Abbey.

William Tyndale (c. 1490–1536): More is known about Tyndale's death than about his life. Even his surname is uncertain (it may have been "Hitchins"). He was born in Dursley, Gloucestershire. The family was well off and respectable and William attended Oxford University, graduating in 1512, before being ordained a priest. He studied theology, at both Oxford and Cambridge universities, and became fascinated by scripture—its status and its accessibility. Printing had made books, even the Bible, readily acquired commodities. But the Bible in Latin was beyond most English citizens' understanding, even if it was within their means to buy it. A phenomenally gifted linguist, Tyndale was able to read Hebrew as readily as Latin and Greek, and eminently capable of translating Holy Writ into his native English. His conviction that the Bible should be "Englished" brought him, inevitably, into conflict with the authorities, clerical and secular—and most particularly with Rome and the pope. In Germany in the 1520s, as an acknowledged disciple of Martin Luther, he embarked on his great work of translating the New Testament into English. On the publication of this work he was proclaimed a heretic, by Cardinal Wolsey, Henry VIII's plenipotentiary. Tyndale further vexed the monarch by criticizing, on religious grounds, his royal (but unreligious) divorces. Unwisely having returned to England, Tyndale was tried for heresy in 1536, found guilty, and burned at the stake. His last words were, reportedly, "Oh Lord, open the King of England's eyes." His translation supplies the basis of the subsequent King James, or "Authorized" version. Tyndale's version, alas, was tragically unauthorized.

Wakefield Master, The: This is the only identity we can ascribe to the unknown, now forever unknowable, genius who, in the early 15th century (at some point between 1400 and 1450), wrote seven of the plays in the Wakefield cycle, most famously the *Second Shepherd's Play*. He may well have been a churchman. That a single author produced these early masterpieces is deduced from stylistic characteristics—notably his use of stanza, rhyme, proverb and comic effect. Others of the Mystery Plays were probably the production of many hands, and many contributions from players over the generations.

John Webster (c. 1578–c. 1634): Little is known of Webster's life. His father was a prosperous London coachmaker. John evidently had a good school education, and trained as a lawyer in one of the London Inns of Court. These were institutions in which drama was relished, and often performed. Webster married a very young woman (evidently pregnant by him) in 1606. Thereafter, he was a man of the theater. He worked in collaboration with many of the leading playwrights of the time. His own, single-authored, major works, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, were, evidently, written and staged around 1610. They establish this shadowy dramatist as one of the greatest of Shakespeare's late contemporaries.

Part II

Aphra Behn (c. 1640–1689): Little is known of Aphra (sometimes “Afra,” or “Eaffry”) Behn's life, and the little we do know is tantalizing, and, if true, highly dramatic. The woman destined to be the first professional writer among her sex in England was born Aphra Johnson in Kent, where her father was a barber. She may have been Catholic. It seems likely, although not certain, that she went with her family (the circumstances are mysterious), in her early 20s, to the island of Surinam, near Venezeula, then a British colony, and stayed there around a year. This supplies the narrative to her most famous work, the novel (perhaps the first novel in English) *Oroonoko*. The Restoration of the monarchy, with Charles II, in 1660, confirmed her Tory, Royalist sympathies. It seems likely that, in her mid-20s, she married a German merchant, called “Johah Behn”. The marriage was short-lived: he may have died. (Or, some speculate, Mr. Behn may never have existed.) In her late 20s, Behn (as she now was) served as a spy in the Low Countries for the King (England and Holland were intermittently at war). It did not profit her. By a series of misadventures, she ended up in debtors' prison at the end of the 1660s. In the 1670s, she turned her hand very profitably to drama (principally Restoration Comedy) and prose fiction. Such was her reputation, that she is buried in Westminster Abbey. Another first for womanhood. She is celebrated as a pioneer by, among many others in the 20th century, Virginia Woolf, whose epitaph for Behn is: “All women together, ought to let flowers fall upon the grave of Aphra Behn ... for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds.” And, one might add, keep their private lives very private.

William Blake (1757–1827): Blake was born, of humble stock, in London, the son of a hosier (trouser maker). His education was basic—but ran, momentarily for English literature, to formal training at a local drawing school. His talent in this direction enabled him to escape his class destiny: apprenticeship, making clothes, in his father's shop or some other tailor's. William was, instead, apprenticed to a local engraver. The picture industry, for domestic decoration, was booming at this period. Having served his time, Blake set up as an independent engraver in his early 20s. In his mid-20s, he married Catherine Sophia Boucher, who assisted him in his subsequent literary and artistic activities. Blake's early collections, the self-illustrated *Songs of Innocence and Experience* were never recognized for the major works they are until long after his death; that, indeed, is the case with all Blake's work, particularly with the so-called “prophetic” poems, in which he set out to create literature on the scale of Milton, Shakespeare and—most ambitiously—the Bible. He was too big, too original and (it has to be said) too “low” for his own age. His income came mainly from commissioned work. At a period of historical unrest, Blake was “radical,” and imprudently so. The authorities had marked him as a dangerous. He was tried, and cleared, of treason. But his poems continued to applaud the revolutions in France and America, and to welcome something similar in England. Blake died in 1827 and is buried in an unknown grave. It is a symbolism that would have pleased his genius, which was as subversive as it was original.

Anne Bradstreet (c. 1612–1672): Variouslly labeled the first Metaphysical woman poet in English Literature, and the first considerable writer in American Literature, she was born in England. Her father, Thomas Dudley, a former soldier, was a nonconformist. In 1630, the family sailed for Massachusetts, in search of religious tolerance and trading opportunities. Traveling with the family was Simon Bradstreet, whom Anne had earlier married. Anne, as was

commoner with nonconformists, had been well educated. Life in New England was harder than it had been in the Old Country (where, for example, Anne had enjoyed the run of a fine library). The physical conditions were primitive, the religious discipline strong. Little is known about her life in Massachusetts—other than that she moved house several times (on one occasion because of fire) and that she had eight children and grandchildren, some of whom she outlived. And, most significantly for literature, that she wrote poetry. Her brother-in-law had her first volume of poetry published in England, in 1650. Her shorter, much more admired, poems were published posthumously.

John Bunyan (1628–1688): Bunyan was born on the outskirts of Bedford—a small town in the Midlands of England, whose laureate he will forever be. He was the son of a tinker: the humblest of trades (mending and selling kitchenware was the principal tinker’s activity). One book, the Geneva Bible, gave him most of the education, and literary wherewithal, that he would need in his later life as the greatest Puritan writer of his time. Bunyan fought with Cromwell’s Parliamentarians, in the Civil War. Their uncompromising, “leveling” Puritan values, sense of constant persecution, and severe theology, would sustain him through much subsequent hardship. He married twice. According to his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding*, he was wild and sinful in his early days, before mending his ways. After the war, he turned preacher. There was, however, no peace for John Bunyan. With the Restoration, times were hard for hardliners like himself. He flagrantly disobeyed Royalist prohibitions on preaching, and was jailed, at Bedford, from 1660 to 1672. The conditions of his incarceration were not stringent. It was during this period that he conceived and wrote his great work, the *Pilgrim’s Progress*. It would be published in 1678 and establish itself as the most popular work of English fiction, for those of a religious bent, for centuries to come. Bunyan, who never recanted his views, was released, by act of Royal clemency—and promptly imprisoned again in 1673, for four more years. Bunyan used his enforced leisure to write some 40 books, before dying in 1688. He is buried in London.

Margaret Cavendish (the Duchess of Newcastle, 1623–1673): Born Margaret Lucas in Colchester, Essex, she emigrated with her sisters to France, in 1640, to escape the Civil War. She was a courtier of the Queen in exile, and met her husband, William Cavendish, the Duke of Newcastle, in Paris. They married in 1645. Her first volume of poetry, *Poems and Fancies*, was published in 1653. It reveals her lively interest in science—and her consciousness of how unusual such an interest in one of her sex: a woman, moreover, who writes and publishes poetry. The book caused something of a sensation. It also attracted some ridicule. She went on to write prolifically, and often aggressively, against the prejudice of her time. She died, prematurely, aged 50.

Daniel Defoe (c. 1660–1731): Daniel Defoe (or “Foe”—the upper-class prefix was added later) was born in London, the son of a tallow chandler (maker of candles). His family background was “dissenting” (that is, the Foes did not subscribe to the doctrines of Anglicanism). His early childhood saw a near invasion of London, a London which had been ravaged by the Great Fire of 1666 and a catastrophic outbreak of plague. He would reconstruct, in vivid journalistic style, those events in later life. Defoe in early adult life seems to have been a merchant; trading moderately prosperously; although throughout life, he was never clear of debt and sometimes bankrupt. He married in 1684, and had a large family. After a particularly severe financial crisis in 1692, he seems to have traveled abroad, dealing principally in wine and other commodities. He began writing and publishing seriously, well on in life, in the late 1690s. Defoe produced more pamphlets, political journalism, books, and anonymous material than have ever been identified. Late as he may have started, he is one of the most prolific authors of the time. His pamphleteering was very effective and got him, occasionally, into hot water with the authorities. He was placed in the pillory (publicly shackled by the neck) in 1703, for his attacks on the ruling Tories—although he switched allegiance strategically, and cynically, as the political wind blew. It was very late in life, beginning with *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719, that Defoe began writing the novels for which he is now principally remembered. At the same late period, he wrote his great survey, *A tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain*. He died in London, as he lived, in debt taking refuge from his numerous creditors.

John Dryden (1631–1700): Dryden was born in the Midlands county of Northamptonshire, into the gentry class, on the fringe of the aristocracy (a position he would cultivate in his later writing career). Jonathan Swift was a distant relative. Dryden was educated at one of the country’s best schools, Westminster, in London and thereafter at Cambridge University. He came into adulthood during Cromwell’s Protectorate. His religious views were flexible and pragmatic, throughout life, and expressed fluently, and often ambivalently, in his poetry. As his later career demonstrated, John Dryden could survive, and thrive, under both the Protector, and the restored monarch. In 1654 he graduated and, on the

death of his father, came into a small inheritance. It was not sufficient to live on, and thereafter Dryden would be a professional writer, dependent on patronage and royal favor in his verse, and the box-office in his dramatic work. In the first instance, however, he gained employment with Cromwell's administration. He went on (after Cromwell's funeral, in 1658, which he attended) to celebrate Charles II's return to the English throne with a panegyric poem of praise. Thereafter he turned his hand to many forms of literary work: criticism, satire, drama, translation. He can claim to be one of the greatest Restoration exponents of each of these genres. He was established Poet Laureate in 1688—versifier to the king. About the same time, he converted to Catholicism, commemorating the fact with a reflective poem on faith: *The Hind and the Panther*. He himself expected that such grand ventures as his translation of Vergil would establish him alongside Shakespeare and Chaucer (both of whom he “modernized”) as one of the great figures in English Literature. Posterity, perversely, has preferred his incidental, lighter satires, his poems on “Affairs of State,” and mock-epic ventures, such as *MacFlecknoe*. He died in 1700, and is buried in Westminster Abbey alongside Chaucer—company John Dryden would see as fit to accompany him into eternity.

Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745–1797): Equiano was born in the Eboe (the spelling varies) province of what is now southern Nigeria. The only account we have of his early life in Africa is what he provides in his *Interesting Narrative*. He was, he informs us, kidnapped by slavers, aged 11. He was sold on, by traders, eventually finding himself first in the West Indies, and then in Virginia (both British possessions). His experiences in the first months of his slavery constitute the most horrifying passages in his narrative. This autobiographical version of Equiano's early years has, however, been questioned: he may, other sources suggest, have been born in America. Accounts of his later life are more reliable. An intellectually able, but physically slight, man, he was able to ingratiate himself with various masters, and preserve himself from the destructive manual labor of black slavery. In Virginia, he became the personal slave to a British Royal Navy officer—something which enabled him to educate himself by stealth. His master renamed him “Gustavus Vassa” (a royal Swedish name, bizarrely). He was baptized a Christian. Equiano remained in this servitude for eight years, traveling widely. Now a valuable property—literate and numerate—Equiano was sold on to a merchant. After three years, he was able to buy his freedom. He subsequently traveled widely, making good use of the commercial skills he had picked up. Few writers of the time had seen as much of the world as Olaudah Equiano/Gustavus Vassa. In the mid-1780s, he settled in England and associated himself with the abolition movement, becoming a prominent speaker and lobbyist. This led to the publication of his *Interesting Narrative*, in 1789. The book was hugely successful. In 1792, Equiano married an Englishwoman, Susanna Cullen. The couple had two daughters. He died in 1797. His grave is unmarked and it was not until the second half of the 20th century that his remarkable literary achievement was fully recognized.

Henry Fielding (1707–1754): Fielding was born into the landed gentry class of England, in the county of Somerset. His family had aristocratic connections—something that would make Henry's way through the world relatively easy. He had his early education at Eton—the best school in the country. Here it was he picked up his lifelong love of, and familiarity with, the classics. A relative, the writer Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, encouraged his early ambition to write. Initially, his interest was the London stage and he enjoyed considerable success with his comic burlesque, *Tom Thumb* (1730). Fielding was both writing for the stage and managing a theater at this time of his life. His satire of the government, however, led to the censoring of his activities (and the stage generally). Fielding was obliged to undertake a career change (one can thank the vindictive prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole, for *Tom Jones*—without his philistine persecution, Fielding would never have taken to fiction). After attempts at magazine editorship, and the law, he turned to the novel. His contemporary, Samuel Richardson, provoked Fielding's ire and his first serious effort in fiction was *Joseph Andrews*, a satirical burlesque on the other novelist's *Pamela*. His generous, man-of-the-world morality was displayed at greater length in his most popular work, *The History of Tom Jones: A Foundling* (1749) which, despite its anti-Richardsonian line on what constitutes “virtue” went well beyond satire. Fielding had married in 1734, and his wife, Sophia (a favorite name with him) is portrayed as the heroine in *Amelia*. She died in 1744. Fielding remarried his wife's maid, provoking scandal among friends of his own, upper class. He had often been short of money, but his later years were relieved by his being appointed a Justice of the Peace (local judge) in 1748. In this role, Fielding interested himself in the establishment of an efficient London police force. He was regarded as an eminently good JP, and became something of a London institution in the most famous of the capital's local courts, in Bow Street, by Covent Garden. He

died in Lisbon, where he had gone with his wife and family for health reasons. His last book, published posthumously, is an account of the voyage. It is, like everything he wrote, exquisitely well written and humorous.

Anne Finch (Countess of Winchilsea, 1661–1720): Born Anne Kingsmill, she was the daughter of Sir William Kingsmill, who died very shortly after her birth. In her early 20s, she served in the royal household as a maid of honor to the Duchess of York. As someone able to move in public life, she was the friend of, among others, Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift. She married a fellow courtier, Colonel Heneage Finch. Both lost their posts at court with the deposition of King James II. Thereafter they lived quietly in the countryside, from where she published a volume of verse, *Miscellany Poems on Several Occasions* (1713).

Edward Gibbon (1737–1794): England’s greatest historian was born in London, into a family enriched by trade. In poor health all his life (something that, he records, made him an unnaturally bookish child) he attended Westminster School and Oxford University. The formative influence on his intellectual development, however, was a trip taken, in his late teens, to Switzerland, where he imbibed the principles, practices, and skeptical attitudes of the European Enlightenment—“free thinking,” as it was called. It was on this trip, that Gibbon relinquished the Catholicism he had temporarily embraced—remaining open-minded about religion for the remainder of his life (something that permeates his historical thinking). Although the episode is murky, it was in Switzerland that the young student fell in love. It ended unhappily, and Gibbon would remain a lifelong bachelor—and sternly unromantic. In affairs of the heart, as everything else, he was a rationalist. Gibbon’s first book—a stylish essay on literature—was published when he was only 23. In 1763, he embarked on a Grand Tour of Europe (the finishing touch to an English gentleman’s education). It was to have a momentous influence on him, bringing him as it did to Rome in October 1774. Seated in the ruins of the “Eternal City,” he conceived the germ of what was to become his life’s project: how did the greatest empire the world had known become this heap of tumbled stones? Gibbon’s father, with whom he had a difficult relationship, died in 1770—allowing him full financial independence. He moved to London, enjoying to the full the clubman-scholar’s life in the capital. Dr Johnson was among his acquaintance. He served, unenergetically, as a Member of Parliament (the best club in London, as it was known). All the while he was researching and drafting his great “history.” The first volume of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was published in 1776 and proved a bestseller. The final sixth volume was published in 1788. Never physically strong, exhausted by his scholarly labors, and prey to organic weakness, Edward Gibbon died prematurely aged 56.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679): Hobbes was born in the year of the defeat of the Great Spanish Armada—an ill-fated invasion attempt on England. War would be the conditioning fact over his long life. His father was a parson, although it was an uncle who made provision for the young Thomas’s education. An exceptionally clever child—with a precocious mastery of the classics and mathematics—he excelled in his studies at the University of Oxford (also, at the turn of the century, a hotbed of political activity). His intellectual prowess brought him patronage and a close connection with the royal court. When that court was imperiled by the Civil War (1642–1651) Hobbes, like the king and his followers, took refuge in France. There, he immersed himself in the intellectual and philosophical debates which were fomenting in that country. But the English Civil War was principally formative on Hobbes’s political thought, as expressed in his great treatise on government and society, *Leviathan*. On the monarch’s return to England, in 1660, Hobbes was awarded a pension, which allowed him to pursue his studies. A polymath, he attracted fame over the following decades as a metaphysician, a translator of the classics, a legal theorist, and a mathematician. His was a genius without compartments. Nor, happily, was his life “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784): Johnson was born in the small midlands town of Lichfield, in the county of Staffordshire. His father was a bookseller, of advanced years. Being born into a bookish environment was influential on the young Johnson, as was chronically poor health (he was, from babyhood, blind in one eye, had imperfect hearing, and scarred by scrofula). He attended the local grammar school, and went on to Oxford. The family, however, could not afford to keep him there. After a year, he was obliged to leave, although his remarkable intellectual powers were already evident. So, too, was his temperamental inclination to melancholy and what contemporary medicine would label depression. For a while, he was employed as a school teacher. His financial affairs improved with marriage, in 1735, to a woman of property, a widow over 20 years his senior. This enabled him to set up a private school. The venture was unsuccessful and two years later he settled himself in London—at which point his outstanding intellectual talents

enabled him to rise in the world. He did so, momentarily for English literature, without the aid of aristocratic, or state, patronage. Among his other achievements, he established writing as a dignified profession. Initially Johnson worked as magazine journalist and took on any Grub Street hackwork that came his way. His two verse satires *London* (1738) and the later, majestic, *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749)—the first work to be published under his own name—established him as a major voice in the Augustan Revival of English literature. Poetry, however, was not his main outlet. In 1750, he launched his own journal, *The Rambler*, which would be the outlet for many of his finest essays, all written in a distinctly “Johnsonian” style. In the 1750s he was also working on his magnum opus, the *Dictionary*. Despite his depiction of himself as an “idler,” his literary output was vast. He edited Shakespeare and wrote the first extensive work of English literary history, *The Lives of the English Poets*. In 1763, he met the young Scot, James Boswell, to whom posterity is indebted for the greatest biography (and most vivid pen-portrait) of a literary man in the English language. In 1762, Johnson received a Crown Pension of £300 a year, which relieved his later years. Widowed in 1752 (and having given up alcohol, for which he had an early weakness) he lived a sociable domestic life with friends, establishing himself as—among all his other achievements—the greatest conversationalist of his age. Thanks to Boswell, we have a full record of that conversation.

Katherine Philips (1631–1664): Born Katherine Fowler, her father was a nonconformist in London. She was well educated at local schools, and cultivated friendships there which would be lifelong. In 1639, her father died and her mother remarried a Welsh nobleman. The family resettled in Wales. Katherine married a relative of her stepfather, James Philips, in 1648. He was almost 40 years older than his 16-year-old bride. As a married woman, under the pen-name “the Matchless Orinda” Katherine began to write poetry. Her first poems, Metaphysical in style, were published in 1651. Her collected poems were published in the year of her death. Like many of her contemporaries, Katherine Philips was conflicted by the Civil War, and seems to have had somewhat divided loyalties (unlike her husband, who actually signed the death warrant of Charles I). She died, prematurely, of small pox. The most respectable of women writers of her time, her character was conventionally opposed to that of the more scandalous Aphra Behn—who is, nonetheless, the greater writer.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744): Pope was born a Roman Catholic at a time when members of that faith encountered difficulties verging on persecution. This, and serious health difficulties (principally spinal), resulting in lifelong disability, led to young Alexander’s being privately tutored. His father, a prosperous London linen-draper, encouraged his son’s extraordinarily precocious poetic talent. At the age of 16, he was publishing verse which brought him to the attention of discriminating readers and critics. He was also immersing himself in literature of the past, and of other European cultures, framing the principles and practice of Augustan verse—of which he would be the principal exponent. Pope’s subsequent life was one of literary creativity, interspersed with literary warfare against those opponents whom he regarded as witless dullards. This belligerence inspired his greatest satirical project, *The Dunciad*, first published in 1728. This mock-epic (a form in which Pope excelled) was reissued with new targeting of dunces of the day during the next 15 years. Pope secured his financial independence with Augustanizing translations (effectively “modernizations”) of Vergil and Homer. His Horatian “epistles” are, among his varied poetic output, the works which have found greatest favor with modern readers. He was a friend of those great writers of his day who were congenial (notably Jonathan Swift) although he had an unfortunate tendency to fall out with friends (most bitterly with the blue-stocking author, Lady Wortley Montagu). He never married, and died, prematurely, in his mid-50s.

Samuel Richardson (1689–1761): Richardson was born near Derby, in the north of England, the son of a joiner (a skilled worker in wood). His formal education did not extend beyond his school years, although, as his later career witnesses, young Samuel must have been a remarkably apt pupil. From an early age, he is recorded as being used by friends to write their love letters. He was apprenticed in London as a printer in 1706, and in 1721 was able to set up in business for himself as a printer, publisher, and bookseller. He married the same year. His business thrived (he would eventually be a leader in the book trade), but Richardson’s family history was tragic. By 1731, his wife and six children had all died. He married again in 1733, although his earlier marital suffering left a wound which never healed, and left him prey to melancholy. Richardson liked to write—particularly instructional materials (“conduct manuals”) for women. In 1740, he published his first (huge) novel, *Pamela*, which enjoyed sensational popularity, particularly among women readers. It also attracted the satire of Henry Fielding, for its simple (as Fielding thought) morality, leading to one of the

most entertaining, and productive, feuds in English literature. Richardson's equally massive, but more complex, novel (also narrated in epistolary, or "familiar letter" form), *Clarissa*, was published in 1747. He tried his hand at a male leading character in his last great effort in fiction, *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754).

Laurence Sterne (1713–1768): Sterne was born in Ireland, where his father was a serving English army officer. Shortly after his birth, the family removed to Yorkshire—the northern county which would be Sterne's lifelong home, and the setting of his major fiction. After a gentleman's school education, Laurence took his degree at Cambridge University. A number of members of his family had been eminent churchmen, and that was the profession which Laurence followed. Alongside his literary achievements, he would, in later life, be recognized as one of the great Anglican preachers of his age. Sterne married in 1741. Both he and his wife Elizabeth were afflicted with consumption—something that he mentions, in passing and poignantly, in his fiction. The skull, as he said, was always on his desk as a *memento mori*, adding a dark tinge to Shandean comedy. The duties of an Anglican clergyman in Yorkshire were not onerous, and Sterne was able to begin publishing the first volumes of his great comic work, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* in 1759. It was a hit with the reading public, and made him something of a London celebrity—if always suspicious in the eyes of his church, given the work's impropriety. *Tristram Shandy* continued to appear, volume by volume, until 1767. It was followed by the journal novel, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, in 1768. Sterne died, soon after, of the tuberculosis which had afflicted him throughout life.

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745): The greatest prose satirist in English literature (and only half English, given his Irish connections) Swift was born in Ireland. His parents were Protestants and members of the so-called "Ascendancy," or Irish upper-class establishment. His father died early; his mother left for England. Swift was left to be educated at school and university in Dublin. In 1688, after the Glorious Revolution—which led to the Protestant William of Orange (i.e., Holland) acceding to the throne of England—Swift took up residence in London. He intended eventually to enter the church. In England, he found aristocratic patrons, and began a Platonic romance with the woman he called "Stella" (Esther Johnson). At the same period, the ailments which would torment his later life began to manifest themselves. In 1795, Swift was ordained a Church of Ireland priest—it being, despite the name, the Anglican Church in Ireland (then an English colonial possession). In the late 1690s, Swift began publishing the satires for which he would later become famous, beginning with *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*. In both these works, his arch-conservative views are trenchantly, and hilariously, expounded. In 1700, Swift had established himself back in Ireland. His relationship with the English power elite never brought him the favors, or preferment, his talents deserved: and disfavor embittered him. In the early 1700s, he began another, mainly epistolary, romance with the woman he called "Vanessa" (Esther Vanhomrigh). His writing suggests incorrigible phobia about physical sexuality, and what romantic impulses he had were distilled into exquisite prose. By 1710, Swift had allied himself with other, congenial, men of letters in England—such as Addison, Steele, Congreve, and Pope. In 1713, he was appointed Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin (he had hoped for much more). He began writing, aggressively, on the unfairness meted out to Ireland by its English masters. He began work on *Gulliver's Travels* in 1720, and the great satire was published six years later. He died—if not quite, as Dr. Johnson said, "a driveller and a show"—sadly afflicted with mental disorder. He may possibly have married "Stella," alongside whose tomb, in Saint Patrick's, he chose to be buried.

John Wilmot (second Earl of Rochester, 1647–1680): The most famous libertine writer in English literature, at a period when there were many such, Rochester (as he is commonly referred to) was born in Oxfordshire. His father had been ennobled for services to the monarch, Charles II, while in exile in France. Born as the Civil Wars were ending, young Rochester would be flagrantly anti-Puritanical in his life and writing. He also inherited from his father a propensity for license and dissoluteness which went well beyond the cavalier into the frankly depraved. He inherited his title early in life. After a perfunctory period at Oxford University (he graduated at 14) Rochester undertook the Grand Tour, before taking up residence in London. He fought gallantly for his country against the Dutch, before marrying an heiress, in 1667. He kept a domestic establishment in the country, and cut a dash at Court. In town, he was notoriously drunk, adulterous, and "profligate" (as the current term was), along with other wild, aristocratic comrades. He wrote scurrilous verse, prose and drama (his most famous work in this line is aptly entitled *Sodom: Or the Quintessence of Debauchery*). His literary irresponsibility led to him being exiled even from Court on one occasion. He died, of syphilis it is assumed, in his early 30s. He repented his wicked ways on his deathbed, leaving a quantity of wholly unrepentant verse behind

him. Almost all of it was circulated in manuscript.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797): Mary Wollstonecraft (her married surname, “Godwin”, is rarely used) was born in London. Her father, whom she called a “despot,” created for her, her mother, and her siblings a desperately unhappy and improvident family background. Aged 19, Mary set out to make her own way in the world. Her father, Edward John Wollstonecraft, had wasted what money he inherited and she was obliged to live by her wits. With her sister Eliza, a refugee from an unhappy and brutal marriage, she set up a school, in London. Mary would later go on to write, shrewdly, on *The Education of Daughters* (1787). Subsequently, as was the destiny of other well-educated but unmoneyed, young women, she took up work as a governess. By the late 1780s, she was settled in London, living by her pen. She was helped by a congenial publisher, Joseph Johnson. A radical, Johnson was instrumental in politicizing his young assistant. She was also strongly (and sympathetically) affected by the Revolution which was currently transforming France. In 1792, she produced her momentous feminist tract, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In the same year, she went to Paris where she met, and fell in love with, the American writer and merchant, Gilbert Imlay. The relationship was intense and unhappy, so much so that Mary twice attempted suicide. A daughter, Fanny, was born in 1794. Having written a book on the Revolution, Wollstonecraft returned to England in 1795. Through Johnson, she had met the most influential radical philosopher of the time, William Godwin, whom she married in 1797. In the same year, she died having just given birth to a daughter, Mary—subsequently Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*.

Part III

Jane Austen (1775–1817): Jane Austen was born into the large family of a Church of England clergyman, in Hampshire. She was the seventh child in a family of eight (all of whom survived childhood—rare at the time). Jane grew up, happily, in a rural-small town setting, something that left an indelible mark on her later fiction, as did occasional visits to fashionable watering places (i.e. where visitors would drink the supposedly healthful spring waters) such as Bath, and even more occasional visits to London. Being a girl, she was educated mainly at home, and learned music as well as foreign languages. Her brothers were in the navy, or in business, and she evidently knew much more about the world than she chose to display in her fiction. She was also allowed access to a large supply of reading matter: through her father’s books, and circulating (i.e. lending) libraries. Her first compositions were for the amusement and admiration of her immediate family, who encouraged further efforts, and evidently offered useful advice. Her father, for example, bought her a writing desk (such as Catherine Morland buys, with the money her father gives her, in *Northanger Abbey*). After her father’s death, in 1805, Austen lived with her widowed mother and sister. She received at least one proposal of marriage which, after a temporary acceptance, she declined. It was, evidently, her choice to be single. Details of her personal life were jealously protected, after her death, by her brothers and sister, Cassandra. We shall never know Jane Austen intimately. The publication dates of her novels do not give much indication of when they were actually composed, revised, and (in many cases) rewritten. Nor do any of them reflect, in any detail, the turbulence of the world around her in the early years of the 19th century. *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) was the first of her major novels to see print, although the ideas, and first writing of the narrative, may date from a decade earlier. Her novels were popular during her lifetime, but in no sense were they bestsellers to rank with the fiction of Walter Scott (who admired her) or Mrs. Radcliffe (whom Austen herself enjoyed reading, although she satirized the Gothic novelist mercilessly in *Northanger Abbey*). Her fiction was published anonymously, “by a Lady.” That she certainly was. Austen died, prematurely, of an organic ailment which has not been positively identified. She is buried in Winchester Cathedral. It was a hundred years before her stature, as one of the very greatest writers in English literature, was established. That opinion is unlikely to be revised.

The Brontës (Charlotte, 1816–1855; Emily, 1818–1848; Anne, 1820–1849): The most renowned writing sisterhood in English literature. Their father was born into the peasant class in Ireland. Gifted, he raised himself in life, eventually graduating from Cambridge University (by which point he had changed his name from “Prontey” to something less obviously Irish). Patrick Brontë took religious orders, married well, choosing an English heiress as his bride. He earned for himself a comfortable living (i.e., church position) in Haworth, Yorkshire. His wife, however, died in 1821 and the young Brontë children were brought up by relatives and housekeepers. It was predominantly a female family, there being five daughters, of whom three survived into (short) adulthood. The one son, Branwell, also had outstanding gifts—but not as lavish, or as well-disciplined, as those of his three writing sisters. All of them were destined to live short—if

intense—lives. Charlotte and Emily were sent, for a short period, to the brutal boarding school described as “Lowick” in *Jane Eyre*. Thereafter, the Rev. Brontë resolved to educate his children himself (with the exception of Branwell who, being the son and heir, merited more professional treatment). Emily and Charlotte spent some time in Belgium, teaching at a boarding school for girls and learning something of the world. It had a formative effect, particularly on Charlotte, who fell in love with the married proprietor of the institute (in a transformed state, M. Heger returns as the hero of at least two of her subsequent novels). Emily was never happy outside Yorkshire, away from her native moors. All three of the sisters tried governessing, with the long-term ambition of setting up a school. The family mood was darkened not merely by the omnipresent sickness and death, but by Branwell’s dissipation and increasing moral degeneration (about which Anne was the most vivid in her later fiction). The Brontë children (including Branwell), as soon as they could write, were composing long, fantastical narratives, and whole worlds (“Gondal,” “Angria”) in which their stories could be set. Their first attempts were in poetry, and wholly unsuccessful. Fame struck when Charlotte sent a sample of her work to the London publisher George Smith, an approach which led to the publication of *Jane Eyre* in 1847. Less luckily, Anne and Emily entrusted their first novels (*Agnes Grey*, *Wuthering Heights*) to the least trustworthy publisher in London. As a result, neither received the acclaim they deserved, and that *Jane Eyre* won for its (pseudonymous) author, “Currer Bell.” Thereafter, all three sisters’ lives were tragically curtailed. Emily and Anne died from consumption; Branwell, in the same year as Emily (1848), from drink. Charlotte lived on to marry her father’s assistant, the Rev. Arthur Nichols. She died, soon after, from complications in her first pregnancy. The Rev. Brontë, now childless, lived on at Haworth for many years.

Robert Browning (1812–1889): Unlike his great coeval in Victorian poetry, Tennyson, Browning was never laureate, never ennobled, and spent his most productive years well away from England. Yet his influence on the poetry of his time, and his reputation—contemporary and posthumous—are fully as great as the other poet’s. Browning was born in London, the son of a senior official at the Bank of England. Robert would never know poverty. The Browning household was prosperous, and highly cultivated. Robert wrote poetry from childhood onwards and picked up modern languages with great facility. A post-Romantic, if not as obviously as Tennyson, he was more influenced by Shelley and Byron. He, like them, would be an intellectual radical, and a “pilgrim” more at home abroad than in England. After a brief flirtation with higher education at London University he undertook to educate himself. Over the 1830s he tried his hand at drama (unsuccessfully) and developed (successfully) what would be his principal instrument in poetry, the “dramatic monologue”—a form which required the creation of character and situation. His early long poems *Paracelsus* (1835) and—particularly—*Sordello* (1840) were found to be excessively difficult by his contemporaries (something else which differentiated him from the more easily accessible Tennyson). Browning’s career took a dramatic turn in 1845. Having come across the poems of Elizabeth Barrett, he arranged to meet her. The two poets fell in love and—despite fierce opposition from her disciplinarian father (she was a chronic invalid)—they married and eloped to Italy: an environment more congenial to both of them (and kinder to her health) than England. They produced, in the next few years, the works for which they are famous: Elizabeth’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, and his *Men and Women*, a volume which displays his mature mastery of the dramatic monologue form. She, never strong, died early: He lived long. He is buried in Westminster Abbey’s Poets’ Corner: she is not.

Robert Burns (1759–1796): “The poet who followed the plough” (and “liked his drop,” not to mention the lassies) was born in Ayrshire, in the south west of Scotland—the “Lowlands” (i.e. south of the barrier of mountains beyond which, to the north, are the Highlands, clans, and kilts). “Rabbie” was the eldest of seven children of a tenant farmer (a “sharecropper,” in American terminology). As was the fate of male children, he was put to work early in the fields. In addition to what education he could pick up there was, in the late 18th century, a rich oral tradition to be picked up there, particularly of dialect balladry. It was a woman friend, Nelly Kilpatrick, who inspired him to take advantage of his manifest singing and writing skills. Robert was also attracted (to his father’s stern displeasure) to dancing. He proposed marriage to a lady who wisely, given his meagre resources and wild ways, rejected him. After a brief attempt at work away from home, in 1781, Burns continued to live and labor at the home farm (now a different one from that in which he was born). He was also beginning to write and compose. Burns’s life changed with his father’s death, in 1784. Without its patriarch, the farm failed, and the family was obliged to move on. Burns already had a reputation (in a community which strongly disapproved of such things) as a womaniser. His first illegitimate child (of many) was born

around this period. He eventually married the mother of two of his children, Jean Armour, in 1788. It was increasingly clear that Burns could not support himself by his father's trade. He toyed with the idea of emigration. But his fortunes took a turn to the literary with his first collection of verse *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786). Initially published locally, it was hugely successful. It contains many of Burns's most loved poems ("To a Mouse," for example). This was the period of the so-called "ballad revival"—and Burns, a genuine balladeer of the people—found himself, quite unexpectedly, at the head of a literary school. He enjoyed to the full his celebrity in Edinburgh ("the Athens of the North"), mixing with the capital's luminaries. He continued to publish in dialect and much less successfully so, in the King's English. Despite his fame, he carried on farming, until the early 1790s, after which his principal source of income was as an exciseman (i.e., an official in the customs office). He settled with his family in the small town of Dumfries, not far from where he had been born and brought up. In 1790, Burns produced what is probably his best known poem, *Tam O'Shanter*. At a period when France was in Revolution, Burns's sentiments—reflected in his verse—were republican and radical: something that has always endeared him to Scottish Nationalists, whose laureate he is. Always prone to dissipation—drink, that is—Burns died at the tragically young age of 37. He enjoys the unique honor, among literary authors, of being commemorated annually round the English-speaking world (with haggis, whisky, and pipes) on "Burns Night," 25 January.

Lord Byron (George Gordon Byron, 6th Baron Byron, 1788–1824): Byron was born in London. His family background was famously disordered. He feuded, from childhood on, with his mother. His scapegrace father, nicknamed "mad Jack Byron" passed on to his son a natural rebelliousness. "Gordon" would grow up, famously, as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know." But a genius. He inherited his family's title ("Lord"), aged only 10. Few writers have been more lordly. Byron attended one of the country's best public schools, Harrow, and Cambridge University. While still a student, he was publishing verse (in a volume entitled, mischievously, *Hours of Idleness*) and provoking savage criticism from unsympathetic reviewers: attacks which he relished. Bisexual, Byron was a lifelong outlaw in his private life—something in which his later poetry (notably *Don Juan*) glories. In his early 20s, Byron undertook the Grand Tour. Europe at the time was ravaged by the Napoleonic Wars, and he spent time in the East, whose relaxed manners, morals and exoticism had a profound effect on him. Already he had cultivated the Anglophobia which was to condition his later writing: he was an inveterate foe of English morality, the English middle classes, and English insular provinciality (as he saw it). He, by contrast, was worldly, insubordinate, and cosmopolitan. This was the essence of what would become known as "Byronism." Despite his aristocratic heritage (and the parliamentary seat that went with it), he was notably radical in his politics—especially on the issue of national liberation. In 1812, the first books of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (his Grand Tour poeticized) made him, overnight, the most celebrated writer in England. Exile, however, rather than pilgrimage, would mark his subsequent career. A series of newsworthy sexual scandals, ugly divorce, suspicions of incest, and the furious indignation of the English bourgeoisie led to his leaving England in 1816 (in the company of Shelley, and Shelley's new partner, Mary Godwin, themselves fugitives from English morality), never to return. Resident mainly in Italy, he produced his major work, the long-running satire on England, sexual mores, and the battle of the sexes, *Don Juan*. It was begun in 1819, published serially in England by his friend, John Murray, and was unfinished at the time of his death. Nor is it easy to see how the picaresque narrative of this intrepid sexual adventurer could ever be finished. Byron died (of fever) at Missolonghi, in Greece, where he had joined the forces fighting for liberation from Turkish colonial occupation. A hero in Greece he was the "bad Lord Byron" in his own country. Westminster Abbey refused his body for interment in Poets' Corner.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834): Coleridge was born in Devon, the son of an Anglican country parson. After his father's death, he was sent to school in London, and to Cambridge University. From his earliest years, his reading was extensive and eccentric. On leaving Cambridge, in 1794, he briefly served in the army. At Cambridge he had made the acquaintance of another, future "Lake Poet" (as the Wordsworth—Coleridge circle would be later called), Robert Southey. A romantic idealist in life, as much as in literature, he and Southey planned a utopian community—a "pantisocracy"—which came to nothing. As did much in Coleridge's life. More practically, Southey introduced him to the woman he made his wife, Sara Fricker, in 1795. The marriage would prove unhappy. In the later years of the 1790s, Coleridge was publishing poetry, and was active, although never successful, in political journalism. As would be the case throughout his career, he had great difficulty in seeing through, or finishing, anything that he started. Like all liberally inclined intellectuals of the time, he was excited by the French Revolution and had become an object of interest

to the English authorities. At the same period, in the hectic mid-1790s, Coleridge formed his friendship, and literary alliance, with William Wordsworth (and Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy, an important figure in both their lives). It introduced a welcome stability into Coleridge's career. The result was the collection, *Lyrical Ballads*, arguably the most revolutionary single volume in English literary history. The democratic idea of the "ballad"—the poem of the people, written in the language of the people—was at the heart of the venture. Coleridge's life was made easier with a lifelong pension, of £150 a year, from the Wedgwood family (enriched by the manufacture of domestic pottery). It enabled him to travel to Germany, and pursue his interest in the philosophy (particularly that of Immanuel Kant) and the Romantic literature of that country: It was from Germany he took his ideas, and from France his politics. Through Wordsworth he met, and fell in love, with Sara Hutchinson, in 1799—precipitating what would be a long-running and insoluble crisis in his married life. His relationship with Wordsworth (a much steadier man, morally) deteriorated in the early 19th century. Coleridge, despite an addiction to opium (about which he writes, in the preface to one of his unfinished poems, "Kubla Khan") remained active on a number of fronts: as a poet, a journalist, a critic, a lecturer (on Shakespeare, notably), and as a political and social philosopher. His later life was socially reclusive. He published a writer's autobiography, *Biographia Literaria* in 1817. Extraordinary as his achievements were, his career is one of supreme genius—tantalizingly unfulfilled. Increasingly addicted to opium, he died in London, and is buried there.

Charles Dickens (1812–1870): Dickens was born in Portsea, on the English coast, the son of a shiftless naval clerk. Of his nine siblings, only four survived childhood. Charles was the eldest son. As a result of his father's financial difficulties, the family's circumstances were chronically unsettled. It was a disturbed childhood. The Dickenses moved to London where, in 1824, John Dickens was declared bankrupt, and was imprisoned for debt (Dickens would recall these disasters in his later, and "darkest," novel, *Little Dorritt*). At the age of 12, young Charles was sent to work in a factory alongside the Thames. Although the experience was brief, it scarred him for life leaving what he called "a secret agony of my soul" (the wound resurfaces, fictionalized, in the early chapters of *David Copperfield*). Dickens was first articulated (i.e. apprenticed) as a solicitor (lawyer). But he hated the law, and was attracted to journalism and the theater, where he could display his talents to applause. His first newspaper article was published in 1833. Three years later, he was earning enough from this line of work to marry Catherine Hogarth (his then editor's daughter). His career took off like a rocket (as he put it) with the serialized novel, *Pickwick Papers*, in 1836. For this work, he assumed the pen-name "Boz." The comic chronicle of amiable Sam Pickwick took the reading public by storm. It led to a stream of offers—notably from the publisher Richard Bentley, who commissioned (for his new magazine, of which Dickens was to be the editor) the serial *Oliver Twist* (1837), the first "social problem" novel of the Victorian era. Over the next 10 years (which included a highly contentious trip to America, in 1842) Dickens established himself as the leading writer of his time, and a Great Victorian Institution. Astonishingly innovative, he pioneered the "Christmas Book," in 1843, with *A Christmas Carol*. In the mid-1840s, a darker tone and more careful construction can be detected in his work. The threshold novel is *Dombey and Son* (1846–1848) which, like most of his fiction, was serialized in his favorite monthly installment form. Among his other innovations, Dickens can be said to have invented the detective novel, with *Bleak House* (1852–1853). At the same period, Dickens cemented his relationship with the British public with his tuppenny (two-pence) weekly journal, *Household Words*. The title could apply to almost everything he wrote. No writer has ever glorified the family more than Dickens. Ever practical and incorrigibly determined to make the world better, in the 1850s he set up (with the rich heiress Angela Burdett-Coutts) a reformatory for "fallen women." Like everything he turned his hand to, it was successful. By the end of the decade, Dickens was earning up to £10,000 a novel, and supplementing his vast income with highly successful lecture tours. His private life was less triumphant. In the late 1850s, he fell in love with a young woman, Ellen Ternan. He separated, amid some scandal, from his wife (who had borne him 10 children). His relationship with Ternan, "the Invisible Woman," is mysterious. There may have been an illegitimate child. Dickens's second visit to America in 1867–1868, a lecture tour, was hugely successful and remunerative. But it took a huge toll on his health as did his furious work-rate. A third of the way through the serialization of his last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (whose unwritten conclusion has always baffled Dickensians), the author suffered a fatal aneurysm, and died at his country house at Rochester, in Kent. He is buried in Westminster Abbey. There is no "Novelists' Corner," but if there were, Charles Dickens would have first place in it.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881): The future prime minister of England (and the only prime minister to have practiced fiction) was born in London, the son of the antiquarian scholar, Isaad D'Israeli. The family was Jewish, but Benjamin

was baptized into the Church of England, in 1817. He retained throughout life, however, an idealistic attachment to Zionism. In young manhood, he tried various careers—law and journalism, among others—before enjoying success, in the 1820s, with “fashionable novels.” They celebrated youth, energy, and arrant Byronism (“coxcombry,” as indignant contemporaries called it). Disraeli’s course in life took its definitive direction when (after some strategic changes of party affiliation) he entered Parliament, in 1837. In the 1840s, Disraeli used fiction to propagate his distinctive “One Nation” brand of Conservatism, in the so-called “Young England” trilogy of novels. In the 1850s and 1860s, he occupied a series of increasingly high political offices, culminating in the premiership, in 1868. He continued writing “political” fiction throughout his life, in the intervals in which he was out of office. His last work of fiction, *Endymion*, for which he received a record-setting £10,000, was published in the year before his death.

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–1865): The novelist universally known to her contemporaries as “Mrs. Gaskell” was born Elizabeth Stevenson in London of Unitarian parents. Her father was a civil servant (government administrator)—formerly an Anglican minister who had lost his faith. “Doubt” was epidemic at this period. As was usual with Unitarians, the young girl was as well educated as a boy would have been. The formative incident in Elizabeth’s life, however, was the death of her mother in her early childhood, and the young girl’s removal from London, to the North of England—specifically Knutsford (later immortalized as “Cranford”), a village near the urban powerhouse of the industrial revolution, Manchester. The dichotomy between “North and South” (the title of Gaskell’s 1855 novel), and the perennial misunderstandings between the two great regions of England, would furnish her principal theme as an author. In 1832, Elizabeth married a Unitarian minister, William Gaskell, based in Manchester. The marriage was happy. The inexhaustibly philanthropic Mrs. Gaskell was the model of a minister’s wife. In 1845, after the death of her only son from scarlet fever, her husband advised her to take up writing, as a kind of grief therapy. The “hungry 1840s” were a period of terrible distress among Lancashire textile workers. Mrs. Gaskell wrote a social-problem novel, on the Dickensian model, *Mary Barton* (1848). Subtitled *A Tale of Manchester Life* the novel was successful. The depiction of the heroine’s father, an unemployed mill-worker driven to desperate measures, attracted sympathy for the currently distressed working class; which was precisely what the novelist desired. Mrs. Gaskell attracted the favorable interest of Dickens, who employed her as a serial novelist in his journals, and encouraged her talent (although he always paid her less than his male serialists). In addition to hard hitting industrial fiction, Mrs. Gaskell penned the charmingly idyllic *Cranford* (1853), depicting a society entirely made up of maidens, spinsters, and widows—“Amazons,” she ironically called them. In addition to fiction, Mrs. Gaskell published the definitive biography of her friend, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, in 1857. Mrs. Gaskell died of a heart attack while visiting the house she had just bought with the proceeds of her last novel, surrounded by her three daughters. She is buried at Knutsford.

John Keats (1795–1821): Keats was born into the lower classes of English society, in London. His father was an ostler (i.e., he looked after patrons’ horses, at a public house). John Keats Sr. was killed in an accident, when John was nine, and family life, thereafter, was unsettled—although John was sustained by a close relationship with his brother, Tom. Both of them would go on to be afflicted with the family ailment, consumption. Keats was largely brought up by his grandfather. A child of astonishing precocity and native genius, he picked up a school education (effectively self-education) before enrolling as a student at Guy’s Hospital. He was not cut out to be a surgeon or an apothecary. Under the patronage of the progressive magazine editor, Leigh Hunt, Keats published his first poems when he had just turned 20. *Endymion*, published in 1817, attracted savage scorn from the critical establishment. Keats was lampooned as the “Cockney Poet.” Hunt’s radicalism did not help Keats’s reputation. Although morbidly sensitive to criticism, he continued to write and in 1819—the so-called “Living Year”—he produced a series of masterpieces in poetry, including the famous “Odes.” At this period, although the circumstances are elusive, he was involved with the love of his life, Fanny Brawne. Keats’s most ambitious work, *Hyperion*, was destined to be unfinished as, indeed, was what promised to be one of the most glorious careers in English literature. As his health deteriorated, friends arranged for him to travel to Italy, for the sake of his lungs. He did not recover, and died and is buried in Rome. At his request, the epitaph “Here lies one whose name was writ in water” was inscribed on his tombstone.

Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823): Little is known of Radcliffe’s life. She was born, Ann Ward, in London. Aged 22, she married a journalist and newspaper proprietor, William Radcliffe—and it was as “Mrs. Radcliffe” that she wrote and published her fiction. Legend has it that she was encouraged by her husband to write, in the absence of the couple

having children. Writing in the florid, highly melodramatic, Gothic style, for which popular circulating libraries had created a huge demand, she produced her first novel in 1789. But it was with *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1796) that she became sensationally popular, earning the highest prices ever hitherto paid a novelist. Despite the huge readership she had recruited, Radcliffe gave up publishing fiction in the last 25 years of her life—possibly, it is speculated, on her husband’s instruction. Her lasting reputation has been as the novelist whom Jane Austen wrote *against*.

Walter Scott (1771–1832): Scott was born in Edinburgh, the son of a “Writer to the Signet” (attorney at law). In his very early childhood, he was lamed by polio: A malady for which he, along with doctors of the period, never knew the name. During his childhood, which was sickly, he was subjected to various remedies: all doomed to fail, some agonizing. Among the most successful remedies (although not at all in the way his doctors intended) was a long sojourn with farming relatives at Sandyknowe, in the borders between England and Scotland, where young Walter was steeped in oral song and balladry—a culture going back hundreds of years, to the prehistory of the country. This experience, and the dialect of the Lowlands which he heard around him at Sandyknowe, left an indelible mark on him. After a very early stint at Edinburgh University (he enrolled when he was just 12), Walter went to work in his father’s law firm. But he was clearly too gifted, too intellectual, and—above all—too ambitious to remain a scrivener, or clerk. He enjoyed a second spell at university more than he had the first. Edinburgh was, at this period, a center of European enlightenment. On graduating, Scott qualified as an advocate (i.e. a lawyer entitled to argue cases in court). He was also active in literary circles in Edinburgh, avidly collecting ballads from the Borders, where oral traditions were dying out. These ballads would eventually be published, in 1701, as *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. Always interested in the business of books, Scott had formed friendships with, among others, the Ballantyne brothers, two printers who would work with and for him, and later be financially ruined along with Scott. Scott’s first published works were ballads, in the German style. He had assured his professional security with what was, effectively, a sinecure in being appointed, in perpetuity, a “sheriff” (i.e. legal officer) in the border area of Selkirk. In 1797, he married the illegitimate child of an English nobleman, Charlotte Charpentier. She brought money to the marriage. Scott—a scholar by temperament, with an insatiable historical curiosity—was able to indulge his antiquarian and scholarly interests to the full. He wrote, published, and undertook research labors enough for 10 men. Scott and the Ballantyne brothers had their first great commercial success with the long poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, in 1805. The book-length, historical narrative in verse, was sensationally popular. Scott followed with other poems until 1812—when the arrival of Byron on the scene convinced him that he could not compete with this new rival. He, and his printing friends, together with the enterprising publisher, Archibald Constable, moved into prose fiction, with *Waverley*, a romance set in the 1745 Rebellion (the uprising in which Bonnie Prince Charlie came to grief). The work was published anonymously, as were its successors (Scott’s poetry, a more “respectable” line of work, had been signed). The novel was sensationally popular. The “author of *Waverley*” was crowned “the wizard of the North.” Scott, the most fluent of writers (his first novel took him only a few weeks to dash off), turned out a dozen more historical novels during the next 10 years, moving in 1819 from Scottish to medieval English settings with *Ivanhoe*. His success extended well beyond the merely literary. Scotland became, as a result of Scott’s fame, a “romantic” country in the public mind, creating Britain’s first tourist industry. Scott was also largely responsible for lifting the obloquy that had hung over his country since the 1715 and 1745 Jacobite uprisings (the second of which had come close to toppling the English monarchy). He was a favorite of the Prince Regent, later George IV, who confirmed his favor with a royal visit to Edinburgh (stage managed by Scott) in 1822. Scott, over-confident in his earning power, came to grief in 1825, when a catastrophic crash in the London banking system ruined him, the Ballantynes, and his publisher Constable. Much of his financial difficulty arose from the expense of the baronial castle he had built for himself, Abbotsford. Courageously, Scott undertook to pay of all his debtors with his pen. He came within creditable distance of doing so by the time of his death, accelerated by his heroic labors, in 1832. He changed the whole course of 19th-century literature.

Mary Shelley (1797–1851): Mary’s mother was the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and her father the radical philosopher, William Godwin. It was, for a novelist of ideas, the most propitious pedigree imaginable. Her mother, however, died shortly after Mary’s birth—robbing her of what would have been a powerful intellectual influence. Nonetheless, Mary grew up in a stimulating domestic environment, somewhat blighted with Godwin’s remarriage to Mary Jane Clairmont, a widow. Mary Godwin would have a difficult relationship with both her step-mother and her step-

sister, Claire Clairmont. Mary grew up, surrounded by books, and was unusually well instructed in how to read them. Poets were frequent guests in the Godwin household. They included Coleridge and—momentously—the young radical poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley. In 1812, Shelley fell madly in love with the 15-year-old Mary. He was married at the time, and a father. In defiance of public morality (and Godwin’s disapproval), Percy and Mary traveled extensively over the following two years. Their first child died, prematurely, in February 1815. A second child was born a year later. The couple married in December 1816, shortly after Percy’s wife drowned, in tragic circumstances for which Percy cannot be entirely absolved. Earlier that year, in Switzerland, in the company of Byron and John Polidori, *Frankenstein* was composed. Godwin—who had been estranged from the couple—was reconciled by their belated marriage. Eventually the Shelleys settled in Italy. Mary’s later life was attended by tragedy—notably the death of children and the death of her husband by drowning, sailing off the coast of Italy, in July 1822. Over the next 30 years, Mary Shelley wrote a number of works of fiction, which can be regarded as precursors of the genre we know as science fiction. None has enjoyed the perennial success of her juvenile masterpiece, *Frankenstein*.

Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892): Tennyson was born in Lincolnshire, a large, flat, coastal county in the dead center of England. Its landscapes would permeate his poetry. His father was a clergyman, and Alfred had 11 siblings. Both his parents were well born, highly cultivated, and took a keen interest in their children’s education. Alfred was writing poetry in his early teens, and was encouraged to do so and even to publish his juvenile efforts. After attending various local schools, he went up to Cambridge in 1828. His experiences at the university were formative. Here it was he met his closest friend in life, Arthur Henry Hallam. The friendship was passionate. He also won the university’s premier prize for verse. In 1830, he published a volume of his verse whose melancholy, mellifluous, Keatsian, lyricism attracted some scorn, although it contained what would prove to be some of his most enduringly loved poems. Melancholy would be the constant mood of Tennyson’s manhood—a mood which he was capable of distilling into exquisite verse. He left the university in 1831, without taking a degree (not unusual at the time) on the death of his father. In 1833, Hallam, who had been intending to marry one of Tennyson’s sisters, died. It prostrated Tennyson, utterly, and would lead, 17 years later, to his long meditation on bereavement and the meaning of life, *In Memoriam* (hugely popular, it was Queen Victoria’s favorite poem and, as she said, consoled her on the death of her husband, Albert, in 1861). During the 1840s, Tennyson established his unchallenged status as the leading poet of the day, and the most popular. His narrative poems (*Enoch Arden*, *Maud*) sold as successfully as Dickens’s fiction. In 1850, on the death of Wordsworth, Tennyson was appointed Poet Laureate. In the same year, he was able, after a long engagement, to marry. In 1854, he wrote the most famous poem on the Crimean War, “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” It qualifies as the best public poem ever written by a laureate. In 1884, Victoria created him Lord Tennyson. His death, in 1892, was commemorated in London with what was, effectively, a state funeral. He is buried in Westminster Cathedral, although his religious views, shot through with the “doubt” so common among Victorian writers, may make his rest less than easy.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863): Thackeray was born in India, where his father was a senior civil servant, before dying in 1816. His mother remarried and William was sent back to England, to be educated, aged seven. He had his school education at Charterhouse and went on to Cambridge, which he left without a degree, in 1830. He also lost much of his inherited wealth, gambling. Prodigiously gifted—in art as well as writing—Thackeray was, as he readily admitted, “idle” by nature. His idleness, however, was compensated for by the quickest of wits. After false starts in law and art (he studied for a while in Paris) he settled on journalism, in which quick wits and a ready pen were principal assets. For 10 years in Paris and London, Thackeray “wrote for his life.” His output was vast, and entirely anonymous. He compounded his financial difficulties by marrying, “imprudently.” Having borne him two surviving daughters, Isabella Thackeray went incurably insane, in 1840. Thackeray was condemned to a clubman’s and bachelor’s life (with the addition of two children) for the remainder of his life. Having made his name as a satirist—particularly of the English middle classes (Thackeray invented the word “snob”)—he finally realized his potential as a writer with the serialized novel, *Vanity Fair* (1847–1848). He was middle-aged when this work (the first to have his name attached) was published. A panoramic satire, with broad streaks of sentiment and worldly wisdom, this portrait of the 19th century was a huge hit. Thackeray notably mellowed in his later work. As a novelist he was second only to Dickens in public reputation. His energies (always prone to dissipation) were lessened by his falling victim, in 1850, to the cholera epidemic which was sweeping London—it is pleasant to record that Dickens saved his life, by dispatching his personal physician to his great rival. Thackeray’s later fiction is less vibrant than *Vanity Fair*, although his 18th-century historical

romance, *Henry Esmond* (1852), has its admirers. Thackeray's last years were enriched by lucrative editorial work, and enabled him to build a fine "Queen Anne" period house in Kensington (it is now the Israeli Embassy). He died, prematurely, his health never having been strong. His daughter, Anne, went on to become a successful novelist in her own right.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850): The leader, and principal theorist, of the English Romantic Movement, Wordsworth was born in the mountainous "Lake District," in North West England, with which his career was later intertwined. "My native Alps," he called them. His "seedtime," and his quasi-religious views about "Nature," as he recalls in his great autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, were profoundly influenced by the region. His mother and father—a lawyer, with whom he had a difficult relationship—both died early in his life. After going to school locally, the 17-year-old William attended Cambridge University. In 1790, he spent time in Revolutionary France, where he had an affair with and had a child by a French woman, Annette Vallon. The circumstances have always been mysterious. An inheritance at this period of his life enabled him to concentrate on poetry, which he always knew was his destiny. Although he had been writing, and publishing, poems from the early 1790s, Wordsworth's literary career took its destined direction with his meeting Coleridge in 1795. The result was the collaborative volume, *Lyrical Ballads*, in 1798. This volume and its revised editions over the next few years revolutionized English poetry, moving it definitively away from the Augustanism of the 18th century. As the 1790s came to a close, Wordsworth set up home with his sister Dorothy, in Grasmere, in the Lake District. A coterie (the "Lakers," as Byron dismissively called them) formed around him. Further inheritances enabled him to pursue his literary career, undisturbed. In 1802, he married, and can be said to have settled down in life. Over the next half century, it is sometimes felt, some of the fire went out of his poetry. Settling down is not always good for poets. The relationship with Coleridge, always intense, broke down, although another major poet, Robert Southey (a fellow "Laker"), took his place in Wordsworth's orbit. Over many years, he had been working on his most ambitious work, an autobiography in verse, *The Prelude*. It would not be published in its complete form until the time of his death. In 1843, he was appointed Poet Laureate—although he published, and wrote, little in the last decade of his life. He died and is buried in the Lake District. Few literary resting places are more appropriate.

Part IV

W. H. Auden (1907–1973): Auden was born in the Midlands, the son of a doctor (his father had strong interests in literature, and in Freud—interests his son inherited). At Oxford University, Auden established himself as a leading figure among what would later be known as "the thirties poets"—principally himself, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, and C. Day-Lewis. They were enthusiasts for T. S. Eliot—who published much of their poetry—but, unlike him, they inclined towards political radicalism and, in their early years, politically agitating poetry. The 1930s was a decade in which ugly totalitarianism was ascendant in Germany, Italy, and Russia. Auden and his comrades were pro-Moscow until the Spanish Civil War disillusioned them. Auden had supported himself as a schoolteacher in his early professional life, although poetry always remained his principal interest. His first volume of verse was published in 1928. It, and its successors, established him as the leading young poet of the time, although his poetry was found even more difficult by lay readers than Eliot's. In January 1939, with war in Europe clearly imminent, Auden—disillusioned with the old world—immigrated to America, with his close friend, the novelist Christopher Isherwood. Both men were homosexual, and England's intolerance had made permanent residence impossible for them. Auden became an American citizen in 1946. The poetry of his maturity merges his extraordinary virtuosity and mastery of the techniques of verse with more personal and, increasingly, religious concerns. In his last years, he returned to England, now more morally relaxed than it had been, to live in his old Oxford college.

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989): Beckett was born in Dublin, into the city's lower middle classes. He went to school and to university in Dublin—manifesting an early enthusiasm for literature and (oddly) cricket. He graduated with a degree in modern languages—useful for a writer most of whose career would be spent in France. In Paris, in the late 1920s, Beckett made the acquaintance of James Joyce. The friendship (or, more properly, master—pupil relationship) would be formative on Beckett's literary development. After drifting between Paris, Dublin, and London, and a false start in university teaching, Beckett began writing on his own account in the 1930s. He settled at the same period in Paris. His first publications were novels (e.g., *Murphy*, 1938) which were both comic and experimental. Beckett, from the first,

was doing new things. During the war, in France, he worked with the French Underground, for which gallantry he was later decorated. Beckett's reputation as a leading playwright in England was forged by the performance of his play (translated from the French) *Waiting for Godot*, in 1955. This absurdist drama, in which two tramps do nothing, while nothing happens to them, had a revolutionary impact on British theater. With successive works, which were increasingly enigmatic and minimalist, Beckett's fame grew. It was sealed with the award of the Nobel Prize, in 1969. *Breath*, a work performed that same year, has no characters, lasts 35 seconds, and the only "action" is the sound of breathing. This was as far as even Beckett could take his art. As his novels testify, he could, when it was required, be as copious, fluent, and verbose (in the highest sense) as James Joyce himself—the writer with whom he shares the very highest place in Irish literature. Whether Beckett truly belongs to that country, to France, or to Britain is still a matter of hot contention. This course appropriates him for Britain.

Rupert Brooke (1887–1915): Brooke was born at Rugby, where his father was a teacher at the famous public (i.e., highly selective) school. Precociously brilliant, Brooke was a luminary at Cambridge University and seemed destined for a glittering career in poetry. He volunteered for the armed forces, on the outbreak of war, in 1914. He died, in the Dardanelles, of blood poisoning in 1915. His war sonnet, "The Soldier," was adopted as a patriotic anthem by his country in their arduous struggle against Germany, although the poem's patriotism had come to seem offensively facile by the conclusion of that most bloody conflict.

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924): The most cosmopolitan of great English novelists, Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski was born, of Polish parents, in the Russian dominated Ukraine. Poland too was under the Russian heel and Conrad's father was a prominent revolutionary. Both his parents died early and Conrad (under the care of an uncle) migrated to France, where he embarked on a career as an officer in the merchant marine. As a mariner, rising eventually to the command of his own vessel, Conrad saw much of the world. It would feed his later fiction (particularly formative was a trip to the Congo, in the early 1890s). In 1886, he became a British citizen. After 20 years at sea, settled in England, married, and turned to writing. He was close on 40 years old before doing so—and doing so in what was, effectively, his third language. His influences were uniquely mixed: They included sturdy nautical novelists, spinners of seafaring yarns, and, much more ambitiously, Henry James (a personal friend of Conrad's). In the years that followed, with novels such as *Lord Jim* (1900), *Nostramo* (1904), and *Victory* (1915) he established himself as a great English novelist, and the greatest ever to take the sea as his subject.

Noël Coward (1899–1973): The consummately stylish showman of the 20th century, Coward was born the son of a piano salesman, and a mother who encouraged his early enthusiasm for theater. He had his first play put on the stage before he was 20, and enjoyed huge success with his modishly decadent psychological drama, *The Vortex* (1924), in which he himself took the leading role. Gay—something that the English theater could accept, and England outside the theater couldn't—Coward always had a keen eye for those who could not, quite, fit. He also had a fine ear for the nuances of English speech. He went on to cultivate a highly remunerative line of sophisticated "drawing room" comedy, increasingly light in manner, which audiences loved. His most enduring work is the screenplay he did for the perennially popular film, *Brief Encounters* (1944). He was knighted in 1970.

Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930): The creator of Sherlock Holmes was born in Edinburgh, into an Irish Catholic family. He qualified as a doctor at Edinburgh University, and took up his first practice in southern England. Inspired by a hawk-eyed instructor from his university days, Joseph Bell—who diagnosed his patients via "clues," not declared symptoms—Doyle introduced his amateur detective to the world in 1887, with the novella *A Study in Scarlet*. The Baker Street sleuth became sensationally popular—along with his assistant, Dr. Watson—with a series of short stories in the *Strand Magazine* in the 1890s. A new "Holmes" could drive the circulation of the journal up to half a million. Doyle wrote much else—historical novels, which he himself thought very highly of, and science fiction—notably, *The Lost World*, 1912. After the First World War, he became a public advocate for spiritualism. But it is Holmes that Conan Doyle is principally remembered for.

George Eliot (1819–1880): Born Mary Ann Evans, the writer later known as George Eliot was brought up in Warwickshire, near Coventry—the Midlands setting of much of her subsequent fiction. The family background was nonconformist (another interest in her later novels) and, given access to a good library in her young girlhood (thanks to

her father's position as land agent to a wealthy employer), she went on to finish her education among free-thinking, intellectual circles in Coventry. A firm-minded woman, she broke away from the devout religious orthodoxy of her father and closest brother, Isaac—a crisis dramatized in *The Mill on the Floss*. She moved, inevitably, to London where, initially, she picked up work in higher journalism, and as a translator from the German. This work served to sharpen her remarkable intellect still further. In the early 1850s, she formed the most important relationship of her life with George Henry Lewes. They would be partners until his death, in 1878. He could not marry her, however, being already married and having, according to his freethinking principles, condoned his wife's adultery. It was Lewes, along with the publisher John Blackwood, who encouraged her to write fiction. She did so with the declared aim of "raising" the literary form, making it a vehicle for important ideas and intellectual debate. After some experimental short stories, her first novel, *Adam Bede*, written under the male pseudonym, "George Eliot," appeared in 1859. Despite its challenging subject matter—the impact of the Methodist religious movement on rural life, at the turn of the century—the novel enjoyed a runaway success. Other works of fiction followed, culminating in what is generally agreed to be Eliot's masterpiece: *Middlemarch* (serialized 1871–1872), a study of the provincial world in which she grew up, and the impact of political "reform." After Lewes's death, which prostrated her, she wrote no more fiction: although by this stage of her life "George Eliot" was recognized as the leading woman of letters in England, and by some the leading "person of letters," irrespective of gender. She herself died two years after Lewes, having married a young disciple, John Cross, who tended her posthumous flame assiduously. Posterity recognizes her not as Mary Anne Evans, nor Mrs. Lewes (the title she preferred, socially), not as Mrs. Cross but—in tribute to her genius—"George Eliot." Because of the "immorality" of her relationship with Lewes no place could be found for her among the respectable writers of England in Westminster Abbey until the 1970s, when a commemorative stone was belatedly laid in the consecrated ground.

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965): Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in Saint Louis, Missouri—which has always rendered him ambiguously British or American literary property. His education was extensive: at the universities of Harvard, the Sorbonne in Paris, and Oxford in England. His early interests were in philosophy as much as in poetry, to which he was turned by Ezra Pound, in 1914. He settled in England and married, disastrously. The breakdown of his marriage, and the eventual madness of his wife, blighted his life over the following decade. During this decade, while working at a bank—until a subscription among his friends yielded financial independence—he worked on his epochal poem, *The Waste Land*. Published in 1922, it was recognized from the first as the primal work of literary modernism, along with Joyce's *Ulysses* (published the same year). In 1927 Eliot became a British subject. He was, in the second half of his life, as he proclaimed, a fervent royalist, conservative, and an Anglo-Catholic—anything but American. His interest moved into drama, and he wrote a number of verse plays of which the most often performed is *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). Now a director at Faber, the most influential literary publisher in England, Eliot brought on the careers of a coterie of younger poets—including Auden and Larkin. His second great poetic project, *Four Quartets*, was completed in 1943. Although Eliot's published output was small, his influence as a poet, a critic, and a patron was immense. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948.

E. M. Forster (1879–1970): An only child, Edwin Morgan Forster was the son of an architect father, who died shortly after his son's birth, and a dedicated mother. He was brought up surrounded by women and, thanks to inheritances, comfortable financial circumstances which he would enjoy all his life. Forster was one of those fortunate authors who was never obliged to sacrifice his literary ambitions to the crude requirement of earning a living. Forster was unhappy at school, but blissfully happy at Cambridge University where his being intellectually brilliant, highly cultivated, and gay were no barriers to success. Indeed, they could be thought to promote it. At Cambridge, through the philosopher G. E. Moore—a thinker who had a profound influence on what came to be called the "Bloomsbury group"—Forster developed his conviction that the most important things in life were personal relationships. At a period when England was convulsing with patriotism and nationalism in World War I, this was a highly radical sentiment. Having left Cambridge, in the early years of the new century, Forster traveled widely in Europe and in India—something which would inspire his last, and finest, novel, *A Passage to India*, 1924. He began publishing fiction in 1905. His characteristic themes revolve around the motto to his 1910 novel, *Howards End* (1910), "Only Connect." For him as for the other members of the Bloomsbury group, the massive disconnections of WWI were traumatic. Forster effectively gave up writing fiction (or much else) in the last half century of his life. He remained a powerful force, however, always on the side of liberalism, tolerance, and the personal values which he extols in his fiction. His last published novel,

Maurice, which came out only after his death (having been judged unpublishable when written, 70 years earlier) is a frank proclamation of his homosexuality.

William Golding (1911–1993): Golding was educated at one of Britain’s best public schools and at Oxford University. On leaving university, he worked, variously, as a journalist, an actor, and a theater producer. He served in the Royal Navy in World War II, and was profoundly influenced by the total breakdown of civilization and the irrepressible rise of savagery, which he conceived that global conflict to represent. On demobilization, he took up work as a schoolteacher. His first novel, *Lord of the Flies*, had great difficulty finding a publisher and did not see print until 1954. It was recognized as a classic, if profoundly pessimistic, narrative—a work which, in its depiction of English schoolboys on a desert island reverting to primitive violence, overset a line of native optimism which can be traced back as far as *Robinson Crusoe*. The success of the novel allowed Golding to concentrate full time on his writing. It led to the award of a Nobel Prize in 1983, and a knighthood in 1988.

Graham Greene (1904–1991): Joseph Conrad’s most distinguished disciple, Greene was educated in the public school, Berkhamsted, where his father was headmaster. While at Oxford University, he was impelled to convert to Catholicism—something that would influence his subsequent fiction, much of which revolves around dilemmas of conscience and topical reformulations of “sin.” Greene (who at one period of his life was a film reviewer) was fascinated by cinematic technique. He also believed that, as did the movies, the novel should have a broad popular appeal. He divided his own fictional output into what he called “Entertainments” (e.g., *A Gun for Sale*, 1936) and “Novels.” Like Conrad, Greene was a nomadic novelist. Few writers have used as many foreign settings in their fiction (every one being a version of hell). Like Conrad, he even made his journey up the Congo, commemorated in *A Burnt-Out Case* (1961). During the Second World War, Greene was involved with espionage, which is a frequent theme in his postwar fiction (e.g., *The Human Factor*, 1978). A commercially successful writer, Greene spent his last years in the south coast of France—a pleasingly marginal location for a novelist always on the edge of what he wrote about.

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928): The writer who most clearly bridges the Victorian and modern literary eras, Hardy was born, the son of a stone-cutter and a woman who had been in service, in rural Dorsetshire (the region he would later call “Wessex”). He would never attend university—something that he would turn into angry fiction in his later masterpiece, *Jude the Obscure*. But he had an excellent school education, locally, and followed his father’s trade. His clear intellectual ability allowed him to move upwards in the construction industry, into architecture. The great turn in his life came when he moved to London. Hardy’s love life, in his 20s, has long fascinated, and eluded, biographers. But throughout life his relationships with women were complicated. His first marriage, to Emma Gifford, in 1874 (at the time when he was giving up architecture for writing) was passionate and unhappy. He would celebrate the relationship in some of the finest love poems in the English language—written, ironically, after her death in 1912. Hardy was a writer who always looked backward, and was always most inspired by events in his, and England’s past. Elegy is his characteristic mode. Hardy began writing in the early 1870s, but it was not until the first of his great Wessex novels, *Far from the Maddening Crowd*, in 1874, that he achieved success. Thereafter his progress was rapid. But his works, while they greatly entertained, also offended. Like the French realists of the time, Hardy was not prepared to avert his eyes from the realities of life, as he saw them and as many of his contemporaries preferred not to see them. Protest at his work climaxed with *Jude the Obscure*, in 1895. Thereafter, comfortably well off, and settled in a fine house which he had designed himself near his native Dorchester, Hardy turned his attention to poetry, most of it lyric, most of it infused with Hardyan gloom (exquisitely articulated). At the time of his death, in 1928, he was the Grand Old Man of English Letters, and much loved. His funeral was almost as spectacular a public event as Tennyson’s had been. The prime minister insisted his remains be buried (against Hardy’s wishes) in Westminster Abbey. His heart, however, was buried in Wessex, where it had always been.

Seamus Heaney (1939–): Heaney was born just over the northern border of Ireland, in Protestant Ulster, although his family was Catholic. This marginality, being between the Irish and English worlds, was formative on his later poetic stance. His father was a farmer—something often alluded to in his poetry. Heaney attended university in Belfast (Northern Ireland) and, on graduation, took up academic work. He would work in a number of British, Irish, and American universities over the following decades. His first collection of poetry appeared in his mid-20s. Other volumes

followed as his reputation grew. In 1989, he was appointed professor of poetry at Oxford and in 1995 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Since then, he has won virtually every major poetry prize in the English-speaking world. Immensely energetic, Heaney suffered a stroke in 2006, from which he happily made a swift recovery.

Henry James (1843–1916): The most influential practitioner and theorist of prose narrative in the 20th century, Henry James was born an American, in New York. His family was one of high intellectual distinction (a brother, William, was the leading philosopher of his time). James settled in Europe, in 1875, absorbing the new ideas about literature which were fermenting, particularly in France. He made it his mission to “raise” the novel to the level of an “art.” He began writing novels on his great “international” theme in the 1870s. In the last twenty years of his life, England would be his base (he became an English citizen, shortly before his death, in 1915, as the Europe he loved was being torn apart by war). Relatively little of James’s fiction is set in Britain, but his influence (particularly via the critical introductions he wrote to his “New York” collected editions of his work) is found everywhere in the English novel of the 20th century.

James Joyce (1882–1941): Joyce was born in Dublin, into a shiftless, Catholic family background which he immortalizes in his autobiographical novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). He was educated at Jesuit institution—something that left an indelible mark on his literary personality. Joyce came of age as Irish nationalism was in the ascendant, and with it a new literary aspiration. Joyce, however, found Ireland (specifically Dublin) both all-absorbing and impossible to live in—given his increasingly skeptical and “modernist” ideas. His subsequent career would be one of “silence, exile, and cunning.” Having married his first love, he eventually settled for several years in Trieste, a place whose marginality suited his temperament. Here he taught and developed his increasingly experimental line of fiction. His first published work of fiction was the linked short-story collection, *Dubliners* (1914)—a title which would have been appropriate for everything he wrote. He moved well away from this early, French-realistic style, in *Portrait*, particularly in its opening and concluding sections. In this novel Joyce articulated his sense of what the modernist writer should be: aloof, like a god paring his nails above the hurly-burly of life. The full-blown practice of his artistic theory emerged with *Ulysses*, in 1922, the most playfully experimental novel in English (with much Irish in it) since *Tristram Shandy*. The novel, inevitably, encountered censorship obstruction in the English-speaking world. It was a decade before the English- or American-reading publics had full access to this most innovative of novels. Joyce’s work was never commercial and he depended on patrons which, luckily, he never had difficulty finding. His sight failed in later years; his family situation was often difficult, a daughter, Lucia, fell mentally ill; and with Europe in upheaval his “exile” was increasingly difficult. He left behind what is generally regarded as the most difficult novel in the language, *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

Philip Larkin (1922–1985): Larkin was born in Coventry where, as he joked in one of his poems, his early years were “unspent.” His father was a senior administrator in the city—which was heavily bombed during World War II. Philip was the Larkins’ only child. He went to Oxford during the war, having been rejected for service on account of poor eyesight. At university he formed what would be a lifelong friendship with the novelist and poet, Kingsley Amis. On graduating, in 1943, Larkin took up a series of posts as a university librarian. He also wrote poetry and fiction. Two of his novels were published. They both throw a revealing light on the author. But it was his poetry which gained him a growing reputation. Larkin went against the violent, “apocalyptic” style of currently admired poets such as Dylan Thomas. His achievement is contained in half a dozen slim volumes—all of which express complex thought under what sometimes looks like a post-Hardyan superficial simplicity. Larkin moved the main current of English poetry away from international modernism to insular, English, traditionalism. His later poetry was increasingly somber in tone (he hated what England had become, over his lifetime). In his last years, as he liked to say, he had not given up poetry, but “poetry gave up me.”

D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930): David Herbert Lawrence was born in the industrial Midlands of England, the son of a coal miner father and a former schoolteacher mother. The parental clash is commemorated in his most personal novel, *Sons and Lovers* (1913), although the tensions of his childhood may be tracked through to his last, and most scandalous, work, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1930). “Love” would be his great theme. His most complex notion of what this “shimmering rainbow” was is expressed most sensitively in the novels which are generally considered his best: *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920). Constitutionally frail, and jealously protected by his mother, young “Bert” Lawrence was spared hard labor in the pits. By dint of self improvement, and native intelligence, he qualified as a

schoolteacher. But tame professional life in the classroom was not for him. He eloped with the wife of one of his college teachers, Frieda Weekley (*née* von Richthofen) in 1912. Thereafter, the couple's life was one of "passionate pilgrimage." After the First World War (difficult by virtue of her background, and his hatred of the conflict) they lived abroad. Lawrence's fiction, which constantly pushed against the limitations of censorship, reached its peak of unpublishability in the English-speaking world with *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in which, quixotically, he attempted to "hygienize" the Anglo-Saxon four-letter vocabulary of sexual relationships. Always prey to pulmonary weakness, Lawrence died of consumption in Venice. His reputation rose meteorically during the 20th century but, with the turn of the century, is somewhat depressed.

George Orwell (1903–1950): The author known to posterity by this name was born Eric Blair. He was born in India, the son of a British civil servant (administrator). His childhood was unsettled, apart from his school years at Eton. His family could not afford university, and he joined the Indian Imperial Police as an officer. The experience is recollected in an early novel, *Burmese Days* (1934) and many of his essays (notably that on shooting an elephant, which allegorizes the intrinsic weakness of British imperial rule). His early life, as a member of Britain's elite, did not indoctrinate Orwell: it made him an inveterate critic of Englishness. He attempted various experiments with the country's class system, chronicled in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). His political views were given practical expression when he enlisted, to fight with the Anarchist forces (POUM), against the fascist Nationalists, in the Spanish Civil War. It was a deeply disillusioning experience. In the Second World War, Orwell worked in broadcasting and wrote voluminously for papers and magazines. His disillusionment with Communism found expression in his bitter Aesopian fable *Animal Farm* (1945), and his equal disillusionment with the postwar English welfare state, and superpower totalitarianism, was scathingly expressed in his dystopia, *1984* (1949). Both have had a profound effect not merely on subsequent literature, but on political thought and action in the English-speaking world.

John Osborne (1929–1994): John Osborne had a troubled childhood—which some might say contributed to his lifelong penchant for "anger." He (along with his fictional creation, Jimmy Porter) was the archetypal Angry Young Man—from birth. Born into the lower middle classes, his father died early in his boyhood. He cordially hated his mother (a former barmaid). Osborne left school early (and angrily), with no worthwhile qualifications. He drifted into the theater, first as an actor in provincial repertory companies, then as a writer. The first serious play written entirely by him, *Look Back in Anger*, was produced in London, in 1956. It was a low point in English drama (dominated by the vacuousness of Terence Rattigan's plays) and in English history (the empire effectively collapsed that year, in which Britain and France invaded Egypt in a futile attempt to recover the Suez Canal). The mood of the country was furious. Osborne's play expressed that fury, with blazing eloquence. Osborne followed up with *The Entertainer* (whose lead role was taken by the country's leading actor, Laurence Olivier), an elegy for the dying music hall tradition and, indirectly, the working class communities that supported it. Thereafter Osborne's career (not helped by a tempestuous personality) was distinguished, but less focused. He ceased being the spokesman for his time, and became one among a number of playwrights combining to create what posterity has seen as a second golden age of English theater.

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918): Owen was born into the lower middle class, his father being a railway station master in western England. Wilfred had his higher education at a technical college, but he was already drawn to literature, and was writing precociously clever and innovative poetry. After a period teaching English in France, he volunteered for the army in 1915. Here he formed a friendship with a fellow poet, Siegfried Sassoon. Different as their styles were—Owen's derived, quite clearly, from the Keatsian romantic tradition—they would establish themselves as the two leading poets of World War I. Owen experienced the bloodiest of trench warfare, was decorated for gallantry, and died on Armistice Day. His best poems were written in the last year of his short life. Like Sassoon, Owen was probably homosexual. How he would have developed as a poet, had he survived, can only be surmised—but given the promise of what he achieved, he would surely have established himself as one of the very greatest poets in the language.

Harold Pinter (1930–): Pinter was born in the East End of London, into the respectable Jewish middle classes who had a vibrant community there. His father was a gentleman's tailor. Young Harold was evacuated from London during the war, to escape the German bombs which rained down on London in the Blitz. The disorienting experience had a profound effect on him. Once returned to his home, Pinter had an excellent school education. On leaving school (and

refusing national military service, on conscientious grounds) Pinter went into the theater, initially as an actor, under the stage name, David Baron. His style of acting was notably different from that current in provincial repertory theater at the time, making emphatic use of silence and unusual vocal stress. Some years into his acting career, Pinter began writing. His first notable work, *The Birthday Party* (1958) introduced all the elements of what would later be famous as “Pinteresque”: namely enigmatic settings, fragmentary dialogue whose effect is cumulative rather than sequential, and—most strikingly—a looming atmosphere of “silent menace.” *The Caretaker* (1960) certified him as one of the group of playwrights (with Osborne and Beckett) who were revolutionizing English theater. Over the next four decades, Pinter wrote for the theater, did film scripts, directed plays, and occasionally acted. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005; the award coincided with his most furious attacks on America, for the “imperial” (as he saw it) invasion on Iraq, and the iniquities of U.S. foreign policy. He remains the angriest of the formerly Angry Young Men.

Terence Rattigan (1911–1977): The son of a diplomat, Rattigan followed the usual course of upper-class education, at Harrow School and Oxford University. On graduation, he devoted himself to writing popular drama for the London stage—at which he was, from the beginning, outstandingly successful. He adopted the Victorian “problem play” for modern settings; “light melodrama” was the presiding tone. His most popular work, *The Winslow Boy* (1946) centers on a court case, called to decide (preposterously) whether a public school boy has stolen a tiny money order or not. Some of Rattigan’s plays, notably *Separate Tables* (1954) hint at more serious issues, notably the playwright’s own sexuality. The revolution which wholly changed English theater in the 1960s—with anger, absurdity, and “kitchen sink” realism—frequently defined itself as virulently anti-Rattigan and his drawing-room melodrama. He himself defended his style, vigorously, but posterity has sided with the modernists.

Isaac Rosenberg (1890–1918): Rosenberg was brought up in the (then) Jewish quarter of East End London, the son of a peddler and trader. It was a scholarly and aspirant background and the young Isaac was able to develop precocious talent in poetry and painting. He was accepted to study at the country’s best art school, the Slade, in the University of London. In 1912, he published his first volume of verse, which attracted a favorable response from discriminating critics such as, notably, Ezra Pound. Although his family background was pacifist, and although he was physically unfit for active service, Rosenberg volunteered for the army in 1916. He refused all promotion and was killed, a private soldier, in the last year of the war, having produced, during his two years in the trenches, his best poetry.

Salman Rushdie (1947–): Rushdie was born in Bombay, in the year of Indian independence; a coincidence which furnishes the theme of his novel, *Midnight’s Children* (1981). The family background was prosperous and Muslim, but relaxed on religious matters. Rushdie was educated at one of England’s best schools, Rugby (which he hated) and Cambridge University, where he was happy. After graduating, he worked as an advertising copywriter and occasionally an actor. The least insular of authors, he absorbed the innovative techniques of “magic realism.” *Midnight’s Children* used these to fine effect. The novel won Britain’s premier fiction prize, the Booker. Thereafter, Rushdie’s career bloomed. It received a harsh check, in February 1989, when the Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader in the Islamic Republic of Iran, declared Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) blasphemous, and imposed a *fatwa*. For many years Rushdie was obliged to go into protective custody—under the wing, ironically, of a Britain about which his novel had been fully as satirical as it had been about Muslim fundamentalism. He continued to write in these straitened circumstances, establishing himself as the most brilliant of the postcolonial school of novelists.

Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967): Sassoon was born into the moneyed English upper classes. His mother encouraged him to be a poet. After leaving Cambridge University, he devoted himself to the activities of a member of the landed gentry—particularly fox hunting (something recalled in his postwar book, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, 1928). He volunteered for service when World War I broke out, and served with great gallantry, being awarded a Military Cross—which he later threw away in disgust. Sassoon was sickened by the carnage of trench warfare—brilliant as he was at it—and composed bitterly satirical poems which he was brave enough to publish during the war. Unlike his comrade, Wilfred Owen, Sassoon survived. His poetry thereafter lost its bite, as he returned to his gentlemanly prewar mode of existence. His later, religious poetry has been found largely uninteresting and he is remembered, and respected, as the most forcefully direct of the First World War poets.

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950): Shaw was born in Dublin, into a family which he records as having been

unusually frigid in its personal relationships. He was largely self-educated. Aged twenty, he moved to London. From his mother he inherited a passionate love of music. His most successful early writing was music criticism for the newspapers and magazines which teemed in the capital at the time. Less successfully, Shaw (who believed in writing 5,000 words a day) turned out five novels which were variously unpublishable and, if published, unreadable. He was, meanwhile, taking a keen interest in the theater, currently at a low ebb. He perceived, very early, that comedy (in a tradition extending as far back as Ben Jonson) could be the vehicle of “ideas.” From the Norwegian dramatist, Ibsen, he also realized that drama could be used to assault, and overturn, bourgeois philistinism—even though bourgeois philistines made up the bulk of the audiences. Fusing his extraordinary comic gift (quite as brilliant as that of his Irish contemporary, Wilde) with the advanced thinking of Wagner, and Nietzsche, Shaw began writing plays. They were paradoxical in manner, and powerfully ideological. Shaw pulled off the virtuosic trick of entertaining the British public, while undermining their prejudices. His first play, *Widower’s Houses*, examined the real source of middle-class wealth—working-class exploitation. Prostitution, he argued in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (1898) was as rational as marriage—given the intrinsic irrationality of marriage. He himself was ultra-rational in his lifestyle: a socialist, a Darwinist, a secularist, a vegetarian, and a lifelong abstainer from alcohol (and sex). In his mid-career masterpiece, *Pygmalion* (1913), he anatomized the hierarchy of British class, in terms of accent. In his later career (the longest literary career in English literature) Shaw became increasingly religio-philosophical. His utopian adherence to the doctrine of “Life Force” is expounded, at vast length, in his five part “biological Pentateuch” *Back to Methuselah* (1921). He died, still writing, festooned with honors. He is the only writer to have won both the Nobel Prize and an Oscar.

Tom Stoppard (1937–): Stoppard was born Tomáš Straussler in Czechoslovakia. The family fled the country, to escape the Nazi invasion, in 1939. As Jews, they would probably not have survived the war. His father did not. Stoppard’s surviving family settled in England, where the boy received a thoroughly English upbringing. He left school at the age of 17, and although clearly brilliant (with a natural gift for philosophy) he never attended university. He worked as a journalist, but was attracted to the theater, where he had friends who encouraged his writing. His first stage success, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967), established him overnight as the wittiest of dramatists currently writing. The play is clearly a recycling of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, with the difference that Stoppard’s characters talk at express train speed, and a dauntingly high intellectual level. His drama has since moved in various directions—although critics sometimes complain that there is no single masterpiece. He returns to his personal roots in *Rock ‘n’ Roll* (2006), in which the fall of Communism is chronicled via a “deviant” (i.e., Western-influenced) Czech musical group in Prague. Stoppard won an Oscar for the script of the film *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), and was knighted in 1997.

Evelyn Waugh (1903–1966): The son of a leading London publisher, Waugh was educated at public school and Oxford. He was notably idle at university and intended to become an artist. An unsuccessful spell of school-teaching and equally unsuccessful marriage (which was dissolved in 1930) was followed by conversion to Catholicism (in the same fashion as his contemporary, and friend, Graham Greene). Thereafter Waugh devoted himself to a literature, establishing himself in the 1930s as a ruthless satirist of the nihilistic barbarism, as he saw it, of the modern age. Waugh saw active service in the Second World War, and out of it, and his intensifying devotion to his church, he wrote what is considered his finest work, the “Sword of Honor” trilogy (1952–1961). Not only the most deeply felt, it is the most personal of his works—with the possible exception of *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957), which playfully chronicles Waugh’s mid-life nervous breakdown. Waugh was archetypally English, but incorrigibly antagonistic to what, in an early novel, he calls the “decline and fall” of his country. He and Greene (along with Anthony Burgess, Muriel Spark, and David Lodge) embody that principle, enunciated by George Orwell, that there are no good Catholic novels in the 20th century, but some excellent novels written by Catholics.

H. G. Wells (1866–1946): The Godfather of British science fiction (who always preferred to be known as a novelist of ideas, and popular philosopher), Herbert George Wells was born in Kent, into the lower classes. His father was a professional cricketer turned shopkeeper; his mother had been in service (i.e., a servant). After school education, the young Wells was put to work in a draper’s shop (commemorated in his later comic novel, *Kipps*, 1905). By dint of heroic self-education, he gained entrance to the Normal School of Science, in London, where he came under the influence of the leading Darwinist of the day, T. H. Huxley. Not sufficiently gifted to be a scientist proper, the young Wells embarked on a series of “scientific romances,” of daring novelty, for popular readership. They included *The Time*

Machine (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Having made a name for himself, and infected with the new socialist doctrines abroad at the time, Wells's later work—in fiction, journalism, and social commentary—is more “serious.” He wanted to be a “sage,” writing, for example, a preposterously ambitious *Short History of the World* (1922). He returned, brilliantly, to science fiction with the utopian *The Shape of Things to Come*, in 1933.

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900): Wilde was born in Dublin, into a well-off family, established as members of the “Ascendancy” (i.e., Protestant and loyal to England, rather than Catholic Ireland). His father was a surgeon. Wilde went to school and university in Dublin before completing his education (brilliantly) at Oxford University. Already his brilliance as a poet and a conversational wit were clear to his contemporaries, as was also his personal flamboyance. From the first, Wilde dedicated himself to the French “Art for Art’s Sake” doctrine. Life, he liked to say, imitated art. The highest art was the highest artifice. At the same time he embraced “Hellenic” ideals of beauty and human relationship. It both fascinated, and appalled, the English middle classes. Wilde was famous before he had produced anything which would justify that fame. He wrote higher journalism, delicate fairy stories and fables, and decadent verse. It was not until he began writing high-society comedies for the London stage that his career took off, with *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) and his one undisputed masterpiece, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). Wilde was married (happily) with children, but bisexual, and recklessly adventurous. The highpoint of his theatrical career coincided with a vindictive prosecution for “indecent practices” (homosexuality) which led to him being imprisoned for two years. On his release he took refuge in France, where he died, a disgraced, once celebrated, author shortly after. His most famous poem, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, vividly commemorates his suffering, as does the spiritual memoir, *De Profundis*, not published until long after his death. It was not Oscar Wilde, but England, which—posterity has concluded—was disgraced by his prosecution.

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): Virginia Stephen was born into a literary family. Her father, Leslie Stephen, was a leading liberal man of letters. But he was also Victorian, and Virginia’s life would be a crusade against what her fellow “Bloomsberry,” Lytton Strachey, called “Eminent Victorians.” Early in her family life the Stephens moved to the north London area of Bloomsbury. Virginia, a brilliant young girl, had no opportunity to go to university—something about which she is wittily furious, in her essay, “A Room of One’s Own.” She did, however, have that room. And she did have access to the leading literary paper in London, the *Times Literary Supplement* (whose reviews and articles were anonymous—disguising the sex of the contributor). She and like-minded intellectuals (Strachey, E. M. Forster, Maynard Keynes), all of a progressive and antiestablishment cast of mind, founded the “Bloomsbury group.” In 1912, she married the author and social commentator Leonard Woolf. Rigorously antiromantic (and lesbian by preference), Virginia had none the less found a stable and loving partner. The two of them would, following one of her recurrent nervous breakdowns, and as a kind of therapy, founded the Hogarth Press, in 1917. Having an outlet for her creative fiction enabled her to pursue an experimental line of fiction which flowered with *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), and *The Waves* (1931). In them she explored the potential of her “stream of consciousness” method, which broke away from the old rigidities of fictional narrative. Throughout her writing life, Woolf also published trenchant criticism and wrote lively personal diaries and letters which rank as among the best private correspondence of the century. Always prey to mental disturbance, she drowned herself, in her country house, in 1941 believing—as her last novel *Between the Acts* testifies—that England would quite likely lose the war. Posthumously, and particularly after the feminist energy brought to literary criticism in the 1960s, she has been recognized as one of the two or three most important novelists of the century.

W. B. Yeats (1865–1939): William Butler Yeats was born in Dublin into a cultivated, artistically inclined, Protestant family. His early circumstances were comfortable. His first ambition was to be an artist, like his father and brother, Jack. But in his early 20s he turned to literature. The nationalist revival of Irish (“Celtic”) literature was in full flow. So too was the renaissance of Irish drama—notably at Dublin’s Abbey Theatre. Yeats threw himself enthusiastically into both movements. At the same period, he developed a hopeless love for the woman who was both his muse and his siren, Maud Gonne. He adored and devoted himself to her for years, but she would never be his. He married—happily, as it would transpire—another woman in 1917. Yeats’s poetry, much of which was dreamily expressive of the “Celtic Twilight” hardened, and matured, under the influence of Modernist writers such as Ezra Pound. It is a feature of Yeats’s

work that it was in constant evolution: His poetry never stood still, stylistically. In the first decades of the 20th century, now a leading Modernist, he produced his most enduring work, with the crises of Irish nationalist struggle leading to independence in the early 1920s. Yeats combined politics with poetry over the next decade—as what he called “a smiling public man.” He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923.

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Parts I–IV

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John Sutherland is UCL Emeritus Lord Northcliffe Professor of Modern English Literature at University College London and Visiting Professor of Literature at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech).

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After 10 years at The University of Edinburgh, Professor Sutherland moved to a post at University College London, the first institution in England to admit Nonconformist, Jewish, and female students, and the first institution to pioneer, in 1830, what is taken to be the first university English department in England. After a decade at University College London, he was appointed Visiting Professor of Literature at Caltech, where he won teaching excellence awards instructing a predominantly scientific undergraduate community in his own unscientific field.

In 1992, Professor Sutherland was appointed to the Lord Northcliffe Chair at University College London. He maintained a split appointment until 1994, when he retired from active teaching at University College London.

Over the course of his career, Professor Sutherland has had visiting appointments at Dartmouth College, the University of Münster, and The University of Western Ontario, teaching students at every level in a variety of academic contexts. He has received numerous awards and honors, including the Associated Student Body of Caltech Excellence in Teaching Award (1992 and 2003) and the Sherman Fairchild Distinguished Scholar Award from Caltech (1993).

Professor Sutherland is the author of more than 30 scholarly editions (mostly of classic Victorian fiction) and scores of articles in learned journals. Starting in 1992, he wrote a weekly column in *The Guardian* newspaper for seven years. As

a result of his journalism and broadcast work, he is one of the best-known academics outside of academia.

Professor Sutherland’s books range from close examinations of manuscript materials (*Thackeray at Work*) and publishing history (*Victorian Novelists and Publishers; Fiction and the Fiction Industry*) to biography (*Mrs. Humphry Ward: Eminent Victorian, Pre-eminent Edwardian; The Life of Walter Scott: A Critical Biography; Stephen Spender: A Literary Life*) and *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction (The Stanford Companion to Victorian Fiction* in the United States), a massive encyclopedia of one of English literature’s major genres. This last work took a decade to complete, and he regards it as his major effort in scholarship.

In 1996, Professor Sutherland embarked on a series of literary “puzzle books” with Oxford University Press, beginning with *Is Heathcliff a Murderer? Puzzles in 19th-Century Fiction*; the work was extraordinarily popular, even appearing—for a glorious week or two—on *The Sunday Times* bestseller list. Five more puzzle books followed, culminating with *Henry V, War Criminal? and Other Shakespeare Puzzles* (with Cedric Watts).

Professor Sutherland continues to publish prolifically. Since 2005, in addition to a wealth of journalism and reviewing, he has written *Victorian Fiction: Novelists, Publishers, Readers; Inside Bleak House: A Guide for the Modern Dickensian* (a companion to the BBC TV dramatization of Dickens’s novel); *So You Think You Know Jane Austen? A Literary Quizbook* (with Deirdre Le Faye); *So You Think You Know Thomas Hardy? A Literary Quizbook; Bestsellers: A Very Short Introduction; The Boy Who Loved Books: A Memoir; How to Read a Novel: A User’s Guide*; and has edited an edition of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Black Arrow*.

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