Classic Novels: Meeting the Challenge of Great Literature

Parts I–III

Professor Arnold Weinstein

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Arnold Weinstein, Ph.D.

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

Born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1940, Arnold Weinstein attended public schools before going to Princeton University for his college education (B.A. in Romance Languages, 1962, magna cum laude). He spent a year studying French literature at the Université de Paris (1960–1961) and a year after college at the Freie Universität Berlin, studying German literature. His graduate work was done at Harvard University (M.A. in Comparative Literature, 1964; Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, 1968), including a year as a Fulbright Scholar at the Université de Lyon in 1966–1967.

Professor Weinstein's professional career has taken place almost entirely at Brown University, where he has gone from Assistant Professor to his current position as Edna and Richard Salomon Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature. He won the Workman Award for Excellence in Teaching in the Humanities in 1995. He has also won a number of prestigious fellowships, including a Fulbright Fellowship in American literature at Stockholm University in 1983 and research fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1998 (in the area of literature and medicine) and in 2007 (in the area of Scandinavian literature). In 1996, he was named Professeur Invité in American literature at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris.

Professor Weinstein's publications include the following: *Vision and Response in Modern Literature* (Cornell University Press, 1974), *Fictions of the Self: 1550–1800* (Princeton University Press, 1981), *The Fiction of Relationship* (Princeton University Press, 1988), *Nobody's Home: Speech, Self and Place in American Fiction from Hawthorne to DeLillo* (Oxford University Press, 1993), *A Scream Goes Through the House: What Literature Teaches Us About Life* (Random House, 2003), and *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison* (Random House, 2006). He has just completed *Northern Arts: The Breakthrough of Scandinavian Literature and Art from Ibsen to Bergman*, to be published by Princeton University Press in 2008. His latest project is *Literature and the Phases of Life: Growing Up and Growing Old*, under contract with Random House, with an expected completion date of 2009.

In addition to his career in teaching and writing, Professor Weinstein has produced a number of courses for The Teaching Company, including *The Soul and the City: Art, Literature and Urban Life*; *Drama, Poetry and Narrative: Understanding Literature and Life*; *20th-Century American Fiction*; and *American Literary Classics*.

Table of Contents
Classic Novels: Meeting the Challenge of Great Literature

Classic Novels: Meeting the Challenge of Great Literature

Scope:

The title of this course, *Classic Novels*, indicates the stature of the books we will cover. Beginning with Defoe and closing with García Márquez, our aim is to illuminate some of the most influential works of fiction in Western literature, yet works that challenge our sense of what a novel is, what it does, and why we have it. Those issues are represented in the subtitle of the course, *Meeting the Challenge of Great Literature*; our goal will be to grasp the intellectual ferment and power—social, emotional, and artistic—of these famous books. Hence, this course is more than a history of the novel; rather, it is a series of encounters with fictions that may be old but are far from dead. Our clichéd notion of a novel as simply "a slice of life" needs to be upended and rethought. Classic novels are restless creatures, trying out new forms of expression, challenging our views on how a culture might be understood and how a life might be packaged. What is the shape of experience? How would you represent your own? These books help us toward a deeper understanding of our own estate.

The virtue of beginning this course with three premier 18th-century writers—Defoe, Sterne, and Laclos—is to realize how wildly experimental the novel form is in its early phase. Defoe is our great journalist-author, and in *Moll Flanders* he tells the modern story of an underprivileged woman in a bustling metropolis, yielding a tale of streetsmarts and masquerade as the condition of survival in London. If Defoe's book is straightforward narrative, what are we to make of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*? Nothing seems finishable or tellable in this confection of digressions, mishaps, and sexual innuendo. Sterne is a tonic figure: He exposes all the wiring, reminding us that *stories* are actually weird constructs, that *thinking* explodes most forms of expression. Then comes the dazzling epistolary *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, rich in parallels with our modern culture of e-mail and text-messaging, wise about the lies we tell both others and ourselves. Seen together, these three narratives show us how unpredictable, how unhinging the *life story* might be; in these mirrors, we recover the depths and unruliness of our own condition.

The second phase of the course tackles a number of the greatest 19th-century novelists. These books constitute the heyday of the genre itself, functioning somewhat like the Internet of today, as sources of information about a rapidly changing world. They also explore something we are unequipped to see with our own eyes, the relations between self and society. Balzac's *Père Goriot* offers us the archetypal capitalist story: An innocent young man comes from the provinces to Paris to make his fortune, but at what price? Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* wins the prize as primitive fable: a story of crazed and ungratifiable longings, of the clash between appetite and culture. With Melville's *Moby-Dick*, American fiction enters both our course and literary history. This exuberant book, at once Shakespearean and mercantile, goes right off the charts of realism into metaphysics. Flaubert and Dickens appear as mid-century prophetic figures. *Bleak House* is an anatomy of the modern city: anonymous, inscrutable, corrupt, yet dreadfully interdependent. Flaubert seemingly returns us to a realist mode of writing but in a merciless, scalpel-like fashion; *Madame Bovary* rings the death knell on our dearest fictions, romantic love and bounded self. The Russians Tolstoy and Dostoevsky extend the canvas of fiction further than any other 19th-century practitioners. *War and Peace* offers a modern epic of the convulsive changes affecting Russian history and society, whereas *The Brothers Karamazov* uses the story of a parricide to explore the spiritual and psychological reaches of the human soul, yielding the most dimensional fiction of the century. At the century's close, the novel turns inside-out; Conrad's brief but bottomless *Heart of Darkness* is at once a moral anatomy of the "European project" and a crisis in storytelling. The 19th century ends on a deeply nihilistic note: An ethos and a way of writing are both in their death throes.

The last phase of the course begins with Thomas Mann, then zeroes in on five masters of the modern age—Kafka, Proust, Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner—and closes with the magic realism of García Márquez. Mann's *Death in Venice* extends the Conradian anatomy of a sick Europe, and it points toward the libido-driven Freudian legacy that is our own. At this point, the novel form seems to explode with new vistas and new challenges. Kafka is the most sibylline of the group, as he packages spiritual fables and quests in relentlessly materialist frameworks. Proust's huge novel is the *ne plus ultra* of subjective vision, as if the inner world simply gobbled up the older regime of landscapes and surfaces. Might this be the great untold story that earlier fiction never accessed? With Joyce's *Ulysses*, we arrive finally at what may seem an unreadable fiction. In fact, this monumental text is, aside from its erudition and high jinks, the funniest and most carnal story in our literature, wise about both mind and body, offering us a shocking view of our actual song and dance. Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* takes the inside story further still, making us aware that our inner pulsions and responses have a fierce language of their own, that the enduring reality of others lies strangely within our own subjectivity. We then go to Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, a stream-of-consciousness masterpiece that chronicles, via the death of a mother, a still larger tragedy: the cashiering of self altogether. Our

final text, García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is the crazy quilt of the course, showing us a new world altogether, one in which family fate and human desire mock the old laws of time and flesh. Could this be a new freedom?

By course's end, a cartography of fictional projects and possibilities will have come into focus. The novel lives. Its practitioners have much to teach us, not only about the ways stories are told, but about the actual resources of our own lives. This storehouse of fictions is something of an "open sesame," because it enriches our sense of our own form and fate. A knowledge of their accomplishments widens and deepens—forever—one's sense of what classic novels do and what we gain by responding to the challenge of reading them.

Lecture One
Meeting the Challenge of Great Literature

Scope: As an institution, the novel has a basic mission: to present the "life story." This mission can be carried out in a stunning variety of ways, and classic novels are those books that continue to stun us with their manner as well as their tidings, at once offering a living picture of the past and enabling us to get a new purchase on our own arrangements. After all, what is a life story? Despite our brave résumés with their sweet coherence, our actual experiential lives take place in the murk—no X-ray vision, little sense of our own dance—with few markers and still fewer guides.

Whether it be Moll Flanders's feisty adventures in 18th-century London, or Ahab's crazed pursuit of the white whale, or Emma Bovary's no less mad search for love, or the violent brooding of the Karamazovs as they consider a world without God, or the grotesque antics of Faulkner's Mississippians as they process a mother's death, or the fierce yet fantastic doings of García Márquez's Buendía clan during their hundred years of solitude, these stories—these human fates packaged between two book covers—help us to a fuller sense of our own estate, our own selves. Reading great fictions of the past as well as the present takes us into the looking glass. That is its challenge.

Outline

I. After almost 40 years of teaching, I've come to believe that literature is miraculous; it has the ability to capture life between two covers.

- **A.** We cannot hold flowing water in our hands, but life itself flows into and onto the pages of the books we read, and then flows into us.
- **B.** In this course, we'll look at 18 books spanning some 250 years. We'll try to get at what they mean for most readers, what they have meant in the past, and what they might mean for you.

II. This course is titled *Classic Novels: Meeting the Challenge of Great Literature*. Those terms may appear staid, but they are not: They are bristling with energies, vistas, and surprises.

- **A.** We begin with *literature*. How seriously is it taken today? Can it compete for your attention with topics as obviously relevant as politics or science or economics? My core belief in this course—and in my life—is that reading literature is no less than a transformative experience, a voyage unlike any other.
  1. Literature is the transcription of human life into language. That endeavor is not as simple as it sounds, because life is not language. In this regard, writers are trailblazers and pioneers, colonists of sorts, conquering worlds and bringing them into language, sharing them with us, and making them available to us.
  2. We might think of language as an umbilical cord that serves as a conduit through which we may enter into communication with the world of others.
  3. It seems that real experience is abstracted when it comes to us as language, but the opposite may be true: Only via literature do we wake up to the startling reaches of life. Kafka said: "Art is the ax that chops into our frozen sea."
  4. In this course, we will consider that paradox—that art or literature makes things surprisingly more real, not less so, and in that sense, it makes available to us what we might call our own estate.
  5. In real life, we are locked into our own bodies and minds. All the rest—the reality of others—is, to some extent, guesswork for us. Literature opens up a world that would otherwise be opaque and unknowable and enables us to explore our own inner reaches.
- **B.** Now we turn to the question: What is a novel? One answer: Novels depict a "life story." There is much to ponder in that definition.
  1. Do you have a "life story"? Can you see it? Could you tell it to someone else? Could your life story be found on your résumé? For that matter, does your mind work in the same way as your résumé? Does it always move forward, from beginning to middle to end?
  2. Literature shows us something about the many directions in which the inner life moves, and they're hardly straightforward. Some would argue that the shape of a life cannot be known or seen until it is over. Further, none of us can see the passing of time, which is the medium we live in.

3. The miracle of the novel should jump out at you when you hold it in your hands. Between two covers, novels render visible the passages of life, the forming (and deforming) of individuals. Novels give us a plenary view of life—the interplay between hidden thoughts and spoken words, the effects of the environment, the incidents and accidents of existence. We are not equipped to get this view on our own.

C. What, then, is a classic novel? "Classic" is a word that can put people to sleep, because it can connote some mummified artifact kept under glass, requiring only our respectful salute.
1. Classic novels are books that invariably surprise us by destabilizing much that we thought firm and in place. It's true that art embodies order, but at the same time, it explodes our paltry notions of order. It tells us that life is far more provocative and bristling and fascinating and unruly than our narrow definitions usually allow.
2. Classic novels offer a reflection of the time and place where they were written, still breathing the life of long ago and enabling us to breathe it, too.
3. But classic novels are not simply a means for us to experience faraway places. These texts still speak to us today, functioning as mirrors for us and for our moment. *Moll Flanders*, for example, speaks to the battle of women to find a legitimate place in society; *Bleak House* offers a frightening view of still-unsolved problems and crises of urban culture.

D. Finally, there is the challenge of reading these books. They challenge us to wake up, to enter into their depths, to partake of the life they contain.
1. Reading is a form of time travel. It is also a two-way street: We leave (momentarily) our own precincts to enter into other worlds, but those other worlds move on their own into us.
2. Reading is also a voyage in the sense that it takes the mind elsewhere. In this course, we'll travel to the Napoleonic campaign in Russia with Tolstoy, through the heat of Mississippi accompanied by a dead body in Faulkner, and along the streets of Dublin in Joyce's version of *The Odyssey*.
3. Reading these books is akin to visiting the storehouse of culture to take nourishment from it. We might think of reading as similar to ancient cannibalism or modern medicine: We "ingest" the books we read in order to take their magic powers or healing potency into ourselves.

III. What about these books chosen for this course? Why is our list what it is?

A. We begin with three masterpieces of the 18th century: Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and Laclos's *Liaisons Dangereuses*.
1. We see how variously the life story can be told: via the journalistic account of a woman-thief, the reflexivity of a story that comes undone on every page, or the letters exchanged between two seducers and their victims.
2. These early fictions teach us that novels are shape-shifting creatures, that they are never merely a slice of life. They make us wonder how we would represent our own affairs.

B. The second phase of the course covers the great canonical narratives of the 19th century in Europe, Russia, and America. This is the heyday of the genre; these books are inexhaustible in their vistas.
1. Balzac's *Père Goriot* and Dickens's *Bleak House* inscribe the education of young people within a systemwide analysis of Paris and London. Why should a novel centralize young people? As we'll see, the 19th-century *Bildungsroman*, the novel of formation, puts young people on center stage and shows us a broader picture of the conflict between the values they've learned and the operation of culture and society that they encounter.
2. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* all explore the dark, sometimes fatal side of human feeling: the primitive family saga in the British moors, the suicidal quest for romance in Normandy, the murderous crisis of love and belief in Russia. These books embody the great staples of art—love, violence, sex, death, God—that are still relevant and significant today.
3. Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* create novelistic universes of their own. Melville sets his sights on the infinite—the depths of the sea and of the human soul. Tolstoy gives us the great historical stage where we act out our own small dramas. Each text takes the measure of personal fate in a scheme that dwarfs it.

C. In our third phase, we read the master narratives of the 20th century, which chart a crisis of Western thinking that is still with us today.

1. Whereas Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Mann's *Death in Venice* are endgame stories about the collapse of values, Kafka's explorations of metamorphosis and enigmatic arrest signal a world that no longer plays by the rules of daytime logic.
2. Proust, Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner are the epochal writers of the modern period. Each succeeds in bringing to the page a story never told before: the inner record of feeling, thought, fantasy, and desire that has always subtended the factual record. With philosophy, humor, lyricism, and tragic pathos, these novelists track human memory and human sentience; they reconceive our arrangements; they allow us to recover our own story.
3. We close with the masterpiece of Magic Realism, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, in which all that seemed to govern human life—the laws of time, space, history, and logic—seems overcome by a vision of desire and freedom. Could this be a new beginning?

Questions to Consider:

1. How would you evaluate the importance of literature? In one's education? In one's spare time? As opposed to other subjects and fields? Is this an area where there might be a gap between lip service and reality, between professed beliefs and actual beliefs? Why should this be the case?
2. What do you make of the argument that literature might offer us a "shock of recognition" concerning major existential, emotional, and social issues? Do you think the testimony of literature can rival the testimony of experience? If so, why? If not, why?

Lecture Two
Defoe—*Moll Flanders*

Scope: Daniel Defoe, arguably the father of the English novel, is our first great journalist-author: He was curious, with a sharp eye for street life, and equipped with a plain style. As inheritor of the *picaresque* novel—a work of satire, looking at society from the bottom up—Defoe makes his protagonist in *Moll Flanders* a woman, and turns her loose on the streets of London. The result is a modern story of cunning and survival, revealing the resources available to people without station or power.

Moll Flanders is a self-described artist who uses disguise as the key to her monetary and erotic successes; her world is governed by the rule of exchange. Often criticized as philistine and hypocritical, Moll may surprise us with her peculiar honesty and integrity. Ultimately, Defoe offers us a double story: Moll's (visible) ongoing adventures in deception as well as her own (invisible) spiritual bookkeeping. This last accounting, what the reader sees versus what the other characters see, constitutes that "inside story" that is the ultimate purview of fiction itself.

Outline

I. We begin this lecture series with *Moll Flanders,* written by Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) and published in 1721.

- **A.** As we'll see, this seemingly straightforward narrative is filled with masks, disguise, lying, and scheming.
- **B.** At a key moment, Moll asks a man she has loved: "Do you not know me?" The existential issues inherent in this question are at the core of this early-18th-century novel.

II. Defoe has long been considered the father of the English novel, even though he inherited an established picaresque tradition. We may also regard him as a great journalist, with a sharp eye for current events in early-18th-century London.

- **A.** The *picaresque* novel is of Spanish invention, dating back to the mid-16th century and relating the affairs of a *picaro*, a lowlife figure. Critics have claimed that such novels have no plot but are strictly episodic.
  - **1.** From an aesthetic point of view, the episodic nature of the picaresque novel may be a weakness, but it also prompts us to ask: Does life itself have a pattern?
  - **2.** The genre is most known for its bottom-up angle of vision, as the authors of such works satirize the arrangements of the wealthy or powerful from the perspectives of beggars or thieves or con men. Picaresque novels are rich in information about the kinds of resources available to people without resources.
  - **3.** This tradition can be said to live on in fiction of every century: Not merely Defoe's work but Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Ellison's *Invisible Man* illustrate the vitality of the model.
- **B.** As a "journalist," Defoe published papers and pamphlets on virtually all the issues of his age: religious controversy, duels, bankruptcy, insurance, care for the elderly, and conditions for the mentally ill.

III. Defoe's signature appears to be his plain style and his prosaic—as opposed to poetic—view of life.

- **A.** The writing itself takes on a conversational, unadorned style, with few allusions and few flourishes. It is attuned to modern life.
- **B.** Defoe is our great witness to the emergence of the middle class; he celebrates enterprise, mercantilism, and hard work.
  - **1.** His views on industriousness and profit have been seen in terms of Protestantism and the work ethic. The focus in Defoe's books is on the individual in *this* life; he doesn't address religious salvation or transcendence.
  - **2.** For modern readers, his work raises the question: Is there no conflict between fattening your purse and saving your soul?
  - **3.** The commonsensical Defoe is visible in his world-famous *Robinson Crusoe*. This story of a man abandoned on a desert island could have been an existentialist nightmare. In Defoe, it becomes a tale of *homo economicus*: Get busy and organize the island.

IV. *Moll Flanders* brings all these factors into play, while adding one more fascinating twist: The protagonist is a woman.

A. The story of an innocent country girl corrupted by city life was a familiar topic for the 18th century. London, a thriving business capital, was growing by leaps and bounds. This same story is unforgettably imaged in Hogarth's print series *A Harlot's Progress*.

B. Some readers assert that Moll's story is modeled on the real-life adventures of female criminals. In his preface, Defoe claims that her story is a moral tale of remorse, but is it?

1. Moll, an orphan without money or papers, attempts to succeed in a world regulated by class and wealth. Her goal is to become a gentlewoman, which for Moll means gaining a measure of independence. Her only tools for achieving that goal are her beauty, her body, her wit, and her cunning.

2. When she's younger, Moll tries to make a wealthy marriage, usually by appearing to be a woman of means. As she ages, she becomes a thief.

3. Moll's activities as a thief are perfectly suited to Defoe's plain style, and the result is an utterly materialist definition of the "good life": money, lace, linen, and silver. These things are measurable; what about the things that are not measurable—morality, emotion, the soul?

C. The novel has been severely criticized as philistine and soulless. Its moral claims have been thought hypocritical. But Defoe shows us Moll's inner life with unflinching honesty.

1. When her first husband dies, Moll enumerates how much money he left her and tells us that her two children were "taken happily off my hands…." Here, she seems interested only in the material life.

2. Later, she describes a clever plan for stealing from the upper-class resident of a home during a fire. She feels remorse afterward, but says, "I could never find it in my heart to make any restitution. The reflection wore off and I began quickly to forget the circumstances that attended the taking them [the stolen items]."

3. Here, Defoe seems to say that her remorse is real—it's just not very powerful. We're not without moral values, but life makes us callous, and those values surface only occasionally.

4. In this view, Defoe's book makes others look pretentious and hollow. He seems to ask: How morally scrupulous is any life?

D. Moll's sense of how to succeed is linked to her dexterity and wit, but it is not alien to a kind of inwardness.

1. Moll's first husband was, in fact, the younger brother of her first lover. Moll loves the older brother desperately, but it is the younger brother who takes her seriously and persuades his family to allow the marriage to take place.

2. After her husband's death, Moll confesses that she never loved him, despite his kindness toward her. Instead, she is obsessed with his brother: "And I never was in bed with my husband that I wished myself in the arms of his brother…. In short, I committed adultery and incest with him every day in my desires…."

3. Defoe shows us in this remarkable passage that the world of surfaces (Moll in bed with her husband) is echoed by a world of memories and other relationships (the world that takes place in her mind). We can't help bringing that world into the world in which we live.

V. Moll's erotic and economic successes would appear to hinge on her talent for disguise and self-presentation. The virtues of being incognito are crucial.

A. Moll can never tell people who she is because of the risk that she would be hanged as a thief. Still, thieving is a form of artistry in this book, a creative activity. For Moll, the desire to steal verges on the pathological.

B. Some have argued that disguise is the modus operandi of modern urban life. Most of our relationships are secondary, and we tend to keep our "histories" hidden. Like Moll, we find virtue in invisibility.

C. In contemplating a marriage to yet another lover, Moll lists her own transgressions but promises, "I will make him amends if possible by what he shall see for the cheats and abuses that I put upon him which he does not see."

1. This is a statement of Moll's ethics, and it's a form of bookkeeping. She knows that her past is checkered, but she will try to live in such a way that makes up for that checkered past.

2. With this bookkeeping, the novel creates a dialectic between what is hidden and internal and what is public, our words and actions in relationships with others.

3. Although disguise is part of this book and we tend to think of disguise as fake, in fact, the novel is stunningly honest, taking the measure of who we are over time.

VI. The pendant to disguise in this novel is confession.

A. Characters confess throughout the book and not only in church. Moll herself is intensely social, and disguised though she may be, she needs to share her experiences with others.

B. When Moll is finally taken to Newgate Prison, a minister moves her to open up, and she relates to him her history. Confession, not disguise, is the final truth of the novel.

C. The legacy of *Moll Flanders* is that our lives are much longer than any of the shorthand versions of them we have. The full title of the novel is *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, Etc. Who was born in Newgate, and during a life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five Times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother), Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest and died a Penitent.* Such a title calls into question any neat view of a human life, and suggests that all of us lead picaresque existences over time.

Essential Reading:

Daniel Defoe and Albert J. Rivero, *Moll Flanders: An Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*.

Supplementary Reading:

John Richetti, *The Life of Daniel Defoe: A Critical Biography.*

Arnold Weinstein, *The Fiction of Relationship*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Defoe's heroine has often been criticized as soulless and driven exclusively by materialist values. Do you agree with this assessment? Does this make *Moll Flanders* more—or less—relevant to a modern American audience?
2. Defoe's novel seems obsessed with the notion of disguise and self-concealment. What do you make of the urban issue here: that one is always incognito in an anonymous big city? Do you agree or disagree with the argument that disguise might be a form of self-enactment? To what extent do you think you yourself go about in disguise?

Lecture Three
Sterne—*Tristram Shandy*

Scope: *Tristram Shandy* is the oddest narrative in English literature: a story that goes nowhere, an endless number of learned references, an obsession with digressions, and a hodgepodge where plot disappears. Sterne's book has been linked to an old tradition of erudite allusions, but it has also been seen as a prodigious forerunner of the narrative experiments of the 20th century.

Like *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land, Tristram Shandy* points to a world of ruins and dead authority, therefore reimagining and reconceiving the very notion of *doing*. Its self-awareness as construct, its wordplay, its shaggy-dog stories, its interest in private whim and pornographic suggestion, its concern with metaphor and analogy, all point toward a new kind of literature in which words acquire a kind of autonomy and suggestive power never before seen. The reader is king.

Outline

I. *Tristram Shandy* (1760-1767), written by Laurence Sterne (1713–1768), is the oddest narrative in English literature, and it makes us realize how maddeningly free and inventive a "story" might be. As we come to that realization, we might also wonder how much freer our own thinking could be, and we begin to see the extent to which we are imprisoned by conventions of thought, language, and logic.

A. At first, we note the overwhelming presence of learned references in this text: Latin, Greek, Dutch, biblical, and more.

1. The modern reader sees here a world of ruins, of ancient "authority" that no longer resonates or is even readable today. One senses a parallel with T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, a picture of 20th-century life filled with dead references.

2. But soon we realize that Sterne himself is mocking these learned traditions, even turning baptism itself into wordplay.

3. Sterne is obsessed with rules and the breaking of rules and delights in poking fun at those who practice strict adherence. He invokes the example of critics watching the famous Shakespearean actor Garrick; they are so concerned with whether Garrick follows the rules of drama that they miss the essence of his performance.

4. If the old traditions do not bind, what does? Sterne suggests that we are condemned to our own inner conscience (in modern terms, consciousness) as the only compass available. But this inner law is highly unreliable.

B. *Tristram Shandy* is Sterne's unforgettable and delicious response to this quandary, a work of art that both uses and breaks the rules, a work of art filled with references to long-dead authorities. It celebrates individual consciousness and subjectivity. The great 18th-century critic Samuel Johnson said of *Tristram Shandy*, "Anything that odd won't last long." Can this novel be read today?

1. The first major obstacle we confront is the fact that writing about life is endlessly expansive; entire chapters could be written about one's birth or first hours of existence. Sterne gives us background, foreground, and a host of other grounds, while scarcely moving forward with the life story of his hero, Tristram.

2. Such a technique is given the inadequate term *digression*, inadequate because it implies that one's goal is to go straight forward. That, Sterne tells us, is fine if you're a muleteer but not if you're telling a story.

3. In *not* moving forward, in writing a digressive text, Sterne shifts the center of attention from the presumed plot of his story to the reader.

4. One origin for this kind of writing is Sterne's interest in the philosopher John Locke and his notion of *free association*—the idea that the mind works metaphorically, traveling from one idea to another without necessarily any logical connection.

5. As we can imagine, such a model of associative thinking makes logic and even conversation difficult. Sterne labels this behavior "hobbyhorse," suggesting that this child's toy represents the odd, capricious way in which we think.

C. This model of thinking leads to a view of life as largely private and solipsistic.

1. If we almost always operate by free association, with no common universal logic to govern our thinking, then we almost always need a translator or decoder in our dealings with others.
2. This situation is hospitable to individual obsessions. Sterne's characters speak *past* each other, and the reader is left to decide whether his or her own conversation follows that same model.
3. This view of life and the way the mind works also suggests that we are, in some sense, locked out of the minds of others. Sterne wishes he could use Momus's glass to view the soul of others and see how thoughts are formed.
4. Without such a device, Sterne seems to suggest that the best way to know others is to pay attention to their particular obsessions, their free associative patterns, and so on.
5. Such a model of associative thinking enables a narrative performance like no other. Sterne enjoys leaving his characters in mid-speech, in mid-air, while he goes on to other topics, other moments in time, and other places in space. It is the power of *writing* that makes this possible.

II. The stunning mobility of Sterne's *manner* is to be contrasted with the deterministic and coercive conditions that shackle the life of his characters, particularly the protagonist, Tristram.

A. The book's first sentence tells us that even the hero's conception was interrupted by an instance of associative logic.
1. The book suggests that biological creatures are subject to terrible pressures, any one of which can cause lasting damage. In Tristram's case, his conception was interrupted, he was pulled from the birth canal by forceps, he was given the wrong name, and he was nearly castrated as an infant. From this perspective, he is destined to be a cosmic loser.
2. We see here the book's interest in contrasting the kinds of freedom we have versus the determinism to which we are subject.

B. Sterne's digressions show an interest in trying to emancipate the power of language, suggesting meanings beyond a dictionary's definitions.
1. The chapter entitled "The Promontory of Noses" is a prime example of Sterne's use of double entendre.
2. Another, nearly pornographic, chapter tells the story of the "fair Beguine" nursing the character Trim after a knee injury.
3. These are both instances of associative, even projective, thinking, which like pornography, is more concerned with imagining nakedness than with showing it outright.

C. In this way, Sterne creates something beyond the words themselves, and this creation is particularly important because the lives in the book are so coerced.
1. Sterne himself tells us that he wants to work a miracle through language.
2. Double entendre is one way to do that. The passage about the white bear illustrates another: Sterne uses grammatical structure to show us all the ways it might be possible to think about a white bear.

D. The celebration of thinking and language comes to a marvelous conclusion late in the book in the recounting of the courtship between Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman.
1. Uncle Toby has been wounded in a war and the widow wonders whether he has been left impotent.
2. She finally asks him, "Where were you wounded?" Uncle Toby, thinking about the site in Belgium where he received the wound and the maps he has drawn of the battle, tells the Widow Wadman, "You shall see the very place. You shall put your finger on it."
3. That place is neither the trenches in Belgium, nor the maps, nor Toby's groin. It is the place where these characters live—the place that literature and thinking and language and imagination make possible. The mind generates its own free place, and that is the territory of literature.

E. *Tristram Shandy* is punctuated by a narrator who has a vile cough, as indeed, Sterne himself did. One of the late chapters is about death tracking Sterne, and we begin to realize that therein lies the dialectic of the book—the coercive conditions of a physical body, which will die, and the freedom of the mind, which can play forever.

Essential Reading:

Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*.

Supplementary Reading:

Wolfgang Iser, *Laurence Sterne: Tristram Shandy*.

Thomas Keymer, *Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel*.

Melvyn New, *Tristram Shandy: A Book for Free Spirits*.

Ian Campbell Ross, *Laurence Sterne: A Life.*

Arnold Weinstein, *Fictions of the Self: 1550–1800*.

Questions to Consider:

1. *Tristram Shandy* goes as far as it can to expose the "wiring" and the artifice that undergird what we think of as a story. Does this teach us anything valuable about how we make sense of our arrangements or how we represent our experience? Do you find Sterne's manner engaging or frustrating?
2. Sterne prides himself on the unusual bond being generated between his book and his reader. Do you think that the pyrotechnics of *Tristram Shandy* make for a more personal and intimate reading experience?

Lecture Four
Laclos—*Les Liaisons Dangereuses*

Scope: *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* is the supreme epistolary novel of the 18th century: an elegant, cynical, classic representation of the games and gambits of *ancien régime* France. The epistolary form, with its aura of immediacy, harks back to Richardson, yet Laclos's book is stereophonic, giving us a mix of perspectives and voices, complicating our judgment. Chief among the players are the two "superman" figures, Valmont and Merteuil, the great seducers of the novel, bent on self-assertion and domination at all costs.

In observing the strategic gambit of these two sovereign seducers, the reader is led to question how they achieve their successes and what role *letters* themselves play in this project. It is doubtful that any reader of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* will ever look upon that most pious genre—the love letter—in the same way again. Laclos obliges us to consider what actually goes into such letters, why we write them, and what impact they might have.

Outline

I. *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, written by Choderlos de Laclos (1741–1803), is the masterpiece of epistolary fiction, a novel of letters.

A. With today's e-mail and text messaging, we don't write many letters, but this novel reminds us that any form of writing always says more than was intended, means more than its author could have known, and connects and exposes its author more clearly than might be expected.

B. The term *communicative chain* is sometimes used for this phenomenon, suggesting, in some sense, that we are bound by our communications.

II. *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* provoked scandal when it was published in 1782 but has since been seen as the supreme representation of *ancien régime* France: elegant, witty, vicious, and corrupt.

A. The epistolary genre was considered avant-garde in the 18th century and was influential in the rise of the novel.

1. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* was published in 1740 and is said to have inaugurated the English psychological novel, especially in its depiction in letters of the thoughts and feelings of the embattled Pamela, virtuous maiden, who must resist the evil Sir Booby. Richardson later followed suit with a still greater, more tragic letter-novel, *Clarissa Harlowe*. Readers throughout Europe were stunned by the seeming immediacy of these books, displaying human consciousness in a new way.

2. No less famous is Rousseau's epistolary work, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, published in 1760 and depicting the archetypal romantic drama of an aristocratic maiden in love with her tutor but forced to marry an older man. Rousseau's story is one of maturation and acceptance of social norms, but he also proved that an author can bring a great deal of information into the epistolary form.

3. A third famous letter-novel is Goethe's tempestuous *Sorrows of Young Werther*, published in 1774, at the height of the *Sturm und Drang* pre-Romantic period, devoted to Werther's passionate effusions and desire for the married Lotte. Once again, we see the conflict between desire and law; Lotte does not yield, and Werther commits suicide (in a yellow frock coat). A spate of real suicides actually followed.

B. It is not hard to see the quantum leap effected by *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*: The text is completely stereophonic, so that the letters reflect all the different perspectives brought into play.

1. This may be one of the slipperiest books ever written. The publisher's preface asserts that the letters must be fiction because the idea that such evil could exist in the current age of order and decorum is unimaginable. At the same time, the editor's preface claims that the letters are real, transcribed in the book as a means of exposing vice and exhorting readers to virtue.

2. The defining feature of the epistolary novel is its seeming immediacy, its direct representation of human feeling. Laclos, however, forces us to ask whether any letters we read or write are sincere. In fact, we have no way of easily distinguishing between truth and falsehood in letters.

3. In this novel, the letters are not written to us but are a mode of communication between friends, lovers, and dupes. What was a total display of self in the earlier letter-novels has now become a mode of disguise. We no longer feel confident that we know the writers' real feelings, even though they try to persuade the recipients that what they are writing is the truth.

III. The novel is justly famous because of its two principal figures: the Marquis de Valmont and Madame de Merteuil. Former lovers, wealthy, and attractive, they are the book's great seducers, bent on an erotic search-and-destroy mission.

A. They compose strategic love letters to their victims while exchanging letters about tactical matters between themselves. They copy, save, and shrewdly analyze all the letters, benefiting from a panoptic view of events. We begin to realize that we, as readers, are in exactly the same position of overview and interpretation.

B. In this sense, the novel is about power and control—mastery. Reading, itself, is a form of mastery, a gradual building of understanding. The rational project of reading as an exercise in sense-making can be traced to the Enlightenment and its emphasis on reason as the cardinal virtue. *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* is a carnival of reason, with Merteuil and Valmont decoding and deciphering the letters written by others.

C. Merteuil and Valmont are Nietzschean superman figures, even though this book was written a century before Nietzsche. They seek to subvert all traditional values and codes.

1. Valmont's particular victim is the virtuous and pious Madame de Tourvel. Her virtue arouses him, and he says categorically that he wants to become the god she worships. Further, he wants her to suffer incrementally as she gives up her God for this new one, her lover.

2. One feels that Valmont and Merteuil cannot tolerate the happiness of others: They are mad for self-assertion.

D. In the hands of Valmont and Merteuil, letters become vessels of intentionality, calculated for the effects they are to produce. The novel shows us the extent of staging, artifice, and outright dishonesty and manipulation possible in letters.

E. In this light, we are led to a distressing question: What is a love letter?

1. We think of a love letter as an expression of one's feelings for another, but as we've seen in this lecture, letters are never that direct. Is a love letter an expression of feeling, a bid for mutuality, or a vehicle of will and persuasion?

2. A love letter, once sent, is a free-floating verbal construct—free of both the writer and the reader. We can't know whether it is sincere or not, and we can't constrain what it might mean. This is very close to the status of literature itself.

3. Valmont's letter to Tourvel, written as he is in bed with his lover, Emilie, is perhaps the most authentic letter in the novel. Its language and reality are the same; only its addressee is incorrect. The letter embodies the elegance and cruelty of the *ancien régime*, as well as the impudence and brilliance of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

Essential Reading:

Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

Supplementary Reading:

Roy Roussel, "*Les Liaisons dangereuses* and the Myth of the Understanding Man."

Arnold Weinstein, *The Fiction of Relationship*.

Questions to Consider:

1. The epistolary novel began in the 18th century, but modern novels, such as *The Color Purple*, suggest that it is still alive and well today. Given our culture of e-mails and text-messaging, do you think there will be still more developments along these lines? If so, what kinds of themes are likely to be paramount?

2. Many readers have claimed that *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* is our premier account of *ancien régime* France. How would you substantiate this claim? What features of the novel seem to point to a culture of long ago? What features seem, on the other hand, entirely modern?

Lecture Five

Laclos—*Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, Part 2

Scope: Valmont and Merteuil are tyrants of intelligence, and their analytic prowess is cued to a quasi-scientific understanding of libido and body language. This material view of the human subject seems to leave no room for soul. The plot of the book appears to be one of sexual control, yet it becomes clear that the male seducer's role is oddly sanctioned, whereas the female seducer must know how to vanquish without tarnishing her reputation. Merteuil's ambitions along these lines—reading others, producing herself—make her a stunningly modern figure. But why, then, does the book end in failure?

Given that the projects of seduction and mastery go horribly amok, the reader is obliged to reconsider whether the strategic gambits of Valmont and Merteuil might, in fact, blind us to an altogether different reading of events. Is the project of "body control" ultimately manageable? This, in turn, raises the issue of the valuation we ascribe to intelligence (as opposed, say, to traditional moral values). Laclos's text ultimately explodes all fond notions of control and rationality in human affairs. Liaisons are *dangereuses*.

Outline

I. In this lecture, we'll explore two questions prompted by *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*: First, what accounts for the failure of the ambitions of the novel's two chief characters, Valmont and Merteuil? Second, how do we, as readers, rank goodness versus intelligence on a scale of importance or value? As we'll see, these two issues are related in this novel.

II. Upon closer inspection, one realizes that Valmont and Merteuil are characterized by an ethos of control, particularly of the minds and bodies of others. This ethos is not far from self-deification.

- **A.** Valmont and Merteuil come across as supreme analysts, as tyrants of intelligence.
  - **1.** Their major gambit consists in reducing the world (of others) to their own design, much as a scientist does in running a laboratory experiment with mice. Valmont and Merteuil systematically deny the freedom of others.
  - **2.** Their project is almost algebraic: To transform the opaqueness of reality into something manageable, even transparent (for them).
- **B.** What is the magic power that Valmont and Merteuil possess? It is a capacity to *read the body*, that is, to detect the signs of somatic and libidinal interest on the part of their victims.
  - **1.** The idea of the body as a kind of machine stems from the materialist worldview of the late 18th century. Today, we speak of "body language" to denote our bodies' making known their own urges, desires, or needs. Valmont and Merteuil know that body language cannot lie, that desire expresses itself spontaneously via blushing, trembling, and so on.
  - **2.** This knowledge of affective signs is their trump, and this view of the body's irrepressible wants has great ramifications: It cashiers other views of the human being, especially moral or idealist views. If the body has its own set of needs, then *innocence* has no meaning. The body experiences desire—is already sexually informed—whether or not one has a cognitive scheme in which to understand that desire.
  - **3.** Hence, Valmont knows that Tourvel is drawn to him, even before she herself knows. Laclos raises the question of whether there can be any defense against such predators. Can we prevent ourselves from blushing or trembling? Can we outlaw seducers?
  - **4.** We see in this novel a program in which analysis is power. One character's ignorance is another's power; Valmont's knowledge of Tourvel depends to some extent on her ignorance of herself. The grisliest instance of this power game is the systematic seduction, impregnation, and destruction of the young Cecile by Valmont.
- **C.** The rules of the seduction game are not the same for Valmont and Merteuil.
  - **1.** Valmont's projects of seduction are ultimately (if not openly) sanctioned by society's double standard. Merteuil has the far more difficult—and, perhaps, more enjoyable because more challenging—task of carrying out her seductions in secret to maintain her reputation for serene and impeccable behavior.
  - **2.** Merteuil explains to Valmont that most of his "conquests" probably wanted to be seduced, while she is expected to put up a fight before she "surrenders."

3. Significantly, if we see Valmont's great skill as one of decoding, then we are stunned by the far greater genius of Merteuil: She not only reads signs, she can produce them at will.
4. The most brilliant letter of the novel is devoted to Merteuil's art of self-invention, autogenesis. She regards all opportunities for sensation of any stripe—pain or pleasure—as a kind of laboratory experiment, a chance to learn something. Merteuil, however, inverts body language, putting on a doleful expression when she feels pleasure and a radiant one when she experiences pain.
5. In this way, Merteuil is the alternative to body language as a spontaneous and irrepressible expression. She speaks her body, making it represent whatever she bids it to.
6. Merteuil tells Valmont that most women are creatures of feeling, of whom she is completely contemptuous. She says, "They continually confuse love with the lover, who suffer from the wild delusion that the man whom they have chosen for their pleasure is the only one capable of providing them with it." Orgasm, she suggests, is impersonal; one should not confuse the divinity with the person who makes it available to us.
7. This kind of materialism amounts to a terribly anonymous, impersonal doctrine. Our feelings are lodged in our erogenous zones, and love is merely the desire to have them activated, stimulated, and gratified. The Romantic movement will, of course, dislodge this view.

III. As mentioned earlier, things do not end well in this novel. It closes with all the projects of seduction going amok. What went wrong?

A. To answer this question, it is, perhaps, useful to consider two different scientific models of observation.
1. In one model, A observes and controls B. This is akin to a behaviorist mode of thinking and would appear to be the book's operative logic.
2. But the famous Heisenberg theorem challenges this model of distance and control by arguing that the observer is part of the experiment; if we translate this into emotional terms, the seducer cannot maintain the requisite distance or freedom from the object.

B. In this light, we might look at the scene awaited throughout the novel, Valmont's seduction of Tourvel.
1. Valmont sets the scene in classic rake fashion. In the letter he writes to Merteuil detailing the seduction, he compares his methods to those of great French generals, drawing a parallel between the principles of the boudoir and those of the battlefield.
2. When he has completed his conquest, however, Tourvel is in tears, and the only way that Valmont can console her (to ensure a second session of love-making) is to tell her that she has made him happy.
3. For Tourvel, Valmont's happiness makes her infidelity bearable, but he discovers that her feelings, in fact, trigger his own. His "ecstasy" outlasts his orgasm.
4. In this book in which the body is nothing more than a set of drives, needs, nerve endings, and erogenous zones, this statement is revolutionary.

C. At about this point, the reader begins to realize that things may be different from what they appear. Is Valmont seducing Tourvel, or is he seduced *by her*?
1. Merteuil has known all along that Valmont is in love with Tourvel, and she may be jealous. One of the conceits of the novel is Valmont's promise that once he has bedded Tourvel, he will return to Merteuil's bed.
2. Merteuil also knows that Valmont is toying with her. To punish him, she dictates a note to Tourvel, in which Valmont must write, "My love for you lasted exactly as long as your defense for yourself—lasted as long as your virtue."
3. At this juncture, our scheme of (true) strategy letters versus (false) love letters runs aground. We begin to suspect that Valmont's strategy letters to Merteuil have been self-deluded and that the love letters to Tourvel are all too true.

D. Now the plot seems to go out of control. Valmont is slain in a duel by Danceny, who had loved Cecile but was himself seduced by Merteuil. We may even wonder if Valmont's death in the duel was a suicide.

E. The further we read into this book, the less we know, because the letters themselves are a façade. And why have we not seen this coming? Why have we signed on for the "interpretation" initially offered by Valmont and Merteuil? The answer returns us to the question asked earlier: How do we rank the importance of intelligence versus virtue? As readers, we have been seduced by the intelligence of this couple.

F. The novel closes rather grimly—with Valmont's death and Merteuil ravaged by smallpox. Her belief in her ability to control her body is belied by her own deformity.

Essential Reading:

Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

Supplementary Reading:

Roy Roussel, "*Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and the Myth of the Understanding Man."

Arnold Weinstein, *The Fiction of Relationship*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Laclos's novel emphasizes the authority and power of intelligence as the chief trump card in life. Can intelligence be somehow ranked against other more traditional virtues, such as morality and decency? Are these issues with us still today? What does it mean to claim that intelligence "seduces"?
2. Laclos's Madame de Merteuil is the novel's most remarkable figure, not only because of her shrewdness and insight, but also because of her extraordinary power of self-control and self-shaping. "*Je suis mon propre ouvrage*," she says ("I am my own creation"). What do you make of this claim? Is it credible? Is it desirable?

Lecture Six
Balzac—*Père Goriot*

Scope: *Père Goriot* chronicles a crisis in values that has been linked to the rise of capitalism: the supplanting of human relations by the cash nexus. Balzac draws on the *Bildungsroman* tradition—the story of a young person's moral education—but he is no less obsessed with Paris itself as his topic. Balzac thinks himself a scientific writer, a sociologist, but we see him as a Romantic visionary, fascinated by passion and obsession.

Balzac's story of Rastignac, the young protagonist who comes to Paris to study law, is a new kind of initiation story, a novel of formation that quickly becomes a novel of deformation. How will this young man succeed when the "luggage" he brings with him cannot sustain him? One answer is to find an authority to follow, but in this search, too, the novel presents a number of alternatives.

Outline

I. The first novel we explored in this course, *Moll Flanders*, was a story of a young woman coming from the country to London, yet we can't accurately describe that book as a story about her education.

- **A.** In contrast, Honoré de Balzac's (1799–1850) *Père Goriot* is an initiation story, a novel about a young man coming from the country to make his fortune in the city or, to put it metaphorically, a young man leaving the Garden—the garden of Eden—to encounter Culture itself.
- **B.** As we look at *Père Goriot* in this lecture and the next, think about why a writer would elect to focus on the young. We'll return to this topic later in more detail.

II. Our tour through 18th-century fiction—*Moll Flanders*, *Tristram Shandy*, and *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*—should make it clear that "telling a story" is an open-ended proposition. With Balzac's *Père Goriot*, published in 1834, we encounter a masterpiece in the traditional format: A seemingly realistic story about "modern" social conditions.

- **A.** Balzac is often hailed as the supreme realist of the 19th century—and the author saw himself that way—but we may find that his account of life in Paris is also fantastic, even visionary.
- **B.** Born in 1799, Balzac writes with a memory of revolutionary France, as well as of the Bourbon Restoration in 1815. But we understand him best as the novelist of the "new" France of Louis-Philippe, an age of entrepreneurs. Parallels are not lacking between the heady business speculations of this moment and the manic development schemes of the 1980s in America or the kind of bookkeeping done at Enron in 2002.
  - **1.** Louis-Philippe is occasionally called the *roi bourgeois* ("bourgeois king"), and the France of his time can be rightly qualified as a capitalist culture. The intense, business-focused atmosphere of Paris is embodied in *Père Goriot* in the Baron de Nucingen, the great capitalist speculator.
  - **2.** The novel depicts a culture where material goods matter. Rastignac, the young hero from the provinces who has come to Paris to study law, is given the gift of an elegant apartment by Delphine and her father, Goriot. Delphine compares the gift to those given to knights in the Middle Ages—armor, swords, and horses. For her, the "modern" weapons for success include a fine apartment and elegant clothes.
- **C.** Arguably, the central player in *Père Goriot* is Paris itself. The great metropolis, a popular literary subject at the time, offers its own themes, and the novel seeks, in the spirit of James Fenimore Cooper, to be a guidebook of sorts for the contemporary reader.
  - **1.** In a memorable simile in the novel, Paris is compared to an American forest where Huron and Illinois Indians struggle for existence.
  - **2.** Writers of the mid-19th century sought to make the changes taking place in the city more available to their readership.
- **D.** Balzac himself was an exemplary Parisian, walking the streets, taking notes, staying awake with coffee, and constructing his great opus, *La Comédie Humaine* (*The Human Comedy*), meant to rival Dante's epic work.
  - **1.** Early on, Balzac discovered that all his novels would be "one," and his characters would return in later volumes, even if altered. In fact, Rastignac will appear in later books by Balzac. What will he be like after the education he receives in *Père Goriot*?

2. Thinking himself utterly scientific, Balzac sought to illuminate the new laws that govern society, with parallels to zoology and biology. We might situate him also as a "sociologist," as part of a tradition that will go on to Zola, Dreiser, Updike, and DeLillo.
3. Balzac's ideological commitments are tricky. He saw himself as a conservative, defending church and throne, critical of the entrepreneurial culture he lived in. But we today see that he identifies with his rebels and outsiders. Ultimately, he takes the measure of his time: one of upheaval and change as a new economic order is coming into being.

III. Although Balzac's classic procedure is exposition, laying out the scene in great detail, one senses that the driving power of his work is more imaginative than descriptive.

A. A famous example of exposition is the description of the boarding house the Maison Vauquer.
1. Balzac compares the personality of Madame Vauquer to the boarding house itself and claims that once we understand one, we understand the other. Her whole person, in short, provides a clue to the boarding house, just as the boarding house implies the existence of such a person as she is.
2. We should not believe, however, that Balzac's characters will be utterly predictable.

B. Balzac uses the model of the detective story as a template for exploring his characters' inner passions. Everything we see functions like a sign-board or marker, pointing to hidden depths.
1. Each character conceals a past drama. Of Mademoiselle Michonneau, the dried-up old woman who also lives in the boarding house, Balzac asks, "What acid had consumed the feminine curves of this creature? … Was it vice? Grief? Greed? Had she loved too well?" Each question could be the seed of a novel or short story in itself.
2. There is nothing empty in Balzac's scheme, no concern with *ennui* (boredom). His world is bursting with passion and excitement.
3. In one passage, Balzac describes Paris itself as a bottomless, unknowable ocean, and this discourse of depths to be sounded governs the novel. It is also a model of reading: to go beyond the words to what is hidden or imagined.

C. Although the book seeks to chart the new, it also signals its relation to the old.
1. *Père Goriot* seems to be a rewrite of *King Lear*, the story of a father cannibalized by his daughters.
2. Balzac also specifically references Walter Scott's idealistic tales of people living up to high moral codes, but this novel tackles the other side of that equation—people who compromise themselves, yet struggle to balance their tricky behavior with a code they can no longer live up to. This theme of "sellout" is a modern one, indeed.
3. We also see in *Père Goriot* the 19th-century literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of formation. The origins of such tales can be found in Goethe's story of Wilhelm Meister and traced through Stendhal, Flaubert, Charlotte Brontë, and Dickens.

D. The novel as an initiation story returns us to the question of why a writer would center a story on the adventures of the young and what the consequences of that focus might be.
1. One consequence—perhaps unintended but inevitable—is the marginalization of the old. In this regard, *Père Goriot* is a paradigmatic tale about the fate of the old or the fate of fathers in a new economic order.
2. In contrast, the story of Rastignac's move from the country to Paris to study law deals with the great question confronting the young: how to succeed? Although Americans might think of this question as universal and timeless, in traditional societies, young people took the place dictated by their class.
3. The *Bildungsroman* is remarkably economic in this sense: An innocent young person comes from a traditional setting in the country to a new culture—a culture of the cash nexus. That person's encounter—or collision—with the new system illustrates for us the appearance of a new ethos and its attendant difficulties.
4. Thus, the novel of formation quickly becomes the novel of deformation. As Rastignac will learn, the "luggage" that he brings with him—his traditional system of beliefs—is not sustainable.
5. Rastignac arrives in Paris with the idea that studying hard is the key to success, but the encounters he has will change his way of thinking and make him reconsider what it will take to succeed.

E. *Père Goriot* is about a search for fathers, for authority. But what authority should Rastignac follow? The novel offers a number of candidates, not all of whom are males.
1. In the drawing rooms of Madame de Restaud and Madame de Beauséant, Rastignac sees a life that is very seductive and one that has no connection with the career he is pursuing.

2. We see, then, that Rastignac's education will not follow a straight and narrow path. Instead, his search for authority, for the right way to live, will be akin to what Cooper wrote about—a trip into the wilderness, perhaps without an appropriate guide.

Essential Reading:

Honoré de Balzac, Burton Raffel, and Peter Brooks, *Père Goriot: A New Translation: Responses, Contemporaries and Other Novelists, Twentieth-Century Criticism*.

Supplementary Reading:

Martin Kanes, *Père Goriot: Anatomy of a Troubled World*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why do you think the *Bildungsroman*—the novel of education—comes into prominence in the 19th century? What does it mean to put a young person, as opposed to an old person, at the center of a story? Can we, in the 21st century, learn something about our own values and crises from a story written almost two centuries ago?
2. Balzac saw himself as a scientific observer of his century, charged with showing his readers how their world truly operated and how it was changing. Do novels still perform a social mission of this stripe, or have other forms of expression replaced narrative literature?

Lecture Seven
Balzac—*Père Goriot*, Part 2

Scope: Balzac's novel records a clash between old values and new values. What can it mean when a father is betrayed by his daughters? In the figure of Goriot, we see a fascinating account of passion tinged with imbecility. Rastignac, caught in his own love dilemma, recognizes Goriot's tragedy, but is mesmerized by the remarkable Vautrin; in Vautrin, Balzac shows us the "new man," the omniscient, amoral superman figure who sees clear in the Parisian labyrinth and proposes his own Faustian pact with Rastignac.

Père Goriot registers the fate of feeling in a modern culture. Madame de Beauséant explains to Rastignac that success is only possible if one's heart is unexposed, if one exploits the feelings of others. Here would be the grim education charted in the novel. Yet Balzac's text moves us because it also tells a different story: One of compassion and caring, especially in the relation between Rastignac and the dying Goriot. Family destruction or family making: What does the reader ultimately learn from this corrosive fiction?

Outline

I. Balzac calls Paris a forest rather than a jungle, but either way, we see that the modern city is a place where the cash nexus or economic relationships replace everything else. In particular, they replace or destroy family ties. The question we'll explore in this second lecture on *Père Goriot*: Could we re-imagine family altogether? Could we re-conceive family in an impersonal, anonymous setting?

- **A.** Balzac's title tells us that the key story here involves the fate of Goriot, that is, the fate of fathers in a changing world. But what are we to think of Goriot himself? We see easily enough that he is fashioned after Shakespeare's Lear, but his stature is more in doubt**.**
  - **1.** Goriot comes across as both sublime and grotesque. Balzac labels him a "Christ of paternity," but he is also "canine."
  - **2.** We question, moreover, just what kind of a father this man has been. He is a terrible object lesson against spoiling one's children. We might even argue that he has tried to buy them.
  - **3.** Balzac narrates Goriot's past: a splendid capitalist story of a man rising to the top of the heap via shrewdness and cunning. We measure better now just how far he has fallen.
  - **4.** Goriot's two daughters are beautiful, rich, and miserable. Anastasie is being bled dry by her stylish lover, and Delphine is unhappily married to the entrepreneur Nucingen. Rastignac woos Delphine, and she returns his feelings. The possibility that the two will have an affair makes Goriot, Delphine's father, strangely happy.
- **B.** With the phrase "Christ of paternity," Balzac signals to us that Goriot's story is about the Passion itself, about the fate of love as crucifixion.
  - **1.** Goriot loves his two daughters to the point of idolatry. For him, they are the only conduit through which affection can pass, the only stimulus that exists. Such love can seem monstrous.
  - **2.** With their insatiable need for money, the daughters have driven Goriot increasingly into poverty. They are embarrassed by him, although he continues to give them what little he has left. In turn, the fact that he no longer has adequate funds to give to his daughters makes Goriot fatally ill.
  - **3.** On his deathbed, Goriot believes that his daughters will return to care from him, but of course they don't. We see the fate of fathers in this novel—the *Lear* story without Cordelia.
  - **4.** At one point, Goriot demands that Anastasie and Delphine be brought to him, by the police if necessary: "Compel them to come. Justice is on my side, the whole world is on my side, I have natural rights, and the law with me…. The country will go to ruin if a father's rights are trampled underfoot."
  - **5.** That emotional outcry becomes an ideological critique. Balzac is telling us that this is the fate not just of Goriot but of all of France if the culture maintains its new cash ethos.
- **C.** What is Rastignac supposed to learn here?

II. As mentioned earlier, *Père Goriot* has a number of candidates for father figures or mentors. Another contender is Madame de Beauséant, a *grande dame* who understands the heartless Parisian rat race perfectly. She, too, instructs her country cousin Rastignac.

A. Well connected and powerful, Madame de Beauséant offers her name to Rastignac as an "Ariadne's thread" for negotiating the Parisian labyrinth. Indeed, her name does open doors for Rastignac, giving him access to the two daughters of Goriot.

B. Above all, Madame de Beauséant offers Rastignac advice about what to do and what not to do in order to succeed in Paris.

1. She tells him to *use* others, particularly women.

2. But the crucial corollary is to hide the heart. Madame de Beauséant is sketching the dominant ethos of Parisian life.

3. Against this advice of mask and concealment, we must remember the deepest thrust of Balzacian writing: to open up, to move from fact to feeling or imagination.

III. The most unforgettable figure in *Père Goriot* is Vautrin, the satanic master criminal who also lives in the boarding house and takes a special interest in Rastignac.

A. Vautrin acts as the novel's sphinx: He himself remains a mystery, yet he sees through all the others. Some scholars have argued that he is a representation of Balzac.

1. Vautrin proposes a Faustian pact with Rastignac: He sees that the penniless young girl Victorine (also in the boarding house) is in love with Rastignac, and he concocts a plan to make sure that her rich father will alter his will and leave his money to his daughter; this is possible if Vautrin arranges for the rich man's son to be murdered.

2. Rastignac is, thus, to marry Victorine, become rich, and pay back his comrade Vautrin. Vautrin's vision of future happiness is a plantation in the American South.

B. Vautrin is the novel's Nietzschean figure, a law unto himself and utterly contemptuous of so-called values and virtues. Further, he has an unparalleled knowledge of Parisian life; in a remarkable scene, he offers to Rastignac a virtual computer printout of the young law student's "chances" if he stays on the path of the straight and narrow.

1. Vautrin advises Rasignac that the only way to succeed in Paris is "by the brilliance of genius or the cunning use of corruption. You must cut a path through this mass of men like a cannonball, or creep among them like a pestilence."

2. Vautrin's character is summed up in the lines: "There are no such things as principles. There are only events. There are no laws. There are only circumstances." This vision of life eradicates the ideals that Rasignac has learned in his traditional education, and seems the most venomous view of society that Balzac has to offer.

C. As an alternative to his almost statistical analysis of Rasignac's chances of success, Vautrin offers the student the possibility of removing himself from the competition, marrying Victorine, and becoming wealthy. This is the great moral challenge for Rasignac.

D. In some sense, Rasignac must choose between two "fathers": the amoral, brilliant Vautrin or Goriot, the man crucified for love.

E. Why does Vautrin offer to make Rasignac's career? Balzac implies that he is a homosexual and doesn't particularly like women.

IV. As the daughters continue to press their monetary needs ever more on Goriot, the old man becomes increasingly miserable and infirm. We soon see that he is dying. Rastignac and his friend, the medical student Bianchon, take turns looking after him during the night.

A. Goriot's dying is narrated with melodramatic panache in the novel, and it is set against the grand reception given by Madame de Beauséant (where she will be betrayed by her lover), an event that the social climber Delphine insists on attending, even as her father is on his deathbed.

B. Rastignac is sickened by Delphine's indifference toward her father. He acquires a kind of tragic double vision, so that he sees the dying Goriot "through" the splendor of the Beauséant reception, as if the planes of the two worlds overlap each other

C. As Goriot dies, only the two boys—Rastignac and Bianchon—are there to minister to him. In a sublime moment, he mistakes them for his daughters. Is this folly, as the narrator tells us? Or, perhaps, is this the emerging alternative moral vision of the book: a vision of human caring, not a dismantling but a making of the human family?

Essential Reading:

Honoré de Balzac, Burton Raffel, and Peter Brooks, *Père Goriot: A New Translation: Responses, Contemporaries and Other Novelists, Twentieth-Century Criticism*.

Supplementary Reading:

Martin Kanes, *Père Goriot: Anatomy of a Troubled World*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Many readers feel that Vautrin is Balzac's great creation, and he continues to fascinate us long after we've finished reading the novel. What do you think of Vautrin? Could you imagine a modern Vautrin? What would he look like today?
2. In Balzac's somewhat Cubistic novelistic universe, characters return. Hence, Rastignac will also return in later books. What will he be like?

Lecture Eight
Brontë—*Wuthering Heights*

Scope: *Wuthering Heights* is arguably the fiercest novel in this course, and it defies all the rules of the *Bildungsroman* by its view of feelings as primitive, anarchic, and deadly, at odds with society and with the notion of a bounded self. In the end, Brontë seeks (much needed) uplift via a generational fable of children undoing their parents' damage, but the book's power lies in its destructiveness. The book makes use of the seer/scribe dichotomy: Half-comprehending outsiders tell the story of the frenzied protagonists.

That story centers on the life and experiences of Catherine and Heathcliff—daughter and orphan—growing up and fusing their lives together at the savage Wuthering Heights. Their passionate behavior is cut against the refined Lintons who live at Thrushcross Grange. In choosing Edgar Linton instead of Heathcliff (an echoing choice), Catherine triggers the ensuing plot of hurt pride and violent revenge; she also seals her own fate by acting against her deepest nature, for she and Heathcliff are one.

Outline

I. Rather than tackling Charlotte Brontë's better known *Jane Eyre*, we choose younger sister Emily's (1818–1848) astonishing *Wuthering Heights* (1847).

- **A.** Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* is a book about maturation, a true *Bildungsroman*. In contrast, Emily's *Wuthering Heights* seems to go out of its way to illuminate the dark and violent forces of both nature and the psyche that will not easily be corralled by education or the transition to adulthood.
- **B.** Emily's book is fiercer than anything else we will read in this course. It depicts a world that is so primitive as to be primeval, thereby making everything we have read seem almost prim and proper by contrast.

II. The familiar dyad of reason and passion goes bankrupt in this book, inasmuch as reason seems utterly absent, whereas passion has a ferocity and hunger that nothing can satisfy and that no social form can accommodate.

- **A.** Here, emotion is the wellspring of being, allied to the natural elements themselves. Indeed, the novel makes a mockery of our notion of civilization, which seems to bear little relation to the organic, fierce, dark forces that roil in both the world and the human subject.
- **B.** *Wuthering Heights* reminds us of the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss's theory of "the raw" versus "the cooked": The elemental world of coursing feelings is raw, unamenable to form or control, and the project of culture is to domesticate these anarchic forces, to turn them into something "cooked."
- **C.** The novel's two places symbolize this conflict between the primitive and the civilized: Wuthering Heights, home to Catherine, Heathcliff, and Hindley, is the realm of the raw, whereas the elegant Thrushcross Grange, housing the more refined Linton family, represents the cooked. The solution proposed by the novel to resolve the conflict inherent in this dichotomy is generational: The children will—maybe—carry out the charge of culture via intermarriage and "softening."

III. Brontë's native genius is to *frame* these primitive actors and acts by having us approach them from the outside through the reports of others.

- **A.** The initial narrator is the visitor Lockwood, an over-civilized, mannered fop, who comes from London to rent Thrushcross Grange after the central events of the novel have taken place. He is the least suited to understand what he sees and hears, but he is nonetheless initiated into the horrors via dream and hallucination.
  - **1.** Lockwood spends the night at Wuthering Heights and is disturbed in his sleep by something knocking against the window. Reaching out in a dream state, he puts his hand through the glass.
  - **2.** Lockwood's hand is then gripped by the icy fingers of a child, Catherine Linton, who begs to be let in. When Lockwood can't shake off the child, he rubs her wrist against the broken glass of the window pane.
  - **3.** This child, this ghost that wants to come in, is the ghost of the narrative in some sense. The scene is an inversion of the invocation to the muse from ancient literature; instead of the writer asking the muse to inspire him, this is the story itself, begging to be told.
  - **4.** This scene also gives us a glimpse of the sadism to come in the story. It's possible to see this entire novel as a story of abused children, indeed, of childhood as a time of abuse.

B. The major source of information for the story of Catherine and Heathcliff and the Lintons is Nelly Dean, a shrewd woman of common stock who has served these families and witnessed their story firsthand.

1. She seems to meet all the requirements for a reliable narrator, but is she capable of understanding the events or people at Wuthering Heights?

2. We might posit a narrative principle here of seer and scribe; that is, the seer's experiences are elemental and inchoate, while the scribe's job is to translate them for us, to bring them to language. We could even argue that this is the mediation of literature itself—it is the bridge between us and events at which we were not present.

3. This same model is at work in *Moby-Dick*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Absalom, Absalom!*

IV. Nelly's story revolves around the events befalling the Earnshaw family "long ago," before Lockwood's arrival.

A. Mr. Earnshaw, the father of Hindley and Catherine, goes on a mysterious visit to Liverpool. He returns with a still more mysterious item—the orphan child Heathcliff, whom he adopts into the family.

1. "Who is Heathcliff?" is a recurrent question for Brontë critics. Is he Earnshaw's illegitimate son or, as the book seems to suggest in a flurry of possibilities, a gypsy, the child of a Lascar (a sailor from India), black, American, even exotic royalty? Some have said that he is the hated English "other"—the Irish.

2. Whatever his origins, he is despised by the older sibling Hindley, but he forms with the feisty Catherine a relationship that is among the most remarkable in literature: a fusion of souls, a kinship that seems to go beyond flesh.

B. The plot moves into full gear only when the children Catherine and Heathcliff make their way to Thrushcross Grange, home of the refined Lintons. The conflict between nature and culture starts to resonate.

1. Catherine, injured, is taken in by the Lintons, but Heathcliff is rejected as a beggar boy. Catherine stays at Thrushcross Grange for five weeks, and when she returns home, she is en route to becoming a little lady.

2. Hindley is delighted with the transformation in Catherine, but Heathcliff cannot understand why she has been tempted by the wimpish Lintons and their civilized manners. His pride is injured, and of course, the story is complicated by the fact that the Lintons' son Edgar has fallen in love with Catherine.

C. The catalyzing event in the book is a crucial conversation between Catherine and Nelly that is overheard by Heathcliff.

1. Catherine shocks Nelly by saying that she would be miserable if she were in heaven. Nelly's reaction is predictably moral: Catherine is a naughty girl and, like all sinners, would be unhappy in heaven.

2. Catherine replies that she had a dream in which she was in heaven, but it didn't seem to be her home. In anger, the angels flung her back to the heath above Wuthering Heights, and she "awoke sobbing for joy."

3. Traditional dogma is reversed here. Catherine doesn't mourn her lost place in paradise. For her, heaven is foreign and alien, and she weeps for joy when she is sent back to the heath—to the natural world and, of course, to Heathcliff.

4. When Nelly questions Catherine about Edgar, she replies:

> I have no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven. And if the wicked man in there [Hindley] had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now, so he shall never know how I love him, and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same. And Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning or frost from fire.

5. Heaven is rejected in this scene as a pious, inhospitable artifact, but the raw nature of Wuthering Heights is home. This is a fierce view of Eden and a fierce view of human connection because Heathcliff is, as Catherine says, "more myself than I am."

6. As we said, Heathcliff overhears this exchange but only to the point where Catherine says, "It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now." He immediately leaves.

7. The scene continues with Catherine's question: "What were the use of my creation if I were entirely contained here?" But she is not contained only in herself because, as she tells Nelly, "I am Heathcliff."

8. With this utterance, the contours of self are erased. What does it mean to believe deeply that you are also someone else? It is the end of agency and any sense of self-ownership and brings with it a horrible vulnerability.

Essential Reading:

Emily Brontë and Richard J. Dunn, *Wuthering Heights: The 1847 Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*.

Supplementary Reading:

Maggie Berg, *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margin*.

Emily Brontë, *The Poems of Emily Brontë*.

Edward Chitham, *The Birth of Wuthering Heights: Emily Brontë at Work*.

Thomas John Winnifrith, ed., *Critical Essays on Emily Brontë*.

Questions to Consider:

1. *Wuthering Heights* was poorly received by the English reading public in 1847. Even Emily's sister Charlotte seems, in her two prefaces to the novel, embarrassed by the book's "excesses," wondering where the pious Emily could have learned or seen the things recounted in this story. Where indeed?
2. Catherine's feelings for Heathcliff, and his for her, are what stay with us after we've read this novel. How would you go about analyzing this "relationship"? Is it sexual? Is it credible? Is it desirable? Is it inescapably fatal?

Lecture Nine
Brontë—*Wuthering Heights*, Part 2

Scope: Heathcliff, spurned, leaves; he returns later, to wreak his revenge. Things turn very dark: Catherine is dying of her feelings, and Heathcliff displays a (lifelong) mix of brutality and cruelty that stun us. These characters seem positively driven by ungovernable fury, by pathological forces. We realize that Wuthering Heights is a place of utter violence, uncontainable. Softness and kindness have no place here. Conventional values are cashiered. Brontë dives very deep.

Criticism has focused on Heathcliff as the marginalized, mad, dark, Byronic male and on Catherine as an equally mad, self-assertive female; even death does not stop them. Their love is at once paradisal and demonic. The novel depicts both childhood's lost bliss and childhood's despotic feelings, including sadomasochism and outright torture. The book's second half valiantly attempts to remedy the disorder by telling the story of the next generation, also injured and injuring but moving toward reconciliation and love. How to make sense of this war between dark and light?

Outline

I. Most people regard *Wuthering Heights* as romantic, but in this lecture, we'll see its dark, almost pathological side. The text seems to focus on the poisonous consequences of both cruelty and love; such consequences live on, suggesting something of the cycles of revenge we find in *The Oresteia*.

II. Catherine's grand and unforgettable pronouncement, "I am Heathcliff," strikes us initially as the epitome of romantic desire; it comes early in the novel, and few readers expect things to go as badly as they do. We increasingly understand what it means *to be another*, as well as oneself.

- **A.** With Heathcliff gone, Catherine marries the likable Edgar Linton, who is smitten with her. She moves into Thrushcross Grange.
- **B.** A few years later, Heathcliff, utterly altered, returns. Handsome, rich, exuding a sense of power, he pronounces an implacable judgment on the events that have taken place.
  1. He indicts Edgar as an impossible love-object for someone of Catherine's vital and generous nature.
  2. His most withering and tragic indictment, however, is of Catherine. In betraying him, she has betrayed herself. This is not mere rhetoric: Catherine, faced with the return of Heathcliff and his insistence on the wreckage her marriage has wrought, becomes ill.
- **C.** The novel is merciless in its almost clinical account of Heathcliff bearing down on Catherine to remind her of the criminality of her actions. This isn't a simple argument in which one person tells another that he thinks she has done something wrong; here, everything Catherine has done, she has done to Heathcliff, as well.
  1. With Catherine on her deathbed, we might expect that Heathcliff would treat her kindly, but instead, he explodes: "Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself."
  2. Here, we see the boomerang logic of this book. Catherine and Heathcliff experience themselves as one, with no boundary between them. They are horribly vulnerable and interdependent; each of their gestures ricochets endlessly. When Catherine asks for Heathcliff's forgiveness, he says that he can forgive *his* murderer, but not *her* murderer.
  3. After her death, Heathcliff curses Catherine's body, imploring her to haunt him. His desire for her to torment him after her death is proof for Heathcliff that their love is still alive.

III. *Wuthering Heights* installs a view of human behavior that borders on the pathological. We realize that such notions as self-control and boundaries simply have no purchase here. Catherine and Heathcliff are among the most extreme creations in literature.

- **A.** The book treats us to a number of scenes in which we realize just how uncontrollable its characters are. Once we see this dimension of the novel, we know that it will not end well.
- **B.** Heathcliff's return pushes Catherine over the edge. In one remarkable scene, she tries to set up a primitive *mano a mano* contest between Heathcliff and Edgar. The feeling is virtually Darwinian.

1. Catherine also tries to warn Edgar's sister, Isabella, away from Heathcliff, telling her, "He's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man."
2. Catherine sees clearly here. There is nothing soft about the romantic interactions in this novel; they are death-dealing.
3. Ultimately, the stress of Heathcliff's presence is too much. We watch Catherine being invaded by tumult, coming apart, and moving toward collapse and death.

C. If Catherine is mercurial, however, Heathcliff is volcanic.
1. He is possessed of and by a mix of fury, venom, violence, and cruelty that one does not easily forget. His haunting by Catherine will serve to nourish his rage.
2. Heathcliff marries Isabella and treats her with utmost brutality.
3. This behavior stamps him throughout his long life. After Catherine's death, the plot moves to the next generation coming under Heathcliff's tyrannical reign.

D. The lack of gentleness or kindness in this book is frighteningly evident in the treatment of children. Heathcliff, for example, will beat Catherine's daughter, also called Catherine.
1. Recall Lockwood's dream about a tortured child at the beginning of the novel. *Wuthering Heights* is about torturing children. It is also about childhood as loss that cannot be redeemed.
2. It does not seem unreasonable to view the general spectrum of behavior in this novel as strangely *infantile*: the tortured antics and tantrums of creatures who cannot grow up or forget.

E. But Catherine and Heathcliff are only the most visible mad people of the text. All the denizens of this book are capable of fury and violence. It seems to be a trademark.
1. When Heathcliff talks about hanging Isabella's dog, he notes, "But no brutality disgusted her. I suppose she had an innate admiration for it."
2. The line seems to suggest that cruelty is contagious, and killing animals and treating children with brutality certainly appear to be signature behaviors in this book.

IV. With this in mind, we understand the generational imperative of Brontë's novel. She is desperately trying to "clean up" the story she tells in the first half of the book.

A. Catherine's daughter is first married to Linton, the sickly but vicious son of Heathcliff and Isabella. After his death, she will probably marry Hareton, the "wild child" of Hindley. Young Catherine teaches Hareton to read, a classic example of turning "the raw" into "the cooked."

B. The novel seems sugared over by the end, with the second generation cleaning up most of the mess made by the first generation. Yet the last words of Nelly suggest that even in death, Catherine and Heathcliff find "unquiet slumbers."

Essential Reading:

Emily Brontë and Richard J. Dunn, *Wuthering Heights: The 1847 Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*.

Supplementary Reading:

Maggie Berg, *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margin*.

Emily Brontë, *The Poems of Emily Brontë*.

Edward Chitham, *The Birth of Wuthering Heights: Emily Brontë at Work*.

Thomas John Winnifrith, ed., *Critical Essays on Emily Brontë*.

Questions to Consider:

1. *Wuthering Heights* is stamped by emotional violence of a rare stripe. Do you find its characters sadistic? Pathological? Infantile? Is maturation possible in such a scheme?
2. Given the generational structure and logic of the novel, it would seem that Brontë wanted to write a fable about the possibility of "civilized behavior." Has she succeeded? What kind of future do you imagine for the denizens of Wuthering Heights after the last page of the novel?

Lecture Ten
Melville—*Moby-Dick*

Scope: Melville began his career as an author of sea adventures, but in *Moby-Dick*—influenced doubly by his encounter with Hawthorne and his reading of Shakespeare—he produced the richest American fiction of the 19th century, stamped at once by an Emersonian belief in the spiritual dimensions of the "real" and by a passionate desire to celebrate American democracy as a new phenomenon in world culture.

Ishmael is our jaunty, lively guide to the world of whaling, and the book presents his encounter with the "native" Queequeg as a paradigm of fraternalism, indeed multiculturalism. But the book's great subject, as well as its title, is "the Whale." It is instructive to remember the huge significance of the whaling industry in mid-19th-century America, and Melville not only offers us an encyclopedic account of whales and whaling but establishes the whale as a godlike creature of history and myth. We begin to see the symbolic reaches of Melville's project.

Outline

I. *Moby-Dick*, published by Herman Melville (1819–1891) in 1851, breaks with the familiar form of the Anglo-European novel (life story, linear plot, societal backdrop) to give us something at once lyrical and metaphysical, altogether larger than life. The book enlarges the concept of the self versus society to the human being versus the universe.

- **A.** With *Moby-Dick*, American fiction enters our course and enters world literature, as well. Like the narratives of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky that we will read later, this novel establishes a place for itself in world literature while challenging many of the canons of literature.
- **B.** In some ways, Melville's artistic career followed a tragic curve: His first book, *Typee*, was enormously popular, but each book written afterward became less picturesque, less exotic, and more philosophical. *Moby-Dick* is the fullest expression of all that Melville would achieve.
  - **1.** The huge dose of philosophy and metaphysics in *Moby-Dick* was thought to make it almost unreadable, and at this juncture Melville's descent into oblivion begins.
  - **2.** After *Moby-Dick*, Melville continued to write short stories, some of which are brilliant, but he became increasingly a ghost in American literature.

II. The explanation for this downward curve can be found partly in the influences on Melville that found their fullest and richest expression in *Moby-Dick*.

- **A.** First, *Moby-Dick* is, in some ways, a response to the legacy of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the architect of American literature and American thinking in the early 19th century.
  - **1.** In essays from the 1830s onward, Emerson called for an indigenous American literature.
  - **2.** Emerson also had a spiritual dimension to his thinking that is echoed in Melville. Emerson coined the word *oversoul* to describe the infusion of the natural world with spirit, and he believed that writers and poets tap into that soul. Melville, too, seems to see the material world as suffused with something beyond matter—spirit or energy.
  - **3.** The political component in Emerson's work—the celebration of the American democracy as a new social and political form—is also found in Melville.
  - **4.** Scholars have noted an American Renaissance in literature in the 1850s, the period when *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby-Dick*, *Walden*, and *Leaves of Grass* were all written. *Moby-Dick*, in particular, is a text that seeks to get clear of the European and Classical standards by which literature was earlier produced.
- **B.** Melville also discovered Shakespeare at roughly this time: a hugely metaphoric, lush, and metaphysical discourse that breaks entirely with earlier realist fiction.
- **C.** Perhaps most pointedly, Melville encountered the catalyzing figure of Nathaniel Hawthorne through his writings in 1850 and in person as a neighbor in 1851. Hawthorne's impact as a writer of the soul who rejects the hustling materialism of his moment came at a crucial time.

III. *Moby-Dick* celebrates American themes and American figures as does no earlier novel.

- **A.** The Nantucketer is presented as a new kind of hero, fully on a par with the knights and princes of yore.

B. America's mythic promise to the world, then as now, is democracy: a sociopolitical scheme whereby differences of class and rank no longer count, where one's past no longer governs one's life. The whaling boat, the *Pequod*, filled with sailors from the world over, typifies this democratic vision.

1. Many readers have noted, of course, that there are no women aboard the *Pequod*.

2. The literary critic Leslie Fiedler once said that all the great American novels belong "on the children's shelf." He went on to make the claim that not one major 19th-century American text dares to speak intelligently about sex between men and women.

IV. Our guide to the world of *Moby-Dick* is Ishmael, who is also one of the novel's great triumphs. We are with him from the book's first line, "Call me Ishmael," and we stay right on through to the grisly end, when he alone survives "to tell the tale."

A. Ishmael is bluff, plain-speaking, robust, and engaging, but he is also more complex than this. We learn that he is prone to depression and that his unfailing remedy in these times is to go to sea.

B. One of the book's signal episodes is Ishmael's initial encounter with his bunkmate Queequeg the harpooner, the fiercely marked, exotic South Sea Islander. The narrative "unpacking" of this meeting combines humor, satire, and wisdom. We also see democracy at work in this scene, in which Ishmael and Queequeg share a bed, and it establishes a connection between the two that will last throughout the book.

C. A later chapter, called "Monkey Ropes," describes the complex set of ropes that hold the seamen as they descend into the suspended bodies of the whales they have caught. The scene is emblematic of the way Melville writes, moving from the finite and anecdotal to the metaphysical.

1. Ishmael thinks of the ropes as a "Siamese ligature" that unites him with Queequeg. He then says that his own individuality has become a "joint stock company of two."

2. In Melville, once this type of thinking starts, it keeps going. Thus, Ishmael begins to think about the extraordinarily wide-ranging relevance of this perception for all of us.

3. "If your banker breaks, you snap. If your apothecary by mistake sends you poison in your pills, you die." In every walk of life, in everything we do, we are interdependent, interconnected in ways that we rarely see.

4. The rich, expansive quality of Melville's imagination takes such homely scenes and transforms them into metaphors that are quite philosophical in character.

5. Another example can be found in the discussion of "fast-fish," those claimed by a particular ship, and "loose-fish," those that are fair game. Melville operates his own kind of magic with these terms, turning them to a discussion of colonialism, possessions, politics, and ultimately, the human mind.

V. Melville's original title for the novel was *Moby-Dick, or The Whale*. It is not always easy for modern readers to appreciate the extraordinary significance (at once economic and imaginative) of whales and whale-fishing in 19th-century America.

A. Only in 1859 was petroleum discovered. Before that, whale oil had a central place in industry, and America was the unquestioned world leader in this field. Melville expresses considerable pride on this front.

B. The treatment of the whale in this novel, far from being some kind of obligatory descriptive chore, opens the door to Melville's imaginative energies, and the book is stamped by the sheer variety of discourses about this huge creature of the sea.

1. Melville has obviously done research on the subject of cetology. The novel thrusts at us an encyclopedic knowledge of whale-lore and whale-data, but even these descriptions suggest something larger. Can we understand the strange design of the whale's tail? Can we understand its face? In looking at its face, are we looking at the face of God? Can we truly take the measure of the whale?

2. But the whale has a still more impressive pedigree in myth and legend, linking it to St. George, Perseus, and Hercules. Might the whale be the Sphinx of the sea?

3. Melville is clearly obsessed with the metaphorical scale and the reach of whales, the way they figure the godhead and the dimensions of yearning and belief. Inhabitants of the depths, they offer Melville an image of the human soul: its secrets and the arduous trip needed to sound it. These are the adventures recorded in this novel.

4. For Melville, the whale is older than history. It precedes time and has occupied the vast reaches of the world. Melville says, "He [the whale] swam the seas before the continents broke water. He once swam over the site of the Tuileries and Windsor Castle and the Kremlin."

5. Clearly, the depths, of both the sea and the soul, fascinate Melville, but the quest to plumb the depths is filled with anxiety. We sense in Melville an unsatisfied yearning for a place of peace and harmony at

the bottom of the great ocean, an "insular Tahiti" to be found "amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being."

Essential Reading:

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*.

Supplementary Reading:

Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*.

Julian Markels, *Melville and the Politics of Identity: From King Lear to Moby-Dick*.

Eyal Peretz, *Literature, Disaster and the Enigma of Power: A Reading of 'Moby-Dick.'*

Christopher Sten, *Sounding the Whale: Moby-Dick as Epic Novel*.

Shawn Thomson, *The Romantic Architecture of Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*.

Questions to Consider:

1. We've all heard the term *chick-lit*. Melville is often treated as *boy-lit*, given that there are no women whatsoever in this long novel. Is *Moby-Dick* a rewarding text for women? The claim was once made that all American literature belongs on the children's shelf, given its diffidence about relations between the sexes. Is there any libido in sight in this book?
2. Melville encountered Shakespeare, and we have *Moby-Dick*. Was this a happy encounter for us? Is the book overladen with Shakespearean flights and fancies? Is Melville's style so overblown that we tire all too easily in reading him, or does he reap rewards from his literary pilfering?

Lecture Eleven
Melville—*Moby-Dick*, Part 2

Scope: The towering figure of *Moby-Dick* is the "ungodly, godlike" Captain Ahab, candidate for a new kind of American stature, delivered with Shakespearean pomp and eloquence, bent on getting revenge for the life-wound suffered via Moby Dick: the loss of his leg. Ahab's vision of Moby Dick as evil incarnate testifies to a theatrical world of masks and surfaces; in this crazed figure, Melville creates an unforgettable portrait of human depths and mania.

Moby-Dick is stamped by a mix of monomania and perspectival brilliance, yielding a stereophonic world of competing visions. The most memorable, modern, and disturbing of these visions is Ishmael's account of the "whiteness of the whale," positing whiteness as nihilist truth, as "leprous" and corrosive, as the essence of *thinking* itself. Ultimately, Melville's novel is stamped by an awareness of language and perception as irremediably contingent. Yet the book insists on bearing witness to destruction and trauma, producing an unforgettable "white wail."

Outline

I. Whereas the Nantucketer is a new kind of American figure, and Ishmael is our lively guide to the *Pequod*, both are drawn on our scale. Melville's ultimate sights go higher and further. He is concerned to create a larger-than-life hero, a man as huge and dimensional as the whale: Ahab, an "ungodly but godlike" figure whose thoughts and feelings constitute much of the dramatic core of the book.

- **A.** The Quaker captain is repeatedly imaged in terms of *sultanism*, to signal that his rank is parallel to the great authority figures of the past.
  - **1.** As a ship captain, Ahab exercises a kind of absolute authority that was to fascinate Melville throughout his life. At the end of his career, Melville wrote *Billy Budd*, dealing with the moral and legal questions that accompany such authority.
  - **2.** Ahab's stature comes to us also through the extravagant Shakespearean language he is endowed with, including soliloquies of great power.
- **B.** Ahab is on a mission of revenge: He has lost his leg to the infamous Moby Dick, and he now sees in the white whale the very incarnation of evil. Ahab's goal is "to strike through the mask," suggesting that the physical whale—like all physical objects in our world—offers to our eyes a deceptive surface, hiding a moral intention, in this case: evil.
  - **1.** Starbuck, the first mate, challenges this view of natural creatures, but Ahab insists that we must break through the surface if we are to deal with the real forces that course through the world and inform our lives. For him, whether or not the white whale is hiding something is immaterial; Ahab is driven to pursue it relentlessly.
  - **2.** Ishmael meditates about the extent to which the whale is the focus of Ahab's life. For Ahab, Moby Dick unites all the evil in the world and stands as an emblem of it. As Ishmael says, "He placed upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down."
  - **3.** Ahab sees himself almost as a living counter-weapon to the force of evil embodied in the white whale: "As if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it."
- **C.** In "mapping out" Ahab and his crazed project, Melville creates a kind of archeology of the soul as a layered edifice that we must explore downward, moving always deeper and deeper.
  - **1.** In one passage, Melville compares the surface of Ahab's madness to the Hotel de Cluny in Paris, a medieval structure built atop Roman ruins.
  - **2.** Even underneath the surface of this madman, there are still further depths to explore.
- **D.** In reflecting on Ahab's mania, Ishmael suggests that Ahab's obsession—his madness—has hijacked his personality.
  - **1.** This idea calls into question all notions of selfhood and "ownership," inasmuch as the self can be hijacked, taken over by its obsessions, as if madness were literally a form of alienation.

2. The book asks whether "I" is an agent or instrument. This is not entirely outside the realm of Freud's model of the unconscious—is there something within us to which we have no access but that nonetheless directs our needs?

E. The book posits Pip, the black cabin boy, as Ahab's alter-ego. In an episode of great beauty, Pip falls overboard, goes to the bottom of the ocean, and sees there the teeming variety of undersea life and its indifference. After his rescue, he is permanently altered, "vacated."

F. Whereas Ahab personifies megalomaniac passion and single-mindedness, Melville is no less keen on signaling the solipsism and tunnel vision of such a figure.

1. The *Pequod* runs across many other ships, and often enough contact is made, but Ahab's maniacal pursuit of Moby Dick makes him averse to social intercourse.
2. Ahab's crazed single, cyclopic vision is contrasted wonderfully with whale vision: The whale's eyes are on the sides of its head, and each eye works independently, something no human can match.

G. Ultimately, Melville wants his novel to be stereophonic, as is evident in some of the most famous chapters, such as "The Doubloon," where we see a veritable lineup of altering perspectives.

1. Like all money, a doubloon is a semiotic launching pad. This coin, nailed to a mast, sends each character who sees it into his own particular vision.
2. For Ahab, the doubloon references a coming storm—the turmoil of his life. The pious Starbuck sees the Trinity in the doubloon, while the prosaic Flash thinks of how many cigars he could buy with the money.
3. When Pip looks at the doubloon, he says, "I look, you look, he looks, we look, ye look, they look." He occupies every subject position grammatically, looking from every different angle.
4. Then Pip says, "Here's the ship's navel, this doubloon here, and they are all on fire to unscrew it, but unscrew your navel and what's the consequence?" Melville uses the old joke about unscrewing the navel causing one's backside to fall off, in order to suggest the dissolution caused by thinking.

II. The crown jewel of *Moby-Dick* is the chapter entitled "The Whiteness of the Whale." It is here that Melville (via Ishmael) offers his most provocative view of a scheme where anthropocentric thinking no longer holds.

A. First, Melville explores and dismantles the familiar semiotic scheme that links the color white to a host of traditional values: spiritual, aesthetic, indeed racial.

B. But whiteness soon leads Melville to blankness, to nullity. All our symbolic schemes are in cahoots with the illusory, even histrionic role of colors themselves—construing a world of value and variation and delineation and meaning, whereas nakedness, nothingness, is what is truly there.

1. Melville's contemplation of whiteness is spellbinding. He calls it, "… a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink," and continues, "Whiteness is the erasure of meaning."
2. In modern terms, Melville's whiteness opens the door to a world of the absurd, where no pattern or meaning exists.
3. We then get a series of images to show how vivid our world is, but these, he says, are "but subtle deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within."
4. Even light "remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips or roses, with its own blank tinge." Light, then, makes us realize that all the vibrancy of the setting in which we live, including ourselves, is a façade.
5. We may also align light with the basic activity of *thinking*. We perform an operation on the world's surface by dint of thinking, but in Melville's case, this can be terrifying, as if thinking were in league with cannibalizing, with devouring the surface in order to arrive at emptiness.

Essential Reading:

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*.

Supplementary Reading:

Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*.

Julian Markels, *Melville and the Politics of Identity: From King Lear to Moby-Dick*.

Eyal Peretz, *Literature, Disaster and the Enigma of Power: A Reading of 'Moby-Dick.'*

Christopher Sten, *Sounding the Whale: Moby-Dick as Epic Novel*.

Shawn Thomson, *The Romantic Architecture of Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Ahab is, far more than Ishmael, the daunting figure of this novel, its great figure of authority. His quarrel with Moby Dick has mythic proportions. Is he a fanatic? Is there even a "terrorist" dimension to his exploits? How do we gauge such a man today?
2. The chapter on "The Whiteness of the Whale" seems to look toward the 20th century and beyond. Where would you point if you were asked to track Melville's legacy?

Lecture Twelve
Dickens—*Bleak House*

Scope: The work of Dickens—melodramatic, over-rich prose in the grand style—is a hard sell, and the elephantine *Bleak House* is particularly hard. Like Balzac, Dickens enlists the detective story schema, with its emphasis on blindness, as famously signaled by London fog on the opening page, fog as the labyrinthine legal system, fog as perceptual murk, fog as material dirt. Yet this is a novel about exploration of the huge urban container where individual lives play out.

Often faulted (today) for his omniscient practice, Dickens is contrapuntal here: The benighted Esther Summerson's story is spliced with the all-knowing narrator's account. Dickens makes use of the reliable Victorian "dirty laundry" plot: discovering concealed sexual secrets (a model that harks back to *Oedipus Rex* in more ways than one). Rejected, damaged, or abandoned children litter this novel and constitute one of its major themes. But the story of an illegitimate child will be folded into something larger still: an ecological fiction. Individual hegemony is on the line.

Outline

I. Charles Dickens's (1812–1870) *Bleak House*, published serially in 1852–1853, stands as the grandest English novel of the 19th century: an erotic whodunit, a gallery of grotesques, a moving melodrama, a social critique, and a display of technical virtuosity—all keyed to great issues that still plague us today, such as the diseased environment and blindness about our place within a larger scheme.

A. The novel opens memorably with a depiction of London fog and a reference to "the death of the sun," suggesting the apocalypse.

1. Historical accounts tell us that 19th-century London was a filthy place and that the fog distorted vision. Of course, the London streets were mostly mud.

2. Not seeing clearly is perhaps the book's dominant motif, harking back to the figure of Tiresias in the *Oedipus* of Sophocles and governing much of this novel's energies.

3. The inability to see clearly further reminds us of Corinthians 13, where Paul says, "For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face." Paul's dark glass stands for our incapacity to make sense of things.

4. The fog or dark glass might also represent a formula for detective fiction or, indeed, for reading in general. We might go further still in asserting that the path to knowledge is similar: We must go through the murk to achieve clarity.

5. Dickens is (wrongly) faulted as being an omniscient author who leaves little labor to his readers. But *Bleak House* is spectacularly contrapuntal, consisting of a brilliant weave between the all-knowing narrator and the in-the-dark protagonist, Esther Summerson. As we will see, Esther's groping vision is an important component of this book and a sharp contrast to the grandiloquent, authoritative discourse of the omniscient narrator.

B. *Bleak House* can also be understood in terms of power: the power of institutions as they coerce individual lives; in this light, it reminds us of the theories of Michel Foucault. According to Foucault, we breathe in, in a sense, the authority of our culture's institutions, and these institutions inform us in ways of which we aren't aware.

1. Chancery, the court of law, constitutes the supreme legal institution in the novel, and the case of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* informs and poisons every individual in the text. The case has been ongoing for decades and seems to have taken on a life of its own.

2. Many of the main characters of the book hope for a settlement of the case that will give them the benefits to which they believe they are entitled. The life of Richard Carstone, in particular, is cued to the suit. He suspects that he will be cheated by his benefactor, John Jarndyce, who in turn realizes that the boy has somehow absorbed the case's poisonous atmosphere.

3. This view of life as a legal labyrinth looks forward already to Kafka's dark and surreal worldview that we will see in *The Trial*.

4. We soon realize that Chancery is also a bristling metaphor of sapped hope, diseased feelings, and living death. A number of characters will die in connection with Chancery.

II. Like so many great 19th-century novels, *Bleak House* is a marvelous detective story, cued to sexual secrets, airing what we might call Victorian "dirty laundry." This tradition is alive and well today also, as we see in our soap operas and TV detective programs.

A. We mentioned *Oedipus* earlier in the lecture, and we might note that this play shares some similarity with a detective story. Both *Oedipus* and *Bleak House* deal with the need to cleanse the community.

1. In the work of Sophocles, it turns out that Oedipus himself is the transgressor; his killing of the king and sleeping with the queen have brought on the plague in Greece.

2. The play, therefore, has a kind of purgative plot; once the evil is found and excised, the disease is cured.

3. This returns us, again, to the detective story. Once the murderer is discovered, the community can sleep safely.

B. The fundamental plot in *Bleak House* focuses on the origins and fate of the young protagonist Esther Summerson.

1. Esther believes herself to be an orphan, but the reader soon realizes that she is the illegitimate child of the beautiful, aristocratic Lady Dedlock, who had a liaison with the mysterious Captain Hawdon, known initially by the resonant name Nemo ("no one" in Latin).

2. These threads start to come together when Nemo, reduced to the position of legal scribe, copies a document for a case involving Lady Dedlock. She recognizes the handwriting of her former lover and nearly faints, raising the suspicions of the family lawyer, Tulkinghorn.

3. The novel is driven by an epistemological imperative: to illuminate one's origins. This classic plot harks back to *Oedipus*: We are in the dark concerning our own most basic relations. Esther begins as someone groping toward the light, and at a key moment in her evolution, she goes literally blind.

C. Esther, like Oedipus, is the "cast-out child." But in her case, her abandonment is linked to sexual shame; the determining words she has heard since infancy are,"your mother is your disgrace, and you were hers." Dickens is out to measure what kind of damage this constitutes. His culture, like his novel, is filled to the brim with injured children.

1. The plot rotates around three "abandoned" young people: Esther the orphan and the two wards of the court, Ada and Rick. All are enmeshed in the ancient labyrinthine legal case of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*.

2. In characteristic Dickensian fashion, these young people, all of whom are in trouble, are taken under the wing of the wise, paternalistic John Jarndyce. As we've said, Esther is an orphan, and Rick and Ada are depending on the case to be settled, although its settlement will lead to the death of Rick.

3. In the meantime, Rick and Ada fall in love, and Ada becomes pregnant, bringing one more child into the scene.

4. This novel, we begin to understand, is written under the aegis of damaged children, and it is no accident that a key early scene entails the death of an infant, a sickly child born into the most gruesome socioeconomic arrangements.

5. Other children also come into view, including the monstrously childlike Harold Skimpole, who lacks moral maturity, and the distant children of both England and Africa, who are the "targets" of the novel's philanthropic women. Dickens can be searing in his critique of bad (idealist) mothers, women blind to their own flesh-and-blood progeny.

D. Esther illustrates to perfection the price paid by injury and abandonment.

1. Unloved in childhood and persuaded of her own guilt in her conception, she personifies the complex Victorian attitude toward gender and libido. She is the novel's "angel in the house," stamped by self-abnegation; cheerful, capable, self-effacing, she is a figure of tireless goodness; we are entitled to wonder what price has been paid for such virtue.

2. As mentioned earlier, Esther goes temporarily blind, a condition brought on by smallpox, and it's not farfetched to think of smallpox as some kind of displaced sexual punishment for her mother's transgressions.

3. When Esther finally meets her mother, she is especially gratified that her disfigurement will not allow anyone to recognize her and thus cause embarrassment to Lady Dedlock.

E. The exemplary damaged child of the text is the orphan Jo, who underscores the fact that London is a place where children go under.

1. Jo is a child of the famous slum called Tom-all-alone's and a friend of Nemo's. His motto is "I don't know nothink," meaning that he is the most benighted figure of the text.

2. Jo's illiteracy constitutes what may be the deepest blindness of the novel. Perhaps the inability to read, to gain access to language, is what it truly means to live in murk and fog.

Essential Reading:

Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*.

Supplementary Reading:

Janice M. Allan, *Charles Dickens's Bleak House: A Sourcebook*.

Gordon Bigelow, "Market Indicators: Banking and Housekeeping in *Bleak House*."

Arnold Weinstein, *A Scream Goes Through the House: What Literature Teaches Us About Life*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think Dickens is a hard sell today? If so, why? If you were obliged to defend him as a "must-read," how would you proceed?
2. The Victorian culture maintained a view of women that seems to us today to be impossibly high-minded and repressive. Is *Bleak House* stamped by such a view? In particular, does the entire Dedlock plot seem like a thing of the remote past to you, or do such affairs matter even today?

Lecture Thirteen
Dickens—*Bleak House*, Part 2

Scope: All of Dickens's novels seem overpopulated, crawling with individuals, yet the plot is invariably one of linkage and connection. This fiction of relationship goes counter to our intuitive sense of freedom, contours, and hegemony. But the novel is out to explode our sense of untouchability, and thus posits the great London slum known as Tom-all-alone's as the core of the city and of the novel; everyone will be affected or infected by it.

The logic of plague is borne out by Jo's role: The exemplary orphan child of the slums infects Esther with smallpox, and Esther, thus, experiences her sisterhood with the boy. The novel is tentacular. Most spectacular is Krook's death by spontaneous combustion: an explosion, as it were, of urban pus. The coherence of *Bleak House* is the coherence of epidemic, of systemwide exposure, of no conceivable immunity. This is an economic and philosophical concept that speaks to us even today. *Bleak House* is a terrifying family novel because we are "related" beyond our knowing.

Outline

I. Although the erotic whodunit initially commands our attention in reading *Bleak House*, we gradually come to understand that the novel tells a more ambitious story that entails a new vision of the world of interconnection—a tentacular vision in which people find, usually to their amazement or horror, that they are connected to others more closely than they might have imagined.

A. The long-awaited revelation of Esther's status as illegitimate daughter of Lady Dedlock sends shockwaves along social lines because it is a looming, likely fatal dishonor for the aristocratic lady. Dickens exploits this side of things to the hilt. Little can match the breathless final pursuit of the fleeing Lady Dedlock by her daughter, Esther.

B. But we gradually recognize that the fable of unacknowledged, illicit connection goes much further than even this. More so than Balzac's *Père Goriot*, *Bleak House* registers new lines of family and identity, a new model of brotherhood and sisterhood that is at odds with all notions of agency and hegemony that individualism takes for granted.

1. Thomas Carlyle once wrote of a woman dying of typhus who walked from house to house in her village, begging for help and telling her neighbors, "I am your sister! You must help me! I am bone of your bone!" Of course, no one helped the woman, but her disease infected the others, thereby proving her "sisterhood."

2. It is this sense of family that comes through in Bleak House—not some happy, cozy affair but a much larger, more lucid and angled picture of how we are connected beyond our ken.

C. In this light, the central relationship in the novel may well be that of the orphan Esther to the orphan Jo. There is no blood tie here whatsoever, but, of course, the infection model posits linkage of a different sort.

1. Jo—illiterate and impoverished, abused more than anyone in the story—has no home and is told incessantly to "move on." Sick and bereft of help, he ends up at Bleak House, where Esther's maid, Charley, tends to him, then catches his smallpox. Esther tends to Charley, and she, too, contracts smallpox and becomes disfigured. Here is Dickens's virulent tale of human connection writ large.

2. Esther's gathering relation to Jo is invariably figured by Dickens as a challenge to Esther's sense of self: She has inklings of being something other than who she thinks she is.

3. Think again of *Oedipus*: The backdrop of that story is the plague, but the foreground shows us a man rediscovering who he is. The story of epidemic or disease inevitably entails a redefinition of the human subject. We rethink our own boundaries and contours, as Esther does here.

4. Esther's experience of smallpox itself is narrated with great metaphorical power; it graphs Esther's bursting out of her old self, almost as if she is pregnant with something larger than herself.

D. The sense of connectedness in this novel is perhaps captured in the German phrase *auf dem Leib erfahren*, meaning "to experience in the flesh." Dickens is equally demanding of his characters.

1. Esther describes her pain: "Dare I hint at that worst time, when strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads?"

2. On one level, the image of the necklace reminds us of the finery worn by Esther's mother, Lady Dedlock.
3. At the same time, a necklace or a starry circle is a larger shape made up of components. Esther has no agency or hegemony here; she is a cog in the system. In ecological or environmental terms, she is part of a larger family. This is the lesson taught by disease.
4. Dickens initiates Esther into this family through pain and disfigurement, but in a sense, the transformation is grand. She is reborn and reconfigured—even her face is altered.
5. We are all changed by intense experiences—religious, emotional, moral—and Dickens is out to chart that evolution in terms of moral growth, human responsibility, and spiritual citizenship.
6. Each of these terms positions us in a larger framework, where we have no control, and this is the experience of Esther.

II. The fluid world of linkage and connection that becomes visible in this tale of plague and infection radically challenges our sense of the contours we have taken to be real, concerning the shape of both our selves and the world.

A. This key truth of the novel can be expressed in another familiar term: *pollution*. As we saw with disease, pollution betokens a scheme of incessant yet invisible traffic between subjects and environment; pollution cashiers all our notions of confining boundaries and annihilates any view we might have of immunity.
1. We might think of the body as a fairly closed proposition, but in fact we are porous, both ideologically and emotionally. All that we've seen or heard or read goes through us; our bodies are not membranes that can keep the world at bay.
2. This is what is meant by the phrase "Subjectivity is constructed": We are the products of many influences that have come through us.
3. As we know, our bodies are physically porous as well**.** The smoke from an exhaust pipe makes its way into our lungs. No one has immunity—not behind walls of skin or stone or class**.**
4. Hence, the slum of London, Tom-all-alone's, is the central force field of the novel. Its pestilence cannot be contained. Its power links together high and low, and it makes for a new constellation of meshed people.
5. Despite all our normative logic, the sick and the poor in this life have the keys to the city. Of Tom-all-alone's, Dickens says, "He has his revenge. Even the winds are his messengers and they serve him in these hours of darkness. There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere."
6. Those who study environmental science will attest to the truth of this statement. As we saw with Chernobyl, the wind eradicates borders and defenses between countries.

B. The list of characters in *Bleak House* would outrun most Russian novels, but every one of them is connected to someone else. For Dickens, that connection is not just an aesthetic concept—it is the structure of life itself.
1. We see, in Dickens's complicated detective story, numerous ways to be connected—through money, power, or disease. The book charts the hidden, concealed, and denied connections between people who appear to be separate and independent.
2. Nothing illustrates this more handsomely than the infamous scene where the mysterious Krook—rag-and-bone man and possessor of secrets—dies of spontaneous combustion. He literally explodes, and his oily fluids coat the scene where he is discovered.
3. Those fluids seem to image the logic of Dickens's novel—whatever is inside and hidden by our skin can explode and flow out into the environment.
4. We have the makings here of a systemwide diagnosis. "Something is rotten in the state of Britain," seems to be Dickens's guiding belief. This scheme is stunningly somatic, and Krook's flux of oily, viscous fluids may be understood as urban pus.
5. The fates of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* and of Rick himself are linked to the same imperious figurative logic. When Rick discovers that he will receive nothing in the case settlement, he opens his mouth to speak but blood flows out, as if we are all merely collections of fluids that can explode in a moment of crisis.

C. This powerful image leads us, in closing, to the self-awareness of *Bleak House*. Much of what we have discussed about *Bleak House* is invisible to the eye—powerful forces that invade us. The project of this book—indeed, the project of literature—is to make those invisible connections visible, to bring them to language and legibility. In *Bleak House*, language is not so much celebrated as achieved.

Essential Reading:

Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*.

Supplementary Reading:

Janice M. Allan, *Charles Dickens's Bleak House: A Sourcebook*.

Gordon Bigelow, "Market Indicators: Banking and Housekeeping in *Bleak House*."

Arnold Weinstein, *A Scream Goes Through the House: What Literature Teaches Us About Life*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Dickens was a passionate student of urban hygiene, with a reformer's zeal. Is *Bleak House* rewardingly read as a text about the environment, a text about the ramifications of pollution, or is such a reading a little tendentious?
2. What do you make of Krook's "spontaneous combustion"? Is this simply over-the-top, or is Dickens pointing at a higher kind of logic here? And why does Dickens choose Krook—an otherwise fairly minor character—for this spectacular event?

Lecture Fourteen
Flaubert—*Madame Bovary*

Scope: Flaubert acknowledged in himself an incessant warfare between the dreamer and the realist, and this tug-of-war is visible in *Madame Bovary*, a book he also termed, mysteriously, "a book about nothing." Emma Bovary resembles Don Quixote, inasmuch as both of them see the world through the lenses of "romance," derived crucially from *books*, and each is on a collision course with reality. At stake here is the unsettling notion that each of us scripts our world, projects our own fantasies onto it.

The novel charts Emma's implacable progression from romantic yearnings to marriage with the dull Charles Bovary—yielding a grisly anatomy of marriage itself as *ennui* and disenchantment—to be followed by apprenticeship and entry into adultery with the young clerk Léon and the seasoned rake Rodolphe. Flaubert is at once merciless, tragic, and ironic in his account of Emma's desperate passions and search for ecstasy, for we see how utterly degraded the project is: the vulgarity of the players, the clichés of language, the cheat that goes by the name of desire. Are women particularly targeted in such fictions? Might desire be produced by the marketplace? Homais the pharmacist emerges as the novel's great antagonist.

Outline

I. When we looked at Laclos' novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, we saw the incompatibility between the feeling of love, which should suggest mutuality, and the act of writing a letter, which is a private, sometimes solipsistic, and frighteningly free operation.

- **A.** In *Madame Bovary*, written by Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880) and published in 1857, we look at the thing itself, not the love letter but the actual phenomenon that we call love. This novel is famous in Western literature for the searing portrait it gives us of love as something that may or may not be possible.
- **B.** Flaubert acknowledged in himself an incessant warfare between romantic dreamer, on the one hand, and realist critic, on the other. He was a romantic who choked continuously on what he had absorbed, who both explores and punishes desire in all his books. *Madame Bovary* stages the life and death of romance.

II. The novel displays both the making and the unmaking of Emma Bovary. In short, we begin to realize just how "constructed" the psyche and its fate might be.

- **A.** Emma's convent education is offered as the source of many of her fantasies and dreams about what reality is supposed to offer us. A voracious reader of romances and exotica, she reminds us of Don Quixote, who also was formed by prior scripts that effectively served as lenses onto the world. Are our emotions always schooled in this way—without our control or awareness?
- **B.** As someone who desired to be married by torch ceremony at midnight, Emma is fated instead to wed the widowed country doctor Charles Bovary. Flaubert writes the course of her feelings toward Charles with surgical acuity, yielding a critique of marriage itself as the death of romance, an inexorable experience of routine and *ennui*.
- **C.** Flaubert is incisive and brutal in nailing the character of Emma's husband: "Charles's conversation was as commonplace as a street pavement, and everyone's ideas trooped through it in their everyday garb, without exciting laughter, emotion, or thought."
  1. There is nothing original about Charles, prompting us to ask whether the same might be said of all human beings. Are we all nothing more than a reservoir of commonplaces?
  2. Flaubert is famous in this book for his almost clinical depictions of married existence, taking us to the dinner table, instead of the bedroom, as the site of the loss of romance. We get a sense of the gradual dissipation of affection that can't survive the routine of two people eating together night after night.
- **D.** Expecting to encounter passion and ecstasy in her life, Emma now wonders if all this is a misunderstanding, indeed, a fraud.
  1. Do those grand words really correspond to experience? Are bliss and passion compatible with marriage and time?
  2. Emma has learned these terms from books she read in the convent. In this light, Flaubert seems to raise the question: Does life cheat us? We might even wonder if our vocabulary cheats us of our concepts. Do we have all the wrong tools?

E. Despite all obstacles, Emma does not give up on desire. There is even a term for characterizing the projection of one's hunger onto other (imaginary) people and places: *bovarysme*. Emma, for example, buys a map of Paris and imagines herself walking through its elegant streets and shopping in Parisian boutiques.

F. Flaubert at times states upfront his critique of Emma's equipment: She was "incapable of understanding what she did not experience or believing anything that did not take on a conventional form." Flaubert told friends that he hated writing *Madame Bovary* and thought love a vulgar and trite subject, but he also said, "*Madame Bovary, c'est moi*."

III. *Madame Bovary* measures Emma's love life. It is a "sentimental education," to use the title of Flaubert's other great novel.

A. The kind, innocuous, bumbling, untalented Charles is not long for Emma's real affections. His botched surgery of a clubfoot, although instigated by Emma, confirms her low esteem for him. The visit to the Vaubyssard ball—elegant, well above the Bovarys' station—confirms it still further.

B. Nonetheless, Emma has a lifelong need to find romance, and her next candidate is the young law clerk Léon. He seems initially as dreamy and cliché-filled as Emma does, but Flaubert cuts their sweet, amorous conversation with the scientific remarks of the novel's monstrous bourgeois figure, the pharmacist Homais, yielding a contrapuntal logic of which we will see more.

C. The love between Emma and Léon is unconsummated, and Léon leaves Yonville. Then enters Rodolphe, a handsome country gentleman who is determined to seduce Emma and who succeeds quickly in doing so.

1. Emma can only view their encounter through the lens of her romance books, but when Flaubert writes about their lovemaking, his language is poetic.

2. There is a suggestion here that love is, in some sense, still holy and beautiful.

D. Later, a more "seasoned" Emma encounters Léon again, in Rouen, at the opera, where human passions are magnified.

1. They are both now ready to have a serious affair, and their relationship moves also through the stages of passion, becoming more insistent, more provocative, and more desperate as Emma seeks fulfillment at all costs. We sense something almost pathological in her fierce needs.

2. Soon enough, this affair, too, runs its course; Emma realizes, "Every smile concealed a yawn of boredom, every joy a curse, every pleasure its own disgust, and the sweetest kisses left upon your lips only the unattainable desire for a greater delight."

3. This, then, is the punishment meted out to passion and desire: The surest way to kill desire is to satisfy it.

IV. Emma ultimately commits suicide using poison. We can easily see that she has been on a treadmill, that the great quest for romance and fulfillment is doomed. But *Madame Bovary*'s greatness consists in the complex perspectives we gain in analyzing her fate and its constituents.

A. We can place this novel in the context of other 19th-century stories about women's quests for romance, most of which end in death.

1. Consider Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, or Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*; we see in these works that perhaps women seek fulfillment via passion because no other courses of action are available to them.

2. *Madame Bovary* can be read as a sacrificial text, revealing the dead end of the cult of feeling. Emma herself hopes that her child will be a boy so that he will have power, but she bears a girl.

B. Yet we need to remember that Emma Bovary commits suicide *not* because of love problems but because of money problems.

1. Emma is increasingly in hock to Yonville's shopkeeper, Monsieur Lheureux, who shrewdly plies her with clothes and furnishings to satisfy her desires, gradually usurping control over the entire Bovary finances, pushing them further and further into debt. At the end, the debt is called; Emma desperately tries to borrow funds, fails, and kills herself.

2. Flaubert is showing us how the marketplace helps to create our appetites. Once again, we see that desire is in collusion with prior entities, whether they be romantic novels or Parisian fashions.

C. The novel does not close with Emma's death; it ends with a distasteful conversational duel between the major antagonist in the book—the pharmacist, Homais—and a priest. Here, Flaubert stages a dialogue between religion and science, and he is equally disgusted with both**.**

Essential Reading:

Gustave Flaubert, Margaret Cohen, and Paul De Man, *Madame Bovary: Contexts, Critical Reception*.

Supplementary Reading:

Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Perpetual Orgy: Flaubert and Madame Bovary*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Flaubert seems as fascinated by the origins of desire as much as by its operation. In other words, he goes to great lengths to show that Emma's views derive in part from her convent education and even from her exposure to the newest Parisian modes. What do you make of the proposition that *love* is a huge construct, manufactured by a variety of institutions, as opposed to some indwelling, native sentiment?
2. A number of female protagonists—Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina, Hedda Gabler to name the most famous—finish rather badly in 19th-century literature. What are we to learn from this? Does Flaubert's novel still have anything to teach us about these matters today?

Lecture Fifteen
Flaubert—*Madame Bovary*, Part 2

Scope: Flaubert is regarded as the gateway to modern fiction, because his rendition of Emma Bovary's story is marked by an arsenal of modernist techniques, highlighting the absurdity and hopelessness of her wishes and inaugurating a new kind of impersonal writing, with special attention given to the cliché-ridden utterances of the characters, as if feeling and language were incommensurate with each other. The book works contrapuntally, cutting Emma's longings against scenes of vapidness and dross; the material world cannot be moved or made hospitable to spirit, and the project of passion is suspect.

Desire itself seems on the block in this novel. In its few scenes of passion, we sense a strange precariousness, suggesting that ecstasy is a form of dissolution, that it annihilates the self. Yet this protagonist and this novel are intensely moving, as we see in numerous scenes of great richness and pathos, because *hunger* has a special dignity, and the search for beauty and the presence of desire cannot be entirely discredited, however imperfect the players and the setting may be.

Outline

I. Undoubtedly, Flaubert's famous novel registers the failure of the great romantic projects of love and desire, and it will always be read in this fashion. But unlike many other 19th-century novels about tragic love, it commands our attention also as a stunning, complex *verbal* artifact. Proust, Joyce, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and all those who followed are, in some real sense, Flaubert's progeny, and they have said so.

A. If Flaubert is the fellow who contains within him the two warring spirits of romance and reality, it can scarcely surprise us that his novel is a multi-voiced, multi-toned affair. And, at the same time, it is among the first narratives we have that prides itself on being impersonal.

1. Flaubert is credited with inventing what we call *free indirect discourse*: a way of writing subjectivity *into* seemingly objective third-person narrative. The characters' likes and dislikes lard the text, even though they are not in quotation marks.

2. Flaubert regarded the novel form as an independent text, free of editorializing, in which the author's authority is never openly displayed. He once said that the writer or artist was like God in the universe: powerful behind the scenes but never visible.

3. This view might be an invitation for a kind of bullying of an author's characters; they become cogs or ciphers, but the writer never openly displays his hand in their fate. We will see this development later in the work of James Joyce.

B. Flaubert wrote with unbelievable care and slowness, prided himself on choosing *le mot juste*, and is known to have screamed aloud his words to sense their fit before leaving them on the page.

1. At times, the style of the book is aggressively generic, as in the description of the country people attending Emma's wedding or the gentry at the Vaubyssard ball. It would be a mistake to see this as only an aesthetic matter; the force of this prose cuts very deep, hinting that all of us might in fact lack depth and soul, existing rather as entities more generalized and anonymous.

2. Flaubert openly expressed the loathing and boredom he experienced for his story and his characters, and there is a kind of contempt in this writing that is not always easy to stomach. He has a remarkable gift for the knockout punch that simply annihilates a character. Of Léon, he says, "Every notary bears within him the debris of a poet."

3. Still more unusual is the seeming distraction of the narrative voice, inasmuch as it frequently focuses on material outside the purview of its own major characters. One of the most famous episodes of the novel is the cab ride in Rouen: Emma and Léon are inside the coach making furious love, but the scene is rigorously narrated from outside. The cab is described as "more tightly sealed than a tomb and tossed around like a ship on the waves," suggesting the secrecy, violence, and voluptuousness of the action inside.

4. Especially venomous is the use of quotations in the book. All of these characters seem "nailed" when they open their mouths, as if only clichés can come out. It's as if the language we are outfitted with for expressing our views is polluted or degraded, in contrast to the beautiful, modulated, exquisite language of the writer.

a. Recall the scene in which Emma returns home after her tryst with Rodolphe and repeats to herself, "I have a lover." Contrast that utterance in terms of its adequacy with Flaubert's description after their lovemaking of "blood coursing through her flesh like a river of milk."

b. There seems to be a terrible disconnect, a fissure, between what we feel and what we can say. In Flaubert's words: "The human tongue is like a cracked caldron on which we beat out tunes to set a bear dancing when we would make the stars weep with our melodies."

C. But the most vitriolic element of Flaubert's arsenal has to do with composition itself. The book is profoundly contrapuntal, inasmuch as Flaubert arranges scenes in such a fashion that no overt critical judgment is even necessary.

1. We see this in the scene where Homais holds forth as Emma and Léon mouth romantic clichés.

2. We see it in a sequence in which Charles's grisly, grimy experiences as a country doctor—bloodletting, emptying bedpans—are juxtaposed against Emma's ordering fine stationery, dusting off her books, and daydreaming about Paris.

3. The most infamous example is at the agricultural fair, when Rodolphe makes his great declaration of love to Emma against the backdrop of political rhetoric and farm animals. At the same time that Rodolphe tells Emma he is irresistibly drawn to her, a prize is awarded at the fair for manure! Here is a kind of "eloquence" that is new to fiction.

II. It would seem that *Madame Bovary* is an unremittingly harsh and punitive novel, but the miracle of this book is that it is immensely moving. Flaubert cannot prevent himself from endowing Emma with a kind of pathos and beauty on the far side of cliché.

A. Emma's physical, sensual presence is exquisitely evoked and palpable throughout the novel—without cliché—imbuing the book with a strange warmth on the far side of its built-in mockeries.

B. At times of great feeling, Emma experiences a kind of "undoing," a physical/perceptual collapse that stays with us. At other moments, she tallies her losses, indeed sees herself as a series of losses.

1. Flaubert tells us: "One by one at every stage in the growth of her soul, in the succession of her conditions, maidenhood, marriage, and love, shedding them along her path like a traveler who leaves something of his wealth at every inn along the road."

2. This view of life as a progressive loss of illusions is a form of wisdom that gives Emma depth of character and cuts beyond the irony surrounding her.

3. In a passage in which Emma is contemplating suicide, memories and ideas explode in her mind like fireworks. Prefiguring Proust, Flaubert tells us that she sees all the scenes of her past in a kind of prelude to madness. His careful description of the landscape mirrors her psychic condition.

C. Emma obtains the poison and eats it greedily. We realize that the act of eating greedily is a paradigm of her life; she has always experienced a great, sustaining hunger. Even as she is given last rites by the priest, the same hunger and desire that she never managed to satisfy in life are transferred to death.

D. For all his distance and irony, Flaubert conveys much compassion in this story of loss.

1. Charles realizes the extent of his wife's deceit; her debts mean that their daughter, Berthe, is destined for a life of poverty and exploitation.

2. What stays with us from this novel, beyond anything else, is the nobility of human feeling, even when—especially when—it is betrayed by the foibles of the players.

3. Emma Bovary, deluded though she is, seeks beauty in a world that apparently has none to offer. That persisting in a search for beauty and maintaining a belief in beauty survive the wreckage of this book is beyond the reach of irony.

Essential Reading:

Gustave Flaubert, Margaret Cohen, and Paul De Man, *Madame Bovary: Contexts, Critical Reception*.

Supplementary Reading:

Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Perpetual Orgy: Flaubert and Madame Bovary*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Flaubert, who was both the son and the brother of physicians, is often said to have a style that is "surgical." Do you agree? Is this novel essentially a critique of Emma and her wants, or are Flaubert's sentiments more divided

and various than such a view might suggest? Do you exit this novel with contempt for Emma or with compassion? Does this depend on you or on Flaubert?

2. One famous passage in *Madame Bovary* indicts language itself as incommensurate with human feeling, suggesting that our emotions may be at once genuine and clothed in threadbare clichés. What do you make of this statement? Does it apply to life as you live it and know it?

Lecture Sixteen
Tolstoy—*War and Peace*

Scope: In *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoy utilizes a contrapuntal scheme similar to that used by Dickens in *Bleak House*—private lives spliced against grand public events—but he rejects the basic narrative logic of traditional fiction, thereby giving us history alongside story, war alongside peace, minor characters who don't fit, and no real ending. In one critic's terms, he is both a "fox" (seeing a world of discrete particulars) and a "hedgehog" (sustaining a grand overarching vision).

This fertile tension underwrites Tolstoy's contempt for traditional history-writing and novel-writing; the Napoleonic wars are shown to be anarchic, and his characters are never through learning who they are, as they evolve and experience the conflict between private consciousness and impersonal fate. Tolstoy's own vision is panoramic, yet he can render individual darkness and amazement. The upshot is a novel about Mother Russia and about the lives of a host of unforgettable characters, trying to understand life.

Outline

I. We might call Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) a connoisseur of chaos. *War and Peace* (1863–1869), in particular, is a novel that mixes fiction and history, while remaining suspicious of order, pattern, and design.

A. Many readers assume that literature gives order to life; otherwise, why would we read books? In fact, though, art often deconstructs, exposing the speciousness of our patterns and models. Tolstoy fits squarely into this tradition.

B. Two of our earlier authors, Melville and Dickens, also wrote extremely long novels, and both authors challenged our model of a novel as a neat slice of life. Tolstoy does so even more.

1. *War and Peace* has none of the lyrical and metaphysical splendor of *Moby-Dick*, but a comparison with *Bleak House* may be instructive.

2. Tolstoy, like Dickens, uses a contrapuntal strategy, a strategy of juxtaposition, to achieve a kind of shock effect.

3. Like Dickens, Tolstoy also wants to show us both private and public views of events. He gives us, for example, a timeless Russian peasant witnessing the sack of his town. The eternal peasant, juxtaposed against the encroaching War, is called "as inconsequential as a fly on the dead face of a loved one." Note the disconnect here between events that have enormous emotional value for us and the natural scheme of things, which takes no heed of our emotions.

4. Tolstoy's book is also over-rich in information about the social conditions of Russia in his time. Here, he is interested in overturning any sort of smooth political reasoning. We see the contrast, for example, in Pierre, who is interested in reform for the serfs but fails to achieve it, and Andrey, who almost accidentally introduces successful reforms on his estate despite his lack of real interest in improving the lives of the peasants.

5. In the same vein, we know that a military hierarchy is powerful and unchangeable, yet in a number of scenes in this book, social rank undercuts it. The rendition of real historical figures in the book is equally problematic.

C. There is nothing predictable about how Tolstoy will treat the facts he confronts. Hence, his focus is not on war itself but on how we tell the story of war, and how individual lives stack up against that backdrop.

1. A strange parallel exists here with *Tristram Shandy*. Tolstoy does not pull rabbits out of his hat as Sterne does, but he thinks that historians routinely cheat by transforming the anarchy of event and experience into some kind of pattern, just as Sterne sees falsity in the traditional linear narrative.

2. Tolstoy has particular contempt for the German military planners working with the Russians during the Napoleonic campaigns. Their focus on the grand strategy for war fails to account for actual events on the ground.

D. Traditional narrative logic moves linearly toward climax and resolution; even the huge fiction of *Bleak House* ultimately draws together its countless players, but we won't find that sort of order in Tolstoy. *War and Peace* is studded with things that do not fit: disquisitions on the nature of history-writing, descriptions of military maneuvers spliced with notations about life in Moscow and Petersburg, accounts of bit players

who never contribute to the larger "story," and some major problematic deficiencies, including the lack of a hero or ending.

II. A well-known metaphor has been applied to the Tolstoyan perspective by the British critic Isaiah Berlin: Is his the vision of a fox or a hedgehog? These terms denote opposed views: The fox has an unflinching view of specificity, of detail, variety, particulars, but the hedgehog has the overarching central vision, the grand unified theory.

A. Tolstoy had an incomparable fox vision. He felt the integrity of individual creatures, so his characters have an uncommon density.

1. At times, Tolstoy sees through his characters, telling us things about them that they do not know. We see this reach into character, for example, in the sequence in which Andrey discovers that he has no feeling for his infant son or, a bit later, for his father. It's as if the characters are discovering themselves as they move through life.

2. Tolstoy is also capable of surprising both himself and us about his characters, as in the case of the swaggering bully Dolokhov who dotes on his elderly mother and hunchback sister.

3. For the most part, these characters come to us with their depths, their striving, their mix of light and dark. In Tolstoy, there is as much dark as light, and we live more truly in the murk, with only gradual moments of light.

a. The scene in which Nikolai discovers he is in love with Sonya offers a marvelous example of the flickering world in which Tolstoyan characters live and their gradual movement to self-awareness.

b. Although Nikolai has taken the route to the neighbor's house many times, on this night, he and Natasha and Sonya are in festive masquerade, and the scene is transformed for him. The circumstances seem magical, and Nikolai feels as if he has lost his sense of who he is, which thereby changes what he feels.

c. In the glittering description of the party revelers on an enchanted night, Tolstoy seems to have lifted the curtain on the dull routine of our lives and revealed something sharp, illuminating, and dizzying behind it.

B. Tolstoy's fox vision sometimes makes understanding causality or rationality difficult in *War and Peace*.

1. One of the most philosophical passages asks what makes a ripe apple fall, offering a number of possibilities but no single explanation. As Melville did, Tolstoy extends the reach of situations that appear to be material, making us almost dizzy with the number of possible causes.

2. Tolstoy was convinced that we do not have an overview of events. Late in his career, he came to the idea that only God has a totalizing, objective view.

C. The fox in Tolstoy also makes him incurably suspicious of the (hedgehog-like) great master plans put forth in his century, whether they come from Hegel or Marx or Darwin. He does not believe that behavior or events can be easily theorized.

1. At the particular level, this means that he will challenge the prevalent historical writings about Napoleon's campaign in Russia. The historians have it wrong on every front: Their "great man" theory centralized Napoleon himself, whereas he, too, was a pawn.

2. Of Napoleon, Tolstoy says: "And once again, like a horse on a treadmill that thinks it's doing something for itself, he humbly resumed the cruel, unhappy, burdensome, inhuman role that was his destiny."

3. Tolstoy also believed that historians had misinterpreted the battles of Austerlitz and Borodino, as well as the burning of Moscow.

III. The critique of pattern and form that we have seen in this lecture is not as abstract as it sounds.

A. In a battle, orders are never followed, not because they are intentionally rejected, but because actual behavior is far more anarchic and unpredictable. Soldiers themselves return from the fray and—unwittingly—lie about it.

B. Likewise, the outcome of battles, great and small, is, in reality, left either to chance or to immeasurable particulars and, thus, at odds with the theories put forth by military historians.

C. The book cashiers the notion of war as a logical, systematic chess match: "Every order carried out is always one of many that are not."

D. Thus, what we are told is that history is, in fact, fiction. This is a very modern perception, perhaps first put forth in our own time by Hayden White in his book *Metahistory*—that history is a construct.

E. This same tug-of-war regulates our personal lives, makes us into fabulators, or liars, as we go about explaining what we feel and what we've done. In this regard, a résumé or a biography would be a suspicious document, attempting to give pattern and form to the messiness of life, and Tolstoy is always at war with this attempt.

Essential Reading:

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, Anthony Briggs, trans.

Supplementary Reading:

Isaiah Berlin, "The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History."

Gary Saul Morson, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in War and Peace.*

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, Louis Shanks Maude and Aylmer Maude, trans., George Gibian, ed.

Questions to Consider:

1. Tolstoy seems obsessed by the disconnect between sweeping global theories and the actual murkiness of real experience. His grand example is, of course, the Napoleonic campaign, and he takes aim at the many historians who've misled us (as he sees it) about these events. In our more recent time, with its spate of wars and rhetoric in the 20th (and 21st) centuries, do you find Tolstoy's critique a resonant and necessary one?
2. War illustrates, as little else might, the large, chaotic backdrop against which individual gesture seems puny and benighted. Does *War and Peace* shed light on our own "historicity"? Can we see the role we play on that larger stage? What might literature add here?

Lecture Seventeen
Tolstoy—*War and Peace*, Part 2

Scope: The grand figures of *War and Peace* are Prince Andrey Bolkonsky, brilliant, aristocratic, cynical, and brittle; Pierre Bezukhov, clumsy, illegitimate, rich, and dreamy; and Natasha Rostov, vivacious, hungry for life, tempestuous, and beloved. The emotional entanglements of this trio sketch a haunting story of romance, loss, and redemption. Through their evolution, Tolstoy tells us about the benightedness of one's course, failures, and successes in living, yet the goodness of love. Only slightly less memorable are the extended family members and the teeming world of others, including the greats of history, such as Napoleon himself.

Tolstoy is most magnificent in his accounts of visionary experience (in battle and in love), when the murk lifts, and we see clearly, but these moments are brief and unsustainable. His book remains with us as a tour de force about the mysteries of experience, both private and public. Russia's fate and individual fate are locked in a dance; we come to realize that our own affairs are inscribed in a comparable treadmill but that love is real even when truth is elusive.

Outline

I. In a previous lecture, we cited Paul in Corinthians 13: "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face." This quote seems to mark the path of self-discovery for Tolstoy's characters, who will be the subject of this lecture.

II. Tolstoy stands as a giant among novelists because of the unforgettable characters he has left us and the evolving, twisting plot that links, separates, and re-links them. Most famous are his two male protagonists—Andrey and Pierre, said to represent the two sides of Tolstoy—and the beguiling Natasha.

A. Prince Andrey Bolkonsky is at once dashing and brittle, ambitious, a hero of great willpower, an admirer of Napoleon, very brave, yet lucid and self-aware.

1. Bored with his wife, Lisa, Andrey comes to life in battle, discovers the burning passion within him to achieve glory. He seeks "[t]o be loved by men I don't even know and shall never know." The clarity here doesn't interfere with his intensity.

2. Wounded at Austerlitz, Andrey experiences the quintessential Tolstoyan discovery of truth lurking behind our daily illusions. As he lies wounded on the ground, he appreciates the grandeur of the sky for the first time. Only in moments of great peril, perhaps impending death, does the veil lift and we truly see.

3. When he returns home to find Lisa dying in childbirth, Andrey experiences a revelation of his blindness and self-centeredness, leading to lifelong remorse. He doesn't discover that he truly loved Lisa, but he realizes the magnitude of her suffering and his indifference toward her.

4. Bitter and cynical, Andrey then rediscovers life's holy promise in the person of Natasha; the idea of coming back to life is beautifully imaged in the figure of the bare old oak tree that will be altered by spring's sap.

5. Andrey realizes the sterility of his political ambitions and gives them up when he meets Natasha. But then his life takes a tragic turn: Natasha betrays him, and he is wounded at the Battle of Borodino.

6. Even before the battle, Andrey has a premonition of death. The complex political schemes he has been involved in, the ladder he has tried to climb, the reputation he has tried to establish—all these evaporate, and he senses that something more real is poised to happen. As he stares at the spinning shell that is about to explode, he discovers, once again, the simple magic of life: grass, earth, air.

7. Dying, Andrey meets up again with Natasha, yet his growing apprenticeship with death constitutes a weaning from life. Although he is alive, he is also dead; he has made peace with the world, but there is no passion left in him. He is beyond the living.

B. Pierre Bezukhov—fat, illegitimate, decent, naïve, and clumsy—is the book's dreamer and quester.

1. Pierre is the malleable figure, the one who is shaped often by others' designs. His inheritance is "arranged" by a relative, his proposal to marry Hélène is staged by her father, and his duel with Dolokhov is an exercise in the absurd. He does not, however, lack intelligence.

2. Some of the book's strangest pages denote Pierre's involvement with Freemasonry, illuminating his mystical and idealist side.
3. Rich and independent yet restless and unfocused, Pierre chooses to witness the Battle of Borodino. He is disappointed by the chaos of the battle but later comprehends its horror.
4. Caught by the French as a prisoner during the siege of Moscow, Pierre witnesses atrocities and believes that he will be executed, despite the fact that he has befriended some of the French officers. He wonders what this "it" is—this impersonal, anonymous force—that will simply eradicate these relationships and, indeed, Pierre himself through execution.
5. As a prisoner, Pierre meets Platon Karatayev, a wise man who gives Pierre something of a religious education about the value of suffering and a vision of life's own preciousness. Here, we perhaps find the core values of the book:

> Life is everything. Life is God. Everything is in flux and movement and this movement is God. And while there is life, there is pleasure in being conscious of the Godhead. To love life is to love God. The hardest and most blessed thing is to love this life even in suffering—innocent suffering.

6. This is the kind of epiphany that one comes to in suffering and hardship: Everything is precious. Everything is imbued with the spirit of God, his presence. This, too, is the epiphany of *War and Peace*. Behind this sprawling novel that touches every realm and aspect of society is the view that all this is life, and what's most miraculous about life is simply what's in front of us.
7. Having befriended and adored Natasha from the outset, Pierre is reunited with her at book's end, and the two will marry. After professing his love for Natasha, Pierre sees a comet in the night sky. Everything in the novel has taught us to be suspicious of any connection between our private affairs and the cosmos, but this image seems irresistible to Tolstoy.

C. Perhaps the most memorable and lovable figure of the novel is Natasha Rostov, decent, spoiled, hungry, restless, and forever childlike even though destined for crises.
1. Tolstoy does not sugarcoat Natasha: She is spoiled, impetuous, and irresistible; her mouth is too big; and her appetite for life is such that we sense it will meet with disappointments.
2. Meeting Prince Andrey catapults Natasha from childhood to stunned womanhood. Their love is instantaneous, but they must wait a full year before marrying. Natasha senses that this will turn out to have been a catastrophic decision.
3. Nightmare arrives in the form of sexual tumult: Natasha is seduced by the violent, dashing Anatole. The episode is inscribed under the aegis of opera and artifice. This leads to disgrace; the engagement with Andrey is over.

III. Tolstoy's book contains more than these three characters, including the families of Natasha and Andrey, but it's these three that we remember.

A. We follow the curve of Andrey's life from boredom with Lisa, to the battlefield, to Lisa's death in childbirth, to the discovery of Natasha and renewed life, to betrayal, and finally, to injury and death. We follow both Pierre and Natasha through their suffering to a form of mellow contentment.

B. In this way, the book gives us a fabulous sense of humans on a stage that dwarfs them, yet nonetheless encompasses the beauty and integrity of their own lives.

Essential Reading:

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, Anthony Briggs, trans.

Supplementary Reading:

Isaiah Berlin, "The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History."

Gary Saul Morson, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in War and Peace.*

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, Louis Shanks Maude and Aylmer Maude, trans., George Gibian, ed.

Questions to Consider:

1. Despite the insistent material realism of Tolstoy's account of human events—people, places, and things described with great care—the great moments in his novel have a dreamlike character to them, as if one were

awaking to a new universe altogether. Do you find this to be a romantic trait, or do you share this view of murk and light?

2. *War and Peace* closes with two proper marriages, replete with lots of children. All this follows the tumultuous account of war and desire and error and fate. How happy do you think this ending is? How happy are you with it?

Lecture Eighteen
Dostoevsky—*The Brothers Karamazov*

Scope: *The Brothers Karamazov* ranks with the *Oedipus* as the greatest murder story ever written, for each tells us about our deepest psychic arrangements. At the center of the novel is a black hole: the murder of Fyodor Karamazov, left unnarrated by Dostoevsky. The oldest son, Dmitri, will be convicted at book's end, but we know he is innocent. We learn that the illegitimate son, Smerdyakov, was the killer; he, in turn, sees himself as having acted out the desires of the other sons— especially Ivan, the intellectual, who ultimately faces his own shadowy complicity.

The Karamazov family is unforgettable: Fyodor, the buffoon/lecher with money; Dmitri, the impulsive, passionate one caught between his proud fiancée, Katerina, and the seductive Grushenka, whom he adores (and whom the father woos); Ivan, the cold, contemptuous intellectual whose philosophical "rebellion" and story of the Grand Inquisitor are at the book's heart; and Alyosha, the spiritual one, devoted to the saintly Elder Zosima (rival father), the champion of children, and poised to enter the world. These composite relationships constitute a bristling ethical and passionate world.

Outline

I. In the framework of this course and of the European novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), written by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), is a seismic event. God was never absent in the earlier texts we've explored, but here, Dostoevsky examines the question of how humans can live and take the measure of their lives if, as Nietzsche said, "God is dead."

- **A.** This crisis in human thinking may seem dated to us, but Dostoevsky's God-haunted creatures are, indeed, our contemporaries; the God-centered world has never been more at issue than it is in our time. Further, the Enlightenment legacy of rationality comes across in this novel as cold, sterile, and perhaps evil.
- **B.** How does this new line of thinking fit with the 19th-century novel form? All too often, the 19th-century novel is stereotyped as a realistic depiction of recognizable types and social forces. But this model is blown sky-high by the likes of Dostoevsky, for he opens up the stage immeasurably, highlighting metaphysics, soul, and God as key elements of the human story.
- **C.** Like Sophocles's story of Oedipus, this novel centers on a parricide, and it reads like a detective story: Dostoevsky's book lays out clues, suggests candidates for the killer, and closes with a trial, but it ultimately leaves the murder unsolved.
  1. The murder in this novel is, in a sense, anonymous and communal; the story doesn't point us to a single guilty party, as the plot of a sleuthing narrative might.
  2. Here, murder is much more insidious, because everyone could be guilty. Moreover, many of the characters in the book will discover their own hideous complicity.
- **D.** Fairly early in this novel, we know the basic outline of events.
  1. The older son, Dmitri, will be convicted of this crime at book's end, yet we know that he is "technically" innocent.
  2. The illegitimate son, Smerdyakov—called a lackey, a eunuch, and an epileptic—will later confess to the middle son, Ivan, that he committed the murder, while pinning the blame on Dmitri.
  3. But Ivan—the intellectual, the atheist—comes increasingly to realize that he himself is deeply implicated, guilty of a deed that he committed in spirit if not in fact.
  4. The one person who is not a candidate for the murder is the youngest son, Alyosha—a novice in training to be a monk. He is the most positive and spiritual member of the family and serves as a mediating figure.

II. What is unforgettable about *The Brothers Karamazov* is the depiction of the key players. As we find with those people who are significant in our lives, the more we learn about these characters, the more mysterious they become.

- **A.** The murdered father, Fyodor Karamazov, is a stunning creation, and he threatens to run away with the novel.

1. Rich, repulsive, lecherous, immoral, old Karamazov is a perfect candidate for murder. He also enacts a key role in Dostoevsky's universe: He is a buffoon, here defined as "a man of whom no one knows what he will do next."
2. Fyodor is physically hideous, with bags under his beady eyes, a grotesque Adam's apple, and black teeth. He is a supreme lecher and a man of great cruelty.
3. He dismisses the possibility that he will go to hell in almost comic fashion: If hell has no hooks and no ceiling from which to hang them, then he can't be dragged down to hell with a hook. This is a kind of 19th-century deconstruction of hell in a materialist framework, and it already looks forward to Kafka.
4. An infamous womanizer, Fyodor now lusts after Grushenka, a beautiful young woman who toys with the men who desire her.
5. Dmitri also passionately desires Grushenka; here is the classic motivation for parricide: sexual rivalry between father and son.

B. Dmitri, the oldest son—impulsive, generous, rash, passionate—is engaged to Katerina Ivanovna but loves Grushenka.
1. The relationship with Katerina obeys the Dostoevskyan law of "insult and injury" and is stamped by pride from beginning to end.
2. Dmitri's passion for Grushenka may or may not be reciprocal; even Grushenka doesn't seem to know how she feels about Dmitri at the beginning of the novel. Much hinges on this uncertainty, which also makes for a much more interesting narrative.
3. Above all, Dostoevsky flags Dmitri's potential as murderer. We know from numerous passages that he is tempted to murder his father, yet he also wonders whether or not, at the crucial moment, he will cross the line.

C. Ivan, the middle son, is cold and contemptuous, referred to as "the grave." He has a cynical view of his family.
1. He tells Alyosha, "Viper will eat viper," a phrase that predicts his own fate at the end of the novel, when his mind will fall apart; viper eating viper, reptiles devouring each other. This is a complete reversal of the Cartesian motto "I think, therefore I am," which grounds the human being on the authority of thought. Here, thinking destroys the human subject.
2. Before he goes mad, Ivan offers us some of the most startling and unforgettable passages in the novel. In one chapter, "Rebellion," he explains his rejection, not of God, but of the world God made. He paints a detailed picture of the brutalization and suffering of children, and concludes that if belief in God means accepting these horrors, he wants no part of faith.
3. Perhaps most memorable in Ivan's critique of religion is his "poem" about the Grand Inquisitor.
   a. Christ returns to Earth in Spain during the time of the Inquisition and is arrested. The Inquisitor explains that Jesus has tragically misjudged human beings, human nature, and human need.
   b. What humans need, according to the Inquisitor, is miracle, mystery, and authority. We desire to avoid the horror of death and to be free of freedom, to be told how to behave through ritual. The job of the Church is to create the structure of religion, not its substance.
   c. Jesus has no words for the Inquisitor but kisses him, as if a kiss is the only commensurate response to evil in the world.
   d. Some critics have compared the two figures of the Inquisitor and Jesus to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. One author, Tolstoy, understands the secular world in which we live and the need to shepherd people in this world, not the afterlife. Dostoevsky, the nightmarish figure, has none of the solidity of Tolstoy and looks, instead, into the depths.
4. As mentioned at the beginning of the lecture, Ivan will learn from Smerdyakov that the murder was committed as an embodiment of his own view that if there is no God, everything might be permitted. Thus, Ivan has been a silent partner in the murder, a realization that spells the end of the hegemony of selfhood. Ivan, who has not done anything factually, realizes that he is, nonetheless, implicitly a murderer.

D. Alyosha, the youngest brother, is the novel's positive figure, the "lover of mankind."
1. He is also the figure whom readers frequently find the least compelling in the book, although his presence is necessary. He serves as a sponge soaking up the horrors of the novel, which, in Dostoevsky's world, must out.

2. Alyosha loves his family but worships the book's rival father, the Elder Zosima, who is the novel's figure of true spiritual love. Dostoevsky sketches the career of Zosima for us so that we might understand how he has arrived at faith and humility.
    a. In a scene early in the book, Zosima bows deeply to Dmitri, an act that suggests the elder's understanding that Dmitri is a man at the breaking point, a man who might be willing to commit murder. Zosima seems to know what is boiling inside of people.
    b. Zosima also loves Alyosha, partly because Alyosha reminds him of his own brother Markel, who is dead. In dying, Markel tells his mother: "Do not weep, life is paradise, and we are all in paradise, but we do not want to know it." In the black depths of Dostoevsky's worldview, here is a vision of the world marked by grace and beauty.
    c. Markel asks for forgiveness from the natural world: "Birds of God, joyful birds, you too must forgive me because I have also sinned before you." Humans are the blight on God's creation.
    d. Zosima comes to a surprising end. He is frail and his death is imminent. When he dies, his body starts to rot and reek with the "odor of corruption" almost immediately. The stench causes a scandal in the monastery and a crisis in Alyosha. Could this be evidence that Zosima was not as holy a man as he seemed?
3. Alyosha's mission in the novel is to go into the world. Indeed, Dostoevsky originally planned a further novel about his adventures, although this was never written.
    a. Alyosha is stamped by his love for children, a quality that suggests the makings of new family or community quite different from that of the tortured Karamazov clan.
    b. We learn the story of Ilyusha, whom Alyosha saves from a group of school-aged tormenters. Instead of thanking his rescuer, Ilyusha bites the novice monk.
    c. The boy's father, Captain Snegiryov, later explains to Alyosha that Ilyusha had witnessed and been marked by his own humiliation at the hands of Dmitri. According to the captain, "He saw the truth, and the truth went right through him."
    d. The same child who sinks his teeth into Alyosha comes to us as a child who was almost crucified by what he saw. He cannot live with the truth of his humiliated father and becomes obsessed with taking revenge. The novel gives us a complicated picture of children, who can be at once victims and vicious.

Essential Reading:

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, trans.

Supplementary Reading:

R. P. Blackmur, *Eleven Essays in the European Novel*.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Constance Garnett, trans., Ralph E. Matlaw, ed.

Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*.

Robert Louis Jackson, *The Art of Dostoyevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes.*

Questions to Consider:

1. At times, one feels that Dostoevsky's rendition of character is so layered and rich that judgment is impossible. In particular, the father, Fyodor, comes across as a morally (and even physically) repulsive figure who nonetheless fascinates us in his extreme buffoon-like behavior. Is Dostoevsky telling us something about the poverty of our categories?
2. From an ethical perspective, the youngest son, Alyosha, is clearly the most admirable and positive figure of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Yet many readers find him nonetheless a paler and less achieved figure than his brothers. Are we to infer that the story of saintliness is a harder sell from a narrative perspective? What future do you foresee for Alyosha after the novel's close?

Lecture Nineteen
Dostoevsky—*The Brothers Karamazov*, Part 2

Scope: The murder of the father, left as a mystery until the end, is a resonant transgression: It marks the revolt against authority, and it can be read in Freudian terms and as a rebellion against God. Dostoevsky is out to explore the great question of his age: how to live if there is no God and everything is permitted? His novel is the greatest religious exploration in fiction we have, because he takes the full measure of this "modern" crisis. Against the backdrop of a purely scientific worldview, he displays the antics of the soul: the tension between love and pride, the reality of suffering and evil, the complexity of motivation.

This most restless of novels is tirelessly inventive and self-aware, filled with surprises on every front for both us and the characters. Little remains in place: Human desire can be hideous; forgiveness is impossible; what looked set is exposed as mobile; the conventions are mocked. Endlessly perspectival, *The Brothers Karamazov* pirouettes its great issues, mixes the tragic with the grotesque, and celebrates life with an unparalleled intensity. It is a joyful book.

Outline

I. What is our response to Nietzsche's famous statement "God is dead"? Might it be the idea that everything is permitted? Is murder permitted? Is murder perhaps even desirable or irresistible?

A. *The Brothers Karamazov* is a detective story unlike any we know because the killing in question, the generative crime at the core of the book, is not simply the murder of old Fyodor but of God.

B. And by whom is God murdered—modern life, human desire? Is the Crucifixion an event from the sacred past, or does it take place every day in human relationships?

II. We saw the crisis of authority with the death of the father in Balzac's *Père Goriot*, but in this novel the father is murdered, and it seems that one can find joy in murder or in hurting others. Dostoevsky's novel offers us a troubling new view of freedom.

A. The reader senses, early on, that Fyodor Karamazov is a stunningly bad father, a logical candidate for being murdered.

1. At book's end, the lawyers at the trial will argue that Fyodor deserved death because he was such an unworthy father. Even before the trial, Dmitri wonders repeatedly whether he would have been able to resist killing his father.

2. At one point, in talking to Alyosha, Ivan makes the remarkable observation that no life is intrinsically worthy.

3. Smerdyakov, who commits the murder, does so almost as a kind of scientific experiment: What would it be like to kill the old man? This same kind of "scientific curiosity" finds its most horrendous expression in the Nazi doctors who experimented on human subjects.

4. Some critics have examined this novel in light of Freud's theory of the despotic father who must be killed for his sons to achieve freedom; this "primal horde" thesis of patriarchal rivalry and sacrifice seems relevant to Dostoevsky's novel.

5. Yet killing the father inevitably suggests an attack on God, as if the very operation of human freedom is a kind of deicide. Not only is everything permitted in this new dispensation, but the darker truth is that murder is what we desire. Ivan actually articulates this thought at the trial, when he says, "Who doesn't wish for his father's death?"

B. Dostoevsky asks questions in this novel about the darker side of the human psyche: Do we delight in murder? Do we itch for it? Do we have within us a profound need for violence and blood?

1. Ivan's shocking question in court probes deeper: Isn't this desire for murder what we thrive on, what titillates us? We discover in ourselves the same horrible truth that Ivan discovered: our own complicity.

2. Dostoevsky reminds us of an idea whose germ we saw in *Wuthering Heights*: The psychic brutality and violence of human nature are difficult to reconcile with the views we would like to hold about human kindness.

3. The Russian word *nadryv*—translated as "strain" or "laceration"—seems to dominate the psychology of these characters. We see this firsthand in the relationship between Dmitri and Katerina, whose "debts" to each other become a form of humiliation.
4. Grushenka's character is also dominated by *nadryv*, as we see in her desire to mock and torture Katerina. Grushenka achieves the power she desires over Katerina through insult and injury.
5. Dostoevsky makes us see that the murder of God isn't necessarily theological. God is murdered when love dies, when relationships are characterized by *nadryv*.
6. Ivan tells Katerina that the more Dmitri insults her, the more she loves him. That kind of love is akin to the joyous torturing of others that we saw with the children throwing stones.
7. Against this, we remember Zosima's bow and the kiss of Christ as the only response to the horrors of the world, as well as Markel's certainty that we inhabit paradise.

C. Perhaps the most unforgettable rendition of horror in this novel involves the girl Lise, whom Alyosha intends to marry.
1. Lise tells Alyosha about her own dark desires, to set fire to a house, for example. She further informs him that the community is delighted with the juicy crime of his brother killing their father.
2. Lise then relates a story she read of a Jew who tortured and crucified a four-year-old child. According to Lise, the boy died in four hours—"quickly." She then imagines that it was she who crucified the child and watched him die while "eating pineapple compote," as if his death were part of her dessert.
3. We learn here that people don't necessarily commit horrible acts in the heat of the moment but at their leisure. Lise would savor both the crucifixion and the pineapple compote.
4. The scene with Lise destroys any notions we might have about the innocence of children. Their violence and cruelty goes beyond a reflection of the behavior they see in their adult models. They exalt in injury, in inflicting pain and death.

III. The reigning worldview in Dostoevsky's late-19th-century moment was that of Materialism, what's known in the book as "the Bernard scheme." Claude Bernard was an eminent French scientist who is often credited with putting the last nail in the coffin of a religious picture of the world.

A. Naturalist writers from many countries subscribed to Bernard's Materialist, scientific view as a depiction of human reality, but how does this perspective help us understand human feelings, intuitions, and desires, perhaps even the soul?

B. Dmitri tries to square his life against the Bernard model after he is accused of the crime. Remarkably, he says that he feels sorry for God, because he is no longer a credible explanation for things. Instead, Dmitri attributes his behavior to nerves, "little tails," in the brain. Today, medical scanning can show us where speech and emotion are lodged in the brain, yet do those scans show love, or hate, or the soul?

C. Dmitri stands for the Enlightenment rejection of the God-centered view of life. The Inquisitor asserts that human beings will never be free of their craving for miracle, mystery, and authority, yet the novel seems to wrestle with this view set against science. In one late scene, the devil visits Ivan and speaks to him, but we don't know whether it is really the devil, or Ivan's devil, or Ivan himself, or Ivan's soul.

IV. *The Brothers Karamazov* can certainly be heavy reading, yet it is also a restless, brilliant, alert, and perky novel.

A. The book is immensely aware of itself as language. It contains poems, quotations, letters, and tracts. Dostoevsky seems to want to show us an arsenal of approaches to relating the spiritual drama of his characters.

B. The tone of the novel can change in an instant, and the book seems to delight in pulling the rug out from under its characters—and from under all of us as readers.
1. We saw this earlier when Grushenka turned the tables on Katerina, transforming herself from friend and accomplice to tormentor. Later, Grushenka tells Alyosha that her performance with Katerina was for his benefit.
2. In another scene, Alyosha listens to Katrina ranting about Dmitri. To us, her hysterics seem genuine, but when it's over, Alyosha suggests that her outburst seemed rehearsed—another performance.

C. The novel is relentlessly perspectival; the lawyers in the trial at the end reconfigure and reconceive for us events that we thought were immovable.

D. Finally, the book has its own wackiness.
1. Ivan tells Alyosha that he cannot bear prophets or epileptics, both of which descriptions apply to Dostoevsky himself.

2. A minor character explains that he unknowingly married a woman who was lame, thinking that she was skipping out of pleasure at the prospect of marrying him.
3. This kind of humor keeps the novel bubbling and joyous. We understand it as the very heartbeat of the book, the flow of great literature, which we as readers receive as a transfusion.

Essential Reading:

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, trans.

Supplementary Reading:

R. P. Blackmur, *Eleven Essays in the European Novel*.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Constance Garnett, trans., Ralph E. Matlaw, ed.

Micheal Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*.

Robert Louis Jackson, *The Art of Dostoyevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes.*

Questions to Consider:

1. The famous segment on the Grand Inquisitor is often anthologized and read on its own as a classic Dostoevskyan utterance. Do you feel that this piece constitutes the moral heart of the novel? What do you make of Ivan's account of the Christian legacy? Do miracle, mystery, and authority continue to hold sway as the major seduction of religious thinking?
2. *Nadryv*, or "laceration," would seem to be the prime characteristic of Dostoevskyan psychology. It is most evidently in play in the relationship between Dmitri and Katerina; where else in the novel do you see signs of it? Do you find this type of behavior credible?

Lecture Twenty
Conrad—*Heart of Darkness*

Scope: Published in 1902, the novella *Heart of Darkness* has been seen as a portal to the 20th century—a critique of the European "project" and imperialism, as seen in the account of the narrator, Marlow, of the mysterious Kurtz, the idealist-turned-monster. This quest narrative traces Marlow's own trip into the Dark Continent in search of Kurtz, and the story is stamped by fascination, as Conrad employs an arsenal of techniques for conveying what is surreal and demonic in his tale.

Although the story lambastes the greed, exploitation, and inhumanity of European trading interests, it has nonetheless been construed as racist and complicit in colonialist thinking, given its representation of both Africa and Africans. The harder one looks at this text, the murkier it becomes: Is it a denunciation of imperialism? A discovery of nihilism? An exploration of the potential savagery and bestiality inside all men? A dissolution of the ego? A meditation about language and literature as a bridge to the "other"?

Outline

I. With *Heart of Darkness*, written by Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), storytelling becomes problematic.

A. Is this short novel an adventure story, an anatomy of imperialist Europe, a critique of colonialism, or a racist account of Africa and Africans? Is the writing itself classic, purple, or impressionistic? Is the novel an allegory about writing? Published in 1902, *Heart of Darkness* can be read as both an end-stage document for 19th-century Europe and as a gateway to the 20th century in terms of its subjectivity and indeterminacy.

B. The congenial Marlow's account of his voyage into the Dark Continent in search of the mysterious Kurtz—based on Conrad's own experiences and recalling Stanley's famous pursuit of Livingstone—is an adventure story turned inside-out, transformed into riddle and unspeakability. When we say that the book represents a crisis in storytelling, we mean that language no longer seems to function as a sufficient bridge for the author between his work and the reader.

II. The novel opens with the fascinating suggestion that London was once like Africa: unexplored and primitive. The story will constitute a double voyage, guiding us into Africa as a representation of the remote past and taking us on a textual voyage as we listen with Marlow's fellow passengers aboard the *Nellie*.

A. Marlow offers us a grim portrait of European exploitation—ruthless, inhuman, hypocritical—that reduces African workers to the status of cannon fodder. The Belgian financial interests are in search of ivory, and we see just how much bestiality and horror go into this enterprise.

1. Again, Conrad wants us to think about voyages—the journey back to our earliest origins, and the journey to understanding of the ideological and economic system that is in play here.

2. He is straightforward in his characterization of the Belgian mission in the Congo: "With no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe."

B. The enigmatic Kurtz—initially idealistic, charismatic, perhaps godlike, perhaps demonic—serves as a dreadful metaphor for the entire pursuit: what can happen to a civilized man when he moves ever further into the heart of darkness.

1. In speaking of his lineage, Conrad tells us, "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz." He is a kind of European specimen, and he begins his sojourn in Africa by writing a report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs.

2. "But," as Marlow says, "the wilderness had found him out early and taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion." Here, the relationship between individual and setting seems to be reversed; the setting becomes authorized and empowered and the person is a thing to be acted upon.

3. Of course, we can see another voyage here—a trip into the darker recesses of the human heart. But with Conrad, self-scrutiny alone will not bring knowledge; we don't know who we are until we have been tested.

4. It's no accident that Kurtz is imaged for us as a voice; he is presented as language. Literature itself is the field of expression that regards the world as voice or language. Homer for us is a voice, as is Shakespeare. They are just as enigmatic as Kurtz is.

C. *Heart of Darkness* reads just a bit like a narrative treasure hunt: We follow clues as Marlow seeks to convey to his listeners the stages of his search, bringing us ever closer to the prime quarry.

1. We get bits of information about Kurtz, but we are told that it is not easy or necessarily safe to try to imagine him. Marlow says, "The thing to know was what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was a reflection that made you creepy all over. It was impossible—not good for one either—trying to imagine."

2. Here, Conrad tells us that imagination itself is a journey—the slippage of gears, the loosening of the anchor. It makes us available to take on others and bring them into ourselves.

3. Marlow says that trying to know Kurtz is difficult for those of us who are grounded, because here was a man who had lost his footing. What might we discover about ourselves if everything is permitted?

D. As the hyper-articulate Marlow tries to describe events in the Congo to his fellow passengers on the *Nellie*, he interrupts himself continually, concerned that he is not conveying the story.

1. Marlow asks his listeners, "Do you see anything?" This is a crisis of confidence that sets in with this book.

2. Conrad gestures here toward the greatest problem all writers face—how to make one's material come alive to readers. Indeed, this may be a problem for all of us—how do teachers or parents get their ideas across?

3. With *Heart of Darkness*, many have asked: Whose story is this—Marlow's or Kurtz's? In *Wuthering Heights*, we saw the seer/scribe model, in which Nelly Dean attempts to tell the story of Catherine and Heathcliff, who are almost unreachable themselves. The same is true of Kurtz, and with this novel, the straightforward way of telling a story disappears.

III. Not surprisingly, *Heart of Darkness* has generated a host of incompatible interpretations.

A. Some have argued that the story not only has no center but that its failure to narrate represents the core logic of deconstruction: that language is always ruptured from presence, that words have no contact with reality.

B. Others have taken a more psychological line, seeing in Marlow's quest for Kurtz a textbook account of self-discovery, of the voyage into one's own "dark heart."

C. Philosophically speaking, one might argue that the story is about the discovery of nihilism at the core of the human enterprise: that all projects are fraught with illusion.

D. In 1975, the distinguished Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe struck a new note entirely by claiming that Conrad's story—a classic enshrined in literary history, taught in classrooms throughout the English-speaking world—was "bloody racist."

1. Achebe argued that Conrad's use of Africa and Africans as the backdrop for a Western story was anything but innocent or neutral. The Africans are cast as prehistoric savages with no culture, dimensionality, or dignity.

2. Postcolonial studies and cultural studies have since examined *Heart of Darkness* as a revelatory document about colonial practices, even while acknowledging Conrad's conscious critique of the worst transgressions involved in these practices.

E. *Heart of Darkness* is also a story about economic exploitation and, ultimately, power. The most famous artistic remake of this novel is Francis Ford Coppola's epochal film *Apocalypse Now*.

1. The American (mis)adventure in Vietnam offers provocative parallels to the story of Marlow seeking Kurtz—the idealist-turned-monster, the genius who "went native"—by framing both stories in terms of a discourse on power.

2. Why stop at Vietnam? We are never through discovering our (moral and ideological) collusion with violence and evil, especially when abetted by issues of racial and ethnic strife. Consider the behavior at Abu Ghraib prison or the genocide practiced in Darfur, and you will see that Conrad is distressingly alive and well today.

F. One returns to Conrad with a sense that he had looked into the pit and set out to graph what he saw there. Before (and beyond) the political, what Conrad noted was the psychic catastrophe at hand: The *self* fissures, comes apart, when subjected to sufficient stress. Here is why he revered the "seaman's code" with its insistence on duty and restraint: Keeping your eyes to the job at hand is the only way to hold on to who you are.

Essential Reading:

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

Supplementary Reading:

Joseph Conrad and Robert Kimbrough, *Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*.

Attie De Lange, Gail Fincham, and Wieslaw Krajka, *Conrad in Africa: New Essays on "Heart of Darkness."*

Questions to Consider:

1. Some critics have argued that Conrad's luscious yet groping impressionistic style is strangely at odds with the dark ideological vision of his book, meaning that the verbal sumptuousness of Conradian prose seduces us into ignoring the vile amorality underneath the performance. How would you respond to this critique?
2. What is your opinion of Achebe's well-known critique of *Heart of Darkness* as "bloody racist"? More generally, does an ideological analysis of the story along lines of race and imperialism seem to you to take the full measure of Conrad's narrative?

Lecture Twenty-One
Mann—*Death in Venice*

Scope: *Death in Venice*, like *Heart of Darkness*, is a cautionary fable about the failure of Western Enlightenment values; its protagonist, the writer Aschenbach, is a cultural hero exemplifying discipline, reason, form, and rejection of the "abyss," who goes to Venice for a vacation. Echoing Nietzsche's theory of the tug-of-war between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, Mann—neglected today as too wordy, too portentous—strikes the modern Freudian note by locating chaos in sexual desire, indeed, in the taboo subject of homosexual desire.

The story is larded with bristling signs of Aschenbach's coming collapse: hallucinatory dreams of libido and jungle, an encounter with corrupt "doubles." It all comes to a head when Aschenbach sees and is smitten by the beautiful boy Tadzio. At this point, theories of beauty implode because they are driven by desire. Aschenbach's impending downfall is doubled by the existence of plague in Venice: Is denial of the abyss possible? What is hidden behind "form"? In our own moment of sexual liberalism combined with child pornography and abuse, what do we make of this story?

Outline

I. Thomas Mann (1875–1955) is one of the great masters of 20th-century European fiction, and his works are a tribute to what civilization has achieved. Venice, for example, is a dreamlike city of canals and romance, but it is also a living allegory, struggling at significant economic cost to avoid death by drowning. What does it mean when the elements take over, and what are the elements?

- **A.** *Death in Venice* (1912) bears striking parallels to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, inasmuch as each is a cautionary fable about the failure of Western Enlightenment values. Each story makes use of the voyage as a form of quest, discovery, and self-discovery, thereby drawing the reader in.
  - **1.** Yet Conrad's impressionism and conjectural narration differ markedly from the polished, marmoreal style of Mann.
  - **2.** In this sense, *Death in Venice* can be seen as a rich yet severe critique of form itself, the way reality is packaged. This novel is a profound meditation about the meaning and power of form.
- **B.** Thomas Mann's entire *oeuvre* might be symbolized by the tension between two cultural sites: Lübeck (Mann's birthplace in northern Germany, locus of bourgeois decorum and hard work, haven of European values of discipline and order) and Venice (romantic home of art, dream, and desire; epitome of southern Europe's cult of hedonism and gratification).
- **C.** With *Death in Venice*, Mann is unquestionably borrowing from Nietzsche's famous work *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which Greek tragedy is understood in terms of the interplay between order and chaos, between the Apollonian rule of form/frame and the Dionysian core of frenzy. This novel raises questions about whether these two elements can be married, whether the frenzied core can be made interpretable by the frame.
- **D.** Mann, once regarded as a master figure in Western literature, is less read today, in part because his encyclopedic interests and his polished, sometimes sententious style are so at odds with a reading public geared to a more minimalist kind of writing.
  - **1.** Yet we would do well to reread Mann, for he is even more Freudian than Nietzschean, inasmuch as the eruptive and anarchic disorder of this story is profoundly sexual in character. Libido is what will not be corralled.
  - **2.** Mann strikes the modern note in this text by presenting sexual desire as *homosexual*, as a quasi-Greek sense of an older man's desire for a beautiful boy. We now know that Mann himself was homosexual by inclination, even though he married and had a family; he was drawn to younger men all his life.

II. The story's protagonist is an author, Gustav von Aschenbach, a culture hero of discipline and control.

- **A.** Aschenbach is recognized throughout Germany (and Europe) for his classical writing, his marmoreal style. One does not go too far astray in seeing parallels between Aschenbach and Mann himself.

B. This "master" is served up as a moral exemplar to the young via anthologized work in school textbooks. He is on record as having no sympathy with the "abyss," as being severely critical of lax behavior and Bohemian self-indulgence.

C. Mann thought of his own work as following in the tradition of Goethe, who wrote, "The master is shown through his constraint." Framing and tightening a work of art gives it a clarity and power that it could not achieve otherwise.

III. Aschenbach decides to take a vacation to Venice, and the story is larded, perhaps over-larded, with signs and portents of impending trouble.

A. Before leaving on his trip, Aschenbach glimpses a strange man while out walking. The encounter is what Freud would have called "uncanny"; a current of hunger passes between the two men as they look at each other. The modern reader easily sees the homosexual undertones here, as well as the signal that something significant will happen in Venice.

B. Then comes the first hallucinatory scene of the story: Aschenbach "sees" before his eyes an exotic, primeval, wild tropical landscape. We read it as Venice, but also untrammeled nature and sensuality and, perhaps, sexuality.

C. Once in Venice, at the Lido, Aschenbach perceives a second sign via another stranger, this time a man at once young and old, on a boat headed to the city. He's obviously a mirror of Aschenbach, but his presence also leads us to question the neutrality of vision.

D. The climactic encounter of the stay in Venice, and of the tale itself, is the vision of the beautiful Polish boy Tadzio, who is staying with his family at the same *pensione* as Aschenbach. The *machine infernale* now goes into full gear.

1. This graceful, lovely child represents for Aschenbach the irruption of the gods into his everyday life, in particular, Eros, the progenitor of beauty and desire. This entrance of myth is both grand and annihilating; suddenly, Aschenbach's life moves onto a larger stage and engages with forces beyond his control.

2. Aschenbach's entire life has been devoted to the cult of beauty, understood as form and harmony. This discovery of beauty as living flesh is at once deeply logical and deeply unhinging.

3. Why does beauty arouse us as it does? Mann quotes Plato in the *Phaedrus*: Human beauty is the "sole aspect of the spiritual which we can perceive through our senses or bear so to perceive." The flesh is the incarnation of beauty, perhaps ultimately, the highest form of beauty.

4. But in admiring beauty, are we seeing spirit clothed in flesh or something utterly carnal? And what does this mean for the artist who searches for and tries to produce beauty? Aschenbach is a disciplined craftsman who makes beautiful language, but he can make no language about this beautiful boy; some other response is called for.

5. Aschenbach has never been drawn to boys before, but his desire for Tadzio challenges his entire thesis about discipline, control, and rejection of the abyss. Does this mean that his life of restraint has been a lie? Aschenbach discovers here his own truth, not simply his feelings of desire for the boy, but the darker truth about his philosophy of life and his works of art.

IV. Tadzio is initially seen as tainted by disease, and disease turns out to be the hidden gathering force of the tale.

A. Venice—hot, sultry, overripe—is the site not only of rotting garbage but of infection, indeed, of plague itself. Aschenbach hears rumors of the spread of plague to Venice, but the Italians involved in the tourist trade vigorously deny the presence of disease in their midst.

B. Skillfully, Mann moves us from the physical, material plague to its moral and spiritual counterpart. Venice is a place of intemperance, indecency, increased crime, and professional vice. Discipline is in trouble; form becomes chaotic, miasmic. We're not surprised to learn that the secret of Venice—that it harbors plague—is the secret of Aschenbach—that he harbors sexual desire for this beautiful boy.

C. Aschenbach's reaction to this knowledge is the same as that of the Italian hotel owners to the knowledge of the plague—it must be kept quiet. Nor can he leave Venice. He realizes that his art, his truth, and his life coalesce in his infatuation with this boy.

D. The novel's most explosive scene is its late Dionysian dream sequence: All the motifs of primitive appetite and sexual frenzy, no longer controllable, now burst into expression. The dream deteriorates into a frenzy that totally annihilates all that Aschenbach has stood for. It is a siren song for beauty.

E. Written almost a century ago, *Death in Venice* has a strange resonance in today's culture of liberal sexuality and alternative lifestyles. Aschenbach's cult of discipline may seem quaint to us, but his central truth—his inability to deny his sexual desire for a child—is still an issue for our century.

Essential Reading:

Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice*.

Supplementary Reading:

Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice*, Clayton Koelb, trans. and ed.

Questions to Consider:

1. Aschenbach is to discover that the cult of beauty seems to lead to the abyss. How meaningful are any of these terms today? Do we still believe in either a cult of beauty or the abyss?
2. At one point, Mann suggests that we would do well *not* to peer too deeply underneath the polished surfaces of form and order. This is a short step away from saying that the achieved work of art is indeed achieved at considerable cost, that we should content ourselves with its outward harmony rather than seek to uncover the struggle that may have gone into it. How much, in general, do we ever know about what lurks behind the forms of art?

Lecture Twenty-Two
Kafka—"The Metamorphosis"

Scope: "The Metamorphosis" is Franz Kafka's signal contribution to modern literature, and it radically challenges our interpretive skills: Is Gregor Samsa *really* a bug? If so, why? How? If all literature entails for its readers "trying on" a new perspective, then Kafka shows us how it might feel to *be* a bug. What is Gregor's reaction? What would yours be? Is this a picture of what can happen to a body? Is this a critique of Gregor's former life? Can one "exit the human"?

The sister Grete tells the family that they must forget this creature is Gregor. How does the reader take this? Can Gregor be at once an animal for his family and a person for us? Here, we see the value of literature itself as testimony of the *human*. Kafka's story chronicles not merely one but a host of metamorphoses, including those of Gregor's parents and his sister. By story's end, when Gregor is dead, we see a strange sacrificial fable being played out; how do we interpret it?

Outline

I. In the famous encounter between Oedipus and the Sphinx, Oedipus is asked to name the creature that is on four legs in the morning, two legs at noontide, and three legs in the evening. His answer is "man," who crawls on four legs as an infant, walks on two legs as an adult, and uses a cane in his old age. For humans, metamorphosis is real, and one of the questions raised by Franz Kafka (1885–1924) in "The Metamorphosis" (1915) is: How much change does it take for someone to stop being considered human?

- **A.** Kafka speaks to the sense that our world is full of those who are alive but not treated as humans because of religion, race, gender, even age.
- **B.** "The Metamorphosis" might be one text that serves as a rationale for why literature matters. Kafka's work doesn't give us a familiar representation of things that are already known; instead, it reworks the givens into a constellation that we've never considered before.
- **C.** Kafka once wrote, "Art is the ax that chops into our frozen sea." This violent metaphor suggests that the human heart is a thing of torpor, complacency, deadness.

II. The shortest text in this course, Kafka's "Metamorphosis" occupies a unique place in the history of fiction and will remain a classic as long as people still read. Although many great writers, including Ovid, have compared humans to animals (albeit less often to insects), it is much rarer for these matters to move from metaphor to reality.

- **A.** The first challenge of Kafka's story is its literalness. Given that all literature is an affair of lenses through which we perceive reality—and this is arguably its greatest trump—it is especially staggering to see the world from the insect's angle.
  1. Gregor Samsa wakes up with a strange, new, insect-like, multilegged body, but he is remarkably nonchalant about the change. His greatest worry is that he will be late for work.
  2. The word *angst*, meaning "fear" or "fright," is often used in connection with Kafka, but there is no fright in this story. In fact, it has a completely pedestrian point of view and its own simple logic.
  3. Gregor has other concerns: how to get this new body off the bed or how to open a door when he has only his mouth to work with. He seems to go through a crash course on his altered conditions.
  4. We see Kafka's literalism here, as well as a rigorously anatomical, physiological picture of changed circumstances. When Gregor's parents see him, they are horrified, and a coffeepot is knocked over in the ensuing pandemonium. When Gregor sees the spilled coffee, "He could not resist snapping his jaws several times in the air." This is the instinctual response of the insect.
  5. Most of us, if we live long enough, will go through a similar crash course on the altered conditions of our own bodies. In fact, we might ask: Do we "own" our bodies? Kafka helps us understand that the body is always *terra incognita*. Perhaps the old, the chronically ill, the deformed, and the dying know something about this.
  6. In this story, Kafka packages the unwelcome news that control of our bodies is illusory, and makes us wonder what a strange thing it is to be living in a body.
- **B.** Kafka does not interpret this metamorphosis for us—his story remains literal—but, of course, we ask: Why has this metamorphosis taken place? Scholars and critics have put forth numerous theories.

1. Gregor is a low-level traveling salesman. Could his transformation into an insect be construed as a judgment, a verdict on the quality of his life?
2. Perhaps Gregor's story is a sacrificial one. Is he a Jesus figure who has undergone this terrible change so that others might live?
3. It has also been argued that many of Kafka's stories revolve around the issue of "exiting the human"? Is "the human" a category one can exit? Kafka seems to explore this question in a number of his stories, and human history shows us that people have been cast in the role of "other" for centuries.

III. "The Metamorphosis" is not just about Gregor himself. It sheds great light on family relationships as well. Indeed, little can match the pathos of Gregor's reception by his family, particularly his encounter with his father.

A. It is well known that Kafka felt bullied all his life by his father, Hermann, a large, powerful man, who had no understanding for his rather effete, weak son. The struggle in "The Metamorphosis," however, plays out in a different way.

B. Here, the father is depicted as a man who pursues his son because he believes that this insect will destroy his wife and daughter. He attacks Gregor "[p]itilessly… hissing like a wild man."

C. Before Gregor's transformation, his father had been a moribund, decrepit figure, but his need to protect his family revitalizes him. At one point, Gregor looks at his father and hardly recognizes him; he wears a dapper uniform and looks ready to become the breadwinner himself.

D. Some scholars have compared the scene in which the father throws apples at Gregor to the legend of St. George and the dragon. One of the apples becomes lodged in Gregor's skin and will contribute to his death.

1. As Gregor tries to return to his room to escape his father and the barrage of apples, his mother rushes in, her loosened clothes fall to the floor, and she throws herself at her husband, begging him to spare Gregor's life. We see here the sexual reunion of the parents, also triggered, in some way, by Gregor's metamorphosis.
2. Freudian critics assert that Gregor's sight going dim at this point suggests that he cannot bear to look on the sexual embrace of his parents.

IV. Readers frequently feel that the Samsa family is a "beastly" outfit, given the way they treat their altered son. But is this criticism valid?

A. We must always remember that although we know Gregor's thoughts and feelings, he no longer possesses language and cannot communicate with his family.

1. The story is narrated from Gregor's angle of vision, and we know—but no one else does—that he is still a sentient, thinking creature.
2. Thus, it makes sense when the sister, Grete, exhorts her parents to forget that this is Gregor: "If it were Gregor, he would have realized long ago that it isn't possible for humans to live with such a creature, and he would have gone away of his own free will."
3. Human language, it seems, is the last badge of our citizenship in the human community, what makes us human, and what shows others that we are thinking, feeling creatures. A disease such as Alzheimer's, which eventually deprives sufferers of language, exiles them from the human community.
4. The reverse is also true: Literature acts as the continuing living voice of people who are long dead.

B. Toward the end of the story, Gregor (dying, essentially of starvation) hears Grete playing music and experiences a great hunger, as if music might be the nourishment that he craves.

1. Here, Kafka suggests that we might seek a kind of nourishment that is not material but spiritual.
2. Indeed, the whole story seems to focus on the implicit incompatibility between having a body and having a soul. It's the body that has changed in Gregor's case, and he has exited the human community. Yet we know that he is still a living, feeling, desiring, loving creature.

C. At story's end, the dead Gregor is swept out with the trash, and the family is freed of him. The parents look at their daughter and realize that she will marry soon and have children. Can we say, then, that Gregor is like Christ? His transformation and exit catalyzes their return to life.

Essential Reading:

Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, Stanley Corngold, trans. and ed.

Supplementary Reading:

Stanley Corngold, "The Structure of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*," in *The Commentators' Despair: The Interpretation of Kafka's Metamorphosis*.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, Dana Polan, trans.

Questions to Consider:

1. The familiar German term *angst* has often been posited as a synonym for Franz Kafka's work. Do you find any *angst* in "The Metamorphosis"? Do you expect to find it? Why is it (not) there? What does Kafka's tone teach us about the meaning of his story?
2. Even though we may think it surreal for a man to wake up as a bug, some critics have suggested that, in fact, the human body can be subject to enormous changes over a lifetime, via age or illness or deformity. Does Kafka's story speak to this issue? How?

Lecture Twenty-Three
Kafka—*The Trial*

Scope: As always, Kafka opens with a bang: Joseph K. is arrested, but why? Can there be guilt without a crime? Could there be a crime of *omission* instead of *commission*? Kafka's characters are placed on a stage that does not obey realism's rules: Note the whipping scene. One needs to assess the strange legal setting in this novel: attics, tenements, a labyrinth where characters cannot find their way. How does Joseph K. respond to this challenge?

We gradually realize that Kafka is telling a spiritual fable in strictly material fashion: How do we find *grace*? The most famous episode here is the parable "Before the Law," where the key image of a closed door stands as both man's punishment and as Kafka's characteristic topography of obstacles. Is justice possible? Is this a picture of "our" politico-religious arrangements?

Outline

I. What is a trial, and what does it mean to be on trial? Does one have to have committed a crime or be in a courtroom to be on trial? Can a bad conscience be a way of standing trial?

A. If Kafka's Gregor Samsa woke up transformed into a bug, in *The Trial* (1925), Joseph K. wakes up to a no less radical, yet far more secular undoing: He is arrested, "[w]ithout having done anything wrong." Kafka never finished *The Trial*; he urged his literary executor to destroy it. In this labyrinthine world of bureaucratic offices, airless corridors, and unreachable officials, the notion of something—such as justice or truth—being reached or completed seems inconceivable.

B. *The Trial* can be read as a parable about the workings of a police state, yet matters appear to be murkier than that.

1. K., the protagonist, has not only done nothing wrong but also lives in a country with a legal constitution and, thus, has no idea who these people in his bedroom are, what authority they represent, or what he is accused of. Could someone be guilty without knowing why? Welcome to Kafka's world.

2. K. is told by those who have come to arrest him, "There's a law that causes you to be arrested." When K. says that he is not familiar with this law, the "authorities" respond, "He admits he doesn't know the law, and yet he claims he's innocent." What law is this? Could it be God's law? In going about his life, has K. gradually stumbled onto the wrong side of a higher law?

3. K. is summoned to court, but he is not sure where it is located. All he finds is a tenement building, filled with odd people; he finally climbs to the fifth floor and stumbles onto what must be the court, even though it resembles a political meeting. Here, Kafka emphasizes the material obstacles between us and the truth; further, the philosophical/moral issue of judgment is placed in a degraded, sordid, materialist setting.

4. K. seeks to harangue the court, but he is never sure who these people are, nor whether he is losing or gaining ground. The Examining Magistrate makes mysterious signs to people in the room; everyone seems to be wearing some sort of a badge. In back, a man and a woman have sex on the floor.

C. The plot thickens as K.'s trial seems to become known ever more widely.

1. His uncle visits and gives him advice; others who meet him know of his problems; he is urged to seek the help of well-placed people, such as the painter Tittorelli and the lawyer Huld.

2. Yet visits to these people—leading to suffocating attics with tiny rooms where one must climb over beds to get to the door or to dark enclosures where people emerge from the shadows, also seeking help—seem to make the situation even worse for K.

3. Titorelli seems a fraud; he is surrounded by giggling yet depraved young girls and may or may not be able to help K. The painter cons K. into buying copies of the same worthless paintings.

4. As K. makes his way to the court and those who have been recommended to help him, he becomes physically drained and feels seasick, as Kafka tells us. After his hearing, he sees that people are talking to him, but he can't make out what they're saying. Kafka's *topography of obstacles* is complete.

5. The lawyer Huld confuses K. even more. Huld lays out the complex categories of legal outcomes that may result, conveying a sense of an enormous, graduated, but unreachable bureaucratic power structure.

II. Up to now, my analysis of *The Trial* sounds halfway realistic; we all know that the legal system is labyrinthine, that you can get lost in it. But in Kafka's story, even the operational rules of reality seem to dysfunction.

A. Time and space do not play by their conventional rules. The setting may be simply altered with no logical explanation; people appear from nowhere. We lose mastery of our lives, the sense of where we are and what we're doing.

1. In *The Trial*, K. had lodged a complaint against the two people who arrested him. Then, one day, he is walking along the bank corridor, opens a door, and finds these two people being whipped by the Whipper as punishment for his complaint.
2. A day or two later, K. opens the same door and finds that they are still being whipped, as if in suspended animation for eternity.
3. This is nightmare logic, taking place in a world that most of us would not feel comfortable negotiating.

B. Kafka's sterile scheme seems initially hyper-logical—just as the legal system, with its rules and statutes, seems logical—but it is undercut with other currents. For example, the body continually interrupts people in Kafka.

1. K. seeks to speak to his neighbor, Fraulein Bürstner, late at night, and soon finds himself—unasked—kissing her lips and throat.
2. The washerwoman at the courtroom who had sex on the floor is smitten by K., and drags him into an erotic imbroglio.
3. Huld's housekeeper, Leni, presses herself on him as Huld is orating in the dimly lit room, kissing him, biting him, pulling him off to another room.
4. The world is exploding in every possible direction. It doesn't make sense logically, somatically, physically, or sexually. No systems are controllable.
5. Further, no projects will succeed in Kafka—not winning the case or accomplishing goals in life. Maturation is a joke in Kafka; we neither learn anything nor live long enough to achieve anything.

C. K. maintains his daytime logic, fights the good fight, but is drawn in ever more deeply and realizes that he is en route to losing his ground, his case, and his life. Perhaps the most important episode takes place in the cathedral, where K. has been asked to take an Italian visitor and has a fateful exchange with the chaplain.

1. The chaplain tells K. the parable "Before the Law," a bravura piece justly acclaimed as containing the very essence of Kafka's dark vision of unreachable grace and truth. Here is Kafka's classic topography of obstacles.
2. A man from the country comes before the law, but a doorkeeper prevents him from entering. He waits for admittance for years, attempting many times to be allowed in. Finally, as the man is on the verge of death, the doorkeeper, after explaining that this door was earmarked for this man alone**,** closes the door.
3. The parable is a forbidding tale of being locked out from the truth and an illustration of the idea that we humans spend our entire lives *waiting*: for answers, for illumination, for salvation. This is a home truth worth pondering.

Essential Reading:

Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, Willa Muir and Edwin Muir, trans.

Supplementary Reading:

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*.

Mark Spilka, *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation*.

Philip Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Kafka tells us that Joseph K. lives in a society with a legal constitution (and, thus, with personal legal rights), yet he is arrested nonetheless. Is this a political critique? Or is Kafka trying to tell us something about guilt and punishment that is incommensurate with any precise legal system as such? What would this "something" be?
2. Watching Joseph K. go through his paces as accused subject, the reader ultimately comes to some kind of judgment about the protagonist. What is your judgment? Can you say why he is put to death at story's end? If not, what sentiment does this leave you with, regarding Kafka's "achievement"?

Lecture Twenty-Four
Proust—*Remembrance of Things Past*

Scope: Proust's massive novel is pivotal in the history of fiction, because it appears to swap the Realist depiction of society and history for a maniacally "inside" story. The famous early sequence with the madeleine illustrates Proustian voluntary versus involuntary memory. Can the past come out of a teacup? Can we access our own past? How?

The novel's ensuing depiction of the protagonist's childhood in Combray appears to be fixed and solid, yet when we look carefully, we see an unending series of metamorphoses and reversals. All the characters appear to have a "night side" that Proust relentlessly uncovers. Here is what we'll call "false-bottom fiction." Such writing puts mystery and surprise into a world we have taken for granted.

Outline

I. The 3,000 pages of *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–1927) by Marcel Proust (1871–1922) mark a change in narrative fiction from the depiction of the outside world to an exploration of the interior mind and memory.

A. The premise of Realist fiction is, according to Stendhal's phrase, to serve as "a traveling mirror" that offers us a reflection of our social arrangements. Our traditional view of the novel is that of a document about historical reality; this was one reason that the novel was such a popular form in the 19th century.

B. One of the most famous sequences in literature is the episode of the madeleine in Proust's novel, in which the protagonist, a tired, depressed, middle-aged man, dips his pastry in tea, eats it, and experiences a feeling of profound euphoria and bliss.

1. The protagonist knows that the experience of drinking tea with pastry is connected to something inside him, but how can he bring this "something" up to the light?

2. This is the paradox of self-exploration: How do we retrieve out of our depths that which is lurking there, which may be of immeasurable value for us? In other words, how can you explore "you"?

3. For the protagonist in Proust, the past suddenly begins to emerge, as if the *Titanic* is being raised from the depths of the sea. Taste and smell, what we might think of as the most ephemeral of senses, are responsible for bringing memory back to life.

4. In this novel, what is brought to the surface is the childhood of the protagonist, Marcel, in a village in France called Combray. The subject is the human self, a world of enormous, immeasurable, and lost experiences and memories.

C. "Involuntary versus voluntary memory" will be Proust's terms for exploring the nature of recollection. Proust's signature theme now comes into play.

1. "Voluntary memory" is what all of us think of as memory, the recollection, for example, of what you did yesterday.

2. "Involuntary memory" is far richer, greener, and more vital. Think of looking at a picture of yourself as a child and ask yourself: Can I feel who I was at that time, can I re-become that child?

3. Proust tells us that many of our memories, our records of our own past lives, are like ashes. They are conceptually available to us but not experientially available.

4. Involuntary memory is secular resurrection: The dead live again, including our own dead selves from the past. Secular resurrection—memory—is an alternative to the scientific law of entropy, in which all things tend toward deterioration. Memory is the only antidote to that loss.

D. The description of the village of Combray emerging from the teacup evokes the Japanese custom of filling a bowl with water and steeping pieces of paper in it to watch the shapes unfold. Is this spectacle of paper-becoming-reality not an image of literature itself?

II. What is Combray, this idyllic village remembered by Marcel?

A. At first glance, Combray is a place of fixed customs and rituals, a knowable world, where nothing is unlabeled.

1. Nailed-down characters proliferate: Swann, Françoise, Vinteuil, and his daughter.

2. On closer inspection, however, we see that Proustian reversals stud Combray and establish the signature rhythm of the novel—boomerang.

3. Consider, for example, Tante Léonie's dream in which her dead husband is still alive. Her description of this situation as a nightmare to Marcel reveals to him a hidden side of her.

B. More fully developed is the memory of Françoise, the family servant, and her exquisite dishes of asparagus.
1. Marcel gives us a picture of the "celestial hues" and "radiance" of the asparagus combined with the stench of his urine after eating it.
2. This mixture of the high and low, lyrical and earthly, is completely new in writing.
3. We later learn that the preparation of the asparagus irritated the asthma of the girl who works under Françoise in the kitchen and whom Françoise dislikes.
4. Proust wants us to see the coexistence of the lyrical, poetic world, the world of the radiant asparagus, with a much harsher, smellier reality—the "chamber pot of aromatic perfume."
5. The metaphor we might think of here is a false-bottomed suitcase, with a panel to hide contraband. We don't know where the bottom is in this novel; the assumptions we rely on can be removed to reveal something hidden underneath.

C. Deconstructing Legrandin, the apparent freethinker of Combray, is our next task: Is he a freethinker or a snob?
1. Marcel and his family encounter Legrandin in town while he is talking to the chatelaine. Legrandin won't interrupt his conversation but attempts to convey his affection for the family with an expression of his eye, what Proust calls "an enamored pupil in a countenance of ice."
2. The word "lie" doesn't begin to describe this false declaration of affection. Here, Proust shows us how much creative energy we put into lying. In fact, lying may be mankind's greatest creative endeavor; in lying, we change reality into something that belongs to us. In this novel, normative values are in trouble.

III. As we've said, the characters in this book have double lives, particularly double night lives. Almost every major character in the book will be revealed to be homosexual, as was Proust himself.

A. The novel is justly known for its presentation of Charlus, Proust's most famous character, the pederast who is described as straight for the first half of the novel.
1. Marcel describes Charlus' expression when their eyes meet: "These eyes were shot through by a look of restless activity." The boy doesn't realize that he is being looked at with hunger.
2. In such descriptions, Proust shows us a man whose own energy is uncontrollable, who is, in a sense, in thrall to his sexual compulsions.

B. Proust highlights, as few others have, the sexual currents that link people.
1. In one passage, he tells us that signs pass between homosexuals "which indicate one of his kind to the beggar in the person of the nobleman whose carriage door he is shutting, to the father in the person of the daughter's suitor, to the man who has sought healing, absolution or legal defense in the doctor, the priest or the barrister…."
2. The sexual link here obliterates the obvious relationship. The real link is not between the suitor and the daughter but between the suitor and his potential father-in-law. Those who seek assistance from a doctor, priest, or lawyer may receive sexual attention instead.
3. This Proustian theory of libido totally alters the patterns of connection between people whom we think we understand. Everyone seems to be linked and related in ways we do not know. Proust maps for us these lines of relationship under the surface, re-charting the world for us in the process.

Essential Reading:

Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Moncrieff, Kilmartin, and Mayor, trans.

Supplementary Reading:

Samuel Beckett, *Proust*.

Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and Art*.

Alain de Botton, *How Proust Can Change Your Life*.

Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time.*

Arnold Weinstein, *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*.

Philip Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Proust's two cardinal terms are "voluntary" and "involuntary" memory. Is this distinction familiar to you? Do you feel that it is applicable to your own sense of memory and retrieval of the past? Would you say that Proust's philosophy, in this regard, is somber or upbeat?
2. The important French novelist André Gide was the reader for Gallimard Press who rejected Proust's first volume when it was submitted to them. Gide thought Proust was altogether too flowery and "precious" to be taken seriously. Gide later regretted his judgment call, but do you think he may have had a point?

Lecture Twenty-Five
Proust—*Remembrance of Things Past*, Part 2

Scope: Love is one of the great themes in Proust's novel. The child's love for his mother and grandmother expresses a need that seems both infinite and gratifiable, as is clear in the famous scenes of the goodnight kiss and the visit to Balbec. But adult love is another matter; over the course of the novel, Proust stages the strange evolution of the protagonist's love for Albertine. Is love possible? If not, why?

Habit appears to most of us as an innocuous notion, but Proust makes us realize how it functions as a cocoon for us, keeping us ensconced in our own private head-world. But what happens when habit is disrupted, when the world breaks in? These matters can have great pathos, especially when it comes to our perception of our loved ones. Here is the logic that accompanies Proust's staging of the grandmother's death.

Outline

I. The familiar title that we use for this novel is probably a mistranslation. The title in French is *À la recherché du temps perdu*, "In search of lost time." Much of this lecture will focus on how the work of time takes place, along with a subject that doesn't seem to be connected, human love.

A. We cannot see the work of time, although we can see its effects. In fact, it may not even be bearable for us to see the work of time in the faces and bodies of those we love.

B. The love of the mother and grandmother for Marcel is the anchor of this novel. We see the child's voracious need, and the selfless women who answer it. Does this endless supply of love and support equip the child for adult life? How likely is it that this relationship will find its match in adult love?

1. A famous early episode is the goodnight kiss between Marcel and his mother. We get a sense of jealousy here—that the boy cannot bear for his mother to have a life of her own. We also get a sense that the relationship is almost erotic, not from the mother's point of view but from the boy's.

2. Later in the novel, on vacation in a seashore hotel room, the sickly Marcel is almost overcome by the alien environment. The strange room seems as if it is assaulting him, and he "longed to die."

a. Then his grandmother comes into the room, and the boy says "to the expansion of my constricted heart, there opened at once an infinity of space."

b. We almost feel as if the grandmother exists only as a source of endless love and nurturance for Marcel.

c. The alterity—otherness—of the world threatens who we are, and we can find salvation only in love.

C. The Albertine saga constitutes the adult love relationship at the heart of the story.

1. Marcel first sees Albertine and her band of friends at Balbec. He is infatuated with their vitality and beauty, their potential to become almost anything.

2. Albertine invites Marcel to her bedroom for what he assumes will be a session of lovemaking, but he has misread her signals.

3. Later, when Albertine comes to visit Marcel in Paris, she is more experienced, but when he goes to kiss her, he finds that his lips are ill-suited to the job. As he closes in, he can't see what he's doing, his nose gets crushed, and his kiss lands on her cheek.

4. Still later, Albertine moves in with Marcel, but he finds that her consciousness is a barrier for him to sex. He can have sex with her only when she is asleep.

a. For Marcel, sex depends on the exclusion of her subjectivity, which would distract him from what he needs to be able fully to love her.

b. Of course, this idea is monstrous in normative terms, but there is a strange logic here: Subjectivity is the enemy of love, not the ally of it. Love can only be fully actualized when there is no distraction or competition.

5. Marcel suspects Albertine of lying about her sexual tastes and adventures and, thus, sequesters her in his apartment. He suspects that she is a lesbian and believes that he cannot compete with female rivals.

6. Albertine has an accident on a horse and dies, but her relationship with Marcel is still not over. He asks his friends to investigate the rumors of her lesbian affairs. Even in death, she continues to romp freely in his imagination, and he finds that he can still be deceived and humiliated by her.

7. Ultimately, we learn that even loving someone does not give us access to their thoughts, their dreams, their fantasies. We think of love as the deepest expression of mutuality and human connection, but our love objects will always remain "others" to us, reaching inward themselves to infinity.
8. Jealousy emerges here as our worst creative fiction, as the unverifiable and endless novel that we invent on our own.

II. Proust is among the rare writers to explore the notion of *habit*.

A. Proust calls habit a "skillful arranger"; we might also think of it as "feathering one's nest." Birds feather their nests by taking random twigs and making a home; so do people.

B. Habit is the protective lens that shuts out the world's alterity so as to make it into a personal cocoon, to preserve our status quo. Are we equipped to see the world when the lens becomes broken?

C. In writing about Proust, Samuel Beckett said, "The boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being." This quotation delineates the seesaw directionality of Proust's novel, those moments when habit fails in its mission, and the world jumps in.

1. Suspecting that his grandmother is ailing, Marcel plans a surprise visit, but he is shocked by the sight of her. As he enters her room, he suddenly stumbles into the recognition that she is old, sick, and dying. He has kept this knowledge from himself because of his love for her.
2. Proust says, "Every habitual glance is an act of necromancy. Each face that we love, a mirror of the past." This brings us back to the beginning of the lecture and our inability to see the work of time.
3. Our love for people preserves them in a certain way, enabling us to deny time and deny death.

III. Death, however, is the somatic endgame for all of us. We see, in the long and painful account of the grandmother's decline, a brutal physical lesson about mortality and the entropic treadmill all of us are on.

A. The grandmother experiences a stroke while walking in the Tuileries Garden with Marcel. She tries to convey to him that she is still the same woman of refinement, but the assault on her body has begun, and she is unable to make herself understood.

B. One by one, she loses her sight, her hearing, her ability to speak. We see her body as a fortress that is being stormed by the forces of entropy, and we realize that she is fated to lose this battle.

C. A "beast on a bed" is the final image we get of the grandmother. Awakened in the middle of the night, Marcel comes to her sickroom to say farewell, but she doesn't recognize him. Is this a replay of the "Little Red Riding Hood" story? We'll look at that question in the next lecture.

Essential Reading:

Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Moncrieff, Kilmartin, and Mayor, trans.

Supplementary Reading:

Samuel Beckett, *Proust*.

Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and Art*.

Alain de Botton, *How Proust Can Change Your Life*.

Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time.*

Arnold Weinstein, *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*.

Philip Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Some would argue that there is no such thing as love in the Proustian scheme. Rather, they claim, it is all egomania, hunger, and pathology. Given what you know about this novel, does this tough criticism make some sense? Consider the examples of both the grandmother and Albertine as key instances for your argument.
2. Vision, Proust seems to be saying, is incapable of integrating *time* into its operation. Do you factor time into your perception of people, especially of loved ones? Is this possible? Is it desirable? What are its consequences?

Lecture Twenty-Six

Proust—*Remembrance of Things Past*, Part 3

Scope: Sickness and death are signature themes in Proust: The boy watched, helplessly, the grandmother's stroke and dying, yet he now discovers that she still lives inside him, via memory. Memory is a double-edged sword: The dead live, but we ourselves are graveyards. Time itself is on the docket: Do we dare factor time into our perception of loved ones? What would we then see?

Proust's legacy hinges on his view of art and artists as the source of that inside story that eludes us in life, an inside story that has no truck with the material surface world we all see. Can it be written? Do you know your own? Proust leaves us with a form of fourth-dimensional portraiture, suggesting that it dwarfs anything we might find in our retinal perception or in photography or film. Can you see the fuller figure of your life?

Outline

I. The crucial thing that precedes remembering is, of course, forgetting. What does it mean when we forget the past? How much of our lives have been forgotten? What happens when we forget our dead—both the people we have loved and our prior selves? Do the dead live on in some way—in photographs, in graveyards, or in us?

A. We closed the last lecture with the grim scene of the death of Marcel's grandmother, in which she is described as a "beast on a bed." Two calendars are in play here: One marks the physiological death of the loved one, but the other marks the death of the loved one in us.

1. Proust is interested in this second form of death because it is also a life—the life that people live inside of us even though they are physiologically dead. We experience this life as mourning.

2. Successful mourning usually signifies that one's own ego becomes free and uninhibited again. Freud put forth this view in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia"; the "work of mourning" is a systematic process in which the unconscious cuts the ties that connected us to the loved one; dead tissue cannot nourish living tissue.

3. When grief ebbs to the point that thoughts of the dead loved one no longer hurt to the same degree, successful mourning has taken place. We are then free to cast our love elsewhere. Living ultimately trumps grief, allowing us to get past the deaths of those we love. We will honor and remember them, but we will become, in some sense, free of them.

4. In this novel, Marcel continues to have adventures after the death of his grandmother. He completes the process of mourning and, to a degree, forgets his dead loved one.

B. Then, however, Marcel returns to Balbec, to the same hotel room where he and his grandmother had tapped messages on the wall to each other a year earlier. While in the room, he is struck by what he feels is an invading spirit; it's almost as if his grandmother has come back to life in the setting where the two of them had experienced so much intimacy and love.

1. Marcel sequesters himself in the room to process her death, to do the work of mourning, and he encounters the double-edged sword of memory. Memory is, on the one hand, a magic retrieval, a presence of loved ones who are dead. At the same time, it never blinds us to the fact that our loved ones are only present in a virtual sense.

2. Proust helps us to see the poignancy and inseparable nature of this presence/absence.

3. Only in Balbec for a second time does Marcel fully feel and understand what his grandmother was. He learns that she was already ill when the two visited the town earlier, and remembers moments when he was unkind to her.

4. Proust tells us that these memories are a form of self-punishment: "For as the dead exist only in us, it is ourselves that we strike without respite when we persist in recalling the blows that we have dealt them."

C. In the hotel room, Marcel fully realizes that his grandmother is no longer alive, and he realizes what he has lost with her. He knows what she was and that she is gone for good.

1. Marcel has had dreams in which he pursues his grandmother, who is dead but not fully gone. In his dream, he is told that the only way to find her is to enter his own bloodstream, the River Lethe. The dream reminds us of the myth of Orpheus and his journey to Hades to retrieve the dead Eurydice.

2. For Marcel, the dream is about saying farewell. Like all of us, he regrets not having fully shared his feelings with his grandmother while she was alive. He relives her death on his calendar time, not hers, now experiencing what she meant in life and the meaning of her death.
3. This type of farewell dwarfs what is said at the deathbed. There, we are helpless; we can do nothing for the dying bodies of our loved ones, and they are in no condition to hear our feelings. Marcel now experiences the act of saying farewell within himself.

D. The French word for oblivion is *oubli*, the place to which we consign those who have died or whom we have forgotten. Our past selves may be stored there, as well, but through memory, they are all accessible. *Oubli* is a form of death in life.

1. We are always locked out of the plenitude of our own lives. If we think of our résumés, we might ask: To what extent can we remember and relive this trajectory, which is, in fact, nothing other than our own lives? A résumé represents the markings of who we once were, yet how often is that invested with life; how many of these selves still live in us?
2. Even in the present, we play any number of separate roles, focusing only on the one we are currently involved in.
3. Proust's word *oubli* is the operative notion that makes life possible for us to become something now and rule out all the other things that we are or were. In this novel, we get a sense of the beauty and necessity of having to make this kind of vertical retrieval to recover something of the scale and scope of our lives and loves.
4. This novel is about recovering what is buried within us; it also deals with hallowing the temporality of life and the ability to see others in time. Can we look at someone we love and see what the curve of time would tell us about that person? It's not clear that any of us is able to see the roundedness of the lives we look at.
5. Proust tells us that if we could see our loved ones existing in time, they would appear covered with the "velvety patina of the years." We would see the richness, the length, the fullness, and the dimensionality of their lives, which we cannot now do in our "snapshot world."
6. We are even unable to see our own stories fully, the motifs that make our lives cogent over time.

II. Proust would tell us that our truth is not in photographs or résumés; it's in our inner memories, which we must find a way to access.

A. Proust was critical of photography and realist literature, which he would have said doesn't capture anything. It doesn't tell us the private human story. Someone walking into your home and seeing your mementos couldn't possibly know what they meant to you, but such things are markers for you of your life, your emotions, your experiences, and your past. No faithful rendition of outside surfaces could render that inside story.

B. Proust argues that each of us has an inner history that we know nothing about which may be brought to the surface by association. We all have private markers—a smell, a sound—and Proust's project is to get in touch with those to enable us to recover our own lives.

C. For Proust, even a detailed biography is a fraud, because our lives are more than just a series of conventional events and ideas. The real story is what's inside of us.

D. In the last segment of the book, Marcel goes to a reception with people he has known all his life, but they look like they've been transformed. He sees two women whom he once loved when he was young; they have become dowagers, but he is able to look past what life has done to them and to himself and recapture his earlier love. As with F. Scott Fitzgerald, America's writer of desire, desire for Proust—that passion, that intensity—is more important than what one receives.

E. Proust finally says that his book is a mirror for his readers; they will see in themselves, perhaps, a door opening to their own unstoried, untold, unmapped inner lives.

1. Marcel remembers his aunt having dinner plates with an Ali Baba motif, and he believes that if she had known the fuller lives of her guests, she would have thought she was having Ali Baba to visit, the man who finds magic treasure in a cave.
2. The treasure, for Proust, is simply our own lives.

Essential Reading:

Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Moncrieff, Kilmartin, and Mayor, trans.

Supplementary Reading:

Samuel Beckett, *Proust*.

Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and Art*.

Alain de Botton, *How Proust Can Change Your Life*.

Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time.*

Arnold Weinstein, *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*.

Philip Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Grandmother's death in this novel turns out to be a "double-death," inasmuch as she first dies for herself but only later dies within Marcel. Do you agree with this model of a double calendar for processing deaths? What seems to you most awful or most beautiful about such a vision?
2. Proust offers as his final image of the human being in time a man on stilts. It is a circus image. Why do you think Proust chose it? Does this trivialize his great theme, or does it bring it home to us in a special way? Can you see your own life as being on stilts? Does this perception soothe or hurt?

Lecture Twenty-Seven
Joyce—*Ulysses*

Scope: *Ulysses* is the most influential novel in the English literary canon, 800-pound gorilla or not. Joyce began his career with scrupulous realism, then wrote the swollen *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, his most popular book, about self-making and freedom. *Ulysses*, with echoes of Homer, reprises Stephen Dedalus in drastically new fashion and questions the entire theme of self-emancipation by showing the past's hold.

Stephen is obsessed with the fate of flesh and/or soul, with "dogsbody" (our bodies rot at death) or "godsbody" (the immortal soul remains). Yet this heavy material is larded with hilarious humor, and Joycean prose succeeds in mocking its young protagonist, offering us a radically new kind of literature, illuminating a song and dance we rarely see. Stephen, brilliant, *Hamlet*-obsessed, is the son looking for a father.

Outline

I. James Joyce's (1882–1941) *Ulysses* (1922) is arguably the most distinguished modern classic in the English literary tradition and, perhaps, the most unread and unreadable.

A. We know the book recasts the adventures of Homer's hero Odysseus as a day in the life of the characters in modern-day Dublin, but beyond that, the novel seems confusing. We don't seem to find any kind of plot or story; we flit in and out of bits of dialogue, description, and Joycean erudition. In these three lectures on *Ulysses*, however, we'll also see that it's a hilariously funny novel.

B. *Ulysses* is a wake-up call for readers, and in it, Joyce awakens us to *our* genius, not his. He makes us realize that we, too, operate in the same way that his characters, Stephen and particularly Bloom, operate—we engage in a strange song and dance and talk back to life in ourselves in ways that we rarely attend to.

II. Before we begin *Ulysses*, let's take a brief look at the curve of Joyce's work.

A. Joyce's first narrative, *Dubliners*, is a lean portrait of straitened lives at the end of the 19th century, a somewhat unrewarding book.

B. Then comes *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, his most popular and manageable text. This essentially autobiographical text tells the story of Stephen Dedalus, a young Irishman torn between his desire to be a priest or to be a writer.

1. In *Portrait*, Joyce moves into a subjective mode, writing the evolution of Stephen Dedalus.

2. At the end of the novel, Stephen leaves Ireland for the Continent to make his career. The book tells a bracing, seductive story of liberation and self-emancipation.

3. Of course, the name "Dedalus" recalls for us the myth of Daedalus, who constructed wings and taught himself to fly, and his son, Icarus. As we know, Icarus flew too close to the sun, melted the wax of his wings, and fell into the sea. Both flying high and falling low will be important in Joyce's work.

4. Young people (perhaps particularly American young people) are drawn to *Portrait* because it confirms a view of life that they believe in: We can fly over the constraints of birth, class, and gender to achieve individual freedom.

5. A great deal of modern thinking suggests, however**,** that culture is, in fact, contained within us. It is not something we can fly above. Joyce seems to subscribe to this model in writing his later books, such as *Ulysses*.

6. We should also note that *Portrait* is not the clear emancipatory fable that it at first seems. It contains many passages in which Stephen has visions of a great future, leaving behind the sordid conditions of his life up to that point, but those passages are invariably followed by evocations of falling and of being trapped in a dense, material world. The directionality of *Portrait* is contrapuntal.

C. Joyce's next book, *Ulysses*, is our target in these lectures. Weighing in as the 800-pound gorilla in the English canon, *Ulysses* is the most significant, most celebrated, and most unread of the great novels in English.

1. The central features of *Ulysses* include the use of stream-of-consciousness writing, or the interior monologue, and a delight in mixing the inside world of thought and feeling with the physical and conceptual stimuli of the outside world, the noise of life.

2. As we've said, *Ulysses* is harder to negotiate than most novels we're familiar with. We usually think of novels as moving in a linear fashion, but Joyce tells us that life isn't like that.
3. In *Ulysses*, the autobiographical figure of Stephen shares the stage with two other major figures, Leopold and Molly Bloom. In fact, Bloom will dwarf Stephen in significance.
4. Joyce chose the story of Odysseus for his modern-day pilgrimage because he thought of that figure as well-rounded—a father, son, husband, farmer, warrior, and traveler. Perhaps most importantly, he is also wily, resourceful, and cunning.
5. This novel forces us to ask: Do we have Odyssean adventures ourselves? Could going to work or trying to get a raise be an Odyssean adventure? What about other kinds of behaviors, such as passing gas? Joyce prompts us to rethink what the Homeric hero model might mean when translated into modern life.

D. Joyce's last book, *Finnegans Wake*, is his nighttime epic. It is a book of *portmanteaux* (constructed or blended words) and is read almost exclusively by Joyce specialists and worshippers.

III. A new Stephen Dedalus appears in *Ulysses*, and he is a far cry from the swooning young protagonist of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

A. Back from Paris, Stephen is living in a Martello tower with Buck Mulligan. He feels alienated, outcast, and unrecognized. His mother is dying, and Stephen has refused to kneel and pray at her deathbed, as she begs him to do. Joyce undertakes to write Stephen's guilt about his mother's dying.
1. In an opening scene, Buck Mulligan, the Mephistophelean figure of the book, makes snide jabs about Catholicism and diminishes Homeric language. Instead of the "wine-dark sea," he speaks of the "snot-green sea." Stephen's guilt will be written in a way that merges the outside setting, the Martello tower and the sea, with his own anguished mental landscape.
2. Stephen has a vision of his dead mother coming to haunt him in her grave clothes. He looks toward the sea, now described as a dull green mass of liquid. This triggers another memory of his mother's green bile vomited into a china bowl. These dull green masses bring to mind the mass of the Church that Stephen refuses to attend.
3. In a Catholic mass, the body and blood of Jesus become the wafer and the wine. This is the miraculous transformation that Stephen refuses, and he does so because the dying body may become green bile instead of a wafer and wine. This returns us to the Homeric reference to the sea—our "great, sweet mother"—and reminds us of Stephen's own dead mother. We see here Joyce's approach to writing a character's inner emotion.
4. We tend to think that our deepest emotions are lodged in an inner sanctum inside of us that we visit only periodically. But Joyce tells us that this inner sanctum doesn't exist; instead, our emotions are awash in the way we see the world. They bleed into the outside scene, and anything we see can send us into our own hidden emotional story.

B. In *Portrait*, Stephen said that he would fly over the nets that threatened to constrain him, but in *Ulysses*, Joyce writes about collusion, about merging, and about the fact that we are porous; the outside world constantly enters us, and we constantly bleed into the outside world. The contours that we think of as binding the self are, in fact, mixed with external things.

C. Stephen has refused to pray and will be reminded of that fact constantly. He overhears a conversation on the beach about someone who has drowned and visualizes a corpse that has been in the water for nine days. His thoughts seem to be a meditation about the final outcome of the human body. Do we possess an imperishable soul that will be reunited with God, or are we merely physiological creatures that will decay after death?
1. In *Ulysses*, the corpse appears on the beach, swollen with gas. This world seems to have no place for Jesus.
2. In fact, the world of *Ulysses* is more like that of Proteus (the title of this chapter), the god of incessant change. Change is Joyce's picture of the human body and the human mind.

D. At one point, Stephen says, "Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all the dead." The air we take in is saturated with the decomposition of life, yet this is a remarkably vital phrase, filled with hunger, energy, and vibrancy. This is Joyce's dialectic: Life and death are locked together in a dance.
1. Stephen develops two terms for this dialectic, the first of which is "godsbody," which is code for the mass. When someone dies, he or she becomes part of the larger body of God.

2. The other term is "dogsbody," the idea of the physical body destined to rot.

E. We shouldn't think for a minute that Stephen's thoughts are esoteric. He is grappling with issues that are basic to us all.

IV. Let's turn now to some of the humor in *Ulysses*.

A. *Ulysses* is, foremost, a text that talks back. For example, Stephen doesn't answer Mr. Deasy when he asks whether Stephen has always paid his own way, but the text does, with a grocery list of Stephen's debts.

B. In *Portrait*, Stephen had seriously considered becoming a priest, but we now learn that he had prayed to the Virgin not to have a red nose and had asked the devil to have a woman in the street lift her skirt a little higher. We even get a replay of a courtroom scene, in which Stephen puts himself on trial for having yelled "Naked women" on a tram.

C. Joyce's wordplay in Stephen's reflections on the books he planned to write is another way in which *Ulysses* seems to stick its tongue out at the young man's most serious ambitions.

D. The Stephen Dedalus here is much better company than the figure in *Portrait*. In *Ulysses*, Stephen has a sense of humor about himself. We will see more of Joyce's humor in the next two lectures.

Essential Reading:

James Joyce, *Ulysses*.

Supplementary Reading:

Harry Blamires, *The New Bloomsday Book: A Guide Through Ulysses*.

Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*.

Clive Hart and David Hayman, eds. *James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays.*

Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses*.

Arnold Weinstein, *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Stephen Dedalus is, essentially, a successful figure who comes of age and leaves Dublin for Paris in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Why do you think Joyce would want to retrieve Stephen from Paris and bring him back in *Ulysses*? What does this tell us about the project of "flying over nets" that constituted Stephen's bid for freedom?
2. How many books do you know where the text "talks back"? Given how straightforward so much literary notation is, do you feel that the actual noise in our heads differs greatly from the accounts we read in books? Would you know how to tell your own story?

Lecture Twenty-Eight
Joyce—*Ulysses*, Part 2

Scope: The central figure of *Ulysses* is Leopold Bloom, ad man and modern-day Odysseus, with the liveliest imagination in literature. Bloom, like all of us, has much wrong with his life (a dead son and a cheating wife), and Joyce's gambit is to display this man's skill at dodging bullets, evading ghosts; such moves are termed "lotus solutions," and Joyce suggests that the Church has always been wise about strategies of evasion.

The novel treats us initially to Bloom's sorties, his down-to-earth wisdom that is at odds with transcendental formulas, but we increasingly measure—via driblets of text and rising memories—what Bloom has lost. Yet the novel moves from depictions of consciousness through a staggering set of pyrotechnical narrative ventures, yielding some of the richest and funniest displays in Western literature, shocking us with its views of how a story can be told. Our view of our own lives is energized.

Outline

I. If Stephen Dedalus is, in some sense, a younger version of Joyce, the main character of the novel, Leopold Bloom defies categorization. He has, perhaps, the liveliest, shrewdest, funniest imagination in literature.

- **A.** How can Bloom be Odysseus? To answer that question, we must revise our notions of heroism and, perhaps, survival in a modern world.
- **B.** Much of the pleasure in this novel consists of watching Bloom in action. He has been termed "polytropic," a man of many turns. Arguably, the chief delight of *Ulysses* lies in the sparkling rendition of Bloom's wily maneuvering through his day, his city, and his life.
- **C.** We meet Bloom as he wakes up and goes to the market to shop for his breakfast. While waiting in line, he admires a woman in front of him with ample hips—a "freebie" that life has offered him as he starts his day. On his way home, he fantasizes about her. This text is full of such small pleasures that are, in fact, significant pieces of our lives.
- **D.** Bloom's perceptions are among the sweetest in literature. He wonders, for example, whether fish get seasick and whether birds choose particular targets for their excrement as they fly overhead.

II. Many people have trouble reading *Ulysses* because of the difficulty of finding its plot.

- **A.** Rather than a direct storyline, this book is filled with scattershot, random notations. But Joyce seems to be asking us: Does life have a plot? If so, is it a grand plot that follows us from birth to death, or is the story of a life told in "plotlets"? Will the kids win the game today? Will I have sex tonight?
- **B.** *Ulysses* also plays with the Homeric idea of the lotus. In Homer, the lotus blossoms cause Odysseus to fall asleep. Here, "lotus" is a code word that stands for a narcotic approach to avoiding difficulties in life or simply opting out of troubling situations. We might think of this as a negative reaction to experience, but it may be a superior form of wisdom. Joyce suggests that the most basic imperative in the human psyche is to find pleasure and avoid pain.
  1. Bloom sees a sort of happy bargain for coach horses that have been castrated but are well fed via their feedbag.
  2. In another scene, he observes the Catholic mass from the point of view of a former Jew and an advertising man. He admires the Church's use of effective strategies of persuasion to retain the faithful. Bloom's interpretation of the intricacies of Catholic ritual is hilarious.
  3. Another form of the lotus idea is avoiding one's ghosts. For Bloom, these ghosts are his father, who committed suicide, and his son, Rudy, who died when he was 11 days old. Joyce tells us that, contrary to popular wisdom, facing up to such realities may be stupid and inadvisable.
  4. Bloom tries to avoid thoughts of his father, Rudy, and Blazes Boylan, who is slated to make love to Bloom's wife, Molly, at 4:00 in the afternoon.
  5. This strategy of avoiding trouble is a basic, elemental kind of wisdom. Dickens uses the phrase "artful dodger" in *Oliver Twist*, which describes, in some sense, what we all seek: to dodge the bullets of life and not think too much about what is happening in the world around us.

6. Homer's *Odyssey* was thought of as his comic text, a story about cunning, wiliness, and avoidance of direct confrontation. This seems to be the side of the epic that interested Joyce.

III. As we saw earlier, Stephen is haunted by issues of life versus death. Do the same questions haunt Bloom?

A. In addition to the two deaths associated with Bloom that we've seen already, those of his father and his son, he is also attending a funeral on this day, that of his friend Paddy Dignam.

B. Thoughts of the funeral trigger, in Bloom, the image of a cemetery as a picnic grounds or a processing plant that receives a daily ration of dead bodies. We might contrast Bloom's musings with Stephen's obsession with "godsbody" and "dogsbody."

C. As Bloom is leaving the ceremony, Mr. Kernan quotes to him the Protestant phrase "I am the resurrection and the life," saying, "That touches a man's inmost heart." Bloom's response: "Your heart perhaps, but what price the fellow in the six feet by two with his toes to the daisies?"

1. We see Bloom's materialist view of the exalted afterlife of the body: The cemetery is merely a storehouse for broken organs.
2. Finally, Joyce ends the scene with a pun: "Come forth, Lazarus! And he came fifth and lost the job."

IV. *Ulysses* is also a book of great appetite. The "Lestrygonian" chapter follows Bloom into a restaurant, where he watches people eating.

A. As Bloom sits at a table drinking wine, he experiences a remarkable memory of the first time he made love with Molly. Their life since Rudy's death has been without sex, but his recollection of their first time together is lyrical and richly evocative. The passage ends with the words "Me. And me now," a comment on Bloom's passionate past and the life he leads in the present.

B. Such moments of grandeur and lyricism are often squeezed in between the other flotsam and jetsam of this book. Again, Joyce is telling us that this is the way life works: It bleeds through our everyday experiences.

C. Three pages later, Bloom sees a dog vomit on the street and lap up the mess. He thinks to himself, "First sweet, then savoury." This gastronomical injunction brings us back to Bloom and Molly exchanging the seedcake in their mouths. That was the sweet, and the episode with the dog is the savory.

D. This is an example of Joyce's contrapuntalism, and it's also a formula for life. How often do we experience or remember moments of lyricism that are followed by episodes that are much more pungent and cynical?

V. Joyce has a huge bag of literary tricks that goes beyond the use of stream of consciousness that is usually associated with *Ulysses*.

A. The "Aeolus" chapter takes its name from a Greek god of winds. The chapter takes place in a newsroom and is divided into headlined sections. For Joyce, words can be windy, in some cases even flatulent.

B. The "Wandering Rocks" chapter gives us a bird's eye view of the characters as they make their way across Dublin, but the characters lose their depth and humanity from this perspective.

C. Why does Joyce write this way? The best answer seems to be: because he can. He sees life from countless vantage points and angles.

D. Probably the most infamous chapter in the book is "Oxen of the Sun," which focuses on the labor of Mina Purefoy in a maternity hospital. Joyce writes the chapter in terms of the birth of the English language, from Anglo-Saxon to the English of his own day. By writing the chapter in this way, Joyce makes us realize how storied, historical, and layered language is.

E. In the "Sirens" chapter, the world consists solely of sound. Bloom sits in a bar, thinking about Blazes Boylan and his wife, and the words running through his mind become music: "Tipping her tepping her tapping her topping her," "Flood, gush, flow, joygush, tupthrob." Joyce is not constrained to use an ordinary dictionary here.

1. In this same chapter, Bloom also thinks about the ravages of his life as if it were just words: "Hate. Love. Those are names. Rudy. Soon I am old." These are the words that perhaps signal Bloom's life, but they are, at the same time, just words.
2. What if we could imagine that "hate" and "love" were just words? What if we could reduce the pain of a dead loved one to nothing more than words? "Sirens" and Joyce's other chapters seem to give us a kind of esoteric showmanship, but they also bring us a profound, basic wisdom.

Essential Reading:

James Joyce, *Ulysses*.

Supplementary Reading:

Harry Blamires, *The New Bloomsday Book: A Guide Through Ulysses*.

Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*.

Clive Hart and David Hayman, eds. *James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays.*

Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses*.

Arnold Weinstein, *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Leopold Bloom is Joyce's candidate for Odysseus/Ulysses, Homer's wandering hero. Bloom is an ad man, and his voyage takes place in one day in Dublin. Does a procedure like this seem to you to belittle Homer's heroic text? Further, would you call Bloom "heroic"? Does this make a difference?
2. *Ulysses* is often thought of as a stream-of-consciousness masterpiece. Yet after the first six chapters, Joyce appears to sign on for an entire bag of narrative tricks and high jinks that have little to do with the representation of consciousness. Why would he do this?

Lecture Twenty-Nine
Joyce—*Ulysses*, Part 3

Scope: In this final lecture on Joyce, we tackle the three magisterial late chapters of *Ulysses*. "Circe," located in a brothel, is the theatrical highpoint of the novel; Joyce has now endowed everything with voice, so that what was only thought or desired now speaks. The hiding places of private thought and interior monologue disappear. Metamorphosis is the rule here, and Bloom's sexual fantasies and worries spiral into a spellbinding sadomasochist performance.

"Ithaca" depicts homecoming for Bloom and Stephen, but its narrative despotism—a voice hectors Bloom with catechism-like questions—makes us see that Bloom is the text's toy; this same distant voice makes us see the absurdity of any man's concern about his wife's sexual behavior (or anything else). In "Penelope," the novel closes, finally and richly, inside Molly Bloom's mind, as she reflects on her lovers past and present and on her life. We exit this book with an incomparable sense of discovery and vitality.

Outline

I. *Ulysses* is often mischaracterized as stream-of-consciousness fiction, but after chapter 6, it begins to narrate from different vantage points.

A. Stream of consciousness is the subjective realm, our own interior monologues, which offer us a kind of freedom vis-à-vis circumstances and events that are otherwise coercive and determinant.

B. "Circe," the brothel chapter in *Ulysses*, takes up one-third of the novel and is written in theatrical form. Why would Joyce abandon narrative for drama?

1. In drama, everything is given a voice. In Shakespeare, for example, Hamlet speaks, as do Polonius, Laertes, and Gertrude. In Joyce, bars of soap, bedsprings, chimes, handbills, sins of the past, and waterfalls speak, along with all the characters.

2. If everything is voiced, then the inner sanctum of the individual is no longer private. The interior monologue is brought to language and goes public, telling all about the person whose monologue it is.

3. In the "Circe" chapter, Bloom is on trial not so much for something he has done but for what he has been thinking and feeling. The author Beaufoy appears to chastise Bloom for reading his story in the outhouse, as Bloom had done earlier in the novel. A group of women from the "horsey set" command him to lower his pants so that he can be whipped for ogling them. Nothing can be hidden here.

4. Bloom's meliorist reformist fantasies also appear in this chapter, telling us something about the intellectual climate of the 1920s.

C. Above all, Bloom is a target in the "Circe" chapter. All characters are manipulated by their authors, but in *Ulysses*, the puppet strings are visible.

D. "Circe" is also the chapter where we begin to dig deep into the substrata of Bloom's psyche, and as we've already seen, we find a good bit of sadomasochism.

E. Because "Circe" is a surreal chapter, we see metamorphosis here. Bella Cohen, the madam of the brothel where the chapter takes place, becomes a man, Bello, and Bloom becomes a woman.

1. In becoming a woman, Bloom is subject to extreme sexual aggression and humiliation on the part of the madam.

2. Bello impels Bloom to witness the fornication of his wife with Blazes Boylan, denigrating Bloom's sexual prowess in comparison to Boylan's.

3. Bloom watches Molly and Boylan through a keyhole, and his reaction is one of extraordinary sexual excitement.

4. The other chapters of the novel have Bloom trying to repress this event, but here, Joyce suggests that this is what Bloom wants at some deep level. Joyce tells us that sexual desire is a strange thing, not easily labeled.

F. Before returning to reality, the "Circe" chapter gives us two remarkable epiphanies. Stephen has a vision of his dead mother urging him to pray, and Bloom has a vision of his dead son, Rudy, reading Hebrew.

G. As Bloom and Stephen exit the brothel, Stephen taunts two British soldiers, who then lay him out. Bloom takes care of Stephen, who has clearly become a substitute for the dead Rudy.

II. We next turn to "Ithaca," which of course stands for homecoming, both for Homer and for Joyce, but the modern text pulls out the stops for delineating just where we keep house, inwardly as well as outwardly. This chapter is about taking measures; both Bloom and Stephen become toys to be measured by Joyce.

A. Scholars and critics have worked diligently to impose a humanistic interpretation on *Ulysses*. Despite the book's pyrotechnics, they claim that the great human themes of husbands and wives and fathers and sons are at its core.

1. With Stephen and Bloom now together in the apartment, Joyce begins by exploring Bloom's name. He makes anagrams of it—Elpodbomool, Molldopeloob, and so on—opening up a series of possibilities for Bloom's identity.

2. Next, Joyce blends the characters, calling them Blephen and Stoom, as their educational backgrounds are recited. He seems to treat his characters as an assemblage of letters and words, not the three-dimensional, living creatures that we expect a book to give us.

3. Joyce is also interested in the difference of 16 years between the ages of Bloom and Stephen. He plays a multiplication game with the ages until Stephen is 1,190 years old and Bloom is 83,300.

4. All these games lend a kind of hilarity and freedom to the emotion-laden issue of the father/son relationship.

B. Stephen leaves, and Bloom finally makes his way to the bedroom; there, he sees his wife's body and the traces of her lover's form. The novel transforms this discovery into something richly philosophical:

> "If he [Bloom] had smiled, why would he have smiled? To reflect that each one who enters imagines himself to be the first to enter whereas he is always the last term of a preceding series even if the first term of a succeeding one, each imagining himself to be first, last, only and alone whereas he is neither first nor last nor only nor alone in a series originating in and repeated to infinity.

1. The great fantasy of life from birth to death is that we are bounded individuals, that we have integrity, our lives have a shape, and we have a destiny. But this passage tells us that life is nothing but a serial process into which we are born and which will continue after we die.

2. At birth, we are initiated into a generic dance. We try to personalize it, but how much originality do we really have? We're not free, for example, to invent the gestures of lovemaking.

3. This seems to be one of the central points of the book: "I" is something of a fiction; it exists in an ecosystem that always dwarfs it, contextualizes it, and contains it.

4. Now, Bloom wonders, what would be the significance of a man and a woman fornicating**,** if seen from Mars? The text tells us that he registers the "lethargy of nescient matter: the apathy of the stars." The affairs that are so critical to us in our lives seem almost absurdly insignificant when viewed from a great distance.

III. The book closes with Molly, who offers us a shrewd, carnal, wise picture of the events we have read about from the vantage point of Stephen and Bloom.

A. Molly is the great priestess of desire. She remembers her past lovers and closes the book with a remembrance of her life in Gibraltar when Bloom met and proposed to her, and she gave herself to him.

B. Joyce knew that his book was quite possibly too theoretical, too abstract, and too overorganized, and he said that Molly's chapter would be the way the book would be "countersigned into eternity." Molly's voice, both of flesh and of spirit allied to flesh, complements the voices of Bloom and Stephen. Together, they give us one of the richest anthems of human life, of spirit and body, found in literature.

Essential Reading:

James Joyce, *Ulysses*.

Supplementary Reading:

Harry Blamires, *The New Bloomsday Book: A Guide Through Ulysses*.

Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*.

Clive Hart and David Hayman, eds. *James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays.*

Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses*.

Arnold Weinstein, *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Circe is the sorceress who (in Homer) transforms men into swine; Joyce enlists the metamorphic principle in writing his brothel chapter, "Circe." Among the things that shift shape are Bloom's private thoughts and secrets: They now assume public form. Does this procedure wreck the earlier narrative of "interior monologue"? Can you imagine your thoughts taking public form? How would you feel?
2. Feminist critics have rarely been happy with Joyce's rendition of Molly Bloom in the final chapter, "Penelope." They claim that Joyce stays with a stereotype of the female—body, instinct, emotion—but offers little in the way of reason and discipline. How do you feel about approaching the novel in this way?

Lecture Thirty
Woolf—*To the Lighthouse*

Scope: In the central protagonists of *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf seeks both to represent and (somehow) to get clear of her own famous parents, Leslie and Julia Stephen. Are either of these projects possible (for anyone)? What all readers most remember about the book is the magnificent perspectival portrait of the mother, Mrs. Ramsay, seen as earth mother, priestess of marriage, and player in a violent Freudian drama.

By contrast, Mr. Ramsay is angular, hungry for praise, a tad caricatural; he, like his wife, is a quester. Woolf is unrivaled in her success at delivering this pair *as couple*, and the stream-of-consciousness narrative beautifully delivers the impossible (and absurd) balancing act between inner self and outer world, between "me" and "you" that goes by the name of marriage but rarely makes it into literature.

Outline

I. *To the Lighthouse* (1927), written by Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), is the most personal and, probably, the most beautiful novel in this course.

- **A.** One of the novel's central questions is, How can one write marriage? Can you imagine writing the marriage of your own parents? Could you show them in the round, as the adults they are, not just as your parents?
- **B.** A corollary question is, What kind of language could be used for depicting our tumultuous human feelings? Could you use straightforward, denotative language, or would a new kind of script be required?
- **C.** Woolf's parents, Leslie and Julia Stephen, were well known in British intellectual circles at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Julia died when her daughter was quite young, leaving a wound that Woolf experienced all her life. Her father exerted a stranglehold on Woolf, nearly suffocating her. *To the Lighthouse* is the book in which Woolf attempts to exorcise her dead parents from her life.
  1. In her diary, Woolf wrote that had her father lived, she would have been unable to produce books.
  2. The response of Vanessa, Woolf's sister, to the portrait of their mother in the novel speaks volumes about what the author wrought: "It was like meeting her [mother] again with one's self grown up and on equal terms, and it seems to me the most astonishing feat of creation to have been able to see her in such a way."
  3. Can you know your parents? This is the echoing question that underlies the novel, and it is not easy to answer, given that all children remain (no matter their ages) children to their parents. Could you write them as adults?

II. What most readers see in this book is the remarkable portrait of the mother, Mrs. Ramsay. Her beauty and presence strike everyone who knows her.

- **A.** A hard-headed scientist friend of the Ramsays, William Bankes, pays tribute to Mrs. Ramsay, envisioning her as a Greek goddess. He is struck by her radiance, grace, and creative energy.
- **B.** Charles Tansley, the mean-spirited, insecure, awkward student of Mr. Ramsay, finds in Mrs. Ramsay the most beautiful woman he has ever seen: "…what nonsense was he thinking? She was fifty at least; she had eight children. Stepping through fields of flowers and taking to her breast buds that had broken and lambs that had fallen; with the stars in her eyes and the wind in her hair—He took her bag."
  1. Through such descriptions, Woolf makes lyricism possible in a realistic framework. In her language and her writing, Woolf shows us something of the splendor of the world that lives in our feelings.
  2. Taking Mrs. Ramsay's bag may seem like a small thing, but for Tansley, it is momentous; it is his encounter with grace and beauty.
- **C.** Mrs. Ramsay is also the book's love apostle in her constant cheerleading for marriage. But inside the cheerleader is another Mrs. Ramsay, a sterner, darker, and more fascinating figure: the connoisseur of chaos.
  1. Mr. Ramsay is a philosopher with a range of principles, theorems, and ideas about man's fate in the world. Unlike her husband, however, Mrs. Ramsay has an intuitive sense that nature is brutal, that the world is inhospitable to human beings, and that her children will never again be as happy as they are at this moment in their lives.

2. She is a magnetically beautiful woman with an absolutely lucid, unflinching view of the contest between us and the forces of life and fate.

D. The formidable Mr. Ramsay represents the noted intellectual Leslie Stephen, but he seems something of a joke in the novel.

1. His son Andrew characterizes his father's philosophy as almost Platonic, relating to eternal forms that have little to do with the phenomenal world.
2. One of the book's most famous and satiric passages depicts the exertions of Mr. Ramsay in his quest to get from Q to R. This gently mocking episode suggests that perhaps he can't even achieve full self-knowledge.
3. Mr. Ramsay needs constant praise, a need that is fulfilled by his wife.
   - **a.** In the first chapter of the book, "Madonna," Mrs. Ramsay sits with her son James enfolded in her arms. When Mr. Ramsay enters, needing his daily ration of support, she "…braced herself, and half turning, seemed to raise herself with an effort and at once to pour erect into the air a rain of energy…"
   - **b.** Our traditional sexual images are all transformed here. Mrs. Ramsay, the goddess figure who essentially represents life, receives the male, giving him what he needs to sustain his own life. Her gift makes his life fertile.
   - **c.** At the same time, James views the scene from an Oedipal standpoint, his father storming his mother.
   - **d.** The language depicting relations between a husband and a wife here is quite different from any kind of sociological or realistic description.

III. Woolf is interested, in this novel, in the multiple subjectivities that make up relationships between two people in a marriage. She sees, in fact, the impossibility of marriage.

A. Each partner must be himself or herself. Where is the middle ground? How can these two selves fuse?

B. Woolf also sees the humor and the reality of marriage. She doesn't say that marriage is a façade or a fraud—it's real even if it is impossible to actualize.

1. Focusing on the mundane, Woolf finds great riches in the simplest habits and behavior of husbands and wives.
2. We see her perspectival genius in the scene in which Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are walking together and discussing Charles Tansley as a prospect for their daughter.
3. Mrs. Ramsay stops to look at some flowers, and Mr. Ramsay interrupts his own thoughts to try to share her interest. All he can say, however, is "These flowers seemed creditable."
4. We get the same scene from Mrs. Ramsay's perspective. As she walks, she thinks that it is good for young men to simply hear her husband, the great philosopher, lecture; at the same time, she wonders whether she is seeing evidence of moles or rabbits on the property. The two subjects are deliciously scrambled in Woolf's prose.
5. Woolf shows us how bizarre it is that we actually make sense to others, given that our minds are constantly flitting, moving, and dodging. Her depiction of the charming anarchy of human thought restores us to ourselves.

IV. As most people know, Woolf was one of the first great 20th-century feminists.

A. We might think of Rousseau's famous term "social contract" to characterize the work that women have always done and have rarely gotten credit for: Women provide the glue for human connectedness.

1. Mrs. Ramsay surveys a dinner scene at the summerhouse with horror. All those gathered at the table are distracted and uncommunicative. She knows that it is her role to create a connection, a living exchange among the diners.
2. "Speaking French" is Woolf's metaphor for the effort required to bring life and harmony to social discourse.

B. At the dinner, Mrs. Ramsay serves *boeuf en daube*, an exquisite French stew that the cook has been preparing for three days. She takes great pleasure in seeing her guests partake of the stew; she inhales the fragrance of the stew that seems to hold these people together as a human community against the elements. Woolf writes: "Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures."

Essential Reading:

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*.

Supplementary Reading:

Rachel Bowlby, *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*.

Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*.

Anna Snaith, *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*.

Arnold Weinstein, *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Woolf's style is famous for its lyrical and metaphorical splendor. Aside from the aesthetic virtues of such writing, do you think that image and metaphor might provide a unique way of bringing our "interior" to language? Woolf seems to do this in her rendition of the Ramsay family, as we see in the violent images at the beginning of the novel. How much figurative language would you use in representing your own emotions?
2. A famous scene in *To the Lighthouse* focuses on people sitting around a table eating dinner. Do you know of many novels that do this? Could eating together be at once pedestrian and philosophical? I used the term "social contract" when referring to this scene; do you sense that you are under contract at such moments? How significant is gender in these matters?

Lecture Thirty-One
Woolf—*To the Lighthouse*, Part 2

Scope: The most famous passage of this novel depicts Mrs. Ramsay (a figure richly particularized and present) as, in fact, "an inward core of darkness," suggesting that our outer form is a façade, that we extend inwardly in time and space in ways that no one sees. With stunning brutality, scarcely halfway in, this beautiful woman is "killed" by the plot, as Woolf pays tribute to "the reign of night," the forces of death and war that decimate the human family. Can anything be saved?

Then, 10 years later, the family reassembles, including the book's spinster-artist and figurative daughter, Lily Brisco, who seeks to make sense of all this: the life and death of Mrs. Ramsay, the mystery of human relationship, the possibility of retrieving one's dead via memory and art. Can we go to the lighthouse? Woolf offers two exquisite final versions of just that.

Outline

I. Woolf rivals Proust as our premiere writer about love, death, and memory. Mrs. Ramsay is one of literature's greatest creations, which makes her death—depicted as an aside, in parentheses—all the more shocking and brutal.

A. In the last lecture, we spoke about the inevitable miscommunication between people who live together. Indeed, we might easily see the fate of all human relationships as the impossibility of two subjectivities ever coming together perfectly. Of course, the true fate of human relationships is death, and that's what this novel seems to be about: what happens to loving people when time exerts its terrible power.

B. In Proust, the grandmother must be re-captured and re-felt by the boy long after she has died in order for him to fully understand the horror of her loss. With that in mind, let's begin this lecture by returning to Mrs. Ramsay to see what is so wonderful and what is lost in her.

II. In Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf offers her most profound depiction of human reaches and multiplicity, of the self we are, beyond the obvious roles we play.

A. Mrs. Ramsay is an exquisitely sensitive mother, attuned to the needs and wants of her children, her demanding husband, and her guests. She is a well-endowed woman, yet she can surprise us.

1. In a famous passage, Woolf writes about Mrs. Ramsay's musings after she has put her son to bed: "For now, she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself.… All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being one's self, a wedge-shaped core of darkness."

2. A witness to the scene would see only a woman knitting, but she is somewhere else entirely, inwardly**.** This "wedge-shaped core of darkness" is, in some sense, moving. Paradoxically, when Mrs. Ramsay sits alone for a few moments, she feels "free for the strangest adventures."

3. Woolf writes: "Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by." Woolf is not just saying that there is more to us on the inside than what we show others, but that we are mobile, untrackable creatures—what's on the inside is also elsewhere.

4. This idea radically changes our sense of a bounded form of identity. One's apparently cogent and identifiable self is really just an illusion, an appearance for the benefit of others.

5. Thus, any kind of realistic art form, such as a traditional novel that describes its characters, can't get at what matters, because it can't possibly track the voyage that takes place inside human beings.

6. The 16th-century philosopher Montaigne used the word *ondoyant*, meaning "wave-like," to try to describe the human psyche, and scholars since have connected Montaigne's view to Shakespeare's, seen particularly in Hamlet. The bottom line is that we are "other" even unto ourselves. We move, shift, and re-form.

7. Woolf seems to say that we have far more possibilities within ourselves than what we show to the world. It's even conceivable that self can be a prison, something that people try to alter through various means.

8. We see the fuller extensions of this idea in a scene in which Mrs. Ramsay awakens in the night and seems to experience orgasm. Whereas we customarily think of great pleasure as a deeply private

experience, Woolf suggests that ecstasy is a rupture of the self; it comes when we let go of our contours and experience otherness.

B. The death of Mrs. Ramsay stuns us: Scarcely more than halfway into the novel, its almost mythic heroine dies. Most readers are shocked by the severity of this move.

1. Killing off your heroine means breaking all the rules of fiction; why would an author do it? Moreover, the death comes almost as an aside. Woolf writes of Mr. Ramsay reaching out his arms, "but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before…[t]hey remained empty."

2. This sets the stage for the great questions of this novel: Does anything survive? What's left when someone of this beauty and vitality dies?

III. The middle section of the novel is about the reign of night; it seeks ways to depict chaos.

A. Chaos doesn't come only because Mrs. Ramsay dies. The wedge-shaped core of darkness, which was Mrs. Ramsay's expression for the freedom and mobility of the human mind as the self exits its contours, has changed from a description of human subjectivity to a description of the terrible darkness of the world and of life itself.

B. Earlier, we saw that Mrs. Ramsay was a connoisseur of chaos. She knows that life is brutal and that her children will never be as happy later as they seem to be in childhood. This darkness spreads over the novel in the middle section, signaling to us the darkness that spread over Europe with World War I. Remarkably, Woolf has found a way to write this dark night of civilization into her story of a particular family.

C. We come to understand that chaos takes not just a single endowed, beautiful person, but many people. It dismantles the summerhouse itself and the people who have lived in it.

1. The dinner party scene highlights a small group of people sharing a meal at a house on an island, surrounded by the sea, by the elements. We realize how disproportionate those forces are—the elements versus a fragile human family sharing a ritual of food, wine, talk, and love.

2. The water, the wind, and the darkness rule here. The "little airs" (Woolf's term for the damage and deterioration meted out to the summerhouse) yield their unstoppable results, invading even the bedroom.

3. These forces of destruction and entropy cannot be denied, bringing the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay and others, again brought to us in parentheses.

4. Nothing can stop these brutal forces of nature. The inward core of darkness is no longer inward; it has become an outward tempest. We are reminded of the horrible forces of destruction that we see on the heath in *King Lear*—forces of turmoil and war that will destroy the human family.

D. The third phase of the novel depicts the return to the summerhouse 10 years later of those who have survived. Lily Brisco has played the role of Mrs. Ramsay's figurative daughter, yet she feels nothing on her return. How can feeling be reborn? Time not only destroys people, but it erases what we felt for them.

1. Lily's love for Mrs. Ramsay, one of the most poignant elements of the early part of the novel, is expressed in a stunning passage about the urgency and impossibility of "reaching" the one you love. As Lily presses against Mrs. Ramsay's knees, she imagines that inside the woman's heart and mind are tablets that bear sacred inscriptions. Are such inscriptions readable?

2. As the passage continues, the inscriptions become urns, then waters that are poured from one container to another. Lily asks, could you press into another's secret chambers? How do you become the same as the person you love?" These are the great questions of human relationships.

3. In this light, these inscriptions become far more intimate and somatic, concerned not so much with knowledge as with unity, fusion with the other. This is what must be reborn in Lily 10 years later: She must resurrect those feelings of tenderness and desire that she felt for Mrs. Ramsay.

4. The spinster Lily also remembers Mrs. Ramsay's cheerleading for marriage as an institution, and now, in hindsight, she can see how much the great lady got wrong, especially in connection with Paul and Minta Rayley, whose marriage "came apart."

5. But the Rayleys' connection—dead or not—nonetheless explodes into Lily's awareness as evidence of passion's strange imperviousness to time. Does feeling live forever?

IV. Resurrection is the question of the final chapter. "The lighthouse" is not only about what remains but about what can be brought back to life.

A. Human feeling is now seen as the ultimate motor force that animates these survivors in the old house.

B. Here, we realize how much the title of the novel means. The great unanswered question at the beginning of the book—to go or not go to the lighthouse—is actualized in the final scenes.

1. Mr. Ramsay and two of his grown children will go to the lighthouse and bring gifts, parcels for the lighthouse men.

2. The imagery picks up John Donne's famous line "No man is an island." This fragile human family will go into the watery element to make a bridge to the lighthouse, itself an emblem of human isolation.

3. The children have forgotten nothing of their father's bullying, but at the same time, they want to please him, to receive his love and benediction.

C. Complementing the narrative of the trip to the lighthouse is Lily's emblematic reprise of her unfinished painting of Mrs. Ramsay. Both of these actions are tributes to the great lady. In fact, Lily's completion of the painting seems nothing less than an effort to bring Mrs. Ramsay back to life. Art, we see, is akin to what Walt Whitman called "retrievements out of the night."

1. The painting is meant to keep Mrs. Ramsay alive through memory, through Lily's tribute. But how does one paint a picture in such a way that one's love for the deceased reappears, shows itself as part of the picture, keeping the subject alive?

2. Lily knows that this is a great challenge, but she tries to meet it. Woolf writes that her painting is an act of tunneling into the past. The way Lily will make the painting is by re-immersing herself in her loving, pulsing memory of Mrs. Ramsay.

3. When Lily first returned to the empty house, she felt empty herself. Only when her feeling is rekindled can the painting be completed. Lily is surprised to find that when her feeling for Mrs. Ramsay is reborn, she is hurt, but the rebirth of Mrs. Ramsay takes place through Lily's tears.

4. Lily finishes the painting just as Mr. Ramsay and the children arrive at the lighthouse. Mr. Ramsay looks back at the island and sees a "plate of gold." He steps off the boat like a young man, giving us a sense that the past and love can, indeed, be recaptured.

Essential Reading:

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*.

Supplementary Reading:

Rachel Bowlby, *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*.

Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*.

Anna Snaith, *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*.

Arnold Weinstein, *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Mrs. Ramsay is characterized as a "wedge-shaped core of darkness" in the famous sequence when she "voyages" out of herself and into the world. This would appear to be the end of "self." Is it possible that our deepest feelings lead us out of personality and into something else? What else?

2. Mrs. Ramsay dies in the middle of the book. The last chapter is about measuring, 10 years later, what is left or what might be retrieved and how it might be done. What answers does Woolf give? Do you find this credible or not?

Lecture Thirty-Two
Faulkner—*As I Lay Dying*

Scope: *As I Lay Dying*, a Faulknerian masterpiece in stream-of-consciousness writing, explores the nature of both death and art through the death of a mother and the trials and thoughts of her family. This metamorphic novel stuns us also with its grasp of natural forces outside the human scheme. Perhaps the most resonant figure of the novel is its coffin: What, this book of elements and fluids repeatedly asks, does it contain? What does it mean to contain something?

A key theme in the book is *encounter*: with others, with the coursing natural world. At a climactic moment, the family wagon (with its precious cargo of mother in the coffin) enters the floodwaters, and the Faulkner baptism takes place: the immersion into the elements. But it is a baptism in reverse, because *I* comes undone when subjected to such pressure. The book's title is its great (modern) question: Can *I* die? Is *I* a fiction?

Outline

I. *As I Lay Dying* (1930) was an early novel by William Faulkner (1897–1962) but, arguably, his greatest masterpiece in stream-of-consciousness writing. As different as the tonalities of the two writers may be, we can find many parallels between Woolf and Faulkner, including the subject matter of this book—what lives and what dies.

- **A.** The title, *As I Lay Dying*, tells us everything we need to know about the novel in terms of what Faulkner is getting at in modern thinking and modern life: the death of the notion of *I*.
- **B.** *The Sound and the Fury* was Faulkner's first breakthrough stream-of-consciousness text, but *As I Lay Dying* seems to take the technique even further, yielding perhaps the most philosophical text he ever wrote. We see perspectival narration with a vengeance in this novel, which is composed entirely of first-person vignettes, but the point-of-view technique is focused on great, unanswerable questions.

II. The novel has a seemingly simple theme—getting the coffin with the dead Addie Bundren from the farm to Jefferson for burial. This mission generates a complex set of responses, ranging from family members' diverse opinions to those of outsiders in the community.

- **A.** Faulkner reprises the plot-enabling dilemma of the *Antigone* of Sophocles: what to do with a dead body? This is scarcely a literary motif; how to manage dead bodies is a crucial element of all religious cultures.
- **B.** Whereas so much modern literature seems to be about the human psyche—and Faulkner ranks high here—this novel also gives us an unforgettable sense of the elements themselves, the nonhuman landscape and stage where the players go through their paces.
  - **1.** Faulkner is one of the rare modern writers who does full justice to the priority, authority, and ferocity of our natural world. He manages to give us a rich sense of the incredible tumult inside human beings, as well as of the physical world we inhabit.
  - **2.** In that light, Faulkner is one of our most pagan writers. The material world—the world of wind, water, earth, and sun—exists for him as something that dwarfs the human being.
- **C.** *As I Lay Dying* is justly renowned for its stream-of-consciousness narration, its vignette-like composition. We thus encounter a staggering spectrum of responses to Addie Bundren's death.
  - **1.** Anse, the seemingly shiftless husband for whom everyone in the novel feels contempt, has an astonishing country wisdom; he also has his own design in going to Jefferson. Anse observes that horizontal things, roads and wagons, are for moving, but that God made men and trees upright for staying put. As we will see in this text, stability is a fiction; nothing can stay put.
  - **2.** Jewel, the favored (illegitimate) son, is presented as the impassioned, almost nonverbal literalist whose feelings for his mother are largely unavowable. He is the physical force in the family.
  - **3.** Cash, the carpenter, is the book's pragmatist, the man who expresses himself through artisanal means. He is the maker of the coffin, and his mother rightly sees this as an expression of love.
  - **4.** Darl, the philosopher, is the novel's most stunning and authoritative figure: capable of metaphysical flights, blessed/cursed with a kind of X-ray vision into others, and yet ungrounded. Darl's poetic and metaphysical flights constitute one of the high points of Faulknerian fiction.

a. In one early scene, Darl remembers getting up in the night to get a drink of water. When he puts the dipper into the bucket, he "stirs the stars awake."

b. Echoing Proust, Shakespeare, and others, Darl says, "In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep….When you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were." In other words, if you are just a sleeping body, you have no consciousness; you are not.

c. The same passage closes: "How often have I lain beneath a rain on a strange roof, thinking of home?" We realize just how homeless this character is, how the mind itself has exiled Darl from any sense of groundedness.

5. Dewey Dell is the unwed, pregnant daughter whose response to her mother's death is inseparable from her feelings about pregnancy. Faulkner's account of her sensations of carrying a living seed in her are compatible with her no less powerful sense of collapsing self.

6. Vardaman, the youngest child, is also the most unhinged figure of the novel, and his trauma is unforgettably conveyed by Faulknerian associative logic and startling metaphor.

a. At the moment his mother is dying, Vardaman catches a huge fish. In his mind, the two become confused: His mother cannot be dead because she was still alive when the fish was flopping around.

b. When the coffin bearing Addie is nailed shut, Vardaman drills holes in it so that she won't suffocate.

D. The family's responses to Addie's death are dramatically cut with the no less diverse reactions of the neighbors and townspeople to this death and this traveling coffin that begins to smell in the Mississippi heat.

1. Peabody, the book's doctor, offers some of the most speculative ideas about the phenomenon of death: "I can remember how when I was young I believed death to be a phenomenon of the body; now I know it to be merely a function of the mind and that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement. The nihilists say it is the end; the fundamentalists, the beginning; when in reality it is no more than a single tenant or family moving out of a tenement or a town."

a. The core imagery of the novel is contained in the idea of death as a tenant moving out of a tenement. Like a tenement, a coffin is a container, but what does it contain? A body? A soul? A single identity—an *I*?

b. Later in the novel, we're forced to ask whether even language contains meaning.

2. Tull, the neighbor, serves as a kind of barometric, common-sensical figure, but he also has moments of visionary insight. He says that sorrow and affliction are liable to strike anywhere, like lightning.

3. Cora Tull, his wife, is one of Faulkner's splendid comic creations: opinionated but deliciously wrong in many of her judgments.

4. And then there are those who are shocked by the sheer stench of this traveling coffin with its rotting cargo.

III. Faulkner sets up the human pilgrimage, then subjects it to inhuman trials. He hits his characters biblically with water and fire, lining up obstacles to complicate the Bundrens' trip with the coffin to the cemetery in Jefferson.

A. The first obstacle is the swollen flood waters and the strangeness of the river. Tull says, "It was thick like slush ice only it kind of lived." We get a sense that the water is animated, demonized.

1. Darl says of the river, "It talks up to us in a murmur, becomes ceaseless and myriad." The elements are not just alive, but they speak, cluck, and murmur.

2. When the Bundrens reach the point where they will cross, they feel as if they have come to the end of the earth, the place "where the motion of the wasted world accelerates just before the final precipice."

3. In the eyes of the mules, Darl sees "a wild, sad, profound, and despairing quality as if they had already seen in the thick water the shape of disaster, which they could not speak and we could not see." This takes us back to Tiresias, the blind seer of *Oedipus*.

B. "Leaving the road" comes to resonate as a notation about the tug between civilized pattern and elemental forces. In Faulkner's novels, we find that we might fall off the road, out of sanity or reality, and into the elements.

1. Darl and Cash share an encounter as they ready the wagon to cross the river, in which they see each other completely denuded and stripped. We see here a collision between human subjectivities, and between humans and the elements.

2. To see the Bundrens and their wagon entering the elements is to see the novel's primal encounter with nature's fury. The result is catastrophic; the wagon is overturned by the rushing waters, and the coffin simply flows out of it.
3. The Bundrens' efforts to retrieve the coffin function as a reverse baptism. As they are immersed in the elements, they become un-named, "undone." Darl says, "As though the clotting which is you had dissolved into the myriad original motion."
4. In Faulkner's world, all that we take for granted about the cogency, the unity, and the value of the self can come undone, as if, again from Darl, "you could just ravel out in time."

Essential Reading:

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*.

Supplementary Reading:

André Bleikasten, *Faulkner's "As I Lay Dying."*

Linda Wagner-Martin, ed., *William Faulkner: Four Decades of Criticism*.

Arnold Weinstein, "Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*: The Voice from the Coffin," in *Nobody's Home: Speech, Self and Place in American Fiction from Hawthorne to DeLillo*.

Philip Weinstein, *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Faulkner's world in this novel can seem at once entirely mental (the whole novel as a suite of interior monologues) and entirely physical (the presence and authority of land, water, air, flesh, and blood). Do you find there to be much communication between these two realms? Regarding your own condition, does this model appear to be viable?
2. What are the benefits Faulkner derives from writing *As I Lay Dying* as a series of vignettes? Is there a price to pay? Are you able to see the lineaments and outlines of the fuller story? Can you imagine your life inscribed in such a sequence of personal visions and voices?

Lecture Thirty-Three
Faulkner—*As I Lay Dying*, Part 2

Scope: The philosophical heart of this novel is located in the dead mother's astonishing chapter, where she offers a withering critique of all language as mendacious, cowardly artifice, severed from the things it names. This grand modern theme of language-as-lie is expressed with pith and splendor. We may nonetheless ask: How can a writer not believe in language?

This novel registers the countercharge of art itself as a response to the fictiveness of both language and self. Faulkner has met the challenge of capturing in words the spectacle of a world of endless flux where no forms or containers can hold: body, coffin, identity, word. The writer possesses only his own tools, and they constitute a humanist creed. Writing itself withstands time and death; writing is to be understood as a "voice from the coffin."

Outline

I. As we've seen, in Faulkner's world, *I* can die if exposed to sufficient violence and pressure. Faulkner's language to depict this crisis is sharp-edged, but the novel also gives us an indictment of language as mendacious, as producing a "word world" that is incommensurate with the real flow of life. This is a basic dynamic in human life because, unlike animals, we are verbal creatures.

II. The richest, most astounding chapter in the novel presents the testimony of (the dead?) Addie Bundren. She—and her views—may be thought of as the core of this novel, its center.

- **A.** What kind of schoolteacher was this strange woman?
  - **1.** How do we assess her desire to whip her students? We see here a pure enactment of will, to make herself real to her students, to penetrate them in some way.
  - **2.** Addie's desire to enter her students in this way may be a metaphor for writing itself. At some level, every writer may desire his or her words to enter the flesh and bloodstream of the reader.
  - **3.** Faulkner is interested in the physiological, somatic, and even carnal dimensions of language. As speakers and writers, we experience some of the same primitive desire to penetrate our audience with the power of our language.
- **B.** Addie Bundren's quintessential quality would seem to be pride.
  - **1.** Faulkner characterizes her as a "private woman," "particular." He defines her pride as "that furious desire to hide the abject nakedness which we bring here with us, carry with us into operating rooms, carry stubbornly and furiously with us into the earth again."
  - **2.** Above all, Addie Bundren displays a resistance to being seen or opened or altered. It is worth considering this "closedness" in the context of this novel's array of penetrating forces.
  - **3.** Her son Darl is cast as the man with eyes that go right through you. Is this not the vision of the novelist? Yet Darl is also the figure who is coming apart, who, in fact, "unravels" at novel's end.
  - **4.** Daughter Dewey Dell is afflicted with the same dissolution as Darl, the collapse of *I*. She tells of a nightmare in which she lost all sense of self: "…I couldn't even think of my name I couldn't even think I am a girl I couldn't even think I…."
- **C.** Addie, farm wife though she is, is the great theorist of these matters. She denounces the archetypal deceit in human life: language.
  - **1.** Addie says, "That was when I learned that words are no good, that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at." Words are always approximate, groping, trying to get close to something that they don't ever quite match.
  - **2.** Addie decides that all words are specious, evasive. They are not ways of dealing with reality but substitutes for reality. Words cover for experiences, but the experiences themselves are unspeakable. There is no way to make our experiences felt or understood by others.
  - **3.** Addie goes even further: "I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth." We seem to live on two axes, one of language and one of action, and in Addie's view they diverge because language itself is incommensurate with meaning or experience.

4. One of the crucial arguments in modern culture has to do with the rupture between language and reality. But unlike the arid propositions of linguistic theory, Addie's diatribe against the mendacity of words is stunningly metaphoric and beautiful.
5. In trying to describe the connection between words and deeds, Addie speaks of words as "coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights, fumbling at the deeds like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother."
   a. Because Addie is thinking of her lover in this passage, we associate the cries of the geese with the noises we make when we speak love.
   b. The final analogy of the orphan shows the tenuous relationship between language and meaning, between the gestures of love and love itself.
6. Writers, of course, can never get clear of language. Faulkner indicts language here as fallacious, erroneous, and incommensurate with meaning, but he does so using the most fiery, eloquent, remarkable words imaginable.

III. The great heroism of *As I Lay Dying* is its magnificent response to the crises of both language and self.

A. The world of this novel is a world of coursing elements, of flow and metamorphosis.
1. The world *moves* in this book, and the job of writing is to capture that movement. It is also a book of voices—of wind, water, and people. Faulkner's world is one of elemental, primitive logic.
2. From Vardaman's anguished cry, "Mother is a fish," to the stunning evocation of Jewel with the horse, Faulkner creates new amalgams, blends of human/animal.
3. Darl, unable to associate the stench of the body with his mother, sets the barn in which the coffin rests on fire, but Jewel, the literalist and the favorite son, saves it in a spectacular scene. Faulkner's language here reaches toward myth and surrealism to speak what is unavowable in Jewel's relation to his mother.
4. At the end of the novel, Darl goes mad. The last words we hear of him are, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes," as if he is dissolving into nothing more than a collection of noises.

B. "Coming apart" seems to be Faulkner's dark wisdom: If the self is subjected to sufficient stress, it will not hold. Language is severed from deed. What form of "doing," then, is still imaginable?
1. Recall the scene of immersion, of fateful baptism, when the Bundrens enter the floodwaters and are "undone." Immediately afterward, the Bundrens form a human chain and reenter the waters, searching for Cash's lost tools. In other words, they retrieve from the elements the tools of human measure.
2. We see here a saga of human civilization against the odds that beset it. Cash, too, becomes more visible to us after this scene. Faulkner seems to tell us that things made by humans may offset the anarchic forces of deterioration and death.
3. Faulkner exhibits a great artisanal pride here. Unlike Addie's pride, which is the desire not to be exposed, this is the pride we experience after we have made something fine. Perhaps that's what humans are here for—we cannot win over the elements, but we can make things.
4. The book opens with Cash making his mother's coffin, and Addie knows this is a labor of love. Perhaps labor is love. We saw a similar ethos in Conrad, where work is the only thing imaginable to offset chaos in humans.
5. The container in this novel—the coffin—is real, no matter the status of what's inside. And no matter what we call the container—coffin, tenement, body—it has its own integrity and beauty.
6. Humans are the species that builds forms; they are coffin-makers. Addie Bundren's coffin has pride of place in this tumultuous novel. It is the precious container, and Faulkner treats it with the awe it deserves. After the coffin is retrieved from the river, Darl says it is "still yellow like gold seen through the water."

C. Ultimately, Darl tells us that he hears Addie talking from the coffin "in little trickling bursts of secret and murmurous bubbling."
1. We might interpret this as the very voice of human decomposition and rot, but we might also read it as a human voice from a coffin, a perfect figure for literature.
2. Yes, Addie is dead; so, too, are Homer and Chaucer and Shakespeare and Faulkner. Art—this novel, all novels—is itself understood as a voice from a coffin.

Essential Reading:

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*.

Supplementary Reading:

André Bleikasten, *Faulkner's "As I Lay Dying."*

Linda Wagner-Martin, ed., *William Faulkner: Four Decades of Criticism*.

Arnold Weinstein, "Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*: The Voice from the Coffin," in *Nobody's Home: Speech, Self and Place in American Fiction from Hawthorne to DeLillo*.

Philip Weinstein, *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Addie Bundren's posthumous monologue is a bravura piece in American fiction. In it, she lambastes language as mendacious, escapist, and severed from the truth. This indictment is roughly similar to the theory put forth by such linguists as Saussure at the time the novel was written, arguing that all language is *referential*, that is, a sign system that can never get beyond its network of words. What do you make of the fact that an uneducated Mississippi farm wife comes up with the same view as a professional linguist?
2. Faulkner's universe seems to be one of violent and penetrative forces, against which the frail enclosures of self cannot hold. Here would be also the meaning of the book's title. Do you find such a vision altogether too dark, or is there some dignity in it?

Lecture Thirty-Four
García Márquez—*One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Scope: Called a triumph of Magic Realism, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is an appropriate close to this course because it challenges the essential laws that seem to govern both reality and fiction. At issue are the dictates of time and space, as well the taboo against incest and the social constraints on desire. The story of Macondo and the Buendía clan centralizes such tensions as passion/punishment, war/peace, self/other, and history/text, always asking: What rules apply?

Magic Realism claims that things have a life of their own, and this novel is studded with fantastic events, ranging from natural miracles to the ascension into heaven and the reprieve from death. Spirits abound. The love life of this family is front and center. We also witness the evolution of Macondo from Edenic beginnings to the acquisition of language and the inroads of technology and "progress": railroads, the telephone, a banana plantation, gringos, a workers' revolt, a massacre, and denial. Magic? Or a history we know all too well?

Outline

I. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), written by Gabriel García Márquez (1927–), is an appropriate conclusion to this course because it rings a change on everything we have read up to now. Rather than exploring the abyss, it rises into the air.

A. This novel takes us full circle, returning to the sense of exploration and play evident in *Tristram Shandy*, but it also marks a turning point in the history of fiction. García Márquez acknowledged the critical influence of such writers as Kafka and Faulkner, but he transforms their doom-oriented narratives into something rich and strange, known in literary terms as Magic Realism.

B. It's easy to see this kind of fiction as escapist, but perhaps it makes more sense to view it as a bid for freedom, a new way of imagining time, space, desire, the course of a novel, and the course of our lives.

1. In Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, we saw lives lived with the illusion of freedom, but from our vantage point of knowing the entire novel, we realize the extent to which the characters' lives are coerced by the fates of history.

2. Consider, too, the story of Oedipus, the preeminent text that shapes Western thinking. Oedipus lives his life blindly under the illusion of freedom, not knowing that it is utterly determined by past transgressions of parricide and incest.

3. Could we reshuffle this deck? Could we flout the laws that seem to coerce and constrain human freedom? What might there be on the other side of history, fate, and moral injunction ("thou shalt not")? More drastically, can we imagine or re-imagine Eden?

4. Macondo, the mythic community at the core of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is an Eden, a place "before the Fall."

C. Like Rome, Macondo is founded on a murder and a curse. José Arcadio murders Prudencio Aguilar, who taunts him about his unconsummated marriage with his cousin Úrsula and introduces the possibility of a curse: The union of José and Úrsula could result in the birth of an iguana or a child with a pig's tail. After murdering Prudencio, José tells his wife that there will be no more killings; they will take their chances with their offspring.

1. When the story of Oedipus opens, Thebes has already been afflicted with plague. Retribution for the crime he committed unknowingly has been enacted. There is no maneuvering room or freedom.

2. García Márquez's book is different, however; sexual desire has its play here, and desire is not the same as incest. We have no idea whether Oedipus desired Jocasta, but in this text, we are treated to expressions of the characters' desire.

3. Aureliano José, for example, is infatuated with his Aunt Amaranta, and she feels the same tug. José Arcadio (the fabulously-endowed son) leaps into marriage with Rebeca, thought to be his sister. These encounters are narrated in the language of the earth and nature. We feel here a natural force field of sexuality that fuels these lives.

4. The book will close with a magnificent tribute to liberated desire: Aureliano (the great-great grandson of the founder of Macondo) has an ecstatic sexual relationship with his Aunt Amaranta Úrsula. This

time, fate is enacted; their coupling terminates in the birth of a child with a pig's tail and, worse still, the deaths of the mother and the child and, finally, the extinction of Macondo.

5. Nonetheless, the moral verdict here is not an easy one. The relationship between Aureliano and his aunt is ecstatic, playful, and free. They know that they're risking a curse and punishment, yet there is an Edenic feeling to their union. Repeatedly, the book measures sexual freedom/excess against its opposite number: coldness of heart. Which is worse?
6. At one point, Úrsula tells her son, Aureliano the warrior, "If you execute your best friend out of political necessity [which he is poised to do], it is the same as if you had been born with the tail of a pig." There are many ways to lose one's position in the human family—incest, as well as coldness of heart.
7. García Márquez understood from Kafka what it takes to leave the human realm.

II. The story of Macondo, like that of much of Latin America, takes place under the sign of war, and at one point, the assertion is made that the community is fighting so that a man can marry his mother. This is not an endorsement of incest but a challenge to the prohibitions of law and denial.

A. For the most part, these wars highlight the "usual suspects": the liberals versus the conservatives, the atheists versus the Church. One of the chief characters, Aureliano Buendía, commits his life to the liberal cause.

B. In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy showed us the battlefields with startling immediacy, but García Márquez writes war as an endless, repeating, interminable backdrop, like a plague that never diminishes. No amount of magic can overcome this kind of death, and it is the death that Latin America has known for a century.

C. Yet one could argue that the greatest war in the novel is the war against logic as we know it, the logic that rules our everyday thinking, as well as our notion of what a novel is supposed to be. We may think, for example, that time moves forward in an unstoppable course, but this novel asks us to think again. Inwardly, in our memories or our feelings, we can be in many places at once. The book also tells us that people can return from the dead.

III. Magic Realism gives us a new fix on all these crucial terms. What might the world look like if the laws of time and space and desire were overcome? Remembering Kafka's story of the man turned insect as well as his own grandmother's tales that mixed fact and fantasy, García Márquez reinvents fiction.

A. As mentioned at the beginning of the lecture, Macondo was created as a place that has parallels with the Garden of Eden.

1. No one has ever died there, and there is no need for either priests or government. It lives in tune with the Creation. As Melquíades, the philosopher of the novel, says, "Things have a life of their own…It's simply a matter of waking up their souls."
2. There are deaths in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, but they are not like the deaths we've seen in Proust, or Woolf, or Faulkner. Imagine, again, overturning this curse on our species.
3. In this book, when the patriarch dies, yellow flowers appear. The girl Meme is in love, and yellow butterflies fill the room. Prudencio Aguilar's ghost returns because death is too lonely. Melquíades comes back frequently from death in new forms. The beautiful girl Remedios ascends, in front of our eyes, to heaven without truly dying. The afterlife here is, in fact, life.

B. Even the writing style is a cunning mixture of present, past, and future. The book opens with a line that already sends us into the future: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember the distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice."

1. The novel reconceives familiar issues and concerns. The child Rebeca arrives, bearing her dead parents' bones in a sack. What kind of allegory is this? The image is much more pithy and material than our words "mourning" or "grieving."
2. This same child experiences a voracious, ungratifiable hunger and devours earth itself, giving weight and density to the idea of yearning. García Márquez refuses abstractions, presenting his characters' feelings in terms of blood, bone, nerve, and sinew.

C. We witness, in this novel, the "evolution" of Macondo from Eden as it enters history.

1. Macondo experiences the "insomnia plague," which entails a universal loss of memory. From this loss of memory (and culture), we arrive at the creation of language, enlisted as our only means of retrieval.
2. Founded as Eden before the Fall, Macondo also experiences the inevitable inroads of "progress." Mr. Herbert comes to Macondo and discovers bananas; he is followed by engineers, Mr. Brown, the

gringos, and ultimately, the banana plantation. In parallel, we see other forms of progress: the railroad, film, and the telephone.

3. This history seems eerily familiar, and it proceeds apace with its own hideous logic. Predictably, the banana workers protest their conditions and are massacred. The massacre is flatly, publicly denied: It never happened; 3,000 "satisfied workers" simply returned to their families.
4. Is this magic? Or is this, indeed, the dirty history of our time? Have we not seen this before, in many Latin American countries, in the Balkans, and elsewhere?
5. José Arcadio Segundo witnesses the massacre, and his entire subsequent life is cued to this event. García Márquez asks us: How do we bear witness to disaster? How long do we remember? Is it sufficient, as the priest is told, that we exist at this moment, or do we have a greater duty?

Essential Reading:

Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Supplementary Reading:

Michael Bell, "The Cervantean Turn: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," in *Gabriel García Márquez: Solitude and Solidarity*.

Eduardo Posada-Carbó, "Fiction as History: The Bananeras and Gabriel García Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30.2 (May 1998): 395–414.

Michael Wood, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Magic Realism—with its fuller play of fantasy and desire—is revered by some, despised by others. What arguments would you present for it? Against it?
2. In what senses do you feel that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* bears witness to the earlier work of Kafka and Faulkner, both of whom García Márquez saluted as precursors for his work? How does it alter their vision and their logic?

Lecture Thirty-Five
One Hundred Years of Solitude, Part 2

Scope: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has a splendor and zest and impudence that seem unique in the Western tradition of the novel. It plays tricks with time and space; it flouts the laws we have thought to be real; it explores the power of desire. Yet its darkest truth is in the title: solitude. In the figures of Colonel Aureliano Buendía, Amaranta, Rebeca, and Fernanda, we see the threat of living death, of hollowness at the core, of mummification. What can oppose emptiness and repression? Lust for life.

Melquíades, the gypsy-philosopher, presides over a mysterious script, kept locked up in the recesses of the Buendía house, and with rabbinical fervor, each generation of Buendía (men) tries its hand at deciphering this book. Not unlike the Book of Revelation, this "intertext" contains the fate of the family, but can the austere, solitary task of "reading" coexist with the vibrancy of flesh and life? Is this not literature's grand query? The novel's ecstatic but tragic ending leaves the question open—for us to decide.

Outline

I. We've seen repeatedly in this course that literature gives us unique access to the inner life, what Hamlet called "that which passes show." *Hamlet* is one of the great texts about the inner realm that others are in the dark about, while a book like *The Brothers Karamazov* shows us, in the person of Ivan, the self as a tomb.

A. What about the drama of death in life, which is another way of saying "solitude"? How do we take the measure of solitude, given that we live and die in ourselves? Further, isn't reading itself an act of solitude? In some sense, this issue, the attempt to gauge the meaning of solitude, relates to the whole project of reading literature.

B. The gaiety, zest, and sheer chutzpah of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* may constitute its strongest claim on our interest. The great contribution of Magic Realism to Western fiction is its widened grasp of what reality entails, enabling dreams, desire, and imagination to coexist with the contingent world of facts and laws. One risk that García Márquez runs is that we will see his book as "touristic," as a kind of facile, make-believe world in which fantasy rules.

C. As we have noted, the grisly world of historical fact—colonial exploitation, cruelty, and abuse—is not elided in this novel, but emerges powerfully and, perhaps, as a direct result of the discourse of magic and play. Conrad's news of racism and ideological warfare, along with Faulkner's sense of family doom, can be glimpsed behind García Márquez's humorous and surreal rendition of life.

II. However, the richer, still darker quarry of this novel is advertised in its title: solitude. Few writers have sketched a grimmer picture of the incurable loneliness of being alive, of the incessant risk of being emotionally buried alive.

A. Amaranta, a woman of deep passions, nonetheless turns down numerous suitors; burns her hand black; spends her last days sewing her own shroud; sees herself as a messenger for, and enters willingly into, death.

1. Amaranta acquires a carton of letters to take with her to the other side. This is an image of death as continuation of, literally, commerce, an exchange between life and death.

2. Often, the deaths of characters in this novel are other dimensions of their own beings, a different view from our Western notion of death. In García Márquez, death is part of what one is.

B. Rebeca seems to satisfy her primordial hunger, evidenced by her habit of eating earth, through marriage with the sexually powerful José Arcadio (the son), yet after his death, she literally exits the commerce of the living to bury herself alive in her house, forgotten by all.

C. Perhaps the most intriguing figure of solitude is Fernanda, the devout and pretentious wife of Aureliano Segundo.

1. Fernanda constantly refers to her distinguished father, who sends the family a yearly Christmas gift. One year, the gift is the father's dead body, with the skin broken out in festering sores.

2. This scene makes it clear that Fernanda represents the tradition of death, which is the denial of life and pleasure—solitude in the sense of literally being buried alive.

D. Even the great matriarch of the book, Úrsula, who lives to 145 and has brought up countless generations of children, emerges in her old age as a figure negotiating the world via touch and smell, entering into solitude as the last truth.

E. But the master portrait here is of Colonel Aureliano Buendía, the younger son of the patriarch. Aureliano is García Márquez's candidate for war hero, the man who spent his entire life fighting for the liberal cause and paying the supreme price for this career: an increasing coldness of heart, a solitude that cannot be breached.

1. Aureliano is the man whose fate is not to die at the hands of a firing squad but to die by becoming ice.
2. On his return home from war, he declares that "no human being, not even Úrsula, his mother, could come closer to him than ten feet."
3. One of the most moving passages in the book is the moment when Aureliano realizes that Úrsula fully understands and is saddened by what he has become. She is the only person who penetrates his misery.
4. Aureliano looks at his mother and sees how old she has become, yet he feels no pity: "…he made one last effort to search in his heart for the place where his affection [for her] had rotted away, and he could not find it."
5. Aureliano is the dark conscience of the novel. Perhaps we are all enclosed by 10-foot circles. Perhaps we cannot feel, but only see, the scars that life has given to those we love.
6. Aureliano is the figure who lives, as it were, the 100-year history of war in the novel. This history has corroded him, and he knows that he is living death.
7. How does Aureliano die? He watches a circus going by, a woman on an elephant, a camel, a dancing bear, and clowns, and through it all, he sees his own solitude. He puts his forehead against a tree and dies.

III. What, one asks, can counter solitude, mummification? The book's reply is: lust for life, human appetite, and desire.

A. As we've seen, the novel seems to celebrate phallic power. The sexuality of José Arcadio (the son) is described as cyclonic, as a kind of vital, elemental force.

B. The novel is equally committed to female fertility. Pilar Ternera seems to mother or mate with virtually all of the men in the book, but there is nothing abusive or exploitive in her situation. With her counterpart, Petra Cotes, Pilar shares the role of sexual assent and sexual assertion. On the far side of any constraints, they seem to relish their power and their role in the culture.

C. Desire in this novel transcends the personal. This is especially clear in the fruitfulness of Petra's relationship to Aureliano Segundo, who is married to Fernanda. Their affair is a vision of fertility and plenty.

D. The most passionate episode of the novel is its haunting final love relationship between Aureliano (the great-great grandson) and his Aunt Amaranta Úrsula.

1. The two brave all laws of constraint, decorum, and coercion and seem to re-create their own Garden of Eden, but their lovemaking is followed by "a torrent of carnivorous ants who were ready to eat them alive."
2. These ants bring destruction. They know nothing of human love but only follow nature's inhuman, logical dictates. The force that brings these two bodies together may well be akin to the force that devours flesh in the end.

E. But García Márquez is no dewy-eyed romantic. He is alert to the ravages and the excesses of feeling, and he has a fine sense of its labyrinths.

1. Arcadio (the grandson) is depicted as a brutal tyrant. He is vicious and is shot by a firing squad.
2. The great grandson José Arcadio is a sinister pedophile, meeting his just deserts at the hands of children.
3. José Arcadio Segundo is haunted by the sights he has seen and can never be free of his indwelling fear.

IV. Returning repeatedly in the episodes of the lives of the Buendía clan during its 100-year duration is the mystical figure of Melquíades, the gypsy philosopher/tutelary divinity of the story. Melquíades presides over the mysterious, cryptic script that it seems only he can read.

A. We see an entire line of men seeking to decipher the magic script that entails the history of the Buendía family, on the order of a Book of Revelation.

B. García Márquez does not hide from us the fact that these men pay a price for attempting to decipher the script: They opt out of life, staying in the room for decades, in order to attend to this text. It is a severe equation. We are also struck by the fact that the script is kept in a closed-off room that has 72 chamber pots, as if the record of human doing were somehow inseparable from the waste of the human body.

C. The book turns increasingly dark toward the end. The Catalonian bookseller, one of the wise men of the text, auctions off his books and urges the people of Macondo to disregard all that he has said earlier about art and writing: "…that wherever they might be they always remember that the past was a lie, that memory has no return, that every spring gone by could never be recovered, and that the wildest and most tenacious love was an ephemeral truth in the end." As we come to the end of the book, we know that the curse will be fulfilled.

D. The story ends with Aureliano and his aunt having their wild, ecstatic, yet innocent affair, yet we also realize that he has spent years decoding and deciphering the script. It's as if García Márquez brings together in Aureliano the two poles of fiction: the lusty fornicator and the reader of text.

1. Amaranta dies, and the ants who sought to devour Aureliano and Amaranta after their lovemaking return to devour the child who is the product of their union. We feel as if God, who has seemed to be absent in this novel, finally returns to mete out punishment. But the only crime of the two seems to have been to recover Eden, to escape history.
2. At the end, Aureliano reads the text and sees that it is his own history. A storm begins to blow that will destroy Macondo. As Aureliano reads, he sees himself becoming the text: "He began to decipher the instant that he was living, deciphering it as he lived it, prophesying himself in the act of deciphering the last page of the parchment, as if he were looking into a speaking mirror."
3. Aureliano and Macondo are swept away by the storm, and we are told that there is no second chance for them. But we may find their second chance in the eternal life that literature confers; reading spawns a living world.

Essential Reading:

Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Supplementary Reading:

Michael Bell, "The Cervantean Turn: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," in *Gabriel García Márquez: Solitude and Solidarity*.

Eduardo Posada-Carbó, "Fiction as History: The Bananeras and Gabriel García Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30.2 (May 1998): 395–414.

Michael Wood, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Colonel Aureliano Buendía is the great military figure of the novel. He is also its primary example of solitude as an inevitable curse of living. Do you think there is some kind of logical connection between these two concepts: war and solitude?
2. The final sentences of this novel read like a curse or doom finally come true: Aureliano reads, at last, the script that pronounces the extinction of the Buendía clan. Yet this moment of judgment follows what is arguably the freest and most ecstatic human relationship of the novel, even if it is also transgressive. How does one square these things?

Lecture Thirty-Six
Ending the Course, Beginning the World

Scope: Our course began with a journalistic account of a woman battling heavy odds in 18th-century London, and it closed with the mythic tale of an entire family battling its fate in the rise and fall of Colombian Macondo. There have been battles throughout—economic, sexual, ideological, moral, military, spiritual, biological, emotional—and literature alone grants us access to this ongoing drama. It is through works of art and imagination that the known record (facts, dates) comes alive, in its human fullness and dimensionality.

As Richard Carstone is dying in *Bleak House*, Dickens writes that he is "beginning the world." Each of us is fated in "real life" to inhabit one body and one mind and one world, but the magic of reading enables us, over and over, to begin the world anew: with new eyes, new ears, new sights and sounds. New heart? Maybe. What is certain is this: The virtuality of art—that it is "not real," according to the skeptics—is its supreme trump card, for it opens the door to voyages we can take in no other way.

Outline

I. What we've learned in these 36 lectures on classic novels should be understood as seeding and working the soil of the brain and heart. We don't have any real way to measure the effects of this kind of education, but I believe that reading literature widens the way we look at the world, making us more dimensional.

- **A.** In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard says, "You must work for your bread"; he then goes on to say that, of course, this isn't always true in the real world. Some people gain their bread without working, and others labor without receiving bread. In the mind and the soul, however, Kierkegaard believes that his law holds. We must earn our truths, and one way to do so is by reading literature.
- **B.** What do you gain—what have you gained—by reading classic novels written over a 250-year period?
  - **1.** There is nothing crass about such a question, because we are entitled to know the possible benefits of the labors we undertake.
  - **2.** Often, we read great books too early in our lives or in situations where we are obliged to read them. Books don't speak to us then; they become dead letters.
- **C.** One reason to read classic literature is to become culturally literate. The books we have looked at are Western classics, and knowledge of them can provide a basis for intellectual exchange. Yet knowing the plots and characters of works of fiction can also seem like a whimsical proposition. Do we take from these books something truly vital?
  - **1.** The reality of literature is not informational. In fact, we now live in a moment that seems awash in information, and it's not always clear how "good" this information is.
  - **2.** There are serious distinctions among information, knowledge, and wisdom. We're long on information and short on knowledge—and shorter still on wisdom.

II. The following are thumbnail sketches of what I take to be the enduring truths of the narratives we have read. I hope you will use these as entryways for what you might look for in these books and what they might mean.

- **A.** Defoe teaches us about the deeper wisdom of "keeping our own books," of recognizing the spiritual dimensions of our experience. One of the great wonders of *Moll Flanders* is that it seems as if it is nothing but a description of the physical, material world, but it has moments where we see an inner realm of spirit and feeling, in which Moll herself "keeps her own books." This book points out to us the difference between the world we can see around us and what we know about ourselves.
- **B.** Sterne reveals to us the anarchy and deliciousness of thinking in contrast to the order of normal prose and normal logic. The mind is agile, and *Tristram Shandy* tries to track its adventurous activity.
- **C.** Laclos leaves us with a disturbing sense of intelligence-as-seduction and of all human liaisons as ungaugeable and dangerous. He asks some hard questions in this book: What is the value of intelligence? What is rewarded in our culture, intelligence or virtue?
- **D.** Balzac dramatizes the fate of feeling in a new capitalist order with its ruthless, success-at-all-costs ethos. His *Bildungsroman* was one of the first to show us the price of success, an issue we face at all stages of our lives.

E. Brontë casts her light on the brutal and primitive reaches of human feeling, exposing the illusoriness of rules and decorum. *Wuthering Heights* is a ghoulish story that reveals the rage, anger, and hunger inside us all. It also shows us the depths of the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff, who are so closely connected as to become one.

F. Melville sounds the metaphysical depths, shows us that the world of appearances might be a pasteboard mask, and suggests that the self can be hijacked by its passions. He also offers us a world of wonder, taking us out to sea and showing us ever-increasing depths to be plumbed.

G. Dickens makes us understand "pollution" and "ecosystem" as both literal and moral concepts: We are porous creatures, related to one another beyond our ken. *Bleak House* also points to our modern world, where events that take place far away can reverberate at home or in our souls.

H. Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is a tough, unflinching text, embodying both romantic lyricism and an analytical, even cynical, perspective on romance. Flaubert shows us that human desire can be constructed by outside influences and, tragically, that desire cannot be gratified. Nonetheless, desire may still be what is most beautiful about us, the search for something beyond what we have.

I. Tolstoy writes the tug-of-war between the anarchy of experience and the desire for pattern, as individuals find and lose their way in historical events. He makes us understand that we always live in a historical setting that we cannot see. We do not know how our roles will be seen when the history of our moment is written.

J. Dostoevsky shines his light into the human psyche, attuned to its unpredictability, pride, violence, and tenderness in a world where all is permitted. He gives us the word *nadryv*, "strain, laceration," as the chief characteristic of human relationships. But he also tells us that if we could look properly at every single moment, in everything around us, we would find paradise.

K. Conrad's impressionist text points to the underside of European colonialism, inflected by racism, greed, and self-deification. Conrad announces an era of horror, guilt, and damage done to others and, therefore, ourselves, by the primitivism that may lurk inside the most well-regulated minds if subjected to sufficient stress.

L. Mann writes about the power of the abyss, showing that form and beauty are driven by libido. They are often a façade, behind which are hunger and desire. They point to the abyss, and the artist is inevitably en route to the abyss in his search for form and beauty. Discipline itself may be a myth, and even more disturbingly, *Death in Venice* asks the question: Have you lived a lie?

M. Kafka's weird stories enact the exit from the human, whether through metamorphosis or legal arrest; truth and justice are unreachable. Kafka is a spiritual writer in a material age, and he gives the death blow to any kind of anthropocentric and humanistic scheme.

N. Proust bequeaths to us a new entity: the creature on stilts, the view of our life-in-time, the private universe hidden in each of us, and the magic of memory. Proust tries to take the measure of temporal reaches—the length of time one has lived, the extent to which one is extended into the past.

O. Joyce stages, with unparalleled genius and exuberance, the song and dance of both mind and body, the strange melody of human thinking. He gives us the never-before-told story of the self in culture as if the traffic of our molecules and the noise of the street and the sound bytes of the media and the pulsations of the body were all brought together in a remarkable form and mesh.

P. Woolf writes, with lyricism and savage beauty, the radiance and doom of her female protagonist, Mrs. Ramsay, the mother, and about the projects of retrieval via art and memory. She tells us why art matters and shows us that we are not as bounded as we think, that the inward core of darkness is mobile.

Q. Faulkner registers, against a backdrop of rotting flesh and coursing elements, the dying of *I*, the play of consciousness, and the splendor of the land and water. It is not merely the fate of flesh that interests him, but what human beings can do to offset this entropic scheme. We also find in Faulkner's work the most violent assault on the self; what we think of as the bounded ego could, if subjected to sufficient pressure, "unravel in time."

R. García Márquez, the revolutionary, breaks all the rules; he privileges freedom, desire, and fantasy, yet acknowledges the irremediable solitude at one's core. His book is an extraordinary circus of desire, but there is a supreme penalty to be paid.

III. Despite this list, and despite these lectures, there can be no shortcuts for understanding literature. You must work to earn your bread yourself.

A. Everywhere you look (and in places where you cannot look), people are reading. Here is culture's most inexpensive, commonplace, and democratic creative act. At Richard Carstone's death in *Bleak House*, Dickens writes that he is "beginning the world." That is what we do when we read these books.

B. Reading books means converting the print into meaning. We make such conversions all the time, responding to a green traffic light, a smile, or a cholesterol count.

1. Converting the print on the page into its fuller meaning is an extraordinarily gratifying, pleasurable, even hedonistic exercise.

2. Art is the bloodstream of civilization, and reading is like a blood transfusion, in which the reality of the world of past writers—their imaginations, their hearts, and their brains—becomes available to us. We become citizens of the world—we begin the world—by reading books.

Supplementary Reading:

Arnold Weinstein, *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*.

———, *A Scream Goes Through the House: What Literature Teaches Us About Life*.

Questions to Consider:

1. We return to our initial query: What can be the value of literature? Given the diversity of materials and themes seen in this voyage through fictions, what common ground might emerge as the constants in reading? Has there been a "voyage"? If you have not read the books but only listened to the lectures, have you—or have you not—had the experience of literature?

2. I have posited semiotics—the interpretation of signs—as the core challenge of all reading, indeed, of all education and all experience. To what extent do you feel that you engage in semiotic labors during your everyday life? Do you think this key transaction is merely a mental procedure, or is it something more vital and existential?

Timeline

1660	Daniel Defoe probably born in London.
1707	Union of England, Scotland, and Wales as the United Kingdom of Great Britain.
1713	Laurence Sterne born in Clonmel, Ireland.
1721	Defoe's *Moll Flanders* published by W. Chetwood and T. Edling in London.
1731	Defoe dies in London.
1741	Pierre Ambroise François Choderlos de Laclos is born in Amiens, France.
1759–1767	Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* published serially in nine volumes in London.
1768	Sterne dies in London.
1775–1783	American Revolution.
1776	U.S. Declaration of Independence.
1782	Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* published in Paris by Durand.
1789	The French Revolution begins.
1799	Honoré de Balzac born in Tours, France.
1801	Establishment of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, superseding earlier United Kingdom.
1803	Choderlos de Laclos dies in Taranto, Italy.
1804	Napoleon crowns himself emperor of France.
1812	Charles Dickens born in Portsmouth, England; Napoleon invades Russia.
1814	The Congress of Vienna repartitions European national and colonial borders after the Napoleonic wars; foundation of the Confederation of German States.
1818	Emily Brontë born in the parsonage at Thornton in Yorkshire, England.
1819	Herman Melville born in New York City.
1821	Gustave Flaubert born in Rouen, France; Fyodor Dostoevsky born in Moscow.
1828	Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy born at Yasnaya Polyana, the family estate in Tula Province, Russia.
1830	The July Revolution in France overthrows the Bourbon King Charles X and instates a constitutional monarchy (the July Monarchy) under Louis-Philippe, Duc d'Orléans.
1834	Balzac's *Père Goriot* published by Werdet et Spachmann.
1847	Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* published under the pseudonym Ellis Bell by T. C. Newby in London.
1848	Revolutions in France overthrow the July Monarchy and instate the Second Republic; Emily Brontë dies in Yorkshire, England.
1850	Balzac dies in Paris.
1851	Melville's *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* published in London and New York.
1852–1853	Dickens's *Bleak House* published in 20 monthly serials by Bradbury and Evans in London.

1853–1856	Crimean War.
1857	*Madame Bovary* published by Michel Levy Frères; Joseph Conrad born Jozef Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski in Berdiczew, Podolia, Russia (now Ukraine).
1861–1865	American Civil War.
1865–1869	*War and Peace* published in six volumes.
1867	Establishment of the Austro-Hungarian (Hapsburg) Empire.
1870	Dickens dies in London.
1870–1871	Franco-Prussian War.
1871	Marcel Proust born in Auteuil, France.
1875	Thomas Mann born in Lübeck, Germany.
1879–1880	*The Brothers Karamazov* published in St. Petersburg.
1880	Gustave Flaubert dies in Croisset, France.
1881	Dostoevsky dies in St. Petersburg, Russia.
1882	James Joyce born in Dublin; Virginia Woolf born in London.
1883	Franz Kafka born in Prague, Bohemia (now the Czech Republic).
1891	Melville dies in New York City.
1897	William Faulkner born in New Albany, Mississippi.
1902	*Heart of Darkness* published in London by William Blackwood.
1905	Bloody Sunday massacre of Russian demonstrators in St. Petersburg, leading to the unsuccessful Russian Revolution of 1905.
1910	Tolstoy dies in Astapovo, Ryazan Province, Russia.
1912	*Death in Venice* published in Munich, Germany.
1913–1927	*Remembrance of Things Past* published in seven volumes in Paris. *Du côté de chez Swann* published by Grasset; all other volumes published by Gallimard.
1914–1918	World War I.
1915	*The Metamorphosis* published by Kurt Wolff in Germany.
1917	Russian Revolution.
1918–1920	Some chapters of *Ulysses* published serially in *The Little Review* and *The Egoist*.
1919–1933	Weimer Republic in Germany.
1922	Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR); independence of the Republic of Ireland; *Ulysses* published in book form in Paris; Marcel Proust dies in Paris.
1924	Joseph Conrad dies in Bishopsbourne, Kent, England; Kafka dies in Kierling, Klosterneuberg, Austria.
1925	*The Trial* published.
1927	*To the Lighthouse* published by Harcourt in New York.
1928	Gabriel García Márquez born in Aracataca, Colombia.

1929 ..... The New York Stock Exchange crashes; Thomas Mann wins the Nobel Prize in Literature.

1930 ..... *As I Lay Dying* published by J. Cape and H. Smith.

1933 ..... Hitler comes to power in Germany.

1939–1945 ..... World War II.

1941 ..... Joyce dies in Zurich, Switzerland; Virginia Woolf dies in Lewes, Sussex, England.

1945 ..... Germany divided by the Allies; decolonization of most European empires begins; atomic bombs fall on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan.

1950 ..... Faulkner wins the Nobel Prize in Literature.

1955 ..... Mann dies in Zurich, Switzerland.

1962 ..... Faulkner dies in Byhalia, Mississippi.

1967 ..... *One Hundred Years of Solitude* published in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

1959–1975 ..... Vietnam War.

1982 ..... García Márquez wins the Nobel Prize in Literature.

1989 ..... Fall of the Berlin Wall.

1991 ..... Dissolution of the USSR.

Glossary

Defoe, *Moll Flanders*

episodic: rambling, unstructured plot

homo economicus: man defined by economic forces

picaresque: satirical narrative genre devoted to the adventures of the *picaro* (rascal, rogue)

plain style: unembellished, straightforward language with few allusions

Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*

digression: narrative strategy of breaking the linear flow

double-entendre: use of words with more than one meaning, often obscene

free association: mental process of moving from one idea immediately to another

hobbyhorse: Sterne's term for the compulsive, associative character of thinking

Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*

ancien régime: the pre-Revolutionary French class-based society

contrapuntal: a narrative strategy of clashing perspectives

epistolary novel: the narrative tradition of the novel-in-letters

Heisenberg theorem: a modern scientific model of the observer's impact on the observed

Nietzschean: cult of the amoral "superman" figure

Scientism: materialist view of humans as regulated by biological forces

Sturm und Drang: tempestuous pre-Romantic German literary culture

Balzac, *Père Goriot*

"Ariadne's thread": derived from the Theseus myth, the path through a labyrinth

Bildungsroman: narrative genre of novels about the education/formation of the young

La Comédie Humaine: the cumulative title Balzac gave to his many novels

ennui: French for "boredom," "emptiness"

exposition: Balzac's method of laying out his story

parvenir: French for "succeed"

pension: French term for a boarding house

Realism: literary school devoted to descriptive accounts of social settings

Satanic: literary term derived from Milton, denoting a powerful, evil, yet seductive figure

Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*

Byronic male: literary term depicting a mysterious, powerful, romantic male figure

moor: the primitive area of Yorkshire where Brontë situated her novel

"raw versus cooked": anthropological term from Lévi-Strauss, denoting primitive versus civilized

seer/scribe: narrative strategy of a distanced observer relating a mysterious story

Thrushcross Grange: civilized abode of the refined Lintons in *Wuthering Heights*

Wuthering Heights: primitive abode of the Earnshaws and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*

Melville, *Moby-Dick*

cetology: the science of whales

cyclopic: reference to the one-eyed giants of Greek mythology

Emersonian legacy: impact on American thinking of R. W. Emerson's transcendentalism

epic: grand narrative of nation-building or larger-than-life heroes

semiotics: the interpretation of *signs* (as a model of human and social behavior)

soliloquy: Shakespearean device of speaking one's thoughts to the audience

stereophonic: narrative strategy of multiple speakers

sultanism: imagery, derived from the Middle East, of powerful male rulers

Dickens, *Bleak House*

"angel in the house": Victorian notion of the angelic, pure, sexless women

Chancery court: London law court that decides civil cases; considered mysterious and powerful

ecological: term denoting a scheme in which interdependency rules

epistemological: the science or project of "knowing"

Foucault, Michel: French theorist of the shaping value of institutions upon subjectivity

pollution: environmental term connoting the porousness of the individual human being

Victorian period: mid-19th-century British culture of high ideals and sexual repression

Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

bovarysme: term coined from this novel; a propensity to project one's desires onto the world

Don Quixote: hero of Cervantes's 17th-century novel, synonymous with seeing-via-books

Enlightenment legacy: ethos of rationality and logic stemming from 18th-century thinkers

free indirect discourse: narrating personal feelings indirectly via third-person prose

Romance: idealist view of life as ecstasy and passion, often based on literary depictions

Tolstoy, *War and Peace*

"fox versus hedgehog": a singular vision of particulars versus a "global" overview of the whole

Freemasons: quasi-religious cult, operative in Europe since the Middle Ages

positivist: a view of events determined rigorously by discernible cause/effect

metacritical: term denoting authorial self-awareness signaled in the text

metahistory: modern view of history as "constructed" (rather than recovered)

War of 1812: meant here especially as Napoleon's European and Russian campaigns

Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Bernard, Claude: scientist and figure for the scientific atheist worldview

buffoon: key figure in Dostoevskyan psychology: fool/trickster of ridicule

Grand Inquisitor: figure of religious authority derived from the 17th-century Spanish Inquisition

"insult and injury": Dostoevskyan psychology of pride as a ruling force, can be sadistic

nadryv: Russian term denoting "laceration"; used in a psychological sense by Dostoevsky

patriarchal rule: system of socio-moral authority based on a figure of the father/God

Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

colonialism: term denoting (here) the European exploitation of Africa

deconstruction: modern theory of reality as "constructed" and undecidable

imperialism: term denoting the political regime and ambitions of the British Empire

impressionism: literary/artistic term for denoting the subjective immediacy of phenomena

postcolonial: refers to modern inquiry into the practices of imperialist societies

Mann, *Death in Venice*

The Birth of Tragedy: Nietzsche's account of Greek tragedy as an interplay of order/chaos

Dionysus: Greek god of inebriation and frenzy

Eros: Greek god of desire

marmoreal style: a polished, "worked" style that "contains" what is inside it

Phaedrus: text of Plato that discusses both beauty and gender

Kafka, "The Metamorphosis" and *The Trial*

bureaucratic: referring, in Kafka, to the anonymity of a complex power structure

metamorphosis: transformation

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: classic Latin text about humans transformed into other shapes

sacrificial logic: a social logic of the rationale behind human sacrifice

"topography of obstacles": in Kafka, a predictable landscape of resistance

Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*

Balbec: the Norman seaside resort where Marcel and his grandmother go

Combray: the village of the protagonist's childhood memories

Faubourg Saint-Germain: the elegant aristocratic area/culture of Paris

inverti: French morphological term for "inverted"; used to label/signify homosexuals

madeleine: particular French pastry

oubli: French for "oblivion," for all-that-is-not-remembered

reversals: the defining rhythm of Proust's work

Joyce, *Ulysses*

"artful dodger": Dickensian term for ducking the forces of authority, rethought by Joyce as strategy for avoiding painful truths

"Circe": Homer's goddess who transformed men into swine; Joyce's metamorphosis

Daedalus and Icarus: Greek figures of the father and son who flew using wings made with wax; when Icarus, the son, flew too close to the Sun, his wings melted and he fell to his death

"Ithaca": Odysseus's native island, homeland; Joyce's homecoming chapter

Non serviam!: "I will not serve!" Lucifer's famous cry of revolt and emancipation

"Penelope": Odysseus's faithful wife; Joycean final chapter on Bloom's wife

stream of consciousness: writing that taps into the (ungrammatical) flow of thoughts

voyeurism: the libidinal pleasure involved in seeing or spying on others

Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

Donne, John: English metaphysical poet who wrote "No man is an island"

mimetic art: the realist notation of "copying" reality

The Social Contract: Rousseau's 18th-century tract about civic liberty

Stephen, Leslie and Julia: Virginia Woolf's famous parents

Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

Antigone: Sophoclean play about burying the dead, and moral responsibility

baptism: religious rite of naming, reconceived by Faulkner as the crisis of *un-naming*

Jefferson: central town in Faulkner's Mississippi scheme

Lacan, Jacques: French poststructuralist theorist of language sundered from substance

sign-system: view of language (from Ferdinand de Saussure) as sign/referent, reworked by Faulkner

Yoknapatawpha: Indian word used by Faulkner as the name of his fictitious Mississippi county

García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

boom: term used to describe the explosion of Latin American fiction in the 1960s

Macondo: the name given by García Márquez to his imaginary Colombian community

Magic Realism: term used to designate a modern movement in Latin American fiction

Script: the mysterious written record that contains the entire Buendía history

Biographical Notes

Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850). Balzac's masterpiece, *La Comédie Humaine*, written between 1830 and 1850, includes almost 150 interconnected novels and short stories and constitutes a vast portrait of early-19th-century French society. Balzac's meticulous descriptions and intricately interwoven plots notably classify social types in the same way that 19th-century naturalists classified zoological species. Throughout his career, Balzac worked both days and nights, drinking enormous amounts of strong black coffee to maintain his productivity. Despite his genius as a novelist, Balzac led a turbulent personal life, unsuccessfully seeking acceptance from the nobility, taking mistress after mistress, and accumulating staggering debts to finance his flamboyant wardrobe, antique collection, and large printers' bills. Yet the story of his troubled life only renders his enduring and international influence on the novel more remarkable.

Emily Brontë (1818–1848). Of the three Brontë sisters who wrote novels, the least is known about Emily. She lived most of her life at the family house in Haworth, and of all the Brontë sisters, Emily spent the most time there. She undertook various brief stints at boarding school, both as a student and teacher, and spent several months in Brussels in 1842 with her sister Charlotte, learning French and German while teaching young pupils. As children, Emily and her sister Anne wrote an ongoing saga about an imaginary land called Gondal; Emily also wrote some excellent poetry. *Wuthering Heights* was not well received upon first publication, which may have discouraged Emily from writing and publishing a second novel. After caring for her brother, Branwell, during his fatal illness, Emily herself fell ill yet refused medical treatment and continued her daily household tasks until the day of her death.

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924). Conrad was born in Russian-occupied Poland to an aristocratic family that was forced into exile to avoid retaliation for its involvement in nationalist uprisings. His parents died when he was young and he was placed in an uncle's care. Conrad joined the French Merchant Marine in 1874–1875 and traveled to Martinique and the West Indies. With the British Merchant Marine from 1878–1894, he sailed to Africa, Australia, India, and Indonesia. He became a naturalized British citizen and rose to the rank of captain in 1886. His experiences as captain of a Congo River steamboat for a Belgian company in 1890 loosely contributed to the plot details of *Heart of Darkness*. He eventually settled in England, married, and devoted himself full-time to writing. Between 1894 and 1924, he produced more than a dozen novels and almost 30 short stories, as well as novellas, essays, memoirs, and plays.

Daniel Defoe (1660?–1731). Although Defoe is best known today for his perennially popular novels, including *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), *Moll Flanders* (1721), *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), and *Roxanna* (1724), he was famous in his lifetime as an outspoken journalist, whose religious and political writings led him at times to be convicted for libel and treason and subjected to fines, imprisonments, and one instance of pillorying. In addition to his work as a journalist and novelist, Defoe, who was born into the merchant class, worked at various times as a stockings vendor, merchant, investor, importer, propagandist, pollster, and spy for England and Scotland. His fortunes rose and fell; he experienced lawsuits, terms in prison, and bankruptcies; participated in a failed rebellion against King James II in 1685; and later served the court of William III.

Charles Dickens (1812–1870). Dickens was sent to work in a blacking (shoe polish) factory in London when he was 12, after his father was imprisoned for debt. This experience fueled his ambition as a writer and led him to criticize debtor's prisons and the British legal system. After secondary school, Dickens educated himself by reading history and literature in the British Museum Library while working as a law clerk, court reporter, and journalist; this introduction to law, politics, journalism, and theater provided the background for many of his novels. In addition to novel writing, Dickens served briefly as editor of the *London Daily News* and founded and edited the reviews *Household Words* (1883–1885) and *All the Year Round* (1859–1870). At once critical and emblematic of Victorian society, his novels, especially *Oliver Twist* (1839), *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *David Copperfield* (1849–1850), *Bleak House* (1852–1853), *Hard Times* (1854), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and *Great Expectations* (1861), continue to enjoy large readerships today.

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881). Dostoevsky grew up in a middle-class family in Moscow and graduated from engineering school but began a career in writing with a translation of Balzac's *Eugenie Grandet* in 1844. He became a member of the Petraschevsky Circle, a radical group of socialist thinkers who were arrested in 1849. They faced a death squad, but just as they were to be killed, orders from the czar arrived, commuting their death sentences to labor in Siberia. Dostoevsky's time as a political prisoner in the labor camp in Tobolsk, Russia (1850–1854), and his subsequent service in a Siberian army outpost for five years haunted the rest of his life and writing. Upon his return

to St. Petersburg, he suffered professional and personal losses: His journals were shut down by the authorities, his wife and brother died, and he lost much of his fortune to a gambling addiction. Despite these troubles, he wrote steadily, producing such well-known works as *Notes from Underground* (1864), *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1869), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

William Faulkner (1897–1962). The foremost writer of the American South, Faulkner established his reputation among critics with *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930). Yet he did not capture the American public's attention until the publication of the novel *Sanctuary* (1931), a sensational thriller that he wrote with the sole intention of making money. He wrote remarkable, complex novels, including *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Wild Palms*, *The Hamlet*, and *Go Down, Moses* in the 1930s and 1940s but made little money from them and lived instead on his work as a screenwriter in Hollywood. He continued, however, to be critically applauded in the United States and, especially, in France. The 1946 publication of *The Portable Faulkner* created a renewed interest in his work. In 1949, his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature won him international admiration for his humanism.

Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880). Although *Madame Bovary* portrays French provincial life with painstaking realism and Flaubert admitted that he shared much of Madame Bovary's temperament, famously declaring, "Madame Bovary, *c'est moi*" ("Madame Bovary is me"), he rejected the identification of his novel with the term *Realism*. The novel caused a sensation in 1857 and Flaubert was put on trial for offending public morality; he was acquitted, but the scandal put him in the public eye. His subsequent works, including *Salammbo* (1863), *Sentimental Education* (1870), *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1874), and *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881), received critical acclaim. Flaubert shared friendships with other important literary figures, including George Sand, Ivan Turgenev, Henry James, and Guy de Maupassant, and his voluminous correspondence with Louise Colet and others embodies a valuable range of his observations on aesthetics.

Gabriel García Márquez (b. 1928). Born in Aracataca, Colombia, García Márquez began his writing career as a journalist, and acknowledges that his fiction and journalistic writing reciprocally influence each other. When *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) first appeared, the demand for the novel was so high that it constantly required new printings. As one of the novels of the "boom" that brought Latin American literature to international attention, it won García Márquez the 1982 Nobel Prize in Literature. His magisterial intergenerational portrait of Macondo often garners comparisons to Faulkner's depiction of Yoknapatawpha County. Every subsequent novel by García Márquez has been immediately published in substantial editions and translated into several languages. He currently lives in Mexico City.

James Joyce (1882–1941). Joyce received a Jesuit education at Clongowes Wood College outside Dublin (which is featured in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) and attended University College, Dublin. As evidenced by his ever-popular short-story collection, *Dubliners* (1914), and first novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Joyce harbored ambivalence toward the Irish nation: Although interested in the Irish nationalist movement, he condemned the Irish for developing what, in his view, was a narrow provincialism. To "fly by those nets," Joyce lived most of his adult life abroad, first in Trieste, Italy, where he composed much of *A Portrait*, then in Zurich, where he wrote most of *Ulysses*, and eventually in Paris. With *Ulysses* (1922), Joyce pioneered the stream-of-consciousness technique. Although it was hailed as a masterpiece, its humorous and unabashed portraits of sexuality led to censorship in many countries. Joyce's last work of fiction, *Finnegan's Wake* (1939), is considered one of the most difficult texts in English literature.

Franz Kafka (1883–1924). Born into a middle-class Jewish family in Prague, Kafka endured a lifelong conflicted relationship with his father, an uneducated, domineering owner of a dry-goods store. At university, Kafka studied law and became friends with the writer-to-be Max Brod, with whom he explored Prague's intellectual and artistic scene. After his studies, Kafka worked in an insurance agency and managed his father's factory part-time. The monotony of his bureaucratic profession, his father's mismanagement of the factory, and the interference of these responsibilities with his writing exacerbated his anxiety and his health problems. Kafka spent months at a time in sanatoriums, regaining his health and returning to Prague only to fall ill once again. He also experienced several personal disappointments: Although he proposed to several women, none of his proposals culminated in marriage. Kafka stipulated in his will that his manuscripts should be destroyed, but Brod ignored the will and brought Kafka's unpublished stories and unfinished novels to light.

Pierre Ambroise François Choderlos de Laclos (1741–1803). Laclos attended the Royal Artillery School in La Fère and served as an officer in the army for much of his life, specializing in fortification projects. A posting in Grenoble allowed him to interact with aristocratic society and provided background for his only novel, *Les Liaisons*

dangereuses (1782). Notoriously successful as a critique of the *ancien régime* and in its interweaving of multiple perspectives, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is considered the pinnacle of the 18th-century epistolary novel tradition. Laclos also wrote poetry, literary reviews, and essays on literature, politics, military science, and women's education, the last of which were published posthumously in the collection *De l'Éducation de femmes* (1903). During the French Revolution, Laclos served as the secretary of the Duc d'Orléans and was a Jacobin club member. Imprisoned twice during the Terror, he escaped the guillotine and went on to serve in Napoleon's army until his death.

Thomas Mann (1875–1955). Influenced by artists and philosophers, including Wagner, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, while remaining skeptical of all of them, Mann is known for his distant, ironic narrative style and philosophical investigations into Western aesthetics and history. His first novel, *Buddenbrooks* (1901), a realist portrait of his merchant ancestors, garnered critical acclaim. The novella *Death in Venice* (1912) was variously received, and Mann's reputation languished until the publication of *The Magic Mountain* (1924), which was placed on a par with Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* and won him the 1929 Nobel Prize in Literature. Although Mann was able to publish during the first few years of Nazi power, his German citizenship was revoked in 1936 when he published invectives against Nazism, after which he inadvertently became a symbolic leader of German progressives and exiles. He lived in the United States for several years and spent his last years in Switzerland.

Herman Melville (1819–1891). Eclectically educated and an avid reader, Melville taught secondary school briefly before undertaking his first whaling voyage in 1841. Sailing with the merchant service, whaling ships, and the U.S. Navy, he became one of the most traveled 19th-century American men of letters. The early novels *Typee* and *Omoo* draw from his experiences in Tahiti and other South Sea islands; other voyages took him to Hawaii and South and Central America. He wrote fiction prolifically for 11 years; in addition to *Moby-Dick* (1851), his works include the novels *Mardi* (1849), *Redburn* (1849), *White-Jacket* (1851), and *Pierre* (1852) and such shorter works as "Bartleby, the Scrivener," *Benito Cereno*, and the essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses" (1850), a manifesto of American literature. After this intense period, Melville traveled again, became a customs inspector in New York, and wrote poetry, not returning full-time to fiction until the writing of *Billy Budd* in the late 1880s.

Marcel Proust (1871–1922). Proust's happiest days were his childhood vacations at the family's country home in Illiers, which he depicts as Combray in *Swann's Way*. Yet most of the time, this son of a successful doctor and an overprotective mother suffered from serious ailments, especially asthma. Despite his illnesses, Proust managed to frequent Parisian society regularly, attending salons, concerts, dinners, and parties that would be novelized in *Remembrance of Things Past*. After studies at the Sorbonne in both law and literature, he began his literary career by publishing essays and stories in literary reviews, collected with additional stories in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (1896). He attempted an autobiographical novel, *Jean Santeuil*, which was later reworked in his *chef d'œuvre*. *Remembrance of Things Past* took more than 15 years to write, and although he did not live to see it published in its entirety, in 1919, Proust won the prestigious Prix Goncourt for *Within a Budding Grove*.

Laurence Sterne (1713–1768). Born in Ireland, Sterne spent his early childhood traveling between Ireland and England until his family settled in North Yorkshire when he was 10. After attending Cambridge, he spent most of his adult life as clergyman in a rural village north of York. In 1759, he anonymously published *A Political Romance*, which masterfully satirized the pettiness of church officials in York. Sterne's most important works, *Tristram Shandy* (1760–1767) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), were written at the end of his life. The former draws extensively on his experiences in rural York, as well as such literary influences as Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift, Montaigne, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. His voyages to France and Italy (intended to help him recover from tubercular episodes) inspired *A Sentimental Journey*.

Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910). Tolstoy lived almost all his life on his family's estate, Yasnaya Polyana. Widely read and educated at the universities in Kazan and St. Petersburg, he spent his youth in leisurely pursuits with other aristocrats in Tula, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. The experience of fighting with the Russian army in the Crimean War led to his first novel, *The Cossacks* (1863). After his marriage in 1862, Tolstoy entered a period of intense creativity that produced *War and Peace* (1863–1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1875–1877). In the late 1860s, the deaths of several family members and his own near-death experience precipitated a spiritual crisis that prompted him to practice a rigorous, self-styled form of Christianity. He abandoned Russian Orthodoxy; rejected violence and institutional authorities, including the state, the church, the military, and private property; and embraced pacifism, simplicity, inner conscience, and the personal relationship with God. Writing prolifically on his spiritual views, he attracted several followers; his post-conversion fiction, such as the novellas *Ivan Ilyich* (1886) and *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1890), reflects his concern with living a morally correct life.

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941). Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, a noted scholar and biographer, encouraged her to read widely from a young age. Her childhood was tragically punctuated by instances of insanity in her family and sexual abuse by her older half-brother. Woolf herself did not escape mental illness: Her mother's death sparked a mental breakdown, and after her father's death, she attempted suicide. After her parents' deaths, she and her siblings moved to a house in the London neighborhood Bloomsbury. There, they formed the Bloomsbury Group, a regular gathering of intellectuals, at which she met her husband, Leonard Woolf, a critic and economist. Together, they founded Hogarth Press and published some of the most important avant-garde writers of the day. Writing alternately assuaged and provoked Woolf's depressive episodes, and she ultimately committed suicide. In addition to her novels, for more than 30 years she wrote reviews and essays for the *London Times Literary Supplement*. Woolf is also remembered for her vigorously feminist essays, including *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938).

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Note: The entries in this bibliography are grouped according to the authors covered in the lectures.

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Winnifrith, Thomas John, ed. *Critical Essays on Emily Brontë*. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1997. Classic essays covering Emily's biography and poetry, and criticism of *Wuthering Heights* from its publication in 1847 until 1995.

Melville, *Moby-Dick*

Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick*. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, eds. New York: Norton, 2002. Includes an editor's introduction, significant maps and visual materials, responses to the novel from contemporaries and other novelists, a substantial selection of the best 20th-century criticism, a chronology, and a selected bibliography.

Higgins, Brian, and Hershel Parker. *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*. New York: G.K. Hall; Toronto, New York: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992. A voluminous compilation of contemporary reviews, articles, and essays dating from the novel's publication to the present, with special sections on literary influences and affinities, the whale, Ahab and Ishmael, and the writing of the novel.

Markels, Julian. *Melville and the Politics of Identity: From King Lear to Moby-Dick*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993. A compelling reading of the novel as staging an ideological battle central to American cultural politics; draws on the philosophies of Locke and Hobbes.

Peretz, Eyal. *Literature, Disaster and the Enigma of Power: A Reading of 'Moby-Dick.'* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. A powerful, compelling reading of the novel as a paradoxical attempt to testify, through language, to unspeakable events of literature and history.

Sten, Christopher. *Sounding the Whale: Moby-Dick as Epic Novel*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996. Contends that *Moby-Dick* brings together the two epic traditions: the ancient, nation-building epic of battle and the more modern, universally oriented epic of the spiritual journey.

Thomson, Shawn. *The Romantic Architecture of Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*. Madison, NJ; London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 2001. Explores the Romantic aesthetic of the novel, reading it as the confrontation of two Romantic tendencies: Ahab's "passionate idealism" and Ishmael's "grounded intellect and Romantic spirit."

Dickens, *Bleak House*

Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. Nicola Bradbury, ed. London: Penguin, 1971. This paperback edition includes an introduction by the editor, original illustrations by Hablot K. Browne, a chronology, bibliography, notes, and appendices on Chancery, spontaneous combustion, and Dickens's number plans for the novel.

Allan, Janice M. *Charles Dickens's Bleak House: A Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 2004. Includes sections on context, interpretations, a selection of key passages, and a bibliography of further reading. Written/compiled for the

undergraduate writing a research paper on the novel but clear, informative, and useful for anyone interested in the novel and its historical and literary contexts.

Bigelow, Gordon. "Market Indicators: Banking and Housekeeping in *Bleak House*." In *Fiction, Famine and the Rise of Economics in Victorian Britain and Ireland*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. An intelligent analysis of Dickens's representation of the Chancery court as a legal system that exists simply to perpetuate itself, at the expense of the characters' well-being.

Weinstein, Arnold. *A Scream Goes Through the House: What Literature Teaches Us About Life*. New York: Random House, 2003. This book about the representation of feeling and pain in literature contains an essay on *Bleak House* that grafts Dickens's book into a discourse about plague, infection, and human connection reaching back to Sophocles and continuing to Tony Kushner. Expresses many of the ideas central to the two lectures in this course.

Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

Flaubert, Gustave, Margaret Cohen, and Paul De Man. *Madame Bovary: Contexts, Critical Reception*. 2nd ed. Margaret Cohen, ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004. A truly impressive edition, featuring a revised translation, a generous sampling of earlier versions of key passages, Flaubert's letters on *Madame Bovary*, the trial against Flaubert, and a judicious selection of groundbreaking critical essays. An introduction, chronology, and selected bibliography are also included.

Vargas Llosa, Mario. *The Perpetual Orgy: Flaubert and Madame Bovary*. Helene Lane, trans. New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1986. A pleasurable account of another novelist admiring and learning from his reading of this novel; analytically precise and presented with humor and imagination.

Tolstoy, *War and Peace*

Tolstoy, Leo. *War and Peace*. Anthony Briggs, trans. New York: Penguin, 2006.

———. *War and Peace*. Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. Louis Shanks Maude and Aylmer Maude, trans. George Gibian, ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996. Supplementary materials include relevant historical maps, a summary of the publication history of the novel, several of Tolstoy's diary entries and letters pertaining to the novel, drafts of the introduction, and a comprehensive selection of criticism. A chronology and selected bibliography are also included.

Berlin, Isaiah. "The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History." Chicago: *The Elephant*, Ivan R. Dee, 1953, 1978. This provocative and oft-cited essay argues that if there are two kinds of thinkers, those who believe in a unifying central vision of the world (hedgehogs) and those who see the world as having many different ends without any definitive unity (foxes), then Tolstoy is caught in between: He sees the world like a fox but wants to believe in the organizing principle of a hedgehog.

Morson, Gary Saul. *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in War and Peace.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987. An excellent study that examines Tolstoy's critiques of and innovations in language, history, and psychology through this novel.

Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, trans. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

Blackmur, R. P. *Eleven Essays in the European Novel*. New York: Harcourt, 1964. This early collection of essays by a distinguished poet/critic has some of the most illuminating pages on *The Brothers Karamazov* ever written. Blackmur is especially alert to the deeper rhythms and philosophical significance of the text, while also paying special attention to its figures and metaphors.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Constance Garnett, trans. Ralph E. Matlaw, ed. New York: Norton, 1976. Includes a broad range of critical essays and a selected bibliography.

Holquist, Michael. *Dostoevsky and the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. Contends that Dostoevsky emerges at a crossroads at which Russian literature's predominant concern with defining Russian nationalism and Russian national history gives way to a preoccupation with more modern and universal issues.

Jackson, Robert Louis. *The Art of Dostoyevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. An insightful study that covers all the short fiction and novels, with special attention to character development, Russian literary and historical context, and Dostoevsky's preoccupation with ethical and metaphysical dilemmas.

Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. New York: Penguin, 1999.

———, and Robert Kimbrough. *Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*. 3rd ed. New York: Norton, 1988. This comprehensive volume includes a historical map, primary and secondary historical sources on the Congo, excerpts from Conrad's Congo diary and relevant correspondence, contemporary authors' accounts of Conrad's writing process, passages from Conrad's writings on life and art, a generous selection of critical essays, and a guide to bibliography.

De Lange, Attie, Gail Fincham, and Wieslaw Krajka. *Conrad in Africa: New Essays on "Heart of Darkness."* Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs; Lublin, New York: Maria Curie-Sklodowska University, distributed by Columbia University Press, 2002. A newer collection of critical texts, international in scope, that emphasizes postcolonial and intertextual readings of Conrad.

Mann, *Death in Venice*

Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice*. New York: Vintage, 1954.

———. *Death in Venice*. Clayton Koelb, trans. and ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1994. Supplementary materials include relevant historical maps, Mann's working notes and relevant excerpts from letters and essays, a sampling of criticism available in English, a chronology of Mann's life, and a selected bibliography.

Kafka, "The Metamorphosis" and *The Trial*

Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*. Norton Critical Edition. Stanley Corngold, trans. and ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996. Supplementary materials include Kafka's manuscript revisions, relevant excerpts from Kafka's letters and diaries, a good selection of critical essays, a chronology, and selected bibliography.

———. *The Trial*. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir, trans. New York: Schocken, 1984.

Corngold, Stanley. "The Structure of Kafka's *Metamorphosis.*" In *The Commentators' Despair: The Interpretation of Kafka's Metamorphosis*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1973, pp. 1–38. A seminal essay that reviews the major criticism of the text and argues that its innovation lies in the transformation of the metaphor into the fact of fiction, the counter-metamorphosis of the metaphor.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*. Dana Polan, trans. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. Fascinating account of Kafka's work that refuses all discussion of transcendence and metaphor and insists on examining the actual topography of the writing itself in order to achieve an immanent reading of Kafka.

Spilka, Mark. *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963. Early but provocative effort to link Kafka's bureaucratic, nightmarish labyrinths to the penal world of the late Dickens, especially as seen in *Bleak House*.

Weinstein, Philip. *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. This brilliant account of modernism situates the breakthrough work of three key authors—Kafka, Proust, and Faulkner—against the backdrop of Enlightenment premises in order to argue that the new prose of these three 20th-century figures annihilates our assumptions of mastery, or our view of literature-as-knowledge.

Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*

Proust, Marcel. *Remembrance of Things Past*. C. K. Scott-Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, trans. New York: Random House, 1981.

Beckett, Samuel. *Proust*. New York: Grove Press, 1957. A beautifully written and insightful essay from a not-yet-famous Beckett (he was only 25 years old at the time of writing), demonstrating how involuntary memory in Proust shocks individuals out of the complacent structures of time (ultimately, mortality) and habit in which everyday experiences are otherwise mired.

Bersani, Leo. *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and Art*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965. An elegantly written analysis that shows how the narrator's failed attempts to novelize life have allowed him to develop an aesthetic of novelistic reminiscence. Careful and precise attention is given to the motif of homosexuality in the novel.

De Botton, Alain. *How Proust Can Change Your Life*. New York: Vintage, 1998. An original approach to Proust's novel and a delightful read; de Botton explores how Proust's wisdom can be applied to daily life and argues that the novel audaciously demonstrates that suffering can make one's life a richer experience.

Shattuck, Roger. *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time.* New York: Norton, 2000. Incorporating insights from Shattuck's earlier *Marcel Proust* (1974) and *Proust's Binoculars* (1963), this book navigates various editions and translations, foregrounds Proust's innovative approach to visuality and optics in the novel, and offers a unified vision of this sprawling novel.

Weinstein, Arnold. *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*. New York: Random House, 2006. Articulating more fully and more concretely the issues developed in these lectures on Proust, this study focuses on the discovery of a universe of interiority in Proust, outfitted with a logic and a language at odds with traditional narrative discourse.

Weinstein, Philip. *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. This brilliant account of modernism situates the breakthrough work of three key authors—Kafka, Proust, and Faulkner—against the backdrop of Enlightenment premises in order to argue that the new prose of these three 20th-century figures annihilates our assumptions of mastery, or our view of literature-as-knowledge.

Joyce, *Ulysses*

Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York: Random House (Vintage), 1986.

Blamires, Harry. *The New Bloomsday Book: A Guide Through Ulysses*. Revised edition keyed to the corrected text. New York and London: Routledge, 1988. A useful reading companion. Provides an exhaustive chapter-by-chapter account of the novel, covering plot summary; thematic highlights; explanations of colloquialisms; correspondences with Homer's *Odyssey*; and cultural, religious, historical, and literary allusions.

Budgen, Frank. *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960. In this volume, Budgen recalls his daily conversations with Joyce in Zurich in 1918–1919, delivering, all at once, a memoir of their friendship, a bystander's account of the novel's development, and a perspicacious reading of *Ulysses* in its own right. Includes essays on *Finnegan's Wake* and Budgen's obituary on Joyce.

Hart, Clive, and David Hayman, eds. *James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974. A collection of classic essays with contributions from many important Joycean scholars.

Weinstein, Arnold. *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*. New York: Random House, 2006. Tackling the critique of Joyce as esoteric and unreadable, this study emphasizes the humor and everyday wisdom of *Ulysses*, while attending as well to the trailblazing innovations in narrative history that this novel inaugurates.

Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

Woolf, Viriginia. *To the Lighthouse*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich (Harvest), orig. copyright 1927.

Bowlby, Rachel. *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*. New York: Blackwell, 1988. A magisterial career-length study that defines Woolf's commitments to feminism and modernism.

Lee, Hermione. *Virginia Woolf*. New York: Vintage, 1999. This biography offers a complex and comprehensive portrait of Woolf as a literary genius and profoundly human being. Drawing extensively on correspondence and journals, it is notable for describing how Woolf's experiences of the advent of modernity in her lifetime affected her work and how Woolf was able to overcome personal suffering to generate her greatest artistic achievements.

Snaith, Anna. *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*. Basingstoke, England: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's, 2000. Explores the convergences and divergences of public and private in both Woolf's life and her writing, and discusses Woolf's feminism, her narrative techniques, her view of the evolving history of gender roles, and her attitudes toward publication and participation in public debate. Introduces previously unexamined manuscript material, and letters written to Woolf by her readers.

Weinstein, Arnold. *Recovering Your Story: Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Morrison*. New York: Random House, 2006. This discussion of Woolf's novel is paired with an account of *Mrs. Dalloway*, with an emphasis on the creation of a language of interiority that stakes out new ground in modern fiction.

Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

Faulkner, William. *As I Lay Dying*. New York: Random House (Vintage International), 1991.

Bleikasten, André. *Faulkner's As I Lay Dying*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973. This book-length study of Faulkner's novel remains the fullest and most readable critical account of the text, encompassing a wide spectrum of philosophical and writerly issues and particularly attuned to Faulkner's stylistic virtuosity.

Wagner-Martin, Linda, ed. *William Faulkner: Four Decades of Criticism*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1973. This early collection of essays includes the classic studies of Faulkner's work, when his reputation as an American novelist was at its peak. Later Faulkner criticism is more attuned to issues of ideology, but this volume is a useful starting point for sizing up the Mississippian's achievement.

Weinstein, Arnold. "Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*: The Voice from the Coffin." In *Nobody's Home: Speech, Self and Place in American Fiction from Hawthorne to DeLillo*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Offers a more extended and close-grained reading of Faulkner's novel, developing the central issues and motifs that are sounded in the two lectures of this course. Reads Faulkner in terms of a long American discourse about self-making and self-extinction.

Weinstein, Philip. *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Although it does not deal directly with *As I Lay Dying*, Weinstein's study of Faulkner remains one of the most lucid and persuasive efforts to situate Faulknerian writing within the context of poststructuralist theory. The treatment of race, gender, and consciousness is superb.

García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

García Márquez, Gabriel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006.

Bell, Michael. "The Cervantean Turn: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*." In *Gabriel García Márquez: Solitude and Solidarity*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. Offers a beautiful reading of the Macondo characters as sleepwalkers, unaware that their strange behavior attests to their repressed fears of confronting reality. Addresses the influence of surrealism; the inadequacy of the term *Magical Realism*; the value of the local, developing nation's perspective within the globalizing present; the similarities between Cervantes and García Márquez; and, as indicated by the title of the book, the interplay of solitude and solidarity in the text.

Posada-Carbó, Eduardo. "Fiction as History: The Bananeras and Gabriel García Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude.*" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30.2 (May 1998): 395–414. Examines the critical reception of García Márquez's account of the banana workers' strike as history against more accurate historical accounts and explores the effects of the acceptance of García Márquez's fictional account as history.

Wood, Michael. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. A thoroughly readable companion to the novel, covering historical context, literary affinities, and the major themes and stylistic innovations in the text.