

20th-Century American Fiction

Part I

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

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20th-Century American Fiction

Scope:

The aim of this course is to analyze and appreciate some of the major works of fiction produced in this country over the past century, using as a focal point the idea of “freedom of speech.” The focus on freedom of speech is appropriate for a number of reasons: (1) these texts often invoke the fundamental political freedoms guaranteed by the American Constitution, and many of them take the liberty of articulating the painful ideological conflicts that have punctuated our modern history: war, racism, poverty, drugs, sexism and the like; (2) “freedom of speech” also spells out the key thesis to be presented in these readings: language itself turns out to be not only “free,” but a precious means of becoming free, of experiencing life beyond the constraints of the ordinary workaday world; (3) the overriding theme in American literature, as in American life, is that of freedom itself, whether expressed in a laissez-faire economy, in “upward mobility,” or simply in our belief that we can make ourselves and our lives into something beyond the origins and influences of our births (a theme formerly known as the American dream). No other society has ever professed such beliefs, and it is not surprising that our literature has much to tell us about the viability of these notions.

Why would literature be a privileged record for this special American story about freedom? The answer: American fiction is something of a battleground in the “war of independence” that human beings—white or black or red or yellow, male or female—wage every day of their lives. Our war consists of achieving a self, making or maintaining an identity, making our particular mark in the world we inhabit. This is a battle because the twentieth-century American scene is not particularly hospitable to self-making: great forces coerce our lives, forces that are at once economic, biological, political, racial, and ideological. We are dogged by not only death and taxes but by the influence of family, of business, of society, of all those potent vectors that constitute the real map and landscape of our lives. This vexed and conflicted terrain does not resemble the smooth résumés that are our shorthand for what we have done, but it does correspond to our experiential awareness of what we go through, how we have changed from childhood to adulthood, what our work and friendships and marriages have been and what they have meant to us. Literature enables us to recover this territory, our territory. The texts presented in this course constitute an enlarged repertory of human resources, of the battle for freedom.

We begin by looking at the great texts and movements of the nineteenth century, especially our belief in heroic selfhood, and we begin to see and chart the kinds of forces that make up the moving stage we occupy. Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* is among the most poignant descriptions of life at the beginning of the century, but the charm of this small-town narrative acquires a deeper hue when we see the amount of repression and inner violence that Anderson chronicles. Hemingway’s *In Our Time* and Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* are both, in their own ways, about American loss of innocence, about how the Great War and the brutality of modern life permanently altered our belief systems. This theme is presented as physical trauma in Hemingway, as madness and decay in Fitzgerald. Faulkner’s *Light in August* depicts the ravages of racism in the American South, but it seeks, magnificently, to pair its overt story of carnage and neurosis with another, more elusive fable of love, kinship, and redemption. We turn to Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* for the first—and perhaps the best—account of growing up black and female in America, a story that is expressed in a kind of language and diction that moves breathlessly from the vernacular to the legendary. Flannery O’Connor’s stories bring a different agenda to our course: the challenge of perceiving the contours of God, spirit, and grace in a seemingly materialist Southern landscape peopled with the lowest profile folks in American literature. Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*, once censored and then seen as merely a raunchy drug epic, will be studied as a dazzling and disturbing account of the body in culture, a body that is horribly open and defenseless against the takeovers that beset it. War returns to our course in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, at once poignant and wacky, speaking to us of mass destruction and of extraterrestrials in the same voice, a voice that is hard to forget. The course will close with a series of lectures on three of the most significant contemporary writers, writers whose works may not yet be familiar to you. In his sprawling and audacious *Public Burning*, Robert Coover uses that most popular American code, entertainment, to present a manic account of the Rosenberg execution and the antics of one Richard Nixon. Toni Morrison’s fascinating *Sula* is an experimental novel in which Morrison fashions a group of characters whose lives and values make rubble out of the conventions of humanistic culture, whether black or white. Finally, Don DeLillo’s appealing, absurdist comedy of modern life, *White Noise*, depicts our encounter with the technological madhouse in which we live but which we have not quite gotten around to seeing.

These American fictions, seen together, tell a composite story about coping, about fashioning both a story and a life. The range of experiences and subcultures to be found here will dwarf the experience of any single reader, and that is how it should be. Much is dark in these stories, but the honesty and integrity of these writers adds pith and richness to our own lives and makes us realize that reading is as much a lifeline as it is entertainment or education.

Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Analyze and discuss representative works of eleven major American novelists and short-story writers—Anderson, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hurston, O'Connor, Burroughs, Vonnegut, Coover, Morrison, and DeLillo—identifying what is most distinctive and significant about each one of them.
2. Discuss how the American belief in freedom of the individual underwrites our literature, as well as our political and economic systems, and trace that theme by using specific examples from major works of the nineteenth century and showing the influence of these examples across the spectrum of the works under study.
3. Explain the concept of freedom of speech as a political foundation of our nation; as a means by which literature embodies, explores, and actualizes life; and as a resource used by all humans to transcend determinism.
4. Discuss and provide examples of American fiction's forceful dramatization over the past century of the conflict between the human subject and the great social forces—war, economics, racism, sexism, etc.—that coerce and sometimes destroy selfhood and even human life.
5. Compare and contrast, with examples, the literary achievements of our great trio of American modernists: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, in relation both to the historic “moment” of modernism (Lost Generation, Great War, etc.) and the narrative innovations of these writers (renderings of violence, stream of consciousness, etc.).
6. Identify the range of positions and subjectivities (e.g., white, black, male, female, etc.) encountered in the works under study, and evaluate the importance to our national consciousness of this stereophonic literature, which brings in voices from the center and the margins.
7. Compare and contrast new talents writing in the late twentieth century—especially Coover, Morrison, and DeLillo—with established writers, identifying specifically where the later writers are experimental and where they share common ground with the well-known figures of the early- and mid-twentieth century

Lecture One American Fiction and the Individualist Creed

Scope: This lecture traces our belief in freedom and individualism to the notion of an “atomic self” expounded by nineteenth-century figures like Emerson and Whitman, and it suggests that we can also find this notion in twentieth-century writers. We are asked to imagine how this belief in an atomic self strongly shapes our attitudes toward society and to recognize that American fiction makes visible to us these central questions about our national life.

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

1. Give examples of how several nineteenth-century writers utilized the notion of the atomic self.
2. Contrast nineteenth-century American novels about the supreme individual with European novels of the same period.
3. Sketch the essential elements of the “American dream.”
4. Describe the importance of innocence as a trope in American fiction.
5. Explain the distinctions between romance and novel genres.
6. Discuss why freedom of speech is central to American thinking and to American fiction.

Outline

- I. A product of American emphasis on limitless freedom, infinite possibilities, and individual uniqueness, the atomic self is an absolutely free, unencumbered figure who refuses to subordinate the self to a larger whole.
 - A. Several giants of nineteenth-century literature exemplify this empowered individualism.
 1. Walt Whitman expresses the flow of power and energy through the self with his insistent questions: what am I? what are you? what is a man anyhow?
 - a. The measure of the world is no longer the gods, the past, or the great figures of legend, but the individual.
 - b. In Whitman’s words, “I contain multitudes.”
 2. Herman Melville’s Captain Ahab typifies the empowered self, wildly pursuing a white whale with the titanic individualism that is at the root of much of our ideology.
 3. Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1835) is the earliest, most salient statement about the atomic self.
 - a. Democracy has no interest in rank or past but is certain to produce a new literature.
 - b. The focus will turn to man, the individual.
 4. Tocqueville’s influence on the first great American philosophical writer of the nineteenth century, Ralph Waldo Emerson, is clear, particularly in Emerson’s essay “Self-Reliance.”
 - a. Emerson urges readers to be true to themselves and their instincts, not to conform, never to imitate.
 - b. He displays an abiding belief in the godlike nature of the individual soul.
 5. In *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau recounts his quest to “live deliberately” in Nature’s solitude and to “drive life into a corner.”
 6. Mark Twain, too, applauds freedom from constraint and escape from the “civilized world” in the final lines of *Huckleberry Finn*
 - B. These are the projects of American life and American literature.
 1. Self-fulfilling freedom from social constraints, conformity, civilization, and social necessity is at the very pulse of American thinking.
 2. European literature of the nineteenth century, by contrast, is that of social notation, class structure, and hierarchy and the way these arrangements imbue human relations.
 - C. Grand themes of bursting free are carried on in the great classical texts of American modernism.
 1. Hemingway’s Nick Adams and Dick Diver yearn to be “clear.”
 2. Faulkner and Vonnegut seek a reprieve from history:

3. The myth of the liberated individual lives on, although the self *does* belong to a world, a family, a race, and cannot be fully autonomous.
- II. The texts chosen for this course will trace various types and manifestations of freedom in American fiction from the nineteenth century to the present.
 - A. The modernist classics of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner will be discussed in detail.
 - B. Lectures will cover such important but less-acknowledged authors as Sherwood Anderson, Flannery O'Connor, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.
 - C. Attention will also be given to a more recent mix of known and unknown writers: William Burroughs, Zora Neale Hurston, Robert Coover, Toni Morrison, and Don DeLillo.
 - III. Though the view is now discredited, the American novel was for years thought of as a romance and not as a novel on account of differences between the European and American forms.
 - A. The European novel paints a historical moment by depicting all aspects of life controlled by social and hierarchical arrangements.
 - B. The American "romance," on the other hand, tells of moral, spiritual, religious, or metaphysical forces on symbolic quests; the emphasis is on freedom, mobility, and desire.
 - C. We now recognize that even these so-called romances have ideological underpinnings and qualify as a form of history.
 - D. American literature will not accept that life could be fully conditioned by social or deterministic forces.
 1. In Henry James' novels, well-heeled innocents embark for Europe in search of experience.
 2. Fitzgerald chronicles the fall of Dick Diver, a brilliant young American who sets out to be the greatest psychologist the world has ever seen.
 3. Sherwood Anderson's Joe Welling uses speech to score victories against those more powerful than he.
 4. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* recounts the emblematic pilgrimage of Janie Crawford's education and liberation.
 5. Exercising the freedom of their written language, authors can create new and experimental spaces.
 - a. In *Light in August*, Faulkner's own language must craft an exit from misogyny, racism, and death-dealing Calvinism into an alternative world where love could somehow replace hatred.
 - b. Coover reaches for the metaphysical while acknowledging the physical and historical by taking astonishing liberties with the factual record of Nixon and the Rosenbergs.
 6. Morrison's *Sula*, picking up where Janie Crawford left off, pursues freedom and celebrates self at the expense of everything else, inspiring questions about the extent and the itinerary of liberation.
 - E. American life and the American dream are faced with dual forces.
 1. American literature bears witness to our distinctive and indomitable desire for freedom and creates a dazzling world of its own.
 2. Because literature is environmental, however, it will always reveal both the self's "caughtness" in the world and our astonished realization of this fact.

Lecture Two

The American Self: Ghost in Disguise

Scope: A number of nineteenth-century authors—Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, and James—present heroes that are surprisingly empty, spectral, unreal even to themselves. This view of the self as hollow, even fictive and constructed is to be found in many major American novels of the twentieth century. Writing and language play a role in facing this dilemma.

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

1. Compare and contrast the traditions of optimistic individualism and of radical doubt or dispossession in American literature.
2. Give examples from Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, and James of “Nobody,” nineteenth-century alienated man.
3. Explain the idea of the performative nature of the self, a self that has blankness or hollowness at its core, and apply this concept to several twentieth-century works.
4. Describe Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* as the great novel of self-making.

Outline

- I. The flipside of the atomic self, a sense of dispossession leads nineteenth-century authors to the central activity of American literature, creation of self and place.
 - A. Nathaniel Hawthorne was like an outsider, out of touch and alienated.
 1. Hawthorne’s stories are peopled with ghostlike figures and people on the fringe of reality.
 2. “Wakefield” is the story of a man who leaves his wife of ten years, only to spend the next twenty years watching her from a distance.
 - a. Wakefield finds that he cannot reenter the systems of his life; to his wife, he is dead.
 - b. His is a mad effort to find himself by spying on the absence he has created and focusing on the impact of his own departure.
 - B. The narrator of Edgar Allan Poe’s “Man of the Crowd” is convalescing in a London apartment when he notices a strange man in the crowd.
 1. The narrator follows this curious stranger, who seems to have life only in crowds, becoming wan and lifeless when alone.
 2. This man, animated by the energy of the crowd, represents a new urban species, spawned by the anonymity of the modern city.
 3. City life is the enemy of selfhood; increasingly, the self is dependent on the roles we play.
 - C. Bartleby, in Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener,” calls the bluff of “self as cosmos.”
 1. Like the man in the crowd, Bartleby is a distinctly urban phenomenon, a product of urban anonymity and nineteenth-century business practices.
 2. In this capitalist age of mechanization, the individual is measured entirely by his or her functionality and productivity.
 3. Bartleby may, however, be the true self in this new era: personality, character, self, and identity are just constructs, blankness alone is at the heart of things.
 - D. Henry James created many eerie outsiders, like Spencer Brydon in “The Jolly Corner” and John Marcher in “The Beast in the Jungle.”
 1. Spencer Brydon returns to New York and encounters the strange specter we come to recognize as his “other” self, the opposite of his solid, material success story.
 2. John Marcher discovers too late that his friend and confidant, Mae Bartram, was in fact the great event he had always believed was waiting for him.
 3. Both men are haunted by the realities they did not live because they had scripted their lives in other ways.
- II. The “vacuum of self” evident in twentieth-century texts is a common feeling that rises out of the realization that we are constantly posturing and creating a fiction of ourselves.
 - A. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* is the grand text of self-making.

1. In the words of Tom Buchanan, “Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his platonic conception of himself.”
 2. Gatsby is the perfect example of the rags-to-riches self-made man.
 3. Dick Diver, from *Tender is the Night*, is another self-making, world-making Fitzgerald character; ultimately he will be defeated by the nothingness at the core of things.
- B.** Faulkner’s Joe Christmas, the emblematic nobody, is doomed never to know who he really is.
- C.** In *Naked Lunch*, William Burroughs shows the complete lack of autonomy and individuality, the total dependency of human life.
- D.** *The Public Burning* is Robert Coover’s portrait of Richard Nixon as a vacant, restless young man seeking his form and continually reinventing himself.
- E.** In *Libra*, Don DeLillo paints Lee Harvey Oswald as the supreme nobody, a man who thought he could shape history but who himself turned out to have been entirely maneuvered, manipulated, and shaped by others.

Lecture Three What Produces “Nobody”?

Scope: In addition to the existential critique of the self as empty or false, there is an equally powerful social explanation at hand: “Nobody” is produced by the discourses of race, gender, and other powerful forces. Being a self with an agenda was not an option for slaves or other minorities, including women, and selfhood is scarcely compatible with convulsive forces such as war.

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

1. Explain the social dimensions of the Nobody figure in such nineteenth-century works as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, *The Awakening*, and *Sister Carrie*, and differentiate between this socially constructed figure and an existential Nobody.
2. Using examples from modern texts, describe how war contributes to the disintegration of selfhood.
3. Describe the significance of the Javanese tale of the white monkey from the sea; define the term “pseudo-speciation”; and state the relevance of both to American social history.
4. Argue whether the American dream is possible in the twentieth century.

Outline

- I. The concept of Nobody is very important in American life, art, and thought.
 - A. This concept is not just a philosophical, existential issue; Nobody is a product of our political and social arrangements that deny the self.
 1. The Javanese tale of the white monkey from the sea exemplifies pseudo-speciation: failure to recognize the humanity of others on account of their differences from ourselves.
 2. Genocide is conceivable only when a people are seen, not as people, but as an inferior species.
 3. Denying selfhood, racism and slavery epitomize these notions.
 4. Sexism, too, can produce pseudo-speciation; women are seen only as the property of men.
 - B. Nineteenth-century literature is full of social denial of the self.
 1. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* plumbs the horror of the American system of slavery and treatment of blacks as merchandise.
 - a. St. Clare realizes what happens to a human being when he or she is reduced to the status of a thing.
 - b. Simon Legree seeks to break Tom and kill his spirit, the logical extension of denial of self.
 - c. Topsy’s denial of predictable social origin is almost a declaration of independence; she may be Nobody, but she is self-made.
 - d. In Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Paul Dee will harken back to Stowe’s novel when musing on his own reified status and monetary value.
 - e. Twentieth-century writers will continue Topsy’s story in ways that Stowe couldn’t at the time: Zora Neale Hurston’s portrait of Janie Crawford, Celie in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, and Morrison’s *Sula*.
 2. Mark Twain’s radically experimental and underrecognized *Pudd’nhead Wilson* tells the story of two infants, one of whom has a little black blood, who are switched at birth.
 - a. Black-blooded Tom, raised in wealth and privilege, is monstrous.
 - b. Chambers discovers as an adult that he is the true heir, white, rich, and free; but unable to read, write, or take part in white culture, he fits in neither society.
 - c. Twain pits nature versus nurture.
 3. Influenced by the naturalists, Theodore Dreiser portrays Carrie (in *Sister Carrie*) as the quintessential American innocent, full of promise, awaiting the American dream.
 - a. Carrie is thrown in and manages to survive among the crushing social and biological forces of the modern city.
 - b. In this determinist view, people are torn up by the city and the brutal power of business and industry.
 4. War, by prohibiting fulfillment of one’s potential, contributes to the creation of Nobody.

- a. Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, one of the first great American texts about war, shows the Civil War through the eyes of a young man; chaos and anarchy prevail, with no pattern or cogency to be found.
 - b. Hemingway carries on Crane's legacy in his Nick Adams stories and in Frederick Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*.
 - c. Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim is undone in *Slaughterhouse-Five* by the numbing experience of World War II and particularly by the firebombing of Dresden.
5. During this period female protagonists, not just from American literature, are doomed to suffer in a patriarchal culture: Edna Pontellier and her sisters in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina, Effie Briest, Maggie Tulliver.
- II.** Twentieth-century American fiction inherited in all its various stripes this legacy of Nobody.
- A.** Racism and Nobody
 - 1. Examples from early in the century include Joe Christmas from Faulkner's *Light in August* and Flannery O'Connor's "Artificial Nigger."
 - 2. More recent examples include Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas from *Native Son*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Morrison's *Beloved*.
 - B.** War and Nobody
 - 1. Hemingway's Jake Barnes and Harold Krebs no longer fit in America after the war.
 - 2. Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* also depict individuals undone by war.
 - C.** The violence of modern life and Nobody
 - 1. Coover's *Public Burning* shows how individual power is minimized in a world now animated by prodigious forces like nuclear fission.
 - 2. In *Libra*, DeLillo lets us see a man coming undone in front of our very eyes as Lee Harvey Oswald is shot by Jack Ruby.
 - D.** Novels such as these are the cameras that capture for us the image of the self coming apart and becoming Nobody.

Lecture Four
Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*:
Writing as the Talking Cure

Scope: *Winesburg*, once a central text in the canon, is now neglected and said to be dated and artless. But Anderson will be seen as the psychoanalyst of small-town America, and his narrator, George Willard, performs an invaluable purgative role in bringing the repressed villagers to speech. This expression is a therapeutic function as well as a writerly strategy.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lesson you should be able to:

1. Explain why Anderson's work, although out of favor in recent years, was a breakthrough text in 1919.
2. Identify the central tenets of Anderson's critique of American society.
3. Describe the role of the novel's narrator, George Willard, both as a member of the community of Winesburg and as a means by which Anderson is able to "say" the unsaid.
4. Explain the importance of speech, discourse, and epiphany within the text.
5. Define Anderson's theory of the grotesque.
6. Evaluate the strengths and limitations of a novel that substitutes a series of self-enclosed tales for a more traditional plot line.

Outline

- I. *Winesburg, Ohio*, once an essential text, has slipped into oblivion.
 - A. The qualities once admired in *Winesburg* are now more dimly viewed.
 1. What looks at first like a nostalgic portrait of small-town America is actually strikingly modern.
 2. Anderson's once shockingly new style of primitive Freudianism is now seen as clumsy and groping.
 3. His work can be seen as an early warning about industrialization and mechanization in the modern city.
 4. Modern writers have much to learn from Anderson, and he has not received his due.
 - B. *Winesburg* was seen as breakthrough text in 1919.
 1. Anderson shows a keen grasp of the unconscious, emotion, libido, appetite, and instinct.
 2. His exploration of sexuality, repression, and abnormal psychology was courageous at the time.
 3. In Anderson's remarkably free style can be found a physical language, a powerful form of expression.
 - C. Recounting his tumultuous birth as a writer, Anderson claimed to be a prototypical romantic artist who left business and marriage to become a writer.
 1. Despite the melodrama, his break from business and family was apparently not so complete or straightforward.
 2. Though both would later ungratefully renounce him, Hemingway and Faulkner learned their craft from Anderson, one of the most famous mentors in the American literary tradition.
- II. *Winesburg, Ohio* is a modernist text the measure of which has not yet been fully taken.
 - A. The central narrator, George Willard, is a reflection of Anderson himself.
 1. A young newspaper reporter, Willard gathers the stories of townspeople.
 2. The repressed residents of Winesburg open up to Willard, and he provides catharsis, allowing them to disclose painful or moving experiences.
 - B. Secrets of Winesburg
 1. Anderson calls Winesburg's inhabitants *grotesques*, a term he uses to refer to people who have twisted lives and extraordinary backgrounds that have nothing to do with who they now appear to be.
 2. "Hands" is Anderson's breakthrough story.
 - a. Wing Biddlebaum speaks with his hands as an implement of communication and, in turn, his hands tell his story.
 - b. Biddlebaum, as Adolph Myer, was a teacher who loved and caressed the young boys he taught.

- c. Though nothing sexual occurred, Myer was run out of town as a result of one boy's false accounts.
 - 3. Anderson, a contemporary of Gertrude Stein, created a compositional practice that changed the face of American prose, a kind of prose-poetry.
- C. Characters actually "say" very little in *Winesburg*; communication takes place through the stories rather than through the characters' verbal exchanges.
 - 1. In "The Untold Lie," Hal asks the advice of his older friend, Ray.
 - a. Ray knows how he should reply according to the dictates of their social code, but he cannot answer readily.
 - b. Later, after they have parted, Ray realizes that the honorable thing may not be the best idea for Hal, that he himself has been trapped by the circumstances of his life.
 - c. Ray rushes back to Hal, who automatically assumes Ray has come to give him the expected response and declares that he has already made up his mind to do the right thing.
 - d. This story reveals the gap between what is said and what is thought.
 - e. Anderson has confidence in literature's ability to bring to light and articulate the secrets people keep.
 - 2. In "Godliness," words of love whispered to a sleeping boy by his aunt blur the lines between dream and reality, imagination and fact; communication takes place almost in spite of itself.
 - 3. Elizabeth Willard, George's mother, is the archetypal repressed figure in *Winesburg*.
 - a. She encourages George to avoid glibness and to look beyond what people say to what they think.
 - b. Elizabeth herself desires both liberation and violent revenge against her husband, whom she holds responsible for her repressed life.
 - 4. We are left to ponder whether a whole life could be played out according to these principles.

Lecture Five

Winesburg: A New American Prose-Poetry

Scope: Anderson's sepia-like tales of Winesburg's grotesques have a reach and a philosophic dimension that we have ignored. These stammering tales of confession and expression are semiotic wonders in that we can no longer distinguish easily between background and foreground, between details and essentials.

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

1. Describe some of the characteristics of Anderson's unique prose-poetry and whether you think someone who writes as Anderson does could also be called a realist.
2. Compare and contrast the doctor figures in "The Philosopher" and "Paper Pills."
3. Describe the significance of colors and of organic imagery in these stories.
4. Compare Joe Welling's and Sherwood Anderson's uses of language as tool.
5. Draw conclusions about the function of storytelling in Anderson's work.

Outline

- I. "Paper Pills" may be Anderson's greatest short story.
 - A. This story has an insistent motif of organic imagery.
 1. In Dr. Reefy were "the seeds of something fine."
 2. Reefy's curious courtship with the tall, dark girl was "delicious, like the twisted little apples that grow in the orchards of Winesburg."
 3. Reefy's knuckles resemble the "gnarled apples" rejected by the pickers; evocative of the grotesque character, these gnarled apples do not look like much, but they hold special sweetness for those who know where to find it.
 4. "Paper Pills" is about the Tree of Life and the life's natural cycle: seed, flower, fruit, paper, language, death, and back to seed.
 5. Anderson never draws the connection between his story and the Tree of Life motif.
 - B. "Paper Pills" is also about the cost of sexual knowledge.
 1. The motif of biting into apples is one of the oldest there is, extending back to Genesis and suggesting forbidden knowledge, loss of innocence, and entry into culture.
 2. Anderson never tells why the tall, dark girl dies.
 - C. This remarkably decentered text, built entirely of metaphors, gives a glimpse of the doctor's reach into the affairs of the community.
- II. "The Philosopher" is an even stranger, maddeningly decentered story.
 - A. Anderson first introduces characters who are not really important to the story itself, Will Henderson and Tom Willey.
 - B. He uses the body and images of color as signals beyond the story itself.
 1. Willey has on his hands red birthmarks that become redder and more bloodlike as he rubs them together excitedly.
 2. Dr. Parcival's hated brother came home covered in orange paint, the color of the railroad.
 3. Parcival's mother was a cleaning mother with small, red eyes.
 - C. Strange Dr. Parcival is actually the central character of the story.
 1. The doctor says George will not figure him out and offers a story full of pieces that do not cohere, including strange elements from the doctor's background.
 2. Dr. Parcival's father went mad and died in an asylum.
 3. Dr. Parcival is haunted by the death of a child.
 - D. Though incoherent on its surface, "The Philosopher" is a largescale mosaic of a failed life, the symptoms of which are on the surface for the reader to diagnose.
 1. George provides a purgative process for Dr. Parcival.
 2. This is a story of neurosis and self-hatred.

- III. Joe Welling, in “A Man of Ideas,” is obsessed with words and loves to talk.
- A. Welling works for Standard Oil, delivering energy to the community.
 - B. Speech and thought are the energy of Welling’s life.
 - C. This story constantly links the energy of Joe Welling with that of the natural world; natural resources are of a piece with human ones.

Readings

Essential:

Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio*

Recommended:

Cowley, “Introduction” in *Winesburg*; Trilling, “Sherwood Anderson” in *Liberal Imagination*; Taylor, “Anderson and the Problem of Belonging” in *Sherwood Anderson: Dimensions*; Spencer, “Sherwood Anderson, American Mythopoeist” in *Sherwood Anderson: Critical Essays*; Howe, *Sherwood Anderson*; San Juan, “Vision and Reality” in *“Winesburg”: Text and Criticism*; Kazin, “The New Realism” in *On Native Grounds*; Weinstein, *Nobody’s Home*

Topics for Further Investigation:

Give some thought to the parallels that exist between the role of George Willard, roving reporter who collects the “stories” of the inhabitants of Winesburg, and the principles of psychoanalysis, of bringing occulted or repressed material to light.

Anderson is customarily thought of as a realist, i.e., a writer who uses language for clear denotative purposes, a writer whose stories have logical order and pattern. How would you make the counterargument for Anderson as prose-poet, inventor of a new kind of narrative procedure?

Lecture Six Hemingway: Journalist, Writer, Legend

Scope: Hemingway's brand of machismo is blatantly politically incorrect today, but his work remains a permanent feature of the American landscape, and his terse, tight-lipped style has influenced generations of journalists and writers. *In Our Time* introduces war and violence to American readers in previously unheard of ways.

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

1. Explain why Hemingway's reputation fell on hard times, both in his day and in our own.
2. Describe the impetus behind the exodus of a significant group of American writers to Paris and other parts of Europe in the 1920s and the literary results of this sojourn.
3. Trace the impact of Hemingway's career as journalist upon his style and subject matter.
4. Describe Hemingway's hero, Nick Adams, and the idea of "grace under pressure."
5. Explain the relationship in Hemingway's work between modernity and violence.

Outline

- I. By today's standards, Hemingway is unforgivably politically incorrect
 - A. His macho ethos, based on the notion of physical prowess, is not acceptable today.
 - B. Hemingway was a vindictive, jealous, competitive writer who took on Anderson and Fitzgerald, among others.
 - C. Nonetheless, Hemingway has had a measurable, undeniable on American literature and continues to do so.
 1. His stories guided American readers to Europe and explained the meaning of World War I.
 2. Hemingway introduced the Lost Generation, the expatriate movement that repudiated of the previous era's puritanism.
 3. He conveyed his own enchantment with life in Paris during the 20s.
 4. Hemingway's career had an interesting shape.
 - a. His clean, journalistic style and simplified syntax were a break from the ornate eloquence of nineteenth-century literature.
 - b. Volunteering as an ambulance driver, Hemingway was wounded on the Italian front in 1918; the trauma of war and of his wound would be recounted again and again in different variations, always representing the meeting of the physical body with fate, brutality, power, and violence.
 - c. Some consider the bare modernist narratives *In Our Time* (1925) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) the best of Hemingway's works.
 - d. With *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), his style gets looser, lush, and more romantic.
 - e. The 1930s were difficult years for Hemingway: little interest was shown in *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) or *To Have and Have Not* (1937).
 - f. In 1940, he reemerges with *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, a flawed and maudlin political engagement that departs from his previous adventures.
 - g. *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), in which he attempted to recapture his simple lipid style, earned Hemingway the Nobel Prize in 1954.
 - h. *Islands in the Stream* and *The Garden of Eden* were both published posthumously.
- II. *In Our Time* is an extraordinary combination of brief stories about Nick Adams.
 - A. Interspersed with the stories of Nick Adams' youth in Michigan and in Europe during the war are paragraph-long vignettes about the war and other types of violence.
 - B. Nick Adams is thought to be a version of Hemingway himself as a boy, and in his stories, Hemingway draws on his own experiences and on newspaper accounts.
 - C. He uses his distinctive idiom of flux--no beginning or end, no structure or pattern, just traffic—to impart the Hemingway vision of war up close and the damage it does to people.
 - D. Hemingway also uses as counterpoint an idealistic, Kipling-esque tone to relate romance and heroism in war.

- E. He has an acute awareness of the weakness and pathos of the human body as a fluid thing that bleeds and hurts.
- F. Hemingway observes a code of tightlipped resoluteness and grace under pressure.

Lecture Seven

Hemingway as Trauma Artist

Scope: The double nature of trauma—physiological injury and emotional wound—is ideally suited to Hemingway’s narrative manner. In his short stories, he shows us the kinds of damage inflicted by war and violence, and he explores the question of how we can possibly find words to convey these experiences with any integrity.

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

1. Identify the several stories behind the simple and straightforward narration of birth in “Indian Camp,” and evaluate the effectiveness of Hemingway’s narrative in revealing the double meaning of trauma.
2. Discuss what the story gains by juxtaposing the innocent boy and his doctor father.
3. Compare and contrast “Indian Camp” and “The Battler” from the point of view of the visibility (or invisibility) of pain and also of Hemingway’s use of layered subtexts.
4. Explain how Hemingway takes us beneath and beyond the romance of war to its true meaning in “Soldier’s Home.”

Outline

- I. Art and trauma share a kinship, and narrative may provide a means of coming to terms, in a way that medical discourse cannot, with trauma in its many extensions.
- II. “Indian Camp” is a brief story about the birth of a child and about narrative birth and delivery.
 - A. This account of an Indian woman’s difficult labor is provided from the narrative standpoint of a youthful Nick Adams.
 - B. Nick’s father wants him to understand the facts of this natural event and provides scientific answers to Nick’s questions.
 - C. The doctor’s successful medical operation is followed by a failed human one.
 1. He essentially misdiagnosed the woman’s screams when he told Nick they were “unimportant.”
 2. In fact, the woman’s screams were lethal *for her husband*; her husband could not survive her pain.
 3. This story shows that the medical view has distinct limits.
 - D. Hemingway saw in birth a determinism in which the individual can be broken to pieces.
 - E. Trauma has two distinct meanings.
 1. Pathology refers to a wound or sudden physical injury.
 2. Psychiatry adds the emotional shock or psychological damage; psychological traumas deepen with time and are hard to identify from the outside.
 3. “Indian Camp” reveals the link between these two realms.
 - F. In “Indian Camp” a comeuppance is meted to medicine itself, as Nick knows instinctively what his father’s science does not.
 - G. Pain is the central medium of Hemingway’s art, and “Indian Camp” reveals the sorts of exits people take when faced with the questions: how much pain can you take? what are the limits?
- III. In “The Battler,” an older Nick Adams again faces the question of “how much can you take?”
 - A. This story is about coming to see one’s injury.
 1. After a brakeman knocks Nick from the train, delivering trauma in the most direct, brutal fashion, Nick wishes he could see the bump on his head and his blackened eye.
 2. He then meets Ad Francis, one of Hemingway’s most interesting characters and, in some sense, Nick’s alter ego.
 3. Ad, a former fighter, is “not quite right” and claims to be crazy.
 - a. Bugs, his black companion and caregiver, explains that Ad has taken too many beatings.
 - b. It also turns out that Ad married his sister.
 - c. Both of these details may have contributed to Ad’s condition, and multiple subtexts clearly bubble beneath the surface, but Hemingway does not explain.

- IV.** “Soldier’s Home” is about the difficulty of articulating trauma.
- A.** Harold Krebs returns from the war and finds that he cannot make people understand what he has been through; what’s more, he insists upon being truthful about his experiences, thereby deflating the myths and glamour of the war.
 - B.** Harold’s difficulty in adjusting leads to problems with his family.
 - 1.** Like Hemingway himself, Harold worships his sister.
 - 2.** Harold’s parents, particularly his mother, want him to get past the war and go back to work.
 - 3.** Mrs. Krebs uses the language and rhetoric of religion, forcing Harold back into a childlike role and back into lies and routines.
 - 4.** Harold is unable to articulate the brutal truth of the trauma that has corroded all of his feelings.

Lecture Eight Hemingway's Cunning Art

Scope: The notion of Hemingway as a simple, straightforward, limpid writer is both true and false. His works challenge the reader to perceive what he called the “fourth and fifth dimensions” of prose, and in his best stories we glimpse something of this larger realm.

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

1. Define the “fourth and fifth dimensions” of prose.
2. Discuss how the simplicity of Hemingway’s style and presentation in “Big Two-Hearted River” both masks and reveals its vision of Nick’s hidden trauma.
3. Explain the importance of Nick Adams’ escape to nature.
4. Discuss how Hemingway’s late work, *The Garden of Eden*, transforms into a new vision of freedoms and limits his earlier themes of the hunt as quest, the trauma of love and war, and the transformation of experience into art.
5. Describe what happens to the machismo of the typical Hemingway hero in *Garden of Eden* and the importance to the story of the liberated and boyish Catherine Bourne, who is obsessed with alterity.
6. Relate this work to the stresses and doubts of Hemingway’s own life, and explain why, for him, writing was a lifelong activity.

Outline

- I. “Big Two-Hearted River” is probably Hemingway’s most famous short story.
 - A. This story provides a sample of his clear, limpid, transparent style.
 1. Simplicity is Hemingway’s signature.
 2. The passage in question is largely monosyllabic, yet it exhibits rare sensuousness and pungency.
 3. Hemingway is a poet when describing simple things in their immediacy; he makes the material world available to us through language.
 4. As part of his rebellion against nineteenth-century Victorian models, Hemingway distrusts fancy language, big words, syntactic intricacy, and pompous terminology.
 5. Puffery must be cleared away in favor of reality and truth, immediacy and integrity.
 6. He attempts to get the simplest, cleanest possible terms to convey the essence of the matter.
 - B. “Big Two-Hearted River” picks up the uniquely American mindset that sees purity in the wilderness.
 1. In the tradition of *Huck Finn*, “Big Two-Hearted River” delivers a young man’s encounter with the woods.
 2. As Thoreau did in *Walden*, Hemingway seeks language to convey basic intimacy with Nature
 - C. “Big Two-Hearted River” is actually a bristling, complicated story, as well as an effort to write a new kind of “poetic” prose.
 1. After the war, a tired, traumatized Nick Adams is in search of safety and renewed life in a burned, blackened world..
 2. Hemingway includes images of the routine violence of nature in depictions of putting hooks through grasshoppers and of catching fish.
 3. In both Hemingway’s effort to write “poetic” prose and in the sense of fear, exhaustion, and fragility evident beneath the text, “Big Two-Hearted River” reflects T.S. Eliot’s *Waste Land*.
- II. What happened to Hemingway?
 - A. The perils of simplicity came to haunt Hemingway.
 1. In direct contrast to wordsmiths like Joyce and Faulkner, who exploited language for all of its rhetorical possibilities, Hemingway sought a window to the immediacy of experience.
 2. He believed that “one true sentence” would be enough to get him back into writing again.
 3. The writer who will not let anything past that is not clean and honest will ultimately find that language can only be stripped so far.

- B. Hemingway enjoyed a sense of play that is little recognized.
1. In *The Garden of Eden*, Hemingway recognizes the conceit and constructedness of his own style.
 2. He never finished this novel; Scribners turned his 2500-page handwritten manuscript into a 200-page book.
 3. At the center of this text is a woman, Katherine Bourne, whose sphere of activity is sexuality.
 4. With a strong sense of substitution and displacement, *The Garden of Eden* explores female sexuality, incest, transvestitism, sex change, and bisexuality.
 5. Hemingway's view in this new terrain is nowhere near as macho or under control as generally believed.

Readings

Essential:

Hemingway, *In Our Time*

Recommended:

Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, *Men Without Women*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Garden of Eden*; Lynn, Hemingway; Kazin in *On Native Grounds* and *An American Procession*; Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel*; Kenner in *A Homemade World*; Bradbury in *The Modern American Novel*; Rahv, "The Cult of Experience" in Rahv, ed., *Literature in America*; Weinstein, *Nobody's Home*

Topics for Further Investigation

Discuss the significance of trauma in Hemingway's *In Our Time*, paying particular attention to the ways in which this notion is treated as both a theme and a technique in the text. Is narrative especially geared to represent these issues?

Hemingway has often been seen as a simple and direct writer, intent only on delivering the immediacy of experience. How might you challenge that view of his art?

Glossary

Anomie: a rootlessness or lack of purpose, clear values, or even identity in a person or society

Apocalyptic: having the character of an apocalypse or world-consuming holocaust. In writing, often refers to a visionary scheme of history or to the coming of the end of the world.

Archetype: a recurring symbol, theme, setting, or character type in literature, as in symbols of the rose, sun, or serpent; themes of love and death; settings such as Edenic gardens; and character types such as heroes and magicians. Quests and descents into the underworld are common archetypal patterns of action. Psychologist Carl Jung suggests these symbols and the myths in which they occur are part of a worldwide collective unconscious, but recent critics pinpoint cultural differences overlooked in the search for universals.

Bildungsroman: a novel that traces the growth, education, and search for identity of a young man or young woman. Many major nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels follow this pattern.

Defamiliarization: an effect achieved in literary works of disrupting our usual perception of the world, thus enabling us to see things from a fresh perspective

Déjà Vu: the feeling that one has been in a place or had a particular experience before

Demiurgic: in Platonic thought, a creative force or deity that shapes the material world; generally, a ruling force or creative power

Denouement: the point at which the complications of a story or play are cleared up, and mystery, confusion, or uncertainty is clarified or resolved

Entropy: a measure of the degree of disorder or uncertainty in a substance or system; sometimes used with reference to works of literature

Epiphany: in Christian theology, denotes a manifestation of God's presence in the world, but in literature the term can also indicate a secular revelation or a moment of special insight

Fabulation: a term used by modern critics to indicate fiction that openly delights in its self-conscious verbal artifice. Modern fabulators include John Barth and Kurt Vonnegut.

Fourth and Fifth Dimensions of Prose: a repressed and elliptical form of writing used by Ernest Hemingway in which the reader must invent or imagine facts or material missing from the text

Gothic: in reference to a novel or romance, describes a story of terror and suspense with sinister or grotesque elements, often set in a gloomy castle or monastery. The Gothic novel flourished in Britain from the 1790s to the 1830s, with Ann Radcliffe as the main proponent. American examples are Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" or, in the twentieth century, William Faulkner's tales.

Grotesque: in literature, disturbingly odd, abnormal, or exaggerated characters as in the tales of Sherwood Anderson, or literary works having these characteristics

Hypercube: a whimsically playful mode of "cubist" fictional writing used by contemporary writer Robert Coover in which every possible permutation of meaning or choice of action in a given situation is displayed

Manichaeism: the doctrine that the world is governed by opposing forces of good and evil

Metatextuality: awareness of text as text

Mimesis: Greek word for imitation, used to indicate a literary work that attempts to reflect or reproduce external reality

Modernism: a period in the early twentieth century during which literature was influenced by such experimental trends as symbolism, expressionism, imagism, vorticism, futurism, and surrealism. Broadly speaking, modernist literature rejects nineteenth-century traditions including the conventions of realism, traditional poetic meter, and bourgeois values. Modernists Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust and William Faulkner experiment with disrupted chronologies. Virginia Woolf and James Joyce reveal their characters' thoughts through stream of consciousness. T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound substitute collages of fragmentary images and complex allusions for a logical exposition

of thought. The drama of Bertolt Brecht and Luigi Pirandello is abstract rather than realist or naturalist. Much modernist writing focuses on the dislocation of urban culture and juxtaposes multiple points of view.

Myoclonic: characterized by an involuntary twitching of the muscles

Mythopoesis: the making of myths, either by a (usually) preliterate culture or by a writer who develops and elaborates a personal system of spiritual values. Can also refer to writing that draws on older myths or that resembles myths in subject matter or imaginative scope.

Novel: usually, but not always, a genre of extended prose fiction characterized in the contemporary period by its openness and flexibility. Novels are longer than novellas or short stories and permit the fuller development of characters and themes. They differ from prose romances in their greater degree of realism and because they tend to describe a recognizable secular world.

Oneiric: dreamlike or having to do with dreams

Postmodernism: a period in Western culture since the 1960s that reflects the cultural conditions prevailing in advanced capitalist societies. It is characterized by disconnected images and styles in the popular media as well as in literature. John Baudrillard and other commentators describe postmodernity as a culture of fragmentary sensations, superficiality, and nostalgia, which eschews coherence and meaning, depth and authenticity. Sometimes in literature the term refers to a continuation of modernism's alienated mood but rejects its quest for artistic coherence in a fragmented world. Flippant indifference or self-conscious fabulation replace the attempt to secure meaning through myth, symbol, or formal complexity. The term *postmodern* refers to fiction rather than poetry or drama and applies to such writers as William S. Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon, all of whom also employ on occasion a quasi-science fiction that disrupts the secular world with the intrusion of the fabulous.

Realism: a mode of writing that is mimetic: that gives the impression of accurately reflecting the life it depicts in the text. It is largely associated with nineteenth-century novels of the common man or of the middle class, and it usually gives close attention to details of physical setting. Examples include the novels of Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, Honoré de Balzac, and George Eliot, or, in the late nineteenth century, the plays of George Bernard Shaw or Henrik Ibsen.

Romance: as opposed to realist writings, romances are fictional stories that include metaphysical or supernatural events or that move into the realm of the improbable or fantastic. Medieval romances, such as tales of King Arthur's knights, typify this genre in its early phases. Modern romance modes include Gothic novels, science fiction, fantasy novels, the final plays of Shakespeare, and the tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne. The latter, for example, substitute allegory or psychological exploration of character for mimesis.

Semiotic/Semiotics: a linguistically based study of the production of meaning via sign systems; focuses on the distinction, according to Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, between signifier and signified. It is the interrelation of the signs themselves rather than their correspondence with external reality that draws attention. When referring to the study of works of literature, the stress is on the production of literary meaning from shared conventions and codes.

Speciation: in biology, the process of developing a new species through evolution

Subtext: the implied, rather than overtly stated, meaning(s) of works of literature

Transference: in psychoanalysis, a reproduction of emotions relating to repressed experiences, especially from childhood, and the substitution of another person, often the psychoanalyst him/herself, for the object of the repressed experiences; seen in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*

Trope: a figure of speech such as metaphor, simile, irony, or hyperbole that suggests alternative meanings behind words and phrases

Tutelary Divinity: a guardian divinity or spirit

Verisimilitude: in literary works, the appearance of truth or reality, a convention originating in Aristotle's concept of mimesis, or the direct representation of nature or reality

Biographical Sketches of Writers Covered

Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941)

Born in Ohio, Anderson served in the Spanish-American War, was married for a time, and held various jobs, including management of a paint factory, before he moved to Chicago to write advertising copy and, with the encouragement of Carl Sandburg and others, to begin his career as a writer. His first novel, *Windy McPherson's Son*, published in 1916 and seemingly reflective of Anderson's own life, records the rise of a small-town Iowa boy to successful manufacturer and his subsequent renunciation of this success to search for truth. *Marching Men* (1917), centering on oppressed Pennsylvania coal workers and a failed mystical movement, followed. But it was *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) that first drew critical attention. Focused, as in many of his works, on frustrated small-town residents seeking a voice and meaning in an increasingly mechanized world, he explores a counterbalancing mystical relationship between man and nature's primal forces. Similar themes are presented in *Poor White* (1920), *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), and *Many Marriages* (1923). *Dark Laughter* (1925) contrasts spiritual sterility of whites with unrepressed joyousness of blacks. Anderson retired in the late 1920s to edit two small-town newspapers in Virginia. This move inspired numerous other works, including *Perhaps Women* (1931), on the potential of women to lead others past sterility and mechanization; a number of novels, essays, and short stories; and his memoirs and collections of letters, published posthumously.

William Burroughs (1914–)

Born in St. Louis and educated at Harvard, Burroughs lived extensively abroad, especially in Paris. His experiences as a drug addict inspired many of his best-known writings including *Junkie* (1953), *Naked Lunch* (Paris [1959], New York [1962]), and *Queer* (1985). Other works, many of which utilize fantasy or science fiction, explore alternative lifestyles such as those of homosexuals or gangsters. Especially in his writings about the drug culture, one finds beneath the fantasy an astute social satire, clinically accurate descriptions of addiction and its aftermath, and an anthropological approach to his subject matter. In 1981 he published *Cities of the Red Night* about a utopian settlement, followed by collections of essays and short prose pieces (*The Adding Machine* [1986] and *Tornado Alley* [1989]). Burroughs' correspondence with Allen Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters*, came out in 1963, and his autobiographical writings of the 1950s were published as *Interzone* in 1989. A guru to the Beat Generation and a prolific but controversial writer, Burroughs' apocalyptic vision has made him a contemporary cult figure.

Robert Coover (1932–)

Born in Iowa, Coover launched his successful writing career with a Faulkner Award in 1985 for his first novel, *The Origin of the Brunists*. Known for narrative experimentation, Coover fuses fantasy, satire, and realism in this novel and in such later works as *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968), which is about an imaginary baseball league invented by and filling out the life of an otherwise lonely accountant. Narrated by Richard Nixon, *The Public Burning* (1977) is a postmodern fable satirizing jingoist rhetoric and Cold War ideology in the context of the Rosenberg executions. *Spanking the Maid* (1982) satirizes sadism in fiction, while *Gerald's Party* (1986) looks at human chaos through the lens of black humor, and *Pricksongs & Descants* (1969) introduces experimental "hypercube" fiction and includes modern parables and other short fictional pieces. Other works include two plays, a film, and *A Night at the Movies, Or, You Must Remember This* (1987), a work that links fiction and film.

Don DeLillo (1936–)

Born in New York City and educated at Fordham University, DeLillo began publishing in the 1970s with *Americana* (1971), about a TV executive who outgrows his business; the existential comedy *End Zone* (1972), which uses football as a metaphor for both atomic war and a rootless, disengaged society; and *Great Jones Street* (1973), about jazz and the drug culture. Subsequent novels of the 1970s and 80s take up such themes as rich New Yorkers caught in terrorism (*Players* [1977]); the corruptible multinational American expatriate community in Athens (*The Names* [1982]); and man's uneasy truce with technology and ecological disaster in his comic masterpiece, *White Noise* (1985). Later works *Libra* (1988) and *Mao II* (1991) look at the story of Lee Harvey Oswald as an anti-bildungsroman and at the world of intelligence and CIA operatives.

William Faulkner (1897–1962)

Born and raised in Oxford, Mississippi, Faulkner used the society and culture of the region to create Yoknapatawpha County, the mythical setting of his greatest novels. Following World War I, Faulkner studied at the

University of Mississippi, worked on a newspaper in New Orleans, lived briefly in Europe, and in 1926, with the help of Sherwood Anderson, published his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, about the return home of a dying soldier. But it is *Sartoris* (1929), a mythical tale that introduces the decline of four Old South families and the rise of the unscrupulous Snopes family, which sets the tone for the works to follow. The experimental *The Sound and the Fury*, a story of the decadent Compson family told from three different perspectives, was published in 1929, followed in 1930 by *As I Lay Dying*, the psychological study of a poor white family preparing to bury their mother. *Sanctuary* was published in 1931 and *Light in August* in 1932, with its redemptive, communal message softening Faulkner's harsh themes of determinism, racism, and neurotic isolation. *Absalom, Absalom!*, published in 1936, depicts the tragic downfall of Colonel Sutpen; *The Unvanquished* (1938) traces the history of the Sartoris family during the Civil War; and *The Wild Palms* (1939) centers, in interwoven tales, on the effects of a Mississippi flood on two very different sets of lives. Of his dozens of other works, *A Fable* (1954) and *The Reivers* (1962) both won Pulitzer Prizes, and Faulkner's acceptance speech for his 1950 Nobel Prize stressed the writer's duty to depict man's endurance against the odds by way of compassion and sacrifice.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940)

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, educated and well-connected in literary circles at Princeton, and briefly a soldier, Fitzgerald published his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in 1920. In it he captures the mood of the Jazz Age at Princeton during the postwar period. *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920), *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), and *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) followed soon after, extending Fitzgerald's portrait of the glamorous and extravagant, but dissipated, life of the 1920s jet set and mirroring his own life and marriage. His finest novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), embodies the American dream during a corrupt period in the figure of the self-made millionaire, Jay Gatsby, who is in love with the unattainable Daisy Buchanan. *Tender is the Night* (1934), autobiographical in many ways, presents the gradual decline and fall of American psychiatrist Dick Diver, whose marriage to his beautiful but mentally unstable patient, Nicole, leads to his own destruction. Finally, *The Last Tycoon*, published posthumously in 1941, tells the story of a movie industry mogul. Several collections of Fitzgerald's short stories were published after his death, as were four volumes of his magazine contributions, poems, and correspondence (*Letters* [1963] and *As Ever, Scott Fitz-* [1972]). The tragedies of his own life and of his wife's nervous breakdown are reflected both in *Tender is the Night* and in essays collected by Edmund Wilson and published in 1945 as *The Crack-Up*.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961)

Born in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1899 and an avid hunter and fisherman, Hemingway began his career as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. In World War I, he served as an ambulance driver in France and in the Italian infantry. After the war Hemingway, badly wounded in action, settled in Paris as a correspondent for the *Toronto Star*, and it was there that he began his serious writing career. Early works such as *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923) and *In Our Time* (1925) show the stylistic influences of expatriate writers Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. Among his most famous writings of that period are *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), about the disillusionment, moral collapse, and escapist activities of a group of expatriate Americans and Englishmen living in Paris after the war, and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), a wartime love story about an English nurse and an American ambulance worker. Hemingway was seen as a leading spokesman for America's "lost generation," unsettled by a postwar collapse of values and loss of faith. His 1920s stories, in their spare, unemotional style, depict the cynical, stoic, and tough survivors of this era who can trust only primal emotions. Works of the 1930s include *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) on bullfighting and *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) on big-game hunting. *To Have and Have Not* (1937) explores collective action as a solution to social problems, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) reflects Hemingway's experiences as a war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War. The highly acclaimed *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a parable about an aging fisherman's stoic and even loving battle with the forces of nature in the form of an enormous fish, helped him win the Nobel Prize in 1954. Several novels were published posthumously, including *A Moveable Feast* (1964), which sketched his life in Paris during the 1920s.

Zora Neale Hurston (1901?–60)

Born in Florida, a graduate of Barnard College with a degree in anthropology, and a Guggenheim and Howard University Alumni Award recipient, Hurston's interest in the folklore and culture of Haiti, the West Indies, and the black South was reflected in her two anthropological studies, *Tell My Horse* (1938) and *Mules and Men* (1935). Her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), about the loves of a black preacher, won a Book of the Month Club award, but her masterpiece is *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), today considered a key feminist text. *Their Eyes* celebrates, in richly metaphorical language, the growing autonomy of a young black girl who only in her third

marriage finds true fulfillment and love in the South's patriarchal society. Later works *Moses: Man of the Mountain* (1939), which interprets the Biblical Jews from a black folk perspective, and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), about a Florida cracker woman, were not as popular. Her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, was published in 1942 and a collection of her short stories in 1985. Although prominent early in her career, she died in obscurity.

Toni Morrison (1931–)

Born in Ohio and the holder of a BA in English from Howard University and an MA from Cornell, Morrison began her literary career with the publication of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), a novel about a Southern black girl who is caught up in self-hatred and believes that without blue eyes she cannot be accepted by society. *Sula* (1974) followed, a striking feminist text that posits with the strong and even frighteningly autonomous women of the matrilineal Peace family an alternative to the black bourgeoisie. *Song of Solomon* (1977), a Book of the Month Club Award winner, focuses on the black male experience and its rites of passage. But it is *Beloved* (1987), a story of the ravages of slavery and its aftermath as experienced by a black woman who kills her own baby to prevent the child's capture and sale back into slavery, that received highest acclaim and earned Morrison a Pulitzer Prize. *Jazz*, set in Harlem during the 1920s, followed in 1992, and in 1993 Morrison was the first black woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Her *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), based on a series of lectures delivered at Harvard, has been widely influential in academic circles. She currently teaches at Princeton University.

Flannery O'Connor (1925–64)

Born in Georgia, the setting of her fiction, O'Connor is known as a visionary Catholic writer of Gothic tales about the Protestant South and the conflict between the sacred and the profane. An early novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), is a macabre and fanatical tale about a young boy who tries to baptize another. Among her best-known short stories are "Good Country People," "A Good Man is Hard to Find," "The Artificial Nigger," and "Everything That Rises Must Converge." These and her other stories depict in a comic and haunting manner the struggle of her characters to escape evil and, in coming to understand themselves, to achieve salvation. Collections of stories include *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955), *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965), and *Complete Stories* (1971). O'Connor's collected occasional prose appeared in 1969 and her letters in 1979.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1922–)

Born in Indianapolis and a graduate of Cornell in biochemistry, Vonnegut served in the infantry in World War II, was captured by the Germans, and managed to survive the bombing of Dresden only because he had been assigned to work in an underground meat locker in a slaughterhouse. Following the war he studied anthropology at the University of Chicago and worked for General Electric. His novels reflect these experiences. *Player Piano* (1952) satirizes mechanization and automation at GE; *Mother Night* (1961) centers on an American spy who outwits the enemy by transmitting secret messages via pro-Nazi radio; and *Cat's Cradle* (1963) proposes the use of lies to achieve human happiness. Using black humor to satirize the duplicity of modern life, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965) focuses on man's need for compassion and generosity, and *Slaughterhouse-Five; or The Children's Crusade* (1969), like earlier works, uses science fiction techniques and surrealistic dark comedy to address the devastation, trauma, and aftermath of war. Other novels satirizing the deficiencies and nihilism of modern society and of contemporary politics are *Breakfast of Champions; or, Goodbye Blue Monday!* (1973) and *Lonesome No More!* (1976). Similar themes are addressed in later novels and stories, including one novel about a Vietnam War veteran, another about the afterlife of two American heroes of the Nagasaki bombing, and a third about a nuclear accident.

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20th-Century American Fiction

Part II

Professor Arnold Weinstein



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Part II
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20th-Century American Fiction

Scope:

The aim of this course is to analyze and appreciate some of the major works of fiction produced in this country over the past century, using as a focal point the idea of “freedom of speech.” The focus on freedom of speech is appropriate for a number of reasons: (1) these texts often invoke the fundamental political freedoms guaranteed by the American Constitution, and many of them take the liberty of articulating the painful ideological conflicts that have punctuated our modern history: war, racism, poverty, drugs, sexism and the like; (2) “freedom of speech” also spells out the key thesis to be presented in these readings: language itself turns out to be not only “free,” but a precious means of becoming free, of experiencing life beyond the constraints of the ordinary workaday world; (3) the overriding theme in American literature, as in American life, is that of freedom itself, whether expressed in a laissez-faire economy, in “upward mobility,” or simply in our belief that we can make ourselves and our lives into something beyond the origins and influences of our births (a theme formerly known as the American dream). No other society has ever professed such beliefs, and it is not surprising that our literature has much to tell us about the viability of these notions.

Why would literature be a privileged record for this special American story about freedom? The answer: American fiction is something of a battleground in the “war of independence” that human beings—white or black or red or yellow, male or female—wage every day of their lives. Our war consists of achieving a self, making or maintaining an identity, making our particular mark in the world we inhabit. This is a battle because the twentieth-century American scene is not particularly hospitable to self-making: great forces coerce our lives, forces that are at once economic, biological, political, racial, and ideological. We are dogged by not only death and taxes but by the influence of family, of business, of society, of all those potent vectors that constitute the real map and landscape of our lives. This vexed and conflicted terrain does not resemble the smooth résumés that are our shorthand for what we have done, but it does correspond to our experiential awareness of what we go through, how we have changed from childhood to adulthood, what our work and friendships and marriages have been and what they have meant to us. Literature enables us to recover this territory, our territory. The texts presented in this course constitute an enlarged repertory of human resources, of the battle for freedom.

We begin by looking at the great texts and movements of the nineteenth century, especially our belief in heroic selfhood, and we begin to see and chart the kinds of forces that make up the moving stage we occupy. Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* is among the most poignant descriptions of life at the beginning of the century, but the charm of this small-town narrative acquires a deeper hue when we see the amount of repression and inner violence that Anderson chronicles. Hemingway’s *In Our Time* and Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* are both, in their own ways, about American loss of innocence, about how the Great War and the brutality of modern life permanently altered our belief systems. This theme is presented as physical trauma in Hemingway, as madness and decay in Fitzgerald. Faulkner’s *Light in August* depicts the ravages of racism in the American South, but it seeks, magnificently, to pair its overt story of carnage and neurosis with another, more elusive fable of love, kinship, and redemption. We turn to Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* for the first—and perhaps the best—account of growing up black and female in America, a story that is expressed in a kind of language and diction that moves breathlessly from the vernacular to the legendary. Flannery O’Connor’s stories bring a different agenda to our course: the challenge of perceiving the contours of God, spirit, and grace in a seemingly materialist Southern landscape peopled with the lowest profile folks in American literature. Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*, once censored and then seen as merely a raunchy drug epic, will be studied as a dazzling and disturbing account of the body in culture, a body that is horribly open and defenseless against the takeovers that beset it. War returns to our course in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*, at once poignant and wacky, speaking to us of mass destruction and of extraterrestrials in the same voice, a voice that is hard to forget. The course will close with a series of lectures on three of the most significant contemporary writers, writers whose works may not yet be familiar to you. In his sprawling and audacious *Public Burning*, Robert Coover uses that most popular American code, entertainment, to present a manic account of the Rosenberg execution and the antics of one Richard Nixon. Toni Morrison’s fascinating *Sula* is an experimental novel in which Morrison fashions a group of characters whose lives and values make rubble out of the conventions of humanistic culture, whether black or white. Finally, Don DeLillo’s appealing, absurdist comedy of modern life, *White Noise*, depicts our encounter with the technological madhouse in which we live but which we have not quite gotten around to seeing.

These American fictions, seen together, tell a composite story about coping, about fashioning both a story and a life. The range of experiences and subcultures to be found here will dwarf the experience of any single reader, and that is how it should be. Much is dark in these stories, but the honesty and integrity of these writers adds pith and richness to our own lives and makes us realize that reading is as much a lifeline as it is entertainment or education.

Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Analyze and discuss representative works of eleven major American novelists and short-story writers—Anderson, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hurston, O'Connor, Burroughs, Vonnegut, Coover, Morrison, and DeLillo—identifying what is most distinctive and significant about each one of them.
2. Discuss how the American belief in freedom of the individual underwrites our literature, as well as our political and economic systems, and trace that theme by using specific examples from major works of the nineteenth century and showing the influence of these examples across the spectrum of the works under study.
3. Explain the concept of freedom of speech as a political foundation of our nation; as a means by which literature embodies, explores, and actualizes life; and as a resource used by all humans to transcend determinism.
4. Discuss and provide examples of American fiction's forceful dramatization over the past century of the conflict between the human subject and the great social forces—war, economics, racism, sexism, etc.—that coerce and sometimes destroy selfhood and even human life.
5. Compare and contrast, with examples, the literary achievements of our great trio of American modernists: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, in relation both to the historic “moment” of modernism (Lost Generation, Great War, etc.) and the narrative innovations of these writers (renderings of violence, stream of consciousness, etc.).
6. Identify the range of positions and subjectivities (e.g., white, black, male, female, etc.) encountered in the works under study, and evaluate the importance to our national consciousness of this stereophonic literature, which brings in voices from the center and the margins.
7. Compare and contrast new talents writing in the late twentieth century—especially Coover, Morrison, and DeLillo—with established writers, identifying specifically where the later writers are experimental and where they share common ground with the well-known figures of the early- and mid-twentieth century

Lecture Nine
**F. Scott Fitzgerald: *Tender is the Night*:
Fitzgerald's Second Act**

Scope: Fitzgerald, the golden-boy writer of the 1920s, spends years and years completing *Tender is the Night*, a record of lost innocence and impending crack-up. The decay theme is especially coded in terms of sexual aberration and excess.

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

1. Describe Fitzgerald's career and relate his life to his art, in particular to *Tender is the Night*.
2. Explain why Fitzgerald is unpopular among today's ideological critics.
3. Give several reasons why this is called an elegiac and epochal text, a text of punctured dreams and broken universes.
4. Cite examples of Fitzgerald's coding of the decay and decline of postwar Europe in terms of sexuality gone amok.
5. Explain the relationship of medicine and disease to the central trope of corruption and decay in the story.

Outline

- I. With the publication of *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922), F. Scott Fitzgerald became the golden boy of the 20s.
 - A. Fitzgerald is associated with the repudiation of Victorian primness during the flapper era of hedonism, speakeasies, and gangsters.
 - B. *The Great Gatsby* (1925), his masterpiece, is the great monument to the American dream, a rags to riches story without equal in American literature.
 - C. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald were beautiful, romantic people with glamour and charisma.
 - D. Fitzgerald wrote many short stories during the 1920s, all the while working on *Tender is the Night*, which was finally published in serial form in 1933 and in book form in 1934.
 - E. Fitzgerald's life had changed dramatically between the 1920s and 1934.
 1. His alcoholism had become more troublesome.
 2. Their excesses were less sustainable.
 3. Zelda was going mad.
 - F. When he died in 1940, Fitzgerald was virtually forgotten; he was still trying to revise *Tender is the Night* to his liking, and *The Last Tycoon* was left unfinished.
 - G. Fitzgerald and the glitzy, tawdry mindset he captures have little to offer for study in an age of ideological criticism (focusing on class, race, gender); more attention is now devoted to Zelda's work and her squelched genius.
- II. Though *Gatsby* is better known, *Tender is the Night* has a magic unlike anything else in American literature.
 - A. Fitzgerald sought to render stereophonically the fall of a great idealist and of several cultures.
 1. Despite seventeen different drafts, he was never quite satisfied.
 2. In particular, Fitzgerald wondered if he had botched the beginning of the novel.
 3. The first third of the novel is a description of the elegant life of money and glamour on the French Riviera as seen through the eyes of Rosemary, a young starlet enamored with Dick Diver.
 4. Though Fitzgerald is a bit clumsy with Rosemary's narrative point of view, she is the right lens for the book; she gets across the magic of the larger than life figure by whom she is mesmerized.
 5. Fitzgerald worried that perhaps this start obscures his desired depiction of the curve of Dick Diver's life.
 6. The story switches in the second part back to Dick's student days.
 - B. Each draft of *Tender* brought in more of Fitzgerald's own life, but the scope is greater than that.
 1. The novel is about America, Europe, Western culture in the aftermath of World War I.

2. In its description of a world in ruins and its nostalgia for lost innocence, *Tender* invites comparison with Eliot's *Waste Land*.
 3. What is left in the wake of war? A tawdry, vulgar, cheap world in which the old, stately, and noble traditions have fallen into decay or disrepute.
 - a. Once a gallant tradition associated with honor and dignity, the dual between Tommy Barban and McCisco is reduced to tacky squabbles over money.
 - b. An American girl seeking the gravesite of her brother is given misinformation.
 - c. Rosemary's film is titled "The Grandeur That Was Rome," ironic in that some of the most striking, ugly passages in the novel take place there.
 - d. The wit with which the names of visitors to a French hotel are voiced makes clear that these are *not* the great landed families of Europe.
- C. Fitzgerald has a number of literary forebears.
1. Like Flaubert, of whom he was an admirer, Fitzgerald writes of punctured illusions and romances gone sour.
 2. Fitzgerald is also comparable to Stendahl, the anatomist of desire both inside and outside the glittery world.
 3. Fitzgerald is America's Proust, a chronicler of the decay of society.
 - a. Both write of the enduring beauty of lost illusions.
 - b. Like Proust, he codes the themes of decay and decline in striking sexual ways.
- D. As depicted in *Tender is the Night*, sexual excess and sexuality run amok are representative of what else is wrong in society.
1. Fitzgerald exhibits a fascination with homosexuality.
 2. The novel is full of innuendo.
 3. The story is told of the corrupted son of a wealthy Spanish family, who is known at his university as "the Queen of Chile."
 4. Mary Mingetti and Lady Caroline Sibley Biers, part of a grand English family, cause great scandal by dressing up as sailors and picking up French girls.
 5. Macho supermale Tommy Barban, always fixated on war, will replace Dick as Nicole's lover.
 6. One particularly intriguing figure, a woman at Dick's sanitarium, is introduced as a victim of sexual freedom.
 7. Coming to the fore in the wake of the Great War and the loss of traditions that seemed to give order to the world, are new things we do not know how to codify or evaluate.
 8. Fitzgerald is fascinated with risk-taking and suggests a kinship between sexual experiment, artistic experiment, and personal freedom.
- III. The central transaction of the novel is the purchasing of doctors.
- A. Wealth, corrupt, decadent, rich people will call in doctors to "clean up the mess."
 - B. Fitzgerald is intrigued by the ability of the rich and the corrupt alone to afford analysts.
 - C. Nicole is schizophrenic, so Dr. Dick is bought for and marries her, the quintessential medical transgression.

Lecture Ten Fitzgerald's Psychiatric Tale

Scope: Dick Diver, promising young psychiatrist, marries his beautiful, rich, sick patient, Nicole Warren, in an acknowledged transgression of medical ethics. *Tender is the Night* follows the classic psychoanalytic structure of working through defenses and covers to reach the concealed but poisoning wound.

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

1. Describe Fitzgerald's handling in the novel of the cultures of the rich and of psychoanalysis and of the interrelationship of the two.
2. Explain the role of transference in the central story of Dick and Nicole and the reasons behind her intense loneliness in a marriage apparently based on love.
3. Identify Nicole's repressed secret and how her being "Daddy's girl" links to larger themes in the novel.
4. Describe how both Dick and Nicole change as a result of their marriage.
5. Name similarities between Fitzgerald's narrative strategies and psychoanalysis.

Outline

- I. *Tender is the Night* has received much criticism for its treatment of psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and psychology.
 - A. Fitzgerald does a lot of name-dropping but does not adequately understand the new field of psychoanalysis.
 - B. Dick is not a credible psychiatrist.
 - C. Fitzgerald does, however, capture something of the cultural dimensions of psychoanalysis, about which there was much excitement at the time.
 - D. Nicole's condition is described in medical terms, and considerable attention is paid to her psychological states, suggesting that Fitzgerald knew what he was talking about.
 - E. Fitzgerald seems to understand the danger of Nicole's dependence on Dick (transference).
 - F. Above all, Fitzgerald shows a dark wisdom about illness and about the effect on others of living with and caring for one who is sick.
 1. Love both can and cannot handle these situations.
 2. Psychological trauma leaves permanent scars that may shrink but will remain.
 3. A person who is mad is unreachable, playing out a script only he or she can see.
 4. Madness is fluid and, like water trying to get through a dike, everything inside wants out.
 5. Though trying is a noble endeavor, madness is impossible for a loved one to cure or control.
- II. All literature has in some way been about coming to know the truths that have been concealed from us.
 - A. Psychoanalysis, in the lay view, involves working one's way back to the scene of the crime and making visible the repressed secret that needs to be let out.
 - B. Nicole's schizophrenia arose from sexual abuse by her father, who later tried to simply have her committed; this is the novel's dark secret.
 - C. "Daddy's girl" is the leitmotif of the book: the title of Rosemary's film, what the Spaniard fears his son has become.
 - D. Continuing this link between older men and younger women, Dick is older than both Nicole and Rosemary; he is continually drawn to "daddy's girls."
 - E. At his lowest moment, in Rome when he has become a rude, slovenly drunk, Dick is mistaken for a man who raped a five-year-old girl.
 - F. Dick, by marrying his patient has—by transference—become guilty of a form of sexual abuse.
- III. *Tender is the Night* follows the simple but profound narrative law by which horrors, veiled in the background, are periodically revealed.

- IV.** The book's greatest, and most tragic, secret is the fragility of love and the beauty of moments that cannot be sustained.
 - A.** Tender tells of the decay of love and the alteration of human beings.
 - B.** Nicole evolves as her illness falls away, and she drifts from Dick, who has helped cure and thereby lost her.
 - C.** The law of life: love perishes and people change.

Lecture Eleven

Dick's Dying Fall: An American Story

Scope: Fitzgerald paints a large canvas of failure, both cultural and artistic, ranging from the Great War to foiled careers. Violence subtends this story at every point, and it is against this fresco of lost hope that Diver's grisly decline is charted. The book stages charm's last stand, charm invested with all the charisma that Fitzgerald himself personified.

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

1. Give examples of Fitzgerald's artistic techniques of verbal richness and foreshadowing in *Tender is the Night*.
2. Explain the significance of the motifs of war and symbolic violence to the story, the importance of Abe North as friend and mirror to Dick, and the significance of the newspaper vendor and of Tommy Barban.
3. Trace the trajectory of Dick Diver's rise and fall: his initial charm and failed promise.
4. Describe Fitzgerald's social satire and rich comedy in the novel but also the poignancy of *Tender's* central story

Outline

- I. In *Tender is the Night*, Fitzgerald gives us a stereophonic, multivoiced text with great verbal richness.
 - A. War is one of the motifs in this novel.
 1. The lost dreams and lost hopes resulting from war make Dick reflect on his childhood and lost innocence.
 2. In a signature depiction, war is interestingly described as a party.
 3. The Great War is over, but Fitzgerald sees violence of a different kind.
 - B. Abe North, Dick's ironic friend, is a pianist and composer.
 1. The character is based on American writer Ring Lardner.
 2. *Tender* charts the failure of all these characters, Abe as well as Dick.
 3. The treatment Abe North contains echoes of other violence, including the Civil War.
 4. Despite the optimism and hope of his return to the States, Abe sneaks back to Paris, unable to leave the easy life; he lacks willpower.
 5. Abe's return to Paris is told of in the language of black people.
 - a. Nicole gets a call from the police, who say they have arrested a Negro, Afghan North.
 - b. At the hotel, a black man and a Mr. Freeman are announced; Mr. Freeman wants to see North before he is arrested.
 - c. Abe calls Dick, says that he has launched a race riot, and that he will go to get Mr. Freeman from jail; Dick is told to look for a Negro from Copenhagen.
 - d. A dead Negro is found on Nicole's bed.
 - e. Abe had apparently entangled himself with one Afro-European and three Afro-Americans in the Latin Quarter.
 6. Abe North is ultimately beaten to death at a speakeasy in New York.
 7. Abe's failure to go back and restart his career appears to have given rise to this violence.
 - C. Fitzgerald tries to write a larger story about social violence not intrinsically related to the Dick Diver story line.
 1. At a train station, Nicole sees Maria Wallis shoot her lover in another scene that calls up images of war.
 2. A newspaper vendor, Dick's sleazy alter ego, reappears.
 - a. The newspaper vendor is always on the make.
 - b. Fitzgerald suggests that this is what could become of the characters if they let go of their idealism.
 3. *Tender is the Night* communicates a sense of the vulgarity of American life.
 - a. Nicole's tryst with Tommy Barban is interrupted by loud yelling and by young Englishwomen who want to use their balcony to bid farewell to their American boyfriends.
 - b. Fitzgerald invokes The Star-Spangled Banner as one young woman waves to her boyfriend.

- c. Sexual betrayal is coded within rich narrative; apparently unrelated things keep sending messages about the main betrayal and suggesting other aspects to its meaning.
- II. *Tender is the Night* records Dick Diver’s fall, or charm’s last stand.**
- A. Dick is Fitzgerald’s great figure of charm.
 - B. The novel begins with Rosemary’s total entrancement by him.
 - 1. Dick brings things to life, frees people.
 - 2. Dick also seems kind and charming, he will take care of her and introduce whole new worlds.
 - C. People believe Dick generously helped them achieve harmony, identity, and fulfillment despite the compromises of their lives; like an artist of people, Dick has made them feel good about themselves.
 - D. Like *Gatsby*, Dick exudes “eternal reassurance.”
 - E. Ultimately the story is about the failure of this type of person.
 - 1. Dick is bought, corrupted, and compromised; he sells out.
 - 2. Fitzgerald has been criticized for being soft on Dick, because Dick is so obviously an image of himself.
 - 3. Fitzgerald does, however, make tough, honest statements about their failings.
 - 4. Dick’s greatest failure is his inability to keep his world alive and happy.
 - a. Dick changes from doctor to sick person.
 - b. As Nicole recovers, Dick goes downhill; he stops creating and begins smashing.
 - c. Dick makes xenophobic slurs about people.
 - d. References to “black death,” “black drink,” and Dick’s “black heart” form the language of Dick’s decay and crack-up.
 - F. Fitzgerald presents things in a rich, varied, orchestral way that is difficult to convey.
 - 1. Fitzgerald is Hemingway’s opposite in the lavishness and musical quality of his prose.
 - 2. A description of Abe North’s death is sandwiched into an argument over which club he died at; multiple viewpoints make the passage stereo-optical as well as stereophonic.
 - 3. The showdown scene of the book, in which Tommy Barban tells Dick that his marriage to Nicole is over and that their love has “run its course,” turns funny and playful with constant interruptions.
 - 4. Dick and Nicole’s first scenes together are described poetically against suggestions of war, the blues, and social malaise.
 - G. The novel ends with the disappearance of Dick Diver, who will end up a small-town practitioner somewhere in New York.

Readings

Essential:

Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*

Recommended:

Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby, Babylon Revisited and Other Stories, The Last Tycoon*; Brucoli, *The Composition of “Tender is the Night”*; Eble, *Francis Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Criticism*; Stern, “*Tender is the Night*”: *The Broken Universe: Critical Essays on Francis Scott Fitzgerald’s “Tender is the Night”*

Topics for Further Investigation

Fitzgerald felt, right up to his death, that he had botched *Tender is the Night* by placing the Rosemary material in the beginning of the novel. Do you agree? What would have been gained had the book started with Dick’s chronological career? What would have been lost?

The most severe criticism of *Tender is the Night* is that it is at once trivial and self-indulgent. The most ambitious praise is that it presents a portrait of the decline of the West following the Great War. Which point of view do you favor? Is there a measure of truth in each view? Explain.

Lecture Twelve
Light in August:
Midpoint of the Faulkner Career

Scope: Moving from terse narratives of trauma and stream of consciousness, Faulkner begins to deal more fully and frontally with racism only in *Light in August*. The book counterpoints the neurotic, damaged life of Joe Christmas, victim of culture, with the pagan and serene existence of Lena Grove, heroine of nature.

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

1. Name some of the reasons behind Joe Christmas' existential estrangement in *Light in August*, and explain how he writes himself into the "great wounds of our culture."
2. Describe Lena Grove's mission and plight.
3. Explain how Joe Christmas and Lena Grove exemplify the tension between culture and nature.
4. Describe Faulkner's very modern treatment of self in the novel.
5. Link Faulkner's depiction of human intimacy, especially that of Joe with Joanna Burden and with Lucas Burch, to Southern attitudes toward gender roles and relationships.

Outline

- I. *Light in August* (1930 picks up issues with which Faulkner dealt in his early works and begins to treat them in a manner more like that of his later works.
 - A. Faulkner became a sensation in American literature with *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), which many consider his greatest work.
 1. Benjy Compson narrates the first portion of the book; he is a 33-year-old idiot used as a window through which we will see the decline and loss of love in a Southern family.
 2. The second part, eighteen years earlier, is narrated by Benjy's brother, Quentin, on the day he will commit suicide.
 3. With Faulkner's stream-of-consciousness style, Quentin's narrative is as difficult to read as Benjy's, but with a different set of problems: Quentin's sexuality; attraction to his sister; inability to defend and protect his sister's honor; and overwhelming sense of failure.
 4. The final chapter is often referred to as the Dilsey section, although it is written in the third person.
 - a. The Easter sermon scene in this chapter is the redeeming moment of the novel.
 - b. The black people in *The Sound and the Fury* are the last visible elements of an orderly moral system; they are invested with a decency, integrity, and wholeness that the Compsons lack.
 - c. However, these people are presented as ancillary, background characters; they do not have sound and fury.
 - B. *As I Lay Dying* (1929) is the sibling text of *The Sound and the Fury*.
 1. This novel shows the response of each child to the death of their mother.
 2. Darl Bundren is in many ways Faulkner's Hamlet.
 - a. Faulkner composes for him, in the language of Mississippi, philosophical discourse on consciousness akin to that of Lacan.
 - b. The mind is a paralyzing, alien place; like Hamlet, Darl is being destroyed by consciousness.
 - c. Other characters are just as extreme: the younger brother, Vardamon, is unhinged by news of his mother's death and continually makes associations between his mother's death and the natural world.
 - d. At root, this explosive, modernist story is about the death of "I" as a cogent, unified identity and about the randomness of consciousness.
 - C. *Light in August* is Faulkner's first plunge into the racial issues that have heretofore just provided background.
 1. Joe Christmas looks white but believes he may have some black blood.
 2. Joe acts as the reappearing figure of an identity in crisis; his dysfunctional psychic material mirrors that of Quentin Compson and Darl Bundren.
 - D. *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner's next great novel, is a staggering return to *The Sound and the Fury*.

1. The novel picks up with Quentin Compson at Harvard on the day of his suicide.
 2. Quentin is talking with his Canadian roommate, Shreve, about events of the Civil War, a conflict still festering within those who come from the South.
 3. The shadow that, in *Sound*, tortures Quentin is here embodied by the “dark brother.”
 4. The dark brother is told of in a Civil War story in which the white son of the Sutpens, a plantation family, finds out he has a black half-brother.
 5. Racial issues and the Faulknerian themes of miscegenation and incest begin to loom larger in this novel.
- E. In *Go Down Moses*, which Faulkner called his “nigger stories,” black consciousness finally becomes central.
- F. Faulkner is almost unteachable today because of his inappropriate views on race and gender, but more than any other writer, he measures precisely the ideological crises for which he is faulted.
- II. *Light in August* (1932), a central text from the midpoint of his career, is the most accessible of his five or six masterworks.
- A. Joe Christmas began as a marginal figure but grew to take over the story.
1. Joe is Faulkner’s great existential character, unexpected in a novel about race.
 2. Joe is a putative black man.
 - a. The curse of the book is that identity can never be “known.”
 - b. Identity is a construct formed by others on the basis of “seeming.”
 - c. *Black* and *white* are merely nominal terms, not essential ones.
 3. Joe is defined by image; he is defined literally as a “negative.”
 4. This book is about his effort to find out who he is and to become real.
- B. Lena Grove frames the story, forming the beginning, middle, and end.
1. Lena arrives in Mississippi, unmarried and pregnant, searching for her husband.
 2. She is certain she will find Lucas Burch, although the locals believe him long gone.
 3. With beautiful language, Faulkner presents Lena as a powerful image of nature, a pagan life force.
 4. She has no learning but grace and decorousness.
 5. Like the blacks in *Sound*, however, she has no inner life.
 6. The birth of Lena’s child will become the plot of this story.
- C. The novel’s great challenge is whether Lena can “get around” Joe Christmas and become the humane, encircling figure to bring harmony to the story.
1. Everything Lena does, Joe cannot.
 - a. Food is a disaster for Joe, as when he beats up his waitress girlfriend.
 - b. Whereas sex is effortless and harmonious for Lena, it is violent and chaotic for Joe.
 - c. Throughout the book, misogyny is displayed in the figurative violence exacted on women.
 2. Faulkner seems to understand human intimacy more in homosocial and sometimes homoerotic terms than in heterosexual ones.
 - a. Joe lives with Lucas Burch and is only comfortable in relationships, even sadistic ones, with men.
 - b. His foster father beat Joe routinely, and he resisted with fear his foster mother’s offers of love and kindness.
 - c. Joe’s tempestuous relationship with Joanna Burden is remembered as a physical contest like those with men.
 - d. The sheriff refers to Joe’s cohabitation with Lucas Burch/Joe Brown as, at least figuratively, a homosexual arrangement.
 - e. Percy Grimm, self-styled, fascist executioner, characterizes Old Man Hightower’s sheltering of Joe as further evidence of homosexuality.
 3. Part of Faulkner’s legacy can be found in his depiction of the male bonding and intimacy unique to this part of the South.

Lecture Thirteen
Light in August:
Determinism vs. Freedom

Scope: Joe Christmas, the white man with a little black blood, is one of Faulkner's supremely dysfunctional characters, and his tortured and violent life are juxtaposed against the harmonious events of nature, especially the birth of Lena's infant. This child whose father is not known centers both the novel and its story of a passion play.

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

1. State the underlying sociological message behind Faulkner's deterministic view of Joe Christmas as a dislocated and helpless victim, a bunch of severed wire ends.
2. Describe the significance of the orphanage scene in which Joe steals toothpaste from the dietician.
3. Explain how Lena's baby becomes the life principle of the text—almost a Christ figure—and the purpose of the fruitful confusion of identities at the baby's birth.
4. Discuss what redemptive, communal message can be derived from the events of the story.
5. Relate T.S. Eliot's poem, "Journey of the Magi," to the story's central message.

Outline

- I. Joe Christmas embodies a deterministic view.
 - A. Joe Christmas resembles many modern protagonists, particularly some of Hemingway's, as a man to whom things are done, a victim figure.
 1. Throughout the novel, Faulkner depicts Joe's helplessness, passivity, and powerlessness in astounding ways.
 2. Joe does not seem to exist for others in the text, an expression of his existential estrangement.
 3. The text goes to great lengths to figure Joe's isolation and disconnection.
 4. Joe is profoundly out of sync.
 - a. His communication misfires; he cannot process what is going on.
 - b. Joe's awareness follows, rather than leads, what is happening.
 - c. He is described as having "severed wire ends" through which the current cannot flow, an image that neurological studies have since proven to be very realistic.
 - B. This deterministic formulation is revealed in an early scene at the orphanage, where Joe has a habit of sneaking into the dietician's office for a taste of toothpaste.
 1. Five-year-old Joe hides behind a curtain as the dietician and her boyfriend rush into the office for a quick sexual encounter.
 2. As he waits, Joe experiences the toothpaste tube: feeling, tasting, not hearing anything, turned in on himself in a very sexual image.
 3. All at once the excessive amount of toothpaste he has swallowed comes back up, and he vomits.
 4. The dietician, who believes they have been spied on, turns into a wild-haired Medusa.
 5. Joe, in the wrong place at the wrong time, has seen the forbidden.
 6. He is called a "little nigger bastard" and baptized into a name and a role.
 7. A foundation is also laid for Joe's own twisted sexuality.
 - C. "Well, here I am" is one of Joe's frequent passive statements that express somatic determinism and a sense of his being victimized by his own body.
 - D. The significance of the name Joe Christmas begins to reveal itself, and a clear parallel is established.
- II. This reading of Joe Christmas is complemented by that of Lena Grove.
 - A. The central event of the book is the birth of Lena's child, a remarkable sequence attended by Mr. and Mrs. Hines, Joe Christmas' grandparents.
 1. Mrs. Hines confuses Lena by referring to the baby as "Joey," the son of or Joe Christmas himself as an infant.

2. Could there have been figurative intercourse between Lena and Joe, a man she has never met, to produce the baby who changes everything?
- B. The baby, a life-affirming, “communal” child, will enter the text and unify the isolated, alienated characters.
 - C. Part of a relational web, Lena becomes “light in August,” a Mississippi phrase for the time at which mares give birth to foals.
 - D. The child represents freedom, alternative life, and forms of relationship other than those of the flesh.
- III.** The tale of a child whose father cannot be named is the oldest story in Western culture.
- A. Lena, a pregnant woman, travels with a man named Joseph, who is not the father, to give birth in a place that looks much like a manger.
 - B. Faulkner expresses a profound belief in life and in a kind of reality beyond the flesh and turmoil of our world, though not explicitly in doctrinal Christianity.
 - C. Faulkner makes clear that there is a moral and spiritual sense to this story beyond its immediacy.
 - D. In Eliot’s “Journey of the Magi,” the wise man returns to his kingdom knowing that witnessing Christ’s birth has led, by the rules of logic and reality, to his own death, his alienation from his people and their gods.
- IV.** Faulkner attempts to produce a symbolic, spiritual, moral set of relationships to contrast the botched, dysfunctional, physical ones we see.
- A. The novel presents a reconsideration of birth, death, and union.
 - B. There is redemption in the possibility of this vision that transcends reality and logic.

Lecture Fourteen
Light in August:
Novel as Poem, or, Beyond Holocaust

Scope: In *Light in August*, Faulkner seeks to create a symbolic realm of gestures and meanings that might posit an alternative to the carnage of his racist, misogynistic plot. This new dispensation aims at no less than the revelation of spirit behind flesh, life beyond death, hope outliving horror.

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

1. Recapitulate the central themes of the novel.
2. Describe, according to Joanna Burden, the curse and legacy of being born black.
3. Explain the consequences of the discovery that Joe Christmas has black blood, including his symbolic crucifixion and its aftermath.
4. Defend the relational, ecological view that the book is about the making of a family.
5. Explain how Faulkner turns a story of carnage into a story of love, a symbolic passion play.
6. Explain the role of the reader in understanding Faulkner's complex vision in this novel.

Outline

- I. In *Light in August*, dismemberment ultimately leads to wholeness.
 - A. Joe Christmas is symbolically crucified.
 1. When it is discovered, after Joanna's murder, that Joe has black blood, he is presumed guilty.
 2. Faulkner uses cinematic prose to relate Grimm's meting out upon Joe the white man's punishment.
 3. Joe's death is narrated without realism in order to show its full dimensionality.
 4. Faulkner uses religious imagery to depict Joe finally finding peace.
 - a. Steadfast, serene, and triumphant, Joe's spirit ascends in a "black blast."
 - b. An extraordinary mix of images speaks of a life after death.
 - c. Joe gains Lena's wholeness and extends his reach, from life as an outsider to posthumous role as a dominant insider, forever in the memories of those who watched.
 - B. Determinist logic states that life proceeds from birth to death.
 1. Joanna Burden imagines the curse upon the white children for the racial crimes of the South.
 2. Faulkner is far from soft on racism: he implies that the children of the South will never be innocent nor free of the revenge of race.
 - C. Faulkner makes it imaginable to move from death to birth.
 1. After Mrs. Hines learns that the grandson taken from her thirty years ago is Joe Christmas, she envisions him returning to her for just one day free of the charges against him and free of the determinist verdict.
 2. In another "might-have-been," in *Absalom*, Quentin and Shreve dredge up memories of the Civil War in order to imagine alternatives to it; in doing so, they embody the very virtues lost in that story, particularly brotherhood.
- II. For Faulkner, to write poetically is to reconceive fate and determinism.
 - A. Faulkner's writing is connective rather than divisive and stresses synthesis rather than analysis.
 - B. In this way, *Light in August* is about the making of a family, the family that Lena is certain will be there for the birth of her child.
 - C. The relational wisdom Faulkner expresses, the conviction that we are all related in a world larger than ourselves alone, goes against the empowered individual of American thought.
 - D. Byron Bunch becomes the father (Bunch→Burch, the biological father).
 1. Townspeople have already mistaken the two.
 2. This is a perfect example of modernist writing, but the transformation is more than that of a letter; it is actualized in the text.

3. Byron loves Lena and attends the birth, but he must also come to terms with Lucas as a male rival and not just a “bunch of words.”
 4. Byron goes after Lucas in an act of gallantry and is beaten up, after which his meditation on identity shifts into a description of meteors and comets, language of transfiguration and transformation much like the “black blast” at Joe Christmas’ death.
 5. Here Bunch becomes Burch.
- III.** Fitzgerald tries to create a passion play, a vision of love that will create a family.
- A. Literature is death-oriented: closure is the nature of writing, with conceptual death occurring at the end of each book, story, paragraph.
 - B. Faulkner writes a book in which nothing dies but instead remains fluid.
 - C. Because there is no other way of getting beyond the linguistic scheme to which words limit the writer, Faulkner creates a language of fusion.

Readings

Essential:

Faulkner, *Light in August*

Recommended:

Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Go Down Moses*, *The Sound and the Fury*; Bloom, ed., *William Faulkner’s ‘Light in August’*; Kazin, “The Stillness of *Light in August*” in *William Faulkner: Three Decades*; Sundquist, *William Faulkner: House Divided*; Matthews, *The Play of Faulkner’s Language*; Kartiganer, *The Fragile Thread*; Weinstein, *Faulkner’s Subject*; Weinstein, *Nobody’s Home*

Topics for Further Investigation:

The reader never knows for sure whether or not Joe Christmas has any black blood. Does this strengthen or weaken *Light in August* as a novel about racism? Justify your answer.

Even though Joe Christmas and Lena Grove never meet, discuss the ways in which Faulkner manages to “couple” them.

Lecture Fifteen
Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: Canon Explosion

Scope: Hurston's novel, published in 1937 and out of print for years, became a cause célèbre in the mid-70s, championed especially by black feminist critics. The book charts the tumultuous trajectory of its heroine, Janie Crawford, as she seeks "the horizon" via two problematic marriages.

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

1. Describe the circumstances of Hurston's meteoric rise and fall and of her current popularity.
2. Identify the central theme of the novel and its relationship to the overall trajectory of this course.
3. Trace the impact of Hurston's background as an anthropologist and folklorist upon the novel's language, its display of contrapuntal voices, and its depiction of community life.
4. Explain the importance of sensuous organic imagery to Janie Crawford's story.
5. Differentiate between Nanny's horizon and Janie's.
6. Contrast the contributions of Nanny, Logan Killicks, Joe Starks, and the pear tree to Janie's growth.

Outline

- I. Prior to a revival of interest in the mid-1970s, few people knew about Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937); now it is one of the most studied and read books in American universities.
 - A. Hurston's career began with great promise but died early.
 1. She began publishing stories while attending Howard University from 1919 to 1925.
 2. From 1925 to 1927, Hurston studied anthropology with Franz Boas at Barnard College.
 3. With the assistance of wealthy white patrons, Hurston began collecting Southern black folklore.
 4. She collaborated with poet Langston Hughes and had great popular success.
 5. In 1936 Hurston won a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship to study West Indian folklore in Jamaica and Haiti.
 6. While in Haiti, she wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in only seven weeks.
 7. Hurston's Guggenheim Fellowship was renewed, and Howard University awarded her an honorary doctorate in 1939 and a Distinguished Alumni Award in 1943.
 8. Hurston's life began to go downhill in the 1940s.
 - a. She was accused in 1948 of sexual molestation
 - b. In the 1950s, Hurston was working as a maid in Florida, still publishing, and becoming increasingly reactionary.
 - c. She worked as a substitute teacher in 1958 and suffered a stroke in 1959.
 - d. In 1960, Zora Neale Hurston died in a welfare home and was buried in an unmarked grave.
 - B. *Their Eyes* was very unpopular among black intellectuals when it was published in 1937.
 1. Alain Locke, called the "dean of black scholars," criticized Hurston for creating pseudo-primitives.
 2. Richard Wright savagely critiqued her work for having no theme; no message; no thought; and for being, like minstrel shows, designed to make white folks laugh.
 3. They wanted work that argues for meliorative social change.
 - C. Hurston's moment came with a vengeance in the 1970s, the heyday of American feminism and African American studies.
 1. Alice Walker first called attention to Hurston's work with an essay she wrote for *Ms.* magazine about her pilgrimage to Hurston's unmarked grave.
 2. Mary Helen Washington applauded Hurston's recognition of identity in her blackness.
 3. Andrea Rushing complimented the language and the strength of Janie Crawford.
 4. The male-driven readings of critiques like those of Locke and Wright miss the point about female liberation, about a woman coming of age and the constraints put on this process for a black woman.
- II. Janie Crawford sees her life as a natural cycle.
 - A. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* begins with Janie's return to Eatonville.

1. The community greets her with nasty, cruel gossip and ill will for having left town with a younger man.
 2. Janie will tell her friend Phoeby her story, and Phoeby will, in turn, pass the story on to the community as part of their oral tradition.
- B.** Janie, raised among white children, did not even know she was black until she saw a photograph.
1. Called “Alphabet,” Janie is a clean slate.
 2. The book traces her development of a name and an identity for herself.
- C.** Puberty marks the dawning of Janie’s consciousness.
1. Nature seems to speak to Janie.
 2. Janie seeks initiation into the physical splendor of the earth and the life process.
 3. This organic fulfillment, or actualization as one’s own true self, paints a picture of an empowered self paralleled only by Whitman.
- D.** Nanny, Janie’s grandmother, provides the contrapuntal voice.
1. Having seen and suffered much, Nanny’s view of the black woman’s fate is not very pretty; the black woman is, she says, the “mule of the world.”
 2. Nanny is the opposite of Janie’s fulfilling pear tree image.
 3. She wants her granddaughter safely married to Logan Killicks before she becomes interested in sex.
 4. Janie finds no fulfillment or magic in this marriage, and she leaves Logan without saying good-bye or divorcing him.
- E.** Joe Starks is Janie’s second husband.
1. Joe seems to be going somewhere; he has ambition and an agenda.
 2. He wants to be a “big voice” in an all-black town.
 3. Joe, however, turns out to be a domineering bully.
 - a. He constantly puts down his wife.
 - b. Women, he avers, cannot think.
 - c. Casual misogyny is rampant in the book.
 - d. Increasingly empowered with language, Janie speaks up in defense of women and in retaliation against the misogyny.
 - e. As Joe ages and become more insecure, he insults her more often, at least once in public.
 - f. Janie launches a counterattack; her brutal insult to his virility marks the end of their marriage.
 - g. Shortly thereafter Joe becomes sick and dies.
- F.** Janie is still unfulfilled.
1. She indicts her grandmother for sidetracking her with things, which her husbands have had and which she has ended up with as a wealth widow.
 2. Janie continues the quest for her horizon.

Lecture Sixteen
Their Eyes Were Watching God:
From Romance to Myth

Scope: Janie's great love climax comes when she encounters Tea Cake, Hurston's alluring male god: a playful, generous artist of sorts. Janie and Tea Cake's experience in the flood brings this couple into the book's core of feverish vitality and cosmic forces. Hurston's genius consists in telling her story of emancipation and love in terms at once mythic and vernacular.

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

1. Explain the many meanings of Tea Cake in the story.
2. Discuss Hurston's solar myth, the biblical resonance of the flood story, and the significance of the phrase "their eyes were watching God."
3. Contrast Nanny's "high ground" with the "muck" where Tea Cake and Janie live, love, and work.
4. Describe the importance of storytelling and the function of the community as chorus.
5. Discuss images of performance and play in the novel's second half
6. Explain why the tragic denouement of Tea Cake's rabies does not detract from the larger positive trajectory of Janie's story

Outline

- I. Tea Cake is Janie's fascinating great love.
 - A. Hurston calls Tea Cake the "son of the evening sun" and paints him in mythic, legendary colors.
 - B. Tea Cake, linked with life-giving, organic forces, is the answer to Janie's nature quest.
 - C. He instructs Janie in ways that the others have not.
 1. Tea Cake teaches her to appreciate and to please herself.
 2. He teaches her to drive and play games.
 - D. Tea Cake represents play and games, and the naturalness of both.
 1. With him, Janie is initiated into equality and the spirit of play.
 2. The play impulse is synonymous with a certain kind of freedom.
 3. Tea Cake also teaches Janie games that help her grow in complexity.
 - E. Tea Cake represents principles of art and creativity.
 1. He is insistently theatrical in his courtship of Janie.
 2. In his imagining and make-believe, Tea Cake represents a generative principle.
 - F. Tea Cake has a presence even when he is absent, because his spirit still seems to be there.
 - G. He calls his love for Janie a "key," and he makes available to her the "keys to the kingdom," the kingdom being the horizon she seeks.
- II. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has a radiance directly associated with the sun.
 - A. Extraordinary passages express the power of the sun as the fundamental source of light as well as life: Hurston's solar myth.
 1. The world is born and dies each day, with its life created by the sun.
 2. Conditions of everyday life are seen in terms of this solar principle.
 3. Life is a gift from the sun; we live by its grace.
 4. Tea Cake, "son of the evening sun," participates in this myth.
 - B. Hurston is aware that nature can also be fierce, anarchic, and destructive.
 1. Tea Cake and Janie go to "the muck," the Everglades as the vital core of the natural process.
 2. Hurston celebrates this area for the vitality and fertility into which Tea Cake and Janie are being drawn.
 3. The Everglades are linked again and again with art—"dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour."
 4. Lake Okeechobee floods during a storm of biblical proportions

- a. Night and death take over as the sun goes down.
 - b. Everything is reconfigured in a nature's metamorphic frenzy.
 - c. The lake itself becomes a monster that overtakes and toys with the human community.
- C. Their eyes were watching God.
- 1. The Seminoles warned the blacks of the impending danger.
 - 2. The blacks do not leave because the whites have neither warned them nor evacuated themselves.
 - 3. Those truly in touch with the land have already fled, but those just appropriating it have lost touch and missed the warning signs.
 - 4. The people who stay discover the raw forces of the world, encounter the power and the glory.
 - 5. Janie does not panic because she has already been integrated with the natural world and has found equivalent power and glory in Tea Cake's love.
 - 6. As they wait for the hurricane, the blacks perform wild music, dance, and play fancy games; "it was art," Janie says.
 - 7. As they swim for their lives in the flood that follows, Tea Cake is bitten while protecting Janie from attack by a strange-looking dog.
 - 8. The dog turns out to have had rabies and to have passed it on to Tea Cake.
 - 9. In a climactic scene, Tea Cake goes mad and becomes increasingly violent, to the point that Janie is forced to shoot him.
- III. Hurston is a folklorist and anthropologist, as well as a poet of sorts and a novelist.
- A. The voice of the people is harsh but real.
 - 1. The communal voice as chorus is a real presence and has its own poetry.
 - a. The story of the mule harkens back to the immemorial scapegoat, as well as to Nanny's view of the black woman's role; Joe Starks retires his mule from labor, but he will not liberate Janie.
 - b. An allegory has buzzards decorously discussing the death of the mule.
 - c. Death is described as a figure with square toes who walks and stalks the land.
 - B. Hurston's vision and language add something special to American literature: Janie's quest completed, she tells Phoeby that she has peace, having gone to the horizon and returned with a story of her life that can be told and passed on as voice and art.

Readings

Essential:

Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Recommended:

Hurston, *Mules and Men*, *Dust Tracks On a Road*; Washington, "Foreword" to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; Gates, "Afterword" to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*; Bloom, Kubitschek, Meese, and Callahan in Bloom, ed., *Modern Critical Interpretations*; Carby and DuPlessis in *New Essays on 'Their Eyes Were Watching God'*

Topics for Further Investigation:

Their Eyes Were Watching God might be thought the Cinderella story of American fiction. From virtual obscurity, it is now regarded as the central text for many different canons: black women's writing, feminism in general, and the American novel as a whole. How can one book fit all of these categories? Do you feel that the stature of Hurston's novel owes something to cultural politics or that it will endure?

How does Hurston manage to tell a story about Janie Crawford's growing independence, on the one hand, and about the folk traditions and beliefs of Southern black culture on the other? Are these two aims harmonious?

Glossary

Anomie: a rootlessness or lack of purpose, clear values, or even identity in a person or society

Apocalyptic: having the character of an apocalypse or world-consuming holocaust. In writing, often refers to a visionary scheme of history or to the coming of the end of the world.

Archetype: a recurring symbol, theme, setting, or character type in literature, as in symbols of the rose, sun, or serpent; themes of love and death; settings such as Edenic gardens; and character types such as heroes and magicians. Quests and descents into the underworld are common archetypal patterns of action. Psychologist Carl Jung suggests these symbols and the myths in which they occur are part of a worldwide collective unconscious, but recent critics pinpoint cultural differences overlooked in the search for universals.

Bildungsroman: a novel that traces the growth, education, and search for identity of a young man or young woman. Many major nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels follow this pattern.

Defamiliarization: an effect achieved in literary works of disrupting our usual perception of the world, thus enabling us to see things from a fresh perspective

Déjà Vu: the feeling that one has been in a place or had a particular experience before

Demiurgic: in Platonic thought, a creative force or deity that shapes the material world; generally, a ruling force or creative power

Denouement: the point at which the complications of a story or play are cleared up, and mystery, confusion, or uncertainty is clarified or resolved

Entropy: a measure of the degree of disorder or uncertainty in a substance or system; sometimes used with reference to works of literature

Epiphany: in Christian theology, denotes a manifestation of God's presence in the world, but in literature the term can also indicate a secular revelation or a moment of special insight

Fabulation: a term used by modern critics to indicate fiction that openly delights in its self-conscious verbal artifice. Modern fabulators include John Barth and Kurt Vonnegut.

Fourth and Fifth Dimensions of Prose: a repressed and elliptical form of writing used by Ernest Hemingway in which the reader must invent or imagine facts or material missing from the text

Gothic: in reference to a novel or romance, describes a story of terror and suspense with sinister or grotesque elements, often set in a gloomy castle or monastery. The Gothic novel flourished in Britain from the 1790s to the 1830s, with Ann Radcliffe as the main proponent. American examples are Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" or, in the twentieth century, William Faulkner's tales.

Grotesque: in literature, disturbingly odd, abnormal, or exaggerated characters as in the tales of Sherwood Anderson, or literary works having these characteristics

Hypercube: a whimsically playful mode of "cubist" fictional writing used by contemporary writer Robert Coover in which every possible permutation of meaning or choice of action in a given situation is displayed

Manichaeism: the doctrine that the world is governed by opposing forces of good and evil

Metatextuality: awareness of text as text

Mimesis: Greek word for imitation, used to indicate a literary work that attempts to reflect or reproduce external reality

Modernism: a period in the early twentieth century during which literature was influenced by such experimental trends as symbolism, expressionism, imagism, vorticism, futurism, and surrealism. Broadly speaking, modernist literature rejects nineteenth-century traditions including the conventions of realism, traditional poetic meter, and bourgeois values. Modernists Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust and William Faulkner experiment with disrupted chronologies. Virginia Woolf and James Joyce reveal their characters' thoughts through stream of consciousness. T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound substitute collages of fragmentary images and complex allusions for a logical exposition

of thought. The drama of Bertolt Brecht and Luigi Pirandello is abstract rather than realist or naturalist. Much modernist writing focuses on the dislocation of urban culture and juxtaposes multiple points of view.

Myoclonic: characterized by an involuntary twitching of the muscles

Mythopoesis: the making of myths, either by a (usually) preliterate culture or by a writer who develops and elaborates a personal system of spiritual values. Can also refer to writing that draws on older myths or that resembles myths in subject matter or imaginative scope.

Novel: usually, but not always, a genre of extended prose fiction characterized in the contemporary period by its openness and flexibility. Novels are longer than novellas or short stories and permit the fuller development of characters and themes. They differ from prose romances in their greater degree of realism and because they tend to describe a recognizable secular world.

Oneiric: dreamlike or having to do with dreams

Postmodernism: a period in Western culture since the 1960s that reflects the cultural conditions prevailing in advanced capitalist societies. It is characterized by disconnected images and styles in the popular media as well as in literature. John Baudrillard and other commentators describe postmodernity as a culture of fragmentary sensations, superficiality, and nostalgia, which eschews coherence and meaning, depth and authenticity. Sometimes in literature the term refers to a continuation of modernism's alienated mood but rejects its quest for artistic coherence in a fragmented world. Flippant indifference or self-conscious fabulation replace the attempt to secure meaning through myth, symbol, or formal complexity. The term *postmodern* refers to fiction rather than poetry or drama and applies to such writers as William S. Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon, all of whom also employ on occasion a quasi-science fiction that disrupts the secular world with the intrusion of the fabulous.

Realism: a mode of writing that is mimetic: that gives the impression of accurately reflecting the life it depicts in the text. It is largely associated with nineteenth-century novels of the common man or of the middle class, and it usually gives close attention to details of physical setting. Examples include the novels of Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, Honoré de Balzac, and George Eliot, or, in the late nineteenth century, the plays of George Bernard Shaw or Henrik Ibsen.

Romance: as opposed to realist writings, romances are fictional stories that include metaphysical or supernatural events or that move into the realm of the improbable or fantastic. Medieval romances, such as tales of King Arthur's knights, typify this genre in its early phases. Modern romance modes include Gothic novels, science fiction, fantasy novels, the final plays of Shakespeare, and the tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne. The latter, for example, substitute allegory or psychological exploration of character for mimesis.

Semiotic/Semiotics: a linguistically based study of the production of meaning via sign systems; focuses on the distinction, according to Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, between signifier and signified. It is the interrelation of the signs themselves rather than their correspondence with external reality that draws attention. When referring to the study of works of literature, the stress is on the production of literary meaning from shared conventions and codes.

Speciation: in biology, the process of developing a new species through evolution

Subtext: the implied, rather than overtly stated, meaning(s) of works of literature

Transference: in psychoanalysis, a reproduction of emotions relating to repressed experiences, especially from childhood, and the substitution of another person, often the psychoanalyst him/herself, for the object of the repressed experiences; seen in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*

Trope: a figure of speech such as metaphor, simile, irony, or hyperbole that suggests alternative meanings behind words and phrases

Tutelary Divinity: a guardian divinity or spirit

Verisimilitude: in literary works, the appearance of truth or reality, a convention originating in Aristotle's concept of mimesis, or the direct representation of nature or reality

Biographical Sketches of Writers Covered

Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941)

Born in Ohio, Anderson served in the Spanish-American War, was married for a time, and held various jobs, including management of a paint factory, before he moved to Chicago to write advertising copy and, with the encouragement of Carl Sandburg and others, to begin his career as a writer. His first novel, *Windy McPherson's Son*, published in 1916 and seemingly reflective of Anderson's own life, records the rise of a small-town Iowa boy to successful manufacturer and his subsequent renunciation of this success to search for truth. *Marching Men* (1917), centering on oppressed Pennsylvania coal workers and a failed mystical movement, followed. But it was *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) that first drew critical attention. Focused, as in many of his works, on frustrated small-town residents seeking a voice and meaning in an increasingly mechanized world, he explores a counterbalancing mystical relationship between man and nature's primal forces. Similar themes are presented in *Poor White* (1920), *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), and *Many Marriages* (1923). *Dark Laughter* (1925) contrasts spiritual sterility of whites with unrepressed joyousness of blacks. Anderson retired in the late 1920s to edit two small-town newspapers in Virginia. This move inspired numerous other works, including *Perhaps Women* (1931), on the potential of women to lead others past sterility and mechanization; a number of novels, essays, and short stories; and his memoirs and collections of letters, published posthumously.

William Burroughs (1914–)

Born in St. Louis and educated at Harvard, Burroughs lived extensively abroad, especially in Paris. His experiences as a drug addict inspired many of his best-known writings including *Junkie* (1953), *Naked Lunch* (Paris [1959], New York [1962]), and *Queer* (1985). Other works, many of which utilize fantasy or science fiction, explore alternative lifestyles such as those of homosexuals or gangsters. Especially in his writings about the drug culture, one finds beneath the fantasy an astute social satire, clinically accurate descriptions of addiction and its aftermath, and an anthropological approach to his subject matter. In 1981 he published *Cities of the Red Night* about a utopian settlement, followed by collections of essays and short prose pieces (*The Adding Machine* [1986] and *Tornado Alley* [1989]). Burroughs' correspondence with Allen Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters*, came out in 1963, and his autobiographical writings of the 1950s were published as *Interzone* in 1989. A guru to the Beat Generation and a prolific but controversial writer, Burroughs' apocalyptic vision has made him a contemporary cult figure.

Robert Coover (1932–)

Born in Iowa, Coover launched his successful writing career with a Faulkner Award in 1985 for his first novel, *The Origin of the Brunists*. Known for narrative experimentation, Coover fuses fantasy, satire, and realism in this novel and in such later works as *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968), which is about an imaginary baseball league invented by and filling out the life of an otherwise lonely accountant. Narrated by Richard Nixon, *The Public Burning* (1977) is a postmodern fable satirizing jingoist rhetoric and Cold War ideology in the context of the Rosenberg executions. *Spanking the Maid* (1982) satirizes sadism in fiction, while *Gerald's Party* (1986) looks at human chaos through the lens of black humor, and *Pricksongs & Descants* (1969) introduces experimental "hypercube" fiction and includes modern parables and other short fictional pieces. Other works include two plays, a film, and *A Night at the Movies, Or, You Must Remember This* (1987), a work that links fiction and film.

Don DeLillo (1936–)

Born in New York City and educated at Fordham University, DeLillo began publishing in the 1970s with *Americana* (1971), about a TV executive who outgrows his business; the existential comedy *End Zone* (1972), which uses football as a metaphor for both atomic war and a rootless, disengaged society; and *Great Jones Street* (1973), about jazz and the drug culture. Subsequent novels of the 1970s and 80s take up such themes as rich New Yorkers caught in terrorism (*Players* [1977]); the corruptible multinational American expatriate community in Athens (*The Names* [1982]); and man's uneasy truce with technology and ecological disaster in his comic masterpiece, *White Noise* (1985). Later works *Libra* (1988) and *Mao II* (1991) look at the story of Lee Harvey Oswald as an anti-bildungsroman and at the world of intelligence and CIA operatives.

William Faulkner (1897–1962)

Born and raised in Oxford, Mississippi, Faulkner used the society and culture of the region to create Yoknapatawpha County, the mythical setting of his greatest novels. Following World War I, Faulkner studied at the

University of Mississippi, worked on a newspaper in New Orleans, lived briefly in Europe, and in 1926, with the help of Sherwood Anderson, published his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, about the return home of a dying soldier. But it is *Sartoris* (1929), a mythical tale that introduces the decline of four Old South families and the rise of the unscrupulous Snopes family, which sets the tone for the works to follow. The experimental *The Sound and the Fury*, a story of the decadent Compson family told from three different perspectives, was published in 1929, followed in 1930 by *As I Lay Dying*, the psychological study of a poor white family preparing to bury their mother. *Sanctuary* was published in 1931 and *Light in August* in 1932, with its redemptive, communal message softening Faulkner's harsh themes of determinism, racism, and neurotic isolation. *Absalom, Absalom!*, published in 1936, depicts the tragic downfall of Colonel Sutpen; *The Unvanquished* (1938) traces the history of the Sartoris family during the Civil War; and *The Wild Palms* (1939) centers, in interwoven tales, on the effects of a Mississippi flood on two very different sets of lives. Of his dozens of other works, *A Fable* (1954) and *The Reivers* (1962) both won Pulitzer Prizes, and Faulkner's acceptance speech for his 1950 Nobel Prize stressed the writer's duty to depict man's endurance against the odds by way of compassion and sacrifice.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940)

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, educated and well-connected in literary circles at Princeton, and briefly a soldier, Fitzgerald published his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in 1920. In it he captures the mood of the Jazz Age at Princeton during the postwar period. *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920), *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), and *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) followed soon after, extending Fitzgerald's portrait of the glamorous and extravagant, but dissipated, life of the 1920s jet set and mirroring his own life and marriage. His finest novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), embodies the American dream during a corrupt period in the figure of the self-made millionaire, Jay Gatsby, who is in love with the unattainable Daisy Buchanan. *Tender is the Night* (1934), autobiographical in many ways, presents the gradual decline and fall of American psychiatrist Dick Diver, whose marriage to his beautiful but mentally unstable patient, Nicole, leads to his own destruction. Finally, *The Last Tycoon*, published posthumously in 1941, tells the story of a movie industry mogul. Several collections of Fitzgerald's short stories were published after his death, as were four volumes of his magazine contributions, poems, and correspondence (*Letters* [1963] and *As Ever, Scott Fitz-* [1972]). The tragedies of his own life and of his wife's nervous breakdown are reflected both in *Tender is the Night* and in essays collected by Edmund Wilson and published in 1945 as *The Crack-Up*.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961)

Born in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1899 and an avid hunter and fisherman, Hemingway began his career as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. In World War I, he served as an ambulance driver in France and in the Italian infantry. After the war Hemingway, badly wounded in action, settled in Paris as a correspondent for the *Toronto Star*, and it was there that he began his serious writing career. Early works such as *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923) and *In Our Time* (1925) show the stylistic influences of expatriate writers Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. Among his most famous writings of that period are *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), about the disillusionment, moral collapse, and escapist activities of a group of expatriate Americans and Englishmen living in Paris after the war, and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), a wartime love story about an English nurse and an American ambulance worker. Hemingway was seen as a leading spokesman for America's "lost generation," unsettled by a postwar collapse of values and loss of faith. His 1920s stories, in their spare, unemotional style, depict the cynical, stoic, and tough survivors of this era who can trust only primal emotions. Works of the 1930s include *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) on bullfighting and *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) on big-game hunting. *To Have and Have Not* (1937) explores collective action as a solution to social problems, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) reflects Hemingway's experiences as a war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War. The highly acclaimed *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a parable about an aging fisherman's stoic and even loving battle with the forces of nature in the form of an enormous fish, helped him win the Nobel Prize in 1954. Several novels were published posthumously, including *A Moveable Feast* (1964), which sketched his life in Paris in the 1920s.

Zora Neale Hurston (1901?–60)

Born in Florida, a graduate of Barnard College with a degree in anthropology, and a Guggenheim and Howard University Alumni Award recipient, Hurston's interest in the folklore and culture of Haiti, the West Indies, and the black South was reflected in her two anthropological studies, *Tell My Horse* (1938) and *Mules and Men* (1935). Her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), about the loves of a black preacher, won a Book of the Month Club award, but her masterpiece is *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), today considered a key feminist text. *Their Eyes* celebrates, in richly metaphorical language, the growing autonomy of a young black girl who only in her third

marriage finds true fulfillment and love in the South's patriarchal society. Later works *Moses: Man of the Mountain* (1939), which interprets the Biblical Jews from a black folk perspective, and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), about a Florida cracker woman, were not as popular. Her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, was published in 1942 and a collection of her short stories in 1985. Although prominent early in her career, she died in obscurity.

Toni Morrison (1931–)

Born in Ohio and the holder of a BA in English from Howard University and an MA from Cornell, Morrison began her literary career with the publication of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), a novel about a Southern black girl who is caught up in self-hatred and believes that without blue eyes she cannot be accepted by society. *Sula* (1974) followed, a striking feminist text that posits with the strong and even frighteningly autonomous women of the matrilineal Peace family an alternative to the black bourgeoisie. *Song of Solomon* (1977), a Book of the Month Club Award winner, focuses on the black male experience and its rites of passage. But it is *Beloved* (1987), a story of the ravages of slavery and its aftermath as experienced by a black woman who kills her own baby to prevent the child's capture and sale back into slavery, that received highest acclaim and earned Morrison a Pulitzer Prize. *Jazz*, set in Harlem during the 1920s, followed in 1992, and in 1993 Morrison was the first black woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Her *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), based on a series of lectures delivered at Harvard, has been widely influential in academic circles. She currently teaches at Princeton University.

Flannery O'Connor (1925–64)

Born in Georgia, the setting of her fiction, O'Connor is known as a visionary Catholic writer of Gothic tales about the Protestant South and the conflict between the sacred and the profane. An early novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), is a macabre and fanatical tale about a young boy who tries to baptize another. Among her best-known short stories are "Good Country People," "A Good Man is Hard to Find," "The Artificial Nigger," and "Everything That Rises Must Converge." These and her other stories depict in a comic and haunting manner the struggle of her characters to escape evil and, in coming to understand themselves, to achieve salvation. Collections of stories include *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955), *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965), and *Complete Stories* (1971). O'Connor's collected occasional prose appeared in 1969 and her letters in 1979.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1922–)

Born in Indianapolis and a graduate of Cornell in biochemistry, Vonnegut served in the infantry in World War II, was captured by the Germans, and managed to survive the bombing of Dresden only because he had been assigned to work in an underground meat locker in a slaughterhouse. Following the war he studied anthropology at the University of Chicago and worked for General Electric. His novels reflect these experiences. *Player Piano* (1952) satirizes mechanization and automation at GE; *Mother Night* (1961) centers on an American spy who outwits the enemy by transmitting secret messages via pro-Nazi radio; and *Cat's Cradle* (1963) proposes the use of lies to achieve human happiness. Using black humor to satirize the duplicity of modern life, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965) focuses on man's need for compassion and generosity, and *Slaughterhouse-Five; or The Children's Crusade* (1969), like earlier works, uses science fiction techniques and surrealistic dark comedy to address the devastation, trauma, and aftermath of war. Other novels satirizing the deficiencies and nihilism of modern society and of contemporary politics are *Breakfast of Champions; or, Goodbye Blue Monday!* (1973) and *Lonesome No More!* (1976). Similar themes are addressed in later novels and stories, including one novel about a Vietnam War veteran, another about the afterlife of two American heroes of the Nagasaki bombing, and a third about a nuclear accident.

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20th-Century American Fiction

Part III

Professor Arnold Weinstein



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Part III
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20th-Century American Fiction

Scope:

The aim of this course is to analyze and appreciate some of the major works of fiction produced in this country over the past century, using as a focal point the idea of “freedom of speech.” The focus on freedom of speech is appropriate for a number of reasons: (1) these texts often invoke the fundamental political freedoms guaranteed by the American Constitution, and many of them take the liberty of articulating the painful ideological conflicts that have punctuated our modern history: war, racism, poverty, drugs, sexism and the like; (2) “freedom of speech” also spells out the key thesis to be presented in these readings: language itself turns out to be not only “free,” but a precious means of becoming free, of experiencing life beyond the constraints of the ordinary workaday world; (3) the overriding theme in American literature, as in American life, is that of freedom itself, whether expressed in a laissez-faire economy, in “upward mobility,” or simply in our belief that we can make ourselves and our lives into something beyond the origins and influences of our births (a theme formerly known as the American dream). No other society has ever professed such beliefs, and it is not surprising that our literature has much to tell us about the viability of these notions.

Why would literature be a privileged record for this special American story about freedom? The answer: American fiction is something of a battleground in the “war of independence” that human beings—white or black or red or yellow, male or female—wage every day of their lives. Our war consists of achieving a self, making or maintaining an identity, making our particular mark in the world we inhabit. This is a battle because the twentieth-century American scene is not particularly hospitable to self-making: great forces coerce our lives, forces that are at once economic, biological, political, racial, and ideological. We are dogged by not only death and taxes but by the influence of family, of business, of society, of all those potent vectors that constitute the real map and landscape of our lives. This vexed and conflicted terrain does not resemble the smooth résumés that are our shorthand for what we have done, but it does correspond to our experiential awareness of what we go through, how we have changed from childhood to adulthood, what our work and friendships and marriages have been and what they have meant to us. Literature enables us to recover this territory, our territory. The texts presented in this course constitute an enlarged repertory of human resources, of the battle for freedom.

We begin by looking at the great texts and movements of the nineteenth century, especially our belief in heroic selfhood, and we begin to see and chart the kinds of forces that make up the moving stage we occupy. Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* is among the most poignant descriptions of life at the beginning of the century, but the charm of this small-town narrative acquires a deeper hue when we see the amount of repression and inner violence that Anderson chronicles. Hemingway’s *In Our Time* and Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* are both, in their own ways, about American loss of innocence, about how the Great War and the brutality of modern life permanently altered our belief systems. This theme is presented as physical trauma in Hemingway, as madness and decay in Fitzgerald. Faulkner’s *Light in August* depicts the ravages of racism in the American South, but it seeks, magnificently, to pair its overt story of carnage and neurosis with another, more elusive fable of love, kinship, and redemption. We turn to Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* for the first—and perhaps the best—account of growing up black and female in America, a story that is expressed in a kind of language and diction that moves breathlessly from the vernacular to the legendary. Flannery O’Connor’s stories bring a different agenda to our course: the challenge of perceiving the contours of God, spirit, and grace in a seemingly materialist Southern landscape peopled with the lowest profile folks in American literature. Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*, once censored and then seen as merely a raunchy drug epic, will be studied as a dazzling and disturbing account of the body in culture, a body that is horribly open and defenseless against the takeovers that beset it. War returns to our course in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, at once poignant and wacky, speaking to us of mass destruction and of extraterrestrials in the same voice, a voice that is hard to forget. The course will close with a series of lectures on three of the most significant contemporary writers, writers whose works may not yet be familiar to you. In his sprawling and audacious *Public Burning*, Robert Coover uses that most popular American code, entertainment, to present a manic account of the Rosenberg execution and the antics of one Richard Nixon. Toni Morrison’s fascinating *Sula* is an experimental novel in which Morrison fashions a group of characters whose lives and values make rubble out of the conventions of humanistic culture, whether black or white. Finally, Don DeLillo’s appealing, absurdist comedy of modern life, *White Noise*, depicts our encounter with the technological madhouse in which we live but which we have not quite gotten around to seeing.

These American fictions, seen together, tell a composite story about coping, about fashioning both a story and a life. The range of experiences and subcultures to be found here will dwarf the experience of any single reader, and that is how it should be. Much is dark in these stories, but the honesty and integrity of these writers adds pith and richness to our own lives and makes us realize that reading is as much a lifeline as it is entertainment or education.

Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Analyze and discuss representative works of eleven major American novelists and short-story writers—Anderson, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hurston, O’Connor, Burroughs, Vonnegut, Coover, Morrison, and DeLillo—identifying what is most distinctive and significant about each one of them.
2. Discuss how the American belief in freedom of the individual underwrites our literature, as well as our political and economic systems, and trace that theme by using specific examples from major works of the nineteenth century and showing the influence of these examples across the spectrum of the works under study.
3. Explain the concept of freedom of speech as a political foundation of our nation; as a means by which literature embodies, explores, and actualizes life; and as a resource used by all humans to transcend determinism.
4. Discuss and provide examples of American fiction’s forceful dramatization over the past century of the conflict between the human subject and the great social forces—war, economics, racism, sexism, etc.—that coerce and sometimes destroy selfhood and even human life.
5. Compare and contrast, with examples, the literary achievements of our great trio of American modernists: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, in relation both to the historic “moment” of modernism (Lost Generation, Great War, etc.) and the narrative innovations of these writers (renderings of violence, stream of consciousness, etc.).
6. Identify the range of positions and subjectivities (e.g., white, black, male, female, etc.) encountered in the works under study, and evaluate the importance to our national consciousness of this stereophonic literature, which brings in voices from the center and the margins.
7. Compare and contrast new talents writing in the late twentieth century—especially Coover, Morrison, and DeLillo—with established writers, identifying specifically where the later writers are experimental and where they share common ground with the well-known figures of the early- and mid-twentieth century

Lecture Seventeen

Flannery O'Connor: Realist of Distances

Scope: O'Connor's stories challenge the premises of realism in that she presents a recognizable everyday scene, peopled with the most ordinary folks, and then proceeds to depict miraculous or otherworldly happenings. Her work raises the stark question: how can one depict the spiritual? Do we know what it looks like?

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

1. Contrast the conventions of realism with O'Connor's incarnational art.
2. Describe her stories' ideological underpinnings and typical subject matter.
3. Explain the meaning of the sequence of events in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" that leads to the annihilation of an ordinary family on an outing in eastern Tennessee.
4. Identify the similarities between the Misfit and Oedipus; discuss the Misfit's feud with Jesus Christ; and relate both to the overall trajectory of the story.
5. Explain the role of animals in the story and the religious significance of the journey, the killings, and the deep, dark woods at the end.

Outline

- I. O'Connor once described herself as a "realist of distances."
 - A. A realist text is a kind of reliable notation of the surface world.
 1. Social, material, and class issues are respected.
 2. No metamorphoses or grand reversals take place.
 3. The plot proceeds in a predictable linear direction toward closure using cause and effect logic.
 - B. Realism has obvious limits.
 1. A realist text has trouble depicting soul or spirit .
 2. When limited to a realist code, we can only discuss God, spirit, or soul by describing surfaces and suggesting a reality beyond, discussing the tangible while hinting at the transcendent.
 3. Plot must move from causal logic on toward a logic of revelation.
 - C. The spiritual, the soul, and the divine would be terrifying if described in physical form.
 1. The popularity of cults and the search for spiritual auras is familiar in our society.
 2. The fact that Rembrandt chose everyday people as models for apostles and saints implies that the human face, seen in the right, way, becomes transcendent and points us in the right direction.
 - D. O'Connor's work is always about the spiritual world behind the screen of the phenomenal and about the coexistence of the mythical and miraculous with our everyday world.
 1. Her work erases the line between the supernatural and the workaday.
 2. It is full of revelations, with ordinary folks who turn out, to their surprise and ours, to be remarkable.
 3. The everyday is also miraculous and transcendent.
 4. Her work does not play by the rules of traditional realism; it jolts our sense of logic and propriety.
 5. In O'Connor's words, her realism does not hesitate to distort appearances in order to show a hidden truth.
 - E. In a realist view, O'Connor's world is simply one of dying, lower middle-class Georgians, rednecks, white trash, and black menials.
 1. Her system is nourished by a calm, complacent racism that it recognizes but does not indict.
 2. O'Connor's world is a piece of culture seen by outsiders as grotesque and exotic.
 3. The culture O'Connor depicts is now unfortunately neglected on account of its political incorrectness.
 - F. Like Kafka, O'Connor is a triple misfit.
 1. She is a visionary Catholic woman in the secular, materialist, Protestant South.
 2. O'Connor regards her Georgia as "Christ-haunted."
 3. She writes about a material world that must rediscover soul, grace, Christ, and the concepts of sin, damnation, and redemption.

4. O'Connor knows, however, that her readers are unlikely to share her views, therefore she uses violence in her stories to break through the modern reader's armor.
 5. Her writing uses a different type of language to erase the boundary between the sacred and the profane.
 6. She calls literature an "incarnational art"; what seems to be unimportant background turns out to be much more and to have an echoing dimension.
- II.** O'Connor's most famous story, "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," shows all of the author's virtues, as well as her problems.
- A.** She paints a vivid picture of a desacralized world and ordinary people immersed in materiality without meaning.
 - B.** Amid animal images and metaphors, the family will embark on an outing to east Tennessee.
 - C.** The scenes pulsate with more than is immediately apparent.
 - D.** The domineering grandmother makes Bailey take a special side trip to see a plantation but realizes, after they have become lost, that the plantation is actually in Georgia, not Tennessee.
 - E.** The realization of her mistake upsets Grandmother and causes her to start; in a chain reaction, everything is turned upside down literally and figuratively.
 - F.** The Misfit, a prison escapee mentioned earlier in the story, appears in a hearse-like automobile just as the family's car leaves the road.
 - G.** Each member of the family is taken in turn into the woods, painted as a dark and threatening place, and systematically shot by the Misfit.
 - H.** The Misfit, one of O'Connor's most fascinating characters, is presented as a scholar/intellectual who has forgotten his own past, during which he murdered his father.
 1. He is tortured by his inability to remember what caused him to be sent to jail, thus erasing the line between deed and meaning, events and their actual significance, crime and punishment.
 2. He is fascinated with Jesus, a good man who was crucified nonetheless.
 3. He relentlessly seeks to reestablish a connection between the sacred and the profane, the superficial and the genuine; he does all the evil he can to force consideration of life and morality.
 - I.** The comeuppance meted by the Misfit is brutal and shocking; the story's final judgment insists upon complete annihilation of the secular life that has been exalted.

Lecture Eighteen O'Connor: Taking the Measure of the Region

Scope: Known essentially as a Southern writer working largely with local Georgia materials, O'Connor probes very deeply into what it means to be from a particular culture: what resources and what blinders that entails. Her most gripping work takes the measure of this scene by inserting it into a framework that includes all history and goes back to the Crucifixion.

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

1. Explain what makes O'Connor a regional writer and in what ways she transcends that regionalism.
2. Identify what produced the elegiac quality of "Judgment Day."
3. Explain the significance of the Dantesque journey of grandfather and grandson to Atlanta in "The Artificial Nigger" and the meaning of the title of the story.
4. Describe the ironies of Ph.D. Joy Hopewell's journey to knowledge through her relationship with "country boy" Manly Pointer in "Good Country People."
5. Describe Mrs. Shortley's function as center of consciousness in "The Displaced Person."
6. Contrast O'Connor's depiction of racism and provincialism with Faulkner's.

Outline

- I. O'Connor's highly regionalist work requires an open mind about Southern culture.
 - A. O'Connor clothes universal issues in a very local idiom.
 - B. Some of O'Connor's most poignant stories, particularly "Judgment Day," involve Southerners who have unfortunately ended up in New York.
- II. "The Artificial Nigger," a story about the loss of soul and denial of one's one flesh, recounts the journey of Mr. Head and his grandson through the city on a trip that echoes Dante's *Inferno*.
 - A. In a parallel with Peter's repudiation of Christ, the grandfather denies being related to the boy, leading to his own immediate damnation.
 - B. Recognition of "niggers," a symbol of cultural typing, gauges what people know and do not know.
 - C. When the two are most lost, they come across the "artificial nigger," a deteriorating statue of a black man with a look of misery upon his face.
 1. The sight of this icon unites the two in common defeat.
 2. The "artificial nigger," an image of exploitation and scapegoating, is bathed in mercy and grace as it catalyzes an awareness of mutuality that brings Mr. Head and his grandson back together.
 3. O'Connor boldly clothes a religious, doctrinal story in the aggressive language of class and race.
- II. A comedy of class and of language, "Good Country People" provides unforgettable characters and narrative experimentation.
 - A. Mrs. Hopewell seeks workers, but not "white trash."
 - B. Mrs. Freeman, a "good country person," and Mrs. Hopewell interact on a level of pure cliché and banality.
 - C. Mrs. Hopewell's daughter, Joy, has rechristened herself Hulga and earned a PhD in philosophy; she crafts herself as an outsider to this culture.
 - D. Manley Pointer, a traveling Bible salesman, makes himself out to be very simple and frail.
 1. When Joy/Hulga tells Pointer that she does not believe in God, he becomes mesmerized with her.
 2. She uses Pointer for a controlled experiment in sensations.
 3. Joy/Hulga remains detached during their rendezvous, until Pointer asks her to tell him where her wooden leg "joins on" and to let him see it.
 4. She feels she's face to face with real innocence when Pointer tells her that the wooden leg is what makes her different

5. Overcome, Joy/Hulga removes her wooden leg, only to find that Pointer is not actually “good country folk” after all.
 6. Pointer abandons Joy, taking her wooden leg and her innocence.
 7. O’Connor tells, in a carnival-like, grotesque fashion, the story of a spiritual event.
- III. “The Displaced Person” is a meditation on regionalism and displacement.
- A. O’Connor suggests the passing of an order, with Georgia forced to meet the modern world and the beginnings of a new South.
 - B. Employed on Mrs. McIntyre’s farm, Mrs. Shortley provides the appropriate estrangement with which to view this story.
 1. Mrs. Shortley fears the Guizacs may bring to her community the violence and destruction taking place in Europe.
 2. Her husband believes Guizac is the German enemy he fought.
 - C. A Catholic priest, accompanied by a displaced Polish family, visit Mrs. McIntyre, a widow who is struggling to manage her husband’s farm.
 - D. Everyone will be displaced by the end of the story.
 1. Mrs. McIntyre loses her health and her farm.
 2. The Shortleys prepare to depart after Mrs. Shortley hears that Guizac will replace her.
 3. Guizac, with the consent of everyone around him, is destroyed by a tractor.
 - E. As the Shortleys leave the farm, Mrs. Shortley has a stroke and dies; in the end she is transformed, displaced and dismembered much like the Polish victims of the war.

Readings

Essential:

O’Connor, *The Complete Stories*

Recommended:

O’Connor, *The Violent Bear It Away, Wise Blood, Mystery and Manners*; Desmond, *Risen Sons*; Friedman, ed., *Critical Essays on Flannery O’Connor*; Hawkins, *The Language of Grace*; Weinstein, *Nobody’s Home*

Topics for Further Investigation

Discuss the notion of the grotesque in O’Connor’s stories. Why does her work appear to be so extremist? Include in your discussion some commentary on the pros and cons of her regionalism.

What kind of problems does the religious writer encounter when the subject is grace or miracles or the events of the soul? How does O’Connor resolve these problems? Do you find them satisfactorily resolved?

Lecture Nineteen

William Burroughs: Bad Boy of American Literature

Scope: Burroughs is known primarily as a Beat-Generation writer and author of the drug epic, *Naked Lunch*; however, this characterization utterly fails to take his measure as a visionary about American culture. His assessment of drugs and of the human need that craves them opens on to a shocking new image of the self.

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

1. Relate Burroughs' background and experience to the subject matter and style of his art.
2. Explain why *Naked Lunch*, although a best seller in France, was censored in the U.S when it was published in 1959; Burroughs' relationship with the writers of the Beat Generation; and why he became a contemporary cult figure.
3. Describe the novel's scientific approach to drug addiction and its simultaneous critique of puffery, pretension, and power.
4. Explain Burroughs' idea of the "algebra of need."
5. Place the novel in the tradition of earlier literary works centered on ecstatic vision or on a degraded, wasteland-like environment.

Outline

- I. William Burroughs and *Naked Lunch* invite discussion of censorship, obscenity, and the question of what is offensive to cultural norms and proprieties.
 - A. The response to *Naked Lunch* is integral to its meaning.
 1. *Naked Lunch* was the last book to be censored in the U.S.
 2. Norman Mailer and Allen Ginsberg testified on behalf of *Naked Lunch* at the court proceeding that dealt with its censorship.
 - a. The text is pornographic, misogynist, racist, self-indulgent, often incoherent, brutal, and filthy.
 - b. Defying description, *Naked Lunch* is also very beautiful.
 - B. William Seward Burroughs grew up in St. Louis, with the Burroughs' adding machine fortune.
 1. He studied anthropology and ethnology at Harvard in the 1930s and traveled throughout Europe afterwards.
 2. Burroughs worked for a year at an ad agency before a brief stint in the military.
 3. Upon returning to the States, Burroughs spent time as a barman, a reporter, a factory worker, and an exterminator.
 4. In 1943, unwilling to lead a bourgeois life, Burroughs entered the drug scene.
 5. He emerged in the mid-50s to act as guru to Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg and to become mistakenly identified as one of the leaders of the Beat Generation.
 - C. Burroughs is a permanent feature in the American cultural landscape.
 1. Before *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs wrote *Junky*, a realist treatment of the 1950s drug scene.
 2. In the 1960s he also wrote a lot of quasi-science fiction, like *Nova Express* and *The Ticket That Exploded*.
 3. He developed with Byron Gysin a device called the *cut-up*, in which segments of narrative are cut to pieces and redistributed.
 4. Though believed to be down and out in the 1980s, Burroughs kept writing, publishing three remarkable books: *The Cities of the Red Night*, *The Place of Dead Roads*, and *The Western Lands*.
 5. Burroughs is still a cult figure and guru today.
- II. *Naked Lunch* is a book for all ages.
 - A. *Naked Lunch* is read differently in each generation.
 1. Published in France in 1959, *Naked Lunch* was an immediate sensation.
 - a. Burroughs was thought of as the archetypal counterculture figure.

Lecture Twenty

Naked Lunch: The Body in Culture

Scope: Burroughs is a rollicking comic writer, even though his humor is hard for many to stomach. He is also a surrealist author, creating figures of human abuse, exploitation, and ecstasy in ways no other author has attempted. His work places the body especially in a network of forces that alters our understanding of culture.

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

1. Elaborate on the “tonic nature of Burroughs’ outrageousness” and justify this drug epic as a comic masterpiece, citing examples of Burroughs’ wit and satire.
2. Describe “mugwumps,” “latahs,” and the Meet Cafe and their purpose in the larger scheme of the novel.
3. Explain Burroughs’ use of the imagery of permeable borders and frontiers, particularly with reference to the body.
4. Justify Burroughs’ reputation as an ecological writer focused both on the decaying environment and on the porous body in ongoing danger of parasitical takeover, and explain what happens to autonomy and willpower in such a world.

Outline

- I. *Naked Lunch*, which Burroughs claims to have written under the influence of drugs, has great comic dimensions.
 - A. Mailer, in defense of *Naked Lunch*, emphasized the fine, caustic comedy of Burroughs’ work.
 - B. Burroughs’ work is full of manic throwaway humor, lines that may be read quickly and not necessarily returned to but that contain great power and meaning.
 - C. Burroughs knows how to spoof bigotry and deflate pretension; his perfect touch with asides never misses the opportunity for ridicule
 1. The description of a man’s glasses leads to the tale of an expert diamondcutter on the skids
 2. In a one-line spoof on the academy, an intellectual says that the best writing today is in scientific reports and periodicals.
 3. Burroughs’ uncanny ear for and ability to pick up on colloquialisms leads to passages that many find offensive.
 - a. His great sense of idiomatic expression lends authenticity to a rendition of the diction of “good ol’ boys.”
 - b. Ginsberg, speaking as a Jewish poet, told the Massachusetts court he was not offended by Burroughs’ antisemitism.
 - c. A consummate satirist, Burroughs was, as Ginsberg said, poking fun at “the whole thing.”
 - D. Burroughs expresses a profound belief that the body itself can be subject to extraordinary events.
 1. Leif the Unlucky collapses in Cairo with strangulated intestines, perforated ulcers, and peritonitis; after being “bedded” in the latrine of the overcrowded hospital, Leif undergoes a number of other outrageous experiences.
 2. In an offensive but interesting representation of pure literalism, Burroughs depicts a father taking his son out for a rite of passage, a “piece of ass”; this, it can be said, is how literature works: it takes words and shows us what their reaches are.
- II. Burroughs takes extreme liberties with the phenomenal, realistic world to which we are accustomed.
 - A. He invents creatures in *Naked Lunch*.
 1. *Mugwumps* engage in anal fornication and sacrifice of youth amid a setting of elegant corruption; they introduce part of the visionary scheme: a view of power to use other people for one’s own pleasure
 2. *Latahs* are clones that can be used in “other ways.”
 - a. The kind of logic that animates this text is remarkably disengaged.
 - b. This segment is about people using people, with no interest in one another.

- c. In a sense, the latahs take over themselves, turning the table with a weird reciprocity that makes visible the possibility that the self is removable.
 - B. One of the most visionary passages of the book is that of “The Meet Café,” a new constellation of power and culture.
 - 1. He provides a long description of many strange people.
 - 2. The passage closes with a futuristic view of the world, with cadres of people whose business it is to exploit the physiological and mental needs of others.
 - 3. The selling and obtaining of “junk” becomes a cancerous metaphor for all the exchanges that take place between people and that make up our economies.
- III. *Naked Lunch* is, in a very profound way, about frontiers.
 - A. This book is about body control, and world politics and global capitalism come to be understood along those lines.
 - B. The novel is distinctly and insistently international; drug culture restricts itself to no single society.
 - 1. Sal’s operations extend throughout the world; he has held twenty-three passports and been deported forty-nine times.
 - 2. He’s talking of a wild international scene of people running drugs and finding safe drug cultures.
 - C. The body is presented as the first and last frontiers encountered by every human being.
 - 1. The body is a place of entries and exits.
 - 2. A view is put forth of the body as a site of incessant voyages and even more incessant traffic.
 - 3. The commerce of the body’s entries and exits provides a structural principle for *Naked Lunch*; the governing structure is the opening of the body.
- IV. Burroughs initially referred to the drug culture as a human virus.
 - A. The single plot of this book and of human life is the entry of the parasite into the host.
 - 1. Despite its evident fragmentation and apparent incoherence, one story is being told over and over in radically different ways.
 - 2. This is the story of a viral world in which something comes inside and takes over something else—us.
 - B. The conceptual benefits of understanding the world include realization of our creaturely vulnerability
 - 1. We are porous, enterable, and manipulable.
 - 2. We have no defenses; our skin appears closed but the environmental picture that life has given us proves that we are permeable.
 - 3. There is an animus, a parasitic logic of life, that leads people to take over other people.
 - 4. Takeover happens in many ways: sexual, chemical, ideological.
 - 5. With this picture of the human subject without defenses, notions of self and integrity become quaint and useless.
 - 6. We are part of a much larger medium subject to encroachment as a condition of life, inhabiting an ecosystem in which we are constantly preyed on—this is the very nature of culture and, at the least, of business.

Lecture Twenty-One

Naked Lunch:

Power and Exchange in the Viral World

Scope: Even though *Naked Lunch* appears to be fragmentary and chaotic, it is actually structured in the most rigorous fashion imaginable, fueled by one central plot: the parasite takes over the host. The lecture discusses the implications of this view and whether there is any conceivable ethic to accompany such a perspective.

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

1. Explain Burroughs' idea of the dangers of parasitical takeover and the precariousness of identity, and the point of Dr. Benway's dystopia.
2. Describe language as one of the most powerful means of exerting control.
3. Discuss Burroughs' new view of world religions in the novel.
4. Relate biocontrol and "sending" to Burroughs' political vision, ecstasy to penetration and loss of control, and the talking asshole to the Western enlightenment ethos.
5. Determine the next step: where one goes from here.

Outline

- I. The archetypal plot of the parasite taking over the host has larger implications in terms of our position in culture and of literature's role.
 - A. The impetus for control is essential to the text.
 1. As expressed by the male hustler, even casual exchanges can be absolute invasion scenarios, attempts to take from you your self.
 2. One of Burroughs' most memorable characters, Dr. Benway, is a professional controller of people, a "manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing, and control."
 - a. Benway asserts that people can be rather easily reprogrammed.
 - b. Burroughs provides an astounding picture of culture organized along these lines, of control, and of parallels with drug addiction
 - B. Burroughs even rewrites religious tradition along these lines: exalted figures of great authority are reconceived along the same control lines as addiction, prostitution, etc.
 1. Christ, in Burroughs world, would have been a carnival performer.
 2. Buddha is a "notorious metabolic junky."
 3. Mohammed was dreamed up by the Mecca Chamber of Commerce.
 - C. Language is the most infectious element of all and the most effective means for one person to get inside another.
 1. Burroughs warns of the threat posed by wise men seeking to speak to the masses.
 2. The "unlocking" of a "word hoard" unleashes contagion.
 3. Conversation and lecturing are both forms of brainwashing.
 4. This view calls into question the noble purposes of learning, education, and lecturing, which can also be seen as traffic, power, the kind of dialectic so central in *Naked Lunch*, with disturbing parallels to the grosser forms of physical.
 - D. Burroughs is talking about more than drugs.
 1. The enemy, the forces that infiltrate, contaminate, and alter the human brain include the culture's media and propaganda; these too are traffic in which we are immersed.
 2. Burroughs writes a lot about biocontrol, an extension of Dr. Benway's dystopia.
 - a. What is the true self if we function better by taking one pill or another?
 - b. We are manipulable, alterable, porous.
 - c. Biocontrol involves certain kinds of what we would call neurological research.
 3. The political regime has one-way telepathic control.

- a. A telepathic sender must send all the time and can never receive, because if he receives that means someone else with feelings of their own could louse up his continuity.
 - b. The sender, a mythic creature, is the central human virus who seeks to control, coerce, debase, exploit, or annihilate the individuality of another living creature.
 - c. Burroughs' political vision is one of control mania.
- II.** This ongoing assault on human integrity, this constant infiltration of the subject is complemented by a desire on the part of the subject to move out.
- A.** We want to be entered so that we can leave.
 - 1. *Ecstasy* means "to leave the place."
 - 2. Penetration by a syringe of drugs leads to departure, or a high of some sort.
 - 3. This regime of takeover is at least in some sense consensual.
 - 4. Burroughs taps into biological determinism that makes willpower a joke.
 - 5. The tough reality is that the body has its own ferocity, singleness of purpose, and mechanical system that others can use.
 - B.** Burroughs sees the erogenous zones as the greatest entries and exits we are ever to know; God is now located in these areas.
 - C.** Many passages in *Naked Lunch* attempt to deliver moments of ecstasy, not as reality but as visions and performances.
 - 1. These depictions get onto the page something of the violence, ferocity, taboos, interdictions, and frenzy that sexuality can entail.
 - 2. Mark, Johnny, and Mary perform and show the frenzy, splendor, and violence that can go into sex.
- III.** Perhaps the most enduring part of *Naked Lunch* is one of Dr. Benway's stories.
- A.** A carnival man taught his asshole to talk, initially as part of a novelty ventriloquist act.
 - 1. After a while it began talking on its own, adlibbing and responding to the man's gags.
 - 2. It developed teethlike hooks and began eating.
 - 3. Eventually it talked all the time, and nothing could quiet it.
 - 4. This is really a story of takeover, of mutiny by part of the body that usurps the rest.
 - 5. Finally the man's mouth sealed over, and his whole head would have spontaneously amputated except that the asshole needed the eyes to see.
 - 6. The brain was trapped inside the head and could be seen suffering behind the eyes until the eyes "went out."
 - B.** In some cultural way, this is a monumental statement challenging the mind/body paradigm; the anus replaces the central intelligence of the mind and of the subject.
 - C.** This amazing text about the loss of authority inverts the old notions of mind and body (the body is there to serve the mind).
 - D.** Despite all of the liberties Burroughs takes, *Naked Lunch* provides something in return by expanding our horizons and making the reader take sight of places we have never been to but can at least imaginatively experience.
 - E.** Burroughs closes his book with a homely wisdom about avoiding these possibilities.
 - 1. He promotes what he calls *patrolling*, which is his primary occupation.
 - 2. Keep an eye on things, make sure there is always some fit between inside and outside, keep yourself from being totally taken over and lost forever.
 - 3. Burroughs gives us an extraordinarily generous picture of the human being in the larger system of the world.

Readings

Essential:

Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*

Recommended:

Burroughs, *Junky*, *Cities of the Red Night*, *The Western Lands*; McCarthy, Tanner, Oxenhandler, Pound, in *At the Front*; Lydenberg in *Review of Contemporary Fiction*; Mottram, *William Burroughs*; Weinstein, *The Fiction of Relationship*

Topics for Further Investigation

Discuss the issue of obscenity as it relates to *Naked Lunch*. What do you make of Burroughs' argument that he needs to be brutal and shocking? In what sense is the charge of obscenity always a reflection of a culture's pieties and proprieties? Is Burroughs self-indulgent or heroic in his trampling of polite convention? Is he still readable?

What view of the body-in-culture emerges from *Naked Lunch*? How does this picture fit with other modern American texts? Are the views of freedom and constraint in this book particularly American?

Lecture Twenty-Two

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*: Apocalypse Now

Scope: Kurt Vonnegut has done the seemingly impossible: he has written a radically experimental book that is also a bestseller. Vonnegut, an actual survivor of the Dresden firebombing during World War II, carried this story in him for decades before figuring out how it could possibly be told in such a way as to render its dreadful power.

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

1. Explain how Vonnegut uses *Slaughterhouse-Five* to come to grips with his own experience at Dresden during World War II.
2. Describe the various, sometimes radically experimental means he uses to bring alive the atrocity and the horror of the bombing and its aftermath of lifelong trauma.
3. Explain the significance of the novel's subtitle, "The Children's Crusade," and why Billy Pilgrim's wife does not want her husband to write a book that could be made into a film about the war.
4. Tell of Vonnegut's effectiveness in contrasting the heroics and rhetoric of war with its reality.
5. Describe the place of the individual in Vonnegut's deterministic world.
6. State the reasons behind Vonnegut's great popularity with the generation of the 1960s and 70s.

Outline

I. The Vonnegut Career

- A. Vonnegut began writing science fiction in the 1950s and established his distinctively wacky, wry tone complemented by melancholy and fatalism.
- B. Vonnegut experienced considerable despair in his life.
 1. His parents were essentially destroyed by the Depression.
 2. His sister and her husband died within 24 hours of one another.
 3. The weird coincidences and bone-crushing disasters of his books are familiar to him
- C. *Slaughterhouse-Five*, published in 1969, may be Vonnegut's only book to stand the test of time.
 1. With *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut immediately became the spokesperson for a generation.
 2. It appeared at the height of the Vietnam War and captured the turmoil of the 1960s.
 3. It is unusual for a radically experimental novel to also be a bestseller.
 - a. It is very down to earth, promotes middle-class values, and is written in clear, simple (even simplistic) language.
 - b. *Slaughterhouse* captures the absurdity of that moment in time.
- D. The criticism mounted, and within a decade of *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s publication Vonnegut was no longer taken seriously; he was condemned as fuzzy, sentimental, facile, superficial, and simplistic.
- E. Now, toward the end of the century, readers are taking renewed interest in Vonnegut's work; his reputation is on the mend.

II. Why did Vonnegut write *Slaughterhouse-Five* in the way that he did?

- A. Vonnegut experienced the firebombing of Dresden.
 1. Many argue that the firebombing of Dresden is the single worst event of World War II.
 2. Vonnegut argues that this event dwarfs all the other atrocities of WWII, yet no one talks about Dresden.
 3. He is included in the novel as a first-person speaker.
- B. The book speaks of the difficulty of getting this story out into the open.
 1. Toward the end of the book, Billy Pilgrim is in the hospital alongside an old war historian who is convinced nothing really important happened at Dresden.

2. Dresden as a city is evoked in the text with a certain pathos; the prisoners of war thought it magical and beautiful, like heaven or Oz, before its destruction.
 3. Vonnegut had this story in him for a long time but did not know how to tell it, like Hemingway's Harold Krebs.
- C. Vonnegut was trying to find out if this story could be articulated in a way that would be commensurate with its experience. How could you say it? How could you find the right language?
1. This challenge to find the right narrative framework with which to deliver war can be traced back to earlier books like Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* and Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme*
 2. Hemingway's *In Our Time* is an appropriate phrase for understanding Vonnegut's evocation of Dresden.
 - a. Dresden, firebombed at the end of World War II, has unmistakable parallels with 1960s America.
 - b. Vonnegut interweaves the story with a still-unfurling account of contemporary America.
 3. *Slaughterhouse* is about war as a continuum, an ongoing phase of human experience
 4. Vonnegut shares Hemingway's suspicion of big words used to talk about war; he is concerned about his integrity as a writer and honesty about his own experience.
- D. "What can you say about a massacre?"
1. Science fiction is one way of working this out.
 - a. Vonnegut describes how Dresden looked after the war in terms of a lunar landscape
 - b. The birds say all there is to say about a massacre: "Poo-tee-tweet."
 2. The book begins with a set of conversations about Vonnegut's writer's block in articulating this story.
 - a. He tries to get people to talk to him about it.
 - b. He goes to discuss their experience with an old war buddy, O'Hare.
 - c. Furious at the thought, Mrs. O'Hare insists that Vonnegut not romanticize the story but instead tell it with the innocence they brought to the war.
- E. "The Children's Crusade," the subtitle of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, calls up the crusade image often found in depictions of war.
1. The crusades, unmasked, were events in which ignorant bigots engaged in violence and brutality.
 2. The romantic view of the crusades dwells on their piety and heroism and portrays their virtue, magnanimity, and honor;
 3. Vonnegut has a particular proclivity for smelling the sentimentalism that covers over the horror of things.
 - a. British soldiers always provide a civilized, elegant vision of war.
 - b. Wild Bob's romantic rhetoric is an American version of Kiplingesque military sentiment.
 4. Vonnegut is suspicious of this rhetoric, and throughout the novel he pairs such romantic mush with vignettes of violence and brutality.
 5. Vonnegut is rendering an example of violence that is not limited to this story, Dresden, or even war; this violence is culture and history.
- F. Vonnegut's world is constructed by discourses.
1. Vonnegut studied anthropology at the University of Chicago; war comes across as following the particular discourses of their culture.
 2. Vonnegut's training in anthropology resounds in his relation of Vietnam propaganda and business propaganda.
 - a. Vision is always in some sense shaped by other strong but not necessarily visible forces.
 - b. What we take to be our personal sense of things has in that sense been scripted.
 3. There is a mechanistic dimension to this book, particularly in depictions of sex.
 4. In the scheme of war, character is a definite liability, which fits in with our concern over the diminishing status of self and identifies war as one of the enormous forces that lead to it.
 5. Vonnegut reaches all the way to an alternate world for a means to treat his material, to a different reality in the world of Tralfamadore.

Lecture Twenty-Three Vonnegut's World: Tralfamadore or Trauma?

Scope: The humor and science fiction dimensions of *Slaughterhouse-Five* have made it appealing to generations of readers, but one needs to ask: what is the relation between the fantastic, other-worldly reprieve that Billy Pilgrim finds on Tralfamadore, and the experiences he has had in the war.

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

1. Describe the relationship between trauma, mental illness, and the breaking of our usual perceptual frame.
2. Explain the importance of Tralfamadore to Billy Pilgrim's journey from Dresden to wholeness.
3. Explain the concept of metatextuality, its relationship to this text, and the role played by Kilgore Trout in the novel.
4. State the purpose of Vonnegut's inclusion of his own persona.
5. Discuss how Vonnegut makes use of the healing power of memory and of art in telling his story.
6. Explain whether the return to innocence is possible.

Outline

- I. Vonnegut rises wonderfully to the challenge of reimagining character, actually bypassing or transcending it.
 - A. Billy Pilgrim, Vonnegut's protagonist who has experienced Dresden, becomes "unstuck in time," gets picked up by a flying saucer and taken to the planet of Tralfamadore.
 1. Tralfamadoreans provide an extreme anthropological alien/other perspective.
 2. Tralfamadoreans are two feet tall and very strange looking; they can see in four dimensions and pity earthlings for being able to see only three.
 3. Tralfamadoreans are critical of human beings, who are locked into their own simple mindsets and space/time references.
 4. They know nothing about and do not believe in death.
 - a. All moments have always existed.
 - b. It is just an illusion that one moment follows another.
 - c. Death is a fiction, an illusion.
 5. Tralfamadoreans have a holistic vision: humans appear as great millipedes with baby legs on one end and old peoples' legs on the other.
 6. Tralfamadoreans bring to the story a strangeness and a defamiliarization necessary as a lens to depict the war.
 7. The Tralfamadoreans also believe that free will is a myth only spoken of on earth.
 - a. Theirs is an essentially fatalistic view.
 - b. They ignore the awful times, because there is nothing they can do about them.
 - B. Vonnegut critics have extensively debated Tralfamadorean values.
 1. Negative view: some argue that this vision implies total moral paralysis and great passivity.
 2. Positive view: perhaps Vonnegut wants us to be critical of the Tralfamadoreans and to use this vision to create our own new, cleansed worldview.
 - C. Billy Pilgrim is happy on Tralfamadore.
 1. A compelling argument has been put forth that Tralfamadore is an escapist fantasy, a retreat from life into a fantasy land.
 2. There are many disturbing parallels between what happens in Tralfamadore and what Billy has gone through in Dresden.
 3. There is a lurching dislocatedness to the book that resembles the dazed, traumatized condition of those in war.
 - a. Departures, psychic or physical, give the book a weird rhythm.
 - b. Billy goes back and forth in time and does not know when he will go or where he will end up.

- II. The narrative experiment produces a new kind of fiction with no traditional narrative tricks, no linearity or sequence.
- A. We are urged to see things panoramically, though we are all locked into our own perceptual frames
 - B. Billy Pilgrim's movement through time, in and out of situations, gives him a kind of immortality.
 - C. As he does in many of his books, Vonnegut inserts a stand-in for himself; in this case it is Kilgore Trout, a science fiction writer who theorizes about many of the questions this novel presents.
 1. Is Dresden like a Tralfamadorian fiction, wherein that which disables is in another dimension and thus not readily apparent?
 2. Is this one of Trout's stories?
 3. *Slaughterhouse-Five* has a kind of metatextuality, a self-conscious awareness of itself as a text.
 - D. Part of *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s metatextuality derives from Vonnegut's own presence in Dresden and in the story
 1. The story begins with Vonnegut making late-night phone calls to old war buddies.
 2. He himself is often standing behind Billy, making comments.
 3. Vonnegut's presence adds pathos, a old man with his memories.
 - E. *Slaughterhouse* wants but never achieves the serenity of the Tralfamadorian lifestyle and philosophy.
 1. We are stuck in the moment; the beauty and terror and value of our lives come from seeing and valuing even moments of fear and trauma.
 2. Science fiction exists in Vonnegut as a never-never land to be desired because life is so awful and inescapable.
 3. Billy Pilgrim is coming apart in this book, not just unstuck in time but unstuck emotionally.
 - a. Billy is exhausted, but he is active in his sleep.
 - b. He weeps without cause, yells, and kicks.
 - c. In the mental hospital after the war, staffmembers think Billy's trauma stems from childhood events, not from the war.
 - d. Trauma can be traced all the way back; it has no beginning or end.
 - e. The sense of horror locked inside Billy is that fourth dimension of trauma that has no physiological sign but that still hurts.
 - f. *Slaughterhouse-Five* yearns to relieve the pain of trauma
 4. The major thrust of the book is a desire for a return to innocence.
 - a. As Billy watches a war movie backward, trauma is undone.
 - b. Innocence can only be returned to through art.
 - c. When Vonnegut attempts to go back, as in the war movie, he ends up back at the scene of the crime, Dresden.
 - d. This is what really happens: you actually go back to the wound.
 - e. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a lot of pain is transmuted into humor and fantasy so that its measure can be better taken.

Readings

Essential:

Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Recommended:

Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*; Klinkowitz, *Kurt Vonnegut*; Allen, *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*; Giannone, *Vonnegut*; Broer, *Sanity Plea*

Topics for Further Investigation

Consider the science-fiction dimension of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, especially the Tralfamador material. How would you respond to the charge that this material dilutes, even trivializes the Dresden story at the heart of the novel?

The concept of a text that is at once radically experimental and an immediate bestseller is, at the least, a bit odd. How would you explain it? Indicate, in your argument, what seems most experimental about *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and why you think it became a bestseller.

Lecture Twenty-Four

Robert Coover: Postmodern Fabulator

Scope: Coover is among the most experimental, playful, and important of our contemporary writers. His work is attuned to power of all stripes, and he seeks to stretch the contours of storytelling in audacious ways. Realism stops making sense, yet there is an undeniable reality to these fictions.

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

1. Describe Coover as postmodern fabulator, and relate his writings to the tradition of narrative experimentation in literature.
2. Tell why his stories in *Pricksongs & Descants* (1969), particularly “The Elevator” and “The Babysitter,” are called “hypercube” fictions.
3. Discuss the historical context of *The Public Burning* (1977) and why Coover chose to focus upon the Rosenbergs’ execution.
4. Explain Coover’s technique for displaying ideology in the story through his character of Uncle Sam, the living jingoist.
5. Describe the complex role Richard Nixon plays as narrator of the story.

Outline

- I. Known largely as a postmodernist, Robert Coover is one of the major contemporary writers in America.
 - A. An incessant experimenter with narrative form, he published important narratives as early as the early 70s and continues to write today.
 - B. Coover is also a learned novelist who has studied the classical writers, and thought about the understandings and organizations of narrative and how they can be reused.
 - C. Ovid could be considered Coover’s earliest antecedent with his work, *The Metamorphoses*.
 1. Metamorphosis, people turning into other things or people simply changing, is of great interest to Coover.
 2. Coover believes that one of our most elemental instincts as human beings is to resist change and its inevitability.
 - D. Two Renaissance writers influenced Coover’s technical interest in narrative.
 1. An aspect of Cervantes’ style that resurfaces in Coover is the entropy of narrative forms.
 - a. The way stories are told is never timeless; the narrative form has its own history, historicity, and death.
 - b. *Don Quixote* is about the death of certain kinds of courtly romance and the madness and comedy of thinking that these stories are still true and accurate guides to reality.
 - c. Coover draws on *Don Quixote* in his assertion that the way we live is always scripted by prior forms we have read about and assimilated or somehow ingested into our own lives.
 - d. In this sense, life really does copy art.
 2. Cervantes also influences Coover by exposing the props of his novel and making its conventions visible.
 - a. Don Quixote realizes he is a character and that people are reading about him.
 - b. The writer can get mileage by showing awareness of the artifice and fictitiousness of all of this.
 - E. Rabelais is an equally important influence on Coover.
 1. Before society separated into the bawdy and the polite (the inventions of later periods), Rabelais wrote very raunchy stories.
 2. Rabelais loves talking about the eating and fornication rituals of those about whom he writes.
 3. He creates playful figures and depicts their exploits, fun, and games.
 4. Rabelais was a punster who loved to play with words and to invent new words; Coover picks up some of this energy for handling words as if they were material objects.

- II.** Coover is a fabulator, one who is intrigued with fables, with blurring the lines between realist notation and moving into the legendary and the fabulous.
- A.** *Pricksongs & Descants* left an imprint on American literature; it is a classic example of what postmodern writing would be like.
- 1.** “The Brother” tells, in redneck country lingo, the story of Noah and the Ark from the point of view of Noah’s brother; in this way, postmodernism takes classical materials and playfully poses them in alternate ways.
 - 2.** “The Elevator” is a modern urban parable, a series of vignettes, in which Martin fantasizes about the elevator operator.
 - a.** The story has no bottom line; at some level all of the fantasies/stories are all equally real.
 - b.** The story arises out of paranoia, fear, desire, and memory.
 - c.** A *hypercube* is a mathematical construct incorporating a fourth dimension; in such an unrepressed cube, everything that may be dormant has been actualized.
 - d.** In much the same way, Coover takes situations and exploits all of their potentialities, writing each as if it were real; this is another feature of postmodernism.
 - 3.** “The Babysitter” introduces Coover as a great American mythographer, a poet with American slogans, rituals, and customs (one of which is babysitting).
 - a.** This story is about the Tuckers’ night out, when they leave their children with the babysitter.
 - b.** Within very few pages, Coover includes 107 vignettes about what happens on this night and plays out every possible scenario, skating in and out with perfect ease.
- III.** *The Public Burning* (1977) took a long time to get into print, for understandable reasons.
- A.** It is about the Rosenberg execution and America in the 1950s.
- 1.** The Cold War and the beginnings of the superpower madness are captured.
 - 2.** The novel also touches on the paranoia of the 50s and the Red Scare of McCarthyism.
 - 3.** We are shown the Rosenberg execution as the great symbolic event that caps all of these passions and fears that are then coursing.
- B.** Coover wants to *show* what the ideological forces of the moment look like
- 1.** Althusser expresses the widely held view that ideology resists visibility.
 - 2.** Coover disagrees, believing that ideology can be shown and that it is on show in the inflated, heated up rhetoric of the 50s.
- C.** Uncle Sam, the figure that represents American ideology, is a character in the book.
- 1.** He has a remarkable language, mouthing all of the slogans and jingoist nonsense about America.
 - 2.** This is the language of manichaeism, of the world being seen as good versus evil.
 - 3.** Sam is also an exponent of American *energy*.
- D.** Coover creates a mixed-media novel in which cartoons live alongside three-dimensional types; he thereby captures the cartoonish nature of ideology.
- E.** The central character in the book is Richard Nixon.
- 1.** Coover took the enormous liberty of writing a huge book with much private, archival research and making Nixon the narrator.
 - 2.** Nixon sees his role both as one who is shaping events and who events are shaping.
 - 3.** Nixon meets Uncle Sam at the Burning Tree Golf Club, in a scene of revelation, like an encounter with divinity.
 - 4.** Sam’s opposite number is the dreaded Phantom, the Red Scare.
- F.** Coover translates politics into sex by presenting Ethel Rosenberg, the spy, as a burlesque dancer.
- G.** Coover takes the political story and alters it totally into a new code in order to see what he can make visible by that code.
- H.** Coover’s novel is meant to be the public burning of an event that was passed over in silence.

Glossary

Anomie: a rootlessness or lack of purpose, clear values, or even identity in a person or society

Apocalyptic: having the character of an apocalypse or world-consuming holocaust. In writing, often refers to a visionary scheme of history or to the coming of the end of the world.

Archetype: a recurring symbol, theme, setting, or character type in literature, as in symbols of the rose, sun, or serpent; themes of love and death; settings such as Edenic gardens; and character types such as heroes and magicians. Quests and descents into the underworld are common archetypal patterns of action. Psychologist Carl Jung suggests these symbols and the myths in which they occur are part of a worldwide collective unconscious, but recent critics pinpoint cultural differences overlooked in the search for universals.

Bildungsroman: a novel that traces the growth, education, and search for identity of a young man or young woman. Many major nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels follow this pattern.

Defamiliarization: an effect achieved in literary works of disrupting our usual perception of the world, thus enabling us to see things from a fresh perspective

Déjà Vu: the feeling that one has been in a place or had a particular experience before

Demiurgic: in Platonic thought, a creative force or deity that shapes the material world; generally, a ruling force or creative power

Denouement: the point at which the complications of a story or play are cleared up, and mystery, confusion, or uncertainty is clarified or resolved

Entropy: a measure of the degree of disorder or uncertainty in a substance or system; sometimes used with reference to works of literature

Epiphany: in Christian theology, denotes a manifestation of God's presence in the world, but in literature the term can also indicate a secular revelation or a moment of special insight

Fabulation: a term used by modern critics to indicate fiction that openly delights in its self-conscious verbal artifice. Modern fabulators include John Barth and Kurt Vonnegut.

Fourth and Fifth Dimensions of Prose: a repressed and elliptical form of writing used by Ernest Hemingway in which the reader must invent or imagine facts or material missing from the text

Gothic: in reference to a novel or romance, describes a story of terror and suspense with sinister or grotesque elements, often set in a gloomy castle or monastery. The Gothic novel flourished in Britain from the 1790s to the 1830s, with Ann Radcliffe as the main proponent. American examples are Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" or, in the twentieth century, William Faulkner's tales.

Grotesque: in literature, disturbingly odd, abnormal, or exaggerated characters as in the tales of Sherwood Anderson, or literary works having these characteristics

Hypercube: a whimsically playful mode of "cubist" fictional writing used by contemporary writer Robert Coover in which every possible permutation of meaning or choice of action in a given situation is displayed

Manichaeism: the doctrine that the world is governed by opposing forces of good and evil

Metatextuality: awareness of text as text

Mimesis: Greek word for imitation, used to indicate a literary work that attempts to reflect or reproduce external reality

Modernism: a period in the early twentieth century during which literature was influenced by such experimental trends as symbolism, expressionism, imagism, vorticism, futurism, and surrealism. Broadly speaking, modernist literature rejects nineteenth-century traditions including the conventions of realism, traditional poetic meter, and bourgeois values. Modernists Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust and William Faulkner experiment with disrupted chronologies. Virginia Woolf and James Joyce reveal their characters' thoughts through stream of consciousness. T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound substitute collages of fragmentary images and complex allusions for a logical exposition

of thought. The drama of Bertolt Brecht and Luigi Pirandello is abstract rather than realist or naturalist. Much modernist writing focuses on the dislocation of urban culture and juxtaposes multiple points of view.

Myoclonic: characterized by an involuntary twitching of the muscles

Mythopoesis: the making of myths, either by a (usually) preliterate culture or by a writer who develops and elaborates a personal system of spiritual values. Can also refer to writing that draws on older myths or that resembles myths in subject matter or imaginative scope.

Novel: usually, but not always, a genre of extended prose fiction characterized in the contemporary period by its openness and flexibility. Novels are longer than novellas or short stories and permit the fuller development of characters and themes. They differ from prose romances in their greater degree of realism and because they tend to describe a recognizable secular world.

Oneiric: dreamlike or having to do with dreams

Postmodernism: a period in Western culture since the 1960s that reflects the cultural conditions prevailing in advanced capitalist societies. It is characterized by disconnected images and styles in the popular media as well as in literature. John Baudrillard and other commentators describe postmodernity as a culture of fragmentary sensations, superficiality, and nostalgia, which eschews coherence and meaning, depth and authenticity. Sometimes in literature the term refers to a continuation of modernism's alienated mood but rejects its quest for artistic coherence in a fragmented world. Flippant indifference or self-conscious fabulation replace the attempt to secure meaning through myth, symbol, or formal complexity. The term *postmodern* refers to fiction rather than poetry or drama and applies to such writers as William S. Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon, all of whom also employ on occasion a quasi-science fiction that disrupts the secular world with the intrusion of the fabulous.

Realism: a mode of writing that is mimetic: that gives the impression of accurately reflecting the life it depicts in the text. It is largely associated with nineteenth-century novels of the common man or of the middle class, and it usually gives close attention to details of physical setting. Examples include the novels of Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, Honoré de Balzac, and George Eliot, or, in the late nineteenth century, the plays of George Bernard Shaw or Henrik Ibsen.

Romance: as opposed to realist writings, romances are fictional stories that include metaphysical or supernatural events or that move into the realm of the improbable or fantastic. Medieval romances, such as tales of King Arthur's knights, typify this genre in its early phases. Modern romance modes include Gothic novels, science fiction, fantasy novels, the final plays of Shakespeare, and the tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne. The latter, for example, substitute allegory or psychological exploration of character for mimesis.

Semiotic/Semiotics: a linguistically based study of the production of meaning via sign systems; focuses on the distinction, according to Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, between signifier and signified. It is the interrelation of the signs themselves rather than their correspondence with external reality that draws attention. When referring to the study of works of literature, the stress is on the production of literary meaning from shared conventions and codes.

Speciation: in biology, the process of developing a new species through evolution

Subtext: the implied, rather than overtly stated, meaning(s) of works of literature

Transference: in psychoanalysis, a reproduction of emotions relating to repressed experiences, especially from childhood, and the substitution of another person, often the psychoanalyst him/herself, for the object of the repressed experiences; seen in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*

Trope: a figure of speech such as metaphor, simile, irony, or hyperbole that suggests alternative meanings behind words and phrases

Tutelary Divinity: a guardian divinity or spirit

Verisimilitude: in literary works, the appearance of truth or reality, a convention originating in Aristotle's concept of mimesis, or the direct representation of nature or reality

Biographical Sketches of Writers Covered

Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941)

Born in Ohio, Anderson served in the Spanish-American War, was married for a time, and held various jobs, including management of a paint factory, before he moved to Chicago to write advertising copy and, with the encouragement of Carl Sandburg and others, to begin his career as a writer. His first novel, *Windy McPherson's Son*, published in 1916 and seemingly reflective of Anderson's own life, records the rise of a small-town Iowa boy to successful manufacturer and his subsequent renunciation of this success to search for truth. *Marching Men* (1917), centering on oppressed Pennsylvania coal workers and a failed mystical movement, followed. But it was *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) that first drew critical attention. Focused, as in many of his works, on frustrated small-town residents seeking a voice and meaning in an increasingly mechanized world, he explores a counterbalancing mystical relationship between man and nature's primal forces. Similar themes are presented in *Poor White* (1920), *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), and *Many Marriages* (1923). *Dark Laughter* (1925) contrasts spiritual sterility of whites with unrepressed joyousness of blacks. Anderson retired in the late 1920s to edit two small-town newspapers in Virginia. This move inspired numerous other works, including *Perhaps Women* (1931), on the potential of women to lead others past sterility and mechanization; a number of novels, essays, and short stories; and his memoirs and collections of letters, published posthumously.

William Burroughs (1914–)

Born in St. Louis and educated at Harvard, Burroughs lived extensively abroad, especially in Paris. His experiences as a drug addict inspired many of his best-known writings including *Junkie* (1953), *Naked Lunch* (Paris [1959], New York [1962]), and *Queer* (1985). Other works, many of which utilize fantasy or science fiction, explore alternative lifestyles such as those of homosexuals or gangsters. Especially in his writings about the drug culture, one finds beneath the fantasy an astute social satire, clinically accurate descriptions of addiction and its aftermath, and an anthropological approach to his subject matter. In 1981 he published *Cities of the Red Night* about a utopian settlement, followed by collections of essays and short prose pieces (*The Adding Machine* [1986] and *Tornado Alley* [1989]). Burroughs' correspondence with Allen Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters*, came out in 1963, and his autobiographical writings of the 1950s were published as *Interzone* in 1989. A guru to the Beat Generation and a prolific but controversial writer, Burroughs' apocalyptic vision has made him a contemporary cult figure.

Robert Coover (1932–)

Born in Iowa, Coover launched his successful writing career with a Faulkner Award in 1985 for his first novel, *The Origin of the Brunists*. Known for narrative experimentation, Coover fuses fantasy, satire, and realism in this novel and in such later works as *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968), which is about an imaginary baseball league invented by and filling out the life of an otherwise lonely accountant. Narrated by Richard Nixon, *The Public Burning* (1977) is a postmodern fable satirizing jingoist rhetoric and Cold War ideology in the context of the Rosenberg executions. *Spanking the Maid* (1982) satirizes sadism in fiction, while *Gerald's Party* (1986) looks at human chaos through the lens of black humor, and *Pricksongs & Descants* (1969) introduces experimental "hypercube" fiction and includes modern parables and other short fictional pieces. Other works include two plays, a film, and *A Night at the Movies, Or, You Must Remember This* (1987), a work that links fiction and film.

Don DeLillo (1936–)

Born in New York City and educated at Fordham University, DeLillo began publishing in the 1970s with *Americanana* (1971), about a TV executive who outgrows his business; the existential comedy *End Zone* (1972), which uses football as a metaphor for both atomic war and a rootless, disengaged society; and *Great Jones Street* (1973), about jazz and the drug culture. Subsequent novels of the 1970s and 80s take up such themes as rich New Yorkers caught in terrorism (*Players* [1977]); the corruptible multinational American expatriate community in Athens (*The Names* [1982]); and man's uneasy truce with technology and ecological disaster in his comic masterpiece, *White Noise* (1985). Later works *Libra* (1988) and *Mao II* (1991) look at the story of Lee Harvey Oswald as an anti-bildungsroman and at the world of intelligence and CIA operatives.

William Faulkner (1897–1962)

Born and raised in Oxford, Mississippi, Faulkner used the society and culture of the region to create Yoknapatawpha County, the mythical setting of his greatest novels. Following World War I, Faulkner studied at the University of Mississippi, worked on a newspaper in New Orleans, lived briefly in Europe, and in 1926, with the help of Sherwood Anderson, published his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, about the return home of a dying soldier. But it is *Sartoris* (1929), a mythical tale that introduces the decline of four Old South families and the rise of the unscrupulous Snopes family, which sets the tone for the works to follow. The experimental *The Sound and the Fury*, a story of the decadent Compson family told from three different perspectives, was published in 1929, followed in 1930 by *As I Lay Dying*, the psychological study of a poor white family preparing to bury their mother. *Sanctuary* was published in 1931 and *Light in August* in 1932, with its redemptive, communal message softening Faulkner's harsh themes of determinism, racism, and neurotic isolation. *Absalom, Absalom!*, published in 1936, depicts the tragic downfall of Colonel Sutpen; *The Unvanquished* (1938) traces the history of the Sartoris family during the Civil War; and *The Wild Palms* (1939) centers, in interwoven tales, on the effects of a Mississippi flood on two very different sets of lives. Of his dozens of other works, *A Fable* (1954) and *The Reivers* (1962) both won Pulitzer Prizes, and Faulkner's acceptance speech for his 1950 Nobel Prize stressed the writer's duty to depict man's endurance against the odds by way of compassion and sacrifice.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940)

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, educated and well-connected in literary circles at Princeton, and briefly a soldier, Fitzgerald published his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in 1920. In it he captures the mood of the Jazz Age at Princeton during the postwar period. *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920), *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), and *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) followed soon after, extending Fitzgerald's portrait of the glamorous and extravagant, but dissipated, life of the 1920s jet set and mirroring his own life and marriage. His finest novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), embodies the American dream during a corrupt period in the figure of the self-made millionaire, Jay Gatsby, who is in love with the unattainable Daisy Buchanan. *Tender is the Night* (1934), autobiographical in many ways, presents the gradual decline and fall of American psychiatrist Dick Diver, whose marriage to his beautiful but mentally unstable patient, Nicole, leads to his own destruction. Finally, *The Last Tycoon*, published posthumously in 1941, tells the story of a movie industry mogul. Several collections of Fitzgerald's short stories were published after his death, as were four volumes of his magazine contributions, poems, and correspondence (*Letters* [1963] and *As Ever, Scott Fitz-* [1972]). The tragedies of his own life and of his wife's nervous breakdown are reflected both in *Tender is the Night* and in essays collected by Edmund Wilson and published in 1945 as *The Crack-Up*.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961)

Born in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1899 and an avid hunter and fisherman, Hemingway began his career as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. In World War I, he served as an ambulance driver in France and in the Italian infantry. After the war Hemingway, badly wounded in action, settled in Paris as a correspondent for the *Toronto Star*, and it was there that he began his serious writing career. Early works such as *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923) and *In Our Time* (1925) show the stylistic influences of expatriate writers Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. Among his most famous writings of that period are *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), about the disillusionment, moral collapse, and escapist activities of a group of expatriate Americans and Englishmen living in Paris after the war, and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), a wartime love story about an English nurse and an American ambulance worker. Hemingway was seen as a leading spokesman for America's "lost generation," unsettled by a postwar collapse of values and loss of faith. His 1920s stories, in their spare, unemotional style, depict the cynical, stoic, and tough survivors of this era who can trust only primal emotions. Works of the 1930s include *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) on bullfighting and *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) on big-game hunting. *To Have and Have Not* (1937) explores collective action as a solution to social problems, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) reflects Hemingway's experiences as a war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War. The highly acclaimed *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a parable about an aging fisherman's stoic and even loving battle with the forces of nature in the form of an enormous fish, helped him win the Nobel Prize in 1954. Several novels were published posthumously, including *A Moveable Feast* (1964), which sketched his life in Paris in the 1920s.

Zora Neale Hurston (1901?–60)

Born in Florida, a graduate of Barnard College with a degree in anthropology, and a Guggenheim and Howard University Alumni Award recipient, Hurston's interest in the folklore and culture of Haiti, the West Indies, and the black South was reflected in her two anthropological studies, *Tell My Horse* (1938) and *Mules and Men* (1935). Her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), about the loves of a black preacher, won a Book of the Month Club award,

but her masterpiece is *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), today considered a key feminist text. *Their Eyes* celebrates, in richly metaphorical language, the growing autonomy of a young black girl who only in her third marriage finds true fulfillment and love in the South's patriarchal society. Later works *Moses: Man of the Mountain* (1939), which interprets the Biblical Jews from a black folk perspective, and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), about a Florida cracker woman, were not as popular. Her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, was published in 1942 and a collection of her short stories in 1985. Although prominent early in her career, she died in obscurity.

Toni Morrison (1931–)

Born in Ohio and the holder of a BA in English from Howard University and an MA from Cornell, Morrison began her literary career with the publication of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), a novel about a Southern black girl who is caught up in self-hatred and believes that without blue eyes she cannot be accepted by society. *Sula* (1974) followed, a striking feminist text that posits with the strong and even frighteningly autonomous women of the matrilineal Peace family an alternative to the black bourgeoisie. *Song of Solomon* (1977), a Book of the Month Club Award winner, focuses on the black male experience and its rites of passage. But it is *Beloved* (1987), a story of the ravages of slavery and its aftermath as experienced by a black woman who kills her own baby to prevent the child's capture and sale back into slavery, that received highest acclaim and earned Morrison a Pulitzer Prize. *Jazz*, set in Harlem during the 1920s, followed in 1992, and in 1993 Morrison was the first black woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Her *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), based on a series of lectures delivered at Harvard, has been widely influential in academic circles. She currently teaches at Princeton University.

Flannery O'Connor (1925–64)

Born in Georgia, the setting of her fiction, O'Connor is known as a visionary Catholic writer of Gothic tales about the Protestant South and the conflict between the sacred and the profane. An early novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), is a macabre and fanatical tale about a young boy who tries to baptize another. Among her best-known short stories are "Good Country People," "A Good Man is Hard to Find," "The Artificial Nigger," and "Everything That Rises Must Converge." These and her other stories depict in a comic and haunting manner the struggle of her characters to escape evil and, in coming to understand themselves, to achieve salvation. Collections of stories include *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955), *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965), and *Complete Stories* (1971). O'Connor's collected occasional prose appeared in 1969 and her letters in 1979.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1922–)

Born in Indianapolis and a graduate of Cornell in biochemistry, Vonnegut served in the infantry in World War II, was captured by the Germans, and managed to survive the bombing of Dresden only because he had been assigned to work in an underground meat locker in a slaughterhouse. Following the war he studied anthropology at the University of Chicago and worked for General Electric. His novels reflect these experiences. *Player Piano* (1952) satirizes mechanization and automation at GE; *Mother Night* (1961) centers on an American spy who outwits the enemy by transmitting secret messages via pro-Nazi radio; and *Cat's Cradle* (1963) proposes the use of lies to achieve human happiness. Using black humor to satirize the duplicity of modern life, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965) focuses on man's need for compassion and generosity, and *Slaughterhouse-Five; or The Children's Crusade* (1969), like earlier works, uses science fiction techniques and surrealistic dark comedy to address the devastation, trauma, and aftermath of war. Other novels satirizing the deficiencies and nihilism of modern society and of contemporary politics are *Breakfast of Champions; or, Goodbye Blue Monday!* (1973) and *Lonesome No More!* (1976). Similar themes are addressed in later novels and stories, including one novel about a Vietnam War veteran, another about the afterlife of two American heroes of the Nagasaki bombing, and a third about a nuclear accident.

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20th-Century American Fiction

Part IV

Professor Arnold Weinstein



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

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

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

Dr. Weinstein is the author of *Vision and Response in Modern Fiction* (1984), *Fictions of the Self: 1550–1800* (1981), *The Fiction of Relationship* (1988), and *Nobody's Home: Speech, Self, and Place in American Fiction from Hawthorne to DeLillo* (1993). He is working in the field of literature and medicine, with a view toward a book-length study of this relationship with special focus on the issues of diagnosis and interpretation.

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Part IV
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20th-Century American Fiction

Scope:

The aim of this course is to analyze and appreciate some of the major works of fiction produced in this country over the past century, using as a focal point the idea of “freedom of speech.” The focus on freedom of speech is appropriate for a number of reasons: (1) these texts often invoke the fundamental political freedoms guaranteed by the American Constitution, and many of them take the liberty of articulating the painful ideological conflicts that have punctuated our modern history: war, racism, poverty, drugs, sexism and the like; (2) “freedom of speech” also spells out the key thesis to be presented in these readings: language itself turns out to be not only “free,” but a precious means of becoming free, of experiencing life beyond the constraints of the ordinary workaday world; (3) the overriding theme in American literature, as in American life, is that of freedom itself, whether expressed in a laissez-faire economy, in “upward mobility,” or simply in our belief that we can make ourselves and our lives into something beyond the origins and influences of our births (a theme formerly known as the American dream). No other society has ever professed such beliefs, and it is not surprising that our literature has much to tell us about the viability of these notions.

Why would literature be a privileged record for this special American story about freedom? The answer: American fiction is something of a battleground in the “war of independence” that human beings—white or black or red or yellow, male or female—wage every day of their lives. Our war consists of achieving a self, making or maintaining an identity, making our particular mark in the world we inhabit. This is a battle because the twentieth-century American scene is not particularly hospitable to self-making: great forces coerce our lives, forces that are at once economic, biological, political, racial, and ideological. We are dogged by not only death and taxes but by the influence of family, of business, of society, of all those potent vectors that constitute the real map and landscape of our lives. This vexed and conflicted terrain does not resemble the smooth résumés that are our shorthand for what we have done, but it does correspond to our experiential awareness of what we go through, how we have changed from childhood to adulthood, what our work and friendships and marriages have been and what they have meant to us. Literature enables us to recover this territory, our territory. The texts presented in this course constitute an enlarged repertory of human resources, of the battle for freedom.

We begin by looking at the great texts and movements of the nineteenth century, especially our belief in heroic selfhood, and we begin to see and chart the kinds of forces that make up the moving stage we occupy. Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* is among the most poignant descriptions of life at the beginning of the century, but the charm of this small-town narrative acquires a deeper hue when we see the amount of repression and inner violence that Anderson chronicles. Hemingway’s *In Our Time* and Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* are both, in their own ways, about American loss of innocence, about how the Great War and the brutality of modern life permanently altered our belief systems. This theme is presented as physical trauma in Hemingway, as madness and decay in Fitzgerald. Faulkner’s *Light in August* depicts the ravages of racism in the American South, but it seeks, magnificently, to pair its overt story of carnage and neurosis with another, more elusive fable of love, kinship, and redemption. We turn to Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* for the first—and perhaps the best—account of growing up black and female in America, a story that is expressed in a kind of language and diction that moves breathlessly from the vernacular to the legendary. Flannery O’Connor’s stories bring a different agenda to our course: the challenge of perceiving the contours of God, spirit, and grace in a seemingly materialist Southern landscape peopled with the lowest profile folks in American literature. Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*, once censored and then seen as merely a raunchy drug epic, will be studied as a dazzling and disturbing account of the body in culture, a body that is horribly open and defenseless against the takeovers that beset it. War returns to our course in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*, at once poignant and wacky, speaking to us of mass destruction and of extraterrestrials in the same voice, a voice that is hard to forget. The course will close with a series of lectures on three of the most significant contemporary writers, writers whose works may not yet be familiar to you. In his sprawling and audacious *Public Burning*, Robert Coover uses that most popular American code, entertainment, to present a manic account of the Rosenberg execution and the antics of one Richard Nixon. Toni Morrison’s fascinating *Sula* is an experimental novel in which Morrison fashions a group of characters whose lives and values make rubble out of the conventions of humanistic culture, whether black or white. Finally, Don DeLillo’s appealing, absurdist comedy of modern life, *White Noise*, depicts our encounter with the technological madhouse in which we live but which we have not quite gotten around to seeing.

These American fictions, seen together, tell a composite story about coping, about fashioning both a story and a life. The range of experiences and subcultures to be found here will dwarf the experience of any single reader, and that is how it should be. Much is dark in these stories, but the honesty and integrity of these writers adds pith and richness to our own lives and makes us realize that reading is as much a lifeline as it is entertainment or education.

Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Analyze and discuss representative works of eleven major American novelists and short-story writers—Anderson, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hurston, O’Connor, Burroughs, Vonnegut, Coover, Morrison, and DeLillo—identifying what is most distinctive and significant about each one of them.
2. Discuss how the American belief in freedom of the individual underwrites our literature, as well as our political and economic systems, and trace that theme by using specific examples from major works of the nineteenth century and showing the influence of these examples across the spectrum of the works under study.
3. Explain the concept of freedom of speech as a political foundation of our nation; as a means by which literature embodies, explores, and actualizes life; and as a resource used by all humans to transcend determinism.
4. Discuss and provide examples of American fiction’s forceful dramatization over the past century of the conflict between the human subject and the great social forces—war, economics, racism, sexism, etc.—that coerce and sometimes destroy selfhood and even human life.
5. Compare and contrast, with examples, the literary achievements of our great trio of American modernists: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, in relation both to the historic “moment” of modernism (Lost Generation, Great War, etc.) and the narrative innovations of these writers (renderings of violence, stream of consciousness, etc.).
6. Identify the range of positions and subjectivities (e.g., white, black, male, female, etc.) encountered in the works under study, and evaluate the importance to our national consciousness of this stereophonic literature, which brings in voices from the center and the margins.
7. Compare and contrast new talents writing in the late twentieth century—especially Coover, Morrison, and DeLillo—with established writers, identifying specifically where the later writers are experimental and where they share common ground with the well-known figures of the early- and mid-twentieth century

Lecture Twenty-Five

The Public Burning: Execution at Times Square

Scope: Coover's most significant book, *The Public Burning*, considers and reconceives one of the most disturbing chapters of American life, the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg as spies during the height of the Cold War. Coover elects to present this grisly story in terms of circus, theater, and jingoist slogans, challenging us to reconsider our own collective past.

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

1. Explain Coover's choice of Time Square as the "ritual center of the Western world."
2. Describe his use of media, play, and performance—the code of entertainment at the core of American life—to expose America's values.
3. Discuss Nixon as American hero *cum* freedom fighter *cum* clown and the purpose of the liberties Coover takes with his character.
4. Describe the means Coover suggests for moving beyond ideology to a reclaimed America through his fusion of Richard Nixon and Ethel Rosenberg.

Outline

- I. Coover translates the Rosenberg execution into the language of entertainment in order to bring the event to light.
 - A. In *The Public Burning*, the Rosenbergs are executed in Times Square, "ritual center of the Western world."
 - B. Coover brings to witness the execution a pictorial parade of America, cartoon figures and the great and mighty from all reaches of American life: sports, entertainment, politics.
 - C. Coover shows great familiarity with the routines of 1950s sitcoms, casting figures like Martin and Lewis as the Rosenbergs.
- II. Coover takes risks in his portrayal of Richard Nixon as central narrator.
 - A. He presents Nixon as a quintessential rags-to-riches American hero, an opportunist personality who will exploit events.
 - B. Coover enters Nixon's libido; puts him on a couch and analyzes him.
 1. Nixon's (dream-stage) thinking is presented and his insecurities dredged up.
 2. A long tradition of religious and political revelations are linked, inviting reconception in other terms.
 - C. Coover was chided for taking such liberties with a public figure, reinventing Nixon and then moving into him.
 1. With no evidence, what kind of standards need to be observed here?
 2. Coover himself always saw Nixon as a clown.
 3. An astounding amount of archival research went into the book, including fullscale portraits/vertical histories of all those who played a role in the Rosenberg chapter of history.
 4. Coover has broken the rules by conflating history with these wildly improvised segments.
 - D. Nixon is caught, ideologically, between Uncle Sam and the Phantom.
 1. The book captures Nixon's transformation as a result of his growing involvement with the Rosenbergs.
 2. The more research Nixon does on the Rosenbergs, the more he sees parallels between himself and them.
 3. Increasingly, Nixon begins to move into Ethel's life, thinking about parallels between himself and her.
 4. Coover creates a Faulknerian figurative kinship.
 - E. Nixon wants to get clear of history and will break the rules in an effort to make his mark and be his own man.
 1. The Rosenbergs are the seductive "other," an opportunity for transformation and growth.
 2. Nixon takes liberties not unlike those taken by Coover.
 3. He leaves Washington and visits the Rosenbergs in prison.
 4. Nixon meets and has wild sex with Ethel Rosenberg in her cell.
 - a. In this passage, Coover takes scandalous freedoms and reinvents the record.

- b.** The point of this fantasy is to show that the only way we can understand the past and the reality of others is through human feeling and human love, fusion of selves
- 5.** Nixon has discovered the narrowness of the atomic self in American thinking.
- F.** Through fiction, the Rosenbergs are offered—via Nixon’s understanding—the reprieve they never received from history.
- G.** Understanding of the “other” from the inside is the only thing that will prevent atrocities like the Rosenberg execution and the national paranoia out of which it stemmed.

Lecture Twenty-Six Robert Coover: Fiction as Fission

Scope: As we know, the Rosenbergs were executed for stealing atomic secrets. Coover has brilliantly explored the actual transgression here: not their theft but atomic fission itself: the transmutation of the elements in order to liberate energies on a scale never before imagined. On another level, this transmutation can be seen as a formula for fiction.

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

1. Explain the Rosenberg crime and its threat to America.
2. Draw parallels between the transmuting power of atomic fission and the powers of narrative fiction.
3. Link the American theme of freedom of speech to this novel.
4. Explain how Coover draws mythic meaning from his story and in what way the novel itself is both a morality play and a “public burning.”
5. Describe the theme of Coover’s *A Night at the Movies*.

Outline

- I. Coover is trying to create a kind of fictional overpass beyond the historical events themselves.
 - A. It’s not clear that imaginative forays will ever have any impact on reality; the past cannot be changed.
 - B. Coover thought of his kind of work as writing about the end of an era, when the construct by which a culture lives begins to come to an end.
 - C. The Rosenbergs have “wrested from the sons of light their most sacred secret, the transmutation of the elements.”
 1. Their theft of the secret of atomic fission is presented as a mythic transgression, like that of Prometheus’ theft of fire.
 - a. The secret of the secret is “what is atomic fission?”
 - b. It is presented in *The Public Burning* as the very quintessence of American power and the entry into the modern age, the creation of a kind of power we don’t know how to handle.
 2. Coover’s book is about the single most important transformation in modern history: the discovery of nuclear power and the ways it has changed things.
 - a. Nuclear energy is a kind of unprecedented mobility.
 - b. Atomic fission is the gateway to modernity
- II. *The Public Burning* is an “atomic” text, about freed, verbal power.
 - A. Atomic fission is the capacity to break through the armature of the atom and to liberate its indwelling energy.
 - B. Could you write a book in a way that will literally parallel this explosion of energy and liberation of power? Could transmutation of the elements be a verbal formula also?
 - C. A “freed,” liberated book, like a hypercube, could include experimentalism; Coover tries to liberate his own materials.
 1. Passages built entirely of puns in which letters and sounds become more important than meanings overturn the structure of ordinary discourse and free phonic powers.
 2. Materials are freed up by letting numbers battle words with little regard for common sense.
 3. Titles can be strung together to form complete passages and to flaunt the expressive possibilities of material; such fashioning captures and makes audible American rhythms and sounds.
 4. The image of a newspaper’s layout is presented with competing stories and different typefaces and subjects; a freed-up text wants to flaunt all of these alternate possibilities and multiple directions.
 5. A crossword puzzle has no beginning or ending; it is multidirectional, going all directions at once; this is an appropriate structure for the way our lives actually play out.

- D. The story is told of a man who forgets to remove his 3-D glasses when leaving a theater, distorting his sense of depth.
 1. Relativity, in terms of our perceptual lives, destabilizes notions of what is here and there, then and now.
 2. There is no ground in relativity, it all depends on the position of the observer.
 3. If you had to produce a narrative parallel to the relativity theory, it would necessarily flaunt the shrinking authority of the human subject.
 - E. Coover wants to write in such a way that the environment becomes increasingly energized and unpredictable, producing a “bomb text.”
 1. In such a world, the human being ceases to have much security or stability.
 2. The Rosenberg’s fate, electrocution, involves a *literal* force field of energy.
 - F. This story tries to register the story of the land and the culture along with that of the Rosenbergs’ destruction; Coover discovers the horrifying power that reduces to nothing the integrity and authority of the human being.
- III. Coover ends the book comedically with a speech by Nixon in which he asks Americans to drop their pants.
- A. Uncle Sam does not want to, but Nixon obliges him to do so
 - B. Uncle Sam gets his revenge by sodomizing Nixon.
 1. Nixon understands that this is not just happening to him, Uncle Sam is doing it to America.
 2. This graphic scene portrays Coover’s sense of the incarnation of power and the fate of the American presidency
- IV. More recently, Coover’s *A Night at the Movies* (1987) imagines a film being made from a book, contrary to our accustomed process.
- A. In “Charlie in the House of Rue” from *A Night at the Movies*, Coover crosses Charlie Chaplin and Edgar Allan Poe.
 1. By writing Charlie’s antics, he makes us see them.
 2. By translating it into language, Coover allows the reader to translate the film image into meanings that hadn’t previously been seen.
 - B. “Charlie” moves into deep water, and Charlie, like Nixon, proves to be a little man lost and trapped by very great forces.

Readings

Essential:

Coover, *The Public Burning*

Recommended:

Coover, *Pricksongs & Descants*, *A Night at the Movies*, *Pinocchio in Venice*; Cope, *Robert Coover’s Fictions*; Chénétier in *Facing Texts*; Andersen, *Robert Coover*; Hume, “Robert Coover’s Fiction” in *Novel*; Weinstein, *Nobody’s Home*

Topics for Further Investigation

Discuss the use that Coover makes of Richard Nixon as central narrator of *The Public Burning*. What do you see as the liabilities of this procedure? the benefits? Comment on the liberties that Coover takes with the public record.

Given its extraordinary amount of narrative fun and games, *The Public Burning* certainly qualifies as an example of postmodernism. Does the experimentalism of the novel weaken or strengthen its political message? Defend your view.

Lecture Twenty-Seven

Toni Morrison's *Sula*: From Trauma to Freedom

Scope: Toni Morrison, the most celebrated contemporary American writer, fashioned in this early novel a mesmerizing account of a black community, replete with some of the most eccentric and legendary characters in American fiction. A new kind of writing is being born.

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

1. Discuss Toni Morrison's major writings and themes.
2. Retell the history of the community of the Bottom, including the role racist attitudes played in its founding.
3. Discuss the significance of the journey of Helene Wright and her daughter Nel to New Orleans.
4. Contrast the matrilineal Wright and Peace families—their lives, relationships, values—and discuss the significance of matriarch Eva Peace's burning of her son, Plum.

Outline

- I. The Morrison Career
 - A. Toni Morrison comes from a family of storytellers who were interested in art and music.
 - B. She graduated with a degree in English from Howard University in 1953 and earned a masters degree from Cornell in 1955.
 - C. Toni Morrison began a teaching career at Howard University and a publishing career as a senior editor at Random House in New York.
 - D. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) is a more traditional novel than her later works, sensitive to the ravages of racism, parental roles, and traumatized children.
 - E. *Sula* came out in 1974 and was nominated for a National Book Award but did not receive much recognition until later.
 - F. *The Song of Solomon* (1977), a Book of the Month Club offering, proved that Morrison could write about male rites of passage and the black male experience.
 - G. *Tar Baby* followed in 1981.
 - H. *Beloved* appeared in 1987 and earned Morrison a Pulitzer Prize.
 1. *Beloved* is a Faulknerian account of the ravages of black history.
 2. Unlike Faulkner's characters, however, Morrison's cannot afford to go back to their dreadful pasts but must block off this material in order to survive.
 3. This is a powerful book about slavery.
 - I. As Morrison's career continued to evolve, she was offered a professorship at Princeton.
 - J. She published *Jazz* in 1992 and in 1993 won the Nobel Prize.
 - K. Morrison is probably America's most distinguished living writer.
- II. *Sula* is in some ways Morrison's most intriguing book and, for Morrison, a necessary one.
 - A. *Sula* begins with the folkloric evocation of a community, Medallion or Bottom.
 1. Bottom got its name from a "nigger joke," a tale of exploitation.
 2. This is a place of gossip and talk.
 3. The community is resilient and tough, an important backdrop for *Sula*, in which Morrison will chart the fortunes and events of this town from 1919 to 1965.
 - B. The first human figure we encounter is Shadrack, who is, like the characters of Hemingway and Faulkner, unhinged by his war experiences; he sees the events through his own particular damaged vision; one of the initial openings to the book
 - C. Helene Wright and her daughter, Nel, are central figures in the novel.
 1. Helene and Nel travel back to New Orleans from Bottom to see Helene's dying grandmother.

2. As one of the town's solid bourgeois figures, Helene holds a position of authority, solidity, and prominence.
 3. When they get into the wrong coach on the train and desperately try to get back to the black coach, Nel watches her mother negotiate this experience and become dismantled by racism.
 4. When they get to New Orleans, Helene's grandmother is already dead, but her mother, a Creole whore, mesmerizes Nel.
 5. Upon returning home, Nel has a sense of awareness of her place as the last link in her chain of being, this failed matrilineage.
- D.** Morrison provides a cumulative portrait of the familiar wounds of war, race, and class.
- E.** After this preliminary material, the book focuses on Nel's friend, Sula, one of the Peace women.
1. The Peace house is almost opposite, in type, from the bourgeois, orderly, predictable home of the Wrights; the Peaces' home is messy, cluttered, folkloric, free.
 2. Eva Peace, the grandmother, may be the book's most memorable figure.
 - a. Abandoned by her no-good husband and left dirt-poor with three children, she is called a creator and a sovereign.
 - b. After leaving her children for eighteen months and returning with money and without a leg, Eva becomes the great matriarch.
 - c. Eva Peace presides over life and death.
 - (1) Eva saves the life of her infant son, but Plum grows up to be a permanently childlike heroin addict.
 - (2) Eva decides that Plum's life has amounted to nothing, and he cannot live.
 - (3) She kills her son without guilt.

Lecture Twenty-Eight

Sula: New Black Woman

Scope: Morrison's tale of two girls, Nel and Sula, turns out to be a quasi-scientific account of two ways of being: humane, vulnerable, and normative on the one hand, or radically egocentric and exploratory on the other. This experimental fable about a character who will stop at nothing challenges our normal ways of thinking.

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

1. Describe the friendship of Sula and Nel, and trace their very different life choices and the consequences of those choices.
2. Explain the significance of Hannah's fiery death, Sula's mishap with Chicken Little, and her affair with Jude in the larger context of the novel.
3. Spell out the consequences of Morrison's deconstruction of Western patriarchy and humanism through the character of Sula, and differentiate Sula's atomic self from other self-actuating individuals in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century works you have studied.
4. Summarize Morrison's portrayal of the black experience and particularly of black women's lives in this novel.

Outline

- I. Eva Peaces's daughter, Hannah, has an easy, harmonious, Edenic sexuality.
 - A. In Hannah, the body is fully accepted and sexuality is free of moral, even of psychological, dimensions; a kind of sexual innocence is imaginable.
 1. She engages in intercourse freely, but sleeping with someone implies a measure of trust and commitment.
 2. The Peace women are sufficient unto themselves; men are unnecessary.
 - B. Hannah will die a fiery death much like Plum's.
 1. Morrison demonstrates her folkloric skills in the depiction of many bad omens.
 2. A strong wind comes but brings no rain.
 3. Hannah dreams of a red bridal dress.
 4. The air is "heavy with peeled fruit and boiling vegetables."
 - C. Through a window, Eva sees Hannah on fire but cannot rescue her.
 1. The burning daughter is described as some sort of weird toy that's gotten out of control.
 2. There is no moral or any emotional dimension to Hannah's death.
 3. Eva is convinced that she saw Sula watching this spectacle with interest but not with horror, much the way Morrison describes it.
- II. Sula and Nel are inseparable childhood friends.
 - A. In what seems almost like a sinister version of Mark Twain, Morrison tells the story of these two black girls with very different trajectories.
 1. Sula displays her iron will by refusing to be intimidated by the white bullies and by cutting off the tip of her own finger to scare them.
 2. Sula and Nel play symbolic sexual games.
 3. Morrison depicts the development of the girls' adolescent sexual curiosity.
 4. Sula is accidentally responsible for the drowning of Chicken Little.
 - B. Part One closes with Nel's marriage to Jude.
 1. Jude, representative of the black male, marries Nel to satisfy his need to fill a man's role and to feel complete.
 2. Nel's childhood ends with her marriage.
 3. Sula leaves Bottom for ten years.
- III. When Sula returns, the book heats up.

- A. Sula first tells off her grandmother, Eva Peace.
 - 1. In defiance of her grandmother’s advice to get married and have children, Sula asserts a new creed: “I want to make myself.”
 - 2. The principle of fire, set up earlier in the book, seems to be taken over by Sula as her very core.
 - B. Sula rebukes Jude, bluntly rejecting his whining appeal for compassion.
 - C. Sula violates societal mores by sleeping with Jude, Nel’s husband.
 - 1. The community considers Sula a witch.
 - 2. The betrayal devastates Nel; she and Jude will never reunite.
 - D. Morrison tells us that Sula’s life is “experimental.”
 - 1. On one hand, we learn that Sula has little ego, no “core.”
 - 2. Sula’s restless creativity does not respect norms or traditional values; she explores thoughts and emotions without constraint, an “artist without an art form.”
 - 3. Only when having sex does Sula find herself, in the harmony of solitude.
 - 4. Connection, caring, involvement make no sense to Sula, who has a corrosive ferocity; she reacts against the beliefs that make up our emotional and moral lives.
 - 5. Sula breaks all of the rules.
 - 6. Sula, in a deathbed conversation with Nel, remains unbent; she believes she, unlike others, owns her self.
- IV. This book tackles the patriarchal tradition of Western humanism.
- V. In asking “How far could you go with a character like this?” Morrison is reminiscent of Camus.
- VI. No black character in literature has ever exerted this kind of limitless freedom or ecstatic sense of self-determination.

Readings

Essential:

Morrison, *Sula*

Recommended:

Morrison, *The Song of Solomon, Beloved, Jazz*; Bloom, ed. *Modern Critical Views: Toni Morrison*; Weinstein in *What Else But Love*; Carmean, *Toni Morrison’s World of Fiction*; Harris, *Fiction and Folklore*

Topics for Further Investigation

Do you read *Sula* predominantly as the story of a community, of a friendship, or of Sula Peace? Are Morrison’s multiple interests harmonious and adequately meshed here?

Make the argument that the Peace women—Eva, Hannah, and Sula—represent nothing less than a brave new world for black literature.

Lecture Twenty-Nine Don DeLillo: Decoder of American Frequencies

Scope: DeLillo's objective resembles those of Balzac, Dickens, and Zola: to draw a map of how we lived during the latter part of the twentieth century in America. A major new talent in American writing, he presents for us places we have been to but never seen, experiences we have had but never understood.

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

1. Place DeLillo in the spectrum of nineteenth- and twentieth-century realist chroniclers of the social and political terrain, and name some of the major themes in his novels.
2. Characterize his narrative style and speaking voice, and explain his concept of power reconceived as language.
3. Explain why *The Names* (1982) could be called an inverted postmodern bildungsroman where identities are unstable and all certainty shattered.
4. Using the example of the supermarket, discuss DeLillo's use of the technique of defamiliarization in *White Noise* (1984), both as a source of his comic vision and as a means of giving the reader striking insights into modern American cultural practices.
6. Explain why he has chosen to center his novel around Jack Gladney, a professor of Hitler studies at a small college.

Outline

- I. The work of DeLillo, a realist writer of remarkable scope, is likely to grow in stature as time goes on.
 - A. Realism seeks to provide for readers a map of the terrain—social, political, economic, etc.
 - B. The goal of Balzac, one of the first great realists, was to give a complete view of how France was changing at the time and to have his literary output rival the documents from history and politics.
 - C. Dickens also stands as a great realist writer, reporting on life in London in a modern, urban economy.
 - D. At the turn of the century, Zola brought to realism an even more scientific approach, depicting the current state of events in each of many arenas.

- E. DeLillo chronicles the last decades of twentieth-century America with an astounding mix of subjects (pro football, mathematics, Wall Street, rock music, pornography, espionage, the Kennedy assassination).
 - 1. The common theme in all of DeLillo's ventures is a fascination with power.
 - 2. DeLillo is a systemic writer, interested in the way in which large, anonymous, impersonal systems have come to dominate life; he believes that this will change the human story and our relationships, thereby to a new kind of writing;
 - 3. His cool, distant style is unmistakable.
 - 4. DeLillo shows an uncanny ear for the way people talk, but, more than Burroughs, he's drawn to professional jargon.
 - 5. He can occasionally be bizarre and even surreal with a focus on the inane and the absurd in daily life.
 - 6. DeLillo expresses a sense that the secrets of our lives can be found on the surface.

II. Power in DeLillo is reconceived as language.

- A. *Great Jones Street* shows power in language and depicts art as an aggressive assault on life.
 - 1. Fascinated with music as an alternative language, DeLillo actually creates lyrics for his rock star in hiding.
 - 2. Modern theorists have language trapped in its own system and unable to reach people; here the system is transcended.
- B. *The Names* (1982) is about being American, as one understands it upon leaving America.
 - 1. DeLillo taps into a long tradition in American literature of the rich experiences of Americans abroad.
 - a. In DeLillo's book, Americans in Athens are working as middle management in large, multinational corporations.
 - b. The tradition of going to Europe to become a person and soak up the culture is being turned upside down; the educational scheme is gone, replaced by survival.
 - 2. In the book's 1980s, terrorism is a global fact of life.
 - a. DeLillo is fabulous at rendering the sounds of terrorism and the new kinds of prudence and caution that are necessary.
 - b. The world is threatening, which leads to paranoia.
 - c. DeLillo is extremely drawn to notions of conspiracy
 - 3. All of this comes out in language, which we learn subsumes all of the lives and all of the issues in this novel.
 - a. The history of language is inseparable from that of business, thus these middle-management people are actually keepers of a scribal tradition, part of a writerly enterprise, not just there to make money.
 - b. We hear about strange acts of violence being performed by a secret cult that kills people who visit a place the initials of which match their own; your name becomes a public target when you reach the right place
 - c. From a linguistic standpoint, a language is being forged and the gap between sign and referent erased.

III. *White Noise* (1984), DeLillo's comic masterpiece, won the National Book Award in 1985.

- A. It is the story of Jack Gladney, a professor of Hitler studies at a small middle-American college.
- B. DeLillo writes about everyday events from an angle we are unaccustomed to, as in his description of a trip to the supermarket.
 - 1. He gives us back the world we see everyday, defamiliarized.
 - 2. Descriptions such as these render back to us those places that are part of our immediate environment but that are much more mysterious than we realize (the supermarket is a spiritual place that awaits deciphering).
 - 3. These are the patterns of our lives, the secret spiritual trajectory of human life today, religious experience.
 - 4. White noise, or background noise, comes to stand for all of the elements of our environment that contextualize us but that we do not even see.

Lecture Thirty

***White Noise*: Representing the Environment**

Scope: DeLillo's comic masterpiece, *White Noise*, makes visible to us our technological world run amok. Above all, he reconfigures the familiar story of the individual versus the world, but in his rendition we actually see and hear the world. The environment speaks here, and what it says is worthy of note.

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

1. State the significance of "white noise" within the context of the story and its effect on individual lives.
2. Give examples of DeLillo's anthropological approach to the myths and ideological constructions of modern American life and the double vision that he fosters.
3. Describe the nuclear incident that shatters a town's sense of invulnerability and the new heroes that emerge in the wake of the incident.
4. Relate Burroughs' idea of the porousness of the human body to DeLillo's novel, and explain how each novel makes a strong environmental statement.
5. Explain how DeLillo conveys the pathos of trying to preserve one's humanity and sense of self, or even to create a self, in the impersonal modern world.
6. Compare and contrast Coover's and DeLillo's treatments of the idea of spectatorship and its meaning in American life.

Outline

- I. A search for the richness of our culture in the obvious is balanced by a suspicious view of what is considered mythic, historical, and grand.
 - A. DeLillo expresses a jaundiced view about Americana, or the way we perceive our spiritual or historical lives.
 - B. DeLillo wants to undermine our icons and show that they have become mere media events and no longer have any real power or immediacy.
 - C. He encourages suspicion of the puffed-up nature of what we think to be the important things
 - D. DeLillo's double vision: to *discover* the everyday world, and to *signal* the gap between label and reality.
- II. *White noise* has a number of meanings, one of which is "sound that is produced by all wave frequencies sounding together."
 - A. The book delivers the environmental sense of things, as DeLillo portrays our uneasy truce with and sullen retreat from the technological environment and the cacophony of signals that punctuate our world .
 - B. DeLillo is equally interested in the toxicity of our culture.
 - C. "White noise" also represents the media's role in our lives.
 1. We have become addicted to viewing disaster on the TV news.
 2. Our spectator position is very important; a belief in our own invincibility is an ingredient in the vicarious terror and pleasure we get.
- III. *White Noise* deals with "the airborne toxic event," an industrial accident in which a tank car carrying gases is punctured.
 - A. Our sense of invincibility is shown to be a fiction when this catastrophe occurs in middle America
 1. Everyone in the community departs under a huge toxic cloud.
 2. DeLillo describes the event in mythic, dramatic terms.
 3. He also provides a consumerist, biochemical analysis of the cloud.
 - B. The villagers move into a refugee camp.
 1. Gladney's son, Heinrich, begins to take on an authoritative role.
 2. The tabloid stories that Babette, Gladney's wife, reads to senior citizens seem no more preposterous than the villagers' own situation, where the norms of everyday life have been inverted.

- IV.** *White Noise* is a *panasonic* novel (this was DeLillo's earlier working title for the book).
- A.** The toxic cloud is environment; it is evidence of the human subject's defenselessness and porousness.
 - B.** How to write a book in which the reader sees and hears the environment? A panasonic novel: to speak the environment
 - 1.** The anonymous voices that come from the television set play the same role as the chorus in Greek tragedy.
 - 2.** Acronyms and terms from the media are inserted out of nowhere.
 - 3.** DeLillo weaves into his human story fragments of the industrial culture in which we live.
 - C.** DeLillo describes the disinherited mind.
 - 1.** The world is impersonal, anonymous, and alien.
 - 2.** Impersonality is not just in the outside environment but in the mechanical dimensions of things, which eliminate willpower and conscious choice.
 - 3.** This notion of an inner mechanical dimension is in line with the mind's biochemical, neurological aspects.
 - D.** We come to see that literature as the record of human feelings, achievements, relations, and life can no longer occupy the whole stage and still be true to the world in which we live.
 - 1.** The notion that the mission of art is to report on what it is to be human is in trouble.
 - 2.** That which is "inside" us is living, organic tissue, not, per the humanist scheme, our private thoughts and feelings; DeLillo alone integrates the two.
 - 3.** What tells our story?
 - a.** Do the contents of the Gladney family's trash tell their story?
 - b.** Jack listens to his child mutter commercial brand names in her sleep, indicative of pollution by the outside world.
 - c.** In our modern age, the human subject has his or her fortune told through mechanical, computerized systems of retrieval.

Lecture Thirty-One

DeLillo and American Dread

Scope: The central fable behind the narrative business of *White Noise* is the oldest fable human beings know: fear of dying. DeLillo makes us understand that this fear animates our lives and our society in countless ways, ranging from Fascism to belief in science and miracle drugs. Death is the white noise that backgrounds every existence.

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

1. State DeLillo's solution, centered around human connectedness and the family, to absolute depersonalization in a technological age.
2. Discuss the reasons behind his emphasis on the American fear of death, and evaluate his presentation of fascism, technology, and Dylar as means of evading that fear.
3. Describe what Willy Mink represents in the novel and the significance of Babette and Jack Gladney's encounter with him.
4. Relate the central themes of *White Noise* to DeLillo's *Libra* (1988), a portrayal of Lee Harvey Oswald, John F. Kennedy's assassin.

Outline

- I. Though written in DeLillo's cool, distant style, *White Noise* portrays the reality and the bonds of a modern family pitted against the environment.
- II. Death is the chief antagonist in *White Noise*.
 - A. The voices of death contribute to the white noise of this text.
 1. The airborne toxic event represents the power and, ultimately, the toxicity of the environment.
 2. The penalty for surviving is obsession with dying.
 3. Fear of death manifests itself physiologically throughout our lives.
 4. Death is the secret goal of all plots.
 5. Death is the secret origin of our sense of déjà vu.
 6. Death is the staple material of the media and the tabloids.
 7. Babette's father, Vernon, uses gallows humor to list the elements of entropy and decay that human beings experience.
 - B. DeLillo is concerned with responses to death.
 1. DeLillo presents one of Western culture's great responses to death, technology to prevent or postpone it.
 2. Fascism is a more sinister response to the fear of death, and Jack's career in Hitler studies begins to make sense in this light.
 3. Jack and Babette have concealed from one another their respective fears of death; they compete about who will go first and who will be most deeply affected by the death of the other.
 - C. Technology has invented a cure for the fear of death, the drug Dylar.
 1. To obtain Dylar, Babette has had sex with the wonder drug's producer, Willie Mink.
 2. Jack's character changes as he goes after Willie Mink to exact revenge.
 - a. Jack gains intensity as he approaches and corners Willie Mink.
 - b. Willie Mink is characterized as a robot-like creature of technology; his speech resembles computer-generated white noise without human drama or sense.
 - c. Jack tortures Mink with one of Dylar's byproducts, its ability to make words seem real.
 - D. *White Noise* closes with DeLillo's comic rhythm and reaffirmation of the family.
- III. *Libra* (1988) is DeLillo's story of Lee Harvey Oswald.
 - A. DeLillo paints Oswald as Libra, the figure that can go both ways, motivated by noble aims and a grand American desire.

- B.** Oswald is, however, a construct crafted by a disgruntled CIA operative in a plot to create a proper figure for the murder of Kennedy.
1. America reveres the notion of the self-made man, but Oswald is a person made, used, and manipulated by others while still believing that he is exercising his own free will.
 2. Oswald makes the public part of his dying and thereby enters into the lives and dreams of America.

Readings

Essential:

DeLillo, *White Noise*

Recommended:

DeLillo, *The Names*, *Libra*, *Great Jones Street*; LeClair, *In the Loop*; Messmer, "Thinking It Through Completely"; Weinstein, *Nobody's Home*

Topics for Further Investigation

Discuss *White Noise* as a report on life in a technological age. Do the issues of technological change impact on storytelling? How?

Comment on the multiple significances of the term *white noise*. How has DeLillo exploited them in his novel of that name?

Lecture Thirty-Two

Conclusion: Nobody's Home

Scope: In this final lecture, we take stock of the various accounts of American life that we have examined, and we consider the role that art plays in bringing to us, in ways that are both personal and societal, a heightened sense of our national past and our current endeavors. The central ongoing drama here, as throughout the century, is the interplay of self and world, a dynamic that literature makes uniquely visible.

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

1. Defend Nobody as the quintessential American protagonist, citing examples of this disempowered and entrapped self from major works of modern American fiction.
2. Describe the tensions between Nobody and the atomic self as two central ways of viewing the human condition in American literature.
3. Discuss the ultimate viability of the free imperial self, as expounded by nineteenth-century writers Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville in *Ahab*, and Twain in *Huck Finn*, in the modern world.
4. Explain, with examples from the texts studied, the subtle differences between the idea that freedom and self-determination are only myths and the idea that the project of self-construction is a central human project.
5. Describe the different forms of connectedness these modern works advocate as a means of moving from Nobody to Somebody, from atom to community.
6. Discuss the compatibility of the humanist code of marriage, children, and decency with the idea of the strong imperial self.
7. Discuss how the theme of freedom of speech gives form to and actuates these works and is integral both to construction of self and to community.

Outline

- I. Although the quintessential American protagonist seeks an empowered, imperial self, that self has proven to be always enmeshed in the designs of others and of the world.
 - A. Oswald's concept of happiness was to erase, through meaningful action, the border between one's personal world and the world in general.
 1. As shown in DeLillo's text, the tragedy is that the self is erased *with* the borderline.
 2. The crucial religious article of the self-made man is in deep trouble as a result of "caughtness" and entrapment in the world.
 - B. Faulkner, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, creates the haunting metaphor of a loom to represent our position and participation in the world.
 1. This image suggests the kind of alienation many people experience.
 2. We have no contact with or knowledge of whomever set up the loom.
 3. There is pattern, but we do not establish it; we have no control.
 4. There is a sense of sharing our space with others.
 - C. In "The Displaced Person," O'Connor provides a vision of the concentration camps through the eyes of Mrs. Shortley.
 1. Mrs. Shortley's only reaction is fear that it could happen here, but no recognition that she is guilty of the same attitude toward others.
 2. At the end of the story, Mrs. Shortley's epiphany brings her a final sense of connectedness
 3. O'Connor gives us an image of the reconstructed body, reassembled from more than just its own, original parts.
 4. She suggests that the only conceivable response to dismemberment is to make oneself whole again by bringing others in.
- II. Reading these texts is a challenge to understand the pattern and synthesis by which the human subject fits in a larger framework, to go beyond the discreet figure of a character and see the world into which that character is inscribed.

- A. We must frame the decentered pieces of Anderson’s mosaic
 - 1. “Paper Pills” is a fable about Dr. Reefy’s involvement in the community, love and death, language and art.
 - 2. “The Philosopher” is even more fragmented, but we must understand that the pieces of Dr. Parcival’s life do fit together.
 - B. The construction of meaning and self is what criticism/the reading of literature is all about.
 - 1. Hemingway’s “Indian Camp” obliges us to realize how wrong Nick’s father is and how important the Indian woman’s screams are.
 - 2. We gradually realize that the journey in “Big Two-hearted River” is not just a fishing trip; it is a story of healing and convalescence.
 - C. Against a backdrop of a world coming apart, Fitzgerald chronicles Dick Diver’s fall in *Tender is the Night* with the dynamic of Dick and Nicole progressing from love to health for Nicole and to decay, ugliness, and disappearance for Dick.
 - D. Faulkner’s *Light In August* requires that we imagine the alternative provided by a marriage of Joe Christmas’ dysfunction to Lena Grove’s harmony.
 - E. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston relates not only Janie’s liberation but her enabling love with Tea Cake.
 - F. The grandmother in O’Connor’s “A Good Man is Hard to Find” inspires recognition of the human family and our moral and spiritual connection to one another.
 - G. In Burroughs’ depiction of life as a viral world, individuals—shorn of integrity and defenses—share a connection.
 - H. Dresden and Tralfamadore, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, are forms of each other; Tralfamadore is the alternate world that must exist if one is to survive Dresden.
 - I. In *The Public Burning*, Richard Nixon ventures into the lives of the Rosenbergs; he discovers both their reality and the reaches of a world much greater than himself.
 - J. Morrison presents the story of two girls with contrasting ways of being; we must understand them together as complementary selves.
 - 1. Hannah’s question resonates, “Was I loved?”
 - 2. What place does love have?
 - K. In DeLillo’s clipped, wry vision of our technological jungle, we finally hear the voice of the environment and our world.
- III. Freedom, originality, and self-determination are not really sustainable or actualizable.
- A. With age, we realize increasingly the difficulty of being original and free.
 - B. The young maintain a fierce, proud sense of the self.
 - C. If the self is fiction, it is a great, supreme fiction.
 - D. We construct our own selves over time: “from this the poem springs.”

Glossary

Anomie: a rootlessness or lack of purpose, clear values, or even identity in a person or society

Apocalyptic: having the character of an apocalypse or world-consuming holocaust. In writing, often refers to a visionary scheme of history or to the coming of the end of the world.

Archetype: a recurring symbol, theme, setting, or character type in literature, as in symbols of the rose, sun, or serpent; themes of love and death; settings such as Edenic gardens; and character types such as heroes and magicians. Quests and descents into the underworld are common archetypal patterns of action. Psychologist Carl Jung suggests these symbols and the myths in which they occur are part of a worldwide collective unconscious, but recent critics pinpoint cultural differences overlooked in the search for universals.

Bildungsroman: a novel that traces the growth, education, and search for identity of a young man or young woman. Many major nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels follow this pattern.

Defamiliarization: an effect achieved in literary works of disrupting our usual perception of the world, thus enabling us to see things from a fresh perspective

Déjà Vu: the feeling that one has been in a place or had a particular experience before

Demiurgic: in Platonic thought, a creative force or deity that shapes the material world; generally, a ruling force or creative power

Denouement: the point at which the complications of a story or play are cleared up, and mystery, confusion, or uncertainty is clarified or resolved

Entropy: a measure of the degree of disorder or uncertainty in a substance or system; sometimes used with reference to works of literature

Epiphany: in Christian theology, denotes a manifestation of God's presence in the world, but in literature the term can also indicate a secular revelation or a moment of special insight

Fabulation: a term used by modern critics to indicate fiction that openly delights in its self-conscious verbal artifice. Modern fabulators include John Barth and Kurt Vonnegut.

Fourth and Fifth Dimensions of Prose: a repressed and elliptical form of writing used by Ernest Hemingway in which the reader must invent or imagine facts or material missing from the text

Gothic: in reference to a novel or romance, describes a story of terror and suspense with sinister or grotesque elements, often set in a gloomy castle or monastery. The Gothic novel flourished in Britain from the 1790s to the 1830s, with Ann Radcliffe as the main proponent. American examples are Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" or, in the twentieth century, William Faulkner's tales.

Grotesque: in literature, disturbingly odd, abnormal, or exaggerated characters as in the tales of Sherwood Anderson, or literary works having these characteristics

Hypercube: a whimsically playful mode of "cubist" fictional writing used by contemporary writer Robert Coover in which every possible permutation of meaning or choice of action in a given situation is displayed

Manichaeism: the doctrine that the world is governed by opposing forces of good and evil

Metatextuality: awareness of text as text

Mimesis: Greek word for imitation, used to indicate a literary work that attempts to reflect or reproduce external reality

Modernism: a period in the early twentieth century during which literature was influenced by such experimental trends as symbolism, expressionism, imagism, vorticism, futurism, and surrealism. Broadly speaking, modernist literature rejects nineteenth-century traditions including the conventions of realism, traditional poetic meter, and bourgeois values. Modernists Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust and William Faulkner experiment with disrupted chronologies. Virginia Woolf and James Joyce reveal their characters' thoughts through stream of consciousness. T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound substitute collages of fragmentary images and complex allusions for a logical exposition

of thought. The drama of Bertolt Brecht and Luigi Pirandello is abstract rather than realist or naturalist. Much modernist writing focuses on the dislocation of urban culture and juxtaposes multiple points of view.

Myoclonic: characterized by an involuntary twitching of the muscles

Mythopoesis: the making of myths, either by a (usually) preliterate culture or by a writer who develops and elaborates a personal system of spiritual values. Can also refer to writing that draws on older myths or that resembles myths in subject matter or imaginative scope.

Novel: usually, but not always, a genre of extended prose fiction characterized in the contemporary period by its openness and flexibility. Novels are longer than novellas or short stories and permit the fuller development of characters and themes. They differ from prose romances in their greater degree of realism and because they tend to describe a recognizable secular world.

Oneiric: dreamlike or having to do with dreams

Postmodernism: a period in Western culture since the 1960s that reflects the cultural conditions prevailing in advanced capitalist societies. It is characterized by disconnected images and styles in the popular media as well as in literature. John Baudrillard and other commentators describe postmodernity as a culture of fragmentary sensations, superficiality, and nostalgia, which eschews coherence and meaning, depth and authenticity. Sometimes in literature the term refers to a continuation of modernism's alienated mood but rejects its quest for artistic coherence in a fragmented world. Flippant indifference or self-conscious fabulation replace the attempt to secure meaning through myth, symbol, or formal complexity. The term *postmodern* refers to fiction rather than poetry or drama and applies to such writers as William S. Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon, all of whom also employ on occasion a quasi-science fiction that disrupts the secular world with the intrusion of the fabulous.

Realism: a mode of writing that is mimetic: that gives the impression of accurately reflecting the life it depicts in the text. It is largely associated with nineteenth-century novels of the common man or of the middle class, and it usually gives close attention to details of physical setting. Examples include the novels of Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, Honoré de Balzac, and George Eliot, or, in the late nineteenth century, the plays of George Bernard Shaw or Henrik Ibsen.

Romance: as opposed to realist writings, romances are fictional stories that include metaphysical or supernatural events or that move into the realm of the improbable or fantastic. Medieval romances, such as tales of King Arthur's knights, typify this genre in its early phases. Modern romance modes include Gothic novels, science fiction, fantasy novels, the final plays of Shakespeare, and the tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne. The latter, for example, substitute allegory or psychological exploration of character for mimesis.

Semiotic/Semiotics: a linguistically based study of the production of meaning via sign systems; focuses on the distinction, according to Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, between signifier and signified. It is the interrelation of the signs themselves rather than their correspondence with external reality that draws attention. When referring to the study of works of literature, the stress is on the production of literary meaning from shared conventions and codes.

Speciation: in biology, the process of developing a new species through evolution

Subtext: the implied, rather than overtly stated, meaning(s) of works of literature

Transference: in psychoanalysis, a reproduction of emotions relating to repressed experiences, especially from childhood, and the substitution of another person, often the psychoanalyst him/herself, for the object of the repressed experiences; seen in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*

Trope: a figure of speech such as metaphor, simile, irony, or hyperbole that suggests alternative meanings behind words and phrases

Tutelary Divinity: a guardian divinity or spirit

Verisimilitude: in literary works, the appearance of truth or reality, a convention originating in Aristotle's concept of mimesis, or the direct representation of nature or reality

Biographical Sketches of Writers Covered

Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941)

Born in Ohio, Anderson served in the Spanish-American War, was married for a time, and held various jobs, including management of a paint factory, before he moved to Chicago to write advertising copy and, with the encouragement of Carl Sandburg and others, to begin his career as a writer. His first novel, *Windy McPherson's Son*, published in 1916 and seemingly reflective of Anderson's own life, records the rise of a small-town Iowa boy to successful manufacturer and his subsequent renunciation of this success to search for truth. *Marching Men* (1917), centering on oppressed Pennsylvania coal workers and a failed mystical movement, followed. But it was *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) that first drew critical attention. Focused, as in many of his works, on frustrated small-town residents seeking a voice and meaning in an increasingly mechanized world, he explores a counterbalancing mystical relationship between man and nature's primal forces. Similar themes are presented in *Poor White* (1920), *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), and *Many Marriages* (1923). *Dark Laughter* (1925) contrasts spiritual sterility of whites with unrepressed joyousness of blacks. Anderson retired in the late 1920s to edit two small-town newspapers in Virginia. This move inspired numerous other works, including *Perhaps Women* (1931), on the potential of women to lead others past sterility and mechanization; a number of novels, essays, and short stories; and his memoirs and collections of letters, published posthumously.

William Burroughs (1914–)

Born in St. Louis and educated at Harvard, Burroughs lived extensively abroad, especially in Paris. His experiences as a drug addict inspired many of his best-known writings including *Junkie* (1953), *Naked Lunch* (Paris [1959], New York [1962]), and *Queer* (1985). Other works, many of which utilize fantasy or science fiction, explore alternative lifestyles such as those of homosexuals or gangsters. Especially in his writings about the drug culture, one finds beneath the fantasy an astute social satire, clinically accurate descriptions of addiction and its aftermath, and an anthropological approach to his subject matter. In 1981 he published *Cities of the Red Night* about a utopian settlement, followed by collections of essays and short prose pieces (*The Adding Machine* [1986] and *Tornado Alley* [1989]). Burroughs' correspondence with Allen Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters*, came out in 1963, and his autobiographical writings of the 1950s were published as *Interzone* in 1989. A guru to the Beat Generation and a prolific but controversial writer, Burroughs' apocalyptic vision has made him a contemporary cult figure.

Robert Coover (1932–)

Born in Iowa, Coover launched his successful writing career with a Faulkner Award in 1985 for his first novel, *The Origin of the Brunists*. Known for narrative experimentation, Coover fuses fantasy, satire, and realism in this novel and in such later works as *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (1968), which is about an imaginary baseball league invented by and filling out the life of an otherwise lonely accountant. Narrated by Richard Nixon, *The Public Burning* (1977) is a postmodern fable satirizing jingoist rhetoric and Cold War ideology in the context of the Rosenberg executions. *Spanking the Maid* (1982) satirizes sadism in fiction, while *Gerald's Party* (1986) looks at human chaos through the lens of black humor, and *Pricksongs & Descants* (1969) introduces experimental "hypercube" fiction and includes modern parables and other short fictional pieces. Other works include two plays, a film, and *A Night at the Movies, Or, You Must Remember This* (1987), a work that links fiction and film.

Don DeLillo (1936–)

Born in New York City and educated at Fordham University, DeLillo began publishing in the 1970s with *Americana* (1971), about a TV executive who outgrows his business; the existential comedy *End Zone* (1972), which uses football as a metaphor for both atomic war and a rootless, disengaged society; and *Great Jones Street* (1973), about jazz and the drug culture. Subsequent novels of the 1970s and 80s take up such themes as rich New Yorkers caught in terrorism (*Players* [1977]); the corruptible multinational American expatriate community in Athens (*The Names* [1982]); and man's uneasy truce with technology and ecological disaster in his comic masterpiece, *White Noise* (1985). Later works *Libra* (1988) and *Mao II* (1991) look at the story of Lee Harvey Oswald as an anti-bildungsroman and at the world of intelligence and CIA operatives.

William Faulkner (1897–1962)

Born and raised in Oxford, Mississippi, Faulkner used the society and culture of the region to create Yoknapatawpha County, the mythical setting of his greatest novels. Following World War I, Faulkner studied at the University of Mississippi, worked on a newspaper in New Orleans, lived briefly in Europe, and in 1926, with the help of Sherwood Anderson, published his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, about the return home of a dying soldier. But it is *Sartoris* (1929), a mythical tale that introduces the decline of four Old South families and the rise of the unscrupulous Snopes family, which sets the tone for the works to follow. The experimental *The Sound and the Fury*, a story of the decadent Compson family told from three different perspectives, was published in 1929, followed in 1930 by *As I Lay Dying*, the psychological study of a poor white family preparing to bury their mother. *Sanctuary* was published in 1931 and *Light in August* in 1932, with its redemptive, communal message softening Faulkner's harsh themes of determinism, racism, and neurotic isolation. *Absalom, Absalom!*, published in 1936, depicts the tragic downfall of Colonel Sutpen; *The Unvanquished* (1938) traces the history of the Sartoris family during the Civil War; and *The Wild Palms* (1939) centers, in interwoven tales, on the effects of a Mississippi flood on two very different sets of lives. Of his dozens of other works, *A Fable* (1954) and *The Reivers* (1962) both won Pulitzer Prizes, and Faulkner's acceptance speech for his 1950 Nobel Prize stressed the writer's duty to depict man's endurance against the odds by way of compassion and sacrifice.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940)

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, educated and well-connected in literary circles at Princeton, and briefly a soldier, Fitzgerald published his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in 1920. In it he captures the mood of the Jazz Age at Princeton during the postwar period. *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920), *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), and *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) followed soon after, extending Fitzgerald's portrait of the glamorous and extravagant, but dissipated, life of the 1920s jet set and mirroring his own life and marriage. His finest novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), embodies the American dream during a corrupt period in the figure of the self-made millionaire, Jay Gatsby, who is in love with the unattainable Daisy Buchanan. *Tender is the Night* (1934), autobiographical in many ways, presents the gradual decline and fall of American psychiatrist Dick Diver, whose marriage to his beautiful but mentally unstable patient, Nicole, leads to his own destruction. Finally, *The Last Tycoon*, published posthumously in 1941, tells the story of a movie industry mogul. Several collections of Fitzgerald's short stories were published after his death, as were four volumes of his magazine contributions, poems, and correspondence (*Letters* [1963] and *As Ever, Scott Fitz-* [1972]). The tragedies of his own life and of his wife's nervous breakdown are reflected both in *Tender is the Night* and in essays collected by Edmund Wilson and published in 1945 as *The Crack-Up*.

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961)

Born in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1899 and an avid hunter and fisherman, Hemingway began his career as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. In World War I, he served as an ambulance driver in France and in the Italian infantry. After the war Hemingway, badly wounded in action, settled in Paris as a correspondent for the *Toronto Star*, and it was there that he began his serious writing career. Early works such as *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923) and *In Our Time* (1925) show the stylistic influences of expatriate writers Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. Among his most famous writings of that period are *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), about the disillusionment, moral collapse, and escapist activities of a group of expatriate Americans and Englishmen living in Paris after the war, and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), a wartime love story about an English nurse and an American ambulance worker. Hemingway was seen as a leading spokesman for America's "lost generation," unsettled by a postwar collapse of values and loss of faith. His 1920s stories, in their spare, unemotional style, depict the cynical, stoic, and tough survivors of this era who can trust only primal emotions. Works of the 1930s include *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) on bullfighting and *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) on big-game hunting. *To Have and Have Not* (1937) explores collective action as a solution to social problems, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) reflects Hemingway's experiences as a war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War. The highly acclaimed *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a parable about an aging fisherman's stoic and even loving battle with the forces of nature in the form of an enormous fish, helped him win the Nobel Prize in 1954. Several novels were published posthumously, including *A Moveable Feast* (1964), which sketched his life in Paris in the 1920s.

Zora Neale Hurston (1901?–60)

Born in Florida, a graduate of Barnard College with a degree in anthropology, and a Guggenheim and Howard University Alumni Award recipient, Hurston's interest in the folklore and culture of Haiti, the West Indies, and the black South was reflected in her two anthropological studies, *Tell My Horse* (1938) and *Mules and Men* (1935). Her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), about the loves of a black preacher, won a Book of the Month Club award,

but her masterpiece is *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), today considered a key feminist text. *Their Eyes* celebrates, in richly metaphorical language, the growing autonomy of a young black girl who only in her third marriage finds true fulfillment and love in the South's patriarchal society. Later works *Moses: Man of the Mountain* (1939), which interprets the Biblical Jews from a black folk perspective, and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), about a Florida cracker woman, were not as popular. Her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, was published in 1942 and a collection of her short stories in 1985. Although prominent early in her career, she died in obscurity.

Toni Morrison (1931–)

Born in Ohio and the holder of a BA in English from Howard University and an MA from Cornell, Morrison began her literary career with the publication of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), a novel about a Southern black girl who is caught up in self-hatred and believes that without blue eyes she cannot be accepted by society. *Sula* (1974) followed, a striking feminist text that posits with the strong and even frighteningly autonomous women of the matrilineal Peace family an alternative to the black bourgeoisie. *Song of Solomon* (1977), a Book of the Month Club Award winner, focuses on the black male experience and its rites of passage. But it is *Beloved* (1987), a story of the ravages of slavery and its aftermath as experienced by a black woman who kills her own baby to prevent the child's capture and sale back into slavery, that received highest acclaim and earned Morrison a Pulitzer Prize. *Jazz*, set in Harlem during the 1920s, followed in 1992, and in 1993 Morrison was the first black woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Her *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), based on a series of lectures delivered at Harvard, has been widely influential in academic circles. She currently teaches at Princeton University.

Flannery O'Connor (1925–64)

Born in Georgia, the setting of her fiction, O'Connor is known as a visionary Catholic writer of Gothic tales about the Protestant South and the conflict between the sacred and the profane. An early novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), is a macabre and fanatical tale about a young boy who tries to baptize another. Among her best-known short stories are "Good Country People," "A Good Man is Hard to Find," "The Artificial Nigger," and "Everything That Rises Must Converge." These and her other stories depict in a comic and haunting manner the struggle of her characters to escape evil and, in coming to understand themselves, to achieve salvation. Collections of stories include *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955), *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965), and *Complete Stories* (1971). O'Connor's collected occasional prose appeared in 1969 and her letters in 1979.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1922–)

Born in Indianapolis and a graduate of Cornell in biochemistry, Vonnegut served in the infantry in World War II, was captured by the Germans, and managed to survive the bombing of Dresden only because he had been assigned to work in an underground meat locker in a slaughterhouse. Following the war he studied anthropology at the University of Chicago and worked for General Electric. His novels reflect these experiences. *Player Piano* (1952) satirizes mechanization and automation at GE; *Mother Night* (1961) centers on an American spy who outwits the enemy by transmitting secret messages via pro-Nazi radio; and *Cat's Cradle* (1963) proposes the use of lies to achieve human happiness. Using black humor to satirize the duplicity of modern life, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965) focuses on man's need for compassion and generosity, and *Slaughterhouse-Five; or The Children's Crusade* (1969), like earlier works, uses science fiction techniques and surrealistic dark comedy to address the devastation, trauma, and aftermath of war. Other novels satirizing the deficiencies and nihilism of modern society and of contemporary politics are *Breakfast of Champions; or, Goodbye Blue Monday!* (1973) and *Lonesome No More!* (1976). Similar themes are addressed in later novels and stories, including one novel about a Vietnam War veteran, another about the afterlife of two American heroes of the Nagasaki bombing, and a third about a nuclear accident.

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