From Plato to Post-modernism: Understanding the Essence of Literature and the Role of the Author
Part I
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Louis Markos received his B.A. in English and History from Colgate University (Hamilton, NY) and his M.A. and Ph.D. in English from the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI). While at the University of Michigan, he specialized in British Romantic Poetry (his dissertation was on Wordsworth), Literary Theory, and the Classics. At Houston Baptist University (where he has taught since 1991), he offers courses in all three of these areas, as well as in Victorian Poetry and Prose, Seventeenth-Century Poetry and Prose, Mythology, Epic, and Film.

He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and has won teaching awards at both the University of Michigan and Houston Baptist University. In 1994, he was selected to attend an NEH Summer Institute on Virgil’s *Aeneid*. In addition to presenting several papers at scholarly conferences, Dr. Markos has become a popular speaker in Houston, Texas, where he has presented five lectures at the Museum of Printing History Lyceum (three on film, two on ancient Greece), a three-lecture series on film at the Houston Public Library, a class on film for Leisure Learning Unlimited, a class on the *Odyssey* for a retirement center, and a lecture on Homer and the Oral Tradition for a seniors group. His audiences for all these lectures and classes have been identical in their make-up to the typical student/client of the Teaching Company. Although a devoted professor who works closely with his students, Dr. Markos is also dedicated to the concept of the professor as public educator. He firmly believes that knowledge must not be walled up in the academy, but must be freely and enthusiastically disseminated to all those “who have ears to hear.” Needless to say, he is overjoyed to be fashioning this series for the Teaching Company.

Dr. Markos lives in Houston, Texas, with his wife, Donna, his son, Alex, and his daughter, Stacey.
Bibliographical Note

I would like to take a moment here to suggest strongly that all students of this series purchase the textbook Critical Theory Since Plato, revised edition, by Hazard Adams (HBJ, 1992). This excellent collection of literary essays contains nearly all the works that I will be discussing in this series. Although the works I will be discussing do appear in numerous anthologies, Adams’s collection is the only one I know of that is comprehensive enough in its depth and breadth to include them all.

At the end of each lecture outline, under the heading “essential reading,” I will begin by giving the author and title of the main essay (or essays) analyzed in that lecture. If the words “in Adams,” appear directly after the title, that indicates that that essay is anthologized in Critical Theory Since Plato. In some cases, I will follow this citation with an alternate source for this essay, especially if that essay is part of a larger work that I think it would be helpful to consult. (This, for example, is the case in Lecture Two: the lecture primarily concerns itself with Book X of the Republic, which is anthologized in Adams; however, since many readers will want to consult the Republic in its entirety, I have included a citation to that effect.) Full bibliographical information will, as usual, be given in the Bibliography at the back of Part II.

Let me also warn the student now that the Bibliography will contain somewhat fewer secondary sources than is typical for the Teaching Company. There is a reason for this. I want to encourage students to immerse themselves in the primary material, in the theoretical essays themselves. Indeed, most students who have the courage to do so will often find that the primary material is actually clearer and more forceful than the secondary material that is supposed to explain and elucidate it. Don’t be afraid to read the theorists directly! If you give this series your full attention and thought, you will be equipped with the requisite tools and background to enter yourself into the ongoing dialogue of literary theory. That is my goal as a teacher; to usher you into that wonderful dialogue and then leave you in the capable hands of Aristotle and Sidney and Shelley and Eliot to add your own unique insights to theirs.

Finally, you may also notice that the Bibliography is somewhat sparse in recent scholarship. There is a reason for this too. With each passing decade, literary theory becomes more and more esoteric, more and more impenetrable. The critics who write the scholarly essays have stopped speaking to the general public and are writing only for their fellow academics. (Indeed, most Ph.D.’s today find themselves unable to pierce through the jargon and fractured syntax of modern theory and those who critique it.) I have tried to confine the Bibliography to works that are written in relatively lucid, jargon-free prose and have focused on enduring classics rather than scholarly fads. However, though my Bibliography avoids this “bitter fruit” of modern academia, I will, in the course of my lectures, try to give the student a sense of what is going on in the academy: what the “squabbles” are and what the status of poetry is at the moment. In addition, in my glossary, I engage quite fully the modernist and postmodernist critique of traditional literary theory. Students desiring a fuller exposure to the modern/postmodern mindset are encouraged to study the glossary closely.

Once again, I issue my challenge: go to the primary sources! If you purchase only Critical Theory Since Plato and challenge yourself to read one essay each week for the next year (guided, where relevant, by the lectures in this series), you will have gotten a richer, more vivid, more lasting education than you would by reading a shelf-full of books about theory. May God speed you on your voyage as you enter, to quote Machiavelli, “into the ancient courts of ancient men.”

A full annotated bibliography can be found at the end of the booklet for Part II. Due to size limitations, we could not include the bibliography in this booklet for Part I.
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From Plato to Post-modernism: Understanding the Essence of Literature and the Role of the Author
Part I

Scope:

The latter half of our century has seen a veritable explosion of critical theories. It is imperative for any modern thinker who wishes to understand fully the issues debated in the academy (particularly those surrounding the nature and status of the Great Books of Western Civilization) to be at least conversant both with the concept of critical theory and the terminology employed by various schools of literary theory. In this series of twenty-four lectures, we will study the major critical writings since Plato so as to gain an understanding of the different theoretical structures, schools, and methodologies that have influenced our understanding and appreciation of literature. We shall seek to understand both the presuppositions upon which each theoretical system is founded and the special terminology associated with each system. If we are successful in these endeavors, we will, in the end, not only understand theory better but will become conscious of our own theoretical presuppositions, of the “baggage” (intellectual, political, ethical, etc.) that we bring with us to our readings of literature.

Rather than attempt an exhaustive survey of literary theory, this course will place three restrictions on itself: (1) it will confine itself to critical appraisals of poetry; (2) it will focus on three theoretical periods/epochs (classical and neoclassical, Romantic, and twentieth century), each of which will be further subdivided into three discrete four-lecture series (classical theory/neoclassical theory, philosophical roots of Romanticism/British Romanticism, objective criticism/modern and postmodern theory), (3) it will, within these epochs, confine itself to the major critical texts by the major theorists (the milestones, if you will, of the genre). In nearly all the lectures, we shall focus on one such milestone and will offer a close reading of the work that locates its place in the history of theory while affording it its own integrity as a unique, often idiosyncratic work of criticism. As we explore together each work, we shall pay particular attention to (1) the writer’s vision of the nature and status of both poet and poem, (2) the unique contributions that the work has made to the history of literary theory and to how readers interpret the poems they read, and (3) the meanings (sometimes esoteric) of the key critical terms used. Below is a synopsis of the six four-lecture units that make up the series.

Lectures One through Four (Classical Theory) will take up the debate between Plato and Aristotle over the central theoretical concept of mimesis (or imitation). We shall learn that while Plato saw poetry as a mere copy of a copy (a shadowy, insubstantial thing twice removed from the reality of the Forms), Aristotle saw the mimetic process as one that could perfect and unify what in nature was haphazard and fragmented. We shall ask ourselves why Plato kicked the poets out of his ideal republic and then attempt to refute his reasons with a series of arguments as to why Plato should in fact be considered one of the fathers of literary theory. In our discussion of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, we shall examine closely his concept of the perfect tragic plot, character, and pleasure and shall define the catalogue of critical terminology that he bequeathed to the history of theory.

Lectures Five through Eight (Neoclassical Theory) will offer close readings of Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, Longinus’ “On the Sublime,” and Sidney’s “An Apology for Poetry.” We shall explore how each one of these major critics both defended the power and truth of poetry and laid down a practical series of rules and regulations to help guide the aspiring poet to achieve literary greatness. In these works we shall witness the age-old debate between genius and art and shall note the high premium that neoclassical critics put upon poetry’s ability to teach and to please. The unit will conclude with a look at the critical views of John Dryden and Alexander Pope, two of England’s greatest neoclassical poets. In all four of these lectures, we shall concentrate particularly on the neoclassical concept of decorum, of what is right and proper, and on the moral and ethical responsibilities of the poet.

In Lectures Nine through Twelve (Philosophical Roots of Romanticism) we will take a sudden turn into the world of German philosophy and shall take up the difficult but rewarding theories of Kant, Schiller, and Hegel. We shall consider in particular the philosophical school of epistemology (the formal study of how we know and perceive our world). We shall also forge a link between a philosophy that tends to interiorize truth and a critical theory that posits that aesthetic beauty is a quality that resides not in the poetic object itself but in the subjective experience of the human mind that perceives and reflects upon that object. In Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* we shall look closely at his paradoxical notion of critical judgment as a subjective universal: an experience that, though wholly unique to each

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individual (it occurs within his own subjective mind), can yet be generalized into an aesthetic concept that has universal validity. In Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, we shall learn how a theory of art can be expanded into a theory of education and how the study of poetry can help transform us into fuller, richer people. Finally, in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Fine Art*, we shall follow the Idea as it journeys through what Hegel terms symbolic, classical, and romantic art in search of a perfect incarnation. Before moving into the complex theories of Kant, Schiller, and Hegel, the unit will begin with a general overview of the tenets of epistemology and with a look at a British critic, Edmund Burke, who set the tone for much of German criticism in his seminal work *An Inquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Here we shall explore in detail the mental faculties of taste and imagination and discuss the visceral impact that sublime and beautiful objects have on our psyches. For most students, this unit will be the most difficult of the series; however, I promise that patient study of this material will yield great intellectual rewards.

With Lectures Thirteen through Sixteen (British Romanticism) we shall draw our feet back to the ground as we shift our focus to the great poets of the British Romantic Age: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. We shall study closely their living and vibrant theories, all of which were informed and vitalized by their own poetic experimentation. First we will consider Wordsworth and Coleridge’s great poetic experiment, *Lyrical Ballads*, and how the two poets each set themselves the task of remaking poetry. We shall explore their shared belief that poetry has the ability to defamiliarize us, to rip away, that is, the veil of familiarity and empower us to view the world through the fresh eyes of youthful wonder. Our texts will be Wordsworth’s revolutionary, epoch-making “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” and Coleridge’s critical and philosophical autobiography, *Biographia Literaria*. In our study of these two major works, we shall consider such key Romantic themes as the nature of inspiration and imagination, the sensibilities of the poet, the language of poetry, and the concept of the poem as an organic whole. We shall study as well Shelley’s great synthetic essay, “A Defense of Poetry,” and several of Keats’s letters. From Shelley we shall learn of the exalted nature and function of the poet; from Keats we shall learn the poetic quality that made Shakespeare great: negative capability. And we shall learn, above all, how, for all the Romantic poets, the questions “What is a poet?” and “What is a poem?” are essentially the same.

Lectures Seventeen through Twenty (Objective Criticism) will begin with a look at a seminal essay by the great Victorian sage, Matthew Arnold: “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time.” Beginning with this essay, we shall chart a new direction that criticism begins to take in the first half of the twentieth century, a new focus on the nature of culture and tradition and a new assessment of the status of the poem. After a quick survey of T. S. Eliot’s brief but influential essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” we shall take up the unique theories and powerful legacy of the American school of new criticism, particularly its central concept of the poem as a self-contained, self-referential artifact. Through a close look at various essays by I. A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom, Cleenah Brooks, and W. K. Wimsatt, we shall explore the new critical belief that poetry speaks in its own special language and exists within its own special microcosm and that it should, therefore, be studied as a thing in itself apart from any considerations of authorial intent or audience response. We shall further discuss a battery of new tools and methods that the new critics taught us to use when explicating poetry. The unit will conclude with a look at the archetypal criticism of Northrop Frye, a theoretical maverick who, in his masterwork, *Anatomy of Criticism*, erected a vast mythic structure for understanding and interpreting the complex legacy of European culture.

Finally, in Lectures Twenty-One through Twenty-Four (Modern and Postmodern Theory), we shall turn our attention to the most recent developments in literary theory. After a look at the four great thinkers who established the philosophical foundations for modernism (Freud, Darwin, Marx, and Nietzsche), we shall survey the many variations of the modern school of structuralism: from the linguistics of Saussure to the poetic theory of Barthes to the historical analysis of Foucault. Having established in some detail the key concepts of modernism, we will then move on to contrast modernism with postmodernism. Our focus here will be the deconstructive theories of Derrida and his “pupil,” Paul De Man, as well as the postmodern leanings of the schools of new historicism, reader response, and feminism. One of the primary goals of this unit will be to define and explicate the often esoteric terminology associated with modern and postmodern theory. As with unit three (Lectures Nine through Twelve), this unit should prove quite challenging to most readers; however, as before, patient study will yield rich rewards.
Lecture One
Thinking Theoretically

Scope: In this introductory lecture, we shall take our first tentative steps toward learning to think about literature in a critical/theoretical way. The lecture will be divided into a brief overview of the nature and importance of literary theory, a summary of the approach that will be taken throughout this series, and a close look at a well-known four-fold system for defining and arranging various theoretical stances that was developed by M. H. Abrams. In this part of the lecture, we shall learn how to distinguish among critical approaches that focus on the relationship between the work of art and the universe (mimetic theories), the work and the audience (pragmatic theories), the work and the artist (expressive theories), and the work and itself (objective theories).

Outline

I. What is literary theory and why should we study it?
   A. Literary theory (also known as literary criticism or critical theory) marks a two-and-a-half-millennia attempt on the part of artists and critics alike to define the exact nature, status, and social function of the arts.
   B. It is perhaps best expressed in terms of a series of questions:
      1. What is the ultimate source of poetry?
      2. Does poetry as a fiction draw us closer to or farther away from truth?
      3. Is the poet an artisan working a craft or a divinely inspired genius?
      4. Does poetry (and the poet) serve a useful function in society?
      5. Is a poem a self-enclosed artifact the meaning of which is eternal and transcendent or a product of various social forces?
   C. These questions are not merely academic; they have direct bearing on:
      1. The way we view ourselves and our culture.
      2. Our appreciation and estimation of such things as beauty and truth.
      3. Our ability to find meaning and purpose in the midst of tragedy.
   D. The presuppositions we bring to our reading of poetry are closely allied to our own (often unstated) presuppositions about God, man, and the universe.

II. What approach shall I take in this series?
   A. I will confine my survey of theory to critical appraisals of poetry (including poetic drama), although the survey can be applied to literature in general.
      1. This is a traditional approach; indeed, until fairly recently, literary criticism was basically synonymous with the criticism of poetry.
      2. Traditionally, poetry has been privileged above prose and has been considered a higher (more “spiritual”) form of writing (cf., the prophetic and “wisdom” literature of the Bible).
      3. The greatest defenses of literature have really been defenses of poetry.
   B. Rather than organize this series around themes, schools, or genres, I shall follow a chronological, great man/major work (“milestone”) approach.
      1. Nearly all the individual lectures will center around a close analysis of one or two seminal essays by one or two key theorists.
      2. Although each individual lecture will be grouped into a four-lecture unit covering a broad historical category (e.g., classical, Romantic), each work/author studied will be granted its own integrity.
      3. I would strongly suggest that all students purchase Critical Theory Since Plato (see Bibliography, Part II); this collection (the best, most comprehensive textbook available) not only contains nearly all the essays I will be studying but adopts the same basic milestone approach as this series.
   C. As I present each major work, I will attempt to convey at least three things:
      1. The writer’s vision of the nature and status of both poet and poem.
2. Some of the unique contributions that the work has made to the history of literary theory and to how readers interpret the poems they read.
3. The meanings (sometimes esoteric) of the key critical terms used.

D. Some unique aspects of this series:
1. It will be slightly less concerned with historical and biographical detail than other series; the focus will remain on the works themselves.
2. These works will be treated as belonging to their own literary genre, worthy of study as such.
3. My Bibliography will contain less recent scholarship than most series.
4. Nevertheless, lectures will be informed by recent academic concerns.
5. Please make use of the richly detailed, carefully cross-listed glossary.
6. Don’t be intimidated by strange concepts/jargon; all will be explained.

III. In *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), M. H. Abrams of Cornell University divides the history of literary theory into four distinct schools/orientations.

A. Mimetic theories (Lectures One through Four) focus on the relationship between poem and universe.
   1. They explore the nature of imitation (Gk. *mimesis*) and tend to view the poem as a mirror of external realities (natural or supernatural).
   2. They agree that the best poem comes closest to approximating and even capturing the higher reality it seeks to imitate, but disagree as to whether the whole imitative (mimetic) process brings us closer to (Aristotle) or farther away from (Plato) that reality.
   3. They are concerned with the ultimate meaning and essence of poetry.

B. Pragmatic theories (Lectures Five through Twelve) focus on the relationship between poem and audience.
   1. They assess the social, didactic functions of art (to teach and please).
   2. They establish aesthetic rules for judging both the skill (art) of the poet and the taste (judgment) of the reader.
   3. They explore the impact that poetry has on its readers/listeners.

C. Expressive theories (Lectures Nine through Sixteen) focus on the relationship between poem and poet.
   1. Poetry is the reflection of internal (not external) realities. This is a concept we term “Romantic.”
   2. Poetry has a personal (not social) and prophetic (not didactic) function.
   3. “What is a poet?” and “What is a poem?” are essentially the same question.

D. Objective theories (Lectures Seventeen through Twenty) focus on the internal relationships of the poem itself.
   1. A poem is a self-contained, self-referential artifact that can (and should) be studied apart from the universe, the audience, and the poet.
   2. A poem is a microcosm that runs in accordance with observable laws.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What presuppositions about poetry do you bring with you when you read a poem?
2. When you read a poem, do you focus first on (1) whether it accurately captures some higher meaning, (2) what emotional impact it has on you, (3) what it reveals about the psyche of the poet who wrote it, or (4) the structure and inner-workings of the poem itself? Which aspect do you think is most important?
Lecture Two
Plato: Kicking out the Poets

Scope: Ironically, Plato is both the first literary critic and the first critic of literature. Though himself a great literary talent, Plato, when fashioning his ideal state (in the Republic, c. 373 BC), decided it would be best if the poets not be allowed to remain. In this lecture, we shall consider why Plato kicked out the poets, why he should not have kicked them out, and what his enduring legacy has been to all those theorists who have followed him.

Outline

I. Why Plato kicked the poets out of his republic.
   A. Plato’s concept of mimesis branded poetry as an unreliable source of truth.
      1. For Plato, our physical World of Becoming is but a shadowy reflection or imitation (mimesis) of the unseen World of Being.
      2. Thus, everything in our world, from objects to ideas, is but a pale copy of the perfect, unchanging originals (or Forms) of these objects and ideas that dwell above in the unseen world.
      3. When a poet describes a chair or writes a poem about love, he is not imitating the Form of the chair (“chairness”) or of love (Love), but the earthly imitation of this ideal Chair/Love.
      4. Poetry, therefore, because it imitates what is already an imitation, is twice removed from reality (the Forms); as such, it is an unreliable source of truth and can only lead astray those who study it.
   B. Poetry appeals to the weaker, inferior side of our mind/soul (or psyche).
      1. Unlike philosophy or math, which we apprehend by way of our rational (Apollonian) powers, poetry, being fanciful, engages that part of our psyche that is both illogical and irrational (the Dionysiac side).
      2. This irrational part of the soul is not only unreliable in matters of truth but is unstable, inducing us to partake in public displays of emotion.
   C. Poetry is a kind of madness or contagion.
      1. In Ion (c. 390 BC), Plato asserts that poets do not write nor rhapsodes (public reciters of poetry) speak by art or skill, but by possession.
      2. Neither poet nor rhapsode understands (rationally) what he creates; he is, rather, carried away (irrationally) by divine inspiration.
      3. This inspiration (which is really a kind of madness) passes down from poet to rhapsode to audience in the same way that a series of three metal rings attached to a magnet are held together by the force of magnetism.
   D. Plato concludes that only hymns to the gods and praises of state heroes will be allowed; all other forms of poetry must be censored.

II. Why Plato should not have kicked out the poets.
   A. Mimesis does not have to pull us farther away from truth.
      1. Perhaps the poet does not imitate an imitation but captures in the physical form of the poem the invisible essence of the Forms.
      2. We will return to this in our study of Aristotelian mimesis (in Lecture Three).
   B. Rather than arouse the irrational side, might poetry not purge it?
      1. Since our emotions are an essential part of our psyche, might it not be best to release those emotions in a controlled, public setting; might art not serve a therapeutic function to cleanse us of excess emotion?
      2. We will return to this in our study of Aristotelian catharsis (in Lecture Four).
   C. If poets are indeed possessed, might not the gods be trying to speak to us?
      1. Plato, in his dialogues, used a method of question and answer (known as the dialectic, or Socratic method) to help uncover truths not readily perceived; might the divine madness of poetry not be another way to rip away the veil of ignorance and misperception in order to reveal truth?
      2. Might not the poet be as much a prophet as the philosopher? Romantic poets and critics would adopt this idea with great fervor.
D. Plato was himself one of the greatest of poets.
   1. His dialogues are themselves recognized as a unique literary genre.
   2. Indeed, he is much easier to understand than Aristotle, precisely because his dialogues are filled with imaginative metaphors.
   3. Often, he will consummate and concretize his philosophical points with a memorable myth or allegory: the myth of Er in Republic, the allegory of the horseman in Phaedrus, the personification of eros in Symposium, the creation narrative in Timaeus.
   4. In Republic IX, he makes political science come alive by describing the natural progression from timarchy to oligarchy to democracy to tyranny in terms of the “Tragic Fall of a Great House” (cf., the House of Oedipus or the House of Atreus).

E. Plato’s “ideal republic” is itself a giant poetic construct.
   1. It does not exist nor was it ever meant to.
   2. It is merely a parable writ large: a way to uncover the nature of justice.

III. Plato’s enduring challenge to literary theory.
   A. At the close of Republic X, Plato issues a serious challenge: he will allow the poets back into the republic if they can prove by means of some formal defense (written either in verse or prose) that poetry:
      1. Has a useful function in a well-ordered state (i.e., that she can both delight and teach).
      2. That she does not deceive but rather enhances our knowledge of truth.
   B. This challenge is the very raison d’être for literary theory.
      1. Nearly all critical theory mounts a defense, in one way or another, of the philosophical truth and/or moral status of poetry.
      2. Nearly all theorists construct themselves and their systems in such a way as to either counter Plato (by creating a separate sphere for poetry) or to co-opt Plato (by presenting poetry as, in fact, the highest form of philosophy).
   C. By putting literary theory on the defensive, Plato made it better by injecting philosophical rigor.

Essential Reading:
Plato, Republic X and Ion, in Adams.

Supplementary Reading:
Plato, Republic (Penguin; Norton).
Plato, Phaedrus, Timaeus, and Symposium (Penguin).
G. M. A. Grube. Plato’s Thought, (Chapter 6); The Greek and Roman Critics (Chapter 4).
Richard McKeon, “The Concept of Imitation in Antiquity.”

Questions to Consider:
1. Is Plato the great enemy of poetry, or one of the greatest poets of antiquity?
2. Do humanities departments in general and professors of English in particular still feel a need to defend the usefulness and morality of poetry? Why?
Lecture Three

Aristotle's Poetics: Mimesis and Plot

Scope: In this, the first of two lectures on Aristotle's Poetics (c. 330 BC), we shall consider how Aristotle took Plato’s negative understanding of mimesis and converted it into a powerful method for creating poetry (particularly tragedy) worthy of philosophical consideration. We shall analyze Aristotle’s notion of plot as a unified whole that moves in accordance with necessity, probability, and inevitability and shall define and discuss the several elements that Aristotle believed worked together to form the perfect plot. Throughout our discussion, we shall illustrate the nature and elements of Aristotelian plot by reference to the play that is quoted most often in the Poetics, Oedipus the King.

Outline

I. A few prefatory remarks about Aristotle.
   A. Aristotle was Plato’s star pupil, as Plato was Socrates’. Aristotle was in turn the private tutor of Alexander the Great.
   B. Aristotle brought philosophy back to earth: the essence and reality (the Form) of a thing now resides within, rather than above.
   C. Aristotle was one of the most systematic thinkers who ever lived.
      1. The western presupposition that all of knowledge can be broken up into discrete little packages called disciplines (college students call them “majors”) comes directly from Aristotle.
      2. Aristotle wrote a treatise on every facet of knowledge: from politics to astronomy, physics to ethics, rhetoric to poetry.
      3. In his Poetics, Aristotle treats poetry as a separate discipline with its own specific laws, its own unique tools, and its own proper ends.
   D. The works we have by Aristotle were not actually written by him; they are compilations of notes taken by his students (hence their “choppy” feel).

II. Aristotle radically redefined the Platonic notion of mimesis.
   A. For Aristotle, mimesis is a positive and natural thing.
      1. As children, we learn primarily from imitation.
      2. Even as adults, we delight in recognizing and contemplating copies.
      3. On a deeper level, we possess an instinctual desire for harmony.
   B. In poetry in general and in the well-constructed plots of great tragedies in particular, Aristotle found the perfect food to feed our innate desire for order, balance, and unity.
   C. It is precisely the imitative (or mimetic) process that allows the tragedian to construct a perfect, unified plot.
      1. The mimetic process transforms an action or story (praxis) that is long, episodic, and haphazard into a plot (muthos) that is focused and unified.
      2. That is to say: the mimesis of a praxis is a muthos.
      3. The story (praxis) of a man begins with his birth and ends with his death and includes all the various incidents that occur in between.
      4. But a plot (muthos) constructed around that biographical story would confine itself to a single day in that life span when all that is most essential to that life comes to a head.
      5. Whereas the events in a story follow each other in simple chronological order, the events in a plot should move forward in accordance with necessity, probability, and inevitability.
      6. The plot is life with all of life’s contradictions purged out of it.
      7. To imitate life is to present life not as it is, but as it should be, not as it manifests itself in an imperfect world, but how it would appear in a more perfect world where:
         a. There is a necessary link between cause and effect.
         b. The stable, meaningful laws of probability determine action.
         c. A sense of inevitability, of a higher controlling fate, is felt.
D. How can one discern between an episodic play and an Aristotelian plot?
1. In an episodic play, there is no internal cohesion between the scenes; in an Aristotelian plot, there is a causal relationship between each scene that propels the reader forward toward the unstoppable conclusion.
2. That is to say, the scenes in an episodic play follow each other post hoc (Latin for “after this”), while those in an Aristotelian play follow propter hoc (“because of this”).
3. When watching an episodic play, one feels he can leave the theater for ten minutes and not miss anything; when watching an Aristotelian plot, one fears that if he steps out for even a minute, all will be lost.

E. Let us illustrate with examples from Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*.
1. The story of Oedipus the man is filled with long, boring stretches during which the tragic pieces of Oedipus’ life slowly coalesce; the plot of *Oedipus the King* is concentrated into an intense, dramatic period of less than a day (actually about six hours) during which all the secrets of his life are revealed.
2. The story of Oedipus is a despicable tale about a man who kills his father and marries his mother; the plot of *Oedipus* is about a man who discovers late in life that he has killed his father and married his mother.
3. That is to say, whereas the story of Oedipus is about the committing of a taboo sin, the plot of *Oedipus* is about the triumph of self-discovery.
4. In terms of his overall story, Oedipus is one of the most pathetic of all men, a man trapped by a cruel and evil fate that he cannot escape; in the confines of the plot, however, he is a noble, courageous man who chooses to seek out the truth about himself no matter the consequences.
5. The story of Oedipus is the raw material for a vulgar made-for-TV movie; the plot of *Oedipus* is one of the great and noble works of all time.

III. Having defined the nature of the unified, “mimeticized” plot, Aristotle goes on to enumerate the many elements that work together to create the perfect plot.

A. A unified plot has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

B. It is shaped like an inverted “V”: a series of complications (the rising action) draws the plot “upward” to its climax (the point of the “V”); after the climax comes the unraveling or denouement (the falling action).

C. In the best plots, the climax is marked by a reversal and/or a recognition.
1. The use of a reversal/recognition is what renders a simple plot complex.
2. A reversal (in Greek, *peripeteia*) occurs when the fortune of the hero moves suddenly from good to bad or bad to good.
3. In *Oedipus*, the messenger thinks he brings news that will free Oedipus from fear, but that very news leads to his destruction. This is the *peripeteia*.
4. A recognition (in Greek, *anagnorisis*) occurs when the hero moves suddenly from a state of ignorance to enlightenment. This is the *anagnorisis*.
5. In *Oedipus*, the messenger reveals to Oedipus his true Theban origins.
6. The best kinds of recognitions are accompanied by reversals; this is the case with the scene from *Oedipus* mentioned in items III.C.3 and III.C.5.

D. The best plots do not end with a *deus ex machina* (“god from the machine”).
1. The *deus ex machina* was a crane-like device that allowed an actor to descend onto the stage in the guise of a god or goddess.
2. It was used by dramatists as a way of resolving “from above” all manner of difficulties and misunderstandings in the play.
3. Aristotle considered the use of this device an artificial way to end a plot.
4. The plot, he felt, should be strong enough to resolve itself in a manner consistent with necessity, probability, and inevitability.
5. *Oedipus* is so well-constructed that the final tragic revelation of Oedipus’ parentage does not seem contrived; it arises naturally out of the plot.
6. Aristotle’s prejudice against the *deus ex machina* reveals his strong commitment to a balanced, rational universe in which all makes sense. Interestingly, Eurypides used the *deus ex machina* effectively and even Sophocles employed it from time to time. In later days, Moliere used a *deus ex machina* in *Tartuffe*.
E. Finally, it should be noted that Aristotle argues forcefully that the plot is the central, most important
element of a tragedy.
1. The plot, he says, is both the end and the soul of a tragedy.
2. Most modern people would disagree with Aristotle: we tend to place the characters (and the actors
who play them) at the center of drama.

Essential Reading:
Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Supplementary Reading:
Richard McKeon, “The Concept of Imitation in Antiquity.”

Questions to Consider:
1. Do you, like Aristotle, favor plays/movies that are tightly constructed with no extraneous elements or
contradictions, or do you prefer more realistic ones in which the plot rambles along in a looser, more natural
way?
2. Do you, like Aristotle, hate plays/movies that end with a “miraculous” climax in which a sudden rescue or
resolution comes from “out of the blue?” If so, what does this reveal about your view of the universe?
Scope: In this second of two lectures on Aristotle’s Poetics we shall shift our focus from plot to character and catharsis. Continuing to illustrate with examples from Oedipus, we shall explore how the tragic character must be good, appropriate, consistent, and true to life and how he should be a moral man who yet possesses a flaw. We shall then explore the nature of Aristotelian catharsis and shall consider how this well-known word can be translated either as purgation, purification, or clarification. The lecture will conclude with a brief look at some other miscellaneous elements of Aristotle’s Poetics that have continued to exert a marked influence on the history of literary theory.

Outline

I. In the Poetics, Aristotle carefully defines the proper nature of the tragic hero.
   A. The Aristotelian tragic hero must possess four qualities.
      1. He must be a good man: he should be neither immoral nor vicious.
      2. His character must be appropriate to his station in life.
      3. He must possess a likeness to human nature: though heroic, he is a man.
      4. His character must be consistent: even if he is inconsistent, says Aristotle, he should be consistent in his inconsistency.
      5. Aristotle also advises that the hero be taken from one of the great tragic houses of ancient Greece (i.e., he should not be a commoner).
   B. The character of Oedipus possesses all four of these characteristics.
      1. Though stubborn and a bit prideful, he is a good king who loves his people and is devoted to truth and justice.
      2. His love and devotion, as well as his stubbornness and pride, are befitting the nature and role of a king.
      4. Both within the framework of the play and throughout his “off-stage life,” Oedipus is supremely, and consistently, the solver of riddles.
      5. Oedipus is a member of the royal house of Thebes.
   C. This good hero should yet possess a flaw (in Greek, hamartia).
      1. Hamartia is usually translated as tragic (or fatal) flaw, but it would be better to translate it merely as “error.”
      2. Aristotle clearly does not see this hamartia as a vice or moral flaw.
      3. Though readers of Oedipus, generally blame the hero’s misfortunes on his pride (in Greek, hubris), it is really his good qualities (his love of his people and his unswerving devotion to truth) that leads to the tragic revelation of his birth.
      4. The full-blown concept of the tragic flaw as a single vice that leads the hero to his tragic downfall is really more indicative of Shakespearean tragedy (e.g., Hamlet’s sloth, Lear’s vanity, Othello’s jealousy, Macbeth’s avarice).
      5. The desire on the part of so many readers (and English teachers) to identify tragic flaws in each of the heroes of Greek tragedy seems to mask an innate desire to “blame the victim,” to gain control.
   D. The best tragedies show a good man who, on account of this error, moves from good to bad fortune; such a movement elicits the proper pity and fear.
      1. A bad man moving from good to bad fortune evokes neither pity nor fear: it merely makes us feel smugly satisfied.
      2. A bad man moving from bad to good fortune merely arouses disgust.
      3. A good man moving from bad to good fortune makes us feel happy, but it does not inspire either pity or fear.
      4. Pity is evoked when we watch a good man suffer undeservedly; fear is evoked when we realize the same may happen to us.
      5. Pity draws us toward the hero; fear drives us away.
II. The mention of pity and fear leads us to Aristotle’s notion of the appropriate response to tragedy, what we might call the proper tragic pleasure.

A. According to Aristotle, the experience of a great tragedy so arouses in us the emotions of pity and fear as to lead to a catharsis of those emotions.

B. Catharsis may be translated in at least three different ways: as purgation, purification, or clarification. Each meaning has its own theory.

C. According to the purgation theory of catharsis, tragedy is a therapeutic experience that works on us like an enema or an emetic.
   1. It cleanses us of our emotions of pity and fear and thus leaves us more fit and able to face the rigors of life.
   2. This view of catharsis is one Plato should have adopted; it suggests tragedy can help wash away, on a group level, our baser emotions.
   3. When viewing Oedipus, the tragic end of the hero is so pitiful and fearful, so emotionally overwhelming, that we leave the theater feeling drained, as if our emotions have been swept away on a tide.

D. According to the (more spiritual) purification theory of catharsis, tragedy does not so much purge our emotions as purify them.
   1. Just as God uses suffering to strengthen our faith and resolve, so the hot furnace of tragedy tests and tries our emotions like gold in the fire.
   2. To experience Oedipus, to see that a man can so rise above himself as to put self-discovery ahead of all else, is to have one’s emotions raised to a higher level; in the end, we are left with a strange sense of calm, not purged, but spiritually purified.

E. According to the clarification theory of catharsis, tragedy sparks in us an intellectual response, a searing moment of perfect clarity.
   1. In this almost mystical moment of enlightenment (this epiphany), our ill-defined emotions are carried up into a higher realm of balanced, harmonious rationality, a realm where the higher patterns and forces of the cosmos are made suddenly visible (the “aha!” experience).
   2. This is how we feel at the end of Oedipus, when we realize that Oedipus must suffer, for if he does not, the prophecy will have been proven untrue, and fate will have been exposed as arbitrary and chaotic. The story of the Crucifixion of Christ is another example.
   3. Catharsis as clarification is still used today in a psychoanalytical setting, to signify that moment when the connections between a patient’s past experiences and present neuroses are suddenly revealed.

III. In addition to his views on plot, character, and catharsis, Aristotle set down a number of other mandates that have become linchpins of critical theory.

A. From Aristotle comes the notion that a critic can inspire great art.
   1. Aristotle was not a contemporary of Sophocles; by his time, Athens had left her Golden Age far behind and was producing mediocre tragedies.
   2. It is clear that Aristotle hoped that by defining clearly the key qualities of Sophoclean tragedy, he might help usher in a new Golden Age.
   3. That is to say, the role of the critic is, in part, twofold: to assess and adumbrate the elements that make art successful; to establish, on the basis of these elements, fixed criteria for what constitutes great art. The French Neoclassical period, exemplified by Racine and others, is an example of a more recent “Golden Age.”

B. As we saw above, Aristotle advised that the hero be of kingly rank: from his day until the time of Ibsen (in Europe) and Miller (in America), tragedies have always revolved around heroes of noble rank.

C. As we also saw above, Aristotle preferred tragedies with unhappy endings; though we take this for granted now, in Aristotle’s day there were tragedies that had happy endings.

D. Aristotle basically invented the notion of genre and genre studies.
   1. He not only divided poetry into different forms (epic, tragedy, lyric) but granted each form its own special criteria and mode of imitation.
   2. He believed there was a proper mode that was natural to each genre, a notion that is at the heart of all later theories of decorum (that is, of what is proper or is not proper for any given type of poem).
3. Indeed, he believed so strongly that each genre must follow its own natural, internal laws, that he
(unplatonically) defended the presence in poetry of irrational elements if such were befitting the genre.
4. Coleridge would later call such criticism (i.e., criticism that judges a poem on its own internal merits)
“genial” criticism. Ungenial criticism occurs when one judges a poem by standards outside its genre.
5. He initiated the aesthetic desire to rank genres in terms of refinement and based this ranking partly on
the responses of a cultivated audience. This foreshadows pragmatic theory. The rankings were tragedy,
epic, and lyric.

E. Aristotle initiated an organic theory of poetry later revived by Coleridge.
   1. He treated tragedy as a living organism that must be true to its own laws.
   2. He felt a perfect tragedy was one to which nothing could either be added or subtracted without
      affecting the work as a whole.
   3. He privileged unified plots in which all parts were related organically.

F. Aristotle praises poetry as a synthesis of history and philosophy and held, in fact, that it was better than
   either one.
   1. Like history, tragedy works with concrete particulars.
   2. However, like philosophy, it expresses universal truths.
   3. Tragedy is a concrete universal that fuses the general with the specific.
   4. This notion profoundly influenced Kant, Coleridge, and the so-called new critics.

G. Aristotle includes a brief section on linguistics in his study of poetry.

H. Needless to say, critical theory would not have followed the same course had Aristotle never lived to write
   the Poetics.

Essential Reading:
Aristotle, Poetics, in Adams.
Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus.

Supplementary Reading:
Kenneth Burke, “On Catharsis, or Resolution.”
Leon Golden, three articles.

Questions to Consider:
1. Why do we always desire to find a tragic flaw in the heroes of tragedy? Do we, in fact, have an inner need to
   “blame the victim”? If so, why?
2. Have you ever experienced a catharsis? Would you describe that experience as a purgation, a purification, or a
   clarification?
Lecture Five
Horace’s Ars Poetica

Scope: In this, the fifth lecture of the series, we begin a new unit (Lectures Five through Eight), that will focus on the efforts of such neoclassical theorists as Horace, Longinus, Sidney, Dryden, and Pope to discern, systematize, and record for posterity the artistic elements and critical rules and regulations that made classical poetry the envy of the world. We begin this lecture with a close look at Horace’s verse epistle, Ars Poetica (c. 20 BC). After introducing Horace and his age and considering the rather ironic nature of the essay (it was written to dissuade two aristocratic boys from a poetic career), we shall enumerate Horace’s rules and regulations for writing great poetry. We shall focus especially on the central notion of decorum in the arts and on the stipulation that poetry must teach and please. We shall also discuss Horace’s views both of the critic and the poet.

Outline

I. With Horace, we move into our second unit (Lectures Five through Eight): Neoclassicism.
   A. In the writings of Horace, Longinus, Sidney, Dryden, and Pope, we see a deliberate, self-conscious desire to imitate the classical world.
   B. Horace and Longinus, living in the Roman world, look back to the great writers of Greece and attempt to assess why they were so successful.
   C. Sir Philip Sidney, living in the Renaissance, would revive the glories of ancient literature and defend this revival along Aristotelian and Horatian lines (Lecture Seven).
   D. John Dryden and Alexander Pope, living in the British Neoclassical Age (which modeled itself on Rome’s Augustan Age) sought to do for their contemporary poets what Horace had done for his: systematize the rules of poetry.

II. Opening comments on Horace and his essay.
   A. Horace was one of the great poets of Rome’s Augustan Age.
      1. This golden age (named for Caesar Augustus) lasted from 27 BC to AD 14 and included Virgil, Ovid, Propertius, and Tibullus.
      2. Horace was a master of the short lyric and the very embodiment of wit.
      3. Horace became a model of the courtly poet who could move around in high (and even royal) society without prostituting his talents or his art.
   B. Though generally translated into prose the “Art of Poetry” (in Latin, Ars Poetica) is actually a verse epistle addressed to the Piso family. This family was Horace’s patron.
      1. In the letter, Horace is purportedly giving advice to the two Piso boys on how to write great poetry.
      2. However, the letter is really a none-to-subtle appeal to the two boys (and their father) to give up poetry (“don’t quit your day job,” we’d say).
      3. With much irony and wit, Horace advises the boys to put their poetry in a closet for nine years before showing it to the public.
      4. Horace, a master of the ironic pose, expresses contempt in his letter for critics who flatter their patrons instead of telling them the truth.
   D. Horace offers an influential view of the proper role of the critic.
      1. A critic is a whetstone against which poets can sharpen their work.
      2. The purpose of the whetstone is not itself to write great poetry (though Horace did so), but to teach the proper duty and office of the poet.
      3. This includes censuring and editing poetry that either uses the wrong material or handles that material in an inappropriate way.
      4. The laws that dictate what is and is not appropriate for poetry constitute the central and foundational notion of all neoclassical art: decorum.

III. Horace and the rules of decorum.
   A. At the heart of decorum is the stipulation not to mix unlike things.
1. Horace illustrates this rule by scornfully lampooning the image of the mermaid; such images, he declares, are the work of feverish minds.

2. More specifically, Horace attacks poets who mix genres, who use comic subjects as the basis of a tragedy or *vice versa*. (If we consider Shakespeare, we see that he does mix generic elements in many of his plays, in a very un-Horatian way.)

3. Each genre should have its own style that is natural to it; there should be an unbroken, clearly defined unity of action, character, and mood.

4. Indeed, each given genre should have its own specific meter, a meter with rhythmic *sounds* that closely mimic (“fit”) the *sense* of the poem.

B. When writing on a traditional subject, “modern” poets must be faithful to the literary precedents set by their poetic forebears.

1. “Modern” portrayals of Achilles or Orestes of Oedipus must be consistent with earlier portrayals (in this case, by Homer and the tragedians). Again, if we consider Shakespeare, we see that he did not follow precedent in his *Troilus and Cressida*.

2. Horace here reiterates Aristotle’s rule that tragic heroes must be both appropriate and consistent, but Horace further inscribes this rule within an accepted authority or tradition: a common trait of neoclassicists.

C. In addition to the notions of what is appropriate and what is traditional, decorum also stipulates what is fit or proper to be shown publicly.

1. Gory, explicit scenes must be kept off the stage; such scenes of suffering should be related (as they were in Greek tragedy) by a messenger.

2. This rule was not followed in the theater of Shakespeare (cf., *King Lear* and the blinding of Gloucester).

D. Related to decorum is Horace’s famous comparison of poetry to painting.

1. As with painting, some poems are best viewed close up, while others are better when seen from a distance; some best in shadows, others in light.

2. In later neoclassical theory, this notion took on greater significance.

IV. Other rules laid down by Horace.

A. After his views on decorum, Horace is best known for his stipulation that the proper end (goal) of poetry is to please and teach (in Latin, *dulce et utile*). Horace here is moving toward pragmatic theory.

1. Old men insist that poetry teach morality, while young men insist that it please and entertain: the best poet will combine the two.

2. Poets that do so successfully will win both fame and fortune.

3. To best achieve this goal, poetry should be both concise and realistic.

B. Horace’s rules for drama have been particularly influential.

1. Plays (and epics) should not begin at the beginning (*ab ovo*, “from the egg”) but should plunge *in medias res* (in the middle of things”).

2. Plays should consist of five acts.

3. They should not end with a *deus ex machina*.

4. The chorus and choral songs should serve an integral function (we might consider, in our time, the musical *Oklahoma* by Rodgers and Hammerstein as an excellent example).

5. These four criteria (the third and fourth of which are adapted from Aristotle) all express an organic view of drama.

6. Like Aristotle, Horace insisted that each part of a play be directly and intimately related with all other parts and with the work as a whole.

C. Finally, two bits of Horatian advice have entered our language.

1. Horace counsels against tacking on elaborate, unnecessary descriptions merely to impress readers; he calls such excrescences “purple passages.”

2. Horace also counsels against starting one’s work with epic promises, lest people say, “the mountain labored and brought forth a mouse.”

V. Horace comments on the nature and the duties of the poet.

A. The true poet combines genius and art; he is an inspired craftsman.
1. Like an athlete, he needs both native ability and rigorous training.
2. The artisan poet must labor never to be mediocre; while a mediocre lawyer may still win his suit, a mediocre poet is a laughingstock.
3. The best poets make it look easy; their works are so perfect and unified that the reader feels he could do the same (though he could not).

B. The role of the poet (especially the dramatist) is a difficult one.
   1. He must please an often vulgar crowd while staying true to his art.
   2. He must make a living without letting the love of money taint his soul.

C. Horace provides us with two contrasting views of the poet.
   1. The negative view depicts poets as grubby, bearded, unkempt leeches driven wild by their poetry and eager to waylay innocent bystanders into listening helplessly as they spew out their mad verses.
   2. This view shares many similarities with the possessed poet of Plato.
   3. The positive view, however, may be seen as an answer to Plato.
   4. The poet is the great civilizer of humanity; he tamed the beast within and established cities, laws, and moral rules of conduct.
   5. He is a divine oracle to whom honor and fame are due.
   6. We will encounter again this ennobled (almost deified) view of the poet in the two great defenses of poetry written by Sidney and Shelley.

Essential Reading:
Horace, Ars Poetica, in Adams.

Supplementary Reading:
Grant Showerman, Horace and His Influence.
G. M. A. Grube, The Greek and Roman Critics, Chapter 14.
Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History, Chapter 5.

Questions to Consider:
1. Neoclassical critics placed the artistic virtues of decorum and tradition above those of creativity and novelty; society today tends to reverse that order. Which ranking do you prefer? Which produces better, more lasting poetry?
2. According to Horace, poetry must both teach and please. How important do you consider the didactic (teaching) side of art to be? Should art have a “message”?
Lecture Six
Longinus on the Sublime

Scope: In this, our second lecture on neoclassicism, we shall shift our focus to Longinus’ treatise, *On the Sublime*. We shall explore Longinus’ view of the proper nature of sublimity and enumerate his “rules of thumb” for achieving it. We shall next analyze his pragmatic approach to theory and his influential conception of the ideal audience for sublime literature. Finally, we shall watch with awe as Longinus mounts a direct refutation of Plato’s *Republic* that not only converts Plato’s negatives into positives, but transforms Plato himself into one of the most sublime poets of all time.

Outline
I. *On the Sublime* is a systematic work in the tradition of Aristotle’s *Poetics*.
   A. Though its author is traditionally called Longinus, we now know it was not written by him but by an anonymous writer (probably first century AD).
   B. Longinus attempts both to define the nature of the sublime and to lay down methods for achieving sublimity in writing (the main focus is poetry, but Longinus does not exclude prose).
   C. Sublimity refers to a certain type of elevated language that strikes its listener with the mighty and irresistible power of a thunderbolt.
      1. Unlike rhetoric, which merely persuades, the sublime overwhelms its audience, literally carrying the audience away to a higher realm of experience.
      2. The sublime has the power to unite contradictions (*concordia discors*).
      3. A sublime passage can be heard again and again with equal pleasure.
      4. The sublime, and its power to transport, transcends both time and space. Consider, for example, Tennyson’s poem *Ulysses*, especially the last fifteen lines.
   D. In his systematic way, Longinus defines what sublimity is not.
      1. It is not bathos or bombast: i.e., all that overwrought, pseudo-tragic clap-trap associated today with melodramatic soap operas.
      2. It is not inflated, hyperbolic language that is used, inappropriately, to heighten subjects that do not merit such treatment.
      3. It is not merely the use of fashionable expressions or fanciful images.
   E. Sublimity, says Longinus, is the “echo of a great soul.”
      1. On the surface, such a phrase would suggest that sublimity lies totally in the realm of genius, and is thus limited to those born with the gift.
      2. Indeed, Longinus believed it was better to produce one great work of sublimity than a hundred faultless, but passionless, poems.
      3. However, Longinus makes it clear that the sublime is the mixed product of both genius and art and, therefore, includes a component of skill.
      4. This famous debate between genius and art is a perennial one in the annals of literary theory; we shall encounter it again.
   F. Having defined what sublimity is and is not, and having granted it partial status as an art, Longinus proceeds to lay down five sources of the sublime.
      1. The first two sources are grounded in an innate ability to conceive great thoughts and feel great passions; they are gifts of genius.
      2. However, the final three all lie within the scope of art; they constitute a craft (in Greek, *techne*) that can, through hard work, be acquired.
      3. These sources have to do not with the thoughts and passions themselves but with how they are embodied in words, syntax, and poetic figures.
      4. Thus, through quoting and analyzing copious passages from poets like Homer and Sappho, Longinus shows how the great masters of the sublime knew how to fit thoughts to words, passions to images.
   G. As a neoclassicist, Longinus, like Horace, helped to establish ground rules for the craft of poetry (which we will explore further in Lecture Eight).
1. There must be an appropriate, rational, organic relationship between form and content: high and low, serious and comic must not be allowed to mix (i.e., Longinus, like Horace, ascribed to standards of decorum).
2. Poets should attempt to mimic in the sound of their poetry the sense that they are trying to convey.
3. The best art hides itself; it seems more natural than nature herself.

II. Longinus is, in part, a pragmatic theorist concerned with the relationship between the sublime work and the audience.

A. As we have already seen, he defines the sublime not just in terms of its nature or essence but in terms of the reaction it elicits in its audience.
B. However, Longinus goes beyond this to define the ideal kind of audience.
   1. The best audience for the sublime is a refined, cultivated one.
   2. Such hearers have sensitive souls that are uplifted by sublimity.
   3. Only such an audience is able to judge the relative sublimity of a work.
   4. This attitude (central to neoclassicism) is somewhat aristocratic and elitist, because the audience Longinus desires must be free from the low and vulgar thoughts that generally accompany rustic toil.
   5. This attitude will not be seriously challenged until the Romantic Age.

III. Longinus answers Plato’s attack on the poets by turning Plato on his head.

A. Consistently, Longinus presents Plato as himself a master of the sublime.
   1. He quotes passages from his prose as models of sublimity.
   2. He shows how Plato often gets caught up in a swell of sublime passion.
   3. Indeed, he argues that it is often the poetic power of Plato’s imagery that drives home his philosophical points.

B. With great irony, Longinus posits as the source of Plato’s sublimity his near possession by the sublime spirit of Homer.
   1. That is to say, that divine madness which Plato “exposes” in his Ion as a form of contagion is, for Longinus, a higher form of mimesis.
   2. Indeed, what appears as possession is really a kind of wrestling (in Greek, agon), a struggle on the part of Plato to exceed his poetic master.
   3. Critic Harold Bloom calls this artistic and psychological need on the part of one poet to outdo his strongest predecessor the “anxiety of influence.”
   4. For Longinus, this struggle is good; to seek to imitate and exceed a past master is not a form of plagiarism but of tribute.
   5. The same sublime spirit that passes from Homer to Plato continues to pass down from Plato to his reader.
   6. For Plato, such inspiration was deemed negative and even dangerous (you’ll recall the metaphor of the three rings attached to the magnet).
   7. For Longinus, this inspiration is positive: it ennobles and uplifts the souls of all those who come in contact with it; it makes them richer, fuller men and better, nobler citizens.

IV. In the sublime conclusion to his treatise, Longinus not only offers his fullest refutation of Plato, but defines the greatest threat to cultural refinement.

A. Longinus begins by lamenting that his age is not conducive to sublime art.
   1. This feeling of being born too late into a non-poetic, non-heroic age is typical of literary theorists.
   2. Indeed, as with Aristotle’s Poetics, one of the purposes of On the Sublime is to inspire and equip a new golden age of poets.

B. At first, Longinus appears to suggest that the ultimate threat to sublimity is tyranny; however, with an unexpected (and rather sublime) turn, he reveals that there is something worse than the loss of freedom.

C. The supreme killers of the sublime are, in fact, materialism and hedonism.
   1. The lust for money and pleasure yields petty, ignoble thoughts; it breeds both vanity and insolence and snuffs out the sublime spark of the soul.
   2. Even political slavery is better than this, because even the cruelest tyrant cannot crush a soul that is inspired by sublimity.
3. The true sublime poet must rise above our petty world of cares.
4. That is to say, the sublime poet must, like the Platonic philosopher, shun the false illusions of this world if he is to achieve his goal.

D. Thus, ironically, a treatise on poetry, which Plato thought so deleterious to the morals of his republic, ends with a powerful moral critique of society.

**Essential Reading:**

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Does the power to create sublime poetry belong only to the privileged few born with the gift of genius, or can we “commoners” labor to acquire this skill?
2. Is it an elitist notion to say that only those with refined tastes can judge properly the merits of a work of art? If so, is such elitism incompatible with democracy?
Lecture Seven
Sidney’s “Apology for Poetry”

Scope: In this lecture, we shall explore Sidney’s great defense of the divine origin and social utility of poetry: “An Apology for Poetry” (1595). We shall discuss first how he praises poetry for being the cradle of civilization, for being a channel of divine power, for teaching and delighting, and for combining and surpassing the virtues of history and philosophy. We shall then move on to show how Sidney refutes the main arguments made against poetry: namely, that it is unprofitable, that it is full of lies, that it entices to sin, and that it was banished by Plato from his republic.

Outline

I. A few words about Sidney, his age, and his essay.
   A. Sidney was not only a great poet and critic but a man of the world.
      1. He lived during the Elizabethan Age (the English Renaissance) and was a contemporary of Shakespeare.
      2. He was both a soldier and a courtier to Queen Elizabeth.
   B. Sidney saw it as his task to revive the sinking reputation of poetry.
      1. Like all the critics before him, he knew he would have to answer not only contemporary attacks on poetry but the attack by Plato.
      2. His apology is more synthetic than original: it pulls together ideas from Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, and a score of other theorists.
      3. Sidney is very much a Christian critic; his defense of the moral nature of poetry must answer both Platonic philosophy and Biblical theology.

II. Sidney’s arguments in defense of poetry.
   A. Poetry is the great light-giver, the cradle of civilization.
      1. The first law-givers, philosophers, and historians were all poets.
      2. Plato was himself the greatest of poets; his fanciful dialogues and beautiful allegories are the “skin” of his philosophy.
      3. Poetry (like a passport) prepares the mind to receive learning.
      4. Men who attack poetry are like sons who rise up against their fathers (cf., the “anxiety of influence” discussed earlier).
   B. The power and craft of poetry are of the same essence as the divine.
      1. In antiquity, poets were seers and verse, the language of prophecy.
      2. It is through poetry that David, in the Psalms, was able to express and embody the majesty and beauty of God. St. Paul, likewise, switches to poetry when he is extolling God’s glory.
      3. The poet (like God) is a maker; whereas all other arts (from geometry to music to science) take their cues and their foundations from nature, the poet alone transcends and even improves upon the natural world.
      4. That is to say, the mimesis of the poet is a higher kind of imitation: it transforms beasts into Cyclopes, men into heroes, bronze into gold.
      5. Indeed, what the poet finally imitates is not nature herself but a more perfect idea in the mind to which the poet gives a shape or form.
      6. Sidney borrowed this concept from a neoplatonic philosopher named Plotinus, who combined the mimetic theories of Plato and Aristotle.
   C. The end of poetry is to teach and please; hence, it is useful to society.
      1. The imitations of poetry are able to delight and teach, for they do not merely copy virtues and vices as they are, but as they should be.
      2. Poetry inspires the soul both to scorn the vices of its villains and imitate the noble and virtuous actions of its heroes; philosophy, which is too grave and austere to bring delight, leaves the soul cold and indifferent.
D. Poetry unites the universal truths (abstract precepts) of philosophy with the concrete examples (physical acts) of history.
   1. Such “concrete universals” (e.g., Aesop’s fables, Jesus’ parables) have the power to implant themselves in our memory and judgment.
   2. The historian is bound to recount a particular event just as it was, even if that event debases virtue and encourages vice; the poet is free to alter the particular so as to embody more fully the universal that is sought.
   3. As his supreme example, Sidney recounts the parable of the ewe lamb that Nathan the prophet used to convict David of his sin (2 Samuel 12).

III. Sidney next moves on to refute four arguments leveled against poetry.
   A. Poetry is unprofitable; there are many better ways to spend our time.
      1. Poetry is, in fact, the most fruitful of all knowledge; it has the power, through teaching and pleasing, to move its hearer to virtuous action.
      2. As we just saw, it does so more effectively than philosophy or history.
   B. Poetry is the mother of lies.
      1. Poets never lie, for they never claim their poems to be the truth.
      2. Poetry, like the stage, offers an illusion: an account of what should or should not be, not what is; only fools confuse illusions with reality.
   C. Poetry entices and leads to sinful behavior.
      1. It is the abuse of poetry, not poetry itself, that leads to sin.
      2. If we are to accept this argument, then we must also criticize the Bible, which has often been perverted into a source for heresy and sin.
   D. Plato kicked the poets out of his republic.
      1. For Sidney, this argument is the hardest, for he honors Plato above all.
      2. Nevertheless, it was the poets who taught and guided the philosophers.
      3. As did Longinus, Sidney finds an anxiety of influence between Plato and Homer; after all, seven cities strove for the honor of being Homer’s birthplace, while the city of Athens voted to banish (or kill) Socrates.
      4. Plato’s central critique of the poets was their scandalous stories about the gods, but the poets did not invent them; they just imitated them.
      5. Indeed, as St. Paul affirms in Acts 17, it was the pagan poets (rather than the philosophers) who came closest to foreseeing the truths of Christ. Paul quotes pagan poets three times in his writings.
      6. Plato himself, in his Ion, affirms that poets speak via divine inspiration.
      7. In all these arguments, Sidney, like Longinus, turns Plato on his head.

IV. Sidney concludes by putting a curse on all poet-haters: may they never win love for want of a sonnet; may they be forgotten for want of an epitaph.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
Forrest G. Robinson, The Shape of Things Known.
W. J. Bate, Criticism: The Major Texts, Introduction to Sidney’s “Apology.”
Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History, Chapter 9.

Questions to Consider:
1. Does poetry truly have the power to move us to virtuous action? Have you ever been so moved by a poem or a play?
2. According to Sidney, a poet “nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth.” Do you “buy” this argument? Is it true or contrived? Facile or profound?
Lecture Eight
Dryden, Pope, and Decorum

Scope: In this lecture, we shall consider two of the greatest proponents of British neoclassicism: John Dryden and Alexander Pope. After a brief survey of the historical background of the period and a quick look at some similar historical trends in France, we shall analyze closely Dryden’s “Essay of Dramatic Poesy” (1668) and Pope’s “Essay on Criticism” (1711). In our study of Dryden, we shall define the central notion of the three unities and use this notion as a way both to explore the relationship between Dryden’s age and that of the Ancients and to contrast the distinctions of French and British neoclassicism. In our study of Pope, we shall focus on Pope’s view of the proper role and nature of the critic and on his insistence that nature is the final source, end, and test of art. We shall also explore how the very verse form that Pope chose mimics the spirit of neoclassical decorum.

Outline

I. Some historical background.
   A. At the same time that Sidney wrote his “Apology” (written 1583; published 1595), England was entering into her Golden Age.
      1. In less than a century, England would produce Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, John Donne, John Milton, and many others.
      2. A similar phenomenon occurred in America following Emerson’s famous 1837 address, “The American Scholar.”
   B. Art lags a bit when the Puritan revolutionaries under Cromwell closed the theaters (1642).
   C. Art revived again with the Restoration of Charles II in 1660.
      1. After the Restoration, both poets and poetry turn, with great force, toward high society and the royal, aristocratic manners of the court.
      2. There is a concerted effort to return to Greek and Roman models and to produce a fashionable and fashioned art based on Aristotle and Horace.
      3. Beginning in 1660 and stretching on to the closing decades of the eighteenth century, England enters her Neoclassical Age (also referred to as the Age of Reason, the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, and the Age of Enlightenment).
      4. Those living in it saw it as the British version of Rome’s Augustan Age.
      5. The height of this age is often identified with the reign of Queen Anne (1702–1714), though Samuel Johnson kept the spirit alive until 1784.
   D. About this same time, France was in the midst of her own Neoclassical Age.
      1. Playwrights like Racine, critics like Boileau, and playwright/critics like Corneille sought to model themselves precisely on classical precepts.
      2. Indeed, British culture in the eighteenth century has a French “air” to it.

II. In his Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Dryden offers a succinct, if playful, overview of the main critical issues debated at the beginning of the Neoclassical Age.
   A. Like Plato’s Republic or Symposium, the “essay” is written in dialogue form.
      1. It takes place on the eve of a great battle in 1665 and concerns four men who, as they cross the Thames in a boat, discuss the issues of the day.
      2. Significantly, although the four men disagree on particulars, they all accept that art is a form of imitation, that it should teach and please, and that it should follow, either loosely or strictly, the laws of decorum.
   B. The first issue of debate concerns their relationship with the Ancients.
      1. Should they imitate them closely? Can they surpass them?
      2. One man argues that we are but ill copiers of the Ancients: our merits are their merits; our faults are our own.
      3. Another says we have progressed and improved art, because we have both nature and the Ancients to imitate, while they had only nature.
4. Nevertheless, all agree that the Ancients are to be honored and heeded.

C. The dialogue gets more specific as they consider the three unities.
1. The unities of time, place, and action were derived from statements made by Aristotle and Horace, but were actually codified by such French neoclassicists as Corneille, Racine, and Boileau.
2. According to the unity of time, stage time must mimic real time as closely as possible; in any case, no more than twelve hours (for excellent examples of this, think of the classic western movie, High Noon, or the drama Oedipus Rex).
3. According to the unity of place, action on the stage should be confined to a single space; it should not leap from city to city or locale to locale (again, Oedipus Rex is an excellent example).
4. According to the unity of action, there should be one main plot that is not complicated or diluted by the interweaving of subplots.

D. The four speakers compare and contrast the French and English theater.
1. Whereas most French plays follow the unities, most British plays do not.
2. French plays are more unified and decorous; British plays more lively (e.g., Shakespeare breaks all the unities).
3. The Dryden persona concludes that British drama is better because, though it respects the Ancients, it is not afraid to part from them when necessary.
4. If there is a “moral” to the “Essay,” it is simply this: when the ancient rules of decorum are in sync with nature they should be followed, but if they lead us to abuse nature, they must be altered or abandoned.
5. Neoclassical art is not a pale copy of the Ancients, but a traditional approach that requires laws and models but is not enslaved by them.
6. That is to say, decorum is not a straightjacket (as it seems to us who live in a post-Romantic age) but a guide and touchstone to keep us on track.

III. In his Essay on Criticism (1711), Pope fully embodies the spirit of neoclassicism.

A. Like Horace’s Ars Poetica, Pope’s Essay is a verse epistle.
1. It is written in heroic couplets: two lines (each of which has ten syllables and five stresses) that are linked by a rhyme.
2. Though these heroic couplets are linked together in a series, there is always a strong stop at the end of each couplet, marked by a period, a semicolon, or a colon (only occasionally a comma).
3. Unlike the free-flowing, meditative soliloquies of Shakespeare, Pope’s heroic couplets read like a mathematical proof that moves logically, step-by-step, from proposition to proposition to conclusion.
4. In the movement of his heroic couplets, we can feel the balance, the order, the rationality that neoclassicists prized so highly.
5. Pope cannot be read quickly: he calls for intense concentration and a keen sense of proportion; his poetry is decorum set to meter.

B. Like Horace, Pope spends much time defining the proper role of the critic.
1. True taste in a critic is as rare as true genius in a poet.
2. The function of the critic is almost as vital as that of the poet; indeed, a bad critic is more dangerous to art than a bad poet.
3. Many critics write not out of love of poetry or out of a fine sense of judgment, but out of envy and spite; they destroy what they cannot do.
4. The critic should serve as the handmaid of poetry, but too often critics turn against both poets and poetry with Oedipal fury.
5. Too many critics are like half-breed mules who lack both the genius of the poet and the taste of the true critic; rather than accept the limits of their gifts, they elevate themselves by finding fault in others.
6. The true critic (like the true poet) must learn humility; this is best learned by exposing oneself to the sacred fire of ancient literature.
7. Further, the true critic must judge art not on the basis of his own prejudices but via a close, fair, genial study of a poet’s age, his chosen genre and mode of imitation, and the desired end and aim of his poem.
8. Alas, modern academia has not heeded the advice of Pope.
9. Modern theorists too often stand in judgment on the great poets of our tradition. Rather than learn from their genius, they look down upon them as politically unenlightened; rather than judge them on their own merits, they bend them on the rack of modern theory.

C. The best poets and critics look to nature as the source, end, and test of art.
   1. We follow the Ancients, because in following them, we follow nature; just so, Virgil discovered that to imitate Homer was to imitate nature.
   2. Indeed, the Ancients did not so much invent the rules of decorum as find them, ready made, in nature: “Those rules of old discovered not devised, / Are nature still, but nature methodized.”
   3. Nature is the best touchstone of art for it is unchanging and eternal.
   4. In his Essay on Man, Pope sums up the neoclassical vision of the cosmos by asserting that in nature all is ordered and everything has its proper place in the Great Chain of Being.
   5. We must accept our place in this chain and the limits that come with it, just as we must accept the laws and restraints of decorum.
   6. Though Pope admits there are times when, in a moment of Longinian sublimity, a poet may fly beyond the rules of art to a higher plane, such flights of fancy should be the exception and not the rule.
   7. We must never let our genius (wit) overrun our judgment (art); it is the restraints that make us poets, that make us, finally, human beings.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
R. S. Crane, “English Neo-Classical Criticism: An Outline Sketch.”
J. W. H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: 17th and 18th Centuries, Chapters 4–5.
James Engell, Forming the Critical Mind: Dryden to Coleridge.

Questions to Consider:
1. How can the rules of decorum actually be liberating for a poet? Is restraint necessarily a bad thing in art?
2. How important is it for modern poets to know and honor ancient literature? Is it right to feel humble in the presence of classical art?
Lecture Nine
Burke on the Sublime and Beautiful

Scope: With Lecture Nine, we begin our third (and probably most difficult) unit: the philosophical roots of Romanticism. Although Lectures Ten to Twelve will all focus on German theorists (Kant, Schiller, and Hegel), this lecture will focus on British theorist Edmund Burke and his influential *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Our analysis of Burke’s *Inquiry* will be prefaced by two vital distinctions: between the ontological orientation of Burke’s predecessors and the epistemological orientation of Burke and his successors; between subject and object. In our analysis of Burke himself, we will define such key terms as senses, imagination, judgment, and taste and demonstrate how Burke defined sublimity and beauty not by what they are but by the effect they have on the subjective self that experiences them.

Outline

I. With Burke, we shift from an ontological, mimetic, objective approach to literature to an epistemological, pragmatic, subjective approach.

   A. Ontology is the study of being; it concerns itself with determining the essence of things (whether that essence is natural or supernatural).
      1. Mimetic theorists (those concerned with the relationship between a poem and the universe it is imitating) are ontological in their approach.
      2. Aristotle’s goal to define precisely the proper nature and essence of a well-constructed plot is an ontological one.
      3. Indeed, the Platonic-Aristotelian debate over mimesis is really a debate over the ontological status of a work of art. What is a poem, they ask: does it possess its own substance and integrity or is it just a shadow?
      4. Though neoclassical theory is partly pragmatic (i.e., it is concerned with the nature and the responses of the audience and with whether or not that audience has been both taught and pleased), it nevertheless works within a philosophical framework that is essentially ontological.
      5. The rules of decorum laid down by Horace, Dryden, and Pope are less concerned with audience response than with what a poem should be.
      6. Even Longinus, who does define the sublime partly in terms of its effect, is really concerned with the actual physical, metaphorical, and linguistic qualities of a sublime poem.
      7. Burke’s approach to the sublime is quite different.

   B. Epistemology is the study of knowing; it is concerned not with the thingness of things, but with how we perceive that thingness.
      1. Pragmatic theories in their purest form are epistemological.
      2. They seek to explore not just whether a poem pleases but the mental processes by which that pleasure is perceived and known.
      3. These processes are called mental faculties or modes of thought.
      4. For the true epistemological pragmatist, beauty does not so much define a quality that inheres in a given poem or painting as it describes a certain kind of mental (emotional/intellectual) response that occurs within the mind of the person who experiences that poem or painting.

   C. This leads us to a vital distinction that lies at the core of epistemology and of any theory that takes such an approach: subject/object.
      1. In philosophy, a subject is a conscious self that perceives.
      2. An object, on the other hand, is an unconscious thing that does not perceive but is, rather, perceived by a subject.
      3. Hence, when epistemologists define their responses to art as purely subjective, they mean that the experience has nothing to do with the poetic object per se, but exists wholly in the mind of the subject.
      4. This philosophical use of the word subjective should not be confused with its modern use to signify a personal, relativistic belief.
5. Beginning with Burke and Kant, it becomes standard to refer to this subjective response to art as an aesthetic response and to refer to those who would define group standards of aesthetic taste as aestheticians.

II. In the Introduction to his *Inquiry* (1757), Burke lays the groundwork for understanding how we perceive both art and the greater world around us.

A. For Burke, the groundwork of all perception and thought is the senses (that is to say, Burke was an empiricist in the tradition of John Locke).
   1. Because we all have equal access to sense perceptions (at least all those who are not blind, deaf, etc.) and because the senses are the "great originals of all our ideas," it is possible to arrive at a universal principle of judgment.
   2. Indeed, argues Burke, if we are unable to establish fixed principles of taste and general laws for that mental faculty we call imagination, then his *Inquiry* is absurd and all aesthetic judgment is mere whimsy.
   3. Let us trace how Burke moves from universal sense experience to universal principles of taste (a movement typical of epistemological theory that betrays a desire for order and system that is as strong as that of Aristotle, Horace, Longinus or Pope).

B. All people perceive external objects in the same way.
   1. We all recognize sugar as sweet and tobacco as bitter, and we all find more natural pleasure in the sweet than in the bitter.
   2. Habit can alter these perceptions, but it cannot abolish our knowledge that tobacco is not sweet and sugar is not bitter.
   3. If we disagree, it means we are mad or our senses are impaired.

C. The faculties of imagination and judgment are shaped by the senses.
   1. Imagination (or sensibility) takes the raw material offered it by sense perceptions and recombines that material in a new way.
   2. Although the imagination can be inventive, it cannot produce anything new; it can only vary what it is given by the senses.
   3. Therefore, whatever affects our imagination powerfully, whatever brings it pleasure or pain, must have a similar effect on all men.
   4. Whereas imagination is linked primarily to immediate perceptions and has about it an almost childlike quality, judgment is a higher critical faculty that is closely linked to reason.
   5. Judgment is gained through an increase in understanding brought about by a long, close study of the object of sensation.
   6. Still, as it relies on the sense, judgment too is common to all men.

D. The faculty of taste is the mental product of imagination plus judgment.
   1. As such, taste is common to all men; though there are exceptions.
   2. Some whose natures are blunt and cold are deficient in sensibility.
   3. If this is the case, or if they have seared their imaginative faculties through hedonism or avarice (cf., Longinus), they will suffer from a lack of taste.
   4. On the other hand, if they are deficient in judgment (if they have not studied long and hard) they will suffer from bad taste.
   5. Taste differs from person to person, not in kind but in degree.
   6. That is to say, the principles of taste operate the same in all men, but some, due to a keener sensibility or greater knowledge and discernment, have a fuller or more refined sense of taste.
   7. Oddly, Burke’s view is both strongly democratic and highly elitist.

E. Some additional distinctions between imagination and judgment.
   1. Imagination tends toward synthesis; judgment, toward analysis.
   2. Imagination discovers, even creates unity in the midst of difference; judgment discerns subtle distinctions in what appears to be uniform.
   3. Imagination affords more direct, unmediated pleasure than judgment.
   4. Still, though he asserts that sensibility (or imagination) is essential to taste, Burke finally gives preference to judgment as the true foundation of good taste.
5. The Romantics will shift this preference, privileging imagination over judgment, synthesis over analysis, unmediated over mediated.

III. Burke defines the sublime and beautiful in epistemological terms.

A. Beauty and sublimity are not qualities of the object (as they are, finally, for Longinus), but faculties of perception that can be categorized.

B. He defines the sublime as that which inspires in us feelings of terror.
   1. Dark, gloomy, massive objects invoke in us an overwhelming feeling of power and infinity, feelings that fill us with terror.
   2. Terror produces in us a mental-emotional response called astonishment.
   3. Burke defines astonishment as that moment in which all motion is suspended and our minds are filled totally by an object or thought.
   4. The sublime is experienced not only through eye and ear, but through the senses of taste, smell, and touch as well.
   5. Indeed, though sublimity is a mental experience, it manifests itself in our body by causing our hands to clench and our muscles to constrict.
   6. Though sublimity is linked to terror, no actual danger must be present.

C. The beautiful inspires in us sentiments of tenderness and affection.
   1. Whereas the sublime is more masculine and closely allied to pain, the beautiful is more feminine and linked to pleasure and love.
   2. Small, smooth, bright things cause a relaxing of the body.
   3. Beauty, like sublimity, is perceived by all the senses.

Essential Reading:
Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, ed. James Boulton, complete text.

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Where *does* beauty finally reside? In the object itself or, as we so often say, “in the eye of the beholder”?
2. Burke distinguishes between those who have bad taste and those who have no taste at all. Is this a legitimate distinction? Have you noted it in other people?
Lecture Ten

Kant's *Critique of Judgment*

**Scope:** In this lecture, which most students will find the most challenging of the series, we turn our focus to one of the most influential (and difficult) thinkers of all time: Immanuel Kant. If Burke’s *Inquiry* helped introduce epistemology into the world of aesthetics, then Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790) transformed that introduction into a full-blown science. Through a close analysis of Kant’s *Critique*, we shall explore Kant’s central assertion that aesthetic judgments constitute a subjective universality. In other words, though such judgments are purely subjective and are neither dependent on nor concerned with the usefulness or even existence of the aesthetic object, they are nevertheless felt equally by all people at all times. Having defined fully this vital epistemological concept, we shall then proceed to “unpack” a series of key Kantian distinctions: the beautiful and the good, imagination and understanding, imagination and reason, the beautiful and the sublime, pure beauty and dependent beauty, the quantitative sublime and the qualitative sublime, etc.

**Outline**

I. The judgment of the beautiful, Kant asserts, is purely subjective.
   A. As in Burke, beauty (and the judgment of beauty) has nothing to do with the beautiful object per se, but with the way it is perceived by a subject. In this regard, we might think of Kant as the epistemological version of Aristotle in his cataloging of the mental faculties.
      1. Judgments of beauty are not cognitive (logical, rational) but aesthetic.
      2. Cognitive judgments presuppose fixed ideas and work to establish fixed concepts, but aesthetic judgments work through our feelings and neither rest on any concepts nor seek to generate any.
      3. Aesthetic judgments are likewise free of all ends or purposes.
      4. Should it seek an end, either in its own subjective perceptions or in the object perceived, that end is actually an end in itself.
      5. Should it seek a purpose, it must be a “purposeless purpose.”
      6. That is to say, both subject and object are perceived as being complete and perfect within themselves: no ulterior end or purpose is needed.
   B. Kant clarifies by comparing the beautiful to the pleasurable and the good.
      1. Whereas the pleasurable is an interested emotion that seeks some kind of gratification from the object (similar to *eros*), the beautiful is purely disinterested: it seeks nothing from the object and makes no demands on it (similar to *agape*).
      2. Indeed, it is unconcerned as to whether the object even exists.
      3. Whereas the good seeks beauty as a means to some higher end, the beautiful accepts it, unconditionally, as a finished thing in itself.
   C. Though the judgment of beauty is purely subjective, it is, paradoxically, universally felt: i.e., it constitutes a subjective universality. This is a key point for understanding Kant.
      1. Indeed, what allows it (the aesthetic) to be felt universally is the very fact that it is purely subjective, untainted by any ulterior interests or inclinations.
      2. Because it does not work in accordance with any concepts, because it is a free and disinterested delight, and because it is even indifferent to the existence of the object, it is likewise free of all internal prejudice and external restraint.
      3. Both modern and postmodern theorists tend to reject this concept.
      4. Modernists deny the possibility of a purely free, disinterested response.
      5. Postmodernists deny that any experience of art is universal.
      6. Nevertheless, the concept is central to Kant: for the aesthetic realm to be free, it must be subjective; yet, if that realm is to offer itself as a field for critical analysis and systematic study, it must be universal.
   D. Typically, taste is not universally valid because it is linked to pleasure: the charm of the object gratifies the taste and monopolizes its focus.
      1. There is, however, a purer kind of taste that focuses on form.
2. A poem’s form may be studied as an end in itself, as a purposeless purpose; as such, it lies in the realm of the aesthetic judgment.

3. This formalist element in Kant may be traced back to Aristotle’s preference for plot over character and forward to new critical (objective) theories of poetry as a self-enclosed aesthetic artifact.

E. Though many times Kant speaks as if beauty resides in the object, he reminds us time and again that it resides solely in the subject.

F. Kant calls that spontaneous, independent mental power that is both enlivened and set free by aesthetic ideas the imagination.

1. Kant, like Burke, ascribes to the imagination the power to recombine sense data to form new associations.

2. Poetry sets the associational powers of the imagination most at liberty.

II. Though Kant’s aesthetic is grounded in concept-free feelings experienced by the imagination, understanding and reason do play an important role.

A. Kant distinguishes between pure beauty and dependent beauty.

1. Pure beauty presupposes no concept of what the object ought to be.

2. We may link pure beauty to the later nineteenth century concept of art for art’s sake (in Latin, ars gratia artis), the notion that art is self-subsistent, an end in itself (cf., Oscar Wilde).

3. Dependent beauty presupposes a concept of perfection against which to measure the object; it adheres to a purpose external to the object.

4. For example, it may presuppose rules of decorum or a dictum to teach and please.

5. Kant notes that much of the disagreement among critics rises from the fact that they are comparing two different kinds of beauty.

6. When dependent beauty starts to form concepts (as it does in the idea of “decorum”), it moves out of the realm of the imagination (aesthetics) and into the realm of the understanding.

B. Kant distinguishes between the quantitative and qualitative sublime.

1. The sublime is that which is absolutely great, which inspires in us feelings of limitlessness and infinity.

2. The quantitative (or mathematical) sublime occurs when we come into the presence of wild, chaotic objects that cannot be absorbed.

3. Their greatness surpasses the power of our intuition to grasp them.

4. As a result, the imagination is forced to turn to reason for support.

5. Whereas understanding merely converts sense data into concepts, reason takes these concepts and transforms them into higher laws.

6. The qualitative (or dynamic) sublime occurs when we feel awe or fear before an object of overwhelming power (though, as with Burke, the experience can only be sublime if there is no actual danger present).

7. Our imagination is inadequate to stand up against such might and, as before, it turns to the higher faculty of reason for help.

C. The true epistemological nature of the sublime and the beautiful has to do with the free play of two mental powers.

1. With beauty, Kant describes the subjective experience as a feeling of harmony in the free play of imagination and understanding.

2. With sublimity, the subjective experience manifests itself in terms of a disharmony (or struggle) between imagination and reason.

3. With this distinction, Kant offers a “mental” justification for Burke’s assertion that beauty causes us to relax while sublimity brings tension.

III. Kant builds on the mental disharmony induced in us by the sublime to posit a fascinating theory as to why the sublime moves us so powerfully.

A. True, when we experience the sublime (both quantitative and qualitative), and our imagination is forced to turn to reason, we experience displeasure at our inability to comprehend its magnitude or stand up to its might.

B. This soon turns to pleasure as we realize what this surrender signifies.
1. Our experience reveals to us that cognition (reason) is supreme over sensation (imagination) and that we are supra-sensible creatures.
2. We learn, with great joy, that there is a faculty within us that is greater than nature, that can surpass both her majesty and might.
3. And if both of these discoveries are true, then our final destination and end is greater than that of nature.
4. That is to say, we are not only rational but spiritual creatures endued with purpose and an ability to endure and transcend pain and terror.
5. I like to call this dazzling moment of insight the Kantian catharsis.

C. Though I am presenting Kant as a philosophical source of Romanticism, we must remember that Kant himself lived in Pope’s “Age of Reason.”
   1. Indeed, only an Enlightenment thinker could posit as the source of our greatest emotional experience the knowledge that we are rational.
   2. The Romantics raise imagination to a far higher level than Kant.

Essential Reading:
Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment (selections), in Adams.

Supplementary Reading:
Kant, Philosophical Writings, complete text of Critique of Judgment.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is Kant’s notion of subjective universality democratic or elitist? Are all our judgments equally valid or should thinkers like Kant speak for all of us? If the former, is that necessarily good? If the latter, is that necessarily bad?
2. Have you ever experienced the “Kantian catharsis”? Is there a faculty within us greater than nature, and do sublime experiences invoke that faculty?
Lecture Eleven
Schiller on Aesthetics

Scope: In this lecture, we shall study closely the work of a follower of Kant who, though he carefully preserved the epistemological slant of his master, turned that slant in a new, more fully Romantic direction: i.e., toward the fusion of subject and object. Through an analysis of his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795) and *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry* (1795–96), we shall define Friedrich Schiller’s central aesthetic goal: to bring back into unity the emotional (Dionysiac) and rational (Apollonian) sides of our being. We shall discuss how Schiller links these two facets of our nature to what he terms the sensuous drive and the formal drive and explore how he unites these two opposing drives into a third: the play drive. Finally, we shall see how Schiller links the play drive both to beauty and to culture and how he uses this connection to ensure for poetry a position in society that is even more vital than that of philosophy.

Outline

I. Schiller, born a generation after Kant, “romanticizes” Kant’s theories.
   A. On the one hand, he expands on the epistemological theories of Kant.
      1. Beauty remains a subjective experience that is free and indifferent.
      2. The free play of mental powers is still put at center stage.
      3. The privileging of aesthetic form over didactic content continues.
   B. On the other, he gives these theories a new (Romantic) focus and end.
      1. Burke preferred judgment (analysis) to imagination (synthesis) and Kant privileged the disharmony of the sublime over the harmony of the beautiful, but Schiller champions both synthesis and harmony.
      2. The ideal for Schiller is a fusion (or incarnation) of subject and object. This gives a mystical, spiritual bent to Schiller that is lacking in Kant.
      3. Nature takes on greater importance in Schiller. It is not merely the dead object that it is for Burke and Kant; it too seeks a kind of perfection.

II. In his *Letters*, Schiller looks back with awe on the Classical Age but not for the same reasons as the neoclassicists did.
   A. The ancient Greeks had a natural humanity that we have lost.
      1. They possessed a fullness that could fuse imagination and reason.
      2. We, in contrast, live divided, fragmented lives: our imaginative, intuitive side is cut off from our speculative, rational side.
      3. Nietzsche would term these two sides the Dionysiac and the Apollonian.
      4. Today, they are often linked to female/male, East/West, religion/science.
      5. T. S. Eliot would later term the division of these two sides of the human psyche the “dissociation of sensibility.”
      6. Whereas Eliot says this division occurred in the late seventeenth century, Schiller places it at the end of the Classical Age.
      7. Schiller’s final (aesthetic) goal is for these two sides to be reintegrated.
   B. In *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, Schiller develops this distinction between ancient (naive) and modern (sentimental).
      1. The naive is what is simply and directly tied to nature; it rejects all that is artificial or clever; it is uncorrupted by civilization/society.
      2. Whereas the naive is unreflective and unmediated, the sentimental is complex, artistic, and strongly self-conscious.
      3. The only place we can see the naive today is in children, in their capacity for wonder and their ability to accept nature as it is.
      4. Schiller would restore the lost unity of the naive, but not through backward-looking nostalgia; we must move ahead to a higher unity.
III. It is the role of culture, education, and beauty to achieve this fusion.

A. In *Letters*, Schiller distinguishes between the sensuous and formal drives.
   1. The sensuous drive is linked to material life: to matter, body and change, to the World of Becoming.
   2. The formal drive is more rational: it is linked to the preservation of personality, to the spirit that remains the same, the World of Being.
   3. Our sensuous drive is purely Dionysiac; it is ecstatic and leads us to be swept along by sensation, causing the personality to be suspended.
   4. Our formal drive is purely Apollonian; it seeks a higher, more abstract harmony free from the restraints of time (change) and space (matter).
   5. The realm of the sensuous drive is the world of the particular case, the concrete, the object; the formal drive is the world of the general law, the universal, the subject.
   6. If sensuous/formal equals body/spirit, we might think it would also equal form/content (because body and form are both on the “outside”).
   7. However, the form (not content) of a work of art is actually the more timeless, abstract element; it can be studied coolly and rationally.
   8. Here Schiller, like Kant, treats form as an aesthetic end in itself.

B. Though we might expect the Kantian Schiller to advocate the subordination of the sensuous drive to the dictates of the formal, he does not.
   1. Indeed, he treats them as two distinct but equally valid and vital modes of thought (and spheres of operation) that need to be synthesized.
   2. The greatest task of culture and education is to allow these two drives to operate together: to reintegrate feeling and reason.

C. Out of the fusion of these two drives emerges the play drive.
   1. By calling it the play drive, Schiller does not mean to be derogatory.
   2. Man, he insists, is only fully human when he plays: a notion that both the Romantics and Freud would posit as central to human development.
   3. The play drive, by simultaneously fusing and transcending the other two drives, sets us free from both the physical restraints of nature (sensuous) and the moral restraints of reason (formal).
   4. The play drive is profoundly incarnational; it creates a living form.
   5. The play drive effects a marriage between sensuous and formal, between objective nature and subjective mind, between the concrete and the universal.
   6. To make a biblical analogy: just as our final heavenly form will not be pure spirit but spirit joined to a glorious resurrection body, so the end product of the play drive is not an abstract, bodiless idea (Platonic Form) but a general timeless form imbued with a particular, dynamic life.
   7. In that divine, transcendent moment of play, the universal lifts the concrete up into itself, the form consumes the matter.
   8. The play drive is equivalent to beauty: both are purely aesthetic.

D. Schiller ascribes a unique role to beauty (and the humanities in general).
   1. As with Kant, beauty is indifferent; it is neither useful nor didactic.
   2. It teaches us nothing and supplies us with no particular knowledge.
   3. It provides us instead with a totality, a perfect wholeness; within that whole we find all faculties existing in a higher harmony.
   4. To experience that wholeness is to enter into a pure aesthetic mood, a state of suspension beyond the confines of time and space.
   5. In that mood, we experience true freedom, true play, true unity.
   6. Through beauty (and the sublime) we are empowered to give form to that which is formless (and hence terrifying) in nature.
   7. When we do so we gain an epistemological, suprasensible victory over nature (see Kant above) that frees us from our deepest fears.
   8. Still, Schiller is careful (as Kant is not) to hold on to physical reality; the contemplation of form must not be cut off from the feeling of life.

E. Schiller’s aesthetic, perhaps unconsciously, turns Plato on his head.
   1. Beauty proves to us that feeling and thought can occur together.
2. Therefore, an education in beauty (art) is best able to lead us back to that original, naive unity we have lost.
3. Indeed, beauty (and the play drive), because it most fully fuses concrete and universal, body and soul, is better suited than philosophy (which exists totally in the abstract world of the Forms) to heal the disunity within.
4. It is the poets, not the philosophers, who are best qualified to form whole, integrated citizens who will know justice and live justly.

F. To close with a paraphrase from C. S. Lewis, though beauty may possess no survival value, it does give value to survival.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Can you identify in yourself the opposing workings of the sensuous drive and the formal drive? Have you been successful in fusing these two sides? Has your personal experience of art (especially literature) assisted in this fusion?
2. Was there ever really a golden age when our imagination and our reason worked in unison? If yes, can it be restored? If no, why do we yearn for such an age?
Lecture Twelve

Hegel and the Journey of the Idea

Scope: In this lecture, we shall take up one final German theorist who completed, as it were, Schiller’s romanticization of Kant. Through a close analysis of the Introduction to his *Philosophy of Fine Art* (1835), we shall see how Hegel effected what is perhaps the greatest inversion of Plato by positing a Platonic Form (the Idea) that, rather than remain, pure and untainted, in the World of Being, seeks to enter into our World of Becoming. We shall follow this Idea as it moves through three phases (the symbolic, classical, and romantic) in search of a full, sensuous incarnation. We shall explore how each of these phases is linked to a specific artistic medium and how each phase can be linked to a different person of the Christian Trinity.

Outline

I. If Schiller moves Kantian epistemology in the direction of Romanticism, then Hegel, another Kantian, extends and consummates that movement.

   A. Like Schiller, Hegel seeks in art a higher fusion of subject and object.
      1. True art mediates between form and content, idea and image.
      2. It seeks a full incarnation that offers the greatest degree of intimacy and union between the universal idea and the concrete image.
   
   B. Also like Schiller, Hegel ascribes to art a key cultural and educational function.
      1. True fine art is, like religion and philosophy, one of the modes through which divine or spiritual truths enter our physical world of change.
      2. Art is a cultural storehouse of the wisdom of the ages (e.g., proverbs).
      3. In addition to storing this wisdom, art also acts as a key (sometimes the only key) to unlocking the treasures of long dead civilizations. An example of this is the “General Prologue” to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, which describes life in the late fourteenth century England better than any history book.
   
   C. Finally, like Schiller, Hegel too turns Plato on his head, converting the arts into a higher form of education: a journey of the poet (not the philosopher) from division to wholeness.
      1. In this area, however, Hegel goes far beyond Schiller to enter into a more direct dialogue with the very essence of Platonic thought.
      2. Schiller traces the education, the growth toward unity, of poet and reader, but Hegel traces the education of the poetic Idea itself.
      3. The timeless Idea, the divine Beauty, the spiritual Truth that lies at the core of all great art dwells, like Plato’s Forms, in the World of Being.
      4. Whereas Plato’s Forms remain apart from and untainted by our World of Becoming, Hegel’s Idea seeks a sensuous incarnation.
      5. In the Introduction to his *Philosophy of Fine Art*, Hegel delineates a Platonic journey of the Idea through various artistic modes and genres, as it seeks full and final expression in our world.
      6. What Idea seeks is not just a well-executed artistic form in which to dwell, but an incarnation in which it is expressed in and through a concrete image: not as a body is by clothes but as the soul is by the body.
      7. Imagine a liquid with the desire and power to create its own container.
      8. If it is to achieve this incarnation, Idea must not be fully abstract (as are Plato’s Forms), but must partake of some concreteness.
   
   D. Hegel’s aesthetic offers what amounts to a Christian reworking of Plato.
      1. Indeed, throughout his Introduction, Hegel links the journey of the Idea to several key theological/philosophical distinctions of Christianity.
      2. For example, his assertion that the Idea must already partake of the concrete if it is to successfully incarnate itself is strongly linked to two central Christian doctrines: the Trinity and the Incarnation.
      3. Just as the Idea was essentially concrete even before its physical manifestation, so Jesus, even before he became man in the Incarnation, existed in a pre-incarnate state as the eternal Son of God.
II. As the Idea travels on its incarnational journey, it moves through three distinct stages, each of which is linked to a specific artistic medium.

A. The first and oldest stage is the symbolic.
   1. In this stage, Idea has not yet found its own formative principle; it cannot shape its own container and so seeks a more general form.
   2. The best example of symbolic art is the ancient temple; here the spirit of God (gods) dwelt, but in an indeterminate form.
   3. The defining artistic medium of the symbolic phase is architecture.
   4. Through the medium of raw matter, of huge, rough stones, the early pagans and Jews sought to express the majesty of divinity.
   5. In this phase, full incarnation is not yet possible; the best that can be achieved is to create a divine space for the congregation.

B. The second phase is the classical.
   1. In this phase, the free and adequate embodiment of the Idea is achieved.
   2. Something in physical nature is found that is compatible with (fitted to) the spiritual Idea; the result is a concrete spirituality, a mystic fusion in which the Idea appears and is revealed in a sensuous guise.
   3. The defining artistic medium of the classical phase is sculpture.
   4. In the classical statues of Zeus, Athena, etc., the full presence and power of the god stands before us in eternal repose.
   5. God enters his temple with a flash and takes on a discernible shape with which the congregation can commune directly.
   6. If the symbolic phase is linked to God the Father, a spiritual being whom no one has ever seen, then the classical phase is linked to God the Son, the incarnate God who became flesh and dwelt among us.
   7. In the symbolic Old Testament God’s power is loosely expressed in images like the eagle or the burning bush; in the classical New Testament, his presence enters physically into our world.
   8. The Incarnate Christ is the perfection of pagan anthropomorphism.

C. The third phase is the romantic.
   1. The symbolic phase aspires to an ideal fusion and the classical achieves that fusion; the romantic phase seeks to transcend it.
   2. In the romantic phase, there is a desire to break down the perfection, completion, and rigidity of the classical form.
   3. This shedding of limits frees the spirit to move to a higher plane.
   4. When this happens, the Idea (which is, of course, a subject rather than an object) gains self-knowledge and becomes self-conscious.
   5. Romantic art is art transcending itself: through it we see (as in Kant and Schiller) the triumph of the rational soul over the external world.
   6. As in Schiller (but not in Kant), this triumph is more a higher fusion than a complete overthrow of nature; rather than abandon or eliminate the world, the Idea creates its own inner world.
   7. Just so it is good that the Incarnate Christ go away so that the Holy Spirit may descend to earth and dwell in the inner life/soul of each believer.
   8. The higher fusion of the romantic phase does not restore the classical repose of Eden or the Golden Age; instead, it looks ahead to that greater city, the New Jerusalem, where physical and spiritual will be united.
   9. The New Jerusalem will be heralded by the Great Marriage of Christ and the Church, the ultimate fusion of Creator/subject and created/object.

D. Romantic art works through painting, music, and poetry.
   1. Of these three, painting is the least ideal for it is a physical medium.
   2. Music is more ideal for it is free from physical constraints, yet it still must heed fixed laws and quantities.
   3. Poetry is the freest and most ideal; Hegel terms it the “universal art of the mind” and finds in it a fully abstract, subjective spirituality able to create its own inner world of ideas.
   4. Most Romantic aestheticians would disagree and posit music as the freest, most unmediated of the arts.

E. The movement from symbolic to classical to romantic forms a dialectic.
1. In the dialectical thought of Hegel, an idea (or thesis) creates, over time, its own opposite (or antithesis); eventually the two collide and struggle to form a new and higher fusion (the synthesis).

2. Marx would later rip the Hegelian dialectic out of its proper sphere in the world of transcendent, spiritual ideas and reinscribe it in a fully material, physical world: dialectical materialism.

3. Do not confuse the two; Hegel is often linked, unfairly, to Marx.

4. To “blame” Hegel for dialectical materialism is like “blaming” the Bible for supplying Marx with his key belief that all history is moving unstoppably toward a state of perfect community and brotherhood.

5. Or again, like blaming Wagner for Hitler, when the Ring Cycle is perhaps the greatest indictment of the corruption of power ever written.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Have you ever encountered a work of art in which you felt that the artist had completely and perfectly embodied (incarnated) a higher, abstract truth?

2. Listen to a piece of music by Bach or Handel; then listen to one by Tchaikovsky or Wagner or Chopin. Can you sense in the former an attempt at perfection of form? Can you feel in the latter a desire to break down and transcend the limits of form?
### Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>399 BC</td>
<td>Death of Socrates</td>
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<td>c. 348 BC</td>
<td>Death of Plato</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 330 BC</td>
<td>Aristotle at work on <em>Poetics</em></td>
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<td>27–14 BC</td>
<td>Reign of Caesar Augustus</td>
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<td>1558–1603</td>
<td>Reign of Elizabeth I</td>
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<td>1642</td>
<td>Puritans (in England) close the theater</td>
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<td>1660</td>
<td>Restoration of Charles II</td>
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<td>1702–1714</td>
<td>Reign of Queen Anne</td>
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<tr>
<td>1757</td>
<td>First edition of Burke’s <em>Inquiry</em></td>
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<td>1781</td>
<td><em>Confessions, Part I</em> (Rousseau)</td>
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<td>1789</td>
<td>French Revolution begins</td>
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<td>1790</td>
<td><em>Critique of Judgment</em> (Kant)</td>
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<td>1798</td>
<td><em>Lyrical Ballads</em> (Wordsworth/Coleridge)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Second edition of <em>Lyrical Ballads</em> with “Preface”</td>
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<td>1837–1901</td>
<td>Reign of Queen Victoria</td>
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<td>1848</td>
<td><em>Communist Manifesto</em> (Marx and Engels)</td>
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<td>1859</td>
<td><em>Origin of Species</em> (Darwin)</td>
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<td>1900</td>
<td><em>The Interpretation of Dreams</em> (Freud)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td><em>Course in General Linguistics</em> (Saussure)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td><em>The Well-Wrought Urn</em> (Brooks)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td><em>Anatomy of Criticism</em> (Frye)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Derrida delivers “Structure, Sign and Play”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Biographical Notes

**Abrams, M. H.** (b. 1912). American professor and literary critic, long at Cornell, who is the greatest living explicator of Romanticism and literary theory. Author of *The Mirror and the Lamp* and *Natural Supernaturalism*.

**Aquinas, St. Thomas** (1225–1274). Medieval Catholic theologian whose *Summa Theologica* combines the philosophical rigor of Aristotle with the theological profundity of St. Paul and St. Augustine. His notion of the four levels of meaning greatly influenced Dante’s design for *The Divine Comedy*.

**Aristotle** (384–322 BC). Greek philosopher who studied in Athens under Plato and wrote treatises on nearly every area of human thought. Author of *Poetics*.

**Arnold, Matthew** (1822–1888). British poet, essayist, and critic; one of the great sages of the Victorian Age. Author of “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time.”

**Augustine, St.** (354–430). Born in North Africa, Augustine is the most influential of the early Church Fathers. In his theological writings, which included meditations on language, rhetoric, and allegory, he fused the ideals of Christianity and of Plato.

**Barthes, Roland** (1915–1980). French critic and literary theorist; influential in both structuralist and poststructuralist thought.

**Beardsley, Monroe C.** (1915–1985). American new critic; most famous for his work with W. K. Wimsatt, with whom he coined the twin terms “affective fallacy” and “intentional fallacy.”

**Blake, William** (1757–1827). British Romantic poet who was also, I firmly believe, the greatest painter Britain has yet produced. His deceptively simple *Songs of Innocence and Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (1789, 1794) had a strong influence on the Romantic belief that things are as they are perceived.

**Boileau-Despréaux, Nicolas** (1636–1711; pronounced bwa-LOW). French poet and critic of the neoclassical period whose “Art of Poetry” helped set down the rules of decorum for his age and had much influence on Pope's “Essay on Criticism.”


**Bloom, Harold** (b. 1930). American professor and literary critic, long at Yale, who does not fit neatly into any theoretical category. Author of *The Anxiety of Influence*.

**Brooks, Cleanth** (b. 1906). American professor and critic who perhaps most fully sums up (and certainly is most fully identified with) the goals and methods of new criticism. Author of *The Well-Wrought Urn*.

**Burke, Edmund** (1729–1797). British statesman, essayist, and literary theorist; one of the first great critics of the French Revolution. Author of the influential *Inquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*.

**Coleridge, Samuel Taylor** (1772–1834). British poet, essayist, and literary theorist; a major figure of British Romanticism. One of the most learned men of his age, he is credited with explaining German philosophy to the British. Co-conceived and wrote *Lyrical Ballads* with his friend William Wordsworth; author of *Biographia Literaria*.

**Corneille, Pierre** (1606–1684; pronounced Core-NAY). French neoclassical dramatist and critic who sought in his plays and criticism to adhere to the rules of art laid down in Aristotle and Horace (particularly the three unities). His famous essay on the unities had a strong influence on Dryden’s “Essay of Dramatic Poesy.”

**Dante Alighieri** (1265–1321). Italian poet who made grand use of the medieval four levels of meaning in his epic, *The Divine Comedy*.


Empson, William (1906–1984). British poet and theorist whose critical views are close to those of the American new critics, as the title of his most famous work, Seven Types of Ambiguity, clearly demonstrates.

Fish, Stanley (b. 1938). American professor and theorist, long at Duke, who is one of the founding fathers of reader-response criticism.

Foucault, Michel (1926–1984). French historian, philosopher, and theorist whose work has elements of both structuralist and poststructuralist thought.

Frazer, Sir James (1854–1941). British cultural anthropologist whose masterwork, The Golden Bough, initiated an entire school of myth criticism and served as both the impetus for Frye’s Anatomy of Criticism and the groundwork for Eliot’s Waste Land. The work of the late Joseph Campbell (The Hero with a Thousand Faces, etc.) has inspired a recent return to the mythic-archetypal theories of Frazer, Jung, and Frye.

Freud, Sigmund (1856–1939). Austrian psychiatrist; founder of psychoanalysis. His studies of human development and the significance of dreams have had a profound influence on all areas of modern thought, including literature and critical theory.


Gorgias (c. 483–375 BC). Greek philosopher, teacher, and sophist who was both Plato’s contemporary and his rival. A distant forerunner of deconstruction.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1770–1831). German philosopher whose concept of the dialectic influenced Marx and whose ideas on theology and the fine arts have had a lasting impact.

Heidegger, Martin (1889–1976). German philosopher whose work is identified both with existentialism and phenomenology. He was a major influence on Derrida.

Horace (65–8 BC). Roman poet and critic of the Augustan Age and a key founder and proponent of the rules of neoclassical art. Author of Ars Poetica.

Jakobson, Roman (1896–1982). Russian formalist who carried the structuralist theories of Saussure into the study of language and literature.

Jung, Carl (1875–1961). Swiss psychologist whose theories of archetypes and of the collective unconscious have had a profound influence on literary critics, especially those, like Northrop Frye, who take a mythical-archetypal approach to theory.

Kant, Immanuel (1724–1804). German philosopher whose epistemological theories of art (expressed most fully in his Critique of Judgment) had a profound impact on Romantic philosophers, theorists, and poets.

Keats, John (1795–1821). British poet whose collected letters contain fascinating insights into literary theory: most notably, the notion of “negative capability.”

Lévi-Strauss, Claude (b. 1908). French anthropologist who is one of the founders of structuralism and whose influence on modern theory has been profound.

Locke, John (1632–1704). British empiricist whose epistemological theory of man as a blank slate (tabula rasa) who acquires knowledge through (and only through) the five senses had a profound influence on Edmund Burke.
Longinus (first century AD). Anonymous Greek literary critic who wrote *On the Sublime*. It was long believed that Cassius Longinus (third century AD) wrote the work; we now know he did not, but the name has stuck.

Marx, Karl (1818–1883). German philosopher, economist, and political activist whose theory of dialectical materialism (formulated with the help of Friedrich Engels) lies at the heart of much modernist theory and ideology.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1844–1900). German philosopher and essayist; one of the founders of modernist thought. In his *Birth of Tragedy*, he formulated a famous distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac.

Paul, St. (died c. AD 64). A learned Pharisee and scholar who, after his conversion to Christianity, became the first great missionary. He was responsible for writing much of the New Testament and for pioneering an allegorical approach for reading the Old Testament in light of the new.

Plato (c. 427–c. 348 BC). Greek philosopher and founder of the Academy. His theory of the Forms, his view of art as imitation, and his insistence (in *The Republic*) that the poets be kicked out of his ideal state have had a profound impact on literary theory.

Plotinus (c. 204–c. 270). Greek neoplatonic philosopher who combined the mimetic theories of Plato and Aristotle. His ideas greatly influenced St. Augustine.

Pope, Alexander (1688–1744). British poet whose literary tastes (expressed most fully in his *Essay on Criticism*) helped set the standards for British neoclassicism.

Racine, Jean (1639–1699). French neoclassical playwright who most perfectly embodied in his tragedies the artistic rules and decorum of classical drama.


Richards, I. A. (1893–1979). British literary theorist and linguist whose ideas had a great influence on American new criticism. Author of *Practical Criticism*.

Rousseau, Jean Jacques (1712–1778). French philosopher and man of letters, an innovator in the political, ethical, and educational spheres. Arguably the true father of the modern world, Rousseau’s autobiography (*Confessions*) may be seen as the founding document of Romanticism.

Saussure, Ferdinand de (1857–1913). Swiss linguist whose pioneer work, *Course on General Linguistics*, is the founding text of structuralism.

Schiller, Friedrich (1759–1805). German poet, dramatist, and theorist whose *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* and *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry* have had a lasting influence on the history of literary criticism.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792–1822). British Romantic poet whose “Defense of Poetry” is not only a key Romantic text but synthesizes nearly all the elements of literary theory from Plato to Coleridge.

Sidney, Sir Philip (1554–1585). British poet and courtier; the very embodiment of the Elizabethan Age. His “Apology for Poetry” is one of the great defenses of both the divine power and social utility of poetry.


Wordsworth, William (1770–1850). British Romantic poet who co-authored *Lyrical Ballads* with his friend, Samuel Taylor Coleridge; his revolutionary “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” helped to hasten the demise of neoclassical tastes and to usher in a new slate of Romantic theories, methods, and concerns.
From Plato to Post-modernism: Understanding the Essence of Literature and the Role of the Author
Part II
Professor Louis Markos
Louis Markos, Ph.D.
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Louis Markos received his B.A. in English and History from Colgate University (Hamilton, NY) and his M.A. and Ph.D. in English from the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI). While at the University of Michigan, he specialized in British Romantic Poetry (his dissertation was on Wordsworth), Literary Theory, and the Classics. At Houston Baptist University (where he has taught since 1991), he offers courses in all three of these areas, as well as in Victorian Poetry and Prose, Seventeenth-Century Poetry and Prose, Mythology, Epic, and Film.

He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and has won teaching awards at both the University of Michigan and Houston Baptist University. In 1994, he was selected to attend an NEH Summer Institute on Virgil’s *Aeneid*. In addition to presenting several papers at scholarly conferences, Dr. Markos has become a popular speaker in Houston, Texas, where he has presented five lectures at the Museum of Printing History Lyceum (three on film, two on ancient Greece), a three-lecture series on film at the Houston Public Library, a class on film for Leisure Learning Unlimited, a class on the *Odyssey* for a retirement center, and a lecture on Homer and the Oral Tradition for a seniors group. His audiences for all these lectures and classes have been identical in their make-up to the typical student/client of the Teaching Company. Although a devoted professor who works closely with his students, Dr. Markos is also dedicated to the concept of the professor as public educator. He firmly believes that knowledge must not be walled up in the academy, but must be freely and enthusiastically disseminated to all those “who have ears to hear.” Needless to say, he is overjoyed to be fashioning this series for the Teaching Company.

Dr. Markos lives in Houston, Texas, with his wife, Donna, his son, Alex, and his daughter, Stacey.
Bibliographical Note

I would like to take a moment here to suggest strongly that all students of this series purchase the textbook *Critical Theory Since Plato*, revised edition, by Hazard Adams (HBJ, 1992). This excellent collection of literary essays contains nearly all the works that I will be discussing in this series. Although the works I will be discussing do appear in numerous anthologies, Adams’s collection is the only one I know of that is comprehensive enough in its depth and breadth to include them all.

At the end of each lecture outline, under the heading “essential reading,” I will begin by giving the author and title of the main essay (or essays) analyzed in that lecture. If the words “in Adams,” appear directly after the title, that indicates that that essay is anthologized in *Critical Theory Since Plato*. In some cases, I will follow this citation with an alternate source for this essay, especially if that essay is part of a larger work that I think it would be helpful to consult. (This, for example, is the case in Lecture Two: the lecture primarily concerns itself with Book X of the *Republic*, which is anthologized in Adams; however, since many readers will want to consult the *Republic* in its entirety, I have included a citation to that effect.) Full bibliographical information will, as usual, be given in the Bibliography at the back of Part II.

Let me also warn the student now that the Bibliography will contain somewhat fewer secondary sources than is typical for the Teaching Company. There is a reason for this. I want to encourage students to immerse themselves in the primary material, in the theoretical essays themselves. Indeed, most students who have the courage to do so will often find that the primary material is actually clearer and more forceful than the secondary material that is supposed to explain and elucidate it. Don’t be afraid to read the theorists directly! If you give this series your full attention and thought, you will be equipped with the requisite tools and background to enter yourself into the ongoing dialogue of literary theory. That is my goal as a teacher; to usher you into that wonderful dialogue and then leave you in the capable hands of Aristotle and Sidney and Shelley and Eliot to add your own unique insights to theirs.

Finally, you may also notice that the Bibliography is somewhat sparse in recent scholarship. There is a reason for this too. With each passing decade, literary theory becomes more and more esoteric, more and more impenetrable. The critics who write the scholarly essays have stopped speaking to the general public and are writing only for their fellow academics. (Indeed, most Ph.D.’s today find themselves unable to pierce through the jargon and fractured syntax of modern theory and those who critique it.) I have tried to confine the Bibliography to works that are written in relatively lucid, jargon-free prose and have focused on enduring classics rather than scholarly fads. However, though my Bibliography avoids this “bitter fruit” of modern academia, I will, in the course of my lectures, try to give the student a sense of what is going on in the academy: what the “squabbles” are and what the status of poetry is at the moment. In addition, in the Glossary (see Part I), I engage quite fully the modernist and postmodernist critique of traditional literary theory. Students desiring a fuller exposure to the modern/postmodern mindset are encouraged to study the Glossary closely.

Once again, I issue my challenge: go to the primary sources! If you purchase only *Critical Theory Since Plato* and challenge yourself to read one essay each week for the next year (guided, where relevant, by the lectures in this series), you will have gotten a richer, more vivid, more lasting education than you would by reading a shelf-full of books about theory. May God speed you on your voyage as you enter, to quote Machiavelli, “into the ancient courts of ancient men.”
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From Plato to Post-modernism:
Understanding the Essence of Literature
and the Role of the Author
Part II

Scope:

The latter half of our century has seen a veritable explosion of critical theories. It is imperative for any modern thinker who wishes to understand fully the issues debated in the academy (particularly those surrounding the nature and status of the Great Books of Western Civilization) to be at least conversant both with the concept of critical theory and the terminology employed by various schools of literary theory. In this series of twenty-four lectures, we will study the major critical writings since Plato so as to gain an understanding of the different theoretical structures, schools, and methodologies that have influenced our understanding and appreciation of literature. We shall seek to understand both the presuppositions upon which each theoretical system is founded and the special terminology associated with each system. If we are successful in these endeavors, we will, in the end, not only understand theory better but will become conscious of our own theoretical presuppositions, of the “baggage” (intellectual, political, ethical, etc.) that we bring with us to our readings of literature.

Rather than attempt an exhaustive survey of literary theory, this course will place three restrictions on itself: (1) it will confine itself to critical appraisals of poetry; (2) it will focus on three theoretical periods/epochs (classical and neoclassical, Romantic, and twentieth century), each of which will be further subdivided into three discrete four-lecture series (classical theory/neoclassical theory, philosophical roots of Romanticism/British Romanticism, objective criticism/modern and postmodern theory), (3) it will, within these epochs, confine itself to the major critical texts by the major theorists (the milestones, if you will, of the genre). In nearly all the lectures, we shall focus on one such milestone and will offer a close reading of the work that locates its place in the history of theory while affording it its own integrity as a unique, often idiosyncratic work of criticism. As we explore together each work, we shall pay particular attention to (1) the writer’s vision of the nature and status of both poet and poem, (2) the unique contributions that the work has made to the history of literary theory and to how readers interpret the poems they read, and (3) the meanings (sometimes esoteric) of the key critical terms used. Below is a synopsis of the six four-lecture units that make up the series.

Lectures One through Four (Classical Theory) will take up the debate between Plato and Aristotle over the central theoretical concept of mimesis (or imitation). We shall learn that while Plato saw poetry as a mere copy of a copy (a shadowy, insubstantial thing twice removed from the reality of the Forms), Aristotle saw the mimetic process as one that could perfect and unify what in nature was haphazard and fragmented. We shall ask ourselves why Plato kicked the poets out of his ideal republic and then attempt to refute his reasons with a series of arguments as to why Plato should in fact be considered one of the fathers of literary theory. In our discussion of Aristotle’s Poetics, we shall examine closely his concept of the perfect tragic plot, character, and pleasure and shall define the catalogue of critical terminology that he bequeathed to the history of theory.

Lectures Five through Eight (Neoclassical Theory) will offer close readings of Horace’s “Art of Poetry,” Longinus’ “On the Sublime,” and Sidney’s “An Apology for Poetry.” We shall explore how each one of these major critics both defended the power and truth of poetry and laid down a practical series of rules and regulations to help guide the aspiring poet to achieve literary greatness. In these works we shall witness the age-old debate between genius and art and shall note the high premium that neoclassical critics put upon poetry’s ability to teach and to please. The unit will conclude with a look at the critical views of John Dryden and Alexander Pope, two of England’s greatest classical poets. In all four of these lectures, we shall concentrate particularly on the neoclassical concept of decorum, of what is right and proper, and on the moral and ethical responsibilities of the poet.

In Lectures Nine through Twelve (Philosophical Roots of Romanticism) we will take a sudden turn into the world of German philosophy and shall take up the difficult but rewarding theories of Kant, Schiller, and Hegel. We shall consider in particular the philosophical school of epistemology (the formal study of how we know and perceive our world). We shall also forge a link between a philosophy that tends to interiorize truth and a critical theory that posits that aesthetic beauty is a quality that resides not in the poetic object itself but in the subjective experience of the human mind that perceives and reflects upon that object. In Kant’s Critique of Judgment we shall look closely at his paradoxical notion of critical judgment as a subjective universal: an experience that, though wholly unique to each
individual (it occurs within his own subjective mind), can yet be generalized into an aesthetic concept that has universal validity. In Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, we shall learn how a theory of art can be expanded into a theory of education and how the study of poetry can help transform us into fuller, richer people. Finally, in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Fine Art*, we shall follow the Idea as it journeys through what Hegel terms symbolic, classical, and romantic art in search of a perfect incarnation. Before moving into the complex theories of Kant, Schiller, and Hegel, the unit will begin with a general overview of the tenets of epistemology and with a look at a British critic, Edmund Burke, who set the tone for much of German criticism in his seminal work *An Inquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Here we shall explore in detail the mental faculties of taste and imagination and discuss the visceral impact that sublime and beautiful objects have on our psyches. For most students, this unit will be the most difficult of the series; however, I promise that patient study of this material will yield great intellectual rewards.

With Lectures Thirteen through Sixteen (British Romanticism) we shall draw our feet back to the ground as we shift our focus to the great poets of the British Romantic Age: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. We shall study closely their living and vibrant theories, all of which were informed and vitalized by their own poetic experimentation. First we will consider Wordsworth and Coleridge’s great poetic experiment, *Lyrical Ballads*, and how the two poets each set themselves the task of remaking poetry. We shall explore their shared belief that poetry has the ability to defamiliarize us, to rip away, that is, the veil of familiarity and empower us to view the world through the fresh eyes of youthful wonder. Our texts will be Wordsworth’s revolutionary, epoch-making “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” and Coleridge’s critical and philosophical autobiography, *Biographia Literaria*. In our study of these two major works, we shall consider such key Romantic themes as the nature of inspiration and imagination, the sensibilities of the poet, the language of poetry, and the concept of the poem as an organic whole. We shall study as well Shelley’s great synthetic essay, “A Defense of Poetry,” and several of Keats’s letters. From Shelley we shall learn of the exalted nature and function of the poet; from Keats we shall learn the poetic quality that made Shakespeare great: negative capability. And we shall learn, above all, how, for all the Romantic poets, the questions “What is a poet?” and “What is a poem?” are essentially the same.

Lectures Seventeen through Twenty (Objective Criticism) will begin with a look at a seminal essay by the great Victorian sage, Matthew Arnold: “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time.” Beginning with this essay, we shall chart a new direction that criticism begins to take in the first half of the twentieth century, a new focus on the nature of culture and tradition and a new assessment of the status of the poem. After a quick survey of T. S. Eliot’s brief but influential essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” we shall take up the unique theories and powerful legacy of the American school of new criticism, particularly its central concept of the poem as a self-contained, self-referential artifact. Through a close look at various essays by I. A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, and W. K. Wimsatt, we shall explore the new critical belief that poetry speaks its own special language and exists within its own special microcosm and that it should, therefore, be studied as a thing in itself apart from any considerations of aural intent or audience response. We shall further discuss a battery of new tools and methods that the new critics taught us to use when explicating poetry. The unit will conclude with a look at the archetypal criticism of Northrop Frye, a theoretical maverick who, in his masterwork, *Anatomy of Criticism*, erected a vast mythic structure for understanding and interpreting the complex legacy of European culture.

Finally, in Lectures Twenty-One through Twenty-Four (Modern and Post-modern Theory), we shall turn our attention to the most recent developments in literary theory. After a look at the four great thinkers who established the philosophical foundations for modernism (Freud, Darwin, Marx, and Nietzsche), we shall survey the many variations of the modern school of structuralism: from the linguistics of Saussure to the poetic theory of Barthes to the historical analysis of Foucault. Having established in some detail the key concepts of modernism, we will then move on to contrast modernism with post-modernism. Our focus here will be the deconstructive theories of Derrida and his “pupil,” Paul De Man, as well as the post-modern leanings of the schools of new historicism, reader response, and feminism. One of the primary goals of this unit will be to define and explicate the often esoteric terminology associated with modern and post-modern theory. As with unit three (Lectures Nine through Twelve), this unit should prove quite challenging to most readers; however, as before, patient study will yield rich rewards.
Lecture Thirteen

Wordsworth, Coleridge, and British Romanticism

Scope: With Lecture Thirteen, we move into a new unit—British Romanticism. After a brief introduction to the period that will contrast the Romantics with the century that preceded them, we shall move on to analyze the great poetic/theoretical experiment that most consider the ur-text of British Romanticism: *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). We shall explore both the unique plan of *Lyrical Ballads* and the implications of that plan for literary theory. In addressing the plan of the work, we shall compare and contrast Wordsworth’s task to present natural, everyday objects in a manner almost supernatural with Coleridge’s task to portray supernatural events and characters in such a way as to render them almost natural. As for the implications of this plan, we shall discuss how *Lyrical Ballads* effects a shift in earlier views of mimesis, epistemology, and decorum. Finally, we shall define two key Romantic phrases: defamiliarization and the willing suspension of disbelief.

Outline

I. In this unit, we shall consider the contributions of the British Romantic poets.

A. Our texts will be Wordsworth’s “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads,*” Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria,* Shelley’s *Defense of Poetry,* and Keats’s letters.

1. After an initial lecture on *Lyrical Ballads,* we shall devote one lecture each to Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley.

2. Rather than devote an entire lecture to Keats, we shall consider his theories in relation to those of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley.

B. Like Pope and Dryden, all four of these theorists were poets before they were critics, and their theory is a reflection of their own poetic technique.

1. The Romantics, however, treated the poet (rather than nature or the rules of decorum) as the source and touchstone of art.

2. The Romantics also fashioned a new social role for the poet.

C. They altered the epistemological theories of the Germans (Lectures Ten to Twelve).

1. Whereas the Germans were still pragmatic (interested in the effect of poetry on the mind of the audience), the British Romantics were more expressive (interested in the link between poetry and the poet).

2. Whereas the theorists of the last unit betray an eighteenth-century (or Enlightenment) orientation, the Romantics defined themselves in opposition to the Age of Reason.

3. Though still interested in mental faculties (epistemology), they replaced the eighteenth-century emphasis on analysis with a new focus on synthesis.

4. They also privileged the imagination over reason and judgment.

D. There are three competing events for the cause or origin of Romanticism:

1. The publication of Rousseau’s *Confessions,* Part I, in 1781, with its championing of the individual and its radical notion that the personal life and ideas of a single individual are matters worthy of great art.

2. The storming of the Bastille in 1789, which not only offered the hope of both internal and external freedom, but promised (more radically) that internal dreams could affect and even alter the external world.

3. The publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 (and Wordsworth’s “Preface,” added to the second edition of 1800), that championed new subjects for poetry and a new approach to those subjects.

II. Wordsworth and Coleridge plan together a new kind of poetic volume.

A. The story of this unique partnership, one of the most fruitful literary friendships of all time, is told, partially, in Wordsworth’s “Preface” and more fully in Chapter 14 of Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria.*

1. In 1797 Wordsworth and Coleridge, neighbors at the time, spent long days discussing the nature of poetry and the powers of the imagination.

2. Out of these conversations, they conceived the idea of composing a series of poems of two distinct but complementary kinds.
B. The former kind would select its objects from nature, from the common, mundane, everyday world of the countryside and its inhabitants.
1. It would, in short, write of things that are so familiar that we often overlook them, things whose very commonness renders them invisible.
2. However, rather than merely copy or record these things in a straight mimetic fashion, the poet would throw over them an imaginative coloring that would allow his readers to see them afresh.
3. By lending these objects a “charm of novelty,” the poet would evoke a sense of child-like wonder in his reader, a feeling more often associated with the supernatural than with the natural.
4. This process, by which the “veil of familiarity” is suddenly, mystically ripped away from everyday objects is known as defamiliarization.
5. Most men, says Coleridge (paraphrasing Isaiah 6), have eyes but do not see; defamiliarization opens our eyes to the wonders around us.
6. Wordsworth was responsible for this portion of Lyrical Ballads, and he composed a series of poems centered around such humble, rustic characters as Simon Lee, Goody Blake, and the Idiot Boy.
7. However, despite their commonness, Wordsworth’s poems infuse them with dignity, power, and mystery.

C. The latter kind of poetry would select its objects from the realm of the supernatural.
1. Coleridge took on this task and wrote the “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” a poem richly suffused with supernatural characters and events.
2. However, just as Wordsworth presents his natural objects in such a way as to stimulate an almost supernatural response, so Coleridge presents his supernatural world in such a way as to render it almost natural.
3. Coleridge accomplishes this poetic feat by uncovering (behind the supernatural veil of his tale) dramatic and emotional truths.
4. Our recognition of the psychological truth of the Mariner’s journey compels us to give to the poem our “willing suspension of disbelief.”
5. This famous Coleridgean phrase signifies our ability to temporarily suspend the claims of reason and logic and to enter, through the power of the sympathetic imagination, into the life and heart of a poem.
6. To inspire in its readers this moment of “poetic faith,” the poem must invite them into a higher realm of illusion rather than merely delude them with fanciful images and events (to cite a contemporary cinematographic example: Star Wars is illusion; Batman is delusion).

III. Implications of Lyrical Ballads for the history of literary theory.
A. Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s plan calls for a new kind of mimesis that rather than simply imitate or even perfect its object, transforms it into something “rich and strange.”
1. That is to say, nature (or “supernature”) is merely the occasion for the poem; the poetic act itself (the transformation) is the real point. It is about the subject, not the object.
2. It is not the rules of decorum but the imaginative vision of the poet that determines the shape and end of the poem.
B. More radically, the plan of Lyrical Ballads carries out a supreme form of epistemology in which objects (things) take their ultimate nature not from what they are, but from how they are perceived by the poet.
1. In this, Wordsworth and Coleridge were certainly influenced by William Blake’s masterpiece: The Songs of Innocence and Experience (1789, 1794).
2. In this work, Blake demonstrates how the same images and events take on a different coloring, form, and reality when viewed through the eyes of innocence and experience.
3. The subtitle of his work (“shewing the two contrary states of the human soul”) captures perfectly the radical Romantic belief that things are as they are perceived and that we half create the world around us. The pair of poems, both titled “The Chimneysweeper,” demonstrates this.
4. This concept (which teeters dangerously on the abyss of solipsism) lies behind the Romantic faith that (to quote Blake) “if the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is: infinite.”
5. This new, more radical epistemology places the poet and his perceptions at the center of literary theory; poetry is now to be regarded as self-expression, as a journal of the unique perceptions of an individual.
C. *Lyrical Ballads* shifted old eighteenth-century notions of decorum that declared certain subjects unfit for serious poetry.

1. The rustics treated by Wordsworth would have been subjects for comedy in the eighteenth century; Wordsworth ennobles them to tragic heights.

2. *Lyrical Ballads* mixes the realms of the real and the ideal. Indeed, it sees the ideal in the real, the supernatural in the natural (and vice versa).

3. Not only does *Lyrical Ballads* often take children as its subject, but it also privileges their naive sense of wonder, their freshness, and innocence over the refined urbanity and studied wit of the eighteenth century.

**Essential Reading:**
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria,* Chapter 14, in Adams.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads.*

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Think of the first time you saw Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers.* Did it spark in you a moment of defamiliarization; i.e., did it cause you to “re-see” sunflowers, as if for the first time? Have you ever read a poem that provoked a similar response?

2. Most people today take it for granted that poetry is first and foremost a form of self-expression. Do you also take this for granted? Should you?
Lecture Fourteen
Mr. Wordsworth’s “Preface”

Scope: Lecture Fourteen will be devoted to a close analysis of Wordsworth’s “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” (1800). We shall explore how Wordsworth, in his “Preface,” radically redefines both the nature of poetry and the poet and the function of poetry and the poet in society. We shall focus especially on such key Wordsworthian formulations as poetry as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” the poet as a “man speaking to men,” and the role of poetry as an antidote to society’s “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation.” We shall conclude with a brief look at Keats’s famous distinction between negative capability and the egotistical sublime.

Outline

I. In his “Preface to Lyrical Ballads,” Wordsworth redefines the nature and status of poetry along expressive lines.
   A. Rather than treat poetry as an imitation of an action (mimetic) or an object fashioned to teach and please a specific audience (pragmatic), he sees it as a personal reflection of the poet’s interactions with himself and his world.
      1. Of course, this is not to say that Wordsworth is unconcerned with imitating or teaching or pleasing (he is concerned with all three), but that these theoretical concerns flow directly out of his view of the poet.
      2. As we saw in Lecture Thirteen, it is not the rules of decorum but the visionary imagination of the poet that becomes the source and end of poetry.
      3. In a famous phrase, Wordsworth defines poetry as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”; i.e., as an externalization of the internal emotions, moods, and perceptions of the poet.
      4. Indeed, Wordsworth’s nature poetry is less a reflection on nature than on the feelings and ideas excited in the poet as he contemplates nature.
      5. Even in his more narrative poems, Wordsworth asserts that it is the feeling that gives importance to the action, and not vice versa. This turns Aristotle on his head.
   B. Nevertheless, there is a mimetic element to Wordsworth’s theory.
      1. Wordsworth often wrote on rustic subjects, not so much because the country made him “feel good,” but because in such a setting, he felt men were more in touch with elementary feelings and durable truths.
      2. It was these essential passions, this emphatic, unmediated kind of life, that Wordsworth wanted to capture and embody in his poetry.
      3. For Wordsworth, as for all Romantics, the city and court life of the eighteenth-century poet was artificial, insincere, and out of touch with the wellsprings of our humanity. Wordsworth looked both to the freer life of the country and within his own heart for real passions and truths.
      4. He agreed with Aristotle (and Sidney) that poetry is more philosophical than history because it deals with both specific facts and general truths.
      5. For Wordsworth, that is, self-expression is not an end in itself, but a means to reach that which is most permanent and universal.
      6. This is Wordsworth’s poetic version of Kant’s subjective universality: in describing his own feelings, the poet describes the feelings of all men.
   C. Just as Wordsworth sought to imitate the life and passions of his native Lake District, so he sought to imitate the simple, direct language of the country.
      1. He rejected the (to him) phony poetic diction of the eighteenth century, with its purposely contorted syntax and its artificial “poeticisms.”
      2. Wordsworth adopted a more natural, less mannered, style that mimicked the syntax of good prose. He called it “the real language of men.”
      3. When, seventeen years later, Coleridge wrote his own extended “Preface” (i.e., Biographia Literaria), he would quibble with this phrase, saying that Wordsworth went too far in his praise of rustic manners of speech.
4. However, just as Wordsworth tempered his expressivism with a mimetic focus on Truth, so he tempered his celebration of “real language.”
5. The poet, he asserts, should not slavishly imitate the rustic, but through a process of selection, purge his natural speech of its grossness.

II. Just as he redefines poetry, so does Wordsworth offer a new vision of the poet.

A. The questions “What is a poem?” and “What is a poet?” are synonymous.
   1. Just as poetry is to be written in the “real language of men,” so is the poet to be a “man speaking to men.”
   2. That is to say, the poet is not to be viewed as a different creature: he is of the same kind as all other men, though he does differ in degree. There is no “coterie of poets,” as thought of in the eighteenth-century concept.

B. The poet possesses a more organic, comprehensive soul than do other men.
   1. He has more lively sensibilities and is more in touch with his feelings.
   2. He needs little stimulation to experience deep emotions; indeed, he is able to feel absent pleasures as though they were present.
   3. He rejoices in his own spirit of life and seeks to discover that joy in the world around him; if it is not there, he will create it.
   4. He has a rich store of memories he can tap for poetic inspiration and the ability to relive his memories and the emotions attached to them.
   5. He can sustain an inner mood of tranquility and pleasure.

C. The poet is a lover of his fellow man who honors “the native, naked dignity of man” by humanizing all things in accordance with the human heart.
   1. He is a friend of man who binds all things with passion and love.
   2. Whereas the scientist seeks truth as an abstract idea, the poet “rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion.”
   3. Indeed, prophesies Wordsworth, if science ever becomes so familiar an object that it takes on “flesh and blood,” it will be the poet (not the scientist) who will help transform and humanize it into a kindred spirit.

III. Finally, Wordsworth ascribes to the poet (and poetry) a new social function.

A. Wordsworth warns against the ill effects of urbanization/industrialization.
   1. The massing of men into cities and the repetitive drudgery of their jobs produces in them an ignoble “craving after extraordinary incident” and “a degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation.”
   2. Their senses have grown dull, and they need grosser, more violent, and more scandalous stimulants to satisfy their blunted psyches (yes, nineteenth-century London had its own versions of MTV and The Enquirer).
   3. Wordsworth calls this state of emotional and spiritual deadness, this loss of the ability to be moved by simple beauty and truth, “savage torpor.” (Compare this with Longinus.)

B. Wordsworth saw it as the role of poetry to restore this lost ability.
   1. Poetry, by enlarging and refining our sensibilities, has the power to re-humanize us, to bring us back into the human community.
   2. Poetry restores our child-like wonder, revives our ability to take joy and delight in the natural world and in the quiet beatings of our heart.
   3. Considering this new social function, poetry is more, not less, necessary in an industrialized age than in a rural, pastoral age.
   4. We might note here that, although Wordsworth rejects the refinement and wit of the eighteenth century, he promotes a new “aristocracy” of sensitivity.

C. Though poetry does instruct, it exists first and foremost to give pleasure.
   1. It is through pleasure that poetry draws us back into touch with our world, our fellow man, and ourselves.
   2. The pleasure that poetry gives is no mere entertainment and is not to be scorned; it is the very spirit through which we know and live.
IV. In his letters, John Keats makes a distinction between “negative capability” and the “egotistical sublime” that offers an interesting critique of Wordsworth.

A. Whereas poets who possess negative capability are able to enter the lives of other beings and see the world from their perspectives, those possessing the quality of the egotistical sublime always mediate their visions of the world through their own strong, dominant personalities.
   1. Shakespeare had the former; Milton and Wordsworth, the latter.
   2. To link Wordsworth to the egotistical sublime is not to say that he is arrogant or selfish, but that his personality is such that it both draws all things to itself and colors all things by its perceptions.
   3. Coleridge, too, noted (in Biographia Literaria) that, even in his poetic studies of others, Wordsworth is a spectator ab extra (“from the outside”). In other words, he (Wordsworth) had sympathy, but not empathy.

B. Keats’s desire to move out of himself is not so much a rejection of, as an antidote to, the Romantic belief that things are as they are perceived.
   1. The strong focus on the poet and his perceptions often leads to the Romantic “disease” of over-self-consciousness: the poet thinks so much that he loses his ability to feel and experience the world directly.
   2. Romantic theory (and practice) is a balancing act between the desire for an unmediated vision of nature and an equal and opposite desire to shape nature in accordance with the poet’s perceptions.
   3. The anti-Romantic turn we will encounter in Unit Five (Lectures Seventeen to Twenty) will reject this struggle in favor of a more impersonal, objective view of poetry that uses Keats’s negative capability as a springboard.

C. There is another vital aspect to negative capability, but we shall save this for the beginning of Lecture Sixteen.

Essential Reading:
John Keats, Selected Letters, in Adams.

Supplementary Reading:
Wordsworth and Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads.
Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History, Chapter 16.
W. J. Bate, Negative Capability.

Questions to Consider:
1. Have your own powers of discrimination, your ability to discern beauty and truth in the subtle aspects of life, been blunted by the media’s vulgar and endless assault on our senses and judgment? Read some Wordsworth and see if his poetry does not help to restore your sensitivity and humanity!
2. Wordsworth argues that the true poet is distinguished from other men by a more sensitive and comprehensive soul. Do you agree?
Lecture Fifteen
Coleridge: Transcendental Philosopher

Scope: In Lecture Fifteen, we shall turn our focus to Coleridge, the most learned of the Romantic poet-theorists who was responsible for adapting German philosophy to British Romantic theory. Through a close look at his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), we shall explore his vital distinction between the natural philosopher who moves from object/nature to subject/mind and the transcendental philosopher who reverses this motion. We shall study the need for these two philosophical journeys to meet in a fusion of object and subject, nature and mind, and shall link this central notion of fusion to four other influential Coleridgean conceptions: primary and secondary imagination, organic whole, symbol, and concrete universal.

Outline

I. Of all the British Romantic theorists, Coleridge was the most learned.
   A. He possessed a nearly photographic memory; a keen, discerning intellect; and a knowledge of Greek, Latin, Hebrew, German, French, and Italian.
      1. Coleridge was the man most responsible for importing and interpreting for his countrymen the intricacies of German philosophy and theory.
      2. He played this role for Britain in general and Wordsworth in particular.
   B. In his autobiography, *Biographia Literaria*, he deals most directly with German theory and expounds most fully his theoretical views on poetry.
      1. Indeed, his readings of such German philosophers as Kant, Schelling, and Fichte are so close, he has been (justifiably) accused of plagiarism.
      2. However, despite a series of “too-close” paraphrases, his work yet offers a unified, compelling, original synthesis of literary theory that renders concrete and accessible a host of German abstractions.

II. At the heart of his philosophical and theoretical views lies a vital distinction between two opposing but complementary types of thinkers: the natural philosopher and the transcendental philosopher.
   A. The natural philosopher begins his journey, his theoretical and aesthetic education, with nature (object) and moves upward toward mind (subject).
      1. His starting point is empirical, *a posteriori* observations; his method of reasoning is induction; and his goal is general laws and truths.
      2. His final end, writes Coleridge, is to effect “the perfect spiritualization of all the laws of nature into laws of intuition and intellect.”
      3. The natural philosopher who does not complete his journey risks falling into the dead-end of materialism: the belief that all that exists in the universe is matter and that the spiritual is an illusion.
      4. Wordsworth is a true natural philosopher, as demonstrated in *Lyrical Ballads*, where he transforms the natural into the supernatural, the mundane into the exotic, observation into mystical perception.
   B. The transcendental philosopher begins his journey with transcendent mind (subject) and moves downward toward nature (object).
      1. His starting point is intuitive *a priori* truth: i.e., abstract, non-empirical ideals that are logically groundless, but only because they are the ground of everything else. (cf., Kant’s “groundless ground”).
      2. To begin such a metaphysical journey, the transcendental philosopher must first purge his mind (à la Descartes) of all sensation by assuming what Coleridge calls “an absolute, scientific skepticism.”
      3. From this point, the transcendental philosopher moves downward (deductively) toward the sensual realities of the physical world.
      4. His ultimate goal is to incarnate the universal in the concrete.
      5. The transcendental philosopher who does not complete his journey risks falling into the abyss of idealism: the belief that the objective, material world has no separate existence, no integrity of its own, but is a projection of our subjective perceptions.
      6. Coleridge is a true transcendental philosopher, as demonstrated in his contribution to *Lyrical Ballads*: the treatment of supernatural events in such a way as to render them natural.
7. Whereas the natural philosopher is essentially Aristotelian, the transcendental philosopher is strongly Platonic.

C. If both philosophers successfully complete their journeys, they will meet in the middle at a metaphysical nexus point of the general and the specific.

1. Indeed, neither journey is complete until a fusion of subject and object, mind and nature, is achieved.

2. As a Romantic theorist, Coleridge saw the imagination as the faculty most qualified to effect this fusion (or marriage) of subject and object.

3. In fact, he coined his own word, “esemplastic” (Greek for “to shape into one”), to describe the imagination’s power to fuse opposites.

4. Whereas eighteenth-century theorists tended to use the words “imagination” and “fancy” interchangeably, Coleridge asserted that they were distinct powers.

5. Thus, while the fancy is a lesser, limited power that can only shift images around into new patterns, the imagination is freer, more vital. It can recombine ideas and images at will to create new, higher unities.

6. Only the imagination has both the perceptive power to see similitude lurking within dissimilitude, unity in the midst of multeity, and the synthetic power to fuse and reconcile opposites into one.

III. The ideal of the fusion of opposites that is so vital for both the transcendental and natural philosopher lies behind most of Coleridge’s literary theory.

A. It gives us the key to understanding Coleridge’s famous distinction between the primary and the secondary imagination.

1. Primary imagination occurs when our own individual (subjective) consciousness is passively inspired by the absolute self-consciousness of God (the Great I AM): an echo in the finite mind of the infinite.

2. Artists who make use of this creative power are essentially “divine ventriloquists,” poet-prophets who receive direct inspiration from above and respond passively with a song or a poem.

3. Though all Romantics yearn for this direct inspiration, Coleridge yet hails the secondary imagination as the true source of poetry.

4. Whereas the primary imagination is passive, the secondary is active: “it dissolves, dissipates, diffuses, in order to recreate.”

5. That is to say, it takes the raw material given it by inspiration, breaks it down, and then reshapes it into a new and vital form.

6. It is precisely this esemplastic power of the secondary imagination that enables it to create organic wholes, symbols, and concrete universals.

B. Working from the philosophical/aesthetic theories of Aristotle, Kant, and Schiller (and others), Coleridge fashioned an organic theory of poetry.

1. He viewed a poem as an almost-living organism in which the whole not only contains each part, but each part contains within itself the whole.

2. In the same way, the seed within the apple contains within itself the potential not only for another apple but for an entire grove of apple trees.

3. In fact, Coleridge’s definition of a poem includes the criterion that it give equal pleasure in the whole as it does in each part.

4. In an organic whole, there is a dynamic, incarnational relationship between form and content, as though the content of the poem had (like Hegel’s Idea) created its own form.

5. Ideas and images are fused and dissimilitude is resolved into similitude.

6. One way to test if a poem is organic is to ask if anything can be added to or taken away from it; if it can, the poet has obviously neither fully realized his purpose nor achieved a complete fusion of parts and whole.

7. Coleridge revolutionized the study of Shakespeare by demonstrating that his plays are not the uneven products of an inartistic genius but organic wholes in which each part functions within the whole.

C. Unlike many theorists before him, Coleridge privileged symbols over allegories, for he felt they came closer to the ideal of the organic whole.

1. In an allegory, an abstract notion (the inner struggle between good and evil) is merely translated into a picture language (the devil on one shoulder, the angel on the other).
2. There is no essential link between the idea and the picture: one simply stands in for the other, with the picture remaining merely that.
3. In a symbol, however, the abstract notion (the salvific blood of Christ) is seen in and through the physical symbol (the communion wine).
4. In the symbol, specific and general, temporal and eternal, concrete and universal meet and fuse in an almost mystical, incarnational way.
D. Coleridge, again echoing Aristotle and Kant, uses the phrase “concrete universal” to denote the highest forms of organic wholes and symbols.

1. To call a poem a concrete universal is to say that, within the microcosm of the poem, a universal idea has been fully realized in a concrete form (the book and movie *The English Patient* is an example of such a realization).
2. Just as Christ, via the esemplastic power of the Incarnation, became both fully Man and fully God, so the concrete universal effects a full fusion of an abstract, non-physical idea and a specific, physical image.
3. The mystical, reciprocal relationship that forms within such poems is timeless; it is as if the concrete image has been carried up into the realm of the idea even as the idea descends and dwells within the image.

**Essential Reading:**
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Selected Readings, in Adams.

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Are you more natural or transcendental in your own philosophical attempts to understand the universe? Do you prefer to start with facts or ideas?
2. Modern and postmodern theorists tend to deny Coleridge’s faith in the ability of poetry to achieve a full incarnational fusion of concrete and universal. Do you agree or disagree? Have you read poems in which this fusion occurs?
Scope: After a brief look at Keats’s notion of negative capability and the ways in which it advocates a more intuitive, mystical encounter with truth than does Coleridge’s more philosophical approach, we shall go on to analyze closely Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *A Defense of Poetry* (1821, published in 1840). We shall explore how Shelley provides us with the full and final word on Romantic theories of synthesis and inspiration and how he exalts the poet (and his imaginative powers) to new heights of glory. We shall conclude with an in-depth look at two of the unique and powerful arguments that Shelley presents in his defense of the moral and social usefulness of poetry.

Outline

I. Keats’s notion of negative capability offers a contrast to Coleridgean theory.
   A. The phrase appears briefly and enigmatically in a single letter of Keats.
   B. According to Keats, poets like Shakespeare who possess negative capability are “capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”
      1. They are able to rest in the midst of mysteries and paradoxes without needing to reach after fixed answers or resolutions.
      2. They are able, both philosophically and aesthetically, to suspend their powers of judgment and reason and receive passively.
      3. Indeed, asserts Keats in a related letter, such poets take such direct joy in the powers of the imagination that they receive “as much delight in conceiving an Iago [one of Shakespeare’s greatest villains] as an Imogen [one of his most virtuous heroines].”
   C. Coleridge, writes Keats, on the other hand, could not remain “content with half-knowledge”; he had to solve the mystery, resolve the paradox.
      1. Coleridge was not content merely to receive passively (to him that was slothful); he sought an active, shaping imagination.
      2. Unlike the heterodox Keats, who worshipped the spirit of great art, Coleridge (the only major Romantic who was an orthodox Christian) worshipped a God who was the embodiment of the concrete universal.
      3. Whereas Keats is almost postmodern in his refusal to judge or freeze truth, Coleridge offers a more traditional view of art as revelation. Willing suspension of disbelief (Coleridge) is something that the audience has; Keats refusal to judge or freeze truth is a trait the poet must have.
   D. Shelley combines the philosophical rigor of Coleridge with Keats’s spirit.

II. Shelley’s *Defense of Poetry* gathers together all the key Romantic theories.
   A. He treats fully the Romantic privileging of imagination over reason.
      1. In the Age of Reason, theorists celebrated analysis for its ability to study, to calculate, and to discern the differences between things.
      2. Shelley, as a Romantic, championed synthesis for its ability to shape and color, to perceive value, and to discover and even create similitude.
      3. In a wonderful inversion of Plato, Shelley asserts that reason (analysis) is to imagination (synthesis) as the shadow is to the substance.
      4. It is poetry that is most real, poetry that comes closest to the infinite; science (reason) is a passing, temporary thing with no integral unity.
      5. “Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.”
   B. Shelley describes in detail the nature and ramifications of Romantic inspiration.
      1. The true poet is like an aeolian harp: a small stringed instrument that produces “natural” music when the wind blows over its strings.
      2. In the same way, inspiration blows over the poet, causing him to create.
3. Though Shelley, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, does state that the poet modulates the wind of inspiration, he nevertheless presents the poet more as a passive recipient of imagination than as an active artisan.
4. Indeed, he asserts, no poet can say, “I will compose poetry”; only when the unpredictable spirit of inspiration falls upon him can he create.
5. This belief, however, causes much angst, for inspiration leaves as fast as it comes; the poet is like a “fading coal” that burns out even as it burns.
6. If only we could hold on to that burning fire, Shelley muses, we would be like gods, but alas, its departure is as mysterious as its arrival.

C. Still, while it lasts, inspiration transforms the poet into a poet-prophet.
1. Like all the Romantics, Shelley exalts the poet as a sort of divine conduit.
2. The poet transforms all that he perceives by bringing it into harmony with beauty and the good, with “the eternal, the infinite, and the one.”
3. He rips away the twin veils of mystery and familiarity to reveal Truth. Thus, Romantic poetry can be considered apocalyptic.
4. He does so in solitude, away from the city, yet he is not alone; for each poet contributes a stanza to the eternal poem that is still being written.
5. And, just as each poet-prophet is linked to this greater poem, so are all the poets of a given age linked to a single, “all-penetrating spirit.”
6. Indeed, in his own day, Shelley felt so strongly the influence of this unifying spirit he called it the “spirit of the age” (in German: zeitgeist).
7. Shelley saw himself and his fellow poets as trumpets of this spirit.

III. Although much of Shelley’s Defense is not wholly original (although beautifully put), he also incorporates into his Defense three unique concepts.

A. Shelley’s Defense is not (like that of Sidney) merely an abstract apology.
1. He wrote his “Defense” in direct response to Thomas Love Peacock’s “The Four Ages of Poetry” (1820), a satirical essay that argued that the growth and progress of society was slowly rendering poetry obsolete.
2. Shelley counters by arguing for the moral and social uses of poetry.
3. In doing so, of course, he answers Plato as well as Peacock.
B. “The great instrument of moral good,” writes Shelley, “is the imagination.”
1. Poetry, by awakening and enlarging the mind, both leaves us open and receptive to beauty and love and enables us to move out of ourselves.
2. It sensitizes us to the needs of others, allows us to put ourselves in their place (empathy) and see the world from their perspective (negative capability).
3. Shelley argues, passionately and sincerely, that he cannot conceive what the moral state of our world would be had Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton never lived; they are our true moral teachers.
4. It is poetry that impels us to rise above base and selfish desires, that inspires in us virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship.
C. Poetry is actually more useful and necessary in an age of progress.
1. At present, we have more political knowledge, more philosophical ideas, more scientific facts and figures than we know what to do with.
2. We have, asserts Shelley, bitten off more than we can chew.
3. Discrete facts and ideas are of no real use to us or to society until we can arrange and conceive those facts in terms of higher laws and ideals (the Internet is a good current example).
4. We need the creative faculty, the poetic imagination, to synthesize this sea of discrete facts into something tangible, knowable, human.
D. It is the poets who are the greatest creators and innovators of society.
1. Following Sidney’s lead, Shelley asserts that poets are the originators of language, the inventors of the arts, the architects of law and religion.
2. However, he goes beyond Sidney to ascribe to poets an almost godlike status: they are an influence that “is moved not, but moves.”
3. They are an apocalyptic force, ever purging and renewing our words, our thoughts, our perceptions, and our dreams.
4. They are, he concludes, “the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

Essential Reading:
John Keats, Selected Letters, in Adams.

Supplementary Reading:
W. J. Bate, *Negative Capability*.

Questions to Consider:
1. In our modern information age, we all have access, via the Internet, to vast oceans of facts, figures, and statistics. Have we bitten off more than we can chew? Do we need poetry to synthesize and humanize all this new information?
2. Have you ever experienced the Romantic angst at our inability to hold on to inspiration? If we *could* hold on to it, what would we be capable of?
Lecture Seventeen
The Function of Criticism:
Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot

Scope: With this lecture, we begin a new unit: objective criticism. We shall offer first an overview of the main theorists of this unit, focusing on how they shift the critical perspective from poet to poem, elevate the role and function of the critic, and create for poetry a separate, aesthetic space. We shall then analyze closely two seminal essays that laid the groundwork for objective theory: Matthew Arnold’s “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1864) and T. S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1917). We shall explore Arnold’s famous distinction between epochs of concentration and epochs of expansion and discuss how criticism can help move cultures from the former to the latter; we shall then discuss Eliot’s anti-Romantic call for a return to tradition and for a new de-personalized view of the poet. We shall conclude by defining a famous phrase found in Eliot’s “Hamlet and His Problems” (1919): objective correlative.

Outline

I. In this unit, we shall consider a theoretical shift from the poet (expressive theories) to the poem itself (objective theories).
   A. This shift begins in the critical essays of Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot.
      1. Though Arnold the poet was strongly Romantic, Arnold the critic, in the second half of his career, sought to replace the Romantic focus on feeling with a renewed focus on ideas.
      2. Arnold, as a Victorian sage who attempted to set aesthetic standards for his age, hearkens back to the systematic theories of Pope and Burke.
      3. Eliot, writing half a century later, continued the “de-romanticizing” of theory, arguing that poetry is essentially a de-personalizing process.
      4. In this lecture, we shall consider the theories of Arnold and Eliot both in their own rights and as precursors of objective theories.
   B. Then, in Lectures Eighteen and Nineteen, we shall turn our focus to the full flowering of objective theory in the twentieth-century American school of New Criticism.
      1. Through a close look at essays by I. A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom, W. K. Wimsatt, and Cleanth Brooks, we shall explore the New Critical belief that each poem is a self-contained, self-referential artifact.
      2. We shall discuss how the New Critics created a special aesthetic space for poetry that would preserve it from all external forces.
      3. We shall discuss as well the battery of new tools and methods that the New Critics taught us to use when explicating poetry.
   C. Finally, Lecture Twenty shall take up the archetypal theories of Northrop Frye.
      1. Though Frye, like the new critics, kept his eye on the internal structure of the poem, he delved even deeper to uncover vast mythic networks.
      2. In studying Frye’s theories, we shall view him not only in the context of objective theory but in the context of Christian typology and allegory.
   D. In all four lectures, we shall focus on how theorists since Arnold have increasingly emphasized the importance and centrality of criticism.

II. In his seminal essay, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” Arnold argues for the central role of the critic in fostering great literature.
   A. Arnold begins his essay by asserting that criticism is a positive, noble task.
      1. Though he agrees that the creative faculty is finally superior to the critical, he insists that criticism is a worthwhile endeavor.
      2. All people have the need to exercise “free creative activity”; indeed, the exercise of this power constitutes man’s greatest joy. (Arnold’s concept of “free creative activity” is strongly linked to Schiller’s play drive.)
3. Not all people exercise this power through the production of literature; if that were so, very few people would know joy.
4. For many, criticism functions as the main outlet of mental play.

B. Arnold distinguishes carefully between the creative and critical faculties.
   1. Whereas the creative faculty most fully expresses itself in the synthesis of existing ideas, it is the critical faculty that creates these ideas.
   2. Critics create new ideas through analysis and discovery, by seeing objects as they are (i.e., not as they are perceived by the creative poet).
   3. The critic is not to be disparaged, as he so often was by Romantics who privileged synthesis and subjective perception over objective analysis.

C. Arnold carries this distinction into a wider, aesthetic view of history by distinguishing between two epochs (or ages) in the “life cycle” of a culture.
   1. In epochs of expansion, a culture is rich with new and fresh ideas.
   2. During such epochs, poets are needed to harness this intellectual energy and convert it into great works of art.
   3. Such epochs are rare. Arnold identifies two: Periclean Athens (the age of Sophocles) and Elizabethan England (the age of Shakespeare).
   4. Oddly, Arnold (unlike Shelley) did not consider the Romantic Age (born of the French Revolution) to be an epoch of expansion.
   5. Rather, he considered his own age to be an epoch of concentration, an age in which ideas are stagnant and the free exchange of ideas is stifled.
   6. Just as poets are needed to harness the energy of epochs of expansion (embody the \textit{zeitgeist}), so critics are needed during epochs of concentration to help create and foster a free flow of ideas that will initiate a new epoch of expansion.
   7. For Arnold, great literature is the product of a creative fusion between a great poet (“the man”) and an epoch of expansion (“the moment”).
   8. It is not enough to be a gifted poet; without the fresh ideas available in such epochs, the poet will lack the necessary raw material for great art.
   9. The poet and the critic are thus interdependent—a notion that helped set off a steady increase in the role and status of the critic.

D. Arnold defines criticism as “a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.”
   1. Disinterested, as opposed to uninterested, signifies a critical approach that is removed, objective, and free from all political agendas.
   2. It constitutes a higher kind of curiosity, a “free play of mind,” that follows the flow of ideas wherever that flow may lead.
   3. Arnold felt that the critics of his day were too partisan; they engaged in only as much free play of mind as their political party platforms allowed (the Whigs and the Tories were the two major British parties of Arnold’s day).
   4. Likewise, the British had a negative view of curiosity, saw it as a quality of children that had no practical social value.
   5. For Arnold, criticism has a value that transcends pragmatism; indeed, it even transcends narrow national boundaries to interest itself in the culture and traditions of all Europe.
   6. Thus, in addition to propagating new ideas to inspire poets, the job of the critic includes identifying “the best that is known and thought.”
   7. By “the best,” Arnold refers to what is today known as the canon: the Great Books of the Western world (those by Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, etc.) that have traditionally formed the core of humanistic studies.
   8. Arnold firmly believed that such works were aesthetically superior and that they could be shown to be so by objective, disinterested criticism.
   9. In contrast, many critics today view the canon as a product of socio-political forces that determine what is acceptable and what is not.
III. Eliot, in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” develops Arnold’s canonical views while extending the anti-Romantic move away from subjective feeling. Bear in mind that we have moved forward in time about fifty years from Arnold and are now discussing twentieth-century criticism.

A. Eliot replaces the Romantic emphasis on spontaneity, originality, and novelty with a new focus on history, culture, and tradition.
1. Rather than break with the traditions of the past, great poets carry the past inside them as a living, timeless tradition that is ever contemporaneous.
2. They are conscious both of the pastness of the past and its presentness.
3. They realize that their own poetry only has full value when it is viewed within the context of all the poetry that has come before (the tradition).
4. Indeed they privilege “the mind of Europe” over their own individual minds, because their “historical sense” teaches them that, if they know more than the dead poets, it is only because the poets are what they know.

B. Eliot alters the expressivist belief that poetry is self-expression.
1. The poet is not the source of poetry but a site for the creative process.
2. He is a catalyst that facilitates the fusion of external emotions without himself being involved in the emotions or affected by the fusion.
3. Poetry, that is, is not the expression of a strong personality (as it was for the Romantics) but the “continual extinction of personality.”
4. It is an artistic process rather than a subjective perception: the poet is “a medium and not a personality” (compare Keats’s negative capability).
5. The key to that process is not the creation of new emotions, but a fresh fusion of these emotions with objects, experiences, and states of feeling.

C. This artistic fusion (Eliot calls it a concentration) is expressed in a famous phrase from the essay “Hamlet and His Problems”: “objective correlative.”
1. An objective correlative is an external object, situation, or chain of events that parallels (correlates to) an internal emotion.
2. Because emotions cannot be perceived by the senses and are even difficult to express in language, the poet uses these physical objects and situations to externalize and concretize a heretofore internal and abstract emotion.
3. The poet functions as the site of this fusion of external and internal.
4. In the *Iliad*, Homer uses several objective correlatives to capture and express externally the internal rage of Achilles. For example, Achilles’ war cry (Book 18) causes a dozen Trojan soldiers to fall on their swords in terror.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
Matthew Arnold, *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*.
W. J. Bate, *Criticism: The Major Texts*, Introductions to Arnold and Eliot.

Questions to Consider:
1. Are the Great Books still studied in school because they are “the best that has been known and thought” or because they reflect the reigning status quo?
2. I would argue that Dante is at once the most derivative (imitative) poet who ever lived and the most creative (original). Eliot would agree. Do you?
Lecture Eighteen
The Status of Poetry:
I. A. Richards and John Crowe Ransom

Scope: In this lecture we shall define the aesthetic agenda that the “New Critics” set for themselves. We shall discover how much of their criticism was developed in reaction to a rationalistic, positivistic view of society that threatened to render poetry useless and irrelevant. We will analyze first how I. A. Richards, in Practical Criticism (1929), crafted a distinction between emotional belief and intellectual belief that allowed him to create a separate sphere for poetry safe from the encroachments of science. We shall then explore how John Crowe Ransom, in “Criticism as Pure Speculation” (1941), sought to break down Richards’ simple dichotomy in favor of an ontological view of poetry that treated the poem as a concrete universal composed of both structure and texture, both a paraphrasable core and lively local detail.

Outline

I. In the next two lectures, we shall explore the theories of the New Critics.
A. Nearly all the New Critics hail from the American Deep South (except for I. A. Richards, who was British).
   1. They tend to be conservative and canonical in their approach to poetry.
   2. In this lecture, we shall focus on I. A. Richards and John Crowe Ransom; in the next, we shall take up W. K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks.
   3. Students may also wish to consult the work of R. K. Blackmur, Allen Tate, Yvor Winters, William Empson, and Monroe C. Beardsley.
B. Though best known for their skill at poetic explication (see next lecture), all the New Critics shared a vital aesthetic agenda and mission.
   1. They all felt (and feared) the growing corrosive influence of science—an influence that threatened to render poetry irrelevant.
   2. Positivism, the reigning “religion” of their day, held that rationalism, progress, and technology would usher in a new age of happiness.
   3. To aid in this social transformation, poetry would have to give way to science, values to facts, the private to the public, internal to external.
   4. Language too would have to become more concrete (less “slippery”): a one-to-one correspondence between the word (the signifier) and the object or idea that it signified would need to be erected. Denotation would thus replace connotation.
   5. Irony, metaphor, symbolism, paradox, ambiguity (the very life-blood of poetry) would be purged as ancient relics of the old, unenlightened days of religion, mystery, ritual, and superstition.
C. Though they might have responded to positivism by retreating back to Romantic subjectivity, the New Critics chose another (objective) way.
   1. They sought rather to erect an aesthetic wall around poetry that would preserve it as a complete, self-enclosed artifact that obeyed its own laws.
   2. They chose, that is, to take a formalist approach to literature: one that privileges form over content, for it discovers in the aesthetic form of a poem something that borders on the perfect and the transcendent.
   3. Over this timeless microcosm, the physical, historical forces of decay and change (not to mention the laws of science) could have no power.

II. I. A. Richards was one of the first critics to see the dangers of positivism for those devoted to composing, analyzing, and teaching poetry.
A. He was the first to fight it by creating a separate space for poetry.
   1. He well knew that the “truths” arrived at in poetry were too abstract, too private, too “emotional” to be taken seriously by an empirical, scientific age that had purged itself of “non-factual” truth claims.
   2. If poetry were to compete on the positivistic playing field of fact and reason, it would lose hands down.
3. Richards would have to forge a separate status for poetry that would allow it to exist alongside (rather
than in opposition to) science.
4. In *Science and Poetry* (1926), he coined the phrase “pseudostatements” to distinguish poetic
statements from those made by scientists.
5. By this phrase, he did not mean that poetry was false; to do so would be to accept the either-or,
fact/fiction dichotomies of positivism.
6. Rather, the claims and resolutions of poetry must not be judged by the same criteria (or from the same
perspective) as those of science.

B. In *Practical Criticism*, Richards refined his terminology, replacing the cruder notion of pseudostatements
with a more nuanced distinction between intellectual belief (science) and emotional belief (poetry).
1. Intellectual belief occurs in a rational context of logical consistency; it seeks as its end the fusion of all
ideas into a perfect, ordered system.
2. Emotional belief occurs in an emotional context of sentiments and feelings; its end is to so order ideas
around our emotional needs and desires as to pave the way for their fulfillment.
3. Emotional belief is not verified by an external standard of systematic coherence but by its success at
meeting our emotional needs and desires.
4. Though emotional belief can sometimes accompany intellectual belief, it *can* (and in much great
poetry does) exist by itself.
5. The proof of this is that we need not share Dante’s medieval Catholic Christianity, nor his pre-
Copernican view of the universe, to accept the emotional, psychological, and aesthetic truth of his
*Divine Comedy*.
6. Coleridge’s notion of the “willing suspension of disbelief” is thus true only in part; in reality there is
no need for suspension because neither (intellectual) belief nor unbelief are a factor in the reading of
poetry.

C. As an early New Critic, Richards never quite broke from the positivistic tendency to judge a thing by its
usefulness: to treat it as a means to an end.
1. Later New Critics would favor Kant’s belief that pure beauty constitutes a thing in itself and that any
focus on ends halts that free play of the mind that is central to the aesthetic experience.
2. For John Crowe Ransom, this need for free play would take on both aesthetic (ontological) and
political connotations.

III. In *Criticism as Pure Speculation*, Ransom rejects psychological and moral approaches to literature in favor of a
more objective, ontological approach.

A. He criticizes psychological critics (like Richards) for making too sharp a distinction between feeling-
centered poetry and cold, unemotional science.
1. Such dichotomies only feed the positivistic critique of poetry as useless.
2. A poem is not just an expression of emotion; it has a “paraphrasable core” that is as logical and
coherent as any scientific statement.
3. What distinguishes it as a poem is that the core is situated in a “context of lively local details” that,
scientifically speaking, is irrelevant.

B. Likewise, Ransom criticizes moral, Platonic-minded critics who would judge a poem by its moral or
philosophical or political message.
1. Such critics *accept* the poem’s paraphrasable core, but then treat that core (along with its “message”)
as if it were equivalent to the poem.
2. Echoing Arnold’s distinction between uninterested and disinterested, Ransom asserts that poetry is not
unethical but postethical.

C. Ransom proposes instead an objective, ontological, Kantian view of poetry (even though Kant was an
epistemological, not ontological, philosopher).
1. The poem must be treated ontologically as a free and autonomous end in itself.
2. The critic must accept the poem as it is with both its abstract (universal) message and its particular
(concrete) details intact.
3. Employing the rather homely metaphor of a house, Ransom defines a poem as “a logical structure
having a local texture”: i.e., a functional frame that has been augmented by decorative paint,
wallpaper, etc.
4. Critics who focus on structure to the exclusion of texture have not really understood the poem, because they have ignored its (ontological) essence.
5. Ransom argues that Hegelian/Platonic critics who claim to champion poetry as a concrete universal are only really interested in universals.
6. In contrast, Ransom compares poems to cream-filled pastries and critics to epicures who not only relish the pastry shell but each drop of cream.
7. The true critic, that is, is a hedonist who dines lavishly on a feast of poetry. This is a tasty, if radical, view of criticism that is captured in the title of Ransom’s best-known critical work: *The World’s Body* (1938).

D. Ransom’s essay, however, written in 1941, has a more serious side as well.
1. While the world around him was being enslaved by totalitarian regimes, Ransom asserted boldly that a poem is a democratic state.
2. Unlike Fascist/Marxist states, in which citizens are assigned specific functions from which they cannot deviate, democratic states allow their citizens to define and express themselves freely.
3. In the same way, whereas (positivistic) prose insists that each word have a fixed meaning and function (one-to-one correspondence), poetry allows each of its concrete details (texture) to function freely and uniquely.
4. As a true critic respects the autonomy of the poem’s texture, he will never try to subject that texture to a strict, regimented core of meaning.

**Essential Reading:**
John Crowe Ransom, “Criticism as Pure Speculation,” in Adams.

**Supplementary Reading:**
I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Can you enjoy and even learn from a poem written by a poet whose religious or political views you do not share? How exactly is that possible?
2. Do you read poetry only for how it makes you feel or for what it can teach you, or do you take pleasure in the physical texture of the poem? When you recall a poem to mind, do you only remember its moral or do you remember its specific images?
Lecture Nineteen
Heresies and Fallacies:
W. K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks

Scope: In this lecture, we shall consider how W. K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, two of the most radical New Critics, took the objective, ontological theories of Richards and Ransom and carried them to an even higher level. First, we shall explore how Wimsatt (along with Monroe C. Beardsley), in “The Intentional Fallacy” (1946) and “The Affective Fallacy” (1949), rejected both the Romantic, expressive notion that a poem is the expression of a poet and the neoclassical, pragmatic notion that a poem should be judged by its effect on the reader. Wimsatt favored a more classical, mimetic view that treats the poetic object as a self-contained thing in itself that has its own existence and meaning apart from poet and reader. Next, we shall explore how Brooks, in “The Heresy of Paraphrase” (1947) and “Irony as a Principle of Structure” (1949), rejects Ransom’s notion of the “paraphrasable core” in favor of a view of the poem as a “pattern of resolved stresses.” Finally, we shall consider the methods the New Critics taught us for explicating poetry and shall argue that New Criticism is not elitist and private, but rather, democratic and public.

Outline

I. W. K. Wimsatt, a later, more radical New Critic than Ransom, carries Ransom’s critique of psychological and moral criticism even farther.
   A. In two essays that he co-wrote with Monroe C. Beardsley (“The Intentional Fallacy,” “The Affective Fallacy”), Wimsatt argues that neither authorial intention nor the reader’s response is relevant to the analysis of a poem.
      1. Critics guilty of the former fallacy take as their standard of analysis the psychological causes of the poem, while those guilty of the latter would judge a poem by its psychological effects.
      2. In either case, the critical enterprise drifts into relativism, because external standards not inherent to the poem are arbitrarily applied.
      3. When this external focus prevails, the poem itself, as a self-contained artifact with its own aesthetic integrity and ontological existence, tends to disappear.
      4. After the biographical critic determines what the author was trying to do and the psychological critic measures the quality of audience response, we are still left with a poetic object that must be analyzed.
      5. Essentially, Wimsatt rejects both the Romantic, expressive view of poetry as an extension of the poet and the neoclassical, pragmatic view of poetry as something that either teaches or pleases (Horace, Pope) or that carries its reader away on a wave of sublimity (Longinus, Burke).
      6. Likewise, Wimsatt rejects any kind of epistemological criticism that would locate aesthetic beauty in our mental response to the poetic object.
      7. Instead, he returns to the classical, mimetic, ontological theories of Aristotle, but from a radically word-centered, objective orientation.
      8. That is to say, the poem is to be cut off not just from the poet and the reader, but from the universe as well; the poem is its own universe—a specifically linguistic construct, an independent empire of words.
   B. Though Wimsatt’s single-minded focus on the poem may at first seem obscure, esoteric, and even elitist, it is actually the opposite.
      1. Wimsatt argues that once a poem is published it no longer belongs to the poet or even to the literary critics; it belongs to the public.
      2. Ironically, it is a poem’s external meanings (the kind extracted from the personal letters of the poet) that are most private and inaccessible.
      3. The poem’s internal structure, on the other hand, is public, open to all. Thus, the New Critics mount what might be likened to a “Protestant Reformation” of criticism, removing intermediaries between the poem and the reader (public).
      4. Though most are unfamiliar with the private musings of poets, we all live and breathe in the medium of words; if a poem uses an archaic word we do not know, we need simply consult the Oxford English Dictionary.
5. Indeed, the only kind of external research Wimsatt allows is a study of the special connotations that certain words held for certain poets.

6. Because such connotations are directly relevant to the internal structure of the poem, they do not fall under the aegis of the “intentional fallacy.”

II. Cleanth Brooks, the best known and most radical of the New Critics, develops even further the ontological, objective, linguistic focus of Wimsatt.

A. In “The Heresy of Paraphrase,” he even takes John Crowe Ransom (his former teacher) to task for suggesting that a poem contains a distinct “paraphrasable core.”
   1. For Brooks, there is no “plot summary,” no separate logical statement, that can be extracted from the poem and viewed apart from its texture.
   2. Indeed, the poem is its union of structure and texture (or, rather, the tension that exists between them); it has no simple, reductive meaning.
   3. In fact, Brooks often uses the term “structure” in a higher sense than Ransom to refer to a poem’s “total pattern,” its full complex of meanings.
   4. Brooks defines the poem as a “pattern of resolved stresses.” Within the microcosm of the poem, opposing forces are balanced and harmonized.
   5. However, this balancing is not a negative or reductive one that eliminates (solves) all tensions; it is a “positive unity” that resolves each element of the poem into a fuller symphony, a richer counterpoint.
   6. A poem is not a static (logical) arrangement of concrete details around a universal truth (as Ransom held); it is a dynamic (dramatic) process in which each detail, each truth, is given the freedom to exert its own unique pressure.

B. For Brooks (and Wimsatt), the job of the true critic is to explicate poems, to unpack their internal tensions and reveal their inner structures.
   1. Though the critic may use a poem’s “paraphrasable core” as a temporary scaffold to support his analysis of the poetic “house” (contrast Ransom’s house metaphor), he must never let it take the place of his analysis.
   2. Indeed, among the greatest legacies of New Criticism are the methods they taught us for moving past narrative into the heart of the poem.
   3. The key to a New Critical explication of a poem (what critics still call a close reading) is the assumption that the greatest poems do not present their ideas directly, but through a complex deflection of meaning.
   4. New Critics do not “break the code” of a poem or simplify it into a moral, but seek to uncover its essential ironies, paradoxes, and ambiguities.
   5. This is not to say that poetry is insincere or wishy-washy; on the contrary, irony is the principle medium through which poetry speaks.
   6. Indeed (building on I. A. Richards) Brooks contrasts the ironic structure of poetry with the clear, unambiguous statements of positivistic science.
   7. After all, nearly all the teachings of Jesus (the highest of poets) are expressed in paradoxes: those who would gain their life must lose it, etc.
   8. In a later essay, “Irony as a Principle of Structure,” Brooks uses the image of an arch (whose very stability is predicated upon the balance of opposing stresses) as a metaphor for how poems both work and mean.
   9. Indeed, the best close readings reveal how, within the ironic synthesis of the poem, even ugly or discordant elements can be so brought into equilibrium as to form an eternal work of aesthetic beauty and truth.

III. New Critics are often accused of being elitist, judgmental, and narrow-minded.

A. The reasons for these charges generally include the following:
   1. New Critics are strongly canonical; they believe there exists a body of works that is inherently superior and possesses essential, timeless value.
   2. They assess the value of these works on the basis of aesthetic standards that, they claim, transcend both historical and cultural boundaries.
   3. They employ words like heresy and fallacy to stigmataze those who would move outside the poem or deny their conception of poetry.
4. They insist that all critics learn their methods and vocabulary.
5. New Critics are often attacked today on philosophical, aesthetic grounds, but we shall explore these attacks in the next unit.

B. Although New Critics do tend to be somewhat unfair to emotional poets like Shelley, their influence on theory has been distinctly anti-elitist.
1. Nearly all the works of the canon have long been accepted as superior. The New Critics merely gave us a method and vocabulary to help reveal why these works were felt to be worthy of preservation and study.
2. New Critics wrested control of theory away from an academic coterie of researchers with access to special collections and studies and put it in the hands of anyone with a critical mind, an eye for irony, and an Oxford English Dictionary.
3. Above all, unlike postmodern theory, which is so obscure and jargon-rich that only a small body of elite Ph.D.’s can understand and apply it, New Criticism can be quickly taught, learned, and put into practice by grads, undergrads, and even advanced high-school students.
4. The true goal of New Criticism is, through hands-on training in the art of explication, to empower and free students to interpret on their own.
5. Indeed, the last several generations of English majors (including the czars of postmodernism) have cut their teeth on New Critical methods.
6. Finally, the New Critics carried democratic ideals not only into the ivory tower of critical theory, but into the elite world of creativity by all but inventing the concept of creative writing classes for aspiring writers.
7. It is, ironically, postmodernism (with its multicultural, relativistic agenda) that has cut the academy off from the public at large.
8. It is the vision of New Criticism (a vision that is shared and propagated by groups like The Teaching Company) that has made poetry available to us all.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
W. K. Wimsatt, The Verbal Icon.
Wellek and Warren, Theory of Literature, Chapters 7 and 8.
Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction, Chapter 1.

Questions to Consider:
1. Think back to your college days. Were you trained in New Critical methods of analysis? Did these methods help you to understand and appreciate poetry better?
2. The New Critics assert that poems are (unlike science) purposely indirect, ironic, and even paradoxical. Is this an aspect of poetry that frustrates or delights you?
Lecture Twenty
Archetypal Theory: St. Paul to Northrop Frye

Scope: In this lecture we shall consider an old theoretical orientation that received a stunning rebirth in Northrop Frye’s critical masterpiece, Anatomy of Criticism (1957). First, we shall define the early Christian concept of typology as it was developed in the epistles of St. Paul. Second, we shall discuss how Dante and the medieval church expanded Pauline typology on to four levels of meaning: the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical. Finally, we shall turn to the archetypal theories of Frye and explore how Frye went beyond the New Critical interest in poetic structure to lay out a complex and compelling system to help explain and categorize the wider patterns and forces that underlie all great poetry from the Hebrew prophets to T. S. Eliot.

Outline

I. Before moving on to modern and postmodern theory, let us pause to consider an old theoretical orientation that received a stunning rebirth in 1957.

A. In his numerous New Testament epistles, St. Paul employs a unique way of reading the Old Testament that has strong affinities with literary criticism.
   1. This theological/theoretical approach to scripture is known as typology.
   2. According to a typological reading of the Bible, many of the people, events, and symbols of the Old Testament are significant not only in themselves but as “types” (or figures) of things to be revealed later.
   3. That is to say, they do not achieve their full meaning until they are viewed in the fuller light of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the new covenant (or testament) that God makes with the Church.
   4. Thus, Joshua (Yeshua), who led the children of Israel over the River Jordan and into the Promised Land is a type (or prefiguring) of Jesus (the Greek equivalent of Yeshua) who leads the Church through the River of Death into the Promised Land of Heaven.
   5. Likewise, the near-sacrifice of Isaac by his father, Abraham, is a type of the Crucifixion, where God the Father sacrificed His beloved Son.
   6. When Jesus reworks and redefines the meaning of Passover at the Last Supper, He engages in a supreme act of typology. The Prophet Elijah “types” (foreshadows) John the Baptist, to give another example.
   7. Although Pauline typology is specifically spiritual, it can be adapted for use in a more secular, aesthetic setting.
   8. Indeed, whenever a literary critic attempts to uncover the deep patterns that undergird a work of art, he is engaging in a form of typology.
   9. A typological theory of poetry rests on a firm faith that great poems are not haphazard in structure, but are both meaningful and purposeful.

B. As the Church Fathers and Scholastics (particularly St. Thomas Aquinas) studied Pauline typology, they gradually expanded it to encompass multiple levels.
   1. Indeed, during the heyday of the medieval church, nearly every verse of Scripture was believed to work on four separate levels of meaning.
   2. These levels are known as the literal (or historical), the allegorical, the tropological (or moral), and the anagogical.
   3. In the fourteenth century, Dante adapted this four-fold approach to scripture to serve as one of the key groundworks for his Divine Comedy.
   4. In a famous letter to one of his patrons, Dante explains this theological and aesthetic approach by offering a four-fold reading of the verse: “when Israel out of Egypt came.” Taken literally, this verse refers to the Exodus; allegorically (or typologically), it signifies how Christ freed us from sin; tropologically, it describes the conversion of the soul from its bondage to sin to its new freedom in Christ; anagogically, it prophesies that final, glorious moment when the human soul will leave behind the body’s long slavery to death and corruption and enter the true Promised Land of Heaven. The anagogical level has to do with “leading upward” and with “final things.”
5. For Dante, these four levels should not be viewed chronologically or even in ascending order but as occurring simultaneously, in what Brooks (see Lecture Nineteen) calls a “pattern of resolved stresses.”

6. For Dante, that is, meaning is polysemous (in Greek: “many signs”).

7. Indeed, the New Critical focus on the ironic balance of internal tensions has affinities with both typology and the four levels of meaning.

8. However, what is missing in New Criticism (the focus of which tends to be isolated poems) is a greater system of aesthetic forces and patterns.

9. In 1957, this critical need was richly met by Northrop Frye.

II. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, the Canadian critic (and minister) Northrop Frye lays down a critical foundation that combines the objectivity of New Criticism with the polysemous approach of typology.

A. Disclaimer: Frye synthesizes a great deal more than New Criticism and typology into his vast and systematic critical structure.

1. Indeed, he quotes and borrows from nearly every theorist mentioned in this series (especially systematic ones like Aristotle and Coleridge).

2. He also incorporates the myth studies of Blake, Jung, Frazer, and others.

3. For the sake of brevity, we shall consider only those elements that have direct bearing on the concerns of this series and, especially, this unit.

B. Frye shares with New Criticism the desire to keep his focus on the object.

1. When analyzing literature, we can either take an outward, centrifugal approach that draws us away from the poetic object toward history, biography, etc., or a centripetal approach that draws us into the poem.

2. Like the New Critics, Frye opts for the centripetal, dubbing the poem a “literary verbal structure” that exists in and for itself.

3. The poem does not have a meaning (paraphrasable core) apart from itself; its meaning is wholly inward and verbal.

4. Unlike the statements of science and theology, which seek a direct meaning that is descriptive, assertive, and free from ambiguity, the “statements” of poetry are subtle, elusive, and ironic.

5. These points should be sufficient to show Frye’s agreement with the theoretical views of the New Critics; however, he does not stop here.

C. Frye constructs a wider, archetypal view of poetry that places each poem at the center of a web of meanings that are equally verbal and inward.

1. Frye defines an archetype as a “symbol which connects one poem with another,” and by so doing, helps “integrate our literary experience.”

2. Archetypes are “associative clusters,” words or images or rituals, that carry with them a wealth of connotative meanings and emotions that far exceed their denotative, scientific, descriptive meanings.

3. Some examples: pastoral archetypes of shepherds and gardens; cyclical archetypes of sun, moon, and harvest; social archetypes of funerals, marriages, and scapegoats; heroic archetypes of quests and dragons; etc. The *Star Wars* movies are very archetypical.

4. For Frye, these archetypes do not so much link poetry to the external world as they link one poem to another in a complex series of literary allusions.

5. Thus, though archetypal critics, like New Critics, isolate poems from the external world, they insist they be studied as a part of all great poetry, “as part of the total human imitation of nature that we call civilization.”

6. Indeed, according to Frye, each poem that we study, when viewed in its archetypal context, becomes a “microcosm of all literature.” This is a very organic view of poetry and literature (cf., Coleridge in Lecture Fifteen).

D. This carries us to the typological, polysemous nature of Frye’s theory.

1. In the Christian typology of Paul and Dante, meaning exists and works on a multitude of levels, and yet, all these meanings emanate finally from a single, transcendent God, whom John calls the *Logos* (or Word).

2. Just so, for Frye, though a poem exists both on its own literal, objective level and on a number of different mythical-archetypal-allusive levels, there *is* a final center or nodal point from which all meaning radiates.
3. Raising Coleridge’s view of poetry as an organic whole to a new level, Frye asserts that all great poems, though whole in themselves, are also parts of a greater whole, of a “self-contained literary universe.”

4. Though the poet may be unaware of that center, it is the role of the archetypal critic to reveal that hidden yet transcendent center through a process that is nothing less than apocalyptic (Greek for “uncovering”). So we move from poet-prophet to critic-prophet.

5. The Christian whose eyes are opened to the full significance of the polysemous meaning of Scripture will see that man’s little schemes do not control Biblical meaning, but are themselves controlled by it.

6. In the same way, the archetypal critic, in a flash of insight, sees that the forces of nature and history are not the containers of literary meaning, but are themselves contained by the transcendent vision of the poet. This is true Kantian catharsis, taking us above nature to a perfect, ideal world.

7. Frye is perhaps the last great systematic theorist to express such a strong faith in an absolute, transcendent meaning for poetry.

8. Indeed, in our final unit, we shall see how that faith is problematized, if not demolished, by a variety of modern and postmodern theorists.

Essential Reading:
Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, Chapter 2, in Adams.

Supplementary Reading:
Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History, Chapter 31.
W. J. Bate, Criticism: The Major Texts, Introduction to Frye.
Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction, Chapter 3.
Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism, Chapter 1.

Questions to Consider:
1. Read carefully Galatians 4:21–31. Can you see how Paul’s theological analysis here also has theoretical implications for how to read and interpret ancient literature?
2. Watch the original Star Wars trilogy and the recent “prequel” with your family and see how many archetypal images and events you can identify. To what extent is the continuing popularity of these films based on their archetypal nature?
Lecture Twenty-One
Origins of Modernism

Scope: This lecture will focus on a paradigm shift that took place a century ago and that set the groundwork for modern theory. Our exploration of this shift will fall, naturally, into two parts. First, we shall define and explore logocentrism, a theological, philosophical, and theoretical orientation that has dominated Western thought since Plato. Then, we shall show how the theories of Freud, Darwin, Marx, and Nietzsche disrupted this established framework, opening the door for a radically new way of viewing the nature of reality, of meaning, of thought, and of art. Though our look at these four theorists will be mostly general in focus, our analysis of Marx and Nietzsche will rely heavily on Marx’s “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy” (1859) and Nietzsche’s “Truth and Falsity in an Ultramoral Sense” (1873).

Outline

I. Beginning in the Victorian Age, a paradigm shift slowly spread through Europe that set the groundwork for modern theory.

A. Unlike the revolutionary movements of the Renaissance and Romanticism, which were in part reactionary, this paradigm shift marked a radical break with the past that had little precedent.
   1. Indeed, it marked a rejection of long-held metaphysical and aesthetic beliefs that most theorists from Plato to Coleridge took for granted.
   2. In this lecture, we shall define the nature of those beliefs and show how the four fathers of modernism (Freud, Darwin, Marx, and Nietzsche) disrupted them and thus set in motion the modernist paradigm shift.

B. In the succeeding three lectures, we shall trace the impact of this shift.
   1. Lecture Twenty-Two will take up the main modernist school: structuralism.
   2. Lecture Twenty-Three will trace how, in 1966, the modernist paradigm was shifted again to make way for a postmodern, deconstructive approach to theory.
   3. Finally, in Lecture Twenty-Four, we will trace various theoretical schools that all share a distinctly postmodern paradigm.

II. Until the modern period, most of the great Western philosophers have been logocentric in their thinking.

A. Logocentrists consider meaning to emanate finally from some logos or originary source that is pure and undefiled.
   1. Examples of this logos would include: Plato’s Forms, John’s Logos, Augustine’s Trinity, Descartes’ mind, Kant’s thing in itself, Hegel’s Idea, and Coleridge’s I AM that I AM.
   2. Sometimes, in the work of radical epistemologists, this logos becomes internalized and is known as the absolute self or transcendent ego.
   3. Most logocentric philosophers provide for the expression of this logos through a sensuous incarnation into the physical/material world (cf., Lecture Twelve on Hegel).
   4. The best art is that which most fully realizes the logos. Such art is transcendent: it expresses and encapsulates truths that are eternal and lie outside any given historical period.
   5. Indeed, as in Hegel, the success of this incarnation often functions as the supreme standard or touchstone against which all art is measured.
   6. Within such works of art meaning is ever immanent; yet, its final point of reference lies above the physical constraints of time and space.
   7. The final function of art (and of all language itself) is to point back to meaning (i.e., art is a means to an end, notwithstanding Kant’s belief that art is an end in itself).

B. Logocentrism generally expresses itself through binaries.
   1. A binary is a set of two related terms, in which the first term (which is perceived to be closer to the logos) is privileged over the second.
   2. Indeed, the second term is often seen as a falling away from the first.
   3. The most famous (and most defining) binary is found in Plato, where the idea (or form) is always given precedence over the image (or mimesis) of this idea.
4. Other binaries include: soul/body, *logos* (word, logic, speech)/*praxis* (act, experience, writing), being/becoming, intellectual/physical, conscious/unconscious, essence/existence, genius/art, rational/emotional, Apollonian/Dionysiac.

5. In general, that which is closer to perfection, to the eternal, to that which is unchanging, is privileged over that which alters or decays.

6. Feminist critics accuse logocentrism of being patriarchal and add the following binaries: male/female, white/non-white, Western/non-Western, canonical/non-canonical.

7. Binaries may also be viewed in spatial terms, with the first term acting as the center and the second as the margin.

8. When feminist critics argue that women and minorities have traditionally been “marginalized,” they are speaking both in socio-political terms and in metaphysical-aesthetic terms.

9. In general, Platonists think vertically; Aristotelians think horizontally.

III. Freud and Darwin, as fathers of modernism, disrupted these age-old binaries.

A. This disruption generally takes one of two forms. The poles of the binary are switched; the center and margin are juxtaposed, in a process known as decentering.

B. Before Freud, the conscious mind was privileged over the unconscious.

1. Freud the modernist inverted this established binary, positing the unconscious mind as the true source (or origin) of conscious thought.

2. Before Freud, mental “normalcy” was placed at the center of society, and neurotics were marginalized both culturally and institutionally.

3. Freud decentered this view, positing neurosis as the norm through which society and humanity should be viewed.

4. Today, even “normal” people suffer from some type of neurosis.

C. A similar inversion, or decentering, occurs in Darwinian evolution.

1. The physical (as opposed to spiritual) side of man is brought to the center, and humanity is seen to proceed not downward (outward) from spirit (God/Logos) but upward from matter (animal).

2. Indeed, the “myth” of evolution is as vital to modernism as the ancient theories of creation are central to logocentrism.

3. The modern debate between evolution and creation is more than a dispute over six literal or figurative days; it is a battle over which paradigm (logocentrism or modernism) should rule society.

4. This new evolutionary/modernist orientation may also be seen in the work of the German (theological) school of higher criticism.

5. These proto-modernists were responsible for replacing the traditional Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (or Torah) with the evolutionary-minded documentary hypothesis.

6. A similar shift occurred in classical studies of Homeric authorship.

IV. More radical decenterings were effected by Marx and Nietzsche.

A. Marx (as both an atheist and a materialist) denied the real existence of anything beyond the physical.

1. For Marx, the base (or structure) of society is the economic means and modes of production upon which rests the social, political, and intellectual superstructure.

2. Thought flows upward from the base. Ideology, art, even consciousness itself are determined by economic forces and can never be independent of them (i.e., Marx inverts the binary: human ideas/historical forces, with these forces being privileged by Marx).

3. Art and consciousness have no separate existence, no inherent meaning that can transcend their economic milieu.

4. In Marx’s system, art loses its transcendent status; if it is unable to break free from socio-political forces, then it cannot hope to express Truth. It is a product like anything else.

B. The more modernist Nietzsche broke down the old logocentric faith in the accessibility and even the possibility of meaning.

1. Though best known for his inversion of the Apollonian/Dionysiac binary, Nietzsche is not here at his most radical.

2. To point to divine, creative possession as a source of art is still to take a mystical (and thus logocentric) slant.
3. Nietzsche’s more radical inversion is laid out in “Truth and Falsity in an Ultramoral Sense,” in which he denies the existence of any logos or form.
4. In this essay, Nietzsche argues that Truth is, finally, an illusion that man constructed and then forgot that he had constructed it.
5. For Nietzsche, there is no truth apart from what man creates.
6. Finally, even God is a man-made truth; therefore, not only is God dead, but so are all supernatural, transcendent ideas and realities, whether those ideas and realities are theological, philosophical, or aesthetic.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
Karl Marx (and Frederick Engels), The German Ideology.
Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner.
Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism, Chapters 2–4.

Questions to Consider:
1. How does your view about whether Moses or Homer actually existed and wrote the books that bear their names affect your overall view of art and truth?
2. Can we, as human beings born into a specific historical period and raised within a specific socio-political system, create art that transcends that period and system?
Lecture Twenty-Two

Structuralism: Ferdinand de Saussure to Michel Foucault

Scope: In the preceding lecture, we saw how the theories of Darwin, Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche set the groundwork for modernism. In this lecture, we shall trace a key theoretical offshoot of modernism—namely, Structuralism—by tracing its birth in the linguistic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure, its development in the literary studies of Roland Barthes, and its full flowering in the historical studies of Michel Foucault. We shall focus in particular on defining the at-times obscure terminology employed by the Structuralists and on decoding their rather elaborate theoretical systems. In our analysis, we shall focus on the following key texts: Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (1913), Barthes’ “The Structuralist Activity” (1964), and Foucault’s “Truth and Power” (1977).

Outline

I. As the main offshoot and theoretical embodiment of modernism, Structuralism also inverts and decenters established binaries.

   A. Structuralism privileges form and structure over logocentric (transcendent, originary) meaning or substance: “the medium is the message.” Structure here means a different thing than it meant to the New Critics. It refers to the “base” on which everything else depends.
      1. However, after decentering, Structuralism “rehierarchizes,” setting up a new system as elaborate as that of Plato or Kant.
      2. The systems of Structuralism take in all areas of thought and study. They are interdisciplinary and can be applied to history, psychology, etc.
      3. The system of Marxism, for example, is so systematic, so pervasive, that it can answer all questions, whether political, metaphysical, or aesthetic.
      4. It is no coincidence that the century that gave us Structuralism also gave us an era of totalitarian systems from both the right and the left.

   B. Structuralism originated in the linguistic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure and the anthropological work of Claude Lévi-Strauss.
      1. It was adapted to literature by Roman Jakobson and Roland Barthes.
      2. Michel Foucault later carried Structuralism into the study of history.

II. According to Saussure, no ready-made ideas exist before words.

   A. A word, or linguistic sign, does not unite a thing (pre-existent thing in itself) with a name, but a concept (signified) with a sound-image (signifier). The word (or name) “tree,” for example, is the sign.
      1. The relationship between signified/signifier is arbitrary. If it were not, there would only be one language in the world.
      2. Neither Platonic Forms nor transcendent truths lurk behind the words we use; they are merely arbitrary, man-made concepts.
      3. Each sign is part of a greater system, or structure, of signs that stretches out vertically and horizontally.
      4. Saussure calls this system of language (which is deeper than thought) the *langue* and distinguishes it from *parole*, a specific instance of speech or writing.
      5. Vertical meaning is *paradigmatic* and associative (relating to why the sign was chosen instead of some related synonym or sound) and *synchronic* (relating to how the sign interacts with the existing structure).
      6. Horizontal meaning is *syntagmatic* (relating to how the sign functions in terms of the syntax and grammar) and *diachronic* (relating to the evolution through time of the system).
      7. Consider a musical score: the melody line, read from left to right, is diachronic; reading vertically, the particular notes for each instrument in each measure are synchronic.

   B. The meaning of each sign arises from the differences that set it apart from other signs within the overarching system.
1. Structuralism reverses the Romantic privileging of fusion over fission, synthesis over analysis, in favor of a scientific or positivistic approach.

2. All meaning or value emanates from this system, a system that is socially and culturally derived and that moves upward from the material, not downward from some higher logos.

3. Society creates the system (it is not a given that fell from heaven), and the system creates meaning (it does not express pre-existent ideas).

C. Saussure’s Structuralism struck the final blow at the long-held faith in the purity, integrity, and eternality of meaning.
   1. In the beginning, ontologists like Plato believed in the real existence of ideas and asserted the transcendent, timeless qualities of these ideas.
   2. Epistemologists like Kant, though they abandoned this faith, replaced it with a belief in the equally transcendent qualities of the subjective mind.
   3. As we move into our century, the New Critics, though ontological in name, shift their faith to linguistics, to the timelessness of language.
   4. Saussure’s theories of the arbitrary nature of language disrupted even that feeble faith, setting in motion both the Structuralist abandonment of absolute truth and the postmodern deconstruction of language itself.
   5. This last phase in the death of meaning will be addressed in Lecture Twenty-Three.

III. Barthes and Foucault adapt Structuralism to the study of poetry and history.

A. Barthes views man himself as a structural being.
   1. Like Nietzsche, Barthes is concerned with the “human process by which men give meaning to things.” Barthes is not interested in what things mean, but rather how they mean.
   2. Man is not endowed with meaning; he fabricates meaning.
   3. The Structuralist activity renders a work intelligible not by seeking out its hidden meaning, but by dissecting and recomposing (articulating) the object in accordance with man-made and culture-made rules of association.
   4. A work of art functions (not exists) within a structure.
   5. While Barthes’ concern (after Saussure) is to freeze a given system of meaning and look at it synchronically, Structuralists like Foucault prefer (after Marx) a more diachronic approach.

B. Foucauldian Structuralism combines three aspects of modernism:
   1. Barthes’ synchronic attempt to dissect and articulate all thought within the boundaries of an all-encompassing structure.
   2. Marx’s diachronic view of history as class struggle and his materialist view of structure and superstructure. Marx believes that man moves from one economic system to another.
   3. Nietzsche’s concerns with power (or hegemony) and the genealogy of such things as truth and knowledge.

C. Foucault’s method, thus, is to dissect and articulate historical events within a structure that is modeled not on relations of meaning but of power (within, that is, a power network).
   1. This network forms a structure (discourse) that determines what can be thought and said at any given moment in history.
   2. Truth is one of the products of the discourse, not vice versa.
   3. When the discourse (or discursive structure) changes (during a period of historical transformation) so does truth.
   4. The discourse is not primarily negative or repressive (a juridical system of “thou shalt nots”) but positive; it forms “a productive network which runs through the whole social body.”
   5. An example of this would be the modern American democratic discourse that says that experts, authorities, even Presidents can be wrong, but the people must always be right (cf., the rise in polling).
   6. Another would be the medieval medical discourse that labeled female herbalists as witches (a discourse that has only recently changed!).
   7. Foucault’s role as critic is to uncover the fine meshes of the web of power that lie deeper than the institutions of the state.
   8. For Foucault, (absolute) truth is but one of many discourses (ideologies) around which a society can be structured.
Essential Reading:
Ferdinand de Saussure, from *Course in General Linguistics*, in Adams.
Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in Adams.

Supplementary Reading:
Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature*.
Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is language arbitrary? Do the words we use have any real meaning? If they do not, what does this imply for poetry as an avenue for truth and revelation?
2. Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Do social institutions create and form our ideas or do our ideas create and form institutions?
Lecture Twenty-Three
Jacques Derrida on Deconstruction

Scope: In this lecture, we shall consider the origins of deconstruction in the theories of Derrida, particularly as they were first presented to America in his (in)famous lecture, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (1966). We shall see how Derrida, refusing merely to invert established binaries (as did the Structuralists before him), sought instead to break down (or deconstruct) all such binaries. We shall contrast deconstruction from both Platonic and Christian thought and seek to understand the main terminology associated with postmodern theory.

Outline

I. Jacques Derrida reads the history of Western metaphysics as a continual search for a logos or originary presence.
   A. This logos is sought, for it promises to give meaning and purpose to all things, to act as a universal center, a transcendental signified that all signifiers can be referred back to.
      1. Behind this search is a desire for a higher reality, a full presence that is beyond (and thus not implicated in) the play of structure.
      2. Western philosophy since Plato has simply renamed this presence and shifted this center without ever breaking from its centering impulse.
      3. Even the Structuralists have sought a center, a fixed locus or presence or origin (they have not really decentered at all; see Lecture Twenty-One).
      4. They have broken from the old metaphysic, but still use its terminology and its binaries. Although they sometimes reverse these binaries, they still think in terms of them.
      5. Indeed, the desire for a center is such a strong one that theorists will often posit one even if it doesn’t exist.
      6. Derrida would deconstruct all such attempts to posit a center or to establish a system of binaries; he would replace it instead with a “full free play of meaning.” Compare this idea with Schiller’s “play drive” discussed in Lecture Eleven, but be aware that there are differences.
   B. Derrida’s theories were first made public in a 1966 lecture given at Johns Hopkins University: “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.”
      1. This lecture is generally accepted as the “birthday” of deconstructionism (also known as poststructuralism or postmodernism).
      2. In it, Derrida, ironically, spends more time attacking and deconstructing modern theorists than he does the traditional ones. Is anxiety of influence at work here?
   C. In his lecture, Derrida identifies as his forerunners Nietzsche, Freud, and Martin Heidegger (though even these are not spared some deconstruction).
      1. Nietzsche did away with such concepts as being and truth, showing them to be arbitrary and in constant play.
      2. As such, he is the true father of both modernism and postmodernism.
      3. Freud did away with the faith that the subjective self (or consciousness) can function as a logocentric presence or a transcendental signified. If Nietzsche killed ontology, then Freud killed epistemology.
      4. He “demystified” that nostalgic, Romantic turn inward that would seek to posit itself and its ego as a fixed, stable center.
      5. Heidegger did away with the metaphysical concept of being as presence, of an eternal, pre-existent I AM.
      6. Like Sartre, he argued that “existence precedes essence.”

II. Derrida, in rejecting logocentrism (and its earliest proponent, Plato), has reaffirmed the foundational tenets of Plato’s nemesis, Gorgias the Sophist. He is simultaneously breaking with the two main traditions of Western philosophy: Platonism and Christianity.
   A. According to Gorgias’ three propositions: nothing exists; if it exists it cannot be known; if it can be known it cannot be communicated.
1. In place of Gorgias’ first proposition, Derrida argues that there exists no pure, undifferentiated presence, no norm, no center, no touchstone against which all other “imitations” can be measured.

2. For proposition two, Derrida asserts our inability to find a clear way back to any originary presence or even any controlling system of logic.

3. Derrida expresses this inability in a word that he coined—**différance**—an untranslatable pun that both plays on the French words for “difference” and “to defer” and breaks down the binary of speech and writing in which pure speech was privileged.

4. Like the Structuralists, Derrida privileges difference over sameness; however, he does not share their faith in structure.

5. Derrida argues instead that every time we think we have found a center, it points back to some other center or signified.

6. Thus, meaning is perpetually deferred. Indeed, whenever we try to get to the center (or meaning) of a text, we end up trapped in an *aporia* (Greek for “wayless”), a state of suspension in which meaning is “always already” deferred. We might want to compare this idea with Keats’s “negative capability.”

7. Proposition three finds its echo in Derrida’s insistence that there has been a “breakdown of signifier and signified.”

8. Can writing, the deconstructionist asks, as a system of arbitrary signification, capture or even express meaning?

9. In this step-by-step affirmation of Gorgias’ propositions, we see again the progressive rejection of ontology, epistemology, and linguistics.

B. Metaphysically speaking, deconstruction marks a rejection of Trinitarian-Incarnational Christianity.

1. This is *not* to say that deconstruction rejects the moral teachings of Christianity or that it is “anti-religious.”

2. But deconstruction *is* incompatible with the Christian belief that in Jesus of Nazareth perfect Manhood and Godhood combined; or, to put it metaphysically, that God is wholly transcendent and wholly immanent.

C. Thus, the Prologue to John’s Gospel (1:1–18) may be read as a succinct refutation of Gorgias’ (and Derrida’s) propositions.

1. In answer to proposition one, we read: “In the beginning was the Word [*Logos*], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

2. In contrast to proposition two, we have: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (14).

3. For proposition three: “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known” (18).

D. Deconstruction is both anti-Structural and anti-incarnational.

1. It not only rejects (metaphysically) the fusion of divine and human but rejects the possibility for higher, transcendent truth or meaning to be incarnated in aesthetic forms.

2. The key Christian belief that the Incarnate Word bridged the greatest of binaries (God/Man) marks the polar opposite of deconstruction.

3. Likewise, the related belief that the Bible (also known as the Word of God) is a wholly trustworthy account of God’s will (that it too bridges the human and the divine) is the ultimate illusion for the deconstructionist.

4. We might say that the reason it has taken almost 2,500 years for Gorgias’ three propositions to resurface and seize the academy is that the systems of Plato and Christianity have been remarkably strong and resilient.

5. Indeed, we might say that Plato and Augustine trounced poor old Gorgias so severely that it took him a couple of millennia to recover!

E. Still, we must be fair to Derrida and his fellow deconstructionists.

1. Though the deconstructionist state of *aporia* is, for Platonist and Christian alike, tantamount to being in Dante’s “Dark Wood of Error,” it is not so for Derrida.

2. For Derrida, *aporia* is not a negative state that should call for a nostalgic longing for meaning or presence (as in Rousseau).
3. It is, rather, positive; it marks (as in Nietzsche) “the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming.”
4. It frees us from being bound by any fixed truths or origins; it frees us too from any guilt we might feel over the absence of meaning.
5. In this affirmation, Derrida is much like existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre who felt that the absence of a higher plan or purpose in our lives did not render life meaningless but made our choices even more vital.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:
*Deconstruction and Criticism*.
Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Do you, in your own life, yearn for a fixed center of meaning and purpose? Why? Do you seek such a center when you read/study the great works of literature?
2. Are the deconstructive theories of Derrida and the Christian belief in the Incarnation of Christ incompatible? Can they be reconciled? Is the answer to this question relevant to the status of meaning and truth in poetry?
Lecture Twenty-Four
Varieties of Post-modernism

Scope: In our final lecture, we shall trace how the post-modern theories of Derrida are played out in the writings of Paul de Man, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Stanley Fish, as well as in the modern critical schools of new historicism and feminism. We shall focus in particular on the following issues: how de Man, in “Semiology and Rhetoric” (1979), explodes all critical attempts to perform reductive readings that break the code of a text; how Barthes and Foucault, in “The Death of the Author” (1968) and “Truth and Power” (1977), deconstruct the twin beliefs that poets and great men lie at the heart (or center) of literature and history; and how Fish, in “Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What Goes Without Saying, and Other Special Cases” (1978), asserts that, although a given text may have a stable meaning, that meaning constantly shifts in accord with its community of readers.

Outline

I. Paul de Man, following the lead of Derrida, carries deconstruction into the interpretation of literature.
   A. De Man argues that critics are still caught in the *aporia* of trying to break the code of a text, of so unpacking it as to reach a stable meaning.
      1. We are still doing reductive (“close”) readings that set up a referential structure where inside refers to outside (or vice versa).
      2. We still view the critic as one who reconciles form and meaning, who opens the text like a Chinese box to release a secret meaning.
      3. De Man rejects this view of criticism and of the critic in favor of semiology: “the study of signs as signifiers.”
      4. Unlike in logic (which posits the possibility of a *logos*) or even in grammar (which offers the possibility of fixed, unproblematic meaning), in semiology (and rhetoric), each sign gives way to another in an endless series of deferrals.
      5. The semiologist, who is ever conscious of the slippery, arbitrary nature of language, prefers to ask not *what* words mean, but *how* they mean.
   B. In “Semiology and Rhetoric,” de Man offers both a rhetorical critique of grammar and a grammatical critique of rhetoric.
      1. He carries out the former critique by studying rhetorical questions that seem in grammatical terms to be fixed, but rhetorically deconstruct themselves into a state of unresolved suspension.
      2. The rhetorical question, “What’s the difference?” signals both a vigorous intensification of dialogue and an apathetic end to all further debate.
      3. Likewise, the comment, “That was interesting,” may mean either that the commentator has been fascinated or bored to tears.
      4. In both examples, common phrases are revealed as inherently unstable.
      5. He carries out the latter critique by showing how different types of figurative language deconstruct each other in such a way as to demystify any aesthetic or metaphysical claims made by the text.
      6. In one sense, this is just a radical restatement of New Critical irony; however, de Man carries it to a higher level of ambiguity that borders on nihilism and that disrupts any claims the poem might make to truth.
      7. Actually, de Man would say that the critic alone does not deconstruct the text; the text actually deconstructs itself.
      8. Like all deconstructionists, de Man uses puns to deconstruct language and is constantly vigilant that he not freeze meaning or posit a center in his readings of texts.
      9. Indeed, as a master player of the game, de Man is careful not to leave himself open to being deconstructed by another, more clever player.
II. Though Barthes, in his early years, was a Structuralist (modernist), his later writings tend toward deconstructionism (postmodernism). See Lecture Twenty-Two for more on Roland Barthes.

A. Thus, in the tradition of Derrida, Barthes, in “The Death of the Author,” breaks down (or deconstructs) the empire (hegemony) of the author.

1. He proclaims boldly the death of the author as the center or origin of the text. The author, he asserts, is born with the text and cannot furnish a final, transcendental signified to our interpretation.

2. In a radical assertion of the intentional fallacy that goes far beyond the New Critics, Barthes refuses to freeze the meaning of a text, to assign to it an ultimate (or secret) meaning.

3. A book “is but a “tissue of signs, endless imitation, infinitely postponed.”

4. This revolutionary move, says Barthes, is counter-theological, for to de-authorize the poet is also to de-authorize God, reason, science, and law.

5. Even more radically, it deconstructs the very authority of both the literary critic and the English professor who claim to be able to interpret for their readers and students the “real” meaning of the poem.

6. Barthes finds the unity of a text not in its origin, but in its destination (not in author, but in reader).

7. Of course, the New Critics would accuse him here of replacing the intentional fallacy with a new form of the affective fallacy.

8. Deconstructionists like de Man and Derrida, on the other hand, would accuse him of merely shifting the center from author to reader.

B. In his proclamation of the death of the author, Barthes is one with Foucault (another half-postmodern figure) who, in “Truth and Power,” proclaims the death of the “great man” theory of history.

1. We must rid ourselves, says Foucault, of the illusion that an individual consciousness can determine the discursive structure in which he lives.

2. Even the greatest poets cannot achieve a transcendent vantage point that will allow them to create “pure” poems “untainted” by the socio-political realities of their times.

3. A similar critical belief is expressed in the writings of new historicism, an influential postmodernist school that, though it uses many of the techniques and much of the terminology of the deconstructionists, is descended theoretically from Marx, Nietzsche, and Foucault.

4. To the new historicist, the poet is often the least likely source for clues as to what his poem “means,” for he is as much a product of his discursive structure as is his poem.

5. To understand a poem, we must pierce through its erasures, those moments when the poet attempts to elide material realities that disrupt his aesthetic agenda (or ideology).

III. In “Normal Circumstances . . . and Other Special Cases,” Stanley Fish cleverly reworks the theories of de Man, Barthes, and the new historicists.

A. de Man’s refusal to freeze meaning, the new historicist belief that a text is a product of socio-political realities, and Barthes’ desire to privilege reader over author all play a role in Fish’s reader-response theory.

B. Fish deconstructs the traditional belief that a given text has a stable meaning that is accessible to the trained critic.

1. There is no literal, “common sense” meaning to any given text that can be distinguished from a more variable, figurative, aesthetic reading.

2. What is perceived to be “in” the text (that fixed meaning we cling to) is actually a product of the assumptions we bring to it, of the interpretive community within which we read it.

3. Though a text (be it a complex poem or a simple command) may have (within a given historical community) a stable meaning, that meaning will change from community to community.

IV. Along with the increased focus put on class by new historicists, colonial and feminist critics have emphasized race and gender.

A. Such critics seek to break down all binaries that make distinctions between male and female, white and non-white, etc.

1. They seek to carve out a place for themselves (“a room of their own,” to use Virginia Woolf’s famous phrase), the right to redefine themselves outside any established structures.

2. Indeed, modern (or, perhaps more accurately, postmodern) feminists believe that all gender differences are societal constructs (part of the discursive structure).
3. Postmodern feminists are anti-essentialist; indeed, they use the word *gender* rather than *sex* to speak of men and women, because the word *sex* suggests essential, biological differences between men and women.

B. Just as feminists reject all essential gender differences, so post-modernists reject all essential differences between various kinds of writing.
   1. This is why post-modernists tend to use the word *text* (or its French equivalent, *écriture*) to describe all forms of writing.
   2. Behind the word *text* lies a refusal to privilege poetry, a rejection of the hegemony of the author, and a belief that all writing (from the Bible to pornography) is a cultural product with no separate aesthetic existence.
   3. Indeed, at the heart of text-based theory is a rejection of the long-held belief that there is a core group of literary works (the canon) that possess an inherent, timeless truth and beauty that transcend the historical period in which they were created.

**Essential Reading:**
Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in Adams.
Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in Adams.
Stanley Fish, “Normal Circumstances . . . and Other Special Cases,” in Adams.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Jane Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Shortly after his death, it was discovered that the young Paul de Man had used his critical skills to serve a Nazi agenda, a revelation that begged the question: Is deconstruction a form of relativistic nihilism? What do you think?
2. Are there essential differences between men and women, poems and novels, classic literature and popular culture, or are these differences social constructs? Support your answer based on one or more of the theories put forth in the lecture (not just your “personal feeling”).
Biographical Notes

Abrams, M. H. (b. 1912). American professor and literary critic, long at Cornell, who is the greatest living explicator of Romanticism and literary theory. Author of The Mirror and the Lamp and Natural Supernaturalism.

Aquinas, St. Thomas (1225–1274). Medieval Catholic theologian whose Summa Theologica combines the philosophical rigor of Aristotle with the theological profundity of St. Paul and St. Augustine. His notion of the four levels of meaning greatly influenced Dante’s design for The Divine Comedy.

Aristotle (384–322 BC). Greek philosopher who studied in Athens under Plato and wrote treatises on nearly every area of human thought. Author of Poetics.

Arnold, Matthew (1822–1888). British poet, essayist, and critic; one of the great sages of the Victorian Age. Author of “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time.”

Augustine, St. (354–430). Born in North Africa, Augustine is the most influential of the early Church Fathers. In his theological writings, which included meditations on language, rhetoric, and allegory, he fused the ideals of Christianity and of Plato.

Barthes, Roland (1915–1980). French critic and literary theorist; influential in both structuralist and poststructuralist thought.

Beardsley, Monroe C. (1915–1985). American new critic; most famous for his work with W. K. Wimsatt, with whom he coined the twin terms “affective fallacy” and “intentional fallacy.”

Blake, William (1757–1827). British Romantic poet who was also, I firmly believe, the greatest painter Britain has yet produced. His deceptively simple Songs of Innocence and Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul (1789, 1794) had a strong influence on the Romantic belief that things are as they are perceived.

Boileau-Despréaux, Nicolas (1636–1711; pronounced bwa-LOW). French poet and critic of the neoclassical period whose “Art of Poetry” helped set down the rules of decorum for his age and had much influence on Pope’s “Essay on Criticism.”


Bloom, Harold (b. 1930). American professor and literary critic, long at Yale, who does not fit neatly into any theoretical category. Author of The Anxiety of Influence.

Brooks, Cleanth (b. 1906). American professor and critic who perhaps most fully sums up (and certainly is most fully identified with) the goals and methods of new criticism. Author of The Well-Wrought Urn.

Burke, Edmund (1729–1797). British statesman, essayist, and literary theorist; one of the first great critics of the French Revolution. Author of the influential Inquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1772–1834). British poet, essayist, and literary theorist; a major figure of British Romanticism. One of the most learned men of his age, he is credited with explaining German philosophy to the British. Co-conceived and wrote Lyrical Ballads with his friend William Wordsworth; author of Biographia Literaria.

Corneille, Pierre (1606–1684; pronounced Core-NAY). French neoclassical dramatist and critic who sought in his plays and criticism to adhere to the rules of art laid down in Aristotle and Horace (particularly the three unities). His famous essay on the unities had a strong influence on Dryden’s “Essay of Dramatic Poesy.”

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321). Italian poet who made grand use of the medieval four levels of meaning in his epic, The Divine Comedy.

Darwin, Charles (1809–1892). British scientist of the Victorian Age whose book, Origin of Species (1859), established evolution as a theory to be reckoned with. One of the key founders of modernism.


Empson, William (1906–1984). British poet and theorist whose critical views are close to those of the American new critics, as the title of his most famous work, Seven Types of Ambiguity, clearly demonstrates.

Fish, Stanley (b. 1938). American professor and theorist, long at Duke, who is one of the founding fathers of reader-response criticism.

Foucault, Michel (1926–1984). French historian, philosopher, and theorist whose work has elements of both structuralist and poststructuralist thought.

Frazer, Sir James (1854–1941). British cultural anthropologist whose masterwork, The Golden Bough, initiated an entire school of myth criticism and served as both the impetus for Frye’s Anatomy of Criticism and the groundwork for Eliot’s Waste Land. The work of the late Joseph Campbell (The Hero with a Thousand Faces, etc.) has inspired a recent return to the mythic-archetypal theories of Frazer, Jung, and Frye.

Freud, Sigmund (1856–1939). Austrian psychiatrist; founder of psychoanalysis. His studies of human development and the significance of dreams have had a profound influence on all areas of modern thought, including literature and critical theory.


Gorgias (c. 483–375 BC). Greek philosopher, teacher, and sophist who was both Plato’s contemporary and his rival. A distant forerunner of deconstruction.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1770–1831). German philosopher whose concept of the dialectic influenced Marx and whose ideas on theology and the fine arts have had a lasting impact.

Heidegger, Martin (1889–1976). German philosopher whose work is identified both with existentialism and phenomenology. He was a major influence on Derrida.

Horace (65–8 BC). Roman poet and critic of the Augustan Age and a key founder and proponent of the rules of neoclassical art. Author of “Art of Poetry.”

Jakobson, Roman (1896–1982). Russian formalist who carried the structuralist theories of Saussure into the study of language and literature.

Jung, Carl (1875–1961). Swiss psychologist whose theories of archetypes and of the collective unconscious have had a profound influence on literary critics, especially those, like Northrop Frye, who take a mythical-archetypal approach to theory.

Kant, Immanuel (1724–1804). German philosopher whose epistemological theories of art (expressed most fully in his Critique of Judgment) had a profound impact on Romantic philosophers, theorists, and poets.

Keats, John (1795–1821). British poet whose collected letters contain fascinating insights into literary theory: most notably, the notion of “negative capability.”

Lévi-Strauss, Claude (b. 1908). French anthropologist who is one of the founders of structuralism and whose influence on modern theory has been profound.

Locke, John (1632–1704). British empiricist whose epistemological theory of man as a blank slate (tabula rasa) who acquires knowledge through (and only through) the five senses had a profound influence on Edmund Burke.
Longinus (first century AD). Anonymous Greek literary critic who wrote *On the Sublime*. It was long believed that Cassius Longinus (third century AD) wrote the work; we now know he did not, but the name has stuck.

Marx, Karl (1818–1883). German philosopher, economist, and political activist whose theory of dialectical materialism (formulated with the help of Friedrich Engels) lies at the heart of much modernist theory and ideology.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1844–1900). German philosopher and essayist; one of the founders of modernist thought. In his *Birth of Tragedy*, he formulated a famous distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac.

Paul, St. (died c. AD 64). A learned Pharisee and scholar who, after his conversion to Christianity, became the first great missionary. He was responsible for writing much of the New Testament and for pioneering an allegorical approach for reading the Old Testament in light of the new.

Plato (c. 427–c. 348 BC). Greek philosopher and founder of the Academy. His theory of the Forms, his view of art as imitation, and his insistence (in *The Republic*) that the poets be kicked out of his ideal state have had a profound impact on literary theory.

Plotinus (c. 204–c. 270). Greek neoplatonic philosopher who combined the mimetic theories of Plato and Aristotle. His ideas greatly influenced St. Augustine.

Pope, Alexander (1688–1744). British poet whose literary tastes (expressed most fully in his *Essay on Criticism*) helped set the standards for British neoclassicism.

Racine, Jean (1639–1699). French neoclassical playwright who most perfectly embodied in his tragedies the artistic rules and decorum of classical drama.


Richards, I. A. (1893–1979). British literary theorist and linguist whose ideas had a great influence on American new criticism. Author of *Practical Criticism*.

Rousseau, Jean Jacques (1712–1778). French philosopher and man of letters, an innovator in the political, ethical, and educational spheres. Arguably the true father of the modern world, Rousseau’s autobiography (*Confessions*) may be seen as the founding document of Romanticism.

Saussure, Ferdinand de (1857–1913). Swiss linguist whose pioneer work, *Course on General Linguistics*, is the founding text of structuralism.

Schiller, Friedrich (1759–1805). German poet, dramatist, and theorist whose *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* and *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry* have had a lasting influence on the history of literary criticism.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792–1822). British Romantic poet whose “Defense of Poetry” is not only a key Romantic text but synthesizes nearly all the elements of literary theory from Plato to Coleridge.

Sidney, Sir Philip (1554–1585). British poet and courtier; the very embodiment of the Elizabethan Age. His “Apology for Poetry” is one of the great defenses of both the divine power and social utility of poetry.


Wordsworth, William (1770–1850). British Romantic poet who co-authored *Lyrical Ballads* with his friend, Samuel Taylor Coleridge; his revolutionary “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” helped to hasten the demise of neoclassical tastes and to usher in a new slate of Romantic theories, methods, and concerns.
Glossary

The glossary is cumulative for all twenty-four lectures. I have tried to be as thorough as possible and, in most of the entries, have provided a paragraph rather than a simple sentence definition. This fuller format will allow the reader to understand not only the meaning of each word, but how that meaning is related to other words and to wider schools of thought. If a word in an entry appears in italics, it means that that word (or a variation of it) is defined elsewhere in the glossary. I would strongly encourage the reader to make use of these italicized cross-references; in the philosophical world of literary theory, individual terms and concepts often remain obscure until they are placed in a wider context of other terms and concepts.

Please do not confuse this glossary with a handbook of literary terms. I have made no attempt here to define figures of speech (simile, metaphor, apostrophe, etc.), or metrical terms (iambic pentameter, dactylic hexameter, blank verse, etc.), or poetic devices (onomatopoeia, alliteration, etc.). I have confined myself instead to terms that have direct bearing upon the history of literary theory and that are associated with the great critical schools and theorists discussed in the lectures.

Finally, please do not think that either this glossary or my twenty-four lectures are inclusive of all schools of critical thought. For the sake of brevity and clarity, I have chosen to focus only on those movements that I consider to be most representative, most useful, and/or most influential; furthermore, I have chosen to confine myself more or less to the criticism of poetry (hence, I say little to nothing about the many narratological schools that have turned their critical attention toward prose in general and the novel in particular). In order to maintain a fair and balanced historical perspective, I have been especially selective in my survey of the last century. Here is a brief alphabetical list of twentieth-century theoretical schools not covered in the lectures or the glossary: art for art’s sake (late nineteenth century), dialogic criticism, existentialism, multiculturalism, phenomenology, psychological and psychoanalytical theory, speech-act theory, theater of the absurd, and Russian formalism. I have also touched only briefly on the race, class, and gender concerns of colonial, Marxist, and feminist criticism. The most convenient and accessible sources of information on these schools are M. H. Abrams’ A Glossary of Literary Terms and A Handbook of Literary Terms by Wilfred L. Guerin, et al. (see the Bibliography, Part II).

Ab ovo: see in medias res.

Aeolian Harp: A small stringed instrument that produces “natural” music when the wind blows over its strings. In Romantic theory and poetry, the aeolian harp (named for Aeolus, the Greek god of the wind) is frequently used as a metaphor for the way in which inspiration blows over the poet and causes him to create. The harp metaphor illustrates well the Romantic view of the poet as a passive recipient of imagination, rather than as an active artisan.

Aesthetic: On the simplest level, aesthetic signifies a concern with beauty and with fostering a refined taste for and a critical appreciation of that beauty. Today, however, aesthetic is often used by diachronically minded (historicist) theorists to label traditional, synchronic theorists whom they consider “guilty” of evading historical forces and material realities. That is to say, aesthetic is often used today of critics (especially the new critics) who retain a belief that poetry exists in a self-contained world of its own, untainted by crude historical forces and vulgar material realities. Aestheticians (especially those influenced by Kant) grant poetry a special status that allows it to transcend all boundaries of time and space and to escape the confines of all political agendas and ideologies. Aesthetic can be used in both an ontological sense, to refer to the beauty of an aesthetic object, and an epistemological sense, to refer to an aesthetic (subjective) response to that beauty. For Kant the epistemologist, aesthetic judgments are to be distinguished from cognitive (logical) ones: the former work through feelings and are independent of all ends or concepts; the latter are based on ideas and lead to the formulation of concepts and principles.

Affective Fallacy: see intentional fallacy.

Allegorical: see four levels of meaning.

Allegory: see symbol.

Analogical: see four levels of meaning.

Anti-essentialist: see essentialist.

Antithesis: see dialectic.

Anxiety of Influence: A phrase coined by modern critic Harold Bloom to define a specific kind of artistic struggle (or agon) that he sees as underlying and propelling the history of literature. Bloom’s thesis, influenced strongly by
the Oedipal theories of Freud, is that each new poet must overthrow the “strong” poet who has preceded him: a
dialectical view of poetic history that yet resists falling into the pit of Marxist materialism. Bloom’s thesis is both
compelling and disturbing.

**Apollonian**: In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche makes a distinction between two philosophical-spiritual-aesthetic
orientations that he calls the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysiac*. The *Apollonian* (named for Apollo) is rational,
intellectual, balanced, and stoic; the *Dionysiac* (named for Dionysus) is intuitive, emotional, creative, and ecstatic.
Whereas Western metaphysics has traditionally privileged Apollo over Dionysus, Nietzsche inverts this privileging,
even as he calls for a higher fusion of these two sides of man.

**Aporia**: Greek for “wayless”; a term used by *deconstructionists* to refer to what happens when a critic tries to trace
a given *signifier* back to a single, stable *signified*. This finally futile attempt to reach the *center* (or meaning) of a
text, ultimately leaves the critic in a state of suspension in which meaning is always already *deferred*.

**Archetype**: In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye defines an *archetype* as a “symbol which connects one
poem with another” and, by so doing, helps “integrate our literary experience.” *Archetypes* are “associative
clusters,” words or images or rituals that carry with them a wealth of connotative meanings and emotions that far
exceed their denotative, scientific, descriptive meanings. Some well-known examples are the pastoral *archetypes*
of shepherds and gardens; the cyclical *archetypes* of sun, moon, and harvest; and the heroic *archetypes* of quests and
dragons. George Lucas’s *Star Wars* trilogy abounds with archetypes as does Eliot’s *Waste Land*. In the criticism of
Frye, *archetypes* do not so much link poetry to the external world as they link one poem to another in a complex
series of literary allusions. For Frye, *archetypes*, though *polysemous* in nature, all point back to a transcendent,
*logocentric center*, an aspect of Frye that has been criticized by both *modernist* and *postmodernist* theorists.

**Articulate**: see *structuralism*.

**Bathos**: A term used first by Longinus and then picked up with a vengeance by Pope. *Bathos* describes a kind of
heightened style that fancies itself *sublime* but is in reality overwrought and melodramatic. The *batheitic* poet lacks a
sense of *decorum*.

**Beauty**: Until very recently, *beauty* has been prized as one of, if not the, most vital element of a work of art.
Viewed *ontologically*, *beauty* has traditionally been defined as a kind of higher harmony or balance or proportion: a
reflection in our world of the greater harmony of the cosmos. Viewed *epistemologically*, *beauty* is a mental response
to certain objects that produces within us sentiments of tenderness and affection. (Cf. *sublime*.)

**Binary**: A set of two terms in which the first term is privileged over the second, and the second term is seen, in
some way, as a falling away from the first: *form/imitation*, being/becoming, *presence/absence*. Whereas
*structuralists* tend to invert *binaries*, *deconstructionists* seek always to break them down. *Binaries* can be viewed
either *vertically*, with the first term up and the second term down, or *horizontally*, with the first term in the *center*
and the second at the margin. (Cf. feminism.)

**Canon**: The Great Books of the Western world (i.e., those by Homer, Sophocles, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, etc.)
that have traditionally formed the core of humanistic studies. *Canonical* critics believe that the works of the *canon*
are aesthetically and essentially superior and possess an inherent value that transcends the time and place in which
they were written; *non-canonical* (generally postmodern) critics view the *canon* as a product of socio-political
forces (cf. discourse) that determine what is acceptable (*status quo*) and what is not.

**Catharsis**: In the *Poetics*, Aristotle argues that a well-constructed tragic *plot* will so move our feelings of pity and
fear as to produce in us a *catharsis* of those emotions. The word *catharsis* may be translated in at least three ways
(as purgation, purification, or clarification), each of which suggests a slightly different understanding of the nature
of what might be termed the proper tragic pleasure. According to the purgation theory of *catharsis* (most famously
described in Milton’s brief preface to *Samson Agonistes*), tragedy works on us like an enema or an emetic,
cleansing us of our emotions of pity and fear and leaving us more fit and able to face the rigors of life. According to
the clarification theory of *catharsis*, tragedy does not so much purge our emotions as purify them. Thus, whereas the
former theory is therapeutic in nature, the latter is more spiritual, suggesting that *tragedy*, like suffering, can
strengthen our faith and resolve by testing and trying them like gold in the fire. Finally, according to the
clarification theory of *catharsis*, tragedy sparks in us an intellectual response, a searing moment of perfect clarity in
which ill-defined emotions are carried up into a mystical realm of balanced, harmonious rationality. The
connections between the seemingly arbitrary chaos and suffering of our world and the higher patterns and forces of
the cosmos are made suddenly visible in this realm.
Center: see decenter.

Close Reading: A method of explicating (or opening, unpacking) a poem that was developed, taught, and propagated by the American new critics. All close readings rest on the new critical assumption that the greatest poems do not present their ideas directly, but through a complex deflection of meaning. The close reader, rather than attempting to simplify or reduce a poem to its narrative and/or didactic meaning (its paraphrasable core), seeks to uncover its essential ironies, paradoxes, and ambiguities. The best close readings reveal how, within the ironic synthesis of the poem, even ugly or discordant elements can be so brought into equilibrium to form an eternal work of aesthetic beauty and truth.

Concrete Universal: The aesthetic history of this paradoxical phrase can be traced from Aristotle to Kant to Coleridge to the new critics. Put simply, to claim that a certain poem is a concrete universal is to say that within the microcosm of the poem, a universal idea has been fully realized in a concrete form. This notion is, of course, profoundly incarnational and logocentric; like Christ (the ultimate Logos), who was both fully Man and fully God, the concrete universal effects within itself a fusion of the physical and the non-physical, the specific and the general, the image and the idea. Indeed, at its boldest, the notion of the concrete universal asserts an aesthetic and metaphysical reality that has since been problematized by modernists and rejected by postmodernists. This notion is that, within the space of the poem, signifier and signified enter into a relationship that is not only essential and timeless (as opposed to arbitrary and “language-specific”), but profoundly, almost mystically, reciprocal: i.e., the signifier is carried up into the signified, even as the signified descends and dwells in the signifier. (Cf. symbol and organic whole.)

Decenter: Traditional metaphysicians and theorists have posited a center that is fixed and pure and that can function both as the source of all meaning and as the transcendental signified toward which all signifiers can be referred. Modern theorists sought to disrupt this traditional view by, in part, dethroning the traditional hegemony of the center (by decentering). Deconstructionists, however, have argued that modern theorists did not, in fact, decenter the old system; they just created new centers to serve as new transcendental signifieds. It was left, therefore, to critics like Derrida to truly eliminate the center and to posit no final reference point for the signifiers of philosophy, poetry, and language itself.

Deconstruction: A critical school (initiated by Derrida) that seeks to break down (or deconstruct) traditional binaries; at its heart lies a refusal to posit a simple link between signified and signifier or, indeed, to allow for any fixed center of meaning. In opposition to most literary critics, deconstructionists reject any and all attempts to break the code of a text or to set up a referential system of interpretation; rather than freeze the meaning of a text, they seek what Derrida calls a free full play of meaning. Deconstruction lies at the heart of most postmodern theory and is anti-essentialist in orientation.

Decorum: A concept central to neoclassical art (especially that of Pope). The poet who possesses decorum understands intimately the proper relationship (or fit) between form and content. He prefers a serious, rational type of art that does not inappropriately mix the high and the low, the serious and the comic. When Romantic poets and theorists began to advocate the production of serious, meditative poems about low and rustic subjects (as Wordsworth did both in his poems for and his Preface to Lyrical Ballads), they rang the death knell of neoclassical decorum.

Defamiliarization: A term used to describe that mystical moment when the Romantic (Wordsworthian) poet rips away the “veil of familiarity” from the everyday objects of our world and thus allows us to see them afresh, with child-like eyes of wonder. Most men, says Coleridge (paraphrasing Isaiah 6), have eyes but do not see; defamiliarization opens our eyes to the mystery and beauty that surrounds us. The term was later used by a theoretical school known as Russian Formalism.

Deferral: In deconstructionist lingo, deferral occurs when a critic tries to link a given signifier to a single, stable signified. In attempting to do so, the critic finds that every time he thinks he has found a signified (or center) that will halt the meaning of the signifier (and the text it is a part of), it merely points back to another signified (or center). This process is carried out through a perpetual series of deferrals until the critic puts aside his desire to find a center and enters a state of aporia.

Deus ex machina: The deus ex (sometimes, ek) machina, or “god from the machine,” was a crane-like device used in classical Greek theater that would allow an actor to descend onto the stage in the guise of a god or goddess. This device was used by dramatists as a way of resolving “from above” all manner of difficulties and misunderstandings; thus, after weaving a veritable Gordian’s knot of relationships in his Ion, Euripides has the goddess Athena descend...
in a basket and unravel everyone’s true identity. (Note: the phrase *deus ex machina* is also used to refer generally to any situation in which the identity of a character is discovered “in the nick of time” by an implausible or at least contrived means; e.g., a scar, a birthmark, a childhood pendant, even a footprint.) Aristotle strongly disapproved of this device for he felt it was an artificial way to end a *plot*; the *plot*, he felt, should be strong enough to resolve itself in a manner consistent with necessity, probability, and inevitability. Indeed, one of the reasons Aristotle favored Sophocles over Euripides was that the latter made much use of the *deus ex machina* (although it should be noted that Sophocles makes brilliant use of the device in his *Philoctetes*). Molière offers a “serious parody” of the device in his *Tartuffe*.

**Diachronic:** see *synchronic*.

**Dialectic:** In the philosophy of Plato, *dialectic* refers to a process of question and answer through which false notions are stripped away and the truth is revealed. In the philosophy of Hegel, the conflictual nature of Plato’s *dialectic* is retained, but the whole process is systematized and placed in a historical (*diachronic*) continuum. For Hegel, an original idea (or *thesis*) produces, over time, its own opposite (or *antithesis*); these two ideas then, through a process of struggle, transformation, and fusion, produce a new and higher idea, called the *synthesis*. A generation later, Marx would co-opt the Hegelian *dialectic* for himself, reducing Hegel’s historical yet *transcendent* approach to a strictly *historicist/materialist* one. The resulting process, known as *dialectical materialism*, preserves the movement from *thesis* to *antithesis* to *synthesis*, but reinscribes it in a material continuum of economic forces and class struggle. Thus, whereas for Hegel it is primarily *aesthetic* and *transcendent* ideas that progress through the *dialectic*, for Marx, such ideas are but products of socio-political realities that are themselves produced by a *dialectical process* in the economic strata of society.

**Dialectical Materialism:** see *dialectic*.

**Différance:** A “one-word poem” coined by Derrida that is composed of two French words: one meaning difference, the other meaning to *defer*. The word functions on two levels. First, it links the *modernist* notion (best expressed in the *linguistic* theories of Saussure) that language and meaning are based on and produced by differences rather than similarities (on “scientific” analysis/fission rather than Romantic synthesis/fusion) with the *postmodern* notion that (because of the breakdown of *signifier* and *signified*) meaning is perpetually *deferred*. Second, it *deconstructs* the traditional *binary* of speech/writing by privileging the written word over the spoken word. (Because *différance* and the properly spelled *différence* are pronounced exactly the same in French, the listener can only determine which word is being spoken by seeing it in written form.)

**Dionysiac:** see *Apollonian*.

**Discourse:** In the writings of Foucault, *discourse* refers to widespread social-political-historical systems of power that determine what can be thought and said at any given moment in history. These systems are known as *discursive structures*.

**Discursive Structure:** see *discourse*.

**Disinterested:** *Disinterested*, as opposed to uninterested, signifies an approach to criticism (whether *aesthetic* or otherwise) that is removed, objective, and free from all political agendas or *ideologies* (today, we would say non-partisan). The word was made famous in Matthew Arnold’s definition of criticism as “a *disinterested* endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.” (Note: the phrase “the best that is known and thought” is central to the traditional understanding of the *canon.*) *Objective theorists* in general, and the *new critics* in particular, are great advocates of Arnold’s notion of *disinterestedness*. To *modern* and especially *postmodern* theorists, however, the whole concept of *disinterestedness* is an illusion; all poets and critics create and write out of a reigning *discourse* and cannot achieve the necessary *aesthetic* distance to speak *disinterestedly*. To the *historicist*, a claim of *disinterestedness* is merely a veiled way of asserting the *hegemony* of the *status quo*. The *historicist* “faith” that everything is political is diametrically opposed to the objective “faith” that certain great writers (e.g., the authors of the *canon*) can so *transcend* their time and space as to achieve the timeless state of *disinterestedness*.

**Dissociation of Sensibility:** According to T. S. Eliot, during the seventeenth century, the great metaphysical poets and writers of Britain (especially John Donne) were able to fuse within their lives and their art the emotional and the intellectual. After the seventeenth century, however, Britain (and Europe in general) fell into a *dissociation of sensibility*: i.e., their intellectual and emotional sides began to pull away from each other, producing either an overemphasis on the former (the eighteenth-century *Age of Reason*) or the latter (the nineteenth-century *Age of Romanticism*). Schiller traces a similar division in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*.
**Documentary Hypothesis:** A theory developed by the German higher critics (late nineteenth century) that displaced Moses as the sole author of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). According to this hypothesis (learned by all seminary students), the Pentateuch was written and rewritten, edited and re-edited over a period of hundreds of years. This radically new way of viewing biblical authorship betrays a modernist, anti-logocentric view of both metaphysics and aesthetics. It suggests that, rather than Moses writing the Pentateuch, the Pentateuch wrote Moses.

**Écriture:** see text.

**Egotistical Sublime:** In the letters of Keats, the egotistical sublime is a quality possessed by artists like Milton and Wordsworth whose poetic vision is always mediated through their own strong, dominant personalities. Coleridge’s incisive comment that, in his poetic studies of other people, Wordsworth is always a spectator "ab extra" ("from the outside") reinforces Keats’s notion that egotistical poets, though they may have great sympathy, are lacking somewhat in empathy. (Note: Keats does not use egotistical in a pejorative sense.) Keats contrasts Milton and Wordsworth with Shakespeare, that chameleon poet who could lose himself completely in the lives of his characters. Generally speaking, the opposite of egotistical sublime is negative capability.

**Emotional Belief:** In Practical Criticism, I. A. Richards, seeking a unique sphere for poetry separate from that of the positivistic world of science, fashioned a vital distinction between intellectual belief and emotional belief. Whereas intellectual belief occurs in a rational context of logical consistency, emotional belief occurs in an emotional context of sentiments and feelings. Intellectual belief seeks as its end the fusion of all ideas into a perfect, ordered system; the final goal of emotional belief is to so order ideas around our emotional needs and desires as to pave the way for their fulfillment. Emotional belief is not verified by an external standard of systematic coherence but by its success at meeting our emotional needs and desires. Richards’ distinction helps to explain why readers who do not share Dante’s medieval Catholic Christianity or his pre-Copernican view of the universe can yet accept the emotional, psychological, and aesthetic truth of his Divine Comedy. John Crowe Ransom later criticized Richards for making too sharp a distinction between feeling-centered poetry and cold, unemotional science; this dichotomy, he felt, only fueled the positivistic critique of poetry as useless. (Cf. pseudostatements.)

**Epistemology:** see ontology.

**Episodic:** see plot.

**Epoch of Concentration:** see epoch of expansion.

**Epoch of Expansion:** In “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” Matthew Arnold makes a famous distinction between two epochs (or ages) in the “life cycle” of a culture. In epochs of expansion, a culture is rich with new and fresh ideas; during such epochs, poets are needed to harness this intellectual energy and convert it into great works of art. Such epochs are rare; Arnold identifies two: Periclean Athens (the age of Sophocles) and Elizabethan England (the age of Shakespeare). Oddly, Arnold (unlike Shelley) did not consider the Romantic Age (born of the French Revolution) to be an epoch of expansion. Rather, he considered his own time period to be an epoch of concentration, an age in which ideas are stagnant and the free exchange of ideas is stifled in some way. Just as Arnold believed that great poets were needed to harness the energy of the epoch of expansion, so he believed that critics were needed during epochs of concentration to help create and foster a free flow of ideas that would, in time, catapult their culture into a new epoch of expansion. Though Arnold, like most theorists before him, privileged the creative over the critical, his notion of the two epochs actually raised the status and function of the critic to a level of importance almost equal to that of the poet (a recent tendency that postmodern theorists have taken to an extreme; see text). For Arnold, the crowning works of the canon are the products of a creative fusion between a great poet and an epoch of expansion (between “the man” and “the moment”). It is not enough to be a gifted poet; without the fresh ideas available in such an epoch, the poet will lack the necessary raw material on which to exert his creative gifts. Oddly, though Arnold is one of the great bugbears of modern and postmodern theory, his notion that “the moment” is as vital as “the man” does put some restraints on the traditional logocentric faith in the transcendent power of poetry.

**Erasure:** A critical term/tool used by postmodern critics (particularly deconstructionists and new historicists) to refer to those moments in a text when the artist attempts to elide material or historical realities that disrupt his aesthetic agenda (or ideology).

**Esemplastic:** A word coined by Coleridge to express the imagination’s power to shape and fuse seemingly discordant images into a single, unified whole. The word is composed of three Greek words that mean, literally, “to shape into one.”
Essentialist: Traditional theorists tend to be essentialist, in that they believe that there are essential differences between various genres, various modes of discourse, and various works. Generally, this belief is accompanied by a firm conviction that certain modes of discourse (poetry) certain genres (tragedy and epic), and certain works (those that make up the canon) are inherently superior to others. As a rule, most postmodern theorists are anti-essentialist: they do not accept the canon as being essentially superior and refuse to privilege poetry over prose or even to make distinctions between aesthetic and popular culture.

Explication: see close reading.

Expressive Theories: One of the four types of critical approaches defined in M. H. Abrams’ The Mirror and the Lamp. Expressive theories explore the relationship between poem and poet; they are epistemological in orientation and view poetry as essentially subjective. Originating in the philosophical theories of Kant and reaching their fullest expression in the work of the British Romantic poets, expressive theorists consider the questions “What is a poem?” and “What is a poet?” to be nearly identical.

Fancy: see imagination.

Feminism: Though to most people, feminism merely signifies a belief that women should have full and equal access to the workplace, in the realm of postmodern theory, feminism means a great deal more. Feminist theorists begin by rejecting the binary system of logocentrism as a patriarchal construct that has privileged not only men, but male concerns and values. Male art has been treated as the norm (or center), while women and their artistic endeavors have been relegated to the margins of both society and literary criticism. Postmodern feminists are firmly anti-essentialist and non-canonical in orientation and champion the use of such words as gender and text.

Figure: see typology.

Formal Drive: see play drive.

Formalist: To call a critic a formalist is to identify him with a theoretical orientation that privileges form over content and that discovers in the aesthetic form of a poem something that borders on the perfect and the transcendent. Mimetic formalists (like Aristotle) believe that certain poetic forms are superior for they most fully capture and embody higher truths. Pragmatic (epistemological) formalists (like Kant) hail form as a pure, timeless end in itself, the ideal object for aesthetic (subjective) contemplation. Expressive (Romantic) formalists (like Coleridge) champion form as a sort of altar on and through which is enacted the marriage (fusion) of subject and object, concrete and universal. Objective formalists (like the new critics) consider a poem’s form, rather than its content, to be that which transforms the poem into a self-contained, eternal artifact.

Forms: In the metaphysics of Plato, the Forms are a series of unchanging, transcendent Ideas that exist (pure and invisible) in the heavens and that serve as the patterns for all earthly, material realities. The Forms exist in an unseen World of Being that cannot be perceived by our senses, but can only be contemplated by the mind’s eye. All things that we behold in our physical, sensual World of Becoming are, in fact, imitations of these perfect Forms; they have no essential truth or reality of their own. (Cf. mimesis, logos, and logocentrism.)

Four Levels of Meaning: In the medieval church (and especially in the theories of Thomas Aquinas), nearly every verse of scripture was believed to work on at least four separate levels of meaning: the literal (or historical), the allegorical, the tropological (or moral), and the anagogical. In a famous letter, Dante, who used this understanding of scripture as one of the groundworks for his Divine Comedy, offers a four-fold reading of the verse: “when Israel out of Egypt came.” Taken literally, he writes, this verse refers to the Exodus; allegorically, it signifies how Christ freed us from sin; tropologically, it describes the conversion of the soul from its bondage to sin to its new freedom in Christ; anagogically, it prophesies that final, glorious moment when the human soul will leave behind the body’s long slavery to death and corruption and enter the true Promised Land of heaven. Though this method of analyzing literature is spiritual in origin, the concept of multiple levels of meaning working simultaneously can also be used in a secular setting. The Greek word “polysemous” (literally: “many signs”) is used to define a belief that the words and images of poetry do not have one simple meaning but signify a number of different (sometimes opposing) meanings. This is to be contrasted from the more positivistic belief that there should and must be a one-to-one correspondence between a word (signifier) and its meaning (signified). Though nearly all theorists who adopt the four levels of meanings (from St. Paul to Dante to Northrop Frye) are logocentric in focus (or at least believe in transcendence and in absolute standards), the concept of polysemous meaning is actually central to the relativistic, anti-logocentric theories of postmodernism (especially deconstruction).
Gender: A “politically correct” word that, in the halls of academia, has taken the place of the word “sex.” Postmodern theorists (particularly feminists) insist that the word gender be used because, unlike “sex,” it does not suggest that there are essential, inherent, biologically determined differences between men and women. To the postmodern feminist, all gender differences (even the maternal instinct itself) are societal constructs (products of the reigning discourse).

Hamartia: see tragic flaw.

Hegemony: A synonym for power used by modern and postmodern theorists alike (especially those influenced by Foucault) that is societal and institutional (rather than personal) in scope.

Heresy of Paraphrase: see paraphrasable core.

Higher Criticism: see documentary hypothesis.

Historicism: see new historicism.

Horizontal: see vertical.

Idealism: Philosophically speaking, idealism is the belief that the only real thing in the universe is Mind (whether that Mind be the I AM of God or the Absolute Self). The physical objects that we see around us are but projections of this Mind; indeed, material things (the object) only exist inasmuch as they are perceived by a consciousness (the subject). Such a view of reality tends to rob art of its independent status as a concrete universal. The pure idealist should not be confused with what Coleridge calls the transcendental philosopher. The former denies any essential integrity to matter and remains in a solipsistic, egocentric world of pure mind; the latter acknowledges the real existence of the physical world and yearns to see the world of spirit/mind achieve a full incarnation in the world of matter. The fullest expression of idealism is to be found in the writings of Fichte; the opposite of idealism is materialism.

Ideology: As used by Marxist theorists (and especially by postmodernists who have been influenced by them), ideology refers to a complex belief system by which certain classes at certain periods structure their views of God, art, reality, etc. Those who hold these ideologies (whether they be aristocrats, philosophers, or poets) consider them to be objectively and universally true; in fact, the Marxist asserts, they are social products that do not (as the ideology holder desires to believe) have the power to transcend their historical moment. New historicists in particular have sought in their criticism to so pierce through the aesthetic “shields” (or erasures) that poets erect as to uncover these ideologies and the discursive structures that create them.

Imagination: Though critics sometimes use the words imagination and fancy as synonyms (as does Edmund Burke in his Inquiry), the Romantics (especially Wordsworth and Coleridge) forged an important distinction between the two. The fancy, they argued, was clearly the lesser power: though it does possess the ability to conjure up “fanciful” objects, it must finally, writes Coleridge, “receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.” The fancy, that is, works within fixed parameters; it plays, but on a limited field. The imagination, on the other hand, is freer, more vital: it can recombine ideas and images at will to create new and higher unities. Unlike the fancy, which can only shift images around into new patterns, the imagination has both the perceptive power to see similitude lurking within dissimilitude, unity in the midst of multiplicity, and the synthetic power to fuse and reconcile opposites into one. It is primarily this esemplastic power that enables the imagination to create organic wholes and concrete universals.

Imitation: see mimesis.

Incarnation: Though often used to refer specifically to the Christian belief that, in the person of Jesus Christ, God took on human flesh (John 1:14), the word incarnation is used more generally by logocentric aestheticians to refer to the power of physical, temporal works of art to capture, encapsulate, and contain truths that are non-physical and eternal.

Intellectual belief: see emotional belief.

In Medias Res: In order to produce unified (rather than episodic) plots, Aristotle favored a device by which tragedians would begin their play not at the beginning (with, say, the birth of Oedipus), but in medias res (“in the middle of things”), at a moment of tension and conflict out of which a dramatic reversal and/or recognition is about to spring. The great epic poets (from Homer to Milton) also preferred to plunge in medias res, rather than to begin ab ovo (“from the egg”). Though it is Horace who really coined the term, Aristotle describes the device in his Poetics.
**Intentional Fallacy:** According to W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, two of the most radical new critics, poems should be analyzed and judged solely in terms of their internal structures. Critics who take as their standard of analysis the feelings or intentions of the poet (the psychological causes of the poem) are guilty of what they dub the intentional fallacy; those, on the other hand, who would judge a poem by the impact it has on a reader (its psychological effects) are guilty of the affective fallacy. When either of these fallacies is indulged, the poem itself, as a self-contained artifact with its own aesthetic integrity and ontological existence, tends to disappear. These two fallacies are, respectively, a rejection of both the Romantic, expressive view of poetry as an extension of the poet and the neoclassical, pragmatic view of poetry as something that either teaches/pleases (Horace/Pope) or that carries its reader away on a wave of sublimity (Longinus/Burke). They constitute as well a rejection of any kind of epistemological criticism that would locate aesthetic beauty in our mental response to the poetic object. Rather, they mark a critical return to the classical, mimetic, ontological theories of Aristotle. However, even here, there is a vital shift. For Wimsatt and Beardsley (as for most of the new critics) the poem is to be cut off not just from the poet and the reader, but from the universe as well; the poem is its own universe, a specifically linguistic construct. (Note: The postmodern school of reader-response offers a more recent example of the affective fallacy.)

**Interdisciplinary:** A critical approach, favored by structuralists, in which works of art are viewed from a multitude of perspectives; the need to achieve such a multi-faceted perspective stems from the structuralist belief that art must (and can only fully) be understood as a product of a vast, complex system that takes in all areas of thought. (Foucault’s study of discourse offers a critical assessment of this system.)

**Interpretive Community:** see reader-response.

**Langue:** In the linguistics of Saussure, langue refers to the overall system of signs (along with its rules for grammar, syntax, and standard usage) that allows people to communicate with and understand each other. The langue lies deeper than thought and is accepted unconsciously, rather than chosen consciously, by those who use it (in this, it shares some similarities with the discursive structures of Foucault). Saussure distinguishes langue from parole, a specific instance of speech or writing that arises from (and is the product of) the controlling langue. (Note: In the linguistic theories of Noam Chomsky, langue is called competence and parole is called performance.)

**Linguistics:** Having lost their faith in the real existence of logocentric being and presence (ontology), and in the ability of the human mind to know and understand being and presence (epistemology), metaphysicians and theorists eventually turned to linguistics: the scientific study of the nature, origin, and structure of human language. Traditional, logocentric-minded linguists maintained a faith in the existence of a “language of Adam” that fell pure from heaven but was later disrupted by the tragedy of Babel (Genesis 11). Modern linguists since Saussure have argued that the link between signifier and signified is arbitrary and that language is a cultural-historical, socio-political construct rather than an incarnation of Platonic ideas. Though Saussure’s approach was mostly synchronic, later linguists uncovered and built upon diachronic elements latent in his work.

**Literal:** see four levels of meaning.

**Logocentrism:** A metaphysical and theoretical orientation that has dominated Western thought since Plato, logocentrism has come under growing attack by modern and postmodern theorists. Put simply, logocentrism considers meaning to emanate finally from some logos or originary source that is pure and undefiled. Logocentric-minded aestheticians consider the best art to be that which most fully realizes this logos and believe that such works of art, because they express and incarnate truths that are eternal, can transcend their time and place to exist on a plane of perpetual meaning. Logocentrists not only believe that there is a real and essential link between the signifiers of poetry and the signifieds to which they point, but generally posit a transcendental signified (or center) to which all signifiers can be ultimately referred.

**Logos:** Though the word logos is often used specifically to refer to the incarnate Christ (John 1), it is used more generally by logocentrists to refer to a final center or presence (a transcendental signified). This center not only gives meaning and purpose to all things but serves as the final referent point and touchstone against which all forms of beauty and truth can be measured and judged. Though the literal meaning of logos is “word,” its multiple Greek meanings (which include “speech,” “reason,” and “revelation”) point both to the rational (Apollonian) nature of the logos and to its ability to make itself known in the physical world.

**Materialism:** Philosophically speaking, materialism is the belief that all that exists in our universe is matter, a belief that necessitates not only a rejection of the existence of God but of any and all supernatural beings, agencies, and phenomena. In the work of radical materialists like Marx, this rejection has serious repercussions for critical theory. If nothing exists but matter, then art loses at once its essentialist, transcendent, and incarnational status.
Indeed, works of art (along with philosophy, theology, and consciousness itself) become mere products of material realities that have no separate existence, no inherent meanings of their own. We can expect from art neither essential truths (for nothing pre-exists physical reality), nor transcendence (for there is nowhere to go beyond matter), nor incarnational beauty (for there is no higher beauty to incarnate). The pure materialist should not be confused with what Coleridge calls the natural philosopher. The former denies any essential integrity to the spiritual and so remains stranded in a world devoid of higher meaning or purpose; the latter acknowledges the real existence of the supernatural and yearns to see nature lose itself in the eternal world of spirit. The fullest expression of materialism is to be found in the writings of Marx; the opposite of materialism is idealism.

Mimesis: Greek for “imitation,” the word mimesis carries very different connotations in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. For Plato, mimesis (in the literal sense) refers to the fact that works of art are but imitations (i.e., shadowy copies) of the Forms. Indeed, they are imitations of imitations, since a painted chair is an imitation of an earthly chair, which is itself an imitation of the Form of the Chair (“chairness”) that exists in the heavenly World of Being. The same would hold true for a poem about love: the poem reflects an earthly concept that is itself a reflection of the Form of Love. Thus, Plato concludes, art is twice removed from the Forms (which is to say, twice removed from reality) and therefore not a reliable source of truth or knowledge. (It should be added here, however, that Plato, at times, describes poets as semi-divine madmen who are inspired/possessed by the gods and sing their songs in a prophetic frenzy. This image of the poet, though not necessarily flattering, does suggest that poetry can, in fact, be a vehicle for apprehending divine truths. The fact, too, that Plato is the father of a logocentric aesthetic that has granted to poetry the high status of incarnate vessels of transcendent truths, mitigates his dismissal of art as but a faint copy of the real.) In contrast to Plato, Aristotle saw the mimetic process of art as one that improves and perfects on existing ideas rather than weakening and obscuring them. Thus, rather than converting a Form into a shadowy imitation, the Aristotelian poet takes a shadowy idea and gives it form. According to the Poetics, a great tragedian is one who can take an episodic story (praxis) and, through the power of mimesis, convert it into a unified plot (muthos). Mimesis, for Aristotle, is a sort of alchemical process that, by stripping a tale of all its extraneous elements and concentrating and purifying those that remain, can transform a base, vulgar story (e.g., about a man who killed his father and married his mother) into a golden plot (e.g., about a man dedicated to learning the truth about himself, no matter what the personal cost).

Mimetic Theories: One of the four types of critical approaches defined in M. H. Abrams’ The Mirror and the Lamp. Mimetic theories explore the relationship between the work of art and the universe and judge its success on how close it approximates the true nature of the logos. Mimetic theories are ontological and logocentric in orientation and seek a kind of art that is pure and transcendent.

Modernism: Rising up out of the revolutionary theories of such late-nineteenth-century thinkers as Marx, Freud, Darwin, and Nietzsche, modernism marks an attempt to invert binaries and thus disrupt (or at least problematize) the traditional belief that such things as absolute Truth and Beauty have a pure, transcendent existence separate from (and not contingent upon) the material realities of our world. The most influential school of modernist thought is structuralism.

Muthos: see plot.

Natural Philosopher: see transcendental philosopher.

Negative Capability: This well-worn phrase appears, briefly and somewhat enigmatically, in a letter of Keats. A poet who possesses negative capability (Shakespeare being the supreme example) is able to do at least two things: to enter into the lives of other beings and see the world from their perspective and to be able to rest in the midst of mysteries and paradoxes without needing (philosophically or aesthetically) to reach after fixed answers or resolutions. Though Keats was certainly not a deconstructionist, one could argue that there is much similarity between negative capability and the deconstructionist concept of aporia.

New Criticism: An American school of criticism that reached its height during World War II. New critics are best known for espousing an objective, ontological view of poetry and for advocating poetic explications that focus on the internal structure of the poem rather than on the intentions of the poet or the effect of the poem on the reader (see intentional fallacy, paraphrasable core, and close reading).

New Historicism: A poststructural critical school that, though it borrows much of its methodology from deconstruction, is most strongly indebted to the work of such diachronic historicists as Marx and Foucault. In opposition to the critical stance of synchronic aestheticians, the new historicists (and all historicists in general) assert that art, far from transcending historical/political realities, can only be understood as a product of such
realities. Both poet and poem are stripped of their ability to achieve a pure, “agendaless,” apolitical vantage point from which to view truth (whether philosophical, social, or aesthetic). Indeed, the poet is often treated as the least likely source for clues as to what his poem means, for he is as much a product of his discursive structure as is his poem. To understand a poem, we must pierce through its erasures and thus uncover its hidden ideology. New historicism has tended to focus most of its critical attention on the Elizabethan Age (particularly Shakespeare) and on British Romanticism (especially Wordsworth).

**Non-canonical:** see canon.

**Object:** see subject.

**Objective Correlative:** This phrase appears, briefly and somewhat enigmatically, in an essay by T. S. Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems.” According to Eliot, an objective correlative is an external object, situation, or chain of events that parallels (correlates to) an internal emotion. Because emotions cannot be perceived by the senses and are even difficult to express in language, the poet uses these physical objects and situations to externalize and concretize a heretofore internal/abstract emotion. In keeping with his depersonalized, anti-Romantic view of poetry, Eliot posits the poet not as the source of these emotions but as the site, the artistic medium, where this fusion of external and internal occurs.

**Objective Theories:** One of the four types of critical approaches defined in M. H. Abrams’ *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Objective theories consider works of art to be self-contained, self-referential artifacts that can be studied apart from poet, audience, and cosmos alike. This view of art is linguistic in orientation and is almost wholly identified with the theories of the new critics.

**Ontology:** Whereas ontology (“the study of being”) concerns itself with determining the essence of things (whether natural or supernatural), epistemology (“the study of knowing”) concerns itself not with the thingness of things but with how we know and perceive that thingness. That is to say, ontologists focus on the object, while epistemologists focus on the subject. To the ontologist, beauty is a quality that inheres in a poem or painting; to the epistemologist, beauty is an emotional/intellectual response that occurs within the mind of the person who experiences that poem or painting. Mimetic and objective theories tend to be ontological; pragmatic and expressive theories tend to be epistemological.

**Organic Whole:** In Romantic literary theory (particularly in Coleridge), a great poem is considered to be an organic whole; i.e., an almost living organism in which the whole of the poem not only contains all the parts, but each part contains within itself the whole (just as the seed within the apple contains within itself the potential not only for another apple but for an entire grove of apple trees). In fact, Coleridge’s definition of a poem includes the criterion that it give equal pleasure in the whole as it does in each part. If a poem is truly an organic whole, there should be a dynamic, incarnational relationship between its form and its content. The form of the poem should not be arbitrary or imposed from without; rather, the content of the poem should create its own form. Within the poetic space of the organic whole, idea and image are fused, and dissimilitude is resolved into similitude. An organic whole is essentially symbolic (rather than allegorical) in that it allows abstract ideas to be perceived in and through particular images. One way to judge if a poem is truly an organic whole is to ask if anything can be added to or taken away from it. If parts can be added to or taken away from the poem without changing its essential meaning, then the poet has obviously neither fully realized his poetic purpose nor achieved a complete fusion of parts and whole. The concept of the organic whole dates back to Aristotle’s *Poetics*. (Cf. *concrete universal*.)

**Paradigmatic:** In the linguistics of Saussure, each individual sign has both a paradigmatic (or associative) meaning and a syntagmatic meaning. In the former case, the critic is concerned with why the sign was chosen instead of some related synonym/sound; in the latter, with how the sign functions in terms of the syntax and grammar. In general, poetry (with its strong emphasis on such figures of speech as metaphors and symbols) elicits a more paradigmatic approach; whereas, prose (with its greater rhetorical concerns) favors syntagmatic analysis.

**Paraphrasable Core:** According to John Crowe Ransom, a poem is composed of a logical, coherent structure, a sort of narrative backbone (the paraphrasable core), that is augmented by a “context of lively local details.” The true (new) critic must analyze and appreciate both the universal structure of the poem and its more specific, concrete details (its texture). In his attempt to explain this interplay between structure and texture, he compares it, respectively, to the foundational frame of a house and to the paint, wallpaper, etc., that are used to decorate the house and give it a unique character. Ransom basically agrees with the notion of poetry as a concrete universal, but he insists that both sides of that equation be given equal emphasis. Cleanth Brooks’s famous phrase, the heresy of paraphrase, is meant to be a direct critique of Ransom’s notion of the paraphrasable core. Brooks, the most radical
of the new critics, asserts that there is no paraphrasable core that can be extracted from the poem and viewed apart from its texture. The poem is its union of structure and texture (or, rather, the tension that exists between the two); to try to separate the two is to vivisect and thus kill the poem. (Note: Brooks often uses structure in a higher sense than Ransom does to refer to a poem’s “total pattern,” to its full complex of meanings.)

Parole: see langue.

Play Drive: In his Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man, Schiller distinguishes between the sensuous drive (the Dionysiac side of our being that is emotional, physical, and changing) and the formal drive (the Apollonian side of our being that is rational, spiritual, and eternal). Rather than privilege one over the other, Schiller calls for a fusion of the two into a third drive that he terms the play drive. The play drive strives to reconcile matter and form, object and subject; it creates what Schiller terms a living form, a concept central to Coleridge’s notion of the concrete universal.

Plot: In the Poetics, Aristotle makes a famous distinction between the story (praxis) and the plot (muthos). Whereas the story, let us say, of Oedipus, concerns all those events that took place from his birth to his death, the plot of Oedipus the King focuses on a single day in the life of Oedipus when all the loose strands of his life come together in a climax of great power. The story of Oedipus is a long disunified string of events that moves through a series of disconnected episodes (i.e., it is episodic); the plot of Oedipus is a unified poetic artifact in which each scene follows the previous scene in accordance with necessity, probability, and inevitability. The playwright arrives at the plot, by running the story through the mimetic process. For Aristotle, the plot (rather than the characters) is the most vital part of a tragedy; indeed, it is the very soul of the play. (Cf. in medias res, deus ex machina, unities, reversal, recognition, catharsis, tragedy, tragic flaw, and mimesis.)

Polysenous: see four levels of meaning.

Positivism: A belief system prevalent in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries that held that rationalism, progress, and technology would usher in a new age of happiness. The new critics, sensing rightly that such a system, if taken to its logical end, would render poetry both useless and irrelevant, mounted a firm resistance. Indeed, the new critical view of poetry as a self-enclosed, self-referential artifact was constructed in part to create an aesthetic space for poetry that would shield it from the encroachments of science.

Postmodernism: Whereas modern theory seeks to invert binaries and set up new (and often elaborate) structures of thought, postmodernism seeks to deconstruct all such binaries, refusing to privilege one structure (or center, or reading) over another. Postmodernism tends to be both anti-essentialist and relativistic in its orientation.

Poststructuralism: Essentially identical to postmodernism.

Pragmatic Theories: One of the four types of critical approaches defined in M. H. Abrams’ The Mirror and the Lamp. Pragmatic theories explore the relationship between the work of art and its audience. Pragmatic theorists are concerned with the social, didactic functions of art (with how it teaches and pleases), with the aesthetic rules for poetry (see decorum), and with the intellectual and visceral impact of literature (see catharsis, sublime, beauty). A gradual shift from ontological to epistemological concerns may be seen in such theories. Both classical and modern studies of the nature and status of rhetoric are pragmatic in orientation, as is the postmodern school of reader-response criticism.

Praxis: Greek for “action” or “experience,” praxis is a word used by Marx and his heirs (i.e., by historicists) as a substitute for the logos-centered criticisms of logocentrism and aestheticism. In the Poetics, Aristotle uses the word to mean story, and contrasts it with the Greek word muthos (or plot).

Presence: In metaphysical, logocentric terms, presence signifies a belief in a center or logos that contains within itself pure being, that is self-contained and self-existent (the ultimate example of presence would be the I AM of Exodus 3:16). Whereas ontological theorists (whether Judeo-Christian or Platonic) tend to locate presence in some heavenly World of Being, epistemological theorists since Descartes (and especially since Kant) often posit the absolute self (or transcendent ego) as the central, controlling presence in their metaphysical systems. Postmodernism in general, and deconstruction in particular, have sought to break down both the ontological and epistemological faith in presence. The existentialist motto, “existence precedes essence,” is, in part, a rejection of presence. In feminist criticism, the binary of presence/absence is considered patriarchal and is often linked to the male and female genitalia.

Primary Imagination: In Biographia Literaria, Coleridge makes a famous distinction between the primary and the secondary imagination. According to Coleridge, the primary imagination is a “repetition in the finite mind of the
eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.” The primary imagination establishes a passive link between absolute self-consciousness (the I AM of God) and our own individual self-consciousness. Artists who make use of this creative power are essentially “divine ventriloquists,” poet-prophets who (like an aeolian harp) receive direct inspiration from above and respond passively with a song or a poem. The secondary imagination, on the other hand, is active: “it dissolves, dissipates, diffuses, in order to recreate.” That is to say, the secondary imagination takes the raw material given it by inspiration, breaks it down, and then reshapes it into a new and vital form. (Cf. the Aristotelian notion of mimesis.) Though Coleridge, like all the Romantics, often defined himself as an aeolian harp inspired from without (see both his poem “Kubla Khan” and his preface to that mystical product of the primary imagination), he also knew that it takes the active, shaping force of the secondary imagination to create symbols, organic wholes, and concrete universals. Indeed, in their autobiographies (The Prelude, Biographia Literaria), both Wordsworth and Coleridge define the growth of the poet/philosopher’s mind as moving from the primary to the secondary imagination: from the passive reception of sensation to the mature recollection (Wordsworth) and methodizing (Coleridge) of those sensations.

Pseudostatements: In his attempt to preserve poetry from the corrosive influence of positivism, I. A. Richards insisted that the claims and resolutions of poetry must not be judged by the same criteria (or from the same perspective) as those of science. The statements made by poetry are not to be taken in the context of logical proof or scientific verification; they are pseudostatements meant to be taken in the aesthetic context of a specific poem. Although Richards meant this term to be taken in a positive sense, he soon realized its negative connotations and replaced it with a more nuanced distinction between intellectual belief and emotional belief.

Purple Patch: Phrase coined by Horace in his “Art of Poetry” to refer to long, dull, non-essential passages of description inserted by writers merely to fill up space and to impress the reader with their virtuosity.

Reader-Response: a postmodern school that deconstructs the traditional belief that a given text has a stable, transcendent meaning that is eternally true for all readers. In opposition to this view, reader-response theorists (most notably, Stanley Fish) have argued that there is no fixed, literal, “common sense” meaning to any given text. Indeed, what is perceived to be “in” the text (that fixed meaning we cling to) is actually a product of the assumptions we bring to it, of the interpretive community within which we read it. Thus, though a text may have (within a given historical community) a stable meaning, that meaning will change from community to community. Reader-response theorists often spend much critical effort defining the social, political, and religious make-ups of these interpretive communities. Reader-response theory may be viewed as a postmodern version of older pragmatic theories; it is opposed to the new critical view of the poem as a self-enclosed artifact and is proud to be accused of falling into the affective fallacy.

Recognition: In a well-constructed Aristotelian plot, the climax of the tragedy should include a recognition (“anagnorisis” in Greek), a moment when the hero moves suddenly from a state of ignorance to enlightenment. The best kinds of recognitions are accompanied by reversals.

Reversal: In a well-constructed Aristotelian plot, the climax of the tragedy should include a reversal (“peripeteia” in Greek), a moment when the fortune of the hero moves suddenly from good to bad or bad to good. The best kinds of reversals are accompanied by recognitions.

Secondary Imagination: see primary imagination.

Semiotics: a synonym for semiotics.

Semiotics: Initiated by the linguistic studies of Saussure, semiotics is, to define it most simply, the study of signs (“semion” in Greek) as signifiers. The semiotician seeks to study the way signifiers function in any given society and to uncover the controlling system of signs (or langue) that determines how members of that society will interpret, not just the signifiers of poetry, but all signifiers in general. Semiotics has proven to be quite interdisciplinary in scope; its methodological tools have been borrowed and developed by structuralists, deconstructionists, and psychoanalytical theorists alike. More recently, critics of the cinema have attempted to work out a complex, “scientific” theory to explain the function and impact of visual signs in the popular medium of film. Semioticians are interested not just in what signs mean, but how they mean. (Cf. langue and signified.)

Sensuous Drive: see play drive.

Sign: In the theories of Saussure, the sign is the basic linguistic unit: it is formed by the union of a signified and signifier.
Signified: In the *linguistic* theories of Saussure, the *signified* is the concept toward which the sound-image (or *signifier*) refers. The relationship between the *signified* and *signifier* is arbitrary (there is no *essential* reason why one sound should be chosen over another to represent a given concept). In addition, the *signified*, though it serves as a reference point for the *signifier*, possesses no inherent life or truth of its own (the *signified* is merely a concept and is not to be confused with the eternal, self-existent *Forms*, or Ideas, of Platonic metaphysics). Though Saussure stated that the relationship between *signified* and *signifier* was arbitrary, the *deconstructionists* went beyond this statement to assert a more radical breakdown between the two. (Cf. *transcendental signified, deferral*, and *aporia*.)

Signifier: see *signified*.

Status Quo: In *modern* and *postmodern* theory, this phrase has come to take on a particularly political slant; the *status quo* is no longer what is “normal” or “acceptable,” but what serves the interests of the ruling class (generally, white male bourgeois heterosexuals). *Postmodern* theorists often accuse the *canon* of being a product of the reigning *status quo*.

Story: see *plot*.

Structuralism: A *modernist* school of thought that originated in the *linguistic* studies of Saussure but quickly expanded to take in all areas of thought and study. (*Structuralists* tend to be *interdisciplinary* in their orientation.) The goal of the *structuralist* is (to borrow the terminology of Barthes) to render a given work of art intelligible not by seeking out its hidden meaning, but by dissecting and then recomposing (or *articulating*) the object in accordance with man-made or culture-made rules of association. Works of art are seen as functioning within a system that is often pervasive throughout an entire society. While most *structuralists* tend to take a *synchronic* approach (they seek to freeze a given system and study it as an artifact), others (most notably Foucault) prefer a *diachronic* approach.

Structure: see *paraphrasable core*.

Subject: In the language of German philosophy, the word *subject* is used to refer to a thinking consciousness that perceives. The *subject* is contrasted with the *object*, a non-thinking, unconscious thing that does not perceive but is, rather, perceived by a *subject*. When *aestheticians* like Kant describe the pleasure and judgment of art as purely *subjective*, they mean to say that the experience has nothing to do with the poetic *object* per se, but exists wholly in the mind of the perceiving *subject*. The British Romantic poets made much use of the German distinction between *subject* and *object* and attempted in their poetry and theory to fuse or synthesize the two. Wordsworth, in particular, sought, through the power of *imagination*, to effect what he called the Marriage (or fusion) of Nature (*object*) and the *Mind of Man* (*subject*). Coleridge argued that the first decision that the philosopher must make is whether to begin his search from the *subject* (transcendental philosopher) or from the *object* (natural philosopher).

Subjective: see *subject*.

Subjective Universal: According to Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, although our experience of *beauty* is purely *subjective* (see *subject* above) and constitutes a free, *disinterested* delight, it is nevertheless felt equally (universally) by all people. Though much attacked by modern (particularly *historicism*) and postmodern theorists, the concept of *subjective universality* is central to Kant’s *Critique*.

Sublime: According to Longinus, the *sublime* is a type of elevated language that strikes its listener with the power of a thunderbolt, transporting him to a higher realm of experience that *transcends* time and space. Although this definition would suggest an *epistemological* approach to the *sublime*, Longinus tends to be more *ontological*, defining sublimity more as a quality that inheres in certain lines of a poem. Edmund Burke, on the other hand, took a purely *epistemological* approach to the *sublime*, defining it not as an *objective* quality but as a *subjective* response. Thus, for Burke, *sublimity* is that which inspires in us feelings of terror and astonishment. This is to be contrasted with *beauty*, which invokes sentiments of tenderness and affection. Traditionally, the *sublime* and the *beautiful* have been identified, respectively, with the masculine and the feminine, a patriarchal *gendering* that has been criticized by feminists.

Symbol: Romantic theorists tend to privilege *symbol* over *allegory*. For Coleridge, in an *allegory*, an abstract notion (like the inner struggle between good and evil) is merely translated into a picture language (the devil on one shoulder, the angel on the other). There is no inherent link between the idea and the picture: one merely stands in for the other. In a *symbol*, however, the abstract notion (the salvific blood of Christ) is seen in and through the concrete, physical *symbol* (the communion wine). In the *symbol*, specific and general, temporal and eternal, concrete and universal meet and fuse in an almost mystical, *incarnational* way. (Cf. *concrete universal* and *organic whole*.)
Synchronic: According to Saussure, a linguistic system of signs can be studied either synchronically (by focusing on the way that each individual sign interacts with the overall structure/system) or diachronically (by focusing on how the system itself changes and evolves through time). Saussure’s own viewpoint is clearly synchronic (“same time”); he attempts in his writings (as do Frye, the early Barthes, and most of the new critics) to freeze a given linguistic system and study it apart from history. Other theorists (whose bent is more historicist) prefer a more diachronic (“through time”) approach that seeks to uncover historical and dialectical forces that create and alter the structures and systems of language. Most diachronic thinkers (like Foucault and the new historicists) are strongly indebted to Marx and his study of how the economic forces of history shape and produce not only our language, but our art, our religion, and even our consciousness. Though Saussure uses synchronic and diachronic in a strictly linguistic sense, these terms can be used to distinguish contrary ways of approaching all aspects of human society, from the intellectual to the spiritual, the political to the aesthetic.

Syntagmatic: see paradigmatic.

Synthesis: see dialectic.

Text: According to postmodern theorists, no one type of discourse or genre is essentially superior to any other. As a result, such theorists prefer to label all forms of writing as text, a term that is both non-judgmental and relativistic and that masks an orientation that is non-canonical and anti-essentialist. The word text is further preferred since it reduces all works of art (from The Iliad to a work of pornography) to the status of social products, rather than the aesthetic creations of free and transcendent creative minds. (Note: this secondary meaning of the word text is derived in part from the French structuralist notion that all written discourse is écriture [“writing”], that arises, not from some personal, poetic language, but from the controlling langue.) Text-oriented theorists, in their quest to “democratize” all forms of writing, even refuse to privilege poetry over criticism; thus, to the deconstructionist, a theoretical essay about Hamlet is to be afforded equal “textual” value as the play itself. Indeed, over the last several decades, critical theory has grown into its own literary genre. So much so, in fact, that in many postmodern graduate departments, students spend more time studying critiques of the canon than they do the canon itself.

Texture: see paraphrasable core.

Thesis: see dialectic.

Tragedy: For Aristotle, tragedy is the greatest of literary genres; this classical view of the high status of tragedy has dominated literary theory until very recently (when the postmodern theory of text deconstructed the whole notion of generic hierarchies). Interestingly, though most people think of a tragedy as a play with an unhappy ending, Aristotle defines it as any play in which there is a reversal of fortunes (there are some famous Greek tragedies—most notably Euripides’ Ion—that have happy endings.) However, Aristotle’s stated preference for tragedies with reversals that go from good to bad set the critical taste for subsequent Western theory.

Tragic Flaw: In the Poetics, Aristotle describes the proper tragic hero as a good man whose downfall is brought about “not by vice or depravity, but by some error” (“hamartia” in Greek). Hamartia, translated “error” here, may also be translated “flaw,” to which later commentators have appended the word tragic (or, sometimes, fatal). Aristotle makes it clear that this “tragic flaw” is not a vice, yet most readers tend to think of it as such. Our tendency to do so has been influenced, no doubt, by Shakespearean drama, in which the tragic heroes tend to suffer from a specific vice (what Hamlet calls a “mole in nature”; e.g., the avarice of Macbeth, the jealousy of Othello, the lust of Antony).

Transcend: To transcend is to rise above spatial (physical) and temporal (historical) boundaries. One of the great debates of twentieth-century critical theory is whether or not art has the power to transcend the time and space in which it was written: logocentrists say yes; modern and especially postmodern theorists say no. It is, more than anything, the transcendent nature of art that has made it both the handmaiden and the rival of religion.

Transcendental Signified: For logocentric philosophers and theorists, the transcendental signified is the ultimate or originary signified (the primal center) toward which all signifiers and signifieds (all meaning itself) finally refer. For the theist, God himself is the final transcendental signified. Postmodernism has been particularly strong in tearing down the status of the transcendental signified (which is also to deconstruct being, presence, and center) and in exploring the powerful human desire to posit such a signified as the source and touchstone of all truth and meaning.

Transcendental Philosopher: In Coleridge’s Biographia Literaria, the transcendental philosopher is defined as one who moves (deductively) from subject to object, from mind to nature, from a priori truths (i.e., assumed, non-
empirical foundational truths that are logically groundless only because they are the ground of everything else) to the sensual realities of the physical world. To engage in such a metaphysical journey, the *transcendental philosopher* must first purge his mind (a la Descartes) of all sensation by assuming what Coleridge calls “an absolute, scientific skepticism.” Coleridge contrasts the *transcendental philosopher* (who is essentially Platonic) with the *natural philosopher* (who is essentially Aristotelian). Unlike the *transcendental philosopher*, the *natural philosopher* begins with the object, with nature, with *a posteriori* (*i.e.*, empirical) observations and moves (inductively) upward toward the *subject*, toward mind, toward those higher truths that do not change. The final goal of the *natural philosopher*, writes Coleridge, is to effect “the perfect spiritualization of all the laws of nature into laws of intuition and intellect.” If both philosophers successfully complete their journeys, they will meet in the middle: at a metaphysical nexus point of the general and the specific that is exactly parallel to that self-contained *aesthetic* realm that Coleridge labels, variously, as a *symbol*, an *organic whole*, or a *concrete universal*. *Transcendental philosophers* who do not complete their journey toward the natural risk falling into the abyss of *idealism*; natural philosophers who stop short of the *transcendent* risk the even greater temptation of yielding to *materialism*. Coleridge, in his poetry and criticism, was a confirmed *transcendental philosopher*; Wordsworth, on the other hand, was the quintessential *natural philosopher*. Indeed, in the diverse poems they contributed to *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge betrays his orientation by choosing subjects of a supernatural character, then attempting to render them natural. Wordsworth, on the other hand, betrays his orientation by selecting subjects from nature, then presenting them in such a way as to throw over them the aura of the supernatural. (Note: Coleridge’s distinction between the *transcendental philosopher* and the *natural philosopher* may be fruitfully compared with Schiller’s distinction between the *formal drive* and the *sensuous drive.*)

**Tropological:** see *four levels of meaning*.

**Typology:** In the epistles of St. Paul, *typology* defines a particular way of reading and interpreting the Old Testament. Many of the people, events, and symbols of the Old Testament are significant not only in themselves but as types or *figures* or patterns of things to be revealed later in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and in the new covenant that God makes with the Church. Thus, Joshua (Yeshua), who led the children of Israel over the River Jordan and into the Promised Land is a type (or prefiguring) of Jesus (the Greek equivalent of Yeshua), who leads the Church through the River of death into the Promised Land of heaven. Likewise, the near-sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham (Genesis 22) is a type of the Crucifixion, when God the Father sacrificed his beloved Son. (The *typology* here is rendered more significant by the fact that in the Genesis account, God provides a ram to take the place of Isaac, whereas at Calvary, Jesus himself becomes that ram: the sacrificial scapegoat led to slaughter.) When Jesus reworks and redefines the meaning of Passover at the Last Supper, he engages in a supreme act of *typology*. In terms of the *four levels of meaning*, the *allegorical* (which gives the New Testament fulfillment of the *literal* meaning) is essentially *typological*. Though *typology* (like the *four levels of meaning*) is specifically spiritual in origin, it can be used in a secular setting.

**Unities:** Building on the Aristotelian notion of *plot*, dramatists of the seventeenth-century French neoclassical school (particularly Racine) asserted that all great drama must adhere to the three *unities* of action, time, and place. In addition, therefore, to centering itself around a single main action, the drama was expected to confine itself to a single location and to cover a period of no more than twenty-four hours. Though Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* adheres to the three unities, most of Shakespeare’s greatest plays do not.

**Vertical:** In the *linguistics* of Saussure, the system of *signs* that defines the *langue* for any given society is seen to extend along two axes: the *vertical* (see *paradigmatic* and *synchronic*) and the *horizontal* (see *syntagmatic* and *diachronic*).

**Willing Suspension of Disbelief:** A phrase coined by Coleridge to signify our ability to temporarily suspend the claims of reason and logic and to enter, through the power of the sympathetic *imagination*, into the life and heart of a poem. To inspire in its readers this moment of “poetic faith,” argues Coleridge, a poem must invite them into a higher realm of illusion rather than merely delude them with fanciful images and events. Coleridge’s most famous poem, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” exacts from most of its readers this *willing suspension of disbelief*.

**World of Becoming:** see *Forms*.

**World of Being:** see *Forms*.

**Zeitgeist:** German for “spirit of the age,” the word *zeitgeist* is used to define a belief that, during certain ages (e.g., the Renaissance), there exists a new life force, a fresh perspective that can be felt and perceived in the works of all the artists who live during that age. Romantic theorists like Shelley were strong proponents of this belief, a belief
that most teachers of survey courses use to help distinguish one age from another. Though the concept of *zeitgeist* shares some similarities with that of *discourse*, the former tends to be *transcendent* and *logocentric*, while the latter tends to be *historicist* and *structuralist*. 
Bibliography

Please read Bibliographical Note on page ii of the Part I and Part II booklets. Note 1: * denotes Essential Reading.

I. General Works

*Abrams, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. 7th ed. New York: HBJ, 1999. The best book on the market for defining the meaning of literary terms (and jargon) and for explaining as lucidly as possible the theoretical assumptions, frameworks, agendas, and methods of each of the major critical schools. This is an excellent companion book to Adams’ Critical Theory Since Plato. If you can’t get a hold of the seventh edition, the sixth edition is fine.

*Adams, Hazard, ed. Critical Theory Since Plato. Revised ed. New York: HBJ, 1992. See Bibliographical Note on p. ii; this is the one book you must buy. It contains all the essential essays from Plato to postmodernism and is even lightly annotated. Each essay is preceded by a brief but helpful preface on the major contributions of the theorist in question and, even more helpfully, by a brief bibliography. This is the textbook I always use when I teach a class on literary theory.

Auerbach, Erich. Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968. Although this seminal work of theory focuses much more on prose than on poetry, it has become almost essential reading for anyone interested in the development of Western literature and culture from the Greeks to the present. The first chapter, a comparison/contrast of the literary styles and artistic perspectives of Homer and Genesis is a bona fide classic and a must read.


*Benet’s Reader’s Encyclopedia. 3rd ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1987. Like Holman’s Handbook, this marvelous encyclopedia has helpful entries on all the main literary terms and movements. Again, as with Holman, this cannot take the place of Abrams’ Glossary in the area of pure literary theory; however, any serious reader of literature would do well to own either Holman or Benet’s. Note: an added benefit of Benet’s is that it contains helpful biographies on nearly all the theorists covered in this series. Now available in a (much longer) fourth edition (1996), edited by Bruce Murphy.

Bloom, Allan. The Closing of the American Mind. New York: Simon & Schuster (Touchstone Books), 1987. Though not really a work of literary theory, this hugely successful bestseller does, in its too-often ignored 100-page middle section, offer what amounts to a literary-cultural history of the West, with a heavy focus on the Germans (those interested in Lectures Nine through Twelve of this series will find Bloom’s insights interesting and challenging).

Bloom, Harold. The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry. London: Oxford UP, 1973. One of the most famous (and infamous) works of criticism of the last thirty years, this highly esoteric yet intensely provocative study offers a theory of the relation between poets and critics that is both unsettling and hard to dismiss. Bloom’s thesis, influenced strongly by the Oedipal theories of Freud, is that each new poet must overthrow the “strong” poet who has preceded him: a dialectical view of poetic history that yet resists falling into the pit of Marxist materialism. This book has recently been re-issued in a second edition by Oxford (1997).


*Guerin, Wilfrid L., et al. A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. Rather than offer a glossary of theory, as does Abrams (see above), this excellent handbook offers a full chapter on each theoretical school (with a strong emphasis on the twentieth century). In addition, the theory is put into practice through a series of brief interpretations of well-known literary masterpieces. A first-rate handbook.

Hirsch, Jr., E. D. Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know. New York: Random House (Vintage Books), 1987. Like Bloom’s Closing of the American Mind, this was a national bestseller that, though its focus is not really literary theory, has much to say on related issues. Most people bought it for its “Trivial-Pursuit-like” appendix that offers an extensive list of “what literate Americans know,” but its central chapters (too often left
unread) offer an intriguing theory of how cultural literacy is vital to human memory and communication. Well worth reading.


Note 2: Students interested in expanding their appreciation for and understanding of the many different ways that a given work can be interpreted are encouraged to consult two excellent series of books: *The Norton Critical Editions* and the *Signet Classic Shakespeare*. In each of these series, the editors devote the first half of the book to an authoritative, well-annotated edition of a classic work (in Norton, this often consists of a selection of poetry), and the second half, to a dozen or so essays written by various critics from various time periods and schools. Each book therefore offers a veritable theoretical prism through which to view the work at hand. These editions are highly recommended.

II. Classical Theory (Lectures One through Four)


Else, Gerald F. *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry*. Ed. Peter Burian. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986. An in-depth look at Plato’s and Aristotle’s theories of poetry by one of the great translators of Aristotle; only for those interested in more technical information. Students who find this work to their liking will want to get a hold of Else’s main work: *Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument* (1957), a line-by-line analysis of the *Poetics*. This work is currently out of print, but should be available at a good university library.

Golden, Leon, the critic who “invented” the notion of catharsis as clarification, has written several essays that will interest the student of Aristotle; three of the most important are: “Mimesis and Catharsis,” *Classical Philology* 64 (1969), 145–53; “The Purification Theory of Catharsis.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 (1973), 473–479; “Epic, Tragedy, and Catharsis.” *Classical Philology* 71 (1976), 77–85.

Grube, G. M. A. *Plato’s Thought*. This 1935 classic is the standard study of Platonic thought. It was reprinted in 1980 by Hackett.


———. Penguin editions of *Phaedrus, Timaeus*, and *Symposium*. Though all of Plato’s dialogues make use, in some way or another, of myth and allegory, these three dialogues show Plato at his most poetic.

*Sophocles. Oedipus Tyrannus*. Trans. and ed. by Luci Berkowitz and Theodore F. Brunner for the Norton Critical Edition Series, 1970. Although any standard text of *Oedipus the King* will do (most notably, the version in *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore for the University of Chicago Press), I would encourage the student to buy this edition, because it contains, in the back of the book, a wealth of different critical assessments of the play. See Note 2 in section I, General Works, above.

McKeon, Richard. “The Concept of Imitation in Antiquity.” In *Critics and Criticism*. Edited by R. S. Crane for The University of Chicago Press. This essay is available in both the unabridged (1952) and abridged (1957) versions (both of which are out of print, but should be available at any university library). McKeon’s essay offers a straightforward and helpful overview of both Plato’s and Aristotle’s understanding of mimesis. Students interested in the continuing influence of Aristotle’s view of poetry will want to read all the essays in this fine collection by a
group of neo-Aristotelians known collectively as the Chicago Critics. They may wish, as well, to consult R. S. Crane’s *The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry* (reprinted by University of Chicago, 1986), the crowning work of the Chicago Critics.

**III. Neoclassical Theory (Lectures Five through Eight)**


———. *English Literary Criticism: 17th and 18th Centuries*. London: Methuen (University Paperbacks), 1966. This is another good standard reference by Atkins. Currently out of print but available in any good university library.

Crane, R. S. “English Neo-Classical Criticism: An Outline Sketch.” In *Critics and Criticism*. Edited by R. S. Crane for The University of Chicago Press. This essay is only available in the unabridged (1952) version; however, it can also be found in *The Dictionary of World Literature* (1943), edited by Joseph T. Shipley. Though brief, this essay continues to be a useful overview of the topic. Both books are currently out of print, but should be readily available at any university library.


Showerman, Grant. *Horace and His Influence* (1922). Reprinted by Cooper Square Publishers in 1963. A standard work on the subject; one of the volumes in the *Our Debt to Greece and Rome* series.

*Tillyard, E. M. W. The Elizabethan World Picture: A study of the idea of order in the age of Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton*. New York: Random House (Vintage Books), 1959. This is a wonderful and even thrilling account of the way thinkers like Sidney viewed the cosmos. The Renaissance vision of an ordered universe, a vision not all that dissimilar from the one held by Horace, Longinus, Dryden, and Pope, lies behind the aesthetic views that all the theorists held in this unit of poetry. A must read.

**IV. Philosophical Roots of Romanticism (Lectures Nine through Twelve)**


*Engell, James. The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981. The best and most lucid study of German Romantic theory; it surpasses even Wellek’s famous study (see below) in its depth and breadth of knowledge. I relied completely on this book while writing my dissertation on Wordsworth. If you can’t get a hold of this book, Engell’s (and Bate’s) introduction to their edition of Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* (see section V below) covers some of the same ground, though, of course, in less detail.

Kant, Immanuel. *Philosophical Writings*. Ed. Ernst Behler. New York: Continuum, 1986. This excellent selection from the works of Kant (Volume 13 of the prestigious 100-volume The German Library) contains *The Critique of Judgment* in its entirety and is highly recommended for all students interested in Kant. Students who wish to learn more about German Romanticism may wish to consult, among others, Volume 33 (Heinrich Heine, *The Romantic School and Other Essays*) and Volume 21 (*German Romantic Criticism*). If you can’t find the two books by Schiller listed below, Volume 17 offers a collection of Schiller’s essays.

———. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*. Trans. Reginald Snell. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1954. Though Adams anthologizes eight of the twenty-seven letters in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, fans of Schiller will want to own them all. This is a fine inexpensive edition with a good introduction. Alas, this too is out of print; check libraries and used bookstores. At present, Schiller publications in America are more or less limited to The German Library (see above).

*Solomon, Robert C. *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self*. Volume 7 of the History of Western Philosophy series. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. Regular customers of The Teaching Company will be well acquainted with Solomon’s work, which always combines intellectual insight and philosophical depth with great style and lucidity. Although this book has little to say about literary theory per se, it is an excellent resource for understanding not only the specific intricacies of Kantian epistemology but the more general repercussions of a theoretical stance that is focused on the subjective self. It also offers a fine overview of the theories of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Marx.


V. British Romanticism (Lectures Thirteen through Sixteen)

*Abrams, M. H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford, Oxford UP, 1953 (reprint, 1971). One of the classics of literary theory, it explains in rich detail the sources, assumptions, and legacies of the Romantic theorists (both English and German, both major and minor). Abrams makes the theory come alive! This book is also a must buy, because of its famous first chapter, in which Abrams lays out his four-fold division of criticism into mimetic, pragmatic, expressive, and objective (see Lecture One). Indeed, though its focus is Romantic theory, this is really a work that I could just as well have placed in section I above; Abrams has written not just the history of Romantic theory but of Western theory in general.


*Bloom, Harold, ed. *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*. New York: Norton, 1970. A first-rate collection of essays on Romanticism with much to say on theory. This edition contains extensive extracts from Samuel H. Monk’s study of the sublime (see section III above) and Bate’s study of Keats (see entry above), as well as essays by Abrams and Northrop Frye; well worth having on your shelf.


*Gleckner, Robert F., and Enscoe, Gerald E. *Romanticism: Points of View*. 2nd ed. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1975. A classic collection of essays that spans almost a century (the first essay is from 1889) and offers contrasting views of Romantic theory. Some essays take potshots; others are revisionist; yet others are competitive. To read these essays is to leap into the critical fray. A fun read.

**VI. Objective Criticism (Lectures Seventeen through Twenty)**


*Brooks, Cleanth. The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company (Harvest Books), 1956. Arguably the most important and defining work of new criticism. In addition to its more general chapters (e.g., on the Heresy of Paraphrase), it offers a series of chapter-length close readings of such famous poems as Donne’s “Canonization,” Wordsworth’s “Intimations Ode,” and Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” Still maintains its freshness today.


———. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. New York: HBJ (Harvest Books), 1982. One of Frye’s later works, this is very readable and wholly absorbing. Highly recommended for students interested in the Bible as literature.


Ransom, John Crowe. *The World’s Body*. New York: Scribner’s, 1938. An early masterpiece of new critical thought and a great read. This is currently available only in a facsimile edition from Books on Demand, UMI; however, it can easily be checked out at any library.

Richards, I. A. *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World (Harvest Books), 1956. One of the early foundational works of new criticism. Highly recommended. (Students who enjoy this work will want to consult Richards’s earlier study, *The Principles of Literary Criticism.*)

Tate, Allen. *On the Limits of Poetry: 1928–1948*. Reprinted by Ayer, 1977. Though I did not have time to discuss Tate in my lectures, he is one of the great new critics, and these essays are well worth a look.


**VII. Modern and Postmodern Theory (Lectures Twenty-One through Twenty-Four)**

Culler, Jonathan. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975. Culler, along with Scholes, is one of those critics blessed with the ability to define difficult theoretical concepts in layman’s terms. This is a fine and lucid book. Culler followed it seven years later with an equally fine and lucid study of poststructuralism: *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Cornell, 1982). Culler has just come out with a new (1998) book from Oxford UP entitled *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*; I have not yet seen it, but still feel confident that I can give it a hearty recommendation.

*Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory: An Introduction. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983. One of the best and most lucid studies of modern and postmodern theory available. Eagleton is a Marxist, but he’s up front about it and manages to achieve a fairly level plane of objectivity. This book has helped many a graduate student prepare for his literary theory classes.


Lentricchia, Frank. After the New Criticism. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980. A seminal study of modern and postmodern theory. Though not as difficult as most recent theoretical studies, this is still quite challenging for readers who have not done graduate work in English. However, if you’re feeling limber and in need of a challenge, you might enjoy it. But beware: Lentricchia is an avowed and none-to-subtle historicist. He’s a veritable devourer of aesthetic ideologies.

Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. The German Ideology. Selected and edited by C. J. Arthur. New York: International Publishers, 1970. This brief selection from Marx’s seminal work is really all the student needs to gain a full understanding of Marx’s materialist thought and the repercussions of this thought on art and aesthetics.


Note 3: The books written by the theorists discussed in Lectures Twenty-Two through Twenty-Four are very difficult, and I would suggest sticking with the essays anthologized in Adams and the secondary sources listed above. However, for the ambitious student, here is a list of some of the seminal works by each of these theorists: Saussure, Course in General Linguistics (1913); Barthes, Mythologies (tr. 1967), S–Z (tr. 1974); Foucault, Madness and Civilization (tr. 1965), Discipline and Punish (tr. 1977), The History of Sexuality I (tr. 1978); Derrida, Of Grammatology (tr. 1976), Writing and Difference (tr. 1978); De Man, Blindness and Insight (rev. 1983), Allegories of Reading (1979); Fish, Self-Consuming Artifacts (1972), Is There a Text in This Class? (1980).

Note 4: Students who wish some hands-on experience with modern and postmodern theory are encouraged to consult a new and exciting series put out by St. Martin’s Press (Bedford Books): Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism. After reprinting a classic text (Frankenstein, Wuthering Heights, The Scarlet Letter, Hamlet, etc.), the editor offers five analyses of that text, each of which represents closely a given contemporary school (feminism, Marxism, reader-response, deconstruction, etc.). Furthermore, each of these essays is preceded by a succinct overview of the theories, approaches, and methods of the theoretical school represented by that essay and by a very useful, up-to-date bibliography of key books and articles related to that school. In terms of the lecture series at hand, these books are even more helpful than the Norton Critical Editions or the Signet Classic Shakespeare (see Note 2, section I) because they are specifically organized around established theoretical schools. But beware: most of the essays in this series are quite difficult and call for much theoretical sophistication.