

## HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

**ENGLISH LITERATURE***Frederic Will, Ph.D.***Contents**

Overview of English literature

*MEDIEVAL***Poetry**Religious (Langland/ *Piers Plowman*)Epic (*Beowulf*; Chaucer)Narrative (*Gawain*; Mallory)**Vision Literature**

Julian of Norwich

*16<sup>th</sup> CENTURY - Renaissance***Drama** (Shakespeare; Marlowe)**Epic** (Spenser)**Lytic** (Sidney; Wyatt and Surrey)*17<sup>th</sup> CENTURY***Drama** (Jonson)**Poetry****Lytic** (Donne; Herbert; Marvell)**Narrative** (Dryden; Browne)**Epic** (Bunyan; Milton)*18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY***Poetry** (Pope)**Fiction** (Defoe; Swift)**Essay - Philosophy** (Shaftesbury)Essay - **Criticism** (Johnson)*19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY***Poetry****Lytic** (Wordsworth; Keats; Hopkins; Blake)**Dramatic** (Byron)**Essay - Criticism** (Coleridge; Pater)**Fiction** (Dickens; Austen)*20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY***Fiction** (Joyce; Hardy; Lawrence; Woolf)**Drama** (Beckett)**Poetry** (Yeats; Auden; Eliot)

### *Overview of English Literature*

English literature is richly represented for all the major modern periods—Mediaeval, Renaissance, 17th century, 18th century, 19th century, 20<sup>th</sup> century, and now our own 21<sup>st</sup> century. In addition there is a great early text, discovered only in modern times but composed in the 8<sup>th</sup> century—*Beowulf*—which adds a new dimension to the English tradition, itself being of both Germanic and Anglo Saxon provenance. As for the periodization by centuries, this rough and ready means of classifying the stages of English literature is at least a useful guide to assessing the development of this rich body of texts.

From the Mediaeval period we retain texts of profound religiosity, like those of Julian of Norwich or William Langland the author of *Piers Plowman*, tales with religious inflection but vast imagination, like *Sir Gawain*, or *Le Morte Darthur*, or epic panoramas of the life and times of a cross section of people, pilgrims to a shrine, as it happens, but very down to earth and realistic personages, as it also happens; the characters of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The narratives and perspectives of the Middle Ages linger among these documents, but reveal the first contours of modernity here and there, especially in Chaucer.

During certain centuries, specific genres prove dominant. In the sixteenth century Renaissance, of Elizabethan English, there is a great flowering both of sonnet poetry, and of drama, and a noticeable decline in the presence of religious themes in literature. One might say that with the growth of the autonomy of the individual, and the quickening pace of that commerce which forces people together, genres of intellectual directness are surging to the fore. The sonnet, that verse form so often consecrated to love and lovers, and circumscribed by a strict formality, becomes a showpiece of literary achievement, reaching its highest achievement in the works of Shakespeare, and in the work of Wyatt and Surrey. Nothing in the poetry of the time surpasses this sonnet work, except perhaps *The Faerie Queene*, the recondite verse masterpiece of Edmund Spenser. As for drama, there is not only Shakespeare, the master of them all, but the brilliant Christopher Marlowe—and others we can't find place to mention here, in this century of dramatic explosion.

The poetic genius of English Renaissance Literature is rivalled by the complex, often religious and passionate, poetry of the 17<sup>th</sup> century group later called Metaphysicals—Donne, Herbert, Marvell. This efflorescence of subtle and ironic language, written into many forms, is still today a living directive to the poetic impulse. At the other end of the literary creative spectrum, in this century marked in England by heavy political turmoil—the conflict between the Stuart monarchy and Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth form of government—lies the epic creativity of the time: John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. These two profoundly different, but most influential, texts prove the continuing life of the Christian perspective in seventeenth century English literature. Other genres of literature begin to abound, in this century which sees Britain taking on the forms of a middle class early modern society. The satirical dramas of Ben Jonson, directed at the new members of that society, would be appropriate examples.

18<sup>th</sup> century British literature is likely to seem, from our current view point, more distant than the achievements of the centuries before and after it. One might think of such towering figures as Samuel Johnson, Alexander Pope, John Dryden, Jonathan Swift: while deeply immersed in their own times, these highly educated writers are masters of critique, of social interpretation, of wit and irony. They are not among the driving originators of the new in English literature. One of the most generative figures of the period is Daniel Defoe, a novelist, journalist, and social critic, who anticipates much of the thinking of our own time, about the nature and perils of the social contract.

The 19th century, in British literature as in global culture, is multi dimensional and hard to assemble. The Romantic Movement, at the beginning of the century, is the most easily classified period of development, and with it, in England and Western Europe, the Napoleonic Wars, followed by a sequence of efforts to shore up conservative values. (And, not long after the Restoration in France, the development of Marxist thought, which would rumble through the remainder of the century.) The Romantic Movement saw radically new developments in English poetry—one thinks first of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, a trio as startlingly brilliant as the Metaphysicals in the 17th century. Wordsworth's *Prelude*, with its conversational line, its introspective power, and its world-sensitive modernity, marks an extraordinary step forward. Of equal innovative power, in 19th century British literature, is the multi sided development of the

novel genre. Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy are among the several, profoundly different, fictional voices that turn their attention onto the confused but 'progressing' society around them.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century will advance into new forms of poetry and drama, and startle the world with the innovations of an English language which is gradually expanding out beyond its British margins, beyond any expectations of literary tradition. In drama, Samuel Beckett, writing both in French and English, creates a stark minimalist theatre which counterpoints the dense allusiveness of the fiction of his fellow Irishman, James Joyce, in *Ulysses*. In poetry Yeats, Auden, and T.S.Eliot go very diversely about opening rare new spaces for the imagination. The novelist D.H. Lawrence, stepping away from the subtleties of the Joycean world, commits himself to a new kind of earthy passion in fiction—and carries it off with a sure touch.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has not yet a name or voice, in English literature. But it seems easily predictable that the vigor of the English literary tradition will maintain the world directive standards so long associated with the English language, which is itself increasingly becoming the second world language.

## Mediaeval

### *The Background*

The literary culture of pre-conquest Britain can be said to have opened with the introduction of Christianity into Britain, and to be marked by a date like 597, when the Benedictine monk Augustine, sent by Pope Gregory, arrived in Kent, effected the conversion of King Ethelbert, and became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. From that point on access to the classical heritage of the west was made possible. When it came to the discovery of a national literary consciousness, however, the dominant tone in Britain was marked by sharp conflict, among the remaining vestiges of Roman culture and tradition, the introduction of new classical learning, the influence of religious texts reflecting Mediaeval Christianity in several forms, and Germanic influenced Old English texts, which reflected the cultural mix created by a confluence of tribes: Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and native Britons. The greatest work of the pre-conquest period, from the literary standpoint, was *Beowulf* (8<sup>th</sup> century), and precisely there we see clearly the blend of the Christian with the pagan Germanic. In fact the poetry of the time in general reflects the blending of Christianity with the pagan. The poet we call Cynewulf (750-825) wrote, in his *The Dream of the Rood*, about Christ's cross' reflection on the Crucifixion. (The felling of the cross tree, to begin with, swells with pagan implications, while the tree's power, in confronting injustice, is redolent of pre-Christian vitalism.) An even earlier poet, Caedmon (7<sup>th</sup> century), wrote religious literature of which nothing remains but nine lines of a Hymn admiring the Creator. This hymn praises the noble vault of heaven, but in terms that could ring from a pagan as well as a Christian soul. This pre-Conquest culture will serve as a reference point in the present entry on 'British literature,' but as you read the works from this early period you will experience the difference of their world from the world introduced by the Norman Conquest, to which we keep referring. That Conquest, which will bring French culture and language into Britain, will decisively link Britain to the classical world of Roman and Greek culture, a world which in earlier Britain was present only as a colonial occupation, not as a driving cultural force. Not the least of the post-conquest differences will be in language: for the blend of French (and thus Latin) with English, which was a byproduct of the Conquest, was to set the tone for a new literary culture in the British Isles; and to open the door to an evolving form of the language you speak today.

### Discussion Questions

1. Does *Beowulf* belong to English literature? Does the author of the poem feel he/she is working in any national tradition, or belongs to a nation? Does the poem embody a deep relation to cultures other than British? *Are there vestiges of ancient classical learning in Beowulf?*
2. What attitudes and literary strategies does Chaucer share with the other writers considered in this Unit? Is he deeply touched by the Christian tradition you find in Julian of Norwich or *Sir Gawain*? Would he appreciate the kinds of humor and dark passion we find in *Morte Darthur*? Or is Chaucer a Humanist for the ages, who stands out and above his time?
3. Where do you find allegorical thinking in early English literature, and what do we need to know about allegory, in order to understand the way it works in this early literature? Is it possible for us to take pleasure in allegorical literature today? Do we create and consume allegory ourselves?

## William Langland

**Life and Work of Willam Langland.** William Langland (1332-1386) comes to us virtually without personal details. He was from the West of England, and was, as we can see from his major poem, immersed in the religious and social values of his time. It seems he was an unbenched clerk in minor orders, thus an ecclesiastic. And thus, to add, he was thoroughly familiar with holy writ, and with the meanings it had both for his own religious values, and for moral and aesthetic imagination. He was also in sync with the aesthetic assumptions of contemporary serious poets—compliant in the long, talkative pentameter line, compliant in the framing of his most serious work in terms of dream and allegory. We have to imagine that Langland's own values are wrapped up in the allegorical clothing of his text, for *The Vision of Piers Plowman* is not only a history of the major events of the Christian story, but a revelation of the poet's understanding of Christ's significance. Piers, Peter, bears the weight of cosmic meaning on his shoulders, in an unfolding allegory which is at the same time a lively narrative based on alleged vision, and in which is embedded the confusion, chaos, and uncertainty of human societies in our fallen world.

**A sample of the work.** *Passus* (Section) 18 of *Piers Plowman*, opens on the picture of a world-trudging pilgrim dreaming of 'Christ's passion and pain' and of His people, which includes one Piers the Plowman, a slightly tweaked version of our poet himself. Through the lens of dream, Piers allows allegorical figures—Peace, Love, Mercy, Righteousness—to play through an account of the tale of Christ's sacrifice. There is a blending, here, of the Christian vision of the inherent glory of the created world with a narrative of the weariness of all things human. Even today's reader, often uncomfortable with the larger terms of this narrative argument, is likely caught up in the sharp edged energy with which Langland juxtaposes the divine and human worlds. Still in *Passus* 18, Langland goes on to dramatize the meeting and marriage of Righteousness and Peace, and to mirror, in the language used, the blending of differences required in that juxtaposition.

*Thou seist (sayest) sooth (truth), said Righteousness, and reverently her kissed Peace, and Peace her per secula seculorum (till the end of time, phrase from Roman liturgy.)*

Middle English and Latin are juxtaposed within a single couplet, as is done elsewhere in this *Passus*. One must be in Langland's culture, where both Latin and Middle English were vibrantly present speech forms, to grasp the almost Modernist literary play put into action here; juxtaposition and interweaving of languages as we in the twentieth century find it in the fiction of James Joyce or the poetry of T.S.Eliot. The reader of this Langland Modernism may also reflect that Langland's was a culture in which two languages—Latin and English-- were prominent, at least among the educated. We are at a transitional intersection, the mediaeval world slowly slipping away, and the Renaissance, nationally self-aware British world starting to take full control of itself, and Langland knows just how to exploit the aesthetic of the speech of his moment. The blending of Catholic theology with dramatic tale carries this aesthetic subtlety so effortlessly, that we realize we are in a setting where the Christian narrative is widely and comfortably accepted in English literature—perhaps as convincing an acceptance as we will find in later British literature.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*The Vision of Piers Plowman*, London, 1978.

#### Secondary source reading

Godden, Malcolm, *The Making of 'Piers Plowman,'* London, 1990.

#### Further reading

Alford, John, ed. *A Companion to Piers Plowman*, Berkeley, 1988.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. In many ways the Christian mediaeval imagination—allegorical, indirect, trading in symbols drawn from intense belief—is hard for us to read, harder either than ancient classical literature or even the difficult

works of our own time, like James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* which requires a detailed commentary. What do you think is the reason for the choice of allegory by William Langland?

2. In *Piers Plowman* Langland creates a character in search of the best way to lead the Christian life. The social perspective, under which that search is imagined as possible, is communitarian, and in a way conservative, supporting the reigning feudal structure of the time. Is it easy to penetrate that world view, from the angle of our contemporary society?

**Excerpt** <http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/authors/langland/pp-pro.html>

N a summer season · when soft was the sun,  
 I clothed myself in a cloak as I shepherd were,  
 Habit like a hermit's · unholy in works,  
 And went wide in the world · wonders to hear.  
 But on a May morning · on Malvern hills,  
 A marvel befell me · of fairy, methought.  
 I was weary with wandering · and went me to rest  
 Under a broad bank · by a brook's side,  
 And as I lay and leaned over · and looked into the waters  
 I fell into a sleep · for it sounded so merry.  
 Then began I to dream · a marvellous dream,  
 That I was in a wilderness · wist I not where.  
 As I looked to the east · right into the sun,  
 I saw a tower on a toft · worthily built;  
 A deep dale beneath · a dungeon therein,  
 With deep ditches and dark · and dreadful of sight  
 A fair field full of folk · found I in between,  
 Of all manner of men · the rich and the poor,  
 Working and wandering · as the world asketh.  
 Some put them to plow · and played little enough,  
 At setting and sowing · they sweated right hard  
 And won that which wasters · by gluttony destroy.

## Beowulf

**Beowulf, its literary greatness.** The greatest single achievement of Old English poetry, *Beowulf* ranks as one of the world's most touching and mysterious epic poems. The pagan and the Christian blend here, and do so in an atmosphere that rinses away the differences between the two cultures. This oral work was composed in Northumbria about 750 A.D., and was doubtless performed by a scop in regional mead halls, to the accompaniment of the harp.

**Preservation of the poem:** a product of an ancient oral tradition, *Beowulf* was probably put to writing around 1000 A.D., by a literate Anglo Saxon with significant knowledge of both pagan Germanic cultures and Christianity, and with a good feel for the rhythms of Anglo Saxon poetry. The blending of Christian with pagan themes, in the poem, belongs to the end of the first millennium: God, as in Caedmon's *Hymn* (7<sup>th</sup> century), is the supreme creator, while the beastly Grendel—a descendant of Cain, in the poem—is diabolical, and Hell her appropriate abode. It is important to note that, although the epic was created in the earliest period of the development of the English language, it slipped out of sight for the first seven centuries of its existence, and only in the eighteenth century did it become a factor in the development of English literature. Even at that—and we pause to think of the fragility of the literary tradition—the one manuscript of *Beowulf* barely survived a fire, which destroyed many of the manuscripts with which it was housed, in the country library of an English bibliophile.

**Historical setting of the poem:** *Beowulf* may well have been composed in the mid 8<sup>th</sup> century, and probably, though the work is clearly a blend of legend and history, reflects both ancient Anglo Saxon events, from the sixth century at the latest, and events that transpired at the turn of the millennium in Britain, at the time the poem was written down. Those earliest events, to the extent we can plausibly place them, involved turf wars and rivalries among immigrant Anglo Saxon and Germanic tribes in Britain. The poem, therefore, serves as a precious key to the earliest period of British culture, as well as to the contemporary seafaring intersections between Scandinavian and British culture.

**The tale in a nutshell:** Beowulf, a hero of the Geats, is the central figure of the narrative, which he holds together by defeating three antagonists: the dreadful monster Grendel, who has been attacking the warrior residents of the mead hall of Hroðgar (the king of the Danes); Grendel's mother; and finally an unnamed dragon. After the first two victories, Beowulf goes home to Geatland in Sweden and becomes king of the Geats. The last fight, against the unknown dragon, takes place fifty years later. In this final battle, Beowulf is fatally wounded. After his death, his servants bury him in a tumulus in Geatland. And so you have it, the ingredients of either a masterpiece or a generic potboiler. The wise course is to take this epic, loose in construction when compared to the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*, as a document in the working through of contrasting religious/cultural values. While monster slaying is of central concern, all the conquests of the untamed world can also be read as episodes in Christ's overcoming of the savage evil of the world.

## Reading

### Primary source reading

*Beowulf: A New Translation*, trans. Seamus Heaney, New York, 2000.

### Secondary source reading

Irving, E.B. *Rereading 'Beowulf,'* Philadelphia, 1989.

### Further reading

Niles, J.D., *Beowulf: The Poem and its Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983.

### Suggested discussion questions

1. Do you read *Beowulf* as a pagan or as a Christian text? What elements of belief in Christian religion do you see? What is the meaning of this archaic epic poem for us today in the West?

2. *Beowulf* seem to you part of the early literature of England, or to belong to another world of values and styles? Does the language itself seem to you part of the English language of today? Does the reading of *Beowulf* throw some special light on contemporary English?

**Excerpt** <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16328/16328-h/16328-h.htm>

In the boroughs then Beowulf, bairn of the Scyldings,  
Belovèd land-prince, for long-lasting season

Was famed mid the folk (his father departed,  
The prince from his dwelling), till afterward sprang

5

Great-minded Healfdene; the Danes in his lifetime  
He graciously governed, grim-mooded, agèd.

Healfdene's birth.

Four bairns of his body born in succession  
Woke in the world, war-troopers' leader  
Heorogar, Hrothgar, and Halga the good;

10

Heard I that Elan was Ongentheow's consort,

He has three sons—one of them, Hrothgar—and a daughter named Elan. Hrothgar becomes a mighty king.  
The well-beloved bedmate of the War-Scylfing leader.

Then glory in battle to Hrothgar was given,  
Waxing of war-fame, that willingly kinsmen  
Obeyed his bidding, till the boys grew to manhood,

15

A numerous band. It burned in his spirit  
To urge his folk to found a great building,  
A mead-hall grander than men of the era

He is eager to build a great hall in which he may feast his retainers  
Ever had heard of, and in it to share  
With young and old all of the blessings



## Geoffrey Chaucer

**The Early Life of Geoffrey Chaucer.** Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London about 1340, to a family of French descent who had made their fortune in the wine trade. We know that the family had grown prosperous and that it was Chaucer's fortune to have been brought up near the Wine-Trade docks of the River Thames, where he had a chance to watch foreigners at work and play, as well as to begin his observation of a wide variety of English and foreign personal types, an exposure which was to serve him well in what turned out to be a highly developed writing career. When he was ready for a career his father got him a job as a page at court, and from there, Chaucer further developed his experience of society in action. In fact the court, and the social/commercial life it fostered, was to prove a stepping stone for Chaucer into an active life of business and diplomacy.

**Chaucer in Mid Life.** Not only did Chaucer live from the vintner profits of the family, but, while marrying and enjoying fatherhood, he committed substantial periods of time to diplomatic service in Europe. He became acquainted, in that way, with many of Europe's literary luminaries, like Petrarch and Boccaccio. Chaucer went on to form many fruitful personal royal connections as well, to observe life in its pageantry, especially as it played out into the separation among the three dominant classes of society: the nobility, the church and the commoners. It was this last mentioned opportunity that especially enriched Chaucer's awareness of his world, of which we need to note the sharply transitional quality in the second half of the fourteenth century. From other contemporary writers, like William Langland of *Piers Plowman*, or the author of *Gawain and the Green Knight*, we would not know that the formation of a vibrant class society was under way, and that the older feudal world, which is still amply present in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, was yielding to a pre modern Europe.

**The Canterbury Tales.** *The Canterbury Tales*, which draws on this broad experience of humanity, is a long poem considered by most critics to be Chaucer's greatest work. He wrote a number of smaller and less ambitious works, an extraordinary study of the Astrolabe, allegorical works of considerable charm like *The House of Fame* or *The Book of the Duchess*, but the finest work is *The Canterbury Tales*, which recounts the events of a pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Thomas à Beckett at Canterbury, and the stories told, over dinner at the Tabard Inn, by an array of fascinating pilgrims—to whom Chaucer could direct his eye for the social and his mind for the satirical. He brings his full life experience to harvest. It consists of a General Prologue and twenty-four stories told by pilgrims making their way as a group to Canterbury. While the society from which the characters were drawn was in transition, and vibrant, it was still marked by strong differences of 'degree,' and the 'classification' of his characters, by Chaucer, is marked by its attention to status. From the Knight, who naturally comes first, to those reprobates—the Reeve, the Miller, the Summoner, and the Pardoner—who come at the end of the tale, we encounter an unparalleled richness of social tapestry. It is striking, and of typical modesty, that Chaucer includes himself at the very end of the list of story tellers, as a high ranking royal official.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, New York, 2013.

#### Secondary source reading

Boitani, Piero, and Mann, Jill (eds.), *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, Cambridge, 1986.

Ford, Boris, *Mediaeval Literature, Part One: Chaucer and the Alliterative Tradition* (Harmondsworth), 1987.

#### Further reading

Mann, Jill, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, London, 1991.

#### Suggested discussion topics

1. You will be struck by Chaucer's fascination with social classes, and their typical representatives, as they gather in the Tabard Inn. Does it seem to you that Chaucer is consciously creating a portrait of his own

society? If so, does that portrait spring from the narrative instinct or from the desire to portray society? In other words is Chaucer above all a story teller whose society is rich with interest for him, or is he an observer of society who has found a narrative style for characterizing that society?

2. You see from the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* that Chaucer is fascinated with character types—the Miller, the Pardoner, the Knight, The Wife of Bath. Does he conceive of these characters as abstractions, which sum up many traits in a generalized package, or are these fully developed characters, each one distinct as Chaucer conceives him or her?

**Excerpt** <http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/gchaucer/bl-gchau-can-mill.htm>

#### THE MILLER'S PROLOGUE

The Words between the Host and the Miller  
 Now when the knight had thus his story told,  
 In all the rout there was nor young nor old  
 But said it was a noble story, well  
 Worthy to be kept in mind to tell;  
 And specially the gentle folk, each one.  
 Our host, he laughed and swore, "So may I run,  
 But this goes well; unbuckled is the mail;  
 Let's see now who can tell another tale:  
 For certainly the game is well begun.  
 Now shall you tell, sir monk, if't can be done,  
 Something with which to pay for the knight's tale."  
 The miller, who with drinking was all pale,  
 So that unsteadily on his horse he sat,  
 He would not take off either hood or hat,  
 Nor wait for any man, in courtesy,  
 But all in Pilate's voice began to cry,  
 And by the Arms and Blood and Bones he swore,  
 "I have a noble story in my store,  
 With which I will requite the good knight's tale."  
 Our host saw, then, that he was drunk with ale,  
 And said to him: "Wait, Robin, my dear brother,  
 Some better man shall tell us first another:  
 Submit and let us work on profitably."  
 "Now by God's soul," cried he, "that will not I!  
 For I will speak, or else I'll go my way."  
 Our host replied: "Tell on, then, till doomsday!  
 You are a fool, your wit is overcome."  
 "Now hear me," said the miller, "all and some!  
 But first I make a protestation round  
 That I'm quite drunk, I know it by my sound:  
 And therefore, if I slander or mis-say,  
 Blame it on ale of Southwark, so I pray;  
 For I will tell a legend and a life  
 Both of a carpenter and of his wife,  
 And how a scholar set the good wright's cap."  
 The reeve replied and said: "Oh, shut your trap..."

### *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (ca. 1375-1400)

**The author of Gawain.** Of the author of *Sir Gawain* we know even less than of the author of *Piers Plowman*. What conclusions we can draw are again based on linguistic evidence, and point to the area of the northwest Midlands, in the second half of the fourteenth century. From the tale the author creates here, in the alliterative verse which roots this English in the oral traditions which pre date the Norman Conquest—the dividing line (1066 A.D.) separating Anglo-Saxon from Anglo-Norman England—we see that the author is deeply engrained in the Arthurian lore traditions which ruled much of mediaeval literature. Arthur and his Knights, in their ancestral home of Camelot, maintain the twin traditions of chivalry and knighthood, under the sign of the Cross and the Holy Virgin. The author of *Gawain* is also deeply versed in Holy Scripture, like the visionary author of *Piers Plowman*.

**The Gawain Tale.** We have noted the sophisticated insouciance with which William Langland juxtaposes Latin and Middle English; proof enough of the high literary level of fourteenth century English poetry. The *Gawain* author—author of four interconnected texts of which *Gawain and the Green Knight* have received foremost attention--goes even harder for the aesthetically dramatic. The poem opens with a lead-in reference—to that line of British kings, sprung from the politically embroiled Brutus of the Roman Republic, which leads directly into the reign of King Arthur. After that intro the poet springs violence: into King Arthur's court rides a heavily armed foe/challenger, dressed in bright green, horse and armor bright green, and a holly branch in hand. (Green—this is part but only part of the literary fireworks, is the working symbol of regeneration and of the Savior who rose again.) The challenge issued by the Green Knight proves his cultural origins, in primitive Celtic—not Christian—rite: he seeks a challenger who will behead him, in return for being himself beheaded a year later, on New Year's day. King Arthur's nephew, Gawain, takes up the challenge, beheads the intruder, and is then astounded to see the headless challenger rise, take his head in his hands and ride away. The remainder of the poem introduces us to Gawain's quest to find the Green Knight, within the appointed time, and to do so while behaving himself nobly in the chivalric Christian tradition. (The pagan Celtic and the Christian perspectives co exist throughout the poem.) In the end, chivalric graciousness—we are in the magic world of Arthurian culture—wins out, and Gawain is released from his obligation to be beheaded.

**The chivalric theme of the poem.** Chastity, a high Feudal virtue twinned to the protection of woman, is a major virtue for Gawain, and he struggles manfully, and successfully, to maintain his purity. (An image of the Virgin Mary is embroidered onto the inside of his shield.) However he errs against the chivalric code, in the wilderness Castle at which he arrives as he sets out in search of the Green Knight. (How important and punctilious is that code we rapidly learn.) On the first night in the Castle Gawain's host stipulates that his guest must return his 'winnings' from his stay, and this is what Gawain fails to do. He has received a modest girdle—a warder off of death—from his hostess at the Castle, and fails to return it to the lady before his departure. Consequences and humiliation follow, the overcoming of which becomes in the end the true test of Gawain's chivalric valor.

#### Reading

##### Primary source reading

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. Kline, 2007; online.

##### Secondary source reading

Brewer, Elisabeth, '*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*': *Sources and Analogues*, Cambridge, 1992.

##### Further reading

Barron, W.R.J., '*Trawthe*' and *Treason: The Sin of Gawain Reconsidered*, Manchester, 1980.

##### Suggested discussion topics

1. The place of the Christian religion, in the thinking and writing of the Middle Ages, cannot be overstated. We encounter the Christian world in the Pardoner, the Nun's Priest, and the Parson of Chaucer; in all which tales there runs a thread of irony; in *Piers Plowman*, and in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. What is the particular significance of Christianity in *Sir Gawain*?

2. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* invokes what literary scholars have often called archetypal patterns; in this case, say, the patterns of the heroic chivalric quest, that of Gawain, and of the ritual beheading and survival of the Green Knight. These patterns are typical lines of narrative, which occur in multiple texts and which seem to derive from fundamental forms of human experience. What kind of archetypal patterns do you find in *Sir Gawain*?

**Excerpt** <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/English/GawainAndTheGreenKnight.htm>

1

Soon as the siege and assault had ceased at Troy,  
 the burg broken and burnt to brands and ashes,  
 the traitor who trammels of treason there wrought  
 was tried for his treachery, the foulest on earth.  
 It was Aeneas the noble and his high kin  
 who then subdued provinces, lords they became,  
 well-nigh of all the wealth in the Western Isles:  
 forth rich Romulus to Rome rapidly came,  
 with great business that burg he builds up first,  
 and names it with his name, as now it has;  
 Ticius to Tuscany, and townships begins;  
 Langobard in Lombardy lifts up homes;  
 and fared over the French flood Felix Brutus  
 on many banks all broad Britain he settles  
 then,  
 where war and wreck and wonder  
 betimes have worked within,  
 and oft both bliss and blunder  
 have held sway swiftly since.

2

And when this Britain was built by this baron rich,  
 bold men were bred therein, of battle beloved,  
 in many a troubled time turmoil that wrought.  
 More flames on this fold have fallen here oft  
 than any other I know of, since that same time.  
 But of all that here built, of Britain the kings,  
 ever was Arthur highest, as I have heard tell.  
 And so of earnest adventure I aim to show,  
 that astonishes sight as some men do hold it,  
 an outstanding action of Arthur's wonders.

## Thomas Mallory

**The Life of Thomas Malory.** Scholars still debate the life of Thomas Mallory, for whose work there are two possible claimants. It appears that the Thomas we have here is a well attested felon and jailbird, who set his literary imagination on a time and place, the mythical Arthurian period of English history, into which he could interject his disappointments and wishes. It seems that his period of creative ferment came during a period when he was in prison on charges of extortion, rape, theft, and violence. Like the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Mallory found in the roundtable world that same zone of chivalric lords and ladies which keeps Camelot alive before our thoughts even today. (Cf. for instance the legend of the Kennedy clan and their Camelot.) But the imaginative work of Mallory is far different from that of the *Gawain* poet. Where the *Gawain* poet was dramatic and allegorical, Mallory is a prose stylist recounting a precise mythical history.

*Le Morte Darthur* was published in 1485, thus a century later than the writings of Chaucer, Langland, and the *Gawain* poet. The poem was published by the brilliant printer, William Caxton (1422-1491), who had played an important role in arranging and editing Mallory's text. (To repeat: two 'Mallories' contend for the honor of authorship of this poem, but it seems plausible—although it still makes us wonder—that the criminal Mallory was indeed the author of the great poem we are considering.) Mallory was a brilliant stylist, who captured the whole extent of the haunting legend of King Arthur and his roundtable, whose history had become a cultural rallying point for the forming British nation. The England that Mallory's Arthur rules is both a mythical Christian kingdom, and a dream world of heroic myth. In recounting the realms of these diverse worlds, Mallory gives thorough accounts of the main figures in the Arthurian legend: Tristram, Gareth, Lancelot are all followed through their legendary journeys, and the Pursuit of the Holy Grail is actively highlighted. Arthur himself is tracked, in splendid prose, from his initial optimistic removal of the knife from the stone, to his despondent death, cloaked in the phrase, 'the noble felyshyp of the Rounde Table is brokyn for ever.'

**The influence of Mallory's *Morte Darthur*.** The brilliant pathos, with which Mallory described the exploits, passions, and ultimately demise of the Arthurian project left a great impression on later generations of British writers, who were long conscious of the power of the Arthurian theme in the formation of British culture. In the sixteenth century Edmund Spenser, the author of *The Faerie Queene*, and Sir Philip Sidney, both looked to Mallory as a fountainhead of understanding of their own literary ancestry. In the nineteenth century Alfred Lord Tennyson deepens the entire tale, making the chivalric interrelations into romance, and idealizing even the mediaeval mantle of honor which enshrouded Mallory's work.

**The importance of Caxton to Mallory.** Malory's own background may have been socially dubious, but his printer—in that age when printing was an individual job requiring a lot of hands on skill—was an aspiring middle class entrepreneur of the kind required to ground and distribute texts. Caxton was a product of the new economic confidence, the earlier demise of which Mallory recounts in his doleful history of the Arthurian legend.

## Reading

### Primary source reading

*Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Stephen Shepherd, New York, 2003.

### Secondary source reading

Bennett, J.A.W., *Middle English Literature*, Oxford, 1986.

### Further reading

Riddy, Felicity, *Sir Thomas Malory*, Leiden, 1987.

### Suggested paper topics

1. *What is Mallory's attitude toward the adultery between Lancelot and Guinevere, and toward Lancelot's behavior after that adultery?* This question begs attention because Lancelot is a generically noble figure in

the Arthurian scene, and his relation to Arthur is defining for the whole society of the roundtable. Mallory says in an aside that he is not sure what the two lovers were doing in Guinevere's chamber. Is Arthur made a fool?

2. You might want to browse in the Troubadour poetry being composed in Southern France at the end of the Middle Ages, especially in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. You will find that poetry populated with love/death themes, in which idealized love for the noble lady leads either to dark illegitimate passion or a sublimation of love in which the lover is cancelled out. What parallels do you see between that literature and Mallory's?

**Excerpt** <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/mart/mart000.htm>

*CHAPTER I How Uther Pendragon sent for the duke of Cornwall and Igraine his wife, and of their departing suddenly again. IT befell in the days of Uther Pendragon, when he was king of all England, and so reigned, that there was a mighty duke in Cornwall that held war against him long time. And the duke was called the Duke of Tintagil. And so by means King Uther sent for this duke, charging him to bring his wife with him, for she was called a fair lady, and a passing wise, and her name was called Igraine. So when the duke and his wife were come unto the king, by the means of great lords they were accorded both. The king liked and loved this lady well, and he made them great cheer out of measure, and desired to have lain by her. But she was a passing good woman, and would not assent unto the king. And then she told the duke her husband, and said, I suppose that we were sent for that I should be dishonoured; wherefore, husband, I counsel you, that we depart from hence suddenly, that we may ride all night unto our own castle. And in like wise as she said so they departed, that neither the king nor none of his council were ware of their departing. All so soon as King Uther knew of their departing so suddenly, he was wonderly wroth. Then he called to him his privy council, and told them of the sudden departing of the duke and his wife. <2> Then they advised the king to send for the duke and his wife by a great charge; and if he will not come at your summons, then may ye do your best, then have ye cause to make mighty war upon him. So that was done, and the messengers had their answers; and that was this shortly, that neither he nor his wife would not come at him. Then was the king wonderly wroth. And then the king sent him plain word again, and bade him be ready and stuff him and garnish him, for within forty days he would fetch him out of the biggest castle that he hath.*

## Julian of Norwich

**The Life of Julian of Norwich.** How much can you know of an anchoress who cloisters herself from the world, after a ceremonial burial has ritually closed her off from the rest of society? The answer is, not much. We know that Julian, whether perhaps once married, or never, became an anchoress, at a time when the Black Plague was sweeping across Europe and England, and that, possibly, the cloister was seen as a refuge for her, from the ravages of the plague itself. Whatever the backstory, it seems evident that she acquired her name Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) from the fact that the cloistered cell where she lived shared a wall with the Cathedral Church of Norwich—which was at the time the second largest city in England. The cloister itself was in Norwich, in East Anglia, and is still standing. Beyond that we have little but conjecture about the life of Julian. Indirect evidence suggests she may have come from a privileged family. From the writings she has left us, we know that she fell mortally ill at the age of thirty—May 13, 1373—and that immediately upon her recovery she wrote down the text of her *Revelation of Divine Love* (*The Short Text*.) We know from Julian exactly the time when she received the visions that she writes of in this text, and the content of the ‘showings’ which were bestowed upon her. Twenty years later she composed her *Long Text*, in which she looked back on her earlier experiences, in a powerful effort to understand them better.

**The visions and views of Julian of Norwich.** The writings left us by Julian are relatively brief. *The Short Text*, written down in 1373, consists of twenty five chapters, some 11,000 words. *The Long Text* consists of 83, 500 words; the total the size of a single mid sized volume. In that work, though, she constructs her passionate theology, the fame of which spread sufficiently, that by the time of her death she was a magnet to other writers and thinkers of high spirituality, like the brilliant Marjory Kempe, who visited her in 1414. (Julian herself was familiar with what was already a rich mystical literature in her time—the works of Rolle, Hilton, and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*.) For Julian, love is the central theological notion, and God is essentially love. (The poet T.S. Eliot, in his *Four Quartets*, made famous for our time the famed phrase of Julian: ‘All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well,’ the ‘words’ God spoke to Julian in her illness.) She was superbly sensitive to the power of the moment and of the precise event to suggest the totality of the creation. Thus she describes taking a small hazelnut in the palm of her hand, wondering what it is—as the German mystic Jakob Boehme had wondered, at a ray of sun transmuting a pewter mug in the daylight—and being ‘told’ in vision that the nut is ‘all that is,’ a compact image of the whole creation, as is Jesus Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Julian endures potent awarenesses—that Christ is our mother, that sin leads to self-knowledge and should not be scorned, that all who express spiritual love will be saved, regardless of conceptual belief or denominational category.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*The Showings* of Julian of Norwich, ed. Starr, Charlottesville, 2013.

#### Secondary source reading

Aers, David, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430*, London, 1988.

#### Further reading

Hodgson, Phyllis, *Three Fourteenth-Century English Mystics*, London, 1967.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Julian of Norwich writes from the center of her visions, though surely not without literary genius as shaper. You might want to look into the portrayal of religious states *in* literature, as distinct from *as* literature. Good case studies can be found throughout the work of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, whose *The Brothers Karamazov* explores the religious sensibility, almost as if from the inside, but still as part of a narrator’s portrayal: the characters of Alyosha, of Father Zosima, and of the Grand Inquisitor are perfect examples of the portrayal of the religious sensibility from *within* literature.

2. With William Langland we asked whether we are able to access the allegorical style today, and whether the dream vision is a captivating literary form for us. We were of course raising the issue of reading Christian literature in an age when narratives of other kinds may be more familiar or attractive to us. With Julian the problem is keener. The physical of the created world—whether Christ's bleeding head or a simple hazelnut—is infused with its spiritual meaning and presence, and yet retains a totally absorbing hereness and nowness. Question: *is this a type of imagination which you are at home with? Do you understand it? Can you live with this Vision?*

### Excerpt

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/mart/mart000.htm>

These Revelations were shewed to a simple creature that cowde no letter the yeere of our Lord 1373, the eighth day of May, which creature desired afore three gifts of God. The first was mende of His passion. The second was bodily sekenesse in youth at thirty yeeres of age. The third was to have of Gods gift three wounds. As in the first methought I had sune feleing in the passion of Christe, but yet I desired more be the grace of God. Methought I would have beene that time with Mary Magdalen and with other that were Cristis lovers, and therefore I desired a bodily sight wherein I might have more knowledge of the bodily peynes of our Saviour, and of the compassion our Lady and of all His trew lovers that seene that time His peynes, for I would be one of them and suffer with Him. Other sight ner sheweing of God desired I never none till the soule was departid fro the body. The cause of this petition was that after the sheweing I should have the more trew minde in the passion of Christe.

The second came to my mynde with contrition frely desireing that sekenesse so herde as to deth that I might in that sekeness underfongyn alle my rites of Holy Church, myselfe weneing that I should dye, and that all creatures might suppose the same that seyen me, for I would have no manner comfort of eardtly life. In this sekenesse I desired to have all manier peynes bodily and ghostly that I should have if I should dye, with all the dredes and tempests of the fends, except the outpassing of the soule. And this I ment for I would be purged be the mercy of God and after lyven more to the worshippe of God because of that sekenesse; and that for the more speede in my deth, for I desired to be soone with my God.

These two desires of the passion and the sekenesse I desired with a condition, seying thus: "Lord, thou wotith what I would, if it be Thy will that I have it, and if it be not Thy will, good Lord, be not displeased, for I will nought, but as Thou wilt." For the third, by the grace of God and teachyng of Holy Church, I conceived a mighty desire to receive three wounds in my life; that is to sey, the wound of very contrition, the wound of kinde compassion, and the wound of willfull longyng to God. And all this last petition I asked without any condition. These two desires foresaid passid fro my minde, and the third dwelled with me continually.



## Renaissance

### The Background

The first Tudor monarch, Henry VII, died in 1485, bringing (in some senses) conclusion to the period of what we have been calling Mediaeval Britain. In the following four centuries Britain took similarly large strides toward what we would, looking back from our moment, probably still call modernity, although we too do not think ourselves so confidently 'modern' as we did a century ago. Kingship under a single monarch, and with strong family lines, was firmly established in the Renaissance period. The language evolved from a condition in which Latinized French was just merging with Anglo Saxon English, into a coherent blend which in Elizabethan England reached a high point of maturity. Above all the consciousness of the British people, as participants in a single national identity, grew to new clarity. At the same time, during this period, the English people were entering into contact with the wide world of Europe, in which dramatic transitions were holding sway. Columbus' discovery of America opened a new pathway for British exploration and trade; scholars went from England to Italy, and brought back inspiring texts of Greek and Latin literature; Martin Luther led a world shaking rebellion against the practices of the Catholic Church. As if in reaction to these challenging events on the world scene, the British cultivated, under their dominant and brilliant Queen Elizabeth, a new sense of national identity. The greatest playwrights in British history—Shakespeare and Marlowe—surged into popularity, giving an unimagined tone and color to London's cultural life.

### Discussion Questions

1. Are the Renaissance texts we read here mirrors of their time? Does the social life of England appear clearly through these texts? Is social background a good measure of literary achievement?
2. What relation do you see between the work of Sidney and that of Edmund Spenser? Is Spenser a romantic, in his fascination with archaic diction? Are the two poets similar in their insights into human nature? What is the role of Italian culture and Neoplatonism in shaping the work of the two writers?
3. Is *Twelfth Night* comic, in a sense contemporary to us today? What do you think of the raw humor in this play? Does it contribute to the point of the whole? Does the same kind of raw humor enforce the power of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*?

## William Shakespeare

**The importance of William Shakespeare.** William Shakespeare (1564-1616) is widely viewed as the most powerful and interesting British playwright and poet. He has been translated into every living language, and continues to exercise a huge influence on writing throughout the world, as well as on educated opinion about the nature and importance of literature. He was the author of thirty eight plays, 154 sonnets, and two long narrative pieces.

**The Life of William Shakespeare.** William Shakespeare was born in the small market town of Stratford-on-Avon in April 1564. He was the son of John Shakespeare, an alderman and successful glover who later in his career suffered considerable financial losses. From what we know, we gather that William was educated at the local school, close to his family home, at which he would have had considerable training in Latin. (He later refers to having ‘small Latin and less Greek,’ but was able to make very effective use, in his work, of Latin historical sources.) At the age of eighteen Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children. Subsequently he went to London, where he began what was to be a very successful career as an actor (1585-92); in fact he parlayed that career into a role as part owner of an acting company, later called The King’s Men, which was for some time a central venue for theater in London. He began his career as a playwright in the early 1590s by writing comedies and history plays. His brilliance was soon recognized, and from comedies, in his early stage, he went on to write both tragedies, and tragic-comedies. His subsequent professional life in London was involved with the theater. In 1613 he returned to Stratford on Avon, where he spent his last years.

**Shakespeare’s Works.** Lest they get mentioned last, Shakespeare’s sonnets require initial attention. Many of these splendid poems, all of which follow the formal sonnet rules of the time, and are thus formalized, break out from within their formalities to a passion rarely equaled in literature. A young man—is he an idealized lover, a homosexual partner?—is the object of many of the sonnets, as is the general theme, which the erotic issue reinforces, of the passing of what is beautiful and transitory. The richness of Shakespeare’s dramas defies all summary. One need only think of *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, or *Othello*—tragedies; of *All’s Well that Ends Well*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* or *A Comedy of Errors*—comedies; or of plays like *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or *The Tempest*—fantasy comedy; to encompass a creative spirit which seems, as the ages have been glad to confirm, to have no limits in empathy or understanding.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Ed. Miola, New York, 2003. Norton critical edition.

#### Secondary source reading

Drakakis, John, ed. *Shakespearean Tragedy*, London, 1992.

#### Further reading

Thomas, Vivian, *The Moral Universe of Shakespeare’s Problem Plays*, London, 1987.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. The literature on Shakespeare is endless. Give yourself a treat and read a small masterpiece, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London, 1942), by E.M.W.Tillyard. Through the window of this little book you will see a backdrop of customs, religious beliefs and practices, and philosophical assumptions which will help to convince you that Shakespeare lived in an Age profoundly different from ours. I suspect you will also feel the closeness of Shakespeare’s world to that of the later Middle Ages, not only to Chaucer but to Christian sophisticates like the author of *Gawain and the Green Knight*. Do you?
2. What kind of villain is Lady Macbeth? Does she seem truly evil, in today’s terms? Is Macbeth a weak man? Or is his only problem corrupt ambition? What is his relation to his wife? Finally, do you see a relevance of this story to the theme of corruption in politics today?

**Excerpt** <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/macbeth/full.html>

**SCENE I. A desert place.**

*Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches*

**First Witch**

When shall we three meet again  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

**Second Witch**

When the hurlyburly's done,  
When the battle's lost and won.

**Third Witch**

That will be ere the set of sun.

**First Witch**

Where the place?

**Second Witch**

Upon the heath.

**Third Witch**

There to meet with Macbeth.

**First Witch**

I come, Graymalkin!

**Second Witch**

Paddock calls.

**Third Witch**

Anon.

**ALL**

Fair is foul, and foul is fair:  
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

*Exeunt*

## Christopher Marlowe

**The Life of Christopher Marlowe.** Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) died at the age of 29, tangled in (so it seems) secret agent plots, furtive trips to foreign nations for which he needed to be absent from college. During such times he may well have been living on the borderlines of the underworld. (You will remember that Thomas Mallory, author of *Morte Darthur*, also lived on the borders of lawlessness; evidence that the literary genius is not always Mr. Mainstream. Across the channel in France the same was true for one of the greatest of poets, Francois Villon, a professional criminal—among other things.) Yet by the time of his death Marlowe was a highly educated Cambridge graduate, the author of a number of closely admired plays, and a recognized servant of the Queen, running various private anti-Catholic missions for her in Europe. We can trace in the amazingly intense life of this young man his dominant fascination with tragic heroes who will transcend the bonds of normal human existence, becoming outreachers of daring power. The characters he portrays clearly emerge from his own life, whose origins were humble if little known. He was born in Canterbury, to the shoemaker John Marlowe, and his wife Catharine. He went to the King's School in Canterbury, then to Corpus Christi College at Oxford. He earned his B.A. degree in 1584, after which he disappears from sight for several years—during his twenties; at which time, we surmise from indirect evidence, he may have been carrying out secret missions for the Queen, on the continent.

**The works of Christopher Marlowe .** From the start of his career as a dramatist, Marlowe, like his contemporary Thomas Kyd (1558-1594), seems to have caught the pulse and temper of his time, the high Elizabethan period in which Elizabeth was a world powerful monarch, the British Empire, backed by the British navy, was surging around the world, and the man on the streets, with a little more money than he was used to a century earlier, was lustily demanding theatrical entertainment forceful enough to hold his attention. Theaters were springing up, a chief source of public entertainment, and Marlowe's dramas, like *Tamburlaine* (1584), *The Jew of Malta* (1589), or *Doctor Faustus* (1616) were created to hold the public attention. Each of his plays highlights a central 'overreaching' male figure, who has great plans of conquest and power, but who is in the end defeated by the exaggeration of his own miscalculations. (There is thus a strong Promethean theme in Marlowe's plots, and plenty of room for elaborate and world shaking downfalls, such as confronted Prometheus himself.) *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* turns around a powerful ambition and miscalculation. The Doctor represents the new man of knowledge and power, a practitioner of dark arts which he can turn to contemporary power, and a scorner of God's laws and the power of Christian redemption. In the end Faustus uses his power foolishly, expends it without care for himself or others, and is left a shell of a human, longing for Christ's mercy. He proclaims: 'And then has thou but one bare hour to live/ And then thou must be damned perpetually./Stand still, you ever moving spheres of heaven/that time may cease, and midnight never come...' The audience will have shuddered for their own fates, and examined their own consciences, as Shakespeare surely made his audience tremble, in the same years of theatrical glory.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*Doctor Faustus and other Plays*, ed. Bevington and Rasmussen, Oxford, 1995.

#### Secondary source reading

Healy, Thomas, *Christopher Marlowe*, London, 1995.

#### Further reading

Sales, Roger, *Christopher Marlowe*, London, 1991.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Does Marlowe's concern with the outreachers take our minds to other literary images of power: Macchiavelli's Prince or Nietzsche's *Uebermensch*? Is there something in common among these power manipulators, and if so what? How are they different? (The Prince, for one thing, is above all a calculator;

while the other two figures are passionate extremists.) How does the legend of Faust, in Goethe, play into this tradition? Is Goethe's *Faust* more conflicted than Marlowe's, in his search for the power that goes with knowledge?

2. In hurrying to the center of great works written long before our time, we often hurry past the details which explain the text we seek. In the case of Marlowe's *Faustus* we need to return to the theological strife of Marlowe's learning years at Cambridge at the end of the 16th century. The Calvinists and anti-Calvinists were in heated strife concerning issues of theodicy, of the justification of God's ways to man. (Question: is the pervasive pain and suffering in the universe part of God's plan? This issue of justification will still dominate the religious/epic thinking of John Milton.) These issues frame the desire of Faustus for a temporary respite from the human condition, in order to enjoy perfect pleasure.

**Excerpt** <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.03.0013>

*Enter Barabas in his Counting-house, with heapes of gold before him.*

**Barabas**

So that of thus much that returne was made:

And of the third part of the *Persian* ships,  
There was the venture summ'd and satisfied.

As for those *Samnites* and the men of *Uzz*  
That **bought** my **Spanish Oyles, and Wines of Greece,**  
**Here have I purst their paltry silverlings.**

Eye; what a trouble tis to count this trash.

Well fare the **Arabians who so richly pay**

The things they traffique for with wedge of gold,

Whereof a man may easily in a day

Tell that which may maintaine him all his life.

The needy groome that never fingred goate,

Would make a miracle of thus much coyne:

But he whose steele-bard coffers are cramb'd full,

**And** all his life time hath bin tired,

**Wearying** his fingers ends with telling it,

Would in his age be loath to labour so,

And for a pound to sweat himselfe to death:

Give me the Merchants of the **Indian Mynes,**

**That trade in mettall of the purest mould;**

**The wealthy Moore, that in the Easterne rockes**

**Without controule can picke his riches up,**

**And in his house heape** **pearle** like pibble-stones,

Receive them free, and sell them by the weight;

Bags of fiery *Opals, Saphires, Amatists,*

*Jacints, hard Topas, grasse-greene Emeraulds,*

Beauteous *Rubyes, sparkling Diamonds,*

And seildsene costly stones of so great price,

As one of them indifferently rated,

And of a Carrect of this **quantity,**

## Edmund Spenser

**The Life of Edmund Spenser.** Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) was born in E. Southfield, London, in 1552. He was educated at the Merchant Taylors' School, and subsequently at Pembroke College, Cambridge. In the following years he spent much of his career life carrying out administrative roles for the British Crown, in Ireland. The colonizing role of England in Ireland was a rough and contentious one, and over an extended period the colonized were in endless rebellion against their colonial masters. Spenser was on the whole one of the tough colonialists. His attitude to Ireland was that the colony was not worth the having, unless it could be reformed and modernized. (In more than one writing he made suggestions, for the future of Ireland, that are today viewed as absolutely genocidal.) Meantime he was becoming increasingly known in England for his poetic work, and admired in England by all including the Queen. In 1579 his *Shepherd's Calendar* was published, to broad acclaim. In 1590 the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* appeared, winning from the Queene a life pension of 50 pounds annually. England, therefore, was a crucial part of Spenser's support and audience base. However he probably acquired in Ireland the distinctive blend of fantasist—the *Faerie Queen* creator, the myth maker--and realist, whose knowledge of human psychology is sharp and penetrating. In the end he was, in some sense, conquered by the culture he approved of colonizing.

**The Work of Edmund Spenser.** Spenser was a contemporary of Shakespeare and Marlowe, creators usually associated with the full energies of the Renaissance mind. However Spenser, unlike some of his great contemporaries, consciously looked back on the archaic past, shall we say the past of *Piers Plowman* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*? In his greatest work, *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser emulated an old fashioned poetic English, which smacked of late Mediaeval writers, and he peopled his *Faerie Queene* with allegorical figures and abstractions of the Virtues and Vices. The intention of this very long epic poem, written in its own distinctive nine line Spenserian stanza, was to follow several knights on an examination of several virtues—Holiness, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, Charity, Magnificence; its aim being 'to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtues and gentle discipline.' On the other hand, though, Spenser confronts the human situation with a direct analytical eye that makes him read as anything but archaic. The struggles of the Redcross Knight, on behalf of Una, are testimonies of heroic valor and virtue, but the subsequent faithlessness of the Knight sears him with a sense of sin which we can feel on ourselves today. The Virtues and Vices that play through this poem have the bite of real life on them. *Hence the question about the modernity of Spenser. Does he 'get to you' as much as Shakespeare? Is Spenser too our contemporary?*

**Spenser and Shakespeare.** The worldwide attention to Shakespeare's work was not lavished on Spenser's contemporary epic work, although Spenser is a brilliant stylist, story teller, and prosodist. What limits our attention to the great Spenser? In addition to the thematic materials, which we have mentioned, and which tend to the abstract, Spenser is an archaizing poet, emulating mediaeval styles and language practices, while Shakespeare, daring and inventive in language, is continually taking us into territory of expression which we had never imagined.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Spenser, *The Faerie-Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, 2001.

#### Secondary source reading

Hume, A., *Edmund Spenser, Protestant Poet*, Cambridge, 1984.

#### Further reading

Bernard, John D., *Pastoralism in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser*, Cambridge, 1989.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Among other things, Spenser is a Renaissance Neo-Platonist, fascinated with the theories of ideal love developed by Plato, but widely popularized during the Hellenizing movements of the Renaissance. Much of the inspiration for Spenser's work and thought also came from the Italy of his time, which was a source of

artistic inspiration in England. You might cross the channel, and take a look at Erwin Panofsky's great *Studies in Iconology* (London, 1939), which looks at the Neoplatonism in Italian painting of the Renaissance. Anywhere you turn in that book will give you insight into the thought world of Spenser, heir as he was both to Platonism and Italian culture

2. A long set of narrative sequences, concerning the pursuit of virtue, may seem far from what we can imagine enjoying today. Comparative Literature is involved with phases of taste and sensibility, and not least with the tastes of the comparatist him/herself. In other words, there is a reflexive dimension to the critical work of Comparative Literature. From that viewpoint, can you explain what it is, in our cultural reading habits, that puts us far from Spenser's sensibility, but that puts Spenser's work at the very center of his own time?

**Excerpt** <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/sonnet-54/>

*Of this worlds theatre in which we stay,  
My love like the spectator ydly sits  
Beholding me that all the pageants play,  
Disguysing diversly my troubled wits.  
Sometimes I joy when glad occasion fits,  
And mask in myrth lyke to a comedy:  
Soone after when my joy to sorrow flits,  
I waile and make my woes a tragedy.  
Yet she, beholding me with constant eye,  
Delights not in my merth nor rues my smart:  
But when I laugh she mocks, and when I cry  
She laughs and hardens evermore her heart.  
What then can move her? if nor merth nor mone,  
She is no woman, but a senceless stone.*

## Sir Philip Sidney

**The Life of Sir Philip Sidney.** Philip Sidney (1554-1586) was born in Penshurst Place, Kent. His father and mother, Sir Henry Sidney and Lady Mary Dudley, were deeply connected to the nobility. Philip's mother was the senior daughter of the Duke of Northumberland, and the sister of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. His younger brother was a highborn statesman and diplomat, and his sister, Mary, who married the second Earl of Pembroke, was a writer and translator, to whom Sidney dedicated his most ambitious work, the *Arcadia*. Philip himself, thus embedded in noble family networks, was educated at Shrewsbury School and Christ Church, Oxford. In 1572 Sidney was elected Member of Parliament from Shrewsbury, and at that same time was sent on mission to Europe, to negotiate a marriage between Elisabeth I and the Duc d'Alençon. For the next several years he traveled widely in Mainland Europe, on diplomatic and social missions for her Majesty. He was widely exposed, at this time, to many of the outstanding intellectuals and writers. In 1575 he returned to England, where he met Penelope Devereux, who was to become Lady Rich, and who would be the inspiration for his sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*. Sidney was to marry Penelope, but her father, who favored the marriage, died before it could be carried out. Following a number of dramatic quarrels, and a withdrawal from court life, Sidney—who was course combining this highly active life with extensive writing—joined forces fighting for the Protestant cause in the Netherlands, and during the battle of Zutphen he was wounded in the thigh and died of gangrene, with his last breath proffering his last sips of water to an even more terminally wounded comrade. Sidney remains the paragon of the Renaissance courtier—a type closely based on the character central to Castiglione's *Courtier*, a text admired and followed throughout the higher circles of European honor.

**The Works of Sir Philip Sidney.** Sidney remains known to us especially for his **Defence of Poetry**, published in 1579, and for his sonnets, collected in the *Astrophel and Stella* sequence, and based around Sidney's love for Penelope Devereux. Sidney's sonnets are infused with the expected—even in Shakespeare—Renaissance themes of anxiety, hope, melancholy, and terror at the swift passage of time, all matters treated with great care in Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*. There Sidney argues that poetry 'awakens and enlarges the mind itself, by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought.' *Praxis*, rather than *gnosis*, thus becomes the goal and accomplishment of great poetry, which has the power to teach and discipline virtue. Prudence, accordingly, comes through as a central virtue taught by poetry. The poet, in the creation of poetry, is fundamentally a creator of value in society. The metaphorical visions which the poet embodies in his work touch harmonies which are central to the universe, and the special power of great poetry resides its capacity to touch cosmic chords.

**The Influence of Sidney's Poetics.** The nineteenth century Romantic poet, Shelley, in his *Defence of Poetry* (1858), writes exuberantly of Sidney's deep conception of the poet as leader and source of inspiration. Shelley writes that 'the poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'; and with that formulation seals the well nigh universal interest in poetry inspired by Sidney's work.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Evans, London, 1997.

#### Secondary source reading

Buxton, John, *Sir Philip Sidney and the English Renaissance*, London, 1987.

#### Further reading

Kay, D., ed., *Sir Philip Sidney: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*, Oxford, 1987.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. The sonnet form was used as early as the work of Chaucer and Dante, in the 14th century, and gained widely admired currency—especially among lovers—with the sonnets of Francesco Petrarch in Italy, and of Shakespeare, who was himself the author of over a hundred sonnets. The form has flourished throughout the development of English literature, and in certain poets of the last century and a half—Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Gerard Manley Hopkins—the sonnet has acquired new forms and emphases. Suggestion:



take a close look at the rare, and rarely used, *curtal* sonnet in the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins. What do you see as Sir Philip Sidney's primary contribution to this tradition?

2. Sir Philip Sidney was an astute literary critic, whose *An Apology for Poetry* was one of the principal Renaissance theoretical works on the nature of literature. You might want to look at that brilliant essay, which takes you, in the mode of Comparative Literature, back in thought to Aristotle, whose view of art as imitation is strong in Sidney, to Plato, whose view of ideal forms is dominant in Sidney, and forward to Shelley, the Romantic poet who most admired Sidney's inspired view of the poet.

**Excerpt** <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/sonnet-54/>

*"Who is it that this dark night  
Underneath my window plaineth?"  
'It is one who from thy sight  
Being, ah! exiled, disdaineth  
Every other vulgar light.'*

*"Why, alas! and are you he?  
Be not yet those fancies changed?"  
'Dear, when you find change in me,  
Though from me you be estranged,  
Let my change to ruin be.'*

*"Well, in absence this will die;  
Leave to see, and leave to wonder."  
'Absence sure will help, If I  
Can learn how myself to sunder  
From what in my heart doth lie.'*

*"But time will these thoughts remove:  
Time doth work what no man knoweth."  
'Time doth as the subject prove,  
With time still the affection groweth  
In the faithful turtle dove.'*

*"What if you new beauties see?  
Will not they stir new affection?"  
'I will think they pictures be,  
Image-like of saint's perfection,  
Poorly counterfeiting thee.'*

*"But your reason's purest light  
Bids you leave such minds to nourish."  
'Dear, do reason no such spite,—  
Never doth thy beauty flourish  
More than in my reason's sight.'*

*"But the wrongs love bears will make  
Love at length leave undertaking."  
'No, the more fools do it shake  
In a ground of so firm making,*

## Wyatt and Surrey

**The lives of Wyatt and Surrey.** Odd though it may seem, it is customary to link together these two gentleman poets, whose contributions to English literature are closely interinvolved. And it is of course relevant, as background to that state of affairs, to remark that both of these men were born into elite and noble society. Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) was born near Maidstone, in Kent. His father was a trusted privy councilor to King Henry VII; he was himself educated at St. John's College, Cambridge. In the course of his life he served the King as a diplomat in foreign affairs throughout Europe. Active and literate, he was familiar with Latin and especially with contemporary Italian literature—Boccaccio, Petrarch—and throughout his short life he wrote a considerable body of poems and sonnets, almost none of which was published until fifteen years after his death, in Tottel's *Miscellany* (1557). The same *Miscellany* brought to English Renaissance poetry the sonnets of Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey (1517-1547). Howard was a descendant of kingly lines from both his Mother and his Father. He was reared at Windsor Castle and for much of his own brief life he was in service as a soldier of the Queene, a role in which he distinguished himself for bravery and gallantry. Like Sir Thomas Wyatt, the Earl of Surrey was a serious and innovative writer, much influenced by the Italianate developments in poetry, and a great contributor to the growing power of British lyric poetry.

**The Work of Wyatt and Surrey.** There was little development of lyric poetry, or the sonnet, in pre-Renaissance England, and the broad development of these literary skills was largely inspired by the growing awareness of Italian culture, which, by the sixteenth century, had become a magnet and style center for the English upper classes and creative artists. The sonnet, as it had been brought to consummate form by Francesco Petrarca in the fourteenth century, was taken over into English at just the right time when the upper society in Britain was attuned to those attitudes, of the lover and beloved, which were centrally enshrined in England: the notion of the beloved as hard hearted, the lover as anxious and entreating, the world as a whole attuned to the pathos of courtly love. Into this mould of sentiments these two brilliant poets, Wyatt and Surrey, build the framework of the English sonnet, which was to depart from the Italianate outer form—*octave, sestet*, and, with a number of variations, to replace it with the formula of three quatrains and a closing couplet. This new form provided for a succinct closure, and an attractively tripartite incremental build-up of lover-expressed sentiments. (With three introductory quatrains there was room for an embedded dialogue between the lover-poet and his hard mistress.) The following sonnet conclusion, from the Earl of Surrey, illustrates the way the final couplet wraps up the final of the three quatrains of the Italianate sonnet:

*And coward Love then to the heart apace  
 Taketh his flight, where he doth lurk and plain  
 His purpose lost, and dare not show his face.  
 For my lord's guilt thus faultless bide I pain;  
 Yet from my lord shall not my foot remove:  
 Sweet is the death that taketh end by love.*

One also sees, in the partial sonnet above, the complex mixture of pain, shame, and persistence which marked the mindset of the sonnet lover.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*Selected Poems of the Earl of Surrey*, ed. Keene, New York, 2003.

#### Secondary source reading

Thomson, Patricia, *Sir Thomas Wyatt and his Background*, London, 1964.

#### Further reading

Greenblatt, Stephen, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Chicago, 1980.

### Suggested paper topics

1. The sonnet form, in the hands of Wyatt and Surrey, tends to develop formal attitudes between a lover and a beloved. How do you feel about the emotion in these sonnets? Is it artificial? Is it heartfelt but in the fashion of another time?
2. Look across the Channel at the contemporary work of the Meistersingers in Germany or the Pleiade poets in France. In all these traditions the love poem is central, and the presentation formal. Is the love in question, in these traditions, Romantic, or is it another kind of love from any we are familiar with today?

**Excerpt** <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/my-galley-charg-d-with-forgetfulness/>

*My galley chargèd with forgetfulness  
 Through sharp seas in winter nights doth pass  
 Twene rock and rock; and eke mine enemy, alas,  
 That is my lord, steereth with cruelty.  
 And every oar a thought in readiness  
 As though that death were light in such a case;  
 An endless wind doth tear the sail apace  
 Of forcèd sighs and trusty fearfulness.  
 A rain of tears, a cloud of dark disdain  
 Hath done the wearied cords great hindrance,  
 Wreathèd with error and eke with ignorance.  
 The stars be hid that led me to this pain,  
 Drownèd is reason that should me comfort,  
 And I remain despairing of the port.*

## 17<sup>th</sup> Century

### Background

In the 17th century Britain was evolving into an early form of the complex society we now experience in our own time. The government was a functioning monarchy, with increasing bureaucratic and legislative power, and the first budding of consumer society could be remotely perceived. (Daniel Defoe is a good example of the new man of this society.) This growing modernity of British society affords the perfect milieu for the development of the man of letters, the kind of figure we find in Browne (a doctor), Dryden (playwright and critic) and Ben Jonson, playwright, literary critic, arbiter of opinions. At the same time there are still immense developments both for the epic, in which John Milton and John Bunyan, though profoundly different from one another, join in passionate engagement with the Cromwellian revision. At the same time there is a sharp renewal of the ever British lyric tradition, and poets of unusual genius and wit—Marvell, Donne, and Herbert—not to mention religious sensibility, rise up as if from the ground, and open vast new vistas for English language writing.

### Discussion Questions

1. Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* is one of the most original and pluralistic of British commentaries on literary values. It features several voices assuming different positions on literary values. How does this text compare to Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, from the previous century? Has there been a powerful change in overall values during this period?
2. What do you take 'metaphysical' to mean, as a description of the poetry of Donne, Herbert, and Marvell? Is that poetry intricate and complex to read, as is some philosophy? Is there a world view coming through the poetry of these metaphysicals? How do you explain both the rejection of these poets in the 18th century, and the new embrace of them in the 20<sup>th</sup>?
3. Milton is arguably the most complex, erudite, and passionate of British writers of the long poem, the epic, while John Bunyan, also the writer of a long epic on Christian themes, is of a relatively simple mindset, and an almost totally allegorical poetic inclination. What does it say, about the British reading public, that it heartily embraced both of these doctrinal writers?

## Jonson, Ben

**The Life of Ben Jonson.** Ben Jonson (1572-1637) was an English playwright, poet, critic, and actor, who exercised a huge influence on the writers and poets of his time. He was born into a family which had its roots in the Anglo-Scottish border country. His father was a clergyman, who died shortly before Ben Jonson's birth. Jonson's mother remarried a master bricklayer. Ben Jonson himself was sent to school at the local, in St. Martin's Lane, then to Westminster school, where the foundations were laid for his excellent knowledge of Latin. (Jonson was foremost among the generally well educated Latinists, among his contemporary English fellow writers.) For a time Jonson worked as an apprentice bricklayer, not being laterally connected to distinguished fellow family members, and then, in his late teens, he went into military service in Holland, and fought with one of the regiments of Francis Vere. After this period with the military—during which he is said to have killed an enemy soldier in direct hand to hand combat, no small feat for a poet—he returned to London, where he found his way into the vibrant theatrical milieu; there his skills as actor, director, and before long writer were highly welcome. By 1597 Jonson was fully employed as an actor in London. He had begun to produce his own plays, one of which, of no great importance otherwise, brought a charge of lewdness, and disruption of social mores, by the Queen; for which Jonson was imprisoned, and while imprisoned, worried about his soul's fate, converted to Catholicism.

**The work of Ben Jonson.** Jonson was distinguished in several genres of writing: critical theory (as in his *Timber, or Discoveries made upon Men and Manners*, posthumously published in 1640), in lyric and epigrammatic poetry (as in his collection *The Forrester*, 1616), or above all in a series of dramas—he was here at his peak between 1605-1620—like *Everyman in his Humor* (1598), *Volpone* (1605), *The Alchemist* (1610). In *Timber* Jonson defends the idea of comedy, emphasizing that for the Greeks and Romans, who were valuable role models for Britain, comic drama was valued as highly as tragic, and stressing the distinctively thoughtful character of good stage comedy, in which human foibles are typically pilloried, and values therefore thought through and sustained. In his own plays Jonson, like his French contemporary Moliere, typically attacks 'vices' in his comedy, and not infrequently vices that are byproducts of the nouveau riche bourgeoisie, which is increasingly declaring itself in seventeenth century Europe. *Volpone*, the unscrupulous Venetian merchant, will stop at nothing in his headlong pursuit of gain--(Good morning to the day; and next my gold/Open the shrine, that I may see my saint./{Mosca draws a curtain, revealing piles of gold}/HaiL the world's soul, and mine!...) In his poetry, as elsewhere, Jonson builds on the classics: his anti urban moralism takes off frequently from the verse precedents of Martial or Horace, as in his ardent tribute to a friend's country estate: /Where comes no guest, but is allowed to eat,/Without his feare, and of the lord's own meat:/Where the same beer, and bread, and self-same wine/That is his Lordships, shall be also mine./

**Evaluation of Ben Jonson.** Ben Jonson is, along with Samuel Johnson, the most Latinate and classical of the major English writers. From that perspective he is both the most invigorating and the most severe of the great writers of English.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, ed. R. Harp, New York, 2001.

#### Secondary source reading

Barton, Anne, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, Cambridge, 1984.

#### Further reading

Womack, Peter, *Ben Jonson*, Oxford, 1986.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Moliere's satirical comedies, contemporary to those of Ben Jonson, tend to target the new middle class of Louis XIV's France. Is Jonson similarly a kind of social critic, directing his bitter satirical dramas to the nouveaux riches of his society?

2. What is the contribution of Roman/Latin culture to Jonson's creativity and world view? What aspects of the ancient classical world most capture his attention? Do those aspects inform his poetry, as well as his drama and criticism?

**Excerpt <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/begging-another-2/>**

*For love's sake, kiss me once again;  
I long, and should not beg in vain,  
Here's none to spy or see;  
Why do you doubt or stay?  
I'll taste as lightly as the bee  
That doth but touch his flower and flies away.*

*Once more, and faith I will be gone;  
Can he that loves ask less than one?  
Nay, you may err in this  
And all your bounty wrong;  
This could be called but half a kiss,  
What we're but once to do, we should do long.*

*I will but mend the last, and tell  
Where, how it should have relished well;  
Join lip to lip, and try  
Each suck other's breath.  
And whilst our tongues perplexed lie,  
Let who will, think us dead or wish our death.*

## John Donne

**The Life of John Donne.** John Donne (1572-1631) was a poet, satirist, lawyer, Anglican priest, and translator, whose influence on English poetry was immense. He was born into a devout recusant Catholic family at a time, in sixteenth century England, when prejudice, harassment, and religious hatred made any faith but that of the Church of England, the cornerstone of British national fervor, suspect and diabolical. (The rejection of Catholicism by Henry VIII, and various laws requiring attendance at Anglican services, had heralded a brutal repression of Catholic priests in England and Ireland.) Donne's father was warden of the Ironmongers Council of London—a prestigious post—and his mother was the daughter of the playwright John Heywood. (On both sides of the parental family stretched lateral branches of distinguished Catholics.) Donne was educated at Hart Hall, later Hertford College, Oxford, and then at Cambridge, but because of his Catholicism neither institution was able to grant him a degree. Consequently in 1592 he entered Lincoln's Inn, in the London Courts of Law, to study for a law degree. By this time, having taken advantage of his many influential connections, Donne was busied on a variety of diplomatic missions to Europe, as well, of course, as on the output of powerful and startling poems (often erotic or sharply satirical) which was to draw attention to him. (In 1602 Donne married Anne More, to whom he remained wedded for sixteen years, and with whom he had twelve children.) Having suffered the victim end of his faith, having seen relatives and close friends tortured for their Catholic beliefs, Donne turned to the Church of England in the 1590's, was ordained a priest of that Church in 1615. There, by stages, he rose to positions of high power, finally in 1621 assuming the prestigious position of Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. In his priestly role Donne wrote fiery and brilliant sermons, much admired to this day for their theology and their prose style. He also, and foremost, continued to create the brilliant sonnets and songs which, already by the 1590's, were making him a central figure in London letters.

**The work of John Donne.** One of Donne's most famous poems runs thus:

*No man is an island,  
Entire of itself,  
Every man is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main.  
If a clod be washed away by the sea,  
Europe is the less.  
As well as if a promontory were.  
As well as if a manor of thy friend's  
Or of thine own were:  
Any man's death diminishes me,  
Because I am involved in mankind,  
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;  
It tolls for thee.*

This poem is Donne at his simplest—as he sometimes is in texts like his *Songs and Sonnets* (1633). And yet the very simplicity of the ruling metaphor, of geological interdependence, develops, on reflection, an increasingly rich relevance to the community of humans. Donne's sermons, of which he left eighty handwritten copy at his death, are similarly rich in the rhetorical power with they move against the hearer. In The 'Sermon of Valediction,' preached at Lincoln's Inn before his departure for Germany in 1619, he wrote the following demand to his audience.

*No man would present a lame horse, a disordered clock, a torn book to the king. Thy body is thy beast, and wilt thou present that to god, when it is lamed and tired with excess of wantonness.*

## Reading

### Primary source reading

*The Love Poems of John Donne*, Digireads.com, 2010.

### Secondary source reading

Edwards, David L., *John Donne: Man of Flesh and Spirit*, London, 2001.

### Further reading

Bald, R.C., *John Donne: A Life*, Oxford, 1970.

### Suggested paper topics

1. 'The Canonization,' is one of Donne's richest poems. Is that poem both erotic and religious? In their love, the two lovers share a hermitage, in which they are enabled to give full growth to their love, and to become images for one another of the whole created world. Imitators of God—Cf. ll. 44-5—the lovers make themselves saintly, secular saintly, worthy of canonization. Donne's erotic poetry, which is passionate and spiritual at the same time, is forever blending the religious with the secular. Try out this notion on any of Donne's sonnets.
2. The fortunes of Donne's poetry are a thermometer for the emotional temper of subsequent English poetry. There was great respect for Donne in 18th century writers like Samuel Johnson and Ben Jonson, but by the 19th century, the moment of Romanticism—we will be there shortly, and your understanding of this point will be sharper—Donne was seen as a wit rather than a real poet. It was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the turning of the wheels of taste, that the poet T.S. Eliot (and others) drew new and enthusiastic attention to the achievement of the so called Metaphysicals—Donne and his contemporary lyricists—and privileged Donne as one of the greatest English language poets. Cf. T. S. Eliot's essay, 'The Metaphysical Poets,' 1921. How does Donne read for us today, in the early twenty first century?

**Excerpt** <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/confined-love/>

*Some man unworthy to be possessor  
Of old or new love, himself being false or weak,  
Thought his pain and shame would be lesser  
If on womankind he might his anger wreak,  
And thence a law did grow,  
One might but one man know;  
But are other creatures so?*

*Are Sun, Moon, or Stars by law forbidden  
To smile where they list, or lend away their light?  
Are birds divorced, or are they chidden  
If they leave their mate, or lie abroad a-night?  
Beasts do no jointures lose  
Though they new lovers choose,  
But we are made worse than those.*

*Who e'er rigged fair ship to lie in harbours  
And not to seek new lands, or not to deal withal?  
Or built fair houses, set trees, and arbors,  
Only to lock up, or else to let them fall?  
Good is not good unless  
A thousand it possess,  
But dost waste with greediness.*



## Herbert, George

**Life of George Herbert.** George Herbert (1593-1633) was an English poet, orator, and Anglican priest, especially known as one of the most distinguished among the Metaphysical poets—that group comprising Donne, Herbert, and Marvell—who brought such fascinating new life to British poetry in the seventeenth century. (One need only go back to the poetries of Wyatt and Surrey or to Sir Philip Sidney, to recover the first timid efforts of British writers, drawing heavily from Italianate work, to formulate a courtly and emotive style for English poetry.) Herbert was born into a wealthy and artistic family. He was born in Powys, Wales, son of Richard Herbert, Lord of Cherbury, an outstanding English deist, and metaphysical thinker whose explorations of the nature of prayer remain guiding to our day. His mother was the daughter of Sir Richard Newport, and a friend of the poet John Donne. His father was a Member of Parliament and a keeper of the official roles of court, *custos rotulorum*. At the age of 12 George Herbert was sent to the Westminster School, and in 1609 he was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge. At Trinity he excelled in languages—Greek and Latin especially—and in 1620 he became the University’s Public Orator, a position he held from 1620-1628. In his thirties, along with writing a large number of poems and tracts, he served several brief stints as Member of Parliament, then, no longer gratified by his prospects in politics, he took holy orders. Then in 1629 he entered the priesthood and took up a small and intimate country parish, where he remained, essentially, for the rest of his life.

**The Work of George Herbert.** When Samuel Johnson, a century and a half later, christened a group of early seventeenth century poets—Donne, Vaughan, Herbert—as ‘metaphysicals,’ he meant to praise with reservations, for like many of his own contemporaries Johnson found the work of these poets excessively witty and intricate, if at the same time innovative and decisive for the new developments of English poetry. It was commonly thought that in these poets the ‘itch of wit’ was too prominent, and it is easy to see why, during the Romantic Movement, such verbal art was rarely given its due. That ‘itch’ eventuated in artifices like punning titles of poems, the teasing of letters into special anagram shapes, as in the ‘Anagram of the Virgin Marie,’ or a variety of rhyming and echo effects within poems. (Though it was a point seldom argued by the authors in question, the purposes behind these devices were seldom trivial, and customarily built themselves forcefully into the points of the poems themselves.) The more pronounced of these efforts, to build the visual into the verbal, were the pattern poems, at which Herbert was a master: ‘the Altar’ mimes both the shape of the altar and the service upon it; ‘Easter Wings,’ with the poem printed out sideways so that the poem emulates the rising flight of winged being, is a stunningly successful example of wit in the service of faith. For the most part, though, Herbert’s poems in *The Temple* (1633) depend on less intense wit, and, as in the example of this collection, on the gradual build up, through the titles and themes of the poems, of the conceptual shapes that lead to the whole of the Christian temple. Lest wit turn into trick, Herbert is always there as the governing voice, intimately humble and looking for God’s grace.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Wilcox, Cambridge, 2007.

#### Secondary source reading

Fish, Stanley, *The Living Temple: George Herbert and Catechizing*, Berkeley, 1978.

#### Further reading

Hodgkins, Christopher, *Authority, Church and Society in George Herbert*, London, 1993.

#### Suggested paper topics

What do you think of the ‘visual poems’ of George Herbert? Are they tricks, or does the visual element contribute to the beauty and power of the poetry?

Does the term ‘metaphysical’ seem apt to describe the poetry of Herbert? Is there any philosophical validity to the term, in his case, or is ‘metaphysical’ here just a term of literary discourse?

**Excerpt <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/discipline/>**

*THROW away Thy rod,  
Throw away Thy wrath;  
O my God,  
Take the gentle path!*

*For my heart's desire  
Unto Thine is bent:  
I aspire  
To a full consent.*

*Not a word or look  
I affect to own,  
But by book,  
And Thy Book alone.*

*Though I fail, I weep;  
Though I halt in pace,  
Yet I creep  
To the throne of grace.*

*Then let wrath remove;  
Love will do the deed;  
For with love  
Stony hearts will bleed.*

*Love is swift of foot;  
Love 's a man of war,  
And can shoot,  
And can hit from far.*

*Who can 'scape his bow?  
That which wrought on Thee,  
Brought Thee low,  
Needs must work on me.*

*Throw away Thy rod;  
Though man frailties hath,...*

## Marvell, Andrew

**Andrew Marvell, the man.** Andrew Marvell (1621-1670) was an English metaphysical poet, friend of John Milton, and Member of Parliament, whose enrichment of poetic skills left an indelible mark on the development of the nation's verse forms, and who has been vigorously rediscovered by poets in our century.

**The Early Life of Andrew Marvell.** Andrew Marvell was born at Winestead in Holderness, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, near the city of Kingston. His father was a clergyman. The family moved to Hull when Andrew's father was appointed lecturer at Holy Trinity Church in that city. Andrew was then educated first at Hull grammar school, and then at age thirteen he went off to Cambridge, to begin his studies at Trinity College. While at Trinity College Marvell pursued the study of languages—his friend John Milton later noted that Marvell was fluent in four languages other than English—and there he published (in Latin) his first poems; one on the birth of a child to King Charles I. From this point on we assume rightly that Marvell was a serious poet, writing irregularly, though during his lifetime he was known almost only for his satirical prose.

**Marvell in mid life.** From 1642 on, that is to say essentially during the hot period of the English Civil War, which lasted until 1651, Marvell was basically living in Europe, traveling on various business and diplomatic assignments in the Netherlands, Spain, and Italy. As this was a period of great uncertainty for England, and the outcome of the Cromwellian Protectorate very hard to predict, Andrew Marvell was eager not to show his political position. In 1650 his Horatian ode laments the regicide, while lauding the return of Cromwell from Ireland. (It will be remembered that while at Cambridge, Marvell had written a Latin poem in praise of the royal child; he was careful to maintain good relations on all sides, and consequently survived the return of the Monarchy. His friend, John Milton, had been a strong antagonist of the monarchy, and only Marvell's intervention saved Milton from execution at the end of the Protectorate.) From 1650-52, once again in England, Marvell served as secretary to the prominent Lord Appleton, at whose country estate, Appleton House, Marvell wrote some of his finest poems, including 'To his coy mistress.' In 1653 Marvell joined John Milton—who had by this time fully lost his sight—as Latin Secretary to Cromwell's Council of State. In 1651, after the restoration of the monarchy, Marvell was elected Member of Parliament for Hull, and found himself so shocked, by the high level of political corruption on all sides, that he sharpened his pen to write some of his bitterest political satires.

**The poetry of Andrew Marvell.** Marvell's poetry is learned and complex, but perfectly tailored to the emotions expressed in it. Take the following eight lines of 'To his coy Mistress,' in which to this point the poet has been yielding to his mistress' dallying:

*But at my back I alwaies hear  
Times winged Charriot hurrying near:  
And yonder all before us lye  
Desarts of vast Eternity.  
Thy Beauty shall no more be found;  
Nor, in thy marble Vault, shall sound  
My ecchoing Song: then Worms shall try  
That long preserv'd Virginity...*

The overriding sentiment, impatience to get down to love's business, could not be cloaked with more elegant desperation. One might test this kind of poetry against that of Wyatt and Surrey, who in their sonnets, as we have seen, adopt stock postures of the anxious lover faced with the cruel mistress. Marvell, with the skill of a Donne or Herbert, injects an immediacy, into the love situation, which brings the experience of literature newly close to life.

## Reading

### Primary source reading

*The Complete Poems of Andrew Marvell*, London, 1972. Penguin.

**Secondary source reading**

Chernaik, Walter, *The Poet's Time: Politics and Religion in the Work of Andrew Marvell*, Cambridge, 1983.

**Further reading**

Swift, Nigel, *Andrew Marvell: The Chameleon*, New Haven, 2010.

**Suggested paper topics**

1. As you see it, what is the relation between Marvell's lyric poetry and the tumultuous political events of his time? Does he subtly incorporate those events into his poetry? How? To what effect?
2. How do you explain the ups and downs of literary reputation, of writers like Marvell—and the other metaphysical poets? What explains such instability in literary tastes, from one century to another?

**Excerpt <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/eyes-and-tears/>**

*How wisely Nature did decree,  
With the same Eyes to weep and see!  
That, having view'd the object vain,  
They might be ready to complain.*

*And since the Self-deluding Sight,  
In a false Angle takes each hight;  
These Tears which better measure all,  
Like wat'ry Lines and Plummets fall.*

*Two Tears, which Sorrow long did weigh  
Within the Scales of either Eye,  
And then paid out in equal Poise,  
Are the true price of all my Joyes.*

*What in the World most fair appears,  
Yea even Laughter, turns to Tears:  
And all the Jewels which we prize,  
Melt in these Pendants of the Eyes.*

*I have through every Garden been,  
Amongst the Red, the White, the Green;  
And yet, from all the flow'rs I saw,  
No Hony, but these Tears could draw.*

*So the all-seeing Sun each day  
Distills the World with Chymick Ray;  
But finds the Essence only Showers,  
Which straight in pity back he powers.*

*Yet happy they whom Grief doth bless,  
That weep the more, and see the less:  
And, to preserve their Sight more true,  
Bath still their Eyes in their own Dew.*

*So Magdalen, in Tears more wise  
Dissolv'd those captivating Eyes,  
Whose liquid Chains could flowing meet  
To fetter her Redeemers feet.*

## John Dryden

**The Life of John Dryden.** John Dryden (1631-1700) was born in the village of Aldwincle, in Northamptonshire. He was the oldest of fourteen children, and was fortunate enough to have high bred ancestry. He was the paternal grandson of Sir Erasmus Dryden, and the second cousin of the prominent writer, Jonathan Swift. He was educated first at the local grammar school, then at Westminster School, whose headmaster he both feared and admired. (At Westminster Dryden profited from a rigorous classical education, and from insistent training in rhetoric. He was made into a seasoned debater, skilled at adopting a variety of views of any given topic. This skill was to play an important role in much of his later writing.) In 1650 Dryden graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge. The self-taught training in formal verse, social participation, and a brilliant ear for the cadences of English—added to the rhetorical skills from Westminster—all followed Dryden into a career of highly public literary prominence, which rendered him the most noted literary figure in England for the last forty years of the seventeenth century. He was a playwright, satirist, lyric and ode writer, translator, jack of all trades in language; and in addition aided, thanks to his favor and caution with the Cromwell Interregnum, by a series of governmental posts and commissions which he was able, again through cautious tiptoeing, to parlay into equally remunerative work upon the return of the Stuarts.

**The Work of John Dryden.** Dryden was a man of letters, active in many literary roles, in the new urban culture of London. That culture had grown, with the economic vitality of the Empire, into a cosmopolitan machinery, revolving around publications, fashionable author trends, and a vibrant coffee house culture in which the prominent artists and writers of the day participated. Within that social/cultural circuit Dryden became a figure of commanding importance. In 1662 he was appointed as a Fellow of the Royal Society—an honor he let slide by failure to pay his annual dues. In 1663 Dryden married, tying himself socially into the life of central London. By 1677 he was becoming a highly popular playwright: a sequence of popular dramas—*Marriage a la Mode* (1678) and *All for Love* (1678)—brought him widespread attention, as did an epic poem, in a stylized, sophisticated form, *Annus Mirabilis*, 1667, a tribute to London for its survival of the great fire which had been so disastrous the year before, and a tribute to the restored monarchy. At the same time, for Dryden was a tireless and brilliant wordsmith, he was busy with his remunerative translations of Latin poetry. His translation of *The Works of Virgil*, 1697, was a major success, including, as it did, a preface in which Dryden hoped to link the glories of the Augustan imperium to those of the Stuart line—though history snatched this recipe away from Dryden, thanks to the banishment and exile of James I. To us, today, the most vivid of Dryden's achievements may be his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), in which a wide canvas of literary critical ideas is vigorously laid out—a work as energetic as Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* a century earlier. In the course of the *Essay* four major literary critical perspectives are developed—a throwback, perhaps, to Dryden's educational experience at Westminster: there is an advocate of ancient literary values, another of modern values, another of French values, a fourth (Dryden's preference) of English values. The whole discussion is vigorous, if inconclusive, and opens a window onto the wide variety of meanings literature had for Dryden and his time.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*John Dryden: Selected Poems*, ed. Hopkins, New York, 1998.

#### Secondary source reading

Winn, James Anderson, *John Dryden and his World*, New Haven, 1987.

#### Further reading

Hopkins, David, *John Dryden*, Cambridge, 1986.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Dryden was a much published translator of Latin literature, in an age when such work could be remunerative and of intense public interest. (The Renaissance marked a renewal of interest in Greek and Latin literatures, especially in their original forms. By Dryden's time, the ability to read these languages

had started to decline, but, like most of his educated contemporaries, Dryden was intensely trained, from childhood on, in Latin and some Greek.) To widen your sense of this classical tradition, and the waves of change that have stirred it during our modern centuries, take a look at Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition* (Oxford, 1985). You will see that the Renaissance fervor for the Classics has persisted through many ups and downs of taste.

2. Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* may well attract your interest, for its creative role in the development of English literary awareness. Dryden was deeply aware of the classical tradition of criticism, and especially of the role of the Elizabethan period in fortifying the English sense of its own literary values. Long after his time, Dryden's *Essay* remained a standard setter for writing in English. Suggestion: take a look at Rene Wellek, *History of Literary Criticism*, a massive context setter for the whole western enterprise of literary critical awareness. What do you see as Dryden's distinctive addition to the development of critical theory?

**Excerpt** <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/can-life-be-a-blessing/>

*Can life be a blessing,  
Or worth the possessing,  
Can life be a blessing if love were away?  
Ah no! though our love all night keep us waking,  
And though he torment us with cares all the day,  
Yet he sweetens, he sweetens our pains in the taking,  
There's an hour at the last, there's an hour to repay.*

*In ev'ry possessing,  
The ravishing blessing,  
In ev'ry possessing the fruit of our pain,  
Poor lovers forget long ages of anguish,  
Whate'er they have suffer'd and done to obtain;  
'Tis a pleasure, a pleasure to sigh and to languish,  
When we hope, when we hope to be happy again.*

## Browne, Sir Thomas

**The Life of Sir Thomas Browne.** Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682) was an English prose stylist, antiquarian, archeologist, and religious speculator, who is widely considered one of the greatest stylists of the English language. He was the son of a silk merchant, who was active at Upton, Cheshire, and was born in St. Michael, Cheapside, London. Thomas was sent to school at Winchester College, then matriculated to Pembroke College, Oxford, where he was graduated in 1623. From Oxford, Browne moved to medical studies in Europe, where, as was the fashion of the time, he moved among several universities: attending the Universities of Montpellier and Padua, then receiving his official medical degrees both from Leiden (1633) and from the University of Oxford. The remainder of his life was passed, for the most part, in Norwich, where from 1637-1682 he practiced medicine. Apart from his medical practice and his writings, which were voluminous, we know rather little about him from those years. It is clear that he remained a supporter of the monarchy, throughout these turbulent interregnum years. During the Civil War he supported Charles I, and from Charles II he received his knighthood.

**The work of Sir Thomas Browne.** The writings of Sir Thomas Browne are long, elegant, digressive, and learned, and yet they tend toward a consistent series of themes, and attitudes to life, which give them coherence. Those attitudes are marked by great openness and curiosity about other peoples, cultures, and religious perspectives, a tolerance unusual for the bigoted times Browne lived, and an endless curiosity about ancient cultures and their religious and funerary practices. His first published work was *Religio Medici*, a broad survey of his views on life and death, religion and some of its ancient solace, which was offered to the public without Browne's authorization, in 1642, and in a form which was discomfiting to Browne—a rather dangerous mix of religious openness, friendliness to Catholicism, and a lot of Baconian scepticism. In 1645 this book was put on the index for its relaxed attitude to Protestant doctrinal issues, and Browne made some effort to modify his positions. But this vigorous creator was not long to be subdued, and with great stylistic verve—he is said to have contributed more than one hundred eighty new words to the vocabulary of English—he advanced into new lengthy texts in which he developed a wide range of religious anthropological views on the world as known in his time.

**Urne Burial.** In 1658 he published *Hydrotaphia, Urne Burial*, which was concerned with various religious practices from the ancient and archaic worlds. (This work was occasioned by various Bronze Age burials from the area of Norfolk, all of which led Browne to reflections on funerary practice.) *The Garden of Cyrus*, also published in 1658, continues Browne's sets of reflections on death, decay, transmigration and the next world. Interestingly enough he retains his Christianity throughout all these investigations. 'Pyramids, Arches, Obelisks were but the irregularities of vainglory, and wild enormities of ancient vainglory...the most magnanimous resolution lies in Christian Religion, which trampleth upon pride, and sits on the neck of ambition, humbly pursuing that infallible perpetuity, unto which all others must diminish their diameters...' It remains only to add, in his quick survey of a perplexingly rich tribute to Christian orthodoxy, that Browne was a devout believer in witchcraft and the occult, as well the Platonic quincunx; secret and cultish paths to salvation.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*Religio Medici*, Sir Thomas Browne, Cambridge, 2008. Digitized reprint.

#### Secondary source reading

Bennett, Joan, *Sir Thomas Browne*, Cambridge, 1962.

#### Further reading

Huntley, Frank Livingstone, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Biographical and Critical Study*, Ann Arbor, 1962.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Does Sir Thomas Browne seem to you foremost a medical mind, or does medicine concern him simply as a byproduct of anthropological investigation? Is his kind of entry point into medical issues a valuable launching stage in the development of experiment based medical practice?

2. Browne was a believer in 'witchcraft,' who had no doubt of the efficacy of such practices and their harmful effect on good society. Does that belief seem to you consistent with his kind of curiosity about ancient religious cultures and their peculiarities?

**Excerpt <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/586/pg586.html>**

SECT. 1.—For my religion, though there be several circumstances that might persuade the world I have none at all,—as the general scandal of my profession,—the natural course of my studies,—the indifferency of my behaviour and discourse in matters of religion (neither violently defending one, nor with that common ardour and contention opposing another),— yet, in despite hereof, I dare without usurpation assume the honourable style of a Christian. Not that I merely owe this title to the font, my education, or the clime wherein I was born, as being bred up either to confirm those principles my parents instilled into my understanding, or by a general consent proceed in the religion of my country; but having, in my riper years and confirmed judgment, seen and examined all, I find myself obliged, by the principles of grace, and the law of mine own reason, to embrace no other name but this. Neither doth herein my zeal so far make me forget the general charity I owe unto humanity, as rather to hate than pity Turks, Infidels, and (what is worse) Jews; rather contenting myself to enjoy that happy style, than maligning those who refuse so glorious a title.

2.—But, because the name of a Christian is become too general to express our faith,—there being a geography of religion as well as lands, and every clime distinguished not only by their laws and limits, but circumscribed by their doctrines and rules of faith,—to be particular, I am of that reformed new-cast religion, wherein I dislike nothing but the name; of the same belief our Saviour taught, the apostles disseminated, the fathers authorized, and the martyrs confirmed; but, by the sinister ends of princes, the ambition and avarice of prelates, and the fatal corruption of times, so decayed, impaired, and fallen from its native beauty, that it required the careful and charitable hands of these times to restore it to its primitive integrity. Now, the accidental occasion whereupon, the slender means whereby, the low and abject condition of the person by whom, so good a work was set on foot, which in our adversaries beget contempt and scorn, fills me with wonder...



## John Bunyan

**The Early Life of John Bunyan.** John Bunyan (1628- 1688) was born in Elstow, a small hamlet in Bedfordshire, the local environment of which was to play an important role in his later writing. He was the son of Thomas and Margaret Bunyan, the Bunyans being widespread in the area, and arguably descendants of Anglo-Norman French settlers. John Bunyan's grandfather was a juror, a sign of his belonging to the land, and his father was a chapman—that is a dealer or trader—or brazier. (These were essential and honorable trades in the area, but were not easy to parlay into higher commerce.) John was probably schooled in house, and not much past the reading and writing elements. It was John's choice to be a tinker, a mender of tinware and pots, which in the absence of new commodities were mended over and over.

**John Bunyan and his Career Life.** Bunyan was born into a sharply Dissenting family, and at a time when the struggles between Cromwell and his anti-monarchists were fighting it out for national dominance. Bunyan was called up for conscription in the Parliamentary army (1644-47), and served for three years, during which time he inevitably partook in manly pastimes like cursing, drinking, and who knows what—for all of which Bunyan was not much later to find himself tortured with guilt. (He was in fact to refer, later, to the three moral outrages he had committed during this period: profanity, dancing, and bell-ringing.) It was about this time that Bunyan began to hear voices, condemning him for his sinful past. After the Restoration of Charles II, a new law was passed, prohibiting private preaching, especially by Dissenters; this law, however, had no effect on John Bunyan, who by this time had become a much listened to preacher, at least in his area of Bedfordshire. In 1660 Bunyan was arrested for preaching in contravention of this law, and jailed for three months, then jailed a second time, upon repeated offense, for a period of six years. It was during this time that he conceived the plan for the most realized of the more than sixty titles he completed (most of them expanded sermons) during his lifetime.

**The Work of John Bunyan.** John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1680 and later) is a Christian allegory of the path to Heaven. Though written by an author with limited book learning—although with a very thorough knowledge of Scripture—and with a religious, not literary, mind, *Pilgrim's Progress* has proved to be one of the most widely read books in English. (The eminent historian Macaulay claimed that the only two Englishmen of surpassing imaginative power, in the seventeenth century, were Milton and Bunyan.) The story is simple, but labyrinthine—as is the passage from ground zero of life, through sinfulness, to ultimate grace. Christian, the hero, must find his way from the City of Destruction, our present location, to the Celestial City, but there are many obstacles in his way. He heads toward a shining light, which he has been told to watch for. As he proceeds, his way is blocked by Obstinate and Pliable, who have nothing to contribute to his progress. He falls into the Slough of Despond, nearly drowning in muck. Pilgrim is pulled out of the muck by Health, but then is once again led astray by Mr. Worldly Wise, who represents the law. The straight and narrow path, seemingly so easy to observe, turns out to be fraught with obstacles, though ultimately attainable.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan, ed. Owen, New York, 2009.

#### Secondary source reading

Colmer, Robert, *Bunyan in our Time*, Columbus, Ohio, 1990.

#### Further reading

Newey, Vincent, ed. *'Pilgrim's Progress': Critical and Historical Views*: Liverpool, 1980.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. It has been estimated that, second to the Bible, *Pilgrim's Progress* is the most widely disseminated and read text in English literature. (Can that conjecture be confirmed?) Can you see why that would be true? What is the extraordinary draw of Bunyan's epic?
2. Religious allegory has figured prominently in English poetry. Compare Bunyan's use of such allegory

with that of *Piers Plowman* from the mediaeval period. Do you see a difference between the allegory of Langland and Bunyan, that corresponds to the difference in cultural environments they lived in?

**Excerpt <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/meditations-upon-a-candle/>**

*Man's like a candle in a candlestick,  
 Made up of tallow and a little wick;  
 And as the candle when it is not lighted,  
 So is he who is in his sins benighted.  
 Nor can a man his soul with grace inspire,  
 More than can candles set themselves on fire.  
 Candles receive their light from what they are not;  
 Men grace from Him for whom at first they care not.  
 We manage candles when they take the fire;  
 God men, when he with grace doth them inspire.  
 And biggest candles give the better light,  
 As grace on biggest sinners shines most bright.  
 The candle shines to make another see,  
 A saint unto his neighbour light should be.  
 The blinking candle we do much despise,  
 Saints dim of light are high in no man's eyes.  
 Again, though it may seem to some a riddle,  
 We use to light our candles at the middle.  
 True light doth at the candle's end appear,  
 And grace the heart first reaches by the ear.  
 But 'tis the wick the fire doth kindle on,  
 As 'tis the heart that grace first works upon.  
 Thus both do fasten upon what's the main,  
 And so their life and vigour do maintain.  
 The tallow makes the wick yield to the fire,  
 And sinful flesh doth make the soul desire  
 That grace may kindle on it, in it burn;  
 So evil makes the soul from evil turn.  
 But candles in the wind are apt to flare,  
 And Christians, in a tempest, to despair.  
 The flame also with smoke attended is,  
 And in our holy lives there's much amiss.  
 Sometimes a thief will candle-light annoy,  
 And lusts do seek our graces to destroy.*

## John Milton

**The Significance of John Milton.** John Milton (1608-1674) was an English poet, pamphleteer, political activist, and moral philosopher. He remains best known for his epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, but he created a number of prose and verse works which have remained influential. He is widely considered one of the greatest of writers of English.

**The Life of John Milton.** John Milton was born on Bread Street, London. He was the son of the composer John Milton, who made a great impression on the young John, with his music and his musical friends. His mother was Sarah Jeffrey. Milton's father had moved to London in 1583, after being disinherited by his devoutly Catholic father. As a young man John was tutored by a well educated Scotsman, Thomas Young, who is credited with having fueled John's ready inclination to independence and freedom of thought. John was sent for schooling to St. Paul's, the church school of St. Paul's Cathedral. There he received an intense classical education. (The exercises imposed by the masters at Paul's were exemplary: passages to translate from Latin into Greek and then back again, with emphasis on retaining the same words and verse structure in the Latin that returned from the Greek.) In 1629 John Milton entered Christ's College, Cambridge, where he was immersed in humanistic studies, and outstanding friends, like Edward King, to whom he was later to dedicate the wonderful elegy, *Lycidas*, and Roger Williams, the Anglo American religious reformer. We can note, as an indication of the creative/scholarly level, of the young Milton, that while at Cambridge he created his own brilliant set pieces, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, studies of the idealized happy and gloomy personality types. After leaving, Milton set out on a tour of Europe, where his open personality and extraordinary learning recommended him to many of the most distinguished circles. (Among many other luminaries he met Galileo, who was under house arrest.) Upon returning from the Continent Milton found himself in an England that was consumed with civil conflict and a period of outright Civil War (1642-1651), which yielded the Commonwealth government that was until 1660 the working space of the interregnum ruler, Oliver Cromwell. Milton himself, as he had made clear long before, had strong anti-monarchical sentiments, and found himself playing an important role as Latin Secretary to Oliver Cromwell; a position to which he was appointed in 1649. His later years were shadowed by the complete blindness to which he fell victim, yet in those later years, after having escaped the punishment of execution, for his participation in the Protectorate, he created his greatest literary work.

**The work of John Milton.** John Milton, as we have noted, was brilliantly creative as early as his University days, when he wrote *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. When we look at his seminal works—*Areopagitica* (1644), *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Samson Agonistes* (1671)—we are startled by the consistent emphasis on the importance of freedom, independent thought, and almost Christ-like endurance of sufferings, in the interest of the good. In *Paradise Lost*, his most ambitious work, a complex drama--Fall, diabolical undermining of man, raging battles between Heaven and Hell, mankind's loss of direction in the cosmos—is played out in almost faultless iambic pentameter, which is the perfect dignified vehicle for the highest possible poetic theme. In *Samson* Milton transfers his own struggle for greatness and purity to a sightless man of power and integrity, in whom we can see Milton fighting for his own soul.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. Kerrigan, New York, 2007.

#### Secondary source reading

Bennett, Joan, *Reviving Liberty: Radical Christian Humanism in Milton's Great Poems*, Cambridge, 1989.

#### Further reading

Milner, Andrew, *John Milton and the English Revolution*, London, 1981.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. John Milton and John Bunyan are near contemporaries, and lived through the same social and political turmoil that defined seventeenth century England. Did the two poets have similar attitudes toward the

political environment they lived? Explain.

2. How does John Milton conceive of Satan? Does he manage to make Satan hateful, or is Satan too interesting to be put in that category? What does Milton do to give personality to Adam? Is Adam as interesting as Satan in *Paradise Lost*?

**Excerpt <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/20/pg20.html>**

*Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit  
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast  
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,  
With loss of EDEN, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,  
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top  
Of OREB, or of SINAI, didst inspire  
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,  
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth  
Rose out of CHAOS: Or if SION Hill  
Delight thee more, and SILOA'S Brook that flow'd  
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence  
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song,  
That with no middle flight intends to soar  
Above th' AONIAN Mount, while it pursues  
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.  
And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer  
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,  
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first  
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread  
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss  
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark  
Illumine, what is low raise and support;  
That to the highth of this great Argument  
I may assert th' Eternal Providence,  
And justifie the wayes of God to men.*

## 18 Century

### Background

By the 18th century the British Empire, which we described as moving toward a middle class and a growing commercial, even international commercial environment, was at the height of its power. British ships controlled the waters, London became an international commercial capital, and British pre colonial presence was about to announce itself in prospective colonies throughout the world. It was into that world of growing geopolitical confidence that the confident public-minded authors of the century grew up and found their voices. Johnson and Pope were strenuous participants in the urban literary and coffee house scene, which was making of London a center of high intellectual culture. Daniel Defoe was a journalist and social commentator, who worked in texts like *A Journal of the Plague Year* to think out the fragilities and dangers of urban society. While the British 18th century was not supreme, for poetic achievement, it excelled in social critique, satirical poetry, like Pope's, and refined aesthetic/ethical perspectives, like those of Shaftesbury.

### Discussion Questions

1. The 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Western culture, is traditionally called the Age of Enlightenment. That term broadly connotes: a practical, demythologized view of human personality and destiny; a devotion to life on this earth; faith in human reason. Do you see those Enlightenment traits in the work of Swift, Dryden and Pope?
2. What is a national literary canon? Who determines what texts belong in a literary canon? Does it make sense to include document-like works, such as those of Mrs. Burney or Equiano, in a literary canon? (Check those 'minor authors' in any anthology of British literature. Are they minor?)
3. The poetry of John Dryden and Alexander Pope fell under sharp criticism, during the Romantic Movement in the 19th century, for being stiff, too formal, too pointed, and even, in many views, mechanical. (When you read Wordsworth and Coleridge, in the next Unit, you may reflect back onto the gap between these century-separated poetries.) What do you think about such charges. Can you read 18th century English poetry as a living part of your own experience?

## Alexander Pope

**The Life of Alexander Pope.** Alexander Pope (1688-1744) was born to Catholic parents. His father was a linen merchant, working at Plough Court in Lombard Street, London. He was taught reading by his Aunt, but for the most part he had no formal elementary education. As a Catholic, Alexander Pope was unable to go to University, vote, or hold public office. The recently passed Test Act had increased the severity of anti-Catholic legislation in England, and anti-Catholic sentiment was common among the British population. Catholics were not permitted to live less than ten miles from London, so that their integration into the advantages of urban life was difficult. To all of which, in the way of disadvantages, should be added that Pope suffered all his life from bad health: his lifelong plague was Potts disease, tuberculosis of the spine, which left him hunchbacked, four feet six inches tall, and prey to all kinds of difficulties of gait and self-image.) He was sent to Twyford School for a few years (1698-99), but beyond that his possibilities were severely limited. Through his own energy, and avidity at reading, Pope educated himself voraciously in languages—becoming highly proficient in Classics and reading in all the Latin classics as well as the classics of English literature—and despite obstacles rapidly made contacts with some of the leading figures in London cultural life—for instance the playwrights Congreve and Wycherley. Before long Pope made his way to the heights of London literary life. He was above all a frequenter of those coffee-houses which were springing up everywhere in London. (Literary talk was to flourish in those locales, as it was to do throughout the 18th century, in part replacing the salons of aristocrats, where in earlier centuries the ruling intellectuals met. The tastes of the moment changed, as did the composition of literary groups, but Pope remained for decades a leader of London cultural life—in a way worthily succeeding Dryden, who had been such an eminence a half century earlier.) In his later years, Pope retired to his country house at Twickenham, where he had constructed a charming grotto, a floral nucleus of work and social interaction which was the delight of his life.

**The Work of Alexander Pope.** Pope's *Pastorals*, 1709, his first published poetry, brought him success, and from that time on his dexterity with the heroic couplet, his unusual wit, and his stimulating world-view enabled him rapidly to surmount the various obstacles, mentioned above, which surrounded the development of his life. As a social intellectual, one of the founders of the Scribblers Club, he was a prominent London figure. A variety of attention grabbing texts—*The Essay on Criticism* (1711), 'The Rape of the Lock' (1712), the translation of Homer's *Iliad*, *The Essay on Man* (1734)—placed Pope at the center of his culture, establishing him as a fervent (and very conservative) social critic, as a dominant literary critic, and as a social satirist (say in 'The Rape of the Lock'), unmatched in his time. Perhaps the most remarkable of his achievements was the rendering of Homer's dactylic hexameters into heroic couplets. Pope's translation of the *Iliad*, while transposing the brilliance of one early culture into his own urban modernity, succeeded in a miraculous transformation, and proved out the popularity of Homer. Behind Pope's technical genius lay his deep sense of the universal in mankind's cultural adventure, and his desire to render 'what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed.'

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. Butt, Abingdon, 1966; newly digitized, 2005.

#### Secondary source reading

Mack, Maynard, *Pope: A Life*, New Haven, 1985.

#### Further reading

Thomas, Claudia, *Alexander Pope and Eighteenth-Century Women Readers*, Carbondale, 1994.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Scholarship on the British eighteenth century abounds. I recommend a look at Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background* (1940), for a well written general study of the cultural climate of 18th century English literature. You will see how Pope's view of nature—and that of his contemporaries—was tinted by both contemporary developments in natural science and by the view that the culture held of

'science,' and of the workings of nature. You can supplement Willey with the classic *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) by A.O. Lovejoy, a history of the idea—intimately congenial to Pope—that all of God's creations were perfectly sorted out by him, and exist as a descending chain of being from him.

2. We know the basic outlines of eighteenth century rational humanism, the Enlightenment perspective announcing itself in the work of Dryden and Swift. (In 18<sup>th</sup> century England, as throughout Europe, there was to be an explosion of empirical science; building on the theoretical insights of the previous century, in Newton and Descartes.) The heart of that perspective was faith in man, and in the orderliness of the reasonable universe that frames man. *How does Pope's poetry exemplify that perspective?* In the *Essay on Man*, Pope sums it up—and notice his genius at summarizing the human condition—by announcing that 'whatever is is right.' In his *Essay on Criticism*, Pope recurs to Nature as the model for art, and when it comes to details he turns to the art of the Greeks as the model form of nature, 'nature methodized.' The 'natural,' in this sense, is man 's artistic foundation. Whatever is natural is right. This too is the Enlightenment perspective. And *The Rape of the Lock*? How is this elegant poem part of the Enlightenment project? One way of looking at the poem is as a cry of support for women's dignity and private space. Another is, as a satire on the least natural aspect of human affairs, the hypertrophy of elegance in social behavior.

**Excerpt** <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/sound-and-sense/>

*True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,  
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.  
'Tis not enough no harshness gives offense,  
The sound must seem an echo to the sense:  
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,  
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;  
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,  
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar;  
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,  
The line too labors, and the words move slow;  
Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,  
Flies o'er the unbending corn, and skims along the main.  
Hear how Timotheus' varied lays surprise,  
And bid alternate passions fall and rise!*

## Defoe, Daniel

**Importance of Daniel Defoe.** Daniel Defoe (1660-1725) was a new and highly innovative type on the British literary scene. He was a trader/businessman, a spy—both for the government and its opposition, a proto novelist, a poet, and a pamphleteer. His ‘travelogue,’ *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719, remains as his most memorable text.

**The Life of Daniel Defoe.** Defoe—the *De* is a ‘distinguished addition’ which he appended to his family name, Foe--was born (probably) in the parish of St. Giles Cripplegate. His father was a tallow chandler, of comfortable means, and a member of the Butchers’ Company, a notable honorary membership of ancient vintage in the City of London. Unlike many early modern English authors, Defoe did not benefit from a distinguished formal education, but as a young man made his life way directly into trade. He traded actively in wines, cotton fabrics, and hosiery, as well as in civet cats—of which he had a collection—for the production of perfume. Despite these multiple involvements, he was frequently in financial difficulty, and we have reason to think he could barely support his wife and eight children, during a marriage which lasted more than fifty years. His unusual insight into the growing commercial vitality of England makes him a particularly valuable witness to the modernization of London, and other major cities of England and Scotland. (His book, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 1719, identifies the development of road and factory building, of banking and industry, throughout the nation, and oozes with praise for the importance of commerce in nation building.) Defoe profits, in his extensive writing—he wrote more than five hundred books—from his own existential involvement with the higher politics of his time, which various personal acquaintances led him into, and from the pure chance that he was present during or shortly after intense and developmentally crucial times in the history of his island nation: the Great Plague which took some 70,000 lives in 1665, and the Great Fire of London, which ravaged the city six years after Defoe’s birth.

**The Work of Daniel Defoe.** We have noted that Defoe wrote more than five hundred books—a total which includes pamphlets and broadsides, as well as full six folios, and which testifies to the explosive development of the urban publishing business in Defoe’s London. Among Defoe’s best known work are titles which indicate how engrossed he was in depicting the ongoing life of his time, a preoccupation in pursuing which he became what might be called modern Europe’s first journalist, or even ‘economic journalist.’ *Robinson Crusoe*, which was published in 1719, placed a shipwrecked sailor on a desert island, where the way in which he made use of his environment, and managed the small population of animals and cannibals with whom he was surrounded on the island, indicate Defoe’s sharp sense of the way a society, especially a colonial society, is constructed. *Moll Flanders*, 1722, gives us a searching adventure into the world of a street trollop and her on the whole highly successful ways of securing her living. In the same year *The Journal of the Plague Year* was published, a haunting and tangible study of the way a society comes apart under internal pressures which it cannot control. In all of these works Defoe writes as narrator/novelist, journalist/sociologist, and poet.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Shinagel, New York, 1993. Norton Critical Edition.

#### Secondary source reading

Backscheider, Paula, *Daniel Defoe: His Life*, London, 1989.

#### Further reading

Rogers, Pat, ed. *Daniel Defoe: The Critical Heritage*, London, 1972.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Is Defoe a journalist, a novelist, a reporter? Are those terms clearly defined in his time? (Are they clear in our day, when journalism has assumed many previously unknown forms?) Does Defoe’s poetry bear the same stamp of ‘social awareness,’ as does his prose?



2. Compare Robinson Crusoe to Lemuel Gulliver, the protagonist in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. How would you compare the approaches of Defoe and Swift to creating the narrative of a protagonist who faces 'the extreme other'?

**Excerpt <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-true-born-englishman-excerpt/>**

*Thus from a mixture of all kinds began,  
That het'rogeneous thing, an Englishman:  
In eager rapes, and furious lust begot,  
Betwixt a painted Britain and a Scot.  
Whose gend'ring off-spring quickly learn'd to bow,  
And yoke their heifers to the Roman plough:  
From whence a mongrel half-bred race there came,  
With neither name, nor nation, speech nor fame.  
In whose hot veins new mixtures quickly ran,  
Infus'd betwixt a Saxon and a Dane.  
While their rank daughters, to their parents just,  
Receiv'd all nations with promiscuous lust.  
This nauseous brood directly did contain  
The well-extracted blood of Englishmen.*

*Which medly canton'd in a heptarchy,  
A rhapsody of nations to supply,  
Among themselves maintain'd eternal wars,  
And still the ladies lov'd the conquerors.*

## Jonathan Swift

**The importance of Jonathan Swift.** Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was an Irish poet, satirist, pamphleteer and political activist (first Whig, then Tory), novelist, and finally Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.

**The Life of Jonathan Swift.** Jonathan Swift, a posthumous child, was born of English parents, John and Erik, in Dublin in 1667. Through the generosity of an uncle, he was educated at Kilkenny School and Trinity College, Dublin, from which he graduated in 1686. In 1688 he went to England to serve as the private secretary to Sir William Temple, who was to be an important guiding figure throughout Swift's life. At Templeton's estate Jonathan Swift met Esther Johnson, the Stella of his early poems, and a figure of emotional importance for him. In 1692 Swift earned his M.A. from Oxford, and shortly thereafter he was ordained a priest in the Church of Ireland, and given a small country parish, whose isolation he hated. About 1696-7, he wrote his powerful satires on corruption in religion and learning, which were published in 1704 and reached their final form in a fifth printed edition in 1710. In 1702 Swift received a Doctorate of Divinity, from Trinity College Dublin. At age thirty-two, he returned to Ireland where he devoted his talents to politics and religion, and his works in prose were written to further various political causes. In 1709 he published *The Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*, both of which brought him public attention. After 1720 he began his greatest work, *Gulliver's Travels*, which he completed in 1728.

**The Work of Jonathan Swift.** *Gulliver's Travels* is Swift's most enduring satire. Although full of allusions to recent and current events, and vibrant with Swift's own very strong political opinions, the work still rings true today, for its objects are human failings, the defective political, economic, and social institutions that they call into being. Swift adopts an ancient satirical device: the imaginary voyage. His narrative center, Gulliver, appears among four different cultural or genetic groups—some tiny (from his view point) some huge (from his view point), some foolish, some gifted. There is not only satire but anthropology in this work, the structure of which also mirrors the travelogues and explorationist diaries that were very popular in the centuries following encounter with the Americas, and the ensuing colonial efforts. *The Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books* continue to develop Swift's disinterested social objectivity. *The Tale of a Tub* airs the religious views of three different passengers on a vessel, displaying what seem the exaggerated view of a religious sceptic and a religious zealot, and the relatively moderate view, that of Swift himself, clearly, of an Anglican clergyman. *The Battle of the Books* is Swift's take on the controversy, of heated interest at the time, over whether the ancients or the moderns are to be preferred in matters of taste and value.

**The evaluation of Jonathan Swift.** As a poet, satirist, commentator on his time, and political activist, Swift has a uniquely powerful ability to transport us back into his world. One theme threads his whole opus, and deserves mention as perhaps Swift's most lasting originality. The Dean of St. Patrick's had many friends, loved various individuals, but had a dim and often bitter view of humans as a species. He considered mankind gross, self-interested, contentious, and smelly. In so asserting, throughout his work, he made no apologies.

## Reading

### Primary source reading

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, New York, 1996. Dover reprint.

### Secondary source reading

Ehrenpreis, Irvin, *Swift*, 3 vols., London, 1962-83.

### Further reading

Higgins, Ian, *Swift's Politics: A Study in Disaffection*, Cambridge, 1994.

## Suggested paper topics

- Jonathan Swift frequently writes the grotesqueness of the human body into his fictions. He seems fascinated with the dark fallen condition of mankind. As an aid to understanding this side of Swift's work, look into the book *Life and Death* (1959), by the American classicist Norman O. Brown. A wonderful paper could result from reviewing Swift in the light of Brown.
- At the time of Swift the European discovery of far distant lands and cultures was far under way.

Columbus had come upon a new world, and Montaigne reflected the excitement of that discovery well over a century before its time. Swift taps into the growing fascination with the travel narrative, and puts it to use both to satirize his own culture—especially through the Houyhnhnms—and to fantasize the adventures of Lemuel in relation to other worlds and attitudes. In other words, this set of Gulliver tales is full of self awareness and analysis. Gulliver is in each tale set off from the people he discovers, by size or personal traits. *Does the unique charm of Swift's presentation come down to a kind of inner social geometry each of us carries inside, by which we are intrigued by seeing and feeling events from different angles?*

3. In the 19th century, which was on the whole scornful of 18th century British literary styles, Swift was even more reviled than Pope or Dryden. Thomas de Quincy, in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote that 'the meanness of Swift's nature, and his rigid incapacity for dealing with the grandeurs of the human spirit, with religion, with poetry or even with science when it rose above the mercenary practical, is absolutely appalling. His own Yahoo is not a more abominable one-sided degradation of humanity than he himself is under this aspect. . . .' I think you see that Swift's scatological imagination, his scorn for social traditions, his mocking of human pretenses all goes against the grain of thinking which flies under the Romantic banner. You might want to enlarge your sense, of this Classical/Romantic polarity, by checking out Irving Babbitt's scholarly classic, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919).

**Excerpt <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-beautiful-young-nymph-going-to-bed/>**

*Corinna, Pride of Drury-Lane,  
For whom no Shepherd sighs in vain;  
Never did Covent Garden boast  
So bright a batter'd, strolling Toast;  
No drunken Rake to pick her up,  
No Cellar where on Tick to sup;  
Returning at the Midnight Hour;  
Four Stories climbing to her Bow'r;  
Then, seated on a three-legg'd Chair,  
Takes off her artificial Hair:  
Now, picking out a Crystal Eye,  
She wipes it clean, and lays it by.  
Her Eye-Brows from a Mouse's Hide,  
Stuck on with Art on either Side,  
Pulls off with Care, and first displays 'em,  
Then in a Play-Book smoothly lays 'em.  
Now dextrously her Plumpers draws,  
That serve to fill her hollow Jaws.  
Untwists a Wire; and from her Gums  
A Set of Teeth completely comes.  
Pulls out the Rags contriv'd to prop  
Her flabby Dugs and down they drop.  
Proceeding on, the lovely Goddess  
Unlaces next her Steel-Rib'd Bodice;  
Which by the Operator's Skill,  
Press down the Lumps, the Hollows fill,  
Up hoes her Hand, and off she slips  
The Bolsters that supply her Hips.  
With gentlest Touch, she next explores  
Her Shankers, Issues, running Sores,  
Effects of many a sad Disaster;  
And then to each applies a Plaster.  
But must, before she goes to Bed,  
Rub off the Daubs of White and Red;  
And smooth the Furrows in her Front,  
With greasy Paper stuck upon't.  
She takes a Bolus e'er she sleeps;  
And then between two Blankets creeps. With pains of love tormented lies;*

## Shaftesbury

**Importance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury.** The 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) was an English philosopher, moralist, and writer who exercised great influence over the aesthetic and moral thought of his own culture, and over European (especially German) thinking in the eighteenth century.

**The Life of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury,** Anthony Ashley-Cooper was born in Exeter House, London. He was the grandson of the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, a man of power and influence over his grandson. His mother was Lady Dorothy Manners, and of his father, it seems, little was said at the time except that he was inadequate physically and mentally. As a consequence of this paternal failing, of which in fact we know almost nothing, the philosopher John Locke, a trusted friend of the first Earl, was called in to negotiate the marriage between Anthony's parents. It is consequently understandable that Locke's pedagogical theories should have played a major role in Anthony's education. (Those theories included a good deal of directed freedom for the student, and a careful search for the student's areas of expertise.) By the age of eleven Anthony could easily read Greek and Latin, and for the rest of his life, of exceptionally active mind, he was fundamentally (and very thoroughly) self-educated. In 1683 he was sent to Worcester College, but was miserable there; shy and marginalized. Subsequently, for more than five years, he traveled on the Continent, which was increasingly the learning ground for young English gentlemen of the time. In 1689 he returned to England, to stand for Parliament, and to be elected M.P. for Poole in 1689. It was at this time, though, that his generally weak health seriously caught up with him, and asthma, triggered by the increasing smoke problem from London, obliged him to return to the Netherlands, a less toxic—and intellectually more vigorous and liberated—atmosphere. There he found himself at the center of a lively group of largely European expatriate thinkers, like Pierre Bayle, who helped the Earl to formulate his ethics and aesthetics. (He was still not known in the British intellectual world.) In 1701 he moved back to England again, where, at the age of forty, he married, fathering one child. In 1711 he was at work on his major text, *The Characteristics*, and much of the rest of his (increasingly debile) life was spent writing, on his English country estate and in the Folly Structure, 'Philosopher's Tower', which he had erected and put to use for an increasingly meditative life.

**The Work of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl.** *The Characteristics* is a system of ethics and aesthetics, which are the most mature reflections of Shaftesbury, on these human branches of philosophy. Not only does Shaftesbury write for the general public—he is not a technical philosopher—but he writes on aspects of speculative thought which put him at the center of the new sensibilities which lead in the direction of Romanticism. (His influence, in this regard, falls strongly on Continental movements of thoughts, where such thinkers as Herder and Goethe were attentive to the Earl's views.) Shaftesbury promoted a vision of harmony, in both ethics and aesthetics, which is rooted in the fundamental balance and graciousness of our innate senses—moral and aesthetic. His view of a well ordered cosmos—like that of Pope's *Essay on Man*, and of the English deists in general—was hungrily absorbed by English nature poets like Thomson, in *The Seasons*, and by the growing British readership for 'sentimental' fiction, such as that of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748).

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Liberty Fund, 2001.

#### Secondary source reading

Gill, Michael, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*, Cambridge, 2006.

#### Further reading

Schneewind, J.B., *The Invention of Autonomy*, Cambridge, 1995.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Shaftesbury, and many of his contemporaries, particularly disliked what they called ‘enthusiasm.’ Look into the meaning of that term, for that time, and the reasons for the objections to the emotion described there.
2. How does Shaftesbury embody ancient Greek philosophy and cultural values in the construction of his view of life? What did he actually know of ancient Greece, and where did he get his knowledge? Was he familiar with the new breakthroughs in classical archeology in his time?

**Excerpt** <https://archive.org/details/characteristicso02shaf>

*It has been an established custom for poets to introduce their work by addressing themselves to some muse; the ancient poets began this practice, but even in our days we find it almost constantly imitated. But I can't help thinking that this imitation, this fashionable revival, must sometimes have stuck a little with your Lordship, who is used to examining things by a better standard than that of fashion or the common taste. You must have noticed that our poets are remarkably uncomfortable when they're obliged to take on this character -of Poet Addressing his Muse-; and you may have wondered why that air of enthusiasm that fits so gracefully with an •ancient should be so spiritless and awkward in a •modern. But it won't have taken your Lordship long to see the explanation; and this could only serve to put you in mind of something that has often occurred to you on other occasions as well, namely that truth is the most powerful thing in the world, because even fiction itself must be governed by it—the only way a work of fiction can be pleasing is by resembling the truth. Any representation of a passion can be agreeable only by appearing to be the real thing. And to be able to move others we must first be moved ourselves, or at least seem to be so. . . . Now, what possibility is there that a modern writer, who is known never to have worshipped Apollo or believed in any such deity as the Muses, should •persuade us to enter into his pretended devotion and •move us by his fake zeal in a religion that no-one believes any more? The ancients, on the other hand, are known to have derived their religion and their political arrangements from the art of the Muses; so it must have seemed natural for anyone at that time—and especially a poet—to address himself in raptures of devotion to those acknowledged Patronesses of wit and science.*

## Samuel Johnson

**The Importance of Samuel Johnson.** Samuel Johnson, 1709-1784, was an English moralist, poet, essayist, lexicographer, historian of letters, and all around ‘man of letters’ in an exceptional sense, unique to the British tradition. Though he is perhaps best known to us through the biography of him by James Boswell, he was in his own time most widely known for his commanding public presence.

**The Early Life of Samuel Johnson.** Johnson was born in Lichfield, Staffordshire, son of Michael Johnson, a bookseller, and his wife. Johnson regularly referred to his own youth as poverty stricken, although we know that his family had money, shortly before his birth. As a consequence of this poverty, Johnson was obliged to work in his father’s bookstore, binding and gluing books—a natural activity for what was to be this supreme bibliophile. It also marked young Johnson’s childhood that he was plagued with some of the illnesses that would pursue him through life, and blessed with a preternatural literary intelligence. Among those illnesses was scrofula—a tubercular disease—and the first stages of a tic-disease we now believe to have been Tourette’s. (As an adult, Johnson was disturbingly off centered, swaying back and forth and plagued with nervous gestures which made many chance acquaintances confused and nervous.) As for the extraordinary intelligence with which he entered life, we may think of feats like memorizing and reciting considerable portions of *The Book of Common Prayer* in his third year.

**The Later Life of Samuel Johnson.** Samuel Johnson was sent to Litchfield Grammar School, where he began his acquaintance with Latin. From there he matriculated to Pembroke College, Oxford, where he would remain for about a year, until his funds ran out. At that point he moved to London, where he gradually inserted himself into the vibrant social/intellectual life of the new London. It was in that center of cultural life that Johnson—the celebrated figure of Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* (1791)—became the arbiter of opinion for London’s literary scene. It was from that post that he wrote many of the works for which he is still known—the *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), *Rasselas* (1759), his *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779-81).

**The Work of Samuel Johnson.** Samuel Johnson was versatile, in various genres. In poetry his earliest work, ‘The Vanity of Human Wishes,’ 1779-81, was among his most successful works. After that, we have seen, he created a wide variety of works, from lexicography to his *Lives of the English Poets*, to innumerable essays on literature and morals. In *Rasselas* he presents the broad scope of his intelligence at its best. An ingenu, *Rasselas* wanders in far climes, learns the habits of foreign cultures, and, together with his teacher Imlac, works up the elements of an aesthetic which is normative for the thinking of eighteenth century classicism. In a characteristically thoughtful encounter with *Rasselas*, his teacher, Imlac says that the goal of the artist is to work to present general truths, not specific ones. The goal of the artist is not to depict the streaks in the lily but the general properties of the lily—the universally human. This generalist notion, which Johnson shared with many of his fellows, and particularly with the portrait painter, Sir Joshua Reynolds, is typical of the relatively abstract character of eighteenth century aesthetics, and of the thinking that is soon to merge into the critical thought of Immanuel Kant.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Samuel Johnson: *The Major Works*, ed. Greene, Oxford, 2009.

#### Secondary source reading

Rogers, Pat, Samuel Johnson, Oxford, 1993.

#### Further reading

Hudson, Nicholas, *Samuel Johnson and Eighteenth Century Thought*, Oxford, 1988.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. In his moral tale, *Rasselas*, Johnson speaks of the importance of going for an understanding of the general, not the individual; of appreciating the whole flower and not the streaks in it. What is the meaning of the ‘general’ for Johnson, and why does he put so much stress on it?

2. Look into the relationship between Johnson and his biographer/friend Boswell. What drew the two together? Was Boswell a passive amanuensis or an active collaborator? Do you think Johnson's crusty *obiter dicta*, which make up much of the Biography of him, were taken down literally or recreated later?

**Excerpt <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/rasselas.html>**

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow; attend to the history of Rasselas prince of Abissinia.

Rasselas was the fourth son of the mighty emperor, in whose dominions the Father of waters begins his course; whose bounty pours down the streams of plenty, and scatters over half the world the harvests of Egypt.

According to the custom which has descended from age to age among the monarchs of the torrid zone, Rasselas was confined in a private palace, with the other sons and daughters of Abissinian royalty, till the order of succession should call him to the throne.

The place, which the wisdom or policy of antiquity had destined for the residence of the Abissinian princes, was a spacious valley in the kingdom of Amhara, surrounded on every side by mountains, of which the summits overhang the middle part. The only passage, by which it could be entered, was a cavern that passed under a rock, of which it has long been disputed whether it was the work of nature or of human industry. The outlet of the cavern was concealed by a thick wood, and the mouth which opened into the valley was closed with gates of iron, forged by the artificers of ancient days, so massy that no man could, without the help of engines, open or shut them.

From the mountains on every side, rivulets descended that filled all the valley with verdure and fertility, and formed a lake in the middle inhabited by fish of every species, and frequented by every fowl whom nature has taught to dip the wing in water. This lake discharged its superfluities by a stream which entered a dark cleft of the mountain on the northern side, and fell with dreadful noise from precipice to precipice till it was heard no more.

## 19<sup>th</sup> century

The divisions of a national literature by periods is arbitrary, yet after the periodization occurs it seems to have defined a fact of nature. Such is the case with English literature. As one sees from the pre Romantic poets, like Cowper, there was already by the mid-18th century a marked softening of sensibility in some popular poetry, and something like a rediscovery of the power of nature. The same changes were visible in the landscape painting of the time. At any rate the period we call Romantic was on the horizon, and it was to acquire sharper definition with the political and social awakening provoked by the Napoleonic Wars, and the defeat of that autocratic Empire on the battlefield at Waterloo. It has become a convention to define the Romantic period from 1798, when Wordsworth and Coleridge published *The Lyrical Ballads*, to 1832, the year of the death of the great Romantic historical novelist Walter Scott. By this latter date, the British government had passed Reform Legislation which sanctified the privileges of the Middle Class, and changed England from a rural nation to a semi industrialized urban one.

**Revolution and Society.** We have seen the power of poetry throughout English literature; from *Beowulf* to the *Canterbury Tales* to Shakespeare to Pope—to create a very mixed bag—dominant expressions in poetry were formative for the whole tenor of a literary age. With the advent of the Romantic Period this feature of English literature is marked: passionate and powerful poetry—in Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and many more—assumes the leading role in defining the art tone of the period. At the same time there is a strong sense that the shape of culture and society is changing. Revolutions—American in 1776, French in 1798—are convulsing the pattern of Western history, and the Industrial Revolution is beginning to modify the social life of Western Europe and especially England.

**The Revolutionary Spirit:** All the major Romantic poets, with the exception of John Keats, were enthusiasts for the new spirit of Revolution in Europe and America. All that was liberating in these movements seemed to want expression in the spirit of poetry. Wordsworth thought it was bliss to be born at the time of the French Revolution, while Shelley and Byron were particularly moved by the self-liberation of the Greeks from the Ottoman occupation. Everywhere human rights were being promoted as sacred—just at the Industrial Revolution was rendering those rights endangered.

**New conception of literary language:** Wordsworth and Coleridge, in *The Lyrical Ballads* (1798) promoted the speech of common men and women, as they heard it in the Lake Country which was home to them. This speech seemed to be the richest source for poetic creation, and it was a source totally different from that privileged by a Neoclassicist like Alexander Pope. (Remember the Latinate sophistication of Pope's rhymed couplets.) There is an unmistakable correlation between Wordsworth's poetic language and the movement toward popular democracy in the Revolutions of the time.

**A New Model of the Past.** The Romantic Movement saw a turning away from the model of the ancient Greek and Latin classics, and from the historical setting those Classics emerged from. (The trend was reflected in educational practice, too, for from early in the 19th century the study of Greek and Latin gradually began its decline.) In place of the classical model the Middle Ages—a period of grail quests, faith and idealism; at least if you saw it that way—began to dominate the imagination.

### Discussion questions

1. You will notice that Pope and Swift died only a few years before the birth of William Blake, in 1757. In with the new! If you were to mix up the works of these three writers in a pile, with no author identification tags on them, would you be able to tell which of the works were by Blake, and which by the other two? How would you tell?
2. Review Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, and the *Preface* to them. Do you find in the early Wordsworth lyrics that simplicity of diction, that general hostility to poetic high style, which will be profoundly different from the ornate language of such as Dryden and Pope? Are Wordsworth's lyrics themselves simple, in language or thought?
3. When you look at the poetry of Byron (d. 1824), Keats (d. 1821), and Hopkins (d. 1899) can you see some unifying factor(s) which marks the group as 19th century? Please take this question back into our earlier entries, and consider whether centuries seem useful categories for literary history, or whether perhaps generations seem more useful benchmarks, for understanding groups of writers?



## William Wordsworth

**The significance of William Wordsworth.** William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was an English poet and critic, who was instrumental in creating the Romantic movement in poetry and criticism. His *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, and the long poem, *The Prelude*, opened totally new vistas to the western poetic tradition.

**The Earlier Life of William Wordsworth.** William Wordsworth was shaped by the Wye Valley and the Lake District of Northwest England; in the village of Cockermouth, in today's Cumbria. There he grew up freely in a classically beautiful landscape, the second of five children, comfortable enough in his family life; his father had a large mansion in the small town where the children were born, and worked as the legal representative of the First Earl of Lonsdale. While William's relation to his father was not close, his father nonetheless imposed on his son a thorough regime of poetry memorization; Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser. William went briefly to the local Hawkshead Grammar School in Lancashire, then was sent to Penrith School, and in 1787 enrolled in St. John's College, Cambridge.

**Wordsworth in Mid Life.** After University, in 1790, Wordsworth set off on a walking tour through Europe. His constant companions, at this time, were his sister Dorothy, and for a long time, during his most creative period, his fellow collaborator Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He also fell in love, while walking in France; in love both with the growing spirit of the French Revolution, for which Wordsworth became a powerful advocate, and with a French woman, with whom he had a child, and whom he supported—despite the fact that the two never married. While he was in early life a passionate supporter of the French Revolution, like the fiery Mary Wollstonecraft, and while he was close to France for romantic and cultural reasons, Wordsworth grew more nearly mainline and conventional of philosophy, as he aged. In 1798, he began to move into his full creative powers. In that year he (with his friend Coleridge) created the *Preface to The Lyrical Ballads*, and in the same year Wordsworth began writing *The Prelude*, his life's greatest work, and one on which he would remain busy until his death.

**The Work of William Wordsworth.** In the renowned *Preface to The Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth makes clear that he wants to break with the formal language and formal metrical conventions of the poetic tradition, and address commonplace daily life through language appropriate to it, rather than through the kinds of language, say, we encounter in Pope and Dryden. He puts it this way, in describing the nature of poetry: 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings...' and thereby he makes clear that true poetry will create its own formal conditions.

*A pleasant loitering journey, through three days  
Continued, brought me to my hermitage.  
I spare to tell of what ensued, the life  
In common things--the endless store of things,  
Rare, or at least so seeming, every day*

*Found all about me in one neighbourhood--*

In these characteristic lines from *The Prelude* Wordsworth introduces the kind of modest, but meditatively fertile setting from which he lets his poetry rise. 'The life in common things,' deeply experienced as part of his own spiritual journey, is itself as rich as the subtlest classical mythology. The limber and conversational iambic lines, in which Wordsworth inscribes his testimony to 'the life in common things,' build a consistent pattern, but do so with the flexibility of 'the speech of common men.' Of such modest care is poetic revolution made.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. Gill, Oxford, 2008.

#### Secondary source reading

Baron, Michael, *Language and Relationship in Wordsworth's Writing*, London, 1995.

#### Further reading

Gill, Stephen, *William Wordsworth: A Life*, Oxford, 1989.

### Suggested paper topics

1. When *The Lyrical Ballads* was published, in 1800, the seemingly extreme simplicity of these poems appeared silly, unworthy of the great traditions of poetry. The fact is that Wordsworth and Coleridge were both in rebellion against the concept of the poem in the 18th century and earlier. (Think back to Dryden and Pope, for examples of that earlier poetry at its best. It is full of poetic diction, personified virtues with capital letters, a vocabulary level which belongs to educated speech, instead of to the voices of common people, as Wordsworth understood it.) In the end which tradition prevailed, that of Wordsworth or that of Pope?
2. Wordsworth's place in the shaping of literary history is decisive. His views of the common voice, of the power of imagination, of the omnipotence of memory, of the impending threats of industrialism and vulgarity, all fall into line with perceptions and cultural developments which dominate Wordsworth's own time. From the Napoleonic Wars, to the French Revolution, to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century growth of the middle class in Europe: all these events coincide with the powerful growth of Wordsworth's sensibility. I suggest you take a look at Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1944), for a broad survey of the cultural landscape in which Wordsworth lived. Geoffrey Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry* (1964) is a guide to the simple mysteries of Wordsworth's early lyrics. Devote some thought and writing to the relation of Wordsworth the poet to Wordsworth as political consciousness.

### Excerpt <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-complaint/>

*There is a change--and I am poor;  
Your love hath been, nor long ago,  
A fountain at my fond heart's door,  
Whose only business was to flow;  
And flow it did; not taking heed  
Of its own bounty, or my need.*

*What happy moments did I count!  
Blest was I then all bliss above!  
Now, for that consecrated fount  
Of murmuring, sparkling, living love,  
What have I? Shall I dare to tell?  
A comfortless and hidden well.*

*A well of love--it may be deep--  
I trust it is,--and never dry:  
What matter? If the waters sleep  
In silence and obscurity.  
--Such change, and at the very door  
Of my fond heart, hath made me poor.*

## John Keats

**The Significance of John Keats.** John Keats (1795-1821), though only partially appreciated during his short life, was by the end of the nineteenth century viewed as one of the greatest English poets, especially wondrous for his sonnets and odes, and for the critical thinking he revealed in his Letters. The English Romantic poets seldom lived long, and Keats led them all in early death, at age 26. It is a widely held belief that had Keats lived a full life he would have excelled such as Chaucer and Shakespeare in achievement. Yet rather than mourn we may better suppose that the brevity of this life was the price of Keats' distinctive brilliance, intermixed as it is with the premonition of death.

**The Life of John Keats.** Keats was born in London, Moorgate, the eldest of four surviving children. His father was an ostler in the stables of the Swan and Hoop Inn, which he later managed. Keats was baptized at St. Botolph-without-Bishopsgate, then sent to the local 'dame's school.' In 1803—his parents lacked the funds to send John to Harrow or Oxford—Keats was sent to John Clarke's School in Enfield, where he developed his rapidly growing interest in history and classics—his attention being particularly drawn to the readings of Torquato Tasso and Spenser, and to the renowned Chapman translations of Homer. In 1804, Keats' father died of a skull fracture, after a horseback voyage to visit two of his sons at school. This tragedy left Keats in a precarious financial and personal situation, which was rendered worse by the death of Keats' mother a few years later. Accordingly Keats recognized the importance of gaining a regular income, and went into training as an apothecary-surgeon. Keats exercised his medical career for a brief period, then found his way into a lively circuit of London poets and before long had decided to devote himself to poetry. His own brilliant activity as a poet was frenetic, dominated by his premonition of death, and in fact fate proved him right, for in 1820 he began to cough up blood, a result of tuberculosis, and a year later he was dead. He had been a known and published poet only during the last four years of his life.

**The Work of John Keats.** Keats was a brilliant master of the verse forms of the Ode and Sonnet, and works of his like his 'Ode to the West Wind,' 'Ode to a Nightingale,' 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' 'Endymion,' 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' have taken their places among the most effective, formal and passionate both, works of English poetry. Keats's brilliance is equally stunning in his letters, among which the most noteworthy is that in which he describes the nature of the poet:

*A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity – he is continually in for – and filling some other Body – The Sun, the Moon, the Sea-- and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute – the poet has none; no identity – he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures.*

The creative power Keats attributes to the poet is 'negative capability,' which, paradoxically, is the condition in which the poet finds his way to the inside of everything in the world.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

John Keats: *The Complete Poems*, ed. Barnard, 1988.

#### Secondary source reading

Roe, Nicholas, ed., *Keats and History*, Cambridge, 1995).

#### Further reading

Gittings, Robert, *John Keats*, London, 1968.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Keats' *aesthetic perspective* is uniquely pervasive, and finds exquisite expression in his work. It is not that Keats is arty, or superficially caught up in the details of beautiful things, but that he finds truth, as he said, in beauty. That is not all he finds in beauty, either, for in the evanescent, shimmering will o the wisp of the aesthetic he finds his own deepest human environment, the proximity of sleep, narcosis, and that kind of loveable death toward which the Nightingale draws him. Discuss this aesthetic perspective more fully, and relate it to later theories of the meaningfulness of beauty.

2. How is literature related to music? You might want to compare Keats to other poets whose work seems to border on the musical. (I think of Whitman in America, Paul Verlaine in France, Heine in Germany; you can supply other and better examples.) Does pure sound have significance by itself, in poetry, or must sound be allied to meaning in order to constitute poetry? You might apply this subtle question to a poem like the 'Ode to a Nightingale,' which is about the music of the bird's call, as it ultimately narcotizes rational (or perhaps any) meaning. Keats is forever working the borders between music, as topic and as part of his poetry, and music as thematic material *in* his poetry.

**Excerpt**

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-complaint/>

*Pensive they sit, and roll their languid eyes,  
Nibble their toast, and cool their tea with sighs,  
Or else forget the purpose of the night,  
Forget their tea -- forget their appetite.  
See with cross'd arms they sit -- ah! happy crew,  
The fire is going out and no one rings  
For coals, and therefore no coals Betty brings.  
A fly is in the milk-pot -- must he die  
By a humane society?  
No, no; there Mr. Werter takes his spoon,  
Inserts it, dips the handle, and lo! soon  
The little straggler, sav'd from perils dark,  
Across the teaboard draws a long wet mark.  
Arise! take snuffers by the handle,  
There's a large cauliflower in each candle.  
A winding-sheet, ah me! I must away  
To No. 7, just beyond the circus gay.  
'Alas, my friend! your coat sits very well;  
Where may your tailor live?' 'I may not tell.  
O pardon me -- I'm absent now and then.  
Where might my tailor live? I say again  
I cannot tell, let me no more be teaz'd --  
He lives in Wapping, might live where he pleas'd.'*

## Gerard Manley Hopkins

**The Life of Gerard Manley Hopkins.** Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1899) was born in Stratford, Essex. He was the first of nine children. His father was the founder of a marine insurance firm, and had earlier served as British Vice-Consul in Hawaii, while later he worked as a Church Warden. (Hopkins' grandfather was a physician, and friend of John Keats.) That is, however, to say far too little about the remarkable family from which young Hopkins emerged. Hopkins' father was a poet and novelist, while Hopkins' siblings were distinguished as writers, musicians, poets, and scholars. (It should be added that his parents were ardent High Anglican members of the Church of England, and thus would be deeply disapproving when their son took his eventual path to Rome.) Stimulated by these surrounding skills, Hopkins himself became a very proficient draughtsman. His natural talents were enhanced by a fine education. At ten the family moved to Hampstead Heath, not far from where John Keats had lived; and in the same year Gerard Manley entered the distinguished Highgate School, where he was to remain for almost ten years (1854-63). From 1863-67 Hopkins studied at Balliol College Oxford, where he absorbed the world of great intellectual figures. Matthew Arnold, poet and humanist, was among the great figures, but the particular inspirations for Hopkins were two: Walter Pater, essayist and aesthete, a thinker for whom the artistic was always close to the moral; John Henry Newman, whose conversion to Roman Catholicism had much to do with Hopkins' own similar move. (Hopkins entered the Catholic Church in 1866, and ultimately joined the Society of Jesuits in 1868, and became a Jesuit priest.) In 1884 Hopkins was appointed Professor of Classics at University College in Dublin, Ireland, and there completed his professional work life, excelling as a classical scholar, as well as a poet. Or rather, to put it more carefully, perfecting a rare poetic talent, but in the end suppressing it, lest it conflict with the submissiveness required of his Jesuit asceticism.

**The Work of Gerard Manley Hopkins.** Hopkins was brought up in an intensely artistic and urbane family, and wrote poetry early in life, but upon deciding to join the Jesuit Order he burned most of his earlier work. It was not until he was a member of the order that he followed his Superior's suggestion, to write a long poem about the wreck of a German ship in the River Thames, and the subsequent drowning of many, including five Franciscan nuns. The poem that emerged from this request, in 1875, was 'The Wreck of the Deutschland,' and it heralded Hopkins' entry into his most mature writing phase. He was closing in on his mature style, which was strongly shaped by his reading and learning in Old English and Old Welsh poetries. The new prosody he forged, using poetic units of a widely varying number of syllables, can be read off a good hearing of the following master lyric, 'God's Grandeur':

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge & shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.*

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Digireads, 2010.

#### Secondary source reading

Martin, Robert Barnard, *Gerard Manley Hopkins—A Very Private Life*, New York, 1992.

#### Further reading

White, Norman, *Hopkins—A Literary Biography*, Oxford, 1992.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. You will have noticed that Hopkins—with his sprung rhythm and inscape and instress theories—puts

heavy stress on the manipulation of the oral/sensuous presentational side of poetry. (In his youth, Hopkins wrote in the vein of Keats, and you can see the aestheticism of, say, *Sleep and Poetry*, in Hopkins.) In addition Hopkins viewed the instress of inscape as a form of address to the created identity of the object of the poem, and thus a fairly direct access to Christ, the emblem and Lord of the created world for Hopkins. If you follow this issue of confrontation with Christ through its embodiment in a poem you will come on the source of conflict, for Hopkins, between his religious vocation and his artistic creativity. Inside himself he doubted that he should substitute an artistic simulation of the Christ encounter for the direct encounter in the Mass, the central act of his priesthood. In the latter part of his life, Hopkins abandoned poetry. Discuss your understanding of Hopkins' reasons for abandoning poetry.

2. To read Hopkins' lyrics—think of 'God's Grandeur' or 'As Kingfishers catch Fire'—is to pay close attention to the prosody that drives his thought, (Is Hopkins' prosody itself a kind of embodied thought?) Take 'The Windhover.' Notice the effect of sprung rhythm, as Hopkins called it, in which there is a regular number of stressed syllables, but a highly variable number of unstressed, and some consequent breathless linking of one line to another. Do you see this pattern creating a novelty in English lyric? Or is Hopkins simply varying familiar patterns with a slight tweak?

### Excerpt

*And he said, If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?*

*2 Kings VI: 27*

*Thou that on sin's wages starvest,  
Behold we have the joy in harvest:  
For us was gather'd the first fruits,  
For us was lifted from the roots,  
Sheaved in cruel bands, bruised sore,  
Scourged upon the threshing-floor;  
Where the upper mill-stone roof'd His head,  
At morn we found the heavenly Bread,  
And, on a thousand altars laid,  
Christ our Sacrifice is made!*

*Thou whose dry plot for moisture gapes,  
We shout with them that tread the grapes:  
For us the Vine was fenced with thorn,  
Five ways the precious branches torn;  
Terrible fruit was on the tree  
In the acre of Gethsemane;  
For us by Calvary's distress  
The wine was racked from the press;  
Now in our altar-vessels stored  
Is the sweet Vintage of our Lord.*

*In Joseph's garden they threw by  
The riv'n Vine, leafless, lifeless, dry:  
On Easter morn the Tree was forth,  
In forty days reach'd heaven from earth;  
Soon the whole world is overspread;  
Ye weary, come into the shade.*

## William Blake

**The Importance of William Blake.** William Blake (1757-1827) was a British engraver, painter, and poet whose powerful expressions of artistic emotion and visionary awareness rendered him a moving symbol of Romantic imagination.

**The life of William Blake.** William Blake was born in Broad Street, in the Soho region of London. He was the third of seven children. His father was a hosier, of medium wealth. Young William went briefly to the local school, where he learned reading and writing, but left school by the age of ten. From that point on he was home schooled by his mother, baptized at the local St. John's Church, although both his parents were Dissenters, refusers of the Anglican Communion. Then in 1772, having given evidence of native brilliance as a draughtsman, he was sent out as apprentice to an engraver. By the age of twenty one he qualified as a professional engraver—he was a master of original techniques of intaglio engraving, which forever bore his trademark skill—and in 1779 he became a student in the Royal Academy, which was under the Directorship of Sir Joshua Reynolds, the most eminent British portrait painter of the day. In 1782 Blake married Catherine Boucher—his great love, to whom he would remain united all his life—and in 1800 the pair moved to Sussex, where Blake lived and created for the remainder of his life. It should be noted that Catherine was, at the time of marriage, illiterate, but that Blake taught her to be his assistant, and that she played an instrumental role in the technical development of his later art. By his mature years, Blake earned a good living producing engravings, setting type, and giving drawing/engraving lessons.

**The Spiritual Setting of Blake's World.** In the sixteenth century, under the reign of Henry VIII, Britain instituted a national church, the Anglican Church, and did its best to extirpate other forms of communion—most notably Roman Catholicism—in the British Isles. Dissidents of all sorts, and that included the family of William Blake, were marginalized. Blake himself drew his spiritual energies largely from the Bible and Milton—himself a dissident—from the hymns of the reformer, John Wesley, and from the visionary theology of Johannes Swedenborg (1688-1772), a brilliant Swedish scientist and visionary, who like Blake was granted many direct visions of the heavenly kingdom.

**The Work of William Blake.** Blake's technique of engraving, and illustrating his own voluminous text, ensured an intimacy of imagination so close, that one can hardly speak of a difference between his visual and his verbal arts. For instance his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794) are poems accompanied by engravings. They are meant to represent what Blake refers to as 'two contrary states of the human soul.' The contrast is this evident:

'The Shepherd'

How sweet is the shepherd's sweet lot!  
From the morn to the evening he strays;  
He shall follow his sheep all the day,  
And his tongue shall be filled with praise.

For he hears the lambs' innocent call,  
And he hears the ewes' tender reply;  
He is watchful while they are in peace,  
For they know when their shepherd is nigh

'My Pretty Rose Tree'

A flower was offered to me,  
Such a flower as May never bore;  
But I said, 'I've a pretty rose tree,'  
And I passed the sweet flower o'er.

Then I went to my pretty rose tree,  
To tend her by day and by night;  
But my rose turned away with jealousy,  
And her thorns were my only delight.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. Erdman, Bloom, Golding, New York, 1997.

#### Secondary source reading

Ackroyd, Peter, *Blake*, London, 1996.

#### Further reading

Frye, Northrop, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*, Princeton, 1947.

### Suggested paper topics

1. For Blake, who developed an elaborate poetic mythology to frame his visions, the same single fallen world can be viewed either as a source of joy or of gloom and despair. To pick a simple example, Blake's Tyger and his Lamb represent the opposed perspectives. Do you see such a joy/gloom opposition playing out through the poems of *Innocence and Experience*? Is this opposition readable with delight and fascination today? Is this material in our present grain? Is it too simplistic? Or too allegorical—almost in the vein of *Piers Plowman*?
2. Scholarship is a fine form of our effort to understand cultural products, and among the literary byproducts of a great writer, like Blake, count the scholarly works he/she has brought into existence. You might want to look at Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1968), a now classic work of criticism, which contains copious and insightful references to Blake, while constructing a schema of literature which shares many traits with the vision of Blake himself. Write an essay on the relation of Frye's visions to those of Blake.

### Excerpt

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-cradle-song/>

*Sweet dreams form a shade,  
O'er my lovely infants head.  
Sweet dreams of pleasant streams,  
By happy silent moony beams*

*Sweet sleep with soft down.  
Weave thy brows an infant crown.  
Sweet sleep Angel mild,  
Hover o'er my happy child.*

*Sweet smiles in the night,  
Hover over my delight.*



*Sweet smiles Mothers smiles,  
All the livelong night beguiles.*

*Sweet moans, dovelike sighs,  
Chase not slumber from thy eyes,  
Sweet moans, sweeter smiles,  
All the dovelike moans beguiles.*

*Sleep sleep happy child,  
All creation slept and smil'd.  
Sleep sleep, happy sleep.  
While o'er thee thy mother weep*

*Sweet babe in thy face,  
Holy image I can trace.  
Sweet babe once like thee.  
Thy maker lay and wept for me*

*Wept for me for thee for all,  
When he was an infant small.  
Thou his image ever see.  
Heavenly face that smiles on thee,*

## Lord Byron

**The significance of Lord Byron.** Lord Byron (1788-1824) represents the dissolute genius in the fullest expression of what was to be the Romantic spirit. How appropriate that, after a life of erotic expenditure, passionate friendship—as with the poet Shelley and his wife—Byron ultimately met his death fighting for Greek Independence in the War against the Turks. This cause, of real and symbolic power throughout Europe, was widely seen in the West as a Battle to release the imprisoned spirit of Ancient Hellenism. Byron was heroic to the end, as well as a superb narrative poet, known throughout Europe.

**The Life of Lord Byron.** George Gordon, Lord Byron was born in London, in Holles Street. He was the child of aristocracy on both sides. His father, Mad Jack Byron, was a flamboyant seducer, who had acquired, then lost, two fortunes by means of seduction, while his mother, a descendant of Cardinal Beaton, was an alternately indulgent and draconian supervisor of the young man. From these parents Byron inherited both extreme handsomeness and a club foot, for which he would throughout his life compensate by unusual bouts of exercise. Byron spent his childhood at the family home in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, and was sent to Aberdeen Grammar School for his primary education. In 1801 he was enrolled at Harrow, where his homosexual tendencies first came into full play, and where he first found true same sex passion. From Harrow Byron went up to Trinity College Cambridge, from which he did not graduate, and where he did too much besides study. In 1809-1811 he went to Europe on the Grand Tour expected of British gentlemen of class, and there he gave way to his passion for travel; for a life which would take him eventually to many corners of Europe—the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Armenia, as well as throughout Western Europe, and that would ultimately, in 1823, lead him to Greece, where he ardently and effectively supported the Greek War of Independence, and where he died of malaria in 1824.

**The Work of Lord Byron.** Byron was a prolific poet, drawn to long epic or mock epic lines, frequently embodying his own experience, though in an inflated and dramatized form. Two of his greatest works are *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*—the publication of which began in 1812, and *Don Juan*, arguably the strongest epic written in English since Milton's *Paradise Lost*. While the two poems share many motifs, and represent different facets of their author, they are, perhaps thanks to the broader canvas and world view of the latter, of different ambition. *Childe Harold*—'childe' is the Middle English word for a young man who is a candidate for knighthood—is a world weary wanderer, whose malaise clearly reflects the European sense of exhaustion from the aftermath of the Revolutionary Era and the Napoleonic Wars—think Europe and American after Depression, Two World Wars, social dislocations of every kind—and who travels throughout Europe in search of new sources of value. *Don Juan* picks up the same thematic—which is pervasive throughout all of Byron's poetry—but extends the range of considerations, in the mind of this cynical, world weary, but life loving hero, who strongly resembles Byron himself. The epic ranges over world history and the whole range of human hopes, and does so with often jaunty and stinging, sometimes deeply passionate, metrical verve. Byron's power, in both these poems, derives from his deep—and always ironic—grasp of the nature of the world he lives in.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

#### Secondary source reading

Lansdown, Richard, *Byron's Historical Dramas*, Oxford, 1992.

#### Further reading

MacCarthy, Fiona, *Byron: Life and Legend*, London, 2002.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Byron took the *ottava rima* form of *Don Juan* from a strong tradition in Italian verse. (The scheme is *abababcc*; with an alternation of four and five stress syllables in the rhyming lines. One would say a bouncy, jocose and impish scheme, and so it is.) So what is the secret of Byron's placing a set of tales of romance into the rollicking onward advance of this meter? He never pauses, he presses forward without unnecessary commentary, he mocks himself regularly, he mocks Don Juan regularly, he keeps his own

person flittingly intrusive throughout the tale; and above all, of course, he is a master of the erotic tease, as Chaucer had been. *Are we getting close to Byron's secret? What do you think?*

2. Byron's *Don Juan* is his masterpiece. Refresh yourself on the libretto of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, which was completed in 1788. In that opera, with a noted libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte, Don Giovanni, Don Juan, comes off as a charming and obsessed sexual predator, attracted to an endless series of women, whom he loves to enumerate. By making this comparison between poetry and opera you will, among other things, double your awareness of Byron's passive Don Juan, to whom women just happen. You will also be asking yourself about the difference of music from narrative poetry, as a medium for constructing character. What difference do you see?

**Excerpt <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/my-soul-is-dark-2/>**

*My soul is dark - Oh! quickly string  
The harp I yet can brook to hear;  
And let thy gentle fingers fling  
Its melting murmurs o'er mine ear.  
If in this heart a hope be dear,  
That sound shall charm it forth again:  
If in these eyes there lurk a tear,  
'Twill flow, and cease to burn my brain.*

*But bid the strain be wild and deep,  
Nor let thy notes of joy be first:  
I tell thee, minstrel, I must weep,  
Or else this heavy heart will burst;  
For it hath been by sorrow nursed,  
And ached in sleepless silence, long;  
And now 'tis doomed to know the worst,  
And break at once - or yield to song.*

## S. T. Coleridge

**The significance of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.** Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was an English poet, theorist and critic, and intimate friend of William Wordsworth, with whom he collaborated closely in creating the seminal works of the Romantic movement in literature.

**The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.** Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire. His father was a respected local vicar, and headmaster of the town school. In his second marriage, Coleridge 's father had ten children, of whom Samuel Taylor was the second youngest. This studious child—Samuel was interested only in reading, and early read all the classics of English literature. At the age of eight he was sent to Christ's Hospital, where he struck up a creative friendship with Charles Lamb. From 1791-94, Coleridge was educated at Cambridge, Jesus College, but proved a wayward student, too much the scholar to fit comfortably with his classes, addicted to high living, and eventually to crippling debt. (His only significant friendship from this period was the future literary figure Robert Southey.) Having proven himself an indifferent scholar, in the University context, his only recourse was the military, in which he was even more a failure. Back at Cambridge again, Coleridge paired up not only with the poet Robert Southey, but soon with William Wordsworth, who (with his sister Dorothy) was to be the great intellectual mate of Coleridge throughout much of his life—though a bitter quarrel estranged them for some years—and for decades Coleridge shared with Wordsworth the distinction of being the leading British poet and thinker. 1797-8 were the most fruitful years of Coleridge's life, for in 1798 Coleridge published (with Wordsworth) *The Lyrical Ballads*, with its epoch changing Preface, and also his most famous long poem, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.' It should be mentioned, because it sharply distinguished Coleridge from Wordsworth, that the former spent considerable time studying German philosophy of the day, and came away from that experience, at the University of Goettingen, far more the speculative thinker than Wordsworth. It is unfortunate for the world that Coleridge's lifetime poor health, treated over that lifetime with laudanum, left him in his later years a pretty miserable victim of opium addiction.

**The Work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.** Coleridge was active both as a poet and as a critic/philosopher. In fact, *besides* his major poetry, of which 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' was an early and huge success, as the star piece of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and *besides* the extraordinary critical daring he deployed in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), in which he transposed into English a basically German conception of *Einbildungskraft* (imagination), which revolutionized critical thinking for the Romantic Movement, Coleridge was immensely influential in interpreting German philosophy and higher culture for England. At the time of publication of *The Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge took an extended trip to Germany, in which he made the acquaintance of many of the leading thinkers of the burgeoning new German Humanism. He left a strong impression wherever he traveled, and came home with a particularly strong impression of the thinking of Herder and especially Immanuel Kant, whose three *Kritiks* were at the time virtually unknown outside Germany. This introduction, of the outlines of a profound system of aesthetics and ethics, was to prove hugely nourishing to the still fairly parochial literary thinking of turn of the century England.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works*, ed. Jackson, Oxford, 2009

#### Secondary source reading

Holmes, Richard, *Coleridge: Early Visions*, London, 1989.

#### Further reading

Leask, Nigel, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Thought*, Basingstoke, 1988.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge observes that in the *Lyrical Ballads*, which bear the authorship of both himself and of Wordsworth, he (Coleridge) created poems of the supernatural, while Wordsworth, as he insisted, wrote poems bearing the real speech of real men in daily life. Do you find this distinction born

out in the poems you have read, and if so what is the *supernatural* element in Coleridge's work? Take 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' 'Christabel,' and 'The Eolian Harp.' What is supernatural about those poems? Why would Coleridge have used that term about those works?

2. Coleridge's definition of imagination, as given in the *Biographia Literaria* (Chapter 13), claims that that faculty is 'the living power and prime agent of all human perception.' Do some reading in the thought of those German contemporaries of Coleridge, from whom he drew the foundations of this radical new aesthetic. (Think how totally this aesthetic differs from that of Dryden and Pope, hardly a century earlier.) Good starting point (with a commentary): the German philosopher Schelling's contemporary *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), which gives the priority to the aesthetic, in the human construction of reality.

**Excerpt** <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-soliloquy-of-the-full-moon-she-being-in-a-mad/>

*Now as Heaven is my Lot, they're the Pests of the Nation!  
Wherever they can come  
With clankum and blankum  
'Tis all Bothereation, & Hell & Damnation,  
With fun, jeering  
Conjuring  
Sky-staring,  
Loungerin g,  
And still to the tune of Transmogrification--  
Those muttering  
Spluttering  
Ventriloquogusty  
P oets  
With no Hats  
Or Hats that are rusty.  
They're my Torment and Curse  
And harass me worse  
And bait me and bay me, far sorer I vow  
Than the Screech of the Owl  
Or the witch-wolf's long howl,  
Or sheep-killing Butcher-dog's inward Bow wow  
For me they all spite--an unfortunate Wight.  
And the very first moment that I came to Light  
A Rascal call'd Voss the more to his scandal,  
Turn'd me into a sickle with never a handle.  
A Night or two after a worse Rogue there came,  
The head of the Gang, one Wordsworth by name--  
'Ho! What's in the wind?' 'Tis the voice of a Wizzard!  
I saw him look at me most terribly blue !  
He was hunting for witch-rhymes from great A to Izzard,  
And soon as he'd found them made no more ado  
But chang'd me at once to a little Canoe.  
From this strange Enchantment uncharm'd by degrees  
I began to take courage & hop'd for some Ease,  
When one Coleridge, a Raff of the self-same Banditti  
Past by--& intending no doubt to be witty,  
Because I'd th' ill-fortune his taste to displease,  
He turn'd up his nose,  
And in pitiful Prose  
Made me into the half of a small Cheshire Cheese.  
Well, a night or two past--it was wind, rain & hail--*

## Walter Pater

**The Life of Walter Pater.** Walter Pater (1839-1894) was born in Stepney, in London's East End. His father was a doctor who had moved to London, early in the nineteenth century, to practice medicine among the poor. Upon the father's death, when Walter was still young, the family moved to Enfield. Walter was sent for a while to Enfield Grammar School, then, in 1883, to King's School in Canterbury, where the beauty of the Cathedral impressed him deeply. (He was at the time reading Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, a book that strongly reinforced these first aesthetic impressions.) In 1858 Pater enrolled at Queen's College, Oxford; during his stay there he made a journey to Europe, especially Germany, where he immersed himself in the reading of Hegel. (It was around this time that Pater lost his faith in Christianity.) In 1864 he was offered a classics fellowship at Brasenose College, but at this point implications of his homosexuality began to surface, and he was turned down at the last minute. (This issue would continue to plague his academic life.) In 1865 he visited the Continent again, and at this point began writing those essays—one on Winckelmann was among the first—which would be included in his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873); his long meditation on Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* is one of the cameo pieces of that text. (It was in that volume that Pater wrote that 'all art constantly aspires toward the condition of music.' In his later years, at Oxford, Pater went on to write considerable fiction, in which he gave various forms to the basic aestheticism of his earlier work, and clarified his 'metaphysic,' in which first place was given to grasping the fleeting beauty of the moment.

**The Work of Walter Pater.** Walter Pater was an aesthete and metaphysician (in a literary sense) who distinguished himself for the brilliance of his word portraits of great works of Renaissance art, and in his highly imaginative fiction. The works of his which most shaped opinion in his reading public were the *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), and *Imaginary Portraits* (1887). Throughout this body of work, expressed in an exquisite and often highly nuanced style, runs a theme of *carpe diem* prose:

*every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive for us, – for that moment only.*

Behind this perspective lies the highly developed notion that the world is essentially flux, and that man's role in it is to grasp the sensually significant instant. It can be imagined that this perspective, which Pater carried through to the first beginnings of a genuine art history, aroused concern among the guardians of public morals. The original Conclusion of *The Renaissance*, which appeared to invite unrestricted hedonism, had to be removed from later editions of the book, because of the outcry of conservatives like the novelist George Eliot. *Marius the Epicurean* transposes this set of concerns, about the values of sense experience and morality, onto a larger canvas, the conflict between developing Christianity and the pagan culture of late antiquity, as it played out in the spiritual world of a young man, Marius, who is open both to the power of the new Christian view of the world, and to the subtle, life-affirming values of the pagans in the countryside.

## Reading

### Primary source reading

Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in the Art of Poetry*, Kindle Edition, Amazon Digital Services, 2012.

### Secondary source reading

Seiler, R.M., *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage*, London, 1980.

### Further reading

Donoghue, Dennis, *Walter Pater, Lover of Strange Souls*, New York, 1995.

### Suggested paper topics

1. Does Pater's novel, *Marius the Epicurean*, throw light on the kind of view he has of Renaissance Art? Does Pater put his ideas across effectively in fiction?
2. Discuss the relation between Pater's Lucretian metaphysics, his poetically scientific view of the flux of life, and his art criticism. Is there a close relation? Is Pater a genuine philosopher?

Excerpt <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4060/pg4060.html>

*The various forms of intellectual activity which together make up the culture of an age, move for the most part from different starting-points, and by unconnected roads. As products of the same generation they partake indeed of a common character, and unconsciously illustrate each other; but of the producers themselves, each group is solitary, gaining what advantage or disadvantage there may be in intellectual isolation. Art and poetry, philosophy and the religious life, and that other life of refined pleasure and action in the conspicuous places of the world, are each of them confined to its own circle of ideas, and those who prosecute either of them are generally little [xiv] curious of the thoughts of others. There come, however, from time to time, eras of more favourable conditions, in which the thoughts of men draw nearer together than is their wont, and the many interests of the intellectual world combine in one complete type of general culture. The fifteenth century in Italy is one of these happier eras, and what is sometimes said of the age of Pericles is true of that of Lorenzo:—it is an age productive in personalities, many-sided, centralised, complete. Here, artists and philosophers and those whom the action of the world has elevated and made keen, do not live in isolation, but breathe a common air, and catch light and heat from each other's thoughts. There is a spirit of general elevation and enlightenment in which all alike communicate. The unity of this spirit gives unity to all the various products of the Renaissance; and it is to this intimate alliance with the mind, this participation in the best thoughts which that age produced, that the art of Italy in the fifteenth century owes much of its grave dignity and influence.*

*The various forms of intellectual activity which together make up the culture of an age, move for the most part from different starting-points, and by unconnected roads. As products of the same generation they partake indeed of a common character, and unconsciously illustrate each other; but of the producers themselves, each group is solitary, gaining what advantage or disadvantage there may be in intellectual isolation. Art and poetry, philosophy and the religious life, and that other life of refined pleasure and action in the conspicuous places of the world, are each of them confined to its own circle of ideas, and those who prosecute either of them are generally little [xiv] curious of the thoughts of others. There come, however, from time to time, eras of more favourable conditions, in which the thoughts of men draw nearer together than is their wont, and the many interests of the intellectual world combine in one complete type of general culture.*

## Charles Dickens

**The Importance of Charles Dickens.** Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was the best known, and most popular, English novelist of the nineteenth century. That means, in fact, that he was at the center of British culture, for in that century of the novel the entire nature of the new urban society of Britain was mirrored back to the world.

**Life of Charles Dickens.** Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, as the second of eight children of John and Elizabeth Dickens. His father was a clerk in a Navy pay office, but not long after Charles' birth the family removed to a house in Chatham, Kent, where they remained until Charles reached the age of eleven. Though Charles was not yet enjoying a formal education, he was reading passionately on his own, especially in the eighteenth century English novelists, Smollet and Fielding. The modest peace of the family, however, was soon to be broken. Charles' father overspent himself, and was put in debtors' prison. As a consequence, Charles was obliged to enter the workforce, first of all in a blacking warehouse, where he earned six shillings a week pasting labels on pots of boot blacking. (The observations Dickens made, on this job and others, and in the boarding house where he found himself in his father's absence, went into his later fictions, as did all the major experiences, grimy as well as stimulating, he encountered in his later life. It was, incidentally, the practice of the time for the entire family to join the imprisoned debtor, and Dickens had thus ample opportunity to see the British prison system up close.) Upon his father's release from prison, thanks to an unexpected inheritance, Dickens was sent to Wellington House Academy, a modest educational establishment. From 1827-28 he worked as a law clerk, then as an editor of a law journal. All this time, as can be imagined, Dickens was actively writing, although essentially on the sketches he would later turn into his novels and short stories. In 1836 Dickens married, a happy commitment that would lead to ten children. In 1842 he made the first of two trips to the United States, then not long after returning he fell in love with a much younger woman—she eighteen, he forty five—and separated from his wife. The last years of Dickens' life, we can say simply, were devoted consistently to fiction.

**The Work of Charles Dickens.** It should be noted, from the start, that most of Dickens' publications were serialized in magazines and journals, so that even some of his most ambitious and extensive fiction was being presented in an incremental form which we might compare to TV serial reception today. Largely out of that system of production—and Dickens wrote with furious energy, like his contemporary Balzac in France—emerged a sequence of often comic, often sociologically bitter, frequently (and darkly) autobiographical fictions, which serve as a depiction of the whole socially underdeveloped middle class and poverty level of nineteenth century England. The greatest works to emerge from that creative effort are still quite familiar to the English reading public: *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-7), *Oliver Twist* (1837-8), *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Bleak House* (1852). The list as such is woefully incomplete, for Dickens had immense creative energy, and wrote as though his life blood depended on it.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, ed. Maxwell, London, 2003. Penguin edition

#### Secondary source reading

Carey, John, *The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens' Imagination*, London, 1991.

#### Further reading

Sanders, Andrew, *Dickens and the Spirit of the Age*, Oxford, 1999.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Compare Defoe, arguably the first journalist/novelist in English literature, with Charles Dickens the novelist. Does Dickens, like Defoe, provide a sociology of his time, while creating tales of it? Or is Dickens imaginative, in a sense which puts him into a more clearly fictional realm?
2. What effect do you suppose serial publication had on Dickens' creative achievement? Do you suppose he was excessively governed by popular taste? Or was he able to shape that taste by his own force?



**Excerpt <http://www.literature.org/authors/dickens-charles/two-cities/book-02/chapter-01.html>**

*TELLSON'S BANK by Temple Bar was an old-fashioned place, even in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty. It was very small, very dark, very ugly, very incommodious. It was an old-fashioned place, moreover, in the moral attribute that the partners in the House were proud of its smallness, proud of its darkness, proud of its ugliness, proud of its incommodiousness. They were even boastful of its eminence in those particulars, and were fired by an express conviction that, if it were less objectionable, it would be less respectable. This was no passive belief, but an active weapon which they flashed at more convenient places of business. Tellson's (they said) wanted no elbow-room, Tellson's wanted no light, Tellson's wanted no embellishment. Noakes and Co.'s might, or Snooks Brothers' might; but Tellson's, thank Heaven!-- Any one of these partners would have disinherited his son on the question of rebuilding Tellson's. In this respect the House was much on a par with the Country; which did very often disinherit its sons for suggesting improvements in laws and customs that had long been highly objectionable, but were only the more respectable.*

*Thus it had come to pass, that Tellson's was the triumphant perfection of inconvenience. After bursting open a door of idiotic obstinacy with a weak rattle in its throat, you fell into Tellson's down two steps, and came to your senses in a miserable little shop, with two little counters, where the oldest of men made your cheque shake as if the wind rustled it, while they examined the signature by the dingiest of windows, which were always under a shower-bath of mud from Fleet-street, and which were made the dingier by their own iron bars proper, and the heavy shadow of Temple Bar. If your business necessitated your seeing "the House," you were put into a species of Condemned Hold at the back, where you meditated on a misspent life, until the House came with its hands in its pockets, and you could hardly bunk at it in the dismal twilight. Your money came out of, or went into, wormy old wooden drawers, particles of which flew up your nose and down your throat when they were opened and shut. Your bank-notes had a musty odour, as if they were fast decomposing into rags again. Your plate was stowed away among the neighbouring cesspools, and evil communications corrupted its good polish in a day or two. Your deeds got into extemporised strong-rooms made of kitchens and sculleries, and fretted all the fat out of their parchments into the banking-house air. Your lighter boxes of family papers went up-stairs into a Barmecide room, that always had a great dining-table in it and never had a dinner, and where, even in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty, the first letters written to you by your old love, or by your little children, were but newly released from the horror of being ogled through the windows, by the heads exposed on Temple Bar with an insensate brutality and ferocity worthy of Abyssinia or Ashantee.*

## Jane Austen

**The greatness of Jane Austen.** Jane Austen (1775-1817) (and Charles Dickens) brought the new nineteenth century form of the novel to its greatest power, finding their ways to depict the essences of a new society, which was palpably different from the cultural world even of late eighteenth century England. Jane Austen's fame grows constantly, in our own century hungry for the careful moral thinking of an earlier age.

**The Life of Jane Austen.** Jane Austen was born in 1775 in the Steventon Rectory, in Hampshire; she had six brothers and one sister—unmarried as was Jane. Jane Austen's parents were substantial gentry, on the lower fringes of the aristocratic class. Her father was from a family of prosperous woolen merchants, and worked in the family business, later serving as Rector at Steventon Rectory. Both Jane's father and her brothers were instrumental in directing her early education, which was in fact primarily reading. (For that purpose she was favored with a huge library composed of her father's books and those of a widely read uncle.) We should think of her childhood as on the whole peaceful and creative, set as it was in charming country landscape, and among enthusiastic readers and thinkers. The dominant tone of the family, from which Jane Austen gained so much of her own confidence and brilliance, and in which she observed a small but intense cross section of her own culture, was one of creative collegiality. The family performed plays, read to each other—as Jane got older—from Jane's own work, which turns out to be, even in its most mature phases, subtly intertwined with her juvenilia. The life that Jane Austen led, inside this sociable and educated home, was very different, in educational background and public exposure, from that led by almost all the male authors in this syllabus. One tends to think, for a parallel to Jane's Austen's cultural upbringing, of the life development of Emily Dickinson, in the United States. It is even relevant to this comparison that Jane Austen, like Emily Dickinson, never married; Jane Austen had one 'love affair'—in the style of her times--and turned down one proposal of marriage.

**The Work of Jane Austen.** Jane Austen wrote many youthful stories and essays, which played into her later work, but the three novels for which she is chiefly remembered were all published within a short time: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811); *Pride and Prejudice* (1813); and *Emma* (1815). The intrigue of these novels, which are largely set in upper class country house interiors, and subtly intertwine with all the dramas of contemporary life—marriage negotiations, intra-family jealousies, the fine texture of joy, innocence, and malignity in the daily—forming what we might think of as an indispensable sociology of a class in action, a class, in fact, which was not to survive for long. (The industrial world, poverty and commerce, in which Dickens' texts plunge, was on its way to rewriting the history of nineteenth century culture.) The kinds of events which trigger the decisions and denouement of Austen's fictions is evident in *Pride and Prejudice*. The theme turns around marriage choices and negotiations, as the competing sisters, in a country squire family, attempt both to evaluate suitors and to play out their own rivalries in the marriage game. Happiness is achieved, on at least one front, when Elizabeth Bennett overcomes her prejudice, and Mr. Darcy his pride, and union is complete.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Jones, London, 2009. Penguin edition

#### Secondary source reading

Nokes, David, *Jane Austen: A Life*, London, 1997.

#### Further reading

Mason, Michael, *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes*, Oxford, 1994.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Jane Austen is by and large considered a comic novelist. Does that term seem to apply well? Does 'comic,' here connote domestic, and subtly ironic? Is Austen distinctively different from Charles Dickens, in regard to these traits?

2. Does the social world Austen depicts, and satirizes, belong to the elite of society? If so, does she write about universal human values? If so what are they, and how does she extract them from the behavior of her characters and settings?

**Excerpt [http://gutenberg.readingroo.ms/2/1/8/3/21839/21839-h/21839-h.htm#CHAPTER\\_VIII](http://gutenberg.readingroo.ms/2/1/8/3/21839/21839-h/21839-h.htm#CHAPTER_VIII)**

*Mrs. Jennings was a widow with an ample jointure. She had only two daughters, both of whom she had lived to see respectably married, and she had now therefore nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world. In the promotion of this object she was zealously active, as far as her ability reached; and missed no opportunity of projecting weddings among all the young people of her acquaintance. She was remarkably quick in the discovery of attachments, and had enjoyed the advantage of raising the blushes and the vanity of many a young lady by insinuations of her power over such a young man; and this kind of discernment enabled her soon after her arrival at Barton decisively to pronounce that Colonel Brandon was very much in love with Marianne Dashwood. She rather suspected it to be so, on the very first evening of their being together, from his listening so attentively while she sang to them; and when the visit was returned by the Middletons' dining at the cottage, the fact was ascertained by his listening to her again. It must be so. She was perfectly convinced of it. It would be an excellent match, for he was rich, and she was handsome. Mrs. Jennings had been anxious to see Colonel Brandon well married, ever since her connection with Sir John first brought him to her knowledge; and she was always anxious to get a good husband for every pretty girl.*

*The immediate advantage to herself was by no means inconsiderable, for it supplied her with endless jokes against them both. At the park she laughed at the colonel, and in the cottage at Marianne. To the former her raillery was probably, as far as it regarded only himself, perfectly indifferent; but to the latter it was at first incomprehensible; and when its object was understood, she hardly knew whether most to laugh at its absurdity, or censure its impertinence, for she considered it as an unfeeling reflection on the colonel's advanced years, and on his forlorn condition as an old bachelor.*

*Mrs. Dashwood, who could not think a man five years younger than herself, so exceedingly ancient as he appeared to[32] the youthful fancy of her daughter, ventured to clear Mrs. Jennings from the probability of wishing to throw ridicule on his age.*

*"But at least, Mamma, you cannot deny the absurdity of the accusation, though you may not think it intentionally ill-natured. Colonel Brandon is certainly younger than Mrs. Jennings, but he is old enough to be my father; and if he were ever animated enough to be in love, must have long outlived every sensation of the kind. It is too ridiculous! When is a man to be safe from such wit, if age and infirmity will not protect him?"*

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century

### Background

The Twentieth Century represents a break from the preceding centuries, not only because of the emergence of globally-encompassing total war, but because the technologies developed during this time made human tampering with fate, human history, and nature a matter of the touch of a button. Sweeping political change and social movements characterize the twentieth century, and they provide much of the underlying tension and motivation in the literary works of the time. While one might imagine that the century's preoccupation with self-awareness would lead to evidence that consciousness of self was, in fact, heightened, the events of the period would argue just the opposite to be true. Consumerism and materialism co-opt self-consciousness by reducing spirituality itself to a commodity. At least these were the insights of the late twentieth century. Perhaps they were simply the self-evident truths of a planet of Peter Pans who use the promise of technology to gain power of nature in order to provoke disruption – not just in the status quo, but in processes that were, in the past, known to be inviolable law (of nature, of humanity).

Many of the highest literary creations of the twentieth century were powerfully contorted by the distresses of society, political conflict, and personal questioning of the meaning of existence. These witnesses to our extreme social discomfort would be such as Beckett, Yeats tormented by the issues of Irish English conflict, Eliot writing out the loss of faith in a small apocalyptic epic, Hardy and Lawrence, very differently assassinating the mediocrity of their own time. The early part of the century, of course, saw the high bloom of Modernism, aspects of which we have already reviewed: the work of Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust in France, Thomas Mann in Germany. Modernism, an aesthetic substitute for the lost harmony cosmos of Alexander Pope or John Donne, acquired through art the simulacrum of a better world no longer believed in.

### Discussion Questions

1. Beckett and Joyce represent two opposite styles of writing. Both Irishmen—but consummate writers of English—the one is stripped down and absurdist, while the other is prolix, and brimming over with allusive meanings and implications. Would you say that these are two representative ways of responding to the complexity of the twentieth century world climate? Which style seems to you to do its expressive work better?
2. In her novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, and elsewhere, Virginia Woolf puts into play her view of the fractured and pulsive nature of human perception. Consciousness is broken down into what we know is true; we are constantly alert, in innumerable registers, to many coordinate sensations, from which we pass from one to another without rest, until death. Does Woolf's project, to write out this state of consciousness, seem to you peculiarly part of the self-awareness of the twentieth century literary mind?
3. Yeats and Eliot, at various points in their writing, pay tribute to the aristocratic ideals which are fading in their century. Yeats is attracted to the pride and dignity of some of the old families of Ireland. Eliot pays tribute to the beauties of a class society in which everyone knows, and values, his place—the world view of Alexander Pope. Among the major twentieth century English writers do you see any strong tendency toward the opposite view from that of Yeats and Eliot? Does the Marxist perception, of a classless society and human economic equality, play any part in the major literature of the century?

## James Joyce

**The significance of James Joyce.** James Joyce (1882-1941) carried the novel form into the twentieth century, and in so doing renovated the English language, and the sense of the global complexity of twentieth century society. After Joyce, fiction could not revert to the more innocent narratorial form of Dickens or Austen.

**The Life of James Joyce.** James Joyce was born in the Dublin suburb of Rathgar, as the eldest of ten surviving children. His family was at that point relatively prosperous, having inherited from a lime and cork business, and not long after Joyce's birth, his father having been made a rate collector for the city of Dublin, the family removed to an upscale suburb. That situation, however, was to prove short lived, for Joyce's father, though talented, had difficulty earning a living, or controlling his drinking, which was the ultimate reason for the family's slide into poverty. Consequently the family moved from home to home, each one successively shabbier. Joyce studied voraciously to break from what he considered to be the intellectual shabbiness of Dublin. This was not easy, though he did indeed manage to acquire an education: first at Clongowes Wood College, a Jesuit boarding school, then at Belvedere College, Jesuit also, and finally at University College, Dublin, which he entered in 1898. Dublin, however, soon lost all charm for Joyce, and in 1902 he moved to Paris, intending to study medicine, and though he found it too difficult, following medical lectures in French, he was from that time on essentially a foreigner to Ireland. In rejecting Dublin, he embraced continental Europe, and sought to shape his mind into a new way of thinking, and in doing so to reinvent literature. To do so required a fervent and unwavering belief in his own genius, which his circle of friends found trying at times. For over a decade he taught English in Trieste, and for twenty years, at the invitation of Ezra Pound, he lived in Paris.

**The Work of James Joyce.** Joyce's first significant work, *Dubliners*, dates from 1914, and concludes with the story 'The Dead,' one of his finest pre-experimental short stories. His greatest work, *Ulysses*, was first published in book form on February 2, 1922, on Joyce's fortieth birthday. The book contains innovations in organization, style and narrative technique that have influenced countless other writers; Joyce wove together mythical themes from many cultures, explored the sexual subconscious with what was then great daring, and stretched verbal and syntactical ingenuity almost to the breaking point; so that it is, perhaps, no great wonder that Joyce had difficulty with publication, his novel having been judged obscene by the U.S. Post Office, and banned from circulation in England and the United States. Eventually, bans were lifted and the book circulated more freely, public sentiment turning sharply in favor of the text. Joyce's last major work, *Finnegans Wake* (1939), took him fourteen years to write, and strives to encapsulate a world history in the dreams of a certain publican named Humphrey Earwicker. In that last novel Joyce presses the power of verbal daring, allows metaphor, pun, allusion, erudite or scatological reference to explode, and to this day remains a rich mine for interpretation and fascination.

**Evaluation of James Joyce.** Joyce brought language out as the center of the verbal creative act, and though he always had a distinct narrative to tell, dislocated as it sometimes seems, it was the way he told that narrative, cunning, punning, that made his work a new threshold for literary development in the West.

## Reading

### Primary source reading

James Joyce, *Ulysses*, London, 2010. Penguin edition.

### Secondary source reading

Ellman, Richard, *James Joyce*, Oxford, 1982).

### Further reading

Kenner, Hugh, *Joyce's Voices*, London, 1978.

### Suggested paper topics

1. Gabriel, in 'The Dead', is a fully developed form of the character Joyce imagined as himself. In Joyce's first published set of tales, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914), one Stephen Daedalus, later a

major figure in *Ulysses*, assumes the personality which will become Gabriel's: detached, wistful, forced to learn his own artistic mission as an observer of life. That is the personality that will make of Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* a fit base for explorations, through a language made up of languages, puns, and allusions to the whole frame of human history. As the title of that epic search indicates, Homer's Odysseus (Ulysses, through Latin) is the final everyman, virtuous and vulgar in all the essential mixtures, but at the same time an observer, like Gabriel and Stephen. The Gabriel personality will tightly link 'The Dead' to *Ulysses*. *How does Joyce make use of Homer's work?*

2. Is literature a direct reflection of its time? Or has literature a history that is basically independent of its time? (I recommend a look at Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), as an aid to understanding how literature is felt and created from within the practitioner standing in a long line of predecessors.) The spur of this question, in the case of Joyce, is *where did he come from? Whom did he make use of in his writing? What is the unique contribution of his own imagination?*

**Excerpt <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4300/4300.txt>**

*He added in a preacher's tone: --For this, O dearly beloved, is the genuine Christine: body and soul and blood and ouns. Slow music, please. Shut your eyes, gents. One moment. A little trouble about those white corpuscles. Silence, all. He peered sideways up and gave a long slow whistle of call, then paused awhile in rapt attention, his even white teeth glistening here and there with gold points. Chrysostomos. Two strong shrill whistles answered through the calm. --Thanks, old chap, he cried briskly. That will do nicely. Switch off the current, will you? He skipped off the gunrest and looked gravely at his watcher, gathering about his legs the loose folds of his gown. The plump shadowed face and sullen oval jowl recalled a prelate, patron of arts in the middle ages. A pleasant smile broke quietly over his lips. --The mockery of it! he said gaily. Your absurd name, an ancient Greek! He pointed his finger in friendly jest and went over to the parapet, laughing to himself. Stephen Dedalus stepped up, followed him wearily halfway and sat down on the edge of the gunrest, watching him still as he propped his mirror on the parapet, dipped the brush in the bowl and lathered cheeks and neck. Buck Mulligan's gay voice went on. --My name is absurd too: Malachi Mulligan, two dactyls. But it has a Hellenic ring, hasn't it? Tripping and sunny like the buck himself. We must go to Athens. Will you come if I can get the aunt to fork out twenty quid? He laid the brush aside and, laughing with delight, cried: --Will he come? The jejune jesuit! Ceasing, he began to shave with care. --Tell me, Mulligan, Stephen said quietly. --Yes, my love?*

## Thomas Hardy

**The Life of Thomas Hardy.** Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was born in Higher Brockhampton, east of Dorchester, in Dorset. His father was a stonemason and builder. Hardy was basically home schooled by his mother, for the first years of his life. Then he went on to the Academy for Young Gentlemen in Dorchester, where he picked up a reasonable knowledge of Latin. At the age of eleven, he left school, for lack of tuition money, and apprenticed himself to an architect. (This period of practical work was to resonate out widely into his mature novels, in which architectural structures play a large symbolic role.) In 1862 Hardy entered King's College, London, in order to professionalize his skills at architecture. At the same time, however, Hardy was finding himself surer of his literary skills, and even vocation, and was beginning to earn enough, from his writing, to justify a change in career. His career decision, to leave architecture for writing, led Hardy down the path of large fate-filled novels in which the English landscape played a major role. In that landscape the forces of nature proved *powerful* antagonists to humanity, as did the human prove to himself, when from within him fate time and time again turned against him. Hardy composed his dark Wessex novels throughout the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, then in his last three decades turned increasingly toward lyric poetry. In his last volume of poetry, *Poems of 1912-13*, he celebrated the passing of his first wife, the true love of his life.

**The Work of Thomas Hardy.** In his own time Hardy was especially recognized as a powerful novelist, whose quite bleak view of life was perfectly set in the gloomy landscapes of what he—summoning up the Anglo Saxon name of a tract of several western countries--called Wessex. Across the bleak stretches of *Wessex*, stony and hilly and half cultivated, Hardy's characters tend to trudge through their difficult agricultural lives, a wary eye forever out for the rough dictates of fate, the depression of an uncertain market, and the age old weight of the human condition. A great fictional world is built out of these severe ingredients, and embodies itself in absorbing works such as: *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), or *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Hardy's poetry, which is equally bleak in outlook—penetrated by the agnostic thinking of Darwin and the geologists—seemed to Hardy his own greatest skill. His poetic procedure is often metrically old fashioned, but strangely complex and realized. Here is the beginning of 'A Broken Appointment':

*You did not come,  
And marching Time drew on, and wore me numb.  
Yet less for loss of your dear presence there  
Than that I thus found lacking in your make  
That high compassion which can overbear  
Reluctance for pure lovingkindness' sake.*

Hardy's poetry compels us with a tone which, though largely conventional in prosody, stops us with harsh chunks of thought, rough hewn words (*Powerfuller*, in 'Hap') and a consistently bleak world view which sharply marks itself off from Hopkins and the earlier Romantics. Hardy also looks closely at the harsh realities of social existence, with a sense for the bitter in the daily. What poem could capture the paradoxical pain of virtue lost more spittingly than 'The Ruined Maid'? This dramatic dialogue plays ironically, and bitterly, on the social outcasting of members who break the moral conventions of the community, but are hiddenly admired—for some of the perks that go with crossing the line.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, ed. Wilson, Kindle book, 2003.

#### Secondary source reading

Gatrell, Simon, *Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind*, London, 1993.

#### Further reading

Pinion, J. B., *Hardy the Writer: Surveys and Assessments*, Basingstoke, 1990.

### Suggested paper topics

1. How does Hardy's work reflect the post WWI world? Is his pessimism and dark tone a reflection of his world, or simply part of his personality? How does that tone come out in poetry? Is he a better craftsman in prose fiction or poetry?
2. Can you see Hardy's architectural background in some of his fiction? Does it appear in the structure of an entire work, or in a preoccupation with structures, within his work?

**Excerpt [http://fiction.eserver.org/novels/mayor\\_of\\_casterbridge.html](http://fiction.eserver.org/novels/mayor_of_casterbridge.html)**

*One evening of late summer, before the nineteenth century had reached one-third of its span, a young man and woman, the latter carrying a child, were approaching the large village of Weydon-Priors, in Upper Wessex, on foot. They were plainly but not ill clad, though the thick hoar of dust which had accumulated on their shoes and garments from an obviously long journey lent a disadvantageous shabbiness to their appearance just now.*

*The man was of fine figure, swarthy, and stern in aspect; and he showed in profile a facial angle so slightly inclined as to be almost perpendicular. He wore a short jacket of brown corduroy, newer than the remainder of his suit, which was a fustian waistcoat with white horn buttons, breeches of the same, tanned leggings, and a straw hat overlaid with black glazed canvas. At his back he carried by a looped strap a rush basket, from which protruded at one end the crutch of a hay-knife, a wimble for hay-bonds being also visible in the aperture. His measured, springless walk was the walk of the skilled countryman as distinct from the desultory shamble of the general labourer; while in the turn and plant of each foot there was, further, a dogged and cynical indifference personal to himself, showing its presence even in the regularly interchanging fustian folds, now in the left leg, now in the right, as he paced along.*

*What was really peculiar, however, in this couple's progress, and would have attracted the attention of any casual observer otherwise disposed to overlook them, was the perfect silence they preserved. They walked side by side in such a way as to suggest afar off the low, easy, confidential chat of people full of reciprocity; but on closer view it could be discerned that the man was reading, or pretending to read, a ballad sheet which he kept before his eyes with some difficulty by the hand that was passed through the basket strap. Whether this apparent cause were the real cause, or whether it were an assumed one to escape an intercourse that would have been irksome to him, nobody but himself could have said precisely; but his taciturnity was unbroken, and the woman enjoyed no society whatever from his presence. Virtually she walked the highway alone, save for the child she bore.*



## Lawrence, D.H.

**The Importance of D. H. Lawrence.** Poet, painter, novelist, cultural critic, D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) was an exceptionally acute critic of the problems with bourgeois modern society, and a powerful counteragent to the too self-conscious literary world of Joyce or Proust, with their narratological experiments. His novels and poetry introduced, into western literature, a new rediscovery of the pagan world in its full richness.

**The Early Life of D.H. Lawrence.** D. H. Lawrence was born in the mining community of Eastwood, in Nottinghamshire. He was the fourth child of John Lawrence, a barely literate miner, and of a beloved mother, who, though formerly a grade school teacher, had been forced by family poverty to do manual work in a lace factory. Consequently Lawrence was obliged to begin his education at the local elementary school, Beauvale Board School, where he studied from 1891-98. Having proven himself an excellent student, he was the first graduate of the school to be given a scholarship leading to further work at Nottingham High School. (While at the High School, Lawrence made friends with a school chum, with whom he shared books and enthusiasm for books: Lawrence's substitute for the literate family background in which many British writers were embedded.) From 1902-06 Lawrence enrolled at the University College of Nottinghamshire. Throughout his educational development, Lawrence was writing poems and short stories, some of the latter of which were to morph into Lawrence's major novels.

**Lawrence's literary career.** Much of Lawrence's literary career was carried on while he was traveling. (By 1919 he had essentially abandoned England, and set off on travels, in Europe, Australia, The United States, and Mexico, which were congenial to his imagination, and freeing from an England he was coming to hate, especially for its squalor and pettiness.) In 1912 he married Frieda Weekley, née Richtofen, then the wife of one of Lawrence's Professors; the two left England in 1919, heading for Germany, then Italy, then throughout a lifetime marriage to those parts of the world in which Lawrence felt he could still discover something of the primal beat of humanity.

**D. H. Lawrence's Work.** The work of D.H. Lawrence from the beginning strikes out on a tone of great personal independence, willed freedom from the hyper sophisticated modernism of Joyce and Proust. Lawrence is out to discover the true presence of existence in his writing, and attempts to do so in vivid poetry, like 'Snake,' of which the following is an excerpt:

*He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom  
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the edge of  
the stone trough  
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,  
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness,  
He sipped with his straight mouth,  
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,  
Silently.*

In a long succession of novels—*The White Peacock*, 1910; *Sons and Lovers*, 1913; *The Rainbow*, 1915; or *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 1928—Lawrence works the territory of passion, the powerful urges of sexuality emerging from the earth itself, the shallowness of civilization and its conventions—and occupies a position, in the literary culture of his time, of pornographer or at best scandal maker. The legal manoeuvres surrounding the attempted publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which was long considered obscene and unprintable, make the point forcefully. Could Lawrence have imagined that the freeing of the passions, which he promoted, would in our time turn into the indifference of 'sex and violence.'

## Reading

### Primary source reading

D.H.Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia*, ed. Kainins, Kindle edition, 1999.

### Secondary source reading

Meyers, Jeffrey, *D.H. Lawrence: A Biography*, London, 1990.

### Further reading

Bell, Michael, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being*, Cambridge, 1991.

### Suggested paper topics

1. Does D. H. Lawrence's work seem 'explicit and shocking' today, as it did in its own time? Your answer in the negative will, naturally, require explaining. What has changed in literary tastes, and cultural tolerance, since Lawrence's time?
2. What do you think of Lawrence's desire to return to simpler and more archaic life forms, where the blood flows strongly and sexually in the veins? Can you see why the guardians of social order were shocked by his perspective? Can you see why he was aggressively resentful toward the work of Joyce and Marcel Proust?

### Excerpt <http://www.gutenberg.net.au/ebooks01/0100181.txt>

*Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or scramble over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen. This was more or less Constance Chatterley's position. The war had brought the roof down over her head. And she had realized that one must live and learn. She married Clifford Chatterley in 1917, when he was home for a month on leave. They had a month's honeymoon. Then he went back to Flanders: to be shipped over to England again six months later, more or less in bits. Constance, his wife, was then twenty-three years old, and he was twenty-nine. His hold on life was marvellous. He didn't die, and the bits seemed to grow together again. For two years he remained in the doctor's hands. Then he was pronounced a cure, and could return to life again, with the lower half of his body, from the hips down, paralysed for ever. This was in 1920. They returned, Clifford and Constance, to his home, Wragby Hall, the family 'seat'. His father had died, Clifford was now a baronet, Sir Clifford, and Constance was Lady Chatterley. They came to start housekeeping and married life in the rather forlorn home of the Chatterleys on a rather inadequate income. Clifford had a sister, but she had departed. Otherwise there were no near relatives. The elder brother was dead in the war. Crippled for ever, knowing he could never have any children, Clifford came home to the smoky Midlands to keep the Chatterley name alive while he could. He was not really downcast. He could wheel himself about in a wheeled chair, and he had a bath-chair with a small motor attachment, so he could drive himself slowly round the garden and into the fine melancholy park, of which he was really so proud, though he pretended to be flippant about it. Having suffered so much, the capacity for suffering had to some extent left him. He remained strange and bright and cheerful, almost, one might say, chirpy, with his ruddy, healthy-looking face, and his pale-blue, challenging bright eyes. His shoulders were broad and strong, his hands were very strong. He was expensively dressed, and wore handsome neckties from Bond Street. Yet still in his face one saw the watchful look, the slight vacancy of a cripple. He had so very nearly lost his life, that what remained was wonderfully precious to him. It was obvious in the anxious brightness of his eyes, how proud he was, after the great shock, of being alive. But he had been so much hurt that something inside him had perished, some of his feelings had gone. There was a blank of insentience. Constance, his wife, was a ruddy, country-looking girl with soft brown hair and sturdy body, and slow movements, full of unusual energy. She had big, wondering eyes, and a soft mild voice, and seemed just to have come from her native village. It was not so at all. Her father was the once well-known R. A., old Sir Malcolm Reid. Her mother had been one of the cultivated Fabians in the palmy, rather pre-Raphaelite days. Between artists and cultured socialists, Constance and her sister Hilda had had what might be called an aesthetically unconventional upbringing. They had been taken to Paris and Florence and Rome to breathe in art, and they had been taken also in the other direction, to the Hague and Berlin, to great Socialist conventions, where the speakers spoke in every civilized tongue, and no one was abashed.*

## Woolf, Virginia

**The upbringing of Virginia Woolf.** Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was born in London, into a highly literate family, crowded with siblings from Virginia's parents' previous marriages. Virginia's father was Sir Leslie Stephen, an accomplished academician and scholar, who founded the to this day prestigious *Dictionary of National Biography*. Virginia and her sister were on the whole educated at home, and though Virginia resented that her brothers were sent away for schooling, later to University, while she remained at home, still she seems to have enjoyed her robust and stimulating family. (She remembered particularly the pleasure of family vacations to St. Ives, Cornwall, when the whole group would be creatively at ease by the sea shore.) In 1895, however, Virginia's mother died, and Virginia suffered the first of what were called her nervous breakdowns. She was devastated. In 1904 this trauma was to be repeated, with equal force, by Virginia's father's death, which left her in collapse. What we may tend to consider bipolar disease, today, may have had another explanation, childhood sexual abuse; though this interpretation is questionable.

**Education and career life.** Virginia's higher education consisted of correspondence courses offered by The Ladies' Department of King's College, a reasonable sprinkling of language and history. It must be said, though, that the truly educational driver in Virginia's life was the family's removal to Bloomsbury, shortly after Sir Leonard's death. Once in that new social milieu, Virginia found herself surrounded by artists and writers—but also by thinkers like Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes, the economist. Her mind unfolded not only into the creative potential of language, but into the issues of man in the universe. On a more fleshly unfolding, this was a time not only for the marriage of Virginia Woolf, to Leonard Woolf (in 1912), but for Virginia's love affair with the classy writer, Vita Sackville-West. The Bloomsbury group, as the leading figures in this cultural community were called, were distinctively liberal, in political and moral terms.

**The Work of Virginia Woolf.** Virginia Woolf is best known for her novels, which figure as part of the Modernist movement—fellow writers being Mann, Joyce, Proust—but she comes at her world descriptions with a distinctive slant. For one thing Virginia Woolf sees the world, quite naturally, from a woman's perspective, both through the lens of women characters and from her own standpoint, as background narrator. Already in her early essay on 'Modern Fiction' she heralds a new sensibility in the writers of her time. The narrator and the personae of her characters are no longer viewed as substantial shaping forces, but rather as composites of sense experience and flow. (Woolf does not work on the assumption of an integral character.) This optic makes itself vivid in such great later novels as *To the Lighthouse* (1927), in which the shimmering reflections of light on the sea reinforce the modes of flickering sense experience which appear to construct the personal universes of the main characters. The bias toward her own gender, as the model for perception, quite naturally leads Virginia Woolf into complex presentations of women as literature. This tendency is perhaps at its most noteworthy in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). The story concerns one day in the life of a woman of some social standing who is preparing a dinner party. In the course of the preparation her mind fantasizes every detail of the coming event, including the elaborate past histories of many of the guests to be, histories which blend into a wide ranging canvas/picture of British society before the First World War.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, London, 1990.

#### Secondary source reading

Clements, P. and Grundy, Isobel, eds. *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays*, London, 1983.

#### Further reading

Bell, Quentin, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography i: Virginia Stephen*, London, 1972.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Both Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater subscribe to a philosophy of sensations and flux, and share—do you agree?—a view of the way an observer puts together some kind of visual whole, in writing. Are both of

these writers fundamentally secular? Is there any aperture, in their writing, for a religiously transcendent perspective?

2. Does Virginia Woolf experiment fictionally as much as do Joyce and Proust? Is *To the Lighthouse*, for instance, a challenge to daily perception? Is it possible to construct a valid narrative out of elements of perception, as Virginia Woolf presents them in *To the Lighthouse*?

**Excerpt <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200331.txt>**

*He--for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it--was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters. It was the colour of an old football, and more or less the shape of one, save for the sunken cheeks and a strand or two of coarse, dry hair, like the hair on a coconut. Orlando's father, or perhaps his grandfather, had struck it from the shoulders of a vast Pagan who had started up under the moon in the barbarian fields of Africa; and now it swung, gently, perpetually, in the breeze which never ceased blowing through the attic rooms of the gigantic house of the lord who had slain him. Orlando's fathers had ridden in fields of asphodel, and stony fields, and fields watered by strange rivers, and they had struck many heads of many colours off many shoulders, and brought them back to hang from the rafters. So too would Orlando, he vowed. But since he was sixteen only, and too young to ride with them in Africa or France, he would steal away from his mother and the peacocks in the garden and go to his attic room and there lunge and plunge and slice the air with his blade. Sometimes he cut the cord so that the skull bumped on the floor and he had to string it up again, fastening it with some chivalry almost out of reach so that his enemy grinned at him through shrunk, black lips triumphantly. The skull swung to and fro, for the house, at the top of which he lived, was so vast that there seemed trapped in it the wind itself, blowing this way, blowing that way, winter and summer. The green arras with the hunters on it moved perpetually. His fathers had been noble since they had been at all. They came out of the northern mists wearing coronets on their heads. Were not the bars of darkness in the room, and the yellow pools which chequered the floor, made by the sun falling through the stained glass of a vast coat of arms in the window? Orlando stood now in the midst of the yellow body of an heraldic leopard. When he put his hand on the window-sill to push the window open, it was instantly coloured red, blue, and yellow like a butterfly's wing. Thus, those who like symbols, and have a turn for the deciphering of them, might observe that though the shapely legs, the handsome body, and the well-set shoulders were all of them decorated with various tints of heraldic light, Orlando's face, as he threw the window open, was lit solely by the sun itself. A more candid, sullen face it would be impossible to find. Happy the mother who bears, happier still the biographer who records the life of such a one! Never need she vex herself, nor he invoke the help of novelist or poet. From deed to deed, from glory to glory, from office to office he must go, his scribe following after, till they reach whatever seat it may be that is the height of their desire. Orlando, to look at, was cut out precisely for some such career. The red of the cheeks was covered with peach down; the down on the lips was only a little thicker than the down on the cheeks. The lips themselves were short and slightly drawn back over teeth of an exquisite and almond whiteness. Nothing disturbed the arrowy nose in its short, tense flight; the hair was dark, the ears small, and fitted closely to the head.*

## Samuel Beckett

**The Life of Samuel Beckett.** Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) was born near Dublin. He came from an ardent Anglican Church of Ireland family. His father was a very successful quantity surveyor, and the family lived in a comfortable town house with a tennis court, surrounded by green spaces, and walkways where Samuel used to walk and talk with his father. The tenor of Beckett's childhood seems to have been comfortable and creative. His first schooling was at Earlsford House School, a neighborhood play school; from there he graduated to Pontora Royal School, where his considerable skills at cricket began to declare themselves. From 1923-1927 Beckett studied at University College, Dublin, majoring in French, Spanish, and Italian, and proving to be a record winning cricketer. In the year after graduation he was contracted to teach English in the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris—where he made the acquaintance of James Joyce, whose research assistant he would soon be, working with the master on the recondite references of *Finnegans Wake*--and then the following year he returned to earn his M.A. in Dublin. In 1937, Beckett settled permanently in Paris, where he was to become a fixture of the literary culture of the city. He was at this time beginning his practice of writing in French, then translating his work into Irish-inflected English. His first works, *Proust* and *Murphy*, were published at this time. He is best-known for his plays, especially *Waiting for Godot* (1948), and *Endgame* (1957). Beckett focuses his dramatic work on fundamental questions of existence and nonexistence, the mind and the body; and in fighting with the French Resistance during the War—for which he received the *croix de guerre*—he proved the breadth of his commitment to the cause of a humanity, which he so often portrays bleakly. It was this complexity and humanity of vision which lay behind the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Beckett in 1969.

**The Work of Samuel Beckett.** Beckett, as noted, became not only a research assistant but a close friend of James Joyce, a fellow Irishman and writer. As their relationship developed, Beckett grew increasingly awed by Joyce's ability to synthesize vast ideas and references, until it occurred to Beckett, who was already well launched in his writing career, that his own path might be the polar opposite of Joyce's. Beckett's drive was ultimately to be toward minimalism and absurdism, as it became called, to reduce the immense proliferation of words, places, and things, which stud the long novels of Joyce, and to strip down plot and narrative to their essentials—a couple of old men talking about meaninglessness—as in *Waiting for Godot*—and speaking in language stripped to the barest essentials of communication. We can track this progression to the minimal through the increasingly austere, and fascinating of Beckett's plays: *Waiting for Godot* (1953), *Endgame* (1955), and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958). These plays, like Beckett's fictions—*Murphy* (1938) or *Molloy* (1951)--were typically composed in either English or French (usually the case) and then translated into the other language, by Beckett. (Beckett's preference for French, as he explained, had a simple explanation: he wanted to write 'without style,' and that was easier for him in a language which was not his native language. In the end it is astonishing that Beckett was able to create, out of style-less language and minimalist plots, a set of texts and plays which is rivetingly interesting.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot; A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*, New York, 2011.

#### Secondary source reading

Pilling, John, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, Cambridge, 1994.

#### Further reading

Knowlson, James, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, London 1996.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Do you see a connection between Beckett's practice of writing in two languages, often translating himself from one to the other, and the 'minimalism' of his plays, which grow increasingly bare and stark? Does his bilingualism lead to a paring down of language and thought?

2. Beckett is a thinker, as well as a writer. On the surface his 'philosophy of life' may seem obvious. But is it? Are there elements of hope? Irony? And if so, what are they based on? Does his pessimism seem to you rooted in a particular tradition?

**Excerpt [http://archive.org/stream/samuelbeckett031321mbp/samuelbeckett031321mbp\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/samuelbeckett031321mbp/samuelbeckett031321mbp_djvu.txt)**

*Beckett's patient concern with bicycles, amputees, battered hats, and the letter M; his connoisseurship of the immobilized hero; his preoccupation with footling questions which there isn't sufficient evidence to resolve; his humor of the short sentence; his Houdini-like virtuosity (by preference chained hand and foot, deprived of story, dialogue, locale) : these constitute a unique comic repertoire, like a European clown's. The antecedents of his plays are not in literature but to take a rare American example in Emmett Kelly's solemn determination to sweep a circle of light into a dustpan: a haunted man whose fidelity to an impossible task quite as if someone he desires to oblige had exacted it of him illuminates the dynamics of a tragic sense of duty. ("We are waiting for Godot to come Or for night to fall. We have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?") The milieu of his novels bears a moral resemblance to that of the circus, where virtuosity to no end is the principle of life, where a thousand variations on three simple movements fill up the time between train and train, and the animals have merely to pace their cages to draw cries of admiring sympathy that ...*

## W. B. Yeats

**The Importance of William Butler Yeats.** William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), though Irish, proved to be the outstanding force in English language poetry in the twentieth century. He won the Nobel Prize for poetry, in 1922, and served two years as an Irish senator, in the last years of his life. We might say that his work constituted a major enlargement of the culture of English literature for an entire century.

**The Life of William Butler Yeats.** William Butler Yeats was born in Sandymount, County Dublin, but the family soon moved to the beautiful region of Sligo, which was to be the sympathetic cultural matrix of Yeats' upbringing. Both his father and mother inherited well, and the family was both prosperous and highly artistic. Yeats' father was a successful painter, and Yeats' siblings supported a creative atmosphere, which played a decisive role in the development of Yeats' own poetic sensibility. As an infant, in 1867, Yeats' family moved to England for a couple of years—to help the Father in his painting career—but moved back to Dublin. Yeats himself was then enrolled in Erasmus Smith High School—where his work was mediocre, his Latin tolerable but his spelling very bad. From 1884-86 Yeats was enrolled in an Art School—he too had vivid painting skills, though, oddly enough, he was tone deaf. In 1887 the family returned to England. (One sees, in this back and forth traveling, the genesis of the complex relation Yeats developed, toward Ireland and England. It has been said that a person is formed by the kind of world he/she lives in at the age of twenty. For Yeats, that period in the mid-eighties coincided with the strong push for Irish Home Rule, and for true independence from Britain; Yeats was deeply sensitive to the issues, and in a complex way a strong Irish Nationalist.) As he matured, Yeats found many of his best energies going into Irish culture, his increasingly subtle poems with historical richness, his founding—with Lady Gregory and others—of the Irish Literary Theater, his repeated efforts to win the Irish Nationalist Maud Gonne, for his wife.

**The Work of William Butler Yeats.** The early work of Yeats, in poetry, tended to a sentimental Irish Romanticism, drawing on Celtic mythology and nationalism. The soft lapping melodies of 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' (1890) show the young Yeats gifted at the writing of traditional verse, still far from his mature style.

*I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee;  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.  
And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning  
to where the cricket sings; There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnets' wings.*

But by, say, 'The Second Coming,' 1920, Yeats turns his deep appreciation of mysticism, the apocalyptic, and social critique into powerful and complex lines:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.*

Much of the mystery of Yeats' greatness is embedded in these lines, whose tone is unrivalled in English poetry, except by Blake, when it comes to isolating the terror of an age and of the human condition.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Finneran, New York, 1996.

#### Secondary source reading

Macrae, Alisdair, *W.B. Yeats: A Literary Life*, London, 1995.

#### Further reading

Foster, Roy, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, i. The Apprentice image, 1865-1914*, Oxford, 1997.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Politicians and poets are often very different from one another. But is Yeats an exception? Does he know how to convert his political ardor into powerful poetry? How does he do it?
2. The poet W.H. Auden criticized Yeats for dabbling, throughout his life, in mysticism and the occult. To Auden that seemed a childish pursuit. Do you see to what uses Yeats put those concerns, in his poetry? What poetic resource do you see, in Yeats' personal mythology of the tower, pern, and gyre?

**Excerpt <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/never-give-all-heart>**

*Never give all the heart, for love  
Will hardly seem worth thinking of  
To passionate women if it seem  
Certain, and they never dream  
That it fades out from kiss to kiss;  
For everything that's lovely is  
But a brief, dreamy, kind delight.  
O never give the heart outright,  
For they, for all smooth lips can say,  
Have given their hearts up to the play.  
And who could play it well enough  
If deaf and dumb and blind with love?  
He that made this knows all the cost,  
For he gave all his heart and lost.*



## Auden

**The Life of W. H. Auden.** W.H. Auden (1907-1973) was born in York. His father was a physician, and his mother was trained as a nurse. In 1908 the family moved to Birmingham, where Auden's father was to become a Professor of Public Health. Auden's relation to his father was close and important; in his father's well stocked library Auden read devotedly as a young person, especially in psychoanalytic literature. It was expected, at this time, that Auden would become a mining engineer, for he was directly interested in geology, and in the culture of mining. (In his first year of University he was to major in Geology, though by the second year he had switched to English.) Auden's first formal education took place at St. Edmund's School in Surrey, where Auden first made the acquaintance of his mentor and lover to be, Christopher Isherwood. In 1925 Auden enrolled at Christ Church, Oxford, where he built on his erotic relation with Isherwood, and entered with gusto into the wider, and idea fraught, literary milieu. He became close friends with brilliant young writers and thinkers like C.Day Lewis, Stephen Spender, and Louis MacNeice, all of whom were not only reshaping British poetry, but thinking intensely about the larger issues of their time, which was preoccupied with its own pre-war social crises, and with the still quite fresh implications of a new social system, the Communism which to some degree fascinated all of these young men. Upon graduation, Auden traveled to Europe, where his observations of the brutal preparations for WW II, and of the social injustices pursuant on the Depression in Europe and Britain, led him (like most of his closest intellectual friends) to support the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, and for a long time to espouse the politics of the far left, Communism above all. All his life, however, Auden was a practicing Anglican, as well, of course, as a prolific poet whose major works appeared between the mid-thirties and 1960, and by the end of his writing career his humanism and love of peace had increasingly taken on the guise of religious intensity. By the time of his death he had given full expression to the bias for religious transcendence, which had only occasionally come to the front in his earlier thinking.

**The Work of W.H. Auden.** It will be noted that Yeats died in 1939, the year of the outbreak of WW II. Hardy died ten years earlier. Although both writers were increasingly pessimistic, as they aged, neither of them had the special pressure of a global war to factor into their pessimism. Auden's life segued directly into the inter-war years of the 30's, then into the Great War itself, and fully into the Cold War. If you look through the Auden poems in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* you will see that almost all of the included pieces deal somehow with the Second World War, or with the collateral damage done by it. The Age being ushered in, during the period of World War II, has been called the Age of Anxiety. Auden's book of that title, *The Age of Anxiety*, which though published in 1947 was full of poems from the previous decade. You can feel the force of that Age in much of Auden's work, and as he sits "in one of the dives/on Fifty-Second Street/Uncertain and afraid..." he is the quintessential intellectual of the forties, open and hopeful, but surrounded by devastating military/political hatred. No poetry written in English so vividly catches the spirit of that time.

### Reading

#### Primary source reading

*Selected Poems of W.H.Auden*, ed. Mendelson, New York, 2007.

#### Secondary source reading

Carpenter, Humphrey, *W.H. Auden: A Biography*, London, 1981.

#### Further reading

Smith, Stan, *W.H. Auden*, Oxford, 1985.

#### Suggested paper topics

1. Look into the relation between Communism and Anglican Christianity in Auden's thought. What were Auden and his elite Oxford friends looking for, when in the twenties they followed the God of Russian Communism? Was it simply a new form of the Christian God?

2. Auden's father was a mining engineer, and Auden was from early on destined to a career as an engineer. In later life he wrote a lot of poetry about geology. Can you trace some strands of scientific interest throughout his poetry? How does he use his experience of science in his writing?

**Excerpt**

[poets.org/poetsorg/poem/i-walked-out-one-evening](https://poets.org/poetsorg/poem/i-walked-out-one-evening)

*As I walked out one evening,  
Walking down Bristol Street,  
The crowds upon the pavement  
Were fields of harvest wheat.  
And down by the brimming river  
I heard a lover sing  
Under an arch of the railway:  
'Love has no ending.  
'I'll love you, dear, I'll love you  
Till China and Africa meet,  
And the river jumps over the mountain  
And the salmon sing in the street,  
'I'll love you till the ocean  
Is folded and hung up to dry  
And the seven stars go squawking  
Like geese about the sky.  
'The years shall run like rabbits,  
For in my arms I hold  
The Flower of the Ages,  
And the first love of the world.'  
But all the clocks in the city  
Began to whirr and chime:  
'O let not Time deceive you,  
You cannot conquer Time.  
'In the burrows of the Nightmare  
Where Justice naked is,  
Time watches from the shadow  
And coughs when you would kiss.  
'In headaches and in worry  
Vaguely life leaks away,  
And Time will have his fancy  
To-morrow or to-day.  
'Into many a green valley  
Drifts the appalling snow;  
Time breaks the threaded dances  
And the diver's brilliant bow.  
'O plunge your hands in water,*

## **Eliot, T. S.**

**The Life of T.S. Eliot.** Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) was born in St. Louis, Missouri. He had four sisters and one brother. His father and mother were of old East Coast patrician stock, but had for several generations been fixtures of St. Louis higher society. Eliot's father was President and Treasurer of the Hydraulic Press Brick Company. Young Thomas' childhood was spent essentially in reading, from his father's library. Cursed with a congenital double inguinal hernia, which would plague him all his life, Eliot was in pain much of the time when he was very young, and was able to conquer this condition with reading. (He was for a long time obsessed with Wild West adventures!)

**The Education of T.S. Eliot.** From 1898-1905 Eliot was a student at Smith Academy, where he studied Latin, Greek, French and German. Subsequently he attended Milton Academy, then enrolled at Harvard as an undergraduate, where he studied for three years (1906-09), getting his B.A. after just three years. In the following years, Eliot studied both at Oxford and in Paris—where he heard lectures by Henri Bergson. In 2011-2014 Eliot returned to Harvard, where he worked on Indian philosophy and Sanskrit, and wrote his doctoral dissertation on F.H. Bradley's notion of the knowledge of the external world. (Eliot earned a Ph.D. but the degree was never granted, as he never returned from England for the necessary viva voce final oral exam.) From this point on Eliot's education was pretty much education in life. In 1927 he became a naturalized British citizen. He began, while in England, both to work in a bank and to teach at several private schools, and finally, after a lucky meeting with Geoffrey Faber, the London publisher, Eliot took up a position as Editor with Faber, a position in which he remained from 1925-1965. Among the array of educational experiences, for Eliot in these years, was the formation of a powerful relationship with Ezra Pound, and a long and unhappy marriage.

**The Work of T.S. Eliot.** In 1914, Eliot met Ezra Pound in London, and a long creative relation grew from that point. Eliot firmed up his critical stance, which he had been trying out in essays, and in 1917 published a keystone essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' in which he lays out ideas about literature which he retained for his whole creative life. Not much later he published incisive essays on the English metaphysical poets, in which he reinforced his earlier thinking; his critical stance held that poetry is a traditional skill, that it is not about emotion but about escape from emotion, and that a mature world view—Eliot was deepening in his own Anglo-Catholicism all this time—was indispensable for significant writing. In the major creative works, which surrounded these critical arguments, Eliot digs deeply into the expression of the great traditions of spiritual experience, and into a precise and originally trimmed metric. A flow of great poems marks his maturing: 1911, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'; 1922, 'The Wasteland'—Eliot's mini epic, and one of the century's greatest works; 1927, 'The Journey of the Magi'; 1930, 'Ash Wednesday'; 1943, 'The Four Quartets.' Throughout these works, and Eliot was a perfectionist but not hugely prolific, Eliot dug into themes of personal identity, social disintegration, the quest for meaning, especially transcendental religious meaning. His final achievement is of limited dimensions—a number of his plays could be mentioned—but of huge insight into the meanings and weaknesses of his own age.

### **Reading**

#### **Primary source reading**

*The Collected Poems of T.S. Eliot, 1909-1962*, New York, 1991.

#### **Secondary source reading**

Ackroyd, Peter, *T.S. Eliot*, London, 1984.

#### **Further reading**

Gordon, Lyndall, *Eliot's New Life*, London, 1988.

#### **Suggested paper topics**

1. Do you see Eliot's 'Wasteland,' and his general conversion to monarchy and Anglo-Catholicism, as responses to the post-WW I climate of the England he adopted? Or does Eliot just use those enviroing conditions as vehicles for poetry?

2. Eliot wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on philosophical questions of our knowing of the outer world. Do you see a philosophical turn of mind permeating his poetry? You might review *The Four Quartets* in relation to Eliot's metaphysics and theology.

Excerpt <http://www.bartleby.com/198/9.html>

*WHEN Mr. Apollinax visited the United States*  
*His laughter tinkled among the teacups.*  
*I thought of Fragilion, that shy figure among the birch-trees,*  
*And of Priapus in the shrubbery*  
*Gaping at the lady in the swing.* 5  
*In the palace of Mrs. Phlaccus, at Professor Channing-Cheetah's*  
*He laughed like an irresponsible fœtus.*  
*His laughter was submarine and profound*  
*Like the old man of the sea's*  
*Hidden under coral islands* 10  
*Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down in the green silence,*  
*Dropping from fingers of surf.*  
*I looked for the head of Mr. Apollinax rolling under a chair*  
*Or grinning over a screen*  
*With seaweed in its hair.* 15  
*I heard the beat of centaur's hoofs over the hard turf*  
*As his dry and passionate talk devoured the afternoon.*  
*"He is a charming man"—"But after all what did he mean?"—*  
*"His pointed ears ... He must be unbalanced,"—*  
*"There was something he said that I might have challenged."* 20  
*Of dowager Mrs. Phlaccus, and Professor and Mrs. Cheetah*  
*I remember a slice of lemon, and a bitten macaroon.*

### Final discussion questions

1. The foregoing set of entries is based on the assumption of a canon of great writers of English literature. Does there seem to be an axis of central or defining works, that constitute a canon of the best, or is there nothing of that sort, only a variety of "interesting" works written in England and its cultural orbit, in English?
2. What role do you see for the Christian religion in the evolution of English literature? At what points in our entries has this role been most conspicuous? At what points has it dwindled? Based on our entries, what direction would you see for the future development of this relation between English literature and Christianity?
3. Do you see the Romantic movement—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, et al.—as a decisive turning point in the development and direction of English literature? (We have pushed this perspective, but doubtless there are various ways to plot the development of English literature.) Or if you were to write a developmental history of English literature, would you look for any large scale scheme at all?
4. Pick one author from each Unit we have studied, and briefly place him or her in his/her historical/cultural context. When you have completed this job, take a look at the general relationship between literary texts and historical setting. Is historical setting a useful framework for explaining the nature of literary works?
5. Is English literature strongly marked by optimism about the human condition—that is, belief that humanity is good, the world surrounding mankind is benign, and there is a purposefulness in the universe? Or is there a strong thread of pessimism, in English literature, in all of the above regards?