HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

20th CENTURY LITERATURE

Course Description

Twentieth Century World Literature covers literature from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century. Students will analyze primary texts covering the genres of poetry, drama, fiction, and the essay. Questions will engage various perspectives and address textual, thematic, historical, and cultural issues of the period. The course is directed to graduate students with previous experience in analyzing literary texts.

Instructors

Paul Davis, Emeritus Professor of English from the University of New Mexico, has developed and taught several courses in world literature, led a curriculum development project in world literature sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and edited several texts in world literature, including *The Bedford Anthology of World Literature,* the text for this course. A specialist in the literature of the nineteenth century with a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, he has written many articles on Victorian literature and several books on the works of Charles Dickens.

David Johnson, Emeritus Professor of English from the University of New Mexico, developed and taught courses in creative writing, mythology, and world literature. In addition to publishing books of poetry and a book on writing poetry, he was a co-editor of *Western Literature in a World Context* and a co-editor of the six-volume *Bedford Anthology of World Literature* (2003), the text for this course. He has published articles on mythology, comparative religion, and travels in Mexico. He has lectured and conducted workshops throughout New Mexico. His most recent book is *Rebirth of Wonder: Poems of the Common Life* (2007) He presently teaches short courses in autobiography and comparative religion in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of New Mexico.

Course Overview

The twentieth century in world literature covers a period that moves from the Eurocentric perspective at the beginning of the period to a genuinely global perspective at the end. The six units in the course begin with the imperialism at the beginning of the century and the modernist movement in Western literature that dominates the period up to World War Two. The wars and conflicts of the century, especially World War Two, profoundly shaped the literature, the post-colonial reaction after the war, and the emergence of a genuinely global literature at the end of the century. Students will consider major primary texts from the period and write critical papers for each of the six units.

Texts for the Course

The reading assignments listed for each of the authors included in the course are from the following text:

The Bedford Anthology of World Literature: The Twentieth Century, 1900-The Present, Book 6, edited by Paul Davis, Gary Harrison, David M Johnson, Patricia Clark Smith, and John F. Crawford. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003.

Course Content

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- Anna Akhmatova
- Takenishi Hiroko

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- Jean-Paul Sartre
- Albert Camus
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Unit 5: Post-Colonialism—Africa
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- Chinua Achebe
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- Jorge Luis Borges
- Pablo Neruda
- Milan Kundera

Course Papers

Students will write a critical paper (1500-2500 words) for each of the six units in the course on the topics listed below.

Unit 1

Discuss Marlow and Kurtz as representatives of the European colonial enterprise in Africa. What attitudes do they share? How do they differ? What enables Marlow to avoid Kurtz's fate? What does the novel suggest about Conrad's perspective on colonialism?

Unit 2

The modernist period was a time of radical change in politics and the arts. Choose two or more writers in this unit and discuss how they pursued new directions in their chosen literary genres. Is it correct to say that these writers tended to turn away from the outside world in order to explore internal, psychological realities?

Unit 3

War has the effect of destroying tradition and letting loose what Yeats describes as "mere anarchy." How can literature provide shape and coherence to counter the destructive effects of war? Discussing one or more of the works in this unit consider how literature creates a ritual or a "rite" to replace those destroyed by war.

Unit 4

It is common for existential writers to raise questions about living in a world without traditional meaning and purpose. Discuss how the existential view of the world is reflected in two of the writers in this unit. Do either of these writers provide some kind of ethical guidance for individuals living in this world?

Unit 5

Analyzing at least two works from this unit, discuss the connections with and the differences between African post-colonial writing and the writing of African-Americans.

Unit 6

We are just beginning to appreciate the effects of globalism on our lives. What is the meaning of globalism as it impacts one or more stories or poems in this unit? What adjustments are necessary for characters living in a global world? Do any of the pieces of literature in this unit show us how to be a "citizen of the world"?

Unit 1: Colonialism

Colonialism and its aftermath, "decolonization" or "post-colonialism," describe one key historical movement of the twentieth century. Inheriting from the nineteenth century the colonial frenzy of the "great race," the twentieth century began with European powers competing to consolidate and control large parts of the third world, particularly in Asia and Africa. The process of decolonization which gained momentum after World War Two returned the colonies to their original inhabitants. By the end of the century most of the colonies had achieved independence.

The "In the World" section on "Colonialism: Europe and Africa" collects materials that present this imperial activity on one continent, especially in the most notorious example of colonial exploitation, King Leopold's Belgian Congo. These materials provide background and context for Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and, later, for Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* as well as for other materials from and about Africa. It also introduces works like Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" and the excerpt from Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" that support and challenge the arguments for colonialism. The inclusion of Yeats in this section is a reminder that colonialism was not limited to Africa or the developing world. Ireland's struggle for independence from Britain, successful finally in 1920, is an example of less visible colonial oppression which, like the treatment of Native Americans in the United States, is not immediately seen as colonialism.

Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" makes the moral argument that inspired the colonial enterprise, though the idealism in its ideology is shown to be hypocritical by George Washington Williams in his account of the Congo, and it is satirized by Mark Twain. Achebe, writing later in the century, challenges the conscious racism that informed colonialism and the writings of many European authors, especially Conrad.

World War Two prompted colonial peoples to challenge their European colonizers and the philosophical justifications for their oppression. Franz Fanon, from the French colony of Martinique, developed the philosophical, political, and moral arguments against colonialism in his manifesto, *The Wretched of the Earth.* He provided a basis for Césaire and Chinweizu to turn Shakespeare's *Tempest* on its head to make it Caliban's rather than Prospero's play, for Felix Mnthali to challenge the dominance of English Literature in the curriculum of African schools, and for Ngugi Wa Thiong'o to speak for a native literature not written in the language of the colonial oppressors.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature,* Book 6.
---"In the World: Colonialism: Europe and Africa," pp. 97-157.

Questions

1. What is Kipling's argument for the "white man's burden"? How do you think each of the African writers in this section would respond to Kipling?

2. Would Kurtz and Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* subscribe to Kipling's views? How might they differ in justifying colonialism in the Congo?
3. How do Williams and Twain characterize Leopold? Are there differences in their assessments of the King? Does Conrad have a similar point of view to theirs?
4. Why does Achebe consider Conrad a racist? Would he make a similar assessment of the other Western writers in this section?
5. Given the arguments Ngugi makes for African literature in native languages would he consider *Things Fall Apart* or *A Tempest* capable of expressing a genuinely African point of view? In what ways might they be compromised as African literature?

Joseph Conrad

Symbolically Conrad opens the twentieth century as a representative of the emerging globalism of the period. Born in Poland, he emigrated to France as a young man where he worked in the French merchant marine, and eventually he resettled in England to become an English writer working in his third language. His works have international settings, from the South Seas and Asia to Latin America, Africa, Russia, and Europe. Written in the wake of the European imperial expansion, Conrad's works view the world from a European perspective, often exploring the ways in which European ideals and perspectives are challenged by contact with other cultures.

Heart of Darkness (1899), based on Conrad's experience as a river-boat captain in the Congo, confronts European colonists with the temptations and vitality in the heart of Africa. Its layered narration draws attention away from the ostensible subjects of the story, Africa and the rescue of Kurtz, to focus on the narrators, particularly Marlow, the teller of the tale within the tale. He comes to represent one version of Europeanness, both identifying with and opposed to Kurtz. The story is also a commentary on European colonialism, especially on the appalling example of the Belgian Congo. Conrad's apparent ambivalence on the colonial enterprise provides another complicating perspective on the Congo and has opened him to criticism, especially from later observers like Chinua Achebe.

Heart of Darkness is usually interpreted as a journey narrative in which the physical journey is a metaphor for the interior journey of the protagonist. Marlow's penetration into the heart of Africa becomes his perilous journey into his own unconscious, his commitment to "efficiency" saving him from a fate similar to that of Kurtz.

Readings

--*Bedford Anthology of World Literature,* Book 6.
---Introduction and *Heart of Darkness,* pp. 30-96.

Questions

1. What can you say about the narrator? What is his attitude toward Marlow? What does the frame narrative—Marlow's conversation with the other men on the *Nelly*—contribute to the story of the journey up the Congo? What is the role of the three listeners to Marlow's tale? Why does Marlow tell them his story? How would *Heart of Darkness* be different if Marlow told the story directly?
2. What, according to Marlow, is the difference between a conqueror and a colonist? To which category do Kurtz and the other members of the trading company belong? What does Marlow mean when he speaks of the idea that redeems conquest? Why are the Europeans referred to as pilgrims? What ideas might be considered the redeeming ideas in the conquest of Africa? Does Marlow subscribe to these ideas?
3. Marlow's stories are said to be unlike other seaman's stories because the meaning of the story "was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only

as a glow brings out a haze." How might this metaphor be said to describe the story Marlow tells?

4. Advance reports describe Kurtz as remarkable, extraordinary, a universal genius. What makes Kurtz unusual? What evidence is in the story to suggest what these judgments werebased on? Does Kurtz live up to his advance billing? Marlow describes him as a "voice." What is the significance of this description?

5. To what do Kurtz's final words, "The horror! The horror!" refer? Why does Marlow lie to Kurtz's intended when she asks him about Kurtz's final words?

6. Marlow claims that the thing that saves Europeans in Africa is their dedication to efficiency. What does he mean by the term? Are the rivets that obsess him related to his idea of efficiency? Can efficiency be said to save Marlow from a fate similar to that of Kurtz?

7. How does Conrad suggest that Marlow's journey into the Congo is also a journey into the depths of his own consciousness? What does the heart at the core of his experience symbolize?

8. What roles do African natives play in the story? Are any of the Africans developed characters? Consider Achebe's criticism of Conrad's portrayal of Africans? Is his criticism justified?

William Butler Yeats

The most important modernist poet writing in English at the beginning of the twentieth century, Yeats is sometimes described, especially by Americans, as an English poet. But Yeats would have rejected such a characterization, for even though he wrote in English and came from one of the British Commonwealth countries, he wrote as an Irishman at a time when the Irish were actively in rebellion against the English and demanding independence. In various ways several of the poems in the anthology reflect his Irishness and his engagement with the struggle for independence. His use of Irish folklore in many of his early poems, like "Who Goes with Fergus?" express an Irish nationalism that seeks to affirm a distinct Irish identity. "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" contrasts urban London with memories of rural Ireland. "Easter 1916" commemorates the revolutionary martyrs executed for their role in the uprising against Britain.

After Irish independence, achieved in 1920, Yeats became a senator in the Irish parliament and many of his later poems explore a broader and more visionary sense of history. Both "Leda and the Swan" and "The Second Coming," the poem from which Achebe took the title for his novel *Things Fall Apart*, describe revolutionary transition points in human history—the fall of Troy and the birth of the Christian era, and the incipient new age. Like T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* these poems are important expressions of the post-World War One malaise.

Two late poems, "Among School Children" and "The Circus Animals Desertion," find Yeats looking back on his childhood and his poetic career. Conscious that age has sapped his physical strength, a theme also in "Sailing to Byzantium," Yeats assesses his remaining spiritual and poetic resources.

Readings

--*Bedford Anthology of World Literature,* Book 6

----Introduction and poems, pp. 181-200.

Questions

1. Consider Yeats's perspective on the Easter Rebellion and its leaders as he expresses it in "Easter 1916." Does he idealize these people or treat them realistically? Is he detached from or engaged with their plight?

2. Note the repetition of the phrase "a terrible beauty is born" in "Easter 1916." What does it suggest to you? Compare this phrase to the action of "The Second Coming." How are the poems linked?

3. How do you respond to Yeats's depiction of rape in "Leda and the Swan"? Why does he choose such a violent metaphor to represent what he saw as the beginning of the classical period? What is Yeats's attitude toward the classical period? How is that period like the one announced in "The Second Coming"?

4. Why is the swan's beak "indifferent" in "Leda and the Swan"? Indifferent to what? Or to whom?

5. Who does Yeats identify with in “Leda and the Swan”? Is the identification legitimate? Does he present the swan’s attack as rape or as something else? Is there any implicit blame of Leda within the poem? Who is asking the rhetorical questions? What does the last question mean? What would the difference be if she did put on his knowledge? What does it mean that she does put on his power? How much does what she knows of the future matter?
6. What events of the early twentieth century might Yeats have had in mind as informing the imagery in the opening stanza of “The Second Coming”?
7. Is thee “blank and pitiless” gaze of the creature in “The Second Coming” similar to the “indifferent beak” of the swan in “Leda”? What view of history do these images suggest?
8. Contrast Ireland and Byzantium as they are characterized in “Sailing to Byzantium.” What is the appeal of Byzantium to Yeats?
9. “Sailing to Byzantium,” “Among School Children,” and “The Circus Animals Desertion” all treat the awareness of aging and the limits of the body, contrasting age with youth and sexual vitality. What compensations does Yeats find to counter the effects of age? What does poetry offer as a compensation?
10. Many of Yeats’s poems employ rhetorical questions, especially at the end. Consider how these questions both crystallize the theme of the poem and leave it up to the reader to construct an answer. Discuss this double function of the question for each of the poems that ends in a rhetorical question.

Unit 2: Modernism

The modernist period, dating roughly from the 1890s to World War II, was a time of intellectual, cultural, social and political crisis--a time when old beliefs, customary ways of living, and traditional forms of governance were challenged, and often replaced. These changes were reflected in science, religion, philosophy and politics, and made this era distinctively "modern. Modernist literature attempts to take into account changing ideas about reality developed by Darwin, Mach, Freud, Einstein, Nietzsche, Bergson and others. At the end of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche was a major precursor of Modernism with a philosophy in which psychological drives, specifically the “Will to power,” were more important than facts, or things. Nietzsche threatened organized religion with his pronouncement about the death of God. Influential in the early days of Modernism were the theories of Sigmund Freud. According to Freud's ideas, all subjective reality was based on the play of basic drives and instincts, through which the outside world was perceived.

After the destruction of World War I, people, especially in cities, began to question meaning and value, experiencing what some writers described as alienation and a loss of faith in traditional institutions. William Butler Yeats (see Unit 1) was one of Europe’s most visionary poets. These lines from "The Second Coming," written in 1920 capture the spirit of the age that witnessed the cataclysmic change of the Bolshevik Revolution, the horror of World War I, and the collapse of accepted truths in science, religion, and politics:

Things fall apart; the center 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.

Many writers and artists of the early twentieth century were conscious that the radical changes that were taking place in their time made it different from the past. T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (see Unit 3) is probably the classic description of this modernist malaise; the poem, published in 1922) presents modern urban society as a sterile, materialistic waste land, where even the search for meaning is filled with detours and dead ends. In general, the focus turned from the outside reality to the interior world of emotions, fears and hopes. From this shift came innovative literary techniques such as stream-of-consciousness, interior monologue, as well as the use of multiple points-of-view. Important developments in fiction were those of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf who created a new psychological novel as they experimented with ways to represent the "stream of consciousness" in prose. In flowing unpunctuated sentences that merged memory and present awareness following an associative logic, they presented the mental life of their characters.

Luigi Pirandello broke tradition in theater by eliminating the distance between audience and stage and mixing the stories of characters from off stage with the actors on stage. The works of Franz Kafka awakened his readers to the frightening isolation of individuals in the modern, bureaucratic state. The poems of Rainer Maria Rilke reflect his poetic search for bridges between interior stages of being and the uncertain flux of exterior reality.

The various forms of experimentation in the work of the modernists were ways to unsettle the conventional expectations of their readers, to make them aware of the incoherence of modern life and the alienating influence of modern institutions.

James Joyce

For serious students of literature, it is tempting to become preoccupied with the monumental importance of Joyce's novel, *Ulysses,* and Joyce's innovative use of the "stream of consciousness" technique for probing the consciousness of his heroes and psychological complications of dealing with urban life. In other words, it is possible to focus on technique, on symbolism, and the brash depiction of sexuality, and miss entirely Joyce's profound insights into the workings of consciousness in a short story like "The Dead."

For over half of "The Dead" the story seems to be a satire of the empty lives of the party-goers. But in the last section, the focus shifts to Gabriel, the erstwhile narrator, who is stirred by his sexual attraction to his wife–feelings that are delegated to his past. Then comes a brilliant psychological twist: how her memory of an earlier love relationship with Michael Furey turns Gabriel's feelings upside down. His disappointment becomes a dark sadness that settles all over the world under a blanket of snow. The associative weaving together of the dead Michael Furey, the lonely churchyard, the spirits of the dead, Gabriel's sad tears, and the falling snow becomes a prime example of Joyce's uncommon skill with the stream of consciousness.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6. Boston: Bedford–St. Martins, 2004.
---Introduction and *The Dead,* pp. 366-402.

Questions

1. Why is this story titled "The Dead"? Remember that there are probably several answers to this question.
2. Why did Gabriel's wife confess her story about Michael Furey to Gabriel? Does the answer to this question involve the relation between memory and music, or something else?
3. As you examine the nature of Gabriel's speech to the guests at the party, how does his speech reflect something about the character of Gabriel and the guests?4. Music plays an important role in "The Dead." How does music serve to connect various parts of the story?
4. Does "The Dead" suggest anything about Joyce's complex relationship to Ireland and why he left his home country as a young man?

Luigi Pirandello

Pirandello's most famous play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author,* is an excellent example of the revolution in art and thought characteristic of modernism, and the aftermath of World War I. Instead of a play which follows a coherent plot or story line, Pirandello set out to test all of the assumptions about theater. He dissolves the line between audience and stage when characters emerge from offstage to demand attention from the cast of a play in rehearsal. As with everyone in the audience, these characters have a story to tell; in fact, they have more than one story, often in conflict with one another. In this way, the different stories and the layers of meaning, begin to resemble the unresolved histories of the relationships between the characters. The actors who are called upon to perform the stories of the characters become mirrors for exploring guilt and the fact that actions create a ripple effect and never really end or come to a conclusion. The painful effects of immorality are reenacted over and over again. The climax of the play occurs when the line between fiction and reality is dissolved, when the hidden lives of the characters are finally revealed and the tragic consequences of immoral actions are understood.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6. Boston: Bedford–St. Martins, 2004.
---Introduction and *Six Characters in Search of an Author,* pp. 201-245.

Questions

1. Why are the characters looking for an author? How do we know that the characters are not fully formed and that their stories are incomplete?
2. Who seems to be more real–the characters or the actors? How would you describe the roles that the actors are supposed to assume?
3. What are the little boy and little girl doing in the play? Why should their deaths affect the audience?
4. Is there a satisfactory resolution to characters' search for an author at the end of the play?

Franz Kafka

Kafka is known for the straightforwardness of his narrations, as if there is little or no explanation for the nightmare events of his plots. Events in his works are moved forward by forces outside the control of the characters in a particular situation. Kafka's situations are like a nightmare or a bad dream in which the dreamer is stuck in a depressing situation for which there is no evident relief. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor represents the a new kind of workman–the salesman–who has no individuality, who works as a cog in a large machine. Neither Gregor nor his family seem to question why he was transformed into an insect or what might be done about his condition. This lack of questioning becomes part of the dehumanizing effect of modern bureaucracies as people under a particular regime come to accept their situations without questioning causes and possible alternatives. Gregor's family simply tries to make adjustments to his new condition as insect.

Kafka's dark vision of reality is difficult to interpret. First, there is there is the resemblance of Gregor's prior existence to that of a bug. These similarities can be translated into a number of modern occupations and work situations. The clue here is the large, impersonal bureaucracy or corporation in which men and women play interchangeable roles and are not known for their individual contributions. The next focus of interpretation is on the treatment of Gregor's family towards him. A dominant image of this interaction is the father who drives his son back into his room and throws apples at Gregor. Lastly, there is Gregor's death, and the effect of his death on the family members. There is a rich irony in the fact that the family seems to come alive with Gregor's death and benefit from it.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6. Boston: Bedford–St. Martins, 2004.
---Introduction and *The Metamorphosis*, pp. 423-460.

Questions

1. One of the first things that Gregor realizes about his situation is that he is late for work. What does this say about his work situation? How does his family react when they realize that he is still in bed? How does his employer react?
2. How do family members react when they first see Gregor in his new form?
3. How does the reader learn that Gregor's dehumanization took place long before his physical transformation?
4. Why does the father throw apples at Gregor? Are apples symbolic in some way?
5. What is Gregor's reaction to music?
6. What roles are played by the three lodgers, the chief clerk, and the charwoman?

Rainer Maria Rilke

In a number of ways, Rilke represents a modern version of the "romantic" poet of the early nineteenth century. He continually traveled around a troubled, fractured Europe in a kind of poetic quest, looking for ways to create a coherent, imaginative world, based on love and beauty. It was as if the genius poet could identify the broken pieces of European culture and reconstruct objects of beauty and worth. Rilke's "Autumn Day" is reminiscent Keats' "Ode to Autumn" complete with the feelings of ripeness and harvest perfection; the poet must address the change of seasons and the approach of death. With "The Panther" and "Archaic Torso of Apollo," Rilke exhibits the power of the imagination to probe the external world and provide bridges to non-human subjects. There is a still a spark of life rushing through the panther's muscles. The brilliance of Apollo's statue is its capacity to arouse a deep response from the viewer, to therefore stimulate a change of life. In similar ways, Rilke takes material from Greek myth, the story of Leda, and the inspiration of an eastern religion–the figure of Buddha–and reveals the power of these subjects to animate the imagination and inspire a kind of reverence. In "The First Elegy" of the *Duino Elegies*, Rilke invokes that image of angels as a way of designating the larger spiritual context necessary for understanding and then healing the painful consequences of World War I. Here Rilke more directly addresses the deaths of young men and the lingering voices of grief floating over the countryside. The sampling of sonnets from *Sonnets to Orpheus* go directly to the tradition of Orpheus and the power of the imagination to transform nature into beauty and song, to provide even the means to journey into the realm of the dead and to resurrect the visible and the invisible. The inspiration of Orpheus is continually reborn in poets like Rilke.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6. Boston: Bedford–St. Martins, 2004.
---Introduction and poems, pp. 245-260.

Questions

1. What kind of activities are suitable for the end of summer in "Autumn Day"?
2. How does Rilke make the panther in "The Panther" a sympathetic creature?
3. How does Rilke create life in the statue of Apollo in the "Archaic Torso of Apollo? What role does sexuality play in the description of the statue?
4. The *Duino Elegies* are difficult poems. The last section of "The First Elegy" deals with the deaths of young people; what are we supposed to learn from the sadness of these deaths?
5. Why are the sonnets written to Orpheus? How is "true singing" in "I,3" a different kind of music from "passionate music"?

Virginia Woolf

At the time Woolf was writing, she was not recognized for her outstanding contributions to both feminist thought and modernist literature. That, of course, has been changed by female and male writers who established Woolf's literary and social reputation; Woolf opened doors and windows for people who followed her. The chapter from *A Room of One's Own* is Woolf as a feminist writer at her best; she makes a strong argument against gender inequity by framing questions around "Shakespeare's Sister" and wondering "why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet." After consulting Trevelyan's *History of England* and the lack of information about the lives of women during Elizabethan times, Woolf shifts to a criticism of contemporary gender relations and the fact that the women writers of her time do not have the advantages that Woolf herself enjoys with a supportive husband and access to publication.

"Three Pictures" and "The Fascination of the Pool" provide a fine introduction to Woolf's departure from the nineteenth-century conventions of fiction as she explores the elusive nuances of the interior sides of consciousness. Using rather simple, everyday scenes–a sailor returning home to his wife, a pool of water–Woolf chooses details and metaphors that exemplify workings of the mind. While exterior reality might follow a straightforward, linear pattern, the subjective, inner world of the imagination shifts in various directions, like streaks of light bouncing off the water. "Three Pictures" was published in an essay collection, *The Death of the Moth*; Woolf, however, referred to sketches like these as stories. Students might want to consider how Woolf uses various elements from other genres to explore human experience.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6. Boston: Bedford–St. Martins, 2004.
---Introduction, pp. 402-408.
---From *A Room of One's Own,* pp. 408-418.
---"Three Pictures, pp. 418-421.
---"The Fascination of the Pool, pp. 421-422.

Questions

1. Why did Woolf turn to Trevelyan's *History of England* in *A Room of One's Own* to support her discussion of the absence of female writers in literary history? How does Trevelyan help to explain the disparity between literary and historical portrayals of women?
2. "Shakespeare's Sister" was originally a lecture at two women's colleges at Cambridge University. Where in the essay does Woolf seem to be addressing this particular audience?
3. What are the difficulties that women writers face in our modern world?
4. What does Woolf mean when she says that a writer's mind must be "incandescent"?
5. What is the effect of the final image of "Three Pictures"? How does the image tie together the three pictures?

6. How does the image of the spoon in the final paragraph of “The Fascination of the Pool” relate to the theme of the piece?

Unit 3: The Literature of War

Twentieth century history is one of nearly continuous wars, from the two world wars that had global impact to the numerous civil wars and wars of conquest and liberation that accompanied colonial expansion at the beginning of the century and the breaking up of colonial rule at the end. The wars themselves produced a literature of reaction, often described as anti-war literature, and had a broader effect on the culture generally, inspiring a literature of malaise and disillusionment. The failure of World War One to be "the war to end all wars" produced the lost generation of the 1920s and 1930s. Even if World War Two did not altogether make the world safe for democracy, it did undermine the class system in Britain, initiate the civil rights movement in America, and prompt the world wide decolonization efforts.

This unit includes a collection of works that respond to several of the conflicts of the century. Four authors are given extended treatment: T. S. Eliot's post World War One poetry characterizes the disillusionment of the interwar period, the time of the lost generation. Federico Lorca, a victim of the Spanish Civil War against the rise of fascism, writes of violence and the pervasive presence of death. Anna Akhmatova suffers under the oppressive regime of Stalin in the Soviet Union. Takenishi Hiroko, a resident of Hiroshima, writes of the physical and psychological legacy of the atomic bomb.

The works included in the section "In the Tradition: The Literature of War, Conflict, and Resistance" are responses to many of the conflicts of the century. World War One decimated Europe, killing a whole generation of young men in trench warfare and gas attacks. Georg Trakl, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, and Erik Maria Remarque describe the horrors of that war; three of the four were among its victims. The scourge of fascism, the atrocities of the Holocaust, and the horrors of the massive civilian casualties of World War Two prompt the works by Bertolt Brecht, Nellie Sachs, Paul Celan, Tamara Ryuichi, and Andrei Voznesensky. Tim O'Brien, an American soldier in Viet Nam, describes a soldier's reaction to "the man he killed" in terms very similar to the German soldier's reaction to a killing in the trenches in the excerpt from Remarque's novel of World War One. Wislawa Szymborska's poem treats terrorism, a tactic used in many of the civil wars and wars of liberation, especially when the contending sides are unequal. The works by Fadwa Tuqan, Yehuda Amichai, and Mahmoud Darwish come out of the continuing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Bei Dao's poems are inspired by the struggle for democratic reform in China.

Nearly all of these works could be described as "anti-war" literature. Even those celebrating a military victory weigh the human cost of war; in Voznesensky's "I Am Goya," for example, the poet becomes Goya, the artist famous for his pictures of the horrors of war, as he celebrates the Russian victory over the Nazis. The theme of Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est," which exposes the "old lie" from earlier literature that celebrated military heroism and asserted that it was "sweet and proper to die for one's country," is rejected by twentieth century authors who focus on the brutal and dehumanizing effects of war.

Readings

--*Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6

---"In the Tradition: The Literature of War, Conflict, and Resistance," pp. 502-551.

Questions

1. Note the adjectives in Trakl's "Eastern Front." Are they predictably connected to the nouns they modify? What do they contribute to the imagery of the poem?
2. Who are the "wolves" in the closing line of "Eastern Front"? How are they foreshadowed earlier in the poem?
3. How do the closing lines of "Grodek" relate to the rest of the poem?
4. Who is the "I" in "Dulce et Decorum Est"? Who is his audience? Why does Owen put the final lines of the poem in Latin?
5. How are the questions at the beginning of each section of "Anthem for a Doomed Youth" answered? Does the sestet repeat the action of the octave or does he change the movement of the poem?
6. Who narrates "Strange Meeting"? How do the final lines conclude the poem?
7. Notice the half-rhymes used in "Strange Meeting." Are they more effective than full rhymes would have been? Why or why not?
8. Does Rosenberg seem more of a realist or an expressionist in "Dead Man's Dump"? Justify your choice.
9. How did the closeness of trench warfare create connections with the enemy? How do Owen and Remarque use this characteristic of trench warfare?
10. Trace the repeated images in "Death Fugue." What are the suggestions in each of these images? How do they change in the course of the poem?
11. Who is the speaker in "A Vertical Coffin"? Is he alive or dead? Is he an exile?
12. Consider the repeated lines in each section of "A Vertical Coffin" and the changes they undergo. Is the progression of these lines similar in each of the three sections of the poem? What is suggested in the image of the vertical coffin? Why is it vertical?
13. Who is the voice in "The Terrorist, He Watches." Is it the terrorist? What is the "sight for sore eyes" in line 7?
14. How does Tim in "The Man I Killed" know the life story of his victim? What leads him to the conclusions he arrives at about the man?
15. Explain the line, "They've grown more than the years of a lifetime" in "Song of Becoming." How is the metaphor of growth used throughout the poem? In what sense have they grown "larger than all poetry"?
16. How do the words "Sort of" in the title of "Sort of an Apocalypse" establish the tone of the poem? Characterize Amichai's attitude toward the on-going conflict with the Palestinians.
17. How do the repetitions in "Identity Card" prepare for the final stanza of the poem?
18. In "An End or a Beginning" what is the promise the poet made as a child? What is the significance of the poem's title? Should it be read as a statement or a question?

T. S. Eliot

The most influential modernist poet, T. S. Eliot was an experimenter and innovator in his writing, even though his philosophical and cultural views were very conservative. His early work, produced during and shortly after World War One has often been used to characterize the period. The poems are not discursive. They use images, colloquial language, and an allusive technique to create the "Waste Land" that is Eliot's defining image of the modern world.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," a somewhat more accessible poem than *The Waste Land,* offers an opportunity to become familiar with the technique of Eliot's poetry. Analyzing it as a dramatic monologue, one can identify the character of its narrator, J. Alfred Prufrock, and outline his situation in the room where "women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo." The allusion to Dante's *Inferno* in the epigraph, the first of many literary allusions in the poem, suggests that this love song may also be an account of a journey into the underworld, or a journey into the hidden layers of Prufrock's consciousness. By the end of the poem, the reader has some sense of the complexities and contradictions in the narrator, as he modulates from one inner voice to another, the rich imagery of the poem communicating his desires and is timidity as he entertains and dismisses various possibilities for his life.

The Waste Land employs the same dramatic, allusive, and imagistic techniques as "Prufrock." Instead of a single dramatic situation and a consistent narrator, *The Waste Land* presents a series of dramatic episodes and a voice that changes from one episode to the next. The framework for the poem, like that provided by Dante for "Prufrock," derives from the grail myth and the quest for wholeness and spiritual restoration. While close attention to the particular images and allusions in a line-by-line reading of the poem can be ultimately rewarding, it is helpful to begin by "listening" to the poem as a whole, as if it were a piece of music, noting its modulations and movements and catching the motifs and themes that recur. Later readings can trace more closely the patterns of imagery and ideas in the poem.

The difficulty of *The Waste Land* is partly due to the difficulty of the times, for the disillusionment after World War One centered in a recognition that the spiritual center of Western civilization had been lost, leaving behind only fragments and no memory of how to piece those fragments together again.

Readings

--*Bedford Anthology of World Literature,* Book 6
----Introduction and poems, pp. 473-501.

Questions

1. Consider the opening lines of "Prufrock." How does the image of the patient in line 3 relate to the images in lines 1 and 2? What is the effect of this cluster of images? How does it set up the rest of the stanza? And the rest of the poem?

2. How does the epigraph from Dante set the tone of “Prufrock”? In what ways can the poem be described as a journey into hell? Could *The Waste Land* also be considered a journey into hell?
3. What is the dramatic situation in “Prufrock”? What is the “overwhelming question”?
4. Characterize Prufrock. What does his name suggest about him? What does the poem tell you about his age, his work, his personal life? Is he a representative figure? Or is he a clinical study?
5. Early drafts of *The Waste Land* carried the title “He do the Police in different voices,” a quotation from Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*. Although the title changed, we can still see the idea behind the original title in the final draft. *The Waste Land* is indeed described in many different voices by different narrators (or at least different aspects of one narrator). What are these different voices? How many “different voices” can you identify?
6. Whom does Eliot expect to be a reader of his poem? Are his expectations very high?
7. Choose one of the episodes in the poem. Who is the narrator? What is the tone in its treatment? How is it expressed? What does the episode contribute to the thematic development of the poem?
8. Follow a single image through *The Waste Land* (e.g. the color violet, the sea, moisture in general, dryness, birds). Can we see these images developing themes in the poem? If so, how? If not, then what is the effect of their repetition?
9. Would you say *The Waste Land* is an atheistic, an agnostic, or a religious poem? If religious, what religion is it? How do you come to your conclusion?

Federico Lorca

Lorca's death by firing squad in the early days of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 is often seen as one of the first casualties in the conflict between fascism and democracy that would culminate in World War Two. While not political, Lorca's work drew on Spanish folk traditions and used surrealistic imagery to celebrate personal and sexual liberation. In "Ode for Walt Whitman" Lorca, a homosexual himself, writes from his disillusioning experience in New York, contrasting the unhealthy sexuality of New York's "pansies" with the natural and healthy sexuality of Walt Whitman. Lorca's most famous poem, the "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" is an elegy for his friend, a toreador who was killed in the bull ring. The repetitions used in the poem give it a ritual formality as Lorca seeks larger meaning in Mejias's death, often seen as a foreshadowing of Lorca's own death and the defeat of the republicans by the fascists in Spain's civil war.

Readings

--*Bedford Anthology of World Literature,* Book 6
----Introduction and poems, pp. 568-586

Questions

1. Discuss the treatment of male love in "Ode to Walt Whitman." What is Lorca, a homosexual, trying to say about the practice of homosexuality in New York? Why does he address his remarks to Walt Whitman?
2. What does the repetition of "at five in the afternoon" contribute to Part I of "Lament"? How is this repetition varied?
3. What does each of the four sections contribute to "Lament"? What is the dominant image in each section?
4. Trace one of the following images through "Lament": blood, moon, stone, river. How is it varied and changed in the course of the poem?
5. Discuss the role of time in "Lament." At the beginning of the poem, time is compacted, almost standing still at five o'clock in the afternoon. By the end of the poem, time stretches out interminably. What role does time play in creating the message of the poem?
6. In "Lament" Lorca celebrates not only the life and death of a hero, but also the passing of a tradition. How is this poem an elegy for Spanish culture?

Anna Akhmatova

Akhmatova's poems in the anthology were prompted by her experience of Soviet oppression under Stalin when her husband, son, and friends were imprisoned or executed. In a direct and plain-spoken idiom, Akhmatova describes her suffering during many years of trial, enlarging her personal experience to encompass more broadly that of the many who suffered with her.

In "Voronezh" Akhmatova contrasts the great days in the history of the city with the present "night . . . that knows no dawn." *Requiem*, a series of poems written over many years between the 1930s and the 1960s, turns her personal suffering into an account of the suffering of the Russian people.

Readings

--*Bedford Anthology of World Literature,* Book 6
---Introduction and poems, pp. 552-567

Questions

1. In epilogues I and II of *Requiem* Akhmatova insists on the connection between her suffering and that of the others who waited at the prisons. How is the suffering that is shared by a community different from individual suffering that is more private? What is the poet's role in such a community?
2. The epigraph, prologue, and two epilogues of *Requiem* were written later than the other numbered poems. How do they serve as a frame for the rest of the poem?
3. To whom is *Requiem* addressed? How do the narrator's voice and the implied reader change over the course of the poem?
4. How does Akhmatova's *Requiem* keep from being sentimental or self-pitying? In what way do the private events of the poem become public? In what way does the narrator show some restraint and detachment, even from the most personally distressing events?

Takenishi Hiroko

A survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, Takenishi draws on her personal experience of that day to write of its lasting effects. The protagonist of "The Rite," Aki is struggling to make some sense of her life ten years after the bombing and to get beyond the recurrent trauma that she experiences as an eerie stillness, accompanied by a terror of being sucked into a black abyss. Using a technique that shifts between third and first person narration and that fragments and disrupts the chronology of events, Takenishi represents the dislocations wrought by the bomb that destroyed the city of Hiroshima, killed her family and friends, and cut her off from her past. The physical wasteland left in the wake of the bombing is emblematic of the psychological and spiritual waste land that remains ten years later, even after the city has been rebuilt.

Readings

--*Bedford Anthology of World Literature,* Book 6.
---Introduction and "The Rite," pp. 967-990

Questions

1. Takenishi uses a disjointed narrative technique that jumps between various times in Aki's life. It is helpful to identify where each section of the story fits in the chronology of events. What does the disjointed chronology contribute to the story?
2. Why does Takenishi begin with the episode of the death of the man living in the shed next door? What does this episode contribute thematically to the story?
3. What occurs between Aki and her former lover, Noboru? How does their relationship suffer?
4. How do the visits with Tomiko and Setsuko affect Aki? What thematic purposes do these visits serve?
5. In the course of the story Aki talks about several rites and speaks of the need for a rite to deal with the effects of the bombing. What kind of rites does she describe? What sort of rite might heal the wounds of Hiroshima?
6. Several of the works that treat war and the effects of war use ritualistic devices to counter the effects of the wasteland: the fragmentation of experience, the loss of traditional cultural values, and the sense of spiritual emptiness. Eliot's allusions to traditional literature and religious teachings and myths, Lorca's incantatory repetitions in a formal lament, and Akhmatova's use of the religious tradition of the requiem are all ways to create a "rite" to counter the destructive effects of war. Does Takenishi use any ritualistic elements in her story to make it, perhaps, the beginning of a rite to counter the effect of the bomb?

Unit 4: Existentialism

The term “existentialism” is used for a philosophical movement which arose after World War I to deal with a world which seemed devoid of purpose and meaning. It is a term which is also applied to a loose collection of writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who revolted against traditional philosophies of the Enlightenment and rationalism.

One way to grasp the meaning of “existentialism” is to imagine the planet earth sailing through the universe, simply obeying the mechanical laws of physics without any purpose or destination. There is no transcendent intelligence or divinity that controls the direction of this spinning earth or has an overall plan for it. Human beings, like all other life forms, are born on this planet, live for a time, and then die. No overall, universal purpose provides meaning for this process. This then is the world that modern science created for us. Without cosmic justice (the promise of rewards and punishments), there is the question of what shapes societal morality. The police? The military? Dostoevsky had said in the nineteenth century: "If God is dead, everything is permitted." The existentialists asserted that it is up to each individual to look at this picture of the world and determine what he or she understands to be the role of human beings. Each individual must define his or her place in the world outside of all systems and beliefs. Christian existentialism accepts this view of the world but claims that a relationship with God is possible.
In response to this world view, the twentieth century became a century of “isms”: nihilism, solipsism, narcissism, hedonism, and existentialism.

The Major Themes of existentialism are the following:
1. We live in an uncertain, unpredictable world that does not make rational sense.
2. No religious or philosophical system provides a coherent, unified view of this world.
3. Individuals must make choices in this world to create meaning for themselves, even though the effects of these choices on others and on the world remain unknown.

The various kinds of writing and thinking in the works of existential writers were ways to unsettle the conventional expectations of their readers, to make them aware of the incoherence of modern life and the alienating influence of modern institutions. The section, *In the World: Existentialism*, provides documents that introduce existentialism. Jean-Paul Sartre, thought to be one of the founders of existentialism, describes the basic tenets of this philosophy and the meaning of the phrase, “existence precedes essence. The French philosopher, Albert Camus, wrote that we live in an absurd universe in which we shout out to the heavens for answers, but there is only silence in return. It is thus up to individuals to create their own meaning and answers. This idea is captured in his rewriting of the Sisyphus myth and the struggle of his hero to find an answer to repetitive work without a satisfying conclusion. Franz Fanon and Oe Kenzaburo take existentialism into the worlds of black identity and the aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing.

Jean-Paul Sartre’s play, *The Flies,* recreates the Greek story of Agamemnon’s assassination after his return to Argos, and Orestes’s struggle to justify his murder and

discover existential meaning in his isolation as an individual. Camus' *The Guest* provides a vivid picture of choices that his hero, Daru, must make in order to live with his humane, value system. Beckett's play, *Krapp's Last Tape,* presents an individual largely worn out by memories captured on tape that repeatedly records his fleeting moments of happiness interspersed with failure, boredom, and loss. These pieces of literature exemplify the complexities of making existential choices in a modern world where various shades of right and wrong, good and evil, confront the individual.

In the World: Existentialism

This section demonstrates the profound influence of existentialism on the writers and thinkers around the world. The pieces explore the possibilities for living in a universe in which there is no pre-conceived, God-ordained plan for our lives. The section opens with an excerpt from Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism." The French existentialists, and, in particular, Sartre and Camus, became the most prominent theoreticians of the existential philosophy and the famous phrase, "existence precedes essence." Sartre declares that there is no pre-existent, essential pattern for human nature that individuals must adopt. Human beings possess the freedom and burden of creating their own lives.

In "The Myth of Sisyphus," Albert Camus takes the Greek myth of the condemned Sisyphus and reinterprets it through the perspective of existentialism. The story of Sisyphus becomes a metaphor for the condition of human beings on earth, who must proceed to roll their stones up the hill only to discover that there is no guarantee of success at the end of the journey. Ultimately there is only death. Camus makes a comparison: "The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd." Camus uses the word "absurd" to describe a world that does not clearly make sense, that in many ways is unreasonable. Sisyphus becomes an absurd hero when he finds a dignified way to deal with this world.

In "Black Skin, White Masks," Franz Fanon applies existentialism to the condition of blacks in the postcolonial world. Blacks must not allow their ancestral past nor their former colonial masters to determine who they are. They must create their own identities: "It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world." And this is the basic spirit of existentialism. In the last piece, from *Hiroshima Notes,* Oe Kenzaburo tackles a particular issue for survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Although Oe is sympathetic to individuals whose extreme sufferings led to suicide, he expresses admiration for those "who do not kill themselves in spite of their misery." They instill courage, they are an inspiration.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6
---*In the World: Existentialism*. pp, 746-769

Questions

1. What is the difference between Christian existentialism and atheistic existentialism?
2. What does the phrase, "existence precedes essence," mean?
3. The existentialist philosophy espoused by Sartre, Camus, and others arose in part from the destruction and horrors of World War II. How does war raise questions about the nature of human beings and the workings of the cosmos?
4. How does Frantz Fanon use existentialism as a way of understanding the position of black people in the postcolonial world?

5. How does the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima raise questions about the meaning of life for survivors of the bomb?

Jean-Paul Sartre

In many ways World War II could be said to have "saved the world for democracy." Not only were democratic governments established in the defeated Axis countries, Germany, Italy, and Japan, but the war forced democratic changes in the winning nations as well. The decline of the class system in Britain and the movement to integrate America racially both began as a result of changes brought about by the war. World War II was the pivotal event of the twentieth century. We are still sorting out its consequences and struggling with issues it raised but did not settle.

Several works that we have included look at the war from different perspectives and explore some of the questions that it raised. Jean Paul Sartre's *The Flies*, an allegorical commentary on the French collaboration with the Nazis, reveals how the war shaped the existentialist concepts of freedom, choice, and responsibility that have been influential in post-war European thought. It is also relevant to note that existentialism of all modern philosophies is often explored in pieces of literature, not necessarily in works of philosophy. Why? Because literature dramatically captures the nature of existence through the imagination: how we live, not just what we think *about* living. Literature appeals to the heart as well as the head.

Although it is tempting to read *The Flies* as purely allegory, with Aegistheus playing the role of the Germans, Clytemnestra as the Vichy government, Zeus as the Catholic Church, and the people of Argos as the French population, this approach can lead to a limited appreciation of the play. Beyond this allegory is the role of Orestes in asserting his own freedom, and then delivering a kind of redemption and freedom to the people, and by implication, a restoration of the French people after the oppression of German occupation during the war. By killing both Aegistheus and Clytemnestra, Orestes is willing to take on a kind of blood guilt as a sacrifice for the people of Argos; as he says, “I must open their eyes. . .They’re free; and human life begins on the far side of despair.”

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6. Boston: Bedford–St. Martins, 2004.
---Introduction and *The Flies*, pp. 692-745.

Questions

1. How does Sartre characterize Zeus in the play? Does Zeus seem to represent the God of Christianity?
2. It is possible to understand killing Aegistheus; what is the argument for killing Clytemnestra?
3. Why does Electra turn against Orestes at the end of the play?
3. How might the condition of the people of Argos be related to the people of France during World War II?

5. Although *The Flies* seems to be making a specific statement to people of France during World War II, does the play have a message for various societies today, including American citizens?

Albert Camus

In order to appreciate the hero of "The Guest" and the dilemma that he faces, it is necessary to understand the political situation of Algeria in the 1950s and early 1960s. During this period, Algeria was a colony of France, populated by French settlers. After World War II, however, native Arabs began to fight for political autonomy and equality for its Arab people. Camus situates his story in the period of the uprising. Daru, a French colonial and the school teacher, lives in an out-of-the-way place where he is largely free of dealing with the national politics. Daru is sympathetic to the local Arabs: He not only teaches Arabs, but distributes food to them during the drought. His situation is upset by a request from the regional police and he is forced to make a choice. Balducci, the gendarme, brings an Arab prisoner to Daru and assumes that Daru, as someone with an European background, will carry out the process of justice for an Arab lawbreaker and take him to a nearby village for a trial. Daru has a moral dilemma; he is forced to choose whether or not he will comply with a colonial situation that he disagrees with. He is reluctant to turn in the Arab, and treats him with food and lodging with sympathetic humanity. In the process, he insults the gendarme by suggesting that he does not want to associate with him. Camus is highlighting the fact that making humane choices in an inhumane world is an existential challenge. The Arab finally chooses his own captivity and Daru is sadly misunderstood by the local natives.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6. Boston: Bedford–St. Martins, 2004.
---Introduction and *The Guest*, pp. 812-825.

Questions

1. What is the significance of the title, "The Guest"? Is there anyone in the story that seems like a guest?
2. What is Balducci's attitude toward Daru? Does Balducci make assumptions about Daru as a typical colonial?
3. Why is Daru reluctant to turn in the Arab prisoner who is apparently guilty of murder? Why isn't the prisoner referred to by name?
4. Daru is likely to be misunderstood by both the European and Arab sides; what course of action is left open to him? What contributes to his choice?
5. Why does the Arab choose the road to prison?

Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett was influenced by several writers and thinkers. At one point, for example, he assisted another Irish writer, James Joyce, with *Finnegans Wake*. After moving to Paris in the 1930s, he joined the French resistance in World War II and subsequently became acquainted with the French existentialists, Camus and Sartre. Without a doubt, Beckett's bleak view of the world and its inhabitants is existential in substance. His literary works pit ordinary individuals with no special virtues or abilities against a dreary landscape devoid of meaning and purpose.

After writing in French for several years, Beckett wrote *Krapp's Last Tape* when he began to write in English again. Beckett is known as a minimalist writer. The title, *Krapp's Last Tape,* suggests that this is the end of Krapp's life, at least his life as he records it on tape. The suggestion is that he has less than a year to go, since he makes these tapes once a year, on his birthday. It also tells the audience that the events of this evening fit into a ritual that Krapp goes through every year. A great deal of the action of this rather abbreviated play is silent acting or pantomime. Through these extended periods of silence, we learn something about Krapp as an individual**.** The challenge then is to understand the reasons behind this ritual and how Krapp has evolved as a person over the years, and primarily over three periods: the recordings he made when he was twenty-eight, thirty-nine, and the present at age sixty-nine. The younger Krapp is rather eloquent, but the contemporary Krapp is almost clownish in his routines: uncorking bottles, eating bananas, and fumbling with his collection of tapes.

Two moments stand out in Krapp's memory: making love to a girl in a boat and a breakthrough when he acquires self-understanding as an artist. These moments are epiphanies by which Krapp seems to evaluate his worth as a human being. The last statement of the play is ambiguous: "Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back." Either this is declaration of existential courage and a willingness to live in an absurd universe, or a statement of sad resignation–it is up to the audience to decide.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6. Boston: Bedford–St. Martins, 2004.
---Introduction and *Krapp's Last Tape*, pp. 770-781.

Questions

1. Why is this Krapp's last tape? Is he going to die? What is the significance of Krapp's name?
2. What does the tape recorder contribute to the dramatic situation?
3. Does the old Krapp change in the course of listening to the tapes? How? Why?
4. Of the three figures of Krapp in the play, which Krapp do you prefer?
5. The younger Krapp feels that perhaps his best years are gone. What do you think of the old Krapp's judgment about the younger Krapp?

6. Why do you think this play is included in a unit called *Existentialism*?

Unit 5: Post-Colonialism

This unit complements the unit on colonialism that begins this course. The literature of colonialism reaches a kind of climax in the first half of the twentieth century when the map of the world was colored to indicate the possessions of the powerful colonizing nations. Although there were active independence movements in the first half of the century, like that led by Gandhi in India or the successful Irish movement that achieved independence in 1920, the decolonization movement is largely a post-World War Two phenomenon. Beginning with Indian independence in 1947, country after country in Asia and Africa gained independence during the second half of the century.

The literature of this post-colonial period reflects a resentment of former colonial masters, a reawakened nationalism, and a search for national and personal identity in changed circumstances. There is a rich post-colonial literature in many different cultural contexts, in India and other south Asian cultures, in Africa, and even in the literature of Native-Americans that could represent this post-colonial cultural emergence. We have chosen texts from Africa and the African diaspora as representative. The selections in "Imagining Africa" include works by Africans from both English and French speaking traditions and works by African-Americans, especially from the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. These selections can be further contextualized by some of the materials in "In the World: Colonialism: Europe and Africa," especially the selection by post-World War Two writers Achebe, Fanon, Césaire, Chinweizu, Nmthali, and Ngugi Wa Thong'o. These earlier materials view the colonial enterprise from the point of view of the colonized. Shakespeare's "The Tempest," for example, is recast as Caliban's rather than Prospero's play in the works by Césaire and Chinweizu.

The selections in "In the World: Imagining Africa" address other issues than colonial oppression. African-American descendents from slavery are many generations removed from their African "homelands" and Africa has become for them what Salman Rushdie calls an "imaginary homeland." African-American writers are concerned with what Africa and America has contributed to their identity and to defining their present situation. Displaced Africans in Europe, like Senghor and other members of the Negritude movement, have more recent ties to Africa and they seek to place a decolonizing Africa in the context of the contemporary world.

Two longer works, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" treat these themes at greater length. Achebe describes a traditional Ibo community in Nigeria as it engages the pressures of political and religious colonization from Europe. Baldwin seeks to understand how African roots give meaning to African-American culture in a story about a jazz musician in Harlem.

In the World: Imagining Africa

This section addresses the topic of post-colonial literature by focusing on Africa. It is helpful to begin this unit by reviewing the colonial perspective on Africa from earlier works in the course, especially Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Chinua Achebe's response to it. The writers in this unit, both those from Africa and those from outside Africa, challenge the colonialist point of view. W.E. B. DuBois, one of the founders of the NAACP, defines the issue for African-Americans as reconciling the African and American halves of their "double consciousness." Music plays an especially large part in African-American culture, especially spiritual music, jazz, and the blues. DuBois, Johnson, and Hughes all treat this musical heritage. Far removed from their African roots, many African-Americans wondered whether their heritage still had relevance and whether their destiny was to return to Africa. Cullen, Baldwin, Brooks, and Morrison deal with aspects of these issues. Césaire and Senghor, writers from the African diaspora in Europe, seek to establish a more positive image of Africa and to dispel the negative associations with blackness. Claude McKay, a Jamaican, treats similar issues in an American context. Several African writers, Okol p'Bitek, Chinweizu and his colleagues, and Nadine Gordimer similarly write of African culture from a positive rather than a negative perspective.

Readings

--*Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6.
---"In the World: Imagining Africa," pp. 853-913.

Questions

1. What is the "double consciousness" described by W. E. B. DuBois? Is it evident in any of the selections by African American writers in this unit? In works by African writers?
2. How do the following writers characterize Africa: Johnson, Cullen, Senghor, Bitek, Baldwin, Morrison, Chinweizu, Gordimer? What differences do you see between the African and the African-American writers?
3. Many of the writers in this section are directly or indirectly addressing the question of whether or not there is a single African culture. What differing perspectives do you find on this issue?
4. Achebe criticizes Conrad of stereotyping his African characters and for not recognizing their individuality or the richness of their culture. Could any of the writers in this section be similarly criticized? How do the writers in this section provide a response to the "racism" that Achebe finds in *Heart of Darkness*?
5. In "Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom" Ngugi Wa Thiong'o argued for an African literature that would not be compromised by using the languages of the conquerors. The African writers in this section are writing in English or are translated into English. Can you see any compromises or complications in their point of view that may be caused by the languages they are using? Who is the audience that each writer seems to be addressing?

Chinua Achebe

Already considered a classic of African literature, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) describes a traditional Ibo community in Nigeria as it responds to the intrusion of western religious and political colonization. Unlike earlier works about Africa which, like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or the popular Tarzan stories, described Africa from the colonists' point of view, Achebe's novel is written from an African perspective. The colonizers do not enter the story until late in the novel, after Achebe has described in detail the daily life and ceremonial occasions in the Ibo community, but the disruptive presence of the Europeans draws out the contradictions within the traditional culture and leads to the tragic outcome of the story.

The traditional culture is presented with considerable complexity, and the hero, Okonkwo, is given psychological depth that reflects his personal history and his relationships with other members of his tribe. So his story, illustratrative of the forces of social change, is nonetheless also the story of a particular individual who determines the direction and outcome of his life choices.

Readings

--*Bedford Anthology of World Literature,* Book 6.
---Introduction and *Things Fall Apart*, pp. 1017-1112.

Questions

1. What does the description of each of the following characters contribute to the characterization of Okonkwo: Unoka, Ikemefuna, Ezeuda, Obierika?
2. What does Part I contribute to the development of the novel? Are the detailed descriptions of village events necessary to the development of the story?
3. How do Okonkwo's reactions to the various deaths that occur in the novel contribute to his characterization? How do they prepare for the ending of the novel?
4. Achebe criticizes Conrad for not seeing his African characters in *Heart of Darkness* as individuals. How does Achebe individualize the African characters in *Things Fall Apart*? Are his European characters individualized? What does each of the Europeans do to bring about the events at the end of the story?
5. How does Achebe's use of proverbs and similes contribute to his presentation of Africa and Africans? What stylistic devices does he use to characterize the missionaries and the other Europeans?
6. What is the tone of the final paragraph of the novel? Is it similar to that employed by Conrad in his descriptions of Kurtz?
7. What is the significance of Achebe's title, *Things Fall Apart*? How does it derive some of its meaning from its original context in Yeats's poem "The Second Coming"?
8. Consider *Things Fall Apart* as a tragedy, a genre traditionally defined as presenting a noble hero who is brought low by a tragic flaw in his character. Does Okonkwo meet the

classic criteria for a tragic hero? In what ways is he noble? Does he bring on his own death or is he a victim of fate?

9. Much is made in the novel of the distinct gender roles given to men and women. How are the different roles for men and women significant in the story?

James Baldwin

Although Baldwin rejected the notion of a single Black culture and considered the African-American experience distinctly different from that of formerly colonized Africans, he nonetheless considered the African-American experience distinct from that of white Americans. Like members of the earlier Harlem Renaissance who celebrated distinctive elements of African-American culture in their work, especially jazz, Baldwin presents Sonny's search for identity through the metaphor of music. As the narrator, much more committed to the goals and priorities of the dominant white culture than Sonny, seeks to know his brother better, he finally discovers Sonny in his music and comes to an understanding of him beyond the powers of language. The story of these two brothers can be taken as one attempting to reconcile the divisions between African and American halves of the self described by W. E. B. DuBois.

Readings

--*Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6.
---Introduction and "Sonny's Blues," pp. 826-852.

Questions

1. Compare the narrator and Sonny. How has their childhood experience differed? How do the goals each has for his life differ? How do the narrator's life choices complicate his relationship with Sonny? Is his account of Sonny's life reliable? What contributes to Sonny's desire to be a musician? How does the narrator change in the course of the story? How does Sonny?
2. When is the narrator telling this story? When it happens? At some later time? Is the time of its telling significant?
3. What does the story of Sonny's uncle's death contribute to "Sonny's Blues"? What is its relevance to the relationship between Sonny and his brother? What is its relevance to the theme of the blues?
4. The narrator promises his mother that he will care for Sonny and not let him fall? Does he keep this promise?
5. Trace the images of darkness and light through the story. What do they contribute thematically?
6. How many kinds of music are mentioned in the story? What is the significance of each? What different kinds of jazz are mentioned? How would Sonny be described as a jazz musician? When is he performing the blues? Can you identify any passages in the story that are "musical"?
7. Consider Sonny's experience and music as emblematic of the African-American experience. In what ways does the story suggest this connection?

Unit 6: Globalism

Almost overnight, it seems, we have entered a global world. The bombing of the twin towers in New York City on September 11, 2001, plus the economic crisis of 2008, made it abundantly clear that the United States cannot and does not exist in a vacuum as an independent entity. Every country in the world is connected and interrelated. Large corporations–what are called transnational corporations–understood this network long before individual countries became aware of it and began to act accordingly. The roots of globalism in the United States can be found as early as the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

Following the example of feminist organizations, various ethnic groups demanded a public hearing, and in some cases, became hyphenated, indicating a mixed allegiance and pointing to ties to other countries: e.g., African-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and so forth. The Vietnam War opened our eyes to Asia, and the emergence of China as a potential threat to the United States. And then in 1989, the Berlin Wall came down, the Soviet Union was broken up; jobs and manufacturing moved out of the United States–were outsourced–to cheaper labor pools in Mexico, India, China and the Philippines. Countries like Mexico and India were overpopulated and large groups of immigrants moved westward and northward, especially to the United States and Britain, searching for jobs. It was inevitable that these immigrants would find their literary voices and use them to express the trials and tribulations of living and working in a foreign country. This period of creativity marked the emergence of what is called "cross-cultural literature," which is characterized by writers who move easily from one culture and language to another and in some cases consider themselves to be citizens of the world. Globalism also impacted music and the cross-fertilization of artists from places like the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, the British Isles, and Scandinavia. In this unit, we first use a sampling of writings–*In the World: Crossing Cultures*–to explore the impact of India on the West and the experiences of Indians who move to England and America. Mohandas K. Gandhi who was instrumental in India's independence from Great Britain in 1947, describes the effect of his experiences in South Africa on his journey to a philosophy of nonviolent resistance. His influence in the United States is felt through the civil rights leader, Martin Luther King who pays tribute to Gandhi on a trip to India. The Mexican writer, Octavio Paz, describes his dramatic impressions of India on three visits to the country. Five writers of Indian descent, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, and Bharati Mukherjee, deal with the complexities of living outside of India, of traveling in a foreign culture, and of using the English language for describing who they are and where they come from.

The selection from Salman Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands" provides a good introduction to his short story, "The Courter," in its description of his problematic relationship to both India and England. "The Courter" describes what can happen to Indians who seek to adapt to the foreign conditions of living in London. Rushdie captures the strange mixture of languages, pop music, movies, and cultural mores that Indians attempt to accommodate in their daily lives. Jorge Luis Borges' story, "The Garden of Forking

Paths," raises the question, How do you capture the multi-layered, circular dimensions of reality with the linear structure of a Western language like Spanish or English with the typical pattern of Subject-Verb-Object? Reality is more often like a collage or series of mirrors than a straight line of events. As a young man, Pablo Neruda lived in foreign countries and was particularly attracted to the surrealism and symbolism of Spanish poets like Garcia Lorca. When he returned to Chili he assumed the voice of the people in their struggle for justice and independence from foreign oppressors. Milan Kundera uses a hitchhiking game to show that the tangled relationship between a young couple transcends national boundaries. Kundera's probing of the young man's and woman's psyches replaces a focus on plot and reflects a new age well acquainted with Sigmund Freud's analysis of the various layers of consciousness.

In the World: Crossing Cultures: The Example of India

India is a large country with over a billion people; more than half are illiterate, living in small villages on less than two dollars a day. It is a country of dramatic extremes: beauty and ugliness, wealth and poverty, beautiful buildings and hovels, spirituality and corruption. Despite attempts at modernization and democracy, people are still bound by caste and ancient codes of behavior. While the winds of globalism blow gently over the landscape, millions of Indians have chosen to move away to countries around the world: to study abroad and where possible to settle down with jobs and an economic future. A large number of Indians have moved to England and the United States.

The section, *In the World: Crossing Cutlure: The Example of India,* begins with Mohandas K. Gandhi, who represents India's unique reputation as a spiritual destination for Westerners, a country dotted with ashrams, gurus and sadhus. Gandhi's experiences in South Africa led to the seeds of his nonviolent approach to social and political change. Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence resistance had a huge impact on Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement in the United States. King describes this influence in "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi." The esteemed Nobel Laureate from Mexico, Octavio Paz, spent several years in India; in the present selection, he provides a detailed, vivid picture of his first visits to India and the extremes of beauty and squalor that one encounters in India. Raja Rao, an Indian novelist, raises the issue of trying to capture the unique flavor of Indian life in an adopted language, English. R. K. Narayan describes the sense of displacement experienced by Indians who travel in the United States and encounter the strangeness of American culture. Narayan's essay seems to be a reaction against globalism; he wants to sustain traditional culture. Salman Rushdie. who emigrated from India, explores the complexities of adopting English for his writing, becoming an English citizen, and residing in New York. He suggests that the transplanted writer becomes a new kind of being–the "translated man." Because of his many travels, V.S. Naipaul focuses on the new world culture, what he calls our "universal civilization." Bharati Mukherjee uses a tour of New York City to show how an Indian woman separated from her husband in India deals with his visit to America and how she is adapting to her new life.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6
---*In the World: Crossing Cultures: India,* pp, 1278-1326.

Questions

1. How did Gandhi's experiences in South Africa shape his philosophy of nonviolent resistance?
2. Why did Martin Luther King consider Gandhi to be "one of the half-dozen greatest men in world history? Can you summarize Gandhi's influence on King? Why was King so famous when he visited India?

3. What attracts Octavio Paz to India? How does he describe the extremes that he found there?
4. Why does the use of the English language challenge Raja Rao's desire to portray life in India?
5. Why does Narayan warn against Indians spending too much time in the United States?
6. Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul spell out the advantages of being exposed to different cultures, different ideas and languages? What are these advantages and how do these two writers differ in their approaches to the topic of a writer's displacement in a foreign country?
7. How does Mukherjee show how the wife in "A Wife's Story" has become estranged from both her husband and India? Does the wife seem satisfied with her new identity? According to Mukherjee, what are the challenges faced by an Indian woman in New York City?

Salman Rushdie

Salman Rushdie's early biography provides a context for understanding the subject matter of his early writings. From a Muslim family, he was born in 1947 in a largely Hindu Bombay (now Mumbai). When he was fourteen, he was sent to Rugby, a school in England. After three years he lived briefly with his family in Pakistan, which became an independent country as a part of the independence agreement when India separated from Britain. Pakistan was filled with Muslim refugees from various parts of India. Rushdie returned to England to attend Cambridge University. After trying to settle in Karachi, Pakistan, he moved to London and eventually settled in New York City. Acquainted with both Eastern and Western cultures, Rushdie's writings became a kind of dialogue between the two, recognizing both the positives and negatives of each. Rushdie saw firsthand what happens to refugees and immigrants caught between two cultures, between India and England.

His short story, "The Courter," explores the lives of characters who have been separated from their homelands: the young narrator, who wants to become a British citizen; an elderly Indian woman, Certainly-Mary, who longs to return to her roots in India; the porter who was originally from Eastern Europe. Rushdie uses the struggles with learning a foreign language, the search for identity in pop music and movies, the misunderstandings of relationships, to illustrate the challenges of moving from one culture to another. There is also humor when the narrator's father confuses *teats* with *nipples* and when Certainly-Mary gets her sari tangled in an escalator. An additional hill that Indian migrants must climb in order to settle comfortably in England involves the history of India as a British colony: the British feelings of superiority towards India and Indians.

The story comes to a kind of resolution when Certainly-Mary returns to India and the narrator becomes a British citizen, which gives him freedom to come and go. Nevertheless, he captures his ongoing struggle at the end of the story with a Wild West metaphor:

> But I, too, have ropes around my neck, I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, *choose, choose.*
> I buck, I snort, I whinny, I rear, I kick. Ropes, I do not choose between you.
> Lassoes, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both. Do you hear? I refuse to choose.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6
---Introduction and "The Courter," pp, 1255-1277.

Questions

1. Who is the courter? How did he get his name?
2. What is the attitude of the narrator toward Certainly-Mary? To his family?
3. What significance does chess have on the rest of the story? What does the narrator mean when he calls chess "their private language?
4. What are some examples of Eastern and Western culture in the story?

5. What is the significance of the narrator's anecdote about the American schoolboy crying after the assassination of President Kennedy?
6. What is the effect of describing the thugs who stab Mecir as Beatles?
7. The uses of language in "The Courter" are very important. What do the many allusions, puns, plays on words, and other verbal devices contribute to the overall meaning of the story?

Jorge Luis Borges

In addition to being a writer of fiction, Borges was a linguist and a scholar, with a special interest in the history of consciousness and comparative religion. In his essay, "The Argentine Writer and Tradition," Borges asks the question, "What is our Argentine tradition?" His answer: " I believe our tradition is all of Western culture. . . ." In his writing, he often crosses the traditional borders between genres, blending his various interests and dissolving the separations between kinds of writing: between essay and fiction, between poetry and essay, between fiction and religious tract, between Judaism, Christianity, Taoism and Buddhism. "The Garden of Forking Paths," for example, begins with a reference to a piece of history, as if Borges were initially writing an essay on World War I. But then the writer introduces fiction by referring to a fragmentary document by Yu Tsun which creates the basic situation that the rest of the story will eventually resolve.

Since "The Garden of Forking Paths" is a kind of puzzle, it might assist the reader to summarize the action. A Chinese man, Yu Tsun, working as a spy for the German government, needs to communicate the name of a British artillery park to his superiors before he is caught by Captain Richard Madden, an Irishman working for British intelligence. Yu Shun finds a man in the phone book, Stephen Albert; Albert is the name of the British park. Yu Shun must go to Albert's home and kill him in order to communicate with his superiors who read the newspapers for some kind of sign. By coincidence, Albert is a sinologist who has translated Yu Tsun's great grandfather, Ts'ui Pen, and solved the mystery of Ts'ui Pen's labyrinth, which, in fact, is a complex book. With the approach of Captain Madden, Yu Shun shoots Stephen Albert and thereby communicates the name of the British park. Yu Tsun is apprehended by Madden and sent to the gallows.

The central metaphor in "The Garden of Forking Paths," is the labyrinth, the creation of Yu Tsun's ancestor, Ts'ui Pen. Yu Tsun envisions "a labyrinth of labyrinths, of one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars." The structure of the story itself is a kind of labyrinth. The fact that Yu Tsun is the great grandson of Ts'ui Pen shows how Borges treats time as circular and not simply linear, as in past, present, future. The point of the story, of course, does not rest with the plot and the communication of Albert's name, but with Borges' clever dissecting of the circular nature of time, and how all of the events might have resulted in a totally different sequence with a different ending.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6

---Introduction and "The Garden of Forking Paths" pp, 648-659.

Questions

1. Why is Yu Tsun a spy for Germany? How is his choice of sides a reflection of how Chinese are regarded in the West?

2. How do the story of the *Thousand and One Nights* and Scheherezade relate to Ts'ui Pen's novel, *The Garden of Forking Paths*?

3. How does the image of the labyrinth evolve in the story? How is it related to the title of the story?
4. How are the selections from Ts'ui Pen's book relevant to the story?
5. What is the connection between Ts'ui Pen's murder and Stephen Albert's?
6. Why does Yu Tsun treat his own death with such fatalism?

Pablo Neruda

The greatness of Pablo Neruda as a poet rests on his dazzling uses of language, his sparkling, energetic images and metaphors. As he matured he began to see his literary role as a spokesman for his home country, Chile. He became an outspoken critic whose poetry could promote justice and bring recognition to the social conditions of the working class. The Nobel Prize winner from Chile, Gabriela Mistral, who was an early mentor of Neruda's, compared Neruda to Walt Whitman, praising him for "that ease of the American man, who knows neither hindrances nor obstacles. . .His Americanism is present in his works in the form of a vigorous freedom, in a blessed audacity, and in a bitter fertility."

Neruda's "Ode with a Lament" is indebted to surrealism, and is reminiscent of the famed Spanish poet, Garcia Lorca. In line after line, tender love images are followed by something startling: "You generate kisses and you kill ants." The effect is both playful and engaging. The associations with death are perhaps memories of previous loves that now bring only jarring images of sadness. The challenge of "Sexual Water" is to follow Neruda's libidinous litany and ascertain whether sexuality has become too dominant in Western culture. "Alberto Rojas Jimenez Comes Flying" is a testimonial to a deep friendship with images of sadness and pain, coldness and death. The poem does not appear to end with some kind of resolution. The "Ode of the Sun to the People's Army" is clearly a public poem, a call to action. The repetition of the Spanish *salud* carries several meanings: *salud* means "health," but in this poem, it also means "forward," "good luck," as a way of encouraging the struggle against Fascism in Spain. The last five poems in this anthology represent a change in focus. As Neruda became more directly involved in Chile's politics, from 1939 onward, his poems are directed to his countrymen and to the Americas. "Hymn and Return" is a call to action. "The United Fruit Co." exposes exploitation by an international company. The last lines are a powerful description of how native peoples are abused. The section from *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* is a tribute to the Inca who built Macchu Picchu in Peru. Their accomplishments include both the domestication of corn and the vicuña. The "Ode to Salt," is a fanciful celebration of salt which carries "the inward flavor or the infinite." In the "Poet's Obligation," the poet has a mission to carry the energetic life of the sea to all those sedentary people who are living or working in various kinds of "prisons," so that "through me, freedom and the sea / will make their answer to the shuttered heart."

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6
---Introduction and poems, pp, 672-692.

Questions

1. What qualities of his past is the poet lamenting in "Ode with a Lament"?
2. What are Neruda's attitudes toward sexuality in "Sexual Water"? Why is sexuality compared with water?
3. How does Neruda use rhythmic language in "Ode of the Sun to the People's Army" to arouse his readers to take action?

4. In “Hymn and Return,” why does Neruda describe Chile as being surrounded by “aggressive water,” “fighting snow,” and a “hostile sky”? What do you think Neruda means when he describes “the hugeness of an America that is asleep” at the end of “Hymn and Return”?

5. In the opening lines of “The United Fruit Co.,” Neruda employs a biblical style and makes reference to Jehovah; what connections does he make between the Bible and the large American corporations?

6. What does Macchu Picchu symbolize for Neruda? Why is it important to recognize the important contributions of native peoples in the Americas?

7. How does Neruda arrive at the description of salt as “the inward flavor of the infinite”? With this description, is Neruda being serious or comic, or both?

8. Why does Neruda describes some people’s lives as prisons in “Poet’s Obligations”? On what aspects of waves and water does Neruda connect with the poet’s responsibilities in “Poet’s Obligation”?

Milan Kundera

In many of Kundera's writings he is concerned with the intersection of politics and individual lives. When he lived in his native Czechoslovakia under communism he explored how an oppressive regime has an impact on its citizens. Even though he was a member of the Communist Party as a youth, he criticized the Party and promoted a more open and liberal society. He wrote "The Hitchhiking Game" before he moved to France in 1975 to become a writer in exile; politics, however, has a very small role to play in the story, which is about a vacationing, young couple engaged in a role-playing game. The young man is twenty-eight years old and the young woman, referred to as a "girl" is somewhat younger and has "quite a tiresome job in an unpleasant environment, many hours of overtime without compensatory leisure and, at home, a sick mother." The young man feels trapped by an eight-hour a day job, which "infiltrated the remaining time with the compulsory boredom of meetings and home study. . .and infiltrated the wretchedly little time he had left for his private life as well." The game begins as a kind of fantasy, designed to allow both the man and the woman to escape from themselves and their tedious work lives. The young man plays the self-assured tough guy who picks up a seductive hitchhiker. The game allows them to try out roles which were previously foreign to them. These various roles are at once exciting and depressing.

Their role-playing seems to uncover sides of themselves that are new and revelatory–even enjoyable. The ending of the story, however, reveals the insecurities of each of them, their lack of self-understanding and the near impossibility of really understanding one's partner. His cruelty in the cheap hotel room leads to her pathetic whimpering, "I am me, I am me, I am me. . . ." Kundera is either directly or indirectly indebted to the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, who uncovered the numerous layers of consciousness and revealed how the ego is responsible for developing stories as accommodations to reality, and, if necessary, promoting lies and deceptions in our relations to others.

Readings

--*The Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, Book 6
---Introduction and "The Hitchhiking Game," pp, 1001-1017.

Questions

1. Describe the state of the relationship between the young man and the girl at the beginning of the story. How does the relationship change over the course of the narrative?
2. How do the separate jobs of the couple lead to the hitchhiking game?
3. Why does the young man become angry with the girl when she seems to be playing a role suitable to his? What is it that she does that upsets him?
4. "The Hitchhiking Game" depicts a kind of sexual power struggle between the man and the girl. What kinds of powers do each of them have and how are they used? Does Kundera seem to favor the man or the woman in the story?

5. Why is it so difficult for the young man at the end of the story to abandon the game and become more human and compassionate again?