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# Heroes and Legends: The Most Influential Characters of Literature

Course Guidebook

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Saint Louis University



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## Thomas A. Shippey, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus  
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**P**rofessor Thomas A. Shippey is Professor Emeritus at Saint Louis University. He holds B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Cambridge. Professor Shippey began teaching at the University of Birmingham in England and became a Tutorial Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, and University Lecturer in English at the same university. He subsequently held the Chair of English Language and Medieval Literature at the University of Leeds before moving to the Walter J. Ong, S.J., Chair of Humanities at Saint Louis University. He has been a Visiting Professor at Harvard University and The University of Texas at Austin.

Professor Shippey has published more than 100 articles, mostly in the fields of Old and Middle English language and literature but also on Old French, Old Norse, and comparative medieval literature. He also has taken a long-standing interest in modern fantasy and science fiction, collaborating with the science fiction author Harry Harrison on three novels and coauthoring three more with him. Professor Shippey is a regular reviewer for *The Wall Street Journal* on both medieval and modern topics and writes for several other journals, including *The Times Literary Supplement* and the *London Review of Books*. In recent years, he was President of the International Society for the Study of Medievalism. He is now a member of the Editorial Board for the series *National Cultivation of Culture* and a contributor to the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*. He is, however, probably best known for his three books on J.R.R. Tolkien. He was an adviser on pronunciation for Peter Jackson's three *Lord of the Rings* movies and figures prominently on the backup DVDs of all three.

Professor Shippey has given invited lectures and keynote speeches at conferences in at least 25 states, Washington DC, and more than 10 countries in Europe. Former students of his are professors at a number of major

universities and colleges in Europe and America. Often replayed on television is his appearance in *The Story of English*, hosted by Robert McCrum and Robert MacNeil, in which he conducted a dialogue in Old English and Old Norse to show how misunderstandings could arise in a bilingual culture. He recently cotaught an innovative online course on philology through Tolkien for the Mythgard Institute and is working on a book on Old Germanic poetry generally, provisionally entitled *How the Heroes Talk*.

Professor Shippey's books include *The Road to Middle-earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology*; *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage* (with Andreas Haarder); *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*; and his edited collection *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*. The last two of these won Mythopoeic Society Scholarship Awards in 2001 and 2008, respectively. He also received a Distinguished Scholarship Award in 1996 from the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts. ■

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## Disclaimer

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In this guidebook, the spelling of character names in literature from antiquity and the Middle Ages may vary according to particular sources used by the professor.

# Heroes and Legends: The Most Influential Characters of Literature

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## Scope:

Storytelling, and the creation of heroes and heroines to tell stories about, is the most universal human art form. Over the millennia of human history, millions of tales, novels, romances, and epics have been written and published, and many more must have been told in the far longer millennia of prehistory. The vast majority vanished without a trace once their immediate purpose had been served—forgotten, discarded, out of print.

A small number survive and become classics. Of that small number, an even smaller number does more than survive: They inspire imitations, sequels, remakes, and responses. It is the heroes and heroines—and sometimes the villains—of these super-survivors who have created and continue to create our imaginative world. “Don’t the great tales never end?” asks the hobbit Sam Gamgee in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Sam has good reason to see that the answer is: No, they don’t.

This course considers a selection of the men and women—and, in one case, monsters—who are at the heart of the “great tales.” Their history spans 3,000 years, from the epics of Homer to the latest publishing and multimedia sensations, such as Harry Potter. The characters in them have given words to the language, such as “odyssey” or “quixotic.” They have powerfully affected political history, as in the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom, who brought forward, perhaps even enabled, the abolition of slavery. No one can be sure what effect the grim warning of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-four* had on generations of politicians, but the word “Orwellian” remains very much alive in our political rhetoric. We do know that Ian Fleming’s James Bond story *From Russia with Love* was one of John F. Kennedy’s favorite books. Great-tale heroes have also created whole genres of fiction, as Sherlock Holmes did for the detective story and Dracula did for vampires. Sometimes they have revived them, as Tolkien’s hobbits and heroes did for epic fantasy, now once again popular in the mass market. Many characters have become

literally iconic—images that everyone recognizes—such as James Fenimore Cooper’s Deerslayer, the American rifleman, or Robin Hood with his bow, both of them embodying the same spirit of freedom in the greenwood though hundreds of years and thousands of miles apart. Generations of women have had their resolve strengthened not to submit to domination and abuse by the (very different) presentations of female courage and independence in Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath*, Jane Austen’s *Elizabeth Bennet*, and Alice Walker’s *Celie*.

Heroic continuity, however, is only one part of this course’s thematic structure. Although some things seem to be universal, such as our admiration for courage, even heroes and heroines are affected by changing cultural values and, in their turn, contribute to those changes. The tale of Arthur’s queen Guinevere would have been impossible without the medieval cult of romantic love, which would have seemed alien and unreasonable to earlier heroes, such as *Odysseus* or *Beowulf*. Not only would the story of *Robinson Crusoe* have been physically impossible before the European age of discovery, but *Robinson’s* very thought processes are those of the new age of capitalism. Both *Orwell’s Winston Smith* and *Fleming’s James Bond* are products of the Cold War era, the one expressing fear; the other, defiance of the new specter of totalitarianism, imposed from within or without. *Tolkien’s hobbits* clearly represent the spirit of the citizen armies of the two World Wars, their essentially peaceful nature exceeded only by their determination to do their duty.

By studying these characters, the super-successes of literature, you will come to understand the secrets of super-success: the new idea, yes, but also the old ideas and images reshaped, sometimes coming back after all memory of them seems to have faded. You will also sense the great currents of historical and cultural change to which the authors have reacted and that their characters embody and express. Most of all, the “great tales” offer an insight into the human heart, in all its variety and complexity, that nothing else can provide. ■

# Frodo Baggins—A Reluctant Hero

## Lecture 1

**W**hy do some fictional characters hold our attention, not just for a few days or months but for decades, even generations? In this course, we'll look at some of literature's most compelling heroes and legends—characters as diverse as Beowulf and Elizabeth Bennet—to try to understand what it is about them that captures our imagination. Why did the adventures of Odysseus enthrall the ancient Greeks, and why have they continued to captivate readers to the present day? What made Sherlock Holmes a celebrity in Victorian England, and why does he continue to be a bankable hero in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Hollywood? In this course, we'll meet many heroes, heroines, and villains that will help us answer these questions.

### A Pivotal Moment for Frodo and Sam

- A pivotal moment in *The Lord of the Rings* comes near the end of the second volume of the trilogy, when Frodo Baggins and his companion Sam have gone off on their own to try to carry out their mission. That mission is to get to the heart of Mordor, the land of the Dark Lord, and there, to throw the Ring of Power into the fires of the Cracks of Doom. This is the only way to destroy it and, thus, break Sauron's power forever.
- The two companions know they're facing thousands of goblins and trolls and the Dark Lord himself, and there's another threat they don't know about: Shelob, the giant spider, who guards the secret entrance to Mordor. Even if they get past her and through all the Dark Lord's inner defenses, even if they manage to destroy the Ring, they don't have a plan for how to get back. It's a suicide mission.
- Frodo and Sam pause to rest and begin to talk about legends and old adventures. Sam remarks that the two are in a legend now and speculates that one day, someone may write a book about them, making Frodo "the famousest of the hobbits." In response, Frodo

laughs, believing that the idea of himself as a hero in a book is genuinely funny.

- Nothing like laughter has been heard in the ruined land on the outskirts of Mordor for thousands of years. In such a place, Frodo's laughter is a kind of exorcism. It dispels the gloom and defeatism that are among the chief weapons of the Dark Lord.
- Shortly afterward, Sam and Frodo go to sleep, with their minds at rest. It's an undramatic moment, but it sheds light on the question of what makes some characters unforgettable and some stories, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, so successful: Nothing has the same charm as the completely unexpected—unless it's the unexpected that we've been unknowingly anticipating.

### Unexpected Heroes

- There are likely many secrets to the unparalleled success of Tolkien's work, but among them must be the hobbits Bilbo and Frodo. Can hobbits—small, dedicatedly unwarlike creatures without strength or courage—be heroes? Although they are certainly unexpected heroes, they seem to be the kind of heroes that readers were waiting for—without knowing they were waiting. What caused that situation?
- Literary talent and inspiration are, of course, among the requirements for lasting success in the world of fiction. But an author's responses to events and changing cultural values are also among those requirements. Further, writers don't just respond to changing cultural values, but they also help to shape them.
- In Tolkien's case, he was responding, in part, to the two World Wars. Two of Tolkien's three closest friends died in World War I, and perhaps even more significant than their deaths was the way in which they died: without romance or glory and without ever seeing the men who killed them. This impersonal element led to a paradox.
  - On the one hand, more and more people were being required to behave heroically; on the other hand, after all those impersonal



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Much of Tolkien's world is medieval—full of knights and dragons—but it's also contemporary in the picture it gives of the nature of true heroism.

and mechanical deaths, it was no longer possible to believe in the traditional images of heroism, brave charges, and gallant stands.

- This dominant mood was expressed in a post-1918 war memoir by the novelist Robert Graves: *Good-Bye to All That*.
- After 1918, traditional heroism seemed to be impossible. The most common reaction was cynicism, as with Graves, but what those who were not cynics were waiting for—whether they knew it or not—was an image of a new style of heroism that they could believe in and not feel cynical about. That's what Tolkien provided with the hobbits.

### **Bilbo: A New Heroic Style**

- In the early stages of Tolkien's novel *The Hobbit*, Bilbo is anything but a hero compared with the fierce dwarves. In fact, Bilbo does the worst thing a creature can do in the old heroic world: He loses

self-control. When Thorin tries to recruit him for an expedition to kill the dragon Smaug, Bilbo shrieks and falls down, “shaking like a jelly.” Right from the start, on an old heroic scale of 1 to 10, Bilbo is a 0. But throughout the book, he rises steadily up the scale, with perhaps five main turning points.

- In chapter 5, when Bilbo becomes separated from the dwarves as they try to make their escape from the goblins, he comes to a goblin tunnel. He draws his elvish blade, finds it comforting, and goes on to meet the strange creature Gollum, win a riddle-contest with him, and make his own escape.
- Bilbo takes another step at the start of chapter 6. He has just made up his mind that it is “his duty,” having escaped from the tunnels, to go back and look for the dwarves when he overhears the dwarves deciding to leave him in the tunnels. At this moment, Bilbo, for the first time, is definitely ahead of the dwarves when it comes to courage.
- More clearly marked is the moment in chapter 8 when Bilbo wakes up to find himself being attacked by a giant spider and manages to kill it. He feels “a different person,” enough of an old-style hero by this time to give his sword a name, Sting.
- But Bilbo’s peak of courage comes in chapter 12 when he conquers his own fear and goes down the tunnel to the cave of Smaug to steal the cup.
- The final step up the heroic scale for Bilbo comes when he creeps away from the dwarves and hands over the priceless Arkenstone jewel to Bard and the Elvenking for them to use as a bargaining point against the dwarves. This is courage of a different kind because it could be seen as dishonorable, even treacherous.
- Bilbo’s heroism is different from traditional saga-style heroism in important ways. First, none of his five main turning points (except the last, to some extent) is recognized by the outside world. They

all take place when Bilbo is alone, and most of them when he is in the dark. His courage is shown in conquering his own fear. Further, Bilbo's decision concerning the Arkenstone represents moral courage—doing what many would call wrong and accepting the risk of blame. Both styles of courage seem especially relevant to the modern world.

### **Frodo's Heroism**

- Frodo, too, starts off fairly low on the scale of heroism. When Gandalf first explains to him about the Ring and the danger it creates, his response is: "I wish it need not have happened in my time." For those of Tolkien's generation, that phrase was reminiscent of Neville Chamberlain's claim that the agreement he made with Hitler in 1938 had brought "peace in our time." The words "in our time" or "in my time" were associated with appeasement and shirking one's duty.
- Like Bilbo, Frodo improves slowly. His first real step up the scale comes at the end of the Council of Elrond. None of the leaders of Middle-earth can decide what to do about destroying the Ring, though they all agree that it must be done, and it must be done by taking it to the heart of the Dark Lord's realm of Mordor. Faced with this task, everyone falls silent. Then Frodo stands up, filled with dread, and says, "I will take the Ring ... though I do not know the way."
- Unlike Bilbo, Frodo is not on his own and he's not in the dark, but he shows a similar kind of understated courage. What Frodo must overcome is his own fear, and he gets no help in doing so. And that continues to be his style. He plugs through the Dead Marshes, around the Black Gate, past Shelob the spider, and into Mordor itself.
- In addition to his own fear, Frodo must also overcome temptation. He is offered repeated opportunities to avoid his duty—to hand over the Ring or use it himself. He and Sam are also tempted, in the Land of Shadow, to do the expedient thing and kill Gollum.

- They have every excuse for doing so, because Gollum would not hesitate to kill them if he could get back the Ring. But another lesson learned in Tolkien's time was that just because the other side does something, it doesn't mean you should do it, too.
- Frodo and Sam feel pity for Gollum, and they spare him, as Bilbo did in *The Hobbit*. The hobbits are big enough—spiritually, not physically—not to take advantage.
- Ironically, pity for Gollum is vital because Frodo fails at the last temptation and chooses not to destroy the Ring. It is Gollum, in the end, who destroys it.
- It's striking that after achieving his quest, which makes him, in a way, the major hero of *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo increasingly fades out. He plays very little part in the liberation of the Shire. Back home, his deeds aren't recognized. He never really recovers from the physical and mental wounds he has suffered. And Sam is pained to discover how little respect he gets.
  - Frodo receives the kind of treatment that our own veterans have often received: not much in the way of thanks, honor, or rehabilitation.
  - That's part of the modern heroic style, as well. Heroism is lonely while you're doing it and unrecognized once it's over. But that just makes it more heroic because there's nothing to keep you at your duty except your own sense of duty.
- Tolkien created characters who expressed the feelings and experiences of the men and women of the last century's citizen armies. They were not professionals and not necessarily volunteers, yet they were often called on to perform tasks that the warrior elites of the past would have regarded as impossibly brave.

## Essential Reading

Tolkien, *The Hobbit*.

———, *The Lord of the Rings*.

## Suggested Reading

Colebatch, *Return of the Heroes*.

Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War*.

Haber, ed., *Meditations on Middle-earth*.

Shippey, *Tolkien*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What do you think makes a hero or heroine? What qualities do you most admire?
2. This lecture argues that ideas of heroism changed in Tolkien's lifetime (1892–1973). Have they changed in yours?

# Odysseus—The Trickster Hero

## Lecture 2

The legendary Greek hero Odysseus is one of the few literary characters who have given a word to the English language—in this case, “odyssey,” meaning a long journey, full of exciting adventures. Odysseus himself has also become something of a symbol. For us, he symbolizes the urge to explore, to know, to push beyond the boundaries. In this lecture, we’ll focus on what makes Odysseus different from the other Greek heroes who surround him, such men as Achilles, Ajax, and Diomedes. They fit our standard definition of hero: strong and fearless. Odysseus is those things, too, but he’s also something else: *polymetis*, “the man of many wiles.” Odysseus is a trickster.

### Background to *The Odyssey*

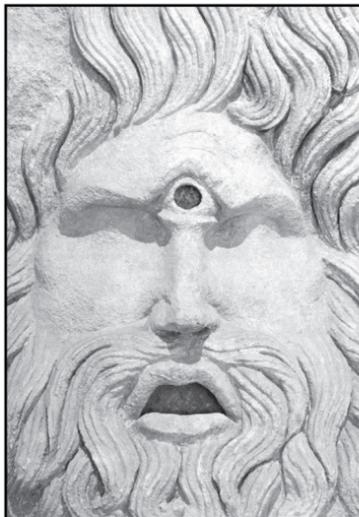
- The starting points of European literature are *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, two epic poems in ancient Greek, long said to be by the blind poet Homer. Odysseus is a prominent figure in the first and the central figure of the second.
- *The Iliad* tells the story of a pivotal moment in the first known event in European history: the Trojan War. In that war, a Greek alliance besieged and, after 10 years, destroyed the city of Troy through the famous stratagem of the wooden horse, a stratagem that was, of course, devised by Odysseus.
- *The Odyssey* then tells the story of Odysseus’s return home after the war to the island of Ithaca, a voyage that took him 10 years. *The Odyssey* starts near the end of that 10-year return trip, for most of which Odysseus has been held captive by the nymph Calypso on her island.
- Odysseus has been absent from Ithaca for 20 years, and the nobles there want him declared dead. They also want his wife, Penelope, to choose one of them as her husband, who will inherit

Odysseus's property. To force her into this decision, a crowd of prospective suitors has moved in, demanding to be feasted every day. The suitors also mean to kill Penelope's son, Telemachus, as a potential avenger.

- Thus, the poem has three strands: (1) At the start, it follows Telemachus's attempts to dodge the suitors and round up support; (2) at the end, it details Odysseus's return and the cunning tactics he uses to eliminate Penelope's suitors; (3) in between, it tells of Odysseus's release by Calypso and his eventual washing up on the shore of Phaeakia.
- At the Phaeakian court, Odysseus is asked to tell his story, which he does. This central core of the poem is the real odyssey. It covers Odysseus's 10 adventures from leaving Troy to reaching Calypso, including his dealings with Circe the witch, his survival after hearing the song of the Sirens, and other famous stories.

### Encounter with the Cyclops

- After leaving Troy, Odysseus and his crew are blown off course to the Land of the Lotus-Eaters. There, the inhabitants eat a plant that makes them so happy they never want to leave. Odysseus manages to escape with his addicted crewmen and lands his ships on an island, from which they can see smoke rising from another island nearby. Curious, Odysseus sets off with one ship to explore the other island and look for provisions.
- Odysseus finds the land of the Cyclopes. These are giants



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**Because his fellow Cyclopes have no social organization, they fail to help Polyphemus after he has been blinded by Odysseus.**

who have only one eye, in the middle of their foreheads. They're completely uncivilized, with no social organization. Each lives by himself in a cave, herding flocks of sheep and goats and living off milk and cheese. They don't know how to make bread or wine. They're also man-eaters.

- Odysseus finds the cave of the giant Polyphemus and notes the sheep pens, the pails of milk, and the racks of cheeses. His men want to take the provisions and return to the ship, but Odysseus decides they should wait inside the cave to see the giant. When Polyphemus returns, he seals the cave with an enormous boulder.
- Odysseus appeals to Polyphemus, reminding him that they are guests, and Zeus, father of the gods, is the protector of guests. Polyphemus is unmoved; he seizes two crewmen, dashes their brains out, and eats them raw. He plans to eat the men two at a time, at breakfast and dinner.
- Polyphemus falls asleep as soon as he's eaten, but Odysseus can't kill him because he and his men will still be trapped in the cave. And although Polyphemus will open the cave in the morning, he'll guard the entrance to prevent the men from sneaking out.
- Odysseus considers his resources, notes his enemy's weakness—his one eye—and makes a plan. He and his men fashion a stake from an olive tree Polyphemus has in the cave. Odysseus then offers Polyphemus wine, to which the giant is unaccustomed. Polyphemus asks Odysseus's name and promises him a gift in return for the wine. Odysseus says that his name is Nobody, and Polyphemus says that his return gift will be to eat Nobody last.
- During the night, as Polyphemus lies drunk, the men heat the olive spike in the fire and thrust it into the giant's one eye. He howls for help, and other Cyclopes come from their caves nearby and ask who has attacked him. Polyphemus, of course, shouts out, "Nobody did it," and the other Cyclopes simply return to their caves.

- In the morning, Polyphemus rolls the rock aside to let the sheep out; he sits by the door, running his hands over the sheep to ensure that there is no man with them. But Odysseus has tied the big rams together in threes, using strips of willow from the giant's bed, and slung a man under each one. He goes out last, under the biggest of the rams.
- Having escaped, the Greeks round up as many sheep as they can, load up their galley, and row for saltwater. In spite of the pleas of his crew, Odysseus taunts Polyphemus, telling him who blinded him. The giant, whose father is the sea god Poseidon, prays to his father to put a curse on Odysseus. Although the hero's divine protector, Athene, will not allow Odysseus to be drowned, Poseidon sees to it that it takes 10 years for him to reach home. And in those 10 years, he loses all his companions.

### **Cultural Values**

- As this story shows, Odysseus is certainly tricky and resourceful, but is he a good leader? He's a survivor, but the people who are with him often don't survive for long. This brings us to the issue of differences in cultural values. A hero in one culture may be very different from a hero in another.
- Odysseus's cultural values are those of a Heroic Age, meaning a particular set of social circumstances. These circumstances have arisen only twice in European history: once after the fall of the Roman Empire (400–600 A.D.) and once earlier, at a time that is difficult to pinpoint.
  - Most people think that Homer created his poems about 750 years before the birth of Christ. The Trojan War took place perhaps 300 years before that.
  - Archaeology has revealed that the Greek cities that launched the assault on Troy—Mycenae, Tiryns, and Knossos—supported a complex and incredibly bureaucratic civilization, yet Homer knew nothing about their advances.

- The heroes in Homer’s poems don’t seem to have heard of writing, and most scholars think that Homer himself couldn’t read or write. His poems were composed and passed on for centuries by word of mouth.
- The old city-civilizations that Homer’s poems commemorate collapsed—so completely that their treasures weren’t found until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What happened, and what effect did it have?
- Hesiod, a Greek poet from about the same time as Homer, gives us a clear answer: imperial overreach. He tells of a race of heroes destroyed by “grim war.” The great cities of southern Greece wasted their energy trying to capture the lands of central Greece (Thebes) and launching a naval attack on Troy, perhaps hoping to seize control of the grain trade with the Black Sea area. The survivors were sitting ducks for new enemies. Since that time, says Hesiod, man had been living in an age of cruelty, deceit, and anarchy.
- In a Heroic Age—a post-collapse age—a primary cultural value is this: Every man for himself. In such a time, there’s not much more social organization than the Cyclopes have. Anyone who strays outside his kin group is likely to be made a slave. Authority has no basis except personal violence, and the only moral restraint is the idea that the gods may punish cruelty to guests and strangers.
- These circumstances may account for some of the complexity of Odysseus’s character. He might like to be more civilized, but in a Heroic Age, what makes a hero are a sword, spear, and shield and the ability to use them.

### Odysseus’s Return

- In the time of Odysseus, the Greeks had invented neither democracy nor aristocracy. The Greek heroes were autocrats; for them, power was personal. But that presents a problem for Odysseus when he returns home. He can’t reveal himself to his wife and suitors and attempt to claim his rights. The suitors will merely cut his throat. Odysseus must rely on himself and a few advantages: He’s tricky;

he has friends among the slaves; and he possesses the useful quality of self-restraint.

- Odysseus returns to Ithaca disguised as an old beggar. He is kicked by his own goatherds, and the suitors throw things at him, but he keeps up his act. His old housekeeper sees through his disguise, but she keeps quiet about Odysseus's identity. Touchingly, his old dog, Argos, also recognizes his master and wags his tail.
- Still, getting rid of more than 100 suitors will be trickier than escaping from the cave of Polyphemus. Odysseus has Eumaeus the swineherd on his side, Eumaeus's friend the cowherd, and Telemachus—all now in on the plot. The hero develops a four-point plan to trap the suitors in the hall where they feast and trick them into allowing him to shoot his old war bow. Once he has the bow and starts shooting, his supporters will fend off the suitors until he has shot all the arrows. By then, the suitors will be panicked, and Odysseus and the others will finish the job.
- The plan doesn't go exactly as expected, but it works. Odysseus is merciless. When those who have been disloyal to him are dead, he rescues his old father from the hovel where he's been living, rejoins Penelope, and resumes his rule over Ithaca.

### Essential Reading

Homer (Fitzgerald, trans.), *The Odyssey*.

### Suggested Reading

Bradford, *Ulysses Found*.

Finley, *The World of Odysseus*.

Fox, *Travelling Heroes*.

Graves, *Homer's Daughter*.

Hall, *The Return of Ulysses*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Is being a hero compatible with having survival qualities?
2. Have trickster heroes (such as Brer Rabbit or Old Man Coyote) dwindled nowadays to being figures of fun, or do they still exist as role models?

# Aeneas—The Straight Arrow

## Lecture 3

As we've said, the great tales continue, but they may be continued in a different spirit from their originals. Those who decide to continue the great tales may do so in a way that contradicts or even reverses what has been told before. They may fill a gap in an original tale or add new elements that no one could have predicted. In this lecture, we'll explore Virgil's attempt, in his Latin epic the *Aeneid*, to continue—and compete with—*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Virgil's hero, Aeneas, is a kind of anti-Odysseus, an archetypal straight arrow. We'll also see that Virgil writes into the gap, filling in the story of the fall of Troy.

### *Pius Aeneas*

- Homer left a time gap between *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. At the end of *The Iliad*, Hector, the great Trojan hero, is dead, and it's certain that Troy is going to fall. *The Odyssey* starts with Odysseus on his way home, after Troy has fallen. Homer does not deal with the Greeks' invasion of Troy or the final destruction of the city, but that's where Virgil starts.
- Just like Homer, Virgil tells his story in flashback, through Aeneas speaking at the court of Queen Dido. The Greeks, including Odysseus, have exploded out of the wooden horse and poured into Troy. The situation is hopeless. Hector, the dead hero, appears to Aeneas in a dream and tells him it's his duty to Troy to get out.
- Aeneas fights his way through the streets but is unable to rescue King Priam, Queen Hecuba, or Princess Cassandra. He is about to take revenge on Helen—the cause of the war—when his mother, the goddess Venus, appears to him in a vision and tells him to consider his own family.
- Aeneas makes his way through the burning city to the house of his father, Anchises. His father also wants to go back to the fight,

but Aeneas's wife, Creusa, begs him to save their son and her. One more vision confirms that Aeneas's son, Iulus, must be saved.

- Aeneas makes his way out of Troy. He carries his father on his back and leads his son by the hand. Anchises carries the household gods, and Creusa follows behind. To the Romans, this order of priorities and Aeneas's behavior represented a model of *pietas*. Indeed, at the start of book I, Virgil calls Aeneas *insignem pietate virum*, “man distinguished for *pietas*.”
- *Pietas*, in this context, means “propriety.” Aeneas, unlike Odysseus, always does what is socially correct. He demonstrates the social values that Virgil (and his imperial patrons) thought most important: respect for the past, for age, and for ancestry; concern for the future destiny of one's bloodline; respect for the gods; and respect for the institution of marriage.

### Aeneas and Dido

- In the confusion of the sack of the city, Aeneas holds on to his father, his son, and the household gods, but Creusa goes missing. Of course, he returns to Troy to look for her, but her ghost appears to say goodbye to him. Creusa's death is convenient given the fact that Aeneas is telling much of his story in flashback at the court of Queen Dido, a Phoenician princess who is in the process of founding Carthage. Dido, a widow, falls in love with Aeneas—so much so as to forget propriety.
- The Trojans and Phoenicians go hunting but are caught in a sudden thunderstorm. Aeneas and Dido take shelter in the same cave, and readers are left to guess what happens next. Later, Virgil puts all the blame on Dido. That day was fatal, he says, the cause of lasting grief. But it's Dido who forgot her good name. Nor did she have the decency to keep the affair a secret. According to Virgil, “she calls it marriage, and with that name veils her sin.”
- The local king, who was contemplating an alliance with Dido, hears about the affair, as does Jupiter, the father of the gods. He sends

Aeneas a message, telling him that his job is to build Rome, not Carthage. Aeneas prepares for a silent departure, but Dido realizes his intent. Aeneas tells her that his leaving is the will of the gods: *Italiam non sponte sequor*; “I do not seek Italy of my own free will.” Dido then commits suicide, falling on her sword.

### Virgil’s Hidden Agenda

- The *Aeneid* was written during the years 29 to 19 B.C.E. specifically for the emperor Augustus and as a national epic. Among its goals was the wish to give Rome a noble origin—one that would have all the prestige of Homer but not be Greek.
- We can see that Virgil is competing with Homer. Aeneas’s itinerary largely follows Odysseus’s, and episodes throughout the *Aeneid* echo those in *The Odyssey*. Virgil is attempting to show that he can do just as well as Homer.
- A large part of the aim of the *Aeneid* is to specifically define Roman virtue, an area where the Romans considered themselves superior to the Greeks. That’s where *pietas*—social propriety—comes in. But *pietas* also includes social duty: subordinating private wishes and personal happiness to public service, to the *res publica*, the “common good.”
- The Romans would say that they invented republican virtue. And they believed that whatever happened to their society, it would still be rooted in that virtue. The proudest thing anyone, including Saint Paul, could say was this: *civis Romanus sum*; “I am a Roman citizen.” Thus, Aeneas, for all his royal birth and divine ancestry, never forgets what he owes to the future of Rome.

### The Situation in Rome

- The traditional founding of Rome was attributed to Romulus and Remus in 753 B.C.E. There was a belief that Rome was a kind of outlaw offshoot from the nearby city of Alba Longa, which explains the need for a story of noble origins.



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After its legendary founding by Romulus and Remus, Rome gained a reputation among its Mediterranean neighbors of refusing to accept defeat.

- The Romans spent many centuries fighting their neighbors, ultimately becoming the “top barbarians” in Italy. They then ran into conflict with established Mediterranean powers, namely, the Carthaginians and the Greeks.
- By about 100 years before Virgil, the Romans were well on their way to ruling a Mediterranean empire, but it’s been suggested that they did so perhaps too easily. In contrast to the Greeks, who had been through the kind of Heroic Age we discussed in the last lecture, the Romans did not know “the reverse side of glory, the bitterness of lost battles, the sting of the master’s lash.”
- That difference would become even more acute in Virgil’s time. Julius Caesar had conquered Gaul. The Roman Civil Wars had been terminated by Augustus’s victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium. The Roman Republic had effectively been abandoned, and the Roman Empire was about to be imposed.

Knowing this history, perhaps we can see some of the anxieties that Virgil was trying to alleviate: remorse for the destruction of Carthage, an inferiority complex toward Greece, and guilt over the Trojan War.

- There was also the issue of republican virtue. Rome had been a republic, run politically by the Senate and the people. Would it lose its republican virtue if it became an empire? Virgil's answer was no. The main republican virtue is subordinating one's private wishes to one's public duty, and that's exactly what Aeneas does.

### **Manifest Destiny**

- There is also a strong sense in the *Aeneid* of what we would call "manifest destiny." This idea is heavily reinforced by Aeneas's descent into the underworld.
- In this sequence, we note again a strong sense of competition with Homer. Odysseus did not descend into the underworld but only called up spirits from there. Aeneas goes all the way. What's more, Aeneas's Golden Bough enables him to exit the underworld—a much more difficult task than entering it.
- As Aeneas walks through the underworld, the road forks. To the left is a kind of hell, where sinners are punished. To the right are the Blissful Groves, the homes of the virtuous. It's a very Roman and republican virtue that lands one in the groves, above all, suffering wounds while fighting for one's country. There, Aeneas meets his father, who gives a long prophecy about the glorious future of Rome.
- Once Aeneas emerges from the underworld, we find much more of the idea of manifest destiny: He fights wars to establish himself in Italy and marry Lavinia, the daughter of the Latin king.

### **Legacies of the *Aeneid***

- For thousands of years Virgil, along with the Bible, was the foundation of Western education. And one major effect of the

*Aeneid* was to make European countries feel the need for a similar myth of origins, which several of them tried to bolt on to Virgil's story. The British version of this was the "Brutus books."

- The Virgilian ideology was rivaled in popularity by the Virgilian visions, especially his vision of the underworld, which gave so much to Dante's *Inferno*. The figure Dante chooses as his guide through hell is Virgil, because Virgil was the acknowledged expert on the underworld.
- As mentioned at the beginning of the lecture, some writers may choose to continue a story by adding new elements that no one could have predicted. This is what the author Richard Adams did when he turned the great heroes of Virgil and Homer into rabbits in his novel *Watership Down*.
  - The novel begins with a puny rabbit, called Fiver, having a vision of utter disaster coming to his warren. Because he cannot get the chief of the warren to believe him, he and a few others, led by a rabbit called Hazel, make the decision to flee on their own and set up somewhere else.
  - Two similarities are immediately obvious: The rabbits fleeing the doomed warren are like Aeneas and his companions fleeing Troy, and their setting up a new warren on Watership Down is like Aeneas founding a New Troy, which will become Rome. Getting to the new warren is clearly an odyssey, and it's quite like Homer's.
  - One close similarity to *The Odyssey* is that the warren the refugee rabbits reach is much like the land of Homer's Lotus-Eaters. What the rabbits there know but won't admit is that humans feed them to be snared and eaten later. Their comfort and luxury carry a price: death.
  - Like hobbits, Hazel's group of rabbits provides another model of heroism for us. Rabbits are prey, not predators. They're not good at long marches because they scatter, or dawdle,

or freeze. But they're more cooperative than human beings. Their weapons are craft and cunning. They're tricksters, like Odysseus, but they use cunning to achieve the goal of Aeneas: to found a new city. Their victory is to survive and breed.

### Essential Reading

Virgil (Fitzgerald, trans.), *The Aeneid*.

### Suggested Reading

Griffin, *Virgil*.

Quinn, *Virgil's Aeneid*.

Spargo, *Virgil the Necromancer*.

### Questions to Consider

1. E. M. Forster once wrote that if he ever had to choose between betraying his country and betraying his friends, he hoped he would have the courage to betray his country. How do you see the balance between public duty and private emotion?
2. What modern stories can you think of that involve descent into the underworld or into an imagined afterlife?

# Guinevere—A Heroine with Many Faces

## Lecture 4

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Italian poet Matteo Boiardo asked himself why the story of King Arthur and his knights was popular across Europe, whereas the legend of King Charlemagne had never caught on. To Boiardo, the answer was obvious. Arthur and his knights became glorious *per l'arme e per l'amore*, “through arms and through love.” What the Arthur story had that the Charlemagne story didn't was a love interest: Guinevere. In this lecture, we'll trace Guinevere's disastrous affair with Lancelot across 10 centuries. In the process, we'll see the effects of what may be the greatest change in cultural values in our history, one that still marks off the Western world from most other cultures on the globe.

### The Knight of the Cart

- The definitive early account of Lancelot and Guinevere came in the 12<sup>th</sup> century from a French poet, Chrétien de Troyes, in a long-verse romance called *Le Chevalier de la Charette*, “*The Knight of the Cart*.”
- Guinevere has been carried off by a knight called Meleagant to a strange country. Attempts are made to rescue Guinevere by other knights and, then, by Lancelot. In the pursuit, Lancelot loses his horse but goes on, on foot, in armor. He sees a dwarf driving a cart and asks whether he has seen the queen. The dwarf invites Lancelot into the cart, and he hesitates briefly before climbing in, knowing that for a knight to ride in a cart is utterly disgraceful.
- Lancelot goes through many adventures in his attempted rescue, but he presses on, inspired by love. When he finally reaches the castle where Guinevere is being held prisoner, he fights a duel with Meleagant but almost loses because he cannot take his eyes off the queen.

- Once Lancelot has won the duel, Guinevere refuses to see him! In despair, he tries to hang himself by being dragged from his horse's saddle-bow. In the end, the two manage to get together, and Lancelot asks Guinevere why she wouldn't speak to him after all the efforts he made on her behalf. Her answer is that he hesitated before getting into the dwarf's cart. The disgrace of riding in a cart should count for nothing against his desire to please his lady.
- The story continues with more adventures, but the important point here is that it is set in a world where cultural values have changed significantly with regard to the status of ladies.
  - This change is perhaps explained best by Reepicheep, the mouse in C. S. Lewis's *Narnia* stories. Reepicheep has been insulted by a boy called Eustace and is about to take the matter further, when it is realized that Eustace's girl companion, Lucy, is cold and wet and must be taken off to be dried.
  - Reepicheep, who is the soul of honor, says, "to the convenience of a lady, even a question of honor must give way." In this, he expresses the central tenet of chivalric love.
  - In an academic work, Lewis himself wrote, "the lover is always abject. Obedience to his lady's lightest wish, however whimsical, and silent acquiescence in her rebukes, however unjust, are the only virtues he dares to claim."
- In Chrétien's story, Lancelot apologizes to Guinevere for his hesitation—behavior that would be viewed as insane by such heroes as Odysseus and Aeneas. The emergence of courtly love in medieval literature marks a significant development in European attitudes toward women that in some ways continues today. The cult of love has marked Western civilization deeply and is still one of its main differences from other cultures.

### **Guinevere's Attraction**

- Guinevere was irresistibly attractive to Lancelot and has remained so to storytellers up to the present day. What's the secret of her attraction?

- One possible answer is that she has always retained an element of the mythic. Her name, Guinevere, seems to be Welsh Gwenhwyfar, which may mean “the white enchantress.”
  - The first mention of her is in a saint’s life, in which we are told that Guinevere is carried off by a king called Melwas (Meleagant) to the Summer Country.
  - There’s a hint here of the myth of Persephone, the fertility goddess who is captured at the end of every summer and taken down into the underworld, from which she must be rescued and released every spring.
- There have been many attempts to explain Guinevere and comment on her, but the canonical version in English is Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*, written in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century and one of the first books ever to be printed in English.
  - Malory also tells the tale of the Knight of the Cart, but he tells it with a strong sense of tactics. According to Malory, Lancelot was ambushed by archers, who managed to kill his horse but not him. When the cart comes by, Lancelot asks for a ride, but the carter addresses him rudely, and Lancelot strikes him and kills him.
  - The carter’s assistant offers Lancelot a ride, which he accepts. One of Guinevere’s maids, looking out the window, sees the cart and thinks it is a tumbril, an execution wagon. Guinevere, however, recognizes Lancelot, and tells the maid off for thinking that the noblest knight in the world might come to a shameful death. The motif of the hesitation has disappeared completely, but somehow, the story can’t do without the cart.
  - Nor can it do without the motif of serious tension between the two lovers. Once Lancelot has burst into the castle, Guinevere’s abductor, Sir Mellyagaunce, begs for mercy, and she grants it. Lancelot tells her, rather sarcastically, that if he had known she would make a deal with Mellyagaunce so readily, he would not have come to her with such haste. Guinevere replies, also

sarcastically, “Why do you say that? Are you sorry for your good deeds?” She’s still in control but no longer on a pedestal.

- For the first time, Malory gives us a recognizable picture of what we would call a relationship. Lancelot and Guinevere often talk to each other with a mix of anger and even scorn, yet they can’t leave each other alone. We can see why Guinevere needs to hold on to Lancelot—he’s her protector—but what causes Lancelot’s infatuation? It seems to be some supernatural or magic power.

### Guinevere and Lancelot

- Let’s look at a few snapshots from Malory of Guinevere in her “relationship” with Lancelot, beginning with a moment when Lancelot removes himself from court to let the affair cool down.
  - To disguise himself, Lancelot accepts a token from another lady, the Fair Maid of Astolat, in the form of a red sleeve. It’s a good disguise because it’s generally known that Lancelot, unlike all the other knights, never ever wears a lady’s token.
  - The court is pleased that Lancelot has met a nice girl, but Guinevere is furious. Lancelot refuses to marry the Fair Maid or become her paramour, and she commits suicide. Guinevere rebukes Lancelot, saying that he might have saved the maid’s life if he had shown her any kindness—although we know that she would have flown into a jealous rage had he done so.



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**Guinevere’s association with the white enchantress may explain her seemingly magical power over Lancelot.**

- Arthur defuses the situation by saying that Lancelot must see to the funeral. But once again, we can see that Guinevere is horribly unfair—which doesn't stop the pair from making up.
- In Malory's tale, the Knight of the Cart affair rumbles on until a duel must be fought between Lancelot and Mellyagaunce. Mellyagaunce has rashly accused Guinevere of adultery with one of her bodyguards, which is half-true: She has committed adultery but with Lancelot. Of course, Lancelot must then challenge Mellyagaunce.
  - Almost immediately, Mellyagaunce gives up and asks for mercy, which chivalry obliges Lancelot to grant. But Guinevere wants Mellyagaunce dead—he knows too much—and she signals her wish to Lancelot.
  - Lancelot offers to take off his helmet and half his armor and tie his left hand behind his back if Mellyagaunce will fight to the death. Mellyagaunce accepts the offer and, of course, loses the duel.
- The point here is this: Guinevere is in a horribly vulnerable position. Repeatedly, she finds her life at risk for her adultery, until Lancelot rescues her. But she shows no sign that she recognizes the weakness of her position, and she never says she's grateful to Lancelot. We must admire her courage and confidence and—perhaps this is the secret of our fascination—recognize her very human reactions. Guinevere is a complex character—more like a woman in a modern novel than a medieval romance.

### Changing Perceptions of Guinevere

- Guinevere's role as an adulteress left her at the mercy of changing cultural values, especially in the Victorian era. In Lord Tennyson's popular cycle of poems about King Arthur, *Idylls of the King*, Guinevere became the scapegoat for everything that went wrong with the Round Table. Victorians still practiced veneration of the lady, but they didn't tolerate the medieval idea of the mistress.

- The 11<sup>th</sup> of Tennyson's 12 poems opens with Guinevere having fled from her husband. When Arthur comes searching for her, she grovels at his feet.
- In Arthur's long rebuke of Guinevere, he says that he can't possibly excuse her because to do so would be a betrayal of public morality.
- Tennyson leaves us with an unpleasant picture of Guinevere, reduced to the status of a dreadful warning. She is allowed no repentance and no painful parting from Lancelot.
- In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a vigorous reaction to this Victorian treatment, the best example of which comes from T. H. White's tetralogy *The Once and Future King*. White writes the scenes of the cart, the duel, and the Fair Maid's suicide in a modern idiom. He also asks whether Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship changed over the many years it lasted.
  - White's Lancelot and Guinevere still bicker, but gently, like an old married couple. The sexual infatuation is gone and has been replaced by tenderness.
  - White also invents a new scene to explain the start of the relationship. As a young man, Lancelot treats Guinevere badly, then realizes that he has hurt her: "She was not a minx, not deceitful, not designing and heartless. She was pretty Jenny, who could think and feel."
- In her long trajectory, Guinevere has gone from being a goddess, to an unreasonable dominatrix, to a proud queen, to a wicked adulteress, and finally to a young girl married off too soon and trying to find her own happiness. Always there is the mix of sexual allure and physical weakness. Always she is under threat, of being abducted, being discarded, or being executed, but she never compromises.

## Essential Reading

Chrétien de Troyes (Owen, trans.), *Arthurian Romances*.

Malory (Vinaver, ed.), *Le Morte Darthur*.

## Suggested Reading

Cross and Nitze, *Lancelot and Guenevere*.

Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*.

Walters, ed., *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Has feminism killed completely the idea of *la belle dame sans merci*, the fascinating but unreasonable mistress?
2. Can you think of any modern story in which a woman is torn between two men, all three of them honorable and admirable people?

# The Wife of Bath—An Independent Woman

## Lecture 5

**T**he Wife of Bath is one of the most interesting characters in *The Canterbury Tales*, and Chaucer may have worked harder on her than on any of his other characters. For most of the characters, we get two perspectives: a description in the General Prologue and the insight we get from his or her tale. But for the Wife of Bath, Chaucer gives us four perspectives. In addition to her description and her tale, we get her tirade about marriage and the tale told by the Shipman, which was clearly originally meant to be told by the Wife. In this lecture, we'll use these sources to fill out a picture of one of literature's most memorable female characters.

### The General Prologue

- As most of us know, *The Canterbury Tales* focuses on a group of pilgrims heading from London to Canterbury, with Chaucer himself among them. Each of the pilgrims is individually described in what is called the General Prologue. Then, all the pilgrims agree to tell tales as they ride along.
- In the General Prologue descriptions, Chaucer likes to pretend that he is simply making remarks at random and leaving readers to draw their own conclusions. He pretends to be naïve and gullible, simply repeating what people tell him, sometimes using their own words. In this way, he avoids responsibility for what is often biting satire, especially of the rich and corrupt churchmen on the pilgrimage.
- The description of the Wife of Bath contains about 20 bits of data in 32 lines of poetry. We learn, first of all, that she's a wife, not a maid or a nun, perhaps a widow; she comes from Bath; she's rather deaf; and she is better at making cloth than the big producers in Flanders. Note that cloth making was one of the few trades open to women, and it was lucrative.

- As Chaucer’s description continues, we learn that in her parish church, the Wife of Bath was the first woman to go up and make an offering. Indeed, other women didn’t presume to go up before her. She wore elaborate Sunday headgear, scarlet hose, and new shoes. Chaucer tells us that she was a “worthy woman” who had had five husbands.
  - What does Chaucer mean by “worthy”? He has a trick of using words in different senses according to the senses in which the characters themselves use them.
  - For instance, Chaucer uses the word “worthy” seven times in his description of the Knight, and each time it clearly means “brave.” For some of the other characters, “worthy” means “well-off.”
  - For the Wife of Bath, it may mean that her reputation has never been challenged, although she’s been married five times and, as Chaucer tells us, has had other unmarried partners in her youth. Drawing our own conclusions, we might say that she’s gotten away with having it all.
- We also learn that the Wife has been on many pilgrimages, even traveling as far as Jerusalem. She knows a lot, says Chaucer, about “wandryng by the weye”—perhaps straying off the straight and narrow?
- The Wife has gapped teeth; she rides an ambler; she has an enormous hat and a mantle wrapped around large hips; and she’s good company to laugh and chat with. Finally, Chaucer tells us, she knows all about the “olde daunce” of love.
- Obviously, this is a sexually experienced and independent woman, and not all of her experience was gained legitimately. She is also financially independent, and her clothes and demeanor display dominance. Chaucer gives us an unusual medieval portrait—a woman not like Guinevere at all.

## The Wife's Personal Prologue

- The autobiography the Wife tells before her tale is truly shocking. She begins by denying authority, a word that, at the time, still had a strong connection with the word “author.” The suggestion here is that she denies “book learning,” which would have been largely under the control of celibate and often misogynist clerics. She is saying that she doesn’t need book learning; she knows things firsthand, and she knows better!
  
- Of course, the book that was the foundation of all book learning at the time was the Bible, and the Wife even takes issue with it, specifically with John 4 and 1 Corinthians 7. She can’t read these chapters, but she’s been told what they say by male clerics, and she won’t have it.
  - The story of the Samaritan woman in John 4 seems to be saying that a woman cannot have five husbands, as the Wife of Bath did, because only the first is truly her husband. But the Wife has had five husbands, all of them perfectly legal and proper. She demands to know how many husbands a woman is allowed to have. Men may try to “define” a number, but she knows that God told us to wax and multiply.
  
  - As for Saint Paul, he may have recommended virginity, but, says the Wife, it wasn’t a commandment. Maybe a woman must be a virgin to be perfect, but the Wife doesn’t mind being imperfect.
  
- After this aggressive start to her prologue, the Wife next gives us an account of her five husbands.
  - Her first three were all old and rich, and she controlled them completely. She says that she made them pay when they wanted to have sex with her, and she made them have sex with her whenever she felt like it. She seems like a terrible partner, but what makes her sympathetic is that she enjoys herself so much.
  
  - Her fourth husband was a womanizer, and the Wife seems glad that he’s dead. The fifth husband turns out to be a bit of a paradox. He was an Oxford student, that is, a cleric but not yet

committed to the priesthood. He was 20 when he married the 40-year-old Wife, and she gave him all her property.

- Being young and rich, this fifth husband has the upper hand. And though he never became a priest, he's studied for the priesthood and believes in authority. He likes to read to her from a book about wicked wives. In fact, she's deaf because she once tore a page from the book, and he hit her.
- But the Wife gets control just the same. She pretends to be dead, and when her husband bends over her, she hits him back. In the end, he agrees to give her complete control, and she makes him burn his book. But once she's got control, she says, she turns into the perfect wife. Control—not independence—was what she wanted all along. Her word for this is “sovereignty.”

### The Wife of Bath's Tale

- The tale Chaucer eventually assigned to the Wife is about sovereignty, and it follows the story of the fifth husband fairly closely.
- In King Arthur's time a knight rapes a maiden. The penalty for this is death, but he is handed over to the queen and the court of ladies to decide his fate. They give him a year to learn what women desire most. If he discovers the correct answer, he'll be allowed to live.
- The knight asks everyone he can find and gets all kinds of answers, until he meets a strange, ugly old woman. She promises to tell him the answer, but in return, he must do what she asks of him.
- The knight returns to the queen and gives the correct answer: that women desire sovereignty. But the old woman asks the court to make the knight keep his promise; she wants him to marry her.
- On their wedding night, the old woman gives the knight a choice: She can be old and ugly and faithful or young and beautiful, but he'll have to take his chances on fidelity. Of course, the knight gives

her the sovereignty to make the choice herself, and she becomes both beautiful and faithful.

### **The Wife's Original Tale**

- The tale that Chaucer originally wrote for the Wife of Bath is a fairly widespread story, well told by the Italian writer Boccaccio in the *Decameron*. Boccaccio's version is a very misogynist story, in which a wife is tricked into infidelity with a man she believes is in love with her. She promises to have sex with the man for money, but he secretly borrows the money from her husband and sets her up in such a way that she is forced to return it.
- Obviously, this isn't a good story for the Wife of Bath, so Chaucer changed it. He removed the witness who had originally seen the man give the money to the wife and whose presence forced her to give it to her husband in the end. In the last scene of Chaucer's version, when the lover says that he repaid the money to the wife, she claims that she thought the money was gift and has spent it all. She tells her husband, "Score it upon my taille," meaning, "I'll pay you back in bed."
- The strong point of this story is the answer from the wife, who gets out of a tricky situation, quite unlike the wife in Boccaccio's story. And it uses a basic idea of the Wife of Bath, namely, that sex and money are interconvertible. Money can be turned into sex, which is what the lover does. Sex can be turned into money, which is what the wife does.
- Chaucer has turned a misogynist story about a helpless female into a story about a dominant female who knows how to give a smart answer. Why would he decide to replace this story with the one about what women most desire?
- One answer might be that the tale she ends up telling is the one the Wife herself would like best—not because it's about sovereignty, but because it's about an old woman who becomes young and beautiful again.

- The Wife of Bath has been a great warrior—and winner—in the war of the sexes, but she knows she’s getting old. She says of herself: “The flour is goon, ther is na-more to telle. / The bran, as I best can, now moste I sell.” By “flour,” she means the best part of the wheat. What’s left after the flour has been ground out is the bran. Still, something can be done with the bran, and the Wife will use it.
- The Wife of Bath is dominant, independent, aggressive, and irrepressible. She’s also a little bit sad and a little bit vulnerable. Chaucer’s shift from the “smart answer” tale to the “happy ending” tale brings out in her an element of yearning and makes her a more complex and sympathetic character.

### Essential Reading

Chaucer (Allen and Kirkham, eds.), *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale*.

### Suggested Reading

Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Do you think Chaucer understood women, or is he just presenting a frightened male view of a strong woman in the Wife of Bath?
2. Is it a good idea to “grow old gracefully” or to carry on cheerfully, like the Wife of Bath?

# Cressida—A Love Betrayed

## Lecture 6

In the last two lectures, we've met a *femme fatale* in Guinevere and a strong woman in the Wife of Bath. There's a third medieval heroine—or villainess?—who attracted the attention of two of the greatest poets in the English language, Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare, as well as a third, the late-medieval Scottish poet Robert Henryson. This medieval heroine is Cressida, caught in a love triangle between an honorable and a dishonorable man. In this lecture, we'll look at Shakespeare's play *Troilus and Cressida* as a kind of commentary on the story and character of this woman, but we'll focus more closely on the portraits of her painted by Chaucer and Henryson.

### Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

- Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is a long poem, written in the 1380s and set during the 10-year siege of Troy by the Greeks. But this is not the Trojan War that Homer would have recognized. The whole setting is medieval, including the conventions of war and love.
- Criseyde is a Trojan, but her father, Calchas, is a traitor, which makes her vulnerable. Calchas is an astrologer, and he's seen in the stars that the Greeks are going to win. Thus, he's fled from Troy and joined the Greeks, leaving Criseyde behind. She is a widow but has powerful friends, including the great Trojan champion Prince Hector, who assures her that she will be protected. But there are Trojans who distrust her, and she won't be safe if the city falls.



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**In Chaucer's Trojan War, armored knights fight by arrangement outside the city, as they did in the Hundred Years' War.**

- The first time we see Criseyde, she has gone to the temple. She's dressed in black, and although she's sure of herself, she's trying not to be noticed. This kind of ambiguity marks her throughout the poem. She seems and is vulnerable, but there's a sense that she's always in control.
- Of course, as Criseyde stands in the temple, she is noticed by Troilus, a Trojan prince, who gapes at her. She returns his gaze, then drops her eyes demurely. In Shakespeare's version of the story, there's no doubt that she is deliberately playing hard to get. Troilus immediately falls in love with her. His friend Pandarus, who is Criseyde's uncle, volunteers to set Troilus up with his niece.
- The conversation between Pandarus and Criseyde concerning Troilus again shows the ambiguity that haunts this rather skillful young woman. She wants to know what he's talking about but refuses to ask outright. Just after Pandarus has left, Troilus rides by in armor, his helmet battered and his shield full of arrows, blushing at the cheers of the bystanders. Criseyde falls in love.
- As the courtly love affair slowly progresses, tremendous pressure is put on Criseyde. She's lured into a private meeting with Troilus by threats of legal action being taken against her. She's lured again to Pandarus's house, where the weather forces her to stay the night. Her room has a secret door, and the affair is consummated. Criseyde looks like a victim, but we have to wonder. Does she really believe her uncle when he says that Troilus is out of town?

### Reading Criseyde

- At this point, our sympathies might be with Criseyde, but then, the situation changes. The Trojans have a bad day in the war and lose many noble prisoners. Calchas, the traitor, persuades the Greeks to offer to swap one of them for his daughter. The Trojan mob immediately demands that she be used as an exchange and sent out of Troy.

- Troilus is in despair and ready to commit suicide. He suggests that they run away together, but Criseyde won't have it. Troilus, she argues, will be disgraced forever if he runs away. She assures Troilus that he can trust her, and Chaucer tells us, "That al this thyng was seyde of good entente"—she really meant it.
- Readers have a moment of doubt in Criseyde in a scene in which Troilus prepares to commit suicide; Criseyde has fainted, and he thinks she must be dead. When she comes around and he stops, Criseyde says that if he had killed himself, she would have done the same with his sword. But is that true? Chaucer has already told us that she is "the fearfullest of creatures." She then immediately changes the subject, telling Troilus they should go straight to bed. Shakespeare has no doubt that she's being deceptive.
- Criseyde leaves Troy, escorted by the Greek Diomedes, to whom she soon begins to turn her affections. This change of heart is made to look especially disgraceful by Shakespeare. He writes a scene in which she arrives in the Greek camp and is kissed by the warriors; she's passed from man to man, flirting coyly but making no objection.
- Criseyde is made to look even worse by the normally nonjudgmental Chaucer. He presents Diomedes as dishonorable, a man who views women as conquests about which he likes to brag, yet Criseyde falls for him. Does she do so out of fear, or is she just a weathervane? Does she not know what love is? Chaucer uses the trick of making excuses for her, which serves to call attention to what she's doing wrong. She then sends a letter to Troilus, who is back in Troy, going mad with worry.
- Criseyde's is the first "Dear John" letter in English, and it's confusing and full of clichés. Having received the letter, Troilus doesn't realize that she's broken off the affair. He finds out only when he sees a brooch he had given to her being worn by Diomedes on the battlefield. This is the only moment when Chaucer expresses criticism of his heroine; he writes, "and that was litel nede," meaning, "There was little need for her to do that."

- From there, the story drifts to an end. Troilus is killed in battle by Achilles. His soul looks down and laughs. Criseyde tells herself that she'll get it right the next time: "to Diomedes, anyway, I will be true." Perhaps she means it, but she never seems to mean anything for long.

### Robert Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid*

- At the end of his poem, Chaucer comments that the story is one about pagans who did not know God. Robert Henryson, 100 years later, believed that wasn't a satisfying ending. In response, he wrote *The Testament of Cresseid*. Most people think it is a harsh and cruel poem, a kind of reproof to Chaucer for being too soft on his heroine, but it seems sad, as well.
- In Henryson's poem, Cresseid receives a cruel "Dear Jane" letter from Diomedes. Alone and deserted, she is passed from man to man. At last, she goes home to her father, who welcomes her. But then she makes a complaint against the gods, and the pagan gods call a parliament to punish her. She has a dream in which the god Saturn touches her with his frosty wand, and the touch turns her into a leper.
- One of the poem's dreadful moments is that Cresseid then wakes up from her dream, looks in the mirror, and discovers it wasn't a dream. In medieval circumstances, she has no option but to join the lepers, among whom she makes another long complaint. This is answered only by a female leper, who tells her that she must live the law of the lepers and always wear a clapper to warn others away.
- As Cresseid is sitting among the lepers, who are begging by the wayside, Troilus rides by. He sees the lepers, but the disease has changed Cresseid so much that he does not recognize her. Just the same, she reminds him of Cresseid, and he throws her all the money he's got and rides on. The disease has made Cresseid almost blind, and she asks the other lepers who has just ridden by. They reply that it was the noble and generous Sir Troilus.

- At this, Cresseid makes a final lament, and then we get her testament, her last will. She leaves her body to the worms and toads, as if she's disgusted with it. She leaves her gold to the lepers, to see her buried. She leaves her ruby ring to Troilus so that he will know about her death. She leaves her spirit to Diana, the goddess of virginity, hoping that after death, she can walk with Diana in the waste woods and streams, as if she never wants to see anyone again.
  - The last clause is a kind of non-bequest. She says, "O Diomed, thou hes baith broche and belt / Quhilk Troilus gave me in takning / Of his trew lufe."
  - She dies saying the word "love," which she has betrayed. She dies unable to bequeath something she gave away for nothing. It's a terrible picture of remorse that comes too late.
- The poem ends with a series of nonstatements. Troilus is bitterly upset by the news of Cresseid's death, but all he can manage to say is, "I can no moir; / Scho was untrew, and wo is me thairfoir." On the gravestone is written "Cresseid of Troyis toun ... / Under this stane, lait lipper, lyis deid." And at the very end, Henryson writes, "Sen scho is deid, I speik of hir no moir."
- We could read the poem as a classic male revenge fantasy, but it seems that Henryson was also trying to answer the basic question: What made her do it? Why did she give up Troilus for Diomedes? The answer seems to be signaled by the gods assigned to carry out the sentence and by the nature of the punishment.
  - In the Middle Ages, leprosy was often thought of as a sexually transmitted disease, while in Henryson's time, the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, syphilis had also started to become common. The symptoms of syphilis could look rather like those of leprosy, as could the results of age.
  - One of the two gods assigned to carry out the sentence on Cresseid is Cynthia, who is also the moon. The moon, the only heavenly body medievals knew that waxes and wanes, is a symbol of change.

- The other god who passes sentence is Saturn. But Saturn in Greek is Kronos, and though this is actually a mistake, Kronos was taken to be the same as Chronos, which means “time.” Thus, Cresseid is punished by change and time.
- Cresseid’s mistake is summed up in the accusation she makes against the gods. She says, “You gave me once a divine guarantee / That I should be the flower of love in Troy.” But there is no such divine guarantee for anyone. At bottom, Cresseid was led astray by feelings of entitlement. She seems to have thought that she would meet more men like Troilus and, perhaps, do better. She found out too late that was not the case.

### Essential Reading

Chaucer (Barney, ed.), *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Henryson (Fox, ed.), *Poems*.

### Suggested Reading

Gordon, *The Double Sorrow of Troilus*.

Lewis, “What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*.”

MacQueen, *Robert Henryson*.

### Questions to Consider

1. In addition to *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*, can you think of any other cases, in literature or in real life, of a woman choosing a bad man when she already has a good one?
2. Do you believe in “the wages of sin” or “bad karma”?

# Beowulf—A Hero with Hidden Depths

## Lecture 7

**B**eowulf is not an easy poem to understand, and Beowulf himself is not an easy character to read. On the surface, he's an even more classic case of the "basic male hero" than any of the ones we've seen so far. He's big and strong and seems fearless; his response to danger and difficulty is, invariably, action. But in this lecture, we'll look for other aspects of Beowulf's personality. In his heroic façade, is he, perhaps, overcompensating for early neglect? Are there hints of vulnerability beneath the surface? And what moral can we draw from the poem? Does Beowulf provide us an example of wisdom gained through age?

### Beowulf as Hero

- On the surface, Beowulf seems like a classic example of the "basic male hero"—big, strong, and fearless. We find a good example of his courage about a third of the way through the poem.
- Beowulf has wrestled and defeated the man-eating giant Grendel in the hall of King Hrothgar. In fact, Beowulf has torn off Grendel's arm, and it's been nailed up as a trophy. After 12 years of terror from Grendel, this is cause for great celebration, and King Hrothgar organizes a feast.
- But in the night, after the feast, Grendel's mother sneaks into the hall. She takes the arm and one of the Danish warriors, Aeschere, and flees back to her home beneath a lake.
- When the king informs Beowulf of this renewed attack, his response gives us the heroic attitude in a nutshell: Heroes fight for glory; death is a certainty, so heroes don't worry about it; and revenge is an obligation.
- Beowulf then tells Hrothgar that they should follow the track wherever it leads. When they reach the monster's lake, the hero puts

on his armor, borrows a famous sword from a bystander, and asks Hrothgar to see that his armor is sent home and that the borrowed sword is replaced if he doesn't return. With that, he dives into the lake and eventually finds himself in a strange submarine hall.

- He sees Grendel's mother and strikes out at her with his borrowed sword, but it bounces off. He throws it down and immediately grapples with her, but she is too strong even for Beowulf. She draws her sax (a short sword) and tries to stab him; Beowulf is saved by his armor.
- Beowulf struggles back to his feet, takes up a giant's sword that is leaning against the wall, and cuts off the hag's head. The poem tells us: "It broke the bone-rings; it sheared through the flesh. She fell to the ground. The sword was bloody. The man rejoiced."

### Beowulf's Deeper Personality

- Although Beowulf is self-confident, he seems to lack a defined sense of self. He regularly defines himself by reference to someone else, apparently his king or lord, whose name is Hygelac. We could take Beowulf's repeated mentions of Hygelac as a sign of his loyal nature, but it also seems like a kind of emotional dependency.
- At one point in the story, Beowulf has a verbal clash with Unferth, one of the Danes at Hrothgar's court. Unferth asks Beowulf rudely if he once had a swimming contest with a man called Breca. They risked their lives, Unferth says, for *dolgilpe*, "a foolish boast," and Beowulf lost the contest.
  - Beowulf replies, strongly and confidently, that he didn't lose, and in fact, he killed the sea-beasts that attacked him. In his reply, though, we can hear notes of self-criticism. Twice he says that he and Breca were both just boys, and he does not entirely reject the accusation of *dolgilpe*.
  - Later in the poem, we are told that Beowulf did not have a good reputation in his youth; the nobles of his tribe considered him lazy.

- Is Beowulf the hero overcompensating for early neglect? Are there hints of vulnerability beneath his intimidating façade?

### **Background to *Beowulf***

- Although *Beowulf* is in Old English (Anglo-Saxon), the poet never mentions England and seems to know nothing about it. He does, however, know about Scandinavia. Half the poem is set among the Danes, and the other half among Beowulf's own people, the Geats, who must be the inhabitants of what are now the Swedish provinces of East and West Götaland.
- The poet has detailed information about four Scandinavian royal houses: the kings of the Danes, Geats, Swedes, and another people called the Bards. All these remained well known to later Scandinavian tradition, except for the kings of the Geats, who vanished without trace.
- We might think that the Geats were fictional, except for the fact that halfway through the poem—after Hygelac has been mentioned at least 10 times—the poet lets slip that Hygelac is the son of Beowulf's maternal grandfather, the king of the Geats. This makes him Beowulf's mother's brother, a relation of special importance to the Germanic tribes. This relationship explains Beowulf's emotional dependence on Hygelac.
- Although Hygelac was completely forgotten in his homeland, he's not fictional and was remembered in England. It's likely that the poet did not bother to explain who he was because he assumed that everyone already knew.
  - Hygelac (called Chochilaicus by a Latin chronicler) was the leader of a disastrous piratical raid on what is now the Netherlands sometime around the year 525. He and most of his men were killed.
  - As a young hero, Beowulf does not know that this event will occur, but the original audience of the poem did. To those who

first listened to the poem, Beowulf’s emotional dependence on his uncle made him vulnerable.

- This point is underscored when Beowulf, after killing Grendel and his mother, offers to bring thousands of soldiers to the aid of King Hrothgar if trouble arises. He says he knows that Hygelac will back him up. Hrothgar compliments Beowulf on his wisdom and says, “if by any chance Hygelac should die, and you survive, the Geats will have no one better than you to select as king—if, that is, you should want the job.” Hrothgar sees Beowulf’s future accurately, down to Beowulf refusing the kingship in favor of Hygelac’s young son.
- Hrothgar sees the shadow hanging over Beowulf, but he doesn’t see the shadow hanging over himself. Once again, the poet does no more than hint at this, probably because the situation was as familiar to Anglo-Saxons as the story of King Arthur is to us.
  - It looks as if the kingdom of the Danes is destined to tear itself apart through civil war, just as the Geats will destroy themselves with rash aggression.
  - The fact is that everyone in the poem is vulnerable—Beowulf, Hygelac, and Hrothgar—but they don’t know it. One person who does know it is the Danish queen, Wealhtheow. As the poem makes clear, in Heroic Ages, it’s women who pay the highest price for defeat.

### **Beowulf and the Dragon**

- As a young hero, Beowulf assumed he was invulnerable, even against monsters. In the last third of the poem, he squares off against another monster, the dragon. By this time, he is old, and almost everyone in his family is dead. He has become king of the Geats, as Hrothgar predicted, by default. He has defeated the Swedes, but he has neither wife nor child.
- In retaliation for a robbery from its lair, a dragon burns down Beowulf’s hall. When he receives the news, we get one fleeing



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**As a young hero, Beowulf was confident in his strength, but as he ages, he must steel himself for battle.**

glimpse of his inner life. The poet says, “The wise man thought that he must have bitterly offended God the Ruler, the eternal Lord. His breast boiled inside with dark thoughts, as was not his custom.” Beowulf orders an iron shield and sets off to certain death—for both him and the dragon.

- How is this older Beowulf different from the young hero he used to be? Before the fight, he sits down outside the dragon’s lair. His mind, we are told, is gloomy. He knows fate is near. In repeated speeches, he thinks over his own long life, full of disasters, but he still takes savage satisfaction in his actions. At last, he pushes himself up with his shield—a stiff-jointed old man?—and orders his men to stay back.
- Just as Bilbo and Frodo showed us that you don’t have to be big and strong to be a hero, so Beowulf shows us that you don’t have to be young and strong either. Heroes can also be old and tired.

What counts is not *mægen*, “youthful strength,” but *mod*, “spirit unaffected by time.”

- Beowulf’s heart is strong, but he’s not what he once was. The dragon fire is almost too much for him; his iron shield gives less protection than he hoped; and his sword fails him. The dragon bites him in the throat with its poisoned teeth.
- Beowulf is saved by a young relative, Wiglaf, who distracts the dragon while Beowulf draws his sax and stabs the worm in its belly. The dragon is dead, but Beowulf’s wound starts to swell. He then makes three death speeches, mixing grief and triumph.
- Scholars have long argued about whether the poet, probably an 8<sup>th</sup>-century Christian, believed that the pagan Beowulf’s soul might be saved. The poet seems to have admired Beowulf, but he knew that salvation was in the hands of God.

### Assessing *Beowulf*

- Some people would like to think that *Beowulf* reinforces the idea that those who live by the sword shall die by the sword. But for a hero in a Heroic Age, that’s the point; there’s no alternative.
- Others have argued that the poem’s message is that a good young hero does not make a good old king. Beowulf’s decision to fight the dragon by himself is certainly disastrous for his people. His death creates a power vacuum. When the messenger announces Beowulf’s death, he predicts that the Geats will be conquered, and the poet says, “He was not far wrong.”
- We might also feel that Beowulf the man shows us how we gain wisdom—insight into the true nature of life and death.
  - The hero begins with an emotional dependency that makes him vulnerable and a confidence that is ill-founded.
  - He learns better, but in a way, he doesn’t change. He becomes even more self-reliant, although he also knows the limits of his

self-reliance. His wisdom isn't perfect, but it may be as good as we can get.

### Essential Reading

Anonymous (Ringler, trans.), *Beowulf*.

### Suggested Reading

Fulk, ed., *Interpretations of Beowulf*.

Irving, *A Reading of Beowulf*.

Niles, ed., *Beowulf and Lejre*.

Shippey, *Beowulf*.

Tolkien, J.R.R. (Tolkien, C., ed.), *The Monsters and the Critics*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Heroes must be brave, but at what point does recklessness become irresponsible?
2. What kind of leaders do you most admire, and what are the most essential leadership qualities?

# Thor—A Very Human God

## Lecture 8

One reason for including Thor, the Norse god of thunder, in our course is that he has been reinvented as a superhero in modern times. Another reason for including him is that the Norse gods were unusually heroic. In fact, we could say that the whole Norse religion existed to express a consciously heroic ethos. The Norse gods know they can die—and that they will die at Ragnarök—but they fight on nevertheless. That’s what makes them heroic. Still another reason for examining Thor is that, in addition to being big and strong like some of our other basic male heroes, he is also funny.

### A Tale of Thor from Snorri

- Most of what we know about Old Norse mythology comes from two connected sources.
  - In the 1230s, an Icelandic politician called Snorri wrote a handbook for aspiring poets that we call the *Prose Edda*. Snorri worked into his handbook about 20 stories concerning gods and legendary heroes, about half of which center on or mention Thor.
  - The second important source for Norse mythology is the so-called *Poetic Edda*—a collection of older poems that Snorri clearly knew. The poems in the *Poetic Edda* add several Thor stories to those in the *Prose Edda*.
- In the first tale Snorri tells about Thor, the god sets out on a journey with his fellow god Loki. The two are traveling in Thor’s chariot, which is pulled by two goats, and they stop for the night at a peasant’s house.
  - Thor slaughters his goats, skins them, puts them in a pot, and invites the peasant family to share the meal. He then tells them to put all the bones in the goatskins. But Thjalfi, the son in the family, splits one of the bones with his knife to get the marrow.

- In the morning, Thor blesses the goatskins and the bones with his hammer, and the goats come back to life. But one of the goats is lame because Thjalfi had split its bone.
- When Thor realizes what happened, he is furious. The peasants are terrified and beg for mercy, and when he sees how frightened they are, Thor calms down and takes Thjalfi as a bond servant by way of compensation.
- Note that in this story, Thor is quite friendly, but he is also short-tempered. Still, he can control himself, and he accepts human companions.
- The group carries on with the journey until nightfall. They find shelter in an oddly shaped empty building, but during the night, there's an earthquake. When dawn comes, the companions go outside and see a giant lying in the forest; the earthquake was the noise of the giant snoring.
- Thor puts on the magic belt that multiplies his strength and gets ready to strike the giant with his hammer, but at that moment, the giant wakes and stands up. Thor hesitates to use the hammer and instead asks the giant's name. The giant replies that his name is Skrymir.
- The members of the group have breakfast together, and Skrymir suggests that they put all their food in one bag, which he will carry. They travel on until nightfall again, and when they stop, Skrymir goes to sleep and tells the others to get on with their supper. But Thor can't get the bag of provisions open; the knots won't come undone.
- Thor becomes angry, and strikes the sleeping Skrymir with his hammer. The giant wakes up and thinks that a leaf must've fallen on his head. Twice more in the night, Thor strikes Skrymir with his hammer, but Skrymir believes he's been hit with an acorn or, perhaps, bird droppings.

- In the morning, Skrymir advises the group that their destination, the castle of Utgard-Loki, is peopled with even larger giants than he. Skrymir tells his companions that they shouldn't act big, or the giants of Utgard-Loki will be angry. He then leaves the group.
- Thor, Loki, and Thjalfi travel on to an enormous castle. They wriggle in through the bars of the gate and find themselves in the giants' hall. The head giant, Utgard-Loki, tells them that no visitors are allowed in the castle unless they can demonstrate a skill.
- Loki volunteers to have an eating contest with one of the giants, Logi, but Logi wins. Thjalfi offers to run a race but loses to a runner called Hugi. Thor tries to drain a drinking horn, to lift a giant cat, and to wrestle with Utgard-Loki's nurse, Elli, but fails at all three.
- In the morning, Thor prepares to go, and Utgard-Loki accompanies him outside the castle. Thor admits that they have not done well, but then Utgard-Loki reveals that the contests were fixed.
  - *Logi* is the word for "fire," and fire eats faster than any person can.
  - *Hugi* is the word for "thought," and no one can outrun thought.
  - The drinking horn was connected to the sea, and Thor's attempt to drain it caused the tides.
  - The cat was the world-girdling sea serpent *Iörmungandr*.
  - The name of the nurse, *Elli*, means "age," and age has indeed put down many people who seem as strong as Thor.
- The tone of this story is a kind of friendly disrespect. Most of the time, the joke is on Thor, and he becomes increasingly frustrated.
  - In the end, Thor is a god who thinks with his hammer and can be fooled, but as Utgard-Loki admits, he's still immensely powerful.

- To humans, Thor is good-natured, and most of all, he's on our side against the monsters who continually threaten the human world.

### **A Modern Tale of Thor**

- Two American fantasy writers, Lyon Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt, recast this story in a modern idiom. Interestingly, the tone of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century story seems almost identical to that of the tale told in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
- De Camp and Pratt followed the main outline of Snorri's story, but they introduced a modern American character, Harold Shea. He has figured out how to travel between dimensions and finds himself in the world of the *Eddas*, where—until he learns the laws of magic—he is out of his depth.
- De Camp and Pratt posed and answered some obvious questions about the story: What was the whole expedition for, and given Thor's temper, why doesn't he use his hammer? Their answers drew on another Thor story, one from the *Poetic Edda* called *Thrymskviða*.
  - This story starts with Thor waking up and finding his hammer gone. In the traditional poem, Loki finds out that a giant called Thrym has stolen it. He'll give it back, but only in exchange for Freyja, the goddess of love. When Freyja objects, Heimdall proposes that they disguise Thor as Freyja.
  - Thor assumes the disguise and travels to the land of the giants, but he's not very good at staying in character as a blushing bride. Ultimately, the marriage ceremony starts, and the stolen hammer is brought out to bless the marriage. But of course, as soon as Thor gets his hands on his hammer, he kills the giant who stole it.
  - Borrowing from this story, de Camp and Pratt answered two of the earlier questions: Thor doesn't use the hammer on Utgard-Loki because the giants have stolen it, and the purpose of the expedition is to get it back. The American, Harold Shea, saves

the day because he can see through Utgard-Loki's illusions and recognize the hammer.

### **Thor and the Giant Hrungnir**

- In another story given to us by Snorri, the giant Hrungnir gets drunk in Asgard and behaves rudely, but because he is under safe conduct, he and Thor agree to fight a duel outside. Each of them will have a second.
- The giants make an enormous clay giant called Mokkurkalfi to be Hrungnir's second, but they give him only the heart of a mare. Mokkurkalfi wets himself when he sees Thor and is finished off by Thor's assistant, the human Thjalfi.
- Hrungnir, however, has a stone heart, a stone head, and a stone shield, and his weapon is a whetstone. When Thjalfi cunningly tells him that Thor will attack from underground, Hrungnir stands on his shield. Thor and Hrungnir then throw the hammer and whetstone at each other simultaneously, and Hrungnir's skull is shattered. But a piece of the whetstone is embedded in Thor's skull, and he can never get it out.
- A German poet long ago suggested that all this was an allegory. Killing the stone giant meant, in rocky Scandinavia, creating cultivable soil. The clay giant was the unworkable heavy clay that defeated farmers. Thjalfi stands for the ordinary peasant, who knows that Thor will help him because Thor is the friend of humanity and, especially, of the working man.

### **Thor the Superhero**

- In 1962, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby latched on to Thor as a new idea for a superhero. His alter ego in Lee and Kirby's work is Don Blake, an American doctor with a lame leg. Blake, vacationing in Norway, sees aliens land. He hides in a cave, where he finds a stick; when he picks it up, it turns into the hammer Mjollnir, and he turns into Thor. NATO fails to drive the aliens off, but Thor succeeds.

- In what ways is the modern Thor different from the ancient one? We've already seen that 20<sup>th</sup>-century writers have not really found a problem with changed cultural values. Still, the comic-book Thor is much more showily violent than his original, and the two sides—the gods and giants—seem much more polarized.
- More important, the tricky combination of friendly disrespect in stories about Thor has nearly vanished. Comic-book Thor is much more like the basic male hero, perhaps because comic books are written for a teenage or sub-teen market.
- At the same time, the comic-book Thor must conform to modern ideas of propriety. For example, he must earn his place, not just inherit it. He is exiled to earth by his father, Odin, and can get his hammer back only if he is found worthy. Thor has to prove his worth by being responsible, a virtue of which there is no sign in the ancient stories. What this means is that Thor is no longer funny. He's a superhero, but he's one who shares the social anxieties of middle America.
- Still, the myth has proved curiously adaptable. Thor crops up repeatedly, even in adult science fiction, and always positively. His image as the friend of humanity remains potent and is set against his uncertain and unreliable relatives, such as Odin in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*. Although Thor has come a long way from the Old Norse *Eddas*, one thing has remained constant: his heroic defense of the vulnerable.

### Essential Reading

Anonymous (Auden and Taylor, trans., *Norse Poems*), *The Poetic Edda*.

Snorri Sturluson (Faulkes, trans.), *The Prose Edda*.

### Suggested Reading

Arnold, *Thor*.

Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*.

O'Donoghue, *From Asgard to Valhalla*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Would you say that fantasies (such as the superhero fantasies) are myths for our time, or are they just not serious enough?
2. People still have different ideas about what's funny. Do you think that humor is among the cultural values that have changed?

# Robin Hood—The Outlaw Hero

## Lecture 9

No one knows the origins of the hero we'll discuss in this lecture, Robin Hood. By the time stories about Robin Hood started to appear, he was already an established figure. Paradoxically, this may be one reason he has remained popular with writers: There are so many gaps in his story that it's easy to write into them. Another reason people continued to add stories about Robin Hood is that from the start, he looked like a bundle of contradictions. As we'll see, these were apparent contradictions only, but they still provoked writers to provide explanations.

### The Original Robin Story?

- Many of the questions surrounding the character of Robin Hood appear in a scene from a poem called *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, probably written around 1425 and the nearest thing we have to the original Robin story.
- Near the end of the poem, the king visits his private deer park and finds it completely depopulated by Robin Hood and his Merry Men. The king is not pleased and decides to look for Robin himself. He disguises himself as an abbot and rides into the greenwood with five of his knights, disguised as monks.
- Of course, Robin and the Merry Men hold up the king's party. But Robin's approach is to invite the king and his men to dinner, then tell them that they have to pay for it. With all his victims, those who reply honestly to Robin that they can't pay for dinner are allowed to keep what money they have. Those who lie about their money lose all of it. The disguised king tells Robin that he has only £40, and when it turns out he's telling the truth, Robin splits the £40 with him.
- To round off the entertainment, Robin proposes a shooting match. Anyone who misses his target will lose his arrow and get a clout

on the head from Robin. When Robin misses, he gives his guest the opportunity to hit him. The “abbot” rolls up his sleeve and—because he’s a warrior-king, probably Edward III—deals Robin a good blow.

- At that moment, Robin recognizes the king. He kneels down and asks for mercy. The king pardons all the men on condition that they enter his service, which of course, they are glad to do. And off they ride together to Nottingham.
- On the way, they play a game called pluck-buffet that involves taking alternate shots at a target. The one who misses or shoots widest gets another clout on the head.
  - We can see the appeal of this detail. Robin is keen on male bonding in a typically rough and violent way, but both he and the king are sportsmen and play fair.
  - Robin is also loyal in a disloyal kind of way. He shoots all the king’s deer, and he kills his officers, but he insists that he loves the king.

### Robin as a Yeoman

- The *Gest* mentions repeatedly that Robin is a yeoman, an abbreviated form of “young man.” The term probably derived from the name a local lord or leader might call his squad of enforcers. Yeomen gained status by doing a good job for the boss and earning land as payment.
- What did yeomen look like in the 1370s, when we first hear about Robin Hood? As it happens, we have a good description of one, written by Geoffrey Chaucer in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The Yeoman there is a forester; he wears green and carries a bow. Robin Hood himself has always been defined by his characteristic weapon, the English longbow.
  - For several generations, the specialized class of English longbowmen ruled the battlefields of England, Scotland, France, Spain, and even further afield.



We often hear that knights were the medieval equivalent of tanks, but the English longbow was the antitank gun.

- This meant that the rural yeomen of medieval England became increasingly confident and even aspirational in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. And Robin Hood was their hero. He expresses all their prejudices, which appear to us as a bundle of contradictions.

### Contradictions in Robin Hood

- In the *Gest*, Robin Hood won't have his dinner until he's robbed someone to pay for it. Here, he is imitating an aristocratic custom. King Arthur also would have dinner served to his guests but would not sit down to eat his own dinner until he'd seen a marvel of some kind. What the poem is telling us is that yeomen are just as good as their social superiors, especially at having good manners.
- We're also told that Robin always hears three masses before dinner, the third of them in honor of Our Lady. Robin is devoted to Our Lady and never robs any company that includes a woman. In fact,

Robin tells Little John that he can rob only churchmen and the Sheriff of Nottingham. Just as Robin loves the king but hates his officials, he's a devout Christian but can't stand the officials of the established church.

- As the story continues in the *Gest*, the Merry Men go off to rob someone on the highway. The next traveler to go by is a knight but a sorry-looking one. Little John courteously kneels down and invites him to dinner, after which Robin tells the knight he must pay. The knight, Sir Richard at Lee, says that he has only 10 shillings, and when Little John checks, this turns out to be true.
  - The knight tells Robin that his son has killed someone, and he has pledged his lands to St. Mary's Abbey in York, a rich Benedictine monastery, to pay for lawyers and compensation. He's due to pay the money back, but he will have to ask for an extension, which he knows he won't get.
  - Robin offers to lend the knight the money if he has a guarantor. The knight replies that God is his guarantor, but Robin rejects that response. When Sir Richard then says that "Our Lady" will be the guarantor, Robin accepts and immediately lends him £400.
  - Sir Richard goes to St. Mary's and is treated rudely by the abbot, who takes delight in the prospect of repossessing Sir Richard's lands. The abbot has a justice sitting by him, just to show that the law is on his side. In the end, Sir Richard brings out the money lent him by Robin Hood. The abbot is chagrined, and his annoyance worsens when the justice refuses to hand back the legal fee that the abbot has paid him.
  - We can see that Robin is devoted to justice in the elementary sense of playing fair, but he also has no faith in the corrupt legal system. His complaint about lawyers and justices is the same as it was about senior churchmen. Robin is a devout Christian, but they aren't; they're just in it for the money. As

for the officials who enforce the law, their bribe-taking and harshness to the poor were notorious.

- Robin is protesting against corruption in the Church, the law, and the administration. But he has a strong belief in true religion, true justice, and true authority. Thus, it's not Robin who is contradictory but his hypocritical enemies.
- A year later, Sir Richard is on his way to repay Robin when he is held up by having to protect a yeoman. Robin is rather surprised that Our Lady, Sir Richard's guarantor, seems to have let him down. He sends Little John off again to see what's on the road.
  - Little John finds a monk and brings him to have dinner with Robin. Of course, the monk lies about how much money he has and forfeits it—£800, double the money Sir Richard owes. Robin says that he knew Our Lady wouldn't let him down.
  - But then Sir Richard turns up. Robin accepts his excuse that he has been protecting a yeoman and refuses to take the money back, saying he's already gotten it from Our Lady. In fact, he even splits the takings from the monk with Sir Richard.
  - Robin certainly isn't behaving like a proper social bandit here. Instead of robbing the rich to feed the poor, he robs the rich to help the gentry. But Robin is a conservative bandit—and quite recognizable in modern America. He is loyal and patriotic but has no time for the government or Washington. The underlying appeal to justice and protest against corruption in Robin Hood's actions have remained vital even after the circumstances of the medieval yeomanry ceased to be relevant.

### **Robin Hood's Fortunes**

- Eventually, the longbow was replaced by firearms, and the yeomanry of England failed to continue their upward trajectory. This didn't put an end to Robin Hood, but after the 15<sup>th</sup> century, he began to seem lower class. In 1598, a playwright called Anthony

Munday, perhaps trying to push him upmarket again, added the notion that Robin Hood was really the outlawed Earl of Huntington.

- In his novel *Ivanhoe*, Walter Scott offered a solution to the continuing puzzle of Robin's ambivalent relationship with royalty.
  - If Robin was hostile to the king's officers but loyal to the king, then there must be two kings: the real king, for some reason absent or in exile, and the king acting in his place, the regent. The obvious place in English history when this was true was when King Richard Lionheart was away on the Crusades and his brother King John was acting as regent.
  - Scholars have often noted how many mistakes Scott made, but it hasn't made any difference. The very openness of the Robin Hood story has been a standing provocation for many writers to try to fill in the blanks.
- Given that Robin Hood emerged from a particular class in a particular place at a particular time, how has he managed to retain his appeal centuries later?
  - Robin represents a strong desire for justice, which is only made stronger by distrust of the law, a feeling that has not gone away.
  - In addition, Robin is strongly associated with merriment, laughter, and jokes, even if the jokes are often violent. Life in the greenwood, for the Merry Men, is carefree.
  - Robin and his men live in an agricultural society, but they never do any agricultural work; instead, they are hunter-gatherers. To people who have to work every day, that form of existence looks fairly attractive.
  - In modern times, Robin has also been made to look good as a democratic hero, almost an honorary American.
- Modern depictions of Robin Hood still show the radical uncertainty of plot that we've seen, but the essentials don't change: the bow,

the forest, the sense of justice, and the idea of freedom from control and from care.

### Essential Reading

Anonymous (Knight and Ohlgren, eds.), *A Gest of Robyn Hode*.

### Suggested Reading

Dobson and Taylor, eds., *Rymes of Robyn Hood*.

Holt, *Robin Hood*.

Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval England*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What modern cases can you think of where outlaws are presented sympathetically (Jesse James, Ned Kelly, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid)? What makes them sympathetic?
2. Has anything replaced “the greenwood” as the ideal hideout or getaway location?

# Don Quixote—The First of the Wannabes

## Lecture 10

**O**f all the heroes presented in this course, Don Quixote is one of the most visually recognizable: an old, thin man on a bony horse with a lance in his hand, wearing antique armor and a helmet made out of a brass shaving basin. Like Odysseus, he has given a word to the English language: quixotic, meaning extravagantly romantic, idealistic to the point of absurdity. *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* by Miguel Cervantes may be one of the most influential works in the history of literature, but it's also one of the least read. In this lecture, we'll try to get the flavor of this novel and explore the surprising complexity of the title character.

### Becoming a Knight-Errant

- Don Quixote is known, of course, for tilting at windmills. This phrase has become popular, especially in politics, and is used to refer to an attack on a target that exists only in the attacker's mind. Don Quixote tilts at windmills because his mind has been completely warped by reading books. More than that, he's become a wannabe.
- For Don Quixote, becoming a wannabe is disastrous because his literary role models are singularly bad. He has overdosed on a diet of romances, and under their influence, he decides to become a knight-errant.
- To fulfill this role, the hero first changes his name. He then cleans up some old armor and fashions a helmet. He renames his old horse Rocinante, adds "de la Mancha" to Don Quixote, and then realizes that he needs a lady love.
  - He remembers seeing a peasant girl that he once liked, whose name was Aldonza Lorenzo, and he renames her, too: Dulcinea, because that sounds properly romantic.

- He imagines himself defeating a giant and sending him to Dulcinea to fall on his knees before her and admit that he has been vanquished by Don Quixote de la Mancha.
- After these preliminary preparations, one further ceremony needs to be arranged: Don Quixote must be made a knight. He finds himself at an inn, where the only customers are a couple of women of easy virtue. Together with the innkeeper, they play along with Quixote's fantasy, and ultimately he is knighted.
- His first efforts do not go well, but undeterred, the Don goes home and recruits Sancho Panza to act as his squire. The arrival on the scene of Sancho is the magic ingredient that makes the story take off.
- Even this early in the book, we can see the pattern that emerges. The Don continually thinks in terms of vigils, challenges, fair ladies, giants, and enchantments. But he keeps running into issues over money and donkeys and ladies of dubious virtue. The fantasy world and the real world keep clashing.

### **Reality versus Delusion**

- This clash becomes evident in the scene involving the windmills. As the Don and Sancho are riding along, they see 30 or 40 windmills standing on the plain, and the Don tells Sancho that he will fight these "giants."
  - Sancho tries to point out that the giants are actually windmills, but the Don doesn't listen. He charges the windmills and drives his lance into one of the sails, but the wind turns it so violently that it breaks the lance and drags the horse and rider over with it.
  - Sancho rushes to help the Don, and says, "Didn't I tell you they were only windmills?" The Don gives the all-purpose answer that maintains his delusion: "An enchanter must have changed the giants into windmills to deprive me of the glory of my victory." No matter what, he rewrites events into the language of his own fantasies.

- This basic joke is played out repeatedly. The Don comes upon a chain gang being led off to the royal galleys. As a knight-errant, he feels obliged to free prisoners, which he does, helped by the galley slaves, who turn on their soldier escort. Another time, he attempts to fight lions that are being transported to the royal zoo, but the leader of the pride doesn't even emerge from its cage. We can see from these incidents that the Don is insane, but he is genuinely brave and, in a way, goodhearted.
- This basic joke of delusion confronted by reality by itself doesn't tell us much. But note that, insane though the Don may be, people go along with him. He meets others who are fans of romance and share his madness to a lesser degree. There are also some who go along with his illusions in the hope of curing him, cheering him up, or playing tricks on him.
- From the Don's point of view, all this playacting around him makes the distinction between the fantasy world and the real world look rather uncertain. Furthermore, we are all wannabes at one time or another. If Don Quixote was living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he might indulge in virtual-reality role-playing games, and no one would notice his delusions.

### Contrasting Characters

- In addition to writing a narrative centered on a wannabe, Cervantes was also responsible for another innovation in the history of literature: creating a contrasting pair of characters. In this case, we have the Don, exaggeratedly romantic, high-flown, and ineffectual, and Sancho Panza, exaggeratedly down-to-earth, vulgar, and worldly wise.
- Such contrasts have been used repeatedly, with many variations. There's the Cisco Kid and Pancho, the Lone Ranger and Tonto, Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee, and Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller. P. G. Wodehouse put a twist on the idea by creating Bertie Wooster, the aristocratic idiot, and his valet Jeeves, who can solve all problems.



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**Just as all of us have a bit of Don Quixote—the urge to be a hero or heroine in our own imaginary worlds—so all of us have a bit of Sancho—the part that reminds us that the fantasy is not real.**

- The pairing of contrasting characters is an immensely useful narrative device and, arguably, psychologically penetrating. Some have said that Don Quixote represents the ego in each of us, while Sancho represents the id. George Orwell skipped the Freudian language and put it like this: “If you look into your own mind, which are you, Don Quixote or Sancho Panza? Almost certainly you are both.”
- Further, just as the Don and Sancho are mixed in every one of us, so in Cervantes’s work, the Don and Sancho rub off on each other. They can speak each other’s language, and Sancho’s adoption of his master’s speech adds another dimension to Don Quixote’s character.
  - In one scene, the Don sends Sancho off to greet Dulcinea; Sancho reflects that this won’t work, because there is no Dulcinea, but he decides to play along with the Don’s mania. He sees three peasant girls approaching on donkeys, and he

tells Don Quixote that it's Dulcinea coming to greet him with two maids.

- Sancho describes the girls in great detail, but the Don replies that all he sees are three peasant girls on three donkeys. Sancho tells the Don that he's got it wrong and rides forward to greet the girls, addressing them in speech that is very like his master's.
- Don Quixote is completely dumbstruck because all he can see is a very ordinary peasant girl who speaks in very non-noble language. He begs her to look kindly on him, even though some enchanter has cast a spell on him to disguise her beauty, but she takes no notice.
- As the girls ride on, Dulcinea is bucked off her donkey. But she jumps up, runs after the donkey, puts both hands on its rump, and vaults onto the packsaddle, sitting astride just like a man. Don Quixote stares after her and says, very sadly, "Sancho, you can see now, can't you, how the enchanters hate me." They've taken away from him his image of beauty.
- This is the complete opposite of the windmill scene, and it shows that the Don is not completely insane. He can see what's in front of him, but does that make him feel better? Perhaps Sancho's attempt to go along with his master's fantasies is psychologically wiser.
- Sancho, like Samwise Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings*, is *samwis*, which is Old English for "part-wise." The peasant sayings he's fond of ("If you lie when you buy, it's your purse that will sigh") reveal a vein of cunning quite opposite the Don's gallantry.
- And sometimes Sancho's cunning pays off. For example, he is given a town to rule as governor by the duke who is playing along with Don Quixote's fantasy and turns out to be a perfect Solomon when it comes to lawsuits. Eventually, though, he gives up the job of governor because it gives a man no peace.

- At the end of the story, Don Quixote is freed of his delusion; he takes his own name back and pronounces an anathema on all romances of chivalry. Sancho tries to cheer him up by talking to him again in his own chivalric terms, but it doesn't work. The Don makes his will and dies, and then, in an ironic fulfillment of his thirst for glory, all the towns of La Mancha fight for the right to claim that they were the hometown of the famous Don Quixote.

### Cervantes's Influence

- Some of Cervantes's later influence is obvious. When English writers first began to write novels, they usually modeled themselves on Cervantes and seem to have been particularly impressed with the idea of the "picaresque," a road novel full of amusing scrapes and misunderstandings.
  - Henry Fielding's famous novel *Tom Jones* imitates *Don Quixote* quite closely, especially in one scene of misunderstandings, jealous husbands, and predatory females.
  - All picaresque heroes also must have a Sancho in attendance: Tom Jones has Partridge, Smollett's Roderick Random has Strap, and much later, Dickens's Mr. Pickwick has Sam Weller.
- We find buried memories of Cervantes in *Tom Sawyer*. When Tom leads his gang in an attack on a Sunday-school picnic, he says that there were diamonds there, and Arabs, and elephants, but Huck says he couldn't see any. "It's all done by enchantment," says Tom, quoting *Don Quixote* as an authority.
- And *Don Quixote* remained a powerful influence on a larger scale than just scenes and sayings. One of the earliest open imitations in English was *The Female Quixote* by Charlotte Lennox. Her heroine, Arabella, has been reading romances, too, but these are female-oriented romances in which the heroine's virtue is perpetually threatened. In Jane Austen's first novel, *Northanger Abbey*, the young heroine's head has been turned by Gothic novels.

- Cervantes gave us the idea of the picaresque and of satirizing the pernicious influence of popular literature. Even more important, he gave us the ideas of the wannabe as a hero and the anti-hero in Sancho. Both these ideas were present at the birth of the novel and have influenced it ever since, never losing their capacity to create both comedy and tragedy.

### Essential Reading

Cervantes (Rutherford, trans.), *Don Quixote*.

### Suggested Reading

Byron, *Cervantes: A Biography*.

Predmore, *The World of Don Quixote*.

Williamson, *The Half-Way House of Fiction*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Do you know any real-life wannabes or people who seem to have damaged their lives by trying to make them fit a pulp-fiction pattern? (See Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse Five*.)
2. What would you identify as the best fictional role models in our time?

# Robinson Crusoe—A Lone Survivor

## Lecture 11

In this course so far, we've had heroes called into being by historical trauma, to express changing cultural values, or to deny or make fun of established values. But with Robinson Crusoe, we have a hero called into being by a new geography. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is the model for the "desert (deserted) island" story, but such stories weren't possible until people discovered habitable islands that had no inhabitants. This was a New World phenomenon, and the New World itself was a study in contrasts for the first European explorers: fear and danger versus luxury and riches. As we'll see in this lecture, such contradictions, along with new ideas and images, dominate the desert island story.

### Contrasts in the New World

- Although we're all familiar with deserted island stories, such stories weren't possible until habitable islands were discovered that had no inhabitants. Such discoveries were a post-Columbus phenomenon.
- The New World was a strange place to the first European explorers. On the one hand, it was terrifying; Europeans encountered destructive tropical weather, sharks, and cannibals for the first time in the 1500s. But the New World could also be alluring, providing such products as potatoes, tomatoes, tobacco, maize, pineapples, and sugarcane.
- Such contradictions probably set many people wondering what it would be like to live in the New World, and these thoughts were fed by accounts of exploration, disaster, and triumph across the sea.
- One such account was certainly a source for *Robinson Crusoe*. It was the story of a Scottish sailor named Alexander Selkirk, who was cast away on an island about 800 miles off the coast of Chile. Selkirk did several things that Crusoe was later to do and become famous for, notably, making his own clothes out of goatskin.

- Defoe’s description of Crusoe in his goatskin clothes makes him visually recognizable. Defoe also tells us that Crusoe is bearded and hairy; he looks like a prehistoric wild man. But Crusoe is pretty heavily equipped in a style that is definitely not prehistoric. He has a saw and hatchet; he wears a baldric with pouches for his gunpowder and shot; and besides his basket and umbrella, he carries a gun.
- We can note one other contradiction in Defoe’s story of Crusoe: When he finds the footprint of Man Friday, he reacts with fear and alarm at the thought of human companionship.

### Crusoe’s Personality

- There are many things about Crusoe as a person that make people uneasy now and probably always did. For example, James Joyce said that he was the model of the British colonizer, and there are certainly things about him that remind us of the worst aspects of the history of European colonization and dominance.
  - Crusoe gets his start as a merchant in what he calls the “Guinea trade.” He scrapes together £40 that he spends on “toys and trifles” to take to Africa, where he trades them for gold dust worth almost £300.
  - Later on, Crusoe is captured by the Moors of North Africa and escapes from them in a boat, along with a Moorish boy he calls Xury. They are picked up by a Portuguese ship on passage to Brazil. The Portuguese captain deals fairly with Crusoe, buying his boat, which gives Crusoe the means to start a plantation in Brazil. However, Crusoe also sells Xury to the captain. Eventually, a deal is struck that Xury will serve the captain for 10 years, after which he will be freed as long as he converts to Christianity.
  - Crusoe is always high-handed when it comes to dealing with any non-Europeans. After he has set up his plantation in Brazil, even though it’s going well and making him rich, he still desires to go back to the Guinea trade, by which he means

buying slaves in Africa and shipping them to plantations in South America.

- In addition to being a potential slaver, Crusoe also is, perhaps, a potential capitalist. He certainly has strong feelings about money. We see this in the scene in which Crusoe attempts to salvage as much as he can out of the wreck of his ship.
  - Although he is now a castaway and completely dependent on his own efforts, everyone else on the ship has been drowned; thus, Crusoe has unchallenged title to a great deal of valuable property, if only he can salvage it.
  - Crusoe gets back on board the wreck and starts stripping it of everything he can find: bread, rum, tools, guns, gunpowder, and more. Then he finds some money, about £36, and muses that it isn't worth anything to him now, yet he says, "upon second thoughts, I took it away."
- Crusoe also represents a high degree of the Protestant work ethic and what is often felt to go along with it: a kind of hypocrisy or self-righteousness.
  - In Protestant England, many people were encouraged to write diaries of their spiritual progress, and in this "autobiography," Crusoe is doing something very similar. He keeps an account book of his soul, just as he does of his money and possessions. This gives a new and unusually honest insight into his inner life, but he comes over as a strange mixture.
  - Is he hardhearted? He takes home a small goat with the aim of making it a pet but later kills it and eats it. He arms himself heavily and seems quite confident that he can wipe out many cannibals if he can take them by surprise.
  - But Crusoe also has a Christian conscience. Although he describes the Indians regularly as "naked savages," he wonders whether their dreadful customs are their own fault and whether they deserve the death he means to deal out to them. They

don't see what they do as a crime. Still, these reflections don't prevent Crusoe from attacking and killing the Indians who have captured Friday and doing the same thing when he and Friday rescue Friday's father.

- Crusoe seems to be able to practice what George Orwell called doublethink, the useful ability to proclaim one principle and believe in it wholeheartedly even when it's contradicted by your actions.
- None of this makes Crusoe a very likeable character, especially in the modern world, and his most obvious blind spot is his treatment of Man Friday. He does, of course, rescue Friday from certain death, and it's only right that Friday should be grateful to him. But Crusoe portrays Friday with a kind of indulgent patronage. As far as Crusoe is concerned, Friday is a child.
  - Crusoe naturally tries to explain Christianity to Friday but runs into trouble when Friday starts asking questions. Crusoe concludes that "nothing but a revelation from heaven" can form correct opinions in the soul.
  - As for what Friday tells him about his own religion, Crusoe's only comment is to say that the Indians also suffer from "priestcraft," which in Protestant England was an obvious slur on Roman Catholics.

### Imitations of Crusoe

- Crusoe is self-righteous, patronizing, money-oriented, distinctly ruthless, and for all his spiritual account-keeping, possibly so hypocritical that he doesn't even notice it himself. We must ask, then, how has he come to inspire so many imitations? In German-speaking countries, imitations of Crusoe were so numerous that a special term was developed for them: *Robinsonaden*.
- The most familiar of these imitations is *The Swiss Family Robinson*, which became a children's classic. Jules Verne wrote one called *L'Ecole des Robinsons*, "*The School for Robinsons*." J. M. Barrie,



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**Robinson's most lovingly described success on the island is his construction of a kind of fort for himself.**

the creator of *Peter Pan*, added an element of class comedy in a play called *The Admirable Crichton*, in which an upper-class family is stranded with their butler, who turns out to be the most practical and useful member of the party.

- What seems to have made Defoe's book a hit in the popular consciousness was Crusoe's ingenuity. At the heart of the story are detailed accounts of his triumph over his environment: how he learns to grow grain and grind it to make bread; how he learns to make butter, cheese, and baskets; and how he builds a fort for himself.
- There's a moment, too, as Crusoe explores the island and sees its abundance when he feels how lucky he is. We might even say that he has the best of both worlds.
  - He has land of his own to do what he wants, with no human competition and no serious animal competition. At the same time, he has considerable accumulated capital—from all the

things he salvaged from his own wrecked ship and more added from a second wreck that comes ashore years later.

- He also has what we might call the intellectual capital of the civilization he comes from. Crusoe may not know exactly how to do things, but he knows what can be done, and with the aid of labor and patience and experiment, he manages to supply most of his wants.
- We've likely all been Crusoes, at least in our imaginations. Building a treehouse or a fort as a child is a Crusoe-style activity, and we can imagine ourselves doing similar things as adults, with better equipment and more know-how. It's an immensely satisfying feeling, and we feel Crusoe's own satisfaction as he rises above his difficulties.
- There are no desert islands left on Earth, which is probably why Crusoe stories have been shifted into science fiction.
  - One obvious Robinson spinoff is a book called *No Man Friday* by Rex Gordon. It's about someone who finds himself stranded on Mars, with no resources other than what he can salvage from his wrecked rocket.
  - James Blish, one of the first *Star Trek* authors, wrote another book along similar lines called *Welcome to Mars*.
- Crusoe expresses the sense of enormous untapped possibilities that came over the Western world as it broke out of its medieval isolation. He has many of the bad qualities that accompanied the surge into the New World, especially his treatment of the native peoples to whom the Westerners felt so superior, but on his own, competing against nature, he is an admirable figure.

### Essential Reading

Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*.

## Suggested Reading

Ellis, ed., *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Robinson Crusoe*.

Seidel, *Robinson Crusoe: Island Myths and the Novel*.

Souhami, *Selkirk's Island*.

## Questions to Consider

1. If you were to be stranded on a “desert island,” like Robinson’s, what half-dozen pieces of equipment (single items, not a whole toolbox, as Robinson had) would you select as top priority?
2. Do you think that modern science-fictional post-apocalypse stories (Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*; John Varley, *Slow Apocalypse*) are really “Robinsonades”?

# Elizabeth Bennet—A Proper Pride

## Lecture 12

Elizabeth Bennet is the heroine of Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice*. This book was published in 1813, but for more than two centuries, it has been one of the most popular novels written in English. It’s had several successful film and TV adaptations, and it’s even inspired a kind of remake, under very different social circumstances, in the form of the bestselling novel *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. As we’ll see in this lecture, there are indeed differences between Jane Austen’s social and cultural values and ours; hers are not completely unrecognizable, but they’re strange. Perhaps the greatest differences are not found in the realm of love or romance but in class and money.

### The Lady/Gentleman Line

- Near the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth, who has poor financial prospects, has received a proposal of marriage from the extremely rich Mr. Darcy. Much to his surprise, she has turned him down. Later on, she realizes that she has been misinformed about him and has misjudged him, and events have started to bring them together again.
  - Mr. Darcy’s aunt, Lady Catherine, has heard about this and is extremely displeased because she wants Darcy to marry her own daughter, his cousin Anne, and unite their estates. She calls on Elizabeth to warn her off.
  - Elizabeth refuses to give Lady Catherine a straight answer to the question of whether Mr. Darcy has proposed to her. Lady Catherine declares that Elizabeth and Darcy can never marry because he is engaged to her daughter, although he isn’t.
  - Ultimately, Lady Catherine says that Elizabeth is simply not good enough for Mr. Darcy: “If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up.” Elizabeth replies, “In marrying your

nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal."

- An important idea is wrapped up in Elizabeth's statement: There is a dividing line in society. Above it are gentlemen and ladies; below it are just men and women. Everyone above the line is, in theory, equal, and because Elizabeth is above that line, as she says, "so far we are equal." Those last words, however, also imply inequality in other respects, such as money.
- This "lady/gentleman line" was extremely important for 19<sup>th</sup>- and even 20<sup>th</sup>-century society in Britain, Europe, and America.
  - These days, "lady" is a polite term for a female person, but in a much more formal sense, "lady" means a certain elevated rank in society; specifically, it applies to the wife of a knight. Elizabeth doesn't use the term in that sense. What she means is that she is above the line; thus, she's eligible to marry a gentleman, however rich he is.
  - One definition of "gentleman" is a member of the officer class, and one privilege of the officer/gentleman class in Austen's time was that gentlemen could fight duels, while military officers could not refuse a duel. Perhaps a simpler definition of "gentleman" is someone who has enough money not to have to work.
  - Working for a living in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England was liable to disqualify one from being a gentleman. That's another reason that Elizabeth Bennet's world seems strange to us. Today, we assume that everyone has a line of work, but that was not the case in Austen's time.

### **The Bennets' Finances**

- Although the core of Austen's novel is about love and romance, the story is framed and given tension by concerns about money.

- Elizabeth Bennet has poor financial prospects because her parents have five daughters and no sons. Mr. Bennet has an estate worth £2,000 a year, but the estate is entailed. The entail means that the estate must be inherited by a male. Without sons, Mr. Bennet's estate will go to his next male relative when he dies, which is a cousin of his called Mr. Collins. According to Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins will put her and her daughters out of their house before Mr. Bennet is cold in his grave.
- Mrs. Bennet has £4,000 capital of her own, and Austen tells us that she can expect a return on that capital of about 5 percent a year, or £200—not much to support six people. Mr. Bennet's £2,000 a year means that his estate—probably farmland that he rents out—is worth about £40,000. Mr. Darcy, meanwhile, who has £10,000 a year, is worth about £200,000. In modern terms, that's the equivalent of about \$100 million.
- Another significant difference between Austen's time and our own is that earlier, it was difficult to accumulate capital. Ladies certainly couldn't do it because they weren't allowed to work. And the only professions that gentlemen could enter without losing status were the church, the military, the higher reaches of the law, and “respectable” trade.
- What all this means is that the financial gap between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy is vast. It was brave of her, then, to turn him down the first time he proposed. She had also turned down a proposal from Mr. Collins, but her friend Charlotte accepts Mr. Collins only three days later, despite the fact that Charlotte knows Collins is stupid and that Charlotte's situation is better than Elizabeth's.

### Romantic Core of the Novel

- The romantic core of the novel is the on-again-off-again relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy, which runs in parallel with a similar relationship between Elizabeth's sister Jane and Darcy's friend Mr. Bingley and is confused by the arrival of the adventurer Mr. Wickham.

- At first, Wickham seems to take an interest in Elizabeth, then switches to a lady known to have £10,000, and eventually marries Elizabeth's sister Lydia. We also find out that Wickham had previously tried to elope with Darcy's underage sister Georgiana, which would have been very profitable indeed.
- Meanwhile Elizabeth is not the only lady with her eye on Darcy. There's his cousin Anne and Caroline, the sister of his best friend, Mr. Bingley. Mr. Bingley is attracted to Elizabeth's sister Jane, and Mr. Collins switches deftly from Elizabeth to Charlotte Lucas. The structure of the novel seems rather like an English country dance, with the characters formally pairing off and changing partners, all at arm's length.
- The main theme of the novel, though, is husband-hunting. Its famous first sentence is: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of good fortune must be in want of a wife." The joke is that this is not universally acknowledged. It's an opinion held strongly by young ladies in need of a rich husband and even more strongly by their anxious mothers.

- Husband-hunting, however, must not be too obvious. Any suggestion of sexual forwardness would ruin a young lady's reputation

and spoil her chances for good. For example, when Lydia elopes with Wickham and lives with him for two weeks before they are married, even Elizabeth says, "She is lost forever."



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**One of the main functions of formal balls in upper-class society was to advance the cause of husband-hunting for young ladies.**

- Appearance was certainly important for attracting an eligible man, along with accomplishments, such as playing the piano. But to make a real impact, a young lady needed something more, and that's what Elizabeth has. She chooses the rather dangerous route of speaking her mind and playing hard to get. On more than one occasion, she refuses to dance with Darcy, but he comes to find her honesty bewitching.
- Elizabeth, slightly taken by the new arrival in town, Mr. Wickham, is told by Wickham that Darcy is not to be trusted, and she believes him. She also learns that Darcy has tried to distract Bingley from his interest in her sister Jane. As a result, when Darcy proposes, she turns him down flatly.
- Darcy then writes a long letter justifying his conduct, and Elizabeth realizes that it's correct. She has been deceived, and she was ready to be deceived because of the offense she took against Darcy when she first met him. If he showed pride, she showed prejudice. But it's too late; she seems to have lost her chance.
- Elizabeth and Darcy are drawn together again when Darcy takes charge of finding Lydia and Wickham after their elopement. Darcy bribes Wickham into marrying Lydia and prevents the scandal from getting worse. In the end, Darcy makes a second proposal, which Elizabeth accepts.
- The story in this novel is one of success against the odds. It's also what we might call a Cinderella story in a highly realistic setting. It's given edge and tension by concerns about money, class, and sexual strategies. Finally, it's a story about a kind of female dominance. Elizabeth doesn't flirt and she doesn't make compromises, but she does learn to criticize herself; we might say that she teases her way to success.

## **Elizabeth Bennet and Bridget Jones**

- Interestingly, the plot and some of the characters of Austen's novel were picked up and heavily adapted in Helen Fielding's 1996 and 1999 novels about Bridget Jones.
- The male lead in these stories is actually called Darcy, and he makes a bad first impression, just like Austen's Darcy. There's a Mr. Wickham analog, as well, in the form of the unreliable, womanizing, dangerously attractive Daniel Cleaver.
- Bridget, however, is not at all like Elizabeth Bennet in several important respects. She worries all the time about smoking, about drinking too much, and about putting on weight; she works for a living; and of course, she has had previous sexual partners, including the womanizing Daniel.
- Despite the changed cultural values, is there a lurking similarity? Bridget still has an element of desperation about her, which reminds us of Mrs. Bennet's anxiety transferred to her daughter. It's also true that there is still pressure on a young woman to get married or, at least, to have a stable relationship.
- Another similarity is that Bridget is a modern and independent young woman of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, just as Elizabeth was a modern, independent young woman of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century—or at least as independent as early-19<sup>th</sup>-century English society would allow.
- Finally, both Bridget and Elizabeth, in different ways, seem to have the odds stacked against them. Bridget has much more money and freedom than Elizabeth, but she still thinks that men have the upper hand in the contest of the sexes. The word we might use for these ladies is “gallant”; each plays the rather poor hand she was dealt as best she can.

## Essential Reading

Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*.

## Suggested Reading

Honan, *Jane Austen: Her Life*.

Steiner, *Jane Austen's Civilised Women*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Elizabeth Bennet “has it all”: wealth, love, integrity, independence. Do you find this realistic?
2. In what ways have cultural values changed in our lifetimes with regard to male/female relationships?

# Natty Bumppo and Woodrow Call—Frontier Heroes

## Lecture 13

So far in this course, we have had Greek and Roman heroes and English and Spanish heroes, but in this lecture, we will turn to American heroes. The first of these shows us that a character can be specifically American, in a way we readily recognize, yet can have roots going back to before Columbus. This is Natty Bumppo, the hero of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* and the iconic American frontiersman. Along with Natty, we'll also discuss Woodrow Call, Larry McMurtry's hero representing our picture of the Wild West.

### An American Robin Hood?

- Nathaniel Bumppo, the hero of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, has numerous names, including Natty, Leatherstocking, Hawkeye, Pathfinder, Deerslayer, and *La Longue Carabine* ("The Long Carbine"). Whatever we call him, Natty created a new and powerful image, that of the frontiersman.
- Natty is not big and strong, like the basic male hero we've seen, but lean and sinewy. He is deeply tanned, dresses in buckskin, and has no settled home. He is a creature of the great forests of the eastern United States, from the first stage of Anglo-American settlement—in Cooper's chronology, approximately 1740 to his old age in 1805.
- Although he is typically American, Natty is also similar to Robin Hood; he lives by hunting in the forest. Even more significantly, he is closely identified with his weapon: the American long rifle. Also like Robin Hood, Natty shows his excellence in shooting matches, and like Beowulf's sword or Thor's Hammer, his rifle has a name: Killdeer.
- As far as weaponry goes, Natty is an American Robin Hood, but he's not at all like Robin Hood in other ways. He's not an outlaw or a robber. In *The Pathfinder*, he says that he has had three temptations

in his life: to steal a pack of skins he found in the woods, to win a shooting match by deceit, and to take advantage of a band of Iroquois whom he found sleeping. He rejects all the temptations, though in the last case, he shoots the Iroquois after they wake up. Natty has a moral code, but it's one of his own.

### Anglo-Americans and Native Americans

- The fact that Natty's code is cross-cultural returns us to the idea that he has roots that go back before Columbus. We learn that he was raised as a Moravian Christian, but he was also brought up by the tribe of Delaware Indians. He is, in a way, intermediate between the Anglo-Americans and the Native Americans, and Cooper uses him to give a markedly sympathetic picture of the latter, though of course, it's one written from the heart of Anglo-American culture.
- A scene from *The Deerslayer* illustrates this point. Natty has reached Lake Glimmerglass in upstate New York. There's a houseboat on the lake, inhabited by a man called Tom Hutter and his two daughters. Natty also has two companions, a white man called Harry March, nicknamed Hurry Harry, and his Mohican friend Chingachgook, also known as *Le Gros Serpent*, "The Great Serpent."
- The Hutters are under threat from a band of Huron Indians, and the whites have behaved badly. Hurry Harry shot a Huron girl for no reason, and he and Tom Hutter, a former pirate, have attempted to raid the Hurons, an attempt that turned out fatal for Hutter. The Deerslayer himself has been captured while trying to rescue Chingachgook's intended bride, the maiden Wah-ta-Wah.
- The Hutter daughters, left alone in the houseboat by the death of their father, are surprised to see the Deerslayer canoe out to them. He has been released to try to make a deal that he knows the daughters cannot accept. He has every reason not to go back because the Hurons plan to torture him to death, but he tells the girls that he must return because he gave his word.

- Here, Natty is honoring his Delaware upbringing. It would be a disgrace, to the Native American mind, to do the sensible thing in this situation, and Natty will not accept disgrace. The point being made by Cooper is that Native Americans—even the Hurons—are more honest and honorable than the whites.
- That's not to say that they are not also more savage. Torture is part of their way of life, as is scalp hunting. In the *Leatherstocking Tales*, we find a continuing debate about savagery. In numerous scenes, the Deerslayer speaks up for Native American virtues.
  - Cooper expresses himself continually in terms of color and assumes that color equals race and race equals culture. All this is contradictory to modern sensibilities.
  - Still, through the words and actions of his hero, Cooper says that we cannot judge one culture by the rules of another.
  - As a consequence, the Deerslayer believes that what is allowable to his friend Chingachgook, such as taking scalps, is not allowable to himself. Nevertheless, the Deerslayer is well able to see an underlying similarity.

### **Cultural Conflict**

- In the running comparison between the whites and the Native Americans, the latter often come off better. They consider more carefully before they take action, are respectful to their elders, and don't repeat their mistakes. Most of all, unlike the whites, they do not deceive.
- It's true that there are ambiguities of which the Deerslayer is well aware, as we see in *The Last of the Mohicans*. The story here is that Natty is escorting two young women to Fort William Henry when he finds that they are being stalked by a party of Iroquois.
  - In 1757, this fort was surrendered to a mixed force of French and Native Americans on the condition that the British troops and their followers could leave unharmed. But once the troops laid down their arms, the Hurons and others massacred them.

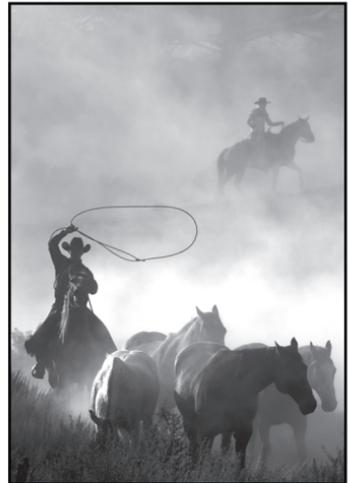
- This action is very bad faith by European standards. By Native American standards, however, one might say that they kept their word to individuals, but they did not understand the concept of treaties binding on all parties.
- In the *Leatherstocking Tales*, we get a nuanced picture of cultures and cultural values that are in conflict because they exist at the same time. The Deerslayer and Chingachgook are friends and equals in a way that isn't true of Don Quixote and Sancho, but there's a cultural gap between them.
- We know well that this cultural conflict ended in tragedy: with the dispossession of the Native Americans. Cooper makes this an individual tragedy with the death of Chingachgook's son, Uncas, in a battle against the Iroquois.
  - Uncas's death foreshadows not only the decline of the Delawares but also the disappearance of whole tribes and languages and the absorption or subordination of others into the modern, dominant culture of North America.
  - This is not the fault of the Deerslayer, who is caught between the British and the Americans and between the colonists and the natives. He is completely virtuous, but as with the Native Americans, his honesty and integrity don't do him much good.
- Like Chingachgook, the Deerslayer ends childless and is driven steadily out to the edges of his own culture. In the last of the five *Leatherstocking* novels, *The Prairie*, the Deerslayer dies among the tribe that has adopted him, the Pawnee Indians. As we saw with Beowulf, it's unclear whether or not he dies a Christian death.

### The Wild West

- In literary criticism, the word "imaginary" is used as a noun to mean a collective picture of an era derived from books, films, television, and so on. The most powerful imaginary of our time is the Wild West, encompassing gunslingers, wagon trains, rustlers, and, above all, cowboys and Indians. One set of heroes in this

imaginary is Woodrow Call and his sidekick, Gus MacRae, from Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* series.

- McMurtry seems to have drawn much of his information from a book called *Comanches* by the historian T. R. Fehrenbach. The point this book makes—and McMurtry repeats—is that, entirely contrary to what we've always been told in the Wild West imaginary, the Indians had the cowboys beat.
  - The Comanches, in particular, for decades prevented settlement of large areas of Texas, Oklahoma, and the southern Great Plains. They accomplished this because they were culturally superior, had better horses, were better adapted to the arid prairie, and had a better weapon: the compound bow they used for hunting buffalo.
  - The Deerslayer's long rifle was an excellent weapon for the forests, where there was always cover and where men fought on foot, but on the Great Plains, it was useless. In the time it took an Anglo to reload a long rifle, a Comanche could easily fire off six arrows.
  - Anglo-American expansion halted until the appearance of the other iconic American weapon: the six-gun, a repeating weapon that could be fired accurately at short range from horseback.
- The career of McMurtry's Woodrow Call dramatizes the shift of power that took place with the advent of the six-gun, beginning in 1844. McMurtry tells this story in a series of four novels.



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**The era of the cowboy became possible only after the advent of the six-gun enabled Anglo-American expansion in the West.**

- In *Dead Man's Walk* (chronologically the first in the series), Woodrow and his sidekick, Gus, who are Texas Rangers, fare badly against a Comanche chief and a force of Mexicans.
- In *Comanche Moon*, the Rangers are better mounted, better armed, and more skilled. They manage to defeat a Comanche raid, but much of their manpower is drawn away to the Civil War. Afterwards, the cowboy era sets in, when it became possible to drive large herds of cattle across the Great Plains.
- In *Lonesome Dove*, Woodrow and Gus are independent contractors, whose trail drive parallels the real-life drives of American cattlemen from 1866 onwards. By this time, the dangers on the prairie are white bandits and Indian outcasts rather than organized war parties.
- In the last novel, *Streets of Laredo*, the Comanches are only a memory and so are the Rangers. Woodrow suffers a handicap; he is still furiously independent but without wealth, property, or even respect, except from a few.
- Both of these heroes, Natty and Woodrow, lasted little longer than their enemies, the Hurons and the Comanches. They were brought into being by an entirely new set of circumstances: conflict between agriculturalists with an industrial civilization behind them and Stone Age nomadic hunters, newly empowered by the horses introduced to the continent by the Spanish.
- There was a Heroic Age different from that of Homer or Beowulf but far better recorded—and now immortalized, for good or ill, by our largely inaccurate and self-flattering imaginaries. Both Woodrow and the Deerslayer remain important correctives to both the forest-frontier imaginary and that of the Wild West.

## Essential Reading

Note: Essential readings are listed in chronological order of the heroes' lives.

Cooper, *The Deerslayer*.

———, *The Last of the Mohicans*.

———, *The Pathfinder*.

McMurtry, *Dead Man's Walk*.

———, *Comanche Moon*.

———, *Lonesome Dove*.

———, *Streets of Laredo*.

## Suggested Reading

Dekker, *James Fenimore Cooper*.

Fehrenbach, *Comanches*.

McMurtry, *In a Narrow Grave*.

Person, ed., *A Historical Guide to James Fenimore Cooper*.

Stegner, *Winning the Wild West*.

## Questions to Consider

1. The NRA defends American culture by appealing to the Constitution. Do you think it is the Constitution or the power of the American “imaginaries” that sets limits on gun control?
2. Which “cowboy” hero or heroes do you remember with most affection from childhood and why?

# Uncle Tom—The Hero as Martyr

## Lecture 14

In this course, we've seen heroes, such as Robin Hood and Robinson Crusoe, created by particular social and geographical circumstances. But in this lecture, we'll look at a hero created by a particular historical circumstance. He's also a hero who, of all the ones we'll examine, probably had the greatest effect on real political history. Further, this hero is not, like Frodo Baggins, a new type of hero but, in fact, an old type that has become unfashionable. Of course, the hero is Uncle Tom, from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The historical circumstance that created Tom was the Compromise of 1850, and his political effect was to contribute to the start of the Civil War.

### Uncle Tom as a Christian Martyr

- Uncle Tom, the central figure in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is a different kind of hero, one that has become unfashionable. He corresponds to the medieval hero pattern of the saint: the Christian martyr.
- Hagiography, the writing of saints' lives, was the major form of written narrative for many centuries, but then it fell into disuse. One reason for its disfavor is that its heroes are not active but passive. They show heroism, not through conventional courage, bravery, or gallantry, but through fortitude: the courage of endurance.
- Fortitude has never quite caught on in Western popular culture, despite its great importance for Christianity. When he wrote his Christian epic *Paradise Lost*, John Milton noted that he was swimming against the tide. In telling the story of Adam and Eve, he was rejecting the stories of wars and fabled knights in favor of "patience and heroic martyrdom / Unsung."

## A Story of Protest

- The impetus for writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is said to have been a vision Stowe had in which she saw Tom's death. But the thunder that preceded this lightning bolt was the Compromise of 1850, legislation that made a significant change to the earlier Fugitive Slave Act.
  - After 1850, northerners were required by law to assist slave catchers, and slave catchers were no longer required to prove the ownership of those they sought.
  - The effect of the legislation was to set up a border zone of anger and indignation, mainly along the Ohio River.
- Uncle Tom is a slave in Kentucky, married to Chloe, with a considerate master, Mr. Shelby. But Shelby gets into debt, and to clear the debt, he plans to sell another slave he owns, Eliza, and her son, Harry. Eliza hears about the plan and runs away. Shelby then decides to sell Tom to a slave trader, and he is taken off in chains. Tom doesn't run away because he knows that if he does, someone else will be sold.
- On the steamboat going down the river, Tom saves a white girl named Evangeline from drowning. He's bought by Eva's grateful father, Augustine St. Clare, and of course, treated well. St. Clare intends to free Tom, but he is killed in a brawl, and Mrs. St. Clare sells all the family's slaves. Tom is bought by Simon Legree, the archetypal slave owner villain. Legree runs a cotton plantation deep in the swamps of the Delta; eventually, he beats Tom to death.
- *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a novel in protest of the whole institution of slavery. Thus, Stowe takes a broad view, and one way she works is by pairing characters.
  - For example, Tom is a passive hero, but he is paired with an active hero, Eliza's husband, George. Like his wife, George also runs away, and when the slave catchers come after them all, he meets them not with submission but with pistols.

- Other contrasting pairs include Mr. and Mrs. Shelby, Senator and Mrs. Bird, and Eva and Topsy.
- These pairings set up a theme of hypocrisy. For example, if the United States is the land of liberty, why do George and Eliza have to flee into Canada, where they are beyond the reach of American law? Stowe points to further hypocrisy in the Senate, in the North, and among slave owners.
- Mixed in with this is the theme of sexual slavery. For instance, one of the northerners who helps Eliza escape remarks, “Handsome ‘uns has the greatest cause to run.” Another female slave, Cassy, has wound up as a sex slave on Simon Legree’s plantation.
- Stowe rarely pulls punches. Later on, some critics, including Henry James, thought that this was inartistic of her, but she didn’t care about art; she cared about abolishing slavery. Thus, she punctuates her novel with direct appeals to her audience, often addressing them woman to woman.

### Passive versus Active Heroism

- In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, we are once more in the presence of different cultural values. It’s important for us to appreciate the much more powerful force of Christian belief in Stowe’s mind and world.
- As we’ve seen, Tom sacrificed himself for others by not running away when he’s sold by Mr. Shelby. He also saves little Evangeline from drowning. Perhaps the only thing we can hold against Tom at the beginning of the novel is that, unlike George, he never rejects the whole institution of slavery.
- Tom’s “ministry” starts when he is sold to Simon Legree and marched off to Legree’s plantation. Stowe calls the chapter during the march “The Middle Passage,” indicating that this is the real start of slavery. The next chapter is called “Dark Places.” At the Legree plantation, Tom reaches what other writers call “the heart of darkness.”



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**On his first night on Legree's plantation, Tom begins his "ministry," helping two women who are exhausted from their work in the fields.**

- In the 10 chapters that deal with Tom on the plantation, there are a number of recurrent themes, among them, submission versus defiance.
  - We encounter this theme when Legree takes away the clothes and belongings that Tom has acquired during his life with St. Clare.
  - Legree takes away Tom's hymn book, but he does not succeed in taking away Tom's Bible. Legree tells Tom, "I'm your church now!" Tom does not reply, but something within him refuses. The defiance is present, but so far, it's silent.
- Another theme in the novel is temptation, primarily, temptation to give into despair. In addition to the outer struggle of resisting Legree's tyranny, Tom also has an inner struggle: resisting the feeling that God has deserted the slaves. A further and particular temptation for Tom is that Legree bought him because he wants Tom for an overseer, and the quality he desires in overseers is hardness.

- The first test for Tom comes over Lucy, who has been bought to be a sexual partner for one of Legree's slave overseers. She is too old to work in the fields. Tom, against orders, fills her cotton basket from his so that she will not be short on weight at the end of the day. Still, Legree insists that she is short and tells Tom to flog her.
- Tom refuses, and now his defiance becomes overt. Legree demands, "An't yer mine, now, body and soul?" and Tom replies, "My soul an't yours, Mas'r ... It's been bought and paid for, by One that is able to keep it." Tom gets his first flogging in Lucy's place.
- Legree's displaced concubine, Cassy, comes to Tom's assistance, bringing him water. But despite her good intentions, she again tempts Tom to despair. She tells him, "There isn't any God, I believe," and Tom almost agrees with her.
- Cassy, though, reads the Bible to him, and Tom remembers what he has been told of the Passion of Christ and the lives of saints and martyrs. They, too, were killed gruesomely. Thus, he concludes, "Sufferin' an't no reason to make us think the Lord's turned agin us."
- Tom defies Legree again, once more refusing to burn his Bible and become an overseer, and at this point, one might expect that his defiance would lead to death and the climax. But Tom sees a vision of Christ in which the crown of thorns turns into rays of glory; after that, he seems to be untouchable by cruelty, his will "entirely merged in the divine."
- Tom has one temptation left to resist. Cassy, herself driven to desperation, wants him to kill Legree with an axe while he's drunk. But Tom refuses, reminding her that we must love our enemies and that victory lies in love and prayer.

- Cassy and another slave, Emmeline, make their escape. Legree suspects that Tom knows what has happened to the runaways and tries to make him talk. But Tom refuses and tells Legree to repent; this time, Tom is beaten to the point of death. And yet, in an *imitatio Christi*, an “imitation of Christ,” Tom forgives Legree and the two slave overseers who have flogged him.

### A Truthful Ending

- After the beating, George Shelby, the young son of Tom’s first owner, turns up too late to save Tom but in time to watch him die. Among Tom’s last words are: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” and “What a thing it is to be a Christian!”
- We can see why some have felt this to be an unsatisfactory ending. George Shelby knocks Legree down and takes Tom’s body away for burial. Cassy and Emmeline escape, and Cassy is reunited with her long-lost daughter. But Legree is never officially punished, although we’re told that he dies raving and desperate. And there is no happy ending for the other slaves on the plantation.
- Nevertheless, we might say that that is exactly Stowe’s point. In 1852, slavery had not been abolished, and many slaves were in the hands of people like Legree. Stowe’s book was written to shame the collective conscience of America into action against an atrocity that was still continuing. A happy ending would have been a lie and a betrayal.
- Many people also find Tom’s obsequiousness to Legree—even at the end—difficult to take. Certainly, that has been the response of many African American writers, including J. C. Furnas and Robert Alexander, who wrote challenges to, or refutations of, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.
- It’s true that Stowe stereotyped, sentimentalized, and offered a role model that later offended African American pride. It’s also true, however, that what she did worked. She wasn’t trying to provide a role model for African Americans; she was trying to make white

Americans feel ashamed of themselves, and sometimes shame is more powerful than fear.

- Through *Uncle Tom*, Stowe struck a blow against slavery heavier than John Brown's and a blow for the power and influence of women. Perhaps the short answer to her critics is to ask: Do you want glory and approval, or do you want to achieve your goal? Stowe's goal was achieved in 1865 with the final abolition of slavery in America.

### Essential Reading

Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

### Suggested Reading

Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*.

Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Has Christianity remained as powerful a force in the struggle for civil rights in your time as it was in Harriet Beecher Stowe's? If not, why not?
2. Who are now the most influential role models, in fiction, for African Americans?

# Huckleberry Finn—Free Spirit of America

## Lecture 15

As the list of heroes we're exploring gets longer, we should expect to start seeing features of earlier heroes in some later ones, and that's certainly the case with Huckleberry Finn. Like Odysseus, Huck goes on an odyssey, and he's a trickster, staging his own murder to escape his drunken father. Further, much of Huck's odyssey has a sense of Robinson Crusoe about it; his very name suggests that he is a hunter-gatherer. There is also a connection to *Don Quixote*, when Tom organizes the raid on a Sunday school picnic. Above all, though, Huck is emblematic of a free spirit, someone who is comfortable in his own skin.

### A Free Spirit

- The one word we most often associate with Huck is “free,” and what makes Huck a free spirit most of all is that he's always himself. As we say nowadays—and this is not true of Tom Sawyer—he's comfortable in his own skin. One reason for this may be that from the start, a main element in Huck's character is his freedom from social responsibilities.
- Although Huck is free of illusions and he frees himself from both his drunken father and the conventions of St. Petersburg, his freedom takes a serious turn.
  - Being a free spirit sounds good, but the price of cutting yourself loose from organized society and drifting along on a raft is that you have to make your own decisions.



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**Huck's odyssey is much more peaceful than that of Odysseus; as Huck says, “You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.”**

- Huck must look inside himself to do that. Seeing clearly about both himself and others—and doing it on his own—is what makes Huck a hero.

### Huck's Odysseys

- After the events of *Tom Sawyer*, which made both boys rich, Huck has been adopted by the Widow Douglas, but he misses his freedom. His money attracts his drunken father, who carries him off. Huck decides to run away, stages his own murder to avoid pursuit, escapes, and meets up with Jim.
- Jim, an African American slave, is also on the run but much more seriously. He is the property of the Widow Douglas's sister, Miss Watson, and he's heard that she means to sell him down the river. There, he will become a plantation slave instead of a household slave and will lose all hope of freeing his wife and children. He plans to escape down the Mississippi to Cairo, where he can cross into Ohio and become a free man.
- The most important part of Huck's journey is his deepening relationship with Jim. This inner odyssey progresses in tandem with the outer odyssey of the raft, but it's a much more problematic one.
- Huck begins his inner odyssey with his society's casual assumption of racial superiority. The first time we encounter Jim is when Huck and Tom play a trick on him that is designed to make Jim look stupid. Such tricks are repeated several times, but later, the outcome starts to shift.
- At one point in the story, Huck leaves the raft in a canoe to try to find a place the two can tie up on the riverbank. But Huck gets lost in the fog, and the current carries both the canoe and the raft along swiftly. It's a long while before Huck gets back to the raft again, and when he does, Jim has gone to sleep. When Jim wakes up, Huck pretends that the two were never separated.
  - Huck is so convincing that Jim believes he must have had a dream, which he tries to interpret. The fog, the current,

everything in the experience must stand for something else, and the final return to the clear river stands for Jim getting through to the free states.

- Huck lets Jim go on, but then he points to the leaves and branches that have landed on the raft while it was crashing along in the current and asks what they stand for. Of course, the leaves and branches prove that all the events in the fog actually happened.
- Jim looks at the debris and, with great dignity, says that when he thought Huck was lost, his heart was almost broken with grief. He then goes on: “En all you wuz thinkin’ ‘bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren’s en makes ‘em ashamed.”
- Here, Jim, the black slave, assumes complete moral superiority over the white boy, and Huck recognizes it. It takes several minutes before he can work himself up to humble himself to a black man, but as Huck says, “I done it, and I warn’t ever sorry for it afterwards, neither.”
- Huck has always been easy in his own skin, but now he has to put himself in someone else’s skin. And it’s a skin of a different color, which he’s always been told creates an impassable barrier. That’s a significant stage in a child’s emotional development and a significant stage in the emotional development of America. Huck is starting to become an emblem, not just of the free spirit of childhood but also of the free spirit of America.

### **Huck’s Inner Struggles**

- Huck’s continuing struggles with his conscience are the focus of several scenes that have been hailed as the great masterstroke of the American novel, a kind of demonstration of what it means to be American.

- The first such scene comes just after the scene with the trash. Jim, by now confident that Huck is on his side, tells Huck that once he is a free man, he plans to save up money to buy his wife, and they will then work to buy back their two children. If their master won't sell them, they'll find an abolitionist to go and steal the children.
  - Huck, who has been brought up in a slave society, finds this plan alarming. Jim is prepared to steal his children, who are the property of another man. Huck decides to paddle ashore and give Jim up.
  - But as he sets off, a couple of white men come along with guns, looking for runaway slaves. Huck dissuades them from searching the raft by implying that his father is aboard and sick with smallpox.
- In the fog, Jim and Huck missed the confluence with the Ohio and drifted into Arkansas, a slave state. Jim is caught, and Huck feels bad about helping a slave run away. He's been told all his life that those who behave in this way will go to hell.
  - Huck decides to write a letter to Miss Watson, telling her where Jim is so that she can repossess him. But then he starts thinking about his experiences with Jim on the river and how grateful Jim was after Huck saved him with the smallpox story. After a long hesitation, Huck says to himself, "All right, then, I'll go to hell" and tears up the letter.
  - Here, Huck is rising above the constraints of his culture. Of course, he did that in one way earlier on, when he apologized to Jim for making a fool of him. But this goes a step further. The earlier apology was a private matter, but in tearing up the letter, Huck is defying what he's always been taught is public morality.
  - Huck takes the action that he's been taught is wrong because he knows in his heart that it's right. This rejection of authority—the idea of the superiority of the individual conscience—is very American. Our own hearts are a better guide than anything we've read or been told.

- Huck tells lies, sometimes for good reason and sometimes not. And he'll go along with other people's deceptions, as he does with Tom Sawyer. But at the same time, he sees through others, he sees through himself, and he sees through official morality. Huck is what we might call a soothsayer: He sees the truth and reports it.

### **Freedom from Illusion**

- We see the other side of Huck's freedom from illusion in several scenes of "life on the Mississippi." As he and Jim drift into the southern states, Huck starts to encounter different communities that are bound by their own rules—rules that prevent them from being free.
- The most dramatic example here is the feud between two aristocratic families, the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons. When one of the Grangerford daughters runs off with a young Shepherdson, the feud is reignited. It ends, as far as Huck is concerned, when his friend Buck Grangerford is shot dead. Huck lays out the body and weeps for his friend.
  - No one remembers any more what the feud is about. Buck didn't even dislike the Shepherdsons. When Huck says that he thinks one of them is a coward, Buck corrects him sharply: "There ain't a coward amongst them Shepherdsons—not a one."
  - They're not cowards or fools. But in a way, they're slaves to their own inherited and unexamined beliefs. And unlike Huck and Jim, they can't free themselves.
- We could make a similar point about an attempted lynching Huck observes. The would-be lynchers are faced down by a lone man, another Southern gentleman. Why? Because in a way, they're playacting—acting out what they think is their role. They can't stand up to a lone man, who—right or wrong—isn't playacting.
- Indeed, playacting becomes the dominant image of the later parts of the novel, especially when Jim and Huck meet the duke and dauphin and when Tom concocts the intricate plan to rescue Jim.

- Tom’s fantasies prevent a simpler plan from working. Worse than that, after Tom’s plan has failed and Jim is once again chained up, Tom confesses that no one has a right to chain Jim up at all. As Tom knew all along, Jim is no longer a slave. He was freed by Miss Watson in her will.
- Unlike Huck, Tom has never had to overcome his own conscience about stealing someone else’s property. Further, he seems never to have had a twinge of conscience about using Jim and Huck as extras in his own incompetently produced drama.
- Everyone around Huck is, in a way, self-imprisoned—by their own romantic illusions, like Tom, or by their unexamined and inherited beliefs, like the slave owners and isolated communities along the Mississippi.
  - Huck is different from all of them. He’s naïve and inexperienced and easily tricked by showmanship, but he sees into the heart of things.
  - If he knows something is wrong, he doesn’t do it. He doesn’t condemn people but mostly feels sorry for them because they—the Grangerfords, the duke and dauphin, the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson—can’t free themselves.

### Essential Reading

Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

———, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

### Suggested Reading

Chadwick-Joshua, *The Jim Dilemma*.

Inge, ed., *Huck Finn among the Critics*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Can you think of any examples from your own experience of people who have decided to rebel against the rules under which they were brought up because they decided the rules were morally wrong?
2. How much space is there for real-life Huckleberry Finns in modern societies? Is he now an impossible role model for childhood?

# Sherlock Holmes—The First Great Detective

## Lecture 16

In the later 1800s, two events occurred that had a significant impact on popular culture. The first of these was the arrival of public education and the creation of a new reading public. In turn, this public created a new set of heroes: the characters of Rider Haggard, Mark Twain, H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Bram Stoker. Collectively, these writers are sometimes referred to as the New Romancers. Also in the 1880s, characters began to escape from their creators and belong to their fans. That is certainly the case with the hero in this lecture: Sherlock Holmes.

### A New Romance Hero

- By the 1880s, English-speaking countries had reached a high degree of literacy. Most of the authors who created heroes for these new readers can be seen in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, a movie based on Alan Moore's comic book series. These authors, called the New Romancers, included Rider Haggard, Mark Twain, H. G. Wells, and others.
- One prominent New Romance hero who is missing from the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen is Sherlock Holmes, the creation of Arthur Conan Doyle. He first appeared in the 1886 novel *A Study in Scarlet* and then figured in three more novels and 56 short stories.
- There's almost no need to describe Sherlock because he's become common property to a greater extent than any of our heroes so far. There have been movies, TV series, many sequels, and uncountable imitations related to Sherlock. Many of Sherlock's phrases have passed into common use.
- Sherlock introduced the idea of the private detective, or as he calls it, the consulting detective. He gave us the idea of the clue, the vital fact that explains a mystery. We could even say that he initiated the idea of forensic detection. The center of his novelty and his appeal,

however, is the idea that there is always more information in things and people than (almost) anyone realizes.

- The signature moment for Sherlock's methods comes early in *A Study in Scarlet*, when Sherlock deduces that a man outside the window is a retired sergeant of Marines. In *The Sign of Four*, Watson asks Sherlock to tell him about the late owner of Watson's watch. Sherlock correctly guesses that it belonged to Watson's elder brother, who must have been a man of untidy habits, lived mostly in poverty, and died of drink. In a later story, Sherlock tells us that the basis of his method is observation, deduction, and information.

### **Outguessing Sherlock**

- The real thrill of the stories has been the staple of the detective story ever since: trying to outguess Sherlock, almost always unsuccessfully. He always sees something we don't, and what we don't see is often pointed up by the regular police inspectors who compete with Sherlock, don't see it either, and always go for the simple explanation, which is wrong.
- For example, in "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb," an engineer describes how he was driven off to an unknown destination, where he lost his thumb. He says he was picked up from the railway station in a carriage, and Holmes asks whether the horse was tired or fresh. There seems to be no point to this question, but the fact that the horse looked fresh when it arrived at the station means that the secret destination cannot really have been 12 miles away. The engineer being taken there must have been driven in a circle.
- In *The Valley of Fear*, a man is found with his head all but blown off in a house that is surrounded by a moat and must be entered by a drawbridge. We might focus on all kinds of questions here, but Sherlock hones in on the fact that the dead man had only one dumbbell. He deduces that the missing dumbbell must have been used as a weight to sink something in the moat.

- For Sherlock, one fact is enough to destroy a hypothesis. In this respect, he is the first of the scientific detectives. In the “Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans,” a man found dead on a railway track has no ticket in his pocket, although it’s impossible to board the train without a ticket. Sherlock deduces that the man was placed on the roof of the train from an overhanging window and rolled off when the train went round a bend.
- In *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson writes that the mist in his mind was slowly clearing away and he began to have “a dim, vague perception of the truth.” Sherlock tells him that the mist is the result of his failure to grasp the importance of the single real clue at the start of the inquiry. However, at the end, even most readers can’t identify this single clue.

### The Metropolis and Gothic Horror

- One of the reasons the world had to wait until the 1880s for a Sherlock-style character is that a private detective needs a metropolis. As Sherlock says several times, in Victorian London, 4 million souls were packed into a few square miles, with every opportunity for strange crimes and strange motivations.
- This metropolis is also part of a much wider world, the presence of which is felt surprisingly often in the London of Sherlock Holmes. In “The Adventure of the Five Orange Pips,” the Ku Klux Klan pursues an informer. *A Study in Scarlet* brings in the Mormons of Utah. The first half of *The Valley of Fear* is set in Surrey, but the explanation of the man with his face destroyed takes us back to clashes between labor unions and the Pinkertons in West Virginia.



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**In the ever-present fog of Sherlock Holmes’s London, everything becomes mysterious.**

- Along with new settings and circumstances, we also find in the Sherlock stories a large dose of Gothic horror.
  - The best example of this is found in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, which features an ancient legend, a giant hound, Stone Age huts on Dartmoor, an escaped criminal, and the bog called Grimpen Mire.
  - Sherlock himself is the acme of rationalism. He believes that everything has a natural cause, if only we can discover it. But he operates in a world that appears to others to be inscrutable, even supernatural. His job is often to dissolve the sense of Gothic horror, but the reader gets to shudder at the horrific settings before they're swept aside.

### **The Character of Sherlock**

- Perhaps the main reason for Conan Doyle's extraordinary success is the character of Sherlock Holmes himself: impressive, original, and just barely likeable. Sherlock is a cocaine user and a heavy smoker, and he has a very un-rounded personality.
- Watson notes that although Sherlock knows almost everything about anything to do with his profession, he is both ignorant of, and incurious about, everything else. He knows nothing about literature or philosophy and very little about politics. He's an expert boxer, swordsman, and pistol shot but prone to fits of lethargy. He has no interest in the opposite sex, with the exception of Irene Adler, whom he regards respectfully as a worthy opponent.
- The Holmes/Watson combination is another example of a successful character pairing, similar to the pairing of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. But Sherlock's relationship with Watson is rather odd. Holmes has a peculiar and callous way of interacting with his associate.
  - For example, Watson writes long reports of the goings-on at Baskerville Hall, but it turns out that they were largely useless. Holmes was hiding out on the moor all the time and hardly needed Watson to tell him what was going on.

- Even more culpably, Holmes allows Watson to think that he is dead at the hands of Professor Moriarty, only to shock him into fainting by turning up disguised as an old bookseller in “The Adventure of the Empty House.”
- Narrow-minded, self-centered, an addictive personality—why has Holmes been such a success? Perhaps because he gives his readers a new sense of human potential. We could all be Sherlocks if we could learn to use our eyes and our brains better.

### Later Detectives

- Sherlock established the template for the fictional detective. Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot, Nero Wolfe, and many others have followed in his footsteps. The image of the detective has, of course, been much affected by changes in culture and in crime.
  - The detective, whose activities are basically intellectual, mutated into the private eye, with a strong added streak of violence.
  - Opposed to the private eye story was the police procedural, in which results are achieved not by brilliant strokes of genius but by the dogged gathering of information.
  - We see a further stage in such novels and movies as *LA Confidential* or *Pulp Fiction*, when the cops and the robbers are difficult to tell apart, the criminals may be psychopaths, and the plots are so tangled that we feel even Sherlock would not be able to figure them out. Modern society does not have the underlying conviction of rational behavior, even among criminals, that Victorian society had.
- Nevertheless, the basic formula is still powerful. Doyle stories have been converted into many films and TV series, and they have found many authors to continue them. In addition, we should note the phenomenon of Sherlockians, those who treat Sherlock as a real person.

- This phenomenon started as early as 1912, when a scholar named Ronald Knox published “Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes.” The pompous title was itself a joke, but it’s been followed up by many more such studies.
- Today, there are many Sherlock Holmes societies, and the Internet is alive with websites where fans discuss problematic issues.
- Doyle actually provoked the continuation phenomenon by having Watson mention cases that he hadn’t written up, such as “the affair of the giant rat of Sumatra,” for which we are told, “The world is not yet ready.”
- Sherlock has also been especially influential in science fiction and fantasy. For example, in the Lord Darcy stories, written by Randall Garrett, Lord Darcy is a Sherlock figure in a parallel universe.
- George MacDonald Fraser’s *Flashman and the Tiger* is an affectionate parody of Doyle, in which a Sherlock character makes a mistaken deduction. Perhaps the truth in this story is that in the modern era, we have less confidence that everything can be solved by careful observation and intellectual deduction. Nevertheless, like all the great heroes and legends, Sherlock is capable of mutating into ever-more-successful forms.

### Essential Reading

Doyle (Symons, ed.), *The Complete Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

### Suggested Reading

Baring-Gould, *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street*.

Klinger, ed., *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Most of us come into contact with serious crime thousands of times in fiction but rarely or never in reality. Why do you think crime fiction has become such an important part of popular culture?
2. Changes in cultural values have often been mentioned in this course, but they seem to have made no impact on the popularity of Sherlock, clearly Victorian though he is. Why do you think that is?

# Dracula—The Allure of the Monster

## Lecture 17

The origins of *Dracula* can be traced back to perhaps the most successful literary vacation in world history, which took place in Switzerland in the summer of 1816. At a villa there were assembled Percy Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, Lord Byron, John William Polidori (Byron's physician), and others. When the vacationers grew bored, they decided that they would all write horror stories. Mary started on what would become *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Byron started a vampire story but abandoned it. Polidori later published a story called "The Vampyre," which was thought to be by Byron and achieved something of a vogue. Other vampire stories followed, priming the reading public for Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*.

### Structure and Opening of *Dracula*

- *Dracula* is a structurally complex work, almost an epistolary novel. In addition to Dracula and his brides, there are seven main characters: Jonathan Harker, an estate agent; Jonathan's fiancée, Wilhelmina, known as Mina; Mina's friend Lucy Westenra; and three men who want to marry Lucy: Arthur Holmwood, the one she accepts; Jack Seward, a doctor who runs a lunatic asylum; and a Texan called Quincey P. Morris. The final character is a Dutchman and an expert on strange diseases, Professor van Helsing.
- The story of *Dracula* is told through letters between Lucy and Mina, Mina's private journal, Dr. Seward's diary, excerpts from newspaper reports, additional letters, and the journal of Jonathan Harker. Jonathan's journal, the first 60 or 70 pages of the novel, established the ground rules for all future vampire fiction.
- In the journal, we read that Jonathan sets off in a coach, but all the other passengers are terrified at his mention of Count Dracula's castle. The landlady at the inn presses a crucifix on Jonathan before the journey.

- The count meets Jonathan at a prearranged rendezvous point, and the two drive off; howling wolves escort the carriage until the count commands them to go away.
- The count's hands are as cold as ice. He has a cruel mouth and sharp teeth. His nails are long and cut to a point. He has hair on the palms of his hands. Jonathan notices that his reflection doesn't show up in a mirror.
- When Jonathan cuts himself shaving, the blood seems to infuriate the count.
- When the two of them sit up talking, the count leaves as soon as he hears a cock crow at dawn. And he is repelled by the crucifix that the landlady at the inn had given to Jonathan.
- In a scene that became a movie classic, Jonathan sees the count emerging from a window and crawling down the castle wall over a precipice, "face down, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings."
- Soon, Jonathan realizes that the castle is a prison, and he is a prisoner. But the count is a gentleman, even a gracious host, and it's difficult for Jonathan to turn him down. The count also speaks with great pride of his ancestors.

- Also present in the castle are the brides of Dracula. Jonathan first sees them when he wakes in the night and notes that they are "ladies



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**The first section of Dracula sets up the "rules" for vampires: the cold hands and sharp teeth, lack of reflection in mirrors, and fear of crucifixes.**

by their dress and manner.” But they don’t behave in a ladylike way, and Jonathan does not respond to them as a gentleman should.

- Although he is engaged to Mina, Jonathan confesses to his journal a “wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips.” And the three ladies are dead set on doing just that.
- Jonathan is saved by Dracula, who chases the three women off, saying, “This man belongs to me.” Nevertheless, Jonathan has nearly been seduced.
- Later on, in despair at his growing understanding that he has been made a prisoner and reserved for some unpleasant fate, he finds the count in his coffin, looking young, fresh, and gorged with blood. Jonathan tries to kill him with a shovel but fails and escapes over the castle wall.

### **Hidden Fears**

- Obviously, vampire stories are about sex and repression, and they trade on our hidden fears. It’s important to note that a vampire can cross one’s threshold only if invited in. We might say that’s true psychologically, as well as physically. There must be something that welcomes the vampire in.
- What are the hidden fears that vampire stories address? A common one for men is that women are more interested in the “bad boy”—the serial seducer—than the nice guy.
  - Count Dracula is the bad boy to a higher power. He conquers both Lucy and Mina and boasts about it to the other men: “Your girls that you all love are mine already.”
  - The girls seem innocent in their encounters with Dracula, but we don’t know what was in their hearts.
- How does the count gain power over these young ladies? There’s more than a suggestion that he creates in them a sexual awakening that their husbands and fiancés cannot match. Stoker repeatedly

uses the key word “voluptuous,” which derives from Latin *voluptas* and means “sexual pleasure.” Note also that the physical descriptions associated with the word “voluptuous” are decidedly not the Victorian female ideal.

- The brides of Dracula are voluptuous, as we might expect, but they aren’t the only ones. After Lucy has encountered the count, her fiancé, Arthur, comes into her room, and she speaks to him “in a soft, voluptuous voice.”
- Later on, when we see Lucy, now dead, possessed, and risen from her grave, we’re told that her purity has changed to “voluptuous wantonness.” As she lies in her coffin, the men see her “blood-stained, voluptuous mouth” and think that it looks like “a devilish mockery of Lucy’s sweet purity.”
- Another fear that has a role in the novel is the Victorian fear of syphilis, a disease that has a long incubation period, is asymptomatic for a long time, and was incurable and, eventually, fatal. Like syphilis, the curse of the vampire is passed on; the victim becomes a vampire. Fortunately, if the vampire is killed, then the infected “undead” can be cured. They can die, like the brides and Dracula himself, or they can live naturally, like the children whom Lucy has been preying on since she contracted the vampire infection.
- Both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* have some basis in the scientific beliefs of their time. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some thought it possible that life could be restored to the dead by “galvanism.” That’s part of the scenario in *Frankenstein*, and in *Dracula*, van Helsing has ideas about it, too. But in *Dracula*, the question is whether life could be restored or prolonged by blood.
  - People were already experimenting with blood transfusion. Only four years after the appearance of *Dracula*, Karl Landsteiner discovered the existence of the different types of blood, knowledge of which is necessary for safe transfusion.
  - In *Dracula*, Lucy receives several transfusions from her lovers to make up for the blood she has lost to the count. This

must have been known to be dangerous in 1897, and when van Helsing is doing it, he mentions that there is no need to “defibrinate” (filter) Arthur’s blood for Lucy because the young man’s blood is “pure.”

- Van Helsing may mean that Arthur is morally pure rather than physically pure. But just as physical infection doesn’t necessarily imply moral infection, so moral purity—which we’re prepared to accept that Arthur has—cannot guarantee physical purity and, thus, a safe transfusion.
- Consider how someone catches syphilis. If one partner in a marriage catches the disease, it means that someone must have engaged in premarital or extramarital sex. Thus, the physical and the moral are strongly connected, and van Helsing’s remark is not as naïve as it seems.

### **Modern Vampires**

- With *Dracula*, it’s obvious that we have another case of changed cultural values, perhaps created by changed technology. With antibiotics and reliable contraception, the modern world is not as frightened about sexual dangers as the Victorian world was. At the same time, the feminine ideal has also changed, and female voluptuousness is not an automatic sign of evil. Why, then, has the vampire become even more a staple of popular fiction?
- Stoker left several openings for development in his story and in the character of Dracula, and as we’ve seen, later writers often write into a gap left by a favorite predecessor.
  - Mina sets up one such development. Near the end of the novel, when Jonathan is cursing Dracula to eternal damnation, Mina points out that Dracula, too, is a victim who needs to be saved. The point is dramatized when the men fight their way through to Dracula’s coffin and kill him. Dr. Seward writes in his diary that at the last moment, Dracula’s face wore “a look of peace.”

- This establishes the idea of the “good vampire,” one struggling against his or her nature. This idea has been developed in many contemporary vampire books and movies, such as Terry Pratchett’s comic Discworld novels and Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight series.
- Another gap that cried out for development is the idea of the *longaevus*, the near-immortal. Stoker’s Dracula is immensely proud of his ancestry, but we never know how old he is. Is it possible that when he boasts about his ancestry, he’s really boasting about himself?
  - Once people started researching the origins of the vampire belief, the idea emerged that perhaps Dracula had been a historical figure; the 15<sup>th</sup>-century ruler Vlad the Impaler is often suggested. Dracula, after all, is a nickname. It derives from Latin (as pronounced in Romanian) *draco ille*, “the dragon.”
  - If Dracula is a *longaevus*, how many more are there? Interest then started to focus on Professor van Helsing. Stoker brings him in as an expert on infectious diseases, but he seems to know much that is not merely medical. Perhaps he is a *longaevus*, too.
- Finally, later authors have addressed the hidden fears of society, so crucial to the success of Stoker’s *Dracula*. We may no longer be terrified of female sexuality, but we have become much readier to believe in secret organizations dedicated to our downfall, such as those in Ian Fleming’s James Bond books. Perhaps there are also secret orders dedicated to the fight against the undead; that’s the premise of Stephen Sommers’s 2004 movie *Van Helsing*.
- Stoker could never have imagined how some of the gaps he left would be developed. But that’s what happens when fictional characters become part of the ever-growing global imaginary of Extraordinary Gentlemen—legendary heroes and heroines.

## Essential Reading

Stoker (Hindle, ed.), *Dracula*.

Shelley (Hindle, ed.), *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*.

## Suggested Reading

Clements, *The Vampire Defanged*.

Klinger, ed., *The New Annotated Dracula*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What is your own favorite take on the vampire legend, and why does it appeal to you?
2. What kind of fears or other responses are created in a specifically female audience by the vampire legend?

# Mowgli—The Wolf Child

## Lecture 18

**R**udyard Kipling’s Mowgli, the jungle boy, started off as a legend. Like some of our earlier characters, he also has a hint of myth in his background. Yet this character has also, perhaps more than any other, had an institutional impact on the world, starting 100 years ago and continuing up to the present day. The legendary element of Mowgli is that he is a feral child, a child raised by animals. The mythical element is Mowgli’s association with Faunus, the Latin woodland deity. As we’ll see, his institutional impact can be found in the Boy Scout movement, which echoes Kipling’s message to young people to practice self-reliance and cooperation.

### “In the Rukh”

- Rudyard Kipling wrote nine stories about Mowgli, the first of which, “In the Rukh” (“In the Forest”), appeared in 1893. Kipling followed that story up with *The Jungle Book* in 1894 and *The Second Jungle Book* in 1895. In terms of the chronology of Mowgli’s life, “In the Rukh” is last.
- This story focuses first on a young Englishman called Gisborne, who works for the British Indian government’s Department of Woods and Forests. He lives on his own, deep in the jungle of central India, in the Seonee Hills. There, he supervises new plantations, irrigation, fire control, and sustainable felling. Another of Gisborne’s tasks is dealing with man-eaters.
- The story starts with a report of a forest guard killed by a tiger. Suddenly, out of the jungle comes a man, naked except for a loincloth and a wreath of white flowers. He knows this particular tiger and guides Gisborne to a place where he can get a clear shot at it.
- Who is this strange man who knows everything in the jungle? Gisborne’s boss, Muller, has the answer. Muller is old and wise, and

when he sees the jungle man, he asks to see his elbows, knees, and ankles. He finds the scars he knew would be there. This is Mowgli. The ankle scars are bites from his wolf cub brothers, and the others are from running on his knees and elbows when he was young.

- According to Muller, Mowgli is an anachronism; he comes from a time before the Iron Age, even the Stone Age. Mowgli is Faunus himself, the Latin woodland deity. Muller admits that only Mowgli, not even Muller himself, will ever know the true inwardness of the forest.
- Yet for all of Mowgli's feral nature, "In the Rukh" describes how he finds a human mate and goes into service as a forest guard with the government. He's accepted into society, if only on its outermost edge.

### **"Mowgli's Brothers"**

- It's never absolutely clear where Mowgli comes from. In "Mowgli's Brothers," we learn that somehow, as a toddler, he escapes from the tiger Shere Khan, who has, perhaps, frightened off his parents. He toddles into a wolf lair inhabited by Father and Mother Wolf and their four newborn cubs.
- Mother Wolf is annoyed when Shere Khan comes after the boy and demands his prey. She faces off the tiger and says that from now on, Mowgli is a wolf.
- Mowgli must be accepted by the Seeonee Pack, and he needs two nonrelated sponsors to save him from Shere Khan. Mowgli's two sponsors are Baloo, the bear, who is the wolves' schoolmaster, and Bagheera, the black panther, who has no right to be there but offers to pay a ransom: a fat bull, newly killed, not half a mile away.
  - Bagheera has a fellow feeling for Mowgli because he is a wolf child in reverse: an animal raised by humans, until he escaped.
  - Thus, Mowgli becomes a member of the Seeonee Pack and is inducted into the world of the talking animals, including

Baloo; Bagheera; Akela, the leader of the pack; and Kaa, the giant python.

### The End of Shere Khan

- The idea of a human who has all the powers of an animal is thrilling, but Mowgli isn't safe from all dangers. Several of the stories are adventure tales, telling how Mowgli copes with his enemies, especially Shere Khan.
- After Mowgli has been adopted by the wolves in "Mowgli's Brothers," the story skips 10 years. During this time, the wolf pack has deteriorated. The young wolves have started following Shere Khan for scraps, and they are ready to get rid of their old leader, Akela. Shere Khan has taken over at the wolves' council, and once again, he demands Mowgli as his right.
- But Mowgli has been down to the Indian village in the jungle and come back with the Red Flower: fire. With this, he cows Shere Khan and rescues Akela. The story ends with him going down to the village to become a man. In the sequel "Tiger! Tiger!" he's learned human language and has been semi-adopted by a woman who thinks—or hopes—that he may be her son, who was taken by the tiger.
- Mowgli uses the village herd to settle accounts with Shere Khan. He knows that the tiger is waiting for him in a ravine. He splits the village herd, driving the bulls down the ravine, while Akela and his wolf brothers herd the cows and calves up the ravine. The two stampedes collide, with Shere Khan caught and killed between them.

### Mowgli and Kaa

- In "Kaa's Hunting," Mowgli, who is mad at Baloo for beating him into learning the Law of the Jungle, makes friends with, and is carried off by, the *bandar-log*, the monkey people. The Law of the Jungle is a main theme for Kipling, projecting a powerful

and influential image of how people, especially young people, should behave.

- The *bandar-log* are the only animals who are outside the Law of the Jungle. They squabble, boast, and chatter and never get anything done—all too much like people. They are quite lacking in animal dignity and discipline.
- The *bandar-log* live in large numbers in an old ruined city, which makes it difficult for even Baloo and Bagheera to rescue the man cub. But Mowgli also has a friend in Kaa, a 30-foot rock python, of whom the monkeys are terrified. Kaa rescues Mowgli, and the boy learns a painful lesson from Baloo about obedience.
- Kaa is also vital to Mowgli's tactics in "Red Dog." Here, a giant pack of red dholes (Indian wild dogs) has come up from the south to take over the Seeonee wolf pack's hunting grounds. Coached by Kaa, Mowgli provokes the dholes into chasing him across the nests of killer bees. Half the dhole pack is killed, but Mowgli escapes. The dhole survivors are finished off by the wolf pack.

### **Kipling's Themes**

- Such stories as "Red Dog" and "Kaa's Hunting" are principally adventure stories, stories about solving tactical problems. Yet a major theme of the stories as a whole is Mowgli's oscillation between animals and humans. Another theme is the satirical one, directed against human vices. A third is the educational one, in which the well-behaved and law-abiding animals, especially the wolf pack, are held up as role models for young readers.
- We can see how the last two themes work in another story, "The King's Ankus," a kind of homily on the effect of greed.
- Another story, "How Fear Came," is a kind of animal myth, in which Hathi, an elephant, explains how man brought fear into the jungle. The rather low grade Kipling gives humanity is also the theme of "Letting in the Jungle" and "The Spring Running." These



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In “Letting in the Jungle,” as penalty for the villagers’ superstition, Mowgli calls in the elephants to break down their walls.

stories develop the idea of Mowgli’s oscillation between the human and animal worlds.

- Although Mowgli is fairly judgmental about humanity, Kipling is not entirely negative. Indeed, these stories put forward a powerful ideal of what humanity should be and could be. Kipling’s satire is easy to grasp, as is his moral: that we, too, should observe the essential precepts of the Law of the Jungle.
- Kipling expresses the meaning of the Law of the Jungle in a poem found at the beginning of one of the stories in *The Jungle Book*. The poem provides good general advice—don’t be deceived by flattery, know who your friends are, and so on—but it also covers such issues as welfare and lays down rights and responsibilities. The poem is a kind of constitution—a notably libertarian one. But the main thrust of it is discipline: self-discipline first, then obedience to the law.

- Much of this teaching was taken over by the Boy Scout movement, which teaches a balance between self-reliance and cooperation. We don't know the full effect this movement has had on the Western world in the last 100 years, but it's interesting to note the surprising strength of Western democracies when faced with military challenges. That surely has something to do with their many nongovernmental institutions.
- People often say that Kipling was an imperialist, and he was. But imperialism had many shades. Note that Mowgli is an Indian boy, not an English boy, and there's never the slightest suggestion that this might affect his legendary, heroic, and near-mythical status. Kipling's ideology of self-discipline as a basis for liberty—imperialist in origin or not—proved readily acceptable and capable of transplantation, even into the republican and democratic soil of America.

### **Continuations of Kipling**

- As with so many of the authors we've looked at, Kipling left openings for continuations. These openings led another author, Pamela Jekel, to write *The Third Jungle Book*, which includes two stories based on hints of other adventures Kipling gave in "Red Dog."
- The well-known fantasy writer Neil Gaiman produced a kind of analog of *The Jungle Books* called *The Graveyard Book*. It's about a child who loses his parents and is brought up, not by animals, but by ghosts.
- Much earlier, it's likely that Mowgli provided some inspiration for another feral child hero, Tarzan of the Apes, created by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Tarzan plays on the same human wish to be immensely strong, fearless, and at home in the wilderness.
- In the end, Mowgli learns obedience from Baloo and cooperation from Kaa. He learns to reject greed, cruelty, and superstition. But he also learns that he must move on from the carefree life of the

jungle and take on adult responsibilities. As Kaa says, “Man goes to Man at the last, though the Jungle does not cast him out.” Gray Brother, the wolf, says, “From now, we follow new trails.” Many a Boy and Girl Scout must have taken those words in and silently accepted their truth.

### Essential Reading

Kipling, *The Jungle Book*.

———, *The Second Jungle Book*.

### Suggested Reading

Jekel, *The Third Jungle Book*.

Montefiore, “Kipling as a Children’s Writer and *The Jungle Books*.”

### Questions to Consider

1. Kipling seems to put great stress on obedience and discipline while telling stories about freedom and independence. Do you think he got the balance right?
2. Do you think Mowgli and the wolves, adopted into the symbolism of the Boy and Girl Scout movement, are suitable role models for the present day?

# Celie—A Woman Who Wins Through

## Lecture 19

Over the centuries, the trend has been for heroes and heroines to move closer to us in social status. In our course, we've seen this steady decrease in social status, from Thor, a god; to Aeneas, the son of a goddess; to Beowulf, the grandson of a king; and so on. Our first character who appears to be a normal person is the Wife of Bath, but it wasn't until we began looking at Americans that we returned to her level. In this lecture, we move even further into the new American territory with an exploration of Celie, the heroine of Alice Walker's book *The Color Purple*.

### Celie's Social Status

- The heroine of *The Color Purple*, Celie, is poor and black in a thoroughly racist society, and she's been told all her life that she's ugly. She's at the bottom of the social ladder, a position that's underscored by the epistolary nature of the novel: Most of it consists of letters written by Celie in nonstandard English.
- Every one of the book's early chapters has yet another terrible revelation in it about Celie. In chapter 1 the man she thinks is her father rapes her, and she gets pregnant. In chapter 2, her mother dies cursing her, her supposed father takes her baby away, and she thinks he kills it. In chapter 3, he sells their second child, then brings back a new wife.
  - Celie is offered as a wife in place of her younger sister, Nettie, and is taken out of school; on her wedding day, her stepson hits her in the head with a rock.
  - Worst of all, Nettie is sent away, but she promises to write. Celie tells us: "She say, nothing but death can keep me from it. She never write."

- Celie’s low status prompts us to ask two questions: What indications of heroic character can someone show from the bottom? More urgently, what’s the strategy for getting up and out?

### Strategies for Fighting Back

- One strategy for raising oneself from the bottom is to fight, and naturally, people tell Celie to do just that. But does fighting work in *The Color Purple*? As with several of the stories we’ve looked at, this one operates by pairing and contrasts. We see different women try different strategies.
- Sofia, who marries Harpo, Celie’s insolent stepson, is a fighter. In fact, Celie slyly sets Harpo up for a fight. She advises him to beat Sofia, to put her in her place. Soon, he shows up saying that the mule kicked him, he walked into a door, and he shut a window on his hand. Obviously, the decision in that bout went to Sofia. But Harpo is poor and black, too. In the contest between him and his wife, it’s just strength and aggression that are the deciding factors.
- Later, the town mayor’s white wife asks Sofia if she wants to become her maid, and Sofia replies, “Hell, no.” The mayor slaps her for insolence, and Sofia knocks him down. Sofia is beaten unrecognizable, then gets 12 years in jail for assault.
- The traditional strategy of the weak is trickery and cajoling, which Celie and Sofia’s relatives try to get Sofia out of the prison laundry.
  - Harpo’s new girlfriend, Squeak, reluctantly admits that the prison warden is her uncle. The plan is that Squeak will tell the warden that Sofia is happy in the laundry, but she needs to be punished more, perhaps by being made “some white lady maid.” Sofia’s boyfriend says, “This sound mighty much like some ole uncle Tomming to me.” But Shug, the smart one, says, “Uncle Tom wasn’t call Uncle for nothing.”
  - And the trick works, to a degree. Although her uncle rapes Squeak, Sofia is let out of the laundry to work for the mayor’s

wife as a maid. The result is not good, but it's better than what Sofia got from fighting.

- All this time, Celie is learning, especially from Shug, who was once her husband's girlfriend. Shug has gotten along by using her sex and her singing; she makes a living with her music. Shug explains to Celie about sex, and she fixes the worst hurt that has been done to Celie: the fact that she never heard from her sister Nettie. Celie's husband, Albert, has been intercepting and hiding the letters. Celie gets all of Nettie's letters at once and learns from them, as well.
- Nettie has been educated and has broader horizons. She was taken in by a missionary couple, African American themselves, and went to Africa with them. It's Nettie who finds out that Celie's children are alive and have been adopted by the missionary couple. Further, the man she and Celie thought was their father, Fonso, is not their father at all. Their real father was lynched while they were babies for setting up in competition with white traders, and Fonso married the widow to collect her inheritance.
- Celie even learns from Fonso, who gave her away to be married. According to him, the world is all about money. Run the store, as Celie's real father did, but put in a white manager and pay the kickbacks.

### **Celie and Uncle Tom**

- *The Color Purple* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* have marked similarities. Celie, for instance, suffers the same two temptations that come to Tom: to do violence against her oppressors and to despair.
- At the start of the novel, all of Celie's letters are addressed "Dear God." She writes to God for two reasons: She has no one else to write to, and she takes literally what her abusive supposed father said to her after he raped her: "You better not tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy."

- Just like Tom and the slaves on Simon Legree’s plantation, Celie begins to think that there is no God or that God has forgotten her.
  - Early on, arguing with Sofia, Celie says that she couldn’t be angry with her rapist father because the Bible says to honor your father and your mother. Sofia says that she ought to bash her abusive husband’s head open, but Celie says, “This life soon be over. Heaven last all ways.”
  - But once Celie starts writing back to Nettie and no longer has only God to write to, her attitude changes. Shug asks her why, and Celie says, “What God do for me?” It’s a fair question, and Celie concludes that God is just like all the other men she knows: “Trifling, forgetful, and lowdown.”
  - This is a kind of blasphemy that goes beyond anything we heard from Uncle Tom or Legree’s slaves. This scene between Shug and Celie, though, rather like Tom’s vision of the crown of thorns, turns into the existential heart of the novel. Despite what she says, Celie cares about God; even if he’s not there, doing without him is hard.

### The Color Purple

- The color purple appears in an important scene between Shug and Celie that Celie reports in a letter to Nettie. Celie tells Shug that she writes to Nettie now, not to God. Shug wants to know why, and Celie tells her she has lost faith in God. But then Shug explains the basis for her own faith.
  - Shug tells Celie that God isn’t found in church or even in the Bible. The church God, the Bible God, is a white invention. But the God Shug believes in is inside her and inside everyone else. And this God is also “everything ... Everything that is or ever was or ever will be.” God is an it, not a him. And the way to serve it is by being happy, enjoying all the things it has created.
  - You are letting God down, says Shug, if you walk past the color purple in a field and don’t notice it. Forget the God who looks like an old white man. Appreciate the color purple instead.

- Celie takes Shug to mean that she should notice God’s creation instead of trying to locate God. A bush or a tree shows God’s goodness, far more than her husband or her stepfather or any of the other men Celie has encountered.
- What Shug is preaching is a kind of pantheism, though neither she nor Celie knows the word, and in her way, she is duplicating the kind of visionary sense we associate with the Romantic poets: Wordsworth and the daffodils or Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner. Like the Ancient Mariner, once Celie finds herself able to love creation, she is at least on the way to freedom.



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**Celie learns to find God in his creation—among trees, stalks of corn, and wildflowers.**

- Celie takes up her needle, instead of the razor with which she meant to kill her husband. She soon owns her own clothing business and employs other seamstresses. She inherits from her stepfather, and her sister comes back to her. All, it seems, comes from one revelation. The color purple stands for happiness, for acceptance, for forgiveness. It’s a long road from the utter misery of the novel’s beginning.
- Part of what makes Celie a heroine is fortitude, as it was with Uncle Tom. Like Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee, Celie just keeps plugging along, in spite of discouragement and hostility.
- Also like Tom, Celie puts aside the temptations of violence and, worse than violence, of hatred. She has good reason to hate, but she finds the emotion is self-destructive. Unlike Tom, though, and in different circumstances, she does not become a martyr. She finds

her own way out—with the powerful assistance of Shug, Nettie, and some other women. Female solidarity is an important resource throughout the novel.

- This points to a major difference between *The Color Purple* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The enemy in the latter is slavery, but by Celie's time, slavery has been long abolished, though it often doesn't seem so. Nevertheless, Walker's major target has shifted from racism to sexism.
  - Celie's main oppressors are her stepfather, Fonso; her husband, Albert; and until she deals with him, her stepson, Harpo. Male role models, such as Sofia's brother-in-law Jack or Samuel the missionary, are present but peripheral.
  - Nettie's experiences in Africa, which she relates in her letters to Celie, give a telling picture of white colonial exploitation in Africa. And for a while the Olinka people among whom Nettie lives seem a model of cooperation, benevolence, and closeness to nature, yet they, too, believe firmly in male supremacy.
- Perhaps the threat from which the color purple releases us is that of having to play a role insisted on by convention: male or female, submissive or dominant, harsh or gentle. In any of those ways, the role can be a straitjacket.

### Essential Reading

Walker, *The Color Purple*.

### Suggested Reading

Bates, *Alice Walker*.

Dieke, ed., *Critical Essays on Alice Walker*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Do you agree that appreciating beauty is an adequate substitute for religious faith? Can the two maybe be combined?
2. Would you consider *The Color Purple* to be a feminist work? Remember that many feminists have found it too passive in its recommendations (once again, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*).

# Winston Smith—The Hero We Never Want to Be

## Lecture 20

**W**inston Smith is the central character of George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-four*, published in 1949. Unlike Odysseus or Don Quixote, Winston did not give a word to the language, but his creator did. That word is the adjective “Orwellian,” and the noun it usually accompanies is “nightmare.” Winston himself is at the center of an Orwellian nightmare. Of all the characters in our course, he is the least obviously heroic, and his story ends in cowardice, treachery, and defeat. Still, he is an important hero—the hero anyone of the World War II generation might have become and the hero our descendants might become yet.

### Winston as Hero

- Winston Smith is the least obviously heroic of all the characters in our course. He’s afraid all the time and never puts up any overt show of resistance to the Orwellian nightmare in which he finds himself. In the end, under torture, he cracks. Of course, Orwell’s point is that in the nightmare, everyone cracks. In the end, everyone gets taken to room 101, where we each meet our private nightmare.
  - The Party, which rules Britain, knows our terrors. With Winston, it’s rats. In room 101, a cage will be put over his head, and starving rats will be let into the cage to eat his face. He realizes that the only thing that will save him is to betray his lover, Julia, and he does so.
  - Winston cracked under torture, and he remains cracked. At the end of the novel, released from his torturers, though still aware that he will ultimately be executed, he sits listening to the propaganda flowing from the telescreen and tells himself that everything is now all right: “The struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.”
- Winston’s story ends in cowardice and defeat, yet he is an important example of a hero that might have existed if things had gone

differently in World War II and might yet exist in the future. The Orwellian nightmare hasn't occurred in the Western world, but we must continue to heed Orwell's warning.

### **The World of *Nineteen Eighty-four***

- Readers of *Nineteen Eighty-four* can guess some of the basic facts of Winston's lifetime more easily than he can. He was born in 1945. His family name, Smith, is probably the most common family name in English society; calling him Smith is similar to calling him Everyman.
  - The name Winston means something more particular, something obvious now and even more obvious in 1949, when Orwell's book was published. Winston Smith's birth date, 1945, marked the end of World War II, and Winston Churchill was the victorious British leader of that war.
  - But Winston has never heard of Winston Churchill. Nor does he know who won World War II or even who fought it.
- In Orwell's imaginary world, the Party's ideology is known as Ingsoc, short for "English socialism"; note the parallel this has with Nazi, short for Nationalsozialistische Partei, "National Socialist Party."
- Britain is now called Airstrip One, and it's part of Oceania, which probably includes Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Oceania is one of three superpowers, Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia, and these three are always at war.
  - This imagined world is not far removed from reality in 1949. At the time, Britain had a socialist government, and for years, it had been an airstrip for British, Canadian, and American bomber fleets.
  - The world division into three superpowers could readily be seen as a development from Britain, the United States, and Western Europe (Oceania) facing off against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Eurasia) and, on the other

side of the world, the Communist Party of China, perhaps having taken over Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent (Eastasia).

- Under Ingsoc, all food is rationed; London is full of unrepaired bomb sites; and the population is highly militarized—all situations that were also reality in Britain in 1949. The basic facts of the Orwellian nightmare were not unfamiliar to a 1949 readership.
- But the Orwellian nightmare was far worse than real life in 1949. In Winston's world, there's a TV in every apartment, called a telescreen, but it's two-way, and it can't be turned off. Everyone is under surveillance all the time. It's a one-party state, and the Party has total control. The agents of the Party's control are the Thought Police.
- Of course, the emblem of the Party is Big Brother, whose face is everywhere. He's modeled on the great dictators of Orwell's recent past: Hitler and Stalin. But Big Brother may not even exist. He has no name and no personality; if he were a real person and he were to die, he could be replaced without anyone noticing. According to O'Brien, Winston's torturer, Big Brother is immortal; he's gone beyond being a dictator or a king and become something like a god.

### **Ingsoc's Means of Control**

- The first stage in the Party's efforts toward total control seems to be making people accept obvious nonsense. The slogans of the Party are: "War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength."
- The second stage is controlling the language. In Winston's future, the aim is that English will be replaced by Newspeak, which will have a far more limited vocabulary than English. The idea is to prevent even the conception of an unorthodox opinion by eliminating the words people might use to express such an opinion.

- Another means of control is to teach people to use “doublethink,” the ability to be completely convinced of two contradictory opinions at the same time, without knowing that they contradict each other.
- The method of control that most affects Winston—and which he cannot stop himself from struggling against—is the idea of controlling the past.
  - Winston works for the Ministry of Truth, which is concerned only with propaganda. His job is to rewrite history. Any statement of fact that contradicts the idea that the Party is always right must be erased.
  - Throughout Oceania, all reliable evidence of events in the past is destroyed. In fact, the only place where any trace of the past remains is inside people’s minds—and even there, one wonders. The people have been trained to control their minds and memories.
  - The most extreme example of this collective amnesia occurs during Hate Week, when the people switch their hatred from Eurasia to Eastasia on a moment’s notice. As Orwell himself pointed out, much the same thing had occurred among British communists in the 1940s after Hitler invaded Russia.

### **Inner and Outer Stories in the Novel**

- In Book One, the Orwellian nightmare is described in detail. In Book Two, Winston becomes involved with Julia, a younger woman who joins him in resistance to the Party’s attempt to completely control sex. The two have an affair but are eventually captured by the Thought Police. Book Three takes place almost entirely in the torture dungeons of the Ministry of Love and consists largely of a conversation between Winston and O’Brien.
- The inner story of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, however, is focused on Winston’s attempt to remember the past. The first gesture of resistance he makes is to buy a diary, but he doesn’t even know

how to write in a diary. Again and again, he writes, “Down with Big Brother.”

- As the novel continues, we find Winston trying to make sense of his scattered memories, some of which come to him in dreams. He questions an old prole about life before Ingsoc, but the prole’s replies seem random. In the end, Winston gets nowhere in his attempt to recover the past, but he treasures every approach to it. He perseveres in his heroic initiative, but we must admit that it ends in failure.
- *Nineteen Eighty-four* is a science fiction novel of a particular type, often called an enclosed universe novel. Such novels generally feature some kind of disaster in the past and a hero trying to find out what it was, using only degraded information.
  - Most writers have their heroes find a document that explains what has happened. O’Brien, in his capacity as a stool pigeon, gives such a document to Winston—a book, supposedly written by the great enemy of Big Brother, a man called Goldstein. The book explains how Ingsoc came about.
  - Why is the world always at war? It’s a way of preserving power for the Party hierarchy. The world populations are too busy fighting each other to rebel against their masters.
  - The new power system creates an oligarchy and stifles any possibility of equality. But what is the motive for all this? Why do people, even in reality, hand themselves over completely to a political system that gives them nothing back?
  - It seems that even Orwell didn’t know the answer to that question; he just knew that it happened. The great anti-climax of *Nineteen Eighty-four* occurs when Winston reaches the point in Goldstein’s book where the motive is explained, and he puts the book down. He never returns to it because the Thought Police arrive.

- In his conversation with Winston in the torture dungeons of the Ministry of Love, O'Brien says that if Winston wants to have an image of the future of the human race, it's this: a boot stamping on a human face forever. That is what the Party aims to do. But we still don't understand why.
- Winston is trying to probe the great political failures of Orwell's time. This is the reason he deserves to be called a hero.

### The Orwellian Nightmare in Our Time

- *Nineteen Eighty-four* has been successful in persuading Westerners about the nature of the Orwellian nightmare. Do we still need to worry about it?
- Newspeak isn't a reality, but the growth of specialist jargons—academic, legal, and political—sometimes makes it difficult to think straight. We're watched by closed-circuit TV cameras, and we



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**We know that video surveillance, airport searches, and other measures are taken for our own security, but many still fear the ever-increasing power of the state.**

know that our governments have the ability to monitor our emails and phone calls. We're told that these intrusions are for our own security, but some people still appeal to Orwell to justify their resistance to encroachments on liberty.

- For example, taking Winston as their cue, many people ask: How far are we prepared to go in granting powers to Homeland Security? Appeals to remember Orwell's warning about the Orwellian nightmare are still current. The fears are still present, and they're not wholly imaginary.

### Essential Reading

Orwell (Crick, ed.), *Nineteen Eighty-four*.

### Suggested Reading

Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*.

Davison, *George Orwell: A Literary Life*.

Shippey, "Variations on Newspeak."

### Questions to Consider

1. Are you satisfied with the current balance between the need for homeland security and the right to a private life, the right not to be interfered with?
2. How satisfied are you that the images you have of the past—say, of World War II or the war in Vietnam—are basically truthful? Do you have any evidence that they are not?

# James Bond—A Dangerous Protector

## Lecture 21

**O**f all the heroes and legends we discuss in this course, James Bond probably has the greatest global name recognition. The reason for that is that the Bond franchise is probably the most successful in world history. Ian Fleming, who created James Bond, died in 1964, after having published a dozen Bond novels and two collections of Bond short stories. There have since been more than 20 Bond novels written, with permission, by authors other than Fleming, and the original novels and their sequels have been used to create more than 20 movies. In this lecture, we'll ask: What is the secret of this continuing and readily exportable success?

### **Bond's Success in the 1950s**

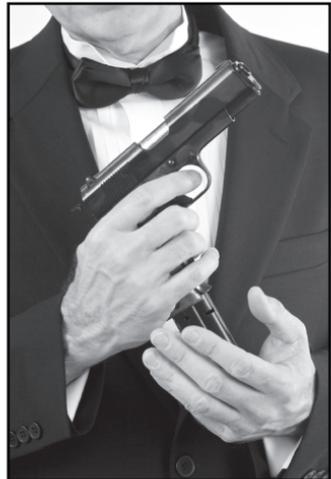
- One reason the Bond novels were successful when they first came out in the 1950s was the dreary and disappointing atmosphere of Britain in the immediate postwar years. The nation had been among the winners of the war, but it remained poor, cold, regulated, and rationed.
- As we saw in the last lecture, Orwell looked into the future at this time and saw things getting worse. In his vision, the new socialist government would turn into Ingsoc, and the country would be taken over from within by a new tyranny.
- Fleming's response was the exact opposite. He didn't think that the future would be like the present only worse; he thought Britain could return to the past. The country would still have enemies, but they wouldn't be internal ones; they'd be external ones: foreign criminals, Soviet spies and saboteurs. And they'd be dealt with as they had been in the past; the traditional authorities would still be in control.
  - That's the point of being "licensed to kill." It's a kind of reassurance. Obviously, democracies are not supposed to use murder or assassination as a political tool. But if the other

side does and we don't, aren't we inflicting a handicap on ourselves? In *Live and Let Die*, Bond says that the success of Mr. Big "shows how one can push a democracy around." Maybe we need to get tough, too.

- But someone has to control these tools, someone reliable and trustworthy. Bond is a killer but not a vigilante. He operates under some kind of system of democratic control, though we never find out quite what that system is.
- Along with this need for traditional authority, there was also a strong element of nostalgia in the 1950s for the time before World War II. For this reason, Bond starts off his career driving a 1930 Bentley. In his world, the movers and shakers still operate in the gentlemen's clubs of London.
  - Significantly, the first Bond novel, *Casino Royale*, is set in a French seaside town that has decided to get back on its feet by reopening its casino and trying to "regain some of its Victorian renown."
  - This nostalgia for a vanished past merges easily into a luxurious present, though that luxurious present had to be somewhere outside 1950s Britain, notably the United States.
  - Some people have said that the secret of the Bond success is snobbery, but it seems more a response to deprivation and a reassurance. Bond is at home in any company; he always knows the right thing to do, to say, to eat and drink. He's the very incarnation of *savoir faire*.
- Bond's sophistication over minor matters, such as what dishes to order in a restaurant, turns into knowledge about many other things. This became a major element in the movies, in which Q, the quartermaster of the Secret Service, constantly issues gadgets to Bond. Some of this interest in gadgetry comes from the original books. In *From Russia with Love*, for example, Bond has a briefcase with built-in throwing knives.

## Bond's Success in Modern Times

- In the rather frightened and deprived context of the 1950s, Bond provided a sense of confidence about the future even as he satisfied readers' nostalgia by taking them back to a better past. In later decades, there's a strong element of wish fulfillment in his success.
- Bond is the kind of man every man wants to be: omni-competent and cool in any circumstances. He's the basic male hero that we've often seen—big, strong, and fearless—but he's never quite unbelievable. He's not unusually big or strong, and he does have moments of fear. More than Odysseus, Beowulf, or Robin Hood, he's versatile.
  - Bond is good at swimming, and he can handle scuba gear, but he has to train for it. He makes an escape on skis in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, but he only just gets away from the professionals who are chasing him. He's a good shot but not as good as his instructor.
  - Although it's Fleming's fault, Bond doesn't know much about guns. In the early novels, Bond's preferred weapon was a Beretta .25, but Fleming was told by a gentleman called Boothroyd that this was just a popgun. Accordingly, in *Dr. No*, Fleming introduced a character called Major Boothroyd, who makes Bond shift to a Walther PPK.
- Bond is a masculine fantasy, but of course, he also appeals to women, though he ought to look like bad news.
  - One of the adjectives Fleming repeatedly uses about Bond



**Bond is versatile, but his fallibility, such as his inexperience with guns, helps to make the character more plausible.**

is “cruel.” And he is cruel. He kills nearly 40 people in the adventures described by Fleming.

- Further, in almost every book, he acquires an extremely attractive woman, who disappears or is disposed of before the start of the next one. He seems like a hit-and-run lover or the classic bad boy.
- But there’s another side to Bond; he’s gallant, even protective in an old-fashioned way. Nearly all the women in Bond’s life have been badly treated and are scarred psychologically or even physically. Honeychile in *Dr. No* has been beaten and raped; Tiffany Case in *Diamonds Are Forever* was gang-raped as a teenager; and other female characters have similar histories.
- Tracy and Vesper, the two women Bond marries or means to marry, both have hidden sorrows or secrets: One is rescued from suicide by Bond; the other commits suicide because she has betrayed him.
- In his ninth Bond novel, *The Spy Who Loved Me*, Fleming experimented by telling the story from the viewpoint not of Bond but of the woman he rescues. She is warned off him at the end by a kindly policeman, but he treats her better than any of her former partners did.
- A third reason for Bond’s success in the modern era is Fleming’s ability to create quite imaginative villains. Perhaps the best of them is Dr. No, with his prosthetic hands, his lethal aquarium, and his desire for artistry in crime.
  - Goldfinger has an obsession with physical gold and a habit of painting girls with gold, so that if they’re not aerated, they die. Ernst Stavro Blofeld is a running opponent through three novels. His female sidekick, Irma Bunt, follows Rosa Klebb in the list of dangerous hags.

- Two other awesome figures are the Irish psychopath Red Grant, recruited by the Russians to become chief executioner for SMERSH, and Goldfinger's Korean bodyguard Oddjob, the karate expert, invulnerable to any kind of hand-to-hand assault.

## **Bond and M**

- The relationship between Bond and his boss, M, is a rather odd one. M seems to regard Bond as nothing more than an expendable employee. By contrast, Bond seems excessively loyal to M. In one of the short stories, "From a View to a Kill," Bond goes outside the terms of his "license to kill" to murder people who have murdered old friends of M. But this is private enterprise, not government business, and even Bond knows he shouldn't be doing it. The relationship seems like one between a father and son.
- A similar relationship may apply, in a way, to some of the villain figures, as well. One repeated and rather implausible scene in the whole Bond corpus is the one in which Bond is captured by one of the villains, who then tries to explain his motives before torturing Bond. Kingsley Amis noted that this scene echoes the lecture a child might get before a punishment.
- Although M might appear to be the kindly—rather than frightening—father figure, he isn't kindly, and in fact, Bond actually tries to kill him at the start of *The Man with the Golden Gun*. True, it's because the Russians have brainwashed him, but their success suggests a kind of ambiguity in the relationship between Bond and M.
- If Fleming's novels are full of father figures for Bond, one might expect that, for all his womanizing, Bond might suffer from some form of castration anxiety. He's not been allowed to grow up. We might even say that Bond is not exactly an adult male fantasy but a teenage fantasy, with the teenage dreams of strength, sophistication, and sexual attraction—all to a disproportionate but not-quite-impossible level.

- Still, Bond has a fairly well-developed moral conscience. His duty is to kill villains, and he does, but he hesitates when asked to do so as a private favor by M. He also claims never to have killed anyone in cold blood. He doesn't physically abuse women, and he's capable of falling in love. He shows concern for some of his partners, and although they sometimes dump him, he doesn't dump them.
- We could sum up by saying that Bond never quite becomes a vigilante. He is always operating under license, which means there is some kind of restraint on him. And this is one of the ways in which he has had a continuing influence on popular culture, especially in the movies: He is a lonely imposer of justice. In this, he's been followed by actors who have tended to take the same kind of role, such as Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry.
- One other thing Fleming's Bond did was give new life to the old genre of spy stories. Len Deighton and John le Carré reacted against Bond by writing what were, in effect, spy procedurals, sordid and unglamorous. Such writers as Tom Clancy took up the technological interest and developed it almost beyond recognition.
- Unlike Frodo Baggins or Harry Potter, Bond does not seem to have deep roots in older myth or legend. He is essentially a new-style hero. Like Winston Smith, he's a product of his time, the old Cold War, which did not end with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Like so many of the tales we've looked at, Bond's story mutated, and he has gone on to be a lasting success beyond the place and time in which he was created.

### Essential Reading

Fleming, *Casino Royale*.

———, *From Russia with Love*.

———, *Dr. No*.

———, *Goldfinger*.

## Suggested Reading

Amis, *The Bond Dossier*.

Lycett, *Ian Fleming*.

O'Connell, *Catching Bullets*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Do you find it possible to accept the various justifications offered for presenting an assassin as a popular hero, or is there a hidden motive for Bond's continuing popularity?
2. With the end of the Cold War, would you say that the Bond franchise has increasingly become comic in tone, each sequel and movie trying to outdo the others in exaggeration?

# Fairy-Tale Heroines—New-Style Princesses

## Lecture 22

Fairy tales came up a few times early on in our course. Behind *Beowulf* lurks the fairy tale of the Bear's Son, and Odysseus and the giant Polyphemus also go back to a fairy tale. As we'll see, fairy tales sometimes underlie modern narratives, as well. Fairy tales are very old, older than Homer. They're also tenacious—still circulating and still mutating. We still respond to them, though we don't always know why. In this lecture, we'll look at a composite figure, the fairy-tale heroine. In particular, we'll see how she has changed or has been changed in the last 40 years.

### A Single Story Transformed?

- During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, every nation in Europe felt that it ought to have its own collection of fairy tales in imitation of the Grimms. There was the Norwegian collection of Jørgen Moe and Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, which gave us “The Three Billy Goats Gruff.” There was the Russian collection of Alexander Afanasyev, which introduced us to the witch Baba Yaga. There were Scottish, Irish, and English collections and others.
- In the modern world, a rather small group of tales has formed a focus of interest, including “Cinderella,” “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” “Rapunzel,” Rumpelstiltskin,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and “Bluebeard.”
  - The last is the story of a husband who tells his new bride never to open a locked room; what he doesn't explain is that in it are the corpses of all his former brides.
  - Of course, the bride opens the room, but Bluebeard finds out and plans to kill her. She's saved at the last minute by her brothers.
- This group of eight tales has several common threads. For example, they always have a threatened heroine, and several have useless or unhelpful fathers. Sometimes, one story seems to be an alternative

version of the other. “Beauty and the Beast” seems as if it will turn into the same plot as “Bluebeard,” but it turns out that the Beast is not a beast after all. Many people have been tempted to say that all the stories are transformations of an underlying story.

### **Transparent, Suggestive, and Pliable**

- Sometime around the 1970s, people began to see that fairy tales were transparent, suggestive, and pliable. Let’s consider each of these adjectives in turn.
  
- Perhaps the most transparent fairy tale of all is “Little Red Riding Hood.” For hundreds of years, people have understood that this tale carries two warnings: Girls should be careful about male sexual predators, and don’t judge by appearances. “The Frog Prince” also tells us not to judge by appearances, but with the reverse implication: What looks like a frog on the outside may be a handsome prince on the inside.
  
- Fairy tales are suggestive in that they sometimes make us wonder whether there is something beneath the surface.
  - “Cinderella,” for example, is a story about growing up and becoming independent. Cinderella has a wicked stepmother and a fairy godmother—a mean mother and a nice mother—but somehow, she has to get away from both. She also has to get away from her father, who may be useless or dangerous. The glass slipper, which fits only one person in the world, seems to stand for the real Cinderella, the core of her personality, what she wants to be loved for.
  
  - In “Snow White,” many have said that the phrase “Mirror, mirror, on the wall ...” is a projection of the appraising male gaze—something that every woman is aware of and something that the stepmother, a generation older than Snow White, fears.
  
  - According to Bruno Bettelheim, who wrote one of the first psychological analyses of fairy tales and introduced the idea of transformations, the dwarves—male but not romantic

possibilities—represent a stage of arrested adolescent development for Snow White, a sort of safe house.

- The thing that betrays Snow White are the gifts offered by the disguised stepmother, all of which have some connection with sexual attraction: the stay laces, part of a kind of corset; the hair comb, long hair being a kind of premodern advertisement for single status; and the red apple of temptation, Eve's apple.
- Beneath the surface, these tales are about gender and about growing up. Further, Bettelheim insisted that we need these tales, or something like them, to help us grow up.
- Once the idea spread that fairy tales were using suggestion to teach life lessons, feminist authors pointed out that they were teaching the wrong lessons, that is, indoctrinating girls into a patriarchal way of thinking. After the 1960s, there was an outbreak of books with such titles as *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye: Breaking the Spell of Feminine Myths and Models* or *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence*.



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The sense that all fairy tales are transformations of a deep underlying story has been very productive, especially for feminist writers.

- This brings us to our third adjective, pliable. Many people, often female authors, began rewriting fairy tales. Key collections included: Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* (1979); Tanith Lee’s *Red as Blood, or Tales from the Sisters Grimm* (1983); and Jack Zipes’s *Don’t Bet on the Prince* (1986). The main aim of such rewrites is to reject the passivity of the traditional fairy-tale heroine; to refuse to see her in her usual roles as victim, caregiver, or sex object; and to challenge the whole basis of the fairy tale and make it relate to modern life.

### Transformations

- The phenomenon of the feminist fairy tale is much assisted by the idea of transformation. Once two or three people have turned a tale inside out, doing it again becomes easier. One retelling seems to feed off another.
- Angela Carter started off the trend. The second story in her *Bloody Chamber* collection is “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon,” a rewrite of Charles Perrault’s version of “Beauty and the Beast.” It follows the original fairly closely, translated into 20<sup>th</sup>-century England.
  - A man is snowbound, deep in the country, in a broken-down car. He goes for help to a grand house, where he meets no one, except a welcoming spaniel. He finds food and drink, he phones a rescue service, and on his way out, he sees, under the snow, one perfect white rose—just what he promised to bring his daughter.
  - The man picks the rose, but the house owner appears, a great roaring lion, who calls him a thief. In Perrault, a transparent bargain is made. For the white rose he’s picked—the traditional emblem of virginity—the father must hand over his virgin daughter. Carter’s version softens this: The snowbound motorist must bring his daughter to dinner.
  - The story ends with a vision of happy domesticity: “Mr. and Mrs. Lyon walk in the garden; the old spaniel drowns on the grass, in a drift of fallen petals.”

- In the next story in the collection, “The Tiger’s Bride,” Carter rewrites “Beauty and the Beast” in a different way.
  - The father is much more culpable: He loses Beauty at cards. She is much more dynamic. She plays out a tough bargain with the Beast; he wants to see her naked, but she makes conditions, ignores his presents, and reduces him to tears. Eventually, she agrees to see him naked in his tiger’s shape and only then bares herself.
  - At the end, the Beast licks her, his tongue ripping off layers of skin until he reaches the beautiful fur underneath. Beauty doesn’t make the Beast human; the Beast turns Beauty into a tiger.
- We find a similar twist in Kathe Koja’s “I Shall Do Thee Mischief in the Wood.” In Koja’s telling, Little Red Riding Hood appears to be a poor waif, trying to sell trinkets in the market. A merchant offers to take her back to her granny in the woods, meaning to take wicked advantage of her. But he’s not the wolf; Granny is, and Little Red Riding Hood has delivered her a victim.
  - Red Riding Hood stories seem to be especially popular in this new mode of writing. Tanith Lee’s “Wolfland” again has Granny as a werewolf, with the Little Red Riding Hood equivalent set to succeed her in her power and estate.
  - We might ask whether Granny is the guilty party, trying to keep her granddaughter in childhood when she is already a woman. But in Carter’s “The Company of Wolves,” Little Red Riding Hood jumps cheerfully into bed with the wolf, ignoring the clattering of old bones under the bed.
- The opening story in Jack Zipes’s collection *Don’t Bet on the Prince* is Jeanne Desy’s “The Princess Who Stood on Her Own Two Feet.”
  - Here, the princess is taller than the prince arranged for her, rides as well as he does, and is equally intelligent. The prince is resentful, so the princess decides to sacrifice for love, even

giving up her talking dog. The dog dies, saying, “Sometimes one must give up everything for love.”

- But the dog comes back as a prince, ready “to look up to a proud and beautiful lady.” In the end, a talking cat tells us: “Sometimes one must refuse to sacrifice.”
- The most disturbing story in Zipes’s collection is “Bluebeard’s Egg” by Margaret Atwood. In this modern story, Sally, a Canadian housewife, is taking a course on fairy tales, taught by a feminist professor. One of her assignments is to write a fairy tale from a different point of view, and she decides to rewrite “Bluebeard.”
  - Sally never writes her assignment because she herself is in the story “Bluebeard.” Her husband isn’t a serial bride-murderer, but he is a serial husband.
  - It’s possible that Sally is not the bride who marries Bluebeard but the previous bride—one of those whose corpses are hidden away in the locked room. The threat to Sally is divorce, a return to work, and the inability to find a career because she let herself be sidelined by marriage.
  - The moral here is plainer than the ones we’ve seen: A woman shouldn’t put all her eggs in the one basket of a nice, comfortable marriage.
- There are numerous possible transformations in fairy tales, and just as we saw a new-style Elizabeth Bennett in *Bridget Jones*, so we see a new composite fairy-tale heroine in, for example, “The Princess Who Stood on Her Own Two Feet.” She’s a creature not of the Brothers Grimm but, as Tanith Lee puts it, of the Sisters Grimmer.

## Essential Reading

Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*.

Datlow and Wildling, eds., *Snow White, Blood Red*.

Lee, *Red as Blood*.

Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*.

Zipes, ed., *Don't Bet on the Prince*.

### Suggested Reading

Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*.

Hunter, *Princes, Frogs and Ugly Sisters*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Do you think that premodern fairy tales, written for premodern conditions, are now irrelevant, as far as life lessons are concerned? Would you say the same about the earlier Disney movies?
2. Can you compile a list of 6 to 10 favorite fairy tales not mentioned in this lecture? Why do you remember them best?

# Lisbeth Salander—Avenging Female Fury

## Lecture 23

In this course, we have come across a number of different kinds of continuation and revival: authors writing into a gap, straightforward makeovers, echoes, independent reinvention, and deliberate rewriting. Elements of all these appear in this lecture and in the character who is at the core of it: Lisbeth Salander, the heroine of Stieg Larsson's trilogy of crime novels that began with *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Although we might think of Lisbeth as strikingly original, in fact, she seems to be a case of reconstruction from an ancient myth—an avenging female Fury.

### “A Heroine Whom No One Will Like”

- The three books in Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy all focus on the character Lisbeth Salander. She's a very unexpected heroine and, once more, a challenge to the basic male hero stereotype. She seems to be fearless, but she's not big and strong. Although she is 24 at the time of the first novel, she is said to look 14. Salander makes up for her weakness with other characteristics. As one character says of her, “She always gets revenge.” She knows no moderation.
- Salander is also said to feel “no emotional involvement.” She responds to many kinds of social interaction only with silence or, sometimes, rage. It's safe to say that she is difficult to deal with.
- She displays a horrific ingenuity in the many ways she takes revenge. Consider, for example, the climactic scene of the final book of the trilogy.
  - Salander is looking through an old industrial building that has come to her on the death of her father, a death for which she herself is largely responsible. There, she finds two female corpses, and then she discovers that she has been locked in by her half-brother, whose name is Niedermann. He is a creature out of a fairy tale, an ogre. His German name means something like “Deep Down Man.”

- Niedermann is six feet, six inches tall and weighs more than 300 pounds. He's a mass murderer, and he has congenital analgesia; he can't feel pain. He's bent on killing Salander.
- The tiny Salander slips away from him and hides underneath a cabinet. From this position, she uses a nail gun to fire seven-inch nails into Niedermann's feet, anchoring him to the floor.
- Salander has other enemies to take care of, in particular, a biker gang, whose members have their own reasons for turning on Niedermann. She texts the bikers, telling them where they can find Niedermann. She then texts the police to report where the bikers are. The bikers kill Niedermann and are, in turn, caught by the police. Salander's enemies are eliminated in a clean sweep.

#### A Version of Winston Smith

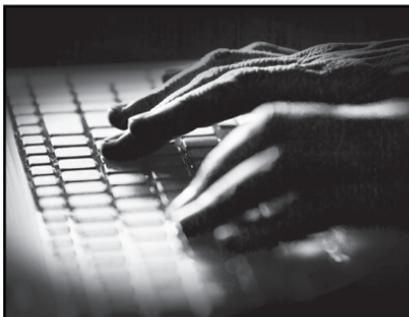
- Although it may seem surprising, we could say that Salander is a kind of Winston Smith, even though we know that in *Nineteen Eighty-four*, it is Winston who is tortured, and he never gets revenge. The similarity between the two stems from the vastly increased power of the state in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries compared to preceding centuries.
- Both Smith and Salander are victims of governmental institutions. The modern Swedish institutions are benevolent in intention, but Larsson points out that they may not be so in practice. Salander earns her own living, but because she has been declared legally incompetent to handle her own affairs, she cannot have access to the money she earns without the authorization of her court-appointed guardian. And Salander's guardian, Bjurman, is a sexual predator.
- Salander can't turn to the state for help because Bjurman has the authority of the state behind him and because she's been declared incompetent. Further, in Salander's case, this situation has been in place for a long time.

- Salander’s father beat her mother to the point that she ended up in a nursing home with permanent brain damage. Lisbeth, aged 12, could not defend her mother physically, but she filled a bottle with petrol, tossed it over her father as he sat in his car, and then set it alight, crippling him for life.
- She was certified as violent and became subject to any treatment her court-appointed psychiatrist deemed reasonable. The treatment her first psychiatrist chose was to have her strapped down on more than 380 occasions.
- Salander’s father is Aleksander Zalachenko, a Soviet defector and former officer of the Soviet Secret Service. As such, he is valuable to the Swedish Secret Service, the Säpo, which is more concerned with protecting this valuable defector than the rights of his daughter. We might say that Salander faces a bad James Bond in the form of the state—not glamorous, not protective (except in theory), but above the law.

### **A Version of Sherlock Holmes**

- Salander is also a modern Sherlock Holmes—in effect, a consulting detective—and a super-hacker. She knows how to find information in the modern electronic environment.
- The Millennium trilogy opens with what Sherlockians would call a classic “locked-room mystery.”
  - Many years ago, on an island owned by a wealthy family, a 16-year-old girl vanished. The island has only one exit, and the girl’s grandfather is sure that someone in his family must have murdered her. Nearing the end of his life, the grandfather is desperate to find an answer to the mystery.
  - The grandfather hires an investigative journalist, Blomkvist, to look into the case. He doesn’t hire Salander, but she gets coincidentally involved. Gradually, Blomkvist becomes the Dr. Watson to Salander’s Sherlock. He observes and deduces, but she digs up essential information.

- The second volume of the trilogy, *The Girl Who Played with Fire*, switches to Salander's unfinished business with her father, a criminal who is still protected by Säpo and by her half-brother. She is shot by her father and buried alive by her half-brother and, at the end, is digging herself out to take an incomplete revenge.
- In the third volume, *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*, the focus switches to Säpo and its attempts to silence Salander. By this time, her father is seen by Säpo as a liability. The book builds to what we might call a classic Perry Mason or courtroom scene, in which Salander turns the tables on the psychiatrist Teleborian, who is once again contending that she should be released into his care.
  - Salander is a member of Hacker Republic, an electronic gang with power that rivals that of the state. The hackers can crack any password, unearth any secret, and retrieve documents thought to be safely buried by Säpo.
  - We might think the activities of the Hacker Republic are reprehensible, but Larsson reminds us that the state engages in similar activities, including tapping our phones and reading our emails. The hackers are, in a way, Little Brother set against Big Brother.



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**For the members of the Hacker Republic, the Internet is a workplace, and they react with violence to any attempt to impair it.**

### Themes of the Millennium Trilogy

- Looking at Larsson's Millennium trilogy as a whole, we can see several important themes: a reaction against the greatly increased

power of the modern state, a feminist backlash against “the patriarchy,” and a focus on an electronic and a political environment.

- Do these themes lead us to feel sympathy for this fierce, alienated woman? One of her associates says that she is the most judgmental person he’s ever met. But she’s also completely tolerant of other people’s weaknesses or personal habits. Is this a paradox?
- It seems that the basis for her judgmentalism, her personal sense of ethics, is not law—she has no respect for that—and it’s certainly not traditional morality. Instead, it seems to be something rather old-fashioned for such a contemporary character: a strong sense of honor. She will not do anything that diminishes her own sense of self-respect, and she will intervene violently to protect or avenge the weak and the vulnerable.
- The end of the trilogy offers a hint that Salander can be rehabilitated.
  - At the end of the first volume, Salander has grown to like and trust Blomkvist, and she hopes to have her first romantic relationship with him. But then she sees him with his long-time lover and realizes that any approach she might make would be an embarrassment.
  - In contrast, at the end of the third volume, Blomkvist calls on Salander, bringing bagels and coffee. He says that he’s “just company ... a good friend who’s visiting a good friend.” In an ending that is muted but hopeful, she opens the door and lets him in.

### **Summing Up Salander and Larsson**

- In Greek myth, the Furies are sometimes called to become protectors of Athens and to act for justice, not vengeance. They become the Semnai, “the Venerable Ones,” and some call them the Eumenides, “the Kindly Ones.” In the case of Salander, remembering the petrol and the nail gun, “venerable” seems to apply.

- As for Larsson, we've suggested that there are echoes in his work of Sherlock Holmes, James Bond, and Winston Smith, as well as mythical figures. But nowadays, if you're writing a detective story, it's hard to avoid some hint of Sherlock, and the "Orwellian nightmare" of *Nineteen Eighty-four* is never far from anyone's mind in contemplating the power of the modern state.
  - These stories, all the heroes and legends we've seen, are part of our mental furniture now. They are the framework of our imaginations, but they don't create the picture inside the frame.
  - In fact, Larsson has credited a totally different heroine as his original inspiration, which is Pippi Longstocking, a little girl in the Swedish children's stories written by Astrid Lindgren. The connection seems to be that both Pippi and Salander are extremely confident females.
- Finally, it's important to note that Lisbeth Salander is not the only case where an old and archetypal pattern has come back to be a smash hit in the modern world. Suzanne Collins's successful *Hunger Games* trilogy was based, she says, on the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, the children sent each year as a tribute and sacrifice to the bull god of Crete.
  - *The Hunger Games* has at its heart another ancient female image, what we might call "the virgin with the bow," in this case, Katniss Everdeen.
  - This virgin is a kind of paradox; she pretends to be in love and fakes the *Liebestod* ("lovers' suicide") to manipulate her manipulators.
  - Katniss recaps Theseus and Diana, just the way that Lisbeth Salander recaps the Furies and the Valkyries.
  - The old myths and images can come back, of course, transmuted. But we also add to them all the time. And the new ones are available for transmutation, as well.

## Essential Reading

Larsson (Keeland, trans.), *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

———, *The Girl Who Played with Fire*.

———, *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*.

## Suggested Reading

Pettersson, (Geddes, trans.), *Stieg*.

## Questions to Consider

1. C. S. Lewis called his last novel, *Till We Have Faces*, “a myth retold.” Can you think of other modern examples of myths being retold, openly or covertly?
2. Would you rather have James Bond on your side or Lisbeth Salander? Which do you think is more realistic as a protector of abused women?

# Harry Potter—Whistle-Blower Hero

## Lecture 24

**W**e started these lectures with Tolkien, the unexpected success of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and we will close with the equally unexpected success of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century: J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter. The Harry Potter story was, if anything, even more unexpected as a success than Tolkien's work. The tale of its creation is a heroic story in itself, with its author, a divorced single mother, writing in a café because she couldn't afford to heat her own room. She has since become one of the richest women on the planet. Returning to our theme of what creates such successes, in this lecture, we'll ask: What can Harry Potter teach us?

### A Fairy-Tale Start

- Harry has a strong element of the fairy tale about him, with a Cinderella start. We first meet him in his bedroom, which is the cupboard under the stairs of Number 4, Privet Drive. He's being sheltered, reluctantly, by his aunt and her horrible husband, who neglect and bully him.
- Harry is saved by the half-giant Hagrid, who sweeps him out of the hands of the muggles (ordinary people) and off to the great school for wizards and witches, Hogwarts, with its headmaster, Albus Dumbledore.
- There, Harry finds that he's famous, the only person to have survived the attack of Lord Voldemort. The attack killed his parents but not him, and that failure is thought (wrongly) to have eliminated Voldemort forever.
- One of the charms of the Harry Potter books is the immensely detailed and amusing magical world in which Harry finds himself. And this world shows us how much Rowling has to draw on. She takes ideas from myth, medieval romance, fairy tales, and her own imagination. In addition, the Harry Potter books are a twist on the



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**In Rowling's world, a magic community exists alongside our real world, but it has enacted a Statute of Secrecy to keep its existence concealed.**

high school story. Hogwarts isn't an ordinary school, but in the seven books, Harry advances a grade every year and undergoes the usual teenage trials.

### **Harry's Success**

- For all his fame and importance, Harry is quite normal. What has made him so special to us?
  - As we said, the hobbits, Tolkien's new-style heroes, were created out of the trauma of two World Wars that had severely shaken traditional models of heroism. That trauma is behind us now, but it hasn't quite gone away. Rowling's Dark Lord has been defeated, but he has every intention, like Tolkien's Sauron, of returning.
  - And the threat of the Dark Lord is a recognizable one. The magic users will take over. They will become the master race, overlords over us muggles. Rule will be restricted to

those of pure wizard blood. Everyone else will be known as “mudbloods” or “half-bloods.” If they’re “pure bloods” who sympathize with muggles, they’ll be called “blood traitors.” We know all about that kind of racist ideology.

- There are also new traumas and anxieties. The truly modern element in Harry is that in his repeated struggles with the Dark Lord, he must fight a war on two fronts.
  - In the fifth book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the magic community’s government refuses to face up to the fact that the Dark Lord has returned and is rallying his followers. Rather than address the situation, the powers that be prefer to hush it up. This involves discrediting Harry and his mentor, Dumbledore, and taking over Hogwarts.
  - The Ministry of Magic puts a stooge into Hogwarts, Dolores Umbridge, to teach the class called Defense against the Dark Arts. Her approach to her subject is to issue all students a new handbook, the aim of which is, essentially, to do nothing.
  - Harry, who has already formed a kind of unofficial self-help group for learning magical self-defense, protests. He gets put in detention, where he must write out “I must not tell lies” repeatedly. Dumbledore and the other Hogwarts teachers who sympathize with Harry can’t protect him because Umbridge has the authority of the state behind her.
- The point here is that Harry is fighting against both the Dark Lord and against the people who also ought to be fighting the Dark Lord. And they fight Harry with modern weapons, such as the media. Harry and his friends fight back with modern methods, as well.

### Harry the Whistle-Blower

- This war on two fronts is a contemporary situation. Just like Harry, we face serious threats to our security: terrorism, financial turmoil, climate change, and more. We have to trust the state to protect us from those threats, but do we trust the institutions of the state?

Skepticism about politicians, lobbyists, and bureaucrats is very much a part of the modern mindset.

- For this reason, ever since Watergate, we've had a word for another new kind of hero: the whistle-blower. As a whistle-blower, Harry tries to alert his community to one threat, but he also faces the other threat of the forces that are trying to hush him up.
- Harry is made to query himself and his own deepest attachments. He is devoted to the memory of his dead parents, but when he begins to receive access to other people's memories, he learns that his father was a bully. In fact, James Potter's bullying has led one of the teachers at Hogwarts, Severus Snape, to dislike Harry.
- One other thing that creates self-doubt in Harry is his awareness that he is, in some mysterious way, connected to the Dark Lord. He gets flashes of what the Dark Lord is doing, and like the Dark Lord, he can speak Parseltongue, the language of snakes. He even finds himself inside the body of the Dark Lord's familiar, the giant snake Nagini, as it attacks his friend Ron's father. Can Harry even trust himself?
- All these pressures naturally make Harry increasingly bad-tempered. He has the teenage sense that no one understands him, and he's repeatedly in danger of alienating even the people who are on his side, especially his two closest companions, Ron and Hermione. As we said in the first lecture, the dominant feeling on the modern battlefield is loneliness, and that applies even on the psychic battlefield where Harry fights.
- One more strongly modern and original element is seen in the Dementors. At the start of the series, these are the guards of the wizards' prison, but they change sides later on. They work by sucking the happiness out of their victims, until everything seems utterly depressing and all resistance ceases. Their last act is the "Dementor's kiss," which sucks away the soul. A real-world correlative, perhaps, is the loss of nerve, the reluctance to stand up

for themselves and their values that has so often seemed to afflict Western democracies in modern times.

### More Changing Values?

- Interestingly, in all seven books of the Harry Potter series, there's not the slightest trace of religious belief, in Christianity or any faith. No one prays or even thinks about the possibility of divine assistance. Magic itself seems to be just a variation of muggle technology—broomsticks and hexes instead of planes and guns—and is only occasionally superior to it.
- Perhaps this is another major shift in cultural values: the erosion or loss of the religious faith that upheld so many of our earlier heroes and heroines. And this loss of faith may explain why the Dark Lord is on a quest for personal immortality. Such a quest is natural in a society that no longer has faith in a life after death; one must abolish death instead.
- The strange thing about Harry, in this world seemingly without faith, is that at the end of his struggle with the Dark Lord, in order to succeed, Harry must die himself, because he had one of the Dark Lord's souls within him. And then he comes back to life because of the blood he shared with the Dark Lord. The symbolism of this is hard to read, but the term "Christ figure" certainly comes to mind.
- This strange blank at the heart of the Rowling universe—this hole where faith used to be—once again makes the point that Harry, his friends, and the whole magic community are on their own. The dangers arise from within themselves, and that's where the solutions will have to come from, as well.
- Still, the moral values of Harry Potter don't seem to have changed dramatically. Tolerance is vital, as is kindness, concern for the vulnerable, and humility. The overall moral of the series seems to be traditional. Despite the fact that Harry often has the feeling that he stands alone against the world, the real power in Rowling's universe is love. Perhaps modern heroes, such as Harry, are thrown

back on themselves in a way that's never been true before, but the answer to loss of faith—to existential loneliness—is love.

### **The House of Legend**

- Tolkien talked about the “Tree of Story,” which puts out new leaves all the time, but in at least one way, that metaphor is inaccurate. Trees put out leaves organically, but that's not how stories get written. For our purposes, then, let's use the metaphor of a House of Legend.
- This house has deep foundations and many rooms on many floors. On the top floors are the gods, goddesses, and humans born of goddesses, such as Thor and Aeneas and, perhaps, Guinevere. Lower down are people with extraordinary talents, such as Sherlock Holmes, the Deerslayer, and Robin Hood. On the ground floor are people like us, such as Celie, Elizabeth Bennet, or the Wife of Bath, who nevertheless get the chance to show what they're made of.
- Anyone can build a new room in this House of Legend and decorate and furnish it to his or her liking. But it will always rest on deep, strong foundations that go down to bedrock in the human heart.
- No story, no hero or heroine, comes out of nothing. Even at the dawn of history, the story of Odysseus and Polyphemus was already old. We're fortunate now that the House of Legend has become so large, with unmeasurable amounts of human ingenuity poured into it for everyone to draw on.
- New rooms in the House of Legend are always welcome, and people are building them right now. But they're still building them on the old foundations. The house possesses two resources, one of which is sustainable and the other, always growing.
  - The growing resource is all the heroes and heroines in the House of Legend. The old ones are still present, and we're adding new ones all the time.

- The other resource—our most sustainable—is what’s adding them: human creativity.

### Essential Reading

Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*.  
———, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.  
———, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*.  
———, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.  
———, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.  
———, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*.  
———, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

### Suggested Reading

Kirk, *J. K. Rowling*.  
Saxena, *The Subversive Harry Potter*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Can you think of real-world examples where a warning has been given, a whistle blown, but the proper authorities have taken no notice or tried to cover up the threat? What do you think causes such behavior?
2. How important has faith been to any of the heroes we have followed, and what are the alternative sources of inner strength?

## Bibliography

Amis, Kingsley. *The Bond Dossier*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1965. An early defense of Fleming's Bond against hostile reviewers, by a famous author with excellent academic credentials.

Anonymous. *Beowulf: A New Translation for Oral Delivery*. Translated by Dick Ringler. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007. Essential reading for Lecture 7. Many other good or adequate translations exist, including those by Kevin Crossley-Holland (repr. 1999), Michael Alexander, (repr. 2003), and Seamus Heaney (2000), but Ringler's, as it says, is meant to be read aloud or recited, like the original poem.

Anonymous. *A Gest of Robyn Hode*. In *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*. Edited by Stephen Knight and Thomas H. Ohlgren, pp. 80–168. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000. Essential reading for Lecture 9. Text and notes available at <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/gest.htm>.

Anonymous. *The Poetic Edda*. Translated by W. H. Auden and P. B. Taylor as *Norse Poems*. London: Athlone, 1981. Essential reading for Lecture 8. Other modern translations include those by Patricia Terry (1969) and Carolyne Larrington (1996), but *Norse Poems* is the work of a great poet in his own right.

Arnold, Martin. *Thor: From Myth to Marvel*. New York: Continuum, 2012. "Marvel" in the title means "Marvel Comics." A wide-ranging and up-to-date survey by a major Norse-Icelandic scholar.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. 1813. Essential reading for Lecture 12. Available in many reprints.

Baring-Gould, W. S. *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street: The Life of the World's First Consulting Detective*. New York: C. N. Potter, 1962. The best of many half-serious accounts of the detective as a real person.

Bates, Gerri. *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005. A good scholarly account of Walker's works as a whole, including *The Color Purple*.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976. A groundbreaking study, by a practicing psychiatrist, of the classic fairy tales, as discussed in Lecture 22. Stresses their therapeutic value.

Bradford, Ernle. *Ulysses Found*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963. An attempt to trace Odysseus's route by an author who is amateur scholar and an experienced small-boat sailor.

Byron, W. *Cervantes: A Biography*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978. The best account in English of the eventful life of this major author.

Carter, Angela. *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. New York: Penguin, 1990. The most important collection of the five listed as essential reading for Lecture 22.

Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quixote*. Translated by John Rutherford, London: Penguin Classics, 2000. Essential reading for Lecture 10. The best and most modern translation.

Chadwick-Joshua, Jocelyn. *The Jim Dilemma: Reading Race in Huckleberry Finn*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998. Scholarly study of one aspect of Huck's "odyssey."

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Troilus and Criseyde*. Edited by Stephen A. Barney. New York: Norton, 2006. Essential reading for Lecture 6. A modernized translation by A. S. Kline is available online at <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/English/TroilusandCressidaBkI.htm>.

———. *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*. Edited by Valerie Allen and David Kirkham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Essential reading for Lecture 5. Also recommended is a lively verse translation of *The*

*Canterbury Tales* as a whole by Tolkien's friend Nevill Coghill (London and New York, Penguin Classics, 2003).

Chrétien de Troyes. *Arthurian Romances*. Translated by D. D. R. Owen. London: Dent; New Clarendon, VT: Tuttle, 1987. Essential reading for Lecture 4.

Clements, Susannah. *The Vampire Defanged: How the Embodiment of Evil Became a Romantic Hero*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011. A good study of the whole "literary vampire" phenomenon.

Colebatch, Hal G. P. *Return of the Heroes: The Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, Harry Potter, and Social Conflict*. Christchurch, New Zealand: Cybereditions, 2003. A combative defense of the value of popular heroic fictions, arguing that they have had a major cultural influence in countering the views of liberal elites.

Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Deerslayer*. 1841. Essential reading for Lecture 13. Available in many reprints.

———. *The Last of the Mohicans*. 1826. Essential reading for Lecture 13. Available in many reprints. The best known of Cooper's works.

———. *The Pathfinder*. 1840. Essential reading for Lecture 13. Available in many reprints.

Crick, Bernard. *George Orwell: A Life*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1980. A detailed but rather defensive account of the creator of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, from a British and left-wing perspective.

Cross, T. P., and W. A. Nitze. *Lancelot and Guenevere: A Study on the Origins of Courtly Love*. New York: Phaeton, 1970. Old-fashioned by academic standards but still a perceptive historical account of one of the Western world's major changes in cultural values.

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. *Snow White, Blood Red*. New York: Avon, 1993. Listed as essential reading for Lecture 22 but of lesser importance than Carter above and Zipes below if one has to choose.

Davidson, Hilda R. Ellis. *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964. An old but lively account of the Norse gods, including Thor.

Davison, Peter H. *George Orwell: A Literary Life*. New York: St. Martin's, 1996. A tougher account than Crick above, by an independent scholar who nevertheless vastly increased the amount of Orwell material known through indefatigable personal inquiries.

Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. 1719. Essential reading for Lecture 11. Available in many reprints.

Dekker, George. *James Fenimore Cooper: The American Scott*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967. A sound and comprehensive academic study of Cooper's many works.

Dieke, Ikenna, ed. *Critical Essays on Alice Walker*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999. A good representative collection of modern views of this author.

Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989. An influential modern academic account of Chaucer's female characters, including the Wife of Bath.

Dobson, R. B., and John Taylor, eds. *Rymes of Robyn Hood*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976. Brings together much of the early Robin Hood material, with an introduction that did a great deal to set the hero in a real-life place and time.

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. *The Complete Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Edited by Julian Symons. Nationwide Book Service, 1981. There are many reprints of all the Sherlock Holmes novels and short-story collections, but this is a handy and complete set of the essential reading for Lecture 16.

Ellis, Frank H., ed. *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Robinson Crusoe*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969. A useful survey of academic opinions about this work, which aroused much interest in the immediate postcolonial era.

Fehrenbach, T. R. *Comanches: The Destruction of a People*. New York: Knopf, 1974. A fascinating if often horrific account of a great but perhaps inevitable tragedy.

Field, P. J. C. *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*. Cambridge: Brewer, 1993. This study disentangles the real Sir Thomas from several other possibilities and concludes that the author of *Le Morte Darthur* was, in fact, the notorious criminal. Weighs judiciously the (mostly unproved) charges against him and sets him and his family in the context of civil war.

Finley, M. I. *The World of Odysseus*. New York: Viking, 1951. Excellent study of the social institutions revealed in the poem; sets them in the context of the ancient Greek Heroic Age.

Fleming, Ian. *Casino Royale*. 1953. Essential reading for Lecture 21. The first to be published of Bond's adventures and first in terms of his own life. Available in many reprints.

———. *Dr. No*. 1958. Essential reading for Lecture 21. This, the sixth Bond novel, was possibly the one that gave him mass-market appeal with the release of the 1962 movie.

———. *From Russia with Love*. 1957. Essential reading for Lecture 21. Fifth to be published. One of President Kennedy's favorite novels.

———. *Goldfinger*. 1959. Essential reading for Lecture 21. Another of the best of Fleming's novels, seventh to be published.

Forshaw, Barry. *Death in a Cold Climate: A Guide to Scandinavian Crime Fiction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. A study of the phenomenon, with a chapter on Larsson.

Fox, Robin Lane. *Travelling Heroes: Greeks and Their Myths in the Epic Age of Homer*. London: Penguin, 2008. An up-to-date and scholarly account of what is known of ancient Greek voyaging in the age of Homer. Interesting complement to Bradford above.

Frederickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914*. New York: HarperCollins, 1972. A study that sets *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in a much wider context.

Fulk, R. D., ed. *Interpretations of Beowulf*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981. A wide-ranging collection prepared by the major living *Beowulf* scholar.

Garth, John. *Tolkien and the Great War*. London: HarperCollins, 2003. A close study of Tolkien's life and movements from 1914 to 1918 and of the poetry written in that period, during which his mythology of Middle-earth began to take shape.

Gordon, Ida L. *The Double Sorrow of Troilus*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1970. An almost line-by-line study of the poem. Follows Troilus's movement from sorrow to joy and back again to sorrow.

Gossett, Thomas F. *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*. Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985. A scholarly study that sets Harriet Beecher Stowe's work in a wider context.

Graves, Robert. *Homer's Daughter*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955. An exceptionally fine historical novel by a learned writer, putting forward the view that *The Odyssey*, as we have it, must have been written by a woman.

Griffin, Jasper. *Virgil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. A good short study of the life and works of this major author.

Haber, Karen, ed. *Meditations on Middle-Earth*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001. This collection brings together informed tributes to Tolkien by many successful professional authors, including Poul Anderson, Ursula Le Guin, George R. R. Martin, Terry Pratchett, and Michael Swanwick.

Hall, Edith. *The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odysseus*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. This study covers the long reception of Homer's *Odyssey* and its hero from classical times onward.

Henryson, Robert. *Poems*. Edited by Denton Fox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981. Essential reading for Lecture 6. Contains, besides the *Testament of Cresseid*, a number of other poems, including Henryson's retellings of Aesop's fables and tales of Reynard the fox.

Holt, J. C. *Robin Hood*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Thames & Hudson, 1989. A comprehensive survey of what is known about Robin Hood and his historical context, by a major historian.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Knopf, 1991. Essential reading for Lecture 2. Famous translations of the past include those by George Chapman (1616) and Alexander Pope (1725). Another good modern translation is Richmond Lattimore's (1965).

Honan, Park. *Jane Austen: Her Life*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987. A detailed study of the life of the author.

Hunter, Allan G. *Princes, Frogs and Ugly Sisters: The Healing Power of the Grimm Brothers' Tales*. Forres, Scotland: Findhorn, 2010. Goes on from Bettelheim above with an updated account of the tales' therapeutic value for all of us.

Inge, M. Thomas, ed. *Huck Finn among the Critics: A Centennial Selection*. Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1985. A good survey of the way in which Huck has been read and responded to over the century since his story was published.

Irving, E. B., Jr. *A Reading of Beowulf*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968. The most accessible full-length study of the poem.

Jekel, Pamela. *The Third Jungle Book*. Niwot, CO: Roberts Rinehart, 1992. Continues and amplifies Kipling's stories by creating an additional 10 stories in the spirit of the originals.

Keen, Maurice. *The Outlaws of Medieval England*. Rev. ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. A survey of the medieval outlaw tradition, of which Robin Hood is the most famous part.

Kipling, Rudyard. *The Jungle Book*. 1894. Essential reading for Lecture 18. Available in many reprints.

———. *The Second Jungle Book*. 1895. Essential reading for Lecture 18. Available in many reprints.

Kirk, Connie Ann. *J. K. Rowling: A Biography*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2003. Gives an account of the creation of the Harry Potter books.

Klinger, Leslie S, ed. *The New Annotated Dracula*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008. Useful backup to the essential reading for Lecture 17.

———. *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2005. Useful backup to the essential reading for Lecture 16.

Kyle, Chris. *American Gun: A History of the U.S. in Ten Firearms*. New York: William Morrow, 2013. Two of the firearms discussed are the American long rifle and the early Colt revolver, both mentioned in Lecture 13.

Larsson, Stieg. *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Translated by Reg Keeland. London: MacLehose Press, 2008. Essential reading for Lecture 23. If you should choose to read only one book in the sequence, this contains all the major themes, though its focus is not initially on Lisbeth Salander.

———. *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*. Translated by Reg Keeland. London: MacLehose Press, 2009. Essential reading for Lecture 23.

———. *The Girl Who Played with Fire*. Translated by Reg Keeland. London: MacLehose Press, 2009. Essential reading for Lecture 23.

Lee, Tanith. *Red as Blood: Tales from the Sisters Grimmer*. New York: DAW Books, 1983. Listed as essential reading for Lecture 22 but of lesser importance than Carter above and Zipes below if one has to choose.

Lewis, C. S. "What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*." In *Selected Literary Essays*, edited by Walter Hooper, pp. 27–44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969. Compares Chaucer's poem with its source, *Il Filostrato* by the Italian poet Boccaccio, and argues that Chaucer made the story and the characters more medieval.

Lycett, Andrew. *Ian Fleming: The Man behind James Bond*. Atlanta: Turner, 1995. Gives an account of the creation of the James Bond books, drawing interesting parallels between the author's life and his fiction.

MacQueen, John. *Robert Henryson: A Study of the Major Narrative Poems*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1967. A very good if purely literary account of *The Testament of Cresseid*.

Maitland, Sara. *Gossip from the Forest: The Tangled Roots of our Forests and Fairytales*. London: Granta, 2012. Considers and rewrites 12 of the Grimm tales, relating each one to a visit to a British forest. Tales and forests exist, she argues, in a symbiotic relationship. Listed as essential reading for Lecture 22 but of lesser importance than Carter above and Zipes below if one has to choose.

Malory, Sir Thomas. *Le Morte Darthur*. Edited by Eugene Vinaver. London: Oxford University Press, 1954. The last two sections of this book, entitled by Vinaver "The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" and "The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthure," are essential reading for Lecture 4. They amount to some 150 pages. Also recommended is Vinaver's selection from Malory with modernized spelling, *King Arthur and His Knights* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

McMurtry, Larry. *Comanche Moon*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997. Essential reading for Lecture 13. In terms of the heroes' lives, this book is second in the series of four. If you should choose to read only one of this series, this is probably the one to pick as best describing the pivotal period of history in the American West.

———. *Dead Man's Walk*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995. Essential reading for Lecture 13. In terms of the heroes' lives, this book is first in the series of four.

———. *In a Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968. Historical essays by the author of the Lonesome Dove series.

———. *Lonesome Dove*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985. Essential reading for Lecture 13. In terms of the heroes' lives, this book is third in the series of four.

———. *Streets of Laredo*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993. Essential reading for Lecture 13. In terms of the heroes' lives, this book is last in the series of four.

Montefiore, Jan. "Kipling as a Children's Writer and *The Jungle Books*." In *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*. Edited by Howard J. Booth, pp. 95–110. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. A focused critical account of the essential reading for Lecture 18.

Niles, John D., ed. *Beowulf and Lejre*. Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1997. An extended account of the archaeological excavations at Lejre in Denmark, which have caused a rethink of the traditional view that *Beowulf* is pure fiction, with no historical foundation.

O'Connell, Mark. *Catching Bullets: Memoirs of a Bond Fan*. London: Splendid Books, 2012. An engaging personal account of what the Bond phenomenon, franchise movies included, has meant to one fan.

O'Donoghue, Heather. *From Asgard to Valhalla: The Remarkable History of the Norse Myths*. London: J. B. Tauris, 2007. Discusses the reception and influence of Norse mythology.

Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-four*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1949. Essential reading for Lecture 20. Available in many reprints. The edition

by Bernard Crick (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) can be recommended, though Davison above and Shippey below are useful correctives.

Person, Leland S., ed. *A Historical Guide to James Fenimore Cooper*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2007. A collection of essays on the life, works, and historical context of the author.

Pettersson, Jan-Erik. *Stieg: From Activist to Author*. Translated by Tom Geddes. London: Quercus, 2011. An interesting account of Larsson's life and background by a personal friend; does much to explain his dominant themes or obsessions.

Predmore, Richard L. *The World of Don Quixote*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967. Sets Cervantes and his works in the context of his time.

Quinn, Kenneth. *Virgil's Aeneid: A Critical Description*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968. A good readable account of the entire work.

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 1998. Essential reading for Lecture 24. In terms of Harry's life, second in the series of seven.

———. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2007. Essential reading for Lecture 24. In terms of Harry's life, last in the series of seven.

———. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2000. Essential reading for Lecture 24. In terms of Harry's life, fourth in the series of seven.

———. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2005. Essential reading for Lecture 24. In terms of Harry's life, sixth in the series of seven.

———. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2003. Essential reading for Lecture 24. In terms of Harry's life, fifth

in the series of seven. If you choose to read only one of the series, this, the longest, is probably the one to pick.

———. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 1999. Essential reading for Lecture 24. In terms of Harry's life, third in the series of seven.

———. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 1997. Essential reading for Lecture 24. In terms of Harry's life, first in the series of seven. The original U.K. title was *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

Saler, Michael. *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary History of Virtual Reality*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Chapter 3, on the Sherlock Holmes phenomenon, is especially valuable as showing perhaps the first literary character to escape from his author and take on a life of his own. Tolkien is also discussed in chapter 5.

Saxena, Vandana. *The Subversive Harry Potter: Adolescent Rebellion and Containment in the J. K. Rowling Novels*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012. Considers issues in the Harry Potter sequence.

Scheuermann, Mona. *Her Bread to Earn: Women, Money and Society from Defoe to Austen*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1993. Takes up one of the themes of Lecture 12, with wider reference.

Seidel, Michael. *Robinson Crusoe: Island Myths and the Novel*. Boston: Twayne, 1991. Looks at the "desert island" motif, among others, with a focus on Defoe's story.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. 1816. There are many reprints of the 1816 work, but the edition by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin Classics, 2005) contains Polidori's story "The Vampyre," which is a valuable backup to Lecture 17.

Shippey, Thomas. "Variations on Newspeak: The Open Question of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*." In *Storm Warnings: Science Fiction Confronts the Future*.

Edited by George Slusser, Colin Greenland, and Eric S. Rabkin, pp. 172–193. Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987. Takes up some of the issues discussed in Lecture 20 and shows how they reappear in later fiction.

———. *Beowulf*. London: Edward Arnold, 1976. An introduction to the poem for students, with the merit of being extremely short, some 60 pages.

———. *Tolkien: Author of the Century*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001. Most accessible account of Tolkien's major works, especially chapters 1 through 4.

Snorri Sturluson. *The Prose Edda*. Translated by Anthony Faulkes. London: Dent; New Clarendon, VT: Tuttle, 1987. Essential reading for Lecture 8. The main source of modern knowledge of tales about the god Thor.

Souhami, Diana. *Selkirk's Island: The True and Strange Adventures of the Real Robinson Crusoe*. New York: Harcourt, 2002. Discusses the real-life original of Defoe's hero, the Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk.

Spargo, J. E. *Virgil the Necromancer*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934. An engaging and scholarly, if oddball, account of how Aeneas's visit to the underworld was changed into legends of Virgil's magical powers. These legends in their turn influenced Dante's great poem *La Divina Commedia*.

Stegner, Paige. *Winning the Wild West: The Epic Saga of the American Frontier, 1800–1899*. New York: Free Press, 2002. A serious and up-to-date account of the true history of events described in the second section of Lecture 13.

Steiner, Enit Karafili. *Jane Austen's Civilised Women: Morality, Gender, and the Civilizing Process*. Brookfield, VT: Pickering & Chatto, 2012. A close look at what is most admirable in Austen's heroines, taken together.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*, 1897. Essential reading for Lecture 17. Available in many reprints. The edition by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin Classics, 1993) has a valuable introduction.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852. Essential reading for Lecture 14. Available in many reprints.

Sutherland, John. *Who Betrays Elizabeth Bennet? Further Puzzles in Classic Fiction*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Starts off with a consideration of one unexplained question in the essential reading for Lecture 12: Who alerted Lady Catherine to Elizabeth's developing relationship with her nephew? Other puzzles concern Sherlock, Dracula, Huck, and Jim.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937. Essential reading for Lecture 1. Available in many reprints.

———. *The Lord of the Rings*. 3 vols. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954–1955. Essential reading for Lecture 1. Available in many reprints.

———. *The Monsters and the Critics*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983. Contains, among other essays, Tolkien on *Beowulf*, said to be the most-cited academic article of all time, and Tolkien on the importance of fairy tales.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. 1884. Essential reading for Lecture 15. Available in many reprints.

———. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. 1876. Essential reading for Lecture 15. Available in many reprints.

Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro). *The Aeneid*. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Knopf, 1990. Essential reading for Lecture 3. Other translations include John Dryden's of 1697 and three from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, by Robert Fagles (2006), Frederic Ahl (2007), and Sarah Ruden (2009).

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983. Essential reading for Lecture 19.

Walters, Lori J., ed. *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*. New York: Garland, 1996. Collection of essays centered on the relationship and characters discussed in Lecture 4.

Williamson, Edwin. *The Half-Way House of Fiction: Don Quixote and Arthurian Romance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984. Relates the subjects of Lectures 10 and 4 and points to the sources of Cervantes's work and the origins of Don Quixote's derangement.

Zipes, Jack, ed. *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England*. New York: Methuen, 1987. The second most important collection of the five listed as essential reading for Lecture 22.