Teaching World Literature

A Companion to

The Longman Anthology
of World Literature

VOLUME II
VOLUME D: THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
VOLUME E: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
VOLUME F: THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A SAMPLE INSTRUCTOR’S MANUAL

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General Editor’s Preface

The tremendous wealth of world literature available today is also a kind of embarrassment of riches: How can we best present this great range of works in class? We’ve designed The Longman Anthology of World Literature with this issue constantly in mind, giving teachable groupings and illuminating juxtapositions throughout the Anthology and framing compelling texts with introductions and notes that give the context needed for an informed and pleasurable reading. Yet finally it comes down to individual class sessions and the detailed discussion of particular works, and here is where this teaching companion comes in. In this book we suggest fruitful modes of approach, presenting ways to engage students, to foster understanding, and to stimulate lively discussion of all our major texts and groupings of works.

We have set three ambitious goals for ourselves in creating this teaching companion. First, it has been written directly by the editors responsible for each section of the Anthology—the use of the Anthology in class isn’t some afterthought; it’s an integral part of our own work on the project. In seeking people to join me on the editorial board, I looked for coeditors who are dynamic and experienced teachers as well as deeply knowledgeable scholars and clear, lively writers. We’ve seen this teaching companion as the opportunity to share directly with you our best ideas on how to bring these texts alive in class.

To this end, our second goal has been to discuss every major author or combination of authors in the Anthology, opening up possible lines of approach, indicating good connections that can be made, and sketching important trends in scholarly debate. Third, we’ve tried to be suggestive rather than prescriptive, and we hope to inform instructors who are new to some of this material while also intriguing people interested in a fresh take on familiar works. This volume gives us a chance to expand on the reasons behind our choices and to indicate ways that we have found these materials to work best during many years of teaching them.

Teaching with and across Groupings

A distinctive feature of our Anthology is the grouping of works in Crosscurrents sections, in Perspectives sections, and as Resonances between texts. Together, these groupings are intended both to set works in cultural context and to link them across time and space. These groupings have a strategic pedagogical function as well. We have observed that in other anthologies, brief author listings rarely seem to get taught. Added with the laudable goal of increasing an anthology’s range and inclusiveness, the new materials too often get lost in the shuffle. Our groupings of works cluster shorter selections in ways that make them more likely to be taught,
creating a critical mass of readings around a compelling literary or social issue and economically providing cultural context for the major works around them.

We expect that our contextual groupings will be used variously by different people. A Perspectives section can be taught entirely as a freestanding unit, or it can share a week with an important work or major author. “Perspectives: Strangers in a Strange Land” in Volume A, for example, works well as a freestanding assignment. It contains a major unit of biblical narrative, the Joseph story, together with the Book of Ruth, each of which gains by being taught with the other. Leading into the Joseph story are a pair of Egyptian narratives: “The Story of Sinuhe,” an evidently real-life autobiography of migration between Egypt and Palestine, and a mythological tale, “The Two Brothers,” which presents an early Egyptian version of the young man resisting seduction by his superior’s wife. So this Perspectives section in itself links well-known biblical works to the existing Near Eastern literary context, both in terms of theme and of genre. At the same time, it directly follows our selections from the Book of Job, whose hero—interestingly, not an Israelite himself—finds himself suddenly a stranger in his own land. A little further afield, “Perspectives: Strangers in a Strange Land” can also be taught in conjunction with other narratives of foreign travel and estrangement, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh earlier in the Ancient Near East section and The Odyssey in the ensuing section of the volume.

Our Perspectives sections typically work well with one or more of the major works around them, and our Crosscurrents sections lead into their volumes in multiple ways. “Crosscurrents: The Art of the Manifesto,” for example, leads off Volume F with issues that can be connected to our first major twentieth-century author, Joseph Conrad, whose Preface to The Nigger of the “Narcissus” is his own manifesto for his modernist art, a valuable introduction to Marlow’s narration in Heart of Darkness that follows. Issues raised in the “Manifesto” grouping recur throughout the volume, from Kafka’s parables to “Perspectives: Poetry About Poetry” to Borges’s self-reflective fictions.

While entire Perspectives and Crosscurrents sections can be assigned, individual works within them can also be paired with works elsewhere. For example, in “Classical Arabic and Islamic Literatures” (Volume B), the poems of Abu Nuwas in “Perspectives: Poetry, Wine, and Love” can be taught alongside the tale of Abu Nuwas that appears in The Thousand and One Nights. In Volume E, Walt Whitman can either be taught with the other writers next to him in “Perspectives: The National Poet” or he can be assigned instead with Emily Dickinson and Rubén Darío later in the volume. Darío’s poem “Walt Whitman,” indeed, makes a direct link to work from, whether the two poets are assigned together or in different weeks.

Particularly in the case of our fuller Perspectives sections, like the Enlightenment-era section on “Liberty and Libertines” (Volume D), it can be productive to assign different readings to different members of the class, with students working in teams to explore contrasting viewpoints; these can then be debated in class or presented as written projects. Students interested in exploring Perspectives section issues in greater depth should be alerted to the extensive bibliographies at
the end of each volume; Perspectives sections, as well as individual author listings, have bibliographies that can lead students further into the primary sources.

Obviously, the various Perspectives sections and the juxtapositions of works and Resonances are only a few of the many groupings that could be created. We wouldn’t want any student to come away from the course with the misconception that these were the only issues that mattered in the period or culture in question. Rather, these groupings should be seen as exemplary of the sorts of literary and cultural debate that were current in a region or an era. Students can be encouraged—individually or in small groups—to research and develop their own perspectival clusters of materials, using as a point of departure some text or some issue that has particularly intrigued them. They could then present their own Perspectives section to the class as a whole or write it up and analyze it as a term project.

On a larger scale, we have followed custom in dividing the Anthology according to the broad period divisions that have become ubiquitous in modern literary study, with further division by region in the first three volumes, but there is no reason that a survey course should treat these divisions as sacrosanct. Even within a generally chronological presentation, it can be interesting to have some cross-cutting sessions or weeks, such as an overview of the sonnet, or a section on travel writing, or one on short prose narratives. Such groupings can bring together material from two, three, or more sections and even volumes of the Anthology. Courses organized by genre or by theme will mine the Anthology for entirely different groupings suited to individual needs. We hope and expect that teachers and students alike will use our tables of contents as a starting point for ongoing explorations and reconfigurations of their own.

Reading the Illustrations

Our hundred black-and-white illustrations and fifty color images are very much conceived as part of the Anthology’s teachable material, and the extensive captions for the color images and for many of the black-and-white ones are intended to signal effective avenues of approach to them. Many of the images work directly with particular authors or works, but valuable points can be made with images of more general import, including our six cover illustrations. These are teachable images, not mere window dressing, and a detailed caption for each appears at the end of the list of illustrations that follows each volume’s table of contents.

Inter-arts comparisons have to be made with care, respecting the differences embodied in different media—differences often of patronage and audience as well as of materials and method. We wouldn’t want such comparisons to create simplistic images of “The Medieval Mind” or “Oriental Art.” Yet to speak of a culture at all is to recognize that its participants share (and may struggle against) commonalities of history and of worldview, and the varied artistic productions of a given region or era will often show certain family resemblances. Visual art, architecture, and music can be particularly useful in a world literature classroom because they don’t have to be experienced in translation (except in the significant but more limited translation of reproduction). Important aesthetic values have often
been shared by poets and painters (who at times have even been one and the same person), and these values and strategies can often be seen most directly and vividly in visual arts, while they may be somewhat muted in translation. As we know, too, our students are growing up in a culture that is more visual than verbal, and seeing can help them to then read. For both these reasons, starting from visual art can help sensitize students to what to look for in the literary works of the region and period.

Reading and Listening

An important addition to our Anthology’s resources is our pair of audio CDs, which can show students how literature has played out in the larger aural culture of its times. As with painting, music can illustrate aspects of a culture’s aesthetics, from reconstructed ancient Egyptian and Greek music, to medieval Japanese court music, to Bach and Handel in the Enlightenment and Jelly Roll Morton and Igor Stravinsky in the twentieth century. Equally, our CDs allow students to hear poetry read—or sung—aloud, in the original and in translation, giving direct access to the sounds of a variety of the languages included in the Anthology and restoring the aural dimension that great poetry has always had. Our twentieth-century selections include several major poets reading their own work, including T. S. Eliot, Anna Akhmatova, and Pablo Neruda, as well as noted performers and poets reading earlier poetry: Dylan Thomas declaiming a speech by Milton’s Satan with evident relish, Adrienne Rich reading a haunting poem by the great Urdu poet Ghalib. A number of our selections also show the kinds of cross-cultural connections found in many of our Anthology texts, as with a gorgeous early Arab Christian hymn of the Byzantine era on the first CD and a Spanish Jewish lullaby recorded in Eastern Europe on the second CD.

Teaching with the Web

Our course Website is designed to enhance teaching in a variety of ways. It provides annotated links for our major authors and groupings, giving students guidance in further exploration and research for projects and term papers. We include a glossary of literary and cultural terms and also an innovative audio glossary. This allows students to click on each author’s name, and each name or term included in the pronunciation guides at the end of many of our introductions, so as to hear directly how each should be pronounced. Finally, we have a section of original texts and variant translations for each of the Anthology’s six volumes. Each section includes several poems printed in the original and in two or three translations, giving an opportunity to explore the ways meaning shifts in translation. Each original text in these sections is also read aloud in a connected audio file, so that students can hear the original as they look at it in print and in translation. These selections can be downloaded for use in class or given as assignments for students to experience on their own.
Typo Alert!

As you and your students read the Anthology, I would be very grateful if you let me know of any typos you find in the Anthology (or indeed, in this volume too). Every page has been proofread with care, and we’ve fixed all the typos we’ve found, even though a few of them had a weird logic of their own. The enraged Achilles, for example, disputing Agamemnon’s claim on his prize at the start of The Iliad, swears “a great oath,” which in our page proofs became “a great bath”—an oddly appropriate highlighting of the childishness within his heroism, which I corrected with some regret. Some typos are no doubt still hiding in the 6,500 pages of the Anthology and in this companion volume as well. So please let me know of any lingering errors you encounter and also send me broader ideas and suggestions of all sorts.

An Evolving Collaboration

The scope and definition of world literature has been changing rapidly in recent years, and The Longman Anthology opens up new opportunities for all of us. We’ve designed the Anthology to be open and flexible in form, and it is sure to be used in a variety of ways: in courses with a historical, or a generic, or a thematic basis; in survey courses using the full Anthology and in upper-level courses using only one of its volumes; in quarter-system as well as semester-based schools; in community colleges, in liberal arts colleges, and in universities. Starting in fall 2004 we plan to post onto our course Website selected syllabi and other teaching materials reflecting actual practice as the Anthology is used in class. I invite contributions for this purpose. The print Anthology itself reflects a collaboration between the editorial board and the many reviewers we thank in our Acknowledgments; our reviewers often went far beyond the call of duty in helping us select texts and find the best ways to present them. The Anthology’s publication is only the next stage in this ongoing collaboration, now with everyone who uses it in class and who shares their experiences with the rest of us who are working on and with the book.

Finally, I also welcome suggestions for improvements to the Anthology itself. Our Anthology is meant as a resource for teachers in an evolving and growing field, and with your help future editions will allow the Anthology to reflect these changes. So I would be delighted to hear what things you would most like to see added in the future and to learn what existing conjunctions and combinations work best for you, what others might better be rethought. I can be reached by e-mail at the address below or by letter at the Department of English and Comparative Literature, 602 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.

My coeditors and I hope that the entries in this teaching companion will assist you in teaching our Anthology. We hope too that you’ll find The Longman Anthology of World Literature as enjoyable to use as it has been to create, and I look forward to hearing from you as you work with it in the coming years.

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The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

The World the Mughals Made

Babur's defeat of the Afghan Sultan Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat (near the capital Delhi) in 1526 C.E. inaugurated one of the most materially opulent, politically powerful, and culturally rich periods of imperial stability in South Asian history. Various dynasties of Indo-Muslim rulers had sat on the throne of Delhi from the thirteenth century onward, a period generally known as the Delhi Sultanate. Babur, however, saw himself as superior to these Delhi sultans, the last of whom he had defeated soundly in battle, and felt that he was carrying on the tradition of the great conquerors Mahmud of Ghazni, his illustrious great-grandfather Timur (Tamerlane), and his matrilineal ancestor Genghis Khan. But unlike these powerful predecessors, all of whom had at one time or another been lured by the wealth of Hindustan and quickly departed once they got it, Babur was forced by circumstance to stay in India after his victories. In doing so, he laid the foundations of a “dynamic, centralized, complex” empire (John F. Richards, The Mughal Empire, 1993, p. 1) that was to last for some three centuries. Richards summarizes the Mughals’ place in world history thus:

[Mughal] India far outstripped in sheer size and resources its two rival early modern Islamic empires—Safavid Persia and Ottoman Turkey. The Mughal emperor’s lands and subjects were comparable only to those ruled by his contemporary, the Ming emperor in early modern China. . . . The “Great Mughals” wealth and grandeur were proverbial. His coffers housed the plundered treasures of dozens of conquered dynasties; his regalia and throne displayed some of the most spectacular precious stones ever mounted. Nearly all observers were impressed by the opulence and sophistication of the Mughal empire. The ceremonies, etiquette, music, poetry, and exquisitely executed paintings and objects of the imperial court fused together to create a distinctive aristocratic high culture. (The Mughal Empire, p. 1)

Babur

When we think about premodern kings and emperors, especially the greatest among them, we often picture solely the imperial pomp and splendor: the courts, the poets, the dancing girls, the royal processions and regal festivals. How intriguing—and refreshing—therefore, to read Babur’s memoirs. The impression left by
the excerpts provided here is much the same as that left by reading the entire work—that of a humble, meticulous, cultured, supple intellect.

Babur was of course a conqueror, and his memoirs do not shy away from topics such as kingly honor and the martial responsibilities of the ruling elite, as expressed in his letter to Humayun:

Through God’s grace you will defeat your enemies, take their territory, and make your friends happy by overthrowing the foe. God willing, this is your time to risk your life and wield your sword. Do not fail to make the most of an opportunity that presents itself. Indolence and luxury do not suit kingship.

Conquest tolerates not inaction; the world is his who hastens most. When one is master one may rest from everything—except being king. (Volume D, p. 19)

But such sentiments do not set Babur apart from his time. Rather, one can look at Babur’s sense of urgency here as part of an overriding conviction, culled from his own experience of being forced from his homeland by the Uzbeks, that if you don’t seize the opportunity to rule and conquer, you will be ruled and conquered by someone else. War was simply part of the elite social landscape, and being good at it was nothing to be ashamed of.

Yet it is important to stress the sense of fear and danger with which men like Babur and his army constantly lived. We see a hint of this in Babur’s need to encourage his troops, among whom “manly words or courageous ideas were being heard from no one” (Volume D, p. 18). Babur expresses this state of mind explicitly in another section of the memoirs, when some of his men, frustrated, hot, and tired, want to leave Hindustan and go back to Central Asia. He tells them:

For some years we have struggled, experienced difficulties, traversed long distances, led the army, and cast ourselves and our soldiers into the dangers of war and battle. . . . What compels us to throw away for no reason at all the realms we have taken at such cost? Shall we go back to Kabul and remain poverty-stricken? (Wheeler M. Thackston, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, 2002, p. 358)

This last question goes to the heart of Babur’s motivations for entering India. The economics of the drive to conquer India have rarely been emphasized as much as they should, and men like Babur (or Mahmud of Ghazni before him, c. 1000) have often been portrayed solely as Muslim holy warriors, intent on religious war against peaceful Hindus. The rhetoric of jihad and iconoclasm were often employed, to be sure, having, as Babur blithely observes, “favorable propagandistic effect on friend and foe” (Volume D, p. 18). But the reality was much more complex.

Babur rarely refers to the natives of India as “infidels.” One exception is during his discussion of India’s “wonderful weights and measures” and “excellent system of numbering”: “Most of the people of Hindustan are infidels, whom the peo-
ple of India call Hindu. Most Hindus believe in reincarnation” (Thackston, Baburnama, p. 352). This is an observation, pure and simple, and can hardly be considered a call to jihad. His notorious dislike of the people whom he encounters in India—including the “rustic and insensitive” Afghan sultans of Delhi (Baburnama, p. 321)—had mostly to do with what he deemed to be their lack of refinement and gentility: “Hindustan is a place of little charm. There is no beauty in its people, no graceful social intercourse, no poetic talent or understanding, no etiquette, nobility, or manliness” (Baburnama, p. 352). Indeed, in the most explicit remarks on the nature of kingship cited above, he makes no mention of even Islam or the duties of a Muslim monarch, much less of iconoclasm, of the need to war with and convert infidels, or any such jihad-like motivations. Even his celebrated “pledge of temperance” (Volume D, pp. 18–19) can be read as a garden-variety quid pro quo with the Almighty (“I’ll stop drinking, you help me win”), coming as it does during a period of self-doubt immediately before Babur’s crucial battle with the intransigent Rajasthani king, Rana Sangha. Thus, outside of the martial context, Babur’s attitude toward the Indian population, Hindu and Muslim alike, could be characterized by indifference (or sometimes disdain), rather than vehement religious antagonism. Remember too that, in order to gain hold of this infidel land, Babur defeated a Muslim king at Panipat.

We need to temper this general attitude, however, with Babur’s clear desire to understand India. Page after page of Babur’s memoirs contain detailed remarks on the subcontinent’s flora and fauna, weights and measures, timekeeping methods, and monetary denominations. His desire is to first comprehend and then improve upon the native Hindustani practices, rather than impose his own system on the native Indians. His approach is representative of the many gestures of cultural accommodation made by all the Mughal emperors.

It is also fascinating to examine the family ties expressed in these excerpts. Modern historians have tended to treat the Baburnama and other such chronicles as sourcebooks for names and dates of political history; their uses for social and cultural history were, if not entirely overlooked, then certainly never tapped in the way they merit. In his letter to Humayun, Babur’s gentle chiding of Humayun’s poor penmanship and prose style (Volume D, p. 20) shows a human, paternal side rarely acknowledged for conquerors of his stature. His remarks on the naming of “al-Aman” (Volume D, p. 19) reveal not only something about the sociolinguistic spectrum of northern India at the time and the fact that such an Arabicized name would seem out of place in Hindustan but also something about Babur’s personality and his sense of émigré pragmatism that people would simply have a tough time saying the boy’s name.

The scholarly literature has long characterized Mughal family life exclusively by intrigues and bloody wars of succession, but here we see a different, gentler, more loving side of the imperial family. Indeed, students will be fascinated to hear the story of Babur’s death. It is reported that Humayun had fallen seriously ill, and none of the imperial physicians could find a successful treatment. Desperate and fearing for his son’s life, Babur, on the instructions of a mystic, walked around Humayun’s sickbed three times and offered himself to God if only his son would
get well. The offer apparently was accepted, for Humayun recovered, and Babur himself died soon thereafter, in December 1530.

Jahangir

We get more evidence of the intimate family atmosphere of the royal household from Jahangir, who informs us that his father always called him by the pet name Shaykhu Baba, rather than by his given name, Salim (the epithet “Sultan” is simply an honorific, which by Mughal times referred not, as in previous eras, to the reigning monarch but to his heirs, the equivalent of “prince”) (Volume D, p. 22). Salim’s relationship with Akbar was notoriously fractious, so bad that at one point, feeling that his father would pass him over and nominate Salim’s own son as successor instead of him, he had his father’s closest confidante and advisor Abu’l Fazl assassinated and sought to rebel, albeit unsuccessfully. (For a popular, if historically inaccurate, depiction of Akbar and Salim’s relationship, you might consider screening the epic Bollywood film Mughal-e Azam—“The Exalted Mughal”—which is available on DVD, in Urdu with English subtitles.) We needn’t deny the contentiousness of Mughal court politics, especially around the issue of succession, to appreciate that the royal family was capable of great intimacy and expressions of love, as Babur’s writings also show. Indeed, whatever their disagreements might have been, Jahangir refers to his father with utmost humility and respect throughout the Jahangirnama.

A subtly revealing moment in his memoirs is Jahangir’s choice of name for himself, as recounted in “Designation of Name and Honorific” (Volume D, p. 22). In addition to demonstrating the coalescence of religious inspiration (“an inspiration from the beyond suggested to me”), political ambition (“the labor of emperors is world domination”), and astrological coincidence (“my accession occurred at the time of the rising of the majestic greater luminary”) that went into such a decision, we get an important insight here into the Mughals’ sense of their global significance, as well as the global audience for whom Jahangir is writing. It is unlikely that anyone in Hindustan would have confused Jahangir (Sultan Salim) with the Ottoman Sultans Selim I and Selim II; the fact that he is worried about such mistaken identity (“I should change my name lest it be confused with the caesars of Anatolia” [Volume D, p. 22]) indicates the cosmopolitan reach of Persian literature at the time and its vast, quasi-global audience. Jahangir knows—or at least hopes—that literati and intellectuals far from the subcontinent will be reading his book, as is also evident by his gesture of converting Hindustani measurements to their globally better-known Iranian equivalents (“By weight that much is six Hindustani seers, which is equivalent to one and a half Iranian maunds” [Volume D, p. 22]).

But writing for a global audience is not the same as pandering to it. Unlike the era of Babur and Humayun, by the time Jahangir acceded to the throne the Mughal Empire was firmly established as a global power. The sense of political, territorial, and cultural competition with the Ottomans of Turkey, and especially the Safavids of Iran (who had helped Jahangir’s grandfather Humayun regain
Hindustan after he lost it to the Afghan Sher Shah Suri) becomes more and more pronounced during Jahangir’s reign. Jahangir notes this explicitly, and it is especially significant that he does so in terms of India’s capacity for religious tolerance during his father’s reign:

Followers of various religions had a place in the broad scope of his [Akbar’s] peerless empire—unlike other countries of the world, like Iran, where there is room for only Shiites, and Rum [Anatolia], Turan [Central Asia], and Hindustan [the North India of the Delhi Sultanate, or that controlled by the Afghans], where there is room only for Sunnis. Just as all groups and the practitioners of all religions have a place within the spacious circle of God’s mercy, in accordance with the dictum that a shadow must follow its source, in my father’s realm, which ended at the salty sea, there was room for practitioners of various sects and beliefs, both true and imperfect, and strife and altercation were not allowed. Sunni and Shiite worshipped in one mosque, and Frank and Jew in one congregation. Utter peaceableness was his established way. [This refers to Akbar’s famous policy of sulh-i kull, or “peace with all.”] He conversed with the good of every group, every religion, and gave his attentions to each in accordance with their station and ability to understand. (Wheeler M. Thackston, The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India, 1999, p. 40)

Of course, the Mughals were nominally Muslim emperors. But Akbar’s reign is justifiably famous for its consistent policy of reaching out to all groups: socio-politically, as in his marriage alliances with powerful Rajput families; culturally, by commissioning grand translation projects of the Sanskrit classics, as well as instituting Persian as the official, nonsectarian, cosmopolitan language of administration for the whole of his lands; and religiously, by holding special court assemblies for the exchange of theological principles, by giving generous land grants to pious groups of all faiths, and by abolishing many of the taxes generally levied exclusively on non-Muslims. Akbar had set the stage for an ecumenical approach with his imperial Din-i Ilahi, a generalized “religion of God,” a major component of which was the policy of sulh-i kull. Thus Jahangir’s conversations with the hermit Jadrup (Volume D, pp. 23–25) can be seen in the context of this tolerant, inquisitive imperial sensibility. Moreover, in the wake of Akbar’s Din-i Ilahi, it is significant that Jahangir has no difficulty in seeing the ascetic practices of the Hindu Jadrup as not simply parallel to, or a tolerable alternative to, but in fact as the same as Sufism, the Islamic mystical tradition—“He is not devoid of learning and has studied well the science of the Vedanta, which is the science of Sufism” (Volume D, p. 24). Similar is Jahangir’s use of quotations from Rumi’s and Sana’i’s Persian works to describe the Hindu hermit. Part of what had made Persian such an attractive choice to Akbar as a language of administration was its long poetic tradition of expressing nonspecific, almost secular mystical ideals (see Muzaffar Alam, “The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan,” in Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia, ed. Sheldon Pollock, 2003; and Muzaffar Alam, The
Languages of Political Islam, 2004). Here we see that tradition—and its capacity for crossing communal boundaries—in action.

Much of Jahangir’s personality comes through in these few selections, and much as with Babur, we hear the day-to-day voice of the emperor here: frank discussions of his bouts with alcoholism and substance abuse, as well as those of his friend Inayat Khan (Jahangir’s brother Daniyal, too, waged an unsuccessful battle with alcoholism and died as a result); his tender reminiscences of Shaykh Salim Chishti; his regret and his understanding of the frightening power of his own words as emperor, even when spoken in jest, at the death of the blacksmith Kalyan.

We also pick up hints of what it meant to live in the increasingly globalized world of the seventeenth century, specifically in the description of Muqarrab Khan’s trip to Goa. The Portuguese had begun making forays into the Indian Ocean maritime routes as early as the late fifteenth century. By Jahangir’s time, more and more Western trading companies were making their presence felt in India by establishing ports, trading outposts, and even full-fledged principalities (with permission of the Mughal emperor, of course). And, in addition to more conventional trade in precious metals, spices, and textiles, there were cultural exchanges of “every sort of thing and object,” including the “rarities” prized by a fascinated Jahangir (Volume D, p. 25). Ironically, the same forces of globalization that made such wonders available at Jahangir’s court would enrich and empower the Mughals’ competitors—specifically, the British East India Company—enough to usher in the colonial era of Mughal decline and Western domination. But in the early seventeenth century, at the height of Mughal power, such an outcome would have been inconceivable.

Sauda and Mir

During the eighteenth century, the landscape of power and dominance in Hindustan began to change dramatically. Following the death of Aurangzeb, Jahangir’s grandson and the last of the so-called Great Mughals, a succession of less charismatic, less effective emperors followed who became ever more vulnerable to the plots and intrigues of ambitious cadres of nobles, as well as to the growing imperial pretensions of regional powers such as the Sikhs, Jats, Rohillas, and especially Marathas, who had previously been more or less willing to accept Mughal sovereignty (see Muzaffar Alam, The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab 1707–1748, 1986). Meanwhile, Delhi began to suffer brutal raids from outsiders—most notably those of the Iranian Nadir Shah in 1739 and the Afghan Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1748—and the British, for their part, were steadily consolidating their hold on the Gangetic plain.

This state of affairs resulted in a growing sense of anxiety and helplessness among the people of eighteenth-century Delhi, including the two illustrious poets excerpted in Volume D, Mirza Muhammad Rafi’ Sauda and Mir Muhammad Taqi Mir. Common parlance began to note the irony in the fact that the emperor Shah Alam II controlled nothing beyond a nearby Delhi suburb (see C. M. Naim, introduction to Zikr-i Mir: The Autobiography of the Eighteenth Century Mughal Poet Mir
Muhammad Taqi Mir, 1999—Naim’s introduction and appendices are extremely insightful, informative, and well worth reading for anyone planning to teach Mir). The poet Mir bemoaned the regional uprisings and raids by outside plunderers much more explicitly: “Sikhs, Marathas, thieves, pickpockets, beggars, kings—all prey on us / Happy is he who has no wealth; this is the true wealth today” (cited in Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, Three Mughal Poets, 1968, p. 221). When the Mughal emperor could not even safeguard his own capital, what indeed was the point of seeking financial security?

This undercurrent of sociopolitical instability and popular fatalism is the context for Sauda’s scathing commentary in “How to Earn a Living in Hindustan” and has historically been viewed as the cause of the pathos evident in so much of Mir’s poetry. Sauda’s satires, however, are not always directed at society’s ills. He was willing to go after everything under the sun, including specific people who might have piqued his ire, and even, on at least one occasion, the heat of the sun itself, as Russell and Islam note:

> The atmosphere of his satires is the atmosphere of the open-air political meeting, where the speaker and heckler are all the time trying to score off each other, and the audience thoroughly enjoys every hit that goes home. . . . Not all of them are personal attacks. Some are sheer clowning, like modern slapstick comedy. One is a ferocious attack on the intolerable heat of the Indian summer. (Three Mughal Poets, p. 42)

Such caustic salvos, however, could have dangerous consequences, as one famous incident shows. One of his rival poets became so upset at Sauda’s attacks that he sent a gang of his pupils (shagirds) to waylay the satirist, and it was only the intervention of Sauda’s patron, the Nawab of Lucknow, that saved him from physical harm. All in all, however, there is no doubt that a sense of lost nobility in society at large underlies much of Sauda’s critique. As Russell and Islam write:

> In demanding, so to speak, that his social ideals be realized, he did not feel that he was demanding the impossible, for he believed that they had already been realized once before—and only a generation or two before his time. Thus one of his satires contrasts the Delhi of former times with that of his own day. (Three Mughal Poets, p. 59)

But it is important also to emphasize that the picture of Mughal decline—which was put to much invidious use by the British, who sought thereby to legitimate their own imperial ambitions—is only one way to characterize Sauda and Mir’s eighteenth-century milieu.

This narrative of a terminal decline is only too familiar. It, nevertheless, expresses a specific and narrow perspective: a Delhi or Mughal-centred point of view. The same years, looked at from Lucknow, Hyderabad or Murshidabad, or through the eyes of the Marathas, the Jats, and the Sikhs,
were a time of empowerment and resurgence when those regional courts and cultures came into their own. The same holds true from the point of view of Urdu too. The eighteenth century marks the emergence of Urdu—more accurately Rekhta, Hindi or Hindui, as it was then variously called—as the preferred literary language of the elite of Delhi and the Gangetic plain, instead of Persian. (Naim, introduction to *Zikr-i Mir*, pp. 1–2)

Both of these trends, the rise of regional courts and the shift to Urdu, had effects on and were in turn affected by the careers of Sauda and Mir. Both poets were forced to leave turbulent Mughal Delhi in search of patronage and wound up finding financial security and lending their prestige and cultured aura to the newly wealthy court of the Nawabs of Awadh in Lucknow—a crucial development in the emergence of Lucknow as a center of culture to rival Delhi in the late eighteenth century. Of course, poets were often ambivalent about their reciprocal obligations to the patron, as evidenced by Sauda's gripe: "But perhaps you have thought of becoming a poet... he is trying all the time to compose an ode to his patron" (Volume D, p. 29). Mir, too, had some famous squabbles with his various benefactors. The fact remains, however, that poets depended on patrons for money (perhaps a source of their proud bitterness), and patrons needed poets to establish their reputations as worldly, cultured men.

More generally speaking, one could argue that the success of Urdu literary culture itself was made possible in part by the legitimacy provided by the success of Mir, Sauda, and a handful of others in the first generation or so after the shift away from Persian. They showed that Urdu could be just as expressive, cultured, and refined as Persian—in their eyes, perhaps even more so—and was an equally viable literary language, suitable to all poetic genres. It should be pointed out, though, that even while Urdu gained currency as the literary lingua franca of eighteenth-century North India, Persian remained the language of all serious prose (including Mir's autobiography) and continued to be used for poetry as well, by luminaries such as Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib and Muhammad Iqbal, throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries.

The centrality of the *ghazal* in Urdu literary culture, and Mir's place as one of the most nimble practitioners of this lyric genre, cannot really be overstated. Part of the difficulty of accessing this wealth of poetic output, from the instructor's perspective, is the conventionality of the genre itself. The *ghazal* world is populated with certain stock characters and references, and the poet could use, associate, and contrast these freely, with the expectation that his or her audience would see the connections, the "nets of awareness" at which any given couplet hinted. (The phrase comes from Frances W. Pritchett's excellent study, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics*, 1994; especially recommended is Part Two, "Flowers on the Branch of Invention.")

Many of these conventional figures are represented in our selection of Mir's couplets. For example, we see in the first few couplets the pangs of one of the most popular *ghazal* protagonists: the overwrought lover, burning with anticipation, driven to madness and social scorn by devotion to an inaccessible or cruel beloved.
Mir’s description of his father in the autobiography could just as easily apply to the *ghazal* protagonist: “He possessed a suffering heart but was ever eager for more suffering” (Volume D, p. 34). The paradigmatic example of such a hero-lover, willing and eager to endure all hardships, is the legendary Majnun, who lost his sanity pining for his beloved Laila and wound up wandering the desert talking to plants and animals, desperate for any news of her whereabouts. The poet has only to use the word majnun in his couplet, and a whole host of associations will flash before the minds of connoisseurs: deserts, dust, madness, the inaccessible beloved, various plants and animals, and so on. The *ghazal* protagonist himself knows that true love is dangerous—hence, Mir’s warnings against it in the first few couplets—because in this poetic universe the true lover will do anything, will renounce all propriety for that amorous intoxication, and will eventually wind up suffering both social excommunication and loss of self, loss of “strength, and faith, and fortitude, and will and heart and soul” (Volume D, p. 32) until “at the last nothing but ash remains” (Volume D, p. 31).

The cause of all this agitation is, of course, the beloved, in comparison to whom other standard-bearers of beauty and radiance such as the sun, moon, and nightingale’s song will pale. And if at times it seems as if this beloved is too impossible, too perfect, this is because one cannot always say in any given couplet (*she’r*) whether the beloved is divine or earthly. Indeed, we see here part of the in calculable influence on Indo-Persian poetry of the “mystical dimensions of Islam,” i.e., Sufism. (For details and basic background material on Sufism, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 1975.) In keeping with the Sufi path to mystical union with the Divine, the poetics of the *ghazal* recognize two possible types of love: symbolic love (*‘ishq-i majazi*), and true love (*‘ishq-i haqiqi*). But, in contrast to the Western conception of this binary, Sufis and Indo-Persian poets tended to view human love, however heartfelt, as the unreal, metaphorical, symbolic love; only love of the Almighty qualifies as the true, *haqiqi* love. Most good *ghazals*, of course, take advantage of this opposition, and the best of them can usually be read both ways: as expressions of earthly longing for an inaccessible human beloved and as cosmic longings for reunion with the Divine, who created us, gave us free will, and then left us alone to our existential angst—like the heavens, in Mir’s father’s exquisite discourse on love in the autobiography, “going round in circles and never reaching their desired one” (Volume D, p. 34).

Concomitant with this belief that true love can only be divine love is the sense among Sufis and poets that true religious sensibility is the inward, personal path (*tariqa*) to rapprochement with God. Thus the *shaikh* (the promulgator of the external practices of worship such as regular prayers, the pilgrimage to Mecca, and adherence to socioreligious norms such as abstinence from intoxicants) is viewed in the *ghazal* as one of the chief disturbers of the protagonist’s encounter with the Divine Beloved. The *shaikh* is the enemy of love, the scourge of those who would drink the wine of mystical intoxication, and is therefore reviled, as Mir does in the excerpt in Volume D, as an antagonist to true lovers and mystics everywhere. Of course, as with beloveds, wine too can be earthly or divine, and playing with the ambiguity of this trope of earthly versus mystical inebriation is one of the most use-
ful tools in the poet’s kit. In either case, there is no ambiguity about the scorn heaped on the representative of hypocritical normalcy, the intolerant shaikh with his dogmatic, heartless “gear of piety” (Volume D, p. 32).

Banarasidas

With the _Ardhakathanaka_, Banarasidas’s “Half a Tale,” we engage with yet another style of early modern self-presentation which, in the words of one scholar, “illustrates important changes in medieval Indian society and culture, of which the most important were a growing interest in personality, in the development of individual aspects of literature and culture, and the individualization of creative activities and culture itself” (Eugenia Vanina, “The _Ardhakathanaka_ by Banarasi Das: A Socio-Cultural Study,” _Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society_, Series 3, vol. 5, no. 2 [1995]: 211–224). Unlike most historical chronicles and hagiographical accounts from the period, and more so even than the more “personal” royal memoirs of Babur and Jahangir, Banarasidas offers a vision of culture, society, and political events almost exclusively as they are relevant to his own life and spiritual journey, indeed literally to his own person.

Nothing illustrates this frame of reference more clearly than his response to Akbar’s death: “... I heard the dreadful news, which came as a sharp and sudden blow. It made me shake with violent, uncontrollable agitation. I reeled, and losing my balance, fell down the stairs in a faint” (Volume D, p. 40). There is something new, jarring in an almost Sartrean way, in this hyperbolic, psychosomatic transmutation of sociopolitical trauma onto Banarasidas’s own body. For both the North Indian _sant_ tradition and the militant Shaiva devotees (see Volume C of the _Anthology_), the worshipper’s body had become a temple, an earthly, material replacement for the false gods in the temple. For Banarasidas, this relatively new emphasis on the materiality of the body remains—as does the critique of external forms of worship—but with a significant twist: for Banarasidas, the body is the material intersection of cosmic forces both present and past, and the effect of these forces is consistently, for perhaps the first time in South Asian literature, depicted as a violent eruption of physical ill ease. Over and over again, throughout his _Tale_ Banarasidas suffers such “eruptions,” beginning in his infancy:

> I kept good health for the first few years of my life, but in Vikram 1648 [1591 C.E.], the evil karma of my past erupted unawares and I fell sick with _sangrahani_, an acute and chronic form of dysentery. The doctors tried many cures but the disease persisted for a whole year. Then, suddenly, it disappeared on its own. (trans. Mukund Lath, _Half a Tale_, 1981, p. 14)

Autobiography, here, is not just one’s life story but the story of an early modern man’s struggle to negotiate “the quirks of destiny” (Volume D, p. 41), the effects of historical events on everyday people, and the search for spiritual equanimity in the face of his own religious skepticism. With regard to the latter, we see Banarasidas inhabit successive religious personae, even in the course of our short
His display of tormented passion as the lover-cum-Sufi vividly demonstrates his familiarity, even as a provincial Jain merchant, with Indo-Persian mystical and literary traditions and echoes what we have already encountered in Mir’s work. Meanwhile, he dabbles in the panoply of scholarly traditions, from lexicography, poetics, and erotics to Sanskrit grammar and literary theory. (The mention of *rasā* refers to the eight, sometimes nine, generalized emotional sentiments accepted by Sanskrit literary theory; see “Perspectives: What Is ‘Literature?’” in Volume A, p. 925.) When Banarasidas finally renounces this erotic and scholarly “state of abandon” (Volume D, p. 40) it is telling that within a month he falls gravely, almost nauseatingly ill—once more described as “innumerable eruptions” appearing all over his body—and rationalizes the ailment as “my sins . . . bearing fruit once again” (Volume D, p. 40). Later, he tries out life as a devotee of Shiva only to abandon that calling too, as a direct result of Shiva not coming to his aid when he falls down the stairs upon hearing of Akbar’s death. Thus yet again, he creates a narrative chain that links historical events, his own physical well-being, and his quest for “faith and belief” (Volume D, p. 41). A thoroughly modern man.

Beyond this heightened sense of being-in-the-world, Banarasidas provides a wealth of insight into social life under the Mughals. His accounts of the idiosyncrasies of trading communities, the prevalence of travel in spite of the many described difficulties, and many other features of day-to-day life have all been very useful to social historians in the sixty years or so since the text was unearthed in 1943. For our purposes, it might be most beneficial to focus on the light shed on some of the issues raised by the other selections represented in Volume D. For example, we have already noted the echo of Mir’s mysticism. Precolonial South Asia is often characterized as a world of fixed identities and fixed roles, timeless and unchanging. How striking, then, and how refreshing to reflect on the nonchalance with which Banarasidas, the Jain trader, appropriates Sufi themes and tropes to make an aesthetic point about the fervor of his passion. It tells us a lot about the diffusion, availability, and exchange of religious ideas across lines of community, language, and class. There is no mention here of religious exclusivism of any sort, and throughout his *Tale* Banarasidas is free to experiment with religious truth in virtually any way he deems fit—indeed, to take advantage of this religious freedom when and as he pleases, as the story of his encounter with the robbers demonstrates. The story is revealing in many ways and serves Banarasidas well by highlighting a beautiful contradiction: On the one hand, the story reinforces with a wink his growing sense of the superficiality of the external trappings of organized religion (such as sacred Sanskrit mantras, the Brahman’s thread and *tilak*-mark on the forehead); and on the other, it almost tenderly exemplifies the earnest reverence that even the most dangerous elements of the social landscape maintained for true men of religion.

Consider, too, the vehemence of the reaction to Akbar’s death, not only by the author himself but also by the community at large. Once again, the fear and panic engendered by the emperor’s death prefigures the kind of desolation that Mir and Sauda saw a century later in Delhi. The ruler’s role was to ensure social stability, and his passing could be a time of great turmoil, especially if a war of suc-
cession were to ensue. But it cannot be stressed enough that the emperor’s religious affiliation is conspicuous by its absence in Banarasidas’s account. He and his Jain community specifically, and the majority Hindu populace of Jaunpur generally, seem much more concerned with social stability in a time of transition than with any repression they might suffer under a Muslim monarch. Indeed, the fact that from Banarasidas’s point of view the news of Jahangir’s accession “came as a great relief and people heartily hailed the new king” (Volume D, p. 41) shows clearly that the emperor’s religion was simply not an issue for everyday people.

Indeed, along with the wonderful and entertaining account of his spiritual quest, his \textit{Half a Tale} tells us a great deal about how ordinary South Asians lived and made their way in the world the Mughals made.
No other traditional novel has captured the hearts of Chinese readers more than The Story of the Stone, also known in the West as Dream of the Red Chamber, which took shape over a period of four decades during the second half of the eighteenth century. It stands unchallenged as the most comprehensive Chinese novel, encompassing a three-thousand-year span of Chinese culture and embracing all major literary genres and philosophical traditions.

As the first significant fictional narrative not based primarily on legend or historical figures and events, its account of the glory and decline of a rich and powerful family has proved compelling enough to inspire serialized versions for television in late-twentieth-century China. Stories about its obsessive fascination for early readers resemble those about the lethal, suicidal influence of Goethe’s Sorrows of Young Werther: “A young man who read the novel seven times in a month was so profoundly affected that he died of melancholy shortly thereafter. Similarly, a girl died vomiting blood after a single perusal!” (Anthony C. Yu, Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in “Dream of the Red Chamber,” 1997, p. 219, n. 3). A Chinese family is still likely to refer to its coddled young scion as their little “Jia Bao-yu,” after the protagonist in Stone, and animated debate can ensue in contemporary classrooms about the relative merits of the two young women in his life, Lin Dai-yu and Xue Bao-chai.

That The Story of the Stone bore an intimate connection to the personal and family history of its author was assumed from the start. An early manuscript version circulated among friends and family of Cao Xueqin with annotations by an anonymous reader who referred to himself as “Red Inkstone,” and, in its comments, suggested both his familiarity with the author’s background and the many correspondences he recognized between the characters in the novel and those from Cao’s life. Generations of scholars since that time have created a cottage industry known as “Redology” in their efforts to identify every possible link between events in the novel and the actual history of the Cao family. In the Chinese critical tradition, the longstanding impulse to read a literary work as autobiography can be traced back to the commentary tradition on the first anthology of poetry, the Book of Songs, and its presumption that the anonymous poems in that collection constituted a critique of their times, with the primary critical task therefore being one of contextualizing each work. When extended to poems by known authors, the exercise followed two circular courses: reading the biography into the poems and reconstructing the biography from them. Small wonder, then, that a novel whose protagonist so resembles its author should inspire similar interpretations. Still, as Ying-shih Yu has written, “We certainly have here a strange, paradoxical situation: in the eyes of the general reader, [Story of the Stone] is entirely a work of fiction, but within the main currents of Redological research of the last century, it has never truly assumed the place of fiction. On the contrary, it has always been treated as an historical document” (cited by Yu in Rereading the Stone, p. 19).

Adding further grist to the scholarly mill is the fact that Cao Xueqin wrote only the first eighty chapters of The Story of the Stone. The questions of who com-
pleted the work and how faithful the last forty chapters are to Cao’s intentions have been much debated. Complicating the picture is the amount of time that elapsed between the initial circulation of the eighty-chapter manuscript in 1754 (which existed in as many as ten versions) and the publication of the novel with the additional forty chapters almost forty years later (1791–1792). Whoever wrote the last third of the book dutifully recapitulates the events of the unfinished manuscript, and, in the opinion of many readers, takes a less nuanced and more melodramatic, sentimental, and moralizing perspective on the story while wrapping it up. There is no question that the pace of the action also picks up measurably, with one crisis or death following another and all loose ends tied up, but it is also true, as Andrew Plaks has noted, that whoever was writing had a clear task at hand, that of “finishing the book” (Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber, 1976, p. 217). And that he (or they) did accomplish.

Keep in mind that the necessary excision of some eighty percent of The Story of the Stone for our Anthology has, not surprisingly, created a drastically tighter, narrower narrative focus and an illusion of linear progression that a reader of the first eighty chapters in the original would not be likely to experience. This selection focuses on the relationship between Jia Bao-yu and his cousin Lin Dai-yu and its tragically foreordained unhappy end. There is little sense of the leisurely and encyclopedic panorama of the people and events within a wealthy Chinese household, with intrigues unfolding both upstairs and downstairs, as well as in between, whose gradual and inevitable decline is being staved off by the meticulous recounting of its daily activities. Endless feasts, festivities, dramatic performances, domestic gatherings, and visitors of all sorts are interspersed with breathtaking descriptions of extravagance, greed, corruption, mismanagement, and abuse of power and provide the backdrop for the unfolding and unraveling of relationships among the young male protagonist, his elders, and the several young women of his generation. The multigenerational perspective that makes this one of the world’s great family novels, like Thomas Mann’s Buddenbrooks or Junichiro Tanizaki’s The Makioka Sisters, is also necessarily foreshortened but clearly lies at the heart of its significance and impact.

The end of Story of the Stone is in its beginning, and it is extremely important to spend some time with the first chapter, much of which is included in the Anthology. As is the case with other traditional Chinese novels, the first chapter functions largely as a prologue and is set in a temporal and spatial context removed from that of the main action. Here, however, this function is more complicated than most. As Anthony Yu notes, the novel’s opening constructs “a triple frame (mythic, realistic, narrativistic) wherein to introduce the setting and characters of the tale and to lay much of the groundwork for subsequent development of its immense plot” (Rereading the Stone, p. 122). It solves Cao Xueqin’s problem of accounting for the origin of his story, about whose unusual nature he is clearly and self-consciously aware, as the comparison to other types of narratives suggests, and it also alerts us to what will happen at the novel’s end, the stone’s renunciation of the world. Note that there is a story enclosed within the story of the novel’s mythic frame. Students should be reminded not to forget about the discarded stone, its re-
covery, and the lesson it teaches to the monk Vanitas/Brother Amor (the work’s first reader), as well as the episode recounted from its experience as the Divine Luminescent Stone-in-Waiting, in which the Crimson Flower incurs a debt of tears to him. Keep in mind, too, that a monk and Daoist priest reappear at various crucial intervals, sustaining throughout the novel the overlap between the mythic and the everyday.

Two entries into this human narrative are provided at the beginning as well: (1) the dream of Zhen Shi-yin (whose name means “true things concealed” and whose daughter suffers an unhappy fate later in the story), which includes an encounter with the goddess Disenchantment, who reappears in Jia Bao-yu’s dream in Chapter 5, and (2) the conversation between Jia Yu-cun (“false words preserved”) and Leng Zi-xing. Such discussions and introductions on the part of outsiders to the main characters constitute a familiar technique of conveying background information efficiently, and they provide as well a foreshadowing of the Jia family’s weaknesses and incipient decline. Incidentally, Zhen Shi-yin and Jia Yu-cun themselves serve as mirrors to the fates of the family. Zhen, whose daughter disappears in the confusion of a fire that breaks out when he wakes up from this dream, ends up abandoning his wife to become a Buddhist monk. Jia experiences a rise and fall in his career that parallels the family’s fortunes.

We are introduced to the Jia household through the eyes of another outsider, the young granddaughter Lin Dai-yu, who is being escorted by Jia Yu-cun, her tutor, from another city to join the family because of the deaths of her parents. Her first encounter with the young hero of the story is telling, for his sense of having met her before reinforces the reality of the underlying myth. The debt of tears owed by the Crimson Flower will be repaid generously throughout the novel. With the introduction of Xue Bao-chai the eternal triangle is in place, and its dynamics play themselves out to their prescribed conclusion. Comparisons and contrasts between the two girls run throughout the novel: Dai-yu is frail, hypersensitive, consumptive, brilliant, and unrealistic, whereas Bao-chai is relatively sturdy, even-tempered, healthy, and less talented but more responsible. Bao-chai’s golden locket links her with Bao-yu’s jade, but Bao-yu’s emotional affinities are clearly more powerful with Dai-yu. Each girl is not without appeal to Bao-yu, however, and it is no accident that his name consists of one character from each of theirs.

In Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber, Andrew Plaks discusses at some length the use of a number of such devices to structure The Story of the Stone. Plaks argues that principles of what he calls “complementary bipolarity” and “multiple periodicity” organize both the characters and events in the novel. The former is based on the complementary relationship between the forces of yin and yang, whose influence in any given situation was believed to alternate cyclically, and the latter on phases of the dominance of the five elements (earth, fire, metal, water, and wood), whose sequential movement has similarly been seen to explain courses of events. (The same argument has been made for Journey to the West as well.) Plaks analyzes both how the novel’s characters correspond to these phases and how the cyclical alternation between joy and sorrow, union and separation, often within a single chapter, is patterned on yin-yang alternations as well. While
it is interesting to note the role played by these structures, the novel is likely to seem more mechanical from this analysis than it deserves. Plaks’s discussion of the function of the garden in *The Story of the Stone*, as well as his comparison of it to other Western literary gardens, however, is extremely useful and worth consulting. You may wish to consider in particular his argument concerning the typical structure and function of allegory in Chinese literature—as exemplified in *The Story of the Stone*—and its difference from Western prototypes: whereas the former works horizontally, through synecdoche, containing on one plane the entire ground of being, the latter works vertically, structured on a metaphorical relationship between figure and transcendent truth.

Constructed to honor the visit home of Bao-yu’s sister, who has become one of the emperor’s concubines, the garden is the main locus of activity from Chapter 23, when the family’s children are allowed to move into its buildings, until Chapter 78, when the scandalous discovery of a pornographic object forces an exodus from its grounds. While it creates an ideal world within the world, despite its isolation and enclosure, the garden does not prove impervious to human weakness and the passage of time. To what extent, you might ask, does it exemplify the realm of fiction itself? As Wai-yee Li observes, “With vistas named by Bao-yu and the girls, and with abodes fashioned as extensions of their personalities, the Garden seems an ideal, pure world of youth and innocence, games and literary gatherings, love and poetry. Yet the Garden, like its symbolic counterpart, the Illusory Realm, is a precarious dream” (“Full-length Vernacular Fiction,” in *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, ed. Victor Mair, 2000, p. 650). Note the similarity between the arch in the Land of Disenchantment traversed by Bao-yu in his dream in Chapter 5 and the one within the garden itself described in Chapter 17. That episode, in which Bao-yu is asked to name the various structures in the garden, is important for other reasons as well. In addition to indicating the important cultural associations of gardens with literature and including an interesting discussion of what it means to be natural, it offers Bao-yu an opportunity to demonstrate his poetic talents and also provides illuminating insights into the nature of his relationship with his father.

Students may well be shocked by this interchange between Bao-yu and Jia Zheng, whose public disapproval of his son is only partially for the benefit of the toadies who are touring the garden with him. Chinese fathers in general were not likely to praise their children in front of others, but Jia Zheng’s single-minded focus on Bao-yu’s eventual success on the civil service examination, from which excessive indulgence in the wrong kind of literature might possibly distract him, moves over the course of the novel from the obsessive to the downright abusive. (At one point only the intervention of Jia Zheng’s mother, Grandmother Jia, prevents him from literally beating Bao-yu to death when displeased with his son’s behavior.)

Still, it is the relationship between Bao-yu and Dai-yu that breaks most readers’ hearts. Chapters 23–34 illuminate the basis of their relationship, bringing to the fore the nostalgic sentimentality they share (as in the flower-burying scene), their common intimation of doom, and their shared love of reading. Note that it is the drama *Romance of the Western Chamber*, which is based on the Tang dynasty
tale about Ying-ying (both of which are included in Volume B of the Anthology, pp. 116–132, translated as Story of the Western Wing and “The Story of Yingying,” respectively) that binds the two cousins together. Both works center on the sexual awakening of a young woman, and Bao-yu’s introduction of the dramatic text to Dai-yu may be compared to the shared experience of Paolo and Francesca in Dante’s Divine Comedy. Although they do not literally read the literary work together, it is a text that awakens their passion. As Anthony Yu argues, “The human Bao-yu and Dai-yu in the garden, to be sure, are not the wailing inmates of hell. But like Paolo and Francesca, . . . this Chinese couple can also trace the first root of their human love (‘la prima radice / del nostro amor’) to the experience of reading—and hearing—literary fiction” (Rereading the Stone, p. 211).

The sustained process of self-dramatization that follows can only end unhappily, however, thanks to the primacy of the family’s interests that dictate the novel’s cruelest drama, in which—much later in the novel—Bao-chai is asked by her elders to pose as Dai-yu to delude Bao-yu into marriage. Meanwhile Dai-yu, who alone had challenged the hegemony of the family’s interests, manifested in their insistence on Bao-yu’s dedication to study in preparation for the examinations, dies, virtually abandoned, of tuberculosis. “The profound and perduring appeal of Dai-yu’s story perhaps may be explained by the way it draws upon the fears and frustrations of the women of an entire culture,” notes Yu (Rereading the Stone, p. 253).

As Mark van Doren wrote in an introduction to an earlier translation of the novel:

The whole society is doubtless what seems most interesting in the end. It is a human organization that must obey the laws of its own survival; and it does so no matter what individual gets in its way. To certain of its members it now and then seems heartless. But to say this is to suggest how far Dream of the Red Chamber transcends the ordinary novel of manners. It transcends it, indeed, to the point of tragedy. (“Introduction” to Dream of the Red Chamber, trans. C. C. Wang, 1958, p. viii)

As Yu writes, Dai-yu is “the fateful victim of ill health, human deceit, mythic beliefs” (Rereading the Stone, p. 253) and, we should also remember, of the story’s structure. Yu’s discussion of The Story of the Stone begins with the premise that its “merit as verbal art lies in its insistence that it is a work of fiction,” and that “its own fictionality is the subject of sustained exploration and dramatization” in the narrative (p. xi). He also traces the way mirrors, dreams, and jade chart the theme of Buddhist enlightenment that mandates Bao-yu’s departure from the world. After the marriage to Bao-chai with which this selection concludes, the protagonist regains enough of his wits to pass the civil service examination and impregnate his wife. Having bequeathed to his family the distinction of his performance and an heir (though whether male or female, we do not know), he disappears in the company of a monk, as the return of the Stone to the Land of Greensickness Peak had foretold. Has he achieved enlightenment by abandoning what Buddhism would regard as the illusory world of human desire and its resulting attachments?
A more sophisticated position might maintain that drawing such a distinction between illusion and reality is itself an illusion; perhaps the jade must renounce the world of desire, but the words jade and desire remain in fact homophonous in Chinese. It is also the case that however insistent the novel has been on its own nature as illusory fiction, its success in drawing readers into its reality has been extraordinary. In this sense, then, as Yu writes, “the medium subverts the message”: “if life is illusory like a dream or fiction, what are we to do with so engaging an illusion as fiction?” (Rereading the Stone, p. 149). The Story of the Stone never loses sight of the paradox it sustains from the start, encapsulated in the couplet about the permeable relationship between truth and fiction that appears above the archway to the Land of Illusion. Dusting off familiar homilies about appearance and reality is not without purpose here, though in the end the meticulous attention to detail, lingering and often loving, provides more than enough to take seriously and critically. As Wai-yee Li concludes:

In its encyclopedic inclusiveness, Stone in a sense sums up Chinese culture, but the greatness of the book lies more in the ways it asks difficult questions of that culture. It poses as problems the ways systems of order (whether sociopolitical, moral, philosophical, or religious) accommodate or define the self; the meanings of roles and displacement; the claims of emotions, desire, imagination, and artistic creation to coherence, authonomy, and responsibility; reconciliation of contradictions in the name of order and harmony. The nostalgia for and idealization of a lost world in Stone capture the modern Chinese reader’s feelings about the entire traditional Chinese culture; at the same time its ironic, critical self-reflexivity intimates the burden of modernity.” (“Full-length Vernacular Fiction,” p. 655)

RESONANCE

Shen Fu

This memoir (of which only two-thirds survives) dates from a generation or so after The Story of the Stone and is clearly indebted to the earlier work. Shen Fu’s family, however, occupied a lower rung on the social ladder. While he appears to have aspired to bureaucratic office, his family’s financial straits made it impossible for him to prepare himself successfully for the civil service examination, and he became a part-time clerk in a government office. His business efforts were unimpressive as well, with his real interests focused on writing and painting.

There is no real precedent for this extended autobiography; earlier precedents were typically much shorter (as in Tao Qian’s [365–427] “Biography of the Gentleman of the Five Willows” in Volume B of the Anthology, p. 133) and also much less intimate. Scholar-officials writing about their lives usually focused on their public careers rather than details of their personal lives. Six Records of a Floating Life owes something to a genre dating from the Song dynasty known as biji, or “ran-
dom jottings,” which consisted of miscellaneous, unsystematic notes on topics of interest to the writer, such as travels to interesting sites, flower arrangement, or architecture. Much of the Six Records (though largely in sections not included here) includes discussions of such traditional biji subject matter, but what is distinctive and new is Shen Fu’s willingness to reveal aspects of his personality, sentiments, and relationships that earlier writers would not have been inclined to share.

As with any confessional work, of course, one can question the extent to which an apparent frankness is to be believed, and it would be worth discussing how the Six Records compare on this account with examples from other traditions, as well as what rhetorical indices make the revelations seem more or less genuine. Shen Fu’s willingness to disclose less than admirable traits of his own throughout the narrative certainly helps to earn our trust. So, too, do his disarmingly brief and direct comments on the nature of his feelings for his wife, Yün.

Shen’s depiction of Yün as a virtually fully fleshed individual, a creature of desire and an object of love, owes something both to the relationship of Bao-yu and Dai-yu in The Story of the Stone and to an evolving ideal in the late imperial period of the “companionate marriage.” This was made possible by the increasing literacy and literary activity among elite women at the time and was also linked to a growing interest in the centrality of emotion to human existence. More permissive models of appropriate sentiments to be expressed between spouses, for example, could be tolerated, without challenging the family’s right to determine who that spouse should be. Note, however, the risks that sexual attraction and intimacy would inevitably present to the vertical loyalties owed to the husband’s parents, and the displeasure that our couple constantly fears incurring is reminiscent of the disapproval at the heart of the early folk song, “A Peacock Southeast Flew” (Volume B, p. 105).

As was the case in The Story of the Stone, a fundamental tension between cultural norms and individual aspirations is brought to the fore here. Both works, as Anthony Yu observes, are “preoccupied in one way or another with the issues of desire (qing) and vocational choice, and the role of women in the effort of upholding family values and success” (Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber, 1997, p. 178). Small wonder, then, that the “floating life” of Shen Fu’s title emerges as a stream of hardship, sadness, and death, on which joy is allowed to bob in only brief, intermittent, and fragile moments.
Jean-Baptiste Poquelin [Molière]

The School for Wives has been held up by some Molière scholars as the most quintessentially characteristic of all his plays and the one in which “Molière’s reaction to the emerging modern culture is first comprehensively sketched” (Larry Riggs, “Pedagogy, Power, and Pluralism in Molière,” in Approaches to Teaching Molière’s Tartuffe and Other Plays, eds. James F. Gaines and Michael S. Koppisch, 1995, pp. 74-82, citing Max Vernet [Molière: Côté jardin, côté cour, 1991]). This assessment is supported by the historical fact that this play gave rise to a sustained and intense querelle—more than that indeed, as contemporaries referred to it not as the usual literary “quarrel” but as an all-out guerre. Molière’s contemporaries understood the high social and literary stakes involved in his critique of emerging modernity. Important elements of that critique for emphasis in the classroom might include any of various aspects of its main social and literary implications: the role of literacy and education in class mobility and the changing status of women, the relation between traditional literary convention and the developing project of realistic representation or verisimilitude, and an increasing emphasis on originality in the creation of literary works and on their popular reception and commercial success.

Historical Background and Reception: The Comic War

The School for Wives was the first of many Molière plays to send shock waves of scandal, as well as bitter aesthetic and moral controversy, through Parisian society. While Les Précieuses ridicules had ruffled feathers as early as 1659, L’Ecole des femmes was the first of Molière’s plays to engender a sustained critical controversy, dubbed by one participant “the Comic War.” Exploding theatrical as well as literary rivalries while fueling the antagonisms of literary women and religious prudes, this public debate touched on all aspects (listed in the preceding paragraph) of the play’s implied social and literary critique.

From the beginning Molière was always sensitive to the dangers of achieving fame by exposing recognizable and important groups of people to public ridicule. As he presented his first spoof on an influential class, Les Précieuses ridicules, he spread it about that he was not mocking the famous Parisian précieuses but only their vulgar provincial imitators. Yet this caution did not prevent him from alienating both educated women and the literary establishment, as he later alienated the Catholic Church, the medical profession, and other powerful groups. Some literary historians claim that the new play again offended the précieuses by so baldly presenting the power imbalance between the sexes in two
prime realms that concerned them, marriage and female education. It is possible that these literary women failed to see in the irony of Molière’s new and unfamiliar brand of theater that he was in fact an enemy of their enemy—but such a misprision on the part of literary sophisticates is not likely. It is worth noting that the précieuses themselves did not deign to engage directly in the Comic War; the idea of this play’s offensiveness to literary women is derived from the fact of his earlier and later attacks on them, combined with remarks by some of Molière’s male antagonists, who protested they could not possibly approve of The School for Wives for fear of offending “le beau sexe.” It is also true that some précieuses sought social power by becoming what Ninon de Lenclos called “précieuses prudes” and joining the cabale des dévots, and that this powerful group of religious lay people joined the clergy in prosecuting a not very funny war against Molière all the way through to their scandalized and repressive responses to Tartuffe (1664) and Dom Juan (1665).

Much more interesting than the question of whether particular literary women privately took issue with The School for Wives is the observation that Molière’s commentaries on the status of women, in several plays devoted to the subject (including Les Femmes savantes, 1672, in addition to those already mentioned), always link gendered power relations with literary and linguistic ones. The first official meeting of the Académie Française was held in 1634, excluding, at Cardinal Richelieu’s behest, the very women who had first brought its future members together in their salons. Its mission was to codify, centralize, and control the French language, which the précieuses had themselves worked to refine and control over the previous decades. In Les Précieuses ridicules and Les Femmes savantes, Molière satirizes these women’s arrogation to themselves, through control of language, of an unprecedented measure of social and literary power; in The School for Wives he lampoons male efforts to use language, literacy, and education to keep women in their place. Meanwhile it is no accident, of course, that in his satires of the précieuses Molière is mocking aristocrats and the bourgeoisies who emulated them, while his audience’s sympathies are directed, in The School for Wives, toward a female character possessing neither wealth nor status. Those self-proclaimed champions of the fair sex who attacked Molière were themselves linking the battle of the sexes—or querelle des femmes—with the literary, linguistic, and class battles in which they were probably more sincerely engaged. For Molière’s satire of the mannered language of the précieuses, for example, was also indirectly a satire on the stilted verse of neoclassical tragedy. Ultimately, the literary and theatrical stakes in the Comic War were nothing less than the definition and control of literary language, of the norms of decorum and verisimilitude, of conventionality and originality, of the ability to get plays sponsored and performed, and of the nature of the audience for whom they would be performed.

Part of the impetus behind the Comic War was the competition for resources between Molière’s upstart theatrical troupe at the Palais-Royal and its established rival at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, but the simple economic fact of this competition was driven by a struggle over the definition of the style and reach of dramatic literature: tragedy versus comedy, sublime style versus plainer language, preservation
of high neoclassical decorum versus broader, more popular appeal. It’s important for modern students of seventeenth-century drama to remember that issues of artistic and moral decorum were inextricable and were bound up with the playwright’s appeal across social boundaries. The connection between Molière’s violation of literary decorum in his play and of social decorum in his personal life would not have seemed insignificant to contemporaries. The close connection between moral and literary decorum, moreover, thoroughly informed seventeenth-century French notions of verisimilitude. In this light the curious fact that Molière’s detractors accused him simultaneously of writing about his own real-life situation and of plagiarizing the story from other writers—how could both be true or make sense at the same time?—may look less strange to modern students. Neoclassical verisimilitude had nothing to do with morally unsavory realities; Molière’s vulgar comedy violated its norms, and thus his contemporaries might have sought to understand it instead as a direct representation of contemporary actuality. The fact that it was nevertheless based on borrowed literary material—like any tragedy—was thus evidence that it had neither tragedy’s merit of decorous verisimilitude nor the merit of being at least an unmediated, original, and direct, if tasteless, representation of truth.

On this very point, in March 1664, Lacroix intervened in Molière’s defense in a literary critical dialogue, *La Guerre comique*, that lent its title to the entire controversy. Lacroix makes a revolutionary point when he asks why a comic writer should not “make use of his reading,” while tragic poets regularly borrowed their entire subject matter and translated long passages directly from ancient authors to “ornament their works.” In the context of the *quérelle des anciens et modernes*, to imitate the ancients was to observe proper decorum in the grand goal of successful artifice in the imitation of nature; to imitate nature directly, without the ancients as guides, was to miss the mark; but to imitate fellow moderns was merely theft, or hack writing at best. Molière’s use of sources like contemporary comic novellas was part of his project to elevate comedy to the same artistic status as tragedy.

The fabulous commercial success of Molière’s innovative, modern approach to theater in *The School for Wives* was an important aspect of the threat he represented. It guaranteed that the critique of contemporary social mores delivered by his combination of conventional comic plot devices with character types recognizable from contemporary life rather than classical literature would have all the greater impact by reaching a large audience. One contemporary called Molière “a constant threat. He takes his eyes and ears everywhere with him!” Wisely, however, Molière never mocked the monarchy. A paradox of his career as a popularizer of literary theater is that the protection of the king and his brother was crucial to Molière’s professional survival. The king was so fond of Molière that he sometimes, violating court protocol, liked to enjoy a simple lunch alone with the middle-class playwright. Molière knew better than to bring his eyes and ears along on those occasions. That he became such a threat within only five years on the Parisian theater scene demonstrates how important was the enthusiastic public response to his new brand of comedy. Crucial as was the king’s support to Molière’s
ability to continue producing plays in Paris in the face of scandal, it never would have been sufficient, alone, to make them survive the centuries.

Connections with Related Works

The material Molière was accused of plagiarizing was taken from Scarron’s novella, La Précaution inutile. This was itself a free translation of El Prevenido enganado by Maria de Zayas y Sotomayor, an excerpt of which, translated as Forewarned but not Forearmed, is included in the Anthology as a Resonance section (p. 251). Zayas’s work borrowed in turn from a sixteenth-century Italian novella collection by Straparola, which had been translated into French as Les Facétieuses nuits. The story of a man whose fears of female infidelity inspire him to raise a young girl in complete innocence to become his wife (but is cuckolded all the sooner because of her extreme ignorance) runs through all these sources. Molière actually tones down the moral impropriety of his predecessors: The girl is no longer the illegitimate daughter of a woman who cheated on him in youth, who in turn dupes him before he actually marries her and without actually having sex with his rival. For further comparisons with Zayas, see her introduction, Volume D, p. 251.

The Perspectives section “Court Culture and Female Authorship” (Volume D, p. 257) provides further contextualization for both Molière’s and Zayas’s versions of the story of a man who tries to keep a woman ignorant in order to keep her faithful. This collection of works in various genres documents the unprecedented degree to which women were in fact becoming educated, literate, published authors who took stands on the same issues themselves. The excerpt from Madeleine de Scudéry’s Clélie provides an example of literature by, about, and for the précieuses, those learned ladies who in Molière’s time were controlling language and decorum and relations between the sexes in unprecedented ways. Madame de Lafayette’s brief novella, The Countess of Tende (complete in the Anthology) is another seventeenth-century story about cuckoldry but with a very different tone and a much more ambiguous moral than those either of Molière or Zayas. The letters of the Duchesse d’Orléans, the royal patron to whom Molière dedicated The School for Wives, wittily display the irreverence and vulgarity with which even ladies of the highest rank could sometimes poke fun at the social and sexual mores of the age of the Sun King. The English poetesses presented in the Anthology—Mary, Lady Chudleigh; Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea; and Ann Yearsley—all comment in different ways on the real and continuing barriers to education faced by women of various classes.

Beyond the context provided by these contemporaries, immediate predecessors and successors in Western Europe, illuminating connections can also be drawn between The School for Wives and classical sources or texts from distant cultures that treat related issues.

While The School for Wives is a reworking of early modern novellas, the locus classicus for the theme of the play and its sources is of course the Pygmalion story in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, in which a man forms the perfect woman out of inert matter, only to be disappointed. The same theme, closer to Molière’s treatment in that it understands the “formation” of women specifically in the more modern
terms of education, appears centrally in Murasaki Shikibu’s *The Tale of Genji* (presented in Volume B). Long after the early conversation Prince Genji holds with other young noblemen about the education necessary to produce the ideal woman, he strives, not unlike Arnolphe, to create one for himself by raising the daughter of one of his many imperfect mistresses.

Continuing the theme of education as formation, a lovely juxtaposition would be *The School for Wives* with Kant’s essay, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (Volume D, p. 670), which concludes the “Perspectives: Liberty and Libertines” section of the *Anthology*. If enlightenment, as Kant defined it a century after Molière, is “man’s freedom from his self-imposed tutelage,” *The School for Wives* anticipates that conception in a play about a woman who refuses—unlike Zayas’s heroine—to allow tutelage to be imposed upon her.

At a less thematic, more formal level of analysis, the ambiguous relationship to the project of verisimilitude exemplified by *The School for Wives*, its uneasy balance between convention and what is now called realism, could also be compared to the similarly uneasy balance struck in *The Tale of Genji* (Volume B, p. 222). The satirical treatment of social and sexual conventions in *The Story of the Stone* (see Volume D, p. 80) or the tales of Saikaku (Volume D, pp. 73 and 604) would also make an interesting comparison. Alternatively, an analysis of the way satire operates in Molière would benefit from a comparison either with Asian works like Saikaku’s or in those closer to Molière’s cultural context by Swift, Pope, or Voltaire elsewhere in Volume D.

**Classroom Strategies**

Particular pedagogical issues arise in any attempt to teach a play about teaching. Although Molière challenged the predominant neoclassical theatrical decorum of his age, he nevertheless followed its Horatian injunction to instruct while delighting. His comedies are so entertaining that their didactic function can sometimes be lost on students, and the lessons Molière offers are of course much more ambiguous and polyvalent than those propounded by his characters. That is the joke and the point, and a most valuable approach is to help students understand not only what lessons are implicit in the play but even more importantly what kind of pedagogical method it exemplifies.

In an extremely useful essay on teaching the pedagogical implications of several Molière plays, “Pedagogy, Power, and Pluralism in Molière” (in *Approaches to Teaching Molière’s Tartuffe and Other Plays*, eds. James F. Gaines and Michael S. Koppisch, 1995, pp. 74–82), Larry Riggs argues, “The ridicules’ power-mad, univocalist pedagogy is undermined by Molière’s dramatic, pluralist influence. Their regarding others as objects for a pedagogical enterprise is a vital part of what makes them ridiculous.” With more specific reference to *The School for Wives*, Riggs points out that Arnolphe’s insistence that Agnès “imprint on herself” the printed text of *Les Maximes du mariage* (“Imprimez-le-vous bien,” 3.2.678) implies a dramatist’s mistrust and critique of the monologic, moralizing text: “Texts tend to be antidialogic; Molière’s comedy is relentlessly dialogic, or pluralist.” The mindless internalization of a printed text is the image of what Riggs terms “absolutist pedagogy.”
In the classroom, then, a pedagogical style that gives students as active a role as possible and acknowledges and respects their voices and views best helps them grasp the meaning of this play. Such a method could begin with as basic an exercise as performing dramatic readings in class, with students assuming different roles. This makes the classroom a theater rather than a cloister or domesticating prison. It should help students begin to experience, first of all, the delightfulness of the language and the theatrical event, while the simple experience of hearing their own voices in the class may help them better grasp and articulate its dialogic lessons.

Arnolphe's tyranny can be compared to the absolutist monarchy of his patron Louis XIV in more than one way. While Arnolphe silences the voices of others with his absolutist pedagogy, he also tries to usurp the role of the paterfamilias, who, in seventeenth-century thought, reflected the authority of the king in the microcosm of the family. (This idea was critiqued by Locke and by Kant [p. 671]. Critiques of this idea at the beginning and end of the Enlightenment period make interesting textual comparisons in this regard.) In the absolutist family, a father could dictate both his daughters' and his sons' marriage partners despite their wishes (as Oronte does—successfully, after all—in The School for Wives, 5.7.22–43). A wife's or daughter's (or fiancée's) chastity is the keystone upon which his legitimacy as père-de-famille depends, and thus any means of controlling female sexuality is warranted. It's important to observe, however, that Arnolphe, through his absolutist, text-based pedagogy, attempts to usurp the roles of both father and husband to Agnès, without being either in effect. He has not married her, and the big surprise of the ending is that she turns out to be the daughter of Enrique. (This provides another interesting contrast with the Zayas source story, where Don Fadrique is as symbolically close to being the young girl's father as is possible without committing incest when he does become her legal husband—but without ever having sex with her.) Surprise, which Arnolphe dreads in the form of cuckoldry, is in the plot identified with the legitimate authority of paternity. It may be argued that a critique of absolutism can be found at the level of the play's dialogic form, but Molière stops short of questioning its legitimacy on the more obvious level of representation. Arnolphe represents, not the illegitimacy of absolutism, but an illegitimate instance of usurpation of an absolutism that, when exercised even arbitrarily by legitimate fathers like Oronte, works out to everyone's advantage in the end.

Although neither fathers nor husbands have such absolute authority over their wives, daughters, sons, or wards anymore, one good discussion question for students is to ask whether, nevertheless, a play about someone who desires to control others because of his own fear of loss of control still has contemporary significance. Arnolphe's greatest desire, along with his moralizing pedagogy, has been reduced to an equivalence with his greatest fear. The equivalence between fear and desire; the inability to admit alternative views or the legitimacy of competing interests because of fear of loss of control; the desire to protect oneself by controlling others through the formative powers of education; the authority of print, pedagogy, or social status—none of these are purely antiquarian concerns. Nevertheless, through analyzing the motivations of Molière's characters in these terms, students can learn a great deal about seventeenth-century France and the motivating forces of the Enlightenment.
The Nineteenth Century

Perspectives

Romantic Nature

Rousseau

Whereas Thoreau spent two years at Walden Pond and minutely catalogued the changing seasons (see the excerpt from the “Spring” chapter of Walden), Rousseau’s two months in his island refuge were attuned to the unchanging rhythm of the days. The initial impulse, then, is toward a stoicism that empties out existence. But Rousseau discovers a new form of life within confinement and so veers from passivity into ecstasy. His experience redeems the formerly fallen realm of nature, sin, and imprisonment, making a paradise out of the deserted spot to which he has been driven. His apparently artless praise of the natural world and of the innocent pulse of life is thus revolutionary in its naturalism. It turns religion on its head (“so long as this state lasts we are self-sufficient like God”), and its simplicity reflects the same radical impulse that drove his political philosophy.

The return to nature in the Reveries can readily be paralleled to the return to nature in the Social Contract, where Rousseau had called for the dissolution of all political conventions so as to reconstitute society from the roots. Rousseau is never far from remembering “the tumult of social life,” the threat of the Bastille, indeed, the general passions and disturbances of “our present state of affairs.” He fights his way toward calm and toward justice. The Fifth Reverie thus shows us both the power of impulses toward nature and the conflicted drives lying behind them. And, like so much Romantic-era writing, motifs of nature, of politics, and of the individual imagination are inextricably linked.

Kant

The view of infinity suggests the nobility of human aspirations; the heavens and the moral law arise conjointly. And because both are infinite, they cannot properly be stilled by any quasi-scientific formulas such as astrology nor by the quasi-moral self-satisfactions of fanaticism. Kant shares with Rousseau the exalted stimulus by nature, though in this passage nature is unbounded in space rather than (as with Rousseau) eternally repeated in time. The nature exaltation of Wordsworth’s poem “My heart leaps up” is closely related. But Kant was a resistant if avid reader of Rousseau, and he rejects the absorption in self that was Rousseau’s special discov-
ery and curse. Instead, he links moral aspirations to scientific discovery, a connection that helped propel science forward but also relieved science of the obligation to justify its own morality. This brief, famous excerpt from Kant’s ethical work, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, concentrates a number of motifs that have remained controversial from Kant’s day to our own.

**Blake**

“The Ecchoing Green” comes from *Songs of Innocence*, issued by Blake (with the poems set onto his hand-colored engravings) in 1789; “The Tyger” comes from *Songs of Experience*, issued (in the same format) together with *Songs of Innocence* in 1794. The title prepositions are ambiguous. The earlier collection may be sung by innocence or may be sung about innocence, from a position of experience. Consider the rich ambiguities of the natural scene, which may be headed for sunset rest followed by another, similar day (as with Rousseau’s nature), or it may be headed for death (as with Thoreau’s nature): “And sport no more seen.” But who does the seeing? Knowledge is tinged with guilt or danger—guilt of the little ones or danger to them. *Songs of Experience* are even more fraught, whether sung by experience or about it. And yet experience may point toward redemption, as it does for both Rousseau and Thoreau.

Even shorn of their illustrations, as they have often been read, Blake’s poems give marvelously condensed and pointed versions of the Romantic dialectics of selfhood, nature, and revolutionary reconstruction. Electronic reproductions of the plates may be accessed through the William Blake Archive at http://www.blakearchive.org/main.html.

**Keats**

The Nightingale Ode is the longest of the five odes in Keats’s great 1820 collection. It is more self-reflective than the Autumn Ode or those on the Grecian urn, Psyche, and melancholy. Its speaker touches on all the themes of Romantic reverie, including Rousseau’s bliss, the hypnotic restlessness of Goethe’s (and Schubert’s) Gretchen at her spinning wheel, and even, in its third strophe, Poe-like terrors. The ringing song of the unseen bird suggests death to the world but also openness to imagination. When the bird flies away, the speaker resents the deception and thinks again of death (“’tis buried deep”). But, as Keats says at the conclusion of his sonnet “O thou whose face,” “And he’s awake who thinks himself asleep.” If he loses the eternity represented by the bird’s Greek and Biblical associations, he gains in retrospect the deepening of the now three-dimensional local space. So, for the Romantic imagination, in what is known as “dialectic,” every loss is also a gain, with the “sole self” balanced against the world, time against timelessness, and the here and now against the depths of culture. Without any overt movement, the ode stages both a static survey and a discovery. That is its buried plot.

Keats wrote four of the five odes in spring, 1819, the Autumn Ode later. It turns homeward, replacing the Nightingale Ode’s “sunburnt mirth” with coolness,
wine with cider, the mythological nightingale with the homely swallows, the Biblical gleaner with a native one. It even leaves the Greek-derived term *ode* out of the title. Time passes from summer toward winter, without anxiety over the lost spring songs and with only the most delicate hints of the coming cold.

**Droste-Hülshoff**

Romantic writers employed supernatural motifs and folk legends to explore psychic depths. Droste’s “Heath-Man” leaves behind plots such as (notably) that of Goethe’s “Erlking” and retains only the terrified feelings. Note how the speaker is increasingly infected with the mother’s hysteria. Do the adult voices rescue childhood from corruption or preserve its innocence? In so bold an evocation of the complexities of early experience, no simple answer is possible.

“In the Grass” takes Romantic reverie out of the speculative, intellectual dimensions seen in prior readings by men and into the purely emotive sphere of the love-death, reflecting the cloistered confinement a woman like Droste suffered in her life. In the original the poems rhyme, but not compellingly; their greatness lies in the themes and imagery.

**Leopardi**

Like Wordsworth, Leopardi uses blank verse in “The Infinite” (faithfully represented in this translation) to give his short poem the unfettered richness of epic. But he senses the contradictions of a poetry that aims to be grand and personal at once; the grand obliterates the personal, thought drowns the thinker, and nature is imagined as either hidden or violent and destructive. Wordsworth sometimes falls prey to such moods; you might compare the “Ode, in passion uttered” (*The Prelude* 5.96) and the fear of inundation in the Arab dream passage.

**Emerson**

American Transcendentalism was composed of varying proportions of German idealist philosophy, neo-Platonic mysticism, Wordsworthian elation, and an enthusiasm derived from Puritan religious sources. (In the discussion below, passages in Emerson are located by paragraph number; N = “Nature” and SR = “Self-Reliance.”) Like Kant, Emerson draws his inspiration from the stars (N1). To Emerson, to be sure, they are uplifting and “poetical” rather than sternly ethical, but they also point him, as they did Kant and his followers, toward a mystical view of scientific discovery: The great astronomers are moral heroes (SR1) and “Intuition” trumps “Tuition,” becoming a “primary wisdom” lodged in “magnetism” and in a “science-baffling star” that carries us beyond knowledge toward “inspiration” (SR8). “Let a man keep things under his feet” (SR5) reflects a realist grounding, but, like Wordsworth leaping up at the rainbow, nature leads Emerson toward ecstasy. “Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles,” “standing on the bare ground,” Emerson’s head is “uplifted into infinite space” (N4).
is the trajectory of the famous “transparent eye-ball” passage, which, like much in Emerson, is easier to understand as the restatement of a general pattern than as an isolated, resonant mystery. “In the woods, we return to reason and faith” (N4): such is the itinerary. Likewise, reverie, which calmed Rousseau, thrills Emerson (SR8), bridging between nature and his quasi-religious faith in a world of transcendent illumination.

Here are some related themes you may wish to trace. Emerson is associated with Rousseau and Wordsworth in his idealization of childhood purity (N4). In one respect the childlike wonder found throughout Emerson’s texts appears like a regression back to nature, to a nativist primitivism, and to mysticism. But in looking backward, Emerson also looks toward origins. A key word in his texts is “cause.” “Every true man is a cause” (SR4); “All things are dissolved to their centre by their cause” (SR 9). To the extent that causes are either biological or symbolic, they are regressive. But a scientific cause is associated with an impulse or force driving things forward, and so “posterity seem to follow his steps as a train of clients” (SR4). Implicit in childhood is growing up, in science is discovery, in historical action is futurity. A “cause” may even be political, as it seem to be at the close of our excerpt: “let us not rove” (i.e., not let our minds wander from necessity), but instead, “let us sit at home with the cause,” tending to ourselves and our fellows (SR15). Even sitting at home, “beside our native riches,” Emerson is thus always thinking ahead and toward action: “Let us stun and astonish the intruding rabble of men . . .” (SR15). Even in harking back, he points forward—“Whence then this worship of the past?” (SR9)—thus the remarkable energy of his doctrines and of his style. He is the most insistant of all the Romantic vitalists (at least before his great admirer Nietzsche): “Life only avails, not the having lived. Power ceases in the instant of repose” (SR13). Notice in a typical paragraph (SR10) the short, energetic sentences: it begins in declarative verbs that evoke the sage’s knowingness and moves at the end toward transitive verbs, first without expressed objects (“man postpones or remembers”) and then with forward-looking objects (“man . . . laments the past, or . . . stands on tiptoe to foresee the future”). Passive verbs are rare in this most dynamic of thinkers; some students may enjoy discovering that Emerson uses them to speak of royalty, suggesting how backward a monarchical state is and how it must yield to a democratic future (SR7).

The true seer, for Emerson, is the poet. Art is the vision of totality that integrates childhood with adulthood, the past with the future, the individual with the common good (N3). And one name that some instructors may want to introduce for his characteristically American itinerary—from mystical wisdom or naive vision toward vitalist action and social commitment—is pragmatism. The pragmatist strain is buried at the core of Emerson’s mystical strain; whether following the itinerary outlined here or some other path, I suggest helping students pull apart motifs in Emerson and then align them in an implicit plot that can make reading him a delightful practice of surprising discoveries.
Thoreau

Thoreau can be read as a representative European Romantic, as a representative American Romantic in contrast to more world-weary European authors, as a distinctive personality juxtaposed to Emerson, or as a powerful voice for cosmopolitan discovery—or all four in succession. His love for the sights and sounds of nature allies him with Rousseau, Wordsworth, Keats, and many other contemporaries. So does the inclination toward self-scrutiny, especially with its focus on self-consciousness and the notion of a mind-created world of experience, rather than on moral self-examination: “be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade but of thought.” “Common sense” was an Enlightenment slogan that Thoreau, as an extreme believer in the power of the individual, equates with “brain-rot.” Also broadly characteristic of the age was the inclination toward a grandiose faith in science. The years at Walden Pond were an “experiment” from which Thoreau hoped to learn “the laws of the universe”; the precision of observation that appears in the journals and in other parts of Walden

Thoreau’s vitalism is typical of its day, but his “tonic of wildness” is more bracing and sometimes more threatening than that of any other major writer, with the “inexhaustible vigor” of nature paired with an unsentimental observation of its destructive power. Emerson traveled widely in Europe and America, whereas Thoreau rambled only within New England (where he scaled the heights of Maine’s highest mountain, Katahdin) and neighboring territories. But Thoreau compensates with a cultural consciousness that ranges across the globe. “The wild goose is more of a cosmopolite than we,” perhaps, but not even Goethe can match the geographical range of literary, philosophical, and political interests manifested even within our relatively brief excerpts. Thoreau culminates our perspective section on “Romantic Nature” because he offers the most dynamic, restless exhilaration at natural powers and at their human embodiments.
Goethe

Goethe’s Faust

A large and disparate text, Faust connects effectively to any and all themes of the period—Romantic titanism and genius with the moral issues raised by originality; revolution with its sympathetic devil who often steals the stage and blends increasingly with the central protagonist; the transition to economic modernity from the small-town world of Part I to the great world of Part II that ends with Faust as a kind of industrial tycoon; changing attitudes toward nature, from the sentimental nature worship of the late 18th century to fears about its destruction at the hands of modern technology; the representation of depth psychology, if one reads Faust and Mephistopheles as the inseparable sides of the same personality; and the problems raised by the new Kantian philosophy about the nature of the self and the possibility of moral action in a secular world in which absolute knowledge of truth or divinity has become impossible. These themes are all responsive to tracking images, but the long composition history sometimes makes the play seem more difficult than it really is. The following materials offer a brief overview.

The lengthy process of composition (1772–1832) can be divided into clear stages. The first one, from 1772 to about 1775, generally known as the Urfaust (“original Faust”) includes the first half of the scene “Night” (through Wagner’s interruption) and essentially all of the scenes dealing with Margareta (commonly known as the Gretchen Tragedy, Gretchen being the German nickname for Margaret). It is generally considered a work of original genius typical of what in Germany is called the period of storm and stress (1770s). Goethe published part of this material in 1790 under the title Faust, ein Fragment, and later destroyed the manuscript (a secret copy of which only came to light in 1870). The Fragment is the version in which Goethe’s contemporaries got to know and to judge the play. Many works were published as fragments in the period, so it was not obvious that Goethe would ever add any more to it. It is, basically, a bourgeois love tragedy different from the many others in the period only in its extraordinary quality. It is the part of the play where Goethe is most independent of the Faust legend; it is also the part of the play that has been most influential on imitators and especially on opera composers.

The second major stage of composition took place in the 1790s, when Goethe was surrounded by philosophers, poets, and scientists all trying to come to terms with the implications of Kant’s philosophy. This stage consists of the three prologues and the remainder of Part I; it was basically finished in 1801, but its publication was delayed by the Napoleonic Wars until 1808. The additions make the play fall into two parts, the expanded first part now often referred to as the Tragedy of the Scholar, followed by the Gretchen Tragedy mentioned above. As long as we are willing to believe that Goethe thought the new material was relevant to the old, then it is sensible for students to reflect on how the new material changes the meaning of the old material.

Part II, finally, though begun as Goethe was finishing Part I, was written primarily from 1825 to 1831. It stands in the same relationship to Part I that Part I
does to the Urfaust. Part II interprets Part I, elaborates it, reinterprets it, and sometimes even parodies it. At the same time it replays the earlier drama at a more general level, dealing now not with individuals but with societies. If Part I reconfigures the Faust of the Urfaust from a being organized around genius and feeling into an individual organized around self-consciousness and reflection, Part II generalizes and abstracts to the level of all humanity.

The scenes we have included from Faust are discussed below.

Part I

Prologues: The prologues are worth a lot of class time because they define the central issues of the play as Goethe understood them in the 1790s. Why are there three? It is often helpful to begin with the second, the “Prelude on the Stage.” The director and the poet articulate opposing points of view that can be characterized with the kinds of descriptors listed in Table 1. Their disagreement is mediated by the clown, who urges combining their opposed views in a human love plot—the human, love, and the play are all crucial elements. The same can be done for “Dedication” and “Prologue in Heaven.”

Table 1. Introductory Scenes in Faust

| Dedication (History) | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ghosts               | Stanza 1        | Self
| Happy memory         | Stanza 2        | Lament/labyrinth/old loves
| Past gone            | Stanza 3        | Music/throng/applause
| Past becomes real    | Stanza 4        | Real vanishes; music independent of voice
| Past                 | Self-reflexiveness | Present
| Other                | Memory          | Self

| Prelude (Consciousness) | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Director                | Clown           | Poet
| Time                    | Moment          | Permanence/stability
| World                   | Error/truth     | Spirit
| Sight                   | Experience/feeling | Hearing
| Food                    | Drink           | Poetry
| Society                 | Love            | Nature
| Theater                 | Fancy/actor     | Poetry
| Deeds                   | Labyrinth       | Words
| Crowd                   | Both/and        | Isolation
| Reality                 | Truth           | Past
| Present                 | Youth (cf. memory) | Self
| Other                   | Theater/play (cf. forms) | Idea
Prologue (Knowledge)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Michael</th>
<th>Gabriel</th>
<th>Raphael</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hell</td>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chain</td>
<td>Spin/alternate</td>
<td>Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mephistopheles</td>
<td>Faust</td>
<td>The Lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>Erring/striving</td>
<td>Clarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particular</td>
<td></td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grasshopper</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>Faust, Faust</td>
<td>Truth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Past and present mediated by reflection in the “Dedication,” real world and ideal mediated by play in the “Prelude,” and world and truth mediated by Faust in the “Prologue” become three parallel structures that identify the major issues of the drama. The different iterations of the dialectical process establish the principle early in the work that nothing in Faust has fixed meaning; instead, things can be constantly represented by other things, and all symbols are temporary: meaning exists only in time.

Against this background the moral question posed by the “Prologue in Heaven” is that much more startling. What can it possibly mean that God insists he can save a man who will make a pact with the devil, seduce an innocent young woman, and kill her mother and brother? What does it mean that the criterion for salvation is striving, not good behavior (much less good works), not repentance or atonement? The strong association of God and striving with nature makes the conflict one between nature and justice but not between good and evil, for both are good. Tragedy arises in the play from the incompatibility of the natural order and the human order. The prologues do not resolve this incommensurability; they pose the problem that the rest of the play addresses. Indeed, one might argue that not even the play solves the problem. At best, it enables us to think about it on a case-by-case basis. In that sense the play can be understood as a series of episodes that keep reformulating the same problem from different points of view.

Night and Outside the Town Wall: These early scenes define the object of Faust’s longing: what it is that drives him to his pact with the devil. Since Faust alternates here between despair and excitement, the succession of high points—they are actually all epiphanies—successively refines the definition of what Faust wants. Table 2 gives a synopsis of theme, perspective, and imagery in each stage of these scenes; with the second column registering the progressive clarification of the locus of resolution.
Table 2. Climaxes in “Night” and “Outside the Town Wall”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Moon</th>
<th>Macrocosm</th>
<th>Earth Spirit</th>
<th>Suicide</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
<th>Poodle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moonlight in dew</td>
<td>Divine Light</td>
<td>World Fire</td>
<td>Afterlife Light/ moonbeams</td>
<td>Between Sunlight</td>
<td>Real/ spirit</td>
<td>Real/ spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Heaven</td>
<td>From roof</td>
<td>Beyond Sea/ dawn</td>
<td>Outside, up</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Sparks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Storm</td>
<td>Fiery</td>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Mephisto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirits</td>
<td>world</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hovering</td>
<td>Up/down</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Hovering</td>
<td>Sun god</td>
<td>Hovering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathing</td>
<td>weaving</td>
<td>weaving</td>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>light</td>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in dawn’s wave</td>
<td></td>
<td>poison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All stages in these scenes address in some fashion the tension between world and spirit, or real and ideal—the first represented by increasingly concrete natural beings, the second by phenomena of light. They are mostly connected by imagery of hovering or weaving (mediation) and drinking (always with overtones of learning). The encounters cover a broad range—poetic longing, magical invocation, psychology, real nature. It is especially significant that Mephistopheles in the form of a poodle is the direct successor to moon, sun, macrocosm, and Earth Spirit. He appears in response to Faust’s call for a spirit between earth and heaven to mediate between Faust’s two souls that strive in opposite directions. The devil is not an outsider; rather, he is part of the larger system of the cosmos, which we call Nature, and he functions simultaneously in the material domain of plot, the psychological domain of perception, and the imaginative domain of art.

**Faust’s Study:** The first scene in Faust’s study moves from general representations of nature to Mephistopheles as its specific embodiment. He appears first as a poodle, then (as he swells) Faust describes him as a hippopotamus and as an elephant. Faust tries to exorcize him as a spirit of one of the four elements, and Mephistopheles is in fact the lord of spirits who sing Faust to sleep with a song on the beauties of nature. Mephistopheles negates the cosmos but is always defeated by its persistent existence; all the death he brings results only in eternal rebirth.

The second study scene returns to the devil from the opposite perspective, that of human society. In this perspective the devil’s element is time: He has nothing to offer Faust but human experience; his magic will enable him to compress the experience of all humanity into a single lifetime. The pact with the devil familiar from most treatments of the Faust legend, including Christopher Marlowe’s *Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, is here converted into a bet. The issue is not so much
that it allows for Faust’s eventual salvation at the end of Part II but primarily the
distance Goethe keeps from the traditional good/evil dichotomy. The bet is that
Faust will never be satisfied with the devil’s offerings but will always want more—
in other words, that he will never say no to any new temptation. In the language
of the “Prologue in Heaven,” he will always strive (and therefore, in God’s terms,
be saved). The paradox is thus that salvation depends on constant acceptance, not
rejection, of temptation. The conflict between the demands of nature for constant
development and striving and those of society for obedience to a social or religious
code is formulated with painful clarity.

A Witch’s Kitchen: This scene is an early sample of the world that Mephistopheles
offers Faust, and at first glance it seems less evil—the expectation aroused by its
witch and apes—than simply chaotic and meaningless. By changing his appearance,
the witch’s potion costumes Faust for the role he will play as Margareta’s lover. The
Gretchen Tragedy becomes thereby a play-within-the-play in the same way that the
“Prelude on the Stage” made all of Faust a play-within-the-play. The clue to the
scene’s function is that everyone in it interprets what they do or what they see. The
apes offer running commentary as they crown Mephistopheles king of the world
(an appropriate office for a traditional devil); Faust offers extensive description and
interpretation of the beautiful woman he sees in the magic mirror. In a parody of
this action, the witch offers apparently senseless commentary of her multiplication,
but it is commentary that has tempted scholars to try to interpret it. It be-
comes the normal pattern in the play to have images or plays-within-the-play that
are discussed or explained by other characters. All meaning arises from this inter-
action of the reflecting mind with the objects of the world.

Gretchen Tragedy: When the witch rejuvenates Faust, she strengthens his inward
energy so that he can give meaning to the world around, then he can see Helen in
any woman, as Mephistopheles says at the end of “A Witch’s Kitchen.” In the very
next scene Faust falls in love with Margareta at first sight: he projects onto her his
ideal of the cosmos, just as he already has onto the figure in the magic mirror and
onto his various visions in “Night.” Faust’s visit to her room in “Evening” offers a
good opportunity for analysis of this situation: Margareta is not present, Faust has
exchanged but one sentence with her, yet he describes her and her circumstances at
length and with complete accuracy. It is fruitful to compare his description of her
room to his descriptions of his various encounters with Nature and the Ideal in
“Night” as well as to his description of the figure in the magic mirror in “A Witch’s
Kitchen.” When he leaves Margareta to withdraw into nature in “A Forest Cavern,”
similar language recurs. The tragic destruction of Margareta’s family, of herself, and
of her child makes clear the ultimate impossibility of reconciling Faust’s subjective
projection with the objective reality of his beloved’s circumstances.

The play that Faust and Mephistopheles construct around her—Goethe’s most
unique contribution to the Faust legend—set the standards for all subsequent bour-
gois tragedy, in which a young woman of the middle class is seduced and aban-
doned by an older aristocrat under the sway of a dissolute friend. Nevertheless, the
social issues are extremely complicated. Margareta is aware of the social gap be-
tween herself and Faust. At the same time, Faust is not really an aristocrat, as is usually the case in bourgeois tragedy; he is only costumed as one. This fact universalizes the significance of the play beyond the social question, while it simultaneously identifies the social question as the particular historical manifestation of the universal tragedy.

The treatment of organized religion is more specific. Mephistopheles is of course the enemy of the church, but there is a striking lack of any positive representation of church institutions in the text—the priest who pockets the casket of jewels for the church is no better than the devil who provides them in the first place. The Evil Spirit who besets Margareta in the cathedral is generally assumed to be or to speak for Mephistopheles, but this is not obvious. In his film of the Faust legend, it is obvious to Thomas Murnau that Mephistopheles cannot set foot in a church, while Ken Russell’s film version of Gounod’s operatic *Faust* makes the cathedral the domain of the devil. For both directors the church is the domain of social condemnation of love. It is a helpful exercise to let students look for differences between the language of the Evil Spirit and that of the choir singing the “Dies Irae”: they are not to be found. The Evil Spirit is also sometimes identified as Margareta’s conscience; it is worth exploring what it means to identify the conscience as an evil spirit. If Margareta is stifled by the essentially male, hostile church, she is able to pray outdoors before the statue of the Mater Dolorosa to whom she offers flowers. Some alert students will note the connection to the flower-plucking incident in “Martha’s Garden”; whether we see her as sacrificer or sacrifice, it is important that the feminine principle and love are associated with nature. (This is a good opportunity to remind students of all the imagery of drinking and sucking at the breasts of nature in “Night.”) As always in *Faust*, nature is the positive location of religious feeling (compare also Faust’s elevated mood in “A Forest Cavern”).

“**A Prison**” confronts us with the full complexity of the relation between nature and society. The deserted Margareta seems to have had a child and drowned it; she has at any rate been arrested for infanticide and has lost her wits. Her initial response to Faust’s intention to save her has two stages might be characterized as natural—she wants him to embrace her. But what represents life and nature for her represents loss of the bet for Faust because it means returning to the past, asking for time to stand still. Pure Margareta is thus the strongest temptation Mephistopheles can offer to win Faust’s soul. And paradoxically, to win his bet with Mephistopheles and to be saved in the terms of the Lord in the “Prologue in Heaven,” Faust must (cruelly, helplessly) leave Margareta to her fate, not rescue her like a bold hero of melodrama. Faust sins against nature if he returns to his past with Margareta, and he sins against the social/religious order if he abandons her. And conversely, Margareta still wants to sin against the social order and go with Faust. Only when he refuses to kiss her does she nobly decide to stay within the limitations of her social world and to take the consequences of her action. Mephistopheles, who consistently speaks for nature, declares that she is damned, but a voice from above says she is saved. It is worth reflecting on what it means that Goethe does not simply identify the voice as God’s or as that of the Lord in the
“Prologue in Heaven.” The play is not about good versus evil but about two competing goods (or two competing evils) that can be reconciled only in a play-within-the-play. Renunciation, a concept that was to become central in late Goethe, is the order of the day.

Part II

The scenes selected from Part II give a sense of its more abstract, allegorical style, of the great variety of poetic forms it uses, and of its more explicit focus on art as a creative force equivalent to nature that provides the space in which the conflicting desires of the play can be temporarily resolved. It is amenable to reading in selections because the continuities of the plot come from repeated themes and ideas, not from a causally related sequence of events.

A Beautiful Landscape: This is the opening scene of the second part. It is typical of the style of Part II that no explanation is offered for how we got here. Ariel (borrowed from Shakespeare’s Tempest) and kindly elves heal Faust from his feelings of guilt for the sufferings of Margareta by singing him through the night. Mephistopheles is notably absent, as is any reference to God. Morality is here entirely part of the natural order; living in time is to act, forget, and act again. The end of the spirits’ song evokes the terms of the “Prologue in Heaven” and the pact with Mephistopheles: the order of the day is rebirth, and the deeds of a noble mind should always succeed. Striving is living in time; it does not preclude serious errors but is nevertheless the only path for the person worthy of salvation.

Positioned as it is between the tragedy of Margareta and the dreamlike world of the rest of Part II, this view represents not naive optimism but rather an almost resigned affirmation of the need for optimism in the face of a reality subject always to time, decay, and perversion. The splendid operatic sunrise delivers the same message: It is both magnificent and threatening, it is both nature and elaborate artistic staging. Faust’s monologue states this resignation more explicitly yet. Faust the striver cannot look directly at nature, in the form of the sun, any more than Old Testament prophets could look at God directly. The rainbow in the spray of the waterfall, formed by a process of reflection and refraction, is the only thing to which we have access. But it cannot, of course, be physically grasped, only imaginatively comprehended. The image interprets in retrospect why taking possession of Margareta had to destroy her. This passage marks Faust’s central insight in Part II, that truth can be comprehended only through images and interpretations created by ourselves. This too is an act of renunciation.

A Dark Gallery: This scene is typical of the shift in power from Mephistopheles to Faust in the second part. In Part I Mephistopheles pushed Faust into actions that would incur guilt, like the duel with Valentine; here he encourages him to create, for the Mothers to whom Faust descends are the guardians of all forms. With these mysterious figures nature, art, mythology, and history are brought together in one image, while the motif of descent into the unknowable depths suggests also that Faust descends into himself. At the same time the often comic self-consciousness of the impossibility of what the text describes gives the scene an almost
incommensurable irony typical of the late Goethe. It is thus an excellent example of the multiple levels on which the language of Part II communicates.

A Laboratory: In this scene even Mephistopheles becomes a creator, for the Homunculus at which Wagner labors comes to life only as the devil enters the room. The return to the past of the play (Part I) can be connected with the imagery of descent in “A Dark Gallery,” especially because of the mythological motifs in Faust’s dream. Like almost everything else the dream requires an interpreter, this time Homunculus. It recounts the myth of Leda and the swan; the issue of this union was Helen, who subsequently appears on stage as Faust’s beloved in Act 3 (omitted from our selections). The dream, like all Romantic dreams, suggests that she arrives at least on one level, from Faust’s own subconscious, and that she is his creation. Together with “A Dark Gallery” the scene can be used to map out the connection of the themes of nature, art, etc.

Act 5: We present the complete Act 5 except for most of Faust’s ascent to heaven in the last scene. Since it recurs to the pact and the end of Faust’s relationship to Mephistopheles, it can be read effectively as a comparison of the old Faust with the young (rejuvenated) Faust of Part I and is an excellent example of the way the elderly Goethe reiterated and also reinterpreted his earlier work.

Open Country: This scene introduces us to the current version of Faust’s eternal striving: drainage projects to create new farmland. Because it is presented from the point of view of the elderly Baucis and Philemon, Faust appears as the dangerous agent of modern technology destroying a rural idyll. The pair is borrowed from a late myth in Ovid’s Metamorphoses about a time when humanity had almost forgotten the gods. Through their hospitality to Jupiter and Mercury Baucis and Philemon earn the right to live to great age as keepers of a temple and then to die at the same time by being turned into trees, while their inhospitable neighbors are transformed into frogs and their city into a swamp. It is striking how Goethe has reversed all the parameters of the myth so that the moral ambiguities of Part I all come to the fore: is striving inherently good or inherently evil?

A Palace: Faust is now the head of a large concern that is, however, no better than a band of pirates who steal cargo or bully unwelcome neighbors on command. This is a strictly material view of the theme of the rainbow; in “A Beautiful Landscape” grasping had to be understood as comprehension, but now the figurative dimension has entirely disappeared. Is this a condemnation of the materialism of the nineteenth century and thus of modernity, a failing of Faust in his old age (and thus a failing of European culture in its old age), a revelation of the inherent immorality of the Faustian position, or the tragic conflict between fulfilling one’s natural potential and accommodating the needs of one’s fellow humans?

Deep Night: When Baucis and Philemon die as the intransigent remainders of an earlier age, they are mourned by the watchman Lynceus. Faust has killed not only the kindness of the past but also its beauty. But the couple were already old and old-fashioned; in addition to the old moral question about Faust’s striving, the
scene also questions our relation to history and the passage of time. Goethe is famous as a classicist, but here he acknowledges that even antiquity cannot be a permanent ideal.

**Midnight:** The four ghostly crones complicate the moral situation yet again. They ought to be allegorical embodiments of Faust’s guilt, but they understand themselves in strictly material terms: because Faust is rich, Want, Debt, and Need have no access to him. Care, however, is the last bridge to a spiritual quality, for she affects above all her victim’s relationship to time. What appeared as a general historical question in “Deep Night” must now be analyzed at the level of individual psychology. The blinding of Faust evokes the central tragic theme and especially the blinding of Oedipus in Sophocles. Is it to be construed as an act of justice or as a representation of a true state of affairs? Or, since Faust seems unfazed and replaces the outer light (which represented God in Part I) within an inner light, is it simply an outdated, empty gesture? The themes of knowledge, subjectivity, ethics, and relation to history all come into play here.

**The Great Forecourt of the Palace:** In a stunning reversal this scene suddenly gives us access to Faust’s point of view, and his apparent greed, evil, and heedlessness are transformed into a noble and selfless vision of land reform intended to enable a previously oppressed humanity to achieve its secure place in the world through its own daily efforts. The ideal appealed equally on both sides of the Iron Curtain all through the Cold War. Is striving the crime or the blessing of modernity, of the West? And, of course, who wins the bet? Faust pronounces the fateful and fatal words of the pact in anticipation of a moment in which he can conceive of the highest moment. Is being satisfied with anticipation winning or losing the bet? Whichever side one comes down on, it is a tricky mediation that destabilizes any complacency of judgment. As the play’s ending approaches, you may want to start asking why Goethe called it a tragedy. What is tragic about dying in old age, rich and powerful, even if not all one’s own projects are successfully completed—and particularly if one is then elevated in to heaven, where Faust seems headed in the last scene?

**Burial Rites:** The song of the lemures comes from the grave-digger in *Hamlet* 5.1, so it is interesting to discuss the implications of the shift from classical antiquity to Shakespeare for the model of tragedy as the play draws to its close. The move into broad comedy, reminiscent of the stagey supernaturalism of the “Prologue in Heaven,” is also of interest—few classics before the late twentieth century end with such outright silliness. The theme of love, finally, is central. Typically for this part of the play, the poles are reversed. If Part I was about serious, passionate, heterosexual love, now the theme appears in comic reversal with Mephistopheles’ erotic attraction to the boy-angels who rescue Faust’s soul. If Margareta and ultimately Faust achieve salvation through love, is it so absurd that perhaps even the devil could be saved through the same power? Or is it another cheap trick—as Mephistopheles thinks—to end the play happily? What does it mean that the end of such a great work as *Faust* should seem to depend on a series of shabby tricks?
The implications for the moral function of art and even the nature of art are clearly enormous.

**Mountain Gorges**: In our excerpt of these closing lines of the play, the questions about the arbitrary endings of the previous two scenes are retranslated into the realm of the ineffable. The play cannot really end any more than time can ever end. The themes of knowledge and representation dominate. The play ends with “Eternal Womanhood.” This generalization of love into the abstraction “the eternal feminine” (as it is most commonly designated) connects love finally to nature in the broadest sense, the material form of existence in time.

**Goethe’s Poems**

In line with one of the chief emphases of our Romantic-period selections, from Goethe’s well over 1,000 pages of lyric poetry of all kinds, we have chosen five of his most famous nature lyrics. “To the Moon” expresses an enraptured identification with the profound mysteries of nature. There is a palpable influence of Rousseau’s sense of nature as pure fluidity. (Rousseau’s autobiographical works, including the *Reveries*, postdate “To the Moon,” but Goethe had already been profoundly impressed by similar themes in Rousseau’s novels.) Goethe’s reverie is typical of its decade in its moonlit sentimentalism, the rapidly shifting moods, and the strong emotional bonds of friendship (the friend being emphatically male in the German). At the same time, it is tempered in several distinctive and influential ways. First, Goethe keeps a damper on the emotionalism through confining the outbursts of “troubled mood” to a few moments, by the easy grace of the language (such as the adverb rhyme “so” in line 16, translated comparably with “away”) and by a classicizing distancing that was to become a powerful part of his subsequent writing. Starting with a direct address to the moon, Goethe turns to the river and then to generalizing reflection in the final stanzas, beginning with an echo of a then universally recognizable poem about rural retirement (“Happy he, who far from work . . .”), the second Epode by the Roman poet Horace. Second, in parallel with Goethe’s unique ability both to express and to control emotion lies the distinctive religiosity of the poem: nature is at once divinity and friend, unpredictable power and precious solace. There is nothing either doctrinal or indulgent about the atmosphere, yet the aura of devotion raises nature to a high plane as a guide for the poet’s “soul.” Finally, the phrase “mazes of the heart” (“Labyrinth der Brust”) echoed throughout German writing for at least a half century as an acknowledgment of the deep mysteries of psychology that many writers and thinkers of the period were eager to portray and explore.

“Erlking,” like “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” is one of a great many Romantic-period ballads narrating a haunted journey. Again nature is an uncanny force. Caught between his father, a rationalist eager to dispel the mysteries of nature, and the seductive Erlking, the child recognizes the dangers acutely but is powerless to ward them off. Goethe (together with Rousseau) precedes Wordsworth and other great writers of the Romantic decades in portraying the uncanny power
of infantile drives. The father and the Erlking, indeed, can be taken to personify the tensions tearing apart the child’s heart. Typical of Goethe are the concluding monosyllabic understatements—the child’s last phrase “has done me harm” and the equally spare conclusion “the child was dead”: these may be felt to protect against the power of the emotion and, at the same time, to keep it in reserve, like a coiled spring. (In Franz Schubert’s famous setting of the ballad, his earliest universally acknowledged masterpiece, the child’s last phrase is virtually screamed, pounding out the terror the poetry magnificently understates. Conversely, Schubert sets the end of the poem as a spare, low-pitched, unaccompanied recitative, the bare bones left after nature has seized the child back unto itself.)

Mignon is a child acrobat belonging to a small wandering troupe in Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*. The most famous wild child in all of literature, she is uncontrollable and subject to fits of emotionalism, until eventually she mysteriously wastes away and dies. After her ceremonial obsequies Wilhelm learns that she was born of an incestuous union in the region of Lake Como in the north of Italy. This song, which haunted the European imagination for a century, combines Mignon’s shadowy recollections with Goethe’s idealization of the classical realm of the south. In his multiple roles the unnamed addressee echoes her tainted birth, expresses the mixed drives of childhood ahead toward mature sexuality and back toward infantile dependence, and then projects them onto a religious feeling at once pagan and (in the second stanza and in the word “father”) vaguely Catholic. As the most famous prototype of the figure wandering lost in “the mazes of the heart,” Mignon was imitated (and often recuperated into a kind of normalcy) by numerous mysterious “angel in the house” figures in nineteenth-century novels such as Jenny Wren in Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*.

Goethe’s “Chinese” late poem “Dusk Descended from on High” fuses his classicizing tendencies (abstract diction like “nearness,” emotional coolness, and the semi-ironic mythologizing of Luna) with an evocation of Eastern landscapes such as Goethe might have known from his reading or from Chinese pottery and its European imitations. The style is clipped, almost cryptic; verbs are suppressed in lines 3–4 and (apart from the vague “sense”) remain intransitive throughout. Yet the effect is not of stasis or dancing in place but of time stealthily passing. The past is evoked (“descended” is a past tense, intentionally somewhat awkward even in the German), the future is intimated. But revolutionary fervor is replaced by the quiet ardency of the moon, quietly substituting for the eastern sunrise in a discreet oxymoron (as are the “lake’s deep skies” in the preceding stanza). The mood is uncanny (“All dislimns to shape unknown”) without being at all threatening. As in the Eastern poetry known to Goethe, nature becomes an allegory for social and historical experience. Transformation, inversion, renovation: all occur here, reassuringly, without the revolutionary character that had traumatized many in Goethe’s generation. With nature lighting the way and with the harmony of peoples that Goethe’s advocacy of world literature presaged, the ghosts of the dark past may be overcome and absorbed into a cool, reassuring, harmonic dance.
“Blissful Yearning,” another “Oriental” poem but this time associated with the more passionate Middle East, is less cryptic, more gnomic (a term applied to the slightly obscure epigrammatic style of this poem and others like it). Darkness here is more erotic, with some of Mignon’s mystery, but still free from terror and proclaiming the binding of the moth’s death to rebirth and life. “Die and grow” became one of many Goethe phrases that have entered the German language just as Shakespeare’s (such as “to be or not to be”) have become part of English.
Goethe, Pushkin, and Ghalib were all read in their own time as national poets. This section of the Anthology can also be made to serve, therefore, as a useful perspective on the poetry that immediately precedes it. The interesting complications of the phrase “national poet” can perhaps be introduced by some simple facts from that section: neither Goethe nor Ghalib lived in an independent, unified nation, and Ghalib himself, living in what is now India and writing in both Urdu and Persian, can be associated with more than one nation. Like poems, and for that matter like the life of Ghalib’s Kashmiri-American translator, Agha Shahid Ali, nations are not natural or inevitable entities but historical creations, vexed and fragile, that can as easily not come into existence or fall out of it again. Which means among other things that the process by which they do come into existence is not necessarily something to be celebrated, poetically or otherwise. And not something we should assume that national poets do celebrate.

One rewarding way into this unit would thus be to elicit and then undercut the cliché according to which a national poet would naturally be someone celebrating the noble deeds of the nation’s founding fathers, the glories of its early history, or its self-congratulatory myths. Nguyen Du and his survivor heroine Kieu, forced by swift and chaotic circumstances to act again and again in a manner that does not correspond to their highest ideals, suggest that national independence, like personal independence, was by no means the foreordained happy ending of a pre-existing narrative paradigm. On the contrary, it remained more of an illusion than a reality. Vietnam, like other nations, could not extricate itself from expanding powers like China, France, and later the United States. A possible gender angle on this material might stress that the same moral holds for nations as is often insisted upon in the personal domain by women: “Independence” is a masculine myth that attempts to flee from the realities of universal interrelatedness. As Anna Letitia Barbauld puts it: “Thou who hast shared the guilt must share the woe” (Volume E, p. 342).

The cliché about patriotic self-celebration has a historical basis, of course. You may remind students of poems of military heroism not anthologized here, like Longfellow on the midnight ride of Paul Revere or Tennyson on the Charge of the Light Brigade. The historical process whereby figures like Longfellow become less interesting to readers than, say, Walt Whitman, and less interesting even as poets speaking about their nation, can be traced as well through other countries. For example, you might ask students to compare Felicia Hemans’s patriotically pedagogical “Casabianca” (“The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck”), which applauded British heroism in the war against Napoleon and was recited in schools for decades, and Barbauld’s “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven,” with its dark vision of the unending destruction brought by the Napoleonic Wars and its portent of the loss of British greatness.
Another interesting tactic is to inquire into transnational identifications, analogies, and parallels with the fate of other nations that these poets offer readers of their own. In Barbauld, for example, you can ask students to note how the conquest of the Americas figures even in “Washing-Day,” with its mock-epic reference to the execution of Guatimozin (Cuauhtemoc), the last Aztec emperor, by the Europeans. This can be connected with “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven,” where the reference to the conquest of the Americas comes back in an entirely serious vein as the suggestion that if Britain once claimed to be the homeland of liberty, that claim is no longer defensible after years of war; the cause of liberty is now located in the struggle of the Latin American peoples for freedom. (Compare the note struck by Walt Whitman in “Prayer of Columbus,” where Columbus, viewing the end of his life from the vantage point of a “savage shore, far, far from home,” nevertheless expresses the wish that “the lifeless cross I know, Europe’s dead cross, may bud and blossom in the land he discovered.”) The political complexities of this vision should also be emphasized. As a struggle against Spain, once (though not recently) Britain’s enemy, these Latin American struggles for national liberation might be described as a safe and popular target for British solidarity, much as the cause of Italian nationalism would soon become. They did not necessarily entail throwing into question the problems with democracy at home. Much might then be said about the ambiguities of support for “other people’s nations”: for example, about the support by Byron and Shelley for Greece’s struggle against the Ottomans, a support that included elements of what Edward W. Said has called Orientalism. Yet imaginative alliances were at least as complicated as political ones. The Muslim Ottomans were claimed by Adam Mickiewicz as allies of the Catholic Poles against the Russians (who occupied Poland) despite the fact that the latter too were Christian. No simple paradigm of East versus West will explain such alignments.

Mickiewicz’s imagining of the homeland as a literal landscape, imbued with obscure projects and dense and entangled emotions, often invites juxtapositions with the “Perspectives: Romantic Nature” section. These should be encouraged. Another exercise might be to test the extent to which the ambiguities of Romantic landscape are or aren’t those of the nationalism arising in the Romantic period. For example, students can be asked about the confusion of land and sea, in “Zosia in the Kitchen Garden” as well as “The Lithuanian Forest.” Is this because the sea resists human purposes more obstinately, including the purposes of demarcation, appropriation, and national independence? Another question might concern why Mickiewicz presents Chatir Dah, a mountain in what is now Ukraine, where he was exiled, as sacred to the Muslims, who had both battled and coexisted with Christians in that area for centuries. Is this just an opportunistic gesture toward a potential Muslim ally? What Mickiewicz seems to appreciate most intensely in the mountain is its simultaneous availability to—and distance from—all religions and national causes. “The Ruins of the Castle of Balaklava” similarly singles out these ruins an apparent affirmation of the meaninglessness of taking sides or trying to cordon off the various waves of inhabitants: Greeks, Italians, Mongols, and Muslims. Apartness from national purposes is suggested in a different register.
when Mickiewicz displays a hero who has been forgotten by the nation for which he struggled, for example, in the pathos of “Hands That Fought” and (with even deeper ambiguity) in “To a Polish Mother,” a poem written in 1830, a year of abortive national revolution. There he seems to be telling the mother to discourage her son from taking up the national cause: “a fight without splendor” and a “martyrdom . . . without resurrection.” But is the image of the son in a “solitary lair,” sharing his bed with “the venomous serpent,” then himself becoming a serpent (“like the cold snake”), an image of what the mother is supposed to recommend her son to do, rather than letting him get involved in the cause of “the ancient Poles pride and nobleness”? Or is it an image of what will happen to the son if he does take up that cause? Is poisoning with soft talk an alternative to martial valor, or is it what the national cause requires?

In the selection from Dionysios Solomos, the obvious paradox of the title—can one be free while under siege?—seems to lead the poet away from politics in any narrow sense and into a more philosophical reflection, only weakly tied to the events at Missolonghi. Is it the siege, or is it the national struggle itself, from which the poet longs to be liberated? And into what freedom? In the “Eros and April” section of the poem, pagan sensuality, which defines the beauty of the (national) landscape, also becomes a dangerous temptation, very likely leading away from national-political mobilization. Easter references, suggesting the particularly beautiful Greek spring as well as the story of Christ’s resurrection, generalize the Greek nation’s revolt against foreign rule and also problematize it. Can insurrection be properly figured (here as in Mickiewicz) as resurrection? This metaphor will surely have a good deal of conversational meat on it. The same ambiguities can be explored in the last lines, with their sudden violence and their final image of peace: Is this the justification for the battle, what it is for, what will remain afterwards? Does it make the violence seem misguided rather than necessary? Is the Greece that is the endpoint of these efforts and sacrifices a palpable assemblage of historical people, or must one say that Solomos offers only a mysterious and even mystical image of what the Greeks are fighting and sacrificing themselves for? The grass at the end of “The Free Besieged,” like Whitman’s grass, like the other humble vegetable life in Mickiewicz, and for that matter like the act of washing in Mickiewicz and Barbauld, can suggest the deeply democratic element of nationalism, its retrieval and revaluing of the people’s ordinary everyday life—the momentous decision to “chant our own times,” as Emerson put it. Or on the contrary, it can suggest a potent contrast, apart from and in some sense more real than the dramatic and ultimately disappointing quest for national glory.

For American students, Walt Whitman is no doubt the easy sell of this group. The real challenge will perhaps be to work backwards, linking the familiar excitement of Whitman’s poetry to the nation, then to the national projects of other, less familiar poets. Thus an ideal class on this unit would use Whitman as an agent of dep provincialization, stretching parochial sensibilities and revealing unexpected common ground.

Whitman’s most famous “national” poem is no doubt “O Captain! My Captain!”, written after Abraham Lincoln’s assassination in 1865. In it one can
detect Whitman’s deep personal involvement in the Civil War, in which his younger brother George fought and survived incarceration in a notorious Confederate prison, and his mourning over the casualties he saw while assisting in Washington military hospitals. But his other poems are arguably national in a more interesting sense. (How far Whitman had to go in order to change the prevailing taste is suggested by Barrett Wendell’s comment in 1900 that the concluding stanzas of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” sounded as if “hexameters were trying to bubble up through sewage.”) In “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” the city of Manhattan can be seen as a microcosm of the nation. What Whitman relishes is the chance to see the society in which he lives as a whole. From the special vantage point of a ferry-rider poised between the then-separate cities of Manhattan and Brooklyn, outside and yet also a part of what he contemplates (compare with Wordsworth looking at London from Westminster Bridge), he can capture the enormous diversity of its inhabitants and their activities and, paralleling them in his characteristic participial lists, show their common belonging. In a typically nationalist gesture, Whitman stretches this common belonging to include the dead as well as the living, though in this case the dead are not the country’s heroic ancestors in the past but rather Whitman himself, looking forward into an imagined future. Whitman had experienced a certain disappointment with the first edition of Leaves of Grass, and one possible motive for inventing the nation as an imaginary entity stretching into the future is in order to go over the heads of his fellow citizens in the present who didn’t want to buy his book. Living on in the nation is another version of poetic immortality, a compensatory response to the thought of one’s death, perhaps a mode of transcending one’s death. According to Benedict Anderson in Imagined Communities (1983), this is one of nationalism’s greatest but least obvious strengths.

You might invite students to think about how different Whitman’s mode of nationalism is from the more forced, sacralizing, or tradition-bound versions of “national unity” that can be found in everyday nationalist propaganda. As a poetic mode, the panorama of parallels involves an enormous acknowledgment of difference. There is always lots of action, lots of people and things flowing and progressing, each allowed the freedom to move and be and do. If Whitman asserts that all of these are nonetheless connected, parts of a larger whole, within the spectrum of various nationalist visions, the emphasis here certainly falls less on historical continuity or racial and ethnic homogeneity than on difference. Whitman’s idea of the nation, that is, contains more present than past, relatively speaking, and also has more difference in it—difference seen for once as a strength of the nation rather than a weakness. In a more critical mode, you might also ask students whether this greater tolerance for or incorporation of difference necessarily implies a more benevolent or respectful attitude toward those outside the nation’s borders.

Noticing that there is relatively little Brooklyn in the poem but a lot of Whitman, students may also inquire into the heroic role the poet allots himself as the empathetic, egalitarian, nonjudgmental consciousness that brings all this diversity together, connecting that which would otherwise not be connected. Susan Sontag, who is not herself immune to the charms of this heroic role, might be...
quoted here on how dangerous the image of unity-in-diversity can be, how easily it can lead to empire.

One somewhat oddball exercise is perhaps worth mentioning for its pedagogical potential. In a novel called *Gain* published in 1998 by the novelist Richard Powers, there’s a passage in which the heroine, a 42-year-old mother and real estate broker named Laura who has just discovered she has cancer, tries to help her 13-year-old son with his homework. She finds him at the kitchen table, frustrated, cursing the poem in front of him and starting to cry. His assignment is “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.” She asks him, “What are you supposed to do with it?” And he answers: “Supposed to say what it’s fucking about.” His mother has other things on her mind, but she wants to keep up the pretense of normal life, so she offers to help. She looks at the poem, and we get bits of the poem juxtaposed with bits of her thoughts:

*The certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others.* Not exactly what Laura had bargained for. She was never very good with words. Always hated English, social studies, all those invented topics. She couldn’t wait to become an adult. When things would be real.

She stares at the commodity stretching across these pages. Somehow, she’s become a working adult. Somewhere, she’s learned: nobody makes a living. There are no other topics but these impenetrable, urgent fakes.

*Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west . . . Fifty years hence,* she reads. She has to take the poet’s word for it. *It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not.*

She hasn’t the first clue. It’s like doing some kind of Martian archaeology. She’s in badly over her head. She looks at the page for something to say. Her son stares at her. (*Gain*, p. 87)

Students will perhaps take some encouragement, as they take on the formidable task of studying American and world poetry, to discover that lots of others have trouble understanding it too—that to them, too, it looks like the archaeology of the planet Mars. It should also be encouraging to think that although this piece of poetry homework seems painfully irrelevant, next to the thoughts of her diagnosis and prognosis and chemotherapy that are filling Laura’s mind, in fact the novel suggests that nothing could be more relevant to her situation, if only she could see it.

Notice the first lines from the poem that are quoted: “The certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others.” These are the others that Whitman sees as he crosses on the morning ferry from Brooklyn to Manhattan. He talks about “love” here, but these are not his “loved ones,” his family or friends; they are people he doesn’t know, strangers simply going to work in the morning. And one simple point of the poem, although also a strange point, maybe even a Martian point, is that strangers going to and from work exist on the same plane of “love” as the people at home. They matter to you. Whitman refuses to recognize the usual line be-
tween how you care about what’s private or intimate and how you care about what’s public.

It seems clear that Whitman can accomplish the strange feat of seeing strangers as loved ones in part because he doesn’t feel disheartened by this distance, doesn’t feel so restricted in time. The passage goes on: “Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west . . . Fifty years hence, she reads. She has to take the poet’s word for it. It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not.” The reference to “Fifty years hence” and what others will see then is of course also an indirect reference to the possibility that, like Whitman, we will not be there in 50 years. The poem confronts us with the difficult prospect of caring about things we will not be there to see, whether because they come after or because they are far away. Whitman himself seems supremely confident that this doesn’t matter, that he can care perfectly well about things from which he is distanced in time and place: “It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not.” The plot of Gain will suggest that Laura herself would have gained from taking Whitman’s moral to heart in her own life.

You can also ask students to discuss some more unpleasant aspects of the poem. After noting Whitman’s enthusiasm for the morning commuters of the future, students might consider Whitman’s uncritical, equally enthusiastic embrace of factories and industry: “Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys!” And the way the objects produced by industry get inside us and even become us: “We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant you permanently within us.” For environmental reasons, among others, this is not a prospect we can accept with total equanimity.
Teaching World Literature

A Companion to

The Longman Anthology

of World Literature

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The Twentieth Century

Franz Kafka

The transformation of a human into an animal is a standard narrative theme in literature across the world. It appears in the indigenous oratures of Africa and the Americas, in fairy tales, and in the mythology and texts of Western antiquity. The tradition runs all the way from such classics as Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Apuleius’s *Golden Ass* to contemporary texts such as Arno Schmidt’s *Egghead Republic* and Julio Cortázar’s “Axolotl.” One way into Kafka’s text is to explore with students which of these stories they already know (almost all of them will surely have encountered fairy tales that feature human–animal transformations) and how Gregor Samsa’s story differs from them. Such a comparative approach highlights the way in which metamorphosis in Kafka functions as an absolute for which the text itself delivers no explanation of any sort: It takes place in a modern city otherwise deprived of any signs of magic, does not point to any transcendental scenario of divine justice and retribution, is not the result of science gone awry, and does not in any obvious way stand in for social and political transformation.

To get an even more focused approach to Kafka’s project, the comparison might also zero in on a more contemporary context. Many students will likely be familiar with at least one version of the film *The Fly* (either Vincent Price’s 1958 camp classic or David Cronenberg’s 1986 remake), and this conversion of a human into a bug can provide a useful foil for investigating what is particular to the insect metamorphosis. Clearly, Gregor’s beetle body (not cockroach body, as it’s sometimes misunderstood), which is hidden and unveiled again and again in an elaborate series of stagings throughout the novel, evokes some of the same reactions of revulsion and disgust that the transformation from man to fly triggers in the movies. This disgust is not anticipated in most traditional versions of metamorphosis and has at least in part to do with the perceived alienness of the insect body. But it may also be related to the underlying questions of gender that are persistently foregrounded in Kafka. In one of the novel’s climactic scenes, Gregor leaves his hiding place under the sofa to cling to the image of a woman in furs that his sister Grete is about to remove from his room, and the sight of his body on the wall makes his mother faint; the question of the perception and representation of male and female bodies could hardly be highlighted in a more focused way.

By reading Kafka against the tradition of literary metamorphoses, it would also be easy to direct students’ attention to the way in which Gregor’s transformation from human to animal is a gradual one. While we encounter his body already completely transformed at the beginning, he clearly retains human intelligence throughout the story. His ability to speak in a manner that is understandable to others deteriorates gradually over the course of the first day, but his ability to un-
nderstand humans' language remains unimpaired, even though it isn’t recognized by those around him. Students might be assigned the task of tracing some of his other abilities and experiences: his changing tastes in food and eating habits; his sense of his own body and ability to navigate, hide, and display it; his experience and use of space (which changes quite radically as he starts to climb up the walls and upside down along the ceiling); his perception of music; or his expressions of consideration, shame, or anxiety vis-à-vis his sister. Tracing such developments in the protagonist allows students to understand the framework of social conventions and concepts of self within which Gregor’s transformation occurs and the types of alienation from them that Kafka aims to capture.

This analysis also leads easily to a discussion of one of the most surprising elements of Kafka’s story: the way in which Gregor himself, his family, and his manager react to his metamorphosis. They are dismayed, indignant, or disgusted, and they confront Gregor’s condition as a deplorable illness, an affront to good manners, a violation of professional discipline, or a social tragedy—but none of them really seems to grasp the way in which this event transcends all the normal parameters of social, scientific, or even religious rationality. One would expect them to bring in all conceivable scientific experts, to try various possible cures, or to consult spiritual authorities in order to come to terms with so extraordinary an occurrence. Instead, they react to it as if it were either a shameful family secret or a tragic accident to which one simply had to resign oneself. The extraordinary aggression that Samsa Sr. displays against his son deserves special attention in this context because it is obviously meant to point to tensions that existed in repressed form even when Gregor was a human; it is easy to see that the bankrupt, discouraged father might harbor latent resentment against the son who has replaced him as a breadwinner. Getting students to think about why Kafka has the characters react the way they do makes it easier for them to understand the kind of human condition the author is attempting to portray.

As the father’s reaction already indicates, one of the most insistently foregrounded implications of Gregor’s metamorphosis is its impact on the social and economic status of the family. Losing the principal breadwinner brings some financial hardship for the Samsas but then forces them to assume responsibility for themselves and reintegrate themselves into the labor market, a reintegration that seems to imply their descent from middle-class to lower-class status. But for Gregor’s father and sister, this change also appears to bring about greater independence and self-confidence, which raises a question: To what extent had their exclusive reliance on Gregor and his income been an asset or an obstacle? At the same time, Gregor learns from an overheard conversation that his father had in fact not been left as penniless by his business bankruptcy as Gregor had been led to believe. This detail raises several interesting questions as to why the father had kept this fact from Gregor and whether the family was secretly exploiting Gregor’s work when it could have simultaneously relied on other means of subsistence. In this context, it seems promising as well as ominous that on the day Gregor dies and the three remaining family members excuse themselves from work, the idea of a future son-in-law—manifestly the replacement for Gregor—occurs to the parents.
for the first time. Since, in any case, Gregor’s work and income is clearly crucial for his parents’ and sister’s survival until his transformation, one must wonder to what extent this responsibility limited his own possibilities for starting a family. Considering these economic and social details of the Samsa family’s situation after the metamorphosis, therefore, leads to an analysis of the complex relations of mutual dependence that structure the family.

In this context, it may be worth focusing on the character of Gregor’s sister Grete in more detail. As feminist critics of The Metamorphosis have pointed out, the novel is in some sense as much about her transformation as about Gregor’s. As she takes exclusive care of her brother, accepts a position as a sales clerk, and finally becomes the parents’ hope for a reconstituted family and finances, Grete takes over Gregor’s own central position in the household. Indeed, it gradually becomes obvious that her evolution is made possible only through Gregor’s deterioration and death—and Gregor himself, partly for this reason, resigns himself to the necessity of his own disappearance toward the end. Seen from this angle, Gregor’s discovery that he is caught inside the body of a beetle becomes a complex metaphor for a masculinity that he is no longer able to assume (and, from a biographical viewpoint, it may be no accident that Kafka wrote The Metamorphosis during one of the periods in 1912 when he was assailed by doubts over the relationship with his fiancée Felice Bauer; in letters to her, the “little story” he was working on is frequently mentioned).

Depending on the main themes of the course, other avenues of interpretation can obviously be explored: for example, Gregor’s metamorphosis as an allegory of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, 1986) call a “minor literature,” that is, the literature of a minority group, a context in which the beetle’s body could be read as a metaphor for the alienation Jews experienced in Prague society. Or, conversely, a broader existentialist reading would interpret Gregor’s transformation not so much as the predicament of a specific social group as that of humans more generally, who find themselves thrown into a form of existence they have not chosen and cannot easily give meaning to. The possibilities of interpretation, once philosophical and religious concerns are taken into account, are manifold, as the vast amount of criticism on The Metamorphosis demonstrates. This enormous scope and depth of interpretation of what is a relatively slim text is in itself worth pointing out to students; when modernist literature is taught today, students tend to associate it mainly with writers such as Joyce, Woolf, and Proust. But for some of the most prominent theorists and critics of the early twentieth century—Theodor Adorno among them—the paradigm of modernist writing was neither Joyce nor Proust but Kafka, and The Metamorphosis has remained one of his most lasting achievements.

A discussion of the many different avenues of interpretation into The Metamorphosis can also naturally lead into an exploration of the parable as a genre because The Metamorphosis itself has often been classified as such. Often in short narrative form, the parable describes an unusual occurrence as an image for a more abstract set of ideas; unlike other tropes, the parable usually does not spell out what its intended meaning is but relies instead on the audience’s expectations
and knowledge for its decoding. Its implicitness can lead to great ambiguity of interpretation, especially when the ideas it points to are complex and when the original context of reception shifts; Kafka himself comments on this ambiguity in his meta-parable “On Parables.”

Kafka’s parables, usually designed to comment on complex dimensions of human existence, can be particularly challenging for students—and many of his parables have received quite divergent interpretations by critics. The best approach to such stories perhaps is to make their difficulty the first topic of discussion: What is it that makes their meaning difficult to decode? In what ways are normal interpretive processes blocked? You might begin with a very short parable such as “The Trees,” which gives a clue to its metaphorical meaning in the first sentence comparing the speakers to tree trunks in the snow. What aspects of human existence might correspond to the deceptive mobility and fixity of the tree trunks? Or are “we” the letters of type themselves, black against the white page like tree trunks against snow? What does the parable imply about processes of perception and self-perception? You could approach a more complex parable such as “The Cares of a Family Man” through the question of what the odd half-animate, half-mechanical creature Odradek might represent for Kafka. (Critics have variously interpreted this text as a reflection on the materiality of human existence in the face of death or as an artist’s meditation on the nonfunctional artwork that will outlive him and his more instrumental pursuits.) Discussing the possibilities and limits of interpretation that the short parables point to can also easily take the discussion back to the possible meanings of a much more extended parable such as The Metamorphosis.
Aimé Césaire

When students read Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, they usually don’t find it difficult to grasp the overall project of this long poem—a revindication of black humanity and black culture, the indictment of racism and colonialism with its devastating effects on both black and white psyches—but understanding individual sections and stanzas often proves more complex. To help students gain access to some of these details, it may be useful to situate Césaire’s work for them in the context of two broader movements, surrealism and négritude. To give students a sense of how Césaire’s work emerges out of the European avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s, reading the two manifestos (co-authored by André Breton in the “Crosscurrents: The Art of the Manifesto” section along with the *Notebook* would provide the easiest path of access. “Négritude” is a term that first appears in the *Notebook*, and to establish its importance in this framework, it would be most useful to teach it in conjunction with the poems of Léopold Sédar Senghor, Césaire’s friend and fellow-founder of the movement in Paris in the 1930s.

Breton’s surrealism aimed above all at the liberation of the individual human psyche, and psychoanalysis furnished the major tools surrealists tried out to achieve it. The investigation of dreams and the unconscious or the exploitation of chance and its possibilities for free association served as gates of access to an aesthetic realm that, in however temporary a fashion, was thought to provide an alternative to the constraints of bourgeois existence and a society ruled by means-end rationality. As the fractious history of the surrealists’ association with and breaks from the French Communist Party shows, it was clear that a more permanent liberation of the individual could not be accomplished without a more large-scale revolution in political and social structures; just whether and how this political emancipation could be connected to the kind of liberation envisioned by surrealists remained an issue of contention and at times bitter opposition. In his encounter with surrealism, Césaire inherited not only the enormous energy of the surrealist revolt against a stagnant and outdated society but also the problem of this connection between individual and collective emancipation, which his political engagement on behalf of one of France’s colonies made it impossible for him to sidestep.

Stylistically, the *Notebook* addresses this problem of geographical, social, and historical conditions in a poetic idiom that goes back and forth between brutal realism and oneiric surrealism. More precisely, some of the most striking effects of the poem come about through the expression of social and historical realities by means of a language—and particularly of a metaphorics—that makes them appear dreamlike, hallucinatory, or insane. Students may stumble over the meaning of such metaphors, many of which derive their force from overarching metaphorical patterns: Natural landscapes as well as human-made environments, for example, are associated with parts, processes, and movements of the human body throughout the poem. Sexuality and injuries or diseases that are attributed to normally inert features of the environment form two prominent subsets of this overall pattern. Other metaphors, such as “in a jar full of oil a dim light whose flame dances...
like a fat cockroach” may seem bizarre to students until they are pointed to the connection with Césaire’s earlier reference, in the description of the appalling poverty of his family home, to “the glossy flash of cockroaches in a maddening buzz.” In metaphors such as these, Césaire deploys the legacy of the surrealists (and further back, ultimately that of Baudelaire: cf. the “venomous flowers / flaring in fury-filled prairies”) to bring repulsive realities to the reader’s awareness by associating them with a lyrical beauty that only makes their real horror stand out all the more starkly. In a somewhat different way, this strategy also underlies metaphors that twist stereotypical images of lyricism into visions of terror, such as the blood lagoon on whose surface float skulls instead of water lilies.

It is true, however, that not all metaphors in the poem will prove susceptible to such decoding; indeed, it may be important to point out to students that one of the surrealists’ hallmark strategies was the invention of metaphors whose tenor and vehicle are no longer linked by any discernible similarity but that instead force together radically disparate semantic realms. An accumulation of metaphors such as the “torte of the terrifying autumn / . . . where the air rusts in great sheets / of evil glee,” which associates a season with industrial materials as well as human emotions, may remain difficult to decipher with any conventional procedure. Césaire’s oft-repeated leitmotiv, “At the end of the wee hours,” which connect to other references to day- and nighttimes (such as that of the “tepid dawn of ancestral virtues”), points in more general terms to the surrealist night and its world of dreams as well as to the advent of a new political day.

Surrealist metaphors, then, are used in Césaire’s poem to create a visceral and graphically violent poetic language. It frequently foregrounds details of Caribbean or African landscapes and ecosystems (names of plants, animals, or geological formations) that often seem chosen explicitly because they will make Western readers stumble and recognize their unfamiliarity with the poet’s surroundings. You will probably need to encourage students not to interpret their difficulty with such terms as part of their own ignorance but as part of a poetic strategy that intends to bewilder and alienate readers as much as to draw them in. The use of erudite or arcane vocabulary and neologisms that would be just as unfamiliar to French readers in the 1940s and 1950s as they are to college students today reinforce this procedure. (For students and instructors who can read French, all the more rarefied terms in the poem are explained at the Website http://www2.ac-lyon.fr/enseigne/lettres/collyon/cesaire.shtml.) Césaire takes an at least partially aggressive stance toward his readers (in typically avant-gardiste manner!), challenging them to acknowledge that the colonial subaltern masters their own language more skillfully than they are able to. This appropriation of a European heritage that is then turned against European colonialism links Césaire’s project to that of other members of the négritude movement, as well to other heirs of the avant-garde in the Americas. Andrade’s “Cannibalist Manifesto” (Volume F, p. 38) would make for a fascinating comparison here, especially since Césaire also deploys the metaphor of cannibalism several times in the Notebook, though to quite different effect than Andrade. (You may also want to mention to students that Césaire wrote a twentieth-century version of Shakespeare’s Tempest, Une tempête, which features Caliban
as the postcolonial subject who rebels against his master Prospero by means of the language Prospero taught him.)

Césaire’s passionate advocacy on behalf of négritude is most clearly articulated in the famous passage celebrating “those who have invented neither powder nor compass / those who could harness neither steam nor electricity.” The stanza in which these lines appear mentions négritude explicitly, and this is one of the passages (including at least the two following stanzas) that would deserve close reading. Its rejection of towers and cathedrals in favor of the “red flesh of the soil” and the “ardent flesh of the sky” beautifully illustrates a rejection of European-bred cerebralism and an embrace of the earth, of materiality and corporeality that Césaire shares with Senghor. This embrace also provides the underlying conceptual justification for the pervasiveness of body metaphors in the Notebook that was pointed out earlier and articulates Césaire’s political project in very clear form.

Students need to be made aware, however, that while a phrase such as “my négritude is not a leukoma of dead liquid over the earth’s dead eye” in this stanza can safely be associated with Césaire’s own voice, the same is not true of many of the other statements in the poem, not even all those made in the first person. Césaire combines prophetic pronouncements with realistic or satiric descriptions, quotations from those who exploit and discriminate against black people with responses from those who (sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly) glorify them, the voice of the slave master and the voice of the slave, historical voices (such as that of Toussaint L’Ouverture) with present-day ones, and so on. While the result is distinctive to Césaire’s craft as a poet, the underlying poetic procedure is not: T. S. Eliot’s “Waste Land” or Ezra Pound’s Cantos are other examples of long poems whose lyrical density derives from the wide spectrum of different voices and idioms they integrate. The collage or montage of voices and scraps of discourse from varied sources is one of the principal modes of high-modernist poetry (just as collage and montage also prevail in other modernist art forms such as painting and film). Césaire is not original in this respect, although his combination of a surrealist idiom with the thematics of colonialist critique is extremely innovative. It is not always easy, in the Notebook, to discern just which voices Césaire would endorse and which ones he would reject, though quite often that distinction is clear enough. Perhaps by means of a close reading of some passages (for example, the one beginning with “niggers-are-all-alike, I-tell-you” or the one declaring “No, we’ve never been Amazons of the king of Dahomey”), students can be alerted to this difficulty and the close attention each stanza in Césaire’s poem requires.

Césaire’s political and literary influence has been enormous; one way of situating him in the panorama of twentieth-century intellectuals and writers is to approach him as a predecessor of what later came to be called “postcolonial studies.” His exploration of the social, economic, and psychological consequences of colonial domination for both colonizers and colonized links him to other francophone anticolonial critics such as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi. Césaire’s influential Discourse on Colonialism (1950) belongs as much to the early landmark works on colonialism and racism as do Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks and Memmi’s Portrait of the Colonizer and Portrait of the Colonized.
Gendered Spaces

The idea of the connection between gender and particular spaces should not be difficult to introduce to students because most of them have already had experiences with this association that only need to be elicited. Most of them will know how kitchens and garages can become the sites of gender-differentiated activities, how different sections of a department store or different types of bars and cafés tend to attract a mostly male or female, gay or straight clientele, how gender-shared restrooms at home are linked to different social functions from gender-segregated ones in public places, how empty and crowded streets can entail different experiences for men and women, or how men and women are expected to behave in sacred as compared to secular places. Setting aside some time for students’ own experiences with such place-defined gender distinctions and making them aware of how gender expectations can shape the forms and uses of particular spaces provides an easy way into discussing the texts in this section, especially because four of them—the short stories of Clarice Lispector, Fatima Mernissi, Gabriel García Márquez, and Jamaica Kincaid—focus on the experiences of the young growing up and having to define their identity in relation to spaces whose cultural meanings have already been shaped by other generations.

Depending on which confluences and contrasts the class is designed to focus on, various combinations of stories could be assigned and discussed together. The four stories already mentioned, which revolve around adolescent women confronting spaces defined by males or older women, could be contrasted with those of Hanan Al-Shaykh and Ama Ata Aidoo, which focus on adult women’s confrontations with marriage and the uneven power it assigns to husband and wife. Mernissi’s “The Harem Within” provides a convenient hinge between these two groups in that it portrays a social institution, the harem, that both growing and adult women have to come to terms with. But the discussion could also be organized according to the types of spaces that occupy center stage in the different texts: Lispector and Juan Goytisolo focus on their characters’ experience of public spaces, while Mernissi, García Márquez, and Al-Shaykh emphasize private ones above all. Aidoo’s story integrates both, from the school and private home to a public divorce trial. Alternatively, women’s confrontations with male prerogatives, as foregrounded in Lispector, Mernissi, Al-Shaykh, and Aidoo, could usefully be juxtaposed with texts that put greater emphasis on women’s encounters with the authority of other, usually older women; this aspect is integrated into Mernissi’s story and constitutes the main narrative focus in García Márquez and Kincaid. Lastly, realistically conceived “objective” spaces could be compared and contrasted with more psychologically grounded, fantastic, or utopian ones. Mernissi’s portrayal of the harem, García Márquez’s of the home and the church, Lispector’s of street and school, and Aidoo’s of school and home would, in this configuration, be juxtaposed with Al-Shaykh’s description of a pretended madness, Kincaid’s highly metaphorical descriptions of the changing relationship between a woman
and her mother, and Goytisolo’s utopian celebration of an open-air market as a space for liberated sexualities of various kinds. Mernissi could be discussed as an interesting hybrid in that she turns an objective space and social institution into the equivalent of a psychological condition in the course of her story.

Apart from such larger groupings, more narrowly conceived thematic comparisons also offer themselves. You could focus, for example, on the way in which Lispector’s adolescent female protagonist experiences the public space of the street as dominated by the threat of the male gaze and touch on her body. Curiously, what the story foregrounds is not vision but sound, however, and above all the noise made by the protagonist’s wooden heels, whose staccato, in her own mind, amplifies the conspicuousness of a body she herself perceives as both ugly and precious: Her passage into adulthood, at the end of the story, is marked by the acquisition of new shoes without wooden heels, which are no doubt meant to signal a different kind of self-perception. In the excerpt from Goytisolo’s *Makbara*, by contrast, the possibility of illicit gazing and touching is precisely what makes the street and the marketplace an arousing and exhilarating space, one that offers at least the potential of escape from the constraints of social convention. In contrast to Lispector’s clipped, concise, and elliptic style, Goytisolo indulges in complex syntax, abundant enumerations, and a luxury of visual detail that flows together in sentences and paragraphs barely set apart by a minimum of punctuation and spacing. In comparisons such as these, it would be very important to discuss what the contrasts between the two texts ultimately derive from: differences in the gendered experience of public spaces, differences in the cultural perception of such spaces, or differences of literary vision and style.

The discussion of Lispector could easily be extended to García Márquez’s story “Artificial Roses” so as to highlight a different set of contrasts and confluences. In both stories, adolescent females are exposed to a scrutiny that they experience as intrusive and painful. Yet for García Márquez’s Mina, this scrutiny takes place within the confines of her own home and at the hands of a woman who quite literally has lost her vision, the blind grandmother. But precisely because of this handicap, the grandmother has developed so nuanced a sense of the patterns in the other family members’ behaviors that she can read Mina’s behavior even when Mina desperately attempts to occult its meanings. Lispector’s protagonist, by contrast, behaves in ways that obey a certain inexorable logic in her own mind but are quite impenetrable to those in her surroundings. Both female protagonists, in other words, are portrayed as having to cope with social environments where girls’ and women’s behavior patterns are circumscribed by specific codes of expectation. But whereas these codes drive Lispector’s protagonist into a labyrinth of perceptions and emotions where hardly anyone can follow her, they are precisely what makes Mina’s behavior so transparent to the careful observer. The young woman’s behavior seems driven to the edge of irrationality in Lispector, while it is based on a precise and calculable arithmetic that the woman herself is unaware of in García Márquez—an arithmetic that is inscribed, among other things, in the uses of different places such as the bedroom, the bathroom, the street, and the church.
Al-Shaykh’s “A Season of Madness” and Aidoo’s “No Sweetness Here” yield a different kind of pairing, that of mature women faced with the difficulty of divorce. Both protagonists end up being trapped by the consequences of marriage and attacked by their husbands’ relatives, though in quite different ways. Al-Shaykh’s first-person narrator finds herself unable to admit to her husband her love for another man and her desire for a divorce and resorts to the stratagem of feigned madness instead, only to find that once she does confess the truth, it is itself interpreted as merely another symptom of her mental illness. Neither lie nor truth, in other words, are capable of freeing her from the bonds of an unwanted marriage. Aidoo’s Maami Ama wishes for a divorce to be free from the bonds of a loveless marriage, since she has come to be the one unloved wife among three in her husband’s polygamous relationship. Yet the divorce comes at an extremely high price for her, in terms of not only disadvantageous financial settlements but also the possibility of separation from the only family member she has left and the only human being she loves, her son Kwesi.

Aidoo’s short story gains additional complexity through the presence of yet another female character, the first-person narrator. As Kwesi’s teacher, she also functions as his duplicate mother insofar as she has far-reaching plans of her own for Kwesi’s future education and career—plans that can be understood as an allegory of her hope for Africa’s better and more modern future. It is through this duplication of the mother figure, and the implicit contrast between the traditional polygamous wife who works the fields and the single, educated teacher who works in the classroom, that the final plot twist of Aidoo’s story assumes its full significance. Kwesi is lost not because of the machinations of divorce and a sociolegal structure that favors men over women but because of the apparently random accident of a snakebite—he is lost not just to one but both of his mother figures and to the community as a whole. If Kwesi should indeed be read as the embodiment of black Africa’s hopes for the future, this ending makes an interpretation of the reasons for the failure of this hope complex. Is the teacher, who represents modernization, in any way to blame for his death, given that she left her pupils in order to attend Maami Ama’s divorce proceedings? Or is the cause of death ultimately the conflict between her modernizing ambitions and the older traditions that surface in the conflict between Maami Ama and her husband Kodjo Fi? Maami Ama, in this reading, might well be the representative of Africa’s real predicament—dissatisfied with traditional culture and attempting to find a different way of life, yet losing what is most precious in the process. Obviously Aidoo’s story could very easily lead directly into an analysis of Mariama Bâ’s novel *So Long a Letter*, which addresses very similar concerns about the role of tradition and innovation in West African women’s lives through the thorny issue of polygamy.

You could easily expand the class discussion of Al-Shaykh and Aidoo’s stories to include Mernissi’s “The Harem Within,” which proposes a very different solution to the problem of women literally and figuratively locked into patriarchal structures. Rather than turning women’s predicament into a metaphor for a broader cultural problem, Mernissi ends up psychologizing it by emphasizing the importance of the social barriers that women erect in their own minds. Since this
inward turn implies that it is up to women themselves to tear down such barriers and to open up avenues of subversion in and through existing structures, students may well find Mernissi’s more optimistic outlook more appealing than the bleak ending of Aidoo’s story: Mernissi’s protagonist sees prospects for happiness within the existing structure that seem difficult or impossible in the tellingly entitled “No Sweetness Here.” While such a preference is perfectly understandable, you might want to challenge students on the assumptions that underlie it, that is, elicit their views on the extent to which it is possible and desirable to accept existing gender structures and find a way to live within them or to reject and attempt to change them.

Mernissi’s portrayal of gendered spaces within Arab culture naturally leads back to an exploration of Goytisolo’s chapter, as the expression of a European perspective that here transforms a particular kind of public Arab place into a utopian alternative to what Goytisolo perceives as the repressive urban structures of European cities. The enclosed and closely guarded space of Mernissi’s harem makes for a clear contrast with the open structure and nomadic as well as erotic flows of Goytisolo’s bazaar. Yet the discussion might also take its cue from the encounters between Mernissi’s first-person narrator and Yasmina to explore the relationship between the younger characters and the older women who advise, protect, educate, and in some cases threaten them. Kwesi’s relationship to his teacher and his mother, Mina’s relationship to her grandmother, and the narrator’s relationship to her mother in Kincaid’s short story would thereby come into view.

Among these, Kincaid’s sequence of vignette portrayals of an at times welcoming and protective and at other times uncanny, repulsive, or dangerous mother figure is no doubt the most ambivalent. The sequence is organized in terms of an evolutionary logic of sorts, whereby the protagonist and her mother, sometimes separated by a dark pond only inhabited by invertebrates, by turns appear as reptiles, sea creatures, or furry, cave-dwelling mammals. The changing body shapes as well as the changing settings in which they are located—a dark bedroom, a seabed, an island, a valley, an empty house, “a bower made from flowers”—point to varying sensations of fusion with and separation from the maternal presence. At times the narrator and her mother are depicted as replicas or mirror images of each other, at other times the mother towers far above the child, just as their interaction rhythmically alternates between harmony and rejection. More than any of the other texts in this section, Kincaid’s short story explores a psychological world of dreamlike images that are even further removed from narrative realism than Goytisolo’s utopian fantasies. She draws on elements of biblical narrative (references to a “Garden of Fruits,” a tree, and scaly reptiles appear repeatedly), on pastorals (grazing lambs and bowers of bliss), and on the ancient motif of the metamorphosis. The crucial space in which gender identity is shaped and reshaped here is ultimately the mother’s body and the varying distances that separate the child from it at different moments of her own development.
This section is designed to enable a discussion about the changing role of literature in the evolving mediascape of the twentieth century and about the ways in which literary texts themselves incorporate other media into their own mode of expression. The texts selected for this section integrate them thematically rather than formally; while they address nonprint media, they do not adopt experimental typographies or images into their printed appearance and, due to the Anthology’s format, they do not include audial, visual, or digital literary works (such as radio plays or hypertext poetry), though of course such works could easily be added to the discussion material if students have easy access to the technological infrastructure required.

The order of the texts in the section follows roughly the sequence in which different media emerged over the course of the twentieth century: Mario Vargas Llosa’s *The Storyteller* deals with oral storytelling, print literature, and television but is particularly concerned with the survival of orature; Abdelrahman Munif’s *Cities of Salt* portrays an Arab culture’s first encounter with radio in the 1930s, Christa Wolf’s *Accident* and Murakami Haruki’s “TV People” the role of television in a world saturated with both beneficial and dangerous technologies; and William Gibson’s “Burning Chrome” revolves around the emergent world of international computer networks.

The problem of the confrontation between oral and written culture as Vargas Llosa describes it in *The Storyteller* is not limited to the twentieth century. In different guises, it emerges whenever contemporary readers encounter printed texts that were originally produced and disseminated through oral performance: reading ancient epics such as Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, medieval *chansons de geste* such as *El Cid* or *Le conte du Graal*, or the fairy tales collected by the brothers Grimm implies an experience of literary expression completely different from that of the original audience. If such earlier texts formed part of the world literature course, you might begin the class discussion by referring back to them so as to highlight that the problem of the “medium” is not an exclusively modern or contemporary one. (Eric Havelock has written extensively on the cultural consequences of the transition from oral to written culture in ancient Greece in his *Preface to Plato*.) You might also want to explore in this context the parallels and differences between the contemporary reader’s printed encounter with texts that originated in oral expression but have since undergone a long evolution in printed form and the encounter with oral texts from contemporary indigenous cultures. Native American author Gerald Vizenor’s short story “Shadows” explores the latter problem in the character Baghese’s condemnation of the first-person narrator’s written stories as “dead voices” and his violation of her prohibition to put her stories into print; similarly, N. Scott Momaday implicitly reflects on orality and literacy through his juxtaposition of oral myths, historical accounts, and autobiography in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, and the selections in the Anthology from Leslie Marmon Silko’s *The...
Storyteller (p. 727) reflect an equally intense concern with the forms and functions of oral narrative in a culture dominated by print. The discussion of literature, technology, and media, therefore, could easily evolve out of the engagement with indigenous literature and orature. (You might familiarize students with this unusual term by explaining, as Walter Ong does in *Orality and Literacy* [p. 12], that “thinking of oral tradition or a heritage of oral performance, genres and styles as ‘oral literature’ is rather like thinking of horses as automobiles without wheels”; a different term is needed to foreground the specificity of oral expression.)

One of the central questions that underlies Vargas Llosa’s as well as the indigenous authors’ engagement with orature is whether it is in some ways a more authentic, more “real” and less artificial mode of expression than the written or printed word. But this question plays itself out quite differently in the Native American writers’ texts, whose project is to revive their own cultural traditions, which they broadly perceive as repressed and undervalued by the dominant white culture. Such is not the case for Vargas Llosa’s narrator, whose fascination with Machiguenga storytelling does not imply any return to his own cultural roots, though the vitality of this native tradition clearly becomes a (perhaps utopian) model for his own writing. (It should be noted here that the novel’s Spanish title, *El hablador*, literally “The Speaker,” emphasizes oral expression much more forcefully than the English title *The Storyteller*.) More than anything, what impresses him about the Machiguenga storytellers is the central importance of their craft to the culture: It is the equivalent of mythology, religion, genealogy, education, current news broadcasting, and entertainment all rolled into one, and obviously the narrator longs for a culture in which his own craft of writing could have a similarly broad relevance to the lived experience of the community.

It is in this context that the question of the “authenticity” of oral storytelling emerges in full force. Throughout the novel, the narrator shows an ambivalent attitude toward the Wycliff Bible translators, who study native languages and develop written transcriptions for them with the principal goal of translating the Bible. Even though they help preserve native languages and cultures through their codification efforts, the narrator’s friend Saúl Zuratas had fulminated against what he perceived as their corruption of native culture through the imposition of a foreign religion. But the end of the chapter shows just how ambiguous the authenticity of indigenous culture has become: If Zuratas, a Peruvian of Jewish origin, has himself become a “native” Machiguenga storyteller and has imposed the new injunction of keeping the storytellers’ existence secret, the question is whether he himself is not contributing to the transformation of native culture in his own way just as much as the Wycliffites do in theirs. If the fulcrum of Machiguenga culture is occupied by an outsider to the culture, its authenticity is in question, and with it the whole idea that there still are sources of untainted native culture on which an exhausted Western one can draw to renew itself.

But what prevents a novelist from having the stature of a Machiguenga storyteller in modern society is not only the fact that cultural authenticity may have become an abstract concept rather than a tangible reality, or that literature, compared to indigenous storytelling, might have become too narrowly confined to the niche.
of the “aesthetic.” As the narrator’s own situation shows, one of the factors that has fundamentally altered the meaning of literary expression is the emergence of television as an alternative medium, the one that he himself agrees to contribute to at least temporarily. The show that he helps broadcast in some sense tries to replicate some facets of Machiguenga storytelling in that it, too, aims to combine information, education, and entertainment (against infinite practical odds, as the chapter repeatedly emphasizes). So while the narrator clearly longs to reinvigorate his craft of writing through contact with the premodern medium of oral storytelling, he is at the same time making the transition to the postmodern medium of television, which might further weaken what relevance the printed word retains. Marshall McLuhan, who prophesied a return to orality in the age of television and the computer, would surely have been delighted at the parallels Vargas Llosa establishes between orature and television—even though, in a final turn of paradox, these parallels are described by a novelist in a novel whose title is never far from ironic.

Abdelrahman Munif’s Cities of Salt focuses more directly on the introduction of a technologically advanced medium into a traditional community, in the context of a narrative that more generally explores the consequences of American oil exploitation in the Persian Gulf on the societies and lifestyles of the region. Confirming science fiction writer Arthur Clarke’s contention that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic for those not initiated into its origins and manipulation, the radio appears to the Arab community portrayed in Cities of Salt like nothing short of a miracle at first: The presence of voices and music from what appears to be nowhere cannot easily be accounted for by means of any logic available to its members. But the excerpts presented in the Anthology also show that this sense of wonder and bewilderment gradually gives way to the integration of the new technology into the existing power structure. The emir quickly grasps that if he learns to manipulate the new device successfully, this skill will enhance the authority he already possesses, while a failure to do so might diminish it. Whatever this medium’s function might be for the Americans, in other words, it will be appropriated and refigured by the culture into which it is newly introduced. But conversely, it is also clear that the existing social structures in the Arab community have to redefine themselves at least partially around the new medium. The emir cannot afford simply to avoid a technology that is bound to captivate the deep interest of the population and sees himself forced to acquire a technological literacy he himself might not be particularly interested in and that is clearly bound to remain superficial. In this latter respect, of course, he doesn’t differ fundamentally from the average Western user of advanced technologies; Munif illustrates beautifully how the average user can manipulate such technologies with considerable technical and social success without understanding in the least their underlying principles of functioning. Indeed, the possibility of using technologies without any deeper understanding is precisely what enables their easy implantation into everyday life.

While Vargas Llosa and Munif investigate the relationship between different media in the developing world, in social contexts where the encounter with new technologies always also implies a confrontation with another and usually more
dominant culture, the remaining texts in the section all focus on media as they function in already thoroughly developed societies. Wolf’s novel *Accident: A Day’s News* embeds its consideration of media into the more general context of rapidly advancing technologies. The novel was understood by many as an uncompromising rejection of nuclear technologies and the techno-scientific hubris that created and pretends to be able to manage them. But this is not to say that Wolf’s overall tone is Luddite or antimodern. The novel hinges on the juxtaposition of technologies that sustain life and those that endanger it: The one day in the life of the female protagonist that the reader witnesses throughout the novel is shaped by her concern for her brother, who is undergoing brain surgery that day, and by the simultaneously emerging news broadcasts about the nuclear fallout from the reactor accident at Chernobyl. The excerpt in the *Anthology* switches back and forth between these two contexts; Wolf foregrounds just how porous the boundary between the two different kinds of technologies is by her idiosyncratic punctuation, which often marks the transition from one paragraph to another by just a comma or an ellipsis rather than a period. What enables the transition between brain surgery and nuclear power may well be the fact that they do not after all represent completely different types of technological endeavor but different types of risk. In the case of brain surgery, the risk is voluntary and known in advance by those who undergo it, even though the outcome may still be lethal (in the novel, it is not—the protagonist’s brother survives the operation). In the case of a nuclear accident, the risk is unplanned, involuntary, and experienced as unexpected trauma by those who undergo it. In a way, then, the novel is a reflection on which kinds of technological risk are acceptable and which ones must be rejected as unacceptable in a society that understands itself as civilized.

What compounds this second kind of risk is its transmission by the media; Wolf is relentlessly critical of the Chernobyl coverage on East German media and the way its emphasis on visual appearance rather than substance makes an expert in a suit by default seem more credible than a protester in blue jeans. Even the movies that the protagonist decides to view instead of the news, a Cold-War spy movie and George Cukor’s *Gaslight*, both focus on deception and treachery, as though television could not transmit anything else. It is finally only in the return to literature that the protagonist finds solace at nightfall. Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and particular the passage in which Marlow reminds his listeners that England, too, was once one of the “dark places,” sums up for her her own skepticism of progress and “civilization” and the supposed benefits they bring. Literature, in Wolf’s novel, remains a purveyor of truth in a world that other media saturate with deceptions.

The tone of Murakami’s and Gibson’s engagements with media technology is fundamentally different, in part because they are not predicated on the kind of realism that Wolf’s novel relies on. Both are fantastic stories attempting to capture facets of a contemporary media landscape that is in and of itself beginning to make conventional distinctions between the real and the fantastic difficult. In Murakami’s short story, this difficulty is symbolized by the TV People themselves, beings whose appearance resembles that of humans in every way except that they
are diminished in size; the narrator calls them “TV People” because in two central scenes in the short story, they bring large TV sets to his home and his workplace. Yet, unlike Wolf’s television, we never see these TVs broadcasting any normal kinds of programs; indeed, throughout most of the story they don’t broadcast at all (one doesn’t even get installed). So the TV People seem to be not so much the providers of TV sets as the representatives of an alternate reality that is by no means contained by television screens. Rather than any defined broadcast, it is this alternate reality that is beginning to seep into various spheres of the protagonist’s life. By the end, it is clear that he himself has crossed the border into this other reality and is henceforth separated from the normal life he led with his wife and in his workplace earlier. Even though a phone call, presumably from the wife, will come according to one of the TV People’s predictions, it is clear that it will not re-establish normalcy: The protagonist realizes in a sudden wave of lucidity that the phone network itself is yet another medium that serves as much to separate as to connect different spheres of reality. Television, by the end of the story, has become more than a medium or a technology. The reduction of the protagonist’s body to “TV People” size signals a whole way of life, a basic form of existence. It is worth noting, in this context, that both the protagonist and his wife work in the media and advertising business from the start, and the protagonist’s metamorphosis might be understood to be causally related to the chronic distortions of the real that such employment requires. But whether his transformation has any “objective” reality remains ambiguous throughout the story—it is quite possible to assume that this entire alternate realm exists nowhere outside the protagonist’s own imagination. What militates most strongly in favor of this interpretation is the fact that neither at home nor in the work environment is the presence of the TV People and their delivery of massively sized TV sets perceived or commented upon by anyone other than the protagonist. His wife, whom he portrays as obsessed with order, does not even seem to notice the large TV in the apartment or the disruptions brought about by its arrival; neither do his colleagues at work seem to be aware of a team of TV People carrying around an exceptionally large set with the prominently displayed logo of a rival company. The protagonist himself is disturbed by this lack of any reaction on the part of others, but apparently not to the point where he doubts the evidence of his own senses. Yet the reader might wonder: The protagonist’s bouts of migraines, his insomnia and inability to accomplish even relatively routine tasks such as doing the laundry or answering a wedding invitation might indicate a severe state of depression, and the arrival of the TV People might simply be an imaginary means of escape from a profoundly alienated and meaningless existence. Even if this is the interpretation adopted as most plausible, however, it remains that the means of escape for even a self-declared Luddite such as the protagonist is the television set. Whether it seeks reality or an escape from it, the contemporary imagination is shaped by the world of television.

Gibson’s “Burning Chrome,” a story that already contains some of the core narrative motifs of his later classic Neuromancer, similarly casts a new medium as both an advanced form of reality and the escape from it. The main manifestation of the new digital world of virtual realities is, of course, cyberspace, the world of
international computer networks, which Gibson tellingly refers to as a “consensus hallucination.” But it is good to point out to students that other forms of virtual reality seem equally important in Gibson’s futuristic universe: the realm of “simstim,” a descendant of Aldous Huxley’s “feelies” and virtual reality in which soap operas are experienced via the sensory apparatus of the major star, and the disembodied prostitution that is practiced in the “House of Blue Lights.” What links them is the possibility of detaching motion and sensory experience from the idiosyncrasies of a particular body and making them available to other bodies in a variety of contexts and situations. While this possibility seems at first strikingly innovative due to the technological apparatus that effects the separation of body and mind in Gibson, many critics have pointed out that precisely the possibility of such a separation of mind from matter is one of the most conventional ideas of Western philosophy. Part of what is so seductive about Gibson’s technological imagination, then, is that it finds a way to articulate a very traditional aspiration in the vocabulary of a new medium.

Gibson approaches the new medium in this story via not a lone hacker figure but a team of two computer specialists who complement each other and indeed may add up to nothing other than the two allegorical halves of one personality. On one side, there is Bobby Quine the idealist, who can carry out his missions of digital theft and deception only when he can give himself the illusion that he’s doing them for a woman, even though the story makes it clear he has very little interest in the real aspirations of the women he courts. Automatic Jack’s patently old-fashioned, industrial-style arm prosthesis already marks him physically as a realist and pragmatist. He attempts to dissuade Bobby from what he perceives as an impossibly risky venture, provides the basic technological infrastructure once he’s been talked into joining, and is aware of Rikki’s overriding desire to become a simstim star and does what he can to help her achieve it, even if it implies a renunciation of his own desire for her.

The figures of Automatic Jack and Rikki are also linked through their bodily prostheses, both of which are not simple body replacements but sophisticated technological tools. Jack can connect electric tools directly to his artificial arm, and Rikki succeeds, at the end of the story, in purchasing an implant of artificial Zeiss Ikon eyes that are at the same time simstim cameras. Cyberspace, with which Bobby Quine and Automatic Jack interface through a direct hookup to their nervous systems, is the third kind of prosthesis the story explores; what Gibson has in mind here is clearly McLuhan’s understanding of media as an “extension of man,” a prosthesis that improves upon humans’ natural sensory organs (you could easily assign to students a page or two from McLuhan’s Understanding Media to go along with “Burning Chrome”). The impact of technology and new media on the human body is an issue students might want to explore comparatively in Wolf, Murakami, and Gibson: brain surgery and radioactive fallout as juxtaposed in Accident, the shrinking human body that signals the advent of the realm of television in “TV People,” and the assorted drugs, implants, and systemic alterations the characters of “Burning Chrome” undergo, in many cases so as to take part in the new media landscape.
But cyberspace in Gibson is not merely a bodily prosthesis; it also functions as a new environment whose clean, neon-colored geometry provides a striking contrast with the decaying and sordid urban environments that the characters inhabit in their nonvirtual lives. In fact, it is to some extent surprising to see how Gibson, in practically all of his texts, models the visual appearance of cyberspace, the quintessentially postmodernist space, on that of the grid structures and geometrically shaped skyscrapers of a typically high-modernist city (Manhattan is usually the model that is either explicitly or implicitly referred to). In a metaphor that has by now become extremely commonplace, virtual space is envisioned as an extension of the urban. The description of the run on Chrome’s data mingles this sense of the urban with the vocabulary of military assault and with a general sense of the intoxication induced by extreme, technologically propelled speed that already characterized the manifestos of F. T. Marinetti early in the twentieth century.

Just how much cyberspace functions in the story as an alternative to the real world is foregrounded by the narrative structure, in which the account of the high-speed data heist is interleaved with the story that led up to it. The hard-boiled realism, technological proficiency, and underworld sordidness that Gibson mixes with a fairly unsophisticated sentimentalism in his hallmark narrative idiom may fascinate some students and repel others. It might be important to spend some time sorting out the genre elements that Gibson uses to convey this mix: a film noir atmosphere of crime, corruption, and decay mixed with the glamour of fame and fortune, the suspense of what is essentially a story of a grand-scale heist, the futuristic journeys into cyberspace, and the melancholy sentimentalism of a story of lost love and ideals.

Some students may feel that Gibson unjustly glorifies characters who are essentially thieves out for nothing else but financial gain with the vocabulary of the “cowboy” or the noir private eye, both of which are typically figures holding up a code of honor in an otherwise corrupt world. While this is a legitimate critique of the future world Gibson portrays, it is also worth pointing out that financial gain is a somewhat ambiguous motivation for both of the male characters. Bobby Quine seems mostly interested in a venture that will require all his hacker skills and hone them back to their old perfection. He pretends to himself that his accomplishments will benefit his beloved in an odd caricature of chivaleresque code; as the story makes abundantly clear, nothing much changes in his daily life as the consequence of his newly acquired wealth. Jack, for his part, is initially opposed to the heist and agrees only reluctantly. Prosperity in and of itself seems to mean as little to him in the end as it does to his partner.

In discussing Gibson’s manipulation of different genre codes, gender is likely to emerge as an issue of contention. The principal narrative agents in “Burning Chrome” are males, as they are in most of Gibson’s texts, and their main goal is to bring down a woman who has become “one of the Boys.” Students may well feel that Chrome’s mistake, in the eyes of Jack and Bobby, is not just to have become associated with the Mafia but to have assumed a position of wealth and power that is usually reserved for men. But of course, Chrome is hard to cast as a victim of patriarchy—she has, after all, accumulated much of her wealth by run-
ning a prostitution business that exploits the bodies of other women, Rikki among them. Yet this fact in itself is one of the more disturbing aspects of Gibson's narrative, which all too often features female protagonists who have either a past or present involvement with prostitution, as if women's lives in this future world somehow could not be thought apart from the commodification of their bodies. On the other hand, prostitution makes Rikki ultimately independent from either Jack or Bobby, enabling her to buy herself the Zeiss Ikons and set out for her own career rather than the existence Bobby had envisioned for her. She slips from their grip just as they succeed in stealing the money that would enable either one of them to provide her with a financially secure existence. The gender politics of the story, then, is not unambiguous, yet it may be hard to exonerate Gibson completely from gender stereotyping.

If you teach the texts in the “Literature, Technology, and Media” section in the middle of a class sequence, it would be easy to segue from the exploration of new media and their impact on living environments, human bodies, and senses to the selections in the “Gendered Spaces” section. If you place the “Literature, Technology, and Media” texts toward the end of a course, you might want to conclude by showing one of the films that have recently explored the new virtual realities of the computer with some narrative sophistication. XY's *The Thirteenth Floor* and David Cronenberg’s *Existenz* both approach the virtual by way of complex embedded narrations, and the questions raised in these films—about the nature of the “real,” the function of human sense perception, and the ways in which new media reshape our modes of expression—would round off the discussion of the literary texts in this section.