TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE
ASAL Winter 2013
Lectures — doc. Justin Quinn Ph.D.

1: Introduction and Overview. Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner
2: Poetry to 1950: Frost, Stevens, Eliot
3: 20th Century American Drama: O’Neill, Miller, Williams
4: Post-War Prose: Ellison, Roth, Updike, Morrison
5: Post-War Poetry: Bishop, Lowell, Ginsberg
6: Contemporary Poetry & Prose
TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE
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Seminars – doc. Justin Quinn Ph.D.

1: Introduction and Overview: Whitman, Twain, and the Question of American Literature
2: F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Great Gatsby chapters 1-4
5: Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (Introduction, Prologue and first 6 chapters)

ASSESSMENT
To receive their credit, students will have to submit one essay of 1000 words by 20 December 2013. Essays should be submitted by email to me at jquinn@kan.zcu.cz. Please title the document with your own surname and it must be in either DOC or DOCX formats (not ODT or PDF). No late essays will be accepted, and students will not be eligible for a credit if they do not submit by the deadline. If a student is asked to rewrite, he/she has 10 days from the date of notification. Students will also have to pass an in-class test on 10 December (duration: 5 minutes), which will examine knowledge of the reading material covered in the seminar. There will be one opportunity to re-sit this test in the winter examination period (those students who are away for the semester can take the test then and are requested to email me in early January 2014 about the date). If the student fails the test twice, he/she is ineligible for a credit.

Please note that the essays must be formatted in APA style. Guidelines are available at Purdue Online Writing Lab (you are not permitted to use MLA style, which is also described at the Purdue site). This is the formatting style that you will be required to use for your MA thesis, so please take the time to get it correct. If you have not sufficiently mastered the APA style in your essay, it will be returned for correction. You should consult the English Department Writing Guide on Moodle.

Furthermore, students are warned that essays are routinely checked against internet and other sources (including a database of previously submitted essays), and that cases of plagiarism will result in automatic failure of the course.

ESSAY TITLES
1. Read chapter 8 of Marilyn R. Chandler’s Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction (available online at University of California Press), summarize its argument and then critically analyze it by comparing it to your opinion of The Great Gatsby.
2. Consult the website www.poetryfoundation.org and listen to the podcast “Kay Ryan on Robert Frost”. Then listen to Langdon Hammer’s lectures on Frost on YouTube > Yale Video Lectures. Summarize what these two people say about Frost and then critically analyze it by comparing it with your opinion.
3. Listen to Langdon Hammer’s third lecture on T. S. Eliot on YouTube > Yale Video Lectures. Summarize it then critically analyze it by comparing it with your opinion of The Waste Land.
4. Discuss the presentation of Communism in Invisible Man.
5. In 1965 the FBI labelled Allen Ginsberg ‘potentially dangerous’ and a ‘subversive.’ Based on his poetry, give reasons for and against such a judgement.
6. Listen to Langdon Hammer’s lectures on Wallace Stevens on YouTube > Yale Video Lectures. Summarize his views then critically analyze them by comparison with your opinion of the Stevens poems you have read.
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD (1896-1940)
born in St Paul, Minnesota
1917: leaves Princeton for the army
1918: while stationed in Montgomery, Alabama, falls in love with Zelda Sayre
1919: goes to NYC
1920: This Side of Paradise; becomes famous overnight; marries ZS
1924: goes to France to concentrate on writing
1925: The Great Gatsby
1927: returns to US
1934: Tender is the Night
1936-37: the crack-up; Zelda hospitalized in North Carolina
1937-38: works in Hollywood as screenwriter for MGM

1. The Jazz Age
Roaring Twenties, Lost Generation
Post-War, Economics, Jazz, Flappers (women’s status), Technology (cars, radios, films, telephones, electrification), Prohibition and Organised Crime

By seven o’clock the orchestra had arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums. The last swimmers have come in from the beach now and are dressing upstairs; the cars from New York are parked five deep in the drive, and already the halls and salons and verandas are gaudy with primary colors, and hair bobbed in strange new ways, and shawls beyond the dreams of Castile. The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other’s names.

The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher. Laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath; already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp, joyous moment the centre of a group, and then excited with triumph, glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and colour under the constantly changing light.

Suddenly one of these gypsies, in trembling opal, seizes a cocktail out of the air, dumps it down for courage and, moving her hands like Frisco, dances out alone on the canvas platform. A momentary hush; the orchestra leader varies his rhythm obligingly for her, and there is a burst of chatter as the erroneous news goes around that she is Gilda Gray’s understudy from the Follies. The party has begun. – The Great Gatsby

2. Affluence & Values
Tension between the dissolute affluent life and the need for real values
Cruelty of the Rich

They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made… – The Great Gatsby

3. The Lost New World
And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby’s wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further…And one fine morning –

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

– final paragraphs of The Great Gatsby

ERNEST HEMINGWAY (1899-1961)
born in Oakpark, Illinois
1917: begins work for Kansas City Star; rejected for the US Army; joins Red Cross as driver
1918: injured by a shell in Italy
1919: returns to Oakpark
1921: moves to Paris as correspondent for Toronto Star Weekly
1926: The Sun Also Rises
1928: moves to Key West, Florida
1929: A Farewell to Arms
1933: travels in Africa
1937: war correspondent covering Spanish Civil War
1940: For Whom the Bell Tolls; moves to Cuba
1952: The Old Man and the Sea
1954: Nobel Prize in Literature
1961: commits suicide
1. Style

Gertrude Stein, in her work, had always been possessed by the intellectual passion for exactitude in the description of inner and outer reality. She has produced a simplification by this concentration, and as a result the destruction of associational emotion in poetry and prose.

— GERTRUDE STEIN, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (1933)

I did not say anything. I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.

— A Farewell to Arms

She was unconscious all the time, and it did not take her very long to die.

Outside the room, in the hall, I spoke to the doctor, ‘Is there anything I can do to-night?’

‘No, there is nothing to do. Can I take you to your hotel?’

‘No, thank you. I am going to stay here for a while.’

‘I know there is nothing to say. I cannot tell you — ’

‘No,’ I said. ‘There’s nothing to say.’

‘Good-night,’ he said. ‘I cannot take you to your hotel?’

‘No, thank you.’

‘It was the only thing to do,’ he said. ‘The operation proved — ’

‘I do not want to talk about it,’ I said.

‘I would like to take you to your hotel.’

‘No, thank you.’

He went down the hall. I went to the door of the room.

‘You can’t come in now,’ one of the nurses said.

‘Yes I can,’ I said.

‘You can’t come in yet.’

‘You get out,’ I said. ‘The other one too.’

But after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn’t any good. It was like saying good-by to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain.

THE END — A Farewell to Arms

2. War & Masculinity

WWI, Africa, Spanish Civil War, Matadors, WWII.

The figure of the matador. Bravery, a stylist, doesn’t blabber his fear. Mastery of dangerous situations.

We often talked about bulls and bull-fighters. I had stopped at the Montoya for several years. We never talked for very long at a time. It was simply the pleasure of discovering what we each felt. Men would come from distant towns and before they left Pamplona stop and talk for a few minutes with Montoya about bulls. These men were aficionados. Those who were aficionados could always get rooms even when the hotel was full. Montoya introduced me to some of them. They were always very polite at first, and it amused them very much that I should be an American. Somehow it was taken for granted that an American could not have afición. He might simulate it or confuse it with excitement, but he could not really have it. When they saw that I had afición, and there was no password, no set questions that could bring it out, rather it was a sort of oral spiritual examination with the questions always a little on the defensive and never apparent, there was the same embarrassed putting the hand on the shoulder or a ‘Buen hombre’. But nearly always there was the actual touching. It seemed as though they wanted to touch you to make it certain. — The Sun Also Rises

The bull-fight on the second day was much better than on the first. Brett sat between Mike and me at the barrera, and Bill and Cohn went up above. Romero was the whole show. I do not think Brett saw any other bull-fighter. No one else did either, except the hard-shelled technicians. It was all Romero. There were two other matadors, but they did not count. I sat beside Brett and explained to Brett what it was all about. I told her about watching the bull, not the horse, when the bulls charged the picadors, and got her to watching the picador place the point of his pic so that she saw what it was all about, so that it became more something that was going on with a definite end, and less of a spectacle with unexplained horrors. I had her watch how Romero took the bull away from a fallen horse with his cape, and how he held him with the cape and turned him, smoothly and suavely, never wasting the bull. She saw how Romero avoided every brusque movement and saved his bulls for the last when he wanted them, not winded and discomposed but smoothly worn down. She saw how close Romero always worked the bull, and I pointed out to her the tricks the other bull-fighters used to make it look as though they were working closely. She saw why she liked Romero’s cape-work and why she did not like the others.

Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line. The others twisted themselves like corkscrews, their elbows raised, and leaned against the flanks of the bull after his horns had passed, to give a faked look of danger. Afterward, all that was faked turned bad and gave an unpleasant feeling. Romero’s bull-fighting gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements and always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close each time. He did not have to emphasize...
their closeness. Brett saw how something that was beautiful done close to the bull was ridiculous if it were done a little way off. I told her how since the death of Joselito all the bull-fighters had been developing a technic that simulated this appearance of danger in order to give a fake emotional feeling, while the bull-fighter was really safe. Romero had the old thing, the holding of his purity of line through the maximum of exposure, while he dominated the bull by making him realize he was unattainable, while he prepared him for the killing.

– The Sun Also Rises. (italics mine)

WILLIAM FAULKNER (1897-1962)
born in New Albany, Mississippi
1902: family moves to Oxford (MS)
1918: refused by US Army; accepted by Canadian Royal Air Force, sees no action
1919: enters University of Mississippi
1920s: various menial jobs; travels to Paris, New Orleans
1929: The Sound and the Fury
1930: As I Lay Dying
1932: Light in August; scriptwriter for MGM
1936: Absalom, Absalom!
1942: Go Down, Moses
1950: Nobel Prize in Literature

1. Modernist Techniques
Stream of Consciousness, kaleidoscopic.

Before us the thick dark current runs. It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls traveling along the surface for an instant, silent, impermanent, and profoundly significant, as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive waked for a moment of lazy alertness out of and into light slumber again.

It clucks and murmurs among the spokes and about the mules’ knees, yellow, scummed with flotsam and with thick soiled gouts of foam as though it had sweat, lathering, like a driven horse. Through the undergrowth it goes with a plaintive sound, a musing sound; in it the unwinded cane and saplings lean as before a little gale, swaying without reflections as though suspended on invisible wires from the branches overhead. Above the ceaseless surface they stand – trees, cane, vines – rootless, severed from the earth, spectral above a scene of immense yet circumscribed desolation filled with the voice of the waste and mournful water.

– Darl in As I Lay Dying

It wasn’t on a balance. I told them that if they wanted it to tote and ride on a balance, they would have to –

– Cash in As I Lay Dying

2. Local Matters
Yoknapatawpha County: Pronounced “YOK’nuh puh TAW’fuh.” Based on Lafayette Co.
Thomas Sutpen’s 100, the South. The legacy of defeat.

3. Race
Miscegenation; the castration of Joe Christmas

‘Ain’t your name Christmas?’ and the nigger said that it was. He never denied it. He never did anything. He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too. – Light in August

Percy Grimm’s castration of Joe Christmas:
When they approached to see what he was about, they saw that the man was not dead yet, and when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit. Then Grimm too sprang back, flinging behind him the bloody butcher knife. ‘No you’ll let white women alone, even in hell,’ he said. – Light in August
ROBERT FROST (1874-1963)
1874: born in San Francisco
1885: moves to New England
1897-1899: attends Harvard College (withdraws without degree)
1906: begins teaching at Pinkerton Academy (NH)
1912: moves to England with his family
1915: returns to US
1928: West-Running Brook (‘Spring Poools’, ‘Acquainted with the Night’)
1936: A Further Range (‘Departmental’)

1. Outside Modernism?
Traditional forms do not mean emotional and intellectual regression.

2. Country Things
New England.
His Darwinism

Better to go down dignified
With boughten friendship at your side
Than none at all. Provide, provide!
*
Then the boy saw all –
Since he was old enough to know, big boy
Doing a man’s work, though a child at heart –
He saw all spoiled. ‘Don’t let him cut my hand off –
The doctor, when he comes. Don’t let him, sister!’
So. But the hand was gone already.
The doctor put in the dark of ether.
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.
And then – the watcher at his pulse took fright.
No one believed. They listened at his heart.
Little – less – nothing! – and that ended it.
No more to build on there. And they, since they
Were the one dead, turned to their affairs.

(‘“Out, Out – “’)

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it – it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less –
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars – on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

3. Dialogue Poems
He said twice over before he knew himself:
‘Can’t a man speak of his own child he’s lost?’

‘Not you! Oh, where’s my hat? Oh, I don’t need it!
I must get out of here. I must get air.
I don’t know rightly whether any man can.’

‘Amy! Don’t go to someone else this time.
Listen to me. I won’t come down the stairs.’
He sat and fixed his chin between his fists.
‘There’s something I should like to ask you, dear.’

‘You don’t know how to ask it.’
‘Help me, then.’

Her fingers moved the latch for all reply.

‘My words are nearly always an offense.
I don’t know how to speak of anything
So as to please you…’

‘You can’t because you don’t know how to speak.
If you had any feelings, you that dug
With your own hand – how could you? – his little grave;
I saw you from that very window there,
Making the gravel leap and leap in air,
Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly
And roll back down the mound beside the hole.
I thought, Who is that man? I didn’t know you…’

‘Home Burial’

WALLACE STEVENS (1879-1955)
1879: born in Reading, Pennsylvania
1897: enrolls at Harvard
1900: moves to New York and tries to make a living as a journalist.
1901: fails as journalist and enters New York Law School in autumn.
1916: joins Hartford Accident and Indemnity Co. Job involved a good deal of travel all over the US.
1923: *Harmonium* ('The Snow Man', 'Sunday Morning', 'Anecdote of the Jar', 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird')
1934: becomes vice-president of the Hartford.
1935: *Ideas of Order* ('The Idea of Order at Key West', 'Evening without Angels')
1947: *Transport to Summer* ('Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction', 'Credences of Summer')
1950: *The Auroras of Autumn* (title poem, 'Angel Surrounded by Paysans')
1954: *Collected Poems* ('The Plain Sense of Things', 'The Rock', 'The Planet on the Table', 'Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself')

1. 'Gott ist tot'
*We have killed him – you and I…Do we not feel the breadth of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us?…What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?*


Air is air,
Its vacancy glitters round us everywhere.
Its sounds are not angelic syllables
But our unfashioned spirits realized
More sharply in more furious selves.

Bare night is best. Bare earth is best. Bare, bare,
Except for our own houses, huddled low
Beneath the arches and their spangled air,
Beneath the rhapsodies of fire and fire,
Where the voice that is in us makes a true response,
Where the voice that is great within us rises up,
As we stand gazing at the rounded moon.

   ('Evening without Angels')

2. Reality & Imagination

This is nothing until in a single man contained,
Nothing until this named thing nameless is
And is destroyed. He opens the door of his house
On flames. The scholar of one candle sees
An Arctic effulgence flaring on the frame
Of everything he is. And he feels afraid.

   ('The Auroras of Autumn')

NOMAD EXQUISITE
As the immense dew of Florida
Brings forth
The big-finned palm
And green vine angering for life,

As the immense dew of Florida
Brings forth hymn and hymn
From the beholder,
Beholding all these green sides
And gold sides of green sides,

And blessed mornings,
Meet for the eye of the young alligator,

And lightning colors
So, in me, come flinging
Forms, flakes, and the flakes of flames.

   T. S. ELIOT (1888–1965)

1. Symbolism: French Precursors

Arthur Symons: *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*
Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Jules Laforgue
‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’:

   certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells…

2. The Waste Land (1922)

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images…

Čím jsou kořeny, jež se jí křečovitě zachycují, jaké větve
rostou z té kamenité hlušiny? Synu člověka,
nevědíš ani neuhodíš, poněvadž znáš jen hromadu rozbitých model…

‘You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
‘They called me the hyacinth girl.’
—Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

‘Dal jsi mi poprvé hyacinty před rokem;
říkali mi pak dívka s hyacinty.

   — Přesto jsem, když jsme se vrátili, tak pozdě, ze zahrady,
měl plnou náruč a vlhké vlasy, nemohl jsem
mluvit a oči mi selhaly, nebyl jsem
ani živý, ani mrtvý a nevěděl jsem nic,
hleděl jsem do nitra světla, mlčení.

   The music crept by me upon the waters’
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria street.
City, city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishermen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold

Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.
‘Ta hudba plížila se kolem po vodách’
a po Strandu, dál po Queen Victoria Street.
Ó City, město, někdy slýchám
u baru v Lower Thames Street
příjemné liknání mandolíny od vody
a šum a ruch z té hospody,
v níž rybáři v poledne postávají – tam, kde zdi
Svatého Magnuse mučedníka tají pro oblohu
nevysvětlitelnou nádheru v bělozlatém jónském slohu.

DA
Datta: what have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment’s surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms…

DA
Datta: Co jsme dalí?
Příteli, krev otřásající mým srdcem,
strašná troufalost okamžitého odevdání se,
jež věk rozumnosti nemůže vzít zpět,
jen tím, a jenom tím teď existujeme,
což nenajde se v našich nekrolozích
či v pamětech opentlených pavoukem, jenž bude dědit,
ani pod pečetěmi zlomenými vychrtlým právníkem
v našich prázdných pokojích.
(trans. Zdeněk Hron)

3. Later Work
The Hollow Men (1925), Ash-Wednesday (1930), Four
Quartets (1935-1942)

4. Criticism
‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919),
‘“Romantic” and “Classic”’ (1934), ‘The Metaphysical
Poets’, ‘Milton’ (1936)
“dissociation of sensibility” “objective correlative”:
New Criticism
EUGENE O’NEILL (1888-1953)
Son of an actor (most famous role: Count of Monte Cristo). Born in hotel.
1909: Went gold prospecting (Honduras), but caught malaria.
1912-1913: 6 months recovering from TB
1914-1915: studies play-writing at Harvard
1916: hooks up with Provincetown Players (MA)
1920:Beyond the Horizon
1921: Anna Christie
1924: Desire Under the Elms
1928: Strange Interlude
1936: Nobel Prize
1946: Long Day’s Journey into Night

1. Experiment
Length, technique, mythology, realism (class range)

SCENE – “JOHNNY-THE-PRIEST’S” saloon near South Street, New York City. . . . It is late afternoon of a
day in fall. As the curtain rises, JOHNNY is discovered. “JOHNNY-THE-PRIEST” deserves his
nickname. With his pale, thin, clean-shaven face, mild blue eyes and white hair, a cassock would seem more
suited to him than the apron he wears. Neither his voice
nor his general manner dispel this illusion which has
made him a personage of the waterfront. They are soft
and bland. But beneath all his mildness one senses the
man behind the mask – cynical, callous, hard as nails.
He is lounging at ease behind the bar, a pair of
spectacles on his nose, reading an evening paper.

Two longshoremen [dokařský dělník] enter from the
street, wearing their working aprons, the button of the
union pinned conspicuously on the caps pulled sideways
on their heads at an aggressive angle.

FIRST LONGSHOREMAN – (As they range themselves at
the bar.) Gimme a shock. Number Two. (He tosses a
coin on the bar.)
SECOND LONGSHOREMAN – Same here. (JOHNNY
sets two glasses of barrel whiskey before them.)
FIRST LONGSHOREMAN – Here’s luck! (The other
nods. They gulp down their whiskey.)
SECOND LONGSHOREMAN – (Putting money on the
bar.) Give us another.
FIRST LONGSHOREMAN – Gimme a scoop this time –
lager and porter. I’m dry.
SECOND LONGSHOREMAN – Same here.

2. Delusions & Disillusion
“Mankind cannot take very much reality” – T. S. ELIOT

I never dreamed Holy Mother would give me such
advice! I was really shocked. I said, of course, I would
do anything she suggested, but I knew it was simply a
waste of time. After I left her, I felt all mixed up, so I
went to the shrine and prayed to the Blessed Virgin and
found peace again because I knew she heard my prayer
and would always love me and see no harm ever came
to me so long as I never lost my faith in her.

She pauses and a look of growing uneasiness comes
over her face. She passes a hand over her forehead as if
brushing cobwebs from her brain – vaguely.

That was in the winter of senior year. Then in the
spring something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I
fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a
time.

She stares before her in a sad dream. Tyrone sits in
his chair. Edmund and Jamie remain motionless.

CURTAIN
Long Day’s Journey into Night

3. Modern Tragedy

ANNA – (Touched but a bit embarrassed.) Don’t bawl
about it. There ain’t nothing to forgive, anyway. It ain’t
your fault, and it ain’t mine, and it ain’t his neither.
We’re all poor nuts, and things happen, and we just get
mixed in wrong, that’s all.

CHRIS – (Eagerly.) You say right tang, Anna, py golly! It
ain’t nobody’s fault! (Shaking his fist.) It’s dat ole davil,
sea!

**

ABBIE – I – I killed him, Eben.
EBEN – (amazed) Ye killed him?
ABBIE – (dully) Ay-eh.

…………………..

EBEN – Not – not that baby!
ABBIE – (dully) Ay-eh?
EBEN – (falls to his knees as if he’d been struck – his voice
trembling with horror) Oh, God Almighty! A’mighty
God! Maw, whar was ye, why didn’t ye stop her?
ABBIE – (simply) She went back t’her grave that night we
fust done it, remember? I hain’t felt her about since. (A
pause. EBEN hides his head in his hands, trembling all
over as if he had the ague. She goes on dully) I left the
piller over his little face. Then he killed himself. He
stopped breathin’. (She begins to weep softly)
EBEN – (rage beginning to mingle with grief) He looked
like me. He was mine, damn ye!
ABBIE – (slowly and brokenly) I didn’t want t’do it. I hated
myself fur doin’ it. I loved him. He was so purty – dead
spit ‘n’ image o’ yew. But I loved yew more – and an’
yew was goin’ away – far off whar I’d never see ye
agen, never kiss ye, never feel ye pressed agin me agen
– an’ ye said hated fur havin’ him – ye said ye hated
him an’ wished he was dead – ye said if it hadn’t been
fur him comin’ it’d be the same’s afore between us.

1931: Mourning Becomes Electra (I Homecoming, II
The Hunted, III The Haunted)
ARThur MILLer (1915-2005)

Born in Harlem, NYC
1929: Wall Street Crash, father’s business foundered
1934-38: University of Michigan (journalism then English)
1938: joins Federal Theater Project in NYC (writes many radio plays)
1949: Death of a salesman
1950: a screenplay fails to be produced because of House of Representative Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)
1953: The Crucible
1955: A View From the Bridge
1956: Marries Marilyn Monroe
1957: Convicted of contempt of Congress (he does not give them information about Communist friends and associates).
1958: Conviction overturned
1961: Divorces Monroe (next year she dies)
1964: After the Fall
during the 1970s helps dissident playwrights in Communist regimes (among them Václav Havel)

1. DrAMA & the LEFT
1930s, in the US to be an intellectual was to be a Leftist.
Clifford odets (1906-1963), Waiting for Lefty: ends in the call for a strike

2. the End of the DrAMe

dream: 
Willy – Without a penny to his name, three great universities are begging for him, and from there the sky’s the limit, because it’s not what you do, Ben. It’s who you know and the smile on your face! It’s contacts, Ben, contacts! The whole wealth of Alaska passes over the lunch table at the Commodore Hotel, and that’s the wonder, the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked! He turns to Biff. And that’s why when you get out on that field today it’s important. Because thousands of people will be rooting for you and loving you. To Ben, who has again begun to leave: And Ben! When he walks into a business office his name will sound out like a bell and all the doors will open to him! I’ve seen it, Ben, I’ve seen it a thousand times! You can’t feel it with your hand like timber, but it’s there! Ben – Good-by, William.

reAlITY:
Willy – If I had forty dollars a week – that’s all I’d need. Forty dollars, Howard.
Howard – Kid, I can’t take blood from a stone, I – Willy – Desperation is on him now: Howard, the year Al Smith was nominated, your father came to me and – Howard – Starting to go off: I’ve got to see some people, kid.
Willy – Stopping him: I’m talking about your father! There were promises made across this desk! You mustn’t tell me you’ve got people to see – I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can’t pay my insurance! You can’t eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit! After a pause: Now pay attention. Your father – in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions.

Howard – Impatiently: Now, Willy, you never averaged –
Willy – Banging his hand on the desk: I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928! And your father came to me – or rather, I was in the office here – it was right over this desk – and he put his hand on my shoulder –
Howard – Getting up: You’ll have to excuse me, Willy, I gotta see some people. Pull yourself together.
Willy’s wife “He’s not the finest character that ever lived, but he’s a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him, so attention must be paid. He’s not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog.”

3. Tragedy & the Individual
In this age few tragedies are written. It has often been held that the lack is due to a paucity of heroes among us, or else that modern man has had the blood drawn out of his organs of belief by the skepticism of science, and the heroic attack on life cannot feed on an attitude of reserve and circumspection [...]. The inevitable conclusion is, of course, that the tragic mode is archaic, fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly [...]. I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were [...]. As a general rule, to which there may be exceptions unknown to me, I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing – his sense of personal dignity [...]. Now, if it is true that tragedy is the consequence of a man’s total compulsion to evaluate himself justly, his destruction in the attempt posits a wrong or an evil in his environment. And this is precisely the morality of the tragedy and its lesson. The discovery of the moral law, which is what the enlightenment of tragedy consists of, is not the discovery of some abstract or metaphysical law.

– “Tragedy and the Common Man’

HUACh

Proctor – I like not to spoil their names… I speak my own sins; I cannot judge another. I have no tongue for it.
This is the moral splendor of Proctor in The Crucible, which is exactly the same as Miller’s in 1957. This is M’s redemptive belief in the individual, the kernel of the American Dream that he holds dear, and which restrains him from full immersion in Socialism or Communism.
The longer I worked [on The Crucible] the more certain I felt that improbable as it might seem, there were moments when an individual conscience was all that could keep the world from falling apart. Miller

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS (1911-1983)
born in Mississippi
1929: University of Missouri
1931: works for shoe company
1937: first play produced  
1938: graduates from University of Iowa  
1944: *The Glass Menagerie*  
1947: *A Streetcar Named Desire*  
1955: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

1. Southern Literature  
The old plantation  
Faded gentility  
Inability to confront reality  
Race

2. More Delusions!  
BLANCHE – Out there I suppose is the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir! [*She laughs.*]  
STELLA – No, honey, those are the L & N tracks.

About Mitch and light bulb:  
BLANCHE – I don’t want realism. I want magic! [*MITCH laughs*] Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don’t tell the truth, I tell what *ought* to be the truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it! – *Don’t turn the light on!*

Also, Amanda Wingfield in *GM* with her recollections of gentlemen callers

These delusions collide with…

3. Heterosexual Power  
It struck me that what is at stake there is the father’s great power. He’s the owner, literally, of an empire of land and farms. And he wants to immortalize that power, he wants to hand it on, because he’s dying. The son has a much finer appreciation of justice and human relations than the father. The father is rougher, more Philistine; he’s cruder; and when we speak of the fineness of emotions, we would probably say the son has them and the father lacks them. When I saw the play I thought, This is going to be simply marvelous because the person with the sensitivity will be presented with power and what is he going to do about it? But it never gets to that. It gets deflected onto a question of personal neurosis. It comes to a dead end. If we’re talking about tragedy, the Greeks would have done something marvelous with that idea. They would have stuck the son with the power, and faced him with the racking conflicts of the sensitive man having to rule. And then you would throw light on how the tragedy of power is.  
Ralph Ellison (1913-1994)

born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
1933: studies music at Tuskegee Institute, Alabama
1936: moves to NYC
1937: meets Richard Wright
1952: Invisible Man
1970-80: works at New York University

1. Black Invisibility
I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. – Invisible Man

2. Invisible Man step by step

College (True Blood and Bledsoe; Mr Norton) [Bledsoe:] ‘Damn what he wants,’ he said, climbing in the front seat beside me. ‘Haven’t you the sense God gave a dog? We take these white folks where we want them to go, we show them what we want them to see. Don’t you know that? I thought you had some sense.’ ‘[…] But I’ve made my place in it and I’ll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am.’ (143)

John Updike (1932-2009)

born in Shillington, PA
1954: graduates from Harvard University
1957: moves to Ipswich, MA
1960: Rabbit, Run
1968: Couples
1971: Rabbit Redux
1981: Rabbit is Rich
1988: S.
1990: Rabbit at Rest
1996: In the Beauty of the Lilies
1998: Bech at Bay (includes ‘Bech in Czech’)
2000: Licks of Love (includes ‘Rabbit Remembered’)
regular contributor to New Yorker magazine

1. To Give the Mundane Its Beautiful Due
New York, in my twenty months of residence, had felt full of other writers and of cultural hassles, and the word game overrun with agents and wisenheimers. The real America seemed to be ‘out there’, too homogenous and electrified by now to pose much threat of the provinciality that people used to come to New York to escape. Out there was where I belonged, immersed in the ordinary, which careful explication would reveal to be extraordinary. These notions propelled the crucial flight of my life, the flight from the Manhattan… that I had always hoped to live in. There also were practical attractions: free parking for my car, public education for my children, a beach to tan my skin on, a church to attend without seeming too strange.


2. Rabbit
Running out of gas, Rabbit Angstrom thinks as he stands behind the summer-dusty windows of Springer Motors display room watching the traffic go by on Route 111, traffic somehow thin and scared compared to what it used to be. The fucking world is running out of gas. But they won’t catch him, not yet, because there isn’t a piece of junk on the road that gets better mileage than his Toyotas, with lower service costs. Read Consumer Choice, April issue. That’s all he has to tell the people when they come in. And come in they do, the people out there are getting frantic, they know the great American ride is ending. Gas lines at ninety-nine point nine cents a gallon and ninety per cent of the stations to be closed for the weekend. The governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania calling for five-dollar minimum sales to stop the panicky topping-up. And truckers who can’t get diesel shooting at their own trucks, there was an incident right in Diamond County, along the Pottsville Pike. People are going wild, their dollars are going rotten, they shell out like there’s no tomorrow. He tells them, when they buy a Toyota, they’re turning their dollars into yen. And they believe him. A hundred twelve units new and used moved in the first five months of 1979, with eight Corollas, five Coronas including a Luxury Edition Wagon, and that Celica that Charlie said looked like a Pimp-mobile unloaded in these first three weeks of June already, at an average gross mark-up of eight hundred dollars per sale. Rabbit is rich. – Rabbit Is Rich


TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE
ASAL Winter 2013, Lecture 4
Post-War Prose: Ellison, Roth, Updike, Morrison
whole body go taut, gives his arms wings. It feels like from two weak grubby scuffle again. He goes into the scrimmaging shouts in pride.

appears the ball will miss because though he shot from and comes off his shoulder as his knees dip down, and it ball seems to ride up the rig white hand on top of the ball and the other underneath, with nervousness in front of his chest, one widespread silhouette like a smoke jiggling it patiently to get some adjustment in air itself.

The cuticle moons on his fingernails are big. Then the cigarette makes it more sinister still. Is this one of those walking up the alley at all. Where a show for som

boys are playing basketball around a telephone pole with a backboard bolted to it. Legs, shouts. The scrape and snap of Keds [čivče] on loose alley pebbles seems to catapult their voices high into the moist March air blue above the wires. Rabbit Angstrom, coming up the alley in a business suit, stops and watches, though he’s twenty-six and six three. So tall, he seems an unlikely rabbit, but the breadth of white face, the pallor of his twenty

alley in a business suit, stops

blue irises, and a nervous flutter under his brief nose as a rabbit, but the breadth of white face, the pallor of his

twenty

American Jews, Israel

Half the length of the tunnel it takes me to unzip my zipper silently – and there it is again, up it pops again, as always swollen, bursting with demands, like some idiot macrophalic making his parents’ life a misery with his simpleton’s insatiable needs.

‘Jerk me off,’ I am told by the silky monster. ‘Here? Now?’ ‘Of course here and now. When would you expect an opportunity like this to present itself a second time? Don’t you know what the girl who is asleep beside you? Just look at that nose,’ ‘What nose?’ ‘That’s the point – it’s hardly even there. Look at that hair, like off a spinning wheel. Remember “flax” that you studied in school? That’s human flax! Schmuck, this is the real McCoy. A shikse! And aslee! Or maybe she’s just faking it is a strong possibility too. Faking it, but saying under her breath, “C’mmon, Big Boy, do all the different dirty things to me you ever wanted to do.” ‘Could that be so?’ ‘Darling,’ croons my cock, ‘let me just begin to list the many different dirty things she would like you to start off with: she wants you to take her hard little shikse titties in your hands, for one.’ ‘She does?’ ‘She wants you to finger-fuck her shikse cunt till she faints.’ ‘Oh God. Till she faints!’ ‘This is an opportunity such as may never occur again. So long as you live.’ … But who wins an argument with a hard-on? Ven der putz shteht, ligt der sec – der sekel in drerd. Know that famous proverb? When the prick stands up, the brains get buried in the ground!

– Portnoy’s Complaint
2. Remembrance

When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing – a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place. In the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the clearing while the people waited among the trees.

After situating herself on a huge flat-sided rock, Baby Suggs bowed her head and prayed silently. The company watched her from the trees. They know she was ready when she put her stick down. They she shouted, 'Let the children come!' and they ran from the trees toward her.

‘Let your mothers hear you laugh’, she told them, and the woods rang. The adults looked on and could not help smiling.

Then ‘Let the grown men come’, she shouted. They stepped out one by one from among the ringing trees.

‘Let your wives and your children see you dance’, she told them, and groundlife shuddered under their feet.

Finally she called the women to her. ‘Cry’, she told them. ‘For the living and the dead. Just cry’. And without covering their eyes the women let loose. (106–7)

Sethe told her about Baby Suggs where had sent her three children.

Ella wrapped a cloth strip tight around the baby’s navel as she listened for the holes – the things the fugitives did not say; the questions they did not ask. Listened too for the unnamed, unmentioned people left behind.

It became a way to feed her. Just as Denver discovered and relied on the delightful sweet things had on Beloved, Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost.
ELIZABETH BISHOP (1911-1979)
born in Worcester, Massachusetts; father died 8 months later
1916: mother enters mental asylum and remains there for the rest of her life; EB brought up by relatives
1917: goes to live with grandparents in Worcester
1930-34: attends Vassar College; meets Marianne Moore
1938: settles in Key West
1946: North and South: ‘The Map’, ‘Late Air’
1947: meets Robert Lowell
1951: settles in Brazil with Lota de Macedo Soares
1967: Soares’s suicide; makes transition back to U.S., living in California, Massachusetts, Washington

1. Landscape & Travel
Here is a coast; here is a harbor; here, after a meagre diet of horizon, is some scenery: impractically shaped and – who knows? – self-pitying mountains, sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery…
……………………………………………………..
…Oh, tourist, is this how this country is going to answer you
and your immodest demands for a different world, and a better life, and complete comprehension of both at last, and immediately, after eighteen days of suspension? – ‘Arrival at Santos’

From narrow provinces
of fish and bread and tea,
home of the long tides
where the bay leaves the sea
twice a day and takes
the herrings long rides,

where if the river
enters or retreats
in a wall of brown foam
depends on if it meets
the bay coming in,
the bay not at home;

where, silted red,
sometimes the sun sets
facing a red sea,
and others, veins the flats’
lavender, rich mud
in burning rivulets… – ‘The Moose’

2. Loss
ONE ART
The art of losing isn’t hard to master; so many things seem filled with the intent to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose some every day. Accept the fluster of lost door keys, the hour badly spent. The art of losing isn’t hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster: places, and names, and where it was you meant to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother’s watch. And look! my last, or next-to-last, of three loved houses went. The art of losing isn’t hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster, some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent. I miss them, but it wasn’t a disaster.

– Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture I love) I shan’t have lied. It’s evident the art of losing’s not too hard to master though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

JEDNO UMĚNÍ
Umění ztrácet zvládneš bez bolesti; věci jako by chřely ze všech sil se ztratit, takže není to neštěstí.


Ztrácej dlouhé víc, nesnaž se nalézt
místa, jména a kde byl vlastně cíl
tvých cest. Nic z toho nebude neštěstí.

Ztratím matčin šperk. A horší jsou zvěstí,
že další milý dům se vytratil.
Umění ztrácet zvládne bez bolesti,
Ztratila jsem dvě města, pár království,
jež měla jsem, dvě řeky, světadíl.
Chybi mi, ale neni to neštěstí.

– I ztratil tebe (s veselým hlasem, s
umění ztrácet není moc bolesti,
I ztratit tebe (s veselým hlasem, s
ešer bolesti)

(trans. Mariana Machová)

ROBERT LOWELL (1911-1977)
born in Boston, Massachusetts
1935-37: Harvard University
1937-40: Kenyon College, studies Classics; meets John Crowe Ransom
1940-41: converts to Catholicism; Louisiana State University
1941-42: moves to NYC.
1943: refuses the draft as conscientious objector; serves a year in jail
1948: leaves Catholic Church
1954-1960: lives in Boston
1963-77: teaches at Harvard
1964: For the Union Dead: ‘For the Union Dead’
1969: Notebook, 1967-68
1970-76: lives in England
1977: Day by Day: ‘Epilogue’

1. Autobiography & Family
These are the tranquilized Fifities,
and I am forty. Ought I to regret my seedtime?
I was a fire-breathing Catholic C.O.,
and made my manic statement,
telling off the state and president, and then
sat waiting sentence in the bull pen
beside a Negro boy with curluces
of marijuana in his hair.
– ‘Memories of West Street and Lepke’

My grandfather found
his grandchild’s fogbound solitudes
sweeter than human society.

When Uncle Devereux died,
Daddy was still on sea-duty in the Pacific;
it seemed spontaneous and proper
for Mr. MacDonald, the farmer,
Karl, the chauffeur, and even my Grandmother
to say, ‘your Father’. They meant my Grandfather.
– ‘Dunbarton’

‘The hot night makes up keep our bedroom windows
open.
Our magnolia blossoms. Life begins to happen.
My hopped up husband drops his home disputes,
and hits the streets to cruise for prostitutes,
free-lancing out along the razor’s edge.
This screwball might kill his wife, then take the pledge.
Oh the monotonous meanness of his lust . . .
It’s the injustice . . . he is so unjust –
whiskey-blind, swaggering home at five.
My only thought is how to keep alive.
What makes him tick? Each night now I tie
ten dollars and his car key to my thigh . . .
Gored by the climacteric of his want,
he stalls above me like an elephant.
– ‘To Speak of the Woe That Is in Marriage’

2. History
Shaw’s father wanted no monument
except the ditch,
where his son’s body was thrown
and lost with his ‘niggers.’

Colonel Shaw
is riding on his bubble,
he waits
for the blessèd break.

The Aquarium is gone. Everywhere,
giant finned cars nose forward like fish;
a savage servility
slides by on grease. – ‘For the Union Dead’

No weekends for the gods now. Wars
flicker, earth licks its open sores,
fresh breakage, fresh promotions, chance
assassinations, no advance.
Only man thinning out his kind
sounds through the Sabbath noon, the blind
swipe of the pruner and his knife
busy about the tree of life . . .
Pity the planet, all joy gone
from this sweet volcanic cone;
peace to our children when they fall
in small war on the heels of small
war – until the end of time
to police the earth, a ghost
orbiting forever lost
in our monotonous sublime.
– ‘Waking Early Sunday Morning’

ALLEN GINSBERG (1926-1997)
born in Newark, New Jersey (father socialist, mother communist)
1932: mother hospitalized for mental illness
1943: enrolls at Columbia University
1943-44: meets Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs
1946: meets Neal Cassady
1949: arrested; mental asylum; the ‘Beat Generation’ is named by Kerouac/Herbert Huncke
1954: living in San Francisco
1956: Howl and Other Poems (City Lights)
1957: Howl obscenity trial; deemed ‘not obscene’
1956- travels widely around the world
1961: Kaddish
1965: becomes Král Majáles

1. Beats
I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix, angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of light…
………………………………………
who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston seeking jazz or sex or soup, and followed the brilliant Spaniard to converse about America and Eternity, a hopeless task, and so took ship to Africa, who disappeared into the volcanoes of Mexico leaving behind nothing but the shadow of dungarees and the lava and ash of poetry scattered in fireplace of Chicago, who reappeared on the West Coast investigating the FBI in beards and shorts with big pacifist eyes sexy in their dark skin passing out incomprehensible leaflets…
…………………………………………………………
who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off the roof waving genitals and manuscripts, who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy, who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love…

2. Sex, Drugs and Rock ‘n’ Roll
Thus I met Neal & thus we felt each other’s flesh and owned each other bodies and souls.
So then as I lay on his breast with my arms clasped around his neck and his cheek against mine, I put my hand down to feel his great back for the first time, jaws and pectorals of steel at my fingers, closer and stiller, down the silken iron back to his waist, the whole of his torso now open my hand at his waist trembling, waited delaying and under the elastic of his briefs, I first touched the smooth mount of his rock buttocks, silken in power, rounded in animal fucking and bodily nights over nurses and schoolgirls, O ass of long solitudes in stolen cars, and solitudes on curbs, musing fist in cheek, Ass of a thousand farewells, ass of youth, youth’s lovers, O ass of mystery and night! ass of gymnasiums and muscular pants ass of high schools and masturbation ass of lone delight, ass of mankind, so beautiful and hollow, dowry of Mind and Angels,

Ass of hero, Neal Cassidy, I had at my hand: my fingers traced the curve to the bottom of his thighs.
………………………………………………………………………
– ‘Many Loves’

3. Patriotism
America I’ve given you all and now I’m nothing.
America two dollars and twentyseven cents January 17, 1956.
I can’t stand my own mind
America when will we end the human war?
Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.
I don’t feel good don’t bother me.
………………………………………………………………………
America this is quite serious.
America this is the impression I get from looking in the television set.
America is this correct?
I’d better get right down to the job.
It’s true I don’t want to join the Army or turn lathes in precision parts factories, I’m nearsighted and psychopathic anyway.
America I’m putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.
………………………………………………………………………
– ‘America’

4. War
‘Wichita Vortex Sutra’

Though the highway’s straight, dipping downward through low hills, rising narrow on the far horizon black cows browse in caked fields ponds in the frozen hollows lie frozen, quietness.
Is this the land that started war on China?
This be the soil that thought Cold War for decades?
Are these the nervous naked trees & farmhouses of oriental anxiety molecules that’ve imagined American Foreign Policy and magick’d up paranoia in Peking and curtains of living blood surrounding far Saigon?
Are these towns where the language emerged from the mouths here that makes a Hell of riots in Dominica sustains the aging tyranny of Chiang in silent Taipeh city
Paid for the lost French war in Algeria overthrow the Guatemalan polis in ‘54 maintaining United Fruit’s banana greed another thirteen years for the secret prestige of the Dulles family lawfirm?
………………………………………………………………………
Come to my lone presence
into this Vortex

named Kansas,

I lift my voice aloud,
make Mantra of American language now,
I hear declare the end of the War!

Ancient days’ Illusion! –
and pronounce words beginning my own
millennium…

[February 14, 1966]
MULTICULTURALISM
Melting Pot. Israel Zangwill: ‘America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming.’

Mestizo (European/Amerindian). Chicano/Chicana (Mexican-American).
Native-Americans: N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa, 1934- ), House Made of Dawn (1968)

Salad Bowl.

DIRTY REALISM
(or ‘Gritty Realism’)
Precursors: Hemingway, Chekhov
Demographic: blue collar
Period: 1970s and ‘80s
Exponents: Carver, Ford, Stone, Tobias Wolff

RAYMOND CARVER (1938-1988)
1938: born in Oregon
grows up in Washington State; works in sawmill, as cleaner, various other menial jobs
1967: gets attention for published stories
1976: Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?
1977: joins AA
1978: meets Tess Gallagher
1981: What We Talk About When We Talk About Love
1983: Cathedral

LITTLE THINGS
Early that day the weather turned and the snow was melting into dirty water. Streaks of it ran down from the little shoulder-high window that faced the backyard. Cars slushed by on the street outside, where it was getting dark. But it was getting dark on the inside too.
He was in the bedroom pushing clothes into a suitcase when she came to the door.
I’m glad you’re leaving! I’m glad you’re leaving! she said. Do you hear?
He kept on putting his things into the suitcase.
Son of a bitch! I’m so glad you’re leaving! She began to cry. You can’t even look me in the face, can you?
Then she noticed the baby’s picture on the bed and picked it up.
He looked at her and she wiped her eyes and stared at him before turning and going back to the living room. Bring that back, he said.
Just get your things and get out, she said.

He did not answer. He fastened the suitcase, put on his coat, looked around the bedroom before turning off the light. Then he went out to the living room.
She stood in the doorway of the little kitchen, holding the baby.
I want the baby, he said.
Are you crazy?
No, but I want the baby. I’ll get someone to come by for his things.
You’re not touching this baby, she said.
The baby had begun to cry and she uncovered the blanket from around his head.
Oh, oh, she said, looking at the baby.
He moved toward her.
For God’s sake! she said. She took a step back into the kitchen.
I want the baby.
Get out of here!
She turned and tried to hold the baby over in a corner behind the stove.
But he came up. He reached across the stove and tightened his hands on the baby.
Let go of him, he said.
Get away, get away! she cried.
The baby was red-faced and screaming. In the scuffle they knocked down a flowerpot that hung behind the stove.
He crowded her into the wall then, trying to break her grip. He held on to the baby and pushed with all his weight.
Let go of him, he said.
Don’t, she said. You’re hurting the baby, she said.
I’m not hurting the baby, he said.
The kitchen window gave no light. In the near-dark he worked on her fisted fingers with one hand and with the other hand he gripped the screaming baby up under an arm near the shoulder.
She felt her fingers being forced open. She felt the baby slipping out of his hands and he pulled back very hard.
In this manner, the issue was decided. (1977) *

This blind man, an old friend of my wife’s, he was on his way to spend the night. His wife had died. So he was visiting the dead wife’s relatives in Connecticut. He called my wife from his in-laws’. Arrangements were made. He would come by train, a five-hour trip, and my wife would meet him at the station. She hadn’t seen him since she worked for him one summer in Seattle ten years ago. But she and the blind man had kept in touch.
They made tapes and mailed them back and forth. I wasn’t enthusiastic about his visit. He was no one I knew. And his being blind bothered me. My idea of blindness came from the movies. In the movies, the blind moved slowly and never laughed. A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to.

‘You’ll have to forgive me,’ I said. ‘But I can’t tell you what a cathedral looks like. It just isn’t in me to do it. I can’t do any more than I’ve done.’

The blind man sat very still, his head down, as he listened to me.

I said, ‘The truth is, cathedrals don’t mean anything special to me. Nothing. Cathedrals. They’re something to look at on late-night TV. That’s all they are.’

So we kept on with it. His fingers rode my fingers as my hand went over the paper. It was like nothing else in my life up to now.

Then he said, ‘I think that’s it. I think you got it,’ he said. ‘Take a look. What do you think?’

But I had my eyes closed. I thought I’d keep them that way for a little longer. I thought it was something I ought to do.

‘Well?’ he said. ‘Are you looking?’

My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn’t feel like I was inside anything.

‘It’s really something,’ I said.

– from ‘Cathedral’ (1983)

RICHARD FORD (1944–)

born Jackson, Mississippi
studied at Michigan State University
1968: marries
1970: MFA from University of California, Irvine
1981: after publishing 2 novels, becomes a sportswriter
2012: Canada

My name is Frank Bascombe. I am a sportswriter.

For the past fourteen years I have lived here at 19 Hoving Road, Haddam, New Jersey, in a large Tudor house bought when a book of short stories I wrote sold to a movie producer for a lot of money, and seemed to set my wife and me and our three children – two of whom were not even born yet – up for a good life.

Just exactly what that good life was – the one I expected – I cannot tell you know exactly, though I wouldn’t say it has not come to pass, only that much has come in between. The child we had when everything was starting has died, though there are two others, as I mentioned, who are alive and wonderful children.

I wrote half of a short novel soon after we moved here from New York and then put it in the drawer, where it has been ever since, and from which I don’t expect to retrieve it unless something I cannot now imagine happens.

Twelve years ago, when I was twenty-six, and in the blind way of things then, I was offered a job as a sportswriter by the editor of a glossy New York sports magazine you have all heard of, because of a free-lance assignment I had written in a particular way he liked.

And to my surprise and everyone else’s I quit writing my novel and accepted.

– RICHARD FORD, The Sportswriter

Since there’s no direct-est route to Parkway Exit 102N, where Wade’s already fuming at Fuddruckers, I take the scenic drive up 35, across the Metedeconk and the Manasquan to Point Pleasant, switch to NJ 34 through more interlocking towns, townships, townlettes – one rich, one not, one getting there, one hardly making its millage. I love this post-showing interlude in the car, especially after my syncope on the dune. It’s the moment d’or which the Shore facilitates perfectly, offering exposure to the commercial-ethnic-residential zeitgeist of a complex republic, yet shelter from most of the ways the republic gives me the willies. ‘Culture comfort,’ I call this brand of specialized well-being. And along with its sister solace, ‘cultural literacy’ – knowing by inner gyroscope where the next McDonald’s or Borders, or the next old-fashioned Italian shoe repair or tuxedo rental or lobster dock is going to show up on the horizon – these together I consider a cornerstone of the small life lived acceptably. I count it a good when I can keep all things that give me the willies out of my thinking, and in their places substitute vistas I can appreciate, even unwittingly. Which is why I take the scenic route now, and why when I get restless I fly out to Moline or Flint or Fort Wayne for just a few hours’ visit – since there I can experience the new and the complex, coupled with the entirely benign and knowable.

– The Lay of the Land

direct-est: most direct
showing: showing a house to potential buyers
35, NJ 34: road numbers
Fuddruckers: burger chain
Metedeconk, Manasquan, Point Pleasant: towns on the New Jersey Shore
Borders: book chain
give me the willies: make me frightened
tuxedo rental: půjčovna smokingů
millage: property tax

[Frank’s] not a conventionally understood suburbanite. I guess it’s my view that if you’re flying over a suburb in a helicopter and see some guy down there schlumming along, he’s probably a Pakistani or Chinese or an African-American. I think suburbanites are not knowable. They are only knowable as literature or art knows them, which is to say up close. The conventional wisdom is that suburban life is eventless and risk-free. When I started The Sportswriter, I thought to myself - how about if I wrote a redemptive novel about the suburbs, a paean to New Jersey and its suburban life? I realized that not to mouth the conventional line, but instead to think, as Frank does in The Lay of the Land, “I love this, this is great!” is to uncover a seam of approval, a seam of optimism, of acceptance that is, in fact, buried in us all.

Why does each Bascombe book revolve around a holiday—first Easter, then the Fourth of July, and now Thanksgiving? I set them on holidays because I think that every American reader—and Americans are my readers of first instance—has an embedded memory of each official holiday in this country. Probably we have plenty of such memories: what Easter was like when we were young, and then when we got older. These readers’ memories permit me to make the temporal setting of my book plausible at a primary level of impulse. Readers immediately concede, “Oh, yes, this time setting’s recognizable to me. It really exists.” And if a writer can somehow cause the reader to concede that a book is taking place in a period of time that really exists and that maybe has some of the emotional properties the book ascribes to it, then one requirement of getting the book under way has been achieved. Temporal setting is an important formal feature of a book—at least, for this writer, it is. Beyond that, I have my own accumulated holiday impressions, and I’ve wanted to put them into play in my books.

* [On real estate:] The way in which real estate connects to our national spirit in America came along entirely fortuitously. …I speculate that human beings’—not just Americans’—attitudes toward where they live, toward their pieces of ground, their houses, their previous residences and future ones, are part of their feelings about being alive. We calculate our spiritual condition, in part, in terms of how and where we live. I don’t think it’s peculiarly American to feel that way, and yet it is American. I write about this because I think it’s a very important subject, a fit subject for the imagination (albeit a rather homely one on the surface).


THOMAS PYNCHON (1937- )
born Long Island, NY
1953-59: Cornell University (with a break for the US Navy)
1963: V.
1966: The Crying of Lot 49
1973: Gravity’s Rainbow
1997: Mason & Dixon
2006: Against the Day

1. Between Modernity & Postmodernity
the need to see patterns which may easily turn into the tendency to suspect plots. — Tony Tanner, City of Words

San Narciso lay farther south, near L.A. Like many named places in California it was less an identifiable city than a group of concepts—census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei, all overlaid with access roads to its own freeway. …But if there was any vital difference between it and the rest of Southern California, it was invisible on first glance. She drove into San Narciso on a Sunday, in a rented Impala. Nothing was happening. She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, on to a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the time she’d opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew less about radios than about Southern California, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There’d seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding.

— The Crying of Lot 49

Miles’s Song
Too fat to Frug,
That’s what you tell me all the time,
When you really try’n’ to put me down,
But I’m hip,
So close your big fat lip,
Yeah, baby,
I may be too fat to Frug,
But at least I ain’t too slim to Swim.

‘It’s lovely,’ said Oedipa, ‘but why do you sing with an English accent when you don’t talk that way?’
‘It’s this group I’m in,’ Miles explained, ‘the Paranoids. We’re new yet. Our manager says we should sing like that. We watch English movies a lot, for the accent.’
‘My husband’s a disc jockey,’ said Oedipa trying to be helpful, ‘it’s only a thousand-watt station, but if you had anything like a tape I could give it to him to plug.’
Miles closed the door behind him and started in with the shifty eye. ‘In return for what?’ Moving in on her. ‘Do you want what I think you want? This is the Payola Kid here, you know.’ Oedipa picked up the nearest weapon, which happened to be the rabbit-ear antenna off the TV in the corner. ‘Oh,’ said Miles, stopping. ‘You hate me too.’ Eyes bright through his bangs. ‘You are paranoid,’ Oedipa said.
‘I have a smooth young body,’ said Miles, ‘I thought that you older chicks went for that.’

— The Crying of Lot 49

DON DELILLO (1936- )
raised in the Bronx, NYC
attended Fordham University
worked for some years as copywriter
1971: Americana
1982: The Names
1985: White Noise
1988: Libra
1991: Mao II
1997: Underworld
2007: Falling Man

1. Plots, Conspiracies
Nicholas Branch sits in the book-filled room, the room of documents, the room of theories and dreams. He is in
the fifteenth year of his labor and sometimes wonders if he is becoming bodiless. He knows he is getting old. … Nicholas Branch in his glove-leather armchair is a retired senior analyst of the Central Intelligence Agency, hired on contract to write the secret history of the assassination of President Kennedy. Sex point nine seconds of heath and light. Let’s call a meeting to analyze the blur. Let’s devote our lives to understanding this moment, separating the elements of each crowded second. We will build theories that gleam like jade idols, intriguing systems of assumption, four-faced, graceful. We will follow the bullet trajectories backwards to the lives that occupy the shadows, actual men who moan in their dreams. Elm Street. A woman wonders why she is sitting on the grass, bloodspray all around. Tenth Street. A witness leaves her shoes on the hood of a bleeding policeman’s car. A strangeness, Branch feels that is almost holy. There is much here that is holy, an aberration in the heartland of the real. Let’s regain our grip on things. — Libra

We script a person or persons out of ordinary pocket litter. — Libra

Pocket litter. Win Everett was at work devising a general shape, a life. He would script a gunman out of ordinary dog-eared paper, the contents of a wallet. Parmenter would contrive to get document blanks from the Records Branch. Mackey would find a model for the character Everett was in the process of creating. They wanted a name, a face, a bodily frame they might use to extend their fiction into the world. Everett had decided he wanted one figure to be slightly more visible than the others, a man the investigation might center on, someone who would be trailed and possibly apprehended. Three or four shooters would vanish completely, leaving scant traces of their affiliation. — Libra

2. Mass Media & Simulacra
In the morning I walked to the bank. I went to the automated teller machine to check my balance. I inserted my card, entered my secret code, tapped out my request. The figure on the screen roughly corresponded to my independent estimate, feebly arrived at after long searches through documents, tormented arithmetic. Waves of relief and gratitude flowed over me. The system had blessed my life. I felt its support and approval. The system hardware, the mainframe sitting in a locked room in some distant city. What a pleasing interaction. I sensed that something of deep personal value, but not money, not that at all, had been authenticated and confirmed. A deranged person was escorted from the bank by two armed guards. The system was invisible, which made it all the more impressive, all the more disquieting to deal with. But we were in accord, at least for now. The networks, the circuits, the streams, the harmonies. — White Noise

We go to the overpass all the time. Babette, Wilder and I. We take a thermos of iced tea, park the car, watch the setting sun. Clouds are no deterrent. Clouds intensify the drama, trap and shape the light. Heavy overcasts have little effect. Light bursts through, tracers and smoky arcs. Overcasts enhance the mood. We find little to say to each other. More cars arrive, parking in a line that extends down to the residential zone. People walk up the incline and onto the overpass, carrying fruit and nuts, cool drinks, mainly the middle aged, the elderly, some with webbed beach chairs which they set out on the sidewalk, but younger couples also, arm in arm at the rail, looking west. The sky takes on content, feeling, an exalted narrative life. The bands of color reach so high, seem at times to separate into their constituent parts. There are turreted skies, light storms, softly falling streamers. It is hard to know how we should feel about this. Some people are scared by the sunsets, some determined to be elated, but most of us don’t know how to feel, are ready to go either way. Rain is no deterrent. Rain brings on graded displays, wonderful running hues. More cars arrive, people come trudging up the incline. The spirit of these warm evenings is hard to describe. There is anticipation in the air but it is not the expectant midsommer hum of a shrimp crowd, a sandlot game, with coherent precedents, a history of secure response. This waiting is introverted, uneven, almost backward and shy, tending toward silence. What else do we feel? Certainly there is awe, but we don’t know whether we are watching in wonder or dread, we don’t know what we are watching or what it means, we don’t know whether it is permanent, a level of experience to which we will gradually adjust, into which our uncertainty will eventually be absorbed, or just some atmospheric weirdness soon to pass. The collapsible chairs are yanked open, the old people sit. What is there to say? The sunsets linger and so do we. The sky is under a spell, powerful and storied. Now and then a car actually crosses the overpass, moving slowly, deferentially. People keep coming up the incline, some in wheelchairs, twisted by disease, those who attend them bending low to push against the grade. I didn’t know how many handicapped and helpless people there were in the town until the warm nights brought crowds to the overpass. Cars speed beneath us, coming from the west, from out of the towering light, and we watch them as if for a sign, as if they carry on their painted surfaces some residue of the sunset, a barely detectable luster or film of telltale dust. No one plays a radio or speaks in a voice that is much above a whisper. Something golden falls, a softness delivered to the air. There are people walking dogs, there are kids on bikes, a man with a camera and long lens, waiting for his moment. It is not until some time after dark has fallen, the insects screaming in the heat, that we slowly begin to disperse, shly, politely, car after car, restored to our separate and defensible selves. — White Noise

3. Nostalgia for Religious Meaning