Let’s look at Jack London. A moose didn’t fall on Jack London; he OD’d on morphine. Now, let’s talk about that, okay? ‘Cause they don’t tell you that in this book. He was 40 years old when he died and he wrote a lot. Shelves of Jack London. A friend of mine collects Jack London books and he has got one whole bookshelf practically full of it. I think the man wrote around 52 books in his short life, shortish life. In fact, a survey back in the early ‘90s of world readers, turns out that Jack London was the most popular American writer of them all. More popular than Mark Twain or Ernest Hemingway, or people that you would assume would be the most popular.

And there are reasons for it. From the comments I heard in the hall when I came in here, it seemed like most everybody enjoyed these stories. I mean, they’re pretty gruesome and it’s man against nature and man against beast and man against himself, all the typical conflicts that we’re taught about when we learn to write. But it’s done in such a way that it’s very arresting.

He was a Californian, born in San Francisco. His father was an itinerant astrologer. Now, you tell me what that is. I guess the guy goes from town to town, telling people’s charts. He left his mother when he found out she was pregnant with London. She married a man named London who legally adopted him, but London was never sure his entire life whether perhaps this man might’ve been his biological father, too. Or not “too,” but may have been actually his father.

He had many, many, many, many jobs. His family struggled all their lives. They tried lots of businesses that failed and get-rich schemes and things like that. And at a very young age, he left school and went to work. He did all kinds of odd jobs including
raiding commercial oyster beds which is — that’s what an oyster pirate is. I think that’s a neat thing. But in his boat he would have a shotgun to defend himself from the proper owners of the oyster beds.

A very important thing happened to him when he was 9 years old. He found the Oakland Library and he read for the rest of his life. Indiscriminately, but mostly history, non-fiction, things like that which — a self-educated man. Autodidact, in other words. He did go to Berkeley for about a semester or two, but financially and otherwise he was unable to continue.

The two most important things probably about his occupations is that he did ship out on a commercial ship and saw the South Seas, and also he did go to the Yukon and pan for gold and try to mine and he gathered an awful lot of material for that. You couldn’t have written — nobody could write “To Build a Fire” unless they’d experienced that kind of weather and that kind of place.

They mention three philosophers that I think are worth looking at. They were big influences on him and they seem contradictory when you first look at it. He greatly admired Marx and Nietzsche and Darwin. You think about it, it’s not really all that contradictory. London was a socialist. He joined the Socialist party for most of his life, even ran for mayor of Oakland as a socialist once.

But, you know, you think of Nietzsche you think of the superman, and you think of Darwin you think of survival of the fittest, and you think of Marx and you think of the rise of the — well, the destruction of the bourgeoisie and the inevitability of the end of history. Those things don’t really seem to go together, but they did for London.
That the strongest would be the workers. And that in a Marxian/Darwinian society, the workers would finally overcome. But that within them there would be men who were stronger than other men, and there’s that Darwinian concept and the Nietzschean — the Nietzschean concepts.

At any rate, I bet you read things like White Fang and Call of the Wild. They used to be considered boys’ books, but they’re pretty bloody and violent in their own right. He wrote 1,000 words a day at least. He wrote too much, some would say, or he wrote hurriedly but he wrote for a living. He was the first American to make a million dollars by his — by his writing.

He had kind of an assembly line. One person who visited him said London got up about 10:00 o’clock in the morning, had his first Scotch at 11:00, chain smoked while he wrote in bed. We don’t recommend any of these things for any of you young, aspiring writers. You know, an ashtray full of butts and writing in bed. He wrote in pencil. His wife, Charmien, and his second wife, would come in and collect the notes. Then she’d go into the other room and she’d type ‘em up with a carbon. Then she’d bring ‘em back for him to revise. Meanwhile, he’s putting out more notes. He had a clothesline affair with clothes pins and he’d pin these bunches of notes to them, and she’d kind of peel ‘em off and go in there and type some more. And then she’d announce, “You wrote 1,028 words today.” “All right. Time to quit,” you know.

It’s one way to get things done. It literally is. If you’re going to write, you have to sit down in the morning and do it. It doesn’t just happen. If you want to be a writer, you don’t just one day wake up and say, “Well, where’s that book that I was gonna write?”
You actually have to go to work and do it, and he did.

He once said that he wrote only for money. He said, “I wrote right for no other purpose than to add to the beauty that now belongs to me.” He bought a lot of land. He bought — somebody who grew up poor, that’s often the kind of — something that they look forward to doing. Built up quite an estate. Tried to grow grapes and failed. But you can buy a really crummy wine that’s made on his estate now called — oh, what’s it called — Wolf House wine. “Like his contemporaries Steven Crane and Frank Norris (and like Hemingway a generation later), London was fascinated by the way violence tested and defined character.” How do people react under pressure?

I mentioned those three conflicts awhile ago and I probably ought to reiterate those. If you — when you take a course in writing, they always talk about the conflicts. Stories have to have conflict. And London studied the journals of his day and learned what formulas they liked, and he employed the conflicts in them. What are the three famous conflicts? Man versus nature, man versus man, and man against himself. And supposedly, man against himself was on the higher level there because that’s more psychological than just a battle against nature or another man.

Some people say that “To Build a Fire” approaches all at that last conflict as well. That he is in conflict with himself and may be on his way to some kind of realization near the end. I’m not so sure. Seems to me the dog’s the only one who really comes to any true conclusions. Let’s look at it.

Oh, by the way. I mentioned his suicide. There’s some controversy. The death was ruled uremic poisoning. He suffered from nephritis, a kidney disease that was
aggravated by and perhaps even brought on by his alcoholism, and he took morphine for the pain. It was a prescribed medication. He kept very careful notebooks of how much he was taking, but he was increasing the dosage and seeing how well he was doing with it, and he may or may not have intended to OD but he certainly did. He went into a coma and it lasted about a day before he finally died. There’s still some question. I think it probably was suicide. Seems like from what I’ve read.

Well, “The Law of Life.” Point of view is my hobby horse. What’s the point of view of this story? What stance did the author take to tell it? Whose mind do we get into? I guess it’s Koskoosh — or is it Kaskoosh? Anyway, the old man. What is unusual about narrating a story from this old man’s point of view?

[inaudible student response]

Well, he does die. But, I mean, we’ve had an omniscient narrator who’s telling us — this is like selected omniscience. The old man is not telling the story, but we are privy to his thoughts. And so what he’s experiencing is what we know about. What limits that expression? He’s blind. It’s just like in Ambrose Bierce’s story, “Chickamauga,” that I told you about. This little boy is the central consciousness and there’s no sound in the story, and you’ll realize that about halfway through and then you find out that the little boy was deaf.

So the old man is blind. That way — well, the very opening.

Old Koskoosh listened greedily. Though his sight had long since faded, his hearing was still acute, and the slightest sound penetrated to the glimmering intelligence which yet abode behind the withered forehead.
Look at that language. Look at that high-falutin’ diction. Isn’t that right out of Bret Harte? He does that a little bit sometimes.

But everything depends upon his hearing. And so how would you like to be left alone with a pile of sticks and a firebrand, in the winter, hearing the wolves howl, and all you have to go on is your ears, your hearing. So that when he hears the wolves and when he hears them coming closer, and then finally the sense of touch with the cold muzzle of a wolf — oooooh. I think those kinds of things makes it much more creepier than if he could see. And it’s a challenge to the writer and it’s a pleasure to the reader, and it sold and it’s in anthologies now. So that’s the way that works.

It says,

Sit-cum-to-ha was his daughter’s daughter, but she was too busy to waste a thought upon her broken grandfather. The long trail waited while the short day refused to linger. Life called her, and the duties of life, not death. And he was very close to death now. The thought made the old man panicky for the moment, and he stretched forth a palsied hand which wandered tremblingly over the small heap of dry wood beside him.

I like the way we figure out what’s going on rather than just have the exposition tell us what’s going on.

Well, his son is the chief. That ought to mitigate circumstances somewhat, too. But what about Koskoosh’s own father? He left him to die of exposure. Because this after all is the law of life. He hears this child whimpering and he thinks,

Little Koo-tee, the old man thought, a fretful child, and not over strong. It would
die soon, perhaps, and they would burn a hole through the frozen tundra and pile rocks above to keep the wolverines away. Well, what did it matter? A few years at best, and as many an empty belly as a full one. And in the end, Death waited, ever-hungry and hungriest of them all.

So we had this fatalistic note from the very beginning.

The old man is something of a poet. The boy asks him — or the young man asks him if it’s well with him and he says,

It is well. I am as a last year’s leaf, clinging lightly to the stem. The first breath that blows, and I fall. My voice is become like an old woman’s. My eyes no longer show me the way of my feet, and my feet are heavy, and I am tired. It is well.

Well, that’s a pretty brave front. Is he ready to die? Doesn’t seem to be, not when the wolves get there. He realizes how he will go. “First his feet would yield, then his hands; and the numbness would travel, slowly, from the extremities to the body. All men must die,” he says. That’s not the way he’s going to die, though, is it? Would you rather be torn apart by wolves or freeze? I think I’d rather freeze.

But he didn’t complain. It was the way of life and it was just. Significant quote here. It says, “Nature was not kindly to the flesh.” Bottom of 973. “She had no concern for that concrete thing called the individual. Her interest lay in the species, the race.”

The tribe. They’ll survive. But the old and weak will have to die.

When Tennyson — and “In Memoriam,” talking about nature red in truth and claw, he says, “Are God and nature then at strife? So careful of the type she’s seen,
nature so careful of the single life.” So careful of the species but so careless of individual lives. And just so long as the species makes it, that’s okay.

Does this sound like anyone you’ve read recently? Middle of that next paragraph. “Nature did not care. To life she set one task, gave one law. To perpetuate the race was the task of life, its law was death.” Who does that sound like? Steven Crane and others who will follow.

Then he uses the example of a young woman. “A maiden was a good creature to look upon, full-breasted and strong, with spring to her step and light in her eyes. But her task was yet before her.” She would grow up, she would take a husband. “And with the coming of her offspring her looks left her. Her limbs dragged.” And finally, “Her task was done. But a little while, on the first pinch of famine or the first long trail, and she would be left, even as he had been left, in the snow, with a little pile of wood. Such was the law.”

There’s a wonderful play by Edward Albee called “The Sandbox.” Have you ever come across that? In the very beginning, when he first started talking about the theater of the absurd back in the ’50’s, and one of the characters is the grandma. And they’re taking her out and they set her in this sandbox on the beach to wait for the Angel of Death because it’s time for her to die. They’re just kind of abandoning her. I just now thought about this. But you get your little pile of sticks and there she’s just, “They gave me a good home. I have my own little place by the stove and my own little dish.” You know, kind of like a dog.

But, of course, we really don’t treat elderly people that way, do we? We don’t
decide their time is done and it’s time for them to be cast off. Old folks homes, yeah. That’s a pleasant prospect. I get behind a camper or something and it says, “I’m spending my children’s inheritance.” And I know that they are and I know that their children are mad. Read “Dear Abby.” “Dear Abby: I don’t know what to do. My dad is 79 years old and he just married this 23 year old woman, and he’s rich.” Well, tough for you. Too bad. Get a job. It’s too late.

He remembers abandoning his own dad. And this missionary — I thought you’d remember the missionary. “The winter before the missionary came with his talk-books and his box of medicines. Many a time had Koskoosh smacked his lips over the recollection of that box, though now his mouth refused to moisten. The ‘painkiller’ had been especially good.” It may have been alcohol, but I’ve got a feeling that that painkiller may have been morphine, is that what was on his mind. “But the missionary chilled his lungs on the divide by the Mayo, and the dogs afterwards nosed the stones away and fought over his bones.” I like that. Always talking about the remains. You bury ‘em under rocks but the wolverines will still come and find ‘em out — or the dogs.

There was the Great Famine and there was all this starvation, but there were also times of plenty. And what happens when there are times of plenty? “Then it was the men became high-stomached, and revived ancient quarrels, and crossed the divides to the south to kill the Pellys, and to the west that they might sit by the dead fires of the Tananas.” When times were good and people were well fed, it’s time to go to war.
Then he remembers the moose that he and Zing-ha tracked that day. And nearly all the rest of the story is a description of the old man’s memory of trailing that moose. And in this case, his lack of eyesight won’t hurt anything at all because in his memory he can see perfectly well. They follow this moose and they can tell that the wolves have been after him. He says, “One wolf had been caught in a wild lunge of the maddened victim and trampled to death. A few bones, well picked, bore witness” that his brother wolves ate him. And here we go. “But his foes had laid on from behind, till he reared and fell back upon them, crushing two deep into the snow. It was plain the kill was at hand, for their brothers had left them untouched.” They’re gonna wait and eat the moose. “Together they shoved aside” — end of that paragraph — “the under branches of a young spruce and peered forth. It was the end they saw.”

All right. Now, here these two young men, tracking this snow, and they can see what’s going on in the snow or what has happened by the way — by the tracks and the way the snow has been distributed, and the blood and the dead animals. But when they finally peer through this spruce, they actually see the moose at the end. He says, “It was the end they saw.”

But he doesn’t tell us about it at this point. “The picture, like all of youth’s impressions, was still strong with him, and his dim eyes watched the end played out as vividly as in that far-off time.” But they’re not gonna tell us — or London’s not.

Koskoosh marveled at this, for in the days which followed, when he was a leader of men and a head of councilors, he had done great deeds and made his name a curse in the mouths of the Pellys, to say naught of the strange white man he had
killed, knife to knife, in open fight.

When you said old folks home, I think when you see people in retirement or sitting or porches or sometimes in those situations strapped to their chairs, what are they thinking about? Are they thinking “I want out” or “I want a peanut butter and jelly sandwich,” or are they thinking about the past? Are they reliving the old glory days or — I don’t know. What do you think? Thinking about the past?

[Inaudible student response]

Thinking about lunch?

[Inaudible student response]

Yeah, I’ve witnessed a lot of that. Faulkner talks about and psychologists talk about how memory dims as you get older. Sometimes far past is much more vivid than the recent past. Faulkner compares it to the neck of a bottle. Like a beer bottle. You know, you’ve got a long neck here and then that’s the recent past. You can’t see much of that. But then it widens out as you go back further.

My grandmother could remember — like, she told me that she saw the Wright Brothers fly their airplane in Los Angeles in Watts. Watts was a field then. She saw Caruso sing in San Francisco before the earthquake, before the fire. But she couldn’t tell you what city she was in when she died at 95. She was happy. Emerson was happy in his senility, they say. They’d give him his old speeches and he’d read ‘em, read ‘em out loud. “That’s pretty good,” you know? When they buried Longfellow, Emerson supposedly said, “We’ve just buried the sweetest man who ever life — just can’t remember his name.” Well, enough of that.
This old man can remember. And he thinks about his youth and he thinks about his past, and we don’t hear about the death of that moose for a while. “Hark! What was that?” — in the next to the last paragraph.

A chill passed over his body. The familiar, long-drawn howl broke the void, and it was close at hand. Then on his darkened eyes was projected the vision of the moose--the old bull moose--the torn flanks and bloody sides, the riddled mane, and the great branching horns, down low and tossing to the last. He saw the flashing forms of gray, the gleaming eyes, the lolling tongues, the slavered fangs. And he saw the inexorable circle close in till it became a dark point in the midst of the stamped snow.

We wait till that point for him to think of the death of the moose, and that’s only after he hears the howl of the wolves.

Brilliant. “A cold muzzle thrust against his cheek.” Hello? It says the wolf is “overcome for the nonce” — by the occasion — “by his hereditary fear of man, the brute retreated, raising a prolonged call to his brothers; and greedily they answered, till a ring of crouching, jaw-slobbered gray was stretched round about.” Just like the vision that he had and the memory he has of the death of that moose.

I’m gonna pick on Jack London here. Did that bother you? We can’t see anything except what the old man sees, and we can see in his memory the death of the moose. But how can we see this jaw-slobbered ring of gray stretching around him?

[Inaudible student response]

Because that’s what he’s seeing in his imagination? I’m filming this and I’m
filming this from his point of view, and I don’t want to let him have that gray. But you can. Because this is — I think it’s an objective shot, that I — okay. Jack London gets away with it because he’s Jack London. I think this is one of those occasions when he was writing too many words and had one too many Scotches before he called Charmien in to take the notes.

At any rate, the end is like the beginning.

Why should he cling to life? he asked, and dropped the blazing stick into the snow. It sizzled and went out. The circle grunted uneasily, but held its own. Again he saw the last stand of the old bull moose, and Koskoosh dropped his head wearily upon his knees. What did it matter after all? Was it now the law of life?

Is that a suicide? It should be futile to try to keep on defending himself with that stick? I’d hang on to my stick. I’d get another little stick and try to light that stick.

“To Build a Fire,” 1902, is really a classic. And I’m told that this is true. That if you expectorate and air that cold, that saliva will freeze before it hits the ground. Have you ever heard of that? This just seems pretty incredible to me anyway that it would be 75 below zero. Does it get that cold? The thing about this man is he’s no philosopher. It says,

The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero was to him just precisely fifty degrees below zero. He doesn’t think about man’s frailty or anything like that. You ever think about that
when you’re outside in the extreme cold, that if you were to stay out there you’d die?
Not long ago it was -1. I don’t know if you were outside when it was, but I was outside when it was and it felt like -1. I can’t imagine -75. Neither could the dogs. Incredible.

And he has a dog, a native Husky, a proper wolf dog. We’re told — third paragraph, 978, “The animal was depressed by the tremendous cold.” Well, you just have to get used to animal points of view. “It knew that it was no time for travelling. Its instinct told it a truer tale than was told to the man by the man’s judgment.” End of that paragraph, But the brute had its instinct. It experienced a vague but menacing apprehension that subdued it and made it slink along at the man’s heels, and that made it question eagerly every unwonted movement of the man as if expecting him to go into camp or to seek shelter somewhere and build a fire. The dog had learned fire, and it wanted fire.

That’s why the dog is hanging with this guy.

I mentioned my dog. I wonder what Jack London would think about my dog’s being named Nietzsche since that’s one of his heroes. He’d probably think it was terrible to name a dachshund Nietzsche, but it’s fun. It’s kind of embarrassing when it’s “Nietzsche” — calling him, you know. But he likes fire. Sometimes we’ll put a little area heater on this parrot. I won’t tell you the parrot’s name — it’s not mine. It’s my wife’s parrot. But sometimes it gets a little chilly and we’ll put a little area heater on it. Well, here comes the dog. Whenever he hears that turned on — I don’t blame him.

Have you ever had — the men in here who wear facial hair, beards and
moustaches — have you ever had your moustache freeze? When you're hunting or you're out in the woods, you get so cold and it condenses, your breath condenses? But I don’t think I’d be using smokeless and expectorating and getting a long beard of this stuff. Of course, we get a little survival lore here about watch out for springs under frozen creeks. Because you could fall in, you could fall through.

And the dog actually — he gets the dog to go first. “He compelled the dog to go on in front,” it says. Well, there are places in the world where women walk in front of men by about 10 or 12 paces for the land mines, things like that. Well, the dog doesn’t like that and immediately it realizes from its instinct that it has to get that ice off of its feet. “He did not expose his fingers more than a minute” — helping the dog — “and was astonished at the swift numbness that smote them.” You can get really cold really quick when there’s wind. Wind chill, I think — I’ve only heard about wind chill for about 10 years now. It used to be just cold enough. But when it was 1 the other day they said, “The wind chill is -21.” Oh, good.

It says, “There was no keen intimacy between the dog and the man, so the dog made no effort to communicate its apprehension to the man.” That really doesn’t bother me very much. Does it bother you — the dog’s psychology? The dog doesn’t like the guy. The dog has no reason to like the guy and so he — but then he wet himself to the knees before he got out of — to the firm crust. “When it is seventy-five below zero, a man must not fail in his first attempt to build a fire— that is, if his feet are wet.”

This kind of reminded me of Steven Crane, too. Middle of the first full paragraph, 982: “The cold of space smote the unprotected tip of the planet, and he, being on that
unprotected tip, received the full force of the blow.” Have you ever thought about it that way? It’s not quite the right way to think about weather, but at the same time it’s like the cold of space is entering your bones. It says,

The extremities were the first to feel its absence. His wet feet froze the faster, and his exposed fingers numbed the fast, though they had not yet begun to freeze. Nose and cheeks were already freezing, while the skin of all his body chilled as it lost its blood.

Brrrrr. This would be a good story to read in the summertime when you’re just really burning up.

Well, he gets the fire going. “All a man had to do was to keep his head, and he was all right. Any man who was a man could travel alone.” This is what some critics point to of Jack London’s Steven Crane like belief in how we must help each other. Had he not resisted and realized he should not be traveling alone in an environment this hostile, he might have been all right. Any man who was a man could travel alone.

Well, that fire — well, how would you feel, if you’ve never read this story before, when the snow comes plopping down? He’s melting the snow in the tree above him. And this falls, this falls, this falls till the whole thing comes down on him. “The man was shocked. It was as though he had just heard his own sentence of death.” How undignified. Plop.

Well, it was up to him to build the fire over again, and this second time there must be no failure. Even if he succeeded, he would most likely lose some toes. His feet must be badly frozen by now, and there would be some time before the
second fire was ready. Such were his thoughts, but he did not sit and think them. He was busy all the time they were passing through his mind. And all the while the dog sat and watched him, a certain yearning wistfulness in its eyes, for it looked upon him as the fire-provider, and the fire was slow in coming.

Every time -- just when you think he’s got it, when he finally gets that match lit, he coughs. “The match fell into the snow and went out.” It says, “after fifty below, a man should travel with a partner.” Talking about his feet freezing. There’s that survival technique -- I don’t know; I’ve heard of it — where if you have some kind of shelter at all and you’re with somebody else, you put your toes in their armpits and they put their toes in your armpits and you might save your toes that way. I recommend you know them pretty well, I would think.

When he gets the whole bunch of matches going, “It flared into flame, seventy sulphur matches at once! As he so held it, he became aware of sensation in his hand. His flesh was burning. He could smell it.” Now, there’s a good detail.

Deep down below the surface he could feel it. The sensation developed into pain that grew acute. And still he endured it, holding the flame of the matches clumsily to the bark that would not light readily because his own burning hands were in the way, absorbing most of the flame.

That’s pretty brutal and I see a couple of you making faces. This isn’t Edith Wharton by any means. This is not drawing-room content. I like this verb. “He cherished the flame carefully and awkwardly.” He cherished it. “It meant life, and it
must not perish." People nowadays, when they build a fire, they take a long — or a lot of people do — they take a long fire-starter and just really soak it up real well. I saw a Boy Scout one time. He built a pit-fire and he put enough lighter fluid in there that when he lit it, he burned the eyebrows off the scoutmaster. But, you know, if you really want to do things authentically, you should start out with some newspaper and some matches and some twigs, and that’s the way you ought to build your fire. Don’t put any of that stinking chemicals on the thing, right? I’m sure you all do that. Ecologically sound. But it’s hard, it’s really hard.

And his hands won’t work. “Each twig gushed a puff of smoke and went out. The fire-provider had failed.” Well, did you think — when did you think what he thought about the dog? I’d already thought it. I mean, that’s in all the lore. You know, you kill the deer and then crawl into the — gut him and get into his cavity if you can, as much of you as you can. Do it with a horse. But the dog is no dummy, you know. The dog doesn’t like the way he’s looking at him. “But it would not come to the man” “Come here — hahahaha,” you know? But since his hands won’t work he can’t even strangle it. He can’t even grab it. He tries and the animal gets away. It snarled and whined and struggled. Good detail here, too.

This is good imagination unless London had actually talked to someone who’d been through this. Or is it just really good imagination when he says, “The man looked down at his hands in order to locate them and found them hanging at the ends of his arms. It struck him as curious that one should have to use his eyes in order to find out where his hands were.” I don’t know. I’ve been so cold and numb sometimes that you
had to watch your fingers to see what they were doing.

And so finally he runs. He just runs. This would make a good film. Middle paragraph, 986:

It struck him as curious that he could run at all on feet so frozen that he could not feel them when they struck the earth and took the weight of his body. He seemed to himself to skim along above the surface, and to have no connection with the earth. Somewhere he had once seen a winged Mercury, and he wondered if Mercury felt as he felt when skimming over the earth.

I’m sorry. I keep pulling out these false notes that I find in these works occasionally, but he just said this man had no imagination. Doesn’t that sound like a heck of an extended imagination, using the imagination particularly when you’re freezing to death? “Well, I wonder if Mercury felt this way?” It’s just like he says he’s got to build another fire. With what? He doesn’t have any matches. And if his hands worked, “Well, I thought those were all the matches.” Once again, I think Charmien needed to — when she was typing, she should have been editing a little bit, too. But I certainly don’t write 1,028 words every day and haven’t written 52 books, so I have no right to criticize Jack London.

The dog follows him. He finally decides to try to meet death with dignity. “With this new-found peace of mind came the first glimmerings of drowsiness. A good idea, he thought, to sleep off to death. It was like taking an anaesthetic. Freezing was not so bad as people thought. There were lots worse ways to die.” Seems to me we talked about that one time in here before. Those wonderful lines of Emily Dickinson about
freezing to death, “As freezing persons recollect the snow. First chill, then stupor, then the letting go.”

“Then the man drowsed off into what seemed to him the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known.” And then the dog comes over and creeps close and catches the scent of death which is immediate. Immediate he would know it. “Then it turned and trotted up the trail in the direction of the camp it knew, where there were other food-providers and fire-providers.” No sentimentality here. The dog doesn’t weep over its master — you know, all those Lancier paintings of the dog, the faithful dog, sitting on the grave. No, this dog, he’s gone. Yeah, the dog doesn’t have time for this anyway. But the guy — he didn’t like him anyway.

Hey, have you ever played dead in front of your dog? See what he’d do? What’d he do?

[Inaudible student response]

Did it freak her out? I haven’t tried it on this dog. I’ve only had this dog a couple of years. I need to try it. Used to come in the door and grab your heart, and stumble around a little bit and then fall down, and see what the dog will do.

[Inaudible student response]

Yeah, when it’s real the dog won’t dial 9-1-1. Yeah. Okay. It was my experience the one time I tried it, the dog just came over and sniffed me and walked away. I was thinking, “Well, at least he only sniffed me,” you know. That was the end of that. A cat will just totally ignore you, no matter what you do. It absolutely doesn’t matter.

We’re gonna start poetry for the first time next time and I hope we have fun. It’ll
be a nice change of pace. And Robert Frost is one of our greatest poets so we ought to have a good time. See you.