



Introduction to Fiction: History of the Novel

Professor Laura Leibman

T Th 1:10—2:30 LIB 41

<https://moodle.reed.edu/course/view.php?id=2012>

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: Full course for one semester. In this course we will examine the development of the novel from the seventeenth-century through the post-modern era, especially its traditional and innovative narrative techniques, its various ways of constructing authorial point of view, its mode of plot compression and the relation of literary structure to temporality, and its range of styles. Special attention will be paid to the genre of the romance and to feminist theory. Prerequisites: Humanities 110 or sophomore standing.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Madame de Lafayette, *Princess of Cleves*

Aphra Behn, *Oronooko*

Jane Austen, *Emma*

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Elizabeth Glaskell, *North and South*

Elizabeth Stoddard, *The Morgesons*

Nella Larsen, *Passing*

Jean Rhys, *The Wide Sargasso Sea*

Louise Erdrich, *Tracks*

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Sandra Cisneros, *House on Mango Street*

Sandra Gilbert, *Feminist Literary Criticism & Theory*

Requirements:

- Attend, prepare for, and participate as a speaker and active listener in conference. If you are ill you may skip class, but please email Laura to let her know that you will be absent. Repeated illness will require a note from the health center.
- Write four 1-2 page papers (350-500 words) and one 4-6 page paper on the readings. You will notice that there are six due dates. For one of these due dates, please submit the draft of the 4-6 page paper instead of the short paper. The final version will be due two weeks after the draft is submitted. Please determine by the second week of class for which book you plan to write a longer paper. Please note that your extended paper **should not be** a day that a précis is due, but rather should be a date for which you have a close reading or comparison essay. Late papers will not be accepted, but if you are good at math, you will also notice this also leaves one assignment day that you can skip (again as long as it isn't the précis). Use your skip wisely. Due dates vary according to group, so see the chart below for when your papers are due.

- Papers should be posted on the **news forum** on moodle **48 hours before** the class on which the readings are assigned (i.e. the date on the syllabus and chart below) so that **everyone** can read them ahead of time and use them to begin discussion. Again no essays will be accepted late.
- Complete a timed, take-home final exam. For the take home exam you will be asked to pick one of the novels we have read plus study a “remake” of that novel from either print, film, or television. The exam is timed because it is designed to give you practice for the English junior qualifying exam.

	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
Close Reading 1	9.10	9.12	10.3	9.24
Close Reading 2	10.15	9.24	11.5	11.12
Close Reading 3	11.26	10.29	11.19	12.5
Comparison 1	10.1	10.8	10.17	10.31
Comparison 2	10.31	11.7	12.10	11.21
Précis 1	1.14	12.3	9.17	10.10

Week 1

Tues. 3 Sept. *Princess of Cleves*; first two sections of the entry on the novel in [THE OXFORD EXCLYCLOPEDIA OF BRITISH LITERATURE](#); and the [Oxford Entry on the Romance](#)

Thurs. 5 Sept. No class Rosh Hashana

Week 2

Tues. 10 Sept. *Princess of Cleves*
Close Reading Essay, GROUP A

Thurs. 12 Sept. *Oronooko*
Close Reading Essay, GROUP B

Week 3

Tues. 17 Sept. *Oronooko*
Essay of choice from the section “On Aphra Behn and *Oroonoko*,” *Feminist Literary Criticism & Theory*, pp. 860-92. Précis GROUP C

Thurs. 19 Sept. No class Sukkot

Week 4

Tues. 24 Sept. *Emma*
Close Reading Essay, GROUP D & B

Thurs. 26 Sept. No Class Shmini Atzeret

Week 5

Tues. 1 Oct. *Emma*
Comparison Essay, GROUP A

Thurs. 3 Oct. *Jane Eyre*

Close Reading Essay, GROUP C

Week 6

Tues. 8 Oct.

Jane Eyre

Comparison Essay, GROUP B

Thurs. 10 Oct.

Jane Eyre

Essay of choice from the section "On Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*" *Feminist Literary Criticism & Theory*, pp. 893-917. Précis GROUP D

Week 7

Tues. 15 Oct.

North and South

Close Reading Essay, GROUP A

Thurs. 17 Oct.

North and South

Comparison Essay, GROUP C

20-27 Oct.

Fall Break

Week 8

Tues. 29 Oct.

The Morgesons

Close Reading Essay, GROUP B

Thurs. 31 Oct.

The Morgesons

Comparison Essay, GROUP D & A

Week 9

Tues. 5 Nov.

Passing

Close Reading Essay, GROUP C

Thurs. 7 Nov.

Passing

Judith Butler, *Passing*, Queering: Nella Larsen's Psychoanalytical Challenge," *Feminist Literary Criticism & Theory*, pp. 963-72.

Comparison Essay, GROUP B

Week 10

Tues. 12 Nov.

The Wide Sargasso Sea

Close Reading Essay, GROUP D

Thurs. 14 Nov.

The Wide Sargasso Sea

Essay of choice from *Feminist Literary Criticism & Theory*, pp. 299-834. Précis GROUP A

Week 11

Tues. 19 Nov.

Tracks

Close Reading Essay, GROUP C

Thurs. 21 Nov.

Tracks

Comparison Essay, GROUP D

Week 12

Tues. 26 Nov. *Beloved*
Close Reading Essay, GROUP A

Thurs. 25 Nov. Thanksgiving

Week 13

Tues. 3 Dec. *Beloved*
Essay of choice from *Feminist Literary Criticism & Theory*, pp. 299-834. Précis
GROUP B

Thurs. 5 Dec. *House on Mango*
Close Reading Essay, GROUP D

Week 14

Tues. 10 Dec. *House on Mango*
Comparison Essay, GROUP C

Final exam: Take home. Distributed last day of class. Due Tuesday Dec. 17th at 5 p.m. via email

Description of Paper Assignments

Close Reading Essay (1-2 pages)

On days you are assigned to do a “close reading” please choose a short passage from the primary text assigned for that day. Next, choose what aspect of the work you will be examining. For example, you may want to consider characterization, point of view, setting, prose style, allusions, or figurative language. **For each of your close reading papers, please choose a different element of the work upon which to focus.** I.e. if your first paper is on characterization, your other papers should not be on this element.) **Please make sure you look up your element in the** [The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms](http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272) and reference it in your paper
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272>.

A Close Reading (or *Explication de texte*) operates on the premise that any artistic creation “will be more fully understood and appreciated to the extent that the nature and interrelations of its parts are perceived, and that that understanding will take the form of insight into the theme of the work in question. This kind of work must be done before you can begin to appropriate any theoretical or specific ... approach.”¹

To explicate comes from the Latin *explicare*, to unfold, to fold out, or to make clear the meaning of. A close reading is thus in some ways the literary equivalent of what art historians call “formal analysis.” When you close read, you observe facts and details about the text. Your aim may be to notice all striking features of the text, including rhetorical features, structural elements, cultural references or allusions. A close reading should be more than a list of devices, though. The essay should move from observation of particular facts and details to a conclusion, or interpretation, based on those observations. What do these data add up to mean?²

That is to say, the purpose of examining the elements in the page or frame is to construct an argument: how do those elements come together to form a whole? As writer Diane Hacker points out, division--like classification--

¹ The Literary Link. Ed. Janice E. Patten. June 2, 1998. San Jose State University Web Site. 17 Sept. 2003.
<<http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/patten/index.html>>.

² Patricia Kain, “How to Do a Close Reading,” 1998. Harvard University Writing Center Web Site. 17 Sept. 2003.
<<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/CloseReading.html>>.

should be made "according to some principle": she notes, "to divide a tree into roots, trunk, branches, and leaves makes sense; to list its components as branches, wood, water, and sap does not, for the categories overlap" (and seem random and disconnected).³ Your essay should reveal how the parts of the passage or frame, like the parts of a tree, relate and form a totality.

Please make sure that it is clear which page or paragraph you are analyzing.

Requirements: What does a Close Reading Essay Usually Have?

1. A thesis that is an assertion about the meaning and function of the text. It must be something you can argue for and prove in your essay.
2. Evidence from the text. What specific words or phrases led you to have the ideas you express? Quote them.
3. Analysis of that evidence. If the work were self-evident you could just turn in the book or image as your proof. Literally thousands of people have had thousands of different ideas about the words or details you mention. Explain how *you* arrived at your ideas.

Comparison Essay (1-2 pages)

Compare the novel assigned for that day to one of the previous novels we have read. You will want to limit your analysis in some way by paying attention to one or two specific formal elements or themes. Whatever you seek to compare, you should support your analysis with specific examples from the novels. Stronger essays will see that stylistic (formal) and thematic elements are interdependent and hence will in some way reference both.

Précis (1-2 pages)

Chose an article from the indicated section of *Feminist Literary Criticism & Theory* that you feel helps explain an important aspect of the novel. Your précis must include both a short paragraph summarizing the argument of the article and a long paragraph discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the argument. Here are some more suggestions to get you started:

A. Summarizing

Before writing your summary of the article, you should decide what the author's main claims are, prioritize and summarize them, and mention some of the most important evidence the author offers to prove his or her main claims.

Pay attention to topic sentences and repetition, and try to determine when the author is introducing a new argument, and when she is simply providing examples or explaining the evidence she has offered. Your summary should be as "objective" as possible. That is, you should try your best to represent the argument as you think the author would and reserve your commentary for the critique section of the paper.

One of the most common mistakes I find in student Précis is that a student has read the opening of the essay carefully and then skimmed the rest of it. While in some disciplines, you might be lucky enough to find a summary of the argument (an abstract) at the beginning of the article, opening abstracts are unusual (unfortunately) in Literary Criticism articles. Often, the summary of the argument is at the end of the article. A second trick to remember is that authors often justify their article's existence at the opening by explaining how it fits into a critical debate. You should take note of what the author thinks is the larger significance of his or her work.

As Joseph Williams pointed out in his recent visit to Reed, most academic arguments have at least these four basic components:

³ Diane Hacker. *The Bedford Handbook for Writers*, 3rd. ed. (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1991), 91.

- (1) **Common Ground:** What is the context that the author intends to qualify or question. This may be either a commonly held belief (some people...) or an argument made by a specific critic.
- (2) **But...:** Introduces a question about something key that is not known, fully understood, or contradicts this common ground.
- (3) **So What?** States the significance of the question raised.
- (4) **Thesis:** the answer to problem/question. States the author's main claim.

You should make sure that you have looked for these aspects of the argument. If they are in your article identify them.

B. Writing a Critique

This is your chance to express your opinion about what you have read and to show off your analytical abilities. In your response you might consider some of the following. Remember to use specifics to back your claims:

- What did you find particularly interesting or useful about the critique?
- Is this a valid/good/bad way to approach the readings for the day?
- How might the scholar's arguments help us in our previous discussions?
- How does this piece relate to others we have read?
- Is the author's argument logically sound?
- Did the author use evidence persuasively to support this argument?
- Who do you think was the original audience for this article? How do you know? If you (or students like you) are not the intended audience are there any specialized terms that you did not know that you would need to define for your readers?
- Is there any information or evidence that you wish had been included in the article that wasn't there?

One of the most common mistakes I find in students' analyses of arguments is that people assume if they didn't understand the argument the first time they read it, it is either poorly written or uninteresting. Since articles are mostly written for specialists in the field, you can assume that they will be difficult and will require at least a second reading. It is also highly likely that they will contain specialized language that is unfamiliar to you, but is part of the common knowledge of specialists. You will want to keep a dictionary or a dictionary of literary terms on hand to help you as you read the work (e.g. *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* at www.oxfordreference.com). Similarly, the author probably assumes that almost all of her readers will have a Ph.D. in English or American literature and hence she will most likely make reference to works you have not read. You may find it useful to look up allusions as you are reading if you feel that the argument requires it (again the *Oxford Companion* is a good resource).

Sample Précis: "The Politics of Embodied Poetics: A Critical Synopsis of Michael Bibby's 'The Territory Colonizes': Sitting the Body in Women's Liberation Poetry.'"

In the third chapter of his *Hearts and Minds: Bodies, Poetry, and Resistance in the Vietnam Era*, Michael Bibby examines the centrality of the female body in the language and imagery of Vietnam-era feminist poetry and attempts to contextualize this poetics of corporeality in relationship to other contemporary cultural discourses of protest and liberation. The chapter focuses on the larger historical and discursive context of Vietnam-era feminism, and here Bibby argues that this articulation of feminism was chronologically and conceptually subsequent to the discourses of black nationalism and Third World liberation. Specifically, Bibby states that the essentialist nationalism of these movements was the inspiration for an analogous development in Women's Liberation, the difference being that biological gender rather than skin color (in the case of black nationalism) came to be seen as both the fundamental subject of historical and political struggle and the mark that, across all other categories, unified those engaged in *the* struggle against oppression. The Women's Liberationist poets of the Vietnam era, argues Bibby, re-appropriated the power to see inside themselves, to diagnose, to represent their own bodies, and they did so precisely by emphasizing the female body in their poetry.

Though sometimes repetitive, Bibby's chapter is written with exemplary lucidity, a strength one does not generally associate with works that cite Sartre and Gramsci within the first few pages. Bibby uses the

technical terminology current in the larger academic conversation about the politics of discourse, but he doesn't confine himself to those terms, nor does he attempt, in contrast to many other participants in this conversation, to make a virtue out of obscurity. His efforts to illuminate the complex relationships between a variety of liberationist discourses are generally successful, and the excerpts of poems, essays and manifestos that he provides in the text are consistently instructive and well chosen. The major weakness of his chapter, at least for our purposes, is that he more concerned with the *politics* of corporeality than with the *poetics* of corporeality in Women's Liberationist poetry. Thus, while he provides ample political context for this emphasis on the female body in this poetry, he does not engage at all with questions of a literary-historical nature. As poets identifying the struggle against patriarchy as their fundamental praxis, one would think that these writers would be responding to patriarchy not simply in terms of the larger society, but also in the poetic tradition itself. Bibby does not, though, give any space to discussing how the poetics of the gendered body in Vietnam-era feminist poetry stands in relation to the image of the female body in the broader poetic tradition.

**Exemplary Summary Paragraph: "There's no place like a Tomb: The Paradox of Freedom in Structure."
(Please note that this does not include the second paragraph on analysis that your paper will need!!)**

Some critics claim that Emily Dickinson's lyric style is extremely formal and closed, while others see her work as drastically open. In "Emily Dickinson's Fairer Houses," Lesley Wheeler explores this contradiction, positing the paradoxical nature of a "poetic of enclosure" (15) to enable the understanding of Dickinson's work as both in a sense "open" and "closed." According to Wheeler, Dickinson "uses the limited space of the lyric, which she often depicts as a kind of house, to mimic and subvert qualities of modesty and reserve typically associated with femininity"(22). She utilizes "the house" as a metaphor for lyric poetry, highlighting its nature as an "enclosure" and comparing it to societal beliefs regarding femininity/domesticity; she further compares the experience of being in "the house" to the suffocating "constriction" of a tomb. This motif of death, tombs, graves, etc., appears often in Dickinson's work, presented as a sort of welcome "escape from a culture" (15) that limits the acceptable activities of women. The idea of "enclosure" surmounts that of a simple house and becomes elevated to the status of life itself, as if gender, society, possessing a body at all, become so restrictive that death becomes a welcome release, that "the narrowness of the tomb yields a paradoxical freedom"(15). And yet, according to Wheeler, Dickinson keeps to a narrow, perhaps suffocating form. In this way, Dickinson shows how "confinement may be positively transformed, as domestic enclosures yield to poetic escapes" (34).

Longer Paper (4-6 pages)

For your longer paper, please consider one aspect of the assigned work in greater detail. If it is a "close reading" day, you have extra space to do an expanded close reading; if it is a "comparison essay" day, elaborate at greater length the significance of how one aspect of the novel compares to the same aspect of a previous novel we have written. Either way, your essay should develop an argument about the text and carefully support that argument with textual evidence.

Draft of Longer Paper:

I have signed up to turn in the first draft of my 4-6 page paper on _____

Final Draft of Longer Paper:

Therefore the final draft of my paper is due _____ (2 weeks after the draft is due)

Paper Conference

My paper conference for the draft is _____ (schedule when draft is submitted, roughly one week after it is due).