



Course Description

This course explores the vital relationship between American literature and environmental values, and traces the origins of the America's understanding of the relationship between nature and culture. The class will focus upon Transcendentalist and Utopian movements of the mid-nineteenth century and will include authors such as Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Fuller. We will pay special attention to changes in the New England landscape during this era, including the rise of industrialization and urban centers. Special attention will be paid to the sublime, tourism, urban planning, utopian communities, and sustainable farming. Genres covered include essays, short stories, novels, and travel literature.

Prof. Laura Leibman T/Th 9-10:20 Library 387 <https://moodle.reed.edu/course/view.php?id=784>

Required Texts

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*

Lawrence Buell, ed. *The American Transcendentalists*

Benita Eisler, ed. *The Lowell Offering*

Margaret Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes*

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Blithedale Romance* (Bedford Cultural Edition)

Herman Melville, *Typee*

Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Recommended: Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture*

Writing Assignments

Each student will write five short (350-500 word) essays, and **post them to the class Moodle on your personal page and in addition drop a pdf version in your personal drop box.** This will help this class be as paperless as possible. Essays are due **two days (48 hours) before the class meeting** and the due dates listed on the syllabus which they will serve as discussion-starters. Each day a different group will also be assigned to respond to at least one of the papers posted for the day. **Group D comments on Group B (and vice versa), and Group C comments on Group A (and vice versa).** These responses can be short (3-4 sentences) and should be posted on your page with a link to the essay you are responding to. Please respond to the substance of the paper, not the writing style. No essays will be accepted late. Due dates vary according to group. There is also a final project due during finals week. Explanations of the types of essays and final project are at the end of the syllabus.

Actual Due Dates by 9 a.m. (for Readings Assigned on Date on Syllabus)

	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
Close Reading	2/15 (for 2/17)	4/5 (for 4/7)	4/10 (for 4/12)	5/3 (for 5/5)
Definition Essay	4/3 (for 4/5)	2/20 (for 2/22)	2/8 (for 2/10)	2/27 (for 3/1)
Analysis of Object	3/6 (for 3/8)	2/6 (for 2/8)	4/19 (for 4/21)	3/29 (for 3/31)
Comparison	4/26 (for 4/28)	5/1 (for 5/3)	3/27 (for 3/29)	4/12 (for 4/14)
Analysis of an Argument	2/1 (for 2/2)	3/8 (for 3/10)	2/22 (for 2/24)	2/13 (for 2/15)

Schedule of Readings

Week 1	31 Jan.	William Cronon, <i>Changes in the Land</i> , part I pp. 3-18 Lawrence Buell, "Introduction," <i>The Environmental Imagination</i> , pp. 1-27 (Reserve PS3057 .N3 B84 1995), Create a personal moodle page, link to your group page.
	2 Feb.	Cronon, <i>Changes in the Land</i> , part II pp. 19-158 Thomas Carlyle, "The Age of Machinery," (<i>American Transcendentalists</i> , pp. 16-19) Gallery: Maps of Boston Group A: Paper #1 Analysis of an Argument on either Cronon or Carlyle. Group C comments.
Week 2	8 Feb.	<i>Changes in the Land</i> , part III pp. 159-170 Barbara Novak, "The Nationalist Garden and the Holy Book" (<i>Nature and Culture</i> 3-14) Online Gallery: http://cdm-workspace.reed.edu/slideshow/1802 Group B: Analysis of an Object. Do a close reading of one of the paintings in the online Gallery. Group D comments.
	10 Feb.	Emerson, <i>Nature</i> (<i>American Transcendentalists</i> , pp. 31-67) Channing, "Man's Likeness to God" (<i>The American Transcendentalists</i> , pp. 11-15) Group C: Definition Essay: How does Emerson define Nature or how does Channing define Man? What is the significance of his definition? Group A comments.
Week 3	15 Feb.	Barbara Novak, "Grand Opera and the Still Small Voice" (<i>Nature and Culture</i> 3-14) Emerson, "Hamatreya" (<i>American Transcendentalists</i> , pp. 455-57) William Ellery Channing II, poems (<i>American Transcendentalists</i> , pp. 441-44) Christopher Pearse Cranch, poems (<i>American Transcendentalists</i> , pp. 445-48) Bryant, "A Forest Hymn" (Online) Online Gallery: http://cdm-workspace.reed.edu/slideshow/1803 Group D: Analysis of an Argument (Novak). Group B comments.
	17 Feb.	Thoreau, <i>A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers</i> (Concord, Saturday, Sunday, Monday), pp. 1-113 Group A: Close reading of a paragraph from today's reading. Group C comments.
Week 4	22 Feb.	Thoreau, <i>A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers</i> (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday), pp. 114-256. Emerson, "The Transcendentalist" (<i>American Transcendentalists</i> , pp. 107-22)

Group B: Definition Essay: How does Emerson define Transcendentalism? What is the significance of his definition? Group D comments.

	24 Feb.	Hawthorne, "The Great Stone Face," "My Visit to Niagara" (online) Essays: Dona Brown, "The Uses of Scenery: Scenic Touring in the White Mountains," (<i>Inventing New England</i>) Online Gallery: Uses of Scenery (Moodle) Group C: Analysis of an Argument (Brown). Group A comments.
Week 5	1 March	Margaret Fuller, <i>Summer on the Lakes</i> (Chapters 1-4) Fuller, "Recollection of Mystical Experiences" (<i>The American Transcendentalists</i> , pp. 158-61) Novak, "Sound and Silence: Changing Concepts of the Sublime" <i>Nature and Culture</i> , pp. 29-40. Online Gallery: Sound and Silence (Moodle) Group D: Definition Essay: How does Fuller define mystical experiences or how does Novak define the sublime? What is the significance of her definition? Group A comments.
	3 March	No class. Laura at Society of Early Americanists Conference
Week 6	8 March	Margaret Fuller, <i>Summer on the Lakes</i> (Chapters 5-7) Online Gallery: Nineteenth-Century Art on Landscape and Niagara Falls (Moodle) Group A: Analysis of an Object. Do a close reading of one of the paintings in the online Gallery. Group C comments.
	10 March	Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (<i>The American Transcendentalists</i> , pp. 208-31) Group B: Analysis of an Argument. Group D comments.
19-27 March Spring Break		
Week 7	29 March	Thoreau, <i>Walden</i> , Chapters 1-3 Group C: Comparison Essay. Compare a small section of <i>Walden</i> to one of the other works we have read so far. Group A comments.
	31 March	Thoreau, <i>Walden</i> , (finish) Essays: Miller, "The Iconography of Wrecked...Boats," <i>American Iconology</i> , pp. 186-208 Group D: Analysis of an Object. Do a close reading of one of the paintings in the online Gallery. Group B comments.
Week 8	5 April	"The Idea of Community" (Bedford Cultural Edition of the <i>Bliethdale Romance</i> , pp. 333-40, 347-52) Emerson Declines Ripley's Invitation, (<i>The American Transcendentalists</i> , pp. 201-207)

		<p>Peabody from "Plan of West Roxbury Community" (<i>The American Transcendentalists</i>, pp. 201-207)</p> <p>George Ripley, Brook Farm's Constitution (<i>The American Transcendentalists</i>, pp. 235-43)</p> <p>Group A: Definition Essay. How does one of the authors for today define Community? What is the significance of his definition, particularly with respect to Nature or the Land? Group C comments.</p>
	7 April	<p>Hawthorne, <i>The Blithedale Romance</i> (Bedford Cultural Edition), Introduction and pp. 1-47</p> <p>Group B: Close reading of a paragraph from today's reading.</p> <p>Group D comments.</p>
Week 9	12 April	<p>Hawthorne, <i>The Blithedale Romance</i>, pp. 47-109</p> <p>Group C: Close reading of a paragraph from today's reading.</p> <p>Group A comments.</p>
	14 April	<p>Hawthorne, <i>The Blithedale Romance</i>, pp. 109-end</p> <p>Group D: Comparison Essay. Compare one element of the <i>Blithedale Romance</i> to another work we have read (e.g. community, the land, women, mysticism, a narrative strategy). Group B comments.</p>
Week 10	19 April	<p>Passover no class. Work on Final Project.</p>
	21 April	<p>Orestes Brownson, "The Laboring Classes" (<i>The American Transcendentalists</i>, pp. 193-200)</p> <p>William Ellery Channing, <i>On the Elevation of the Laboring Classes</i>, Lecture I (http://www.bartleby.com/28/132.html)</p> <p>John Coolidge, <i>Mill and Mansion</i>, 3-72</p> <p>Gallery: Images of Lowell (Moodle)</p> <p>Group C: Analysis of an Object. Do a close reading of one of the images in the gallery or one of the buildings at Lowell. Group B comments.</p>
Week 11	26 April	<p>Passover no class. Work on Final Project.</p>
	28 April	<p><i>The Lowell Offering</i> Introduction & "Mill and Boardinghouse," pp. 13-112</p> <p>Group A: Compare one of the writings from the Lowell Offering to another work we have read so far this semester. Group C comments.</p>
Week 12	3 May	<p>Melville <i>Typee</i></p> <p>Group B: Comparison Essay. Compare one element of <i>Typee</i> to another work we have read (e.g. indigenous peoples, the land, women, a narrative strategy). Group D comments.</p>

	5 May	Melville <i>Typee</i> Group D: Close Reading of a paragraph from <i>Typee</i> . Group B comments.
Finals	18 May	Final Project Due 5pm

Description of Paper Assignments (all 350-500 words)

Close Reading Essay

On days you are assigned to do a “close reading” please analyze a *short* passage from **one** of the works assigned for the day. Please focus on only one element (either a narrative strategy or a thematic element).

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--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.

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>>.

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

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

Compare one element of the assigned works of the day to the way a previously work we have read uses the same element. You may compare specific formal elements (narrator, characterization, etc.) or a themes (nature, community, sublime, etc.). Whatever you seek to compare, you should support your analysis with specific examples. Stronger essays will see that stylistic (formal) and thematic elements are interdependent and hence will in some way reference both.

Definition Essay

This should include both a short paragraph summarizing the way that the author defines the term (supported by brief textual evidence) and a long paragraph discussing the significance and implications of that definition. The significance paragraph might also compare the author's definition to other definitions of the same term we have encountered so far.

Analysis of an Object

Provide a brief description of the object (who made it? Where? When? About what?) and one larger paragraph of analysis of that artifact that links it to (2) the literary texts assigned for the day/recently or (3) the critical article for the day.

Analysis of an Argument

This should 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 or essay, 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:

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).

Final Project

The final assignment for this course is to write an on-line critical edition for one of the literary texts for this semester. Your edition should include

1. A critical introduction that positions the work in the notion of nature in the era (about one page text).

2. A sample page from the text that is annotated with links to previous class postings (or external sources) that will help the reader understand the text as a whole and its relationship to the ideas covered in this course.
3. A cultural contexts section that includes at least 2 related objects and a brief explanation (one paragraph) of the relevance of each to the literary text
4. A glossary that includes at least three important terms we have covered so far this semester (e.g. community, self-reliance, sublime, nature, transcendentalism, mystical) and explains how they relate to the text.
5. A conclusion that highlights the significance of the work for understanding American notions of the relationship between nature and culture (one paragraph)

Your final project is intended to build off of the work you and your classmates have been doing all semester. You should feel free to use some of the materials you have written in your earlier assignments and you should link your page to the work of at least three other students in the course (e.g. prior assignments, course discussion, annotations). All final projects must be posted by Wednesday of Finals week (5.18.11).