

Introduction to Fiction: American Short Story
Professor Laura Leibman
T Th 10:30-11:50 ETC 205
<https://moodle.reed.edu/course/view.php?id=558> Fall 2007
 Fall 2010

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Full course for one semester. This course will examine the genre of the short story, 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 from realism and naturalism to allegory, and to impressionism. Additionally, we will see how diverse American experience is represented through the form. Readings may include works by Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, James, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Langston Hughes, Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Philip Roth, James Baldwin, Paley, Bharati Mukherjee, and Sherman Alexie, as well as the collection of *Best American Short Stories 2008*.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Charters, *The American Short Story and Its Writer*: ordered through Reed bookstore.
 Gelfant, *Columbia Companion to the Twentieth Century American Short Story* (Gelfant on syllabus): available on-line through Reed Library, and in Reference: PS374.S5 C57 2000. .
 Herman, *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (CCN on syllabus) is available on-line through the library; limited number of hard copies have been ordered through Reed bookstore.
 Munro, *Carried Away*: ordered through Reed bookstore.
 Rushdie and Pitlor, *Best American Short Stories 2008* (BASS on syllabus): ordered through Reed bookstore.
American Passages (VoD): <http://www.learner.org/resources/series164.html>

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

Each student will write four short (350-500 word) essays, and post them to the class Moodle. Essays are due **two days** (48 hours) before the class meeting in which they will serve as discussion-starters. Each student will choose two essays to revise and expand, each one due on the dates listed on the syllabus. Explanations of the types of essays are at the end of the syllabus.

No essays will be accepted late. You are allowed to skip writing one – and only one – of the assigned essays (i.e. do four of the five essays assigned to your group). Please try not to skip a type of essay for which you only have one paper assigned. Use your choice wisely. Due dates vary according to group. The final exam will take the form of a two-hour timed essay.

	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
Close Reading 1	9/2	9/7	9/14	10/5
Close Reading 2	10/12	10/14	10/26	11/2
Comparison 1	9/21	11/4	11/9	11/30
Comparison 2	10/28		11/23	
Précis 1	11/16	9/28	10/7	9/16
Précis 2		11/18		11/11
Revision 1	9/11	9/11	9/23	9/23
Revision 2	12/2	12/2	12/7	12/7

CLASS POLICIES:

Your physical presence and full engagement are requested at each class meeting. However, if you are ill, please do not come to class. Do notify the instructor of any absences as soon as possible; e-mail is fine. Active discussion of the materials of the class is required; if you are unable to participate in class discussion, you may schedule a discussion with me during office hours.

Week 1: Contemporary Writers/Critical Vocabularies

Tues. 31 August Introduction

Thurs. 2 Sept. Boyle, "Admiral" (BASS 1-22); Evans, "Virgins" (72-84); Goodman, "Closely Held" (BASS 85-106)
H. Porter Abbott, "Story, plot, and narration" (*The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, 39-51)
Salman Rushdie, "Introduction" (BASS xii-xvi)
Close Reading Essay, GROUP A

Week 2 Contemporary Writers/Critical Vocabularies

Tues. 7 Sept. Russell, "Vampires in the Lemon Grove;" (BASS 244-259); Munro, "Child's Play" BASS 201-239
Teresa Bridgman, "Time and space" (CCN 52-65)
Close Reading Essay, GROUP B

Thurs. 9 Sept. No Class Rosh Hashana
Groups A & B turn in revision of first essay by Saturday at midnight

Week 3 American Literary Traditions: Early Nineteenth Century

Tues. 14 Sept. Hawthorne, "The Minister's Black Veil" (ASSW 104-116); Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (ASSW 117-130)
Uri Margolin, "Character" (CCN 66-79)
American Passages 6: Gothic Undercurrents
http://www.learner.org/vod/vod_window.html?pid=1742
Close Reading Essay, GROUP C

Thurs. 16 Sept. Melville, "Bartleby, The Scrivener" (ASSW 197-226); related commentary (ASSW 1407-1417)
Charters, "Early Nineteenth Century, 1819-1860" (ASSW 25-34)
Gelfant, "American Short Story, 1807-1900" (Gelfant 15-33)
Précis on Miller (or you may compare the arguments made by about early nineteenth-century short stories by Charters and Gelfant), GROUP D

Week 4 American Literary Traditions: Late Nineteenth Century (Regionalism)

Tues. 21 Sept. Twain, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (ASSW 285-290); Bret Harte, "The Luck of Roaring Camp" (ASSW 291-299);
Stephen Crane, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" (ASSW 476-475)
Harte, "The Rise of the 'Short Story,'" (ASSW 1356-62)
Charters, "Late Nineteenth Century, 1861-1899" (ASSW 246-254)
American Passages 5: Masculine Heroes
http://www.learner.org/vod/vod_window.html?pid=1741
Comparison Essay, GROUP A

Thurs. 23 Sept. No Class Sukkot
Groups C & D Revision Essay 1

Week 5 American Literary Traditions: Late Nineteenth Century, cont.

Tues. 28 Sept. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (ASSW 391-40); related commentary by Gilbert, Gubar, and Gilman (ASSW 1352-1356); Rebecca Harding Davis, "Life in the Iron Mills" (ASSW 256-84)
Précis on Gilbert & Gubar, GROUP B

Thurs. 30 Sept. No Class Shmini Atzeret
Go to Sandra Gilbert's Lecture 4:30pm Psych 105

Week 6 American Literary Traditions: Fin de siècle

Tues. 5 Oct. Chesnutt, "The Wife of His Youth" (ASSW 457-466); related commentary (ASSW 1365-68); Dunbar-Nelson, "Tony's Wife" (ASSW 476-480); Toomer, "Blood-Burning Moon" (ASSW 674-681)
Gelfant, "The African American Short Story" (Gelfant 25-33)
American Passages 8: Regional Realism
http://www.learner.org/vod/vod_window.html?pid=1744
Close Reading Essay, GROUP D

Thurs. 7 Oct. James, "The Jolly Corner" (ASSW 555-587); related commentary (ASSW 1378-82, 1452-54); Wharton, "The Other Two" (ASSW 515-31); related commentary (ASSW 1473-74); Anzia Yezierska, "My Own People," (ASSW 625-635)
Charters, "The Early Twentieth Century" (ASSW 481-492)
American Passages 9: Social Realism
http://www.learner.org/vod/vod_window.html?pid=1745
Comparison Essay, GROUP C

Week 7 American Literary Traditions: Twentieth Century Modernisms

Tues. 12 Oct. Fitzgerald, "Winter Dreams" (ASSW 636-654); related commentary (ASSW 1449-1451); Hemingway, "Soldier's Home" (ASSW 682-687); Stein, "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" (ASSW 669-673).
Bronwen Thomas, "Dialogue" (CCN 90-93)
American Passages 11: Modernist Portraits
http://www.learner.org/vod/vod_window.html?pid=1747
Close Reading Essay, GROUP A

Thurs. 14 Oct. Hughes, "Red-Headed Baby" (ASSW 738-742); Jean Toomer, "Blood Burning Moon" (ASSW 674); related commentary (ASSW 1320-1326)
William Carlos Williams, "The Use of Force" (ASSW 752-756)
Michael Toolan, "Language" (CCN 217-44)
American Passages 10: Rhythms in Poetry
http://www.learner.org/vod/vod_window.html?pid=1747
Close Reading Essay, GROUP B

October 16-24 Fall Break

Week 8 American Literary Traditions: Early to Mid-Twentieth Century

- Tues. 26 Oct. Faulkner, "Spotted Horses" (ASSW 702-717); related commentary (ASSW 1471-1473); Hurston, "The Gilded Six-Bits," (ASSW 727-737); related commentary (1368-1372; 1469-1470); O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge" (ASSW 998-1010); related commentary (1417-1423)
American Passages 13: Southern Renaissance
<http://www.learner.org/resources/series164.html>
 James Phelan, "Rhetoric/ethics" (CCN 203-216)
 Close Reading Essay, GROUP C
- Thurs. 28 Oct. Bontemps, "A Summer Tragedy" (ASSW 718-725); Steinbeck, "The Snake" (ASSW 756-764)
 Gelfant, "The Ecological Short Story" (50-55)
American Passages 12: Migrant Struggle
http://www.learner.org/vod/vod_window.html?pid=1748
 Comparison Essay, GROUP A

Week 9 American Literary Traditions: Becoming Visible

- Tues. 2 Nov. Brooks, "We're the Only Colored People Here" (ASSW 889-891); Ellison, "Flying Home" (ASSW 872-888); Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (ASSW 938-963); related commentary (ASSW 1298-1302)
 Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, "Ideology" (CCN 217)
American Passages 14: Becoming Visible
http://www.learner.org/vod/vod_window.html?pid=1750
 Close Reading Essay, GROUP D
- Thurs. 4 Nov. Roth, "The Conversion of the Jews" (ASSW 964-977); Paley, "A Conversation With My Father" (ASSW 1090-1094); related commentary (ASSW 1430-1434)
 Comparison Essay, GROUP B

Week 10 American Literary Traditions: Postmodern Experimental Prose

- Tues. 9 Nov. William Gass, "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country" (ASSW 1040-1061); related commentary (ASSW 1348-1351); Richard Brautigan, "1/3, 1/3, 1/3" (ASSW 1085-1089); John Barth, "Title" (ASSW 1062-67); related commentary (ASSW 1302-1312); Amy Hempel, "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried" (ASSW 1143-1149)
 Charters, "Late Twentieth Century" (ASSW 1030-1039)
 Comparison Essay, GROUP C
- Thurs. 11 Nov. Leslie Marmon Silko, "Yellow Woman" (ASSW 1111-1119); related commentary (ASSW 1290-1291); Alexie, "The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore," 1205-1211;
 Paula Gunn Allen, "Kochinnenako in Academe," *The Sacred Hoop* (222-244 E98.W8 A44 1986 or E98.W8 A44 1992)
 Gelfant, "The Native American Short Story" (64-71)
 Précis on Gunn Allen, Group D

Week 11 American Literary Traditions: The Search for Identity

- Tues. 16 Nov. Alice Walker, "Everyday Use" (ASSW 1103-1110); related commentary (ASSW 1469-1470); Edwidge Danticat, "New York Day Woman" (ASSW 1246-50)
bell hooks, "talking back" (*Talking Back*, 5-9 E185.86 .H74 1989)
American Passages 16: The Search for Identity
http://www.learner.org/vod/vod_window.html?pid=1752
Précis on hooks, GROUP A
- Thurs. 18 Nov. Viramontes, "Miss Clairol" (ASSW 1178-1182); Sandra Cisneros, "Woman Hollering Creek" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 43-56, PS3553.I78 W66 1991)
Gloria Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (*Borderlands/La Frontera*, 75-86 PS3551.N95 B6 1987)
Gelfant, "The Chicano-Latino Short Story" (42-49)
Précis on Anzaldúa, GROUP B

Week 12: American Literary Traditions: The Search for Identity

- Tues. 23 Nov. Lan Samantha Chang, "Water Names," (ASSW 1265-68); Bharti Mukherjee, "The Tenant" (ASSW 1150-1161)
Gelfant, "The Asian American Short Story" (34-41)
Monika Fludernik, "Identity/alterity" (CCN 260-273)
Comparison Essay, GROUP C
- Thurs. 25 Nov. Thanksgiving

Week 13: (How) Are Canadian writers American writers?

- Tues. 30 Nov. Munro, "The Beggar Maid" (*Carried Away* 27-4); Munro, "The Moons of Jupiter" (*Carried Away* 83-100)
Comparison Essay 2, GROUP D
- Thurs. 2 Dec. Munro, "Friend of My Youth" (*Carried Away* 155-178); Munro, "Meneseteung" (*Carried Away* 179-202)
Revisions Groups A & B

Week 14: (How) Are Canadian writers American writers? Cont.

- Tues. 7 Dec. Munro, "The Albanian Virgin" (*Carried Away* 277-322); Munro, "Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage" (*Carried Away* 389-438).
Revisions Groups C & D

Final exam: Take home. Distributed last day of class. Due Tuesday Dec. 14th at 5 p.m.

Description of Paper Assignments (all 350-500 words)**Close Reading Essay**

On days you are assigned to do a "close reading" please apply the critical terms for the day (e.g. plot, space, character, dialogue, "African Americanness") as explained in the assigned essay to a **short** passage from **one** of the short stories assigned for the day. Please focus on only **one** element ("critical term") and make sure to refer explicitly to what the author in the *Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (or Gelfant) says about this 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.

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 of the assigned short stories (or short passage from that short story) of the day to a short story previously read in this class **from a different era**. 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 stories. Stronger essays will see that stylistic (formal) and thematic elements are interdependent and hence will in some way reference both.

Précis

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:

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.

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:

- (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).