Forms of Literature--Fall 2012

Novel

This course will explore the development of the modern novel with an emphasis on structure, examining novels of the last 150 years that have taken different models as their source of organization. Our emphasis will be on seeing how influences are borne out in these books, on the choices made by authors in organizing their material and the result of those choices in the ultimate products. Be prepared to think in terms of schema, models, and architecture.

The analysis of the novels will be broken into two parts--an overview devoted to style and history, and a close study of structure. I will conduct the overview for the second half of class, and the close analyses will take up the first half. Those analyses will be led by students, one per book, who will each create a schema to represent the structure of the book at hand. The student will walk the class carefully through his or her book, scrutinizing in particular unexpected shifts in the development of the plot, characteristic moves made by the author, points of congruity within the text and to other, seminal texts, and other points of structural interest. You may approach this any way you like, but creativity is encouraged. Find a way to teach the structural issues of these books. If teaching requires visual aids, group participation, or games, so much the better. By the end of the course every student should have ten clear blueprints to the books we have studied.

In place of a final paper, each student will submit another outline, this one representing a novel of his or her choice, due on December 10th at noon. I'll be in my office to collect them. A formal paper need not accompany this final outline, but 3-5 pages of notes or other casual discussion of the outline will guide me through the work. Grades will be broken down as follows:

- Group Outline and Discussion 40%
- Class Participation 30%
- Final Outline 30%

Any suspected plagiarism--the appropriation of another writer's work for your own--will be reported immediately to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

Because student involvement is essential for the success of the course, attendance will be monitored. After three unexcused absences, grades will be dropped half a grade for each subsequent absence. The Office for Disability Services, 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. The office's number is 2-3307.
Forms of the Novel
Syllabus

Aug. 24 Intro.
Aug. 31 Exercise
Sept. 7 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*
   FRANCIS STEEGMULLER TRANSLATION
Sept. 14-16 OSU Bookfair. Go to [http://english.osu.edu/creative-writing/bookfair](http://english.osu.edu/creative-writing/bookfair) for schedule
Sept. 21 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*
Sept. 28 Nathanael West, *Day of the Locust*
Oct. 5 No class
Oct. 13 Rebecca Makkai Fiction Reading. 165 Thompson Library, 8 pm.
Oct. 17 Lee Martin, Dinty W. Moore, Eric LeMay, and Jeff Gundy Nonfiction Reading. 311 Denney Hall, 7 pm.
Oct. 19 "Wise Blood"—film
Oct. 20 Student-faculty reading: Michelle Herman, Brett Beach, Jenna Killic. 165 Thompson Library, 7:30 pm.
Oct. 26 Evelyn Waugh, *The Loved One*
Nov. 2 Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*
Nov. 9 Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*
Nov. 15 Student-faculty reading: Andrew Hudgins, Rebecca Huntman, Elizabeth Zaleski. 165 Thompson Library, 7:30 pm.
Nov. 16 Gustave Flaubert, *A Simple Heart*
   Julian Barnes, *Flaubert’s Parrot*
Nov. 23 Thanksgiving break—no class
Nov. 30 Edward P. Jones, *The Known World*
### Sign-Up for Presentations

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Exercise (Week 1)

Over the weekend, construct a five-chapter outline of a coming-of-age novel. Free-write as much as you want, but keep the outline itself to one page. In chapter 4, your main character should take an important trip.

(Week 2)

Discuss pleasures and difficulties of creating the outline. Now: Move the trip to chapter 2. What changes are necessary? Make them. Do you have the same book or not?

Everything that exists in a novel is an exercise of the writer's choice.

(Extra, if necessary. On board:

*The Great Gatsby*

I. Gatsby’s parties  
II. Gatsby and Daisy  
III. Death of Myrtle

Move III to II. Now what?)

Novel's structure largely determined by its action. Action can be interior or exterior (*The Three Musketeers, A Man without Qualities* Robert Musil, *Invisible Man*).

Readers pick up cues from the text as to what they should pay attention to, and cues include length of time (number of pages) given to an incident or theme; recurrence, shifts in rhetoric. In conventional novels, we also generally privilege scene over narrative. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, sex metaphor.

Certain broad modes have periodically re-invigorated the development of the novel, and we'll be looking at a number of them this semester—tale, satire, allegory, etc. Those modes have characteristic tropes that writers can use or play against, as they choose. (Genre fiction: its pleasures and perils.)

What are the rewards you look for in a novel? List at least five (read them), and keep the list handy this semester as we move through the material. See whether your responses to what we read accord with your list, particularly after discussion.
Tess of the d'Urbervilles (Week 3)

TALES

Old-fashioned:
- Plot driven
- Flat characterizations; absence of psychological depth
- Archetypes (melodrama)
- Clear, unambiguous themes
- Upholding of bourgeois values
- Highly patterned; absence of surprises in plot

Discuss *Sleeping Beauty* and *Tess*. Hardy's tendency to both embrace the characteristics of tale and fight against them--commenting on them, refusing to give a happy ending, writing such a louche piece. Fight between impulses toward modernism and desire for pastoral simplicity. Last characteristic:
- Fatalism. Tales in general and Hardy in particular.
Phases. Why?

Phase the first, *The Maiden* (p. 7): Tess’s heritage, Angel’s appearance, the death of the horse, Tess’s move to Tantridge, Alec the Evil, the potion, Tess’s spoiling. 67 pages. Highly active.


Phase the third, *The Rally* (p. 101): The Talbothays dairy, Angel introduced actively 100 pages after our first glimpse of him. 51 pages. Active.

Phase the fourth, *The Consequence* (p. 153): Center of the book. POV shifts from Tess to Clare. Tess marries Clare, then confesses. Dramatic climax not their marriage, but her confession. (Less tale-like than modern.) Clare’s sleepwalking introduced. 74 pages. Active.

Phase the fifth, *The Woman Pays* (p. 227): Angel rebukes Tess (20 pages), sleepwalks with her (chapter XXXVII), then leaves. Tess takes work at Flintcombe-Ash under the farmer Angel hit. Phase culminates on dramatic high point—re-emergence of Alec exactly three-quarters of the way through the book. 73 pages. Primarily meditative, with shock at the end.

Phase the sixth, *The Convert* (p. 305): [Who is converted, and to what?] Alec pursues Tess, leaving his newfound ministry behind. As with the other Alec phase, this one is highly active, with Tess’s fortunes diminishing with those of her family and Alec hot on her heels. Tess sends Clare two letters, and Marian and Izz one. 60 pages. Highly active.

Phase the seventh, *Fulfilment* (P. 367): [Who is fulfilled, or what?] Angel returns too late. Tess stabs Alec; the two get a chance at brief happiness, Tess is found sleeping at Stonehenge, Angel joins 'Liza-Lu. (30 pages) Dénouement.

Other issues:

Religion—Angel’s father and mother’s low church, Angel’s inability to believe (the Modern man), Alec, Tess at Stonehenge. Fate versus free will.
Madame Bovary
(week 4)

Aspects of the Modern Novel

Naturalism (e.g. Dickens)
Naturalistic—patterning exists, but subsumed
Character driven; psychological depth
Multiple main characters
Preference for drama over melodrama. Melodramatic elements muted.
Irony
Thematically complex
Frequently critical of bourgeois values
Surprises in plot

Modernism (e.g. Hemingway, Joyce, Stein)
Glorification of style
Intense focus on psychology; flattening of character
Diminution of plot
Interior action; low emphasis on drama
Emphasis on perception
Isolation and valorization of language
Diminishment of the importance of plot; disintegration of causality

Postmodernism (e.g. Barth, Garcia Marquez, Pynchon)
Irony
Preoccupation with history, particularly antique language
Deliberate puncturing of/loss of faith in narrative conventions
Lists
Narrative interpolation
Footnotes, asides
Underlying tone of despair
Preoccupation with external systems
Diminution of focus on human life or choice
Flattening of character
Emphasis on pattern and voice over plot

Madame Bovary demonstrates characteristics from all three categories, and all three
categories—as well as tale/melodrama—are alive and well in contemporary fiction.
Are there any pleasures or surprises left in traditional narrative?
Is story-telling dead for people of discriminating taste?
Madame Bovary

Style
List ten characteristics, first of Hardy, then Flaubert.
(Hardy: Ornate, formal language; antique or nonce words; reliance on sense of smell and touch)
(Flaubert: Flexibility of tone, reliance on detail, use of color and visual imagery)

Imitation exercise: In the style of Hardy, describe a public area that you know well—a farmer's market, a kennel or stable, etc. Do your best not just to imitate Hardy's signature moves, but to sound like him. Read aloud; discuss what creates style.

Now describe the same place in the manner of Flaubert.
We've spent the last several class sessions hurtling through different categories of storytelling. These categories are descriptive more than proscriptive--I don't want anybody going through books with a checklist in hand, trying to create rigid groupings. The exercise would, in any case, be irrelevant and unworkable. There's considerable flex in the system, and these categories of form have to do more with general tendencies of narrative strategies.

These tendencies:
- reflect the social circumstances that produce them,
- ratify them, and
- create for readers differing comprehension of what is significant, even what is possible in different fictional worlds.

Hence the drop from myth to romance (and its kid brother, tale/fairy tale). Instead of gods with infinite powers, we have nobility with limited power or commoners (cobbler, fishermen, farmers) who are given narrow access to magic (elves, talking fish, golden geese). To naturalism with its greater emphasis on middle-class values, since there's no magic any more and power inheres in rules and a regulated social sphere. Keep this in mind as we move into the 20th Century, already kicked off with modernism's emphasis on psychological development over faithfulness to external "realism."

Exercise:
Right now, in class, broadly re-outline *Tess* as a modernist novel, or *Madame Bovary* as a romance.

Read the exercises. What happens to the books and our conceptions of them?
Next: What changes need to be made or issues developed to make *Last Tycoon* a romance?
Tender Is the Night
(Week 5)

Romance
High degree of stylization--patterning in plot and language
- establishment of hero, "half divine" (Northrop Frye)
- hero is held back from birthright
- hero must meet defeat before success
- identities are disguised
- quest
Heroine generally passive, though exerting great power over the hero (Lady of Shallott). She is pursued
Psychological types over psychological development
No or little irony; high seriousness, elegiac mode
Loyalty an ultimate value

Modernism (e.g. Hemingway, Joyce, Stein)
Glorification of style
Intense focus on psychology; flattening of character
Diminution of plot
Interior action; low emphasis on drama
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Clearly this is a more fully realized Modernist text than Madame Bovary.

Does Tender Is the Night fulfill the role of Romance better or worse than The Great Gatsby? What is the relation between the two books? Does Gatsby set out premises--whether or not related to Romance--that are answered, fulfilled, or refuted by Tender Is the Night?
*Day of the Locust*
(Week 6)

Gothic
- Monstrous
- Esoteric locales
- Degeneracy
- Terror
- Emphasis on religion
- Supernatural

Allegory
- Flattening of character--extreme
- Symbolism made pre-eminent
- Patterning of plot
- Pleasure of clear artifice

Comedy
- Flattening of character--exaggeration
- Movement beyond individual control--fate (compare to *Tess*)
- Irony
- Happy ending

Can the book be read as a naturalistic, realist?

Novel as Freitag's triangle, Freudian world view: Extreme sexualization, no freedom through art
Wise Blood
(Week 8)

Southern Gothic
  Grotesque
  Nature/rural
  Perverse sexuality
  Lurid tone
  Violence
  Primal instincts

Allegory
  Flattening of character--extreme
  Symbolism made pre-eminent
  Patterning of plot
  Pleasure of clear artifice

Comedy
  Flattening of character--exaggeration
  Movement beyond individual control--fate (compare to Tess)
  Irony
  Happy ending

Some of Modernism's cubist qualities, but a more coherent plot line. Dreamscape quality from surreal details (grotesque), Freud again:

- Conscious/unconscious mind
- sublimation
- id, ego, superego
- projection

Does this interpretation flatten our experience of the book or enrich it? Does the book exist as a blueprint for Freudian concepts? How do we order unruly consciousness and more unruly subconsciousness? With these tools in hand, do Tess and Mme Bovary feel more realistic or less?
The Loved One
(Week 10)

Comedy
- Flattening of character--exaggeration
- Movement beyond individual control--fate (compare to Tess)
- Irony
- Happy ending

PLUS

Satire
- Sarcasm
- Critical tone
- Firmer narrative line than comedy; focus in plot and characterization
- Instructive aim
- Not necessarily funny
- Greater flattening of character than in comedy; closer to myth
- Irony
- Generally unhappy ending
The Loved One

How can this plot be moved from satire to comedy? From satire to tragedy? Which is the further distance?
Pick one of the main characters—Dennis, Aimée, or Joyboy—and attempt a deepened characterization. (Create background, explore hopes and desires, create a causally linked chain of events.) What happens to the plot? Is it possible to keep the story a comedy?
The Power and the Glory  
(Week 11)

Allegory 
- Flattening of character--extreme 
- Symbolism made pre- eminent 
- Patterning of plot 
- Pleasure of clear artifice

Is *The Power and the Glory* an allegory? What aspects does it borrow from realism? How does Greene work to keep us *from* reading it as strict realism?

Consider the character of the whisky priest against Dick Diver, Emma Bovary, Tess, or Hazel Motes. What is required of the main character of a novel?

Secondary characters: Fellows, Tench, the lieutenant, Padre José, the boy and his family, the Lehrs. Which character attracts you? Start plotting a novel around that character. Go as far from or stay as close to Greene as you like.
- Look for energetic portions.
- What mode works best? What happens if you move further from realism?
Love Medicine
(Week 12)

Another confusing novel. How is the affective experience of reading it different from that of *Tender Is the Night*?
Rather than the Greek model, e.g. *Tess* and Northrop Frye, the focus here is on group experience, emphasis on group experience. "Truth" held as a considerably more relative value. (We will see a different version of this kind of narrative in *The Known World*. See also Toni Morrison, the Zadie Smith of *White Teeth*.)

Postmodernism
Self-referential
Fragmented
Intertextual, multivocalic
Playful
Chaotic, often invoking chaos theory
Anti-hierarchical
Ironic

What's the affective difference between reading this and reading *Wise Blood*?

– Non-chronological

– deliberate contradictions; emphasizes relativity of truth, and even of experience or observation

– nonlinear congruity. As opposed to a book like *Tess*, here there is no straightforward plot, and the resolution of the ending has to do with a harmony of voices, not a singular answer to a singular question.

– Untruth (e.g., Gordy) embraced. Trickster.

List classifications of narrative you see at play in "The World's Greatest Fishermen." Now do the same for "Saint Marie." Is there any overlap? What happens to the narrative when so many different conventions are invoked? Is each of them honored? Are they shattered? Can they coexist, and if so, does their identity remained stable?
Albertine
At 15, runs off to Fargo and spends night with Henry Lamartine. At 22, works in weigh station with Dot. At 23, in the city studying medicine (western).

Marie
Nearly enters convent; instead, marries Nector Kashpaw. Adopts many children, including June; is a stern but good woman. Endures Nector’s affair with Lulu, and ultimately becomes more Indian than Nector, though her heritage is Lazarre, when she takes in Rushes Bear. By the end of her life, in the Senior Center, she and Lulu are reconciles and powerful in Indian affairs.

Nestor
Young and handsome, he gets the government education while his brother Eli learns the woods. Nestor is weak and a tool of the western culture, becoming an icon to whites of what Indians might be, with his handsomeness. He is caught between Marie and Lulu, and finally simply loses his senses. Dies eating the turkey heart of Lipsha’s half-hearted love medicine.

Lulu
Falls early and hard for Nestor, but goes to Moses Pillager when Nestor marries Marie. Has many sons from many different men, lives to see her house burned down by Nestor after he sells her land. She becomes an Indian-rights advocate. By the end of her life, in the Senior Center, she is bald, largely blind, and hugely powerful.

Gordie
Married young to June (and fathering the sorry King), he is unable to restore himself after her death. He drinks himself to death.

Lyman
Nestor’s son, he has Nestor’s sense of money and his closeness to white culture. After seeing his brother Henry, Vietnam vet, drown himself, he ultimately becomes an entrepreneur with the BIA. He builds, then sees ruined, the tomahawk factory, then has a vision of a casino.

Lipsha
Gifted with the touch, but dogged by his resentment for the mother who left him and, later, the fact that many people knew his parentage when he did not. Embattled with King since childhood without knowing why, he fights with him for the car in the first chapter, attempts to help his grandmother with love medicine for Nestor, botches it, learns who his mother was, enlists, runs away, re-tangles with King, and ultimately wins June’s car in poker. Gets the last word.
Flaubert's Parrot AND A Simple Heart
(Week 13)

Tale
Old-fashioned:
  - Plot driven
  - Flat characterizations; absence of psychological depth
  - Archetypes (melodrama)
  - Clear, unambiguous themes
  - Upholding of bourgeois values
  - Highly patterned; absence of surprises in plot

PLUS

Postmodernism
- Self-referential
- Fragmented
- Intertextual, multivocalic
- Playful
- Chaotic, often invoking chaos theory
- Anti-hierarchical
- Ironic

Is Flaubert's Parrot homage or satire?

Homage
- Conscious reference to origin text
- Close shadowing of origin text

Satire
- Conscious reference to origin text
- Emphasis on tone
The Known World
(Week 15)

Again multivocalic, though far less about community than *Love Medicine*. Isolation, diaspora—but the flash forwards assure continuation, history moving forward. Calls into question issues of interpretation.

Ideas of unity largely exploded (entropy)

From Henry’s death a tornado of action ensues—much destruction gathered around a single point.

No single characters change. Movement in the novel works against epiphany—again, entropy

What is the affective experience of reading this book? Compare to *Tender*. Can the "Known" world be known, as it is told here? What can be known?

Large canvas. Myth again, but refracted differently.
- Are characters subject to fate? To randomness? Is there a difference?
- Are there heroes here? What happens to them? Villains? Same question.
- How is this highly dramatic plot kept from melodrama?

Postmodernism
- Self-referential
- Fragmented
- Intertextual, multivocalic
- Playful
- Chaotic
- Anti-hierarchical
- Ironic
Forms of Fiction: The Novel
Student Evaluation

The goal of this course was to help students recognize some of the classic structures of novels and see how those structural elements might be manipulated. How well do you think it succeeded? Is such an emphasis useful for you?

Was this the course you hoped it would be? Why or why not?

Was the reading appropriate, both in terms of content and workload?

Which topics discussed were helpful for you? What would you have liked to discuss more (or at all)?

Were the student presentations effective ways of teaching the material?

Do you feel you have a different grasp of novel structure now from the one you had fifteen weeks ago? If so, in what way?