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Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-4:30

## **George Eliot and the Science of Description**

**ENGL 650**  
**Thursday, 2-4:50pm**  
**Winter 2016**

This seminar will explore practices of description and interpretation in the Victorian period and today. Surveying a range of theoretical works in literary criticism, natural history, and ethology that reflect upon the nature and practice of description, we will ask what literature is doing when it claims to describe the world and what we are doing when we claim to describe a literary text. Our case study throughout the term will be George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (the only novel we will read throughout the term). In one sense, thus, this will be a class about Eliot and the history of science, but in a larger sense it will be a class about literary methodology, and how rethinking description might reshape our literary critical practices today.

### **Required Texts**

Books available at the Duck Store. It is necessary to get the specific editions listed below:

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*. Oxford UP (ISBN: 9780199536757)  
George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*. University of Iowa Press (ISBN: 9780877455561)

Various articles and book excerpts available on Canvas including:

Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading: Or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You," "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins"

Love, "Truth and Consequences," "Close But Not Deep"

Marcus and Best, "Surface Reading: An Introduction"

Buurma and Heffernan, "Interpretation, 1980 and 1880," "Notation after 'The Reality Effect'"

Felski, selections from *The Limits of Critique*

Barthes, "The Reality Effect"

Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?"

Eliot, selections from *The Journals of George Eliot*

Eliot, selections from *The Letters*

Latour, "Circulating Reference"

Freedgood and Schmitt, "Denotatively, Technically, Literally"

Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life"  
Lewes, "Dickens in Relation to Criticism"  
Puckett, "Stupid Sensations"  
Hertz, "Recognizing Casaubon"  
Eliot, "Recollections of Ilfracombe"  
Foucault, selections from *The Order of Things*  
Agamben, "Notes on Gesture" and "The Face" from *Means Without End*  
Darwin, selections from *The Expression of Emotion*  
Lorenz, "The Fashionable Fallacy of Dispensing with Description"  
Huxley, "The Courtship-Habits of the Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)"  
Stanford Literary Lab, "Pamphlet 5: Style at the Scale of the Sentence"  
Allison, "Discerning Syntax: George Eliot's Relative Clauses"  
Daston and Gallison, "The Image of Objectivity"  
Gallagher, "George Eliot: Immanent Victorian"  
Brilmyer, "Plasticity, Form and the Matter of Character in *Middlemarch*"

### **Presentations, Writing, and Participation**

Over the course of the term, you undertake one presentation and write two papers.

**Presentations:** Each seminar participant will give one 20-minute presentation (time strictly enforced) on recent scholarship and historical context related to the text/topic under discussion. Please come talk to me during office hours before presenting.

**Papers:** You will write two papers: a descriptive reading position paper (2-3 pp), due fourth week (1/28) and a conference length research paper (10-12 pp), due eleventh week (3/18). You will design final paper topics in consultation with me; final papers must draw on original research.

Regular and productive class participation is expected in graduate seminars; participation makes up 10% of the final grade.

### **Grading**

I will base your grades on your class participation, the quality of your essays, and your responses to the work of others, both written and oral. All papers should be instances of academic writing, with a thesis, argument structure, and a conclusion. They should also be standard format—Times New Roman or equivalent, 12 point font, one inch margins, double spaced. Be sure to cite all sources.

Final grades will be determined on the basis of the rubric below. I will be using the plus/minus system for final grades. Please note: to ensure fairness, all numbers are absolute, and will not be rounded up or down at any stage. Thus a B- will be inclusive of all scores of 80.000 through 83.999. A+ is only given for truly outstanding, exceptional

work. This course will not have a final or midterm exam.

A+ = 97-100   A = 94-100   A- = 90-93   B+ = 87-89   B = 84-86   B- = 80-83  
C+ = 77-79   C = 74-76   C- = 70-73   D+ = 67-69   D = 64-66   D- = 60-63  
F = 0-60

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Grade %</u>
Presentation	see presentation schedule	20%
Position Paper	1/28	20%
Final paper	3/18	50%
Participation	throughout the term	10%

### Attendance and Lateness Policy

Students are expected to attend every class. If illness or a religious holiday prevents you from doing so, please notify me, and be sure to get the class notes from another student. Repeated tardiness will accumulate as absences—every three tardies count as one absence. *More than three absences will result in your grade being dropped 1/3 of a letter grade.*

### Class Communication

The primary means of communication outside of class in this course will be through Canvas and your UO email account. Please check this account regularly and be sure your preferred email account is connected to Canvas. I am also most readily available through email and my office hours. Generally, you can expect an email response from me within two working days.

### A Note on Plagiarism

As a UO student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of UO include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please see me if you have any questions about your use of sources. Plagiarism will be handled according to the Student Conduct Code:

<http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx>

## **Preferred First Name Policy**

The University of Oregon has a preferred first name policy. According to this policy, a student or employee's preferred first name will be used in university communications and reporting except where the use of the legal name is required for university purposes. If you have reasons to believe your preferred first name may not be listed correctly in the roster or you do not feel comfortable taking advantage of UO's preferred first name policy, please communicate to me the name you wish to use. The preferred first name policy can be accessed here: <http://policies.uoregon.edu/node/216>

## **Students with Disabilities**

Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty and Disability Access Services (DAS). Students with accommodations approved through DAS are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through DAS should contact DAS immediately at 541-737-4098.

## **Title IX Policy and Reporting Responsibilities**

The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. Consequently, all UO employees are required to report to appropriate authorities (supervisor or Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity) when they have reasonable cause to believe that discrimination, harassment or abuse of any kind has taken, or is taking, place. Students seeking to discuss a situation without talking to a mandatory reporter may call 541-346-SAFE. This 24/7 hotline is staffed by confidential, trained counselors. For confidential help, students may also contact University Health Services (<http://healthcenter.uoregon.edu/>) or Sexual Assault Support Services (<http://sasslane.org/>).

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week 2 (1/14): Reparative Reading**

Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading"

Sedgwick, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold"

Love, "Truth and Consequences"

### **Week 3 (1/21): Descriptive Reading**

Love, "Close But Not Deep"

Marcus and Best, "Surface Reading: An Introduction"

Felski, selections from *The Limits of Critique*

Buurma and Heffernan, "Interpretation, 1980 and 1880"

Presentation Topic: Descriptive Reading

**Week 4 (1/28): Realism and Description**

Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Books 1-2)

Barthes, "The Reality Effect"

Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?"

Optional: Levine, "George Eliot's Hypothesis of Reality"

Presentation Topic: Realist Description

Due in Class: Descriptive Reading position paper

**Week 5 (2/4): Reference and Denotation**

Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Book 3)

Eliot, *The Journals of George Eliot* (1869-76)

Eliot, *Letters* (1848-9)

Latour, "Circulating Reference"

Freedgood and Schmitt, "Denotatively, Technically, Literally"

Optional: Buurma and Heffernan, "Notation after 'The Reality Effect'"

Presentation Topic: Scientific and Literary Reference

**Week 6.1 (TBD): Pulsating Realities**

Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Book 4)

Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life"

Lewes, "Dickens in Relation to Criticism"

Puckett, "Stupid Sensations"

Hertz, "Recognizing Casaubon"

Optional: Stein, "Portraits and Repetition;" Brain, selections from *The Pulse of Modernism*

Presentation Topic: Victorian Physiology

**Week 6.2 (2/11): Natural and Unnatural Histories**

Eliot, "Recollections of Ilfracombe"

Foucault, selections from *The Order of Things*

Eliot, selections from *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*

Optional: Brilmyer, "'The Natural History of My Inward Self': Sensing Character in George Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*"; King, "Reorienting the Scientific Frontier"

Presentation Topic: Victorian Natural History

**Week 7 (2/18): Descriptive Ethologies**

Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Book 5)

Agamben, "Notes on Gesture" and "The Face" from *Means Without End*  
Darwin, selections from *The Expression of Emotion* (with Lorenz's introduction)  
Lorenz, "The Fashionable Fallacy of Dispensing with Description"  
Huxley, "The Courtship-Habits of the Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)"  
Optional: Ogilvy, selections from *The Science of Describing*

Presentation Topic: Gesture and Affect

**Week 8 (2/25): Micro and Macro Reading**

Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Books 6-7)  
Eliot, "Notes on Form in Art"  
Stanford Literary Lab, "Pamphlet 5: Style at the Scale of the Sentence"  
Allison, "Discerning Syntax: George Eliot's Relative Clauses"

Presentation Topic: Distant Reading

**Week 9 (3/3): Types, Characters, Specimens**

Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Book 8-finale)  
Eliot, *Letters* (1871)  
Daston and Gallison, "The Image of Objectivity"  
Gallagher, "George Eliot: Immanent Victorian"  
Brilmyer, "Plasticity, Form and the Matter of Character in *Middlemarch*"

Optional: Miller, "Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*;" Ritvo, selections from *The Platypus and the Mermaid*

**Week 10 (3/10):** Final paper presentations

**Week 11 (3/18):** Final Papers due by 5PM Friday 3/18 on Canvas