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# LITERATURE

READING AND WRITING WITH CRITICAL STRATEGIES

Steven Lynn

# Literature



## Reading and Writing with Critical Strategies

Steven Lynn

*University of South Carolina*



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## About the Cover:

We study literature (as thinkers going back to Plato have argued) because it can be a profoundly revealing imitation of life. René Magritte's *La condition humaine* (1934) certainly reminds us of this motivation, as the painting in the window appears to capture reality perfectly. Yet Magritte's work also invites a richer view of art, for the painting is within a painting: the "reality" that is captured in either case is an illusion, made of paint. The space around the window/painting becomes a fantastic trompe l'oeil, miraculously fitting the scene outside, or rather betraying the hand of the artist.

This textbook aims to inspire students to see literature in similarly rich ways: as a powerful reflection of reality, a window to reality, an opportunity to create reality, a reflection only of art, never quite getting to what's real, and much more. Such a multiplicity of meaning, such a swirling of art and life, is central to the human condition, Magritte's work suggests. It's what we're after here.

—Steven Lynn

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Cover Image: The Human Condition, 1934,  
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Printer and Binder: *Quebecor World*  
Cover Printer: *Coral Graphic Services*

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## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lynn, Steven 1952–

Literature: reading and writing with critical strategies / Steven Lynn.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-321-11349-7

1. English language—Rhetoric. 2. Literature—History and criticism—Theory, etc. 3. Criticism—Authorship. 4. Academic writing.

5. College readers. I. Title.

PE1479.C7L955 2003

808—dc21

2003040107

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ISBN 0-321-11349-7

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10—RNT—06 05 04 03

*For Annette and Anna*

# Preface for Instructors



Critical theories are invention strategies. This realization is the starting point for *Literature: Reading and Writing with Critical Strategies*—a new kind of introduction-to-literature anthology designed to help you show your students how to think of insightful things to say about literary works, and how to shape those ideas into forceful essays.

Following the emergence of critical theory in the past few decades, today we enjoy an unprecedented consciousness about how meanings are made and articulated. While composition theory has advanced our understanding of the writing process, the teaching of literature—and writing about literature—has been relatively unaffected by theory. In the mainstream introduction-to-literature books, for all practical purposes, critical theory has been ignored, relegated to an appendix or a chapter beginning on page 2,083.

In keeping theory to ourselves, we may have been trying to save our students from bafflement and frustration. But they don't need to be soaked in Stanley Fish and Julia Kristeva, in Derrida and Foucault, to acquire a working grasp of the different kinds of critical approaches available to them. Some students intuitively discover some of these invention strategies, but most students come into our classes with fairly limited resources for making a literary text meaningful.

*Literature: Reading and Writing with Critical Strategies* dispels the myth that critical theory eludes the grasp of beginning-level students. Your students will find clear and accessible explanations of various critical approaches, and they will be inspired to read, think, and write *critically*. They will learn how critical essays are developed, from a blank page to questions and inklings, to rough sketches, to a finished draft. *Critical strategies are presented here as means to an end—not the object of study, but as a set of guidelines for reading and reacting more richly and rewardingly.*

## Putting Invention Strategies to Work

The literature, after all, is why we're here. And in talking about literature, certain traditional terms and concepts, "the elements," have proved quite useful. Students first engage the meanings of three deceptively familiar terms—"reading," "writing," and "literature"—in the first part of this textbook. Then literary texts, critical strategies, and elements are intertwined in a series of chapters in the second part of the text. These chapters, 4 through 9, explain and illustrate some profoundly influential approaches: reader response, New Criticism, deconstruction, political criticism, historical criticism, and psychological criticism. Each of these chapters is divided into four sections:

**Reflection:** Here the basic principles of an approach are identified, or “reflected,” in the close reading of a poem. The reader who is looking for ambiguities, and attempting to unify those tensions (employing new critical assumptions, in other words), is using quite different strategies from those used by the reader who is trying to relate the author’s life and times to his work (that is, using biographical and historical criticism). Students need to understand that these different assumptions and purposes exist. Good readings don’t just magically *appear*: Good readers produce interpretations, using certain tools and motivations.

**Strategies:** Here students learn how to use each approach’s principles to write a critical essay, starting from nothing and moving through drafts to a final version. These explanations, and the evolving papers, have been classroom tested by dozens of teachers and hundreds of students for accessibility, usefulness, and interest. Each strategy is reduced to three simple yet powerful directives. (Students will also find a simplified overview of the assumptions and practices of each strategy gathered inside the front cover—for quick reference as they develop a more sophisticated understanding of each strategy.)

**Elements:** In traditional anthologies, the elements of literature—like critical theories—are covered in a glossarial format. But the definition of “plot” or “character” doesn’t necessarily suggest to students what they might *say* about a particular plot or character. In this section the elements are defined and discussed as they function within each critical approach, giving students a richer understanding of these basic terms and concepts, and also helping them to generate an abundance of ideas.

**Practice:** To grasp how critical approaches work, to become comfortable applying them, to begin to blend and go beyond them, students need practice. This section therefore presents a set of texts—poems, stories, or plays—that are thematically related, encouraging students to make connections between and among them. The themes, like the works of literature, are particularly responsive to the approach. The political criticism chapter, for instance, gathers practice stories that illuminate idealism. Many students have said that their insight into—and appreciation of—literary works increased exponentially when they have tried to write one. So the “Practice” sections conclude by encouraging students to produce a literary text.

## The Selections

*Literature: Reading and Writing with Critical Strategies* offers a balance of canonical classics, underappreciated gems, and why-haven’t-I-heard-of-this-before pieces. The particular challenges and resources of each genre are considered in an “Invitation” chapter: poetry in Chapter 10, fiction in 14, and drama in 17. Each genre also has a case study chapter, giving students opportunities to explore in depth the following major writers: Robert Frost and Gwendolyn Brooks; Charlotte Perkins Gillman and Flannery O’Connor; Sophocles and Shakespeare. Students too often have been asked to produce literary criticism without having seen much of it. The critical excerpts in each of these case studies, together with the professional and student examples integrated throughout the textbook, provide an extensive array of critical models. Each genre, in addition, has a chapter presenting “More” examples—important, stimulating, wonderful readings representing the range of work in that genre. These additional works provide opportunities to extend the thematic connections established earlier.

As students engage with various recurrent themes, references, and allusions, their reading will grow in confidence and pleasure.

## Portability

Most introductory anthologies of literature offer far more than could possibly be assigned in a single term. *Literature: Reading and Writing with Critical Strategies* offers an abundance of literary texts, but its heft has been limited by a more realistic selection of dramatic works. Individual plays are easy to order, and a broad selection of Penguin paperbacks can be value-packed with *Literature* at a significant discount. Discounted Penguin titles include:

Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*  
 Hwang, *Madame Butterfly*  
 Miller, *Death of a Salesman*  
 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*  
 Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*  
 Shakespeare, *Othello*  
 Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*  
 Wilson, *Fences*  
 Wilson, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*

To review the complete list of titles available, visit [www.ablongman.com/penguin](http://www.ablongman.com/penguin) and consult your Longman representative about setting up a value pack.

## Supporting Materials

### For Instructors:

#### *Instructors Manual*, by Steven Lynn

ISBN: 0-321-12233-X

In the expansive *Instructor's Manual*, you will find sample syllabi, tips on teaching each chapter, answers with explanations for the questions in the book, additional questions, additional writing and reading suggestions, suggestions regarding Internet resources, advice on ancillary materials, more student examples, and much more. The *Instructor's Manual* for this text is unusual in several ways. For starters, I've written it, or gathered the resources for it, myself. Still, since dozens of teachers worked with various iterations of the manuscript for this text, I'm very much indebted to many people for exercises, quiz questions, activities, background information, unexpected connections, writing assignments, exhortations, and warnings. I'm most indebted to Professor Ed Madden, my teaching partner in our teacher-training course.

#### *Companion Website*

[www.ablongman.com/lynn](http://www.ablongman.com/lynn)

This text-specific companion site offers a wealth of resources for both students and instructors. Instructors will find links to sites that will further enhance the coverage of the authors featured in *Literature*, additional plays, and much more. Those same author links are available to students, as are thought-provoking Internet exercises, additional readings, and annotated links to other useful literature sites.

## **Video Program**

An impressive selection of videotapes is available to enrich students' experience of literature. Contact your sales representative to learn how to qualify.

### ***The Longman Electronic Testbank for Literature***

Printed ISBN 0-321-14312-4

CD ISBN: 0-32114314-0

This electronic and printed testbank features various objective questions on the major works of fiction, short fiction, poetry, and drama. With this user-friendly CD-ROM, instructors simply choose questions from the electronic testbank and then print out the completed test for distribution. FREE with the adoption of Lynn's *Literature*.

### ***Teaching Literature On-line, Second Edition***

ISBN: 0-321-10618-0

*Teaching Literature On-line* provides instructors with strategies for incorporating electronic media into any literature classroom. Offering a range of information and examples, this manual provides ideas and activities for enhancing literature courses with the help of technology. FREE with the adoption of Lynn's *Literature*.

### ***Coursecompass Generic Site. Longman English Resources for Introduction to Literature, Fiction, Creative Writing, and Drama Access Code Card, Second Edition***

ISBN: 0-321-14311-6

Blackboard Content: 0-321-14313-2

This course management system provides a number of guides that will help students analyze literature, evaluate plays, critique and write about literature, and conduct research on-line. Also included is a journal for writing about literature, a journal for creative writing, and guides to teaching literature on-line. FREE when value-packaged with Lynn's *Literature*.

## **For Students:**

### ***Literature Timeline***

ISBN: 0-321-14315-9

This visually appealing timeline chronicles the major literary works written throughout history. Students gain historical and contextual insights into the impact historical events have had on writers and their works. . . and vice versa. FREE when value-packaged with Lynn's *Literature: Reading and Writing with Critical Strategies*.

### ***Responding to Literature: A Writer's Journal***

ISBN: 0-321-09542-1

This journal provides students with their own personal space for writing. Helpful writing prompts for responding to fiction, poetry, and drama are included. FREE when value-packaged with Lynn's *Literature*.

### ***Evaluating A Performance***

ISBN: 0-321-09541-3

Do you ever ask your students to review a local production? This portable supplement offers students a convenient place to record their evaluations. Useful tips and



suggestions of issues to consider when evaluating a production are included. FREE when value-packaged with Lynn's *Literature*.

### ***Research Navigator for English***

ISBN: 0-321-20277-5

Designed to teach students how to conduct high-quality online research and to document it properly, Research Navigator guides provide discipline-specific academic resources; in addition to helpful tips on the writing process, online research, and finding and citing valid sources. Free when packaged with any Allyn & Bacon/Longman text, Research Navigator guides include an success code to Research Navigator™, providing access to thousands of academic journals and periodicals, the NY Times Search by Subject Archive, Link Library, Library Guides, and more.

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### **Acknowledgments**

This book wouldn't exist at all without the imagination, vision, and patience of Erika Berg, an extraordinary editor. It wouldn't exist in anything like its present form without the generous and thoughtful assessments of my reviewers, who have helped to guide this book through three major revisions. I'd like to thank especially Lauren Puccio, a remarkable student, whose careful reading of and enthusiasm for the manuscript in its final stages were invaluable. If this list omits any reviewers, my sincere apologies:

Barbara Barnard, Hunter College/CUNY  
 Dana Beckelman, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee  
 Joe Benson, A&T State University  
 Lois Birky, Illinois Central College  
 Paul R. Brandt, Kent State University  
 Kristin Bryant, Portland Community College  
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Janet L. Warman, Elon College  
Thomas A. Westerfield, University of Northern Iowa  
Sharon Wilson, University of Northern Colorado  
W. Potter Woodberry, Tallahassee Community College

I must also thank the dozens of teaching assistants at the University of South Carolina, who proved repeatedly that their students could indeed understand and use rewardingly different critical approaches. The Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English provided a receptive audience at a crucial point in the evolution of this project. KC Culver provided excellent research assistance, and helped prepare many of the brief biographies. Randy Miller also adeptly researched and contributed fine questions regarding *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*. My current research assistant, Monica Hill, continues to provide cheerful and essential assistance.

A few more people deserve my particular thanks:

1. Extraordinary teachers: Karl Beason, my nomination for the greatest high school English teacher ever; Don Greiner, Bernie Dunlap, George Geckle, and Jim Garrison, who inspired me to try to be an English professor of a certain kind—their kind.
2. Amazing assistants: especially Lisa Saxon, who must have cloned herself (it's the only explanation)—the most cheerful and effective administrative assistant anyone could imagine; Elizabeth Smith, who embodies courage and caring; and Modestine Redden, whose good cheer and calm efficiency keep the English department moving.
3. Patient family: Anna, who mostly left her dad alone in his study so he could finish this book, even though she had to save the Beanie Baby universe by herself sometimes; and Annette, who inspired me to win the Nobel Prize in the Special Awards category of Being Lucky Enough to Marry Annette. I'd also like to thank my brother Mike, my mother Leora, and my father Benjamin for asking—and for not asking—how the book was coming along, almost always at the right times.
4. Indefatigable development editor: Barbara Conover, whose good judgment and tactful insistence saved me from many errors and infelicities (those that remain are mine, of course).

5. Wonderful colleagues: The English department at the University of South Carolina is a supportive, fun, comfortable place to work. I'm honored to work with them.

Finally, if you have suggestions or questions, let me know. My email address is [lynn@sc.edu](mailto:lynn@sc.edu), and I'd love to hear from you. I'm happy to respond to queries or comments from you or your students.

Steven Lynn  
University of South Carolina

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