

Access Reading

Study Skills Session, Supporting Documents

Thursday 4th April 2024

Name:

PhD tutor:

Caroline

Subject Strand:

Languages and Literature related courses

Your PhD Tutor: About Me

I am a fourth year part-time PhD student working in the department of English Literature. My thesis is an expansion of my Masters' dissertation, and explores the triple strands of gender, trauma and place in the New England Gothic novel. While my research mostly looks at the current resurgence of fiction from twenty-first century Gothic literature in New England, I also explore literary legacies present in this highly intertextual form. These include twentieth and nineteenth century American literature, and early British Gothic literature. Other areas of interest include broader Gothic literature, such as the Gothic folk tradition, working-class literature and creative writing.

Alongside my research, I am also involved in teaching English students at various levels. I have worked in secondary education since completing my undergraduate degree. I have also worked in the education charity sector supporting students at GCSE and A Level to prepare to access university education. I have also had the opportunity to teach and assess students within the University of Reading's English Literature department.

Since completing my undergraduate degree in 2014, one of my most rewarding professional experiences has centred around being both student and teacher. Struggling with those first Masters' degree essays made me better at anticipating barriers to learning for my students – but also myself, building resilience and greater understanding of how we learn.

Critical thinking:

Critical thinking can be defined as the process of working out **what** you think and **why** you think this.

Critical thinking is essential to all subject disciplines at university study. It is very common for new university students to receive feedback that they need to think thus write more critically to develop their essays and ultimately receive higher grades.

At university critical thinking also involves:

- Identifying **what you want to know**, and **why**.
- Sourcing **relevant and reliable** information.
- Grounding your thinking in this **evidence**.
- Addressing **contradictions** in wider academic thinking.

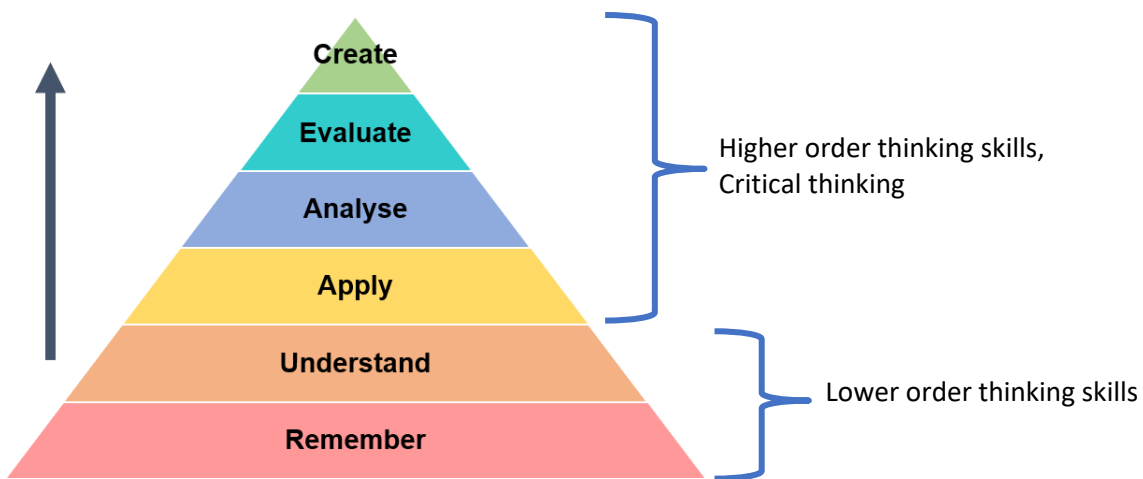
Critical thinking is an important study skill that you will develop at university, practising this skill before enrolling at university to help you make a smoother transition academically.

Bloom's Taxonomy:

To help establish how critical we are being we can utilise Bloom's Taxonomy. Through Bloom's Taxonomy we can see the stages of learning as a hierarchy of critical analysis.

"Remember" requires the least amount of critical thinking and "Create" requires the most. The higher your university work sits on the pyramid the more critical you are being. This means when you analyse and evaluate academic literature you are seen to be more critical than those which simply describe theories and claims without questioning their validity.

To achieve a higher level on the pyramid you still need to undertake everything beneath it but be sure not to get trapped there!



Stages	Description	Examples of words associated with this level
Create	Produce new or original work.	Design, construct, develop, formulate, investigate
Evaluate	Justify a stand or decision.	Argue, defend, support, critique, weigh
Analyse	Draw connections among ideas.	Relate, compare, contrast, examine, question
Apply	Use information in new situations.	Execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate
Understand	Explain ideas of concepts.	Describe, discuss, classify, recognise, paraphrase
Remember	Recall facts and basic concepts.	Define, state, memorise, repeat, quoting

In pairs, discuss and decide whether the following actions show higher or lower-order thinking and where each of them fits into Bloom’s hierarchy of criticality.

Action	Higher or lower-order thinking	Level of criticality
Explain a theory.		
Judge the quality of an interpretation of evidence.		
Test a theory using primary research you have collected.		
Quote a secondary source.		
Trace links between sources in a discourse.		
Determine whether enough evidence has been collected or presented in a piece of literature.		
Make recommendations.		
Interpret evidence in a way that is informed by a particular theory.		
Paraphrase a source.		
Acknowledge a key authority on the topic		

My thoughts...

Relevant take aways from the extract/information
presented...

Things I know already about this topic based on
previous experience/learning...

Things I need to know more about...

Extracts from *Great Expectations* (1861):

Miss Havisham

She was dressed in rich materials—satins, and lace, and silks—all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe on—the other was on the table near her hand—her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom lay with those trinkets, and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a prayer-book, all confusedly heaped about the looking-glass.

[...]

“Who is it?” said the lady at the table.

“Pip, ma’am.”

“Pip?”

“Mr. Pumblechook’s boy, ma’am. Come—to play.”

“Come nearer; let me look at you. Come close.”

It was when I stood before her, avoiding her eyes, that I took note of the surrounding objects in detail, and saw that her watch had stopped at twenty minutes to nine, and that a clock in the room had stopped at twenty minutes to nine.

“Look at me,” said Miss Havisham. “You are not afraid of a woman who has never seen the sun since you were born?”

I regret to state that I was not afraid of telling the enormous lie comprehended in the answer “No.”

“Do you know what I touch here?” she said, laying her hands, one upon the other, on her left side.

“Yes, ma’am.” (It made me think of the young man.)

“What do I touch?”

“Your heart.”

“Broken!”

She uttered the word with an eager look, and with strong emphasis, and with a weird smile that had a kind of boast in it.

Estella

To stand in the dark in a mysterious passage of an unknown house, bawling Estella to a scornful young lady neither visible nor responsive, and feeling it a dreadful liberty so to roar out her name, was almost as bad as playing to order. But, she answered at last, and her light came along the dark passage like a star.

Miss Havisham beckoned her to come close, and took up a jewel from the table, and tried its effect upon her fair young bosom and against her pretty brown hair. "Your own, one day, my dear, and you will use it well. Let me see you play cards with this boy."

"With this boy? Why, he is a common labouring-boy!"

I thought I overheard Miss Havisham answer—only it seemed so unlikely—"Well? You can break his heart."

"What do you play, boy?" asked Estella of myself, with the greatest disdain.

"Nothing but beggar my neighbour, miss."

"Beggar him," said Miss Havisham to Estella. So we sat down to cards.

Mrs Joe

My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I, and had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbours because she had brought me up "by hand." Having at that time to find out for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand.

She was not a good-looking woman, my sister; and I had a general impression that she must have made Joe Gargery marry her by hand. Joe was a fair man, with curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth face, and with eyes of such a very undecided blue that they seemed to have somehow got mixed with their own whites. He was a mild, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going, foolish, dear fellow,—a sort of Hercules in strength, and also in weakness.

My sister, Mrs. Joe, with black hair and eyes, had such a prevailing redness of skin that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible she washed herself with a nutmeg-grater instead of soap. She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles. She made it a powerful merit in herself, and a strong reproach against Joe, that she wore this apron so much. Though I really see no reason why she should have worn it at all; or why, if she did wear it at all, she should not have taken it off, every day of her life.

Joe's forge adjoined our house, which was a wooden house, as many of the dwellings in our country were,—most of them, at that time. When I ran home from the churchyard, the forge was shut up, and Joe was sitting alone in the kitchen. Joe and I being fellow-sufferers, and having confidences as such, Joe imparted a confidence to me, the moment I raised the latch of the door and peeped in at him opposite to it, sitting in the chimney corner.

"Mrs. Joe has been out a dozen times, looking for you, Pip. And she's out now, making it a baker's dozen."

"Is she?"

"Yes, Pip," said Joe; "and what's worse, she's got Tickler with her."

At this dismal intelligence, I twisted the only button on my waistcoat round and round, and looked in great depression at the fire. Tickler was a wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision with my tickled frame

No Expectations at All: Women in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861)

James R. Simmons, Jr.

Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* was published near the end of a long and illustrious career, the thirteenth of the fourteen novels the writer completed before his death in 1870. In the novels prior to *Great Expectations*, women typically embody the extremes represented by Eve and Mary. Like Eve, they are villainous, tempting, and corrupt, often responsible for the downfall of men; or, like Mary, they are perfect, idealized women, good wives and mothers. In *Great Expectations*, the lines are similarly drawn.

The "good" female characters in the novel are easy to identify. Bidley and Clara Barley fit the mold of the ideal Victorian woman: both are caregivers. Bidley takes care of Joe after his wife's death and Clara takes care of her alcoholic father. Bidley marries Joe and has a child and Clara is married by the end of the novel. Like many of Dickens' model women, often referred to as "hearth angels," Bidley and Clara are rewarded for taking their place in the domestic sphere. After marriage they will be further affirmed as the Victorian ideal of womanhood when they become perfect wives and mothers.

The fate of the "bad" women is quite different (and much more interesting). Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham, and Estella do not fit the Victorian standard of the good wife and mother. Consequently, when these women step outside of what is considered the norm, and, especially if they become assertive in any way, they have to be punished—often severely—in order to "save" or "correct" them. Mrs. Joe Gargery (who does not even have the benefit of an identity separate from that of her husband) is frequently referred to negatively. Dickens writes that Mrs. Joe has brought Pip up "by hand," stressing not the fact that she unselfishly raised her orphaned brother by dry nursing him. Dickens instead uses the term as a pun to mean that she frequently beats Pip as a form of discipline. Dickens depicts Mrs. Joe as a bad wife and a bad mother, re-

inforcing this characterization for the reader when he has her tell Pip, "It's bad enough to be a blacksmith's wife . . . without being your mother" (9). A feminist reading of Mrs. Joe, however, notes that Dickens "never focuses on [her] deprivation and expectations," never asks the question " 'Why does not society allow her to have any great expectations?' " (Ayres 89). Ultimately, it seems the only way to correct this woman who does not conform is to beat her into submission—as Orlick does.

Miss Havisham, a wealthy woman of property and great influence, is an anomaly in Victorian society. Growing old in her wedding gown, she is a gross distortion of spinsterhood whose development stopped the moment she was left at the altar. Because she can no longer reach her desired objective of marriage, dictated for women by her culture, she attempts to revenge herself on men through Estella, her adopted daughter. Like other non-traditional women in Dickens' novels, especially women who attempt to compete in a male-dominated world, Miss Havisham is punished in the end, dying unloved and alone.

Estella is "corrected" from "bad" woman to "good." Groomed by Miss Havisham to be a femme fatale, she will clearly not easily become a "hearth angel." According to Brenda Ayres, Estella is not "gentle, kind, and tender, she is calculating, malicious and hard. . . . Instead of internalizing her suffering, as was expected of a good Victorian woman, she inflicts suffering on men" (90). Estella marries Bentley Drummle, not for love, but instead to torment him. For this perversion of Victorian ideals she is repaid in kind. After her marriage, Pip hears that she has led a "most unhappy life," that her husband has used her "with great cruelty" (482). However, in the end, Estella acknowledges to Pip that her suffering has become "stronger than all other teaching"; she has "been bent and broken, but—into a better shape" (484). Estella, the only one of the three, gets a second chance. Finally, the humbled and reformed young woman has the possibility of marrying for love.

Examining the female characters in *Great Expectations* in light of Victorian ideals for women provides us a useful way to understand Dickens' women. Good women—wives, homemakers, and caregivers, those who adopt the accepted feminine role, are portrayed favorably. Those who defy the stereotype usually come to an unhappy end. Students may want to discuss the ways in which some of Dickens' female characters do not conform, what expectations they might have, and what options women had during the nineteenth century outside of marriage. If students have read additional novels by Dickens and other nineteenth-century authors, they might compare the roles of women in these works with those in *Great Expectations*. Although Dickens was the most popular author in England and perhaps the world during the nineteenth century, *Great Expectations* unfortunately conforms to and perpetuates the



James R. Simmons, Jr, 'No Expectations at All: Women in Charles Dickens' Great Expectations (1861) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/dickstudannu.50.1.0001> [Date Accessed: 08/03/2024]

'The Angel in the House' – poem by Coventry Patmore

Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She casts her best, she flings herself.
How often flings for nought, and yokes
Her heart to an icicle or whim,
Whose each impatient word provokes
Another, not from her, but him;
While she, too gentle even to force
His penitence by kind replies,
Waits by, expecting his remorse,
With pardon in her pitying eyes;
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
A comfortable word confers,

¹ Coventry Patmore, 'The Angel in the House'
<https://www.lucy.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/The%20Angel%20in%20the%20House.pdf> [Date Accessed: 08/03/24].



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She leans and weeps against his breast,
And seems to think the sin was hers;
And whilst his love has any life,
Or any eye to see her charms,
At any time, she's still his wife,
Dearly devoted to his arms;
She loves with love that cannot tire;
And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
Through passionate duty love springs higher,
As grass grows taller round a stone.¹

‘Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.’ – Virginia Woolf.

‘You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her--you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it--in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it--she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes, her great grace. In those days--the last of Queen Victoria--every house had its Angel. And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words. The shadow of her wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room. Directly, that is to say, I took my pen in my hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered: "My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure."²

In the mid-nineteenth century, Coventry Patmore published the well-known poem “The Angel in the House,” which defines the Victorian model of the ideal, submissive woman and wife: “Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman’s pleasure.” Well into the twentieth century, the Angel in the House was still haunting women and urging them to sacrifice their own happiness and “fling” themselves down “the gulf” of their husbands’ “necessities” (Melani 2005; Patmore 2003). Virginia Woolf famously wrote that she had to eradicate the Angel in order to write truthfully: “Thus, whenever I felt the shadow of her wing or the radiance of her halo upon my page, I took up the inkpot and flung it at her. She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her. It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had dispatched her” (2004).

The literary tradition gives us an ethereal angel in the house, but the oral tradition gives us the phantom crazy woman haunting the house. In this manner, folklore provides the Angel in the House with an evil twin. I argue that supernatural manifestations of this deviant woman are a common pattern in ghost stories and that she has an excessively aggressive male counterpart. However, wronged parties of either gender are among the most common types of ghosts. Typically in these ghost stories, a murder victim or the victim of a tragic accident draws attention to his or her plight by haunting a particular site (e.g., Lindahl 2004, 451).

² Virginia Woolf, ‘Professions for Women’ <https://www.wheelersburg.net/Downloads/Woolf.pdf> [Date Accessed: 26/01/2023].

³ Jeannie Banks Thomas, ‘Three, Gender and Ghosts’ in *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore* <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt4cgmqg> [Date Accessed: 08/03/24].

Critical reading notes:

Remember you don't have to answer all the questions, use them in a way you find useful.

<p>What are the key arguments in the text?</p>	
<p>What were the strengths of the argument presented? What was convincing and why?</p>	
<p>What were the weaknesses of the argument? Are there any flaws, gaps or limitations to the argument?</p>	
<p>How can I use this source to answer the essay question? What can be learnt from this article?</p>	
<p>How does this text relate to other information I have read and/or my personal experience? Does it agree, contradict, or challenge my current knowledge?</p>	
<p>Does the author reference other's work which I would be interested/should look at myself?</p>	

Further resources:

You might want to consider these further resources:

1. Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* – the novel upon which today’s seminar was based.
2. The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel, ed. Deirde David – an example of one relevant text to our reading that is part of a very useful series for students of English Literature
3. Virginia Woolf, ‘Professions for Women’ – available in full here:
<https://www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/news/professions-women> [Date Accessed: 08/03/2024).
4. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (USA, 2009). – An example of criticism relating to female writing.
5. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (USA: Yale University Press, 2009). – An example of feminist writing about female madness in literature.

If you have any further questions please email:

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