

Final Paper Assignment

DUE SUNDAY, MAY 11, AT 10 PM ON CANVAS

Write a focused, analytic paper making an argument about a specific problem, device, or pattern in one or more crime-fiction texts we have read or films we have studied; your paper should discuss *Petals of Blood* or *Devil in a Blue Dress* at some length. You should avoid writing at length about the texts you wrote your first paper about. Your paper should work through your own ideas about your chosen texts, but your argument should engage meaningfully with at least one scholarly source (peer-reviewed journal article or chapter from an academic book) about a text you discuss, beyond what has been assigned in class. You are also encouraged to cite and reflect on the scholarly discussions of the genre of detective fiction we have read through the semester in relation to your particular topic, but this is not absolutely required.

As always, your analysis should be your own, not derived from other sources (including online guides or “AI” outputs). Base your claims on your careful analysis of primary textual evidence. Show something unexpected in the way the text works; go beyond restating the plot or discussing characters. Your paper should be 2000–2500 words in length.

SUGGESTED TOPICS

These are some example prompts for developing your own focused argument; a successful paper will not necessarily take on all the considerations under any prompt below.

Reasons for moving. Consider the significance of motion through space in one or more texts: how does the plot move through settings and reveal the social organization of space? Who has the capacity to move and how? How does the narrative reveal (or obscure) significant spaces? “Space” is very general, and can be made specific in more than one way; one can consider the different neighborhoods of LA invoked in *Devil*, but one can also consider the differences between rural and urban settings in *Petals of Blood*, for example.

Blame the system. We have underlined the way crime fictions insistently probe the relationships between individual crimes or transgressions and large-scale social problems or tensions. Make an argument about the *way* one or more texts lay these problems out, and connect the techniques of representation to the possibilities, if any, for solving them, within the terms given by the text.

#metoo’s no mystery. All semester, we have been wrestling with texts that represent gender differences in stark terms, mostly from an emphatically masculine

perspective. But women are no simple matter for our texts: develop an argument that goes beyond the obvious points about female characters to elucidate the ways that gender and sexuality fit, or do not fit, into the larger patterns of your chosen text or texts.

No big deal. In any extended text, some characters are *minor*: they don't take up much space, and they are only incidental to the *fabula* action. Yet sometimes paying attention to one or more such figures reveals important patterns of meaning in the text. They may exemplify recurring issues, or they may be the signs of problems that have been submerged. Sometimes the *reason* the text makes a character minor is itself of interest: what determines majorness or minorness in the text? Develop an analysis of one or more minor characters in relation to an important theme or problem in a novel.

Now you see it. In *Petals of Blood*, many narrators and many perspectives contribute to the telling of the story—and to keeping certain parts of the story from the reader. *Devil in a Blue Dress* appears simpler, almost singular in perspective, but the appearance is quite deceptive. Develop an argument about the *significance* of manipulations of perspective in the text, beyond the simple matter of what the reader knows. (“Perspective helps the mystery” is an argument without a motive.) Your argument should be based on a close study of particular moments that establish or transform perspective.

Your own highly focused topic. You may write on a topic of your choice, provided you e-mail me about it at least three days before the due date.

INCORPORATING THE SECONDARY SOURCE

The requirement of responding to a scholar's argument means that you must think of your own work as part of a *scholarly conversation*. As in any conversation, merely repeating what the other person said adds nothing; instead, look for a way in which your own argument *extends, refines, or critiques* an idea from another scholar. This can be as small as an interpretive point about one passage of text or as large as a big idea about crime fiction. Your address to the scholarly source can come at any point in your essay; think about the best place for it in terms of the logic of your own argument.

This secondary-source requirement is significant, but it is not the most important part of the assignment. Your paper should above all make a convincing argument about your primary text or texts. Nonetheless, an important aspect of your motive can come from using another source to demonstrate that there is *something that needs to be figured out* (because people argue over it) and your analysis helps to do so.

WRITING GUIDELINES

The major dimensions of a strong paper remain those described in the first paper assignment: evidence, motive, and argument. Please carefully reread the guidelines from the first assignment.

DRAFTS

Plan to draft and revise. You may send either of us partial or full drafts for brief comments, as long as you do so at least three days before the deadline, and we will continue to be available for questions thereafter.

FORMAT

Your paper should have 1.5-inch left and right margins, with text in twelve-point serif font (e.g.: Garamond, Hoefler Text, Palatino, Baskerville, or, less appealingly, Cambria, Times), and between single and one-and-a-half spacing. Number all pages. The paper should have your name and the date on the first page. Give your paper a meaningful title.

Submit your paper electronically via the Canvas Assignments tool. E-mail submissions are not acceptable. Digital submissions should be in Portable Document Format (PDF) if possible. Native word-processor formats (.doc, .docx, .pages, .odt) are acceptable. All word processors can produce PDF files, through a “Save As...” option, an “Export” command, or a “Print to PDF” option in the print dialog.

STYLE

You must proofread carefully.

Quotations should be carefully transcribed, punctuated, and attributed. Citations may follow either Chicago or MLA style; consistency and thoroughness in citation is more important than exact fidelity to either style. If you use someone else’s work, including someone’s informal comments inside class or out, *you must cite that work*. Using someone else’s work without specific citation is plagiarism. Using a computer platform that uses someone else’s work without specific citation is also plagiarism.

Please follow the conventions of standard written American English. I am non-prescriptive about things like the split infinitive, the sentence-final preposition, and “they” used as a gender-neutral singular pronoun. The passive voice is an excellent grammatical resource and can be used freely, provided it is used wisely.

The best resource on matters of usage is the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary of English Usage*, also available in a paperback Concise Edition. For detailed infor-

mation about current and past word uses, the fundamental source is the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

LATE POLICY

Late papers will be graded, provided they are turned in by May 13. A late paper will receive no higher than a 3.0.

Computer problems are not a valid excuse for lateness. Plan ahead. Back up frequently.

GRADING

The syllabus explains the general meaning of marks on the four-point scale. The chief criteria of assessment are:

Evidence. Has textual evidence been used extensively, chosen well, and interpreted effectively in support of claims?

Motive. Does the paper make its central problem interesting?

Argument. Is the argument focused, logical, convincing, surprising?

Line of thought. Does the paper develop its ideas in connected, orderly fashion? Does the conclusion follow from (and differ from) the opening?

Style. Is the paper clearly written? Is it free from typographical, grammatical, and other errors?

IN GENERAL

An A-range (3.5–4.0) paper is strong by all these criteria; a B-range (2.5–3.5) paper has well-chosen, well-analyzed evidence but does not fully develop its argument or its motive; a C-range (1.5–2.5) paper lacks evidence or uses evidence only to summarize plot; and a D-range (0.5–1.5) paper is too short or ignores the assignment.

If you submit work that is not your own, you will not receive credit for the assignment, and you will face disciplinary consequences. Any part of your paper that is not by you must be correctly attributed to its source; misrepresenting work written by someone else or generated with an online aid as your own is plagiarism. See the Rutgers academic integrity policy on the website <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>.