

The Second Paper

DUE TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12, AT 10 PM ON CANVAS

Your assignment is to write a focused, analytic paper making an argument about a specific problem, device, or pattern in one or two of the following texts: *Whose Body?*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Cane* (focusing on the prose sections), *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, “The Hungry Stones,” or *Untouchable*. Your paper should include some brief reflection on the literary-historical context for your topic by connecting it to other readings in the course: how does your argument reveal developments or continuities over time? A successful paper that addresses multiple texts must go beyond “compare and contrast.” I do not expect you to consult secondary sources beyond what has been assigned; if you use a secondary source, you must cite it responsibly. Your paper should be 2000–2700 words in length.

SUGGESTED TOPICS

You may formulate your own highly focused topic or adapt one of the following:

Crowd scene. Though the texts we have read focus our attention on the inner life of exceptional individuals, many of them also devote narrative space to scenes of collective activity. Consider the mob scene and the political rally in *Untouchable*, for example, or the several communal gatherings in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. How does the narrative form change to accommodate collective activity? What makes groups dangerous or energizing in these novels? What does the turn to collectives reveal that the individual protagonist cannot?

Hearing voices. Many of our texts are particularly interested in *voice*—those aspects of a person’s language that mark them distinctively as an individual or as a member of some collectivity (identity group, social class...) Develop an argument about the way a writer represents voices in dialogue, argument, dissonance, or harmony. Consider not only dialogue but indirect and free indirect discourse, as well as the voice of the narrator, whether third- or first-person. Our classes on Hurston are discussing her use of voice extensively, so *Their Eyes* is not a good choice for this topic.

From below. Many of our writers write about the struggles, desires, and perspectives of those who are marginalized, oppressed, or deprived. Yet all our texts reflect a concern with the *distance* between the act of writing fiction and that of making a political demand from below. Develop an argument about *how* marginalization, inequality, or the rejection of the Other is represented in a text, and *how* a demand for change is (or is not) figured by the narrative. Pay special attention to

fiction's need to represent other actors, not only those who command the most sympathy; to the difference between telling a story and making an argument; to the many ways of taking a stand or questioning a position.

Work it. The tradition of the novel in English has largely excluded most kinds of work. But we have read many texts which devote space to representing people doing their jobs. Choose a text in which work is important and make an argument about how it is represented and why. Consider whether work is fulfilling or alienating, rewarding or exploitative; whether it allows an individual to express something particular to that person, or something shared, or nothing at all; how narrative form does not does not accommodate work, which is often routine, dull, or too specialized for narrative attention. Many of our texts particularly attend to the gender of work: in Hammett, for example, a good paper on work should consider Effie Perrine, not just Sam Spade. Whether you take up the gender question or not, pay attention to work as a *social relationship* and not just a task done by an isolated individual.

WRITING GUIDELINES

Please consult again the guidelines given for the first paper. As in that assignment, thorough use of *evidence*, finding a compelling *motive*, and making a convincing *argument* are the foundation of a successful second paper. The three go hand-in-hand. Finding a good motive is often the most challenging, since it requires thinking about what your reader will find interesting and surprising in your analysis of the text. Interest comes from raising *genuine* interpretive questions to which multiple answers are possible; or from teasing out a *hidden* theme beneath an obvious one; or from making something obvious into something problematic. Ambiguities and paradoxes are often good starting points for analysis. In literary-studies essays, genuine complexity often arises by shifting attention from *what* to *how*: the more carefully you gather and analyze evidence about *how* the language of a text presents a theme, the more you will discover that *what* the text says is not straightforward.

An effective argument must be formulated in clear terms. The words you use for your major concepts should be explained through textual example and used consistently throughout your paper. Writers often discover their key terms only after writing a full draft. Reread your draft or outline (or make an outline of your draft!) and look at the words that you need most to say what your big claims are. Then consider whether other words might not fit better to describe what you have analyzed; whether you keep your original terms or replace them, revise with careful attention to the moments when you use them.

DRAFTS

Plan to draft and revise. You may send us partial or full drafts for brief comments, as long as you do so at least three days before the deadline. We will answer questions, time permitting, up through the day before the deadline.

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 1.5-spacing. *Number all pages.* Put your name, the date, and a meaningful title on the first page.

Submit your paper electronically via Canvas. E-mail submissions are not acceptable. Digital submissions should be in Portable Document Format (PDF) if possible. 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: PROOFREAD CAREFULLY!

Quotations should be carefully transcribed, punctuated, and attributed. In a paper on a single text, you may give a full citation only once, either in an MLA-style “Work Cited” bibliography or in a Chicago-style footnote to the first quotation. After that, page numbers may be given in parentheses. Secondary sources are not required in this paper; but 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. Consistency and thoroughness in citation is more important than exact fidelity to either MLA or Chicago style.

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 wonderful paperback Concise Edition. For detailed information about current and past word uses, the fundamental source is the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

LATE POLICY

Late papers will be graded. If your paper is turned in late but less than 48 hours after the deadline, your maximum grade is 3.0. A paper that is more than 48 hours late can receive no higher than a 2.0.

Because of final course-grade deadlines, we cannot accept a late paper after 5 p.m. on December 19. 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. See the Rutgers academic integrity policy on the website <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>.