

The Second Paper

DUE TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 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: *Passing*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Untouchable*, *Nightwood*, and *Their Eyes*. 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” to show what the comparison reveals about each text. You are not expected to consult secondary sources beyond what has been assigned. Your paper should be 2000–2700 words in length.

PRELIMINARY ASSIGNMENT DUE DECEMBER 3 IN CLASS

Choose a topic and a text. Locate a passage which seems especially relevant to the topic, and write at least a page (350 words) in which you present the passage, contextualize it, and then analyze it to exemplify what is most interesting and surprising about your paper topic.

We will discuss these draft exercises together in class. Credit is on the basis of preparation and participation.

SUGGESTED TOPICS

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 in which many people (often not very specifically characterized) act in a crowd. Develop an argument about how collective activity affects the narrative form differently from the focus on an individual protagonist, and consider whether the novel presents its groups as energizing, dangerous, or something else. A good paper could focus entirely on the parties in *Passing*, or the bazaar mob scene in *Untouchable*, or one of the scenes of celebration and game-playing in *Their Eyes*.

(More) genre trouble. Focusing on *Passing* or *Their Eyes*, make an argument about how and to what ends “literary” fiction engages with the generic conventions of the romance/love story. Consider how these texts embrace, reject, or otherwise interact with shifting norms regarding sex, gender, race, class, or education. Your argument should account for the form of your chosen text alongside its themes and content, with attention paid to elements like narrative structure, focalization, temporality, and intertextuality. You may bring in evidence from the pulp ro-

mance stories we read in the first half of the semester, but be sure to avoid making assumptions about gender and sexuality in these texts.

Many Englishes. In class, we have dwelt at some length on the *varieties* of English incorporated into novels like *As I Lay Dying*, *Untouchable*, and *Their Eyes*. Develop your own distinctive argument about the meaning of switching and mixing language in one or two of our texts (Larsen and Barnes are fair game too). Go beyond description, and avoid repeating material from class: instead, carry out a more focused analysis of the role of particular varieties, how the text switches among them, how the text incorporates “dialect” or “accent” into narrative and/or reported discourse, and how you know how to interpret them. Precision is very important here; use dictionaries when in any doubt: for Standard American and English usage, consult the [Oxford English Dictionary](#); for informal and stigmatized speech, consult [Green’s Dictionary of Slang](#); for Indian English, consult [Hobson-Jobson](#) (but be aware that it is a colonial-era document).

From below. Faulkner, Anand, and Hurston write about the struggles, desires, and perspectives of people from marginalized, oppressed, or deprived classes—while constantly registering the *distance* between the act of writing fiction and that of making a political demand from below. Develop an argument about *how* the struggles of economically exploited people are 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.

Dream, dream, dream. Develop an argument about dreams, fantasies, and nightmares in *Nightwood*. How does the novel present these, and how (if at all) does it distinguish them from reality? Your argument should recognize that “reality” in the novel is quite fantastic in itself: the question is, What kinds of problems, desires, and truths surface in the novel’s representation of the unreal and in the interplay between the unreal and the (fictionally) real?

Toil and trouble. Make an argument interpreting the representation of work in Anand or Hurston (or both). How does the narrative present work: as dignifying or alienating, pleasurable or painful? What aspects of work matter most, and how does the novel form, which typically focuses on events in domestic life rather than the routine of work life, accommodate labor? Your argument must go beyond our class discussions; you might, for example, consider the significance of the laboring body; the (gendered) forms of hidden or uncompensated labor; or the implicit

relation between work in the novel and the work of writing.

Beast life. In various ways, Faulkner, Barnes, and Hurston all dwell on animals, both literally and metaphorically. Develop an argument about the special significance of particular animals or animality in general in one text. Generalizations about “animal symbolism” lead nowhere; instead, interpret specific animal figures or motifs in relation to other themes of the text. What brings animals into the text? How do humans and animals interact? Are there places where distinctions human and non-human animals break down, and if so, what do such categorical breakdowns mean?

Self-designed topics. Self-designed topics must address form as well as content; they must focus on a specific body of evidence; and they must rigorously avoid “character analysis” and plot summary. We will evaluate your self-designed topic when we read your preliminary exercise. If you wish to change to a self-designed topic after that, you must secure our approval by e-mail.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND “ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE”

Although Rutgers subscribes to several “Generative AI” platforms, you are not permitted to use any of them in this course. Your work on this paper should be your own. If you make use of someone else’s ideas, you must cite them fully and appropriately. Evidence of “AI” use (such as made-up sources or quotations) will be treated as an academic integrity violation, in accordance with the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy and the Code of Student Conduct.

If you submit work that is not your own (whether through AI use or otherwise), you will not receive credit for the assignment, and you will face disciplinary consequences. The Rutgers academic integrity policy is available at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>.

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. You may use MLA or Chicago style. When the source of a quotation is clear, both styles allow you to cite simply with a page number 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

358:358 (Goldstone/Schifman)

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*. 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.