

The Second Paper

Due Monday, May 4, at 10 p.m. on Canvas.

Write a focused, analytic paper making an argument about a specific problem, device, or pattern in *Pride and Prejudice* or *Things Fall Apart*. Your paper should work through your own ideas about the text, without relying on other sources like scholarly articles or online guides, except that you should in some way respond to one of the scholars we have read together in class (Johnson, Woloch, Quayson). Statements, ideas, or specific language you take from any sources should be cited appropriately. Your paper should be 2000–2500 words in length, and it should be formatted according to the guidelines described under “Format” below.

TOPICS

You may choose one of the following topics as a starting point for developing a focused thesis, or you may develop your own *highly specific* topic and argument. Avoid formulating an argument which repeats our class discussions.

Embedded tales. Develop an argument about the significance of one or more stories embedded within the primary narrative of either *Pride and Prejudice* or *Things Fall Apart*. (In Austen, the embedded narratives are found in some of the letters embedded in the text. In Achebe, the narratives are given in dialogue.) Your essay should analyze both the internal construction of the embedded tale—its plot, its characters, its themes, its style—and the *meaning* of the relationship between the embedded text and the surrounded narrative. If your paper remains at the level of plot summary (“Mr. Darcy’s letter begins to make Elizabeth fall in love with her”) you do not have a motive. Strong arguments show that there are surprising correspondences or contradictions between inner and outer tales.

Space. Make an argument about the uses of a particular aspect of space or spaces. Focus on the way the narrative constructs space, analyzing how the construction loads spaces with values and implications. What kinds of language matter to the construction of settings, imagined and remembered places, spatial hierarchies? Or reflect on space as something characters and other entities move through: what kinds of travel matter? Who can occupy distinct spaces—and who has freedom of motion? Some possible problems to consider: walking in Austen; “the city” in Austen; the village and the forest in Achebe; imagined spaces in Achebe.

The Other. Achebe’s narrative is preoccupied with encounters between people across radical difference. To the Igbo people of *Things Fall Apart*, the white missionaries and colonialists are alien invaders. (They are right.) Consider how the novel represents difference and its effects, paying

special attention to the subtleties of point of view and narrative embedding. What kinds of differences are made to matter, and which are ignored? Remember to consider carefully the ways us-them distinctions can be reversed, complicated, or overcome. As soon as we begin to notice that “they” are not all the same—or, for that matter, that “we” are not all the same either—the relationship to difference can become more interesting and challenging. (A paper about the Other in Austen is also thinkable, but you have to explain carefully who falls under the sign of the other and why you think so.)

Minor role. Develop an interpretive argument about a minor character—a figure who occupies only a small narrative space. What role does this character play in the structure and meaning of the text? How does this character work to point out particular themes? Why is the character represented only briefly? What gets left out that might have been included? It may be particularly fruitful to think about the way fictional minorhood may be connected to forms of *social* marginalization. A successful paper on this topic cannot be limited to the claim that a minor character matters to the plot (i.e., is casually important in the *fabula*). Because Woloch discusses Mary Bennet at length, that particular minor character is not available for this paper. It may be more straightforward to focus on a minor figure from *Things Fall Apart*.

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 submit partial or full drafts to me for brief comments, as long as you do so at least three days before the deadline. I will answer questions, time permitting, up through the day before the deadline.

FORMAT

Use 1.25- to 1.5-inch margins on all sides, twelve-point serif font suitable for body text (e.g.: Garamond, Hoefler Text, Palatino, Baskerville, or, less appealingly, Cambria, Times), and line spacing between single and one-and-a-half. *Number all pages.* The paper should have your name and the date on the first page. Title your paper meaningfully. Please include a word count at the end of your paper.

Submit your paper electronically on Canvas Assignments. E-mail submissions are not acceptable. If possible, use Portable Document Format (PDF). Native word-processor formats (.doc, .docx, .pages, .odt) are a second-best alternative. All word processors are capable of producing PDF files, through either a “Save As...” option, an “Export” command, or a “Print to PDF” option in the print dialog.

STYLE

Quotations should be carefully transcribed, punctuated, and attributed. A full citation is only required once, either in a first footnote or in a Work(s) Cited list. After that, put page numbers 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.

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*. For detailed information about current and past word uses, the fundamental source is the *Oxford English Dictionary*. For grammar, I consider *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* by Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey Pullum to be the reference standard.

LATE POLICY

Late papers will be graded. A paper that is less than 48 hours late can receive no higher than a 3.0. A paper that is more than 48 hours late can receive no higher than a 2.0. I will accept late papers through May 11.

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? Does the paper go beyond the surface level?

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 (1.0–2.5) paper lacks evidence or uses evidence only to summarize plot; and a D-range (0.5–1.0) 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 on-line aid as your own is plagiarism. Fabricating evidence is also a serious violation of trust. See the Rutgers academic integrity policy on the website <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>. I am eager to answer any questions you have about plagiarism and academic integrity.

You may not use “generative artificial intelligence” software (ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Anthropic Claude, Grammarly’s “AI” mode, or similar large language models) for any part of the work of this course. “AI” tools are damaging to your learning, your integrity as a thinker, and everyone’s ability to distinguish serious attempts at expression from words generated to take up space. Submitting “AI”-generated work is an act of disrespect towards me, towards yourself, and towards higher learning itself. Do not rob yourself of the chance to really develop as a reader, writer, and thinker. If you use “AI” in the context of this course, I will consider it academic dishonesty.