

358:254 (Goldstone)

## Second Paper Assignment

PRELIMINARY EXERCISE DUE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17, AT 10 P.M.

PAPER DUE MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, AT 10 P.M.

N.B. DEADLINE EXTENDED

Write a paper making an interpretive argument about one or more science-fiction texts from our course. Your argument should include both a sustained analysis of at least one fiction text assigned since October 6 *and* a reflection on the genre supported by examples from multiple assigned texts. A paper analyzing a motif or problem across multiple texts is possible, but entails special challenges. You are neither expected nor required to refer to primary or secondary sources beyond those assigned in the course.

Your paper should be 2100–2500 words in length; longer papers are usually acceptable, but significantly shorter papers cannot earn a satisfactory grade.

PRELIMINARY EXERCISE DUE NOVEMBER 17

Tentatively choose a topic and formulate an argument, looking back at your notes from your reading and class discussion of the text you plan to write about. Then write a substantial paragraph (200–250 words) describing your topic, articulating your motive, and indicating the argument you plan to make, indicating at least one specific passage you can use for evidence. You do not need an extensive discussion of a quotation; a brief reference is enough, e.g.: “I will use the description of Genly’s experience in Pulefen Farm to demonstrate Le Guin’s critique of social control.” But the more of the logic of the argument you can explain, the closer you will be to a plan for the paper.

Your topic is what your paper is about, your motive is what makes it interesting and surprising, and your argument is what you show about the topic. To be sure, all of these can be tentative, but do your best to be as focused and specific as possible about all three. Waste no words. This exercise will be graded for effort. You are encouraged to use it to try out an initial paper idea, but your paper is not required to be related to the exercise in any way.

SAMPLE TOPICS

Your choice of topic is your own. Here are three example topics you might adapt: *Stick it to the man*. Ellison’s “Repent, Harlequin!” is only the most obvious example of a science fiction with an explicit social-protest theme. Analyze how

one text challenges a significant social or political problem, focusing on the difference SF makes; then explain how this form of protest matters to the text's relationship to the SF genre in general. Does your chosen text break the mold of prior socially-conscious SF? Or do other SF texts we've read suggest possible limitations or qualifications to an agenda of protest?

*Loving the alien.* The relationship between Genly and Estraven approximates a (tragic) courtship plot: boy meets boy-girl; boy loses boy-girl; boy and boy-girl cross glacier; boy-girl is murdered saving boy. How does Le Guin's treatment of this relationship reflect on the possibilities and challenges of intimacy across difference? How does "the question of sex" on Gethen transform this topic? How does Le Guin's treatment of the alien relate to SF traditions before and after her? Similar questions could be posed about Butler's "Bloodchild."

*Inner space.* J.G. Ballard called on SF to voyage inwards: develop an argument about the representation of inner life in one more SF texts from the 1960s and after. What *techniques* draw our attention to psychology? How do SF writers use characteristic SF motifs (alien beings, technology, estrangement, extrapolation, world reduction...) to probe aspects of the mind: memory, knowledge, perception. Some possible groups: Dick and VanderMeer; Butler and Gibson; Le Guin, Russ, and Tiptree.

#### WRITING GUIDELINES

Careful analysis of textual evidence is central to this paper. We have been modeling this mode of analysis in class. Your claims should be supported by extensive *quotation*. To support a claim, it is not enough simply to quote; once you quote, you must *analyze* what you have quoted, paying close attention to the significance of individual words, of syntactical and rhetorical patterns, of nuances and implications. Avoid summarizing the text; *show how it works*. Do not take for granted that your reader will see the text the way you do: point out the details that can convince the reader of what you say. Every analytical claim you make should be supported by concrete evidence from the text; every part of your paper should make substantive analytical claims.

Your paper must address a significant, interesting, non-obvious question, and it must propose a clearly articulated, non-simplistic answer to that question. The question does not have to be a literal question; but successful papers always have a focused *motive* for the particular analysis they carry out. Think about how your *highly specific* claims connect to broader questions about the genre of science fiction that we have dwelt on in class, and think about how following your

interpretation changes how readers should think about these questions. Think about what is most surprising about what you have to say. You may take for granted that your reader has in mind what has been discussed in class. Do not construct straw men (“everybody thinks...”); instead, cite what a scholar we have read actually claims and then build on or critique it in the context of your chosen story.

Motive is often established at the start of an essay. *Avoid writing a generalizing introduction.* Begin your essay with a surprising piece of evidence or observation of your own that immediately frames the topic you are going to address and establishes its interest. Then move from motive to argument: expanding on that initial piece of evidence, forecast the terms of your argument, then state the central, argumentative claim of the essay.

Your argument should answer your motivating question. That does not mean that every good paper resolves every problem it poses; on the contrary, good papers attend to the complexities of their subject matter. But an effective argument means your reader learns something from your analysis of your evidence. It will help to ask yourself what alternative arguments someone might make about your topic and to anticipate objections to your claims.

Think carefully about the *line of thought* of your writing, the way one claim leads to the next. “Transition sentences” are less important than your sense of the overall logic of your argument: think of the essay as a story you have to tell about the text you are analyzing, one with an arc from beginning to end. One of the most compelling ways to tell such a story is by thinking carefully about the *order of presentation of evidence*: indeed, you can “outline” a paper by first choosing the five or six passages that are most essential to your thinking and then deciding what sequence they should be presented in. The best sequence is rarely the sequence of the text itself; don’t start at the beginning and end at the end of your text. Choose an order that makes your point.

#### DRAFTS

Plan to draft and revise. You may send me partial or full drafts 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

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 appeal-

ingly, 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. If you wish to turn in your paper in hard copy, please contact me in advance.

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. After a first citation of a text, there is usually no need to include more than a page number for subsequent citations. Consistency and thoroughness in citation is more important than exact fidelity to either MLA or Chicago 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.

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

#### LATE POLICY

Late papers will be graded. If I receive your late paper 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. You may turn in a late paper any time until the last day of classes.

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 (1.0–2.5) 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 online aid (including “AI”) as your own is plagiarism. See the Rutgers academic integrity policy on the website <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>.