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Research Paper Assignment
Prospectus due Tuesday, November 9 at 5 p.m.
Paper due Wednesday, December 8 at 5 p.m.

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Research and write a paper of 10 to 14 pages making an interpretive argument about several works in relation to a single genre. The genre may be any of those on our syllabus—or a subcategory of one of our syllabus rubrics. Your particular theme is up to you, but your argument must be focused, original, well-motivated, and supported by careful analysis of evidence. Within this argument you should also find scope to reflect in a rigorous way about the place of your chosen genre in twentieth-century literary and cultural history.

Your research must include at least one "primary" text not found on the syllabus: normally this will be a book, from the 1900–1940 period, belonging to the genre of interest (e.g.: another mystery novel or spy thriller). Alternatives, subject to my approval, might include short stories or a set of non-fictional documents (periodical articles like essays or book reviews). **Begin your research early** so that you will have time to read the additional text. I will work with each of you to help you find interesting and worthwhile research materials. Within the paper itself you will have the task of introducing your additional text and analyzing it for your argument. As with your analysis of books on the syllabus, **this does not mean a plot summary or an encyclopedia entry on the author**. Assume that your readers are capable of finding and reading the book themselves and that you need only give explanatory information in support of specific argumentative claims.

Your research should also address scholarly work on your subject. Indeed, you may find that the best way to locate more primary sources is to see what books have been of interest to previous scholars. You need not, of course, review the full literature on your subject but your argument should engage **at least one** other scholar's work. Engagement does not mean simply summarizing that work or quoting it in order to agree. Engagement means building on, complicating, or disputing the other scholar's salient claims. This can be done with something as small as a single footnote or as large as a several-paragraph section of your paper.

Preliminary work

I will meet with each of you to discuss your ideas and help you locate and work with sources. Annette Keogh, whom you have all met, is also available to help you with your research once you have a topic.

Research Prospectus. This ungraded document consists of a statement of your specific topic, a preliminary version of your argument, and an initial list of sources both primary and secondary. I am **extending** the deadline from that given on the syllabus: please turn your prospectus in by Tuesday, November 9. We will reserve some class time for a research discussion in the subsequent two weeks.

Aspects of a Successful Research Paper

Argument. A good paper has a claim to make; it is not merely descriptive or observational. In literary studies our arguments are most often a mixture of interpretation—what is a work about? what does it mean?—and explanation—why is a given work the way it is? A strong argument must be surprising rather than obvious, complex rather than straightforward. Its logic must be carefully thought out; often this logic comes clearest in engaging with counterarguments and alternative viewpoints. And it must be motivated by an engagement with a genuinely interesting issue. Part of the work of a paper, particularly its introductory paragraphs, is to establish the interest—and the surprise—of the argument.

Evidence. Your research should focus on discovering specific evidence relevant to your argument. A literary research paper's principal evidence is usually in the form of quotations from primary and secondary sources. Those quotations never stand on their own but are always analyzed and explained. A quotation does not work to support an argument until you explain your interpretation and the reasons for it. Use both in-text and block citation; err on the side of copiousness in your analysis. Cite sources carefully. You may use MLA or Chicago style; consistency and completeness of citation is more important than exact conformity to a manual.

Clarity. Your argument convinces most when it is made in prose that places no unnecessary obstacles in the way of understanding: your writing should be efficient and carefully edited for style. Clarity also comes from establishing a clear logical progression for your argument, a progression that your paper anticipates in its opening and returns to periodically. For questions of linguistic usage, the best reference is the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary of English Usage* (also available in an outstanding concise edition). The historical dictionary of reference, if you wish to use dictionary definitions as evidence, is the *OED*.

Grading standard

Your grade is out of 50.

45–50 (A range): Insightful, surprising, original argument; systematic, copious, and convincing use of evidence; effective choice and analysis of primary and secondary sources, bearing witness to thoughtful though not necessarily comprehensive research; clear writing in good style.

40–45 (B range): Clear but less interesting argument; substantial evidence, but in need of further analysis; genuine effort at researching sources which did not necessarily yield the best materials; some problems at the level of style.

35–40 (C range): Unfocused or over-general argument; inadequate or incorrect use of evidence; limited research; significant problems of writing mechanics or citation.

30–35 (D range): Work completed but unsatisfactory in several major areas.

Late work will normally be penalized at the rate of 2 points per day. However, in order to submit final grades on time, I cannot accept papers after Sunday, December 12 at noon. I will grant extensions, for compelling reasons, in advance of the deadline.

Paper submission

Please submit your paper, in **PDF format**, using the Drop Box on the CourseWork site for this course. Please do not send me papers by e-mail or in Word formats (.doc or .docx). For my suggestions about producing PDFs, see this webpage: http://www.stanford.edu/~goldston/pdf.html.

Use a twelve-point serif font in double-spacing with 1.0–1.25 inch margins. Garamond, Palatino, and Hoefler Text are all good choices; Times and Cambria are fine.

Students wishing to turn in hard copy may do so to my English department mailbox, but the electronic option is preferred.