

Paper 2 - Literary Interpretation ENG 67 Fall 07

Due date: 12/11
Drafts due: 12/3

Drafts: We will use a draft/peer review process on this paper. Peer reviews are not optional. We will have essay workshops on 12/3 and 12/5. As always, I recommend working with the college Writing Center. More on this process in a separate document.

Purpose: This second paper is meant to move us into Literary Interpretation, the core idea of the course. You all have been interpreting literary texts, consciously or not, since you learned to read, but the idea here is to do it consciously, and with intent. "Intent" encompasses most of the elements of academic writing (on the handout adapted from Gordon Harvey's inventory) - but it can also be primarily expressed as "motive" and "argument." It goes without saying: have a point you want to make, a thesis to argue, about a work: why and how does that argument fit into a larger interpretive framework? We have been given a broad orientation to literary theory and critical methodologies. What can you use from the theoretical knowledge you have gained to gain insight into a literary work or film?

What works to write about: As with the first, I won't assign topics because I think that people write better about things that interest them personally. Ask yourself: what do you find compelling in the literary texts and films we have viewed so far? You are not restricted to the reading list for this class, though all those works are fair game. We also have some "dystopic" films available online: *Alphaville*, *Blade Runner*, *Brazil*, *Children of Men*, *V for Vendetta*, 1984. There are also recent adaptations of Philip K. Dick stories like *Minority Report*. There are a great many films and literary works that are responses to and meditations on terror, like Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, and Benjamin Kunkel's *Indecision*. But imagine this as your chance to write on just about anything that you find interesting under the broad rubrics of the class: terror, and the dystopian.

Format: see the English Department's "Format and Style Sheet" document and follow its guidelines. Expected length is 5-7 pages, double spaced, with a normal font (12 pt. or smaller).

Content: This assignment goes beyond mere summary, and into analysis, but it is in no way intended as a research paper. You are not expected to use sources outside the text to which you are responding, nor are you prohibited from using them. Any sources you do cite should be noted in parenthetical page citations and a "Works Cited" page.

Criteria for Evaluation

Content (75 points): Basically, how well did you demonstrate your understanding of the text, and how successful were you in finding a method and mode of response appropriate to your essay? An A paper will show great precision in analysis, argumentation; original thinking is the hallmark of an excellent paper. A B paper balances the need for clarity with the complexity of the ideas discussed, and will make solid and insightful observations. A C paper will conform to the strictures of the assignment, but the response may be lacking in evidence, argumentation, or detail.

Grammar, usage, mechanics and format (25 points): The writing should be clear and unencumbered with mechanical errors, citation errors, misspellings or typos. A superior paper will

have excellent, publishable-quality prose that shows variety, balance, and invention (eschewing clichés and stock-phrases like “at the end of the day” etc.)

Methodology: I recommend reading Lynn, Chapter 9 “Investigating the Work” before delving into writing. Even though this chapter concentrates on research papers, you will find much helpful here. The process of writing about literature can be broken down into some simple steps:

- Gather your evidence; select some details to discuss and exclude others
- Acknowledge your own biases as much as you can
- Don't get too hung up on intention, and try to analyze the text as an entity separate from the writer
- Formulate a thesis about the material that you think you can support, and shape your material into a coherent argument.