

The First Paper

Introduction due Monday, February 19, in class.

Paper due Saturday, February 24, at 10 p.m. on Sakai.

Write a focused, analytic paper making an argument about a specific problem, device, or pattern in either *Pride and Prejudice* or *Frankenstein*. (You may not write about Conan Doyle or Pirkis.) Your paper should be 1500–1800 words in length, and it should be formatted according to the guidelines described under “Format” below. It is neither required nor expected that you should cite any sources other than your chosen primary text.

A draft of your introductory paragraph is due on February 19 and will be graded separately as an exercise.

TOPICS

You may choose to write about one of the following topics:

Minor, and yet.... Develop an interpretive argument about the unexpected significance of a character in either Austen or Shelley who occupies only a small narrative space. What features of the character matter to important themes of the novel? What is the effect of the narrator’s choice to represent the character only briefly? What does the “minorness” leave out of representation? Brief contrasts with other dimensions of the character-system of the narrative may be particularly helpful. The observation that a character is important to the plot is not in itself an interpretive claim.

You’ve got mail. Consider how a letter (or perhaps several short ones) functions as an embedded text in Austen or Shelley. Your analysis should interpret the way the letter is framed or presented, its dimensions of suggestion and omission, and the effects of giving the text over from the top-level narrator to another speaker or writer. Consider carefully whether the embedded text itself is a narration. An embedded text reveals something about the outer-level narration as well as those who utter and receive it. (Note: not all embedded texts are letters. The Creature’s narrative, for example, is not a letter.)

Gender, fictionalized. Austen and Shelley do not simply write about women and men; they represent the ways femininity and masculinity are imagined and enacted. Develop an argument about specific, surprising ways *Pride and Prejudice*

or *Frankenstein* represents femininity or masculinity: focus on moments of tension between individual characters and gender norms in the world of the novel, and explain how you know there is a tension. Avoid generalizations about what women or men were expected to be “back then.” Assume nothing; the only allowable generalizations are those based on careful inferences from the text. You might consider speech styles, descriptions, implicit behavioral codes, gendered language for non-human objects, or the gendering of the narrative voice itself.

Location, location, location. Both Austen and Shelley explore the significance of particular places and of travel from place to place. Write about a location in one of the novels, developing an argument about its particular function in the narrative and its relationship to the novel as a whole. Consider description (and who does the describing), but also think about how place shapes action and character, and how various persons *use* the spaces they inhabit in the novel. Your argument should go beyond plot to discuss how a particular location affects the tone and organization of the narrative itself.

How to know. Develop an argument about the significance of one particular mode of knowing (or of being ignorant) in one of the texts: obvious candidates include experimentation in *Frankenstein* and gossip in *Pride and Prejudice*, but there are other possibilities too. Attend carefully to way narrative prevents the process of knowing, analyzing the effects of subjective and objective anachrony, the particular inflections given by the narrator’s discourse, and the revelations and concealments made possible by the narration of characters’ mental states. The best papers on this topic will define a specific mode of knowledge clearly and consider that mode’s blind spots as well as its possibilities for insight, before asking whether the narrative itself offers a related or distinct kind of knowledge.

Keywords (a challenge). Choose a single thematically important word or morpheme to follow through Austen or Shelley’s text. (A good example in Conan Doyle would be “observe/observation.”) Analyze the varying usages of the term in the text, comparing the historical definitions of the word given to you by the *OED*. Then make an argument about how the general idea is shaped by the contexts Austen or Shelley puts it in—what suggestions, nuances, connotations does the novel add? What kinds of tensions or conflicts within the term are brought into focus? Searching through a digitized text will help you collect examples. The Project Gutenberg [Pride and Prejudice](#) appears to be the 1817 third edition; the first edition text is available in [ProQuest Nineteenth-Century Fic-](#)

tion. The 1818 *Frankenstein* can be searched on the [Juxta Commons page](#) comparing it to the 1831 version.

A topic of your own choice. You may choose your own topic, but we must approve it when you submit your draft introduction. A good topic is sharply focused and requires analysis of technique as well as themes.

WRITING GUIDELINES

A good paper about a single text does not begin with a generalization. It begins with a carefully chosen motivating example: a quotation or description of an aspect of the text that demonstrates a problem that needs addressing. The introduction then establishes its *motive* clearly by explaining why this problem is significant for making sense of the text at hand. Having raised an interpretive question, the introduction proposes a clear argument in answer to that question.

Do not spend too much of your paper on material already extensively discussed in class. Instead, use the general themes and concepts of class discussion as hints about how to connect your chosen focus to the broad interpretive questions which make an argument significant. In making the move from specifics to larger themes, an argument must define its *key terms* precisely and be consistent in its use of those terms. Conceptual clarity also requires that you think carefully about the assumptions you are making. The introductory part of your paper should include a concise statement of your argument; difficulties articulating the argument usually reflect conceptual problems that have not been resolved.

Every body paragraph of a good paper is built around careful analysis of textual evidence. No claim about the text can be made that cannot be supported from the text. You must quote, but it is not enough simply to quote. An effective use of a quotation first introduces the passage, normally in less than a sentence, to explain its place in the narrative and possibly its relevance to the argument. The quotation is then followed by *analysis*. This means paying close attention to the significance of individual words—often re-quoting them—drawing out the implications of syntactical and rhetorical patterns, and attending as much to what *might have been said but is not* as to what *is* said. Instead of attempting to paraphrase what a text means or summarize what it's about, 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.

A good paper has an organization that illuminates the *logic* of its argument. It

does not normally follow the order of the narrative but the *line of thinking* that leads from the basic premises of its argument to the most complex and challenging conclusions you wish to draw. This line of thinking is built around a thorough consideration of all the relevant evidence from the text. Problems with the definition of the topic often reveal themselves at this stage: when the whole text is relevant to a topic, that topic is not specific enough for a short paper. Instead, a good topic isolates a distinctive *domain of evidence* that can be discussed. Not every relevant piece of evidence needs the same amount of attention, and some need not be mentioned at all; but a strong argument analyzes all the evidence that matters most.

An effective argument normally takes possible objections into account. If no objections are possible, the motive is probably weak. On the other hand, convincing argumentation does not require straw men. There is no need to say what an imaginary population of “some people” think: instead, clearly point to those aspects of the text that might lead a reader to draw a different conclusion from the one you propose, then explain why that conclusion would be mistaken. The best papers show that the writer has challenged themselves to demonstrate the most complex, precise, comprehensive version of their claims.

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 two 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 via Sakai 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

You must proofread carefully.

Quotations should be carefully transcribed, punctuated, *and attributed*. In a paper on a single text, you may give a full citation only once, either in an MLA-style “Work Cited” bibliography or in a Chicago-style footnote to the first quotation. After that, page numbers may be given 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.

For bibliographic conventions, you may use either MLA or Chicago style. Automatically generated citations are always immediately obvious as such. Your citation should distinguish carefully between authors and editors. Honest attribution and proofreading are more important than following formatting rules.

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 wonderful paperback Concise Edition. 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. You may turn in a late paper any time until Wednesday, May 2.

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.

If you submit work that is not your own, you will not receive credit for the assignment, and you will face disciplinary consequences. 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.