

The Second Paper

Due Saturday, April 28, at 10 p.m. on Sakai.

Write a focused, analytic paper making an argument about a specific problem, device, or pattern in *What Maisie Knew*, *To the Lighthouse*, or *Beloved*. Your paper should be 1800–2100 words in length, and it should be formatted according to the guidelines described under “Format” below. Your paper must also engage meaningfully with one secondary source from the syllabus.

A comparative topic on two of these three novels is also permissible, but it would raise special difficulties; see the note on comparison 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.

Final developments. In James, Woolf, and Morrison, the ending seems to show a central character transformed (or transforming). Endings are particularly salient in shaping the meanings of texts, but this does not mean we have to accept them as definitive in our interpretations. Develop an argument about the complexities, ambiguities, and unresolved problems of the final turn of the narrative, returning to earlier parts of the text to show which questions that turn settles and which it leaves open. Think about pattern as well as plot: what connects the end to the middle or the beginning? Rigorously avoid plot summary. “Maisie grows up” is not a thesis. The question is, what does the way James concludes Maisie’s trajectory mean? Similar questions can be formulated about Lily Briscoe, James Ramsay, or Denver.

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? Possible problems to consider: France and England in James; interiors in Woolf; the vacation spot in Woolf; windows and other openings in Woolf; house and home in Morrison; stoops and thresholds in Morrison; the transposition, contrast, or secret equality of large and small scales in any text.

Layered times. *To the Lighthouse* is constructed around multiple layers of time: the “present” of the story is always in tension with one or more pasts that continually impinge on the present (in characters’ memories, in the narrator’s retroversions, in narrative circumstances). Develop an argument about *how* Woolf creates some aspect of this layering, and explain the significance of this complex “temporality” (as literary scholars call it). Some possibilities: world history and individual life; the old generation and the new; youth and middle age; men’s timelines and women’s timelines; the devices for moving from one time to another within a fictional text.

Sexuality. E.M. Forster remarked snidely about Henry James’s characters that “their clothes do not take off.” But the absence of explicit representations of sex does not begin to explain the workings of sexuality in *Maisie*. How does eroticism and sexual desire enter into James’s novel? How does focalization recast the matter of sexuality in ways we might not expect? To what extent does the novel challenge conventions of children’s sexual “innocence” or the (gendered) standard of sexual “purity”? How do sexuality, privacy, and selfhood interrelate? Similar questions could be formulated about sexuality in Woolf.

Creation. Creative activity is central, in highly diverse ways, to all three of these texts. Choose one such way, define the kind of creation you are talking about, and develop an argument about the representations of creative activity *within* the text (this could include artistic work, rhetorical performance, imagination, make-believe, or lying). Focus on patterns of significance in the language used to describe this activity. Then consider: what does creation within the text have to do with the creative process that made the text? Possible themes: freedoms and constraints; moral obligations; form and formlessness; difficulty and ease; the value of artistic failure; the meaning of beauty.

Labor. What is the significance of representations of labor in James, Woolf, or Morrison? What kinds of representation does the writer choose, and for what kinds of labor? Or consider: who works and who doesn’t have to, and what does that have to do with the major themes and problems of your chosen text? Pay attention to forms of compensation or the lack thereof; study both how work *is* represented and where its absence is notable; and remember that work can be either an unbearable imposition or one of the most pleasurable expressions of the self (sometimes both).

Comparison (a challenge). Any of the above topics could be reformulated in comparative terms. For example, both Woolf and Morrison explore the significance of the space of home; you might formulate an argument about how similar representations of domestic space carry distinct political meanings; or, alternately, you might ask how convergent gender politics nonetheless generate distinct narrative techniques. A good comparative paper cannot be limited to “compare and contrast”; it must formulate a meaningful *relationship* between two texts by showing what each reveals about the other. Do not write a comparative paper because you think you don’t “have enough” to say about a single text; you do have enough. Write a comparative paper if you find a striking and unexpected point of convergence or divergence that leads to cogent analyses of both texts. The grading standard for comparative papers will be notably higher than for single-text papers.

INCORPORATING THE SECONDARY SOURCE

The requirement of responding to a scholar’s argument means that you must think of your own work as part of a *scholarly conversation*. As in any conversation, merely repeating what the other person said adds nothing; instead, look for a way in which your own argument *extends, refines, or critiques* an idea from another scholar. This can be as small as an interpretive point about one passage of text or as large as a big idea about narrative, fiction, literature. Your address to the scholarly source can come at any point in your essay; think about the best place for it in terms of the logic of your own argument.

This secondary-source requirement is significant, but it is not the most important part of the assignment. Your paper should above all make a convincing argument about your primary text. Nonetheless, an important aspect of your motive can come from using another source to demonstrate that there is *something that needs to be figured out* (because people argue over it) and your analysis helps to do so.

Remember that even if you are not writing about Virginia Woolf, you can still engage with Auerbach’s ideas about the representation of inner life or the everyday, and you can think about Zunshine’s claims about Theory of Mind in relation to any fiction.

ARGUMENT PRINCIPLES

- 2.7 Secondary sources often serve to point out *cruxes* in primary sources: problematic moments in or aspects of texts for interpretation.
- 2.8 Secondary sources are most often directly discussed in terms of the *generalizing arguments* they make.
- 2.9 In literary studies, an argument relates to other arguments as contributions to a scholarly conversation.
 - 2.9.1 The scholarly conversation, like ordinary conversation, is regulated by a norm of *relevance*. Because it is a slow-motion, written conversation, scholarly arguments normally make their relevance to the conversation explicit by indicating agreements, disagreements, debts, allies, and adversaries.

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 either of us for brief comments, as long as you do so at least two days before the deadline. We 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*. You may use MLA or Chicago style, and you should format your citations concisely. In either style, there is no need to repeat the author’s name in a parenthetical citation except where there is ambiguity about which source you have quoted. Further research beyond the sources assigned in this course is 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*, 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 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? Does the paper engage effectively with its secondary source?

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.