

Paper 1 Assignment

Five pages. Due Wednesday, October 2, at 5 p.m.

Write a focused, analytic paper making an argument about a specific problem, device, or pattern in a single science-fictional text. Your argument should take the genre into account in some way. You may choose any text assigned up through September 30. (“The Man From the Atom” can be considered a single text.) You may also seek my permission to write about another story in the *Wesleyan Anthology* dated before 1940 or another story by Lovecraft. Not all stories are acceptable, however; if you are not writing about an assigned text, I must approve your topic by September 27.

For this paper, you need not refer to secondary sources, and you are not expected to do outside research. However, the assigned texts on the science-fiction genre may be of some use. If you wish to quote a source (any source), you must, naturally, cite it appropriately.

Topics

The choice of topic is your own. A good topic leads you from a specific analytic focus to a significant, non-obvious interpretive conclusion about the story you choose. Here are three possibilities:

1. *Scale*. By what means does a particular text invoke the huge, the tiny, the instantaneous, the endless? Do the tropes of science-fictional scale humble our limited perception, or do they suggest our imaginative mastery? What is deliberately or involuntarily omitted by the choice of scale?
2. *Sexuality*. What role do sexual behavior and sexual desire play in the world of a particular story? To what degree does the genre block, distort, or unexpectedly reveal sex? Note that this is not the same as—though it is related to—a question about gender roles.
3. *Reflexivity*. Genre fiction in general tends to be highly self-reflexive about its fictiveness (“it’s only a story”). Choose a story, describe its modes of self-reflection, and develop an argument about the effects these dimensions of reflexivity have. Consider: frames, allegories of writing and reading, representations of disbelief, representations of the medium itself.

Writing guidelines

The central requirement of this paper is careful analysis of the materials of science-fiction writing using the evidence of the language of the text. 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. Attend to narrative and linguistic form, to structure and style. 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.

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: it may help to 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 (or fewer) passages that are most essential to your thinking and then deciding what sequence they should be presented in.

Your interpretation must be organized into an *argument* with a meaningful *motive*. In other words, your paper must address a significant, interesting, non-obvious question about one of the texts, and it must propose a clearly articulated, non-simplistic answer to that question. In order to find a motive in this sort of single-text assignment, think about what is most *surprising* about what you have to say: relate your focused claims to broader questions about the author, genre, or theme your paper concerns, and show how paying attention to the particular, *highly specific* argument you are making changes how readers should think about the broader questions. It will also help to ask yourself what alternative arguments someone might raise about your topic and to anticipate objections to your claims. If there are no alternative arguments or no possible surprises, you haven’t found a motive, and you will have to revise your argument.

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. Expanding on that piece of evidence, forecast the terms of your argument, then state the central, argumentative claim of the essay.

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

The page format: between 1.0 and 1.25-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), between one-and-a-half and double spacing. *Number all pages.* The paper should have your name and the date on the first page. Title your paper.

Submit your paper electronically via your Sakai Drop Box. E-mail submissions are not acceptable.

Digital submissions should, if possible, be in 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. For more on producing PDF files, see andrewgoldstone.com/pdf.

If you prefer to turn in hard copy, leave your paper in my mailbox in Murray Hall and *send me an e-mail before the deadline* saying you are doing this.

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, on the blog, or elsewhere, *you must cite that work*. Using someone else’s work without specific citation is plagiarism.

For bibliographic conventions, you may use either Chicago or MLA style. Automatically generated citations are always immediately obvious as such; edit what you get from Zotero. Your citation should distinguish carefully between authors and editors. Honest attribution and proof-reading 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; it is condensed in their slightly less daunting *Student’s Introduction to English Grammar*.

Late Policy

Per the syllabus, one of the two papers in this course may be turned in up to three days late without penalty. The other paper must then be on time. Past these deadlines, the rate of penalty is 0.4 points per day, with no fractional penalties. It is almost always better to turn in your best attempt on time than to take a late penalty in an effort to improve what you have.

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. Note that there are no “minus” grades. The chief criteria of assessment are:

1. Evidence: has textual evidence been used extensively and chosen well?
2. Analysis: is the evidence convincingly analyzed and interpreted, with careful attention to detail, making use of concepts introduced in class?
3. Motive: does the paper make its central problem interesting?
4. Argument: is the argument focused, logical, convincing, surprising?
5. Line of thought: does the paper develop its ideas in connected, orderly fashion? Does the conclusion follow from (and differ from) the opening?
6. Style: is the paper clearly written? Is it free from typographical, grammatical, and other errors?

In general, an A-range paper is strong by all these criteria; a B-range paper has well-chosen, well-analyzed evidence but does not fully develop its argument or its motive; a C-range paper lacks evidence or uses evidence only to summarize plot; and a D-range 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/>.