**Major Essay One**

Interpretation of Literature

Fall 2009, Instructor Jacob Horn

Having completed several shorter writing projects before this one, you have been prepared to consider a text carefully and closely while communicating your ideas through writing—and now you get to really show off what you have learned. This essay is a longer, more complicated response to a text, in which you must make an argument about one or both of the two large pieces we have read. I have a list of possible topics for you to choose from below, but you may wish to consider a different option instead.

As you begin to consider your topics, remember that I am interested in seeing how you make your case for an *argument*—something that someone might disagree with. Making an argument that *Othello* is about a downfall due to excessive jealousy is not useful, since almost no one would disagree. Go deeper with your ideas, perhaps even considering counter-intuitive or “against the grain” readings.

**Topic Options**

While by no means exhaustive, here is a list of possible topics you might wish to consider as you begin thinking about your essay—if you are confused about any of them, please let me know BEFORE you begin writing; I have tried to be clear, but it is important that you do work that fits with the course requirements.

* **Cutting and Keeping in *Othello*:** pick a portion of the text that seems insignificant to the story, briefly describe why it might seem insignificant, and then explain what is useful about it or otherwise necessary for the play—*aside* from a question of plot; pay attention to its position within the play, what follows and what precedes, and what it tells us about the play.
* **Social Pressure in *Othello*:** consider what the play is suggesting about social pressures and how they affect people—who is under these pressures, how does it affect them, and what can we learn from examining these things about the play as a whole.
* **Gender in *Othello* & *Handmaid’s*:** the play may appear less about gender than the novel, but both deal with it in important and useful ways; consider the roles that are being created for women in both, and ask what they tell us or how we are meant to understand them—what is the point of including these things and these characters in these texts?
* **Minor Characters Made Major in *Handmaid’s*:** pick one of the minor characters from the novel and explain how the novel needs them to get one or more of its central messages (related to one of the primary themes of the text) across—this is not a question of plot, so seeing that a character performs certain tasks necessary for the resolution is not what this is for; instead, think about how your choice tells us something interesting about one of the book’s themes.
* **Structure and Form in *Handmaid’s*:** take some time to consider the way the structure works overall to create a tone or effect for the reader, and then pick a specific instance where the text’s structure demonstrates this—and then prove it.
* **Resisting Power in *Othello* & *Handmaid’s*:** both texts rely on power and its deployment to investigate questions of authority and how that leads to problems—either social or political—so explore how the two work through questions of power differently, even if there is some similarity to their messages.

I am putting these up here as general topics instead of specifics because we have discussed some of these concerns in class and you should be familiar with them—that said, I don’t want a complete rehash of what we discussed. It falls on YOU to provide a new interpretation of the texts. I strongly, STRONGLY recommend that you stop by my office during office hours to discuss your topic with me or AT LEAST email me what you plan to work on, since then we can ensure that we are on the same page about your topic before you really get going on your paper.

Additionally, while you are familiar with most of these topics and strategies from the reader responses, it is important that you take what you learned from your prior work and provide better analysis of the texts, as I will be looking for the depth of your insight.

Finally, if you would prefer to work on a topic different from one of those above, please contact me! I support interesting and new ideas, and I want you to write on an appropriate topic that interests you. If that idea or approach isn’t listed above, I am sure we can come to some kind of resolution.

**Requirements**

* 1000-1500 words (approximately 4 to 6 pages).
* 12 point Times New Roman font, double-spaced.
* Properly organized paper, including intro, thesis statement, multiple body paragraphs, and conclusion.
* Properly cited direct quotations from the text(s) used.

**Grading (a.k.a. “things Mr. Horn is looking for”)**

Aside from basic things like clear communication throughout your essay and a good topic to make an argument about, the following list contains a set of things I will be looking for in your essays—make sure you include them, or it will hurt your grade.

* An attention grabbing **TITLE** and an **INTRODUCTION** that both is interesting (avoiding clichés) and sets up the text and how the essay is looking at it.
* An overall **ARGUMENT** that is requires a close reading of the text to support. (If the argument might seem easy to make, think about trying to take a different perspective!)
* A thesis statement that clearly states the essay’s argument and provides a short overview of how it will be proved.
* Several **BODY PARAGRAPHS** that interpret specific parts of the text (quotes, primarily), showing how they support the essay’s primary argument. (Be specific! Don’t assume your reader will understand why a quote is useful!)
* A clear **ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY** with solid transitions and a logical movement from point to point.
* A **CONCLUSION** that discusses why the essay’s argument is useful, important, or necessary, without simply repeating the thesis and the supporting positions.

**Due Dates**

* Thesis Due: Friday, September 25th, on ICON and in class
* Rough Draft Due: Friday, October 2nd, in class
* Final Version Due: Friday, October 9th, on ICON