

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AND EQUIVALENCIES: ENGLISH 40.4

I. Critical analysis

Discuss an aspect of the novel, such as theme, characterization, structure, imagery, narrative techniques, or prose style. Possible topics for the novels follow:

- *Emma*: Emma, an unlikable heroine, Emma's snobbery, Austen's attitude toward marriage or toward love, Emma's relationship with her father and its role in the novel, egotism, fancy versus reason, the narrator, the position of women in Highbury society, Mr. Knightley: the perfect hero, the use of weather, the values of society, Jane Fairfax: a paragon, what Emma learns or doesn't learn;
- *Wuthering Heights*: Nellie Dean's role(s), a comparison of the first and the second generation of Earnshaws and Lintons, corruption, weather imagery or the use of weather, a comparison of the first and second generations, Brontë's view of love, the role of Lockwood, Heathcliff as hero;
- *Vanity Fair*: Becky's innocence, the character of the narrator, Thackeray's use of gambling, Thackeray's attitude toward Amelia, the reader's view of America, the characterization of society, the effect of Thackeray's drawings in interpreting the novel;
- *Great Expectations*: Fire or hand imagery, corruption and criminality, the abused child, parenting and its consequences, the unattainable female (Estella for Pip), the effect of money, corruption and criminality, Pip's moral growth or lack of, the role of Jaggers, Dickens' use of the double;
- *Middlemarch*: the function of St. Theresa, the unattainable male/female (e.g., Casaubon for Dorothea, Dorothea for Casaubon, Rosamond for Lydgate), vocation or aspiration, Lydgate's "spots of commonness," imagery—the mirror, the labyrinth, water, confinement.
- *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*: Tess as victim, Tess as unattainable female or Angel as unattainable male, Angel's transformation, the significance of the subtitle *Pure Woman*, Hardy's philosophizing;

You may prefer to compare aspects of two or more novels: the similarities or differences of two characters (women handling money or their own affairs, like Miss Havisham, Becky Sharp, Dorothea), the portrayal of society in two novels, the use of point of view, a theme like parenting or the unattainable male/female

Or you may analyze a key scene in a novel to explore a major theme or the nature of one or more characters, for instance, does Emma's epiphany at the end of the novel indicate a fundamental change in her?

Minimum length: 6 pages.

Online critical essays: http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/personal.html

II. Personal response

Choose a character, a statement, a theme, an occurrence, an image, or a scene in a novel and write a personal essay developing your response to it. You may make a point by point comparison and/or contrast, or you may refer to the novel briefly in the beginning of the paper (e.g., use the reference to the novel as a jumping off point) and then devote the rest of your essay to your own response. For instance, Emma's self-delusion or persistence in error may lead you to explore a self-delusion you persisted in or her manipulation of others may resemble your need to manipulate others; her egotism may lead you to explore your egotism or the egotism of someone you know. The gossip and observing eyes of the community of Highbury may remind you of a close-knit community you have lived in or community pressure you have experienced. The consuming passion in *Wuthering Heights* may resonate with your fantasies, ideal, or experience. Like Heathcliff, you may have suffered being excluded because of being different in some way from the group.

Minimum length: 6 page.

Online personal essays: http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/personal.html

III. Societal or general analysis

Choose a character, a statement, a theme, an occurrence, an image, or a scene in a novel which leads you into an analysis of some aspect of society today. For instance, the relationship of Emma and her father may lead to a discussion of the consequences of the permissive attitude of many parents; the detrimental effects of marriage on Lydgate and/or on Dorothea, to an examination of the state of marriage today or the need for divorce; the corrupt values of society in *Vanity Fair*, to an examination of the materialism or equating of money and success with happiness and fulfillment in American society; the separateness of people at Box Hill could lead to a discussion of isolation of people today; Jane Fairfax's having to become a governess

could lead to a discussion of women's role in society or the glass ceiling women executives face in large corporations. Other possible topics: Heathcliff as the Other and the position of the Other in our society (the Other may be persons of color, the poor, women, or anyone whose nationality or religion or values differ from the majority's) or Heathcliff the outsider and the treatment of immigrants.

Minimum length: 6 pages

Online societal/general essays: http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/society.html

IV. Putting an author and/or a character on trial

You could try an author or character for one or more crimes against modern readers, against humanity, against characters in the novel. You may write a brief or motion for a trial. Or you may hold a trial with judge, prosecuting attorney; critics and secondary characters may be "expert witnesses" for both sides; the defendants may have a chance to reply. Keep the audience or jury in mind. You may ask questions and provide specific summaries or quotations as evidence. Or you may report a trial for a newspaper. Examples: Harriet could sue Emma for misdirection and abuse of trust; Mr. Martin could sue Emma for alienating Harriet's affections; the modern reader could sue Jane Austen for triviality or George Eliot for boredom; the state could sue Mrs. Joe for child abuse or Joe as an accessory to child abuse; Heathcliff charges the Earnshaws with kidnapping and slavery. You may let your imagination free rein: Lady Macbeth might be put on trial by Christ with Machiavelli as the defense attorney.

Length: This paper will be longer than the 1200 word minimum of choices I, II, and III.

Online trial paper: http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/trial.html

V. A short story

Write your own short story; it does not have to have any connection with any of the novels read in this course. However, a short story must be fully developed; this includes a full exposition of characterization, setting, action, and theme; otherwise, you will have a story summary or outline, not a short story. Or you may experiment; try presenting the point of view of a minor character like Miss Bates, Jane Fairfax, or Harriet or that of a major one, like Mr. Knightley.

Length: How long does the short story have to be? As long as it need to be to achieve its purpose(s). Successful student short stories have ranged from ten pages to nearly fifty. (I do not mean to encourage length by sticking in unnecessary words. Wordiness and redundancy are serious flaws in any writing.)

VI. A Web Project

Choose some aspect of Victorian literature or society, do research, design a Web site to present this information, and write it up. This could be a group project and, depending on the topic, be the equivalent of two papers. Or you may prepare an online segment for one of the authors or works. If you know how to design a Website, you may redesign one of my online lessons to be mor effective. This assignment requires my permission; we would consult about a project and talk periodically, if only briefly and by e-mail.

Online student Web project: <http://projects.vassar.edu/punch/>

VII. Illustrating a novel

If you like to draw, you may interpret a novel with some illustrations. The key concept for this choice is *interpret*; you just can't draw some figures or a scene; the drawings must give the reader insight into the scene, action, or character, that is, must express one or more key elements of the novel or writer.

Online student drawings: <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/image-renzo/>

VIII. The Web Paper and the Victoria Paper

The purpose of the ungraded Web paper is to insure that you have explored some of the Websites listed on my Web pages. You will link to at least three nineteenth century Websites and explore them. I recommend that at least one of them be the Victorian Web, which is a treasure trove of information. Your paper will be a brief analysis of the three Websites: Was it useful? And why? Whom would it be useful for—student, scholar, general public? Was it easy to use and clearly organized?

The purpose of the ungraded Victoria paper is to express your experience of using this listserv—whatever you thought and/or felt about any aspect of the experience. Was it useful? Were you interested or bored and why?

In other words, you will be writing the kind of response you would give to another student who asked what you thought of a Website or of the Victoria List and whether you would recommend that he/she bother looking at it.

Minimum length: 1-2 pages