

First Paper Topics, 5-7 pp., due Feb. 23

This paper, concerning some topic in the readings up to Feb. 17, can go in one of several directions. It could be: 1) a close reading of a passage from an assigned text (remembering that in many cases the text is translated), showing how the passage when carefully considered reinforces or undermines the “main argument” of the text; 2) a comparison and contrast of a concept in two texts; 3) a considered criticism of something that seems problematic in an assigned text. In all three cases, but especially perhaps the third, you’d be well advised to check on feasibility with me, or with your TF.

Let me add to this a kind of pep talk:

A good paper expresses a definite point of view grounded in a thorough understanding of a text. Seen in this way, your paper should be no different in kind from a paper you’d write in any other English or Literature course. When you write a paper for any course in these majors, you choose a text (poem, play, novel—or in this case an essay) and you interpret it in a certain definite way that you consider to be warranted by the text. In seeking advance help from one of us, you may wish to concentrate on two areas of clarification: a) details or issues in your chosen text that you don’t understand; and b) the degree of coherence, plausibility, and relevance to the text of your chosen point of view. Once again, this is what you would do for any other paper: you need to understand the text (the poem, etc.) thoroughly, and develop a worthwhile approach to it. All this would apply to a comparison and contrast of two texts. I say this much, then, to dispel the feeling that “you’ve never written a paper like this before.” Yes, you have!

You’re free to choose your topic within these guidelines, and what follows are only a few **sample** topics of the first and second kind.

--The three kinds of “evidence for the meaning of a poem” distinguished by Wimsatt and Beardsley on p. 814, left-hand column.

--Brooks on the task of the “modern poet,” p. 805, upper left.

--The “metalingual function” in Jakobson. Explain how it differs from the “poetic function.”

--Defamiliarization in Skhlovsky (in the suggested “Art as Technique”): is he talking about words or things?

--The paragraph on *bricolage* in Derrida’s essay, p. 920, and see translator’s footnote, p. 920, left column. (Scientists take note!)

--Irony in Brooks, metaphor in Jakobson (“Two Types of Aphasia”)

- “Statement” in Brooks, “story” (as opposed to “plot”) in Eikhenbaum.
- The author who won’t go away in Foucault and Wimsatt (or will she?)
- What are the differences in emphasis between the assigned Eikhenbaum essay and a 1928 essay by Boris Tomashevsky, “The New School of Literary History in Russia,” to be found in *PMLA* (Jan. 2004; 119:1), 124-32?
- De Man would seem to use the terms “semiology,” “grammar,” and “metonymy” interchangeably, all in opposition to “rhetoric” and “metaphor.” What are we to make of this?
- In Gadamer, how does an historical horizon differ from subjective consciousness, i. e., an author’s or reader’s consciousness?