

ENG 204 -- Paper Two: Formalist Criticism

Option One:

Write a paper not on *what* some piece of literature means (as you did last time), but on some aspect of *how* it means – its craft/form/style/art. Keep in mind the kinds of things we said about the pieces we read in class (by Ray Carver, Emily Dickinson, Joan Didion, Wallace Stevens, G.M. Hopkins, and the imagist poets), as well as the kinds of things Trowbridge and Olson said about O'Connor and Dylan Thomas in the two pieces of criticism we read.

So then, likely questions you might pursue on this sort of project include (though, of course, are not limited to) the following:

- Are there any especially effective elements in a given text or a given writer's general style? What larger effect do they contribute to?
- Is this text's *form* in any way connected to its *content*? Does the form lend itself to and enhance the content in some way? How so?
- Does the text represent an especially sophisticated – or perhaps just different and new – way to write in a given genre? What's special about this particular approach to short fiction, say, or poetry or non-fiction, then?
- To your mind, is this a particularly good or bad piece of literature – and might that lead you to any generalizations about what constitutes “good” and “bad” literature?

Option Two:

Susan Sontag claims that reading interpretively, reading primarily to understand the content of a text, is both an inferior and a conditioned way to understand literature. Do you agree? Do we feel obligated to conduct sort of Easter Egg hunts for hidden meanings as readers when a really sophisticated, fuller way to respond to literature may well be more *intuitive*? Would you say that the interpretive reading of the sort Sontag critiques has limited your ability to respond fully to text in the past? How so? How does she imagine the practice of what she calls an “erotics of reading” might help to broaden or deepen readers' experience of a text?

4 pages minimum. Paper proposal for a conference on Wednesday and 2 copies of a draft for class on Friday.