

Humanities 161: “Cultures and Civilizations”
Spring 2008

Paper assignment

Consider and evaluate the intersection of family and class in *Persuasion* and “Hermann and Dorothea.”

Traditionally, such a paper would be termed “comparative.” That’s not a bad description of what is expected here. It can be argued—should be argued?—that all critical thought is at root comparative: that evaluating A cannot be done in isolation, but must involve some sort of explicit or implicit comparison with B. How else does one construct a yardstick for measurement?

The problem with the term “comparative” in an assignment such as this is that it tends to encourage the simple assertion that “A says this, but B says that”—which approach is ultimately rather sterile. It might be better to describe the essay you are to write as “intertextual.” Your essay should explore the intersection of family and class by engaging the two texts before us in a meaningful and creative dialogue. You should feel relatively unrestrained in choosing your approach. One text may be more important to your argument than another. Ultimately your essay should be an expression of *your* ideas. The whole point of a comparative investigation is to raise questions and consider possibilities that an examination of a single text might leave unexplored. But remember, also, that the conversation to which your essay is a contribution is not disembodied. We are talking about particular texts, and a convincing essay will adduce sufficient and precise evidence from the texts to support whatever your argument happens to be.

Recall from the syllabus:

All writing always via email with documents attached in Word or pdf (filename = yourlastname and the paper number), always sent to the whole class and to us. In addition the two essays and research paper must be printed on plain white paper, double-spaced, secured with a paper clip, and pledged. No cover pages or plastic report binders. All written work must use MLA-style documentation form; the specifics of these requirements may be found in *The Bedford Handbook*, which served as your writing handbook in Humanities 160. *The Chicago Manual of Style* is another useful secondary style guide [available on-line](#) at the library.

Length: 750 to 1000 words (between three and five pages)

Due: Saturday, January 26, before 5:00 pm.