

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21L.003 Reading Fiction
Fall 2008

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.

Vaeth

Paper #1 (5 pp; due SES #8 in class, copy as MS Word document on MIT Server same day, texts, *Araby*, *An Encounter* or *Boyhood*)

Paper assignments will follow the model of the oral presentation (choose a different passage to consider should you write a paper on the same text that you are presenting on). Each paper will be grounded in your primary response and analysis of that work through one specific passage that leads you to larger considerations of that work as a whole.

Trust the approach of many readings and making plentiful observations as an invaluable endeavor for the work of the paper; giving yourself the time to internalize the story so that you can then speak the language of the story with authority is the goal of our work this semester. Now, you want to move from making public observations and making inferences to expressing ideas of your own. It is important to remember that it is YOUR idea about a work that deserves expression and development; you are not obligated to explain Joyce's idea or Tolstoy's idea but you are responsible for explicating YOUR idea about Joyce or Tolstoy. One of the goals of an academic paper is to persuade an audience of readers (your classmates) to see your point of view. Certainly, you can think of this endeavor as making a kind of argument. And there can be no more authoritative persuasion than one that is grounded in the text itself.

As with the oral presentation, select one passage of a half page to a page or so from the story or novel that holds some charge or meaning or questions for you and that you think will bear up under closer study. Approach the passage through a close study of what this microcosm of the larger work signifies about character, actions, setting and of course, language (style, vocabulary, images, patterns of syntax, grammatical marks – any given passage will have much to discover). In your paper, speak the language of this passage – think of it as your essential evidence and your authority to make others see and understand your evolving idea.

In closing, all ideas exist *in potentia* – Coleridge calls them “generative seeds” – ideas are exciting because they ask to be acted on. Even with support, ideas are never beyond doubt. Every idea is fragile and vulnerable. Bring energy, patience and attention to the expression of your idea in these papers. Through experience and the exercise of intelligence, we acquire judgment and by training we forge the habits to support ideas.