

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 #2 (5 pp; due SES #15 in class)

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 an analysis of that work through a close reading of 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 time to internalize the novel so that you can then speak its language with authority is the goal of our work this semester.

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 Mann's idea or Tolstoy's idea but you are responsible for explicating YOUR idea about Mann 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. There is no more authoritative persuasion than one that is thoroughly grounded in the text itself.

As with the oral presentation, limit your scope by choosing a short passage of approximately a half page (or less) that holds some charge or question for you and that you think will sustain further consideration. What do you think the passage signals about character, actions, setting, the writer's use of 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 authority to make others see and understand your 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.