

Essay Two Assignment  
Repetition and Variation in Prose Narrative

This is a four-part assignment. Parts One-Three are the draft, due in class on Monday, Feb. 17. You will hand in all four parts, including the paper itself, on Monday, Feb. 24.

*The Professor's House* unfolds not only by telling its story but also by developing complex patterns. Many images, scenes, objects, and key words reappear over the course of the novel. The old house is contrasted with the new one, and with the cliff dwellings. Lake Michigan gives way to the Blue Mesa. Paris and Washington are important, interestingly paralleled side-locations. St. Peter has pivotal encounters with Augusta in Book One and again in Book Three; he goes swimming, too, in both books. Tom's diary is mentioned in Book One, described in Book Two, and edited by St. Peter in Book Three. Words such as "taste," "comfort," "primitive," "garden," and "sunlight" keep coming up. These are just a few examples.

Your assignment is to write a 3-4 page essay about an image, scene, object, or word that is repeated at least once in the novel. Make sure you make an argument about *how* your pattern works and *why* is interesting or important. That the pattern exists is what your textual evidence will make clear, but it's the topic of your paper, not an argument. The argument will come from explaining how your pattern works and why it is significant.

Part One: selecting and marking-up passages: identify at least two passages that exemplify your pattern. Type or paste them from a full-text online version of the novel (i.e. Project Gutenberg at <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200831h.html>); set them to triple-spaced with ample margins, and print them out. In all, they should amount to 3-4 pages. Then, mark them up:

- Decode, pressing carefully on the exact meaning and structure of each sentence.
- Attend to particular words. What connotations and significance can you uncover? Look interesting words up in the *OED*. Make lists of words. Do different passages use different key words or idioms? Are different characters or narrators speaking with their own idioms?
- Examine images, metaphors, and symbols. How do the passages appeal to the senses? How do they multiply meanings?
- Notice the modes of narration Cather uses in your passages. If there are several, how do they interact? If not, what effects does she achieve by limiting her techniques?
- Who is narrating? How are the passages focalized?
- Explore what stays constant, and what changes, on as many levels as you can think of, across your passages.

Part Two—observations: take notes about what you find in your mark-up. Linger over this stage. A lot of you rushed through it in the first assignment. Try to link up the details that emerged when you asked one set of questions with those that emerged from another. Meditate on what strikes you as puzzling or fascinating in the passages.

Brainstorm about possible paragraphs that might bring together details and ideas from different parts of your notes. Generate a few thesis statements—make them as different from one another as you can, and play the games for developing argument by playing with potential theses.

### Part Three: a detailed outline

You can start with a thesis statement or with topic sentences. Either way, generate a developmental outline that articulates the main claims of your argument in full sentences (not only listing the topics of the paper and the paragraphs).

Your outline should consist of the following parts:

- A thesis statement.
- Topic sentences for each paragraph
- Brief indication of the textual evidence to be used in each paragraph.

### Part Four: the paper

Your paper should be 3-4 pages long, double-spaced, and carefully proofread.

Use *Elements of Style* and *The Little, Brown Handbook* to help you edit your paper.

Your essay should **conform to MLA style citation practices**—if you are unsure about these, consult the guide posted to our moodle site. Beginning with the next paper, I will deduct points from papers that aren't properly formatted, so now is the chance to make sure you've got it down.

### Goals for this paper:

- Fostering a generative, open-ended pre-writing process
- Using evidence and insights produced in pre-writing in a paper
- Engaging with the subtlety, complexity, and ambiguity of the work
- Writing cogent paragraphs that are full of evidence and sustained analysis, and that are structured by an internal logic
- Structuring your paper according to the logic of your argument