The Critical Paper is a brief research paper that combines your personal discoveries about a work or works with what you can cull from appropriate research sources. The Critical Paper focuses on YOUR analytical thinking, however, not the comments from those research sources; the voice of the paper must be overwhelmingly yours. In addition, the Critical Paper will NOT involve biography, as the focus is on the literature itself and not the author's life; besides, narrator and author are two separate entities. In other words, do not discuss how the author's life influences the work.

You have two options in completing the Critical Paper—choosing a given topic or creating one of your own, within limitations. All of the following requirements listed below remain the same, regardless of the approach chosen:

Instructions:

Your thesis must be approved by the instructor.

Prior to submitting your Critical Paper, you must submit to your instructor the following information via Blackboard messages: Topic, Thesis, alphanumeric Outline, and Works Cited page. See the Course Calendar, Syllabus Pg 2 for details.

Use MLA format for this typed paper of 5 full text pages (that does NOT include the required outline or Works Cited page, all of which will be submitted in a single file, not multiple files). If you have taken ENGL 1301 at CTC, one handy reference tool is the St. Martin's Handbook (8th ed.), Chapters 10-15 (concerning writing and documenting scholarly research papers) and Chapter 32 (the MLA format). DO NOT include a title page. See the links for MLA first page format--header, heading, title, etc.

The work you choose to research is your primary source. You must cite lines from the primary source in order to supplement your analysis, to show the reader what you are explaining and to help specifically prove your point.

You must also include a minimum of 4 additional critical sources AND cite from them in the essay. A critical source is one that comments upon or analyzes the text, the specific subject of your paper (be careful here!) and/or the writer’s techniques used in the text. Please use the CTC databases for finding appropriate sources, not internet searches (no .com sites).

\*\*\*\*\*Masterplots, Cliffs Notes, Barron's, BookRags, Pink Monkey, Spark Notes, enotes, Classic Notes, GradeSaver, Book notes, WIKIPEDIA, and any other similar items are not acceptable critical sources since they merely summarize the work; while you may use the Bible as a reference, it does not count as a critical source because it does not comment upon your author’s work. In addition, paper mills such as 123helpme.com, antiessays and freeessays.com are NOT acceptable sources. If you are unsure of your source’s value, please check with the instructor. Again, using CTC's databases can eliminate most of these issues.

A NOTE ON THESIS: The thesis statement you plan to use must control your essay; the thesis is generally one sentence that controls the main idea of the entire essay. The thesis is NOT a statement of intent ("In this essay, I will . . . " is a statement of intent, for example),nor is the thesis a statement of fact (The author uses symbolism in the stories). Instead, the thesis is an argument to be proven or supported. See http://depts.gpc.edu/gpcltc/handouts/communications/literarythesis.pdf . Your thesis must be approved by the instructor prior to the submission of your paper.

A thesis WILL NOT include statements like "The author uses \_\_\_\_\_\_ to give meaning to, to help the reader understand better, to appeal to readers, etc.". We cannot know the author's intentions for the reader specifically; mentioning these kinds of things provide only opinion, and this paper will focus on an objective argument instead. If you find the symbolism interesting and think it gives more meaning to the novel, ask yourself what that meaning is. Doing so can lead to a connection between symbolism and theme--and the basis of a thesis. In addition, AVOID statements like, "The novel wouldn't be the same without \_\_\_\_\_." Any novel and any literary device could complete that statement; it's a given, as is saying that comics would not be the same without (pick any superhero to insert here).

Finding Sources

This is a literary research paper; it will not be appropriate to do internet searches, as those will generally turn up papermills that sell research papers, bloggers who spout their opinions, and webpages created by high school English classes. In other words, sources ending in .com are not going to work for this assignment.

Your best bet is to access CTC's library from your portal page. Once in the library's site, go to Off Campus Computer/Online Databases to access useful search engines like EBSCO and Literature Online. Gale Databases are also useful, as are Masterfile and Academic Search Premier.

\*\*\*Gale focuses on literary research and allows you to choose just critical analysis essays, as well. This is very useful in separating biographical/summary information from the useful stuff.

Synthesis is crucial. Avoid merely copying what your sources express without paying attention to how the data works in your paper. This assignment is not a clustering of well-written quotes from critics. Keep citations to a minimum—15% of your whole paper.

Do not use sources to cite information that already appears in your primary source unless it is part of a specific point the author is making. In other words, cite Shakespeare from Shakespeare himself, not from another writer citing Shakespeare's own words.

Plagiarism is unacceptable. See the plagiarism information you consented to at the beginning of the course for more information. The rule of thumb here is this: if you did not come up with the idea on your own, cite it.

Don't "over-quote" from your sources; this critical paper is supposed to be mostly your words--your analysis. Avoid long quotations; if you must use one, be sure to double-space it and block it if it runs four or more lines of essay text. Also, avoid running quotations back to back. Analysis is needed.

DO NOT summarize the plot of the piece. You can assume that your readers are already familiar with the text you chose. Summary should only be used BRIEFLY in the introduction as a way to remind the reader of the text(s)--just two or three sentences. Save the rest of the paper for analysis. Also, do not cite summary from another source. As the reader, you are capable of summarizing the primary source's plot or an event on your own. Critical sources should ANALYZE your primary source; therefore, you should be citing analytical material, not summary.

DO NOT give biographical information about the author.

DO NOT wait until the last minute to write this paper. It will show.

Ignorance is no excuse. Ask for help!

Save your file as [Your last name] CritPap 2327 (for example, I would save my file as Sullivan Crit Pap 2327) and save as a .rtf file before sending through Messages.

The Critical paper will be written in the third person. Yes, you are forming an opinion of the text you read, but you will present that opinion in terms of statements of fact, not prefaced by "I think", "I believe", or any other first-person statements. This is not a personal response--the discussion boards are for that kind of writing. You are the authority in your own analysis, so simply state your analysis.

All literary assignments are written in the present tense.

Remember, this is an English class. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation count! Use academic English: no contractions, slang, or second person.

Use the attached revision checklist to review your paper before submitting.

Option I: Choose one of the topics given below and follow the instructions for completing the assignment. Note: if you choose a topic that involves the application of literary devices, do not use valuable space in the essay to define those terms. The reader is assumed to be familiar with them.

Compare/contrast the war poetry of Melville ("The March into Virginia", "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight", "The College Colonel", "An Uninscribed Monument") with that of Whitman's war poetry ("Beat! Beat! Drums" through "Reconciliation" in your text). You may consider content, style, tone, etc.

Read some of the prose from Whitman's Specimen Days (found online in several places, including http://jeffersoncountry.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/WhiPro1.html). Compare/contrast his poetry with his prose. Go beyond a simple content comparison--think about how the writings address the same topics, the tone, the literary devices, etc.

How reliable are the narrators in Poe's, Irving's, and Melville's works (those assigned for this class only)? What do they have in common, and how does their reliability affect the works?

Read the excerpt from William Gilmore Simms' preface to The Yemassee. In this selection, he is writing about his novel; however, on a broader level, he is defining Romance in a more specific manner than we have done so this semester. Find those defining factors of Romance in his preface--for example, he says "[i]t approximates the poem . . . and "hurries [individuals] rapidly through crowding and exacting events, in a narrow space of time" (1211)--and use those factors to show how one of Poe's short stories fits Simms' definition of Romance. Use only one of Poe's stories that appears within your text.

Compare the depiction of Indians in earlier works by Mary Rowlandson, William Bradford, John Smith and others with how the Indians present themselves in the speeches and tales. How do you account for the different perspectives (beyond the obvious reasons)? This topic is deceptively simple. There are two parts here--the settlers'/explorers' perceptions AND the natives' perceptions of themselves in THEIR OWN writings/speeches/oral traditions. Be sure you're not focusing on just one aspect and be sure you're not simply providing biography.

Compare/contrast Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher" with Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter". Do not focus on content or plot. Think about literary techniques employed, characteristics of Romanticism they share, style, etc.

Sarah Kemble Knight writes a travel journal. William Bartram also writes a travel journal (Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida--excerpts appear in two places in your text). Compare and contrast the two writings, taking into account the point of view, style, tone, etc. You may consider how the content is affected by a female writer versus a male writer; however, the focus of the essay should not be the content itself (they are both travel journals; it is a given that they will both discuss their surroundings, the people they meet, etc. Focus on the "how" and "why" of these things instead.).

Examine point of view (narrator's perspective- First person narrator, third person narrator, limited omniscient, objective, or others) in Rebecca Harding Davis’s work. This discussion is an analysis of the narration, NOT a retelling of the plot. Examine "why" and "how" the narration influences the reading of a particular reading. DO NOT RETELL THE PLOT.

Discuss Ichabod Crane and Brom Bones (in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" by Washington Irving) in the context of Emerson's "The American Scholar." Analyze the similarities and differences between what Irving shows in his characters and what Emerson discusses in his essay. For this assignment, arranging body paragraphs according to each topic Emerson proposed and supporting with discussion from Irving's stories seems to work well.

Compare/contrast Frederick Douglass's slave narrative to Emerson's "Self-Reliance". In other words, what are Emerson's principles of self-reliance, and how does Douglass's narrative reflect those principles?

Option II: Choose your own source and create your own topic. Do a critical analysis of one of the texts listed below. All primary materials must come from the Perkins textbook (current edition) or novels I have selected. Keep in mind that not all of the authors’ works listed below are the most popular works from their careers; therefore, you need to budget your research time appropriately.

Also, be aware that choosing your own topic does not give you free reign with the research assignment. I reserve the right to veto any topic that I feel does not meet the standard of "critical" or that will not afford you ample opportunity to showcase your critical thinking.

Anne Bradstreet- “Contemplations” or her letters

Michael Wigglesworth- “Day of Doom”

Samuel Sewall- from "The Diary of Samuel Sewall"

Jonathan Edwards “A Divine and Supernatural Light”

Ben Franklin- "Letters"

John and Abigail Adams-"Letters"

Joel Barlow “The Hasty-Pudding”

Royall Tyler- "The Contrast"

Herman Melville-"Benito Cereno"

Rose Terry Cooke- "How Celia Changed Her Mind"

Approaches to Consider for Option II only:

Traditional paper—examine themes, characters, imagery, irony, or other literary techniques.

Historically-based paper—consider the social, political, or religious events that influenced this work and other works during the period. Note that this is NOT a history paper; your work must be based upon the literature and how history influenced it; therefore, the focus will be on the novel, not the history. The majority of your resources should be literary resources, as well.

Current discussion—Is the work relevant to today, to our situations, problems, etc? Be specific in your answer, providing details from current issues. Remember also that the paper is to focus on the text itself, not provide a running list of current situations. You must make the appropriate connections for the reader. The majority of your resources should be literary resources, as well.

Comparison/contrast—discuss how the work relates to or opposes another work read in class.