

Research Paper Assignment

Assignment: Write an argumentative essay (minimum of 10 full pages) on a topic for which you must do research and textual analysis of the works in order to support your claim. You are required to use a minimum of 5 scholarly sources (scholarly articles and books). **ONE** of the sources must be on a **theoretical** approach; the other four should be published scholarship on the Wilder works. Turn in your paper during our last regular class meeting: **Friday December 5th in SSB 340.**

Reviews of performances do **not** count as a scholarly source; you may quote reviews, but they don't count as one of your 5 scholarly sources). You may quote essays from *LOA* but they don't count as one of the 5 sources. **No more than ONE** of the sources can be an online source—**NOT Wikipedia** (not enough quality control, and it's a general encyclopedia, not a literary or theatre one). If you found two great internet sources, you could use both, but only one counts as one of the 5 sources.. (If the article was originally published in a scholarly journal, then it doesn't have to count for the one online source.) You may use more than 5 sources, but keep in mind that the more sources you cite the longer a paper will be (unless you've slipped into the string-of-quotations mode, which is not what you should do).

You should use MLA documentation style (page numbers cited parenthetically in text, works cited page). Be sure to review the Paper Guidelines document on SOCS on how to write literary analysis essays, especially as these are C/C topics. (Don't write a mini-essay on each and never the twain meet; rather, alternate between the two works with each point or category.)

Topic: Choose a topic from the assignment for the first paper, or you may develop your own topic in consultation with me. You cannot do the same topic on the same work(s) you did on paper #1 unless you write 10 new pages for a total of 15 pages minimum. Whichever topic you choose, you must make use of literary theory somewhere in the paper (so NOT necessarily throughout. Thus, it does **not** have to be a paper doing a psychoanalytic reading of the work(s) from start to finish). The theory may be one (or more) on comedy, tragedy, or other related to theatre and drama that we read for class, or it may be one (or more) used in contemporary literary criticism (e.g., feminist lit crit, queer theory, new historicism, deconstruction). (This requirement is in keeping with the English Department's directive to teach theory throughout the major.)

Don't shy away from arguing an interpretation of an issue in the drama or fiction just because I may not agree with that position or theory. I'll make comments as a student of Wilder with certain beliefs, biases, etc., but also as an instructor: objective, regardless of whether I agree or disagree with you on the issue. All you have to do is make a good case for your reading of the works, using your own textual analysis and published scholarship, and theory to support individual points and your thesis overall.

Topic Proposal: In order to make sure you get started early and get feedback before you are too deep into the process, turn in a topic proposal no later than Tuesday November 11th. The proposal should be more or less one page long. In it you should state as specifically as you can the topic (issue, theme, interpretation) on which you want to research and to analyze text. State which works you anticipate analyzing and how you think aspects of the works relate to your topic. Also state which theory you plan to apply.

The final exam is to deliver an **Oral Abstract (summary)** of your research paper to me and your classmates during the Final Exam Period: **Tuesday, 12/16 11:00 AM - 1:50 pm in SSB 340.** Length should be maximum of 5 minutes long (minimum of 3 minutes long). We will have a little time to ask you questions or make comments. There is no makeup possibility; thus if you are not present, you will receive an F that counts for 5% of your course grade.

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Outline: Optional: If you want more feedback than what I provide on the topic proposal, turn in an outline that consists of your working thesis statement, the major points you will support in order to support the thesis, and where the work(s) and scholarly sources will appear (under which points). The thesis and points should be stated as complete sentences, not as phrases or single words. Turn in the wordprocessed outline on or before Tuesday November 25th; I will probably e-mail you feedback or meet with you in conference on Tuesday December 2nd.

Research: Your research is not the end of this project; it is the means to your end. Therefore, give quotations, etc. their proper emphasis as corroborating evidence for your interpretative points, which are supported by your own analysis of the primary sources. Be open to the possibility of adjusting your stand on an issue as a result of researching, thinking, and writing about the subject in depth. You are not required to have read everything published on the works; that particular hell is reserved for graduate school and the tenure track. You will want to use the subject search in the TCNJ online catalogue or databases, the most important of which is the MLA Annual Bibliography. If you have never used this before, you can come to my office hours or make an appointment for me to show you, or just ask a librarian in the reference room at the library.

Audience: Your audience is students (professional scholars and your classmates) of Wilder. Assume your readers know the works already, so there is no need to summarize the plot. You will undoubtedly analyze part(s) of the plot as one kind of textual evidence to support a particular point and the thesis overall, but wherever possible find a quote from the primary and secondary sources. Do not assume your readers have read a particular scholarly work (thus you must quote, paraphrase, summarize as needed)

If you are planning or thinking of going on for a Masters or a Ph.D. in English, this is the kind of paper that could serve as the writing sample for your graduate school application. May the Force be with you throughout this challenging but exciting process of reading, thinking, researching, and writing about the novels and plays of Thornton Wilder.

Additional Topics

9. B. Since the beginning of theatre in western civilization 2500 years ago, we have come to expect that a tragedy will have a major character who is the “tragic hero.” In Greek tragedy there is often more than one character who might be considered the tragic hero. Write an essay in which you argue that one character in a Wilder work is, if not THE tragic hero, at least A tragic figure. You may consider such issues as the degree of suffering, fall from a great height, *hamartia* (the so-called “tragic flaw” compared to an otherwise great character—the best the human race has to offer—but which may be read as a mistake, error in judgment, or sin), deserving of punishment (suffering), sympathetic, *anagnorisis* (recognition or epiphany), etc. Does s/he represent the human race in some manner? Is s/he doomed by fate/god(s)/curse/anything, or is his/her fall the result of free will? Is s/he faced with a damned-if-s/he-does/doesn’t choice? Do we pity him/her? Be sure that you do apply at least one theory of tragedy to help support your case for the character as a tragic figure

9. C. If you’re willing and able to write a longer paper, C/C one Wilder work with a Shakespearean tragedy (H.O.L.M. or R&J) or one of the Greek tragedies with which I am familiar (Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*, Euripides’ *Medea*, *The Bacchae*, *Trojan Women*), who are undisputed writers of tragedy. Apply at least one of the theories of tragedy to the works. Your rhetorical stance in writing this paper would be, for example, if *Antigone* is universally accepted as a tragedy, and theory X applies well to *Antigone*, and if *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is similar to *Antigone*, and theory X also applies well to it, then *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* can be seen as a successful attempt to write a modern tragedy in the great tradition of tragedy beginning with the Greeks. So this is not C/C for C/C’s sake; it’s C/C in order to argue that this modern work

should be regarded as a successful attempt to write a tragedy in the great tradition of tragedy established by the Greeks and Shakespeare.

13. C/C Wilder's screenplay for the Alfred Hitchcock film *Shadow of a Doubt* to the finished film. How do the changes that were made to Wilder's screenplay affect the characterization, or tone, or theme? Which is better, the screenplay or the film? How did aspects of the film (casting, acting, directing, cinematography, musical score) help realize or undermine Wilder's intention? Note: Since there are so few Wilder sources that discuss *Shadow of a Doubt* (my book, Blank in *TW: New Essays*), you would have to make use of scholarly works on Hitchcock, a few of which are on reserve for this course (I think). Note 2: All the scholarly sources, both on Wilder and Hitchcock, are based on the film itself, NOT the screenplay by Wilder, which was published for the first time only last year in the Library of America volume of Wilder's *Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*.