Research Paper Assignment
ENGL 209 – Intro to Fiction
Ryan C. McCarty
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Overview: This paper will be your standard 'research' as it is understood in the broader academic community. The basic idea will involve developing the skill of illuminating one text, using others. Basically, you will do one of three things, either 1) use one of the texts we've read to illustrate the arguments in a non-literary text from a field such as philosophy, sociology, economics, business theory, etc; 2) use a non-literary text to illuminate a certain point about one of the texts we've read; 3) engage in the literary critical discussion surrounding the literary text you'd like to discuss by finding articles that scholars have written about that text (similar to the ones we read in our Norton edition of *House*) and placing your own argument within the critical conversation. Therefore, your first task will be finding materials that relate to what you want to say about a given text and then figuring out how to describe that relationship. We will talk about how to find such items in class.

How to Get There: You will start by thinking about what kinds of things you are interested in, either academically or personally (or hopefully both). Do you like Psychology? Biology? Politics? All of these fields have theoretical models that can be used to discuss literary texts. How does the family or personal environment shape Clifford Pyncheon's consciousness? How is disease or contagion dealt with in *Ruth Hall*? What does the situation of the Rudkus family tell us about the realities of immigrant life? If you cannot think of a subject that you would like to work with, there is always the other option of finding a piece of literary criticism on the text you want to work with and responding to it. Is this critique overlooking something? Misrepresenting the text? We will talk in class about methods of finding such critical works. The next step will be to decide what exactly your topic will be - this will involve developing at least a three-part thesis, including what the non-literary text or texts say, what the literary text says, and what the point of putting them together is. You will then lay out your argument, supporting it with quotations and paraphrases from both texts and supplementing your arguments with bits of information from other items you find during your research. As with all writing, your essay should also include an answer to the "so-what" question. This is the point where you will tell your reader what all your observations mean. The point here is tell your reader something new about the literary text - something that is not obvious until pairing the novel with the non-literary texts; however, make sure that you are actually telling them about *something*.

What I'll Expect: There are some basics to the requirements for this paper - it should be at least 7 pages, double-spaced, typed in 12 point font with 1 inch margins. You should assume that your audience has read the novel and you are just pointing something out about them - no heavy plot summary. You should use MLA citation when you quote from the text and provide a works cited sheet. You should have at least 3 items on your works cited page, including the literary text (that means at least 2 non-literary sources). Your essay will also be graded on several content/organizational factors. The complexity of your thesis and argument will be key - are you going for the easier answers or are you looking for things that aren't so strictly black and white? Do you support your claims with textual evidence and analytic discussion (explaining what each point means and why they tend to mean that) or do you just make claims and then move on to the next point? Do you effectively illustrate the connection between the non-literary and literary texts? Are you doing something fairly new with the text or are you sticking completely to the ways we talked about the text in class? Do the other research materials shed any light on the issue or are they superficially added? Is your essay stylistically interesting and grammatically correct, conforming to the expectations of academic literary analysis? We will discuss these points in class but, as I've stressed so far this semester, I am very open to meeting outside of class with anyone who wants/needs extra help in any area not covered to a satisfactory degree in class. I cannot possibly cover everything, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't get to learn it. Just let me know.