

Critical Conversations with Authors and Texts

When we read, we usually have three “voices” active in our heads (some of us have more than three voices speaking to us at all times, but that’s another story). One voice is a recording voice; its job is to record and read aloud (in our heads) the text we’re engaged with. One voice is a distracting voice; this is the voice that tries to tear us a way from thinking about what the recording voice is saying (just about anything interests the distracting voice, particularly if it’s not in the text – girls, boys, insects, dust motes in a sunbeam, the flight speed ratio of laden European swallows, etc.). The third voice is the critical voice and the one we’re most concerned with in this class; its job is to critically engage the text in a conversation. The critical voice asks questions of the text, tries to answer them, makes connections, and eventually makes meaning: “What’s going on here? Why is this character doing this? How does this fit in with what I read three pages ago? Isn’t this passage similar to what what’s-her-name wrote in that book we read in Sept.? Hey, she’s talking about that thing we studied in history!?! This all makes so much sense; the author is allowing me to see a different side of pork products, a side I never imagined! Ah, so by doing that, the character is showing me what the author has to say about this big theme! I don’t agree with this, it’s too unrealistic – I can’t make it fit my world view.” Etc. etc. The critical voice should always be working to understand, relate to, synthesize and analyze the text being read.

Now, this is where the paper comes in. I want you to type a three page paper in which you record a critical conversation you have with the text of *Catch 22*, including the texts of the two interviews with Joseph Heller. This paper needs to capture a moment (or several) of intellectual curiosity, a moment of questioning, answering, understanding, supporting, synthesizing and analyzing. AND – I’m not going to tell you what to write about or how to structure the paper. We’ll discuss many options in class, options that have arisen from discussion about the book and the interviews. You need to follow a thread that interests you.

I’m not going to pretend that this is an easy assignment – it’s not – but it is doable. I have every confidence that all of you are capable thinkers, despite some recent evidence to the contrary (you know who you are). This assignment, by its very nature, is ambiguous. I’m facing my own catch 22 here: I don’t want to tell you what to do – that is the nature of the assignment, for you to figure it out yourselves – but I know that you need a little more information to start. So, try to remember what I’ve asked for over the year: (an) arguable position(s), original thought, textual support, factual accuracy, recognition of the complexity of the works we study, and stylistic directness and clarity. Good Luck!

Due Friday 4/29/16