ESEM section 13 Capitalist Selves, fall 2026

Short writing assignment (2 pp.)

1) Locate 1-2 passages* from Henry James's "The Real Thing" (1892) *or* Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) (from what you've read thus far) that you find especially puzzling and worthy of closer analysis. Annotate your selected passages and, in about 2 pages, start to analyze closely the textual evidence.

*The passages do not need to be sequential—but it's fine if they are. Keep in mind that this assignment prioritizes analytical depth over breadth.

2) Conclude with a few sentences in which you arrive at a possible analytical question/interpretive problem (see double-sided handout from class).

The aim here is exploratory close reading that can uncover an unexpected direction of inquiry. But you might have at the outset a sense of an analytical question/interpretive problem—if so, note it at the start of your short writing assignment *and* add a note at the conclusion that reflects any adjustments or refinements based on what you've started to discover in the writing process.

• You won't turn in your annotated pages from the short story, but please do annotate!

• What you'll turn in: about 2 pages typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. This will include your close analysis of textual evidence and conclude with a possible analytical question. Add your name and the date to the top of the first page.

Upload to Moodle (as a Word document or PDF) by no later than Sun 9/13 at 5 pm.

Close Reading

"Close reading" is an important part of our analytical and academic work this semester. You'll work to discover, refine, and support your own interpretations—not summaries or translations—through an approach called "close reading."

So—what is close reading? In order to develop an argument about a literary work, you will have to make the important distinction between summary and translation, on the one hand, and analysis or interpretation, on the other. When you summarize, you repeat what the text actually says or describes; when you translate, you explain to your audience in some detail many of the points an astute reader would reach on his or her own—think of translating something from French into English for a person who speaks both languages too. Neither summary nor translation tells the reader anything he or she did not already know. By contrast, when you analyze or interpret literature, you produce your own ideas about how the text creates meaning. In order to produce these ideas, you will need to look closely at the *language* of the text in order to demonstrate not just *what* you think the text means, but more importantly *how* it means what you think it does.

How, then, do you go about interpreting and analyzing rather than merely summarizing or translating a text? *Quote* the text and perform readings of *every* passage you quote: discuss in concrete and specific terms the words, metaphors, images, and/or tone of the passage you are analyzing. What work do particular words in the passage you've just quoted perform, and how do they perform that work? A useful strategy in the practice of close reading is to leave yourself time for revision. As you re-read your paper during revision, when you come to each quotation, ask yourself: "Do I interpret the language of my quotations in detailed and specific terms?" "Is it clear how my close readings support the point of the paragraph?"