WHAT IS AN ABSTRACT?

An abstract is a brief summary of your paper, including your main thesis and arguments. At this stage we ask for brief abstracts (100 words) accompanied by four keywords.

The abstract should NOT make announcements (“In this paper I am going to deal with the gentleman in Dickens”) but summarise arguments (“In this paper I argue that Dickens sees the gentleman as an ideal masculine model”).

How do I write an abstract?

This is an abstract written by a fourth-year student for a paper included in the volume Charming and Bewitching: Considering the Harry Potter Series (https://ddd.uab.cat/record/122987)

“Not My Kind of Hero: Challenging Heroism in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Series”
Rubén Campos

In this paper I question Harry Potter’s so-called heroism by having a look at the very definition of the concept. I argue that although Harry may be the main character of the series, he is only a hero because he has been chosen, both by the author and by the narrative, to be perceived as such. In addition, I argue that heroism in the series is still based on the old “good” vs. “evil” dichotomy, leaving little to no room for grey moral areas, the final duel being the maximum exponent of this problem. To finish, I conclude by claiming that while not the hero, Harry is a mover of people, a leader, not the best or the strongest or the wisest, but someone people are willing to follow. This way the so-called hero is turned into just another piece of a much bigger and complex puzzle.

Keywords: Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling, heroism, good and evil

Let’s break the abstract down into parts:

What the paper does (and how):
In this paper I question Harry Potter’s so-called heroism by having a look at the very definition of the concept.

Thesis statement:
I argue that although Harry may be the main character of the series, he is only a hero because he has been chosen, both by the author and by the narrative, to be perceived as such.
Main arguments:
In addition, I argue that heroism in the series is still based on the old “good” vs. “evil” dichotomy, leaving little to no room for grey moral areas, the final duel being the maximum exponent of this problem.

Conclusions:
To finish, I conclude by claiming that while not the hero, Harry is a mover of people, a leader, not the best or the strongest or the wisest, but someone people are willing to follow. This way the so-called hero is turned into just another piece of a much bigger and complex puzzle.

PLEASE, NOTE:
• The title MUST reflect the thesis statement and announce it
• Not all real-life abstracts follow the same order–some announce the thesis first, and then proceed to present the other elements. We are asking you, however, to follow the order of the elements presented here.
• The main difficulty, of course, is summarising the content of a paper which does not yet exist. In real-life academic practice we do this all the time, particularly when submitting contributions to conferences. In practice, then, an abstract is also a kind of ‘preview’ of the paper you will later write.

Remember:
In order to write a good abstract offering a solid thesis you need to:
• Have a sound knowledge of the text you have chosen as the basis of your paper (you have read it conscientiously, several times, highlighting passages an making notes)
• Know how to contextualize the text – historically and critically
• Detect a topic/theme that you deem relevant (check the list of topics)
• Have consulted a body of bibliography related to the topic you have previously detected as relevant, in order to make sure you’re not going to argue exactly the same thesis someone else has argued
• Focus on some aspect which you feel has not either been dealt with before or developed enough
• Make sure the topic chosen is adequate for the length of the paper (neither too small, nor too big in scope)
This is an extract of Pirsig’s autobiographical best-seller. The text below captures the moment when, as a teacher of Composition, he has to face the challenge of “teaching” a student who has—apparently—nothing to say. His advice to “narrow down”—that is to say, to focus on detail—is what gives the student the tool to finally express what she has to say. As you will see, she writes on a small but relevant topic as her original topic is far too big for 500 words.


He’d been innovating extensively. He’d been having trouble with students who had nothing to say. At first he thought it was laziness but later it became apparent that it wasn’t. They just couldn’t think of anything to say.

One of them, a girl with strong-lensed glasses, wanted to write a five-hundred word essay about the United States. He was used to the sinking feeling that comes from statements like this, and suggested without disparagement that she narrow it down to just Bozeman.

When the paper came due she didn’t have it and was quite upset. She had tried and tried but she just couldn’t think of anything to say.

He had already discussed her with her previous instructors and they’d confirmed his impressions of her. She was very serious, disciplined and hardworking, but extremely dull. Not a spark of creativity in her anywhere. Her eyes, behind the thick-lensed glasses, were the eyes of a drudge. She wasn’t bluffing him, she really couldn’t think of anything to say, and was upset by her inability to do as she was told.

It just stumped him. Now he couldn’t think of anything to say. A silence occurred, and then a peculiar answer: “Narrow it down to the main street of Bozeman.” It was a stroke of insight.

She nodded dutifully and went out. But just before her next class she came back in real distress, tears this time, distress that had obviously been there for a long time. She still couldn’t think of anything to say, and couldn’t understand why, if she couldn’t think of anything about all of Bozeman, she should be able to think of something about just one street.

He was furious. “You’re not looking!” he said. A memory came back of his own dismissal from the University for having too much to say. For every fact there is an infinity of hypotheses. The more you look the more you see. She really wasn’t looking and yet somehow didn’t understand this.

Her eyes, behind the thick-lensed glasses, opened wide. She came in the next class with a puzzled look and handed him a five-thousand-word essay on the front of the Opera House on the main street of Bozeman, Montana. “I sat in the hamburger across the street,” she said, “and started writing about the first brick, and the second brick, and then by the third brick it all started to come and I couldn’t stop. They thought I was crazy, and they kept kidding me, but here it all is. I don’t understand it.”
EXERCISE
Divide the abstracts into their different parts, identify the thesis statement

Abstract#1
“Servility and Destructiveness in Kazuo Ishiguro’s The Remains of the Day.”
Michel Terestchenko
Université de Reims

The figure of the butler, the protagonist of Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel is a subtle illustration of the ability of human consciousness to deceive itself in what Sartre called “bad faith.” The self-deception is enhanced by being legitimized in the framework of a professional ethics. This ethics of the “dignity” of a job perfectly well accomplished, which is presented as nothing but blind obedience, not only leads to the character’s failure in his life but, more dangerously, to his serving as an instrument of evil action. Indirect commentary on latter aspect of the novel can be sought in Sartre’s analysis of “bad faith” and Marx’s of the alienated consciousness but also in the experiments in social psychology conducted by Stanley Milgram which point to the mechanisms by which ordinary people can become agents of mass destruction.

Abstract#2
“Writing in Translationese: Kazuo Ishiguro’s The Remains of the Day and the Uncanny Dialect of the Diasporic Writer.”
Linda Belau & Ed Cameron
University of Texas-Pan American

This essay argues that with his third novel, Kazuo Ishiguro has crafted a postcolonial work that illustrates how the crisis of decolonization is linked inextricably to the crisis of subjectivity itself. Unlike the novels of Achebe, Rushdie, and other postcolonial writers who represent colonial and postcolonial conditions by focusing on the actual postcolonial contexts, Ishiguro accomplishes his postcolonial critique by focusing more on the issue of cultural difference within the developed world than on issues explicitly resulting from the decolonizing process in the colonized parts of the world. Furthermore, his focus on the issue of cultural difference in Britain is not articulated around issues of immigration and assimilation of the other but, rather, around the internal otherness of the British subject itself. Ishiguro’s novel in effect argues that this internal otherness, always present to some degree, emerges most prominently during the breakdown of the Empire, when the traditional symbolic coordinates for British identity are weakened. Ishiguro expresses this perspective in his novel (1) by ever so faintly re-inscribing a traditional narrative form to reflect its internal strangeness or foreignness, (2) by providing an uncanny narrative documentation of the consciousness of a second-class British subject during the height of the decolonization period, and (3) by constructing a narrative that sublimates his own unique Diasporic position as a means of coming to grips with his somewhat unique and personal ethnic and cultural conflicts.
Abstract#3
“What does Heathcliff look like?: Performance in Peter Kosminsky’s Version of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*.”
Sara Martín Alegre
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

In the study of film adaptation, plot is often privileged over character. Studying character reveals that the adaptation of novels is dramatisation involving, as regards this particular factor, the transformation of a non-performative aspect of the source text into dramatic roles performed by particular actors. An adaptation can be said to succeed as far as character is concerned when the actor’s performance usurps the reader’s own mental performance and visualisation of character. Nonetheless, as Peter Kosminsky’s adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* (1992)—and especially Ralph Fiennes’s performance as Heathcliff in it—suggests, this process is not dependent on a single factor, be it the artistic quality of the adaptation, its narrative fidelity to the source or its adequacy for a particular historical period. Performance may even succeed in otherwise failed adaptations, as (arguably) happens in the case Kosminsky’s film, which suggests that the reader’s/viewer’s particular response to adaptation deserves further attention.

Abstract#4
“En-gendering the Nation: Mother Africa and the Female Body in Ayi Kwei Armah’s “An African Fable” and Ama Ata Aidoo’s “Everything Counts””
Esther Pujolràs Noguer
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

The history of the African continent in the late fifties and early sixties is marked by the end—at least theoretically—of colonialism, formally experienced as the independence gained by African nations from European powers. The European imaginary had launched Africa into a pit of nothingness in which time was erased of any historical prescience and pre-historic darkness became the denominator that defined both the African space and their people. Therefore, when African writers took up the pen, they were forced to face this legacy of emptiness and filled the continent with a reassuring image that would match their experiences as African people. The Mother Africa Trope thus came to their rescue.

If the European imagination enveloped Africa in darkness and treachery, the sons of Africa contested such vision with the creation of a trope, Mother Africa, which embodied the black continent as a nurturing, powerful and beautiful mother. The liberating streak behind the trope notwithstanding, the truth is that this process of anthropomorphization entails a practice of objectifying women through a persistent and resourceful use of the female body.

The aim of this paper is to show how two contemporary Ghanaian writers, one male and the other female —Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo—, whose literary career developed in the years following the independence of Ghana, employ the Mother Africa trope in the representation of the postcolonial nation that their country came to be as a consequence of the end of British rule. The basis of my analysis are two short stories, “An African Fable,” written by Armah in 1969 and “Everything
Counts,” the first story of Aidoo’s collection, *No Sweetness Here*, published in 1970. Borrowing the term “en-gendering the nation” from Elleke Boehmer’s *Stories of Women* (2005), I contend that the female body is conceptualized, apprehended and imagined in significantly different and differing ways depending on the gender of the eyes that en-gender the nation.

**Abstract#5**

“Defending the Nation from Jacobin ‘Decadence’: Jane Austen’s *Lady Susan* as a Call to Arms”
David Owen
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Strictly in terms of episode, Austen’s epistolary novella *Lady Susan* (c.1794) is not fictionalised history. Conventionally, it has often been read as little more than the hedonistic exploits of a maverick, of no broader significance to Austen’s major works and of little discernible connection with the ideas that occupied her later writings. But a reassessment of this extraordinary text reveals it to be a highly political account of 1790s England, with the nation torn between the opposing forces of Jacobin and anti-Jacobin responses to the aftermath of the French revolution.

My essay will suggest that the text can be read as a conservative call to arms that defines the desirable qualities and values of national identity in opposition to a continental ‘Other’ that was perceived to be menacing the British nation to its very core. By locating the novella’s discord within the context of a traditional, rural English family, threatened by the machinations of an urbane socialite, Austen not only delineates the Jacobin destructiveness facing conservative England, but also emphasises the need for the nation to respond, as one family, to heal itself and avoid calamity. That the defence of these ideals should fall on the shoulders of Lady Susan’s nemesis, Catherine Vernon (her sister-in-law), adds to the novella the additional layer of a Hannah Moreish appeal for like-minded women to take an active role in the struggle for the society whose values they deeply espouse.
EXERCISE SOLUTION
Divide the abstracts into their different parts, identify the thesis statement

Abstract#1
“Servility and Destructiveness in Kazuo Ishiguro’s The Remains of the Day.”
Michel Terestchenko
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Thesis statement
The figure of the butler, the protagonist of Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel is a subtle illustration of the ability of human consciousness to deceive itself in what Sartre called “bad faith.”

Main arguments
1) The self-deception is enhanced by being legitimimized in the framework of a professional ethics.
2) This ethics of the “dignity” of a job perfectly well accomplished, which is presented as nothing but blind obedience, not only leads to the character’s failure in his life but, more dangerously, to his serving as an instrument of evil action.

Methodology to be used in the paper
Indirect commentary on latter aspect of the novel can be sought in Sartre’s analysis of “bad faith” and Marx’s of the alienated consciousness but also in the experiments in social psychology conducted by Stanley Milgram which point to the mechanisms by which ordinary people can become agents of mass destruction.

Abstract#2
“Writing in Translationese: Kazuo Ishiguro’s The Remains of the Day and the Uncanny Dialect of the Diasporic Writer.”
Linda Belau & Ed Cameron
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Thesis statement:
This essay argues that with his third novel, Kazuo Ishiguro has crafted a postcolonial work that illustrates how the crisis of decolonization is linked inextricably to the crisis of subjectivity itself.

Main arguments:
1) Unlike the novels of Achebe, Rushdie, and other postcolonial writers who represent colonial and postcolonial conditions by focusing on the actual postcolonial contexts, Ishiguro accomplishes his postcolonial critique by focusing more on the issue of cultural difference within the developed world than on issues explicitly resulting from the decolonizing process in the colonized parts of the world.
2) Furthermore, his focus on the issue of cultural difference in Britain is not articulated around issues of immigration and assimilation of the other but, rather, around the internal otherness of the British subject itself.
3) Ishiguro’s novel in effect argues that this internal otherness, always present to some degree, emerges most prominently during the breakdown of the Empire, when the traditional symbolic coordinates for British identity are weakened.
Conclusions
Ishiguro expresses this perspective in his novel (1) by ever so faintly re-inscribing a traditional narrative form to reflect its internal strangeness or foreignness, (2) by providing an uncanny narrative documentation of the consciousness of a second-class British subject during the height of the decolonization period, and (3) by constructing a narrative that sublimates his own unique Diasporic position as a means of coming to grips with his somewhat unique and personal ethnic and cultural conflicts.

Abstract#3
“What does Heathcliff look like?: Performance in Peter Kosminsky’s Version of Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights.”
Sara Martín Alegre
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Presentation of context:
In the study of film adaptation, plot is often privileged over character.

Identification of relevant issue:
Studying character reveals that the adaptation of novels is dramatisation involving, as regards this particular factor, the transformation of a non-performative aspect of the source text into dramatic roles performed by particular actors. An adaptation can be said to succeed as far as character is concerned when the actor’s performance usurps the reader’s own mental performance and visualisation of character.

Thesis statement:
1) Nonetheless, as Peter Kosminsky’s adaptation of Wuthering Heights (1992)—and especially Ralph Fiennes’s performance as Heathcliff in it—suggests, this process is not dependent on a single factor, be it the artistic quality of the adaptation, its narrative fidelity to the source or its adequacy for a particular historical period.
2) Performance may even succeed in otherwise failed adaptations, as (arguably) happens in the case Kosminsky’s film, which suggests that the reader’s/viewer’s particular response to adaptation deserves further attention.

Abstract#4
“En-gendering the Nation: Mother Africa and the Female Body in Ayi Kwei Armah’s “An African Fable” and Ama Ata Aidoo’s “Everything Counts””
Esther Pujolràs Noguer
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Presentation of context:
The history of the African continent in the late fifties and early sixties is marked by the end—at least theoretically—of colonialism, formally experienced as the independence gained by African nations from European powers. The European imaginary had launched Africa into a pit of nothingness in which time was erased of any historical prescience and pre-historic darkness became the denominator that defined both the African space and their people. Therefore, when African writers took up the pen, they were forced to face this legacy of emptiness and filled the continent with a reassuring
image that would match their experiences as African people. The Mother Africa Trope thus came to their rescue.

**Identification of relevant issue:**
If the European imagination enveloped Africa in darkness and treachery, the sons of Africa contested such vision with the creation of a trope, Mother Africa, which embodied the black continent as a nurturing, powerful and beautiful mother. The liberating streak behind the trope notwithstanding, the truth is that this process of anthropomorphization entails a practice of objectifying women through a persistent and resourceful use of the female body.

**What the paper does:**
The aim of this paper is to show how two contemporary Ghanaian writers, one male and the other female –Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo–, whose literary career developed in the years following the independence of Ghana, employ the Mother Africa trope in the representation of the postcolonial nation that their country came to be as a consequence of the end of British rule.

**Methodology:**

**Thesis statement:**
Borrowing the term “en-gendering the nation” from Elleke Boehmer’s *Stories of Women* (2005), I contend that the female body is conceptualized, apprehended and imagined in significantly different and differing ways depending on the gender of the eyes that en-gender the nation.

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David Owen
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**Presentation of text and context:**
Strictly in terms of episode, Austen’s epistolary novella *Lady Susan* (c.1794) is not fictionalised history. Conventionally, it has often been read as little more than the hedonistic exploits of a maverick, of no broader significance to Austen’s major works and of little discernible connection with the ideas that occupied her later writings.

**Identification of relevant issue:**
But a reassessment of this extraordinary text reveals it to be a highly political account of 1790s England, with the nation torn between the opposing forces of Jacobin and anti-Jacobin responses to the aftermath of the French revolution.

**Thesis statement:**
My essay will suggest that the text can be read as a conservative call to arms that defines the desirable qualities and values of national identity in opposition to a continental ‘Other’ that was perceived to be menacing the British nation to its very core.
Main arguments:
1) By locating the novella’s discord within the context of a traditional, rural English family, threatened by the machinations of an urbane socialite, Austen not only delineates the Jacobin destructiveness facing conservative England, but also emphasises the need for the nation to respond, as one family, to heal itself and avoid calamity.
2) That the defence of these ideals should fall on the shoulders of Lady Susan’s nemesis, Catherine Vernon (her sister-in-law), adds to the novella the additional layer of a Hannah Moreish appeal for like-minded women to take an active role in the struggle for the society whose values they deeply espouse.