

## **Gothic Tradition Spring 2015**

### **Discussion Starter**

Each day, a portion (about one quarter) of the class is required to complete (and turn in) a one-page “Discussion Starter” assignment. These short writings – turned in at the start of class -- give me a sense of what interested you (and what confused you), and also serve as a bit of a prod to make sure you keep up with the reading assignments. You will see that most days on the syllabus I’ve listed “Discussion Starter Group X.” To be clear, you **DO NOT** have to work with a group for these assignments; this just lets you know when your particular assignments are due. I’ll pass around a sign-up sheet in class. Once you’re in a group, make note of it on your syllabus so that you know when you have assignments due.

Discussion Starters are due in hard copy (printed) at the **BEGINNING** of class on your assigned day. If you cannot come to class, or if you forget to bring your paper (or forget to turn it in), please complete one for the next class meeting (on the next assignment). Writing (or handing me) your paper after we’ve already had the discussion is not helpful for me (or you).

Whether you are writing a Discussion Starter for a particular day or not, you need to do work before you come to class to help yourself understand the reading. Don’t just say (to yourself “I didn’t understand the reading.” Focus. Struggle. Work with the text. If you don’t understand something, articulate what it is that you don’t understand. Be specific in your questions about what is confusing about the text. Slow down. Merely skimming the reading is not enough. Writing your Discussion Starter is way to push your thinking, to answer your own questions, and to develop starting points for classroom discussion about the text.

Here is what your Discussion Starter should include:

#### **Quotation**

You should include **ONE** quotation from the day’s reading assignment. You should cite it properly in MLA style (see reverse for MLA style overview). You should then follow up after it with some discussion, of about 2-4 sentences. Why is this quote important? What is interesting/confusing/etc. about it?

#### **Questions**

List 2 (or more) questions you have that you think would be good to discuss. Try to develop open-ended questions (not just “yes/no”) to help us expand discussion.

#### **Big Picture**

We’re reading a genre in this course, and part of genre is figuring out a definition – what is old and what is new, what is following a tradition, and what might be starting a new one? What about this particular reading assignment fits (or doesn’t fit) with what you’ve come to know as the Gothic so far? What new innovations are here? Are there elements of the reading that perhaps don’t seem to fit with the Gothic? Is there a different genre or a sub-genre that you think this book might also be a part of?

Your paper should look like this:

Student Name  
Text title  
Date

**Quotation [along with a brief follow-up]:**

“blah blah blah blah” (123). This quote seems important because .... I was really offended by this part because.....I am wondering if....What is going on this passage....is it possible that the author means....

**Questions for the class [Try for two; more is great!]:**

1. Why does...Is this.....What is the significance of.....Do you think.....
2. What do you think of...What would you do if.....Is this author doing.....Why does this character.....

**Big Picture [2-4 sentences]:**

This book seems to follow [other text we read/other text I know]....

This story is the first time we've encountered X kind of character/plotline/theme/event...

This story connects/defies X convention of the Gothic....

This story seems more like X subgenre or other genre than Gothic....

You will receive a “check” in my book for each Discussion Starter that you complete and submit on time. If I see particularly strong effort (thoughtful questions, very engaged connections, etc.), I can assign a “check plus,” or if it’s a particularly lackluster effort (grammar issues, lack of engagement with the material) I can assign a “check minus,” or, in particularly egregious cases, a zero.

Finally, please be sure to follow these guidelines:

- Discussion Starters should be typed.
- Include your name at the top.
- You DO NOT need to use outside research sources – this is your response.
- You DO NOT, for the Discussion Starters need a works cited list.
- The writing should be standard college-level, free from grammar and spelling problems. You may use “I” in your response, and you may (and should) ask questions. Don’t forget to use MLA style for quotes from the text. You should be using complete, grammatical sentences throughout the Discussion Starters.

**MLA style basics for citing a quote**

Below I have provided an example of a quote integrated into my own writing, with proper citation:

In a particularly frightening moment in *The Castle of Otranto*, the narrator describes “The figure, advancing, said in a submissive voice, ‘Be not alarmed, lady: I will not injure you’” (37).

So you put quotes around the quoted material, and then put a page number in parenthesis at the end, with the period all the way at the end (so it’s clear that the page number goes with that quote). In this instance above, I have a quote inside a quote – the narrator provides a quotation from a character (the figure). I’ve put that quote-within-quote into SINGLE quotation marks within the double quotation marks. I also introduced the quote by saying which text it came from and who was speaking (the narrator). If you needed to include the author name in the citation, it would be (Walpole 37). Note that there is NO COMMA within the citation in MLA style. Please refer to an MLA style guide and make sure that you are doing your citations correctly!