

Spring 2015 Gothic Novel First Paper

For this paper assignment, you will do a close reading of two specific scenes or moments in the texts we've been reading that you think are interesting and significant. These might be scenes from *two different books or scenes from within the same book*. You'll want to look for interesting, engaging scenes that show us something -- a turn in the plot, a change in a character, a switch in the power balance. This is a close reading assignment, which means that you will need to pay attention to the tone, style, and nuances of the specific language in the text. You'll want to focus on specific words and images to explain why a particular scene is so important.

This paper is due at the beginning of class on **THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19th**. The paper will be a **MAXIMUM** of five pages (the Works Cited list might go onto page 6, but does **NOT** need to be on its own page if it fits on the last page of the essay text itself). Within that page limit, you **MUST USE QUOTES** from the text describing each scene, and pay careful attention to the details provided. You should include a works cited list at the end. The paper must be in MLA style.

Possible approaches:

- Choose two characters and compare/contrast the physical descriptions of them.
- Choose two climactic scenes and compare/contrast how they build and release tension.
- Choose two exchanges between characters; scenes like arguments, threats, expressions of love, expressions of hate, or discovery are all good choices.

DO NOT focus on plot summary! You DO NOT need to tell me everything that happens in the story, or even everything that leads up to this particular scene. Keep your focus on the specific moments you have chosen and explain how they compare.

Your paper must have a clear thesis that is specific and focused. A typical thesis for this paper should NOT say "All Gothic novels feature villains....." or "Scary things happen in Gothic novels..." or anything general like that. Here are some sample skeletal thesis ideas to get you going:

- Both novel X and novel Y feature heroines who are described as A, B, and C.
- The climactic scenes of novel Z and novel A portray extreme violence and employ sexualized language.
- The choice of words, double meanings, and tone of voice in conversational exchanges between characters G and B, and characters M and F, highlight the innocence of G and M, compared to the villainy of B and F.
- Pivotal scenes in both novel Q and novel P use darkness and light, silence and noise, to heighten the sense of dread for both characters and readers.

You will need to find a way to connect the two scenes you have chosen. You will want to consider various organizational structures. You might spend the first half of the paper talking about one scene, and the second talking about the other, or you might alternate between the scenes. Carefully consider which organizational scheme will be most useful and clear.

You DO NOT need to do outside research for this paper. If you use outside sources, be sure to cite them; however, I expect that the only sources you will be using are the novels themselves, which should appear in your works cited list.

Just Say NO to: plot summary, outside research, long introductions, generalizations, pointless digressions, and plagiarism. Please note that many Gothic novels fall victim to these vices; however, you are not writing a Gothic novel. You're writing an academic paper ABOUT a Gothic novel.

Helpful Hints for Writing Papers

DO NOT start your paper with any of the following: (Some of these are simply my own pet peeves, but they're also general, vague, bland, or over-used – you can do better!)

- Webster's Dictionary defines "this word" as.....
- Since the dawn of time....
- Man has always...Humans have always....
- Literature has always...All of literature.....Literary history is.....
- In our society....In today's society.....In modern society...
- The purpose of this paper is In this paper, I will attempt to
- "Friendship [or whatever]" means different things to different people....

BE CAREFUL about making claims about "best," "first," "most," "the only," and the like, unless you have some evidence. Check your facts – more than once – before making historical claims, and be sure you know the subject area thoroughly.

BE SPECIFIC. Give examples! You have a case to prove, so you need to show evidence from the text itself.

DO use quotes properly. This means introducing them, citing them, and providing proper context. In the case of quoted dialogue, who speaks the words in the quote? Who hears them? If the "speaker" is a narrator, say so.

DO create an engaging opening for your paper. Spend some time trying out different opening lines. Be dramatic. Be bold. Grab the reader by the throat, or other sensitive area of the body.

DO try a variety of organizational schemes. I strongly recommend that you write up an outline of your paper to help you build your argument. Make liberal use of the "cut" and "paste" commands – move whole blocks of paragraphs around to see if they work better in a different order. If you have a print-out of the essay, try cutting up and putting it back together in a different order; you may find a better way to order your evidence.

DO create transitions between your paragraphs. The first sentence of a new paragraph is a place where you can lead the reader from the previous paragraph's topic into the new paragraph's topic. This is easier if you've already done the previous step and achieved the optimal ORGANIZATION. A well-organized paper should make it easy to create transitions that connect your ideas.

DO make use of the resources available to you, including the Writing Center (3rd floor O'Leary library), your peers, online writing resources, and your professor.

DO start writing early; the best papers result from the multiple draft process. Even if you write a great paper on the first draft, developing a second draft will improve it.

DO give your essay a title. It should be more than just "Essay 1." Put the title at the top and center of your first page. You DO NOT need a title page. Save that tree.

DO NOT use question marks or exclamation marks in your paper, unless they occur within text you are quoting and citing from a source. Are rhetorical questions dreadfully overused in student papers? Yes. Should you avoid them? Yes. Why? Because they usually don't say all that much. Often they serve as "filler," or sometimes, perhaps to raise an emotional issue, usually with a great deal of (over)dramatization. "Hasn't this character suffered enough?" or "Isn't this author being rude?" are questions you ask when clearly YOU believe that the character has suffered or the author is being rude. Rather than ask the question, tell the reader that you think this is the case. All too frequently I see the following construction in papers: "Isn't this true? The answer is obvious." If the answer is obvious, why ask the question? Rhetorical questions are a sure sign to me that you're killing time with filler and haven't given enough thought to the truly puzzling questions that exist in a particular text.