

COM 7 – Literature of Fantasy and the Supernatural

Midterm Essay Guidelines

For your midterm essay you will need to develop a nuanced argument about more than one of the texts we have read in class. Below, you will find (1) a prompt to help you frame your argument, (2) guidelines about what constitutes a good essay, (3) general guidelines for this specific assignment, and (4) a rubric for how your essay will be graded. On the course Canvas site you will also find a sample essay (from a different class context) that models effective rhetorical devices. That sample essay is shorter than this midterm assignment, but it may still be helpful as a model of effective argumentative strategies.

- (1) **Prompt: How does fantasy mirror, distort, or reconfigure our perception of the world? Compare two texts to consider the complex relationship between fantasy and reality.** (Hint: your argument does not need to “answer” this prompt, and certainly should not attempt to address the question in broad, theoretical terms – rather it should use the prompt as a starting point to generate an argument rooted in specific textual passages and details. The best arguments will begin with problems or conflicts that you are able to identify through a close reading of the text and will then use those textual problems to highlight larger conceptual issues.)
- (2) Guidelines for How to Approach Writing a Persuasive, Argumentative Essay:
 - a. Start by **finding passages in the texts that seem interesting because they allow for multiple possible interpretations or raise questions**, rooted in conceptually complicated or difficult aspects of the text. This could involve passages that seem to conflict with or be in tension with one another, or it could involve multiple passages that reveal a similar conflict within themselves.
 - i. For example, a passage where, after reading it, you are able to think “it seems like the passage is saying X, but at the same time it also appears to be saying Y, and Y conflicts with/challenges/problematizes X... so the passage ends up raising a question or creating a problem that requires interpretative work to resolve.”
 - ii. Or, for example, a couple of passages where the way you interpret one passage implies something about the text (a conceptual point) but the way you would interpret another passage implies something conflicting about the text, creating a tension or problem to resolve.
 - b. With this textual conflict in mind, you should think about what reading or interpretation of the text it leads you to.
 - c. Now, compare that reading/interpretation of one text with a reading/interpretation of another text (rooted in the same process of finding conflicts and positing responses to them outlined in a-b above). Make sure that your comparison refers to a shared set of conceptual keywords – like, for instance, ‘fantasy’, ‘reality’, ‘mirroring’, etc.
 - i. Your main argumentative claim will derive from what you see when you compare these different texts’ ways of helping you understand those conceptual keywords

- ii. The logical relations among these multiple steps could look something like the following: “While Text A suggests that fantasy relates to reality in way X, Text B suggests a relation between fantasy and reality that conflicts with X: Y. This conflict makes us question whether one or the other vision of this relation is more convincing. My answer to that question is Z.”
- d. Now you’re ready to write! Make sure your essay does the following:
 - i. Makes **a debatable argument that shows nuance** in its interpretation of the textual sources
 - a) A debatable claim offers an interpretation that the text itself provides the resources to disagree with, so that your reader has convincing grounds to take a position other than your own.
 - b) An argumentative claim will use the text to focus on a conceptual issue or set of conceptual issues – it will not be limited to a simple textual confusion (ie the motivation of a character, which is later clarified, etc.)
 - c) A nuanced argument involves multiple conceptual components with complex logical relations to one another (ie not “passage 1 shows us X, and passage 2 shows us X, and passage 3 shows us X, therefore, X” but rather something like “passage 1 shows us X; however, passage 2 disagrees with X because of Y; Y implies Z, as passage 3 shows us; and Z relates to X because of A; therefore, we can say _____” – in other words, the logic connecting the pieces of the puzzle is complex, involves multiple steps pushing deeper, and enables you to unpack the text’s complexity in a conceptually interesting way that is attuned to the many different factors at play within it)
 - ii. Uses **compelling textual analysis (close reading)** to substantiate that claim
 - a) Since a nuanced claim is multifaceted and involves multiple steps, the textual analysis will have to substantiate each of those steps in turn
 - b) The claim will thus require close reading of multiple textual moments to be fully substantiated
 - c) The close reading will use evidence and reasoning to argue for insightful interpretations of the text
 - iii. The claim’s **conceptual significance** is clearly articulated – why it matters which side of the argument you come down on or what interpretation you choose.

(3) Guidelines for Assignment:

- a. Your midterm essay is a complete essay assignment. Your final essay will be based on your midterm essay and will offer you a chance to revise it in keeping with the feedback you receive on the midterm. Separate guidelines will be posted for the final essay.
- b. The midterm is due on Canvas by 11:59PM on 5/19/20
 - i. It should be ~5-6 pages in length, written in a standard font (ie. Times New Roman, Calibri), and double-spaced
 - ii. Include citations for all quotations and a bibliography for all works cited

- iii. Your essay will be submitted on Canvas and will be checked for plagiarism via TurnItIn, an electronic resource that compares your work to online sources and a comprehensive database of other papers. TurnItIn creates an originality report identifying whether parts of your work match or are similar to any of their sources. The work submitted to TurnItIn will be retained as source documents in the TurnItIn reference database to be used solely for the purpose of checking future submitted work for originality.

(4) Rubric for Midterm Essay:

	(F)	(D)	(C)	(B)	(A)
Nuanced Argumentative Claim	Does not have a claim or claim is unrelated to the text and/or prompt. Difficult to parse/identify what the point is.	Does not make a clear and cohesive main claim that can structure the argument. Simply states or summarizes things about the text. Makes some kind of point but in a way that does not allow for the development of a conceptual argument.	Makes a claim that has conceptual value, but the claim may be overly reductive (too simple), lack awareness of alternative perspectives, or lack the possibility to develop argumentative depth. The claim does not respond to a conceptual problem and/or seems unoriginal.	Makes an original claim that responds to a conceptual problem, though the claim may lack some nuance or require further development in its conceptual components. The claim recognizes the possibility of alternative views but may require additional development to respond to them fully.	Makes a nuanced, original claim that responds to a conceptual problem in the text(s). The claim shows insight into the text and its context. The claim's multiple components trace out a deep argument. The claim is situated relative to possible alternative views.
Analysis/Close Reading/Argument	No or meagre analysis and articulation of reasoning. (i.e. does not interpret or have any points of analysis).	Lacks textual evidence and logical articulation of reasoning (ie just asserts opinions with no grounding, or seems to make irrelevant, scattered points, etc.).	Uses textual evidence and explicates the author's reasoning, but simply rephrases or summarizes chosen text without adding any analysis or interpretation or skips steps in reasoning or key pieces of evidence or both.	Uses evidence and reasoning to substantiate the main claim, but perhaps overlooks a couple of important issues or requires further development in some close readings. Substantiates most aspects of the claim but may not be fully convincing and may require additional development to articulate the claim's nuance.	The essay substantiates the claim with insightful analysis of textual evidence and clear reasoning that provides for original and conceptually rich interpretations. The argument develops all necessary conceptual components to convince a skeptical reader of the paper's main claim. Analysis recognizes textual complexity.
Coherent essay Structure/unity	Reading shows no development or clear flow of thought.	Reading shows incoherent or illogical development. Uses circular logic or does not link pieces of analysis and claim together. Claim does not have sub-components or sub-components are not developed.	May contain some details or observations irrelevant to the argument in close readings. May present instances of incoherent development of essay or paragraphs, though it still makes sense in general and attempts to deal with sub-components.	Essay and paragraph development generally coherent & logical. May contain one or two examples of generalizations or unneeded paraphrase. Sub-components are developed but may still need further articulation.	Essay and paragraph development are coherent, logical & rhetorically effective. All paragraphs relate to the point of the close reading. The claim's sub-components are developed in an ordered, logical fashion.
Clarity/polish/correctness/mechanics	Exhibits clear lack of foundational writing skills. Reader cannot understand text or paragraphs or distinguish between phrases used. Does not cite any sources.	So many mistakes in standard prose style (e.g., diction, grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling) that reader can't understand individual sentences or paragraphs. Does not cite sources or cites inconsistently.	Exhibits immature style: e.g., inept or imprecise phrasing. Word choice often problematic. Multiple and significant syntactical, grammatical and punctuation errors and/or multiple citation errors.	Generally clearly written, but sentence structure unvaried and simple. Style may be wordy/repetitive. Diction, grammar, syntax, punctuation, and spelling mostly correct, may contain minor mistakes. References (parenthetical or notes) identify evidence but may not always follow correct or consistent form.	Exhibits a mature and, ideally, graceful style with varying sentence structure. Contains no significant lapses in clarity; diction, grammar, syntax, punctuation, & spelling are essentially correct. Consistent references (parenthetical or notes) identify evidence.