

ENGLISH 230 PAPER #2

The Art of Close Reading: Scrutinizing Werewolves



ASSIGNMENT: Choose a particular passage in one of werewolf texts we read by Marie de France, Angela Carter, and Ursula K. Le Guin, and compose a close reading that sensitively explores its meaning and analyzes the specific techniques it employs.

LENGTH: 750 words (roughly 3 pages)

DUE DATE: Submit on Blackboard by the beginning of class on Friday, October 30th

Unlike your first paper, which focused on “big picture” issues like character development and theme, this assignment is focused on a single passage and asks you to employ close reading, a key method in literary criticism.

Although “close reading” may sound intimidating, it is not so very different from the interpretative strategies we use every day in our conversations. Think of the way we sometimes zero in on a particular statement that someone important to us has made, for example, and carefully analyze its every nuance—from its exact wording, to its context of utterance, to details of vocal inflection and body language—so as to extract its full significance.

In close readings, the devil is in the details. Word choice and phrasing can speak volumes; imagery is crucial; verbal echoes of other works and genres reverberate; and we need to be constantly alert to subtleties of tone.

This is not to say, of course, that close readings have no focus and simply jump from one detail to the next. Rather, you still need a thesis statement and careful argumentation, even if it’s only to point out how masterfully the author uses x, y, and z to send (or contribute to) a certain message, or to problematize a certain issue, or to achieve a certain effect. Your detailed analysis of techniques, in other words, has a point to make, and you should always set it in the context of the work as a whole. (Just where the passage occurs in the story, for example, can have great significance.)

I will be providing you with examples of close readings that will help guide you in composing your paper, but remember that there is no one “right” way to do this—you are exploring how a particular passage affects you, personally, and investigating how it achieves this magic. **Thus, while you are free to go somewhere personal in this paper, you MUST also include careful, sensitive, and detailed analysis of the passage you selected.**

ENGLISH 230 PAPER RUBRIC (KEYED TO ELECTRONIC VERSION ON BLACKBOARD)

I. CONTENT 30%

- **Focus and Length:** Does this paper pursue an argument that fits the assignment? Does it meet the minimum length requirements and include sufficient detail to make a persuasive case?
- **Mastery of Source Material:** Does this paper demonstrate a good understanding of its source material? Does it quote, summarize, and paraphrase from the texts it treats effectively?
- **Originality and creativity:** Does the paper convey strong insights into the texts, contexts, and issues it discusses? Does it stick to the surface or push deeper?

INADEQUATE EFFORT	LOW QUALITY	COMPETENCE	HIGH QUALITY	DISTINCTION
(F)	(D)	(C)	(B)	(A)

II. ORGANIZATION 30%

- **Intro/Conclusion:** Does this paper have a compelling introduction and a satisfying conclusion?
- **Thesis Statement:** Does this paper have a clear thesis statement that signals the main point of view you will develop and support throughout the paper?
- **Body:** Does it unfold clearly in cohesive paragraphs? Have you provided helpful topic sentences and transitions to help orient the reader? Does it build organically rather than jumping from topic to topic or meandering aimlessly?
- **Overall:** Does the overall paper have a balanced feel? Has it been shaped to enhance rhetorical effectiveness?

INADEQUATE EFFORT	LOW QUALITY	COMPETENCE	HIGH QUALITY	DISTINCTION
(F)	(D)	(C)	(B)	(A)

III. EXPRESSION 30%

- **Voice:** Does this paper have a strong sense of personal engagement with its subject matter? Does it include vivid phrasing and lively details that engage the reader?
- **Clarity/Style:** Are your thoughts clearly expressed? Do the sentences flow smoothly, and have you avoided awkward, repetitious, or vague phrasings? Is there a good mix of long and short sentences? Is word choice precise and effective?
- **Grammar/Mechanics:** Is sentence structure clear and logical? Have you caught and corrected errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation? (Check especially for run-ons, fragments, subject-verb agreement, clauses that are stuck on without a clear grammatical relationship to the sentence structure, and comma and semi-colon use.)

INADEQUATE EFFORT	LOW QUALITY	COMPETENCE	HIGH QUALITY	DISTINCTION
(F)	(D)	(C)	(B)	(A)

IV. FORMATTING AND CITATION 10%

- Does this paper conform to MLA formatting conventions? Does it have a Works Cited page and are quotations identified with parenthetical in-text citation?

INADEQUATE EFFORT	LOW QUALITY	COMPETENCE	HIGH QUALITY	DISTINCTION
(F)	(D)	(C)	(B)	(A)

FINAL PAPER GRADE =

NOTE: *The Purdue Writing Lab is an excellent resource to consult for help with MLA formatting or any other phase of the writing process, from brainstorming to polishing.*