

English 197: Writing Link with Comparative Literature 272

Comparison Essay Assignment and Guidelines

Length and Due Dates

Length: 1,250-1500 words, formatted as described in the “Essays” portion of the syllabus

First Draft Due: Wednesday, November 5, at beginning of class; bring in **two** electronic formats

Final Draft Due: Wednesday, November 12, at beginning of class; bring in **two** electronic formats

Assignment

For this assignment, you will compare and contrast **two** of the following films: *Cat People*, *The Exorcist*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Psycho*, *Night of the Living Dead*, and *Rosemary’s Baby*. Your essay should concentrate on one of the following themes:

- the role of the family or marriage in creating horror
- the critique of particular institutions
- the source of horror
- the relationship between seeing and knowing
- the function of the conclusion
- the use of space
- the representation of the human body
- the fractured or doubled self

In your essay, you will present an argument about the significance of the films’ connections, and you will develop this argument by analyzing the narrative and formal elements (*mise-en-scene*, editing, cinematography, sound) of both films.

Guidelines and Expectations

1. Although I have provided a list of themes, you will need to narrow the theme to develop an angle of comparison/contrast. For example, one could discuss space in terms of the movement between or toward particular types of spaces, the sense of entrapment within space, or the vulnerability of “safe” spaces.
2. Effective comparison/contrast essays highlight how similarities and differences reveal something important about each film, the theme, or the genre. As you develop your essay, consider how each film “unlocks” the other. Ask yourself why it is important to examine these films together in relation to the theme.
3. Rather than offering a catalogue of your observations regarding the films’ similarities and differences, your essay should pose an argument about the significance of the connection. Your thesis should not simply state that “films X and Y treat theme Z similarly and differently.”
4. While you can organize your comparison/contrast essay in several ways, you should avoid discussing one film in full, then turning to the other. This format relegates the comparison/contrast to the second half of the paper. Instead, you can structure the first part of the body around similarities, moving from one film to the other, and the second part around differences, discussing each film in turn. You can also focus each paragraph on one similarity or difference, discussing examples from both films.
5. Although the comparison/contrast essay examines a large-scale theme, close textual analysis will serve as your main source of evidence. In supporting your argument, you will

need to pay attention to how the films address the theme through narrative and cinematic techniques. Focus on specific shots or scenes and the cinematic codes at work in those shots or scenes.

6. You should not use outside sources to compose your essay. Focus on your interpretation of the scene, drawing on selections from the Comparative Literature 272 packet as they support your argument. If you quote, summarize, or paraphrase a course text, use MLA parenthetical format to cite your source and include a Works Cited list.
7. You may incorporate screen shots into your analysis. However, you must explicate the image within the body of the essay rather than using screen shots as decorations. Identify and discuss the visual details that illustrate your claim about the films. When using screen shots, caption each image (for example, "Figure 1: Mother's face superimposed on Norman's") and reference the figure number in your text (for example, "The dissolve that briefly merges mother's and Norman's faces marks the difference between seeing and knowing (see Figure 1)").
8. Do not forget the arguments posed during class discussion and on the electronic bulletin board. A review of your notes and the postings on a particular film may help you to ask key questions and shape your analysis. You will, of course, cite specific words and interpretations borrowed from classmates, your cinema studies TA, or Dr. Bean.
9. Clips of all scenes for analysis are available online and on our shared drive in the computer lab. You may access our class "Clips" folder during public hours in Mary Gates 076. You may also access clips via the course web site. Select "Links" from the main page, follow the link to the "Clips" page and log on with your UW Net ID when prompted.
10. When describing a film's plot or stylistic techniques, use the present tense (for example, "Rosemary gorges on raw meat," or "the frame seemingly entraps the characters").
11. If you're having difficulty devising an approach to the essay, or if you want to discuss ideas-in-progress, come to my office hours or email me to set up an appointment.

Grading

I will use the attached grading scale to evaluate the comparison essay. Failure to submit an essay draft will result in a 20-point deduction from the final grade, as revising from feedback constitutes an essential part of the essay assignment. Late essay revisions will receive a 10-point deduction per day late, including weekends and holidays. I will make exceptions to the lateness policy only in cases of documented illness or family emergency. Please remember that technology glitches do not constitute valid excuses for lateness.