

English 197: Writing Link with Comparative Literature 272

Essay 3 Assignment and Guidelines

Length and Due Dates

Length: 1,250-1500 words, formatted as described in the “Essays” portion of the syllabus; essay must include MLA-style citations and a “Works Cited” list

First Draft Due: Wednesday, November 26, by 10:00 p.m. via GoPost

Final Draft Due: Wednesday, December 3, at beginning of class; bring in **two** electronic formats

Assignment

For this assignment, you will respond to one of the following questions:

1. In her essay, “His Body, Herself: Gender in the Slasher Film,” Carol Clover identifies the “Final Girl” as a definitive component of the slasher horror film. The Final Girl “looks death in the face; but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued . . . or to kill him herself . . .” (241). According to Clover, the Final Girl’s gender fluidity allows her to function as a figure with whom the slasher film’s audience—comprised largely of adolescent males—can identify, particularly as the plot progresses to emphasize her point of view. Although Clover focuses on the slasher cycle of the 1970s and early 1980s, one could argue that Clarice Starling from *Silence of the Lambs* is a Final Girl. Analyze how *Silence of the Lambs* narratively and visually constructs Clarice as a Final Girl. Does Clarice maintain all of the elements Clover describes, or does her characterization represent a revision of the Final Girl figure? While your essay should focus on *Silence of the Lambs*, you may reference Laurie in *Halloween*, a character Clover uses to define the Final Girl.
2. Comparative Literature 272 has explored “the idea of the modern monster as mutable, protean, unspeakable and unknowable, but also as ironically, and frighteningly, domesticated” (Bean) in films like *Psycho*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *Rosemary’s Baby*, and *The Exorcist*. Do more recent horror film monsters exhibit this blend of familiarity and inscrutability? Analyze the construction of the monster in one or two of the following films: *Halloween*, *Carrie*, *Videodrome*, *The Shining* or *Silence of the Lambs*. What characteristics define the contemporary monster? How does your selected film or films use narrative and visual codes to delineate the monster? In your analysis, refer to at least one of the essays from the Comparative Literature 272 packet—Clover, Carroll, Modleski or Halberstam. Carroll’s examination of “simultaneously attractive and repellent” monsters (224) and his concept of fission versus fusion may prove helpful as you formulate your argument. So too may Halberstam’s discussion of postmodern monsters who “are already inside” (258), Clover’s description of the slasher film’s killer or Modleski’s analysis of monsters with whom audiences have difficulty identifying.
3. Theorists Carol Clover and Judith Halberstam have examined horror’s play with gender identity. Clover notes that, in slasher films, “gender is less a wall than a permeable membrane” (245). Halberstam argues that *Silence of the Lambs* posits “posthuman gender”—“a gender beyond the body, beyond the human”; rather than understanding gender as innate, Buffalo Bill “reads it only as . . . an external attribute” (265). How do *Carrie*, *Halloween*, *The Shining* or *Videodrome* represent gender? Is gender inherent or is it fluid or superficial? In your analysis, you may focus on one film from the list or compare two. You must also engage the Clover and/or Halberstam articles.
4. In *Psycho*, Norman Bates’s killing impulse is explained at the end by the psychiatrist as a psychosexual disorder—a pathologic attachment to his mother and repression of sexual attraction to other woman. Since *Psycho*, gender and sexuality have become reoccurring and interrelated themes in the horror film genre. Analyze sexuality and/or gender in *Carrie*, *Halloween*, *The Shining*, *Silence of the Lambs* or *Videodrome*. In what ways are sexuality and/or gender part of the source of horror in these films? How are certain conflicts (between attraction/repulsion, self/other, powerful/powerless, dream/reality, exteriority/interiority, present/past, etc.) in these films expressed through the theme of sexuality and/or gender? In your analysis, you may focus on one film from the list or compare two. You must refer to at least one of the essays—Clover, Carroll, Modleski or Halberstam.

Guidelines and Expectations

1. Although I have asked specific questions, you will need to develop an approach to your selected question and formulate an argument about the film or films.
2. The assignment requires you to engage with scholarly articles on specific films or the horror genre. Note that all the questions specify that you integrate at least one of the articles read in the last third of the Comparative Literature 272 course. Besides drawing on the insight of other scholars as you develop your argument, you must refer to the articles through relevant quotations or paraphrase. The integration of sources allows you to support your argument with reference to scholarly authorities and, more importantly, to expand your perspective on the film(s) as you engage with other writers. Think of the essay as an opportunity to enter an academic dialogue on the film(s). When you cite the work of other writers, take care to connect that writer's arguments to the arguments you're making about the film(s). Refrain from simply quoting another scholar and expecting the audience to understand how that scholar's words support your point. Other writers don't compose their articles with your argument in mind; therefore, you have to draw the connection between their work and yours.
3. While your essay will incorporate the ideas of film theorists, close textual analysis will serve as your main source of evidence. In supporting your argument, you will need to pay attention to how the film or films construct the monster or Final Girl, represent gender, or express horror via sexuality and/or gender. Focus on specific shots or scenes and the narrative and cinematic codes at work in those shots or scenes.
4. 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: Clarice stumbling through darkness") and reference the figure number in your text (for example, "Clarice is stalked by Buffalo Bill, who gazes at her through night-vision goggles (see Figure 1)").
5. 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.
6. When describing a film's plot or stylistic techniques, use the present tense (for example, "Max inserts the gun into the slit in his stomach," or "the split screen shows both Carrie and her victims").
7. 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 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.