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# ENGLISH 345: WOMEN FILMMAKERS

## ESSAY 1

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### LENGTH AND DUE DATE

**Length:** 5-6 pages, formatted as described in the "Essays" portion of the syllabus

**Due:** Friday, May 14, by 10 p.m. via Collect It

### ASSIGNMENT

For the essay, you will compare and contrast two films, writing on one of the following topics. In your essay, you will present an argument about the significance of the films' connections, and you will develop this argument by analyzing the thematic, ideological, narrative, and/or formal elements (mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, sound) of both films.

1. What connection do two of the following films draw between personal relationships and institutional structures (the family, military unit, school, and political parties, for example): *Beau Travail*, *Diary for My Children*, *The Hurt Locker*, and *Marianne and Juliane*? To begin exploring the topic, consider the types of personal relationships institutions support, restrict or deny. How do institutional ideologies shape relationships between individuals?
2. How does history shape identity in *Diary for My Children* and *Marianne and Juliane*?
3. *Beau Travail* and *The Hurt Locker* portray worlds populated almost exclusively by men. Compare the representation of masculinity in both films. What actions, values and beliefs constitute manhood in these works? Do the films offer a singular portrait of masculinity, or do characters embody conflicting visions of male identity?
4. Expand one of your postings on *Diary for My Children*, *The Hurt Locker* or *Marianne and Juliane* to incorporate a comparison with one of the other listed films or *Beau Travail*. If you choose this option, clear your topic with me, as not all posting questions will produce feasible topics for a longer essay.

### GUIDELINES

1. Although I have provided questions, you will need to develop an angle of comparison/contrast. For example, one could approach the question regarding institutions and personal relationships by examining how the selected films use figure movement to explore how institutions prescribe physical interaction. Other approaches could involve examining how motifs juxtapose relationships within and outside institutions or analyzing relationships that arise from resistance to an institution.
2. Effective comparison/contrast essays highlight how similarities and differences reveal something important about each film, the question, or the filmmaker(s). As you develop your essay, consider how each film "unlocks" the other. Ask yourself why it is important to examine these films together.
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 issue 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 questions, 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 topic through narrative and/or cinematic techniques. Focus on specific shots or scenes and the cinematic codes at work in those shots or scenes. You may also reference course readings to support your claims. When you quote, summarize, or paraphrase a source, please use MLA format. Please include a works cited list that lists the films and readings referenced in your essay.
6. Remember that you are writing to an audience who has already viewed the films. Therefore, your essay should not offer plot summaries. Instead, any reference to the films—dialogue quotations, scene descriptions, explanations of narrative movement—should support your analysis.
7. Do not forget the arguments posed in class, the course packet or the electronic posting area. A review of lecture notes, readings and 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 or other authors.
8. 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: Juliane's face merged with Marianne's") and reference the figure number in your text (for example, "Although physically separated by a glass pane that does not allow them to touch or hear one another, Juliane's reflection merges with Marianne's face, signifying the sisters' emotional—and perhaps ideological—connection (see Figure 1)").
9. When describing a film's plot or stylistic techniques, use the present tense (for example, "James lifts the bomb," or "as Juli gazes at a building demolition, the scene cuts to a flashback").
10. The course "Assignments" page has sample comparative essays from previous 345 courses. Although the topics and films do not mirror yours, the samples provide models for developing, structuring, and supporting a comparative film analysis.
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 an eighty-point grading rubric to evaluate the compare/contrast essay. Late essays 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.