English 1102.090 (Online) - Reading Themes in Literature (Digital Culture)

Winter 2017 - Douglas College - David N. Wright

Essay Assignment #1 - Close Reading

~750 - 1000 Words (3 - 4 pages)

Due: Feb. 15, 2017, by Email

Weight: 20%

Task: After choosing **one** of the three questions below, write an essay that interprets a particular facet of **either** *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* **or** *JPod* and makes a claim in support of something you think is significant about what the text represents.

Notes: This writing assignment emphasizes close reading, without need to read beyond the novel. You should focus your interpretation on how a specific element of the text diverges from ["normative"](http://digitalcultureslab.ca/douglascollege-online1102/winter2017/lecture-module-3/) meanings. Avoid trying to address the *entire* text, or multiple characters, and do not spend a great deal of time recounting plot events. You should show your audience how an interpretation of specific **things** in the text works and what's significant about those **things** when we try to understand how the text makes meaning. You should not present a book review or plot synopsis that serves only to demonstrate you have read the book. Focus on how one of the contexts below is represented in a **single** character,

symbol, metaphor, or event in the text, and which can be evidenced through a specific passage or two in the text. Then, speak to how that representation--as illustrated by your interpretation of the passage from the text--diverges from--or affirms--our expectations, assumptions, or biases. Finally, suggest how your interpretation--as evidenced by the passage from the text--is significant for our reading of the novel.

Remember that what I expect from you is that you have something to say about how the novel makes meaning. Do not write for any expectation other than that you have a willing reader who wants to read your interpretation of the text at hand. Please do not write for what you think I expect. Write what *you* think. Taking the above instructions into account, I want to read about your perspective, not the perspective you think I want from you. **Your audience is NOT me. Your audience is a group of people who have read the text and who are curious about what you think is significant about it.**

While format, style, word count, and other formal elements of the essay count toward your assessment in this assignment, the majority of your grade comes from the soundness and presentation of your content. Pay attention to how the essay demonstrates good sentence structure, word choice, paragraphing, logic, coherence, clarity, cohesion, and thoughtfulness. An essay that is perfect formally, but demonstrates poor sentence structure, incoherent word choice, poor paragraph structure, poor logic, lack of clarity, rushed and unresolved claims will be graded far, far lower than an essay that is sub-par formally but reflects solid sentence structure, clear syntax, word choices, paragraphing, and logic, precise focus, coupled with thoughtful, resolved, and assertive claims speaking to what's signifiant about the text. Obviously, formatting is important, but for example, a terrible essay that meets

the word count will not pass; an excellent essay that does not meet the word count will pass.

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1) What is significant about the text's narrative?

How is the narrative of one of the texts constructed and why is its construction compelling or unique. As you write, consider describing the general characteristics of the text (e.g., plot, genre, characterization, setting, and style) but also interpreting one or two key passages in detail.

Below are some questions to help you get started. These are *potential* avenues for discussion. Please do not treat these questions as needing to be answered in your paper. You could write a paper that addresses or responds to none of these questions. At most, you should respond to one or maybe two of the questions below and remember that you must assert what's significant for our reading in your answer to these questions. These questions are here to help you get started or think about what you have to do. They are not meant to be [prescriptive](https://www.google.ca/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=prescriptive).

* What is the form of the text? How are pieces of the story stitched together?
* How is time structured? Is it chronological? Non-linear?
* How does the text flash back or flash forward?
* How does it use print style (typefaces, script), if at all?
* How is it focalized? Who presents the story? What do they remember, know, ignore, or forget? How do they travel from place to place or moment to moment?

* While reading, what must we assume or suspend?

* Does the narrative have a beginning, middle, and end? If so, then where are they?
  If not, then why?

* Is there resolution on the last page? Does it change our interpretation?

If you choose this option, feel free to write about the overall form of the text and to also interpret a specific passage or two where the text's narrative structure clearly influences how the story unfolds. Since you're writing an academic argument, you should probably include a claim/thesis supported by evidence from the text.

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2) What is the geographic setting of the text, and why is that setting significant?

Describe one geographic setting in one of the texts and explain why that setting is significant. Of note, this geographic setting should be an actual place that exists or once existed on Earth. As you write, consider the details that matter for the geography of fiction: names of countries and states/provinces, demographics, capital cities, urban and rural locations, histories of place, climate, landscape. You should refer to passages in the text that describe the setting and the emphasis of this assignment should be on the significance of that setting and how it "makes meaning" in text.

Below are some questions to help you get started. These are *potential* avenues for discussion. Please do not treat these questions as needing to be answered in your paper. You could write a paper that addresses or responds to none of these questions. At most, you should respond to one or maybe two of the questions below

and remember that you must assert what's significant for our reading in your answer to these questions. These questions are here to help you get started or think about what you have to do. They are not meant to be [prescriptive](https://www.google.ca/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=prescriptive).

* Where does the text take place?
* Where do characters say they are from? Where are they going? Where do they feel like they belong?
* How does the text describe its settings? From whose perspective(s)?
* What values does the text associate with land? With rural areas? With urban areas?
* How does your familiarity with the setting influence how you visualize the text?
* When you talk about settings in the text, how specific can you get? Country? City? Neighbourhood? Street? Building? Why does this specificity matter?

If you choose this option, feel free to interpret one particular geographic setting in the text. When you address the significance of the geographic setting, you can focus on the particulars of that setting as they are outlined in a passage or two from your selected text. Since you're writing an academic argument, you should probably include a claim/thesis supported by evidence from the text.

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3) What is significant about the language (words) in the text?

How is the language (words) in one of the texts compelling or unique. As you write, consider describing the general characteristics of the text (e.g., plot, genre,

characterization, setting, and style) but also interpreting one or two key passages in detail.

Below are some questions to help you get started. These are *potential* avenues for discussion. Please do not treat these questions as needing to be answered in your paper. You could write a paper that addresses or responds to none of these questions. At most, you should respond to one or maybe two of the questions below and remember that you must assert what's significant for our reading in your answer to these questions. These questions are here to help you get started or think about what you have to do. They are not meant to be [prescriptive](https://www.google.ca/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=prescriptive).

* How would you describe the language of the text?
* Which metaphors and phrases are repeated throughout the text?
* How do characters speak to each other? To themselves? How many languages do they use? How do they translate or switch across languages?
* How would you describe the voice of the narrator?
* Which languages does the text combine or juxtapose?
* When does the language convey information? When is it ambiguous?
* Does the text create its own language? Its own words? If so, then why?
* How does the text sound when you read it aloud?
* How is language embodied in the text?
* Does the language correspond with your everyday life? What must you translate or look up? How does this influence your interpretation?

If you choose this option, feel free to write about the overall language in the text and interpret a specific passage or two where language (words) influences how

communication unfolds in the text. Since you're writing an academic argument, you should probably include a claim/thesis supported by evidence from the text.

Please consult the course outline for the formal requirements, expectations, and penalties associated with this assignment. All course policies and requirements apply to this assignment.