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English 312/Film Studies 380: Shakespeare and Film
Fall 2013

Close Reading Paper Assignment

In this assignment, you will craft a 4-6 page analysis of a film via its structural/visual components. You will choose one scene from one of the films we have seen thus far this semester and do a close analysis of its construction. In essence, you will consider questions of how visual rhetoric complements, contributes to and complicates meaning in the scene. While a successful formal analysis can be accomplished via various means, below is a template for the assignment that you can follow:

1. Summarize the scene's content (what is happening here – what is this scene's significance to the narrative?)
2. Complete a thorough description of each of the scene's following components:
 - a) Lighting: including contrast (light/shadow), accent (where the light lends emphasis), ambient (natural) vs. artificial lighting and tone (how lighting effects color and focus).
 - b) Composition: including framing, the way in which the scene positions objects in relation to one another, the sorts of geometrical patterns emphasized in various shots that comprise a scene.
 - c) Mise-en-scène: What is the scene? How are the objects/people arranged? What is in the foreground; what in the background? What do the various shots in the scene seem to ask the viewer to focus on?
3. After considering the following elements, revisit your initial claims. How does a close analysis of the scene's visual components alter, complement or complicate your initial reading of what the scene is about? How does it add nuance to what the scene communicates? How does it provide a subtext, or underlying possibility to the narrative presented in the scene?

Some advice:

1. As with any close reading or analysis, the more specific you are, the stronger your claims will seem to your reader. Remember, a scene in a film has all the intricacies of a conversation with a family member – there is a lot going on besides what is said.
2. TAKE YOUR TIME. You will not be able to do the sort of close work with your chosen scene if you rush through it. You should spend a good amount of time just taking notes

on the scene (watch it several times, look at freeze frames of individual moments to help you identify individual components, etc), and also spend time really thinking about how a close analysis of various visual elements allows for a deeper understanding of how a given scene communicates meaning.

3. Watch for repetition. Once you have said something once do not repeat it unless you are developing that claim further.

All assignments should be double-spaced, written in standard font (such as 12-pt. Times New Roman), include page numbers and a Works Cited list (the only work necessary for this assignment is the film with which you choose to work).