

Eng 140.07 / Eng 140.08
Spring 2018
Synthesis and Analysis
Essay #2: Making an Interpretation – *Rear Window*

Rough Draft Due: Sunday, March 25

Final Draft Due: Monday, April 2

Length: 4-5 Pages

Overview:

In this essay, we are looking to:

- Present a clear, well-considered assertion to our readers
- Forecast how we will build our case
- Support our assertion using primary and secondary resource materials
- Synthesize these resources into our argument and analyze how these resources help us understand our argument
- Consider other viewpoints
- Maintain a reasonable, well-balanced tone

Specifics to Interpreting for Meaning:

An interpretation is an assertion about the meaning or significance of the piece. We are not looking for “the moral of the story.” We are looking to consider, explore, and examine ideas / themes suggested by the story.

In addition to asserting the interpretation, you must present an argument for it. You may assume readers are familiar with the story, but you should not assume readers understand your interpretation – nor accept it. Therefore, you may need to summarize the plot of the story for us, but only briefly – interpretation is more than merely recounting the plot for your readers.

For our essay, we will be using the romantic thriller *Rear Window* as our text. In our discussions of the film, we will examine several different methods to “reading” the film. This may lead you to write about the overall theme of the film.

For example, you could make the following assertion:

In *Rear Window*, Alfred Hitchcock demonstrates the power of watching by making us accomplices in the main character’s voyeurism. Hitchcock illustrates that while voyeurism is a creative act, it is not necessarily an innocent one.

You may choose, however, to approach the story from one its elements:

- Character
- Setting
- Literary Motif
- Plot Structure
- Symbols

You will need to review the text several times, keeping in mind different suggestions for interpreting – “re-reading the text” with different approaches or ideas in mind can help you to discover how different aspects of the novel work together.

To focus on **Character**:

- Identify the character’s motivations, conflicts, doubts
- Consider whether the character changes or learns anything in the course of the story
- Focus how the character relates to other characters
- Decide what you consider to be the character’s virtues and / or vices
- Consider how the character fits into and is defined by society – especially in terms of class, age, gender.

To focus on **Setting**:

- Consider how the setting signals what is happening and whether it comments on the action.
- Look for cause-and-effect connections between the setting and what the characters are doing.
- Think of how the historical period or cultural context of the story might affect what happens.
- Think of the setting in symbolic terms

To focus on **Plot Structure**:

- Think of the story as a series of images (more like a collage or a dream) and look for ways of understanding the arrangement of these events.
- Think of the story as a sequence of stages or steps leading to a new level of awareness or understanding
- Look at repetitions of patterns and events in the story

To focus on **Literary Motif**:

- Consider whether the story could be seen as an initiation, a journey, a fall from innocence, the character’s disillusionment.

To focus on **Symbol**:

- Identify any universal symbols in the story – how are they used?
- Identify any intrinsic (contextual) symbols in the story – what makes the object symbolic?

Argue for your interpretation not so much to convince readers to adopt your view, but rather to convince readers that it is a plausible interpretation. Look at how the scholars and critics we have read in class approach the film. Do you agree with what they have to say? Why? An essential strategy would be to show readers how you “read the film,” referring to specific details and explaining what you think these details mean in light of your thesis.

1. The primary source of support for your argument, then, is the text itself, but you are not limited to just the film;
2. **You will also need to incorporate the views of at least two other critics / authors from the articles we discussed in class.**

These include:

- Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”
- Ruth Perlmutter, “*Rear Window*: A ‘Construction Story’”
- John Belton, “The Space of *Rear Window*”
- Lawrence Howe, “Through the Looking Glass: Reflexivity, Reciprocity, and Defenestration in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*”
- Barton R. Palmer, “The Metafictional Hitchcock: The Experience of Viewing and the Viewing of Experience in *Rear Window* and *Psycho*.”

You may use the ideas of these writers to support your own; however, you may also choose to disagree and refute their ideas.

3. Quote, summarize, and paraphrase scenes or sequences from the film. However, you should do more than just refer readers to a specific moment; explain the scene and its relevance to your thesis.

Remember to document your material carefully. Paraphrased material – as well as quoted material – must be documented. Include a works cited page referencing all source material.