Paper #1 ~ Explication for Macbeth

DUE: Tuesday, March 2 – in class

Assignment: Write a 4 – 5 page explication paper (1200–1500 words) on one of the assigned passages from Macbeth. Your analysis should address some of the historical and theoretical concerns that we have addressed during the first two course units; the best approach is to use some of the questions on the first handout on Macbeth that also lists scenes at the bottom of the page. The emphasis in this paper will be on detailed textual analysis of a single passage, although you should also demonstrate how the analysis of your specific passage fits into the larger dramatic structure of the play. You must also make direct use of ideas from lecture and the course readings (essay handouts) in your analysis.

Stage 1: practice explication skills: From the passages posted on the course website, choose 3 scenes you find interesting and either print a copy from the website or get a photocopy in class. Using the “Explication / Close Reading Guidelines” handout, write in notes and interpretations for each passage. You should write all over the page, preferably using a few different colors of highlighter or pen. You may also type up some of your interpretations in a separate file. I will grade each of your “explication sheets” according to a check (√) system and that will factor into your grade on this paper. After you have completed all three, select one that is the most interesting and continue developing your interpretive ideas, perhaps by doing more of the Explication exercises. At this point you should definitely start typing up your brainstorming ideas, keeping in mind that you will probably use only a portion of those ideas and discard the rest. I would also like you to choose one of the theoretical or historical essays we have read and select a few concepts and brief quotations (2–3) that will help you to frame your close reading.

Stage 2: write up a rough draft: You will be required to turn in two stages of rough draft work. If you are someone who tends to compose and revise the entire paper on the computer, you should take a moment about halfway through the writing process to print out one of the earlier, unrevised drafts. Due: bring a typed copy to class on Tuesday, February 23. Please note that failing to bring a rough draft or missing class that day will result in an automatic ½-grade deduction on your paper.

Stage 3: paper workshop, in class, Tuesday, February 23. During this workshop you will work in groups of three and exchange and comment on each other’s drafts. I generally do not read rough drafts in full, so this workshop is a very useful occasion to get feedback and advice from two people who will read your entire paper.

Stage 4: conference with instructor: During next week I will set up 15-minute conferences to discuss your paper ideas with me individually. Bring your rough draft from the paper workshop with you.

Stage 5: submit final portfolio: On Tuesday, March 2 you will submit a portfolio (in a two-pocket folder) that includes all the preparatory work you did on the paper (photocopy of passage, rough drafts, handwritten notes, notes from your conference with me, outlines, etc). Please date the different stages of writing that you do, and I will expect to see work from at least 3 different days. Also submit your paper as an attachment over e-mail. Please note that I will not accept a paper without this additional portfolio material. Such papers will receive an “F” with no option to rewrite.

Note on deadlines: over the course of the semester you have a total of 2 grace days for submitting your two formal papers (i.e. you can submit each paper one day late without penalty; beyond that there is a 1/3-grade penalty per day. Grace days cannot be applied to rough draft deadlines). Keep in mind that portfolios that are submitted on time are graded and returned first.

Note on secondary sources: Other than the materials that we have read for this class, I am going to stipulate that you do not consult outside critical commentary on the plays (either scholarly essays or especially random material from the Internet). Students who ignore this guideline may run the risk of violating academic integrity in this class. Students who submit very poorly written papers or ones which do not fulfill the assignment will be required to submit a rewrite within one week; rewrites do not receive a grade higher than a “C” (75%).
Other guidelines: Download and use the “Paper Template” posted on the course website which provides examples of all of the following formatting requirements:
-- no title page, but do come up with an interesting title
-- include your name, date and a word count at the top, single-spaced
-- text should be double-spaced, w/ 1” margins on all sides, 22-25 lines per page, font no larger than 12 pt
-- refer to acts and scenes with Arabic numbers, separated by periods: e.g., Act 1, scene 3, lines 25-30 should look like: (1.3.25-30).
-- always use present tense when referring to the text of the play
-- be sure not to spend any time on plot summary

Pointers for quoting text:
-- the title of the play should always be underlined or in italics
-- to emend a quotation, put your changes in brackets: [ ]
-- to refer to the play without quoting, you should write: “In act 1. . .” To refer to both act and scene: “In 1.3 . . .” (ie, act 1, scene 3)

brief verse quotations: to quote a verse passage of less than 4 lines:
1) use quotation marks
2) put the period after the citation
3) separate the lines with: space-slashmark-space:

Ex: “Murder most foul, as in the best it is, / But this most foul, strange, and unnatural” (1.5.27-28).

long verse or prose quotations: to quote a passage (from a play or essay) that runs to 4 or more typed lines / 4 or more lines of poetry, you need to set off the quotation in this way:
1) omit quotation marks
2) put the period before the citation
3) indent 10 spaces on the left-hand margins
4) citation should be flushed right

poetry / verse: O, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown!
The courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s, eye, tongue, sword,
Th’expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
Th’observed of all observers, quite, quite down! (3.1.150-54)

prose: Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times. And now how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? Your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? (5.1.172-75)