

## Assignment for Essay #2

### **Write a stylistic analysis of a short passage from *Twelfth Night* or *King Lear*.**

Select a short passage (about 5-10 lines) from *Twelfth Night* or *King Lear* and analyze it stylistically. Pick a passage we have not already analyzed carefully in class.

Select a passage which, for some reason that you want to better understand, strikes you as interesting or unusual.

Read the passage slowly, carefully, and repeatedly in order to make worthwhile observations on it. Your assignment is to analyze the text itself, not the characters who speak the lines, or the plot they're involved in, or the themes or ideas they express. To keep yourself focused on the language, try writing your analysis without mentioning any of the characters at all.

The more specific you are the better your analysis will be. So focus on small things (like a pun, an ambiguous word or phrase, a striking antithesis, an arresting metaphor, or some other minute particular) and offer some interesting and truthful insight into them. Although your analysis can address many different stylistic elements in the text (such as meter, wordplay, syntax, figures of speech, sound patterns, imagery, connotations of words, irony, diction, and so on), you may want to focus your analysis on one or two elements of the passage. I have provided some suggestions that should help focus your analysis on the back of this page.

Everything you say in your analysis must relate directly to the actual words of the text. Don't get sidetracked; stick with the words. Make your prose as clear and concise as possible. Don't waste my time and yours trying to sound impressive. Organize your paper around a thesis, a claim about how the stylistic elements in your passage work. A good thesis will address the full complexity of the passage you select.

Your essay should be 2-3 pages (500-800 words). Quote the passage you select at the beginning of your essay. Put the exact word count for your paper on the last page.

Since your only source for this essay will be your chosen passage, you do not need to have a Works Cited page.

You should, however, use MLA style for parenthetical references in the text.

#### **Due Dates:**

- Papers submitted on or before the beginning of class **Tuesday, April 17**, will get written comments.
- Papers submitted on or before the beginning of class **Tuesday, April 24** will receive no comments whatsoever, but will otherwise be graded no differently than papers turned in on the earlier date.
- Papers submitted after **Tuesday, April 24**, will receive a zero.

1. Read the passage for meaning. Pay attention to the sentence, not the line, as the principal unit of organization.  
Find the subject and verb. Forget, for the moment, about the poetry.
2. Try to summarize the main idea or ideas. (Do this in writing: having to commit conclusions to paper forces you to decide what you think. *Don't* include your summary in your essay.)
3. Outline the progression of ideas, identifying major sections. Is there a clear system of organization? Are there antitheses (there usually are in Shakespeare)? Repetitions? Indirections?
4. Is irony a factor? Is there, in other words, a discrepancy between the speaker's words and meanings?
5. Examine the diction of the passage. After reading for denotation (straightforward meaning), think about connotation. Look up important words in the *Oxford English Dictionary* to determine their currency in the Renaissance and to discover implied significance. Notice connections among roots or words, as well as alternative or archaic (but still applicable) meanings.
6. Think about wordplay, remembering that puns need not be funny. Consider multiple senses of words.
7. Notice imagery. Is it particularly abundant? unusually sparse? Do the images suggest patterns or form clusters?  
How do the images promote or clarify the subject?
8. What about figurative language: similes, metaphors, symbols? Analyze metaphors with an eye on the tenor (the thing being described), the vehicle (the thing used to describe it), and the connotations of the comparison.
9. Are there classical, biblical, or historical allusions? What do they contribute?
10. Do you find understatement, hyperbole, personification, paradox?
11. Study the syntax, the arrangement of words into sentences. Is word order normal or inverted? Do sentences seem simple or complex?
12. Examine meter as you have syntax. Is it regular or not? Look for run-on lines or important instances of caesura.
13. Pay attention to musical devices such as alliteration, rhyme, assonance, consonance, euphony, cacophony, onomatopoeia. How do they contribute to the passage's effect on a reader?
- 14. For every device, the essential question is "How does it work?"**