**MFS 210**

**Final Paper Guidelines**

**Dr. Champion**

**Spring 2021**

Outline due: May 9th

Final paper due: May 12th

**I. ASSIGNMENT**

In lieu of the Final Exam, you may opt to write a Final Paper instead. As the culminating written project for this semester, this paper assignment requires you to critically evaluate the film *There Will Be Blood* (2007), directed by Paul Thomas Anderson.

After carefully watching the film and making notes about what stands out to you, you will hone in on a particular formal or stylistic element, describe how the filmmaker uses this element, and propose your conclusions about the effectiveness of these directorial choices.

Your paper will need to contain a clear thesis statement in the opening paragraph. You are basically telling your reader what you want to explore in your paper. Your opening should also include a brief review of the key concepts and terminology that you plan to address in your analysis, drawing from our course material that we have developed this semester. As a reminder, the broad areas of film analysis we have discussed include narrative form, mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound and genre theory.

The main body of your paper should stay focused on your thesis and use examples to illustrate your points. This section will likely be the bulk of your paper. Do not summarize the plot. But otherwise, use great detail in your descriptions and examples.

A helpful suggestion is to choose one or two distinct scenes or sequences in the film, describe them in detail, and discuss how they advance your thesis.

To conclude your paper, you may briefly reiterate your thesis, but avoid being too repetitive. Your conclusion is not meant to be a summary of your paper. Instead, the conclusion is your opportunity to add your personal insights or opinions that you have gained through your analysis.

An outline is due via email to Dr. Champion by May 9th. This outline will include your paper’s general thesis and how you plan to approach your argument.

You are encouraged to discuss your ideas and progress with Dr. Champion at any time during your writing process.

**II. WRITING GUIDELINES**

A good critical paper is not a plot synopsis, and it definitely does not promote or publicize a film with enthusiastic descriptions. Avoid words such as “great” or “excellent.” Find better descriptive adjectives. This is your opportunity to exhibit a critical awareness of the elements of a film and identify what works and does not work in it.

Avoid writing about technical details that apply to all professional productions, such as “All the shots were in focus.” Similarly, do not write about vague terms like “shot selection” or “editing” unless there is something distinctive about it.

Do not overuse a word—think of a synonym if you need to express an idea more than once per paragraph.

Generally, write in present tense when discussing the action in a film. Make sure your tenses are consistent.

Avoid passive voice.

Be careful using first person. If you bring yourself into your essay, make sure you present yourself as an authority rather than simply giving your personal reaction.

Illustrations are welcome.

Give your work a unique title. Do not simply call it “My Analysis” or use the title of the production. Your title will help prepare the reader to comprehend your opinion. You might wait until you have finished your paper before you give it a title.

The most important goal for an analytical paper is to offer your original opinion of the subject and to provide evidence and justification for your opinion.

Proofread your work! “Spellcheck” and “Grammarly” will not catch all your mistakes.

**III. TECHNICAL GUIDELINES**

Papers should be between 1200 to 2000 words, which roughly works out to be 4 to 7 full pages, with standard margins, 12-point font, double-spaced.

Use MLA style for all citations. See examples on the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) website. All ideas and quotes that are not your own must be attributed properly.

All papers must be submitted via Turnitin on Moodle by May 12h at 12:00 pm.

**IV. INSPIRATIONAL TIPS**

The following is meant to assist you if you have difficulty getting started, but you are not required to follow these tips. In fact, trying to address all of these questions is impossible in a 2000-word paper!

1. Consider the film’s overall structure. Specifically, note the act structure and identify structural devices and plot points. What principles or factors seem to have determined its organization? For example, chronology, theme, investigation, misdirection of the audience, etc.

2. Choose two distinct sequences in the film. Describe each scene that comprises your sequences, and discuss how the sequence advances the story (where was the narrative before the sequence began, and where was it after the sequence concluded).

3. Describe what made you care about the film’s characters and their situations. Are the characters believable? Include in your discussion the notion of active character, story arcs, and other strategies the filmmaker uses. Even “bad” people can be interesting, but why?

4. Is the film adapted from a novel or other medium, or is it based on an original idea and screenplay? If it is an adaptation, does it follow the original and neglect the cinematic opportunities of the story? Or does it sacrifice the original work for necessary or unnecessary cinematic devices? If the story is original, how fresh or innovative is it?

5. What is the theme of the film? Is it obvious or only subtly evident? Do the plot, acting, mise-en-scene, cinematography, and other elements in the film successfully impart the theme to the viewer?

6. Is the cinematography and mise-en-scene effective? Does the film make certain use of color, texture, lighting, etc., to enhance the theme, mood, setting, or character? Are camera angles used effectively? Are the camera and/or production design used to create a particular audience reaction?

7. Is the sound effective and appropriate? Does the audio stand-out and draw attention to itself, or does it fit naturally with the images on screen? Is the music appropriate and functional, or is it inappropriate and obtrusive?

8. What editing style does the filmmaker employ? Is it mostly seamless, continuity editing? Or are their complex editing decisions. Do these editing choices contribute to or distract from the overall film?

9. Does the film make use of symbols or symbolism? What purpose do the symbols serve? Are they used effectively? How does the symbolism in the film contribute to or enhance the film’s overall theme?

\*Remember, give your opinion of the film based on the issues that you address, and let your reader understand why you have made your conclusions.