

RLG101H FILM PARAGRAPH – ADVICE

Assignment

As explained in the Film Paragraph instructions, your task is to write a single paragraph analyzing a “non-religious” film using one of the following theories from chapter 5 of Nye’s *Religion: The Basics*: reductionism (p. 108–9); cognitive vs. affective beliefs (p. 117); habitus (p. 124–6). **You must use ONE of these three theories; if you use a different theory, you may be penalized up to 10 marks (out of 20).**

Assignment Goals

One aim of this project is for you to see something that is familiar to you (a film!) in a new way, by looking at it through the lens of a particular theory from the academic study of religion.

Another aim of this assignment is for you to become familiar with the application of theoretical material to data, which is a key activity of scholars in most disciplines.

A final goal is for you to (hopefully!) have fun with this assignment. Really!

Film Analysis

Repeat viewings: We strongly recommend that you watch your film at least twice in order to do your Film Paragraph assignment. When you go to write the final Film Analysis due on Feb. 16 (which will require you to use two additional theories), you should watch your film *at least* one more time again. As you start to develop your analysis, each new time you see the movie you should notice details and connections that you missed before.

Theory: The first step in your analysis will be to fully understand the theory you have chosen. Read over Nye’s explanation carefully, summarizing what you see as the key elements of the theory. The next step is to look for possible connections between the theory and the film. These connections could involve any aspect of the film – images, words, songs, plot, etc. Feel free to focus on any part of the movie you like — you can look at a minor character, or just one scene. The point is to think about the connections that *you* see and find interesting or meaningful.

Analysis: Once you’ve identified connections between the theory and the film, you must use these links to *analyze* the film. It’s not enough to simply identify the connections themselves; you have to try to understand what these connections might *mean*. In other words, when you look at the film using the theory you have selected, what message do you think the film is trying to convey?

Message: The message that you identify must be applicable to *the world outside of the film* (i.e., our world!). In *The Lion King*, for example, you can use Richard Gombrich’s theory of cognitive and affective beliefs to show that Simba should accept his responsibilities to the community as king of the Pride Lands. And so the question is: how is this message relevant to the film’s viewers? Most of us aren’t lions *or* kings (!). However, it is possible to argue that the film is saying that we ALL have responsibilities in life, and that each of us must live up to these responsibilities.

“Religion”: Do not concern yourself with explicitly identifying “religious” aspects of the film. We simply want you to apply a theory of belief to a film. We are not asking you to argue that the film is “religious” in any way.

No research: It is critical that you do this assignment using only Nye’s description of the theory you have chosen, and your own observations of the film. **Do not use any additional research on the theory or the film.** We want *you* to engage both the film and the theory directly, and tell us what *you* think. Ultimately, your analysis will be evaluated on how well you have understood the theory, taken into account evidence from the film, and reasonably supported your analysis using only that evidence.

Writing

Difficulty: Writing is difficult, and academic writing can be particularly challenging. To do your best, it is always good to start early and give yourself lots of time to think, write, and revise. Also: ask for help!

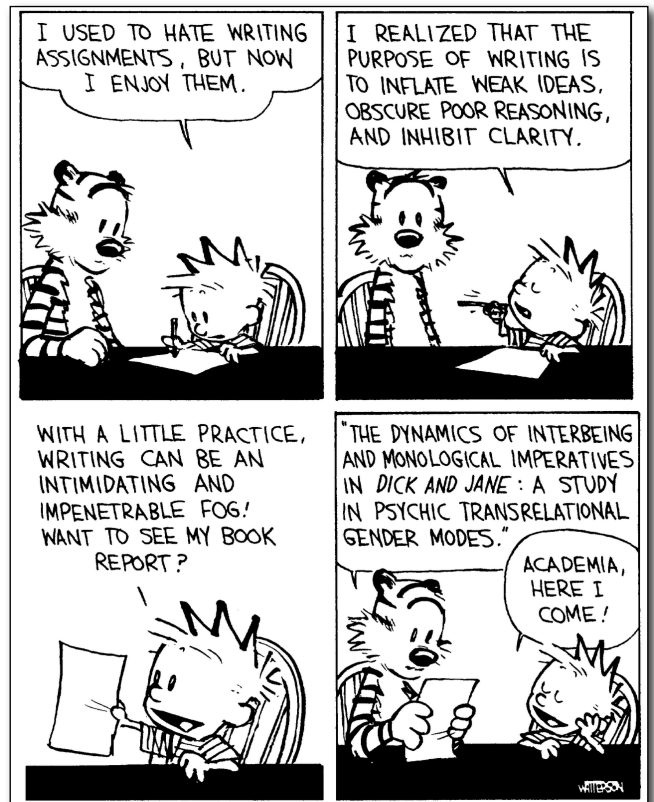
Help: Many people want to help you succeed in writing this analysis. You should not hesitate to ask for assistance from your TA, your instructor, or the lovely and talented folks at the UTM Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (<http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc>). Starting your assignment early will mean that these folks will be able to offer you more focused and useful advice, but if you are stuck in any way at any point, you should talk to *someone*.

Clarity: Your paragraph should **clearly communicate** your points. Do not write like Calvin! You should never write in a way that sounds “academic” but actually says nothing interesting or meaningful or comprehensible.

Citations: Use the **Chicago Manual of Style (author-date format)** for your citations and bibliography. See the example paragraph below.

To quote or not to quote?: When explaining a theory it’s often best to summarize it or rephrase it in your own words (=paraphrase). This will show your own understanding of the theory. If you do quote directly, you must use **quotation marks**. **Whether you quote from Nye’s text or use your own words to explain a theory, you must *always* provide the appropriate citations to Nye’s text.** You can see how to cite references to ideas from Nye’s text in the example paragraph below. Advice on how to summarize and paraphrase is available here: <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources/paraphrase/>

Academic integrity: Academic integrity is essential to the university, but students often commit offences unintentionally. To avoid doing this please read the UofT document, “How Not to Plagiarize”: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>.



Grading Rubric

Make sure you copy the grading rubric into your Film Paragraph assignment, just after your bibliography. The rubric is available from the course Blackboard site under “Film Analysis.”

The bottom portion of the rubric is **quantitative**, and identifies specific grade penalties that will be applied if you do not follow the assignment instructions. For example, if you neglect to include a title page, a penalty of one (1) point will be applied. Please pay careful attention to this list, and avoid unnecessary grade deductions.

The top portion of the rubric is **qualitative**. This means that there are no specific marks associated with each of the items in the rubric. The point of a qualitative rubric is to show you the various elements that are important for this assignment; these are the elements that we will be looking at when we determine what grade you have earned. Below you will find some explanations of each element.

Theory: a) Explanation of theory: You need to explain the theory clearly and correctly. This means accurately quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing the parts of Nye’s text that discuss the theory.

b) Use of theory: Your use of the theory should clearly show that you understand the theory. You should also use the theory in a way that helps us understand something about the *film*.

Analysis: A film analysis is not a statement of fact; it is an argument that offers a new insight into the film based on evidence. You’re trying to convince your reader that the film has a particular meaning that is not obvious. A poor analysis of *The Lion King* would conclude that Scar is selfish. You can support this analysis with lots of evidence, but it’s very clear that Scar is selfish so this analysis does not provide us with any new ways of thinking about the film. The analysis in the example paragraph below, on the other hand, definitely shows us something new about the film – but the analysis is still supported by evidence. In other words the conclusion is not obvious but it is still reasonable.

Support: a) Evidence: Your analysis must be supported by objective, relevant evidence from the film. It’s generally helpful to have at least three pieces of evidence, but the amount you need will depend on your specific analysis. “Objective” evidence refers to aspects of the film that everyone can agree on, such as what characters *say* or *do*, or what *happens* to the characters. Be careful when referring to what a character *thinks* or *feels* – the question you need to always ask is, “How do I know this?” For example, this statement is problematic: “When Nala asks Simba to return to the Pride Lands, Simba doesn’t want to go.” How do we know what Simba wants? A small but important change to this statement makes all the difference: “When Nala asks Simba to return to the Pride Lands, he says no.”

b) Reasoning: Your analysis must be supported by sound logic. Do your arguments make sense? Are your conclusions reasonably based on the evidence you’ve provided? This means making sure you do not ignore evidence that contradicts your analysis. For example, you could find lots of evidence to support the argument that *The Lion King* is telling us to follow “Hakuna Matata.” However this analysis is only reasonable if you ignore everything that happens in the film after Nala asks Simba to come home. At that point it’s clear that if Simba follows “Hakuna Matata,” the Pride Lands will die. And so he changes his mind and saves the Pride Lands. Any reasonable analysis of “Hakuna Matata” in *The Lion King* would need to take Simba’s decision to confront Scar into account.

Message: a) Explanation: You must clearly explain what you think the film’s message is.

b) Support: The film’s message that you state must be supported by the analysis you’ve given. The message is basically the *conclusion* of your analysis.

Paragraph: a) Structure: An analytical paragraph is like a mini essay, with a beginning (introduction), middle (body), and end (conclusion). The paragraph for this assignment must include: introduction (topic sentences); body (explaining the theory and applying the theory to the film); and conclusion (stating the film’s message, which you arrived at by analyzing the film using the theory).

b) Focus: Make sure that everything in your paragraph is focused on the analysis of the film using one theory. Do not bring in unrelated or irrelevant ideas or evidence.

Writing: Most of the items under “Writing” are self-explanatory: clarity, diction (word usage), grammar and punctuation. “Typing errors” are careless mistakes, like writing the film title as *The Line King*. “Biased language” is language that means to be inclusive but is unintentionally exclusive, like using “mankind” when you mean all people, not just men (a better word to use in this case would be “humanity” or “humankind”). “Colloquial language” is language that is too informal for academic writing; for example, “there is a lot of stuff in the film that shows I am 100% right” is very colloquial (better: “I will support my argument with several examples from the film”).

Note: for more information on how to paraphrase and summarize ideas; write a coherent paragraph; use unbiased language; avoid plagiarizing; and use the Chicago Manual of Style, see “Readings on Writing” on the RLG101H course site: <https://rlg101h.wordpress.com/course-texts/readings-on-writing/>

EXAMPLE FILM PARAGRAPH: GENDER AND *LION KING*

Important: This example paragraph uses a theory by Mary Daly from the Gender chapter to analyze *The Lion King*. You may NOT use Daly's theory, or any other theory from the Gender chapter, in order to write your Film Paragraph assignment. The point of the example below is simply to demonstrate how to write an analytical paragraph about a film using a theory of religion. For your assignment you may *only* use **one of the three theories about belief** specified in the Film Paragraph instructions.

The Lion King provides an excellent example of Mary Daly's theory of religion, gender, and ideology. Essentially, Daly argues that communities that worship a male deity will typically be structured so that women have less power than men (Nye 2008, 85). We see this exact dynamic at work in *The Lion King*. Mufasa is the male monarch at the start of the film, but he is not simply a king. After he is killed by his brother Scar, Mufasa appears in the sky surrounded by light, and delivers a prophetic message to Simba that his true place is to rule the Pride Lands. This scene evokes Daly's point that "god is no more than a matter of men writing their political dominance onto 'heaven'" (Nye 2008, 85). Male dominance in fact appears throughout the film. Even though the female Nala defeats Simba every time the two fight, when they fall in love as adults Simba ends up on top. In a structurally similar but much more violent interaction, Simba's mother Sarabi stands up to Scar but is immediately struck down. In fact all of the unnamed, silent lionesses in the film are helpless under Scar's rule, waiting for a single male lion – Simba, the son of the heavenly king Mufasa – to overthrow him and return order to the land. In this way "the ideology of a male god works to legitimate the . . . subordination of women" (Nye 2008, 85). The film's message seems clear: only men belong in places of power.

Bibliography:

Nye, Malory. 2008. *Religion: The Basics*, 2nd edition. London and New York: Routledge.

See next page for an annotated version of the above text.

Annotated *Lion King* Paragraph:

The Lion King provides an excellent example of Mary Daly's theory of religion, gender, and ideology. Essentially, Daly argues that communities that worship a male deity will typically be structured so that women have less power than men (Nye 2008, 85). We see this exact dynamic at work in *The Lion King*. Mufasa is the male monarch at the start of the film, but he is not simply a king. After he is killed by his brother Scar, Mufasa appears in the sky surrounded by light, and delivers a prophetic message to Simba that his true place is to rule the Pride Lands. This scene evokes Daly's point that "god is no more than a matter of men writing their political dominance onto 'heaven'" (Nye 2008, 85). Male dominance in fact appears throughout the film. Even though the female Nala defeats Simba every time the two fight, when they fall in love as adults Simba ends up on top. In a structurally similar but much more violent interaction, Simba's mother Sarabi stands up to Scar but is immediately struck down. In fact all of the unnamed, silent lionesses in the film are helpless under Scar's rule, waiting for a single male lion – Simba, the son of the heavenly king Mufasa – to overthrow him and return order to the land. In this way "the ideology of a male god works to legitimate the . . . subordination of women" (Nye 2008, 85). The film's message seems clear: only men belong in places of power.

Bibliography:

Nye, Malory. 2008. *Religion: The Basics*, 2nd edition. London and New York: Routledge.

Ken Derry 2018-1-17 11:19 AM

Comment [1]: You must begin by clearly stating the paragraph's **topic**. This may take a couple of sentences. For this assignment, your topic sentence(s) should clearly and concisely state the connection between the film and the theory.

Ken Derry 2018-1-17 11:04 AM

Comment [2]: The first time that you mention a theorist in a piece of academic writing, use their full name – and then just their surname afterwards. So it's "Mary Daly" in the previous sentence and then "Daly" from this point on.

Ken Derry 2018-1-17 11:05 AM

Comment [3]: Include a brief summary of the theory early in the paragraph, and then show how it relates to the film.

Ken Derry 2018-1-17 11:18 AM

Comment [4]: This is the correct citation format for Chicago Manual of Style (author-date). Remember: Citations are required for **every** reference to Nye's text (not just direct quotations).

Ken Derry 2018-1-17 11:07 AM

Comment [5]: Here is the first evidence given from this film to support the argument of the paragraph. This evidence consists of brief descriptions of relevant parts of the film. Here, the case is made that, while Mufasa begins the film as an earthly king, he is transformed after death into a being that seems god-like.

Ken Derry 2018-1-17 11:20 AM

Comment [6]: Explain the key parts of the theory clearly and concisely. Put the theory in your own words when you can, but quotations are totally fine (just keep the quotations short and to the point).

Ken Derry 2018-1-17 11:20 AM

Comment [7]: Continuing to highlight links between the theory and the film throughout the paragraph helps to ensure that your paragraph is analytical, and not just descriptive. Doing this also demonstrates that you genuinely understand (and can apply) the theory.

Ken Derry 2018-1-17 11:16 AM

Comment [8]: The paragraph ends with a clear statement of the film's message, supported by the analysis in the body of the paragraph.

Ken Derry 2018-1-17 11:21 AM

Comment [9]: This is the correct bibliography format for Chicago Manual of Style (author-date). Please copy this! ☺