Forms of Biblical Literature: Ancient Genres & Modern Debates

Dr. Everett Hamner
Western Illinois University, Fall 2016
ENG 356, Thursdays 12:30-3, Quad Cities Complex 2206, westernonline.wiu.edu
e-hamner@wiu.edu, 309-762-3999 x62247, off hrs M 9:30-11:30, W 1-2, Th 10:30-11:30 in QCC 2209

General Catalog Description & Prerequisites

A study of the literary variety of the Testaments, including Biblical history, lyric poetry, biography, and letters, among other forms.

Specific Description & Goals

Whether Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, agnostic, atheistic, or otherwise, most Americans today would be hard pressed to match the biblical knowledge of past generations. This trend has been explained by various secularization theories, which assume that as societies modernize, religious expression declines. What such claims often mask, however, is the great extent to which the Hebrew and Greek scriptures continue to drive our discussions not only about religion, but also about politics, ethics, science, race, gender, popular culture, and literature.

Through reading selections from the Bible and focusing on their generic and formal diversity, through examining interpretations from ethnically, sexually, and theologically diverse sources, and through juxtaposing biblical texts with recent literature and cinema, this course offers an opportunity to better grasp that contemporary impact. By conversing honestly and respectfully, we will better appreciate how these ancient texts and their interpretation have shaped so many modern debates. Coursework includes reading comprehension quizzes, a unique conversation assignment, and an argumentative research paper on a topic of individual interest. Key questions will include:

✓ Where do formal differences between genres like history, poetry, prophecy, biography, parables, letters, and apocalyptic affect our interpretations of specific biblical texts?

✓ How do the original cultural contexts of particular biblical texts and the unique backgrounds of individual readers shape interpretive decisions?

✓ In what ways might ongoing cultural debates about human origins, feminism, homosexuality, immigration, parenting practices, and proselytism be reframed by greater biblical knowledge?

✓ How might a more nuanced approach to biblical literature transform interpretations of contemporary fiction, film, and other popular media?

✓ Conversely, how does reading biblical selections next to contemporary fiction and film transform the potential significance of such “secular” texts?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading &amp; Assignment Schedule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st WEEK, AUG 25th</strong>: FAITH, UNCERTAINTY, &amp; THE ROLE OF GENRE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **IN CLASS**: ~Film clips: *Doubt* and *Jonah: A Veggietales Movie*, plus a reading of the original Jonah  
~Some reflection on the act of interpretation and the significance of genre  
~Small group introductions (using introductory survey handout)  
~Syllabus review and discussion of goals and assignments |

### PART ONE: HISTORY, METAPHOR, & THE ORIGINS OF ISRAEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>2nd WEEK, SEPT 1st</strong>: HISTORICAL AND METAPHORICAL LENSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **READING**: ~Borg, ch 1-3: “Seeing the Bible Again,” “The Bible and God,” “History and Metaphor”  
~Bible: 1- Samuel chapters 16-17; 2- Samuel chapters 11:12-15; Psalms 32 & 51 |
| **IN CLASS**: ~Film clip: *The Book of Eli*, along with ongoing common misconceptions about the Bible  
~Excerpt from Hebrew Bible lecture by Dr. Christine Hayes, Yale University (lecture 1, “The Parts of the Whole”—listen/view/read more at: [http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/introduction-to-the-old-testament-hebrew-bible](http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/introduction-to-the-old-testament-hebrew-bible))  
~A case study: the rise, fall, and repentance of King David of Israel  
~Assignment description: the Genesis close reading paper |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>3rd WEEK, SEPT 8th</strong>: CREATION STORIES AND REDEFINING “MYTHOLOGY”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **READING**: ~Bible: Genesis, chapters 1-11 (please read R. Crumb illustrated version via pdf)  
~Borg, ch 4: “Reading the Creation Stories Again”  
~Rikki Watts, “Making Sense of Genesis 1” |
| **IN CLASS**: ~Ancient near eastern visions of the cosmos  
~Excerpt from another Hebrew Bible lecture by Hayes (lecture 3)  
~Film: *A Purple State of Mind* part 1 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>4th WEEK, SEPT 15th</strong>: WHY THE FIRST MONOTHEISTS NEEDED A PURPLE STATE OF MIND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **READING**: ~Bible: Genesis, chapters 12-34  
~Borg, ch 5: “Reading the Pentateuch Again” |
| **WRITING**: ~Paper #1: Genesis close reading draft (not final version) due online by 11 a.m. |
| **IN CLASS**: ~Quiz #1 (1-2 Samuel & Psalms about David, Genesis 1-34, Hayes, Watts, Borg ch. 1-5)  
~Genesis chapter 19: a case study in misinterpretation, with help from Lego blocks  
~René Girard, excerpts from *The Scapegoat*; more *A Purple State of Mind* excerpts |
5th WEEK, SEPT 22nd: ISRAEL’S EXODUS AND THE EVOLUTION OF SLAVE NARRATIVE

READING: ~Bible: Genesis, chapters 35-50 & Exodus, chapters 1-14
~African-American scholar-rapper Cornel West, “A World of Ideas” interview

WRITING: ~Paper #1: Genesis close reading final version due online by 11 a.m.

IN CLASS: ~Film clip: Cecil B. DeMille’s The Ten Commandments
~Cinderella and the book of Exodus
~Excerpts from one last Hebrew Bible lecture by Hayes (lecture 5)
~Martin Luther King, Jr., “Birth of a New Nation” sermon, April 1957 (37:10 mark)
~Cornel West interview with Stephen Colbert
~Any remaining Purple State of Mind scenes; info about Purple Conversations (Paper #2)

PART TWO: THE MANY FORMS OF ISRAEL’S LITERATURE—AND OURS

6th WEEK, SEPT 29th: ANCIENT PROPHECY & HEBREW FEMINISM

READING: ~Bible: Amos; Ruth; Esther
~Borg, ch 6: “Reading the Prophets Again”
~Anne Lamott, “Lily Pads,” from Traveling Mercies

IN CLASS: ~Zooming out: overview of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) and timeline of Jewish history
~Film clips: The Apostle (what might prophecy look like today?)
~Anne Lamott’s heterodoxy

7th WEEK, OCT 6th: LOVE POETRY AND EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY

READING: ~Bible: Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes
~Borg, ch 7: “Reading Israel’s Wisdom Again”

IN CLASS: ~Quiz #2 (Gen 35-50, Ex 1-14, West, Hayes, MLK Jr, Amos, Ruth, Esther, Lamott, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Borg ch. 6-7)
~How too much allegory stole the Bible’s sex appeal
~The impact of a single word’s translation: hebel
~The idea of a canon and the biblical Apocrypha
~Film clips: The Big Kahuna (a Hollywood Ecclesiastes)

8th WEEK, OCT 13th: THE PLACES OF LAMENT, SILENCE, SONG, & DANCE

READING: ~Bible: Job (ch. 1-14 & 38-42)
~Barbara Brown Taylor, “Silence,” from When God is Silent

VIEWING: ~Bono & Eugene Peterson on “The Psalms”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l4055e90KY

IN CLASS: ~Before Job: “Poem of the Righteous Sufferer”
~Maureen Dowd and Kevin O’Neil, “Why, God?”
**9th WEEK, OCT 20th:** WHAT IF ONE OF THE WISDOM BOOKS …

| READING: | ~Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, pp. 1-123 |
| WRITING: | ~“Purple Conversation” written materials due online by 11 am (bring audio/video to class on DVD or flash drive). |
| IN CLASS: | ~Reframing scripture in American literature: G.M. Hopkins and W.B. Yeats  
~Interviews with Marilynne Robinson: The Daily Show and the Iowa Writers Workshop  
~Comparing purple experiences and info about the argumentative paper (Paper #3) |

**10th WEEK, OCT 27th:** ... WERE SET IN 20TH-CENTURY RURAL IOWA?

| IN CLASS: | ~Quiz #3 (Job 1-14 & 38-42, Taylor, Dowd/O’Neal, Hopkins/Yeats, Robinson, *Gilead*)  
~Intertextuality: *Gilead, Home, Lila*, and the Bible  
~Jesus and two women (John chapters 4 & 8); preview of the synoptic gospels |

**11th WEEK, NOV 3rd:** NO CLASS; EVERETT AT CONFERENCE

| WRITING: | ~Paper #3 (Argumentative paper): 1-page initial topic description, research plan, & driving questions due online by 11 a.m. |

**PART THREE: A JEWISH CARPENTER & HIS MOTLEY CREW**

**12th WEEK, NOV 10th:** JESUS AND THE FOUR WITNESSES

| READING: | ~Bible: John  
~Borg, ch 8: “Reading the Gospels Again” |
| WRITING: | ~Paper #3: *first page draft + projected outline of remainder* due online by 11 a.m. |
| IN CLASS: | ~Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, “The Contested Color of Christ”  
~Crystal Valentine, “And the News Reporter Says ‘Jesus is White’” (2016)  
~From conversation to essay-writing, or, how to grow a thesis |

**13th WEEK, NOV 17th:** PAUL, GRACE, AND SEXUALITY

| READING: | ~Bible: Galatians  
~Borg, ch 9: “Reading Paul Again” |
| WRITING: | ~Argumentative paper: *half draft* due online by 11 a.m. |
| IN CLASS: | ~Film: *For the Bible Tells Me So* (documentary on homosexuality, Bible, & Christianity)  
~“Religious Groups’ Official Positions on Gay Marriage”  
WED 11/24: NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING BREAK)

14th WEEK, DEC 1st: APOCALYTIC WARNING & HOPE

READING: ~Bible: Revelation
~Borg, ch 10: “Reading Revelation Again”
~Timothy Beal, “The Bible is Dead, Long Live the Bible”

IN CLASS: ~Quiz #4 (John, Galatians, Revelation, Borg ch. 8-10, Beal), course evaluations
~Film clip: Left Behind
~Argumentative paper: reverse outlining and other tips

15th WEEK, DEC 8th: WRITING TIME & INDIVIDUAL/GROUP CONSULTATIONS

WRITING: ~Argumentative paper: full draft due online by 11 am

IN CLASS: ~Individual and group writing consultations, revision help

FINALS WEEK, DEC 15th: PAPER PRESENTATIONS

WRITING: ~Argumentative paper: final version due online by class time

IN CLASS: ~Brief presentations of papers

Course Texts

PLEASE NOTE:
*Prices below are rounded from recent amazon.com new prices—that site has free 2-day shipping for students. In many cases, used copies can be purchased less expensively (also try bookfinder.com).
*I am happy for students to use complete electronic versions of texts so long as they use appropriate citation methods when writing papers and can accept occasional challenges in finding a given passage.

~Any NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) translation of the Bible. $4+, or you can print the books we read from http://bible.oremus.org/. Other translations can be OK—check with me.

Grading Criteria

~An A recognizes broad and deep understanding of the course material, regular and insightful discussion contributions, and very strong written work—a major impact on the course’s success.
~A B indicates good commitment to coursework, demonstrable contributions and achievements in both verbal and written analysis, and tangible positive impact on other students’ learning.
~A C reflects adequate completion of coursework, including satisfactory participation and writing.
~A D or F denotes incomplete or unsatisfactory coursework, unsatisfactory participation (missing more than 25% of class time or 4+ classes), and/or detraction from course goals (via plagiarism or otherwise).

I will figure final grades using the university scale (A, B, C, D, or F, with pluses/minuses) and the values below (with minor adjustments as needed). Please note the “My Grades” function on the course website, which lets you track assignment grades and estimate your current overall grade at any point.
Assignment Descriptions

**Quizzes:** These will neither be picky, insignificant-detail interrogations, nor such easy affairs that one could prepare sufficiently by reading summaries. The idea is that most people who recently covered all assigned texts with good comprehension will average 70-80% of the points available (i.e., earn a “B” or better). Please keep in mind that each quiz only covers material since the previous one. Students sometimes worry about the quizzes initially, but soon agree they provide valuable accountability during the course and allow for higher-quality, greater-depth discussions. My best advice is to get the reading done well in advance, then go back over it, your reading and in-class notes, and my “discussion notes” or other handouts. Checking your understanding and comparing reactions in outside-class conversations with classmates can also be very helpful.

**Paper #1: Genesis Close Reading.** A 1000+ word careful analysis of any one chapter in Genesis (though of course it is wise to consider context provided by surrounding chapters). Your job is to answer this question as provocatively and insightfully as possible: How is the meaning of this chapter’s content affected by its form? Put another way, how is what it says impacted by how it says it? As you revise, keep in mind my grading criteria: 1/3 will be based on the sophistication, complexity, and credibility of your thesis; 1/3 will consider the quality of your evidence and argumentation in demonstrating it; 1/3 will assess the clarity of your organization and the polish of its writing mechanics.

**Paper #2: Purple Conversation:** This project involves finding a professional member of the clergy whose approach to the Bible is relatively unfamiliar to you; this needs to be someone outside any religious context in which you participate. This person may be Jewish, Christian, or otherwise; the key is that she or he has significant academic education about the Bible. I will provide a list of possibilities, but it is up to you to arrange the meeting. With her/his permission, you will record at least a half hour of discussion, whether in-person, via videoconference, or on the phone. I would also encourage you to visit a worship service in this individual’s context, ideally before your conversation, and to record your conversation on video (though this will not always be possible, and your grade does not depend on it). Your remaining task is to transcribe the most provocative, insightful 500 words of your conversation, then write a 1000+ word reflection that explains what you learned and what questions the talk raised for you. I will grade primarily your transcript and reflection, though you should also turn in your audio/video recording and well-produced submissions will boost borderline grades. Indeed those submissions which include an edited 5-minute video abridgement of the conversation will automatically receive a 1/3 grade bonus; we will sample these during the course.

**Paper #3: Argumentative Paper.** A very carefully revised 2000+ word argumentative paper that defends a provocative claim about the relationship between a particular biblical book/set of passages and a contemporary cultural text/controversy. While engaging materials of individual interest, each student should show evidence of understanding how interpretation is shaped by both knowledge of ancient genres and theological/philosophical positions. Consultations about topic and thesis possibilities (whether via email or after class) may begin as soon as students are ready, but definitely should have occurred by week 10.

**PLEASE NOTE:** For the argumentative paper, there are intermediate due dates for a 1-page plan, a draft of page one plus rough outline of the remainder, a half-length draft, and a full-length draft. These submissions are not individually graded, but I do weigh heavily evidence of progress in these stages when a student’s final course grade is on the border between two possibilities.
My Teaching Philosophy and Expectations of Students

The better we understand each other’s expectations, the more quickly we can develop a good working relationship. Here are a few key elements of my teaching philosophy:

~I want students to engage me and each other authentically and maturely. I hope this course will spark your curiosity in many ways, and that happens best when students honestly and tactfully share reactions to controversial topics. I intentionally raise such issues because a public university classroom is a uniquely valuable setting in which to explore and learn from frank, respectful disagreement. I aim for us to develop a classroom community that everyone appreciates and that extends beyond its walls.

~Just as critically, I expect students to be professionally responsible. You should approach this course as you might a challenging, rewarding job, one with tasks that are yours alone. I well understand that it is very hard to balance multiple classes, paid work, childrearing, and other responsibilities, but my roles include challenging you beyond your comfort zone and honestly assessing your academic work (not your value as a human being). Having a good sense of how your work stacks up, both in terms of strengths and weaknesses, is critical for your future decisions. Do your best to remember: a grade is a snapshot of a brief moment (and even a semester is brief); it takes a lot of these together to begin to illustrate your abilities, and even your entire college GPA will never convey those fully.

~While we will be studying fields in which I am relatively expert, I approach this class as a learner, too. Wisdom is not just knowledge, but humility, a deepening awareness of how much one does not know. I spent over a decade earning my graduate degrees not to hoard power, but to be in a position to empower others. You show you are ready for that with your simultaneous investment. In short, what you get out of this course will be directly related to what you put into it, during and beyond classtime.

Attendance & Participation

My courses differ substantially from those requiring regurgitation of memorized information. Our goals include learning new interpretive approaches, understanding diverse people and ideas, expanding critical thinking and creativity, strengthening analytical and writing skills, and learning from each other’s unique backgrounds. Thus preparation for each session, regular on-time attendance, and thoughtful discussion participation are crucial. Except in extreme circumstances, each class missed beyond 3 (with tardiness or early departure counting as ½ class) will automatically lower the final mark by 1/3 grade (e.g. missing 4 classes changes a B to a B-). Extensive absences will result in an “F” for the course.

Classroom Courtesies

Please excuse yourself when necessary; transitions are the best times. Please mute cell phones and other potential distractions; obviously, laptops and other electronics should not be used during quizzes. Finally, please wait to put away materials until we call it a day; I will respect your schedules as well.

Communication

While there are occasional errors, I do my best to build a trustworthy syllabus that won’t need major adjustments. Please read it thoroughly; it answers most routine questions. Also, keep in mind that unless you expect to be gone for multiple class meetings in a row, I don’t need to know about illnesses, transportation problems, work conflicts, or the other ordinary challenges. When you have a question not addressed on the syllabus or in class, please ask after class or in office hours. If that isn’t possible, email is the next best option (much faster than voicemail). My goal is to respond within 2 business days, but if my answer is detailed, I may ask to shift the chat to office hours. Finally, be aware that I sometimes use email to make class announcements, so ensure I have an address you check daily.
Frequently Asked Questions

1. Q. Can I make up the quiz I missed?
   A. Yes—but only within the next week (whether in office hours, during the next class meeting’s break, or immediately afterward). Also, I only offer this opportunity once per semester, barring extreme circumstances (which do not include having to work, car breakdowns, deaths in friends’ families, etc.).

2. Q. Can you tell me what I missed in class?
   A. Not really; the experience of most of our conversations and even my presentations will be difficult to replicate in other forms. However, I can say that almost every week, I hand out some form of “discussion notes,” and I usually get these posted on the course website (under “Content”) within 24 hours.

3. Q. What should I write about?
   A. What do you care about? What has grabbed you and evoked some sort of emotional response, whether positive, negative, or in some combination? I regularly encourage students to engage texts and questions that have significant personal resonance; most people do their best work when it means more than a grade. If you’re having a hard time getting at what you care about, seek out conversation—not just with me and peers, but also with family, friends, and others who know you well. Sometimes having to introduce your learning to those unfamiliar with the material helps the most in figuring out what excites you.

4. Q. How does your grading scale work?
   A. My system may mean your grade is higher than you think. Western Online will compute your current course grade using my formula, but it’s simple enough to do yourself. The maximum possible points for the course is 100, so divide your total by that (or by the points available as of a given date), then multiply that number by 4. This puts your score on the 4.0 scale, which I then translate to a letter grade. The same process can be used for any individual assignment. So, for example, if you earned 8 out of 10 points on a quiz, you would divide 8 by 10 (=.80), then multiply that by 4 (=3.20), and that would be between a B and a B+. In each case, I reserve the right to bump the grade up a notch if I believe it’s warranted (or rarely down, most often when there are attendance problems like those described earlier in the syllabus).

5. Q. Do you want a hard copy of my paper, and when will it be graded?
   A. Please submit papers via the course website only; if it should be down when a deadline is approaching, emailing the paper and then posting it the next day is fine. My goal is to return papers online within a week of the due date. Late papers can take longer; please alert me of such submissions with an email.

Further Writing Assignment Guidelines

In addition to utilizing the argumentative essay revision guide at the end of this syllabus, it is worth familiarizing yourself with a good style guide. I use MLA style most often, but other styles (Chicago, APA, or another with pre-approval) are fine as long as they are consistently applied. Please use this page setup on all assignments, unless specified otherwise: 1” justified margins on all sides; size 12, Times New Roman font; and double-spacing. Finally, provide a cover page including paper title, course title and my name, your name, and date, as well as a list of works cited or a bibliography. Unless instructed otherwise, all assignments should be submitted online as a docx, doc, or rtf file.

The Writing Center

“The U.S. Bank WIU-QC University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The writing center is located in QC Complex 2219. Call 309-762-9481 for an appointment and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.”
**Late Work**

Barring extreme emergencies or prior arrangement, I will deduct one-third of a grade for each week (or portion thereof) that an assignment is late. If you anticipate special difficulty in meeting a deadline, please discuss this with me privately and well in advance so that if warranted, we can consider special arrangements. Readings and assignments are in many ways cumulative, so it is important that you keep up; at the same time, we lead busy lives and occasionally other priorities intervene. Balancing those realities, my policy aims to make being on-time important without making a rare delay devastating.

**Academic Dishonesty**

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are among the most serious violations of a student’s integrity and of relationships with the instructor, fellow classmates, and the university. In the humanities, plagiarism most often involves presenting another person’s specific words or ideas as one’s own, whether by copying or closely paraphrasing, and without citing the source. *Please be aware that such an offense will at minimum result in an “F” on the assignment and in many cases leads to an “F” for the course.* In many of my courses, I briefly review proper citation, but if you have questions about how to credit an idea or information source, ask. If you are unsure about definitions or consequences of academic dishonesty, consult WIU’s Student Academic Integrity Policy at [http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php](http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php).

**Counseling Services**

“Confidential counseling services are available for WIU-QC students. Time management, stress management, balancing work and family, study skills, low self-esteem, relationship problems, depression, and anxiety are some examples of issues that students may address in personal counseling. Students may call 309/762-1988 to make an appointment with Counseling and Career Services.”

**Accommodations**

“Students with disabilities: In accordance with University values and disability law, students with disabilities may request academic accommodations where there are aspects of a course that result in barriers to inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement. To file an official request for disability-related accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center at 309-298-2512, disability@wiu.edu or in 143 Memorial Hall. Please notify the instructor as soon as possible to ensure that this course is accessible to you in a timely manner.”

**Sex Discrimination/Title IX**

“University values, Title IX, and other federal and state laws prohibit sex discrimination, including sexual assault/ misconduct, dating/domestic violence, and stalking. If you, or someone you know, has been the victim of any of these offenses, we encourage you to report this to the Title IX Coordinator at 309-298-1977 or anonymously online at: [http://www.wiu.edu/equal_opportunity_and_access/request_form/index.php](http://www.wiu.edu/equal_opportunity_and_access/request_form/index.php). If you disclose an incident to a faculty member, the faculty member must notify the Title IX Coordinator. The complete Title IX policy is available at: [http://www.wiu.edu/vpas/policies/titleIX.php](http://www.wiu.edu/vpas/policies/titleIX.php).”

**Student Rights & Responsibilities**

For further information on expectations for both students and university personnel, please see [http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php](http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php).
Dr. Hamner's Argumentative Essay Revision Checklist

The Introduction

1. **Hook**: Will your introduction (including the first sentence) efficiently grab readers’ attention without being silly, exaggerated, or disconnected? Is the shift from it to the paper’s thesis natural or forced?

2. **Thesis**: Is it clear what sentence(s) convey the paper’s central claim?
   
   **Strengthening your thesis**:
   
   - Is your claim obvious or subtle? Boring or daring? Outlandish or plausible?
   - Is your claim vague or specific? General or precise?
   - Is something significant clearly at stake in your argument? Have you provided a sense of why it matters whether your reader buys or dismisses your claim?

3. **Map**: Does the introduction preview the order in which the paper will examine the evidence?

The Body

4. **Main Points**: Can you summarize in a single phrase the main point and/or task of each body paragraph, or are some paragraphs’ goals or relevance to the thesis unclear?

5. **Topic Sentences and Concluding Sentences**: Within a given paragraph, do the topic sentence and concluding sentence fit, without being identical? Do they provide meaningful links between paragraphs?

6. **Organization**: Are there any paragraphs that don’t make logical sense in the organization of the essay—e.g., too-short/disconnected “lonely” paragraphs or too-long/repetitive “bullying” paragraphs? Should any be removed or integrated elsewhere? Can you reorder so the argument’s force grows more naturally?

7. **Textual Evidence/Quotation**: Is there sufficient evidence from specific texts (at least one quotation per body paragraph, as a general rule) to back up the argument’s main points? Are there appropriate page number citations? Does the paper introduce quotations with a sense of their original context? After quotations, do you offer interpretations of their meaning or just expect readers to hear them as you do?

8. **Minimal Summary, Maximum Analysis**: Except in briefly introducing unfamiliar key text(s), does the paper avoid plot summaries? Does your interpretive and analytical work remain the focus?

9. **Reasonable Specifics, Not Generalities or Overreaches**: Does your paper resort to vague generalities that might describe any text? (“The author uses lots of description to help readers understand.”) Does it include gross overstatements that cost you credence? (“In this story everything is about death.”)

The Conclusion

10. **Closure**: Does the conclusion bring the essay to a meaningful close or end abruptly? Does it avoid exact restatement of the introduction, but still reinforce your main points? Does it suggest how the essay’s main ideas might be expanded into other contexts and why it matters that your reader take them seriously?

Mechanics & Style

11. **Grammatical & other mechanical issues**: Has at least one strong writer proofread your paper?
   
   **Among the most common problems (beyond spelling, capitalization, basic punctuation)**:
   
   - Pronoun reference: are the referents of your pronouns clear? Do they agree in number?
   - Run-on sentences and fragments: is each of your sentences a single, complete thought?

12. **Stylistic issues**: Have you presented your work in the most professional, attractive manner possible?
   
   **Among the most common problems, especially for less experienced writers**:
   
   - Verbal “fluff”: is every word and phrase doing real work toward demonstrating your thesis? Have you eliminated as much repetition as possible? You want the “impact per word ratio” as high as possible.
   - Have you stayed in the present tense while writing about literature, film, or other artistic texts?
   - Have you provided an accurate, unique, provocative, inviting title?
   - Does your paper fit the length and formatting requirements?