

Prof. Shankar Raman

Essay Assignment 1:

Due: Sep 29 by 5pm

(leave papers in envelope attached to my office door, or in mailbox)

Length: 5-6pages, double spaced throughout, standard 12 pt font such as Times, one inch margins.

I assume that you have read *Hamlet* and *The Spanish Tragedy* thoroughly in order to prepare for class discussions and paper.

Before you write:

This assignment is intended to get you used to reading the text closely, and developing an argument through close reading. Skim again through either *Hamlet* or *The Spanish Tragedy*, noting those passages or parts of scenes that most attract your attention. Thinking about these, try to articulate a question or a problem that your paper will address. Use the question to figure which sections of the chosen text need to be addressed in your essay. Then, outline your paper, trying to break it down into its conceptual 'moves,' and deciding what sorts of textual evidence are required for each 'move.'

Writing the essay:

Now, you are in the position to begin your essay. Please compose a 5-6 page essay in which you develop a clear and focused argument that addresses the central question or problem you have identified. Be specific and focused, citing the text to develop and support your claims. The task is **not** to go through passages line by line, listing everything you have noticed. Rather, concentrate on what you consider to be the most important aspects of a chosen passage in relation to the theme of your essay. You will thereby be ranging over the play as a whole, making connections that have at their centre the issues raised by the passage you have chosen. You should organise your assertions and observations in such a way that they contribute to a single important claim you want make about the play.

It is not sufficient to say, for instance, that a specific passage "heightens" or "augments" something the play is interested in. That is a vague thesis that simply prompts the question: so what? You need to have a focussed claim that examines the significance of the issues raised by the play and thinks in specific terms about how the passages you have chosen contributes to the elaboration of those issues. Try to move beyond character analysis to make the link between individual moments or actions and the larger issues with which the play deals.

After you write:

After you have written the paper, re-read and edit it to make sure that you have eliminated typographical and grammatical errors. Examine the transitions between sentence and paragraphs and re-work the paper so that it flows smoothly from beginning to end. To cite from the play follow the convention: 1/ the first time you cite, include a footnote detailing the edition you are using 2/ thereafter, simply include citation in parentheses in the body of the text, e.g., (2.3.32-39).

Finally, remember the injunction against plagiarism. If you borrow ideas from elsewhere, or use language from other sources, you are expected to acknowledge explicitly in footnotes or bibliography the nature of your reliance. Such acknowledgement needs to be made not just for direct quotation, but for paraphrasing the ideas of an external source as well.

Some questions to get you started (entirely optional---feel free to choose any topic you like):

What is the relationship between earlier and later versions of the ST? That is, how do the additions work (or not) in relation to the text we studied?

Frames and plays-within-plays: both ST and H make good use of these. Contrast the function and development of such motifs in the two plays (or, choose one of the plays, and discuss its use of frames, internal dramas and other such indicators of meta-theatricality).

How does Hieronimo's alteration or transformation by vengeance affect your reading of Hamlet (the character)?

Would Hamlet be possible without The Spanish Tragedy? (a wide-ranging topic, with many possible specific angles).

Discuss the relationship between the dynamics of the family and the corruption of state in the plays.

What do we make of Polonius and Hieronimo as the heads of functionary families, both of whom suffer unjust victimisation?

The use of figures of speech, rhetorical devices and tropes in the two plays

Think about soliloquies and their functions in the plays: who gets them? How do they work? What sorts of relationships between audience and play do they establish?

Use of letters and second-hand narration in both plays.

Use of props in the two plays

The use of minor characters in the two plays.