

English 200: Reading (and Rereading) *Hamlet*

Gertrude and Claudius Essay Assignment

Length and Due Date

Length: 1,250-1,500 words, formatted as described in the “Essays” portion of the syllabus

Due Date: Tuesday, August 17, by 10:00 p.m. via Collect It

Assignment

For this essay, you will make an argument as to whether John Updike’s *Gertrude and Claudius* constitutes an effective adaptation of *Hamlet*. To make your assertion, you must define what an effective adaptation is while demonstrating how Updike’s novel fits, does not fit, or partially fits your definition.

As you begin to define “effective adaptation,” consider the following questions. You need not answer each question in your analysis; instead, use them to develop your definition:

- What purpose(s) do adaptations serve? Why adapt a text at all?
- Do successful adaptations have to include all of the events or characters in the source text(s)? Why or why not?
- Should an adaptation explore themes similar to those explored in the source text(s)? Why or why not?
- Should an adaptation provide an interpretation or analysis of its source(s)? Why or why not?
- Can an adaptation critique or deconstruct its source(s)? Why or why not?
- Must an adaptation’s story occur in the same period or geographical setting as its source(s)? Why or why not?
- Should an adaptation answer questions left open by the source text(s)? Why or why not?
- Must an adaptation use the same sort of language and literary devices employed by the source text(s)? Why or why not?
- Overall, what is gained and lost by “faithfulness” to the source(s)? Is fidelity even a significant criterion of effective adaptation?

Guidelines

- 1) The key to an effective essay is narrow scope. Although we will identify many criteria for effective adaptation in class brainstorming sessions, you will need to select the two or three essential elements for your essay. In 1250-1500 words, you will not have space to explore all aspects of adaptation in sufficient depth.
- 2) Integrate definition with discussion of the novel throughout your essay rather than spending half the paper defining effective adaptation criteria and half discussing *Gertrude and Claudius*. Each paragraph should identify one element, explain why that element is necessary to effective adaptation, and demonstrate how the novel exemplifies or lacks this component of successful adaptation.
- 3) Although the *Gertrude and Claudius* essay examines a large-scale question, textual analysis will serve as your main source of evidence. In supporting your argument, you will need to pay attention to how Updike’s novel adapts the play through characterization, plot, structure, and language.

4) Remember that you are writing to an audience who has read both the play and the novel. Therefore, your essay should not offer plot summaries. Instead, you should incorporate summary, paraphrase, or quotation into an analysis of how the novel fits your criteria. Each reference to the text should support your argument.

5) As you develop your argument, don't forget our class brainstorming session on adaptation or the discussion of *Gertrude and Claudius* on the posting board. A review of notes and postings may help you to ask key questions and shape your analysis.

6) If you're having difficulty devising an approach to the essay, or if you want to discuss ideas-in-progress, email me or come to my office hours in Padelford A-305.

Grading

Grades for the *Gertrude and Claudius* essay will be calculated on an 80-point scale. Essays are due at the time indicated; work submitted after the due date and time will be considered late. Late essays will receive a 10-point deduction per day late, including weekends and holidays. I will make exceptions to the lateness policy only in cases of documented illness or family emergency.