

Your essay assignment is to write a short paper (about 1200 words, or five pages typed and double-spaced) comparing any two of the major works that we are reading this semester, as long as one is from the medieval period (to 1500), and the other from the early modern period (1500-1789). (Major works include *Beowulf*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Faerie Queene*, *Twelfth Night*, *Paradise Lost*, *Oroonoko*, *The Beggar's Opera*, and *The Rape of the Lock*. If you are interested in dealing with one of the last three works, which we will be covering very near the end of the semester, please discuss your plans with me.) You can, in addition, bring in examples from shorter works, but your focus should be on those two major works. Your essay should present whatever thesis you have chosen to develop, and then support it with carefully chosen and analyzed passages from the text. As you know, a thesis is an assertion of the particular idea that your essay will prove – it is a statement, rather than a question; it is detailed, rather than vague; and it is complex enough to require an entire essay for you to make clear the most significant evidence in its support. Though it is not mandatory to state your thesis clearly and succinctly in your first paragraph (along with sufficient discussion to develop the ideas on which it rests), it is certainly a good idea. At the bottom of this sheet, you will find two *suggested* topics: you are encouraged to work on a topic of your own devising, providing (1) it deals with at least two of the major works we have read this semester, (2) it is an analytical essay proving a specific point, and (3) you clear it me beforehand. Even as suggested topics, the following are probably too general to be covered fully in a short essay. Therefore, focus on a limited aspect of your topic, construct a developed thesis explaining why that aspect of it is significant, and then design your essay so that each paragraph in it contributes directly to the support of that thesis. And, whether you write on one of the suggested topics or propose your own, remember that your essay must cover at least two works from different periods, and must confine itself to the assigned readings in works from which we only read selections (*Canterbury Tales*, *Faerie Queene*, and *Paradise Lost*).

Please do not use a cover sheet, or bind the pages with more than a single staple; do be sure that your name is on each sheet, and that the pages are numbered. State your thesis in your essay as usual, making clear the specific point to be proved, and develop your paragraphs to prove it. To support your readings and to make your analysis clear, you will need to quote short passages from the texts, integrated into your own prose, which relate to the central claims or themes of your essay; please cite the page number for each quotation or group of quotations parenthetically at the end of the phrase or sentence, and avoid using long, indented quotations. Using shorter quotations makes it easier to establish what your reading of each is, through discussion and analysis, as well as to employ that reading in supporting the thesis of your essay. In the case of poetry, when quoting less than five lines, do not indent or separate the quotation, and mark the end of each line of verse with a slash (“/”). Revise for content and to strengthen your thesis and transitions; proofread thoroughly, even if you use a spell-checker first; and follow MLA style, including a Works Cited list at the end, even if you have only used texts the class anthology. You are not expected to use secondary sources for this essay, and using them cannot replace or supersede your own analysis of quotations from the text, but if you do use them, follow MLA style in documenting them.

In addition to handing in a printed copy of the essay in class on My 5th, you must also submit the essay to Turnitin.com on or before the same date. It would be a good idea to go online and establish your Turnitin.com account before you need to upload your essay, just to make sure there are no problems. Once that account is established, you can link it to the course by using the course number (2606037) and password (Beowulf). Then, when your essay is ready to be submitted, simply click the link for “Essay” and upload (or paste in) your work.

Except by prior arrangement, printed essays can only be submitted in the seminar and by students attending the full class; otherwise, make an appointment to hand in the material during office hours, but do not email it to me, or leave it in the department office or under my door. Expect significant delays in the marking and return of late work.

- 1. What Do Women Want?** Female characters in medieval and early modern literature are often stereotyped as either featureless conformists or as dangerous subversives – that is, either as characters who support the status quo without much opposition, or as dissidents who chance undermining authority or the social structure in order to satisfy their own desires. Is that a fair assessment, or is there a richer spectrum of female characterization in these works? Discuss the roles played by women in at least one medieval and one early modern work, considering whether the female characters can be justifiably limited to those two roles—not forgetting, of course, to take into account the nature of the male characters around them, as well.
- 2. Tragic Omission.** Though the Elizabethan period is famous for its tragedies, we are not reading any of them. In fact, none of the major works we read this semester can really be termed tragic in nature. Instead, among the longer works, we encounter epics, comedies and romances – if, as we discussed in class, we understand a “romance” to be an adventure narrative featuring the exploits of a knight or warrior that is often called upon to battle dragons or other monsters. It certainly would not take much to turn most of those into a tragedy, though. Armed with a good definition of “tragedy” (from the Greeks to the Elizabethans), discuss how and why the authors of two works (at least one of which should be comic in some sense) take the stuff of tragedy and make it into something else.