

## FORMAL ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Length: 4-6 full pages of your own prose.  
Due: Wed., May 2, 2012

### Overview

This essay asks you to practice your close reading and crux-busting skills to analyze a work from a selected list that we have not discussed in class. You will develop an argument about an important issue in the text and why exploring it in detail is crucial to understanding an aspect of the work. Use *no secondary or outside sources except those listed below in "Requirements."*

### Purpose

By analyzing a text we did not discuss in class, you are free to demonstrate your strengths and creativity in interpreting a new text – unsullied by my lectures or classmates' opinions. There are occasionally productive ties to texts we have discussed in class, and you may feel free to explore such connections provided that they do not detract from your analysis of the primary work. The assignment as a whole requires you to demonstrate your ability in textual analysis and synthesize the skills we have practiced throughout the semester.

### Requirements

- Select a text from the list we have not discussed in class.
- Evaluate the text, language, literary devices, issues, characters, etc.
- Use your crux-busting skills to identify important passages worth further analysis.
- Develop an organized argument that includes textual evidence analyzed in support of your central argument.
- The only secondary sources you may use are the following, which must be cited within the paper and listed in a Works Cited section at the end:
  - Class notes or NAEL introductory material and annotations
  - The OED – online database
  - *Oxford Dictionary of Classical Mythology* at Watson Reference Shelves (In Library Use Only) BL715 .O845 2003
  - A near-contemporary Bible, e.g., the Douay-Rheims: [www.drbo.org](http://www.drbo.org)

### Format

- Essays must be submitted in standard academic format—typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, carefully revised and edited, with MLA documentation and Works Cited. Pages must be numbered and stapled.
- All written work should follow principles of standard, edited English – including correct grammar, syntax, mechanics, and proofreading.

### Sample Topics

Use of images, e.g., the burning flax in Gower; representation of gender in Lanyer; use of classical allusions in Carew or Milton; tensions between love and religion in Donne or Carew; how the author conveys the theme of [insert important or perhaps easily overlooked theme here]; use of satiric techniques to convey social critique; analysis of character, motive, tone, etc.

## Tips and Caveats

- Start now (or at least by mid-term). Give yourself time to explore your options. Make your choice as soon as possible to give you time to evaluate your selection, develop a plausible argument about it, and revise/proofread.
- Should you choose to explore connections between your text and another text we have read, make sure that your analysis exceeds “compare and contrast” and that you do not lose focus on the primary text at hand.
- Avoid making generalizations such as “that’s what it was like for women back then” or “like all knights, he was a good guy.” These may not be historically accurate and would require historical research to support. Rather, focus on what you can plausibly argue about the text’s *representation* of women or knighthood or your topic, unless the *NAEL* introductions give you any reason to posit a relationship to historical circumstances or cultural beliefs.
- *Choose wisely*: The shortest text isn’t necessarily the easiest to analyze or the one you’ll connect with most readily. Pick a selection that will let you play to your strengths.

## The List of Exciting Works

I have selected these works because they will give you a greater sense of the literary tradition (e.g., Gower wrote at the same time as Chaucer but is very different) or a major author’s works (e.g., *Lycidas* is a beautiful poem unlike anything in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*). If there is an entry in the *NAEL* that you would like to analyze that is not in this list (except Shakespeare), see me for approval, preferably through e-mail so that you have the written record.

Marie de France, *Lanval*, p. 142-55

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Merchant’s Tale*, Bb/Assignments/Merchant’s Tale

John Gower, *The Tale of Philomena and Tereus*, p. 320-30

Elizabeth I, “Speech to the Troops at Tilbury,” and “The Golden Speech,” p. 699-703

Edmund Spenser, *Epithalamion*, p. 907-917

Christopher Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, p. 1004-22

John Donne, *Holy Sonnets*, p. 1268-72

Aemilia Lanyer, “Eve’s Apology in Defense of Women,” p. 1317-19

Thomas Carew, “A Rapture,” p. 1672-76

John Milton, *Lycidas*, p. 1805-11

Jonathan Swift, “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” p. 2590-93