

Essay #1: Genesis and the *Shah-Namah*

Due: 1/29 (Monday)

Hard copy due in class and electronic copy through Blackboard before class begins

Length: 600 word (c. 2 pages) minimum, 750 word (c. 2.5 pages) maximum

Not including citations or bibliography

What am I supposed to Do?

This week we've read the first three chapters of Genesis and the Poet's Introduction of the Persian epic, the *Shah-Namah*. Each text gives the reader a foundational story about the creation of the world, and each text touches on issues of physical, metaphysical, and theological geographies. For this essay, pick one point of difference or commonality in the way that the texts deal with the creation of the world. Make an argument, from the sections that you have chosen, suggesting why the differences or similarities that you have identified matter.

Why? What's the point?

This assignment has two primary purposes. Firstly, it should serve to introduce you to the process of closely reading a text and considering what it means in relation to other documents. This process forms an integral part of the historian's craft, and lies at the heart of intellectual discourse across a wide range of disciplines. Secondly, this essay should provide you space to begin working on making a strong argument in your essays; in short, to make your writing matter.

How do I do this again?

- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Chicago or Turabian citation style.
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in an easily legible font
- Your paper must be at least 600 words long, **not including footnotes or your Works Cited page**. Your essay should not exceed 750 words.
- You are encouraged to schedule an appointment with me to discuss your paper prior to the deadline if you have concerns about your progress, or you would like a second opinion about your work before you turn it in for a grade.

How am I getting graded?

****This paper will be ungraded. You get full marks for turning it in (on time).****

Your paper will be evaluated for the following elements:

- A clear and convincing argument
- Thoughtful consideration of the connections and intersections between the elements that you chose
- Appropriate use of textual evidence in support of your argument
- Conformity to basic standards of written academic prose, including:
 - Correct spelling and grammar
 - General coherence and logical progression of your argument
 - Proper citation

Essay #2: *Timaeus* and the Bible – An Exegesis

Conference with Instructor: Prior to 2/22

Draft Due: 2/23 (Friday) – in class

Essay Due: 3/2/2015 (Friday)

Hard copy due in class and electronic copy via Blackboard before class begins

Length: 900 - 1200 words (c. 3-4 pages)

Not including citations and bibliography

What am I supposed to do?

Both *Timaeus* and Genesis inform us about the way that the earth was created, and about its physical characteristics and geographies (physical, cosmological, and theological). Early Church fathers found *Timaeus* an invaluable resource for thinking about and giving framework to the stories in Genesis, using Plato's text as an interpretive lens. For this assignment, I want you to do the same thing.

In this short (roughly 3-4 page) essay you should pick an element of the creation story from Genesis and explain it using *Timaeus*. You may pick any part of the story you wish – possible topics might include (but are not limited to) the role of God, humanity's relationship to the cosmos, or the creation of man and woman. Use Plato's book as a pair of glasses that you use to bring the blurry biblical passages into focus.

This is **not** a creative writing assignment. You need to make a clear and specific argumentative claim, evidenced and cited appropriately. You do not need to reference outside texts, though you may if it is necessary for your argument.

Why? What's the point?

This essay serves three distinct purposes. Firstly, it helps you to better inhabit a medieval mindset. One of the goals of this class is for you to gain a better understanding of how medieval people conceptualized their global spaces within the frameworks offered them by the bible and a small selection of surviving classical works. As we have seen from Bede, analyzing the Bible (and other texts) was a serious business. Getting to the bottom of the text's meaning meant gaining an understanding of the true workings of the world. Texts like *Timaeus* proved invaluable to early and medieval commentators in this endeavor. Composing an exegetical reading of Genesis's start, using Plato, offers a good start towards understanding how medieval people layered the information available to them to fashion their worlds.

Secondly, this assignment is designed to help you gain proficiency in writing a compelling and persuasive piece of argumentative writing, supported by textual evidence. This is an important skill for people in all fields to master (not only history!).

Lastly, this essay asks you to do the hard work of using one text to analyze another – to use one story to ask critical questions of another, and to synthesize a reasonable hypothesis from the exercise. This skill, as much as any other, is key to both academic work and to living a considered life – with sovereignty of thought – in the modern world.

How do I do this again?

- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Chicago or Turabian citation style.
- You should enter your citations using Zotero.
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in a legible font such as Times New Roman or Garamond, 12 pt. font
- Your paper must be at least 900 words long, not including your Works Cited page.
- You are encouraged to schedule an appointment with me to discuss your paper at any point prior to the deadline if you have concerns about your progress, or you would like a second opinion about your work before you turn it in for a grade.

How am I getting graded?

Your paper will be evaluated for the following elements:

- Participation in a pre-draft conference with the instructor
- A clear and convincing argument
- Thoughtful consideration of the connections and intersections between the two texts
- Appropriate use of textual evidence in support of your argument
- Conformity to basic standards of written academic prose, including:
 - Correct spelling and grammar
 - General coherence and logical progression of your argument
 - Proper citation

Essay #3: Cornell's Alternative Geographies

Draft Due: 3/23 (Friday): bring a hard copy to class

Final Paper Due: 3/30 (Friday)

Hard copy due in class and electronic copy via Blackboard before class begins

Length: 1500-1800 words (c. 5-6 pages)

Introduction to Essays 3 and 4:

The primary source material that we are reading this semester describes the geography of the world in a number of ways. Authors have explained the world in terms of its history and mythology, and its topology and hydrology. They have been concerned with the place of the world cosmologically and philosophically, and they have been interested in describing the globe as a traveled, lived place. Our readings have explained the world by its political geographies, racial geographies, and religious geographies. In short, our authors have been considering the Earth in terms of a number of different frameworks. For these next two essays, I will be asking you to undertake a similar task, on a smaller scale.

What am I supposed to Do for Essay #3?

I would like you to describe, in 5-6 pages, an alternative geography Cornell. Argue for one specific way of thinking about Cornell as a space. Take Cornell as its own world, and imagine a unique or creative way of imagining its geography. The University has its own foundational narratives, and the institution tells very specific stories about itself. It has its own boundaries, but these official borders may be different than the lived borders of its students or employees. Some questions that you might ask yourself as you start thinking about this assignment might include: What are some of these stories, boundaries, and spatial constructions, and how might they offer ways of imagining a different definition for Cornell? What are the official geographies of Cornell, and what is your own experience with them? How are they established or maintained? How does Cornell (the institution) understand, moderate, and narrate Cornell (the space)? Why are Cornell's geographies presented to us as they are?

This essay, like all of your essays for this class, will need to pose a clear and convincing argument. You will need to base your conclusions on demonstrable evidence. You have wide latitude in the sources you chose to employ, and the kinds of geographies on which you focus. Be creative, and be open to new or varied ways of thinking about and interrogating the spatial story that Cornell offers you. But also be rigorous in your evidence – as with our previous assignment, this is not a creative writing piece.

Why? What's the point?

The goal of this essay is two-fold: to encourage critical analysis of the constructed geographies of your world, and to improve your ability to find and manage primary evidence.

Looking through modern eyes – eyes informed by Google Maps and particle physics – it is easy for us to dismiss medieval geographies as the products of uninformed, unsophisticated minds. We wonder why they did not question things that seem so natural and obvious to us. But how often do we look critically at the foundational stories and the received geographies of the places that we inhabit?

This assignment asks you to do just this: to think about the stories we receive about the world around us, and to think about how they are constructed. Critical evaluation of these types of stories makes us all better citizens, nationally and globally. To get there, you will need to employ the basic tools of good scholastic writing: discovery of sources, analysis of their content, and the creation of a synthetic argument.

How do I do this again?

- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Chicago or Turabian citation style.
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in Time New Roman, Garamond, or a similarly readable font, set to 12 pt.
- Your paper must be at least 1500 words long, **not including** your citations or your bibliography. You may exceed this limit if you wish, but you do not need to do so.
- You are encouraged to schedule an appointment with me to discuss your paper prior to the deadline if you have concerns about your progress, or you would like a second opinion about your work before you turn it in for a grade.

How am I getting graded?

Your paper will be evaluated for the following elements:

- Creativity in addressing the question, establishing your argument, and finding your evidence.
- A clear and convincing argument
- Appropriate use of supporting evidence
- Participation in all stages of the process: Draft, Peer Review, and Final Essay
- Conformity to basic standards of written academic prose, including:
 - Correct spelling and grammar
 - General coherence and logical progression of your argument
 - Proper citation

Essay #4: Theoretical Geographies: A Blog Post Response

Full Draft Due in class: 4/13

Final Paper Due: 4/20 (Friday)

2 electronic copies due by the start of class on the 20th:

1 written in or pasted to the BB Course Blog

1 written in MS Word and submitted, as usual, through blackboard

No hard copy due

Length: 1500-1800 words (c. 5-6 pages)

What am I supposed to Do?

You have recently been thinking about the potential theoretical geographies that make up Cornell. In this essay, written as a blog post, you will continue to consider these questions. You will receive one of your classmate's recent essays, and your job is to write a response to its argument. Your essay should have 2 main components:

1. Summary of the essay to which you are responding. This summary should take up no more than 1 page of your essay, and should serve to situate your audience within the original argument.
2. Make a contribution to the original argument. This can take a variety of forms: if you agree with the original essay then your response may build on its argument. If you disagree with your peer's work, then your essay might make a different reading of the author's evidence. In either case, the bulk of your essay must be given over to critical analysis of the original paper's argument and evidence.

Things to keep in mind:

- **DO NOT** simply rewrite your own original essay. Work with the argument that you have in front of you, and address it on its own terms.
- **DO NOT** focus on issues of grammar, syntax, or structure in you peer's writing. Engage with their arguments and their evidence.
- This is not a review of your peer's work; you must provide an argument of your own. It is not enough to simply agree or disagree with the original piece and then add evidence. Your argument, even if it complements the original, must provide a different way of thinking about or approaching the topic.

This response takes the form of a blogpost, so you may write in any style or level of formality that you choose. Your grade will be based, in part, on how consistent you are within the parameters of your choice.

Why? What's the point?

There are three main reasons for this assignment. Firstly, this is the way that academic (and often professional) discourse works: ideas and projects move forward when different people come to tough questions with different approaches. Secondly, this assignment provides you with a space in which to work the process of assessing and critiquing developed arguments. Skill in this area will be useful to you both for peer editing, and for learning how to edit your own, more advanced, work. Thirdly, it allows you to experiment with a different style of writing – one which has been undervalued in academic discourse in the past, but which is of growing importance.

How do I do this again?

- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Turabian citation style. Footnotes will copy into Blackboard from Word as endnotes with links. Include a Work Cited section.
 - Often blog writing does not employ footnotes, but for the sake of academic transparency I'm requesting them for this assignment.
- Your essay must be between 1500 and 1800 words long, not including your Works Cited or footnotes.
- You are encouraged to schedule an appointment with me to discuss your paper prior to the deadline if you have concerns about your progress, or you would like a second opinion about your work before you turn it in for a grade.

How am I getting graded?

Your essay will be evaluated for the following elements:

- Engagement with the argument in your source material
- A clear, convincing, and original argument of your own, either in support of, or disagreement with, your source material
- Logical and coherent presentation of evidence and argument
- Proper citation
- Consistency of tone, voice and style
 - NB: While the style of writing for blog posts is, generally speaking, much more relaxed than that for academic prose, you still need to write in lucid prose that are legible by a wide audience.

Essay #5: Argumentative Research Essay

Meeting with instructor: prior to 4/27 – bring a written proposal and at least 3 sources

Draft due in class: 5/9 (Wed.)

Final due: 5/18 (Friday)

Electronic copy only, via Blackboard, due by 11:59 pm on the 18th

LATE SUBMISSIONS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED

Length: 3000-3600 word (c. 10-12 pages)

What am I supposed to do?

For this essay, you get to choose the topic. I want you to pick an issue that we have touched on in the class – either in the reading or in our class discussions – that you find interesting and worthy of further investigation. You will need to dig into your topic and to develop a clear, distinct and original argument based on your materials. This should be a thesis-driven essay, which makes claims based on the research that you have done. Your essay will rely on sources beyond what we have read for class, and will move beyond summary into actual analysis.

You must schedule a meeting with me prior to April 27 in order to discuss the directions that you wish to take your essay. You will need to do some legwork ahead of this meeting: you should come with a written proposal for your paper (1/2 page or so) and at least 3 sources **external** to our class readings.

Why? What's the point?

The ability to write an independent research paper is a necessary, but hard to master, skill. Regardless of your discipline, you will have to write well researched papers in college and in your post-collegiate careers. Sometimes you will have a topic handed to you, but often you will need to generate your own. The point of this essay, then is to provide practice in learning how to identify worthwhile questions and how to pursue them in a thoughtful, productive way.

This essay also acts as a culmination of many of the themes of the course. Because the essay asks you to tackle, in depth, an issue or topic raised over the course of the semester, you will need to demonstrate a degree of command over the materials at hand. Moreover, in writing an essay of this length you will need to employ many of the approaches to writing and the tactics that we have discussed over the semester. A long research paper allows you to demonstrate progress in your writing in a way that a shorter essay does not.

How do I do this again?

- Your final essay must include (and properly use) at least 7 sources beyond the materials we have looked at in class
- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Turabian or Chicago citation style, and properly cite your sources
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in Time New Roman, Garamond, or a similarly readable font, size 12 pt.
- Your paper must be at least 3000 and 3600 words long, not including your footnotes or Works Cited page.

- The final essay should be submitted electronically, in MS Word file format, via Blackboard

How am I getting graded?

Your paper will be evaluated for the following elements:

- Participation in a pre-draft conference with the instructor
- Participation in peer evaluation
- A clear and convincing argument
- Appropriate use of textual evidence in support of your argument
- Thoughtful consideration of the connections and intersections between your pieces of evidence
- Appropriate length
- At least seven (7) sources external to those used in class
- Conformity to basic standards of written academic prose, including:
 - Correct spelling and grammar
 - General coherence and logical progression of your argument
 - Proper citation