

English 137: Essay #2

Assignment: Write an analytic essay that makes an argument about one or more of Shakespeare's sonnets (except Sonnet 30, which will be covered in class). Strive for a well-organized, well-supported essay that gives thoughtful attention to the implications of textual details.

Topic: The Power of Poetry. Analyze the power of poetry in one or more of Shakespeare's sonnets (you can also choose to write on the ones that weren't assigned reading). According to the *Norton Anthology*, much of Shakespeare's sonnet sequence "develops as a dominant motif the transience and destructive power of time, countered only by the force of love and the permanence of poetry." What gives poetry such remarkable power?

When arguing about the power of poetry, you *should* look at the sonnets in at least a few ways:

- What claims about poetry are made by the speaker in the sonnets (or sonnet) you have chosen?
- What are some poetic strategies Shakespeare uses to create powerful, provocative, memorable verse? In other words, how does Shakespeare use poetic tactics (such as, for example, rhyme, meter, word choice, images, and figures of speech) to his advantage to win the attention and admiration of his readers?
- How do Shakespeare's sonnets fit into a literary tradition, and what does their relation to that tradition suggest about the power of poetry's influence and/or the power of originality?

Here are some other ideas you *might* consider when studying the sonnets:

- What is the relationship between poetry and nature in the sonnets?
- What does Sidney suggest about that relationship in his *Defense of Poesy*?
- Why does Sidney attribute so much power to poets in his *Defense of Poesy*?
- What is the rhetorical power of the sonnets? Why are they powerful arguments?
- What emotional ploys (e.g. flattery, self pity) work to win power or attention?
- Do some sonnets suggest conflicting messages? Why that might be?
- Who appears more powerful—the speaker or the person being praised?

Tips: When thinking about how many sonnets to cover, consider this: for some people, it may be difficult to write on just one sonnet. Perhaps looking at two or three would be more manageable. Perhaps focus mainly on two, but then make occasional connections with a few others. There are many possibilities, but the point is this: the best essays tend to "say more about less" rather than spread themselves thin. A paper will not be stronger because it covers more sonnets; a stronger paper, instead of moving quickly from quote to quote, will carefully examine details—especially the use of poetic strategies. Stronger papers analyze more than summarize.

Note: If you are interested in developing ideas on another topic, please check with me.

Main Objectives: This assignment is designed to encourage you to think more critically about our readings and to communicate your insights in an effective and credible manner. For this assignment, your key goals are to:

- Make a clear and direct argument. Provide a thesis statement (an arguable claim) in your introduction.
- Support your argument with developed body paragraphs that draw out the implications of textual details.
- Organize your argument by creating assertive topic sentences, unified paragraphs, and smooth transitions.
- Establish credibility by presenting a convincing and professional-looking paper. Quote and cite according to MLA format and carefully proofread your essay.

DO NOT PLAGIARIZE—don't let SparkNotes, or some other source, speak for you and rob you of a chance to write what you think about Shakespeare's poetry; if you use outside sources, give them credit; acknowledge, quote, and cite them whenever necessary.

Grading Criteria: Papers will be evaluated upon the effectiveness and clarity with which they address the essay topics and meet the stated objectives of the assignment. More specifically, papers will also be evaluated according to a detailed grading rubric posted on our class website.

Percentage of Course Grade: 20%

Format: 5-6 complete pages, MLA style, typed, double spaced.

Due Date: Please see the Course Reading and Assignment Schedule.

These Resources Are Available on Our Class Website:

- Writing about Literature (Dianna Hacker), a pdf file which includes helpful sections on:
 - Forming an interpretation
 - Drafting a thesis
 - Sketching an outline
 - Avoiding simple plot summary
 - Observing literary conventions
 - Using MLA style to quote and cite effectively
 - Avoiding plagiarism
- My Correction Symbols linked to writing tips from various online resources
- MLA Format Tutorial (YouTube)
- Purdue OWL Online Writing Lab, MLA Format
- Avoiding Plagiarism, The Writing Center at UNC
- MLA Style (Bedford/St. Martin's)
- Citation Builder, MLA Format Tool (UNC)