

Hum 3 Essay 2

For this essay you should choose one of the topics below. Your essay should be based primarily on your own close reading of the assigned text. You may choose to write about either Dante or Chaucer. You should have a clear, arguable, sophisticated thesis, original in both statement and insight. You should support your argument with appropriate and adequate textual support.

Length: 3-5 pages, typed and double-spaced.

***Inferno* Topics:**

1. Why is it that Dido, Francesca, and Paolo (Canto V) are condemned for their erotic love, while Dante's (erotic) love for Beatrice seems to save him?
2. Dante presents a ranking of moral failures. Discuss why sins are ranked accordingly. You should do more than just list the order, but try to arrive at some underlying principle(s) of organization.
3. Analyze any one canto of *The Inferno*. Many scholars suggest that each individual canto reflects a kind of unity. By analyzing the canto as a unit you will have to explain how each element of the canto fits into a unitary whole, then present a thesis arguing for your understanding of the relationship between these elements.
4. Analyze one of the characters in the poem. In your analysis you will need to rely on Hollanders' notes, but you should present your own thesis regarding Dante's depiction.
5. Compare two or more characters, classes of sinners, or moments in the poem.
6. Analyze Dante's use of another text. How and why is Dante using that text?

***Canterbury Tales* Topics:**

1. Compare the description of one of the characters in the General Prologue with the tale that character tells. Does the description match, confound, or complicate in some way the tale the character tells? What is the relationship between the character and the tale they tell?
2. Emelye is a courtly lady, Alysoun a carpenter's wife; how are they alike? How are they different? Does either of them have agency within the tale? What does a comparison between them reveal about the function of women in the Chaucerian universe? Don't lose sight of who is telling which tale...
3. Attempt a close reading of the Cook's Tale. It's a fragment, but you may want to consider the implications of its very fragmentariness. Does it continue the progression (or perhaps one should say degradation) of narrative through the Knight's, Miller's, and Reeve's Tales?
4. How is the Prioress's tale appropriate to the Prioress? Is she the anti-semitic, or is Chaucer? Are they both?
5. The Host prevents Chaucer from finishing the Tale of Sir Thopas; why? What is achieved by this interruption? What can a reading of the Tale of Sir Thopas tell us about Chaucer the Pilgrim? About Chaucer the Poet?