

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

Due: 8/31 (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

### **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 a 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 Turabian citation style.
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in Time New Roman 12 pt. font
- Your paper must be at least 600 words long, not including 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: The Geography of *Timaeus* and the Bible

Due: 10/2/2015 (Friday)

Hard copy due in class and electronic copy via Blackboard before class begins  
Length: 900 word (c. 3 pages) minimum

### **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 through and giving framework to the stories in Genesis. How, then, did these early Church thinkers understand the questions of global geography that arise in comparing the two texts? This is the question I would like you to answer in this essay.

In this short (roughly 3 page) essay you should attempt to reconcile the way that the two texts discuss various types of geographies. In fine: what does the world look like to you, the reader, if your main sources of information about it are *Timaeus* and the first three books of Genesis? Create a vision of the world, supported by evidence from the two texts.

This is **not** a creative writing assignment. You need to make a clear and specific argumentative claim, evidenced and cited appropriately.

### **Why? What's the point?**

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. For us, the goal is 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. Attempting to recreate a medieval global vision is a good start towards that goal.

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 Turabian citation style.
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in Time New Roman 12 pt. font
- Your paper must be at least 900 words long, not including your Works Cited page. 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 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 Theoretical Geographies

Draft Due: 10/19/2015: bring a hard copy to class

Final Paper Due: 10/23/2015 (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:**

To this point in the semester, we've been reading the sources that underpinned medieval ideas about geography. We've been primarily concerned with foundational narratives, and the stage that they set for the world. We will shortly begin to read accounts by people less concerned with cosmology (to a degree) and more concerned with what we more readily think of as geography. As the semester progresses we will begin to turn our attention more and more towards discussing how these theoretical foundations of geography interacted with the lived experiences of medieval peoples. In this next series of essays (essays 3 and 4) you will take these ideas, and the analytical skills you've been developing, to think about the world in which we live.

### **What am I supposed to Do?**

I would like you to describe, in 5-6 pages, the theoretical geographies of Cornell. Take Cornell as its own world. It has its own foundational narratives, and the institution tells very specific stories about what the University is. What, then, are these? What are the theoretical bounds, the multiple rationales, and the layered geographies of Cornell? 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? These are the types of questions you might ask to get you started thinking about this assignment.

This essay, like all of your essays for this class, will need to pose a clear and convincing argument, making a case for what the theoretical Cornell is. You will need to base your conclusions on documentary evidence. You have wide latitude in the sources you chose to employ, and the 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 Turabian citation style.
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in Time New Roman 12 pt. font
- Your paper must be at least 1500 words long, not including your Works Cited page. 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:

- 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
- Creativity in addressing the question, establishing your argument, and finding your evidence.

## Essay #4: Theoretical Geographies: A Blog Post Response

Full Draft Due in class: 11/11

### **Final Paper Due: 11/16 (Monday)**

Hard copy due in class and electronic copy to BB Course Blog before class begins  
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 types of potentials. You will receive one of your classmates' essays on theoretical geographies, and your job is to write a response to it. 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 2 pages of your essay, and should serve to situate your audience within the original argument.
2. Suggest improvements to the original argument. This can take a variety of forms: if you agree with the original essay then your response may take the form of adding further data points and refining the argument. If you disagree with the argument then your essay might make a different reading of the author's 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.
- 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.

### **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?**

- Unlike in academic writing, in a blog post personal experience may count as evidence
  - it may **not**, however, account for all of your evidence
- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Turabian citation style.
- Your hard copy should be double spaced, and in Time New Roman 12 pt. font
- Your paper must be at least 1500 words long, not including your Works Cited page. 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:

- A clear, convincing, and original argument
- Participation in all stages of the process: Draft, Peer Review, and Final
- Appropriate use of evidence
- Conformity to basic standards of written English, including:
  - Correct spelling and grammar
  - General coherence and logical progression of your argument
  - Proper citation
- 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: Annotated Bibliography for Essay #6

**Due: 11/24, Before you leave for Break**

Electronic copy via Blackboard

Length: 7 sources, external to class readings

Each citation: 150-300 words

### **What am I supposed to Do?**

For this assignment you will need to find 7 that are external to the texts we've used in class, and that you plan to use as evidence and sources for your Essay #6. Your sources can be about mapping generally, medieval maps, or about your particular map. You may draw from books, from journal articles, and from appropriate websites (if you have questions about the appropriateness of a site, I am happy to help you make an assessment). For each source you will need to write a paragraph briefly summarizing the sources' details (author, date, location, etc.), the basic elements of the source (what the source is about, important arguments, etc.), and lastly the detailing the basic elements of the source that you believe will be useful to you as you write your paper.

### **Why? What's the point?**

This assignment serves to help make sure that you are working towards Essay 6 in a productive way, and to give you a vehicle for researching beyond the texts that we have been working with.

### **How do I do this again?**

- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Turabian citation style.
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in Time New Roman 12 pt. font
- Your paper must have at least 1 paragraph noting the important features for each of 7 sources. You may exceed this limit if you wish, but you do not need to do so.
- You are encouraged to schedule additional appointments 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:

- Complete number of sources
- Quality of sources (no Wikipedia, Encyclopedia Britannica, etc.)
- Compliance with basic elements of standard written English.
- Turning the assignment in on time.

## **Essay #6: Maps and Space**

Meeting with instructor: by 11/20 to discuss proposal

Essay #5 (Annotated Bibliography for Essay 6) due: 11/23 via Blackboard

Draft Due in class: 12/4 (Friday) for peer review (bring 2 hard copies)

**Final Paper Due: 12/15/2014 – midnight (no late papers will be accepted)**

Electronic copy via Blackboard

Length: 2400-3000 words (8-10 pages)

### **What am I supposed to Do?**

For this last paper, you need to pick a medieval map – one of the ones we have been looking at, or a different one if you prefer – and consider it in the broader context of the material that we have read this semester. Do the ideas about space and geography that we have looked at get represented and reproduced on the map? Or is the mapmaker doing working with very different ideas about the world? How are spaces being created and imagined?

Make an original argument about the ways that space is produced in the medieval period, working from your map, and from the texts we have read. You will almost certainly need to rely on external information to help fill in the gaps in your knowledge about the map you'll be working with. You have wide latitude in how you want to pursue your thesis, but make sure that you are synthesizing an original idea, rather than simply offering a compare/contrast review of the materials.

### **Why? What's the point?**

Over the course of the semester we have examined a wide range of documents and ideas that informed the ways that medieval people thought about spaces. We've looked the geography as an aspect of cosmology, as a way of thinking about the relationship between people, God, and the world, and as a means of describing regional and global spaces. This essay offers you the opportunity to harmonize what we've learned, and apply it in a longer essay. Additionally, for this essay you will need to do some research beyond what we've read in order to understand that map that you've chosen.

### **How do I do this again?**

- As with all papers for this class, you should use the Turabian citation style.
- Your paper should be double spaced, and in Time New Roman 12 pt. font
- Your paper must be at least 2400 words long, not including your Works Cited page or footnotes. You may exceed this limit if you wish, but you do not need to do so.
- You are encouraged to schedule additional appointments 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:

- A clear and convincing argument
- Participation in all stages of the process: Meeting with instructor, Peer Review, and Final

- Appropriate use of textual evidence from a range of sources – both sources that we examined together over the semester, and the sources that you have found for your 5<sup>th</sup> essay – 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

## **Informal Paper #1: Foundations of Home**

Due: 9/4/2004 (Friday)

Hard copy due in class

Length: Roughly 300 word (c. 1 page)

### **What am I supposed to Do?**

Over the course of the semester we will be reading a number of accounts of the construction of the earth – ways of thinking about how the globe came together, and how its geographies operate. For this short (roughly one page) informal writing assignment, you should write your own such account. Instead of writing about global spaces however, you should focus on your hometown. Write a brief foundational narrative for the place where you live. You may write this assignment in any style or level of formality you chose. You have the freedom to write this paper as you see fit.

Except...

You need to write the entire paper in the passive voice.

### **Why? What's the point?**

Passive voice is one of the accursed enemies of historical writers. As practicing historians, we usually want to eliminate the passive voice from our writing; as much as possible it is to be avoided. To do so, you need to be aware of what the passive voice actually is, become adept at recognizing it in writing, and establish strategies for working around it.

On the 4th we will examine each others' papers in peer editing groups, to work through some of the issues that the passive voice presents.

Additionally, this assignment gives me and your classmates a chance to get to know you – and your writing – a bit better.

### **How am I getting graded?**

You will be graded on participation in the assignment, which will include both turning the paper in, and working with your classmates in the following peer editing sessions.

**Be sure to bring a hard copy of your paper to class, and be prepared to share your work with us.**

## **Informal Paper #2: A Cornell Geography**

Due: 9/18 (Friday): Hard copy, in class

Length: 300 word minimum (roughly 1 page)

### **What am I supposed to do?**

You have been given (by Fate) a location on campus to visit. Go to your assigned spot and experience it in whatever manner you deem appropriate. Write a brief (1 page or so) account of your trip. You may write in whatever style you deem appropriate, and focus on whichever aspects of the location or the trip that you wish. There are no real boundaries on this assignment...write about the things that struck you as interesting.

Except...

The whole paper should be written solely using “to be” in your sentences.

### **Why? What is the point?**

One of the ways that people understand the geographies of their surrounds and circumstances is to walk through it and experience it. The process of reconciling received geography with experienced geography is one that we will spend some time considering over the course of the semester, often using the world of Cornell as a space for thinking through questions of space and geographic narrative. It behooves, us, then to learn a bit more about the campus.

With regard to the requirement to write the paper exclusively using “to be”: the verb “to be”, while wholly appropriate and useful in places, tends to be many writer’s verb of choice in their work. Over-use of “to be” becomes tedious and uninformative; your writing will benefit greatly if you can employ a wide range of strong, interesting verbs. As with the passive voice assignment from earlier in the semester: having to write exclusively using “to be” should help to draw your attention to its regular use in your other writings, and help you to work towards greater verbal diversity.

### **How am I being graded?**

As with our other informal writing assignments, your work here is graded on participation...do the work and get full credit.

We will take class time on Friday, 9/18 to work in groups to find better, more interesting verbs. We will also take time for you to tell the class about your experiences, and what you learned while you completed the assignment.