

ENGL 201: World Literature Paper Topics

Paper 1

Choose a quotation of ten to twenty-five lines or so from the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*, and write a paper of 3-4 pages (minimum) in which you use the [Poetry Explication Checklist](#) and the [OED Handout](#) (under Handouts, on my web site) to compare and contrast our class's translation of the poem with two other translations and analyze the differences among the three versions of the passage. Don't just make a shopping list of similarities and differences—you need to write a coherent, organized essay with a thesis statement that makes a focused argument about how the translations create different poetic effects, and convey the apparent meaning or meanings of the passages in different ways. Make sure you analyze the parts of the quotation you discuss—don't simply paraphrase it (the handouts will help here). Your paper should include a Works Cited page indicating which translations you've used. Although you may use dictionaries and encyclopedias to identify words and historical or mythological references, please do not consult any secondary sources or Internet sources. Use MLA format for the paper, and [make sure you quote and cite verse properly](#). Here are some other writing suggestions:

- Use your brain, not your heart to analyze the translations—saying you “like” one translation better than another, or that one translation is “easier” to read than another is not an analysis.
- If you're analyzing the imagery in the translations, actually analyze it—saying “imagery helps me visualize what the poet is saying” is not an analysis.
- Unless you know ancient Greek (and probably even if you do), do not say things like: “Fagles does a great job of translating this passage from Homer.”
- You do not need to provide a long narrative explanation of the history of the poem—your thesis should focus on an analysis of different poetic effects of the various translations. Do not begin your papers with long biographies of Homer or Vergil.
- I don't mind if you use the first person, but don't use it as a substitute for analysis and argument. Do not write things like: “My adventure into the mysterious world of Homer's *Iliad* began with an arduous journey through the stacks of the Longwood library.”
- [Do not use the word “quote” as a noun](#). Unless you're talking to your stock broker.

Translations on reserve at the library (one hour reserve time—check them out, photocopy your passage, and return the books to the counter; going in small groups can often save time here): Translations of the *Iliad* by Richmond Lattimore and Robert Fitzgerald; translations of the *Aeneid* by Robert Fitzgerald and Robert Fagles.

There are other translations of these books in the library you can use, but make sure you choose a verse translation (not prose), and please leave the book in the library to be re-shelved by library staff so other students can use it. There are also older translations of these poems available online at places like Project Gutenberg, but check with me first if you decide to use one of these.

MLA formatting information is available here: <http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/>

Paper 2

The literary critic and poet William Empson wrote:

It seems to me that the chief function of imaginative literature is to make you realize that other people are very various, many of them quite different from you, with different “systems of value” as well. . . . The main purpose of reading imaginative literature is to grasp a wide variety of experience, imagining people with codes and customs very unlike our own. (*Argufying*, ed. John Haffenden [1987], p. 13)

Christopher Ricks has paraphrased this as follows: “One of the ways in which art is invaluable is by giving us sympathetic access to systems of belief that are not our own It is our responsibility not only to believe but to entertain beliefs” (*Dylan’s Visions of Sin* [2004], p. 377).

Identify a character, episode, or quotation in one of the works we’ve read that reflects a religious or spiritual belief (or non-belief) that is different from your own belief (or non-belief), or a social or cultural value or practice, or a moral action or statement with which you disagree. Use a minimum of three sources* to help you understand this belief or system of value in relation to the work you’ve chosen (e.g., if you’re writing about Greek mythology, it might be useful to look for works specifically about mythology in Homer), and use this information to explain to your reader the historical or cultural context of that belief or system of value, especially as it is reflected in the literary example you’ve chosen. Use this research, and your own analysis of the literary example, to develop an argument in which you either agree or disagree with the statements by Empson and Ricks above. Make sure your argument is based on an analysis of specific quotations, both in the literary work and your sources. Make sure you explain why you agree or disagree: How do literary depictions of values different from your own help you understand or think about your own values, or yourself, or humanity? Do they or do they not give you “sympathetic access” to the beliefs of others—and if you think they do, what, precisely, does that mean? Do not generalize in this paper—don’t just talk about the fact that you disagree with Hinduism. Make sure your argument specifically deals with the ways in which the idea you’re addressing is being mediated by a specific literary work.

In addition to the library’s online catalog, you can access materials relevant to the study of literature by going to the “Research your Topic” menu on the library web page and clicking on “English Language and Literature.”

*If you choose only three sources, only one source can be an Internet source, and it should be a credible and reliable one; at least two of your sources should be from books or resources available on the library’s databases. Note that Jstor and ProjectMuse contain several literary journals—these, and other database sources, won’t be counted as online sources. Online “study notes” sites are not acceptable research sources under any condition.