



Cornell University
College of Arts and Sciences

**John S. Knight Institute for
Writing in the Disciplines**

101 McGraw Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853-4601
t: 607 255-2280
f: 607 255-2956

knight_intstitute@cornell.edu

www.arts.cornell.edu/knight_institute

Document Title: Analyze
Author: Byland, Hannah

Course: Medieval Studies 1101
Course Title: Aspects of Medieval Culture: Text, Context, and “Sext” in Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath*
Year of Award: Spring 2015

Copyright Statement:

This material is copyrighted by the author and made available through the Cornell University eCommons Digital Repository under a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-Commercial License.

This document is part of the John S. Knight Writing in the Disciplines First-Year Writing Seminar Program collection in Cornell’s e-Commons Digital Repository.

<http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/10813>

Spring 2015 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

Winning entries will be deposited in a web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See creativecommons.org for more information about cc licensing.)

To facilitate future searching of the Institute's archive, we ask that you provide a brief descriptive abstract (about 75 words) of your document, and a short list of appropriate keywords that might not appear in the text. Examples might include terms like "rhetorical situation," "style," "citation," etc. **Any borrowings such as quotations from course texts or handbooks must be cited properly in the document itself.**

The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Tuesday, May 19. No exceptions can be made.

Spring 2015 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

~Please Print Clearly. Do not staple. Use paper clips only~

Instructor's name

Hannah Byland

Department

Medieval Studies

Course # and title

1101-101: Chaucer's Wife of Bath

Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of the writing exercises, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the writing exercises in a web accessible archive and make them available under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Donna O'Hara (dlo1@cornell.edu) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning essay upon submission of the electronic text.

"Analyze"

Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature

electronic

Date

9/11/15

Essay 3: Rationale, Prompt, Preparatory Work/Writing, Reflection, and Addendum

Essay 3: Rationale

At this point in the semester, I had already worked with students on the basics of close reading and revision (essays 1 and 2), so I was confident students would be ready to work with multiple medieval texts at the same time. As I stated in my syllabus, I wanted students to learn how to “interpret and understand primary source material” and so this essay was designed to achieve that outcome.

The third essay is also a great place to get students used to working with many smaller texts in a more controlled setting. In this case, I controlled the primary sources they read (three medieval “ugly hag romances”) as well as the few articles I assigned this unit. By giving them articles I knew well, I felt I could introduce students to the concept of using secondary sources to support close readings of texts. That way, they would be better prepared to go on to their fourth essay, a research paper, without my close guidance.

For this particular class, I wanted students to see how Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale* fits into the genre of “ugly hag romances.” First, this was designed to get students to interact with a few other late medieval texts. My goal was to make students more aware of the textual world that Chaucer was interacting with. But, I also aimed toward making students more comfortable with the idea of creativity as reconstruction, not just creation *ex nihilo*. When I designed this essay, I knew that I would have my students write their own version of the same tale, one that attempted to do the same thing that Chaucer did to his sources (namely, make them more interesting and more engaged in social commentary).

Essay 3: Prompt

"Analyze"

Along with noticing and revising, you are also expected to be able to pick up a text and analyze it. Think of analysis as though you were asking questions of the text and allowing the text itself to answer those questions. You should start by noticing important little details in the text and move into a conclusion or interpretation based on those details. Remember to *show* your argument, don't just *tell* it.

As we have been learning, Chaucer, like many other authors, was inspired by the "ugly hag" trope when he wrote the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and *Prologue*. For this paper, I would like you to explore the way that Chaucer compares to *The Wedding* and *Florent* in constructing the *WoBT* and *Prol*. Think about analyzing the subtle ways in which Chaucer manipulates, changes, and even simply mirrors those other tales. How can our understanding of those basic elements add to our knowledge of the *WoBT/P*?

A successful paper will:

- Analyze Chaucer's text in comparison with the other two sources
- Provide some deeper understanding of the text through inspection of the way that Chaucer differs from the other texts
- Focus on explaining, dissecting, evaluating, and exploring the text in a fruitful way
- Have a clear and concise thesis
- Maintain a coherent argument that threads through the paper
- Have minimal grammatical and spelling errors
- Use pertinent quotations from the text(s) to support your argument

All papers should:

- be 5-7 **full** pages long
- follow MLA citation format (see the Purdue OWL link on BB for help)
- be in 12 point, Times New Roman (or Georgia) font, double spaced
- have reasonable margins (1" to 1.25" is reasonable)
- have your name, page numbers, & title
- be turned in both hard copy (stapled) and online on BB

Helpful hints:

If you're finding yourself at a loss, focus on one element of the three texts that you want to analyze. It can be the quest, the hag, the knight character, etc.

Now is a great time to schedule a conference with me. We can meet during the planning process or later when you have a draft written.

Essay 3: Preparatory Work and Writing

- **Blackboard responses:** Once a week, I required students to post blackboard responses, guided by a question from me, about the texts we were reading. These questions were usually designed to start classroom discussion outside the class, but also

- aimed at getting students to think critically about the primary texts. For example, when we read an article comparing two of our primary sources (*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* and *The Wife of Baths' s Tale*), I asked students to find weaknesses in the author's argument, using the primary source texts as support.
- Summary v. Analysis Activity: I have found that freshmen have challenging time distinguishing summary from analysis. I lead them in a discussion of the differences between these two terms and then asked them to work together in a group on the worksheet (see pages 4-5). This small-group work then turned into whole class discussion about the various ways to find a balance between summary and analysis.
 - Class Discussion: In addition to discussing different writing techniques, this portion of the course focused on strategies of comparative close readings. Using their blackboard posts as a starting point, we discussed differences between the texts and the way that the authors used form and character development to create strikingly different "morals" to their poems.
 - Peer-review: I used a worksheet-guided peer review for this essay to help students give the most useful feedback. (See page 6 for the peer-review worksheet).

Essay 3: Reflections

The prewriting for this sequence was quite successful and really prepared students to do the kind of writing that I wanted from them. As we had already worked on thesis statements and introductions, their essays had fairly strong opening claims and movements. Many of my students were also able to build an argument about Chaucer based on the changes he made to the archetype story. I appreciated that they were able to do those kinds of intertextual readings, as that was part of the learning outcome for this particular essay. One thing I did not work on and so did not anticipate being problematic was conclusions. In future classes (not just this one), I think I will move discussion of conclusions earlier in the semester. This batch of essays really fell short on the conclusion, which was partly my fault for not focusing on it at all. As a result, I created an "Intros and Conclusions" workshop for the next essay unit.

Essay 3: Addendum

Summary vs. Analysis

Below are two examples of readings of the *Marriage of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*. Given these examples, consider the last two paragraphs, discuss, and write down your responses to the following questions.

- Which contains mostly summary? Which is mostly analysis?
- How can you tell?
- How are quotes being used in each paragraph?
- Does the author of the summary paragraph attempt to do analysis? How could she do it better?
- Is there any summary in the analysis paragraph? If so, how is it working?

Summary (1st half of *Marriage of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*):

The *Marriage of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* opens with King Arthur and his knights out hunting. In a critical moment, Arthur decides to hunt the white hart by himself, which sets him up to meet Sir Gromer Somer. The hunting of the white hart symbolizes Arthur's later quest for the thing women want most. Gromer Somer is a strange character. He says that he wants to kill Arthur because he gave Gromer Somer's land to Sir Gawain. Arthur has to promise to go on the quest for the thing women want most in order to save his own head. In another important moment, Arthur meets the old hag when he's alone in the forest. As he did with Gromer Somer, he makes a promise without knowing what he's promising. It turns out that the hag wants to marry Gawain, which is similar to the hag in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. Toward the end of the first half, the reader learns that the one thing women want is sovereignty and heads off to tell Gromer Somer.

Analysis:

The *Marriage of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* opens with King Arthur and his knights out hunting the white stag. In a moment that will foreshadow the latter half, Arthur decides to continue the hunt on his own, on foot, and with only a bow. Because he's Arthur, he succeeds but the killing of the hart sets in motion a strange, and strangely parallel, series of events. First, Gromer Somer appears. He has a vendetta against Gawain and decides to take payment out by killing Arthur. In this scene, Arthur plays with Gromer Somer's sense of honor to convince him to save Arthur's life. First he says, "whate is thy name with honour?" (61) and then he goes on to say "to sle me here honour getyst thou no delle" (65). First Gromer Somer has honor but if he kills Arthur he will have no honor. But Arthur's rhetorical play does not end there. He ends this speech by telling Gromer Somer that not only will he get no honor, but "alle knyghtes wolle refuse the in every place; that shame shalle nevere the froo" (68-9). Gromer Somer will be removed from the company of knights, be a social outcast for this deed of killing the king. Rather than face that fate, Gromer Somer decides to spare King Arthur.

• **Decide for yourselves:**

Dame Ragnelle is really very foul. The author of the poem gives several lengthy descriptions of her disgusting mien. He says, “she had two tethe on every syde / As borys tuskes, I wolle not hyde, / Of lengthe a large handfulle” (548-50). Even though Gawain wants to marry her in secret, Ragnelle will not be married without a large outcry through the country. For some reason, everyone in the country wants Gawain to marry Ragnelle in private. Even the Queen tells Ragnelle, “to be maryed in the mornyng erly, / as pryvaly as ye may” (570-1). But once again, Ragnelle refuses and says “I wol be weddyd alle openly” (575). One wonders if this is because Ragnelle represents honesty and intelligence. But at the same time she is really a monster: “her nayles were long ynchys thre, / therwith she breke her mete ungoodly; / therfore she ete alone” (607-9). Perhaps the author of the poem emphasizes Ragnelle’s foulness in order to show the reader that lessons are hard to learn but promises must be kept, even if they are not easy to keep. (. . .)

In order to heighten the sense of transformation, the author of the *Marriage of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* makes Ragnelle appear more and more foul as the tale goes on. His first description of her makes her seem ugly, but horrifying. We are told, “her face was red, her noe snotyd withalle, / Her mowithe wyde, her tethe yalowe overe alle, / With bleryd eyen gretter than a balle” (231-3). Even though her eyes are huge and her teeth are yellow, Ragnelle still seems somewhat human. But as the wedding approaches, the author forces the reader into Gawain’s position of panic and dread. All vestigase of humanity seem to fall away from Ragnelle as now she has “two tethe on every syde / as borys tuskes, I wolle not hyde” (548-9). Now Ragnelle is monstrous with “a mowth fulle wyde and fowlee igron, / with grey herys many on” (552-3). Instead of marrying Gawain in private as he wishes, Ragnelle forces him to marry her openly, according to her contract with Arthur. Her foulness increases until the wedding night, when Gawain, in shock, discovers that Ragnelle is actually stunningly fair. She confides in him that her disgusting appearance is the result of magic and it is only then that the reader can fully appreciate the author’s task. (. . .)

Essay 3: Peer Review Worksheet

“Analyze”

(n.b this was on 2 pages, but I shortened the spaces between questions for this application)

Here’s a reminder of what I identified as “successful” in the essay prompt:

- · *Analyze Chaucer’s text in comparison with the other two sources*
- · *Provide deeper understanding of the text through inspection of the way that Chaucer differs from the other texts*
- · *Have a clear and concise thesis.*
- · *Maintain a coherent argument that threads through the paper.*
- · *Use pertinent quotations from the text(s) to support your argument.*

For this peer review exercise, I want you to complete the following exercises.

1. 1. Before sharing your essay with your peer, write out answers to the following questions on the back of the last page.
 - a. a) What do I want to argue in this paper?
 - b. b) How am I comparing the three texts?
 - c. c) What is my biggest strength in this paper?
 - d. d) What is my biggest struggle in this paper?
- e. 2. Share your essay with your peer.
- f. 3. Read your peer’s essay carefully. You may make notes in the margins, but give it a close reading before making any substantial comments. After this first reading, address the following prompts.
- g. 4. Examine the paper for a thesis. Is there one present? Write the thesis below. Then, rewrite it to make it clearer and/or more complex. Offer an explanation for your changes.
- a. 5. Identify three places that you feel your peer did something really well. Note them on the paper and explain why you think they’re good moments.
- b. 6. Identify three places you feel the paper struggles a bit. Note them and explain what you think the struggle is. If you can, offer some ways to help your peer get through that struggle.
- c. 7. How is your peer using sources? As support or as summary? Identify a few places that you feel quotes are being used well and a few places you feel need some work.
- d. 8. Finally, write answers to the following questions below.
 - a. a) What is the author’s argument?
 - a. b) How is the author comparing the three texts?
 - a. c) What is the author’s greatest strength in this essay?
 - a. d) Where does the author seem to struggle the most?
- a. 9. Once finished, share the responses with each other and have a discussion about your papers. In particular, notice differences between the answers for questions 1 and 8.
10. Using the rest of the space on this paper, write a plan for revision. Based on today’s discussion and comments, what do you plan to work on? What will you change? What

will you keep the same, and why?

