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Spring 2016 Knight Award for Writing Exercises

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 24. No exceptions can be made.

Spring 2016 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

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

Instructor's name MANDY LOWELL

Department MEDVL Course # and title 1101: READING, WRITING, AND RIBALDRY - THE OLD FRENCH FABLIAUX

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PLANTING THE SEED OF AN ARGUMENT

Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature 

Date 5/18/2016

Mandy Lowell

Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

MEDVL 1101: Reading, 'Riting, and Ribaldry – The Old French *Fabliaux*

May 18, 2016

When I read my students' first graded papers of the spring 2016 semester, for which they were supposed to offer a close reading of an excerpt of a medieval French poem, I noticed that many of them seemed rather...disjointed. Most of them had theses, and varying amounts of material from our primary sources to support those theses, but they didn't feel so much like coherent papers as catalogues of loosely connected observations, with the thesis as the single element in the paper holding those observations together. The papers had an air of clinical detachment around them, as if their authors had simply gone through a checklist of things they had heard make "good" papers and turned it in without another thought.

As a result, many of the papers felt utterly lacking in focus or purpose, and they could be a struggle to read – which, as I have learned from experience, means they were probably also a struggle for my students to write. From talking with colleagues, I learned that this was a common problem in student writing that usually resulted in what we called "B for boring" papers.

I wanted to give my students a reference that clearly demonstrated not only what an analytical paper was supposed to do, but where it was supposed to come from: the reader, rather than the text itself. I considered several possible analogies to demonstrate the concept (building a bridge? Taking a walk in the woods? Baking cookies?) before settling on the growth of a plant. If they could think in terms of everything in their papers growing out of a single "seed" – whatever it was that made them *want* to write about this topic, or made them think this would be a productive paper topic – they would have a much easier time writing their papers, and might even enjoy the process. I created "Planting the Seed of an Argument" as a companion to the peer review session for their next paper.

The results were immediate and highly promising. When students began to think about their analysis and textual support as things that stemmed from *their own interest* in their chosen topics, they developed more attachment to their interpretations and became far more invested in finding strong and plentiful textual support for their ideas. They also became practiced at identifying the seeds of their peers' arguments, which proved to be most helpful for understanding and using our secondary reading.

I hope that your students find this exercise helpful, and that it stimulates their enthusiasm in a way that cuts down the number of "B for boring" papers you have to read in your FWS!

Abstract

“Planting the Seed of an Argument” is designed to accompany close-reading papers, and encourages students to center their papers around something that stood out to them in the text(s) – the seed of their interest. By following the guidelines on the handout and peer review form, students can practice focusing their writing on developing and supporting their own interpretations of specific details and may find that they become more invested in their own paper topics.

KEYWORDS: close reading, argument, textual support

Reading, 'Riting, and Ribaldry: The Old French *Fabliaux*
 March 22, 2016

Companion to Paper #3: Planting the Seed of an Argument

There are many great metaphors for the structure of an essay: a roller coaster, a building, a roadmap, an interpretive dance. The most fitting one, in my opinion, is the plant. Good academic writing is often rooted in a single, striking point of interest that the author has identified in a piece of literature, historical event, work of art, or even something as mundane as an accounting book. As the author explores that seed of interest, it starts to grow into the fully-fledged flower of an argument, an analytical essay, an article, or a book – or a full-fledged obsession, if one is not careful. In this exercise, we will trace the growth and development of the arguments that you will make in your upcoming papers.

The Subject of Argument

- Who is the character or character type about which you plan you write your third paper?
- Which *fabliaux* will you be working with?

The Seed

You are, I hope, writing this paper on a subject that interests you. Describe your *interest* in the subject. Once you knew the paper prompt, *what made you want to write about this particular subject?*



The Growth

Your initial interest in the subject will now spawn your interpretation and reading of the subject - that is, an argument about it.

Why do you think the subject is important for readers of the *fabliaux*? How does your interpretation of the subject affect the way that you read them, or the way you think they ought to be read?



The Budding

Now we're going to start adding support and embellishment to your argument in order to convince your readers of its validity.

How do the texts themselves support your interpretation of the subject? Look at what characters say and how they say it, as well as the narrator's descriptions of what happens and where.



The Flowering

How does previous work on the *fabliaux* support your argument? How does your work add to and build on theirs?

Use of an outside source doesn't just mean quoting it; it can also mean working and growing alongside it. Your argument might offer a concurring opinion or a counterargument, or it might apply their theories to a different aspect of the genre.



The Garden

What new possibilities does your argument open? What further work can be done? How have you improved on the scholarly discussion that surrounds the genre of *fabliaux*?

These are the types of questions whose answers might appear in your paper's conclusion. Use it to wrap up the work that you have done in a way that suggests new projects for you (or someone else) to explore.



Planting the Seed of an Argument

There are many great metaphors for the structure of an essay: a roller coaster, a building, a roadmap, an interpretive dance. The most fitting one, in my opinion, is the plant. Good academic writing is often rooted *in a single, striking point of interest* that the author has identified in a piece of literature, historical event, work of art, or even something as mundane as an accounting book. As the author explores that seed of interest, it starts to grow into the fully-fledged flower of an argument, an analytical essay, an article, or a book – or a full-fledged obsession, if one is not careful. In this exercise, we will trace the growth and development of the arguments that you will make in your upcoming papers.

0. The Subject of Argument (hereafter The Subject)

In one sentence, what is your paper going to be about?

What *primary sources* are you going to be working with?

1. The Seed

You are, I hope, writing this paper on a subject that interests you. Describe your *interest* in the subject. Once you knew the paper prompt, what made you want to write about this particular subject?

2. The Growth

Your initial interest in the subject will now spawn your interpretation and reading of the subject - that is, an argument about it.

Why do you think the subject is important for readers exploring this primary source? How does your interpretation of the subject affect the way that you read them, or the way you think they ought to be read?

3. The Budding

Now we're going to start adding support and embellishment to your argument in order to convince your readers of its validity.

How do the texts themselves support your interpretation of the subject? Consider not only what they say, but who is saying it, how, where, and why.

4. The Flowering

How does previous work on this subject support your argument? How does your work add to and build on theirs?

Use of an outside source doesn't just mean quoting it; it can also mean working and growing alongside it. Your argument might offer a concurring opinion or a counterargument, or might apply its theories to a different aspect of the genre.

5. The Garden

What new possibilities does your argument open? What further work can be done? How have you improved on the scholarly discussion that surrounds your subject?

These are the types of questions whose answers might appear in your paper's conclusion. Use it to wrap up the work that you have done in a way that suggests new projects for you (or someone else) to explore.

Reading, 'Riting, and Ribaldry: The Old French *Fabliaux*
25 February, 2016

Paper #3: Peer Review Exercise

Author's Name and Paper Title: Victor [REDACTED], "The Innocent Maid"

Reviewer: Joe [REDACTED]

Topic of Paper: Analysis of the role of maidservants in fabliaux

Instructions

- Read your papers out loud to each other one at a time (slowly and clearly).
- While your partner is reading, try to answer questions 1-5. If you cannot answer one of these questions, or are unsure of the answer, **write that down**.
- When your partner is done, explain your answers and record your partner's responses. (If this is your paper, be an advocate for it; listen to your partner, but you don't have to agree with everything (s)he says.)
- **Send this peer review form to me along with your final draft by 11:59 PM on Sunday, March 27.** If you need to send it prior to leaving campus, you can scan it for free in the library (and get a copy for yourself!)

1. What is the *seed of the author's interest* in this topic? (Refer to "The Seed" on your handout.)

The author wants to explore how maid is usually depicted as innocent and hapless in comparison to lady who is often described as licentious and wicked, even though maid usually makes worse and decisions than lady does.

2. Why does the author think this topic is important - that is, how does it enrich or alter our understanding of the relevant *fabliaux*? (Refer to "The Growth" on your handout.)

The author believes that different portrayals between lady and maid indicates jongleurs' own bias against the upper class and also reflects that a large portion of the audience is from the lower class who jongleurs do not want to offend.

3. List a few specific bits of textual evidence that the author offers to support his/her argument. Do you find them persuasive? (Refer to “The Budding” on your handout)

The author relates his argument to two stories: “The Fucker” and “The Butcher of Abbeville” and uses a limited amount of quotation to support his point. Though I think his opinion is interesting and catchy, I still think that the argument could be better if the author uses more quotations to substantiate his argument, especially in details. The author does a good job on generalizing the story but providing details in context can make the argument more convincing.

4. How has the author incorporated outside scholarship? (Refer to “The Flowering” on your handout.) This should not just be a list of sources that (s)he uses; you should be able to explain what the author is doing with books and articles that (s)he cites.

The author incorporates two secondary materials in this essay: Mary Schenck’s classification of auxiliary characters in fabliaux and Murtaugh’s evaluation of money in the Middle Ages. He refers to Schenck’s idea to generalize the role of maid as catalyst in development of the story and as mediator to connect two major characters in stories. He uses Murtagh’s evaluation to emphasize the stupidity of maid’s decision to pay 5 pounds for the man’s services. The author wants to prove that maid sometimes makes worse decision than lady.

5. Can you identify any further exploration into the topic that might be possible, based on the author’s argument? Be generous, but be honest.

The analysis of maid can go further into exploring detailed description of maid’s actions and her words. Based on that, we can not only analyze the role of maid roughly from her relationship between other major characters but also reveals the personality of maid shown in those stories. From this psychological perspective, we may find reasons for nuances of maid’s behavior which can be considered as obedient and interestingly autonomous.