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FWS: The Bible and Ancient Authors
MWF 2:30–3:20

John S. Knight Sequence Prize: *Introduction*

My class differs from other Bible and Ancient Authors classes—and as I’ve been told actually makes it more of the English class it’s supposed to be—because I use the Bible and ancient authors to talk about revision specifically through contemporary literature inspired by these ancient texts. There are four sections we go through in my class: Gilgamesh, Creation Stories, Joseph and Job in the Bible and in poetry, and The New Testament and its manifestations, the Gnostic Gospels, and the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

Of course, as with every freshman writing seminar in the English department, the course is partly composition and partly literature. But I’ve attempted to use these works inspired by the Bible to blend the two parts together. For instance I begin with Gilgamesh because it is this ancient epic from the fertile crescent, novel for its time in both content and form, inspiring numerous texts for thousands upon thousands of years, because it was the foundation, and because I can use it to talk about the foundation of writing an essay, which as I’ve explained in the rationales that follow, I believe to be evidence.

We then move forward into creation stories from Mesopotamia (the culture of Gilgamesh), the Bible, and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. These stories all involve the deadly flood, inspired by the flood story in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. They are early interpretations of that ancient text and thus incredibly useful in teaching the dynamics of analysis in essay writing. We then glide into contemporary poetry inspired by the Biblical stories of Joseph and Job, furthering our understanding of analysis, and argument, by writing about what poets have to say about the meanings of the texts. And finally we reach the New Testament, and the Gnostic Gospels, and open our minds completely to the multi-leveled interpretation of the life of Jesus, “*The Last Temptation of Christ*”. At this point in the course we have been able to cover compiling evidence, analysis, close reading, and analysis of an author’s point of view.

The sequence I am including here, *Before Creation and After*, is the series of assignments of the first three essays dealing with Gilgamesh and the creation stories. I have included not only the essay assignments themselves, but also related handouts and assignments with rationales ~~too~~. Although this sequence is probably larger than most submitted, I truly feel that each part is built upon the one preceding it; essays 1, 2, and 3 give a good idea of the progression from gathering quality evidence to being able to analyze that evidence in the form of not only a thought-provoking thesis, but also the supporting paragraphs that follow it.

My mother is an artist, who usually makes abstract collages, and I can remember the first time one of my friends saw her more “realistic” drawings; he was shocked to find that she could “do it all.” It seems he thought one could go straight to abstract, skipping basic technique and form. I tell my students this story in the first few weeks of class, telling them that before they can “break the rules”, they need to first learn them by heart. This first sequence, I believe, lays down those basic building blocks, preparing them for the more complicated writing and analysis that comes in essays 4–6.

Essay 1: Setting the Scene *Rationale*

There are a few reasons why I use this first assignment and it has been successful on all fronts. First and foremost it's evaluative; given to the students the first day of class it immediately both sets the scene for the freshman writing seminar and for The Epic of Gilgamesh, the first ancient text we tackle in the class. I give the essays individual typed comments which tend to be lengthy because of the necessity for explanation at this early point in the semester; I also tell them what their grade would be, but don't count the grade, so that they can be clear about what is expected in the course. Though, for a couple students this term it was difficult to see a "bad" grade on the page (even if it didn't count), most of the students said that they preferred to know how I graded from the get-go. I also have a policy in my class that any essay can be revised to improve the grade in order to instill both appreciation and understanding of revision, but also hope in the hearts of struggling students.

From this first short assignment I am hopefully able to gauge each student's strong and weak points as a writer, as well as determine if they belong in the course. I phrase the essay assignment in the way I do, asking specifically for an *essay* but not explicitly mentioning the word *thesis*, to assess what each student's definition of an essay is at the beginning of the semester. More experienced students are able to take the question, "what can you infer about Babylonian society from Andrew George's representation and your own map," and answer it in the form of a thesis, then use the text as evidence to show how they came to their thesis. Less experienced students will not have any kind of thesis, and write three paragraphs, each with a different inference. From that kind of essay I can tell they aren't looking at the larger issues raised in their findings and have not yet learned how to analytically read a text, or at least how to write their analysis down on the page. And, of course, I can tell that the word *essay* to them doesn't demand paragraphs with a focused thesis. I've found that it's crucial to progress that all the students and myself use the same vocabulary and define the words we use in the same way—for instance I can't use the word thesis, essay, or evidence and have it mean anything until everyone knows how to define them.

Two words I define on the first day are *observation* and *analysis*. I explain that in this course, any time there is a reading assignment, the students are expected to come up with five observations on the text and five analyses of those observations. In the beginning they always hand me in a sheet with five observations on one side of the page, a line down the middle, and five "analyses" on the corresponding lines; but as I comment on these sheets in the margins, what they think are analyses are really just more acute observations. We discuss in class that an observation is a fact—it's something that is not debatable. Most importantly, it's what the author or poet wrote. And an analysis is what the students think—it's debatable because it is what each individual student thinks the observation means. I find it imperative that this distinction be made right away, so that later on in the course when we discuss what makes a successful thesis, they are already aware (at least subconsciously) of their ability to think about a text, not just regurgitate it. I've found that because of these consistent homework assignments there is, for many students, a point after a few weeks, when they "get it"—they understand the power they have to *think* in words.

Creative Assignment 1: Creation Story *Rationale*

This is another fun assignment; some students at first feared the “lack of structure” in a creative assignment, but once they figured out that they were creating their own evidence for the essay part of the assignment, they really enjoyed it. This creative assignment works as a pre-writing (and pre-thinking) exercise for the 3rd essay on the creation stories. I think it’s a good bridge between the evidence finding of the Gilgamesh assignments and the analysis we do in the creation story assignments. As the students begin working on this essay they read the creation story of Babylon (Gilgamesh’s tradition), and then move on to Genesis in the Bible, and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book I. So that this assignment works to connect essays 2 and 3 not only thematically, but also in terms of the student’s writing techniques.

I don’t grade this one, but I use the short essay as another diagnostic, to see what they’ve learned from working on the larger Gilgamesh essay. I’ve found that writing the creation story gets them to pay attention to the connection between evidence and analysis in the essay, but the essay part of the assignment also gets them to think about the power of words because, of course, they are suddenly the authors being analyzed. Every word counts.

I do write comments, mostly on the essays, mentioning their specific successes in analyzing their own words. One thing I like about this assignment is that if I do need to comment on their failure to analyze their own words (and of course with some students I do), I can tell them that they know the analysis, that it’s just locked in their heads. From their essays I can tell that it is not a problem of comprehension—they certainly know why they wrote what they wrote—but a problem of language, a problem of getting their ideas down in the page. And so with those students, we start from there.

I’ve found in this class, because the authors and the landscapes are so far away, in time and place, that it’s hard for the students to see the texts, particularly the creation stories, as just that, stories. By sitting down and writing their own creation story they can see the authors as human, and thereby these ancient texts become much more approachable for analysis.

Religious and Eschatological Growth

<u>Then</u>	<u>Later / Now (?)</u>
Immortality gained how? - seems impossible man destined to earth	Immortality gained how? - <i>heaven</i> achieved through personal choices + “goodness”,
Gods exist in Physical World	God exists in Metaphysical World
External—Fame, Power, Land important	Internal—Self-enlightenment
Gods are more human-like, flawed; Life unpredictable, gods unpredictable hope that gods would help, undependable	God is supreme, all-knowing Life unpredictable, God, benevolent faith that God will help, dependable
Public (distance from gods lessened through sacrifice, physical interactions w/ gods)	Private (distance from God lessened through prayer, metaphysical interactions w/ god, morality)

*

But does the message of The Epic of Gilgamesh, as a whole, mark a concept of religion in transition?

What are some of the values that first seem emphasized?

And what are some values that are finally realized by the end of the king’s journey?

Some questions we may ask ourselves,

“Does his story mean that he was made a legend because he was brave in deadly situations, meaning a valuable trait in a leader of this time was brute strength and courage?”

“Does his story mean that he was made a legend because he accepted his humanity, meaning a valuable trait in a leader of this time was acknowledgement of one’s subservience to the gods?”

“Does Gilgamesh’s story mean that he was made a legend because he went through the process of ‘finding himself’ successfully, meaning a valuable trait in a leader of this time was personal insight, or growth?”

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Creative Assignment #1:

The Creation Story

Due 2/11

First write your own 1-2 page creation story. It can either be what you personally believe, or you can create a fictional “society” that believes in your creation story. The more detailed and specific you are, the easier the second part of the assignment will be.

Then write a 2 page essay (thesis, supportive evidence from your “text”, and conclusion) analyzing what your creation story tells you about those that believe it (for instance, what’s important to them? what is their definition of divinity? How vast is their scientific knowledge? Or even do they choose to look only towards science for answers?). Your story is the text, so as the essay writer you will be analyzing this text for evidence to support your thesis, but as the story writer, you are the one creating this evidence. That’s a lot of power—use it well.

Essay 1: Setting the Scene

As we prepare to read the The Epic of Gilgamesh, we must travel back in time to the year 1200 b.c.e. when the Babylonian text was first edited into its standard version. It's a time and land foreign to us; we have no photographs or movies, only the writing that has survived to set the scene. But just as we can infer a great deal of information about a place, a time, and its inhabitants from any novel or story, we can infer from the surviving writing much about the Babylonian cosmology at that time. A cosmology is the believed structure of a society's or culture's universe, meaning it is how a person views the world, and for some that means how a person views not only the world of Humans, but also the world of God (or gods). From a society's cosmology we can infer what was important to the society, the hierarchy of social classes, and their fears. We can infer what they believe about the relationship between Humans and the gods, the relationship between man and woman, Humans and animals, and Humans and the natural world. And from this information we can not only begin to understand the power struggles that existed in daily life, but we can begin to get a clearer view of what life was like for the people in that society. And when we can see what life was like in 1200 b.c.e. we can better understand our hero Gilgamesh, where he was coming from, and what was expected of him. ***We generally cannot infer facts from these stories, but we can infer feelings. We can look into people's hearts more than we can look at their entire lives. Myths cannot be taken as historical information. They are representational stories where often, larger more complicated themes are simplified in order to teach readers a lesson or explain an unknown part of history. **We're not looking at what the Babylonian society actually believed; we're looking at symbols for how they felt about their world.**

Your first assignment is as follows (DUE 1/23):

- 1) Read the attached paragraph excerpted from the introduction to The Epic of Gilgamesh written by Andrew George. If you already have the textbook you can read the two pages about the setting in full on page xxxi.
- 2) Draw a map of the world from the cosmology described (to be handed in).
- 3) Write a two-page essay answering the following question in clear connected paragraphs: What can you infer about the Babylonian society from Andrew George's representation and your own map? Remember to show how each bit of evidence led you to your conclusions about the society (to be handed in).

From The Epic of Gilgamesh Introduction by Andrew George, p. xxxii:

“ The Setting of The Epic:

...Men lived in Cities and cultivated the land. Where irrigation could not reach, the farmland gave way to rougher country in which shepherds grazed their flocks, ever on the look-out for wolves and lions. And further off still was the ‘wild’, the empty country prowled by hunters, outlaws, and bandits, where legend had it there once roamed a strange wild man whom the gazelles brought up as their own. Enkidu was his name. Several months’ journey across this wilderness, over many ranges of mountains, there was a sacred Forest of Cedar, where some said the gods dwelt. It was guarded for the gods by a fearsome ogre, the terrible Humbaba, cloaked for his protection in seven numinous auras, radiant and deadly. Somewhere at the edge of the world, patrolled by monstrous sentries who were half man and half scorpion, were the twin mountains of Mashu where the sun rose and set. Further still, at the other end of the Path of the Sun, was a fabulous Garden of Jewels, and nearby, in a tavern by the great impassable ocean that surrounded the earth, lived the mysterious goddess Shiduri, who dispensed wisdom from behind her veils. Across the ocean were the lethal Waters of Death, and beyond them, on a remote island where the rivers Tigris and Euphrates welled up again from the deep, far outside the ken of men and visited only by his ferry-man Ur-shanabi, dwelt Uta-napishti the Distant, a primeval king who survived the great Deluge sent by Enlil (the god who presided over the affairs of gods from his temple of earth) early in human history and as a consequence was spared the doom of mortals. Many other powers populated the Babylonian cosmos—deities, demons and demi-gods of legend—but these are the principal characters of the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic.”

Essay 2: Gilgamesh—The King's Evaluation *Rationale*

This is a fun assignment, but flawed for a few reasons I'll go into shortly. Its main purpose is to enable students to understand the importance of evidence in essay writing. I give out the essay assignment just as they begin Gilgamesh so that they can participate in their reading by making notes for their essays. After we have finished reading and discussing the text, each student takes on their persona of the character from Gilgamesh and gathers evidence of their relationship with him. They type it up, make enough copies for everyone in the class, and then present this evidence during the two-day King's Evaluation. There are two groups: one that has had positive relationships with Gilgamesh, and one that has had negative. Each student, no matter which group they are in attests to what their persona values in their king. We do group work in class prior to the Evaluation, and each group prepares questions for the opposing party.

So, then the purpose of the Evaluation becomes two-fold: to practice gathering evidence, and to determine what value Gilgamesh possessed that made him a legend. Herein lies the problem I think. The students treat the Evaluation as a debate, instead of a group of presentations, which I suppose would be more straightforward. I was thinking of changing the assignment for next term, assigning just presentations, but when I asked my class every single one of them claimed they found the debate style fun, and the compiling of evidence incredibly useful. I do think that the debate style creates an "arguing" attitude that ends up making their theses more enthusiastic, but of course when they are arguing in the Evaluation they slip in and out of their persona. Perhaps I could have one day of short presentations, thereby keeping the close reading aspect of the assignment, and one day of class debate on the values in question. The students would have all the characters' evidence to cite in the debate, and their questions could help them prepare the argument for their essay, which of course is not written in the persona of the character, after all. I think this scenario may work better next semester and I think I'll try it out. Of course, the other problem with the assignment is that during the process of casting characters, students add and drop the class. This term I had thirteen when I cast the assignment and ended up with eight, one of whom dropped, only to be replaced with a new student half way through the Evaluation who hadn't yet read the text and couldn't participate. So I'll have to time it better as well.

I do want to talk briefly about why I find it necessary to practice compiling evidence and why I gave the students the structure for their thesis, basically, "Because Babylonian society values _____, Gilgamesh was legendized." First I consider this essay to be the class' first *real* essay. I want them to think about writing as an investigation, and in this way, evidence serves a metaphorical necessity as well as a literal one. They cannot come up with a great thesis if they have not first gone and gotten their feet wet wading through the text searching for clues. When they can drag up all the bones, lay them out to dry, and then assess how they can best be put together, what piece connects with what, and what shape it has, and what beats it is, then they can decide how they want to analyze the significance of all that, but not before. So, in this first real essay I wanted to lay the foundation of evidence—the bones of the essay. I spoon-fed them most of the thesis so that they could

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Essay #2:

GILGAMESH: The King's Evaluation

For this assignment we know that Gilgamesh was a king great enough to be made a legend, but we must evaluate what he did to become that legend; we must ask ourselves what these legendary actions tell us about the values Babylonian society admired in its leaders.

Luckily, to facilitate this process and to be absolutely certain of our evidence, we've managed to convince everyone from Uruk to come up here to Ithaca, NY, circa 2002 to testify before a panel of experts for his evaluation. After the two-day evaluation, you, the panel of experts, will have reviewed the evidence, analyzed the testimonies, and formed a conclusion concerning his kingly qualifications.

Then based on what you've read and heard, it will be your job to write an essay defining what values Babylonian society admired in their Kings while supporting your definition with the evidence you've gathered over the course of the assignment.

In order to become the panel of experts capable of forming judgments, however, each of you will play a witness testifying at the evaluation hearing, as well as lawyers as you ask each other pertinent questions. Since you'll know your characters ahead of time, remember to take special care to find your "testimony" as you read and know your characters well enough to BE them in class. On the day of the trial come to class with copies of your typed testimony (actual textual evidence with page numbers cited) to hand out to your classmates.

Group #1

Gilgamesh:
Ur-Shanabi:
Uta-Napishti:
Shiduri:

Shamash:
Ninsun:

Group #2

Ishtar:
Humbaba:
Townsfolk:
Enkidu:

Anu:
Wedding Banquet Man :

Group Work: After we've all read The Epic of Gilgamesh, taken good notes on Gilgamesh's adventures, and discussed them in class, we will divide into four groups on Friday, February 1st. Homework the night before will be to devise what you need to say and what questions you should ask your peers. In your small group you will work together, planning your order and your course of action. Remember, this is not a trial, no matter what "side" you're on, you are not attempting to prosecute Gilgamesh. This is an evaluation; your job as witnesses (and "lawyers") is merely to present Gilgamesh's actions honestly and completely to the panel of experts (you again).

Day One: We will hear from Group #1

Day Two: We will hear from Group #2

The ESSAY: While gathering information for the Evaluation, each of you will get to know the characters in the story intimately, but you will also get to know the hero Gilgamesh more intimately through listening to the witness' accounts. It would be very easy to read the story of Gilgamesh and judge him by our standards of leadership, the ones of our own country, time, and culture. But remember, you are the people of Uruk, and you are judging him on your own standards of leadership, based on your country, time, and culture. First, of course, you have to figure out what those standards are. There is no debate as to whether Gilgamesh was a good king or a bad king. The debate you have to settle is what made a good king in Babylonia circa 1200 b.c.e. What can you infer from the Epic about what qualities were valued in Babylonian Kings? Perhaps the qualities we see as "bad" with our American 21st Century eyes were seen as "good" by his subjects, for instance. Through sitting in as both a jury member and a witness in this evaluation you must sort through the testimonies, decide if actions are being presented as "bad" qualities because we are seeing them through biased eyes. What do these seemingly "bad" qualities tell us about the society in which Gilgamesh lived? What was important to them? Why was it important?

In a four-page (typed) essay decide what quality you think was most valued in a King by Babylonian culture and show how The Epic of Gilgamesh illustrates your decision. Support your assertions with evidence from the text. Keep in mind it need not be a physical quality, like bravery or strength, it can just as easily be a spiritual or emotional quality, depending on how you read the text. There is no right or wrong answer, only a well supported or a poorly supported argument.

Handout: Gilgamesh's Journey *Rationale*

I used this handout just before the second essay on Gilgamesh was due to aid in class discussion on some larger themes that exist in the reading. After The King's Evaluation assignment, the students are prepared for their essays with evidence and an outline for a thesis, but this handout on Gilgamesh's journey really helps them think about the non-literal aspects of the story and its hero.

The first page is simply a step-by-step run-down of the story's plot which we've spent the week discussing. Laying it out like this enables them to see the movement of the epic, the stages that Gilgamesh went through in his journey to find immortality. In the beginning of discussion on Gilgamesh the students think literally about his journey and find the qualities of bravery, or persistence to be most valued in the legendary king. They read his journey as a battle against physical monsters and threats, and give little thought to the psychological or spiritual growth that occurs in these battles.

The second page charts the differences between the eschatological and religious beliefs of Judeo-Christian teachings and those of Mesopotamia. Then there are a series of questions and ideas we cover and discuss in class. I always attempt to pose questions of my class, but not to answer those questions for them. This handout aids in discussion of the metaphorical meaning behind Gilgamesh, which again feeds their knowledge of analysis. Not only does this discussion lead to those topics of composition, but it also leads us into the shift in religious texts that will become apparent as we finish Gilgamesh and move on to creation stories of polytheistic Mesopotamia and Rome, and monotheistic Judaism and Christianity.

We know that this epic is a *bildungsroman* (a story which traces its character's maturity).

GILGAMESH'S JOURNEY

of maturity?
of his humanity?
of self-acceptance?

- 1) We have Gilgamesh, a hero 2/3 divine, 1/3 human, struggling with his “humanness,” acting out on his people to display his divine-like power.
- 2) The townsfolk complain to the gods for help and they make Enkidu to be Gilgamesh's equal, to “complete” Gilgamesh.
- 3) Enkidu was transformed from a wild-man into a human, becoming civilized to help Gilgamesh understand his humanity (civilization seems to symbolize humanity and mortality while the “wild” seems to symbolize the land of the supernatural and immortality).
- 4) Gilgamesh takes Enkidu on the journey to defy the gods and kill Humbaba, in hopes of gaining immortality through fame.
- 5) Gilgamesh's transformation into man does not appear to be working. Gods kill Enkidu, showing Gilgamesh his own mortality. Gilgamesh must learn humanity on his own.
- 6) Gilgamesh transforms into a wild-man, running from reality (his humanity symbolized by civilization) in search of immortality.
- 7) Gilgamesh asks Ut-napishti for help, Ut-napishti tells him his extraordinary case of the flood, suggests Gilgamesh attempts to conquer the human need for sleep. Gilgamesh fails, emphasizing his humanity.
- 8) Ut-napishti then suggests he find a magical plant at the depths of the ocean that has the powers of rejuvenation. Gilgamesh dives and obtains the plant only to lose it to a pesky snake as he succumbs to yet another human “flaw” carelessness (and bathing). Gilgamesh again fails.
- 9) Upon arriving, defeated, back at his great city of Uruk, Gilgamesh finally understands the majesty of humanity—his *human* powers, his *human* contributions, the walls of his beloved city.

Essay 3: The Creation Story *Rationale*

This last essay assignment I've included in the sequence is the first essay that we formally revise, thus I've attached the many handouts we cover in class while working on the draft and revision.

The progression of this sequence, if the material is unfamiliar, is from Gilgamesh, a Mesopotamian Epic to the creation stories which bridge the first and second sections of the course because one of the stories is from Mesopotamia, one is from Rome, and one is from the Bible, which takes us into our later more extensive discussion of the Bible. I believe this essay is dependent on the first two Gilgamesh essays and preceding assignments for a few reasons. In terms of the students learning how to read, the earlier assignments asked them to literally step into the landscape of the texts, which enabled them to both observe and analyze. In terms of learning how to think, the earlier assignments carried them chronologically backwards, to the time before the story of Adam and Eve was written and prepared them to focus on the literature that grew from those early stories and their interpretations. In terms of the students learning how to write, the earlier assignments taught them the foundations of deeper analysis, gathering the evidence and making the connection between what the author said, and what they (the student) thinks about it.

For this 3rd essay I hand out this sheet of suggested themes for the essay. They are based on what we discuss in class, or what the students mention in their observation/analyses homework. Following the evidence gathering of essay 2, and these homework assignments, the students should be prepared for the more complex analysis involved in these essay suggestions.

Most students chose to tackle the definitions of divinity suggestion, which led them not into the standard comparison essay they most likely expected, but an analysis of the differing purposes of monotheism and polytheism, allowing them to be seen not as “primitive” and “advanced” but as serving differing objectives. I've found that the more adept writers chose to write about separation and change, sometimes combining the suggestions in their own ways, to analyze the deeper metaphors at work in the creation stories and devolve some cultural catalysts for separation or change. One student went off on her own and wrote about sleep, as it is another common theme in the creation stories.

The themes of separation, definitions of divinity, and change are all obvious observations in the readings, but at this point in the course the students are ready to dig deeper than obvious analyses—I've found that they thrive on feeling stable enough to take risks in their investigations of the texts. Some students took my suggestions a little too literally, even though they themselves had come up with the ideas in class, so I think for next semester I may have them write down suggestions themselves as we discuss in class, as opposed to having my more formal-looking handout. I do want them to be seen as suggestions that we came up with together, not strict assignments.

This was a favorite among the students because, as many said, they knew the Genesis story, but they had no idea the flood existed in other traditions. We were able to talk about

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Essay #3: The Creation Story

Draft due 2/22; Final due 3/1

After reading the creation stories of Enuma Elish (feel free to use the Flood Myth in Gilgamesh), Genesis, and Ovid's Metamorphoses, write an essay (4-5 pages long). Here are some of the suggestions we came up with in class:

- 1) **DIVISION AND DOMINION:** Consider incidents of division and/or dominion in at least two creation myths. Think about how the stories present these incidents, positively or negatively? Consider this kind of separation in a broader sense; define what creation stories say about separation itself, why it occurs, what it produces, and what happens when those set lines are crossed. Use evidence from the stories to support your assertions and attempt to reveal why division and dominion are crucial elements of creation myths.
- 2) **DEFINITIONS OF DIVINITY:** Compare at least two creation myths. Follow the narratives, proving that their differences point to different definitions of divinity. Consider what these definitions say about the different purposes of divinity?
- 3) **CREATION AND CHANGE:** It can be said that all creation stories are about a change, from nothing to something, from darkness to light, from chaos to civilization, from Adam's rib to Eve, from Daphne to a tree. Consider change in a broader sense, define what creation stories say about change itself, how it occurs, what motivates it, and what it produces. Use evidence from the stories to support your assertions and attempt to reveal why creation stories are needed to explain the changes that occur in the world.
- 4) You are free to come up with your own topic, but it must be complicated and curious, and approved by me before you begin work on it.

Handouts: Drafts and Peer Review *Rationale*

Before the students began work on their drafts I handed out this sheet and we talked in class about what was expected from an essay draft. I basically wanted them to get down their first ideas, their preliminary findings in the investigation. I emphasized that their thesis was not set in stone, but that they should focus on what they were drawn to in the text and write about it.

Generally the drafts for essay 3 were okay. I asked them to attach afterthoughts discussing what they felt they accomplished and what they felt they needed to work on. More often than not the students were able to recognize that they “needed more thorough analysis for their observations” or “needed more specific evidence to support their thesis.” But what was important was that they got a thesis down and the path they thought about traveling down to prove it.

I asked the students to bring in an extra copy of their draft on the day it was due for their peer review partner and handed out the peer review sheet as homework. So the following class they received back my comments as well as some from their partner. I was actually pleasantly surprised how meticulous the students were in peer review; it might be because we were such a small group and became so friendly. It also helped that we were all speaking the same language about observations and analyses. And I found that because many students’ topics were related, it helped them better understand their own ideas as well. I tried to pair weak writers with stronger writers which also worked out well not only in regard to suggestions, but also because we were all so friendly, there was a real ethic of helping each other improve.

I didn’t grade the drafts, but gave them my typed comments—usually more questions than statements—on where they might want to go in revision. Some students came in for conferences, as they had for the previous essays, but I only explained my questions. I make a point not to tell them what to do, but rather ask them what they want to say. Usually they had pieces of evidence they wanted to use, and a thesis, but weren’t sure how they made sense together. We worked together on the phrasing of the thesis, so that they knew exactly what they were setting out to prove.

As we worked on revising in class, we concentrated on adding the analyses to all the astute observations.

DRAFTS:

When you sit down to write your draft, think of yourself as the archeologist who first found the text, hidden away in a desert cave. It's your job to pool together your observations and analyses from your homework assignments, and use that evidence to translate the text's meaning into your own language. This translation of the text, *your* interpretation, will be your essay's argument. Try to formulate a hypothesis based on what this evidence tells you about the text, a character, or another aspect of your reading. Remember, communication is key here. A draft is your chance to bring this text out of the cave and into the world. Think carefully about how each one of your observations ties together to reveal the meaning behind the words. Your hypothesis should not be a fact that is obvious, but an idea generated from your analysis of these observations; you're not copying the text, after all, but translating the sense behind it.

A draft is a first revision of the text, it is the boiling down of the story or poem so that you can get to the bones and eventually see how those bones fit together to form the body of work you've been reading in class.

An essay is not simply several paragraphs of detailed observations; an essay is analysis. This is why it will serve you in the end to take your reading responses seriously, to think about the text as you read, to note pages and sections where you find pertinent observations, and then to process those details through analyses as you go. I want you to go out on a limb and see where it takes you. Your draft's hypothesis doesn't have to be definite, or fixed in stone, just examine your own ideas and then push beyond them through analysis to see the possible directions your essay could take.

What is expected of a draft is this: a typed essay no more than one page shorter than the page minimum for the revision, fluently reflecting on the topic assigned, taking risks in both style and content. By risks I mean that you should investigate your own ideas to see where they will take you, even if you don't know exactly where that is. A good draft is not necessarily close to a finished essay; it is an attempt to take your observations/analyses from your reading and see how they connect to each other.

I will comment on your essays and then return them before the final is due. We will have Peer Review the week before your final essay is due where you will meet in class with your classmates to help each other and help yourselves come up with ideas for revision. You can schedule conferences with me before the final is due as well; I will be happy to find a time (if possible) convenient for you, to meet and discuss your draft. Conferences are for you to help yourself, not for me to do the hard part for you, or to gauge your interest, so please come to my office with specific questions about your work.

Hand in your draft with my comments with the revision. I will grade and write comments on the revision, then hand them back for you to keep for future reference.

PEER REVIEW

For next class (2/25) please read your peers' essays carefully and answer the following questions as clearly and as constructively as possible for each essay. Then hand them back to each writer so that they can turn in your critique with their draft and revision on 3/1.

- 1) When you start the essay what is the thesis you think the writer is attempting to prove?
- 2) When you've finished reading the essay does it seem like a different thesis has been proven? If so what is the implied thesis by the end?
- 3) What is the observation part of the thesis? What is the analysis part of the thesis?
- 4) Go through each paragraph. Does each paragraph answer what its topic is (observation), where it is in the text (quoted evidence), and why it proves the thesis (analysis)? If not, please mark those paragraphs accordingly.
- 5) If you find that the writer needs help transitioning between paragraphs, what are some suggestions for possible transitions?
- 6) Are there any sentences in the essay that seem over-complicated or that don't make sense? If so, mark them accordingly.
- 7) Are there any redundancies in any of the paragraphs, or throughout the essay? If so, mark them accordingly.
- 8) What does the conclusion add to the essay? If it doesn't add anything, what are some suggestions for improvement?

Handout: Developing a Thesis *Rationale*

This was a fun in-class exercise we did as a break from revising. For homework they were asked to read a poem by A.D. Hope called “Imperial Adam,” and take notes as they had been doing with the ancient texts. This marked the first step we took in the course away from ancient, and into later interpretations of the bible. It made sense topically, because we’d just read the Adam and Eve story in Genesis, but also because we’d been discussing the authors differing interpretations of the story of creation, from the flood story in Gilgamesh to the one in the Bible and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. But it also worked to prepare the students for the third section of the course where we read stories from the Bible and their more modern interpretations.

As *interpretation* as our theme, I used this handout to show how one finds a good thesis. Step by step we went through the poem, reading and re-reading, until we could come up with a few ideas about how the poet interpreted the original creation story. We talked about how the poem was really no more than an essay on the creation story in a different form.

This helped students who were having trouble creating a thesis understand that it’s simply *their* interpretation of the text. Possibly because 6 out of my 8 students were computer science students, I found that they fought having their own ideas as if everything around them would crumble as soon as they took a stance based on their own ideas. They loved their boring observational theses, but after they gained a little more confidence by taking apart—gasp—a poem, of all things, they felt more comfortable adding analysis to their thesis.

This poem analysis also gave class a nice jolt of energy, away from the heavy ancient texts. It gave them the permission they needed to interpret that which had always been interpreted for them. And it made them heaps less nervous about the poems to come later on.

Class Discussion: Developing a Thesis

Today, using the AD Hope poem *Imperial Adam* we're going to practice close reading and analysis which are the secrets to developing a great thesis—not just one that will get you a good grade, but one you can get behind, and feel passionate about as a writer.

First let's read the poem aloud.

Okay, let's do that again, but this time let's mark observations as we listen.

You could apply the following steps for developing a thesis to any text you choose to write about:

- 1) Take five minutes and free write on how this poem (or other passage, text) affects you.
What parts affect you most, why?
What questions does it raise?
- 2) What's physically going on in the poem? What do we know for sure (observations)?
- 3) What's the deeper meaning of what's going on in the poem (analysis)?
What are some words the poet uses to describe God? Adam? Eve? Sex?
What metaphors are used?
What links this poem, symbolically, to the Genesis creation story?
- 4) Now what can we say about how the poet, AD Hope “read” the Genesis story?
- 5) So what are some possible theses ideas? How can we turn our interpretation of Hope's poem into a thesis that exposes how Hope “read” Genesis?

Some questions to think about when analyzing the poem:

How does Hope view the Fall?

If sex = forbidden fruit = knowledge of good and evil symbolically in Hope's poem, how is sex like the knowledge of good and evil?

Sex is often seen as bringing about an end to innocence—Why?

At what point in the poem do you feel they were symbolically exiled from paradise? Why?

Why was Cain a murderer in AD Hope's poem?

Handouts: Using Evidence Effectively and Writing Skills *Rationale*

From the students' drafts I gathered some examples of success and unsuccessful writing and used them in handouts in class during the week of revision.

The first handout, *Using Evidence Effectively in Essays*, focuses on taking what they know about using evidence from the second Gilgamesh essay, and adding all that they've learned in the course about analysis. That's not to say that this is the first they've heard about the need for this combination, but I found that at this point in the semester, after working with peer review, students are noticing their own flaws as they go, and are at times at a loss for how to do better. Some students write and write after they use a quote in a paragraph, and assume that they're analyzing, and I'll write in the margin, that it's merely more observation, that they need to tell us what that means, but they don't know how to do that, explicitly. So I made up this handout, really only for two or three students, but of course in a class of 8, especially one where usually only 6 show up, that's half the class. In class we went around and gave suggestions for adding analysis to the hanging quotes, wrote some on the board, so that everyone could be clear about the need for observation and analysis, not only in theses, but also in paragraphs. Luckily, from the homework assignments, the students were aware of the difference between the two, but needed to learn to pay better attention to their own writing as they wrote, and as they began to revise.

The second handout, *Writing skills: Troubleshooting*, focused on some sentence level problems I saw in the drafts. We went around the room again and revised the problematic examples. Again, I prefer to let the students come up with the answers to their own questions, whether they notice or not.

I've found both of these handouts helpful because so many students rush through their work, never proofread, and although I stress it, never even read their work aloud. It truly helps them to see their mistakes in front of them, on a handout, being discussed. At this point, as they're beginning to revise, I also point out how a little distance gives them a new perspective on their essays, and some clarity with which you can see their mistakes.

Using Evidence Effectively in Essays:

Just as your essay's thesis should be part observation and part analysis, each of your supporting paragraphs should likewise include both observation and analysis. Typically the observation part of your paragraph will be the textual evidence that you cite. The analysis is not merely sentences that connect that quote to the next quote, or the next paragraph; you must take the time (especially when doing close reading like we are) to analyze your quote specifically. What do the words in the quote mean? What connotations do they have? Are they symbolic for something, and if so, what? What does the quote show you? Basically you shouldn't be using a quote unless it adds to or proves the thesis of your paragraph. Yes, each paragraph should have a thesis. You prove your essay's thesis with several paragraphs of evidence and analysis, and you prove your paragraph's thesis with at least one piece of evidence and analysis within the paragraph. Hanging quotes, or pieces of evidence left un-analyzed, do nothing to prove your thesis (either one). Think about it this way: your essay is an explication of your reading of a text; if you simply hand your reader a quote without analysis, how do you know they'll be reading it the same way as you did? You have to give them your reading of it.

Examples of "Hanging Quotes":

"In addition, the feature of the Lord is also simply perfect. He blessed all the living creatures and made them, **'be fruitful and multiply.'** When he saw **'Adam there was not found an help meet for him,'** he said **'it is not good that the man should be alone,'** and therefore, created woman for man. Though he once **'brought the flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh,'** yet he felt sorry afterwards and decided **'not again curse the ground any more for man's sake.'**"

"In both stories, to illustrate the futility of man's attempt at division and dominion, heaven is threatened. In *Metamorphoses*, **'Giant attacked the very throne of heaven'** (Ovid 7) and Jove struck them down with thunderbolts. When they bled, being the product of man's attempts at division, the earth bore men who were even more evil. In Genesis, the threat is more subtle: God must remove Adam from the garden **'lest he put forth his hand and take also the tree of life, and live forever'** (Genesis 4:22).

Examples of Analyzed Quotes:

"Both Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Genesis begin with the universe in a state of disorder and lawlessness, which is then brought order through division by a God. Ovid's story begins in a universe **'Before the ocean was, or earth, or heaven'** (Humphries, 3). Chaos is directly described as **'all rude and lumpy matter'**, a state in **'whose confusion discordant atoms warred'** (3). The negative connotations associated with 'rude', confusion, discord, and war, reveal that chaos is unpleasant and useless, with no purpose or direction to anything. In addition, there is no harmony to the universe: **'Heat fought with cold, wet fought with dry, the hard fought with soft...'** (3). There is only conflict in such a world. These muddled ideas of 'things' merely exist to fight with each other in an endless cycle of argument."

"In Genesis it is written **'God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him,'** meaning that the being created was perfect like the God that had just spent the previous days creating the heaven and earth and light and darkness."

WRITING SKILLS: TROUBLESHOOTING

Problems to look out for in your drafts in order to revise successfully:

1) Lack of Evidence:

Including textual evidence (a direct cited quote) in each paragraph in the body of your essay enables your point to be explicitly proven as well as understood. Without evidence your argument holds no weight and ends up being vague and unstructured.

Example of Problem:

“On the other hand, in the Epic of Gilgamesh, there are a plethora of gods. The divine is highly dispersed, compared to the unified embodiment of divinity within God in the Bible. Each god or deity represents one or multiple aspects of life, whether known or unknown. For example, there may be a god of wheat harvesting or a god of the after-life. These gods do not always cooperate with one another; they, like humans, act out of self-advancement. Moreover, they have many other features that humans have; they feast (whether they need food and drink is unknown; the gods may just enjoy feasting), they bicker, they cry and show emotions. In other words, the gods of the Epic of Gilgamesh are human-like, but yet they have supernatural powers and the control of elements in their world. Oftentimes, the gods of the Epic of Gilgamesh have different goals and may take different sides in secret, even though a hierarchy of gods is in place. This causes troubles the gods do not foresee.”

2) Vague Words and Sentences:

Sometimes as the writer, you know what you're talking about, and use language that you've adopted to understand your argument; however, you need to define your language in order for your reader to understand.

Examples of the Problem:

“The description of the forbidden tree in Eden also enhances the idea of the necessity to man of the ability to observe both positive and negative manifestations of quality.”

“Whether to personify the gods or not is another significant issue in the definition of divinity.”

“The theory of man's evil nature is not so much portrayed in the Epic of Creation by Enuma Elish.”

“This point is very important because it has dramatic consequences on both societies for the following reasons.”

Handout: Revisions *Rationale*

One of the things I stress most in my class is the real definition of revision, and I'm not ever surprised, but a little disappointed, that in high school my students learned that revisions were just their drafts with a few minor corrections. I have students time and time again come to me in conference and say, "from your comments it sounds like I'm going to have to rewrite my entire essay; was it that bad?"

This handout beats them to the question. I try to explain that having to change significant elements of a draft does not mean the essay is bad—it means the brilliant ideas that are under the surface, aren't fully realized.

In the revisions of essay 3 I was looking for deeper analysis than what the drafts explored. Generally, after the week of peer review, and my comments, and conferences, and the class discussion on building an essay on the sentence level, most students felt comfortable in their revisions and I could tell. They weren't perfect essays by any means, and certainly they were conservative, but they all had clear theses, and well supported evidence.

Thought essay 3 was the first essay in the course to be formally revised, most students had revised previous essays and met with me in conference about how to improve them. At this point in the course, after having gone step by step through the process of building an essay, I find it crucial that the students also realize that they can take it apart, and start again. It is at this point in the class, just as we turn towards poetry, that the students are prepared to find their own voices, "break the rules", and begin thinking abstractly, not just thematically, but in their essay writing as well. Not all of my eight students took those risks in the class. Most were busy with computer science projects. But three did, and that's something.

REVISIONS:

When you sit down to write your revision, think of yourself now as a writer (like Karl Shapiro or A.D. Hope) who has grown up hearing your draft ritually every week. Its words are engrained in your mind; you could retell the original story you read, and the rough translation of its meaning in your sleep. But now you have your own ideas about the draft. You've compiled them from my comments, the comments of your peers, and your own self-review. You are now looking at it with different eyes, seeing it again in a new light. Just as writers have gone back to the primordial stories that continue to resurface, like the Flood, or Creation, and made them new by bringing their own interpretation and voice to the piece, you too will take that familiar draft and re-interpret your own ideas. This, of course, is not an easy task, after all, the poet A.D. Hope approached the bible over 300 years after the King James Authorized Edition was first published in 1611, and here you have to revise your draft in less than a week. Some psychological distance from your writing (because we don't have 300 years) is needed in order for it to improve; when you begin to see your draft as an influential text, but also one that inspires you to go forward, to pursue more sophisticated analysis, then your revision can break out of the mold your draft set for it, and take shape on its own merits.

A revision is not simply the draft with corrections. It is a new essay in the sense that the structure might need to be completely changed to make it more successful, the evidence might need to be re-examined and fleshed out, or the approach might need to be modified to better serve an idea you uncovered while writing the draft. A revision is not an essay written in regard to your draft, but one written in regard to the original text. Keep in mind that the draft is to be handed in with the revision, and if I find that no thoughtful attention was given to improving the entire essay, the grade will be affected negatively.

Often a good essay will develop from a small idea raised in the draft. Because a draft is a rough analysis of your ideas, the draft hypothesis may, in the end, turn out not to be the hypothesis that best fits what you want to say. In the draft it is OK to start with one main idea, and then wind up with a completely different one by the end; this happens often as a result of brainstorming *while* writing, as opposed to *before* writing. Revision is the time to go back and sift through your draft to find the true hypothesis of your argument. Once you've found it, your revision may end up being an entirely different essay from the draft. And that's OK. That's excellent in fact. The biggest mistake made in essay writing is thinking that your first hypothesis is something that can never change. Verbalizing a succinct hypothesis is a difficult task; in this class we will work on looking closely at our ideas, allowing them to change with our growing knowledge, and finding within them the kernels of argument that create great essays.