

English 110.001: Take-Home Essay Questions (choose ONE)

1. Joseph Campbell writes that

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

The forces encountered are often oppositional (whether an individual, a collective, a supernatural force, or a phenomenon like technology); in simple terms, heroes often confront villains. Do heroes need villains to validate their heroic status? Can the hero exist without a defined entity to which he or she is opposed? Write an essay in which you consider the role played by the villain in two works we have read this term. Is the villain sometimes in fact more important/ interesting than the “hero”? Are there texts where a hero is difficult to find? Do figures like Frankenstein or Faustus shift how you might think about Campbell’s definition of a hero? At least one of the works you choose should be one you have not already written on this term.

2. Virginia Woolf mused about women heroes in *A Room of One’s Own*:

It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen’s day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman’s life is that; and how little can a man know even of that when he observes it through the black or rosy spectacles which sex puts upon his nose. [...] Suppose, for instance, that men were only represented in literature as the lovers of women, and were never the friends of men, soldiers, thinkers, dreamers [...] literature would be incredibly impoverished, as indeed literature is impoverished beyond our counting by the doors that have been shut upon women.

Using Woolf’s observations, write an essay about women in two of the works on the syllabus. You might choose to contrast “male” and “female” models of heroism; you might choose to write about women as antagonists of the hero... there are many possibilities. At least one of the works you choose should be one you have not already written on this term.

3. J.R.R. Tolkien wrote about *The Hobbit* that

this is a study of simple ordinary man, neither artistic nor novel and heroic (but not without the undeveloped seeds of these things) against a high setting – and in fact... the tone and style change with the Hobbit’s

development, passing from fairy-tale to the noble and high and relapsing with the return.

To put it another way, "I wish I was at home in my nice hole by the fire, with the kettle just beginning to sing!" is a refrain of Bilbo's throughout *The Hobbit*. It would be difficult to imagine Beowulf or Erik the Red saying such a thing. In Bilbo, Tolkien has created a different kind of hero than we have seen before in the course. Compare and contrast Bilbo with a hero from one of the other works we have studied this term, in order to articulate Bilbo's heroic code.

4. Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods* imagines what it would be like for the gods of many old cultures to be transported to America. This is Mr. Wednesday, who is the Norse god Odin, speaking to the other old gods:

When the people came to America they brought us with them. They brought me, and Loki and Thor, Anansi and the Lion-God, Leprechauns and Kobolds and Banshees, Kubera and Frau Holle and Ashtaroth, and they brought you. We rode here in their minds, and we took root. We traveled with the settlers to the new lands across the ocean. The land is vast. Soon enough, our people abandoned us, remembered us only as creatures of the old land, as things that had not come with them to the new. Our true believers passed on, or stopped believing, and we were left, lost and scared and dispossessed, with only what little smidgens of worship or belief we could find.

Gaiman's novel stages a war between the old gods and the new gods (who are creatures of credit cards, and computers, and consumerism), in a landscape that is at times completely mundane, and at times strange and mystical. The novel, as exemplified by the quotation above, speaks to the role of belief in the creation of the worlds in which gods and heroes have traditionally moved, and wonders whether gods can exist in a world such as ours. What about heroes? Write an essay in which you consider two works from the syllabus that, in your view, are engaged in questioning or reconfiguring the idea of the heroic. At least one of the works you choose should be one you have not already written on this term.

Things to remember as you write this essay:

Formulate a thesis in response to the question you have chosen to answer. Think about whether your paper will be *analytical*, *expository*, or *argumentative*, and craft the thesis accordingly. Then think about how you will structure your paper in order to demonstrate and support your thesis.

Choose passage(s) that support(s) your argument. Mark all the significant features of style and content in the passage(s). You should make frequent reference to the texts in your essay. We are looking for detail, and for evidence that you have read the texts carefully.

Check for consistency in your argument and order in your structure.

Proof-read your essay.

Your essay should be between 4 and 5 pages in length.

IMPORTANT: If you decide you want to make use of secondary material in support of your argument, be careful to document your research thoroughly. Any reference to someone else's work, by quotation or by paraphrase, must be documented in footnotes, endnotes or in parenthetical references. If you do not know how to document your sources, consult a writing hand book or look at the "Documenting Sources" handout on the [OWL \(On-line Writing Lab\)](#) web page:

THIS ESSAY IS DUE ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28th. WE WILL TAKE OFF 2% / DAY FOR LATE PAPERS (unless you have a properly-documented reason for lateness).