

ESSAY 1:

ANALYZE A SHORT PASSAGE OF MILTON'S VERSE.

Select a short passage (between 5–15 lines) from any of Milton's English poems (**excluding** *Paradise Lost*) and write about what the experience of reading them does for an audience.

I want you to write not about what your chosen lines *mean* but about what they *do*. Think about how the lines guide and manipulate the reader as they unfold sentence by sentence, word by word, syllable by syllable. Instead of standard critical questions like “What are these lines about?” or “What do they say?” I want you to focus on the question “What is happening?” and to answer it by tracking and describing the series of actions the lines perform upon the perception of their audience. Think about the lines as a mental roller coaster ride. If you wanted to explain to someone what the experience of a great roller coaster ride was like, you would have to describe in detail the twists, turns, and loops that happen along the way. Do the same for your chosen passage.

Be sure that you write about the chosen lines — that you do not swerve from your topic to focus on the characters involved or the kinds of situations that involve them. Don't spend any time telling readers what the lines say; assume readers who understand the lines and who assume that you do. Don't speculate on what the lines might want to say but do not (that is, don't work them over to manufacture an interpretation).

Think and write about how your chosen lines work—not about *what* they achieve but about *how* they achieve it. Your analysis should focus exclusively on form not on content. Do not talk about the themes or arguments or ideas in the lines but about how Milton presents, manipulates, and styles the material.

You might try writing a substitute version of your lines — a substitute that delivers all the information your chosen lines do but in modern-English prose. Doing that should help you see what things like word choice and positioning do to turn a mere vehicle for transporting ideational freight into an amusement park ride for its readers' minds.

You would be wise to select a passage we have not already analyzed carefully in class.

Make your prose as clear and concise as possible. Don't waste your time (and mine) trying to sound impressive. Write, instead, in a conversational voice: the clear, plainspoken, engaging voice of a person talking about a subject they find interesting. Don't let your essay run longer than what you have to say. Make every word count. One sentence that has something to say is better than a paragraph that doesn't.

Quote the passage you select at the beginning of your essay. Your essay should be between 500–800 words. Use MLA Format for quotations and citations. (See drmarkwomack.com/mla-style/, especially “How to Quote Verse” and “Document Format.”)

Submit your essay through the TurnItIn link on the class Blackboard Learn page labeled “Essay 1—Milton's Verse.” You don't need to submit a hard copy version of your essay.

DUE DATES:

- **COMMENTS DEADLINE: February 27**
If you want comments on your essay, you must submit it on or before Friday, February 27.
- **FINAL DEADLINE: March 9**
Although I will make few or no comments on essays submitted after Friday, February 27, I will grade these papers just the same as those turned in by the earlier date.