Assignment for Paper #2

Write a paper of about 1000 – 1500 words (about 5 pages) on some issue in *The Book of the Duchess* or the first fragment of *The Canterbury Tales* (i.e. General Prologue through the Cook’s Tale).

Some suggested topics are listed below. Note that each offers a starting point and some questions to get you going; you will need to do some careful thinking and re-reading parts of the texts to arrive at a thesis, and then figure out how to present and support that thesis.

You are also free to devise your own topic, and I would encourage those of you who are more experienced in literary analysis to consider doing so.

In every case, your main concern is with illuminating Chaucer’s text; when the topic instructs you to use other material, that other material should be made to serve you and your interpretation of Chaucer. Note that some of these topics do not require any use of sources other than Chaucer; some require research in “background” or source material only.

I recommend that you don’t do additional research in secondary material (i.e., what other people have said about these topics), unless you are already very comfortable with doing literary analysis and forming a thesis.

- Analyze the Host as a character, looking at his description, behavior, and words in the General Prologue as well as his interaction with the pilgrims as the tale-telling continues.

- Respond to “Chaucer the Pilgrim” and construct an alternative reading of the narrator of the General Prologue. Determine what you agree with in Donaldson’s reading, and where you part company with him, and why.

- There are the many references to Fortune, fate, destiny, chance, etc. in the Knight’s Tale. Late in the work, Theseus has a long speech offering a more providential view of the universe (starting at line 2987). Consider the relationship between these different worldviews in the context of the tale. For example, does this tale successfully meld the pre-Christian concept of Fortune with Christian beliefs about God?

- Read the story of Ceyx and Alcione (or Seys and Aleyone as Chaucer spells them) in either of the earlier versions known to Chaucer and provided in the Norton *Dream Visions*: Ovid’s, from *The Metamorphoses*, on pages 251-257, or Machaut’s from *The Fountain of Love*, pages 289 (starting two paragraphs from the bottom of the page) to 291. Compare this version to the one we have in *The Book of the Duchess*, lines 62-220. Consider what Chaucer uses of the story, what he omits, changes, or embellishes, and how it functions in the context of his poem. Analyze Chaucer’s use of his source material.
• Read the story on pages 341-3 of the Norton *Canterbury Tales*, which is of all known tales the one most similar to the Miller’s Tale, and possibly a direct source for it. It’s also fairly typical of the fabliau genre. Consider how the Miller’s Tale is like it, and also how it differs, and discuss how Chaucer puts his own stamp on the story or genre.

• Read the story on pages 344-34 of the Norton *Canterbury Tales*, a possible source for the Reeve’s Tale, and see what insight it gives you into Chaucer’s version.

**Timeline and logistics:**

Please see me at any point in the process where suggestions or feedback may be useful as you choose your topic, develop your thesis, and plan your paper, in addition to the formally scheduled steps:

• For the week of **October 23**, have an “ideas draft.” This is not necessarily a first draft of your paper (though it can be if that work best for you), but informal writing in which you are working through the material you have decided to look at and finding a thesis. This can be in whatever form is comfortable for you at this stage (handwritten or typed, freewriting or visual brainstorming, etc.). It should include some specific passages from the texts. Bring this to class, drop it off at my office, email it to me, or upload it to the dropdown in D2L. **Get this to me by 4 pm on Thursday to get feedback by 4 pm Friday.**

• Write a complete draft of your paper for **October 30**. Turn in a hard copy and also share the draft with your peer group. (Groups will be set up by October 23. Each group can decide whether to share drafts electronically or physically.)

• Groups will meet during the rest of the week of Oct. 30. Read and comment on your group-mates’ papers in preparation for the group meeting; guidelines for this will be provided.

• The final draft, to be graded, is due **November 6**. Turn in one hard copy of the final draft and at least one copy of the previous draft.