Final Essay ENG 1120 K

Proposal due March 20 (5% / **submit hard copy in class**)

Essay due April 3rd

The final essay is an opportunity for you to practice your critical reading and academic writing skills by developing a specific, complex, persuasive argument on a specific topic that you identify working across Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and a secondary source of your choosing. Your essay **needs to make a specific arguable claim**, and you need to develop and support that claim with detailed analysis and interpretation of the text’s content and/or form.

You are required to use at **minimum** a single, peer-reviewed secondary source *OR* theoretical article from the University of Ottawa library collection. You can feel free to use any of the theorists that we have discussed or considered in lecture to inform your argument. Some prompts might require a little more research than others—responsible criticism and close reading might necessitate you seek out reliable, academic sources to inform yourself about certain histories or traditions. If you do consult other sources **be sure to cite them properly** in your Works Cited list.

The questions below are prompts to get you started—do not feel obliged to write on every aspect of the question—they are formulated to prompt you to think about different aspects of how you might read a text. Please feel free to write on a topic that is not included here. If you decide to write on your own topic, you **must** run your idea by me before you begin (ekean@uottawa.ca)

**\*\* We will have a work period on March 17. If you bring your proposal and speak to me in class during this time or during extra office hours I will hold on March 16th, 17th & 18th (exact times TBD in announcements), you will receive an automatic 5% (spots may be limited during class time).**

The proposal should include the following:

- An in-progress thesis statement.

- A brief (can be point form) outline of your major supporting points.

- At least **two** citations from the literary text in support of your thesis statement.

- At least **two** citations from a secondary text in support of your thesis statement.

- A works cited in **MLA or APA format.**

**Essay Prompts**

1. Speculative fiction inherits many of the concerns of the gothic genre; both critique the stability of Enlightenment principles like reason and rationality. At the beginning of the semester, we read about how the gothic inflects the writing of 19th century writers like Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. Does Atwood take up gothic techniques to similarly question the coherence of science or reality? If so, to what effect?
2. The practice of close reading fiction necessitates a skeptical critical reader who is wary of the coherency or reliability of any narrative or narrator. Our readings this term have asked you to be skeptical about points of view, metanarratives (like history and science), and stable subject positions. How and why does *Oryx and Crake* express skepticism of dominant histories and/or subjectivities?
3. Jimmy’s mother abandons him as a child. In many ways, this may be characterized as a purely selfish action, or else an effect of neglectful mothering. Comment on the construction of gender in *Oryx and Crake.* Does Atwood articulate (or else critique) a “postfeminist” ideal? Does Crake consider the existence of gender parity in the Craker’s new world? If so, is he successful?
4. In a central scene of *Oryx and Crake*, Crake tells Jimmy, “I don’t believe in nature either … or not with a capital N” (206). The question of nature has dominated our reading this semester. Discuss how Atwood defines and represents nature. How do different characters understand the value of nature?
5. The Crakers satisfy their hunger for myth by asking Snowman to tell them about the origins of all the new things they encounter in the world. In order to appease the Crakers’ curiosity, Snowman creates an entire mythology to explain their arrival on earth. How do creation myths (or any meta-narrative) give order and/or meaning to the Crakers’ lived experience? Do the Crakers rely solely on the creation myth that Snowman passes down to them or do they question this narrative? To what effect?
6. Convinced that symbolism is the root of all evil, Crake removes the capacity for symbolic thought from the Crakers genetic blueprint. In part, Crake’s Paradice project seeks to eliminate art, spirituality and dreams—he warns Jimmy that as soon as the Crakers start to “practice art, we’re in trouble” (305). What is the danger of art? Why is symbolism harmful? Does Atwood recuperate art and symbolism for good?
7. Compare and contrast the development of **two** characters (one from Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and one from Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*). What is the significance of certain similarities or differences?
8. Propose your own topic (discuss with Dr. Kean).

**Assignment specifications:** 12-point Times New Roman font; double-spacing throughout; one-inch margins on all sides; pages numbered (starting on the SECOND page).

**Please refrain from including a cover page**. Instead, on the top left-hand corner of the **first page**, list your student name, student number, course code and section, my name, and the date of submission. **PLEASE STAPLE** your essay before submission.

**The title should appear centered.** In bold, 12-point font Times New Roman.

Any secondary sources referenced in the paper should be documented **both** in the body of the text and in a separate Works Cited page. Follow the MLA (Modern Languages Association) style of documentation.