

## Comparative Analysis

**Basic Assignment.** Choose two texts from this semester's schedule and write a five-to-seven-page paper that compares the ideas of the two theorists.



**Choose Carefully.** The two texts must be a part of our assigned reading, though they can be from any time period, anything from Plato to Butler. If you're interested in a text or theory from later in the semester, please read it carefully before making a decision.

Browsing the anthology can be useful for generating ideas. And everyone is invited to drop by to discuss possible choices with me. You could talk about your interests (or what you'd like to learn from working on this paper), and I'd be happy to steer you in directions suited to your interests and aims.

**Examples and Advice.** You might compare two theorists who have different approaches to the same idea, theme, issue, or phenomenon (such as mimesis, sublimity, virtue, ideology, gender, modernity, taste, and so on). Or you might compare the methods or aims of critics who seem to have similar approaches (formalism, Marxism, defense of poetry, critique of art for its own sake, etc.) or similar topics and themes but nonetheless have important differences that distinguish their theories. You could compare two different theorists by detailing an important relationship between them, a relationship such as influence or antagonism. Or you could compare forms of argument or types of advice (to readers or writers or other critics).

There are many different ways to approach a comparative analysis, though I think it is key to figure out what your grounds for comparison are (*why* did you pick these two texts rather than some other texts?) and your reasons for comparing (*why* bother? or what is interesting, significant, or productive about comparing these two texts? what do we learn about these texts—that we might not realize by just reading them separately—when we compare them to each other?).

For more specific advice, I have included on the back of this sheet Kerry Walk's handout on "How to Write a Comparative Analysis." For most of you, this may be review. On the other hand, if you've never written a paper like this, you will find her advice indispensable.

**Reminders.** The paper should have a good title. It should be typed and double-spaced. Please use MLA style to cite texts and provide information on your sources. This is especially if you use any sources beyond *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*.

**Due Date.** Thursday, March 30.

**Length.** 5-7 pages.



Photographs: Julia Kristeva (bottom right). Sigmund Freud (top left).