

Department of English & Comparative Literary Studies
EN122 Modes of Reading 2015-2016
Second Formative Essay: Engaging with Theory

Please write a **2000** word essay in answer to **one** of the questions listed below. You will not be expected to read secondary sources to support your ideas other than the ones assigned for the module.

1 “The second feature of this list of postmodernisms is the effacement in it of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture” (Jameson in Lodge, 543). Please comment on this taking into account Jameson’s views on the societal conditions of postmodernity and how they might apply or not to a reading of *The Lonely Londoners*.

2 “‘Country’ and ‘city’ are very powerful words, and this is not surprising when we remember how much they seem to stand for in the experience of human communities.” (Raymond Williams in Lodge, 339). Please comment on this statement, drawing on William’s further development of it and taking into account how one might want to apply to a reading of *The Lonely Londoners*.

3 “I ascribe a basic importance to the phenomenon of language. That is why I find it necessary to begin with this subject, which should provide us with one of the elements in the colored men’s comprehension of the *other*. For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other.” (Franz Fanon in Lodge, 127). Please write an essay on this statement and how it can be related to the uses of language in *The Lonely Londoners*.

4 Helon Habila in his review of *The Lonely Londoners* (*The Guardian*, 17 March 2007) writes: “The gloom hits you from the very first sentence: “One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of un-reality about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if not London at all but some strange place on another planet ...” For the Caribbean immigrants whom Moses goes to Waterloo station to meet, London may well be another planet.” Draw on any one of the theorists read in this unit (Jameson, Williams, Fanon) to comment on this statement as regards the novel’s imbrication in society and history.

5 Rachel Kushner writes: “The first image I pinned up to spark inspiration for what would eventually be my novel *The Flamethrowers* was of a woman with tape over her mouth. She floated above my desk with a grave, almost murderous look, war paint on her cheeks, blonde braids framing her face, the braids a frolicsome countertone to her intensity. The paint on her cheeks, not frolicsome.” (*The Paris Review*, Winter 2012). How does this inform a reading of *The Flamethrowers* as a feminist historical novel?

6 Adorno starts his essay on “Commitment” thus: “Since Sartre’s essay *What is Literature?* there has been less theoretical debate about committed and autonomous literature. Nevertheless, the controversy over commitment remains urgent, so far as anything that merely concerns the life of the mind can be today, as opposed to sheer human survival.” Please comment on Adorno’s views in relation to *The Flame Throwers*.

7 Silvia Federici in “Wages Against Housework” writes: “It is important to recognise that when we speak of housework we are not speaking of a job as other jobs, but we are speaking of the most pervasive manipulation, the most subtle and mystified violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class.” What are the implications of the work of Federici on gender and class issues for a reading of literature?

8 In his review of *The Flame Throwers* (*LARB*, 25 December 2013) Geoff Makk writes about the character Reno and the novel as a whole: “More than any American novelist I’ve read in recent years, Kushner has created one of the strongest contenders to stand with Ahab and Gatsby in the great hall of heroes in American literature.” Please comment on the importance for feminist texts to establish a different form of tradition.