

English 213 – Second Essay
Length: 4000 Words

Throughout this module, we have been operating with two definitions of genre. First, that “genres are essentially contracts between a writer and his readers” (Fredric Jameson) and second, that genres offer “a conceptual framework for the mediation (if not the ‘solution’) of intractable problems” and renders “such problems intelligible” (Michael McKeon). Over the course of the year we’ve examined how different literary genres – sentimentalism, detective novels, dime novels, utopias, slave narratives, the gothic, etc. – engage with, mediate, and make sense of the contradictions underpinning US global expansion in the 19th-century: namely, the tension between the anti-imperialist and revolutionary ideals of America as a republic and its increasingly imperialist, hierarchical, and violent empire.

For your final paper, you will analyse one of the genres we’ve looked at this year. To do so, you will look at two novels that are part of the genre: both can be texts we’ve studied this years (but at least one will have to be from this semester) or, you may choose one novel we have studied this semester and one other novel that we haven’t looked at in the course. Using these two novels, you will develop an interpretive argument about the role your genre plays in theorizing and/or representing one of the main issues or concerns of nineteenth-century America.

Here are some questions to help you develop your argument:

- What are the social problems that the genre addresses and how does it address that problem?
- How does the genre deal with questions of race, gender, sexuality, and class?
- What is the role of genre in dealing with the dual nature of the US as both republic and empire?
- How does the genre deal with questions of space and geography? Some spaces to consider might include the changing frontier, the line between north and south, the border of Mexico and the US, questions of urbanization and suburbanization, etc..
- When does the genre emerge and how, if at all, does it change over time?
- How does your genre envision alternative idea(l)s of America? And what does this ideal look like?

General Essay Guidelines

Assignment. No matter what topic you choose, I'm looking for an essay that (a) argues an interpretive thesis, (b) marshals and analyses textual evidence to support that thesis, and (c) does so in a logical and persuasive way with prose that is largely free of errors in usage. When I say "interpretive thesis," I mean a thesis that doesn't just make an (interesting) observation about the text, but that also interprets that observation and argues for its importance in understanding or rethinking the text as a whole.

Sources. You can use as many or as few sources as you like. That said, I strongly recommend at least looking at the secondary criticism about your chosen text. I would also recommend that you do *some* research into broader field your discussing. As well, remember that the syllabus has numerous secondary readings for each week under "Suggested Reading." These suggested readings are your friend, though of course you should in no way feel limited by them. The goal of this assignment is for you to follow your interests and explore so cast your net widely.

Citation Style. Please include a works cited page and use parenthetical citations for in-text references and quotations. Follow MLA guidelines for these citations and for the works cited entries. To save paper, you may put the works cited right after your argument rather than on a separate page.

Grading. I will never grade on the basis of whether or not I agree with what you're arguing. I grade on how convincingly and logically you argue and how ambitious, creative, and original your argument is. Remember, too, that this is an English course. Therefore, the clarity, grammatical correctness, and sophistication of your prose matter

Plagiarism. Generally speaking, plagiarism is the intentional or the unintentional use of someone else's ideas or words without proper documentation. Please familiarize yourself with the university's policies. The penalties and processes described in that document apply in this course. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, no matter how seemingly insignificant, please ask an instructor.

Comparative Essays. Comparative essays are tricky. Pointing to two things and saying what they are and how they are similar or different does not make an interpretive argument. If you are going to do a comparative essay, make sure you are not just describing the two texts and how they're different, but developing an argument about their relationship to each other.

Advice It Would Be Smart to Heed. A strong essay should always:

- § take risks, be bold, and be engaged
- § boast a thesis statement that poses an argument rather than an observation;
- § include topic sentences indicating the argument of their respective paragraphs rather than summarizing plot;
- § boast paragraphs built around a unified concept/argument that in turn clearly relates to the thesis;
- § boast paragraphs that develop that concept in an organized way;
- § show how textual evidence supports its claims (i.e., showing is different than telling;
- overuse of adjectives and adverbs is usually a sign a paper is telling rather than showing);

§ follow all directions, including using proper MLA style.

Parting advice: Think about what you're writing. Don't write on autopilot. And, if at all possible, get feedback from your tutorial leader once you have a draft. Often, what students think of as a finished essay is really a rough draft of a strong finished essay.