

Asia and the Victorians/EN2D1

Second Assessed Essay Questions (questions for non-finalists; guidelines for all)

Due on 6 May 2021

Answer **ONE** of the following questions. *Feel free to formulate your own question in consultation with Dr Forman.* In addition, the questions below are formulated in open ways; you will need to take ownership of your question and develop an appropriate thesis/overarching argument within its remit. You need a minimum of one text from Term 2 for this essay, but you may write a comparative essay with a text from term 1, provided you do not repeat content.

PLEASE READ THE GUIDELINES BELOW AND AFTER THE ESSAY TITLES BEFORE STARTING YOUR ESSAY.

You are expected to do some degree of independent research for this assignment, which may include primary materials from the period (historical materials, contemporary criticism from journals or newspapers, other relevant literature, etc.) and/or criticism and theory. The module webpage contains a bibliography of useful research materials. Via the library portal, you can access useful databases such as ProQuest Literature One, the Gale News Vault, Nineteenth-Century British Library Newspapers, the Times Digital Archives, Project Muse, the MLA International Bibliography, and Empire Online. *Remember that recent articles are normally embargoed for several years and will not appear in JSTOR.*

All essays must be double spaced and in a font size of 12 point.

PLEASE CONSULT THE ESSAY TIPS DOCUMENT ON THE WEBSITE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO WRITE AND FORMAT YOUR ESSAY APPROPRIATELY.

1. Analyze formal experimentation with genre in one or more of the texts from Term 2.
2. Perform a queer reading of one or more of the texts from Term 2.
3. According to Suzanne Daly, “The term ‘imperial Gothic’ most commonly refers to late 19th-century fiction set in the British Empire that employs and adapts elements drawn from Gothic novels such as a gloomy, forbidding atmosphere; brutal, tyrannical men; spectacular forms of violence or punishment; and the presence of the occult or the supernatural. In *Orientalism* (1978), literary critic Edward Said demonstrated how 18th- and 19th-century European scholars influentially defined the ‘Orient’, in stark opposition to the West, as mysterious, barbaric, irrational, seductive and dangerous. Such conceptions of the ‘East’ would prove highly compatible with the conventions of Gothic fiction.” (<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-imperial-gothic#>)

Explore the deployment of the ‘imperial Gothic’ in one or more texts from Term 2 or in one text from Term 1 and one text from Term 2.

4. In *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, Elleke Boehmer notes, “Europe colonized foreign stories as well as foreign lands. Thus, far from excluding interaction with other cultures, self-iteration, in fact, incorporated foreign influences.”

Analyze the appropriation of “foreign stories” in any TWO of the works from this module.

5. “Everything about China was immense: its area, its population, its variety, the problem and opportunities it seemed to contain. Even its degradations were outsize. And the magnificent recession of Chinese history stretched back through the millennia in a way that made Europeans, and Americans, seem mere newcomers, encouraging them — and this becomes an important theme in Western travel writing — to think of themselves by contrast as specialists in modernity” [Douglas Kerr and Julia Kuehn, Introduction, *A Century of Travels in China: Critical Essays on Travel Writing from the 1840s to the 1940s* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2007) 1-2.]

Explore the contrasts between notions of tradition and modernity in the description of East Asia and/or Southeast Asia.

6. Discuss the representation of ideas of craft and “craftmanship” in one or more of the works from Term 2.
7. Explore the function of archives and archive-building in one or more of the works from Term 2.
8. Analyze the depiction of “irrational” behaviour in one or more of the texts from Term 2.
9. Write an essay about femininity in the imperial/extra-imperial environment, using one or more of the texts from Term 2. Among the issues you may wish to consider are: the projection of normative values of femininity and separate spheres onto “Oriental” women; the way in which the sexual economy functions among expatriates in East and Southeast Asia; the politics of miscegenation; the relationship between women and domesticity and hygiene in the imperial environment; the figure of the concubine, “fallen woman,” or sex worker.
10. Write an essay about masculinity in the imperial/extra-imperial environment, using one or more of the texts from Term 2. Among the issues you may wish to consider are: the representation of boyhood; the imperial/extra-imperial setting as a site for “sexual license”; the failed imperial officer; the discussion of warriors and martial behaviours.
11. How do “neo-Victorian” texts—such as manga, Gene Yang’s graphic novel *Boxers*, or films like *Kwaidan*—offer a critical commentary on the engagements between East and/or Southeast Asia and the “West”?
12. Explore the function of (ritual) suicide in one or more of the texts read during Term 2.
13. Discuss the development of what Benedict Anderson calls a “new, restless double-consciousness” (229) in José Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere*. How does the “spectre of comparisons” function here?
14. How do one or more of the authors from Term 2 manipulate tropes of disgust—and to what ends?
15. Explore the discussion of touch in one or more of the texts from Term 2.
16. Discuss how execution and/or torture are deployed in one or more of the narratives read in Term 2.

17. Examine the representation of “mestizo”/“half-caste” characters in one or more of the texts from Term 2.
 18. Explore the depiction of anti-Western sentiment/xenophobia in one or more of the texts from Term 2. How do writers use this idea of xenophobia to demonize Asian groups as “barbaric,” “uncivilized,” etc. (or, in Ng’s novel, to give the Chinese side of the Hundred Days’ Reform and the Boxer Rebellion)?
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Your essay must have a strong central argument/thesis statement, which should appear towards the start. I will be expecting you to do close reading/textual analysis during the essay, commenting on issues such as narrative voice, style, etc. and the way in which these elements contribute to the title you have chosen.

The essay should use parenthetical citations for quotations and have a bibliography, which preferably conforms to the MLA style. Do not include a “Works Consulted” section in your essay, as your research should be evident from the essay itself.

Information on the MLA style can be found at www.mla.org. The Online Writing Lab at Purdue, https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_style_introduction.html, offers good guidance on the MLA format and on how to formulate a thesis statement. I also recommend *The Craft of Research*, edited by Wayne Booth et al.