

EN2E7 Crime Fiction, Nation, and Empire: Essay 1

Intermediate Years (EN2E7): **1 X 3000-word essay**

Exchange students registered on the module under code EN2E7 and with us for the full academic term adhere to the same assessment methods detailed above.

Exchange students with us for one term only, will submit a 2,000 word essay on the last Tuesday of the term they complete as indicated on their tabula.

Deadline: submitted on Tabula by **12pm on Friday 3rd February 2023** (Term 2, week 4)

Guidelines

Essays should adhere to the English department presentation guidelines as per

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/essay>

Note we use MLA or MHRA referencing.

Choosing one of the 12 options below, you should refer to and compare in your essays, **either two novels, or one novel and a few short stories**, that we have studied between start of term 1 and week 2 of Term 2 (i.e. between Dickens and up to and including the female-detective fiction). You should also engage with primary sources and secondary criticism pertinent to your topic.

All questions contain a quote which must be reproduced with the question at the top of your essay and must be engaged with. If a question contains a quote from a specific text, you are not obliged to choose that text as one of your options, but you should engage with the content and symbolism of the quote itself.

Remember that you also must submit a 1000 word Bibliographic/Citation exercise based on your resources used for this essay. You will find the template document for this exercise separately on the module webpage.

Note that some of the themes below will also be available for the second essay, although not necessarily as the same questions, so think carefully about your choice. You will also have the option of using either one unused text from the first part of the course with a text from the second part of the course, OR two texts from second part of course.

Extensions should be sought via **self-certs** on Tabula (under the personal circumstances tab) or using the **specific extension button** on tabula next to the assignment (this route requires evidence of unexpected circumstances).

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1. For John McBratney, “the English project of detection can go only so far when confronted with the riddles of crime and sin, the mysteries of the English social system, and the ambiguities of narration” (“What Connexion Can There Be?” ...” in *Victorian Secrecy: Economies of Knowledge and Concealment*, ed. Denise Millstein Tischler) Investigate and examine the character, function, and tactics of the narrator(s) and what is achieved by specific/different narrative roles in crime fiction.
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2. Examining representations of either official and/or amateur detectives in crime fiction, explore Kristen Guest's contention that "the ability to blend in to the point of invisibility was part of his [the detective's] job" ("The Right Stuff, Class Identity, Material Culture and the Victorian Police Detective").
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3. Sam Sanders argues that various kinds of mid-Victorian sensation and detective fiction included literary companions whose role was "mediating between the reader and the detective", and who would become "sidekicks" later in the genre. So too, many early examples contained an array of 'amateur' detectives, while many "sought to provide readers with the thrill of exploring criminality from a place of complete safety [...] occupying the literary character space of the stereotypical sidekick" ("...Always with the Inspector"). Write an essay on those who suffer from 'detective fever' in and around crime fiction of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, paying attention to its characteristics, function, and effects.
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4. "'His calling is the acquisition of secrets and the holding possession of such power as they give him, with no sharer or opponent in it.'" (*Bleak House*) Consider the form, currency, and ownership of secrets, and what they reveal to us about ideas of "crime", power, and ideologies of nation.
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5. Arlene Young writes that "whereas a woman might have distinct aptitudes for detective work—such as an ability to infiltrate domestic environments without suspicion—exploiting those aptitudes would stretch the bounds of propriety" in the nineteenth century ("Petticoated Police"). Examine the representation, methods, attitude towards "Women as Detectives" in our course so far.
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6. "'Now, what YOU want,' pursues Bucket, again tapping Mr. Snagsby on the breast in a comfortable and soothing manner, 'is that every person should have their rights according to justice. That's what YOU want'" (*Bleak House*). Consider the portrayal of justice / punishment/ and/or the judicial system in our texts.
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7. Caroline Reitz contends that "nineteenth-century detective fiction [...] helped a national readership imagine the British Empire in a way that was at once destabilizing and reassuring. The detective narrative turned national concerns about abuse of authority into a popular story about British authority in the contact zone of Victorian culture; this in turn allowed the detective and the imperial project to become extensions of rather than anathema to English national identity." (*Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and the Imperial Venture*). Examine some of the ways in which your chosen texts, and the mysteries, crimes, punishments, and resolutions within them, reinforce and/ or disrupt contemporaneous ideologies of British Imperialism.
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8. "'Upon what infinitesimal trifles may sometimes hang the whole secret of some wicked mystery, inexplicable heretofore to the wisest upon the earth! A scrap of paper, a shred of some torn garment, the button off a coat, [...] the fragment of a letter, the shutting or opening of a door, a shadow on a window-blind, the accuracy of a moment tested by one of Benson's watches—a thousand circumstances so slight as to be forgotten by the criminal, but links of iron in the wonderful chain forged by the science of the detective officer'" (*Lady Audley's Secret*). Examine the use of documents

and/or other forms of material evidence/possessions in crime fiction of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

9. “While officers of the law focussed on the act of crime and its possible prevention, criminologists investigated the nature of criminality in order to identify its origins and causes. The figure of the literary detective partakes in both of these endeavours” (Stephan Karschay, “Doyle and the Criminal Body” *Cambridge Companion*, 2019). Analyse the construction and use of the figure of the “villain” and how they unsettle or confirm ideologies of crime and of the British nation.
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10. “The clairvoyance in this case is simply a development of the romantic side of the Indian character. It would be refreshment and an encouragement to those men—quite inconceivable, I grant you, to the English mind—to surround their wearisome and perilous errand in this country with a certain halo of the marvellous and the supernatural” (*The Moonstone*). Write an essay on the relationship between the “Gothic” and detection/crime in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
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11. “the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside” (Sherlock Holmes, “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches”). Consider the topographies and/or mobility of crime and justice in your chosen texts.
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12. In the article ‘Murder Madness’ printed in *Sala’s Journal* on 5 November 1892, the reporter complained that “If the murderer is very bad indeed – and there are degrees of heinousness in murder, though the law, in its wisdom, declines to recognize any distinctions – an endeavour is made by a knot of busybodies to show that he is mad, and therefore irresponsible, and therefore ought not to be punished. If the fantastic antics of the cunning culprit do not seem sufficiently irrational to prove him crazy, the history” of his family “is diligently traced in order to ascertain whether one or more of his family did not show, at some time or other, more or less pronounced symptoms of dementia, and so set up a plea of hereditary insanity.” Examine what your chosen examples of nineteenth and early twentieth-century crime fiction suggest about the perceived textual and contextual relationship between “insanity” and crime.