

The Queer American Novel: Midterm Essay Assignment

Close Reading

Due Thursday, October 15 by the beginning of class as a Microsoft Word attachment. This essay should reach five to seven pages in length. Double-space everything. Use a standard-sized font & regular margins. If you wish to include critical sources, you will need to append a bibliography; otherwise, it is not necessary.

Assignment Description & Task:

This assignment asks you to examine a passage from one of the four novels we've read that has something important to say about sexual identity, gender identity and expression, and/or homoerotic desire. Use the close analysis of the passage to make a statement about the novel as a whole.

Choose a short passage from *Home to Harlem*, *Nightwood*, *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms*, or *Giovanni's Room*. The passage needs to be rich enough in significance to sustain the argument, but also short enough that you can analyze it exhaustively within the space of five to seven pages. I would recommend the focus passage not exceed the length of a medium-sized paragraph.

The likely format for a successful response will begin with an original and interesting title. There will be an introductory paragraph, followed by a thesis statement at the end of the paragraph, or at the beginning of the second paragraph. The thesis will advance a specific and arguable claim about the queerness of the novel. After the introduction, the essay will introduce and quote all or most of the passage, carefully reading and contextualizing all the words cited. Then, the essay will connect the passage to the rest of the narrative, by paraphrasing and/or briefly citing other parts of the novel. The conclusion will add complexity to the thesis statement, perhaps raising further questions, or perhaps elaborating corollary insights that develop from the interpretation. I should add that it is quite possible to write an excellent response without following this standard formatting procedure.

Your task is not to provide a complete and all-embracing interpretation of the novel, but to make a limited argument centered on the key passage you've chosen.