

English 342: The Contemporary Novel

Essay #1

Length and Due Dates

Length: 4-5 pages

Formatting: Please submit essays on 8.5" by 11" paper, titled, paginated, typed and double-spaced, with one-inch margins. In the upper right hand corner of the first page, include your name, the course number, the assignment, and the due date; this information should be single-spaced. You may use a 10 or 12 point Arial, Bookman, Century Schoolbook, or Times New Roman font for your papers.

First Draft Due: Friday, May 2, by 12:00 p.m. in hard copy at Padelford A-305 or via E-Submit

Final Draft Due: Friday, May 9, by 12:00 p.m. in hard copy at Padelford A-305 or via E-Submit

Assignment

You may write on one of the following topics:

- 1) Reviewers and critics of *White Noise* have posited various definitions of "white noise": the buzz of media, the sound of death, the cultural noise that inhibits our ability to distinguish among things. What, in your opinion, is white noise, and how does it function in the novel?
- 2) Both DeLillo and Auster draw on specific generic frameworks in their novels. For example, DeLillo incorporates disaster conventions in "The Airborne Toxic Event" section of *White Noise*, and Auster uses the detective genre in *City of Glass*. How do DeLillo and Auster subvert particular genre conventions or assumptions? Why do they use generic frameworks as they do?
- 3) Characters in *White Noise* and *City of Glass* move among various types of spaces: the house or apartment, the town or the city, the supermarket, the college. Compare and contrast the ways selected spaces function in both novels.
- 4) How do *White Noise* and *City of Glass* explore the construction of identity?
- 5) Compare and contrast the way that language functions in *White Noise* and *City of Glass*.
- 6) Why is or isn't either *White Noise* or *City of Glass* a postmodern novel?

Guidelines

- 1) Although I have provided topics, you will need to narrow the topic and develop a specific argument. For example, an essay on space could compare private and public spaces in DeLillo and Auster or discuss the patterns characters attempt to read in the supermarket and the city.
- 2) If you would like to propose an alternative topic, speak with me before proceeding.
- 3) Let your argument dictate the organizational format of your essay. Just because the novels have a particular narrative order does not mean that your essay must follow that order.
- 4) If you choose a comparative topic, remember that effective comparison/contrast essays highlight how similarities and differences reveal something important about each novel. As you develop your essay, consider how each novel "unlocks" the other. Ask yourself why it is important to examine these novels together in relation to the topic.
- 5) Close textual analysis will serve as your main source of evidence. In supporting your argument, you will need to pay attention to the novels' language, structure, and themes.

- 6) Remember that you are writing to an audience who has already read the books . Therefore, your essay should not offer plot summaries. Instead, any reference to the novels should support your analysis.
- 7) Do not forget the arguments posed in readings, class or the electronic bulletin board. A review of the readings and the postings on a particular text may help you to ask key questions and shape your analysis. You will, of course, cite specific words and interpretations borrowed from classmates or other authors. The course web site has information on when and how to cite sources.
- 8) If you're having difficulty devising an approach to the essay, or if you want to discuss ideas-in-progress, come to my office hours or email me to set up an appointment.

Grading

I will use the attached grading scale to evaluate essays.