



# WRITING CRITICALLY MODES OF READING

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# CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT PODCASTS

- Choosing research sources
- ‘X-raying’ a source (AKA mapping an argument)
- Identifying strengths and weakness in a source
- Demonstrating originality and individuality



# WHAT IS CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT?

- Analysing a source's strengths and weaknesses.
- Comparing and synthesizing different sources in their approach to your topic.
- Challenging a source's analysis with your own reading.
- Applying a theoretical approach to a primary text.
- Using new or different information about an author or text to extend an existing source's reading of that author or text.



# WHAT ISN'T CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

- Quoting sources without analysing them.
- Basing your entire argument on one or two sources.
- Using sources without questioning them or offering alternative interpretations or readings.



# SAMPLE TEXT 1

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), on the contrary, relies a lot on the final revelation. One of the features of modernist fiction is especially relevant: the feeling that nothing is either safe or secure. It is this feeling of anxiety that creates all the suspense within the story.

The main character, by being confined in a room with a 'repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow' (p.34) wallpaper, lost contact with the reality in which she lived.

The paper looks at me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had.(p.35)

The hideous yellow wallpaper, according to her, looked at her continuously, like to provoke her and instigate some sort of reaction. She felt oppressed by the place she was forced to inhabit, calling it a 'colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house' (p.29), creating quite a Gothic setting. However, the surprise for the reader is not quite a conventionally Gothic one...



# SAMPLE TEXT 2

Roderick Usher struggles with living because he has realised that his love is a repressed one. The familiar becomes unfamiliar, life becomes death. According to Freud,

[the] pull towards a zero point is not a simple death wish. The pull towards entropy signifies [...] move towards stability, where the organic merges with the inorganic and where separate units fuse together. (Jackson, p.80)

Here the total collapse of the house into the dim tarn may recall a return to natural unity, where everything is literally swallowed up in an apocalyptic scene. According to Thomas Woodson,

As often in Poe's fiction, the protagonist (here the narrator and both Ushers combined) ends teetering on the verge of a supreme revelation that is also his destruction, an opening that mockingly also closes everything. (Woodson, p.15)

Woodson continues, 'Poe's exaggerated mannerism of style and plot seems unreal, no longer expressing any humanity' (Woodson, p.34).



# SAMPLE TEXTS 3

Lucan suggests a “new form of alienation” (75) is felt particularly strongly within the service industry. This alienation from the self (75), exacerbated by the performative nature of the work, provokes an “emotional exhaustion”, which is “as destructive and debilitating as the physical exhaustion and alienation in the emerging factories” (78).

However, Lucan’s focus on this emotional response over the physical produces a rather limited reading of Tolland’s novel. Although it does go some way to explaining the heightened and almost self-consciously dramatic behaviour of the text’s protagonists, it does not take into account the physical impact of the work on Charlie and Jim. As the novel progresses, their individuality becomes eroded through exhaustion, and even Belle mentions that she “can’t tell them apart at a distance – they both have that same defeated shuffle” (109).

Lucan is right to note that the service industry encourages individuality as part of a performed positivity (89), but the novel’s careful recording of the characters’ physical degeneration is just as significant for an understanding of Tolland’s critique of capital.



# AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The way in which you use your sources will have an impact on the success of your essay.

- The overly reverential cover version (Sample text 2)

- Frank Sinatra, *It was a very good year*
- Robbie Williams, *It was a very good year*



- The imaginative cover version (Sample text 3)

- Kate Bush, *Wuthering Heights*
- China Drum, *Wuthering Heights*





# USING SYNTHESIS

- Synthesis refers to comparing and contrasting multiple viewpoints and sources in your analysis.
- Rather than only using one source to back up a particularly point of analysis, synthesis encourages you to look for similarities and differences across several secondary texts.
- This produces a more in-depth and nuanced analysis that acknowledges alternative interpretations or readings.



# SAMPLE TEXT 4

This turning away from an intolerable reality recalls the work of Norman Brown, who lent theoretical legitimacy to 1960s sub-culture by arguing that “changing reality can be the only rational response of the ego to the contradiction between reality and the pleasure-principle which reigns supreme in the id” (Brown 153-4). Brown remodels the Freudian psychoanalytic model to explain the repression of human nature by history and society; in order to achieve their full potential, the individual must find “a way out of the nightmare of endless ‘progress’” (19). In other words, the individual must learn to live in the present moment by freeing the id and embracing a natural, instinctual reality.

Brown’s ideas influence Thompson’s character and his rejection of material reality; he chooses to construct a reality in which Vegas’s Technicolor landscape takes on new significance. The hallucinogenic projection of a giant ‘nazi’ “screaming gibberish” (90) is a lurid manifestation of the intolerable society that is encroaching upon the narrator and which compels him to retreat back into the alternative subculture to oppose these nightmarish visions of conformity.



# SAMPLE TEXT 5

Firstly, there is the problem of contextual definition. Canada, for Linda Hutcheon, is “an odd national entity” (*Splitting* 1); for W. L. Morton, a country of shifting heterogeneity, composed of “paradoxes and anomalies” (qtd. in Hutcheon, *Splitting* 1). Its shapeless character was embodied in a 1988 report in *The Canadian Forum*, which asked readers to express their national identity by remaking the phrase ‘as American as...’. The most popular response was this: as “Canadian as possible under the circumstances” (Howes, qtd. in Hutcheon, *Splitting* 1). This difficulty of definition affects questions of literary value, too, for, as the 1978 Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel shows, plans to construct a national canon been controversial and largely inconclusive (Bennett 132; Mathews 150). For these reasons, to label this a ‘Canadian’ dissertation would wrongly assume the stability of that term. Additionally, it would imply that Ondaatje is an accurate national representative and so undermine the multiple traditions I have chosen to exclude from this discussion: I do not, for example, address Québécois or Native Canadian (alternatively ‘indigenous’, ‘First Nation’, and ‘tribal’) literatures.



# SOUNDING OUT SYNTHESIS



Les  
Baxter



Stravinsky



The Jazz  
Crusaders

The  
Beastie  
Boys



The  
Stovall  
Sisters



# PUBLIC ENEMY, *FIGHT THE POWER* (1989)



Syl Johnson, *Different Strokes*

James Brown, *Funky Drummer*

The Isley Brothers, *Fight the Power*

Sly & the Family Stone, *Sing a Simple Song*

The Soul Children, *I Don't Know What the World is Coming To*

The J.B.'s, *Hot Pants Road*

Bob Marley and the Wailers, *I Shot the Sheriff*

James Brown, *Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud*

Afrika Bambaataa and Soulsonic Force, *Planet Rock*

The Dramatics, *Whatcha See Is Whatcha Get*

Guy, *Teddy's Jam*

Bobby Byrd, *I Know You Got Soul*

West Street Mob, *Let's Dance*

James Brown, *Funky President*

Trouble Funk, *Pump Me Up*

Rick James, *Give It to Me Baby*

Trouble Funk, *Saturday Night Live from Washington DC Pt. 1*

Kurtis Blow, *AJ Scratch*

Public Enemy, *Yo! Bum Rush the Show*



# AVOIDING COMMON MISTAKES

- Make good use of the Library's resources - don't rely on Google's services to find sources.
- Don't just quote from your secondary sources – analyse what they are saying.
- Don't over-rely on a single source – explore different viewpoints on and interpretations of your texts and topic.
- Don't let research sources completely take over your analysis – we also want to hear your response to both the primary and secondary reading material.



# SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

- [RLF fellow](#) Catherine O'Flynn is based in H521 in the Humanities building and offers bookable appointments on Thursdays and Fridays during term time.
- [English UG academic writing podcasts](#)
- [MLA referencing guide \(Purdue OWL\)](#)
- [The Library's tutorial on using Endnote](#)
- Students who have English as an additional language can receive language support from the [Centre for Applied Linguistics \(CAL\)](#).

