

21L.488 Contemporary Literature
MIT Spring 2008
Professor Sarah Brouillette

Essay #1

Choose one of these topics and write a concise, persuasive, compelling essay that features a strong thesis statement, evidence of close reading and analytical rigor, and abundant textual detail. You needn't consult secondary sources, but you can if you wish.

Topics

1. Why is there a narratee in "The Doum Tree of Wad Hamid"?
2. Near the end of "The Doum Tree of Wad Hamid," the old man suggests that the sacred tree, the water pump, and the steamer stop could have all coexisted on the hill in his village. Discuss the significance of this claim to the story as a whole.
3. Do the new fence around the doum tree and the plaque stating the tree's meaning stand as fitting preservation of a sacred object, or do they ruin it by turning the community's spiritual center into a museum piece?
4. Make an argument about the comparative function and/or the position of the traveller in "The Doum Tree of Wad Hamid" and "The Fortunate Traveller."
5. Make an argument about the attitudes toward development (as an economic and political process) expressed by the speakers in "The Doum Tree of Wad Hamid" and "The Fortunate Traveller."
6. In interview, Derek Walcott once said: "if tyrants read, really read, they wouldn't do what they did, because too much would be revealed, too much would touch them. I think we read now the way tyrants read: we read for information. We don't read to be touched." Discuss this statement in relation to "The Fortunate Traveller."
7. Argue for or against this statement: "The Fortunate Traveller" is a poem that is guilty of the same things it criticizes.

NB

- Guidelines outlining best practices for literature papers are available on our website.
- Your paper must be 5-7 double-spaced pages, in a 12 pt. font.
- The citation system is MLA.
- Three copies of the paper are due in class on 03.04.
- Late papers lose 1% of the course total per day, and go to Literature headquarters to be dated by one of the people working there.