



Robert Brooke

“Rhetoric: The Essay”: Application Essay

Core Assignment:

Craft a 3-part academic essay that explains how a certain set of concepts from rhetorical theory can be applied to a specific “inquiry” or “creative nonfiction” essay to show something interesting about that essay. Your academic essay should include at least the following thinking moves:

- Identification of an “ongoing conversation” about your chosen essay that sets the context for why & how your writing will contribute to the conversation – usually this involves quoting/summarizing some scholars who have written about your chosen essay already;
- Explanation of the theoretical concepts you are using – usually this involves quoting/summary from your sources for those concepts;
- Demonstration of the aspects of your chosen essay to which your chosen theoretical concepts apply;
- Articulation of why this application contributes to the ongoing conversation about your chosen essay.
- In most academic application essays, the first and last thinking moves create what we traditionally call the “thesis” of the essay, while the second and third thinking moves constitute the “support.”

Guidelines:

- Length: 3000 words +
- Form: Academic Essay, MLA format
- Research component:
 - Appropriate citation of the essay you analyze
 - Appropriate citation of the theoretical ideas you use to guide analysis
 - Appropriate representation of the context for the scholarly literature about the essay you analyze, to show the contribution you make

Advice for Assignment:

- This assignment involves two major kinds of essayistic thinking: inquiry and argument. The inquiry part is exploring just what a certain set of theoretical tools will show you in the essay you choose to analyze. The argument part is shaping what you learn through your inquiry into a contribution to some ongoing conversation.
- It matters a lot which essay you choose to write about. You’ll be spending some time with this piece. Similarly, it matters what theoretical concepts you choose to use. Select ones that intrigue you.

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- For finding scholarly conversations about your chosen essay, searching 1) the MLA Bibliography online and 2) JSTOR from a computer linked to the UNL Libraries will turn up a lot. For finding further material on the theoretical concepts we'll use in the course, the Composition/Rhetoric search engine CompPile.org should be a help.

Models:

Several of the essays and chapters in our course books are versions of application essays.

- In the Lopate collection, *Art of the Personal Essay*, consider:
 - James Thurber, "The Secret Life of James Thurber"
 - Gore Vidal, "Some Memories of the Glorious Bird and an Earlier Self"
 - James Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard"
- In Paul Heilker's *The Essay*, chapters 2, 3, & 4 are each application essays.
- In Kristin Dombek and Scott Herndon's *Critical Passages*, chapters 6-8 are application essays.
- In Stephen Jay Gould's *I Have Landed*, a preponderance of the essays are application essays, sometimes to writing, sometimes to art, sometimes to politics. Ones I find particularly clear are "The True Embodiment of Everything That's Excellent" (applying evolutionary theory to Gilbert and Sullivan) and "Syphilis and the Shepherd of Atlantis" (applying modern genome theory to the original 16th century poem where the character Syphilis first appeared).