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Introduction to Graduate Literary Study
 Fall 2009

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Frontispiece due 9/9. Upload a photo of yourself and caption of several lines from 1855 edition of *Song of Myself*
2. Image Gloss due 9/16. Select an image from 1855 edition of *Song of Myself* to annotate in brief (50 words)
3. Explication/Annotation due 9/30. Close reading of a poem (4-5 pp. written), with on-line posting and an oral presentation (10 min.).
4. Digital Museum due 10/14. Select an image from the poem you explicated and digitally annotate it (500-600 words).
5. Bibliographic Essay due 10/28. Comprehensive review, in essay form (5-6 pp.), of the published criticism on a given text, with e-posting and oral presentation (7 min. max.).
6. Group Annotation due 11/18. Work alone or with a partner to post commentary on a passage from *Specimen Days* or lines of poetry published during the Camden years (1-3 pp.)
7. Final project. Oral Presentations due 12/2, 12/9. Critical Essay due 12/14: Critical essay (12-15 pages) with digital support: video, cine-poem, on-line museum, MP3 interpretive reading, or other project that takes a scholarly, fresh approach to your text and is informed by critical theory and criticism. With oral presentation (10 min.).

Guide to Assignments

FRONTISPIECE: Due 9/9

Take a picture of yourself using a digital or cell phone camera. Choose at least 6 lines from the 1855 edition of "Song of Myself" and post the image of yourself and the lines in your blog. Add a short personal statement about the lines. Your inspiration should be Whitman's frontispiece for the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. This photo can also serve as your avatar on the ww2 site.

GLOSS OF AN IMAGE: Due 9/16

Choose an image from the 1855 edition of *Song of Myself* that has literary and/or cultural resonance, for example, "omnibus," "Alamo," "daguerreotype," or "b'hoy." Explore the meanings of the image in the poem and in the larger context in which Whitman wrote. Post your findings in a blog. Enrich your posting with sound, video, or images.

Respond to at least one person's blog

EXPLICATION OF A TEXT:¹ Due 10/7

(Also referred to as “Annotation” in Looking for Whitman www2 project)

An explication is a commentary revealing the meaning of a text. Explication is a fundamental skill for anyone engaged in interpreting texts whether teacher, critic, editor, historian, attorney, clergy, or any professional involved with written language. It consists of two parts: the detailed reading and analysis of the linguistic, compositional, and expressive parts of a text; and the synthesis of these parts into a coherent meaning for the whole. Performance of an explication in class will help you develop skills in verbal analysis and in the presentation of information.

You will select your text by lot from a list that I provide. Some “swapping” within a class will be allowed if both parties agree. Published explications of some of these texts are available, but they should not be used except as a last resort, and then only if the source is properly credited. The explication should be an original reading, though standard references (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, literary handbooks) should be consulted for the meaning of obscure words, phrases, or allusions.

In addition to posting your explication online on Looking for Whitman site, use visual, video, or sound media to present your explication of the poem. These media can:

- explore one or more aspects of the poem,
- connect the poem to Whitman’s life in Camden, or
- provide historical context for Whitman and/or the poem

Method:

1. Read the text sensitively and carefully several times. Jot down random impressions as they occur to you. Look up words that are unfamiliar or carry more than one meaning. Consider the function of words or phrases in terms of the whole passage, as well as in a particular line or stanza. Paraphrase (reword) in order to make sure you understand the text thoroughly.

2. Arrive at an overall impression of the subject and structure of the text, the voice and tone of the speaker or narrator, the implications of any ironies or ambiguities. Justify your impressions by reference to specific linguistic signs in the text.

3. Construct a meaning for the text based on these impressions. Your meaning should not be imposed upon the text without regard for its limitations; but neither should it be restricted to a literal statement or paraphrase of the text. Remember that you are *creating* a reading that can be supported by references to the text.

4. Reconstruct this creative process in a written explication that can also be delivered in an oral presentation. The explication as a whole should move from the beginning to the end of the text, with opportunity for you to refer to words or phrases that gain additional

¹Adapted from Sylvan Barnet, *A Short Guide to Writing About Literature* (Boston: Little, 1968) and Drs. Berkey, Lutz, and Sill.

meaning as the text develops. Begin with your impression of the text's meaning. Proceed in such a way that you discuss persona, voice, and tone, demonstrating the way specific words and phrases support your reading. The written explication should be about 5 pages. The oral presentation, prepared in outline or note form, should take 15 minutes maximum, including time for discussion.

Resources and Models for Explication:

New Critical Print:

Coffman, S. K. "'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry'": Note on the Catalog Technique in Whitman's Poetry," *Modern Philology* 51 (May 1954): 225-32.

Fussell, Paul. "Whitman's Curious Warbel: Reminiscence and Reconciliation," in *The Presence of Walt Whitman*, ed. R. W. B. Lewis. New York: Columbia UP, 1962. 28-51.

Lovell, John. "Appreciating Whitman: 'Passage to India,'" *Modern Language Quarterly* 21 (June 1960): 131-41.

Rountree, Thomas I. "Whitman's Indirect Expression and Its Application to 'Song of Myself,'" *PMLA* 73 (December 1958): 549-55.

Sutton, Walter. "The Analysis of Free Verse Form, Illustrated by a Reading of Whitman." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 18 (December 1959): 241-54.

Electronic:

Mickle Street Review, an <http://micklestreet.rutgers.edu/>

Merande, Jesse. "'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry': An Online Critical Edition," *Mickle Street Review* 19/20. <http://micklestreet.rutgers.edu/CBF/closereading/closereading.html>

Poems for Explication

By Whitman, Walt (1819-1892).

1. "Eidolons" fr. *Inscriptions* [1876]
2. "To Thee Old Cause" [1871, 1881]
3. "Song of the Redwood-Tree" fr. *Calamus* [1874, 1881]
4. "Song of the Universal" fr. *Birds of Passage* [1874, 1881]
5. "The Dalliance of the Eagles" fr. *By the Roadside* [1880, 1881]
6. "Out from Behind this Mask" fr. *Autumn Rivulets* [1876, 1881]
7. "The Prairie States" fr. *Autumn Rivulets* [1880, 1881]
8. "Prayer of Columbus" fr. *Autumn Rivulets* [1874, 1881]
9. "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood, fr. *"Whispers of Heavenly Death"* [1872, 1881]
10. "To a Locomotive in Winter" fr. *From Noon to Starry Night* [1876, 1881]
11. "As at Thy Portals Also Death" fr. *Songs of Parting* [1881]
12. "Mannahatta" fr. *First Annex: Sands at Seventy* [1888, 1888-90]
13. "With Husky-Haughty Lips, O Sea!" fr. *First Annex: Sands at Seventy* [1884, 1888-89]
14. "Yonnonadio" fr. *First Annex: Sands at Seventy* [1887, 1888-89]
15. "Old Age's Lambent Peaks" fr. *First Annex: Sands at Seventy* [1888, 1889]
16. "To the Sun-set Breeze" fr. *Second Annex: Good-Bye My Fancy* [1890, 1891-92]

17. "Osceloa" fr. *Second Annex: Good-Bye My Fancy* [1890, 1891-92]
18. "Good-Bye my Fancy!" fr. *Second Annex: Good-Bye My Fancy* [1891, 1892-92]

DIGITAL MUSEUM Due 10/14

This project builds on the image gloss and involves historical and cultural research on an artifact or event that relates to Whitman's years in Camden. Your post must be tagged "digitalmuseum" to arrive at the proper place in Whitman network.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY Due 10/28

The bibliographic essay is a comprehensive review, in essay form, of the published criticism on a given text. This assignment will familiarize you with research sources and bibliographic methods.

Method:

1. Read and/or refresh your recollection of the assigned text.
2. Locate the most recent comprehensive bibliography of articles and books about your text or author. This bibliography might have been published as an article in a journal, or as a separate volume, or as an appendix to a recent critical biography of the author, as part of the proceedings of a conference on that author, or as part of a multiauthor critical study of a period or genre. Ask a reference librarian about the advisability of searching databases (such as MLA) as a way to turn up this bibliography. Obtain a copy of the bibliography, through interlibrary loan if necessary.
3. Use this bibliography as your baseline. Do not include critical or biographical works published before this bibliography except for those few standard works that are always mentioned when your author is discussed, or the highly significant works that have taken critical discussion of the author or text in a new direction. Locate articles and books that have appeared since the baseline bibliography was published. (If the bibliography appeared in 1993 or 1994 and there is little new material to research, see me.) Use indexes of research, review articles at the end of journals, and databases to locate these recent publications. Obtain copies, or at least reviews, of as many of these items as you can.
4. Read, annotate, and summarize each of the items you locate. Aim not only to recapitulate each writer's argument, but comment upon it. As you read, look for some logical pattern or order according to which the items may be discussed. Identify trends in the scholarship where it stands in relation to earlier work, where it seems to be heading. How has it prospered or suffered from new critical or theoretical approaches or from recent efforts to reconstruct the canon? What problems of philosophy, history, social meaning, or artistic value or technique are being addressed by commentators about the text? Provide your own opinion of the quality of recent work and opportunities for further research that have recently emerged because of new discoveries, new critical methods, or new historical information about your author.
5. Write the bibliographic essay (56 pp.), keeping in mind two purposes: to

provide factual information such as would be found in a bibliographic citation, and to provide an interpretive guide to this scholarship. It is best to begin the essay with biographical information followed by criticism, ending with future trends or developments. Follow the essay with a list of all the recent research you found (MLA style), whether discussed in the essay or not. Also e-post the information and prepare it for oral presentation (7 min. maximum).

GROUP ANNOTATION Due 11/18

This assignment will focus on text added to *Leaves of Grass* during the years that a university specializes in—in our case, the 1881 edition or 1891-92 “deathbed” edition representing the Camden years. You may work with the poem you explicated or with another poem or prose passage. Questions this assignment might address include: what happens when a text is altered? How does the order of placement affect a group of poems? What is the composition history of the poem? How does the poem relate to its group? The annotation will reflect your close reading and historical or critical research, and it can serve as a foundation for your final project.

FINAL PROJECT Due: Oral Presentations 12/2, 12/9. Critical Essay due 12/14:

Your final project will be a critical work in the form of an essay accompanied by a video, cinepoem, on-line museum, mp3 interpretive reading, or some combination of the above that makes an original contribution to the understanding of the writing and life, career, and/or times of Walt Whitman, especially as they relate to Camden.

The critical essay combines analysis and argument to present a judgment or assessment of some aspect of a literary text. This skill, like that of explication, is useful in all aspects of graduate literary study, including essays and exams in seminars and the M.A. Comprehensive Examination.

The text for the critical essay may be the same as for the explication and annotated bibliography. You will not need to summarize research in this assignment, nor should you think of the essay as a “research paper.” It should be an original, largely creative indulgence of your imaginative as well as critical sensibilities, informed by the critical theories studied this semester and by the recent research on the text with which you are now familiar. Some sources should be used and cited according to MLA style, but these should relate to the specific focus of the essay. You should concentrate on taking an interesting, fresh approach to the text, one that opens up some new dimension of the critical discussion. The essay should be 10-12 pages.

Method:

1. Reacquaint yourself with the literary text. What issues or topics stand out as provocative or intriguing? Which of these have not been adequately covered in the research you discovered?
2. Consider the research on this text and identify any gaps, deficiencies, or blind spots. Decide whether you can make a contribution in any of the areas already covered, or whether you can set out in a new direction. Be conscious of the critical approach or methodology you are taking with respect to the text and its contexts.

3. Prepare a draft of the essay; set it aside; have someone whose opinion you value read and comment on it; revise; revise again; check for stylistic accuracy and MLA form. And/or prepare a digital equivalent of a critical essay. Prepare notes or an outline for an oral presentation. Note that the presentations begin the week before the written essay is due; half of you will present then and half you will present when the essay is due.