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Information Literacy Stipend Proposal

Course: Writers: The Brontës (English 4341)

Introduction: This is a multi-stage assignment. Stage 2, a bibliography of 20-25 items on a fairly general topic area relevant to one or more Brontë sister or text, will be conducted with the help of Ms. Rebecca Graff, the subject area librarian for English literature. But I ask the committee to consider that stage 2 is followed by stage 3, a more select annotated bibliography—that the two work together.

Stage 1 is sketched in Appendix A so that the judging committee can contextualize stages 2 and 3, understand what broader topics students are encouraged to consider, and see how those stages are part of a longer, evolving project. Stage 4, not detailed here, is a multi-source interpretive essay.

Also in the Appendix: a previous version of the annotated bibliography assignment that constitutes Stage 3. This is the version I used in a different 4000-level class titled *Gender at the Fin de Siècle*. I will base the instructions for the Brontë class upon the ones given there.

Stage 2: the production of a bibliography of 20-25 items. What follows is a draft of the assignment, followed by information about learning outcomes and the assessment of those outcomes.

Preliminary bibliography. Using the Brontë-related topic you chose earlier, or if you prefer, some new topic, and having determined at least *provisionally* which Brontë novel(s) you wish to focus on, construct a preliminary bibliography of **at least twenty items** and submit it, properly formatted, in MLA style.

Due date: (to be filled in—around fourth week of class.) *Note:* If you plan to write about more than one text, or about a film adaptation, you should aim for at least 25 items so that you can have a representative sampling of each. (See me for more details)

What is the purpose of this assignment? To teach you how to find sources relevant to a literary topic; to teach you about the ways that scholarship proceeds through scholars building on the work of other scholars—*that is, how scholarship takes place as a conversation.*

What items go into this bibliography? Items can include book chapters about the novel, or Brontë, of your choice (or novels, plural, or Brontës, plural)—so long as you have found them in scholarly books from scholarly presses [note: a separate document will explain this].

Also encouraged: scholarly articles/book chapters about a theoretical or critical approach you will bring to bear on one or more Brontë texts, such as discussions of disability studies; animal studies; Victorian religion; Victorian rituals and customs surrounding death; gender (feminist theory and criticism; gender theory); sexuality; class;—*etc.* These should be listed separately, but still properly formatted.

With the exception of articles that continue to be cited by contemporary critics, the articles should generally have been published within the last ten or (at most) fifteen years.

What format should you use? --Use MLA format [actually I'm still considering this...]. But I ask for one difference: **put the bibliographical material for each source in boldface, to separate it from the other stuff that will go in, as detailed next.**

What else goes into this bibliography, aside from a complete and properly formatted bibliographical entry:

- The source (database, bibliography, reference in another piece of scholarship) where you found the reference. If a given source is referred to in one or more of your other sources and you know that, include that information (e.g., "Referred to in Schmo, Joe, 'Yada Yada in Charlotte Brontë's *Blabbety Blah*.'")
- A statement about whether the source is available at SMU or needs to be requested on interlibrary loan.
- If the source is available, say whether you have been able to download it, or whether you have consulted it in print, or anything else about accessing it—for example, is it a book that's out to another reader, and so must be recalled?

How will you accumulate these items?

1. Through the MLA bibliography. This is mandatory.
2. Consult the *The Brontës in Context* and other books I put on reserve. You may also use Google Scholar and JSTOR.
3. **Look at the Works Cited and/or footnotes** of some of the articles that most interest you, work backwards. That is: see what articles come up again and again in the citational apparatuses of the articles you originally located. These are likely to be important works on a particular Brontë or Brontë text. Also: having located such article titles and authors, you can skim the body of the *citing* article to see if a *cited* article is of interest you.

[End of draft of assignment to be distributed to students.]

Learning outcomes and method of assessment: For this preliminary bibliography, I will assess the following outcomes:

1. The student can locate appropriate scholarly sources (books; relevant chapters in monographs, essay collections; and journal articles), for an essay on a literary topic pertaining to one or more of the Brontës.
2. The student understands what qualifies as a scholarly source.
3. The student understands that scholars read and respond to the work of other, prior scholars in constructing interpretations of and arguments about literary texts, writers, and issues, and can apply this knowledge to discovering significant and/or useful sources.
4. The student understands how and where to find sources accessible directly through SMU's holdings.
5. The student understands when sources must be requested from ILL.
6. The student can provide a properly formatted bibliography.

I will assess these outcomes through a rubric based on the following criteria, which represent an A, with gradations of expertise (to be articulated later) going down the grading scale. The rubric will be shared with students (hence the second person address):

1. Bibliography is complete: it contains a sufficient number of items, properly formatted.
2. The items are from appropriate (scholarly, peer-reviewed) sources.
3. You have identified the database or other source where you found the article.
4. The majority of your sources are from within the last fifteen years, except for any must-read older articles you have determined through your reading. You have noted, where appropriate, that you are looking at a particular article because it has been repeatedly cited, and you have said by whom.
5. You have indicated whether you have been able to verify that the source is available at SMU, if so, whether it is available as hard copy or in digital form (or both); and you have actually accessed the available ones.
6. The bibliography is properly alphabetized and formatted, with few errors.

Stage 3: annotated bibliography. I have not yet created this assignment in the precise form that I will use in the Brontë class. I will base it on a similar assignment I used in a different 4000-level course. See Appendix B. In the past I have asked students to annotate as few as five of the items, but I may increase that number and ask for shorter annotations. I will probably omit the synthesizing essay specified in the “old” version of this assignment.

I will assess the following outcomes:

1. The student can articulate, partly in his or her own words, the main ideas of a scholarly work about a literary topic relevant to the course.
2. The student can use judiciously chosen direct quotation to ground his or her claims about the main point.
3. Where appropriate, the student can comment on the critical approach of a scholarly essay, and/or how it connects to another item in the bibliography.

I will assess these outcomes through a rubric that uses the following criteria to represent an A and works down through levels of lesser expertise:

- You have expressed a thesis and/or main ideas clearly, and in language that suggests that you have understood what you read.
- You have, where appropriate, quoted enough in the author’s own words to convey the sense that you are probably representing the essay’s main points with reasonable accuracy. What you say about the argument’s main points seems plausible (to your instructor).
- You make occasional cross-references to other sources in your annotated bibliography, drawing links, comparisons, and or contrasts to related arguments; ; and/or you have identified critical approaches (e.g., feminist, cultural studies, contextual, disability studies, etc.) that contribute to the argument of an essay, where appropriate.

APPENDIX A (stage 1 of multi-stage project)

Choose one of the topics below. You will be the (or *a*) person in class whose task it is to think about that particular topic for each Brontë text we read. On designated days, I will ask you to post to Canvas some observations about how that topic is relevant to the text in question. *You are not locked into this topic, though it may turn out to be the topic you narrow down for your research paper.* **What is the purpose of this assignment?** --To give you something to contribute to class discussion, and to read in a focused way (though I hope not therefore a narrow one.)

Topics: (you may suggest others)

- Death—attitudes, representations
- Animals
- Race; slavery
- Material culture: objects, things
- Empire, imperialism
- Families; mothers; fathers; siblings
- Religion; religious doubt
- Social class
- Femininity or masculinity
- “queer” readings
- Disability studies readings
- Representations of madness
- Medicine; illness; disease
- alcoholism
- Work
- Play
- Genre matters: realism; gothic; romance; development of the novel
- Region; the north of England; being outside of the mainstream
- Relationship to previous writers
- Later writers’ use of one of the Brontë novels
- Film versions and other adaptations
- Representations of Englishness and its “others”; national identity
- Reception and the “Brontë myth”

How will this be assessed? On a three-point scale:

- 3 points: Comments refer to something specific in the text, make a concrete and helpful observation about the passage or specific issue, and suggest something about the meaning for the text as a whole, or for the “Brontës” as a group.
- 2 points: Comments refer to something specific in the text and make a concrete observation.
- 1 point: Comments are vague, too general, and/or impressionistic.
- No credit: No comment has been posted.

APPENDIX B: old version of annotated bibliography assignment, to be revised for the current course.

Annotated bibliography project (due October 17)

The point of this assignment is to create a kind of mini-version of what is sometimes called a “literature review.” It will take time—and you should spread the work out. *Do not leave it for the night, or even the week, before it is due!* Assume that your audience is *members of our class* or other peers who can benefit from your work.

In order to do it well, you will have to examine your 15 articles and book chapters (or as many as you were actually able to get) closely enough to determine the five that you think are most interesting, influential (insofar as you can judge), and discussable in conjunction with one another. *This is not an exact science.* Use your judgment. Follow your own predilections. *You do not have to read every word of every article.* –*Note: if you want to change your topic from the one you chose for your preliminary bibliography, that may be OK. Come talk to me.*

Here’s what your *annotated* bibliography must contain.

- Five annotations of 300-500 words apiece (you have already seen the example on the next page), arranged in chronological order, beginning with the earliest.
- One short essay (approximately 500 words) in which you comment on how the five items you have chosen to annotate fit together—or how they pursue different tracks altogether. In other words: write a short essay that synthesizes what you have read.

Here’s what goes into an annotation. (Example on next page/flip side.)

- A citation for each article (or book chapter)—at the beginning of each annotation.
- A statement of what you understand the item’s main point to be. (I have highlighted mine in yellow to show you.)
- Some elaboration of that point and other notable parts of the argument, using brief quotations to aid in your account and to ground it in the text of the item. *You should not attempt a point-by-point summary.*
- To the best of your ability, some consideration of the method and approach. For example—and these are just that, examples (not a checklist):
 - Does it provide historical background or emphasize the historical context?
 - Does it focus on a single text or look at several?
 - Does it explore other kinds of documents or artifacts other than literary texts?
 - Does it focus on an author’s life (does it take a biographical approach)?
 - Does it announce, or obviously pursue, a critical approach such as *feminist, queer, new historicist, psychoanalytic*, etc.? (Look back at the MLA record, assuming that’s where you found it. Sometimes the record will tell you.)
 - Is the essay readable? What does it assume about its audience?
 - Did you find it illuminating, useful, thought-provoking? Wrong or lacking in any way? *Do comment on problems you see with the argument.*

Questions to ask yourself when you write the essay that *comments* on the annotations:

- Does one critic or scholar build on or refer to any other of your chosen items?
- Do you find areas of general agreement? Sharp disagreement?
- Does a debate shape up? Do you see trends? The answer will vary.

Craft, Christopher. "Alias Bunbury: Desire and Termination in *The Importance Of Being Earnest*." *Representations* 31(1990): 19-46. MLA International Bibliography. Web. 9 Sept. 2012.

Craft reads *The Importance of Being Earnest* as a challenge to “essentialist notions of being” (22) and identity. He argues that the play shows us that the self is not grounded in “nature” or some other thing that serves as the origin of our identity. (After all, this is a case where the “origin” of the character whose identity is at stake is also, as Lady Bracknell points out, a “terminus.”) Instead, identity takes shape as a “dizzying oscillation of persons and representations” (21)—such as the duplication of “Ernests” whose names and identities are merely assumed. The identity most central to this article is sexual identity, more specifically that of the “homosexual” (or “invert”) with which Wilde is often aligned because of his imprisonment for acts of gross indecency. Craft’s point is not that Wilde did not desire men sexually, but rather that Wilde would find incorrect or even meaningless the idea that our sexual desires define us, giving us our “identity” (as homosexual or heterosexual). Nor is the point that the term “homosexual” is simply inaccurate in Wilde’s case because he is bisexual; to opt for the “compromise” term of “bisexual” is still to pin identity to a mistaken notion of “true being” (34).

Craft uncovers what we might call a “queer” subtext to the play by showing how it covertly acknowledges the existence of male-male desire. Central to this argument is Craft’s discussion of “Bunbury” as a term that “performs enormous representational work,” notably but not limited to its being slang for a male brothel and its suggestion of “bury[ing] in the bun” (28). Craft reveals other ways that the play alludes to details of Wilde’s own life and his relationships with young men, all of which are ingeniously slipped into a farcical celebration of heterosexual love whose comic ending brings together three happy male-female pairs. The essay not only calls attention to many doubles entendres and risqué puns, but considers the pun itself as a way of collapsing the conventional opposition between “homo/hetero” or “same/different” on which the whole question of sexual identity hinges (38).

Craft assumes a reader familiar with post-structuralist and deconstructionist concepts and reading practices, as his references to Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, as well as its own propensity for punning, make clear. The essay’s main methodology is close reading, and its analysis is largely confined to the text of the play, both in its original four-act version and the more familiar three-act one. But it is an important close-reading that makes superb sense of what might otherwise seem like meaningless, if very diverting, fun. Moreover, it provides an important expression of “queer” thinking and is an illuminating application of queer theory. More than twenty years after its publication the article remains timely and provocative. While the difficulty of the article will put some readers off, others willing to stay with it may enjoy its brilliance and wit.