

Bibliographical Essay

due by March 22, 2013

Writing a bibliographical essay develops a skill that will serve you later in your graduate studies, most notably in the writing of a comprehensive examination and a thesis/dissertation prospectus or introduction, but also in other scholarly studies and proposals. The rhetorical style in this type of writing, which calls on you to summarize, analyze, organize, and discuss multiple pieces of scholarship, is a necessary academic skill. In that way, this exercise is part of your professional training, preparing you for future work and your career.

In the course context, however, working on a focused survey of a decade of scholarship written on a particular work affords you an opportunity to see similarities and dissimilarities in the ways scholars have approached that writer. After completing your bibliographical essay, you will (probably) be more expert on the decade of scholarship concerning your chosen work than anyone in the class, witnessing how critics have (re)construed, (re)constructed, (re)theorized, (re)discovered, and (re)addressed the literary text. In that way, this assignment is an immersion in scholarly discourse and current approaches to literature, affording you a sense of current types of research and publication.

To write this bibliographical essay, select a *minimum* of 10 sources, not necessarily the first ones that come up on your search. (Because the emphasis for this assignment is critical/interpretive, deal briefly, if at all, with biographical studies and textual or linguistic problems—unless there seems an important debate—and *almost* certainly exclude other editions.) You will want to read your work, then begin reading the articles (or books, if you like), just as if you were going to compile an annotated bibliography, to determine the main point(s) of each item.

But instead of an annotated bibliography, you are writing a bibliographical essay. Rather than leaving each article as a separate description, write a coherent and organized synthesis of studies of the work during the selected decade. Determine any debates or dominant assumptions, then write the findings in the form of an essay. But write your essay less like a “report” and more like a discussion of the contemporaneous state of affairs in studies of the work. You need not reconcile any conflicting interpretations, only discuss the variance in reading and the persuasiveness of the arguments.

The completed assignment should consist of a one- or two-page, numbered bibliography followed by a three to four page (maximum) summary of research. On the bibliography, use MLA format for citations, but you are not obliged to alphabetize by the author’s last name—you can organize the bibliography in the manner that you deem best/most useful. The numbers should be used in the text of your essay to refer readers to each bibliographic citation. I will evaluate the paper not only by its proficient combination of both thoroughness and selectivity, but also by its ease of use to your readers—namely, the other graduate students in this course—and by your ability to summarize.

Organize and sub-divide the essay clearly so that your readers can get a coherent overview of recent research. Discussing the items chronologically, while certainly an option, is not necessarily the best way to direct your exploration. For example, as a possible organizational

pattern you might choose something similar to these categories: Historical, Contextual (i.e. social, political, etc.), Literary (Structuralist, Feminist, etc., numerological, exegetical, etc.).

Present an overview at the beginning, relating what is to follow to previous trends and issues, information you gather from reading in your sources' bibliographies. This summary is no place for your original thoughts on the work under discussion, except as they appear in your organization and separation of the wheat from the chaff. Save your own literary critical opinions for your critical paper. Try to give a fair evaluation of each interpretive work under discussion, even if you disagree with the author's conclusions or critical methods. Indicate (briefly) important contributions that are referred to in other studies, but that are not available in the Dupré Library. You might additionally note trends and areas that seem ignored or little studied.

Provide copies of your bibliographical essay to your fellow graduate student classmates when you submit this assignment, in duplicate, to me. Bringing those copies is part of the assignment. These essays may prove useful in your own research for the final paper, and, perhaps, in preparation for your comprehensive examinations.

Given the time involved in reading the items for your essay, I recommend you get started very soon. And please note, your seminar paper does *not* have to be on the same author as your bibliographical essay.

Bibliographical Essay Sign-Up Sheet

Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, 2000-present _____

Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, 1990-99 _____

Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, 1980-89 _____

Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, 1970-79 _____

Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, 1960-69 _____

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 2000-present. _____

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 1990-99. _____

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 1980-89. _____

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 1970-79. _____

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 1960-69. _____