

ENGL 313: Autobiography and/in "America"
Instructions for Final Essay on the Clement Diary

Please note: You need to set up an appointment to talk with Emma or Anne as you start your project. They will want to talk to you about your topic and see a paragraph where you begin to develop your argument.

Guidelines

- *Your essay should be five to six pages (1200 - 1300 words).*
 - *Refer to the diarists by their last names; their narrating "I"s as their last names in quotes; their narrated "I"s as their first names.*
 - *Please properly cite brief quotations (page nos. in parentheses after the citation, indented if exceeding three lines in length.)*
 - *In developing your analysis and argument, incorporate theoretical terms from the Reading Autobiography chapter we discussed early in the term.*
 - *See grading guidelines on Ctools.*
- • *Due Monday April 21st at 4pm in Emma's or Anne's mailbox or office. You may of course submit the paper earlier in their mailboxes.*

As you decide on your topic and your argument consider the following as providing ideas to draw on: the lecture on the diary form I presented (on Ctools); the theoretical analysis of personal narratives from the Reading Autobiography chapter and from other lectures; the presentations in class on all four of the diaries (your notes); the discussion of aspects of on-line forms or graphic narration that might be useful in thinking about the diary form (from presentations and lectures). You can of course look for scholarly articles on the diary; and if you incorporate ideas from these articles you will need to cite them appropriately.

Please note: These are original, unpublished diaries. We have learned from library staff that you should ask if there are any "control files" on the diary you are working with. Apparently the library keeps files of materials pertaining to the diaries. All four of our diaries have secondary written material that is accessible through the web (though not to the general public), so you will need to ask in the library for access to the control files).

Here are some possible topics/questions to write on. You have to find the argument you want to make about the topic you take up. These questions are meant to prompt your thinking. You cannot just answer the questions seriatim and call it a paper.

Masculinities/femininities. What narrative and or representation of gendered identity does the diary forge? How? Through what media? Is that representative coherent, consistent? Is it fractured, heterogeneous? What forms does it take? How is it related to the larger cultural, social and political context that enters the diary? What other subject positions does the diarist inhabit that intersect with gendered subject positions?

Form. What kinds of rhythms characterize the relationship between entries and spaces; between one entry and another; between images and words (in some cases); between different kinds of writing; between different voices; between silence and writing. How are these rhythms, these relationships important to questions of identity that emerge in the diary?

Diary and Storytelling. Diaries are often described as fragmented, incoherent, the selves they construct as fractured and multiple. Yet some diaries also produce a larger narrative that unfolds over time. Write an essay in which you explore both these aspects of the diary and their relationship to one another. You might think also about the construction of time and space on the pages of the diary or the incorporation of different materials inside the diary as they relate to this topic.

The diarist's relationship to the explicit and implicit purposes or uses of the diary. What purposes does diary writing serve for the diarist? Are there tensions between different purposes? Do the purposes change over time? What story about diary writing emerges in the diary? (Remember how we talked about the story of the story in Maus.)

The diarist and his/her addressee. What kind of conversation is the diarist having with the diary and with the "reader" projected in the diary? Who is/are the addressee(s)? Does the diarist shift subject positions in relation to different addressees or imagined readers?

You may develop your own topic but you need to discuss it with Emma or Anne before you get started.

Sidonie Smith
March 5, 2009

Presentations on Clements diaries - March 9th

On the syllabus I provided the following reading prompts for your Clements diary project. I have re-ordered them, grouped them around topics, and added questions here:

Spend some time looking at the diary as an object. What does it look like? What does the cover look like, if there is one? What kind of paper is it written on? What does the handwriting look like? How is the diary page organized?

What materials are included in the diary? Visual materials? Or inserted memorabilia? Or materials copied into the diary? How do different materials interact? Are they telling the same story, or not? And to what effect?

What kind of things are recorded in the diary? What preoccupations seem to draw the diarist's attention? What kinds of stories are told? Do these foci of attention shift over time? Is the diarist self-reflexive? Is s/he a documentarian, a hoarder, a recorder, a historian?

Think about the diarist as an autobiographical subject. What kind of subject is speaking through the diary? How does the diarist understand him or herself as a writing subject? Think about the subject positions the diarist inhabits. Does s/he write as a student, a "Don Juan," a daughter or sister, an outsider? Do you see any conflictual sites of self-locating?

What kind of voice emerges from the page? Is there a unified voice or many kinds of voices? When does a particular voice emerge? Around what focus or topic? What about the voices of others? Are other people's voices incorporated into the diary? To what effect?

Who is/are the addressee(s)? What kind of "reader" does the diary construct?

What histories - individual, family, community, national - are encompassed in the diary?

To what uses does the diarist seem to put the diary? What does it “do” for him/her? Is it used to gain knowledge, or to tell secrets, or to register dailiness, for instance? Does its use change over time?

Spend time brainstorming these topics/questions. You might want to break up into sub-groups of two or three so that you have people exploring particular sets of questions in some depth; and then discuss them as a group.

Develop talking points on each of these sets of questions individually. Everyone should prepare **five** talking points – not just words or phrases but full sentences. These talking points might incorporate some of the theoretical concepts from our discussions and from *Reading Autobiography*. Sarah and I will collect your talking points at the end of class to register your participation.

Together, as a group, come up with an argument you want to make about the diary (in one, two, or three sentences). The argument is not a description of what’s in the diary. The argument would be about some larger plot you see in the diary; or some contradiction you find at its core; or some relationship of the narrating and narrated I’s you note; or something about the relationship of visual material to written material; or some relationship of the diarist and others; or something about the uses of the diary. If you cannot craft one argument as a group, you can come up with two or three arguments.

On Monday, each group will have up to fifteen minutes to engage in a group discussion about the diary. We’ll put you in the center of the classroom; and the rest of us will sit around the circumference, listening to your discussion. You’ll begin by telling us your argument about the diary. You should determine beforehand what topics you want to focus on and the order you want to take them up. (You might want to give us a chance to ask you questions.)