Eng2532 – Exam 2019-I

Guide for external reader

**Term Paper assignment, Part 1: reader response**

3 or 4 pages

Instructions. The exercise is to develop your capacity to read reflexively. No external sources other than handouts. You may presume the reader of your essay is familiar with the reading materials and does not require a full summary.

There are two tasks you must perform to complete the exercise. (1) Read empathetically in line with what the passages say to you. Be specific by referring directly to the passage by quoting phrases or sentences you feel are particularly important; be empathetic in describing the author’s state of mind (feeling, psyche, thought) and his intent. Look carefully at the meaning of individual words that might help you understand the meaning of the passage. Words have various definitions; they also have origins (etymologies) that may help define meaning. If you can, you may also consider also how the passage sounds to your ear, or, more generally, how the meaning is created by the way the words are arranged. (2) As you expand the discussion by looking at how the two passages are related, focus on ideas and feel free to bring in a discussion of the book as a whole, to consider ideas we have discussed in class from either text, and to explore to what extent the passages are convincing to you the reader.

**Pick exercise (a) OR (b)**

**Exercise a) – Thoreau**

What does the “imagination” of nature mean to Thoreau and why does he engage it?

Respond to the following passage (quotation):

a-1) This world is but canvass to our imaginations. I see men with infinite pains endeavoring to realize to their bodies, what I, with at least equal pains, would realize to my imagination,—its capacities; for certainly there is a life of the mind above the wants of the body, and independent of it. Often the body is warmed, but the imagination is torpid [lethargic]; the body is fat, but the imagination is lean and shrunk. But what avails all other wealth if this is wanting [lacking]? “imagination is the air of the mind,” in which it lives and breathes. All things are as I am (159).

And to one of the following passages:

a-2) Through the din and desultoriness of noon, even in the most Oriental [Asian] city, is seen the fresh and primitive and savage nature, in which Scythians and Ethiopians and Indians dwell. What is echo, what are light and shade, days and night, oceans and stars, earthquake and eclipse there? The works of man are everywhere swallowed up by the immensity of Nature. The Aegean Sea is but Lake Huron still to the Indian. Also there is all the refinement of civilized life in the woods under a sylvan garb. The wildest scenes have an air of domesticity and homeliness even to the citizen, and when the flicker’s [wood pecker] cackle is heard in the clearing, he is reminded that civilization has wrought but little change there (172).

a-3) Thus we “sayled [sailed] by thought and pleasaunce,” as Chaucer says, and all things seemed with us to flow; the shore itself, and the distant cliffs were dissolved by the undiluted air. The hardest material seemed to obey the same law with the most fluid, and so indeed in the long run it does. Trees were but rivers of sap and woody fibre, flowing from the atmosphere, and emptying into the earth by their trunks, as their roots flowed upward to the surface. And in the heavens there were rivers of stars, and milky-ways, already beginning to gleam and ripple over our heads. There were rivers of rock on the surface of the earth, and rivers of ore in its bowels, and our thoughts flowed and circulated, and this portion of time was but the current hour. Let us wander where we will, the universe is built round about us, and we are central still (180).

OR

**Exercise b) – Muir**

How does Muir want us to see the natural world and what does it require to see in this manner?

Respond to the following passages:

b-1) Most people like to look at mountain rivers, and bear them in mind, but few care to look at the winds, though far more beautiful and sublime, and though they become at times about as visible as flowing water. When the north winds in winter are making upward sweeps over the curving summits of the High Sierra, the fact is sometimes published with flying snow-banners a mile long (185).

b-2) It is not long, geologically speaking, since the first raindrop fell on the present landscapes of the Sierras, and in the few tens of thousands of years of stormy cultivation they have been blessed with, how beautiful they have become! The first rains fell on raw, crumbling moraines and rocks without a plant. Now scarcely a drop can fail to find a beautiful mark: on the tops of the peaks, on the smooth glacier pavements, on the curves of the domes, on moraines full of crystals, on the thousand forms of yosemitic sculpture with their tender beauty of balmy, flowery vegetation, laving [washing], plashing [spattering], glinting, pattering, some falling softly on meadows, creeping out of sight, seeking and finding every thirsty rootlet, some through the spires of the woods, shifting in dust through the needles, and whispering good cheer to each of them . . .” (198).

**Term Paper Assignment Part 2: Essay**

Write a 7-10 page paper on one of the following topics. Paper must have at least three (3) secondary academic sources and must draw on course themes and materials.

1. Write a paper on the life and work of one of the following writers, referring to a course theme and concentrating on one of the writer’s works (or part thereof). Writers:

Annie Dillard

Walt Whitman

Henry Beston

Aldo Leopold

Leslie Marmon Silko

Rick Bass

Barry Lopez

Linda Hogan

Edward Abbey

Mary Austin

1. Why was Thoreau interested in the way of life of the Amerindians? Examine this question in his book *The Maine Woods*.
2. Pick a media or popular cultural theme or trend pertaining to environment and discuss in reference to key concepts from the course. Examples – wilderness reality TV shows, environmental catastrophe films . . .
3. What might Wendell Berry say about current developments in technology or what is sometimes called the 4th industrial revolution? Is there a way to alter the design and impact of technology along the lines Berry discusses?
4. How is American nature writing an expression of, and/or a reaction to, U.S. history and culture? Make sure to define terms and be specific in your references. You may choose to refer to one writer whom you take as representative, or refer to two-three writers. You may also choose to concentrate on a single region (e.g. New England, the West), whether representative or unrepresentative of the U.S. as a whole.

Key terms/concepts:

Place

Memory

Beauty

Sublime

Course themes:

Landscape reflects/represents memory – personal and otherwise

The past can always be brought into the present

The role of art and literature in society

Self reflects and constructs world

The design of the assignments is meant to be developmental. This is achieved in two ways: (1) Through revision: each assignment should be submitted twice. The first drafts received comments. Virtually all students did this for assignment #1 and the vast majority did so for assignment #2;the second (and final) draft should benefit from revision on the basis of the comments and on second readings; (2) the assignments are designed to teach the students how to respond to literary texts: the first assignment aims at close reading with guidance, while the second assignment requires students to move textual readings into a broader context – autobiographical, cultural or topical. Some allowance should be given to the fact that in regard to the second assignments students are pretty much on their own – particularly in regard to the complex arguments surrounding contemporary environmental issues; the relation of life experience to the writer was touched on, especially in the case of Wendell Berry, as were cultural themes, but nothing was addressed systematically and students generally are lacking historical background. Please keep this in mind.