

Sample Proposal & Reference Biblio

PROPOSAL

I chose Emily Dickinson's poem "My Life Had Stood a Loaded Gun" to use as a class example because I knew that many students would already be familiar with Dickinson: would have read a number of her other poems, would know something about her life, and would have some idea of the themes and ideas which are usually discussed in her poetry. In addition, she is a woman writer who discusses issues of creativity and consciousness which interest me.

A major reason for picking this poem was that I had studied John Cody's psychobiography of Dickinson in David Bleich's biography seminar; I knew this interpretation well, and also knew some of its flaws. Additionally, I had read Gelpi's Jungian interpretation in Shakespeare's Sisters. I had met Gelpi and his wife at Stanford and admired them greatly for their work on Adrienne Rich. I also saw that the two essays provided a perfect comparison/contrast of Freudian and Jungian views. So, one day I went to the library and just started looking up whatever I could find on "My Life Had Stood." Mostly by shelf-reading (accident) I located the Anderson book; when I read his interpretation I immediately recognized how perfectly it copied New Critical models such as Cleanth Brooks' essay on Donne's "Canonization." Then I found the section in Madwoman. I don't know if this was before or after I'd spent a summer studying at Northwestern with Sandra Gilbert. She and Susan, of course, introduced me to a number of other interpretations which I am not using in class. I also have some other feminist and feminist psychoanalytic readings of the poem which I use in Feminist Lit Crit.

In addition, using Dickinson encourages familiarity with the Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, which I now use as a major reference source whenever I am doing research on a woman writers (It didn't exist when I began this project on Dickinson).

Reference Biblio

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

INTRO BIBLIOS

Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar, eds. The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985. Bibliographic entry on pp. 2399-400.

Gilbert and Gubar's bibliographic entry is a good first place to start Dickinson research as it lists definitive editions, describes available biographies, lists a selection of monographs, and recommends particular feminist studies.

BOOK-LENGTH ANNOTATED BIBLIOS

Buckingham, Willis J., ed. Emily Dickinson: An Annotated Bibliography. Writings, Scholarship, Criticism, and Ana, 1850-1968. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1970.

Looking up poem title in the Explication Index, I found that Buckingham deals with 12 different interpretations of the poem, including two articles by Cody -- presumably the origin of his treatment of poem in his later book. WB's annotations are very sparse; most of space is taken up with listings of reviews. He himself does not evaluate sources. Looks to be of minimal value, unless I were trying to do an absolutely complete list of everything ever written with any relationship to the poem.

CUL: Z8230.5 .B8

Duchac, Joseph. The Poems of Emily Dickinson: An Annotated Bibliography. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979. Section on "My Life", pp. 327-31.

Cited by Gilbert and Gubar, this did not show up in bibliographies list on LUIS. Must go back and do author check to see if in CUL. If it is not, I would probably order it on ILL. It is nine years more up to date than Buckingham. . . . Oh dear. Just looked at the books I'd checked out and realized that I have the Duchac. Found it by shelf-reading; was not properly catalogued in LUIS.

This book is **EXTREMELY** useful. Lists ED's poems in alphabetical order by title. (Slightly odd in that poems beginning with the word "the" are listed under T.) Each entry is then chronologically arranged. Annotations include brief quotes that characterize each reading of the poem; can tell very quickly what main point of each article is. Reading through annotations gives a mini-history of interpretations. Annotations seem accurate for articles I already know, so this gives me more faith in his judgement.

Covers Cody, Gelpi, Rich.

CUL: PS1541 .Z5D8

DEFINITIVE TEXT

Johnson, Thomas H., ed. The Poems of Emily Dickinson. 1955.

Cited by G&G as definitive. Widely known to be so. Numbering system is one used by everyone. "My Life" is #754. Johnson edition also shows variant readings and cross-outs; places where editors disagree as to what Dickinson's handwriting really says or places where she crossed out one word and substituted another. In "My Life," for example, Dickinson originally wrote the word "art" in the next to last line -- "for I have but the art to kill" -- instead of "power".

Franklin, Ralph W., ed. The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson. 1981.

Cited by G&G. This might be of interest because it may show where Dickinson bound the poem, what other poems she associated it with. Need to check CUL to see if we have it and if it is in.

EVIDENCE SHOWING WHICH INTERPRETATIONS ARE MOST IMPORTANT

Gilbert, Sandra and Gubar, Susan. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven CT: Yale UP, 1979. Section on "My Life," pp. 606-13. Notes on p. 696.

Only two previous critics that G&G mention are Cody and Gelpi. I can't find in Madwoman, and don't remember if I heard her say it, but Sandra detests Cody's interpretation at the same time that she says anyone who works on this poem has to come to terms with it. On p. 610, she calls Gelpi's analysis of the poem "brilliant."

Miller, Cristanne. Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1987.

Found this just by shelf reading. Section on "My Life" starts on p. 122; first note cites Robert Weisbach, Gelpi, and Gilbert and Gubar as analyses which helped her the most.

Staton, Shirley. Literary Theories in Praxis. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1987.

Carl gave a xerox of Table of Contents to Tom who gave it to me. Someone else duplicated some of my research on "My Life." Interpretations which she chose are: Anderson, Gelpi, Gilbert and Gubar, and Rich.