

**CAS EN 128: REPRESENTING BOSTON
BOSTON UNIVERSITY, FALL 2014**

PROFESSOR HOWELL

Ongoing Assignment: City Diary

EN 128 has two major objectives: to provide a sense of the richness and strangeness of literary-historical Boston and to encourage extended critical thinking about the actual Boston of today. To fulfill the first of these goals, we'll read and discuss texts from long ago (seventeenth-century poems, eighteenth-century paintings, nineteenth-century novels, and so forth), we'll write a longer essay (the final paper) with a historical focus, and we'll take some exams—all pretty typical Lit-class stuff. To fulfill the second goal, though, we have to move out into the world of physical exploration and creative writing. The City Diary is designed to provide a relatively informal space for recording, organizing, and reflecting upon your responses to Boston and its stimuli. It insists that you take the time to go out into the city: to see things, smell things, taste things, hear things, touch things and then come home and write some of that stuff up. Nothing is off limits: if you want to write about going to a show in the Theater District, I'm all ears; if you spend an hour people-watching in Copley Square and feel like recording some observations, I want to hear them; if you see something on the T that squicks you out, I'm all about it; if you stumble over a cobblestone in Beacon Hill and it makes you angry, write it down and turn it in. Preliminary links to bigger questions—about the nature of urban space, about alienation and belonging, about the role of the individual in this collective experiment, or the role of the collective in the life of the individual, and so on—are most welcome too. Especially so, actually: because this informal material will serve as the basis for a polished personal essay (or set of personal essays, or some other object to be determined) due near the end of the semester, your fleeting deep thoughts will give you a head start on the final product.

Because it is, ultimately, an *aide-memoire*, the City Diary itself can take many forms: a continually updated computer file, a tumblr, a portfolio of annotated drawings—or some admixture of all of these things. As long as it can be turned in (in some way) at City Diary Checkpoints and it's legible to me, you have an enormous amount of freedom to do what you want. Indeed, you are encouraged to work through different ways of cataloguing your responses to and analyses of the things/people/spaces that you encounter out there: the more (and more variable) the merrier. I hesitate to set a word-count or a page-limit for each checkpoint, but I expect that every couple of weeks you'll turn in at least a couple of pages—a bare minimum of one page (roughly 300 words of prose) per week of diary time. Some of you may wish to submit more, which is totally fine with me; I will read it happily. I'll also very happily accept those poems, photos, sketches, etc.—though I hope that in those cases that you'll include some analytical prose as well (introductions to the poems, interpretations of the photographs, descriptions of the circumstances of the sketches, and so forth).

City Diary Exposition (Preview)

Eventually (i.e., in November), you'll be asked to treat one or two of these entries as evidence for an analytical paper. The goal then will be to bring your powers of scholarly reflection to bear upon your own experience—to use these personal moments to frame some kind of broader intellectual or cultural inquiry. Put another way, I'm asking you to act as an anthropologist of your own life, to develop from these fragments some kind of hypothesis about the Way We Live Now. This sounds a little grandiose, but it needn't be: everything all of us do or say or see or feel is embedded in a rich set of social, linguistic, philosophical and aesthetic discourses; from the right angle, even the throwaway moments can open onto really heavy-duty stuff.

Lastly

Please do have fun with this. Although the Expo will get a traditional number grade, individual entries will not: they'll get check marks and a comment or two, but that's it. Honest engagement with the city—and with your senses—is all you need to do a sterling job and get full credit for the assignment. Good luck out there!

N.B.: Important Dates:

Diary Checkpoints:

*9/11/14

*9/25/14

*10/2/14

*10/9/14

*10/23/14

Diary Exposition Due:

*11/6/14