

Guide to  
AMERICAN POETRY EXPLICATION  
Volume 1

*Colonial and Nineteenth-Century*

JAMES RUPPERT



G.K. HALL & CO.

70 LINCOLN STREET, BOSTON, MASS.

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Ruppert, James.

Colonial and nineteenth-century / James Ruppert.

p. cm. -- (Guide to American poetry explication: v. 1)

(A Reference publication in literature)

ISBN 0-8161-8919-6

1. American poetry--19th century--History and criticism--Bibliography. 2. American poetry--Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775--History and criticism--Bibliography. 3. American poetry--Explication--Bibliography. I. Title. II. Series. III. Series:

A Reference publication in literature.

Z1231.P7R66 1989

[PS201]

016.811'009--dc20

89-2196

CIP

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*This publication is printed on permanent/durable acid-free paper*

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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*A  
Reference  
Publication  
in  
Literature*

Nancy Martinez  
*Editor*

*For Terry*

## *The Author*

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## Preface

This book on pre-twentieth-century American poetry is part of a newly expanded and completely revised series that lists extensive bibliographic sources for the explication of both American and British poetry. An expansion of the successful *Poetry Explication: A Checklist*, especially the third edition (1980), these volumes retain many of the features of the previous editions, but with significant changes both in the scope of references and the works explicated.

In revising *Poetry Explication*, the compilers have sought to make it not only a tool for specialists but also a wide-ranging reference instrument for students and professionals who are not specialists, and thus suitable for home and small-school libraries.

This volume is intended first of all to update the third edition of *Poetry Explication*, which listed citations through 1977. Coverage now extends through December 1987. In those ten years the number of English-language explications on all areas of American and British poetry has grown exponentially. In addition to updating the third edition, coverage has been made more inclusive and comprehensive by including explications found in books covering individual authors and works of more than five hundred lines. Because the original editors believed that a scholar of poetry would be aware of the main sources on any individual poet, the earlier editions of the checklist included only those works that might be obscure and difficult to find.

As in *Poetry Explication*, poets are listed alphabetically by last name. Under the author headings, poetical works are listed alphabetically by the

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title of the work (excluding the articles *a*, *an*, and *the*). Citations of explications are then listed alphabetically by last name of the critic. Titles of frequently cited journals are abbreviated; there is a list of corresponding abbreviations at the front of this volume. Full publication data for books cited with shortened titles will be found in the Main Sources Consulted at the back of the volume.

The division of citations on American poets into the two volumes, this one on pre-twentieth-century poets and its companion volume on twentieth-century poets, follows the period designations established by standard literary histories and anthologies. In the case of Edwin Arlington Robinson, a decision was made to include him in this volume.

For anyone interested in looking at explication of the work of a poet, the Main Sources is a good place to start. Books listed there contain either numerous explications or particularly detailed and illustrative explications. For example, if one wishes to find explications of Whitman's poetry, specifically "Song of Myself," one might start with the citations under Whitman and then under "Song of Myself" in the Checklist of Interpretation. But there are more than six pages of citations in this section. Skimming over the Main Sources, however, would bring the reader to a number of titles such as Edwin Haviland Miller's *Walt Whitman's Poetry: A Psychological Journey* or Howard Waskow's *Whitman: Explorations in Form*, both of which are excellent places to begin looking for explication. Of course, in using the volume, citations for *The Explicator* magazine guarantee an emphasis on explication.

The selection of explications was governed by the definition given in the first edition of *Poetry Explication*: "an examination of a work of literature for a knowledge of each part, for the relations of these parts to each other, and for their relations to the whole." At times it was difficult to identify exactly what constituted an explication. When there was any doubt as to the appropriateness of including a citation, it was retained. In some situations, one person's explication is another's paraphrase.

I have included explications of major parts of poems where it was clear that the author was working toward illuminating the intrinsic meaning of specific lines or sections and their relation to the whole of the work, rather than toward a theoretical point outside the work. I admit that this is a subjective and delicate decision. Most scholarly research is published to illustrate theoretical insights; but to be included here, an explication had to be a serious attempt to illuminate a the work as a whole. I have omitted references to critical analyses that seek to elaborate a theory by a series of references to three- or four-line quotes from numerous poems. However, no citation was omitted solely because the author took a theoretical approach. Whether Marxist or phenomenologist, feminist or deconstructionist, if the



author presented an analysis that demonstrated a knowledge of the parts of a poem and their relation to the whole, the work is cited.

Though the essential principles of explication have not changed, their uses may have. Today explication is less a goal (if it ever was purely that), and more a tool. While it is often associated with New Criticism, a brief look at the many scholars listed here will be enough to convince anyone that almost every noted scholar in the last fifty years has done critical work that has made use of explication. The list at times looked to me like an honor roll of American poetic criticism. It seems clear that almost all theoretical speculations now must be grounded on close readings, so that Cleanth Brooks's insight that "we are all New Critics now" is appropriate on a number of levels: while critical theories such as hermeneutics and structuralism may deemphasize explication, many, perhaps most, theoretical approaches--even reader response, deconstructionism, speech act, and dialogics--make use of it.

It seems clear that the valuable tool of explication is too infrequently applied to some pre-twentieth-century American poetry. This underuse might rest on the bias of critics who think of explication as appropriate only to the modern era, though this attitude may not be quite as prevalent in British literary criticism, where poetry from Anglo-Saxon through modern is heavily explicated. Too many critics of early American poetry may feel that the work is valuable primarily for its historical or biographical significance rather than as literary artifact. Also, even less explication exists of the work of minority poets and minor pre-twentieth-century poets. That is perhaps understandable, since the demands of the traditional canon have discouraged research in these areas in general. Much criticism of these writers seems to project an interest in historical and biographical analysis. There is significant explication yet to be done for poets such as Paul Lawrence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, Paula Johnson, James Russell Lowell, and Philip Freneau, to name but a few. I have been able to add a number of poets to the checklist who were not included in the previous editions, such authors as Phillis Wheatley and John Trumbull. Also I have been able to significantly expand the number of citations for some underrepresented poets like William Cullen Bryant and Anne Bradstreet. I hope that this will complement efforts by other critics and anthologists to create a more open literary canon.

A great deal of explication exists for the work of Whitman and Dickinson, perhaps because of our appreciation of their connections to modern sensibilities and techniques. Clearly, the best explication in the last ten years has been done on the work of these two poets. But it is a shame that the poetry of other major writers such as Melville, Thoreau, and Emerson is not more fully explicated. While there is significant explication of the poetry of Poe and Longfellow, there is still much work to be done on these writers, too.

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Perhaps explication is no longer sufficiently novel to be encouraged as an end or goal by contemporary scholarly journals, or perhaps journals discourage explication for explication's sake because they assume potential contributors have mastered it as a tool; whatever the reasons, explication does not enjoy the publication support it once did. Yet, as we enter the nineties, explication may once again receive renewed interest; as we proceed with a redefinition of the humanities and we reemphasize the importance of literary appreciation and understanding, we can not fail to reevaluate our use of explication; as the foundation of literary understanding, it holds a place of importance, implicit in our teaching. Explication's greatest contributions are yet to come. While composition enjoyed revitalized interest in the seventies and eighties, the teaching of literature did not. New strategies in literary education will require that we highlight our most basic mode of understanding--explication.

I would like to acknowledge the support of many people in the preparation of this volume. Nancy Martinez, general editor of the series and organizing genius behind these volumes, supplied invaluable advice and encouragement. The staff of the Inter-library Loan Department at the University of Alaska--Fairbanks did a fantastic job. My thanks to Terry Boren for all her help.

## *Abbreviations*

<b>AI</b>	<b>American Imago</b>
<b>AL</b>	<b>American Literature</b>
<b>AmerS</b>	<b>American Studies</b>
<b>AN&amp;Q</b>	<b>American Notes and Queries (New Haven)</b>
<b>AQ</b>	<b>American Quarterly</b>
<b>ArQ</b>	<b>Arizona Quarterly</b>
<b>BuR</b>	<b>Bucknell Review</b>
<b>CentR</b>	<b>The Centennial Review</b>

## ABBREVIATIONS

ConnR	Connecticut Review
CE	College English
CEA	CEA Critic
CLS	Comparative Literature Studies (University of Illinois)
CLQ	Colby Library Quarterly
CP	Concerning Poetry (West Washington State College)
CritI	Critical Inquiry
DicS	Dickinson Studies (formerly Emily Dickinson Bulletin)
EAL	Early American Literature
EIC	Essays in Criticism (Oxford)
EJ	The English Journal
ELH	Journal of English Literary History
ELN	English Language Notes
ELWIU	Essays in Literature (Western Illinois University)

## ABBREVIATIONS

ES	English Studies
ESQ	ESQ: Journal of the American Renaissance
Expl	Explicator
GaR	The Georgia Review
HudR	The Hudson Review
IEY	Iowa English Bulletin: Yearbook
JEGP	Journal of English and Germanic Philology
KR	The Kenyon Review
L&P	Literature and Psychology
Lang&S	Language and Style
LitR	Literary Review: An International Journal of Contemporary Writing (Fairleigh Dickinson University)
MinnR	The Minnesota Review
MissQ	Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Culture
MLN	Modern Language Notes

## ABBREVIATIONS

MLQ	Modern Language Quarterly
MLS	Modern Language Studies
MP	Modern Philology
MQ	Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought
MR	Massachusetts Review: A Quarterly of Literature, The Arts, and Public Affairs (University of Massachusetts)
MSE	Massachusetts Studies in English
N&Q	Notes and Queries
NEQ	The New England Quarterly: A Historical Review of New England Life and Letters
PLL	Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
PQ	Philological Quarterly
PR	Partisan Review
PrS	Prairie Schooner

## ABBREVIATIONS

QJS	The Quarterly Journal of Speech
RS	Research Studies (Washington State University)
SAQ	South Atlantic Quarterly
SCN	Seventeenth-Century News
SHR	Southern Humanities Review
SIR	Studies in Romanticism
SJS	San Jose Studies
SoQ	The Southern Quarterly: A Journal for Arts in the South (University of Southern Mississippi)
SoR	Southern Review (Louisiana State University)
SoRA	Southern Review: Literary and Interdisciplinary Essays (Adelaide, Australia)
SP	Studies in Philology
SR	Sewanee Review
SWR	Southwest Review
TLS	[London] Times Literary Supplement

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>TSE</b>	<b>Tulane Studies in English</b>
<b>TSL</b>	<b>Tennessee Studies in Literature</b>
<b>TSLL</b>	<b>Texas Studies in Literature and Language: A Journal of the Humanities</b>
<b>UDR</b>	<b>University of Dayton Review</b>
<b>WHR</b>	<b>Western Humanities Review</b>
<b>WVUPP</b>	<b>West Virginia University Philological Papers</b>
<b>WWR</b>	<b>Walt Whitman Quarterly Review</b>



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