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21W.730-4 Writing on Contemporary Issues: Food for Thought:
Writing and Reading about the Cultures of Food
Fall 2008

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Vocabulary Lists

Due in class T 11/18

Everyone who cares about language, and about expressing herself or himself precisely and forcefully, makes it a continuing practice to look up unfamiliar words that other writers use. Words are the blood, bone and oxygen of reading and writing. Limited vocabulary makes it hard for writers to express complex ideas—to break out of the simplistic worldview we associate with children and even many high schoolers. Therefore, it is important that you make it a practice—a habit of mind—to acquaint yourself with unfamiliar words. Not to do so is to permanently limit your written thought to that of a 17-year-old.

To help you in this practice, I am asking you to keep a list of words that are new to you culled from our readings. You *may* include words that describe unfamiliar foods, kinds of hogs, etc.; but the most *useful* words to look up and learn are those that describe actions, moods, attitudes, characteristics of people—words you are likely to encounter again.

Entries in the list. Your list should include the word, its part of speech, the etymology (derivation) of the word, and a brief definition—all of this *only* for the word as it is used in the context in which you encounter it. (That is, many words have multiple definitions; I only want you to include the one pertinent to your reading.) Also note the reading in which you encountered the word—e.g., “Didion,” “Morrison,” etc.

- Your list should include a minimum of 26 words but may include more.
- Keep your list as you go; it will be due 11/18.
- This assignment may be handwritten, as long as it is legible.

Format for vocabulary list

Here are two examples of vocabulary formats—both are fine.

Harangue (noun)

-- from Old Italian: ariangare (to speak in public)

-- long, pompous speech

-- Coming Home Again (Lee) [*Lee is the author of the piece in which this word appears*]

Harangue (noun) – A speech or a piece of writing characterized by strong feeling or expression; a tirade. Comes from the Old Italian word “aringa” meaning to speak in public. (Lee)

Note that in this case, the second definition is more correct—not all harangues are “pompous.” So it is important to use a good dictionary and get a precise definition!