Course description

The course focuses on authors who have sweeping opinions about the world, sometimes proclaiming what is true and beautiful, but more often diagnosing the faults of our civilization and ourselves. Readings include the essays of critics and philosophers (John Ruskin on art and labor, Proust on Ruskin, Simone Weil on violence, Karl Marx on alienation, Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the moral corruption wrought by civilization, W.E.B. Du Bois on race in American life, Wendell Berry on nature and work in our world), Whitman’s poetry, and fiction (Kerouac’s On the Road, Morrison’s Sula). Our daily discussions will be partly devoted to “workshopping” your writing.

Required books

- Morrison, Sula, Vintage, ISBN 1400033438
- Proust, Days of Reading, Penguin, ISBN 0141042532

Other readings (to be provided) will include the first of Marx’s 1844 Economic and Political Manuscripts, essays by Wendell Berry, Allen Ginsberg’s “America,” and Simone Weil’s “The Iliad, or the Poem of Force” (with accompanying selections from the Iliad). Several readings will be distributed via Moodle/Nexus (http://nexus.union.edu/).
Common learning goals of all Union College preceptorials

- **Discuss ideas**: critically and respectfully engage in dialogue with others about ideas in texts as well as those expressed in class
- **Read texts critically**: show an understanding of/ability to evaluate complex and sophisticated ideas from multiple and diverse perspectives
- **Develop effective arguments**:
  - support a focused thesis, including analysis of evidence to support conclusions
  - organize information logically and clearly in essays that guide readers through the text
  - express ideas clearly and appropriately, with few, if any, grammar, usage, and spelling errors
  - integrate evidence into one's own argument (e.g., uses quotations appropriately, correct citation, etc.)
- **Incorporate revision** into the writing process as a means of improving critical thinking and the expression of ideas

Schedule of readings

*Nature, Art, and Work*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W 1/4</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>F 1/6</td>
<td>Ruskin, “The Nature of Gothic”</td>
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<th>Day</th>
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<tr>
<td>M 1/9</td>
<td>Berry, “Is Life a Miracle?” and “Faustian Economics”</td>
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<td>W 1/11</td>
<td>Ruskin, “The Work of Iron”</td>
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*The view from “the Bottom”*

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<th>Day</th>
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<tr>
<td>F 1/13</td>
<td>Writing Analytically pp. 53-60; Morrison, pp. 1-48</td>
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<th>Day</th>
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<tr>
<td>M 1/16</td>
<td>WA pp. 60-67; Morrison, pp. 49-111</td>
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<td>W 1/18</td>
<td>WA pp. 67-72; Morrison, pp. 112-157</td>
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<td>F 1/20</td>
<td>WA pp. 75-82; Morrison, pp. 158-174 and foreword; Du Bois, pp. 1-16</td>
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<tr>
<td>M 1/23</td>
<td>WA pp. 82-87; Du Bois, pp. 17-61</td>
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<td>W 1/25</td>
<td>WA pp. 87-95; Du Bois, pp. 62-108</td>
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F 1/27  Du Bois, pp. 109-158
M 1/30  Du Bois, pp. 159-218
W 2/1   Du Bois, pp. 219-254 and “The Souls of White Folk”

Alienation and Corruption

F 2/3   Marx, glossary and pp. 279-299
M 2/6   Rousseau, Discourse on the Sciences and Arts; Dunn or Bellah
W 2/8   Marx, pp. 299-334

Poet and Author as Prophet

F 2/10  Proust, “John Ruskin”
M 2/13  Whitman
W 2/15  Whitman
F 2/17  Whitman
M 2/20  Whitman
W 2/22  Weil, “The Iliad, or the Poem of Force”
F 2/24  Selections from the Iliad

Beat People

M 2/27  Kerouac, pp. 109-151
W 2/29  Kerouac, pp. 152-196
F 3/2   Kerouac, pp. 197-230
M 3/5   Kerouac, pp. 231-269; Ginsberg, “America”
W 3/7   Kerouac, pp. 270-315
F 3/9   Kerouac, pp. 316-361
M 3/12  Kerouac, pp. 362-408
Weekly close reading and analysis assignment (Workshop)

Most weeks, you will write a full double-spaced page of close reading and analysis (usually of the day’s reading), to be brought in (by me, without your name attached) for class discussion (“workshopping”). The goal is not to state your general thoughts and responses to the reading. Instead, you will choose the specific words and phrases in the reading that you think will best repay close attention. Your page will explain why the text is written and argued in precisely the fashion it is, analyzing the thoughts and words in detail in order to offer your own original understanding of them. Choose ideas that could be understood in multiple ways, and argue forcefully (with specific interpretation—not mere quotation—of the supporting evidence) for what is most attractive and insightful about your way. Indicate how the analysis and interpretation of the text’s details affect how you understand the work’s larger ideas.

Beginning on the first day of class, you will be provided with several examples of this mode of writing. The main goal of the course is to make continuous progress towards mastery of this kind of writing.

In a given week when this assignment is due, the day when your contribution will be workshopped is determined by the following list.

**Monday**  Benova, Duffy, Geller, Owens, Seifert, Ward
**Wednesday**  Choi, Estriplet, Gilchrist, Pender, Shi
**Friday**  Andersen, D’Amario, Franc, Holmes, Rosado, Sweeney

Your contribution is due to me by email by 8 a.m. before class. (Simply include your work in the body of the email—no need for attachments.) You will do the assignment six times:

1. Jan. 6-11: Study the sample close readings and work up your best imitation of the form.
2. Jan. 13-18
5. Feb. 27-Mar. 2: Half the class on the day’s reading, half based on final paper assignment.
6. Mar. 5-9: Half the class on the day’s reading, half based on final paper assignment.
Two graded class presentations

1. Feb. 6-8: Five-minute presentation of an original analysis of Rousseau's thinking and style on the basis of the ideas in a secondary article (with a nod to Marx).

Four graded papers

1. Thu., 1/17, 9 a.m.: Further developed and polished version of one of the first two workshop assignments. 550-750 words.
2. Thu., 2/2, 9 a.m.: The depths and problems of Morrison’s and Du Bois’s ideas understood by bringing the two texts into conversation with each other. 800-1000 words.
3. Thu., 2/23, 9 a.m.: Close reading of a poem. 1250-1500 words.
4. Thu. 3/15, 9 a.m.: Combining close reading of the course texts/authors with insights into your own world (or otherwise bringing in new material beyond the syllabus). 1500-2500 words.

Course policies: Attendance, late work, electronic devices, etc.

1. Come to class on time with the reading (including printouts of anything distributed online), and do not leave during the 65 minutes. All electronic devices should be switched off and stowed away in your bags.
2. Attendance at every class meeting is one of the course's minimum requirements. After two unexcused absences, each additional unexcused absence will result in a 1/3 grade reduction in the final grade. Serious illness, family crisis, participation in team sporting events, and religious observances may be valid reasons for missing class. You must provide written proof for an excused absence (i.e. the above reasons), preferably in advance. It is your responsibility to make up what you have missed (including obtaining notes from a classmate) and to understand that it will not be possible to compensate fully for a missed class.
3. Completion of all assignments is a requirement for passing the course.
4. All assignments must be turned in on time. No work will be accepted more than seven days after the original due date. Late work is penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late. The workshop assignment is essential to our class plan and is penalized a full letter grade for the first day late.
Grading

1. Prepared participation  75 points (7%)
2. Unannounced reading quizzes 100 points (10%)
3. Workshop contributions  100 points (10%)
4. Presentation 1 50 points (5%)
5. Presentation 2 50 points (5%)
6. Paper 1 100 points (10%)
7. Paper 2 150 points (14%)
8. Paper 3 175 points (17%)
9. Paper 4 250 points (24%)

Note:  Reading quizzes will be used to the degree deemed necessary by the instructor, based on the quality of student preparation and participation. If they are not regularly used, the first two grading categories will be combined.

Academic honesty and citation requirements

You must read and understand the 2011-2012 Student Handbook section “Academic Honesty.”

All work submitted for this course must be your own; any idea of another person must always be cited clearly and specifically. (This is just as true of loosely repeated ideas as of quoted ideas. And an “idea” is anything that contributes to the quality of your work: for example, not just literary analysis, but also the selection of which passages are discussed.) You may discuss the readings with your classmates but must not collaborate on any individual written assignment unless instructed to do so. If you ever have any question about proper citation or the propriety of collaboration, please consult with me. The penalty for using ideas that are not your own, in any assignment, without proper attribution, may be a failing grade in the course. I have imposed this penalty before; it is painful, and I do not want to do it again. Violations could also result in expulsion from college or a record of dishonesty that would exclude you from professional school. The Academic Honor Code also requires your refusal to tolerate dishonesty in quizzes and exams (copying, using any aids, or communicating).
If you have consulted any secondary source, please make absolutely certain that anything in your work attributable to it (ideas, evidence, argument, words) is completely and specifically cited. This goes for all secondary sources, recommended or otherwise, including web content I link, the introductions to our textbooks, etc. You are usually not asked to use secondary sources in the writing assignments—it is better if you do not—but if they have helped you, you must keep track of exactly how, and report it. (The principle is that you should receive credit for your own contributions to your work, not, for example, someone else’s clever idea to link two passages to each other.)

**Statement on disabilities**

It is Union College policy to make accommodations for individuals with disabilities. If you have any disability or special concern, please let me know what your needs are in order that they may be accommodated. All discussions will remain confidential to the extent permissible by law. Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations must also: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Dean of Students Office; (2) bring a letter to the instructor from the Dean of Students Office indicating what academic accommodations you require. This must be done within the first two weeks of the term. For more information about services available to Union College students with disabilities, please contact the Dean of Students Office: Shelly Shinebarger, Director of Student Support Services, Dean of Students Office, shinebas@union.edu, (518) 388-6116.

*I am a member of Union’s Faculty & Staff LGBTQ Ally Program and a “safe space” promoter.*