FPR100-15 (W11). First Year Preceptorial: The Author as Sage
Prof. Tarik Wareh

Let’s stay in touch!
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office hours Mon. 3:30, Thu. 10:30, and by appt.
Please drop by to ask questions, discuss the course, and exchange ideas!

Course description
Authors have authority, and this course looks at authors and readers who have invested books and authors with the ultimate authority: to speak as sage and prophet; to judge what is true, healthy, and beautiful; to diagnose the faults of our civilization and of ourselves. This leap of faith has something to do with what happens every time we take a book seriously, although in its pure form it may be considered a discreditable way to read or write. With critical independence, however, we will explore this theme as a way of thinking about the kinds of serious meaning we derive from books and how to write with commitment about our own ideas.

Required books

Other readings (to be provided) will include: selections from Emerson's essays; a sermon of Theodore Parker; William James on the nineteenth-century American religion of "healthy-mindedness"; Simone Weil on the Iliad; and Marcel Proust on Ruskin.

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
Wiki and Moodle
The course wiki (http://wareh.wikia.com) is where you will post some assignments and find links to online readings, etc. Some readings will be provided to you via Moodle (http://moodletest.union.edu).

Schedule of readings

**On the Road with David Foster Wallace**
- M 1/3  Introduction
- W 1/5  Lipsky pp. ix-xiv, 1-52
- F 1/7  [No class] Lipsky pp. 53-109
  - M 1/10  Lipsky pp. 109-145
  - W 1/12  Lipsky pp. 145-178
  - F 1/14  Lipsky pp. 178-216
  - M 1/17  Lipsky pp. 216-268
  - W 1/19  Lipsky pp. 268-310, xv-xxxii

**American Visions of Progress and Efficiency**
- F 1/21  Parker, “Of Justice and the Conscience”
  - M 1/24  James pp. 78-103
  - W 1/26  James pp. 104-126

**How to Read, Listen, and Philosophize According to Nietzsche**
- F 1/28  Nietzsche pp. 231-262
  - M 1/31  Nietzsche pp. 69-99, 136-151

**The Humane and Tragic Iliad in Europe, 1939**
- F 2/4  Weil, “The Iliad, or the Poem of Force”
  - M 2/7  Selections from the Iliad

**Medieval Architecture and the Ills of Victorian Civilization**
- W 2/9  Ruskin, “The Nature of Gothic”
  - M 2/14  Proust, Preface to La Bible d'Amiens

**Prophetic Poetry in England and America**
- W 2/16  Blake
- F 2/18  Whitman
  - M 2/21  Blake/Whitman
- W 2/23  Whitman
Beat People
F 2/25 Kerouac pp. 109-151
M 2/28 Kerouac pp. 152-196
W 3/2 Kerouac pp. 197-230
F 3/4 Kerouac pp. 231-269
M 3/7 Kerouac pp. 270-315
W 3/9 Kerouac pp. 316-361
F 3/11 Kerouac pp. 362-408

Reading quizzes
If it is January 5 (for example), you are responsible for having read and understood the day's main reading and also the Emerson selections for the current and previous days (January 4 and 5). If the author makes significant use of words or ideas with which you are unfamiliar, it is your responsibility to understand them by looking them up.

Compensatory essays
When a reading quiz's answers are incomplete, you will write in compensation a short essay demonstrating understanding of the matter on the quiz, and also discussing the other parts and aspects of the reading (while avoiding repetition of class discussion). If you are absent for any reason, you will also write such an essay.

Class cohorts
The class is divided into three cohorts. Your cohort will determine a weekly series of assignments:

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<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
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<th>Friday</th>
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<tr>
<td>cohort A</td>
<td>Emerson comm.</td>
<td>Emerson aphorism</td>
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<tr>
<td>cohort B</td>
<td>Workshop paragraph</td>
<td>Emerson comm.</td>
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<tr>
<td>cohort C</td>
<td>Emerson aphorism</td>
<td>Workshop paragraph</td>
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<td>Emerson comm.</td>
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Exceptions:
W 1/5 paragraphs and Emerson aphorisms; no Emerson commentaries
F 1/7 [No class] Emerson aphorisms and commentaries; no paragraphs
2/28 – 3/4 [Presentations] Emerson aphorisms and commentaries; no paragraphs
W 3/7 Emerson commentaries; no paragraphs or Emerson aphorisms
F 3/9 paragraphs; no Emerson aphorisms or commentaries

Paragraph workshopping
For each class one cohort will write a paragraph of evidence-based interpretive argument about the day's reading (in relation to previous course readings, if desired). The paragraph must be emailed to the instructor by 8 a.m. before class. A major part of each class meeting will be devoted to presentation, constructive criticism, and discussion of these paragraphs. Please be prepared to discuss how your paragraph could be part of a larger paper's argument, as these assignments will prepare you for the three graded essays. In particular, consult the upcoming paper topic and think about how to fit your specific argument about the textual details into a larger essay on that topic.
Emerson Aphorism Project
Every day this term, you should read the short text by Ralph Waldo Emerson (via Moodle/Files). Every week, on the days assigned to your cohort, you will edit the course wiki to create your own aphorisms in response, and comment on your classmates’ insights and artful self-expression. (See separate handout for instructions.)

Two presentations
In Week Two (on your cohort's day for Emerson commentary, which is still due) and Week Nine (on your day for paragraphs, which we will not do that week), you will give a presentation in class.

The first presentation is a brief (five-minute) introduction of yourself in relation to the themes of the course. Consider discussing: your experience with, or general musings about, the kind of literature we will read; your speculations about where you will find your strongest interests in the course; and where in your own experience of books, art, music, etc., (this certainly need not be “high art”!) you have discovered an authoritative vision of how the world (or any small part of it: high school social life, whatever) works, which you have taken seriously.

The second presentation will interpret for your classmates how such a source of sage authority in your own extracurricular experience works in ways that compare interestingly to our course readings and discussions, and which ought to be taken seriously. This presentation should show off what you have learned, both by reading the course texts, and by developing your ability to think and write about them over the term.

Three essays
Each of the essays in evidence-based critical and interpretive argument will build on our careful reading, paragraph workshops, and other class discussions. The goal is to write clearly, accurately, persuasively and efficiently (in short, everything you say should require your argument and be expressed well, with a minimum of empty and wasted words and sentences), while also allowing the possibility of including your personal and creative responses to the subject matter of the course.

Essay 1 (ca. 1,000 words, due Fri., 1/28): The Positive Vision
Sometimes writers are concerned to evoke healthy ideals: psychological, moral, etc. What is the nature of this mode? What does it struggle against? What expressive resources are particularly suited to announcing it? What are its strengths and dangers?

Essay 2 (1,100-1,300 words, due Wed., 2/16): The Negative Vision
A similar exploration, but in response to cultural critique that rejects the dominant institutions of civilization itself, our age, our nation, our heroes, our way of living, etc.

Essay 3 (1,300-1,500 words, due Wed., 3/16, 8:00 a.m.): The Prophetic Voice
A freer opportunity to develop an interesting argument about what is most interesting, effective, or problematic in “sage” writing. You are encouraged to bring in provocative comparative examples from your own world and critical reflections on it (possibly based on your presentation). You are also required to delve a bit further into one of the course topics that most interests you. For example, if you are interested in American history, you could stake a claim for an interesting legacy of Emerson, Parker, or Whitman’s way of thinking and writing (or James’s, for a more social-scientific view). If you are interested in music, you could pursue the issues raised by Nietzsche’s book on Wagner. If in art, then you could explore Blake as an artist or Ruskin’s art criticism. Etc.
Grading
Students will be graded on the quality of their contributions to the course as follows:

- 50% Paragraph contributions, Emerson Aphorism Project, and presentations
- 40% Three essays
- 10% Reading quizzes and compensatory essays

Academic honesty and citation requirements

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.