

## HUMANITIES 1170-9.0A

THE MODERN AGE: SHAPERS & DEFINERS  
[A Vanier College Foundations Course]

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"Only the artist can divine the meaning of life."

Novalis

"The artist is the antennae of the age."

Ezra Pound

"This [Modern] age is . . . an age of monsters--humanity has rarely seen their like--but also, as if for the sake of balance, it has produced not a few figures of gigantic proportions, to whom it is no shame to pay homage humbly. The mental distance between them and the mechanized man in the crowd is probably greater than that between a medieval theologian and, for example, a member of the coopers' guild."

Czeslaw Milosz

Course Director: Professor Matthew Corrigan  
230 Vanier College

## THE MODERN AGE: SHAPERS & DEFINERS

### 1. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The course will introduce the student to some of the important “shapers and definers” of the Modern (Western) artistic and intellectual spirit (1775-1960), along with the various cultural movements and counter-movements that framed their work (Romanticism, Realism, Symbolism, Modernism, Post-Modernism, etc.). It will do so from a particular point of view: the search by these novelists, artists, composers, philosophers, and psychologists for new languages (language used here in the broadest sense), new forms, new methodologies, commensurate with what human nature has become, what it knows (or thinks it knows) about itself and the world at large.

We will attempt to describe these new languages, new forms, new methodologies; whence they arise, their values, actual and

imagined achievements, prejudices, losses, etc. Part of our concern will be to work out strategies for dealing with cross-cultural or 'synchronous' (concurrent) events; also to probe some of the problems that have troubled and continue to trouble Modern consciousness: Romantic egoism and nihilism, the decline of the spiritual, the power of the unconscious, loss and recovery of nature and the 'organic,' human sexuality, popular vs. high-brow culture.

Works shall be studied in the context of the lives struggling to produce them and of the age in which they were produced; autobiographical elements (particularly important in the works studied) shall be traced and studied, and an attempt made to understand the relationship between life and "the creative work," and "the creative work" and life.

## 2. COURSE STRUCTURE:

One two-hour lecture weekly (110 min) on Thursday 12:30-2:30 pm in Stedman Lecture Hall 'A'; plus two-hour seminar weekly (see below for times). Attendance at both lectures and seminars is mandatory.

## 3. COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING:

A. A series of written assignments (6) due on the dates listed below (40% of final grade).

B. Critical participation in weekly seminars (20% of final grade). (It is impossible to get an 'A' in the course without this grade. Students who miss an inordinate number of seminars will forfeit this grade.)

C. Examination on the course's primary texts (plus lectures), to be administered during the examination period, April 7-30 (40% of final grade).

#### 4. PRIMARY READINGS (REQUIRED TEXTS):

HUMANITIES 1170A COURSE ANTHOLOGY (available from York Bookshop ONLY). (Readings from Romanticism [Rousseau] to Modernism [Carl Jung]). This text should be purchased by students. (Used copies may be available.) Weekly readings will be from this text.

The following paperback books (in the editions cited) should be purchased:

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *THE SUFFERINGS OF YOUNG WERTHER*, trans. Harry Steinbauer (Norton paper).

Vincent van Gogh, *THE LETTERS OF VINCENT VAN GOGH*, edited Mark Roskill (Fontana/Collins paper).

James Joyce, *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN*, edited with introduction by Seamus Deane (Penguin paper).

Thomas Mann, *DEATH IN VENICE AND OTHER STORIES* (Vintage paper).

Carl G. Jung, *MAN & HIS SYMBOLS* (any edition).

Sebastian Haffner, *HITLER* (Phoenix paper).

#### 5. SECONDARY READINGS:

The following books may prove useful for further research on this period (they can be found in the library):

Richard Ellmann & Charles Feidelson Jr., *THE MODERN*

TRADITION (excellent excerpts and introductions to major themes and movements of nineteenth and twentieth centuries).

H. G. Schenk, THE MIND OF THE EUROPEAN ROMANTICS (wonderful book on the breadth and significance of Romanticism).

Friedrich Heer, THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF EUROPE, Vol. 11, (Chap. 20 especially).

E. J. Hobsbawm, THE AGE OF REVOLUTION: 1789-1848.

N. Frye, THE MODERN CENTURY.

E. H. Gombrich, THE STORY OF ART (Chaps. 24, 25, 26 on 19th-century European art).

J. Bronowski, THE ASCENT OF MAN (on the relationship between science and culture).

K. Clark, CIVILIZATION (text for BBC film series). Excellent programmes on the place of art within a given age--using sources from history and the other arts. We shall view two films from this series. The book's text enhances the television script. Programmes from this series can be borrowed from York's film library.

J. P. Stern, THE FUERER & THE PEOPLE.

Joachim Fest, HITLER.

John Lukacs, THE HITLER OF HISTORY.

Ian Kershaw, HITLER Vol. I & II.

THE OXFORD COMPANION TO WORLD WAR 2.

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USEFUL VIDEOS (available from York's film library):

K. Clark, WORSHIP OF NATURE.

K. Clark, THE FALLACIES OF HOPE.

IMPRESSIONISM & POST-IMPRESSIONISM (#2193).

VINCENT: LIFE & DEATH OF V. VAN GOGH (feature film).

IN A BRILLIANT LIGHT: VAN GOGH AT ARLES

LA BELLE EPOQUE 1890-1914 (#1830).

THREE COLOURS CEZANNE (#4132).

JAMES JOYCE: IS THERE ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS ME?

THE NAZIS: A WARNING FROM HISTORY (six volumes, each 50 min.). See especially Vol. I & II.

ARCHITECTURE OF DOOM (#2861).

## 6. COURSE SEMINARS: GENERAL METHODOLOGY

The course makes a special effort to train the student in critical thinking, speaking, and writing, as well as to hone his or her perceptions and develop an aesthetic appreciation of cultural works.

Seminars shall be divided into 'cells' of five or six students (thus five or six cells per tutorial). Each cell will spend thirty minutes at the beginning of the two hour session discussing

'problems and discoveries' (see below) pertaining to the work at hand (usually the work lectured on that week). The group will choose a chairperson (and secretary) to present (briefly) the cell's findings to the whole class (such chairpersons to rotate during the year). The class chooses the topics (problems-discoveries) that merit attention and will spend the remainder of the time discussing these.

It is expected that each student will take his or her turn as chairperson during the year and participate in the weekly discussions.

Presentations as chairpersons and overall participation in the seminars will count for 20% of the final grade.

## PROBLEMS & DISCOVERIES

### A) PROBLEMS:

We arrive at knowledge (what we do not know or do not yet know) by means of both a 'discovery' and 'questioning' process. Our reading of a text continually gives rise to problems--if, that is, our reading is sufficiently astute, sensitive, and involved; by pursuing such problems we can appropriate or 'inhabit' the text more deeply and move significantly beyond our ignorance in the process.

But note: a problem doesn't involve an answer necessarily: problems often remain intransigent, an irritation to knowledge; probes or sparks that ignite avenues of future enquiry. Take, for example, the phenomenon of Romanticism in European culture. The phenomenon cannot be understood completely; we can only offer hypotheses but no final answers as to why human consciousness changed to the degree it did, circa 1800

(a change that involved all of Europe and later the Americas).

By a problem, then, we mean some ontological, moral, psychological, cultural, or aesthetic problem that arises while reading the text, studying the life, movement, whatever.

Consider some other problems involved in the study of Romanticism. What, for example, is this thing the Romantics call 'Nature'? How does it relate to subjectivity--to individual consciousness and self? Why is Romanticism (and its numerous 'natural' derivatives) a male movement for the most part? Do women artists produce their own version of Romanticism? What might this female Romanticism produce (see readings from BITTER HEALING in COURSE ANTHOLOGY, pp. 26-49)?

Or consider a problem that pertains to an artist like Vincent van Gogh. Did van Gogh wish to succeed in the world of art (as he understood it) or did he deliberately court a programme of failure *to become a better artist? An artist out of his own time, an artist FOR the future?* (An example of a unique 'Modern' type, the artist who pursues 'failure' in order to extend his or her art to its limits--to explore the idea of himself or herself as deep-suffering, driven, ever-renewing creator; an artist who exists for the future not his or her own age.) Stendhal, Rodin, Bruckner, Mahler, Rolfe, Munch, Kafka, Woolf, Lowry, Olson are other examples of such types.

Or consider problems having to do with autobiography and art. Most if not all of the works on the course are autobiographical or use autobiographical elements in a significant way: how to deal with this fact in an age when literary criticism disavows such interest and consideration? Can we examine such works fairly WITHOUT considering their insistent autobiographical elements, elements that are woven through their production (whose recognition the artists themselves appear to insist upon)? How to arrive at a meaningful methodology for such determinations?



Problems within, above, and beyond the text: which the text evokes or inspires in the careful reader. Problems that lead to discoveries (insights) about the text and the life behind it (and the relationship between the two); as well as the age that produced same.

## B) DISCOVERIES (INSIGHTS):

'Discoveries' or 'insights' or 'intuitions' are different from 'problems' but are often related to them; thus equally a part of any sensitive reading of the text (or let's say a text that interests us enough to probe it deeply and perform a critical analysis of it).

'Discoveries' are things learned from the text or particular life or the two in combination. Not problems (answerable and unanswerable) per se but perceptions, insights, intuitions that arise from our engagement with the text. Here, possibly, we engage the creative rather than the critical intellect; here we become artists or creative thinkers in our own right--in the presence of the text; the text inspiring new and deeper worlds or realities within ourselves. . . .

What is at stake here is nothing less than a 'pedagogy': 'a means or system of enlarging or educating one's self'; of educating one's self within the worlds of literature, art, intellectual discourse.

## 7. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

Type name and seminar number at top of each assignment. Number and title assignments. All work should be composed on a computer and printed with a good quality printer (double-spaced). Poor quality dot-matrix printers are not acceptable. There are six assignments worth a total of 40% of the final

grade.

1. Due week of Oct. 21

A moment of illumination or self-realization within some natural setting. Use the Lamb, Wordsworth, and Rousseau essays as general models here. This should be a first-person narrative and should be composed in the language of a contemporary (a person writing in 2002 not 1800). 300 words--one double-spaced typed page.

2. Due week of Nov. 11

Brief essay on scene in WERTHER (scene to be determined). 1000 words--three double-spaced typed pages.

(Note: For this and the following mini-essays on literary works please unfold scene briefly and then analyze what the author does or attempts to do in the scene. Comment on any symbolism, imagery, irony employed by the author to achieve his purpose and also relate scene to the larger theme(s) of the work.)

3. Due week of Nov. 25  
Brief essay on some topic in van Gogh's life or work (topic to be assigned). 1000 words--three double-spaced typed pages.
4. Due week of Jan. 20  
Brief essay on some topic in Nietzsche's work (topic to be assigned). (1000 words--three double-spaced typed pages).
5. Due week of Feb. 24  
Brief essay on some topic in Joyce's novel (topic to be assigned). (1000 words--three double-spaced typed pages).
6. Due week of March 31  
Brief essay on some topic in Mann's novella DEATH IN VENICE (topic to be assigned). (1000 words--three double-spaced typed pages).

PLEASE NOTE: ALL WRITTEN WORK MUST BE SUBMITTED BY APRIL 7 (THIS IS A FACULTY OF ARTS REGULATION).

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#### APPENDIX: DRAMATIS PERSONAE

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Baudelaire, French poet 1821-1867  
 Beethoven, German composer 1770-1827  
 Berlioz, French composer 1803-1869  
 Blake, English poet & engraver 1757-1827  
 Braque, French painter 1882-1963  
 Bronowski, Polish scientist & humanist 1908-1974  
 Burckhardt, Swiss historian 1818-1897  
 Byron (Lord), English poet 1788-1824  
 Cézanne, French painter, 1839-1906  
 Chopin, Polish composer, 1810-1849  
 Clark (Sir), English art historian & gallery curator 1903-1985

Coleridge, English poet & essayist 1772-1834  
Conrad, Polish novelist 1857-1924  
Courbet, French painter 1819-1877  
Darwin, English naturalist 1809-1882  
David, French painter 1748-1825  
Delacroix, French painter 1798-1863  
Eliot, American poet 1888-1965  
Flaubert, French novelist 1821-1880  
Freud, Austrian psycho-analyst 1856-1939  
Gauguin, French painter 1848-1903  
Gericault, French painter 1791-1824  
Goethe, German poet, novelist, dramatist 1749-1832  
Gogh (van), Dutch painter 1853-1890  
Goya, Spanish painter 1746-1828  
Hegel, German philosopher 1770-1831  
Heine, German poet 1797-1856  
Hughes, British poet 1930-00  
Hugo, French poet & dramatist 1802-1885  
Ingres, French painter 1780-1867  
Joyce, Irish novelist 1882-1941  
Jung, Swiss psychiatrist 1875-1961  
Kafka, Czech novelist 1883-1924  
Kandinsky, Russian painter 1866-1944  
Kant, German philosopher 1724-1804  
Keats, English poet 1795-1821  
Kierkegaard, Danish philosopher 1813-1855  
Klee, Swiss painter 1879-1940  
Larkin, British poet 1922-1986  
Mahler, Austrian composer 1860-1911  
Mallarmé, French poet 1842-1898  
Manet, French painter 1832-1883  
Mann, German novelist 1875-1955  
Marx, German social philosopher 1818-1883  
Matisse, French painter 1869-1954  
Monet, French painter 1840-1926  
Munch, Norwegian painter 1863-1944  
Musil, Austria-Hungarian writer 1880-1942  
Napoleon, French Emperor 1769-1821  
Nerval, French poet 1808-1855  
Nietzsche, German philosopher 1844-1900  
Nolde, German painter 1867-1956  
Novalis, German poet & philosopher 1772-1801  
Olson, American poet 1910-1970

Picasso, Spanish painter 1881-1973  
Pissarro, West Indian (French) painter 1831-1903  
Plath, American poet 1932-1963  
Pound, American poet 1885-1972  
Ranke, German historian 1795-1886  
Rimbaud, French poet 1854-1891  
Rodin, French sculptor 1840-1917  
Roethke, American poet 1908-1963  
Rolfe (Baron Corvo), English writer 1860-1913  
Rousseau, Swiss man of letters 1712-1778  
de Sade, French writer 1740-1814  
Schlegel (A.), German poet & philosopher 1767-1853  
Schlegel (F.), German philosopher & critic 1772-1829  
Schopenhauer, German philosopher 1788-1860  
Scott, Scottish historical novelist 1771-1832  
Seurat, French painter 1859-1891  
Shelley, English poet 1792-1822  
de Staël (Madame), French novelist 1766-1817  
Stendhal, French writer 1783-1842  
Stevens, American poet 1879-1955  
Strauss (Richard), German composer 1864-1949  
Thoreau, American writer & naturalist 1817-1862  
Tolstoy, Russian novelist 1828-1910  
Turner, English painter 1775-1851  
Valéry, French poet 1871-1945  
Verdi, Italian composer (opera) 1813-1901  
Wagner, German composer 1813-1883  
Wharton, American novelist 1862-1937  
Whitman, American poet 1819-1892  
Williams, American poet 1883-1963  
Woolf, English novelist 1882-1941  
Wordsworth, English poet 1770-1850  
Yeats, Irish poet 1865-1939