

HUMANITIES 4620.06

WORKS & DAYS: ON HUMAN CREATIVITY

"The artist is the antennae of the age."  
Ezra Pound

"[Readers] might be pardoned for believing that these works--[these novels] were a manifestation of great power working under high pressure, that they came forth as it were, all in one breath. The greater the triumph for his morale: for the truth was that they were heaped up to greatness in layer after layer, through long day's of work, out of hundreds and hundreds of inspirations; they owed their excellence, both of mass and detail, to one thing and one alone; that their creator could hold out for years under the strain of the same piece of work, with endurance and tenacity of purpose devoting to actual composition none but his best and freshest hours."  
Thomas Mann, "Death in Venice"

"I feel that by writing I am doing what is far more necessary than anything else."  
Virginia Woolf

Course Director: Professor Matthew Corrigan  
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YORK UNIVERSITY

1. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The course will explore the creative process through the study of the lives and works of a select group of Modern writers, artists, and thinkers.

What does it mean to live creatively? How does one arrive at such a life? What are the criteria of success--for the artist and for his or her age? What role does the unconscious (collective and individual) play in the creative process? What links exist between

creativity and 'psychological disorder'? Why do some (great) artists live their lives 'posthumously' (to use Nietzsche's term)? These are some of the questions the course will attempt to answer.

We shall study certain key works plus whatever relevant biographical statements, journals, and essays we can find. Our task will be to enter the individual life and canon as deeply as possible--particularly to probe the relationship between the two; as well as to explore the nature and significance of human creativity generally.

2. COURSE FORMAT: Seminars once a week for three hours on Thurs. 2:30-4:30 pm. Founders College 202a (or Vanier Basement Lounge 029 if we can get it).

3. ASSIGNMENTS: Two seminar presentation. Students will also maintain an 'intellectual journal' or idea-book relating to the four figures chosen for study. (40 typed, double-spaced pages, due April 7.)

#### 4. GRADING:

Two seminar presentations--each worth 20% (total = 40% of grade).

Regular attendance at and (verbal) contribution to seminars, 20% of grade. (It is impossible to get an 'A' in the course without this attendance and participation grade. Students who miss an inordinate number of seminars will forfeit this grade.)

Intellectual Journal on the four figures chosen for study on the course, 40 TYPED, DOUBLE-SPACED PAGES, 40% of grade. Due Monday April 7, 2003 (Faculty of Arts regulation). (Journal is described below.)

5. REQUIRED READING: The course will focus on the following eight figures (and the works cited), though individual students shall be responsible for in-depth work on ONLY FOUR of these figures (one of whom must be Jung). These figures should be chosen within the first week of class.

STUDENTS should purchase the following:

Anthony Storr, THE DYNAMICS OF CREATION (Penguin).

Course Anthology prepared by instructor (WORKS & DAYS 4620), available from York

book store only (also on reserve in library).

Carl Jung, *THE ESSENTIAL JUNG*, ed. A. Storr (Princeton); *MEMORIES, DREAMS & REFLECTIONS*, ed. Aniela Jaffe (Vintage); *MAN & HIS SYMBOLS*.

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And choose the works of **THREE** of the following figures for in-depth study:

Vincent van Gogh, *THE LETTERS OF VINCENT VAN GOGH*, ed. Mark Roskill (Flamingo); plus any good anthology of the artist's paintings.

F. Nietzsche, *A NIETZSCHE READER*, ed. Hollingdale; *NIETZSCHE: ECCE HOMO*; *NIETZSCHE IN TURIN*, Lesley Chamberlain.

Thomas Mann, *DEATH IN VENICE AND SEVEN OTHER STORIES* (Vintage). Plus Mann material in *ANTHOLOGY*.

James Joyce, *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN*, ed. Chester Anderson (Viking Critical edition); *STEPHEN HERO* (New Directions).

Virginia Woolf, *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*, ed. Stella McNichol, intro. H. Lee (Penguin); *MOMENTS OF BEING*; *A WRITER'S DIARY*, ed. L. Woolf.

Malcolm Lowry, *UNDER THE VOLCANO*; *HEAR US O LORD FROM HEAVEN THY DWELLING PLACE*. Plus Lowry material in *ANTHOLOGY*.

Sylvia Plath, *SELECTED POEMS* (Faber); *THE JOURNALS OF SYLVIA PLATH* (Faber)

Note: we have chosen these artists because we have fairly rich and deep commentary on their struggles as artists--in the form of letters, journals, reflective essays, etc. Each was driven to understand his or her creativity and ruminated continuously on the difficulties of being a good artist. Not all artists are reflective in this way or have left us significant lucubrations on their struggles as artists.

## 6. SECONDARY READINGS:

Other works worth mentioning (we won't have time for them in the course): Gaston Bachelard, *THE POETICS OF SPACE*; M. Merleau-Ponty, *SENSE AND NON-SENSE*; Martin Heidegger (on van Gogh plus his essays on language and the act of poetry); Arthur Koestler, *THE ACT OF CREATION*; Rollo May, *THE COURAGE TO CREATE*;

CREATIVITY edited by P.E. Vernon; D.N. Perkins, THE MIND'S BEST WORK; Arnold Ludwig, THE PRICE OF CREATIVITY; J. D. Keehn, CREATIVITY & MADNESS; D. Jablow & Julien Lief, THE KEY TO GENIUS; Ernst Kris, PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATIONS IN ART; Anthony Storr, SOLITUDE; Kay Redfield, TOUCHED BY FIRE: MANIC DEPRESSIVE-ILLNESS AND THE ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT.

Plus Journals of Stendhal, Gide, Valery, Musil, Kafka, Mann, Nin, and hosts of others. You perhaps can add other artists to this list.

## 7. SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS:

The first presentation should be fairly specific, dealing with one of the texts (or part of a text) on the course. Collectively these reports should take us (and quickly) through the work and lives of all eight figures on the course. Please supply class with hand-outs that cover the topic and are valuable for future consultation by ourselves.

The second presentation (these begin in late January) may continue with same or cover a larger area or topic. They may be 'creative' in an individual sense (employing individual research and thinking), and should take us more deeply into the above figures and into the nature of creativity itself. Topics pertaining to classical music or films can also be considered.

Your approach should reflect your own interests, questions, insights, and should be as original as possible (especially in the second presentation). Overheads and any other media devices (VCR, Powerpoint, etc.) can be accommodated. PLEASE USE HANDOUTS FOR YOUR PRESENTATIONS. Be enterprising and creative!

There may be some overlap between the two presentations but this need not concern us.

Presentations should be about 45 minutes in length.

## 8. SCOPE OF COURSE:

Some questions and themes to help you hone your thinking and research.

1. What is human creativity? How does the individual become an artist? Are most works (bodies of work) ultimately 'autobiographical?' In what sense is the work a "portrait" of the artist? What lessons can be learned from examining the transmutation of 'life into art?'

2. What is the relationship between 'mental illness' and creativity? How does one articulate the problem? (Storr's book on CREATIVITY and Redfield's on manic-depressive illness (cited above) deal with this.)
3. Psychology and art. Does it help to approach art (creativity in the largest sense) psychologically or psychoanalytically?  
How best to do this (and not be jargon-ridden)?
4. Are artists "good people?" Does this matter if the work transcends human weakness and failure? What criteria might we arrive at here? Are works (lives) moral or immoral or amoral?
5. Is failure an issue with this particular artist or thinker (fear thereof)? Can the fear of failure spur the person on significantly? Is there a psychological type that relishes or seeks failure (van Gogh? Lowry?)--knowing that the work will benefit as a result?
6. "We are born posthumously," Nietzsche. Many great artists don't exist significantly within their own ages--but are discovered in a later age (after their deaths). How to account for this phenomenon? (Stendhal, Dickinson, Melville, Bruckner, Rolfe, Kafka--and, of course, Nietzsche himself are examples of this type.)
7. The artist and society. Does the serious artist truly belong in his or her age? Can his or her aspirations and vision be contained by the real world? Is the serious modern artist doomed to alienation? Have things changed significantly today from a hundred years ago--when almost all the great artists died unknown or were not appreciated (perceived) in their own age?
8. In what sense is the writer trying to remake his or her life in the work? Literally and symbolically trying to improve that life? Purify it? Forgive it its peccadillos or its cardinal sins? Is there a sense in which art becomes the real world for the artist--a world in which the artist becomes his or her own God--rules over his or her own universe? Art as compensation for life? Substitution for the bad life?
9. In what sense are Novalis's and Pound's dicta about the artist as the 'prophet' of civilization valid? Is the contemporary artist the "antennae of the race" or its worst symptom?
10. Art and responsibility. Does the artist have a responsibility to society or is 'art for art's sake' a viable and eternal dictum?
11. Biography and art? What rules can we set down for such investigations? Is the 'intentional fallacy' really a fallacy as some schools of criticism would have us believe?

12. High art versus low-brow art in the Modern age. Why is Modern art so serious? So humourless? Has high seriousness gone out of contemporary art? Has art degenerated as a result? Are some arts today (painting?) in worse shape than others? Have certain kinds of artist become extinct?

13. Art and the 'spiritual quest.' In what senses does art become a substitute for religion? (Van Gogh? Rolfé? Lowry?)

14. Check out Harold Bloom's lovely essay on the "the anxiety of influence"--about how artists always have other artists (the great artists from the past) looking over their shoulder. Artists need yet spurn their mentors--usually from another age. How does this process of mentoring work? Must we have mentors?

15. Other questions you might raise yourselves. Remember the course is your course. It will be what you choose to make it.

## 9. CHRONOLOGY:

We shall study the authors and texts in the following order:

Jung, MEMORIES; THE ESSENTIAL JUNG; MAN & HIS SYMBOLS. Students should read all three works.

Then the following (where you have a choice):

F. Nietzsche, A NIETZSCHE READER, ed. Hollingdale; NIETZSCHE: ECCE HOMO; NIETZSCHE IN TURIN, Lesley Chamberlain.

Joyce, STEPHEN HERO; A PORTRAIT

Mann, STORIES

Woolf, MOMENTS; LIGHTHOUSE; JOURNAL

Lowry, HEAR US O LORD (novella "Forest path to Spring"); letters in Anthology. (Also Lowry's novel masterpiece--UNDER THE VOLCANO if you have time.)

Plath, JOURNALS; ARIEL

Then all students: Anthony Storr, CREATIVITY

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## 10. SOME REFLECTIONS ON KEEPING A GOOD INTELLECTUAL JOURNAL (ONE YOU WILL KEEP FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE):

"The aphorism, the apophthegm, are the forms of eternity; my ambition is to say in ten sentences what everyone else says in a book--what everyone else does not say in a book."  
(F. Nietzsche)

"There is no theory that is not a fragment carefully prepared of some autobiography." (P. Valéry)

The Journal or 'fragment' form lies at the heart of the Romantic and Modern enterprises. Nearly all of the dramatis personae of the period retain significant Journals (significant to them and to ourselves): Novalis, Coleridge, Stendhal, Delacroix, Kierkegaard, Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Valéry, Mann, Musil, Woolf, Joyce, Pound, Gide, Kafka, Schönberg, Klee, Camus, Wittgenstein, Auden, Cioran, and others.

Erich Kahler claims that "the most appropriate literary forms of the German Romantics are the fragments."

The Journal or 'fragment' gives way to new forms in Nietzsche, Pound, Eliot, Klee, Wittgenstein, and in our own day, a host of poets and prose fiction writers (C. Olson, A. Ammons, D. Levertov, A. Rich, W. Gass, L. Michaels, etc.).

It gives way to aesthetic principles such as the aphorism (Nietzsche), inscape (Hopkins), epiphany (Joyce), imagism (H.D.), ideogram (Pound), moment of being (Woolf), objective correlative (Eliot).

More practically, a Critical Journal allows a student to cover a range of topics and to do so in some depth (3-5 typed, double-spaced pages per topic). Think of the entry, if you like, as a mini or distilled essay; an essay shorn of excess and dead (rhetorical) weight. The three or so pages at the heart of every twenty page essay (in which three pages you really say something).

Remember: The entry should be a 'critical' exploration, an 'intellectual and emotional engagement' or 'dialogue' with the topic chosen for discussion (poem, prose piece, painting, idea, whatever). Here we might invoke Coleridge's dictum that "deep thinking is attainable only by an individual of deep feeling." **THE JOURNAL ENTRY MUST SAY SOMETHING AND NOT MERELY BE A REGURGITATION OR EMOTIONAL**

REACTION TO THE TOPIC UNDER DISCUSSION. IT SHOULD FOCUS ON THE TEXT AT HAND AND PROVIDE THE READER WITH INSIGHT INTO THAT WORK. IT MAKE A LEGITIMATE DISCOVERY OF SOME KIND.

Avoid: biographical or plot summaries; summaries of lectures; encyclopedia-like summaries; diatribe; personal responses ("I like the way Joyce depicts Stephen's burgeoning consciousness. . . ." Keep the personal voice muted--'I' itself should be avoided if possible though everywhere implied.

A good Journal arrests the reader's attention; it reveals the 'quality of the mind of the writer' (as Henry James nicely puts it); it should define or circumscribe some specific problem.

Suggestions: Keep a rough, general Course Journal in which you collect notes from tutorials, readings, discussions; problems re course; discoveries; etc. The journal you submit for a grade should be DISTILLATIONS OR REWORKINGS OF IDEAS IN THIS GENERAL JOURNAL (THE BEST OF IT, in a sense). THE JOURNALS SHOULD SHOW HOW DEEPLY YOU HAVE PASSED THROUGH THE MATERIAL OF THE COURSE (THE TEXTS OF THE COURSE). IT SHOULDN'T BE SOMETHING YOU COULD HAVE WRITTEN BEFORE TAKING THE COURSE.

Please submit one sample of Journal (3 pp.) by November 21. And another sample (3 pp.) by February 10--so that I can see you are on track. (You may submit a sample earlier if you wish.)

Journals should focus on the four figures chosen for study (Jung plus three others).

Completed Journals (40 TYPED, DOUBLE-SPACED PAGES), must be received by Monday April 7 (this is a Faculty of Arts regulation).

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## 11. SOME GUIDELINES FOR THE PRESENTATIONS:

Please remember that your task is to TEACH the class--to introduce members to unknown artists, texts, problems, etc.

Remember students in the class come from different disciplines--and need some introduction to the figures we are now examining in detail. Don't assume everyone has read these authors and texts.

Introduce the work as if to an intelligent first year class--setting down the necessary



groundwork; stressing essentials; asking salient and significant questions; and--of course, keeping the larger focus on 'creativity.' Please also consult the checklist below on 'points to stress.'

For example, if presenting Joyce the student should keep the following in mind. These works (PORTRAIT particularly) are masterful discussions--treatises in effect--on becoming an ARTIST, written by one of the great writers of all time. They are also books about consciousness and language--how we inherit and come to be masters of both; thus books that should be of interest to every educated person. In PORTRAIT the style evolves with the consciousness of the book (and Stephen's intellectual and sensual burgeoning); likewise the questions posed and answered by that consciousness.

## 12. CHECKLIST FOR THE PRESENTATIONS

You should cover most, if not all, of these points in your presentations.

- 1) Individual's struggles to become an artist (what stands out: home life, (dominant?) parent(s), education, passions, hang-ups, neuroses, etc.).
- 2) Point at which individual realizes his/ her genius.
- 3) Nature of that genius; obstacles to its easy realization
- 4) Characteristics of early work.
- 5) Point at which work 'comes into its own' ('knows itself,' in Jungian terms). Technical breakthroughs and what they represent.
- 6) Reflections on the work by artist himself/herself (in journals, letters).
- 7) Nature of most significant work (autobiographical elements).
- 8) How life becomes 'art' for this individual (describe relationship between two).
- 9) How life is lived. Development of the work.
- 10) Reception of work by age and effects.
- 11) Other problems?

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