UWS 26A: Comedy and Sympathy

Instructor Steven Plunkett
Office: Rabb 339b
M, T and Th 1:30-3:50
Office Phone: x68374
Location Rabb 338
Mailbox in English Dept. Office (Rabb)
e-mail: swp10@brandeis.edu
Office hours: M 10:00-11:00am
12:00

What does it mean to find something funny? When we laugh, must we laugh at something or someone? Why do I sometimes feel such keen discomfort when watching reruns of *I Love Lucy* or *The Office*? Such notorious killjoys as Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, and Immanuel Kant have given their attention to humor, and their evaluations haven't always been positive. Some claim that laughter must necessarily be an expression of contempt for another, that enjoyment of comedy encourages coarseness of feeling and deadens our sympathy for others. These thinkers say that comedy transforms our neighbors' pain and humiliation into entertainment. Certainly, racist or sexist humor seems to operate on this principle, and as the saying goes — most often attributed to Mel Brooks — "Tragedy is when I cut my finger; comedy is when you fall down an open manhole and die." However, there are also those who claim that laughter encourages human sympathy and community. Comedy, they claim, can both unite us in common understanding and help us get outside of our petty jealousies and prejudices by giving us a new perspective on the world. Humor, it turns out, may make us more able to care about each other and to understand our world. It may even be one of the more valuable forms of intellectual inquiry available to curious and sympathetic thinkers.

This course sets out to investigate the relationship between our capacity to enjoy comedy and our ability to appreciate the experiences of others, and seeks to provide interested students the opportunity to sharpen their academic skills and to deepen their analytic habits of mind. We will examine the real and supposed tensions between comedy and sympathy by carefully considering key ideas from a variety of disciplines and by closely examining examples of humor from literature, the visual arts, and performances in television or film. The question of what we find funny and how we ought to regard that feeling offers ample opportunity to rigorously investigate examples of humor, to engage critically the often contentious scholarship that considers that question, and to produce original research suggesting some kind of answer to it over the course of three substantive essay assignments. Students will leave the course with experience in applying essential strategies for framing and working through analytic questions in writing, amply prepared to begin with confidence their scholastic careers at Brandeis.

**Note:** this is a special, one-time UWS offering that will not be available during the academic year.
Required Texts
Nancy Sommers et al, *A Writer’s Reference*
Rosenwasser and Stephen, *Writing Analytically*
*Engravings By Hogarth*, Ed. Sean Shesgreen
Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*
Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, “They Say/I Say”
All other readings will consist of handouts or be covered in a course packet

Grading
Assignment 1: 20%
Assignment 2: 25%
Assignment 3: 30%
Portfolio: 5%
Pre-Draft Exercises: 5%
Participation: 15%

Papers
You will produce three major essays, each featuring an argument
built around the materials that make up one of the course’s three units. Your work will
build toward the articulation of an original theory of satire informed by your own
research and the work which we will do in class each day. To prepare for this task, we
will work with several extant theories of satire in order to get familiar with the process of
analytic argumentation and to learn the shape of the field. Drafts of each essay will be
due one and one-half weeks before the final drafts are due. Prior to the composition of a
draft of each paper, two smaller pre-draft exercises will be assigned in order to help you
get a feel for each unit and aid in the development of a draft. All written assignments
must be double-spaced in 12-point font and must conform to MLA standards or those of a
comparable system (Chicago, APA, etc). All citations should also conform to MLA
standards or those of a comparable system. Also know that I do not accept assignment
submissions by e-mail: you must hand in paper copies of all written work. The essay
assignments are as follows:

The Close Reading: Your first assignment will give you the opportunity to make a sound
and engaging original argument about what makes a particular comic text unique by
giving special attention to particular moments within it. Specifically, you’ll be using the
careful attention you give to a supposedly comic text in order to think critically about a
troubling but popular theory of comedy forwarded by professional wet blanket Thomas
Hobbes. All analytic arguments begin with the analysis of evidence, and all of them
develop through careful analysis of that evidence—analysis that both accounts for the
whole of the text and provides needed insight into the question under examination.

The Lens Analysis: Your second assignment builds upon the skills you demonstrate in
your first by allowing you to assess the arguments of a fellow scholar with specific
reference to a difficult test case. Specifically, we’ll be putting pressure on a strongly
stated case for the possibility of sympathy in fiction, provided by Martha Nussbaum.
We’ll be squeezing it by seeing how it can cope with describing a novel known for its
pessimistic and ironic distance from its characters and its readers: *Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut. In this assignment, you’ll be dealing with a theory of cognition that’s more complete and therefore demands to be taken more seriously. This next step will allow you to integrate ideas from other scholars into an original argument while still providing them with rigorous analysis and testing their conclusions. University-level scholarly work demands engagement with existing theories and arguments, and you must develop habits of analysis that will allow you to consider and express the relationship between your own ideas and those of other thinkers.

The Researched Argument: The third and final assignment allows you to formulate a longer and more complex argument that is bolstered by original research. You will be articulating an original argument that proceeds on your own terms, one that engages a comic (or tragicomic or partially comic) text of your own choosing and a theory of sympathy or comedy in a way that revises or furthers our understanding of the field. Such an activity requires the effective management of primary and secondary sources without losing control of your own voice and argument. This is the culmination of our semester’s hard work, and it will require that you do for yourself what we’ve been seeing done by the theorists of satire we’ve read. This is your chance to say something substantive and original about the nature of comedy and sympathy with reference to an example of your own choosing.

**Drafting**

Writing takes place through recurring processes of drafting, revision, and editing. If you’re going to produce academic work that’s up to the tasks the university sets for you, you must develop successful, flexible strategies for drafting. To that end, this course places considerable emphasis on the processes of drafting and revision. Each essay assignment requires the production of at least one draft, and each draft will go through one round of peer review with select members of this seminar. I will also discuss each draft with you once in a one-on-one conference in my office. The feedback you receive from each of these sessions will inform your revision process and give you some help in revising your draft into a stronger argument. Failure to produce a good-faith draft that at least sketches out the major movements of your argument guarantees failure of the assignment. Good writing is good thinking, and the only way to think things through is to get comfortable with your ideas. Furthermore, getting comfortable with your own ideas frequently involves the ability to reflect critically upon your own writing process. Expect to do plenty of both in pursuit of good writing.

**Class Participation**

You are expected to participate in class discussions and peer review workshops. After all, this course is all about how to generate and analyze ideas, and class discussion gives you a chance to do exactly that long before you put any words to paper. I expect you to say something every day.

You are also expected to have read the assigned readings for the day that they appear on the syllabus. Come to class having read and understood the assigned readings, and with your own questions and observations on each. You should have something substantive to
say about everything we read, and it helps to write questions or observations in the margins of our readings. I expect active engagement with our readings.

Conferences
I have set aside one hour on Monday and one hour on Thursday as walk-in office hours. During those two hours, you may stop by my office without having made an appointment and I will be available to speak with you about an assignment, a reading, the course, or the finer points of the English language. I always enjoy getting visitors during my office hours, so you’re welcome to come as frequently as you like, but everyone must see me once about each essay for a meeting of 15-20 minutes in length. As due dates approach, my office hours may get very busy, so plan accordingly and make use of the appointment sign-up form on latte. Note that each of the three mandatory one-on-one meetings with me counts toward class attendance: **skipping an appointment with me is the same as skipping a class session. If you miss an appointment with me I will not be able to schedule another with you.**

Peer Review
An essential part of becoming a better scholar is getting the chance to see and respond to the work of others, and getting an outside opinion is a key element in the production of strong writing. Accordingly, you will spend a day of each unit discussing each others’ papers in small groups of two to three students. The day that the rough draft is due, bring a copy for each member of your group and exchange drafts with them. Then read the drafts that you’ve been given and mark them up with helpful suggestions, indicate strong or well-argued passages, and jot down a few questions you are left with; you will be given a handout to help you organize your thoughts. You must also prepare peer review letters that you will share with each other and with me: these letters serve as the basis for evaluation of your participation in the peer review process. On peer review day, bring back your annotated drafts and discuss them in your peer review groups. Positive feedback and constructive criticism fuel the revision process; new perspectives on your work.

Portfolios
Please retain all pre-draft exercises, drafts (including copies marked up by the other members of your peer review groups), and final papers in a folder. You will be required to turn this folder in to me each time an essay is due, adding to it each time you complete a new assignment. You will hand all of this material in to me one final time at the end of the semester.

Attendance
If you are going to miss a class due to sickness or some other reason, please let me know beforehand by e-mail: you are allowed a total of three absences before being penalized. However, more than three absences will profoundly affect the grade you receive in the course, as stipulated by university writing program policy. So, choose your absences carefully. If you are late to class three times, it will count as one absence. Note that skipping an appointment with me counts as an absence. I’m only allowed to excuse an absence if I’ve discussed it with your advisor at the department of Academic Services.
Late Papers
Late assignments will not be tolerated in this course: your final grade will drop one full letter grade for each day that it is late (an “A” paper turned in two days late will get a final grade of “C”). However, I am willing to provide extensions if you speak to me at least one week in advance of the final due date. The due date for final drafts is flexible, but you must never be late in providing drafts to your peer review groups: they will be quite unhappy with you and so will I.

A Note on the Definition of Comedy
Some people disinclined to sustained serious analytic inquiry have disallowed critical consideration of what they find funny on the basis that “it’s just funny, man. Lay off. Don’t you know how to take a joke? If anything I deserve an A for that, so why are you calling the police?” This is obviously unhelpful, and yet as will probably become clear to you over the course of the semester as you encounter the varied attempts at comedy that make up the course, it seems like different people really do have very different ideas about what’s funny and about what makes something funny. I plan to get around this difficulty by making clear that we’re discussing the qualities of texts that seem to make them funny to other people. Everything we’re reading has been anthologized or at least described enthusiastically as a clear example of comedy or humor. I’m interested in understanding what would make somebody think that something is funny (instead of, say, boring or horrible or guilt-inducing) and not in whether or not I would agree. We’re interested in inferring why or how somebody would find our texts funny, and you should not plan on giving up at any point because subjective tastes exist. The interesting thing is actually what assumptions make subjective tastes possible.

A Note on the Readings
There is a strong historic link between humor and discomfort, and as you may discover in our third unit, that link has given rise to some interesting and some lame theories of comedy. This course is partially predicated on the notion that often what is funny also makes us uncomfortable. I chose some of our course readings because they make me really uncomfortable. It helps if you’re willing to think analytically about how and why a text becomes awkward or uncomfortable. However, I don’t want you to feel obligated to encounter anything you’d really rather not. You should be able to preview pretty much everything in our course. If you want an alternative reading provided for any of our readings, come share your concerns with me and I can set you up with an alternative text.

Academic Honesty
Plagiarism is a serious offence and it will be treated as such in this course. You are expected to adhere to university standards of academic honesty at all times during your career as a scholar at this institution, and this course is no exception. The university’s policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as Section 5 of your Rights and Responsibilities handbook. All instances of academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for referral to the Student Judicial System, wherein students typically face very serious sanctions. If you have any questions about my expectations,
don’t hesitate to speak with me. The authorities place the burden squarely on you if you have any lingering questions.

**Documented Disabilities**
If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to discuss possible measures of accommodation, please see me after class or in my office as soon as possible.

**Laptop Policy**
Unless the documentation for your documented disability requires you to have one in class, you may not use laptops in class. Analog note-taking is an invaluable skill and I demand that all my students get adequate practice with it.

**Course Schedule (Subject to Change with Sufficient Notice)**
**Unit One: The Sympathy in Comedy**

**Mon Jul 10**  
Introduction and diagnostic essay

**Tue Jul 11**  
Due: Pre-Draft Assignment 1.1  
Read: Hogarth, William: *Beer Street and Gin Lane*  
*Industry and Idleness*  
Chapter 1 of *WA*  
Chapter 2 of *WA*

**Th Jul 13**  
Due: Pre-Draft 1.2  
Read: Chapter 4 of *WA*  
Chapter 5 of *WA*  
Chapter 6 of *WA* (the most important one—you might read it twice)  
Example Student Essay (Handout)  
*Write Now* Close Reading: Brianna Mussman’s essay on *Rear Window*

**Mon Jul 17**  
Due: Rough Draft of Essay One  
Read: Graff and Birkenstein: “Preface” and “Introduction”  
Revised Student Essay  
Chapter 11 of *WA*

**Tue Jul 18**  
In-Class Peer Review Workshop  
Bring: Graff and Birkenstein  
Read: Nussbaum, Martha: “The Old Education and the Think Academy”  
“The Narrative Imagination” 85-99  
*Write Now*: “What to do with a Reading”  
“What to do with Secondary Sources”
**Unit Two:**  
**A Theory of Sympathy Reluctantly Allows Comedy to Move in for a While: Can They Live Together Without Driving Each Other Crazy?**

*Th Jul 20*  
Read: Nussbaum, Martha: “The Narrative Imagination” 99-113  
Vonnegut, Kurt: *Breakfast of Champions*, “Preface” and Ch. 1-15

*Mon Jul 24*  
Due: Pre-Draft 2.2  
Read: Vonnegut, Kurt: *Breakfast of Champions*, Ch. 16-24 and “Epilogue”  
Example essay (Handout)  
Graff and Birkensten 19-29

*Tue Jul 25*  
Due: Rough Draft of Essay 2  
Read: *Write Now*: Brandon Souza’s essay on *Franny and Zooey*  
Graff and Birkenstein: 30-51

*Th Jul 27*  
In-Class Peer Review Workshop  
Read: Graff and Birkenstein: 92-101  
Haralovich, Mary Beth: “Sitcoms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950’s Homemaker”  
*Write Now*: “Plagiarism and the Logic of Citation”  
Watch: *The Simpsons*: “King-Size Homer”

**Unit Three: Your Original Argument about Comedy and Sympathy**

*Mon Jul 31*  
Read: Henry, Matthew: “The Triumph of Popular Culture: Situation Comedy, Postmodernism, and *The Simpsons*”  
Watch: *Community*: “Physical Education”  
Due: Final Draft of Essay 2

*Tue Aug 1*  
Due: Research Proposal (Pre-Draft 3.1)  
Watch: *Freaks and Geeks*: “I’m With the Band”  
Read: Zunshine, Lisa: *Getting Inside your Head*, Ch. 2 and 4  
McConchie, Bruce: *Engaging Audiences* 98-120

*Th Aug 3*  
Due: Annotated Bibliography (Pre-Draft 3.2)  
Read: Example Student Essay (Handout)  
Kerry Walk on Motive (Handout)  
Graff and Birkenstein: 145-55

*Mon Aug 7*  
Due: Draft of Essay 3
Read: Research Essay in *Write Now*

**Tue Aug 8**  
In-Class Peer Review Workshop

**Fri Aug 11**  
Final Portfolios Due by 5:00 P.M. in the usual box, which will be near my English Department Mailbox
Pre-Draft Assignment 1.1
Due Tuesday, July 12

The first step in producing a close reading is making certain that you have a clear understanding of the piece you’re reading. To that end, your first assignment will be to read a passage from a poem and to translate its rather elaborate verse into contemporary American English prose. The poem is actually half of a poem, the first 30 lines of “A Description of a City Shower” by Jonathan Swift. We’ll be discussing the rest on Thursday, and if you write about the poem for your first essay assignment, be sure to use all 63 lines. Somebody out there thinks this poem is funny enough to anthologize, so much so that it’s been used as an example of humorous verse, satiric verse, and parodic verse. Perhaps discussion of why could make for part of our lesson on Thursday. For now, though, I’d like us to stick to translating Swift’s verse into prose that might come out of the mouth of an American born after 1980. For example, a passage that looks like this (drawn from the opening of “Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift,” also by Jonathan Swift, as it happens)

As Rochefoucauld his maxims drew
From nature, I believe ‘em true:
They argue no corrupted mind
In him; the fault is in mankind.

would probably gloss into modern English prose most clearly in a manner like this:

“Since Rochefoucauld drew his maxims from nature, I believe that they are true: they do not argue for a corrupted mind in him, but rather show the fault to be in mankind.”

Notice that while I had to add some words to make Swift’s meaning more clear (“As” can be ambiguous, but the following lines demonstrate that Swift’s sense is probably closest to our modern use of “since”), I also attempted to keep Swift’s sentence intact. While you will probably need to move some words and clauses around to preserve modern sentence structures, do your best to keep your moderns English sentences the same as Swift’s eighteenth-century ones (this will help you to keep track of the subject, verb, and object in each sentence).

Additionally, keep track of each word or phrase that you find yourself needing to look up and include a list of them at the end of your translation, along with mention of the source you used to find out what they mean. For example to make sense of the passage above, I needed to consult the online edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* to learn that Francois de la Rochefoucauld was a French satirist of the Seventeenth Century known for his cynical and pessimistic maxims. I also checked the online edition of the Oxford English Dictionary in order to learn that maxims are short statements that express observations about human nature or experience. **If you need to use a dictionary, make certain that it is the Oxford English Dictionary;** the OED is an invaluable tool to scholars of all stripes for reasons I’ll stress in class on Monday, and you need to get comfortable with using it as quickly as you can. The Oxford English Dictionary can be found online through the Brandeis University Library webpage (http://resources.library.brandeis.edu/login?url=http://www.oed.com). As mentioned above, the passage you’ll be translating is the first half of Swift’s “A Description of a City Shower,” which I’ve reproduced on the next page:
A Description of a City Shower

Careful observers may foretell the hour
(By sure prognostics) when to dread a shower:
While rain depends, the pensive cat gives o’er
Her frolics, and pursues her tail no more.
Returning home at night, you’ll find the sink
Strike your offended sense with double stink.
If you be wise, then go not far to dine;
You’ll spend in coach hire more than save in wine.
A coming shower your shooting corns presage,
Old aches throb, your hollow tooth will rage.
Sauntering in coffeehouses is Dulman seen;
He damns the climate and complains of spleen.
Meanwhile the South, rising with dabbled wings,
A sable cloud athwart the welkin flings,
That swilled more liquor than it could contain,
And, like a drunkard, gives it up again.
Brisk Susan whips her linen from the rope,
While the first drizzling shower is borne aslope:
Such is that sprinkling which some careless quean
Flirts on you from her mop, but not so clean:
You fly, invoke the gods; then turning, stop
To rail; she singing, still whirls on her mop.
Not yet the dust had shunned the unequal strife,
But, aided by the wind, fought still for life,
And wafted with its foe by violent gust,
‘Twas doubtful which was rain and which was dust.
Ah! where must needy poet seek for aid,
When dust and rain at once his coat invade?
Sole coat, where dust cemented by the rain
Erects the nap, and leaves a mingled stain.

Keep in mind that you want a prose translation that is clear to you and that accurately reflects the content of the poem. Paying attention to the structure of the verse and the effect of the meter and line breaks is an excellent thing to do, and that’s part of Monday’s class. However, as Rosenwasser and Stephen make clear, we need to start with the text alone and a good sense of its literal meaning and figurative implications before we move on.
Pre-Draft Assignment 1.2
Due: Thursday, July 14

Now that you’ve had some time to read a variety of texts, it’s time to get the raw materials together for a draft. I’d like this pre-draft assignment to give you a chance to apply some techniques of close-reading as tools to help you determine a provisional response to Hobbes. The challenge of the moment is to determine whether Hobbes is right or wrong about one of our texts, and to what degree. To do that, I’d like you to choose one of our readings (either Sedaris, Handy, Swift, Thurber, Moore, or Saunders) and to perform with it the following steps:

1. Summarize what you think Hobbes would say about your chosen text. If you like, you can write this summary in his dreadful late-Renaissance prose style so long as the expression is clear enough that I’d be able to understand it. I’m asking for maybe two sentences that describe the text from Hobbes’ point of view. Would he say that it fits easily into his theory? Would he be enthusiastic about it?
2. Pull two or three quotes from your chosen work that seem to you to conform to Hobbes’ theory of laughter (or LAUGHTER if you prefer). Write a sentence or two for each explaining why this quote would be so significant for Hobbes.
3. Make your best case for why Hobbes might not be able to explain completely or satisfactorily your chosen comic text. Are there important ways in which he’s wrong or hasty in calling humor a sadistic delight taken in the misery of another?
4. Grab three or four passages from your chosen text that trouble or qualify Hobbes, or show him to be absolutely mistaken. Write two or three sentences about each passage that explain what interesting thing about them challenges or qualifies Hobbes. Describe their significance to the text and to our understanding of humor as something more or other than what Hobbes describes.
5. Write two or three sentences explaining the implications of all of this for Hobbes’ theory. Is he correct? Incorrect? Can he be revised, or is your evidence so significant that we must toss his claims and begin anew?
Essay Assignment One: Feel Bad for Laughing, or Prove you Shouldn’t

Thomas Hobbes defines humor in the following way:

There is a passion which hath no name, but the sign of it is that distortion of the countenance we call LAUGHTER, which is always joy; but what joy, what we think, and wherein we triumph when we laugh, hath not hitherto been declared by any. That it consisteth in wit, or, as they call it, in the jest, this experience confuteth: for men laugh at mischances and indecencies, wherein there lieth no wit or jest at all […] I may therefore conclude, that the passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others, or with our own formerly: for men laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance, except they bring with them any present dishonor. It is no wonder therefore that men take it heinously to be laughed at or derided, that is, triumphed over. Laughter without offence, must be at infirmities abstracted from persons, and where all the company may laugh together.

Actually, my assertion above isn’t exactly true: as we can see, Hobbes doesn’t have a name for what he describes because what we call comedy or humor didn’t have a name until the Nineteenth Century or so. All the same, Hobbes is trying his best to describe the experience of finding something funny—and he does it by telling us that when we laugh we respond to something very specific in the thing we find funny. That thing is the realization that the object of our attention is our inferior, our sudden understanding that we are better than the poor sucker slipping on a banana peel or dying at the age of seven. You might very well take exception to that if you believe you: a) enjoy comedy and b) aren’t a black-hearted monster. So this definition of comedy gives us opportunity to think seriously about what happens in texts like the ones we’ve read in this portion of the course.

It is now your task to put this definition to the test. Using one of the text we’ve read so far (choose from Thurber, Moore, Sedaris, Swift, Handy, or Saunders), you must test Hobbes’ claims by means of extended analysis. All of these texts have been anthologized by readers convinced that these stories are, in fact, funny (Aside from what’s apparent in our course packs, Thurber’s been anthologized in Fierce Pajamas, Saunders in Disquiet Please!, and Sedaris on This American Life (and in Disquiet, Please!). Swift’s presence in the Norton Anthology isn’t necessarily testimony that the editors used him as an example of humorous verse, but he appears in The Oxford Book of Comic Verse). So they give us an interesting occasion to discuss what gets categorized as funny without any of us having to decide for ourselves if we find something amusing. Does your text follow predictions Hobbes gives us? Do they texts work by giving us the means to realize our own superiority over the people in these stories? To what might the editors who chose these texts respond when they decide they’re funny enough to reproduce? Does any possibility for sympathy exist in any of them, and if so is it important to what happens in the text? If the truth is more complicated or interesting than Hobbes suggests, can we revise or expand his claims, or should we toss them out as misanthropic buzz-killing?
Remember that you must not only make a claim for how well the work meets the definition, but also interrogate the definition with your chosen work. In other words, your argument must make an original claim that not only applies the definition, but calls it into question as well. Papers should be 5-7 pages long and formatted according to the guidelines established in the syllabus.

Your Goals

You must formulate a thesis that makes a stimulating, non-obvious, and arguable claim about how well a work we’ve read fits the definition Hobbes provides. Of course, none of the texts we’ve read can be perfectly described by such a definition, and an argument asserting so will be both woefully incomplete and incredibly boring to write. Conversely, an argument claiming that Hobbes’s definition is wholly without merit and completely useless is quite likely underdeveloped as well, and in need of serious revision. We need theses that evolve. Your argument ought to proceed by acknowledging objections to every piece of analysis, and doing so in a way that ensures the thesis becomes more complete and wide-ranging than was possible at the start of the essay. Basically, you are trying to persuade a skeptical reader with an argument that is arguable, is well-reasoned, and considers fairly any likely objections. To do that, you’ve got to give Hobbes credit for what he might get right and to challenge him where he falls short.

You must support your thesis with solid examples drawn from the text you are discussing. The key to the success of any close reading is in the strength of the explication of specific moments within the text. Take a careful look at places in your chosen work that seem especially important to your chosen work and explain what makes them so. What is being said, and how do you know? Of what importance is this specific moment to the whole of the work? How does this point build upon what has come before, and how do subsequent moments relate to it? You’ll want to draw a reader’s attention to specific points in the text through selective quotation and citation, but remember that a quote can’t explain itself and that you must explain why each moment is so significant.

You must structure your argument in a way that makes sense and helps make your case. You need a thesis that evolves. Rosenwasser and Stephen have given us an invaluable guide to analysis at the university level. Give some thought to the way that your paragraphs fit together to make a whole. Does each successive moment of analysis follow from the last? Can a reader follow the progression of your argument from beginning to end and understand why it looks the way that it does? Remember that a successful argument is able to incorporate a variety of different claims and examples into the framework of a larger organizing thesis in a way that is logical and complete. Make sure each moment in your argument adds something to the whole and has a place in the whole that makes sense.

Consider your reader. Assume that you are addressing a good-natured but skeptical reader who has a general knowledge of your text but is lacking in specific knowledge. Remember to provide brief moments in your argument to remind your reader of what is
going on more generally in your chosen work when discussing a specific example, andnever assume that your reader will automatically see things the same way that you do orinevitably draw the same conclusions as you. Your relationship with your readers shouldbe one where you prove to them that your argument has merit and one where you showthem how you reached your conclusions.

**Use consistent and appropriate citation.** You’ll only be quoting from one work this
time around and need not concern yourself with citing the Swift quote, should you decide
to use them. Nevertheless, it is important to clearly identify the places in the text you pay
specific attention to or quote directly. All citations should be consistent with MLA
standards or comparable systems. If you’re quoting a poem, note that individual lines are
separated by a “/” when quoted together.

**Make the most of the inherent variety and nuance of the English language.** Nothing
bogs down a promising argument faster than endlessly repeated terms and frequent
conjugation of “to be.” Do your best to find fresh, active verbs and dazzle me with your
expansive vocabulary.
Essay One Rough Draft Cover Letter

Please write a relatively brief (about one single-spaced page) cover letter to go with your rough draft. In this letter, you should answer the following questions and address any other concerns you might have or any other issues that you are dealing with:

-What are the origins of this draft?

-What do you see as your thesis?

-What do you see as your biggest writing-related problems right now? What do you consider to be your most successful accomplishments thus far?

-What sentence or turn of phrase are you most proud of in this draft? Is there one with which you are particularly unhappy? Why?

-What element of your essay—thesis, structure, use of evidence, analysis, style—would you be most interested in having your respondents focus upon in their comments?

-What do you intend to focus upon most heavily when you revise your essay? How will you do so?

Remember to bring enough copies for myself and the other members of your peer review workshop and to attach them to the copies of your draft.