

QUESTIONS ON AUTHORS IN C19-21 BRITISH LITERATURE

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***2023 Note:** This document's contents are approximately a decade old, so some links may no longer function, and page numbers need updating to the latest edition/s. The document includes versions of my study questions from E222 American Literature from Twain to the Present surveys.

AUTHORS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Cheever, John

Chopin, Kate

Cummings, E. E.

Dickinson, Emily

Eliot, T. S.

Faulkner, William

Frost, Robert

Ginsberg, Allen

Hemingway, Ernest

Hughes, Langston

Hurston, Zora Neale

James, Henry

London, Jack

O'Connor, Flannery

Sandburg, Carl

Shephard, Sam

Stevens, Wallace

Turner, Frederick Jackson

Twain, Mark

Whitman, Walt

Williams, William Carlos

EDITIONS

Nina Baym, et al. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Eighth Edition. Paperback. Package 2: Vols. C, D, E. ISBN-13: 978-0-393-91310-1.

London, Jack. *Tales of the Pacific*. New York: Penguin, 1989. ISBN-13: 978-0-140-18358-0.

JOHN CHEEVER

“The Swimmer” (Norton Vol. E 157-65).

“The Swimmer” (Norton Vol. E 157-65)

1. On page 157 of “The Swimmer,” the story opens on a midsummer’s day and everyone seems to have been drinking. Consider the role that alcohol plays in this story from here on out – how might alcohol consumption be thought to correlate to Neddy Merrill’s illusions and, more broadly, his way of life and outlook?
2. On pages 157-59 of “The Swimmer,” what initial description and characterization of Neddy Merrill does the narrator give us, and what seems to spark the idea of making his way home from the Westerhazys’ poolside party by swimming through all the pools in the neighborhood? How does this strange voyage begin? What is Neddy’s navigation plan and how does he handle his interactions with some of the first neighbors he encounters during his trip?
3. On pages 160-161 of “The Swimmer,” a storm kicks up while Neddy Merrill is swimming his way home. How does he react to the storm at first? What unpleasant circumstances soon confront him, however, and what troubling insight comes his way as a result of them? Moreover, how does the narrator’s description at this point suggest that the story is veering away from simple

realism and towards the inclusion of a symbolic dimension accompanying Neddy's trip?

4. On page 161 of "The Swimmer," Neddy Merrill must cross the highway Route 424 and then use a public pool before he makes his way to the wealthy Halloran couple and their pool. In terms of the story's suburban landscape and its quality as an exploration of suburban ideology, why is it significant that Neddy finds it necessary to make his way across a very busy highway and then dip into a very public pool rather than the private, upscale ones of his neighbors?

5. On page 162 of "The Swimmer," Neddy Merrill makes his way to the wealthy Halloran couple and their pool. What startling and supposedly new information does he hear from them, and how does he respond to what they say? After his conversation with the Hallorans, what mood is Neddy in, and what is the condition of his body at this point? What does the narrator mention about the quality of the season, and why should that description jar us?

6. On page 163 of "The Swimmer," Neddy Merrill reaches the pool area of Helen and Eric Sachs, where he finds out that Eric had a major operation three years ago, one that has left him disfigured. How might the particular type of disfigurement, as it's described, be interpreted as having a symbolic charge with regard to the suburban lifestyle that the text explores? How does Neddy react to Helen and Eric's news at this point, and what reflections occur to him about the other disturbing things he has been told about his own recent existence?

7. On pages 163-64 of "The Swimmer," the wealthy Biswangers snub Neddy Merrill when he encounters them in hopes of getting something to drink, and his former mistress Shirley Adams also spurns him. What is the basis of these people's harsh treatment of Neddy, and what do they add to our understanding of his recent past? Why is the harsh treatment more or less deserved, and how, if at all, do these two encounters near the story's end change your view of Neddy?

8. On pages 164-65 of "The Swimmer," what condition is Neddy Merrill in (both physically and mentally) as he enters the home stretch of his strange trip through a suburban neighborhood's swimming pools, and then finally arrives home? What is "home" by the end of the story? How do the literal and symbolic dimensions come together at this point to cap our understanding of Neddy's downfall?

KATE CHOPIN

The Awakening (Norton Vol. C 561-652).

The Awakening

1. Focus on the domestic situation constituted by the marriage of Léonce and Edna Pontellier. What kind of marriage do they have? How does Léonce Pontellier seem to regard his wife, and what were the circumstances that led to their marriage? In what sense is it at least initially typical of the era in which the novella is set, namely the late nineteenth century?
2. Places such as New Orleans, Grand Isle, and Chênrière Caminada are by no means neutral settings in Chopin's novella. What do at least two of these places (and perhaps others you may think of) have to do with the process whereby Edna "awakens" to herself and her desires?
3. Describe at least a few of the stages of the transformation through which Edna goes as we move from the beginning of Chopin's novella to the end. At what points do you find the key indications of this transformation, and why do you find them the most important?
4. Edna's "awakening" is of course in part erotic in nature, and very frankly so, but at the same time, there's more to it than that. First of all, how important *is* sexual awakening in Edna's transformation, and where do you find at least one indication of that importance? Secondly, how would you describe or explain the other dimension of Edna's awakening, the one that has to do with her sense of "who she really is"? Again, where do you find at least one indication of this dimension of her awakening?
5. How much help or hindrance does Edna get from other characters aside from her husband Léonce? For example, Madame Aline Ratignolle and/or Mademoiselle Reisz? What role does one or more of these characters play in Edna's progress as an independent woman?
6. There is a rather strong concentration on the value of the arts to Edna in particular in Chopin's novella, and the author seems to be working from a basically romantic or "expressive" conception of art's genesis and value for individuals -- namely, art is a vehicle for self-expression, a product of (and encourager of) passion rather than a product of reason. But what more can you

find to say about the arts in this story? What role do they play at key points in Edna's awakening?

7. Consider the concluding chapters of Chopin's *The Awakening*: why does Edna choose the final path that she does, the one that leads to her death? What is it about the nature of her last insights that conducts her towards such an ending? Could things realistically have been otherwise? What would have had to be the case for things to turn out differently?

8. On the whole, what feeling does Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* leave you with as a reader? Was reading the book a positive experience, or an unsettling one? Either way, why so? (Saying the book is "unsettling" wouldn't necessarily mean one dislikes the book since the primary purpose of art need not be construed as bringing us comfort, reassuring us of the rightness of prior views, and so forth. Oscar Wilde once wrote that art is a "disturbing and disintegrating force," and he meant it as a compliment.)

E. E. CUMMINGS

"Thy fingers make early flowers of" (Norton American Lit. 8th. ed. Vol. D 638); "in Just-" (Vol. D 638-39); "O sweet spontaneous" (Vol. D 639-40); "Buffalo Bill's" (Vol. D 640); "the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls" (Vol. D 640); "next to of course god america i" (Vol. D 641); "i sing of Olaf glad and big" (Vol. D 641-42); "somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond" (Vol. D 642-43); "anyone lived in a pretty how town" (Vol. D 643-44); "my father moved through dooms of love" (Vol. D 644-45); "pity this busy monster,manunkind" (Vol. D 646).

"Thy fingers make early flowers of" (Norton Vol. D 638)

1. Cummings' "Thy fingers make early flowers of" follows the *carpe diem* tradition in love poetry that has been around since ancient times, but in what significant way does the relationship between the speaker and the addressee does this poem differ from the usual one in such poems? What effect does that difference have on the poem's meaning?

2. In Cummings' "Thy fingers make early flowers of," what word do you understand to be the antecedent of the pronoun "it" in the final line, and why so?

"in Just-" (Vol. D 638-39)

3. How does a child's way of thinking and manner of expression in "in Just-" help Cummings provide an alternative vision over against an adult's perspective on

life? Moreover, how do you interpret the presence of the “balloonman” in this poem, given that many readers ally this figure with the Greek god of shepherds and flocks Pan?

“O sweet spontaneous” (Vol. D 639-40)

4. In Cummings’ “O sweet spontaneous,” what relationship do philosophy, science, and religion seek with nature? What answer does nature give to their attentions, and why? How do you interpret the connection between nature and death that is posited from line 19 to the poem’s conclusion?

“Buffalo Bill’s” (Vol. D 640)

5. In Cummings’ “Buffalo Bill’s,” what attitude does the speaker strike up with regard to the famous Wild West showman referenced in the poem’s title, William “Buffalo Bill” Cody (1846-1917)? How do you interpret the poem’s final two lines, which are addressed directly to “Mister Death”?

“the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls” (Vol. D 640)

6. When you add together the jumble of statements in Cummings’ “the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls,” what do you understand about the Cambridge ladies -- what kind of lives do they lead, and what sort of thoughts do they apparently think? Why is “Cambridge” (as in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University’s location) more charged with meaning than lots of other places?

“next to of course god america i” (Vol. D 641)

7. How does Cummings’ “next to of course god america i” treat the language of patriotic sentiment -- that is, how does the poem create a counter-attitude to the sentiments and phrases that make up all but the final line? What effect does the final line itself have on everything that precedes it?

“i sing of Olaf glad and big” (Vol. D 641-42)

8. How does Cummings’ “i sing of Olaf glad and big” reinforce its antiwar message? What values does Olaf represent here? What does his oppressors’ behavior suggest about their values? What difference does it seem to make (in the time period referenced by the poem, World War I) that Olaf the conscientious objector is of Scandinavian ancestry?

“somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond” (Vol. D 642-43)

9. What qualities in the lover does the speaker respond to in Cummings' "somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond"? Moreover, discuss this poem in relation to traditional Petrarchan love conventions -- to what extent, for example, does the poet employ Petrarchan hyperbole about his own condition or the quality of the beloved? Or is he doing that sort of thing at all? Explain.

"anyone lived in a pretty how town" (Vol. D 643-44)

10. In "anyone lived in a pretty how town," how does Cummings re-cast the ordinary powers of syntax (word order), parts of speech, and the basics of sentence generation (subject-verb-object strings, etc.) to provide insight into how people's life-patterns play out over time? Moreover, what is the implied narrative in this poem, who are the main characters, and how are they regarded by the others who live in the "pretty how town"?

"my father moved through dooms of love" (Vol. D 644-45)

11. What understanding of the speaker's father eventually emerges in Cummings' "my father moved through dooms of love"? How is this understanding built up from the poem's beginning to its end? What is implied about those whom we might take to be opponents of the father that the poem describes -- how do they live their lives and treat other people?

"pity this busy monster,manunkind" (Vol. D 646)

12. In Cummings' "pity this busy monster,manunkind," what criticism of scientific progress and its supporters is offered, and by what means does the poem convey that criticism? What is the "hell / of a good universe next door" referenced in the poem's final two lines?

EMILY DICKINSON

"320" (Norton Vol. C 97); "340" (Vol. C 99); "448" (Vol. C 102); "479" (Vol. C 102-03); "591" (Vol. C 103-04); "598" (Vol. C 104); "620" (Vol. C 104); "764" (Vol. C 107); "1263" (Vol. C 108); "1668" (Vol. C 108).

320/258. ("There's a certain Slant of light")

1. In "There's a certain Slant of light," what exactly is the "certain Slant of light" referenced? Does it merely reflect the perception of someone in a depressed state of mind, or does it create that feeling in the first place -- what does the

poem suggest in this regard? Moreover, what do you understand by the words “internal difference -- / Where the meanings are” in lines 7-8?

340/280. (“I felt a Funeral, in my Brain”)

2. What is the role of “reason” in “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain”? What is Dickinson perhaps suggesting about the limits of our ability to know anything about death? Moreover, in what manner does Dickinson represent the inner life or thoughts of her isolated speaker, and what might strike us as odd about that way of representing interiority?

448/449. (“I died for Beauty --”)

3. In “I died for Beauty --,” the speaker died for beauty, her interlocutor in the next tomb died for Truth, yet the latter says both things are “One.” How might we interpret that claim? Are truth and beauty really the same thing, or should the point be interpreted differently? Explain. Moreover, how do the poem’s final two lines change the value of the ten lines before them

479/712. (“Because I could not stop for Death --”)

4. In “Because I could not stop for Death --,” what assumptions and attitudes about the speaker’s past as a living being are solicited and perhaps transformed as the carriage and its civil coachman (Death) proceed, passing by various scenes and making their way towards the grave? Why, at the poem’s end, does the speaker still feel surprised by the first day of her passing even though it occurred centuries ago?

5. In “Because I could not stop for Death --,” what seems to be the point of treating death in such a strangely civil, slow-paced manner, and of employing such an odd figure as a coachman to embody death? How does that differ from treating death as, say, a reaper with a sickle?

591/465. (“I heard a Fly buzz -- when I died --”)

6. In “I heard a Fly buzz -- when I died --,” why do you think Dickinson she has chosen a buzzing fly to convey the instant of death? How might this poem be a meditation on the thinness of the line between life and death, and on the significance that the living give to death?

598/632. (“The Brain -- is wider than the Sky --”)

7. What relationship between human beings and nature, and between human beings and God, does “The Brain -- is wider than the Sky --” posit?

620/435. (“Much Madness is divinest Sense”)

8. “Much Madness is divinest Sense” belongs to a tradition of thought about the way we determine who is sane and insane. What is Dickinson’s speaker suggesting about the validity of this powerful opposition?

764/754. (“My Life had stood -- a Loaded gun --”)

9. In “My Life had stood -- a Loaded gun --,” the speaker takes on the perspective of a “loaded gun.” It has sometimes been said that the poem deals with an indefinite feeling of rage on the part of a female speaker. Do you read it that way, or some other way? Give your own brief interpretation of this enigmatic poem.

1263/1129. (“Tell all the Truth but tell it slant --”)

10. “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant --” might well be read as a gloss on Emily Dickinson’s poetic style and philosophy. How so? How -- and why -- does she “tell it slant” rather than simply and directly? What might she be implying about the subjects upon which her poetry dwells?

1668/1624. (“Apparently with no surprise”)

11. What vision of nature are we offered in “Apparently with no surprise”? How does this treatment of nature compare to the representations of nature you have come across in other poems by Emily Dickinson or, for that matter, in other poets, such as one of the English romantics?

T. S. ELIOT

From “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (Norton American Lit. 8th. ed. Vol. D 372-75); “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (Vol. D 368-71); “The Waste Land” (Vol. D 378-91).

“Tradition and the Individual Talent” (Norton Vol. D 372-75)

1. In Part I of “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (372-74), how does T. S. Eliot explain his key terms “tradition” and, in particular, “the historical sense”? When a poet writes with due regard for the historical sense, how is the literary past altered by a work that is introduced in the present? By implication, too, what sort

of poetry is Eliot criticizing -- what sort of poetry do we get if the author has not cultivated "the historical sense"?

2. In Part II of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (374-75), how does T. S. Eliot characterize the creative process? How does his analogy of the poet's mind to "a bit of finely filiated platinum" help him explain the creative process? Stay with this scientific analogy and see how much you can draw from it as a vehicle for understanding Eliot's poetics.

3. In Parts II and III of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (374-75), how does T. S. Eliot take issue with conventional expressive poetics of the sort we find in British romantic literary theory? What fault does he find with Wordsworth's formulation of poetic expression as "emotion recollected in tranquility"? Nonetheless, is Eliot himself offering us an altered form of expressive poetics? If that is the case, what does the poet supposedly express, if not his or her own passions and ideas? Explain.

4. In our brief excerpts from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (372-75), T. S. Eliot does not address how readers can most productively connect with the kind of literature he is defending. That isn't meant as a criticism of him since the essay deals with poetic creation, not reception. Still, what conjectures can you offer on this point? When you read *The Waste Land* or some other difficult Modernist poem, to what extent are you able to "put together" your experience with such poetry as a coherent, integral representation of a culture rather than as the artist's personal expression?

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (Vol. D 368-71)

5. How does T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" represent both nature and the cityscape, and what relationship does it develop between the poem's human characters and their environment? To help you expand on these issues: what images does Prufrock reference by way of describing his surroundings, and what is odd about them compared with the general approach to nature we might find in a poem by one of the English romantics, or an American naturalist writer?

6. How does Prufrock in T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" describe the passage of time? Refer to at least a few points in the poem that deal with time. How does time weigh upon or otherwise affect the narrator himself?

7. Prufrock in T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is famous for his inability to *do* much of anything. So far as you can determine, what is it that keeps the speaker from acting or even making decisions of any import? At what points in the poem does he refer or allude to this failure on his part, and how does he process such failure?

8. How do lines 122-end of T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" affect your understanding of Prufrock's situation? In particular, how do you interpret the symbolism involved in some of these concluding lines?

The Waste Land

General Questions

9. Is there a single narrative voice behind the various utterances made in *The Waste Land*? To what extent do biblical and classical-age references help you construct a narrator or to what extent do they affect the poem's development and drive home its themes?

10. Many readers have found the allusive style of *The Waste Land* daunting since, after all, the poem's author was a polymath who chose to incorporate an astonishing array of historical references, characters, narrative voices, settings, and myths. What strategy do you find yourself employing to understand the broader significance of the poem as a whole?

I. The Burial of the Dead

11. In Part I, lines 1-18 of *The Waste Land*, how are the first seven lines related to Countess Marie's recollections about her childhood, fraught as they are with seasonal references? What kind of consciousness does Marie seem to represent? What is the substance of her recollections, and why do you suppose Marie is the first character (aside from a narrative voice) we hear from?

12. In Part I, lines 19-30 of *The Waste Land*, the text refers to three Biblical sources, as your Norton notes indicate: *Ecclesiastes* and the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah. Who seems to be the "Son of Man" addressed, and who is speaking to that figure? The text in with allusions to these prophetic/wisdom texts to make them "show" the Son of Man something, so what is it that he is being shown: what insight is being imparted to him and presumably to us as well?

13. In Part I, lines 35-42 of *The Waste Land*, we hear from the “hyacinth girl.” What symbolic charge does the flower in question carry? What kind of experience is this girl relating to us, and why is that experience significant to the first part of the poem? Furthermore, why surround it with the tragic strains of Richard Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* at lines 31-34 and 42?

14. In Part I, lines 43-59 of *The Waste Land*, the fortuneteller Madame Sosostris puts in an appearance and reads her pack of Tarot cards. What thematic significance can we gather from her enumeration of the images on the cards she draws?

15. In Part I, lines 60-76 of *The Waste Land*, London is cast as an Unreal City, rather like Paris in Charles Baudelaire’s collection of poems called *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Flowers of Evil), or William Blake’s miserable spectral London, or Dante’s hellish landscapes from *The Inferno*. What is going on in Eliot’s London, and how can we put together the strange pastiche of allusions throughout this block of lines – i.e. the references to the English Renaissance playwright John Webster and the French poet Charles Baudelaire, to Dante and to the famous Roman First Punic War victory in 260 BCE over Carthaginian naval forces off Mylae in Sicily? How do you interpret the relation between this segment and the poem’s first 59 lines? That is, does it mainly drive home themes already mentioned and thereby cap off the first part, or does it bring up new matter to be explored?

16. We might do well to say that Part I of *The Waste Land* sets up the problems that the poem as a whole explores: the loss of a unifying mythic consciousness and loss of individual and cultural vitality. How does any one of the several concentrations in this part of the poem (i.e. the initial reference to the seasonal cycle, Countess Marie’s recollections, Biblical allusions, Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, Madame Sosostris, or London the Unreal City) help in that regard?

II. A Game of Chess

17. Part II of *The Waste Land* alludes to a number of famous historical or mythical females: Cleopatra, Queen Dido of Carthage, Philomela from the Ovidian story “Tereus, Procne, and Philomela” in *The Metamorphoses*, and (at the very end of this part) Ophelia from *Hamlet*. Why this cluster of women -- what do these famous figures have in common that makes them all relevant to the thematic interests of this section of Eliot’s poem?

18. How do you connect Part II of *The Waste Land* (with its concentration on gender, sexuality, and reproduction) with the previous section of the poem,

which emphasized scenes and thoughts rife with incomprehension, failure, sterility and despair?

19. It is always difficult to pin down the narrative voices or speakers in *The Waste Land*, so reflect on that issue here: what voice or voices seem to be speaking the lines in Part II, and what leads you to make the determinations that you make in that regard?

III. The Fire Sermon

20. In keeping with the title drawn from one of Buddha's sermons, we might say that condemnation of humanity's fixation on sensuality and the things of this world is a major theme in Part III of *The Waste Land*, along with the implied need to purify or purge one's mind and senses to escape such fixations. If that's the case, choose a few voices or scenes in Part III and discuss how they articulate this theme.

21. Part III of *The Waste Land* continues to dwell on sexual frustration and apathy as the previous section did. What perspective does the Greek prophet Tiresias (whom Eliot considered a central voice in the poem) offer on these problems? What does Tiresias see, and how does he respond to it?

IV. Death by Water

22. What happens to Phlebas the Phoenician in Part IV of *The Waste Land*? Does this character's death advance the poem's plot? If so, how? In any case, why do you suppose this admonitory relation of Phlebas' death has been placed here before the climactic ending of the poem?

V. What the Thunder Said

23. *The Waste Land* draws in part upon independent scholar Jessie Laidlay Weston's discussion of the Grail Legend in her impressive 1920 study *From Ritual to Romance*. The basic idea is that a Fisher King has been wounded or is ill and his lands have suffered as a result; a quester (an Arthurian knight or an heir to the throne) must help the King heal and thereby restore his lands, in part by "restoring the waters" to a drought-stricken territory. The motif of a restorative quest seems especially important in Part V of *The Waste Land*, so what elements of it can you find there? If the end of the poem is the end of the quest, how successful has it been? What, if anything, has been achieved by way of insight or

improvement in the world constituted by the poem? What passages in Part V are you drawing on to arrive at your view?

WILLIAM FAULKNER

As I Lay Dying (Norton Vol. D 698-793).

1. There are many narrative voices or “consciousnesses” in Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* -- the Bundren family (Anse, Addie, Darl, Vardaman, Cash, Dewey Dell, and Jewel), neighbors Cora and Vernon Tull and others (Peabody, Whitfield, Samson, Armstid, Mosely, and MacGowan). Trace the development of one of the more significant characters through several sections in which that character’s words and consciousness are the central factor. Namely, what is revealed about the character, and to what extent does he or she seem to change from one section to the next that you examine?
2. In Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, which relies on a multiplicity of narrative voices to tell its story, it makes sense to suppose that a given character is best understood not simply by means of what he or she says but also, or even primarily, by means of what others think and say. In other words, an individual’s identity in Faulkner seems to be made out of a constantly woven and unwoven web of interactions, desires, and assumptions on the part of various characters. Discuss an instance in which we learn at least as much about a given character in this manner as we do from anything that character actually says or is said to be thinking.
3. Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* is obviously complex in its way of narrating a tale (non-linear, at times fragmentary, partially stream-of-consciousness-based, etc.), but it nonetheless tells a coherent story about the death of Addie Bundren and the quest of the remaining Bundrens (all of them with troubles of their own) to transport her body to Jefferson, Mississippi. Choose one relatively brief section of the text that you find easiest to comprehend and explain how it helps you understand some other section or aspect of the text that you find more difficult to follow.
4. Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* might well be interpreted as unfolding in a fundamentally “comic” fictional universe (the author sets most of his tales, this one included, in a fictional but realistic place called Yoknapatawpha County, modeled somewhat after Lafayette County, Mississippi), meaning that in spite of much sadness and misfortune (Addie’s death, Darl’s eventual madness, Cash’s leg injury made even worse by a cement cast, Dewey Dell’s unwanted pregnancy,

etc.), the story ends on a note of renewal, not despair. Choose one significant event or aspect of the text that you think fits this notion of a comic universe rather than a tragic one. Alternately, you might choose something about the story that you think *cannot* be subsumed under that heading or concept, and explain why.

ROBERT FROST

“The Figure a Poem Makes” (Norton Vol. D 250-52); “Mowing” (Vol. D 231-32); “Mending Wall” (Vol. D 232-33); “The Death of the Hired Man” (Vol. D 233-37); “The Wood-Pile” (Vol. D 241); “The Road Not Taken” (Vol. D 241-42); “Birches” (Vol. D 242-44); “Out, Out—” (Vol. D 244); “Fire and Ice” (Vol. D 245); “Nothing Gold Can Stay” (Vol. D 245); “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (Vol. D 245); “Desert Places” (Vol. D 246); “Design” (Vol. D 246); “The Gift Outright” (Vol. D 248).

“The Figure a Poem Makes” (Norton Vol. D 250-52)

1. In his essay “The Figure a Poem Makes,” what complaint does Robert Frost make on page 250 against so-called “abstractionists” or radical experimenters in modern poetry? Why can’t we just consider a poem as pure sound, or pure wildness (i.e. random association and so forth)? If sound and “wildness” are to be worthwhile, with what do they respectively need to be combined?
2. On pages 250-51 of “The Figure a Poem Makes,” how does Frost develop his initial statement that the “figure a poem makes” may be captured with the dictum, “It begins in delight and ends in wisdom”? *How* does a poem do that? What do you understand by such associated claims as the remark that a worthwhile poem “ends in a clarification of life” and amounts to “a momentary stay against confusion” (251)?
3. On page 251 of “The Figure a Poem Makes,” how does Frost differentiate between the scholar and the artist with regard to how they obtain their own kind of knowledge? How does a scholar (or scientist) attain and value knowledge? How does an artist do so? While Frost hardly means to condemn scholars or scientists, it’s pretty clear that he favors the way artists arrive at and relate to their kind of knowledge. On 251-52, what justification does he offer for praising artists and poets’ way of “knowing”? In particular, what’s the result when someone gains and then conveys understanding in the artistic way?

4. On page 251-52 of “The Figure a Poem Makes,” Frost shows a certain disdain for political “prating” (251 middle) about big concepts like freedom. He wasn’t friendly towards President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, which the Democratic president and his supporters deemed necessary to jolt the country out of the Great Depression during the 1930s; Frost’s prose and poetry shows a strong individualist tendency that put him at odds with so-called “collectivist” approaches to life and politics. When it came to art, it seems that Frost thought art should deal with the supposedly permanent elements of human nature and the human condition, not involve itself deeply in immediate social or political issues. Do you agree with that kind of approach, or do you find that prescription too rigid? Explain your response.

“Mowing” (Vol. D 231-32)

5. Mowing the grass or wheat to make hay is the stuff of traditional pastoral poetry, and Frost gives us a variation on that theme in “Mowing” -- one that isn’t about a love complaint or an idyllic setting but that rather seems to concern itself with labor. What quality of representation and reflection with regard to the work of mowing, then, do you find in this poem?

“Mending Wall” (Vol. D 232-33)

6. Aside from the obvious, what is a “wall” in the context of Frost’s poem “Mending Wall”? How might this poem be explored as a philosophical reflection on the origin and nature of the divisions we make between nature and ourselves, between one person and another?

7. In Frost’s poem “Mending Wall,” what seems to be the speaker’s attitude towards his neighbor? We know they disagree about whether or not their two properties really need a dividing wall, but how does the speaker respond to his neighbor’s insistence on upholding tradition and property rights?

“The Death of the Hired Man” (Vol. D 233-37)

8. What difference in perspective do you find in Frost’s “The Death of the Hired Man” between the husband Warren and his wife Mary with respect to Silas, the itinerant (i.e. traveling) worker they have long hired to do odd jobs for them? Does Warren’s view change or become clearer to us in the latter half or so of the poem, or does it stay the same? Explain.

9. What is Silas' situation in Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man" when he arrives at Warren and Mary's farm? What are some of the key points at which Frost makes his narrator provide us with further information about Silas? How does the poem bring home to us the starkness, the anything but ideal or secure quality, of the old laborer's life?

10. In Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man," the last full stanza seems to contain a genuinely symbolic moment, one that connects "The moon, the little silver cloud, and she" {Mary, Warren's wife} just before Warren returns to announce quietly that old Silas has died. Explore the significance of this section of the poem: in what sense might it be suggestive of Silas' value to Mary, or Silas' predicament more generally? (If you read this part of the text differently, that's fine; the point is to explore its symbolic charge.)

"The Wood-Pile" (Vol. D 241)

11. In Frost's "The Wood-Pile," the speaker muses about some chopped wood left out in the forest rather than stacked where it can be reached to heat the chopper's home in winter. How is this poem both a reflection on the labor we engage in and, at the same time, on how we invest what we do and make with purpose and significance? So far as you can tell, what does the poem as a whole privilege -- the wood-chopper's labor and the product he created, or the speaker's own communion with objects like that wood-pile? Which is more true, if either is more true -- the purposeful labor, or the quiet reflection? Explain your answer.

"The Road Not Taken" (Vol. D 241-42)

12. In lines 6-12 of Frost's "The Road Not Taken," how does the speaker describe the supposed difference between the two paths that he mentions? So how different are they, based on what the speaker says? (Be attentive to these lines -- it's easy to misconstrue them and thereby miss much of the poem's complexity as a reflection on the "paths" that make up a person's life.)

13. What time frames can you find in Frost's "The Road Not Taken"? One of them is of course the moment at which the speaker made a choice and walked down one path rather than the other, but what other temporal horizons would it make sense to recognize, and how might this temporal complexity lead us towards a strong understanding of the poem's final stanza?

"Birches" (Vol. D 242-44)

14. In Frost's "Birches," we are treated to the adult speaker's recollections about the fun he had swinging from sinewy birch trees during his boyhood. How does the speaker transform those recollections into a reassertion of the human bond with nature as well as, perhaps, a meditation on religious notions about going to one's otherworldly reward at the end of life?

"Out, Out--" (Vol. D 244)

15. In Frost's "Out, Out--," with its title borrowed from a line by Macbeth at the hollow end of his bloody career (see *Macbeth* 5.5.23-24) a young boy just finishing up the day's work with a saw cuts his hand off and dies in surgery when the country doctor arrives to amputate the hand. How is the boy's death regarded by others in the poem, and how does the speaker's attitude compare to the regard shown?

"Fire and Ice" (Vol. D 245)

16. In Frost's "Fire and Ice," the speaker alludes to the end of the world. The general meaning of fire and ice seems to be that the first references a religious perspective in which the world finally burns, as in the "End Times" of Christian theology, and the second references a scientific perspective in which the sun eventually burns out, leaving the planet cold and lifeless. But how does Frost's speaker turn "fire" and "ice" into symbols that speak more directly about human nature itself? What seems to be the speaker's attitude towards "us"?

"Nothing Gold Can Stay" (Vol. D 245)

17. Frost (a native Californian) was a fine observer of the natural environment in his adopted New England, and here in the short poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay," he shows the same acuteness as poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Gerard Manley Hopkins. How does Frost's speaker turn a simple nature-observation into a broader contemplation of the transient quality of life, as well as change our traditional perception of the color "gold"?

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (Vol. D 245)

18. In the first stanza of Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," what purpose does the speaker give for stopping where he does? How, in the next two stanzas, does he go on to build a sense of the oddness of this action he has taken, "stopping by woods" on a dark winter night?

19. Many readers of Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" catch the almost hypnotic quality of the final stanza, with its repetition in the final two lines and its initial summation, "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep," If, then, this poem ends with something like a "call of the woods" to the speaker and perhaps to us, how would you give voice to that call? What is being offered, beyond the literal level of simply going farther into the woods or staying longer in them? At the same time, why might it not be quite right to leave the matter at this primeval level? How, that is, does the poem as a whole cast the woods as part of the human world as well?

"Desert Places" (Vol. D 246)

20. The Norton editors rightly point out on page 231 that while Frost is certainly a fine observer of nature, his outlook with regard to it can't be equated with that of American Transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau. How does this poem both connect the speaker with the landscape and yet leave us with a rather unsettling sense of the relationship thereby posited between them? Furthermore, what does the final stanza, with its response to C17 French philosopher Blaise Pascal's often-quoted thought, "the eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me" (*La silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie*, from *Pensées*), add to the poem's psychological depth?

"Design" (Vol. D 246)

21. The speaker of Frost's "Design" asks a question after William Blake's heart -- as when in that romantic poet's "The Tyger," the speaker asks the beautiful but deadly predator, "what immortal hand or eye / dare frame thy fearful symmetry?" What explanation, if any, does Frost's speaker arrive at for the existence and behavior of "dimpled spiders" like the one that stalks the white moth on the heal-all plant (*Prunella vulgaris*)? If you don't think an "explanation" is what the speaker is mainly trying to achieve, how do you read the poem's significance?

"The Gift Outright" (Vol. D 248).

22. Perhaps the key line in Frost's "The Gift Outright" (which the poet wrote in 1942 and later recited at President Kennedy's inauguration in January, 1961) is the eleventh, in which the speaker says that Americans "found salvation in surrender." In the context established by the poem, how do you interpret that line? What sense of American history, what relationship between the people and the land, does the poem imply?

ALLEN GINSBERG

“Howl” (Vol. E 492-500); “Footnote to Howl” (Norton Vol. E 500); “A Supermarket in California” (Vol. E 500-01); “Sunflower Sutra” (Vol. E 501-03).

“Howl” (Vol. E 492-500) and “Footnote to Howl” (Norton Vol. E 500)

Section 1 (Vol. E 492-97)

1. “Howl” begins with the words “I saw” and continues for more than 75 very long free-verse lines with a catalog of perceivers and experiencers mostly circumscribed by the pronoun “who.” Reflect on Ginsberg’s technique here: the first-person speaker immediately opens out to a third-person series of experiences, feelings, and visions. If we try to put all of these together, what emerges -- what can you identify as at least a couple of key realizations and moments and what seems to be the direction and purpose of the collective consciousness described in the first section as a whole?

2. The last several free-verse lines of the first section of “Howl” seem to comprise a sense of sacrifice on the part of all the perceivers mentioned in the section. To what end or with what success has that sacrifice been tendered, as you interpret the ending of this first part?

Section 2 (Vol. E 497-98)

3. The second section of “Howl” is devoted to naming and further delineating the unholy social and political system that the first part of the poem references. The name that the poet gives this system is Moloch. You’re Norton Anthology note tells you that Ginsberg himself annotated this figure as “the Canaanite fire God....” Do a little research on the Internet and set down what you can about the history and significance of this god. What are some of the institutions and qualities referenced in both the first and second sections of “Howl”? Why does Moloch turn out to be perhaps the best possible characterization for these institutions and qualities: how do his nature and the actions of those who worshiped him in ancient times serve as a reference point for the modern age that Ginsberg is calling out?

4. The second section of “Howl” ends with a reference to many people heading down to a river. The purifying or salvational power of this traditional image should be obvious, but what is it doing here in the present poem? Does it indicate

genuine liberation from the torments and bondage of Moloch? Explain your interpretation.

Section 3 (Vol. E 498-99)

5. The third section of “Howl” is specifically addressed to a friend of Ginsberg, Carl Solomon, and thus it takes on a more personal and intimate cast than the first two sections (which are also dedicated more generally to Solomon). Check out the back story of who Ginsberg met Solomon and what their dealings were with mental institutions, and go on to discuss how this information affects your reading of this section of the poem, which deals at least partly with a sense of liberation and reconciliation.

Footnote (Vol. E 500)

6. The Footnote to “Howl” begins with the word “Holy!” and then catalogs the things we should label as such. This part of the poem is surely inspired by William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, with its grand conclusion, “every thing that lives is Holy” (see [Plate 27](#)). The entire poem has been a vision, and if we register Blake’s influence on Ginsberg, we may look for a conclusion that involves more than bearing witness to painful experience and un-denying what the age’s official morality and “story” has denied (though those accomplishments are important, too) but to a sense of redemption (for Blake “redemption” would be a process, not a one-time event) or at least the possibility thereof. To what extent does *Howl* gesture towards a redemption of or liberation from the repression and cruelty that it has been raging against? Do you find the poem’s overall effect satisfying in that regard – i.e. by means of its diverse and multifarious perspectives, does it achieve clarity and purity of vision at the end? Explain your reasons for responding as you do.

“A Supermarket in California” (Vol. E 500-01)

7. In “a Supermarket in California,” the speaker takes Walt Whitman as his inspiration, and has a dream wherein he goes “shopping for images” in a supermarket. What is the ghostly figure of Whitman doing in this grocery store, and how does the modern store serve as a metaphor of the elder poet’s vision of America?

8. In “A Supermarket in California” in what sense is the speaker comparing himself to Walt Whitman and measuring the difference between Whitman’s America and the America of the 1950s?

“Sunflower Sutra” (Vol. E 501-03)

9. In “Sunflower Sutra,” when Jack Kerouac points out a dead sunflower surrounded by industrial blight, the dead flower becomes the object of the speaker’s meditation. How does the speaker build up for us a sense of what the sunflower looks like and associate its appearance with its blighted surroundings? What insights about the flower and the human spirit emerge from this meditation?

10. In “Sunflower Sutra,” it is clear that the poet’s meditation draws its inspiration from William Blake’s brief poem [“Ah! Sun-Flower!”](#) from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. read the Blake poem available at the link I just provided or use your own copy, and reflect on how Ginsberg’s insights in “Sunflower Sutra” relate to the meaning of his predecessor’s effort.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

“The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (Norton Vol. D 826-42).

1. In “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” how does the text handle Harry’s injury and the process whereby he becomes gravely ill and dies? How was he injured, why didn’t he treat the wound properly, and what stages of illness can you discern as the story unfolds?

2. In “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” it’s clear that the presence of the hyena (which is noted several times) symbolizes Harry’s approaching death. How, exactly, is the hyena represented so that it accomplishes this goal? Moreover, does the hyena symbolize anything besides Harry’s death? If it does, where in the text do you find support for such a reading?

3. In “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” what seems most significant about the way Harry analyzes his own life and his present predicament as a writer who still has much worth writing but no time left in which to write it, now that he is on the point of dying? If he thinks of himself as a failure, how does he account for that supposed failure?

4. In “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” even though the story is mostly about Harry in his final days, we also hear both from and about his wife Helen. What is her “back story,” and what seems to be her perspective on her life, her relationship with Harry, and his illness and passing?

5. In “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” Harry’s final moments or hours are apparently taken up with a dream in which he is loaded into a small plane flown by a friend named Compton, who then flies the plane towards the summit of then-snowy Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. How do you interpret this symbolic journey – as a redemptive vision in which Harry somehow recovers some of the dignity and authenticity he had supposedly squandered, or do you read it in a less positive light? Either way, explain the basis of your own interpretation of Harry’s dream.

LANGSTON HUGHES

From “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (Norton Vol. D 348-50); All Poems (Vol. D 871-80): “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (Vol. D 871); “Mother to Son” (Vol. D 871-72); “I, Too” (Vol. D 872); “The Weary Blues” (Vol. D 872-73); “Mulatto” (Vol. D 873-74); “Song for a Dark Girl” (Vol. D 874-75); “Genius Child” (Vol. D 875); “Visitors to the Black Belt” (Vol. D 875-76); “Note on Commercial Theatre” (Vol. D 876); “Vagabonds” (Vol. D 876-77); “Words Like Freedom” (Vol. D 877); “Madam and Her Madam” (Vol. D 877-78); “Freedom {1}” (Vol. D 878); “Madam’s Calling Cards” (Vol. D 878-79); “Silhouette” (Vol. D 879); “Theme for English B” (Vol. D 880).

From “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (Norton Vol. D 348-50)

1. In “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” what basic argument does Langston Hughes advance regarding the development of African-American art in the United States? How is jazz central to his argument? That is, what qualities does jazz possess that supposedly make it ideal as a vehicle for a genuinely “black” mode of expression?

“The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (Vol. D 871)

2. Who is the “I” that speaks in “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”? The Rivers the rivers in this poem are obviously charged with symbolic meaning in that they reference historical experience and the flow of time. But what more specific connotations can be found in some of the eight or so references to rivers? For example, the Euphrates, the Congo, or the Mississippi that carried Abraham Lincoln to New Orleans?

“Mother to Son” (Vol. D 871-72)

3. What is the most important piece of advice that the mother in “Mother to Son” imparts to her son? What should we make of the “crystal stair” metaphor that she

uses at the beginning and end? Consider, for example, that it could be an allusion to the story of Jacob's dream about a ladder ascending to heaven, a dream he had while fleeing from his brother Esau – see [Genesis 28:10-19](#). How would that kind of allusiveness affect the poem's meaning?

“I, Too” (Vol. D 872)

4. The first line of “I, Too” is rather Whitmanesque in its claim to “sing America.” What kind of song does the speaker go on to sing, if we are to take the poem's content as the equivalent of a song? What does the verbal form “am” in the poem's final line (rather than a repetition of “sing”) add to our understanding?

“The Weary Blues” (Vol. D 872-73)

5. In “The Weary Blues,” how does singing the blues, according to the speaker who heard a black man singing them, affect the singer? How do the lyrics given to us (i.e. the material in quotation marks) compare to the effect described by the speaker throughout the poem and especially towards its conclusion?

“Mulatto” (Vol. D 873-74)

6. In the form of a partial dialog between a mixed-race child and his white father, “Mulatto” describes the rape of a black woman by a white man in the South. The italicized words make up the dialog, of course. What's the substance of that argument, and if there's a winner, which party is it? Moreover, what about the non-italicized portions of the poem -- how do they affect the meaning of the conversation itself?

“Song for a Dark Girl” (Vol. D 874-75) and “Silhouette” (Vol. D 879)

7. Both “Song for a Dark Girl” and “Silhouette” are poems about the abominable Southern practice of lynching black men for various alleged offenses or violations of a strict racial code. How do these poems, their imagery and perspectives or voices taken together, convey the horror of lynching?

“Genius Child” (Vol. D 875)

8. In your view, who is the genius child in “Genius Child”? What attitude does the poem develop with respect to such a child? Why should the song be sung “softly,” and what might happen if the song were to “get out of hand”?

“Visitors to the Black Belt” (Vol. D 875-76) and “Note on Commercial Theatre” (Vol. D 876)

9. Hughes’ “Visitors to the Black Belt” and “Note on Commercial Theatre” both deal with fundamental matters of identity and authenticity amongst African Americans living in places such as New York City and Chicago. In at least one of these two poems, what is the speaker’s point of contention with white American culture – how does the speaker deal with the error in perspective that he is calling to account?

“Vagabonds” (Vol. D 876-77)

10. Hughes’ “Vagabonds” is a brief, almost Blakean poem about the desperate plight of America’s poor. One could, of course, easily voice one’s sympathy for impoverished and homeless people in ordinary prose. What does the poetic form of Hughes’ lament add to the critique?

“Words Like Freedom” (Vol. D 877) and “Freedom {1}” (Vol. D 878)

11. “Words Like Freedom” turns on a distinction between two words -- “freedom” and “liberty” -- whose meanings overlap but are not identical. What, then, is the distinction between them and how does that distinction perhaps account for the speaker’s different reaction to the two words? (It may help to recall that the word “liberty” has strong roots in the discourse of the American Revolution: “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” as in the Declaration of Independence.)

12. In “Freedom {1},” Hughes takes issue with the common C19-20 white-culture insistence (an insistence that became quite loud during the 1950s when the modern Civil Rights Movement got underway) that any attempts on the part of African Americans to gain full equality were somehow premature and impatient. How does the poem counter that notion? How does the speaker give the desire for genuine freedom an undeniable urgency?

“Madam and Her Madam” (Vol. D 877-78) and “Madam’s Calling Cards” (Vol. D 878-79)

13. Madam Alberta K. Johnson is one of Langston Hughes’ personae in his poetry. What kind of personality jumps out at us in “Madam and Her Madam” and “Madam’s Calling Cards”? What, that is, animates Alberta? How does she assess her own value and circumstances? (In responding, you might want to have a look

at another short Hughes poem, [“Madam’s Past History”](#), which isn’t in our anthology but offers us a bit of Alberta’s back-story.)

“Theme for English B” (Vol. D 880)

14. The speaker in “Theme for English B” is assigned a brief version of what today would be called a personal essay in which he’s supposed to tell the reader something he considers true, something expressive of his own identity. Why does he find that seemingly straightforward one-pager so hard to formulate -- wherein, for him, lies the complexity of the task, and how does he resolve the difficulty, if you think he does?

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

“The Eatonville Anthology” (Norton Vol. D 530-38); “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” (Vol. D 538-41); “The Gilded Six-Bits” (Vol. D 541-49).

***The Eatonville Anthology* (Norton Vol. D 530-38)**

1. Hurston’s stories in *The Eatonville Anthology* at times resemble the moral fable genre we find in Aesop and more recent authors such as the C17 French fabulist Jean de la Fontaine, or the C19 folklorist brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. What typifies the approach Hurston takes to characters, scenes and events in one or more of her stories, and what do you take to be the “moral” of the stories that you choose to discuss?

“How It Feels to Be Colored Me” (Vol. D 538-41)

2. On 538-39 of “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” how does Hurston explain her induction into the complexities of racial perception in Florida during the 1910’s, when she was a child?

3. On 539-41 of “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” Hurston addresses not only the impact that her early experiences with racial perception and bias made upon her, but also her current (i.e. 1920s Harlem Renaissance) thinking about race. In doing so, she brings up areas of life such as acting, music (jazz) and fashion. Leaving aside the final paragraph on 541 (in which she compares herself and others to “bag{s} of miscellany propped against a wall”), discuss a few of these stratagems for what they offer by way of insight about race.

4. On 541 of “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” Hurston compares herself to a “brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall” and others to different-colored

bags of miscellany (541). What is the point of this unusual metaphor? What is the significance of the contents of these variously hued bags -- what view of human nature does Hurston's metaphor convey?

"The Gilded Six-Bits" (Vol. D 541-49)

5. From 541-43 of Hurston's "The Gilded Six-Bits," what characterizes the relationship between Joe and Missie May? How do they speak and act towards each other at this early point in their married life?

6. From 543-45 of Hurston's "The Gilded Six-Bits," Otis D. Slemmons arrives in town, determined to make his mark as the proprietor of a new ice-cream parlor, and makes the acquaintance of Joe and Missie May. What impression does he (and his alleged gold jewelry) make on the as-yet happy couple?

7. From 546-49 of Hurston's "The Gilded Six-Bits," we hear how Joe and Missie May fall upon hard times in their marriage, with Joe coming home one day and finding none other than Otis D. Slemmons in bed with Missie May. How does the strain upon the marriage play out, and by what specific means do the couple recover their balance and renew their affection for each other? Is it simply a matter of apology, or does it take more than words? Explain.

HENRY JAMES

Daisy Miller (Norton Vol. C 421-59).

Daisy Miller

Part I (Norton 421-29)

1. Two Swiss locations – Vevey, including the hotel named *Trois Couronnes* ([image](#), and Geneva -- play a significant role in establishing the atmosphere of Henry James' *Daisy Miller*. What do we learn about these places in Part I, and how do they help to give us our first impression of Frederick Winterbourne? How, for example, has his character been shaped by living in Geneva for much of his youth? And what effect does visiting Vevey have on him?

2. On pages 422-25 of *Daisy Miller*, we are introduced to little Randolph Miller, younger brother of the woman he will soon introduce to Winterbourne as Daisy. How does Randolph provide us with a fresh look at the major Henry James theme regarding what it means to be an American living in Europe? What are the boy's

views about America and Europe, respectively, and how do they seem to strike Frederick Winterbourne, himself an American?

3. On pages 424-29 of *Daisy Miller*, Winterbourne gets acquainted with young Daisy Miller. What are his main observations about her at this point in the text? Why does he attach such importance to the term “flirt” in trying to determine Daisy’s personality and quality? Why does he apparently feel such a strong need to categorize Daisy in the first place?

4. On pages 424-29 of *Daisy Miller*, leave Winterbourne aside for the moment and consider Daisy in her own right, i.e. by means of her own words, gestures, and so forth. How do *you* interpret the words and conduct of this young American woman visiting Europe?

5. On pages 427-29 of *Daisy Miller*, Daisy says that she wants to visit the Château de Chillon (pronounced similar to “She-ówn” with a French nasalized final “n”), a Swiss landmark where sixteenth-century patriot François de Bonivard was held prisoner for seven years. From a decorous Victorian point of view (the story is apparently set in the 1870s), what is odd about this scene, in particular the way Daisy and her mother conduct themselves in the presence of Winterbourne?

Part II (Norton 429-39)

6. On pages 429-31 of *Daisy Miller*, Winterbourne’s aunt, Mrs. Costello, offers her nephew a very strong opinion of Daisy and family. What is the basis of Mrs. Costello’s judgment about these fellow Americans, and how does that judgment affect Winterbourne? What does the conversation with his aunt determine him to do vis à vis Daisy?

7. On pages 432-36 of *Daisy Miller*, what reassessment does Winterbourne make upon once again meeting Daisy and her mother? How has his opinion changed since his initial acquaintance?

8. On pages 436-39 of *Daisy Miller*, Winterbourne and Daisy undertake their trip to the famous Château de Chillon. How does Winterbourne at first see the trip shaping up? How does Daisy behave at this place so prominent in European lore - what traits and interests manifest themselves as she and Winterbourne go through the Château?

9. On pages 438-39 of *Daisy Miller*, what are Winterbourne’s concluding thoughts about the trip to Chillon, and how does the subsequent conversation with his

aunt go? In what sense does this conversation with Mrs. Costello encapsulate Winterbourne's dilemma regarding how to "interpret" and act towards Daisy?

Part III (Norton 439-48)

10. On pages 439-43 of *Daisy Miller*, Winterbourne visits Mrs. Walker at a reception in the fashionable Roman *Via Gregoriana* ([image](#)), where Daisy soon makes her entrance. How does this encounter go for all concerned?

11. On pages 443-45 of *Daisy Miller*, what does Daisy decide to do as she departs from Mrs. Walker's reception? How does Winterbourne judge Daisy's new companion, signor Giovanelli, and what new assessment does he make of Daisy herself? To what extent is this view of her different from what Winterbourne had expressed previously?

12. On pages 445-48 of *Daisy Miller*, Mrs. Walker confers with Winterbourne and then gives Daisy some rather heavy-handed advice about her present conduct. How does Daisy react to that advice? Does her response to it surprise you? Why or why not? Subsequently, how does Winterbourne handle the strong disapproval that Mrs. Walker has voiced regarding Daisy? How do his and Mrs. Walker's opinions of Daisy differ?

Part IV (Norton 448-59)

13. On pages 448-51 of *Daisy Miller*, Daisy again calls upon Mrs. Walker at a reception, and parries wits with Winterbourne before Mrs. Walker cruelly "cuts" her (i.e. turns her back on the young woman). Consider how Daisy and Winterbourne dispute the significance of the term "flirt" -- who gets the better of this argument, and why? Does Daisy's poise and her general line of self-defense here surprise you? Why or why not? Finally, how does Daisy react when Mrs. Walker insults her?

14. On pages 451-54 of *Daisy Miller*, Winterbourne begins visiting Daisy at her hotel, where signor Giovanelli dotes on her. What seems to be Winterbourne's present state of mind with respect to Daisy and her moral standing? What terms does he adopt in talking about her with his aunt Mrs. Costello and with a tourist friend?

15. On pages 454-55 of *Daisy Miller*, Winterbourne has his last "almost alone" meeting with Daisy since Giovanelli isn't much of a hindrance even though he is as usual by her side. How does this encounter go for Daisy and Winterbourne?

What seems to be Daisy's aim in alleging that she is engaged to the Italian walking beside her?

16. On pages 456-58 of *Daisy Miller*, a week after his most recent conversation with Daisy, Winterbourne encounters her and Giovanelli unexpectedly while walking at night in the ruins of the Colosseum. What seemingly final judgment does this chance meeting lead Winterbourne to make regarding Daisy's character? What seems to be Daisy's state of mind in reacting as she does to Winterbourne's rather alarmed, heavy remarks to her and Giovanelli?

17. On pages 458-59 of *Daisy Miller*, Daisy falls ill of malaria ("Roman fever") and dies after a week of suffering. What does Winterbourne do after the funeral? What do the text's last six short paragraphs, and especially the last two of them, suggest about the ultimate impact of Daisy on the feelings and consciousness of Frederick Winterbourne?

General Questions on *Daisy Miller*

18. *Daisy Miller* belongs to the first phases of Henry James' long career, a phase in which, as biographer Leon Edel points out, the writer was much concerned with the theme of what it was like, and what it meant, to be an American living in Europe during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. So what do we learn from this text in that regard – what *does* it mean to be an American living in or visiting Europe for an extended period? What similarities and differences between America and Europe does the text explore?

19. *Daisy Miller* may be broadly about "Americanness" in relation to Europe, but it's also a story about a potential love match between a young man and a young woman. Why, ultimately, do you think Daisy proves to be such an enigma to Frederick Winterbourne? Is it because she really *is* full of simultaneously mysterious and contradictory qualities, or are the mystery and contradictoriness qualities that Winterbourne needs to project into her being for reasons of his own? Is the young man simply pulling the usual male-centered scam identified by authors such as Simone de Beauvoir when it comes to women -- i.e. is he defining her *a priori* as an "inessential other" and then judging her on that false, pre-fabricated basis, or is there some other way of understanding Winterbourne's difficulties with Daisy? Explain.

JACK LONDON

From “What Life Means to Me” (Norton Vol. D 917-20). From *Tales of the Pacific* (Penguin edition): “The House of Mapuhi” (31-53); “Mauki” (64-79); “The Sheriff of Kona” (121-34); “Koolau the Leper” (135-50); “The Bones of Kehekili” (151-73).

From “What Life Means to Me” (Norton Vol. D 917-20)

1. How does Jack London describe his early life experience in his essay “What Life Means to Me” (published in *Cosmopolitan* in 1906)? What does he have to say about labor, workers and the capitalists who employ them? How, as he recounts it, did his experiences shape his thoughts on the course he must follow in the future?
2. How much of the revolutionary philosophy in the 1906 essay “What Life Means to Me” can you find either directly or indirectly in one or more of the Jack London short stories we are reading, which were the product of his voyages through the Pacific Ocean aboard the ship he called the Snark?

“The House of Mapuhi” (Penguin 31-53)

3. From 29-36 of “The House of Mapuhi,” why does the native Mapuhi of Fakarava atoll (French Polynesia), who has found a remarkably large and high-quality pearl, want a house including various amenities built for him as payment rather than accepting cash? What kind of deal does the trader Alexandré Raoul offer him, and what terms does he end up getting from another trader, Toriki? What do his family members think of the deal, and why?
4. From 37-45 of “The House of Mapuhi,” the great cyclone of 1903 (this was an actual event in which nearly four hundred people lost their lives) comes on, ravaging Hikueru atoll where the story is set. How does Jack London convey the power of this cyclone? Moreover, what inflection of his favorite theme “man vs. nature” does the extended description offer when we factor in the segment’s focus on the struggles of trader Alexandré Raoul?
5. On 45-46 of “The House of Mapuhi,” the narrative shifts briefly to Mapuhi’s survival (as well as Raoul’s), and then moves strongly on 46-51 to an account of the successful struggle of Mapuhi’s mother Nauri to ride out the storm once she is torn away from Mapuhi, his wife Tefara and their daughter Ngakura. What

trials does Nauri undergo before and after washing up on tiny Takokota island, and what qualities does she summon to overcome them?

6. On 51-53 of "The House of Mapuhi," the narrative cuts to the hut of Mapuhi and Tefara, who are arguing about how Mapuhi managed to get more or less robbed of his pearl by the now-deceased trader Tariki and has nothing to show for it. Into this domestic dispute comes Nauri, who is at first feared to be a ghost. But what news does she bring home with her, and how does it change things for the family as well as perhaps adding a symbolic dimension to the story?

"Mauki (Penguin 64-79)

7. On 64-67 of "Mauki," what are the Melanesian protagonist Mauki's original circumstances -- where did he live, what did he look like, what was his social status, and what happened that drastically altered his life?

8. On 67-71 of "Mauki," Mauki unwittingly signs on the dotted line, so to speak, for a three-year period of service with the powerful Moongleam Soap Company. What pattern of action and consequences promptly sets in? What does Mauki learn about the white men who oppress him during this tumultuous period in his life? How do they react to his numerous attempts to escape, and what decision are they finally driven to make with regard to this "troublesome" Solomons native?

9. On 71-76 of "Mauki," the narrator describes the career and character of Lord Howe Island's overseer and sole white inhabitant, a German man named Bunster. What is this fellow like, and how does he treat Mauki in particular? Moreover, how are the other white Moongleam traders said to have dealt with native islanders who cross them or refute their authority as a quasi-governmental body?

10. On 76-79 of "Mauki," what revenge does Mauki take on his antagonist Bunster, and what arc does his life follow after he has taken his revenge? What has he ultimately learned about how to deal with the white men who have made his life so difficult, and how does he both assert and modulate his own newfound power as a chief?

11. Use the conclusion of "Mauki" (76-79) to reflect on the comparison that Jack London has been making throughout between the so-called savagery of Mauki and his fellow Melanesians and the conduct of the white people who rule the Solomons (a British protectorate from 1893-1978) and other island chains in the

Pacific. Ultimately, what, if any, differences does London's narrative posit, and to what extent does the story offer a critique of British and European practices and assumptions in connection with Melanesian and Polynesian people?

"The Sheriff of Kona" (Penguin 121-34)

12. On 121-27 of "The Sheriff of Kona," how does the narrator, or more particularly his dialogue partner Cudworth, describe Lyte Gregory, the former sheriff of Kona District on Hawaii Island? What are the man's physical attributes and personal qualities? In addition, what role does the landscape description on these pages play as a setup for the rest of the story?

13. On 127-31 of "The Sheriff of Kona," what is the significance of the particular manner in which Lyte Gregory learns of his dreadful condition? From whom does he learn this fact, and what impact does it have on him personally? Aside from the expected disfiguration that leprosy can cause, what seems to account for the denial and horror we find in the reactions of Lyte Gregory and his companions?

14. On 131-33 of "The Sheriff of Kona," why does Cudworth decide to get Lyte Gregory out of the leper colony where he resides? What is the outcome of the raid for Cudworth and Lyte, respectively?

"Koolau the Leper" (Penguin 135-50)

15. On 135-39 of "Koolau the Leper," Koolau makes a speech to his small group of fellow sufferers in the wilds of Kaua'i Island, all of whom are trying to avoid internment in a leper camp on Moloka'i Island. In this speech, how does Koolau assess the situation and prospects of himself and his band of followers?

16. On 139-43 of "Koolau the Leper," the sheriff pursuing Koolau makes his best attempt to capture the diseased fugitive. How does that attempt turn out? What kind of ethical and martial qualities does Koolau show as the white men or "haoles" (foreigners) try to hem him in and capture him?

17. On 143-50 of "Koolau the Leper," soldiers shell Koolau's refuge, his band of followers surrenders, and he is left to fend off his captors alone. Trace his emotions and reflections as he progresses from hunted fugitive to dying man: what qualities in the man persist? What has he proven by virtue of having eluded his would-be captors for so long?

18. General question about “Koolau the Leper”: how would you characterize Jack London’s strategy for representing the condition called leprosy? How does he make the narrator describe the disease and picture it forth for us? What do you think is the intended aim of such a representational strategy?

“The Bones of Kahekili” (Penguin 151-73)

19. Jack London often concentrates on humanity’s relationship with nature, but in “The Bones of Kahekili,” the emphasis lies more on the power of human institutions to shape an individual’s life and perceptions. In the case of Kumuhana the Hawaiian commoner, how does social rank affect the course of this character’s life? How does he take the dramatic events that come his way?

20. In “The Bones of Kahekili,” what is Hardman Pool’s history? How did this white man get to be chief, and how does he maintain his position? Why is he so intent on getting old Kumuhana to reveal his secret about the long-dead Chief Kahekili’s bones, and by what specific means does he pursue this knowledge?

FLANNERY O’CONNOR

“The Life You Save May Be Your Own” (Norton Vol. E 437-44); “Good Country People” (Vol. E 445-58).

“The Life You Save May Be Your Own” (Norton Vol. E 437-44)

1. From 437-40 of “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” which is apparently set sometime during the 1940s (depending on how old that late-20s Ford was when it stopped running), what is the basic situation on the farm of Lucynell Crater when Tom Shiftlet makes his way there? How does he present himself to the elder Lucynell and try to establish rapport with her? To what extent is his self-presentation accurate – what does it reveal and what does it hide?

2. From 440-43 of “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” what more is revealed about the elder Lucynell’s motives with regard to her daughter, and what more do we learn about Tom Shiftlet’s true nature and intentions? In responding to this combined question, try to draw as much as you can from the at times roundabout or indirect dialogue between the two characters.

3. From 443-44 of “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” Tom Shiftlet abandons his new bride and makes his way towards Mobile Alabama, which would seem to have been his intention from at least the moment he married her. So he has tricked the elder Lucynell on the basis of her desire for a permanent son-in-law

to help her on the farm. But I no doubt mentioned in class that the Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor's stories often end with a twist, one that leaves the main character in a difficult state that nonetheless seems to open up a space for redemption. How does what happens to Tom Shiftlet from the time he picks up a young hitchhiker onwards perhaps fit this pattern? In responding, consider not only events but Tom's words and feelings.

"Good Country People" (Vol. E 445-58)

4. From 445-49 of "Good Country People," the text's focus is mainly on the divorced farm-owner Mrs. Hopewell. What seem to be Mrs. Hopewell's main qualities? What is her relationship with her tenant Mrs. Freeman and with her own daughter Joy? Why, for example, is Mrs. Freeman supposedly "good country people" (also explain what that term appears to mean at this point), and what accounts for the tense, frustration-laced relationship between mother and daughter Hopewell?

5. From 445-49 of "Good Country People," how does the text weave in Joy's own outlook and personality – for example, when and why did she change her name from Joy to Hulga, and what does she seem to think of her mother and the "good country people" Mrs. Hopewell is always praising?

6. From 449-54 of "Good Country People," the visit of Manley Pointer the bible salesman is recounted, along with the visit's aftermath. How does this young man become an object of contention between the elder Mrs. Hopewell and her daughter Joy/Hulga? During and after this first encounter, what desires and intentions regarding the young man does Joy/Hulga reveal.

7. From 454-57 top of "Good Country People," characterize the progress of Joy/Hulga's arranged meeting with Manley Pointer. How does she imagine this meeting unfolding in advance? Then, during the actual meeting and conversation, what happens? What does she try to convince him of, and by what means? What is Manley himself interested in? Why does this interest of his both disturb and excite her?

8. From 457-58 of "Good Country People," Joy/Hulga's apparent seductive triumph turns to unpleasant shock and dismay when Manley Pointer takes away her artificial limb and refuses to give it back. He also mocks her atheist rhetoric on top of that strange accomplishment. I mentioned in class that the Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor's stories often end with a twist, one that leaves the main character in a difficult state that nonetheless seems to open up the

possibility of deep insight and redemption. How does what happens to Joy/Hulga at the hands of the devious, cynical bible salesman Manley Pointer correspond to this pattern? In responding, consider what Joy/Hulga's wooden leg has meant to her, and what the taking away of it might mean. Consider, too, the connection between this artificial limb and the strong intellect in which she has prided herself as a mark of distinction amongst the country-dwellers she apparently despises.

CARL SANDBURG

"Chicago" (Norton Vol. D 279-80); "Fog" (Vol. D 280); "Cool Tombs" (Vol. D 280-81); "Grass" (Vol. D 281).

"Chicago" (Norton Vol. D 279-80)

1. In "Chicago," how does Sandburg build up a representation of the bustling Midwestern city -- what images, sounds, people, and activities does he convey as central to the ongoing meaning of the place? Do they all add up to a unified picture, or does the poem's task lie elsewhere? Explain.

2. How is the treatment accorded the great city in Sandburg's "Chicago" similar to Walt Whitman's treatment of his landscapes in *Leaves of Grass* or "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"? But how is Sandburg's description of Chicago also different from Whitman's landscapes generally? How, for example, does Sandburg turn the poem into something like an argument in defense of Chicago, a reply to those who might look down on the city in comparison to the great cities of the eastern United States?

"Fog" (Norton Vol. D 280)

3. In "Fog," why do you think Sandburg describes the coming-on of the fog as being like the stealthy walk, perch and attitude of a cat? In using such a metaphor, what might the poet be suggesting about the impact of fog on us, on our perceptions and our daily lives?

"Cool Tombs" (Norton Vol. D 280-81)

4. Lincoln, Ulysses Grant, Pocahontas, nameless urban masses, and lovers all figure in Sandburg's poem "Cool Tombs." In the end, what do they have in common? By offering us a perspective on death, what is this poem suggesting about how to live?

“Grass” (Norton Vol. D 281).

5. What is the “work” of the grass at the battle sites the speaker of Sandburg’s poem “Grass” mentions -- Austerlitz and Waterloo from the Napoleonic Era, Gettysburg from the American Civil War, Ypres and Verdun from World War I? Why is the natural process mentioned in this poem so necessary to human life -- what mental and emotional process does it imply and regard as vital to getting on with life?

SAM SHEPARD

True West (Norton Vol. E 870-909).

***True West, Act 1* (Norton Vol. E 870-87)**

Scene 1 (871-75)

1. What contrasts and tensions between Austin and Lee already begin to show in the first scene of *True West*, when Lee shows up at their mother’s home where Austin is temporarily house-sitting? What is the two brother’s common background, and yet how are they different in terms of personality and outlook?

Scene 2 (875-78)

2. In Scene 2 of *True West*, Lee mentions that he has some experience in the realm of art, which may come as a surprise to us. Why does Lee bring this up with Austin in the course of their continuing conversation, and how does this new piece of information change the dynamic between Austin and Lee?

Scene 3 (879-82)

3. How does Lee upstage his brother Austin in Scene 3 of *True West*? How do you interpret the interaction between producer Saul Kimmer and Lee -- does Saul appear to take Lee seriously at this point? If he does, what is it that he likes about Austin’s elder brother?

Scene 4 (882-87)

4. In Scene 4 of *True West*, why is Lee so ambivalent about his new project, which involves using his imagination and Austin’s skills as a writer to set down his Western story as a screenplay? What’s the basis of the tension between Lee and Austin with regard both to the lives they’ve led up to now and the kind of cinema

they prefer? In responding to the latter question, consider what the brothers say about concepts such as being true-to-life and authentic in one's delineation of character and action.

***True West*, Act 2 (Norton Vol. E 887-909)**

Scene 5 (887-90)

5. In Scene 5 of *True West*, how did Lee (according to his own report on the matter) manage to convince Saul that he ought to accept his Western-themed story at the expense of Austin's love story? What is recounted about Saul's supposed view of the film industry's ways and needs?

Scene 6 (890-93)

6. In Scene 6 of *True West*, Austen and Saul argue about the quality of Lee's story, which is to be developed into a screenplay. They are also arguing about what is meant by "authenticity" and "the West," a conversation that the two brothers started in the previous scene. According to Saul, then, what makes Lee's story worthwhile, and what seems to be Lee's problem with Saul's analysis of Lee's imaginative efforts?

7. With regard to your own understanding of the Western film genre, what makes for a *good* Western? What makes for a bad one, and why? How does "the West" often figure even in films or television shows that aren't directly Westerns at all? Briefly discuss an example or two that you can think of.

Scene 7 (893-97)

8. In Scene 7 of *True West*, explore the role reversal that occurs between Austin and Lee – how thorough is this reversal, one that sees Lee trying to become a serious screenwriter and Austin wanting to escape to the desert? What are its limitations or boundaries?

9. In Scene 7 of *True West*, Lee recounts a story about his father's quest to get his teeth removed and obtain a set of false teeth. How does that story go, and to what extent does it successfully unfold Lee's notions about true-to-life, authentic narration?

Scene 8 (898-903)

10. In Scene 8 of *True West*, why does Lee take to beating Austin's typewriter with one of the golf clubs that Saul gave him? What are the terms of the deal the two brothers make towards the end of this scene, and by what process have they arrived at it, based on what you've noted about the earlier part of the scene?

Scene 9 (903-09)

11. In Scene 9 of *True West*, what effect does the return of Austin and Lee's mother have on events? How does she greet her sons, and how does she react to the news that they plan to go to the desert, and then to the nearly lethal confrontation they get into in her presence? What about her clumsy interest in Pablo Picasso and the exhibit of his work that's supposedly coming to town soon – what does that tell us about “Mom,” and how might her confused remarks in this vein relate to the struggle between Austin and Lee?

12. In Scene 9 of *True West*, how would you describe the final state of affairs between Austin and Lee? Why have they fallen to fighting instead of pursuing the deal that they made back in Scene 8? How have each of the two men changed, if at all, from the beginning of the play, and what change, if any, is there in their prospects for a more meaningful or satisfying life in the future?

13. In Scene 9 of *True West*, Austin and Lee end up confronting each other in their childhood home, but the space they occupy is described by the stage directions as “a vast desert-like landscape” (909). We know that the desert is a (perhaps *the*) traditional symbolic site of “the West,” both in films and in everyday life. So how do you interpret the symbolism of this setting for the final struggle between Lee and Austin? What does the play's title *True West* mean to you by this point in the action?

WALLACE STEVENS

“The Snow Man” (Norton American Lit. 8th. ed. Vol. D 283-84); “Disillusionment of Ten O’Clock” (Vol. D 285); “Sunday Morning” (Vol. D 285-88); “Anecdote of the Jar” (Vol. D 288-89); “Peter Quince at the Clavier” (Vol. D 289-90); “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (Vol. D 291-92); “The Idea of Order at Key West” (Vol. D 293-94); “Of Modern Poetry” (Vol. D 294); “The Plain Sense of Things” (Vol. D 295).

“The Snow Man” (Norton Vol. D 283-84)

1. In Stevens' "The Snow Man," how does this poem counter the Romantics' way of relating to and representing nature as an expressive vehicle for the human mind and spirit? What must happen, according to the speaker, for someone to write about winter *accurately*?

"Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" (Vol. D 285)

2. Stevens' "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" takes for its subject going to bed at ten o'clock at night: what will one wear, what dreams will come and what do they say about the dreamers? Sort out the groups of wearers/dreamers evoked by the speaker -- who would perhaps dream of "baboons and periwinkles," and who would be quite unlikely to do that? Finally, why does the drunken sailor's dream get pride of place; i.e. why is it mentioned last?

"Sunday Morning" (Vol. D 285-88)

3. In "Sunday Morning," Stevens' speaker contrasts traditional metaphysical abstractions with beautiful material realities and passions, but there's more to the poem than that. Critic J. Hillis Miller writes that "'Sunday Morning' is Stevens' most eloquent description of the moment when the gods dissolve. Bereft of the supernatural, man does not lie down paralyzed in despair" (*Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* Harvard UP, 1966). What, then, does Stevens suggest humanity does in such a case -- how do the lady and others referenced in the poem respond, and what at least partly underlies that response?

"Anecdote of the Jar" (Vol. D 288-89)

4. In Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar," what does the simple jar (a human artifact) that the speaker has placed on a hill in Tennessee do to the surrounding landscape? How do you interpret the thought that the jar "did not give of bird or bush, / Like nothing else in Tennessee"? Why do you suppose that distinctness from bird or bush should matter to us, and what motive can you conjecture for the speaker's having placed the jar on a hill in the first place?

"Peter Quince at the Clavier" (Vol. D 289-90)

5. In Stevens' "Peter Quince at the Clavier," the poet alludes to the story of Susanna in the apocryphal biblical book [*Susanna*](#)? The speaker says that with regard to his thinking about the female addressee's blue silken clothing, "It is like the strain / Waked in the elders by Susanna." What, then, is that "strain" like, so

far as you can tell from the rest of the poem? And how is Susanna herself pictured – what is she doing, and how does she react to the elders who covet her?

“Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (Vol. D 291-92)

6. The blackbird is hardly a creature we associate with romantic transcendence of the ordinary, so what, if anything, is special about the blackbird in Stevens’ “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”? Why are there thirteen ways (and counting, we may suppose) of looking at a blackbird? Do these ways of perceiving or considering the bird somehow connect, or should we just consider each as separate and equally worthwhile? Explain why you respond as you do.

7. In Stevens’ “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” concentrate on any two of the “ways of looking at a blackbird” specified, and try to explain what you believe to be the significance of the perceptions evoked.

“The Idea of Order at Key West” (Vol. D 293-94)

8. In Stevens’ “The Idea of Order at Key West,” what is the basic scene described at the poem’s beginning? That is, what’s happening and who are the characters participating in the scene? If the scene is subject to development, how would you describe that development? In other words, what is happening in the middle part of the poem, and then in the final portion (say, line 45-end)?

9. In Stevens’ “The Idea of Order at Key West,” the speaker says that he and his companion Ramon Fernandez hear the poem’s “she” singing and “not the sea” (14). What relation, if any, does the speaker posit between the female singer and the ocean scene around her? Furthermore, what is the source of her song, if the poem offers any hints about it? Finally, we might broaden the first question to one about the relationship between words/perception/imagination and the world around us: what might Stevens’ poem be suggesting about this relationship?

10. In Stevens’ “The Idea of Order at Key West,” the speaker refers to a “blessed rage for order” and to “the maker’s rage to order words of the sea . . . / And of ourselves and of our origins” (52-55). How do you understand this “rage for order” – according to the poem’s final stanza, what are we supposedly trying to accomplish by means of our speech, our perceptual acts, our imaginings?

“Of Modern Poetry” (Vol. D 294)

11. In “Of Modern Poetry,” Stevens’ speaker explains what is meant by “poem of the act of the mind” (28). How do you understand the meaning of that phrase? Why, for instance, does Stevens use the metaphor of “theater” to describe the kind of thinking that a modern poet must do? How does that kind of thinking supposedly differ from the kinds of thinking we engage in every day, just to get by in the world?

“The Plain Sense of Things” (Vol. D 295).

12. In “The Plain Sense of Things,” Stevens’ speaker addresses the role of imagination in our lives, its role in our perceptions of what things are and how things are. What, then, is “the plain sense of things,” and why does even that plain sense need to be imagined and reflected on?

FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER

From “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (Norton Vol. C 1133-37).

“The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (Norton Vol. C 1133-37)

1. In “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” what does Turner suggest has long been the practical and symbolic value of “the Frontier” for Americans? What transformation is taking place by the 1890s (the time of Turner’s address) in the concept of the Frontier, and how, according to him, might that change turn out to be important to the American experience?

MARK TWAIN

From *Letters from the Earth* (Norton Vol. C 336-51).

From *Letters from the Earth*

1. On page 336, in the initial section of our selections from *Letters from the Earth*, how does the narrator describe God’s creation of the universe? How does it stack up with the account given at the beginning of *Genesis*? In what way is Twain’s account here a reflection on that biblical account of creation?

2. On pages 337-38 of *Letters from the Earth*, what is the “Law of Nature,” and why does it so confuse Satan, who discusses it with his fellow angels? When Satan asks God about this Law, which makes the universe and earth within it

operate as they do, how does God explain what he is up to in establishing the supremacy of such a law? How does he explain its corollaries predation and suffering on the part of the hunted?

3. On page 338 of *Letters from the Earth*, God adds mankind to the creation, and tells Satan to behold this new "experiment." How does God explain the nature of this experiment to Satan? In what way does this explanation relate to the old idea (so popular during the C15-17 European Renaissance) that man is a microcosm of all other beings? On the whole, what seems to be God's attitude towards both mankind and the animals he has created?

4. On page 339 of *Letters from the Earth*, what does the temporarily banished Satan identify in his first letter to Michael and Gabriel as the most striking thing about human beings? What is it about their attitude towards their place in the creation that really seems to get under Satan's skin, and why?

5. On pages 339-42 of *Letters from the Earth*, in his second letter Satan chattily relates the strangeness of the heaven he says humans have invented. How does he develop his critique of this so-called invention -- what does he identify as the most ridiculous things about it, and what reasons does he give for thinking that way? On the whole, how would you sum up Satan's beef with the popular Christian concept of heaven as a place where nice people go to praise God forever?

6. On pages 343-44 of *Letters from the Earth*, in his fourth letter Satan serves up his cynical opinion of Adam and Eve's fall from grace. How does Satan view the famous Fall? What did Adam and Eve gain and lose by chomping that apple in the Garden of Eden? Moreover, why, according to Satan, didn't God just eliminate mankind altogether after things went bad later on -- why did he bother commanding Noah to build an Ark?

7. On pages 344-47 of *Letters from the Earth*, in his sixth letter Satan dwells with particular emphasis on the fly that he says was left behind when Noah launched his Ark; the fly had to be retrieved. To what supposed insight about the nature of God himself does Satan's discussion of this forgotten fly lead -- what divine trait, according to Satan, is the key to understanding God's ways? Ultimately, what criticism does Twain's Satan seem to be making here regarding the *source* of Christianity's conception of the Divine Nature?

8. On pages 346-47 of *Letters from the Earth*, in his sixth letter Satan transitions from his comments about Noah, the Ark and the fly that got left behind to a

concluding discussion on God's key trait and his responsibility for everything that happens. How does Satan explain his rationale for this latter point – namely God's supposed culpability for the evils that human beings suffer? What traditional Christian notion about who or what is responsible for "bad things happening in the world" is Satan implicitly arguing against here?

9. On pages 347-51 of *Letters from the Earth*, a bureaucratic "Recording Angel" writes to one Abner Scofield, evidently a wealthy coal dealer living in New York, regarding the status of the fellow's prayers. Which of Abner's prayers are granted, and which are not? Why so? Finally, how would you sum up the Recording Angel's remarks as a critique of prayer generally on the part of Mark Twain, as it seems fair to suggest?

10. General question: as we can see from the Norton editorial notes about the original posthumous publication of Mark Twain's *Letters from the Earth*, which volume only came out in 1961 (over half a century after the author composed his notes), the effort has always been controversial, for the obvious reason that in it the author serves up an unsparingly satirical analysis of Christian theology and everyday practice. What do you think of the selections you have read, or the entire volume if you happen to have read it? Is Twain just being mean-spirited and derisive about a belief system many others hold dear, or do you think his criticisms, if such they be (after all, this is fiction), are worthy of respect for their bluntness and overall quality of thought?

11. General question about Mark Twain's *Letters from the Earth*: the current intellectual landscape here in America and in Great Britain and parts of Europe contains a fairly robust number of strong advocates of atheism or agnosticism, the scientific method, etc. over against basically any kind of religious belief or practice. Some names we could mention in this regard are the late Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and comedian/talk show host Bill Maher. And then there are the so-called Pastafarians, who insist on replacing every mention of a traditional, metaphysical God with a reference to what they find an equally bogus metaphysical entity, "the Flying Spaghetti Monster" (FSM). If you are familiar with some of these critics, how does Mark Twain's wry satire compare to the sorts of arguments they make against the truth-status and moral uprightness of the world's religions?

12. General question about Mark Twain's *Letters from the Earth*: let's say that for the sake of argument, we granted the compelling force of the author's apparent objections to Christianity or indeed any religion whatsoever. (I am not suggesting that you should actually agree or disagree with Twain -- that is hardly my place!)

Would that mean we ought to accord “reason” or “science” or “the scientific method” our absolute or near-absolute trust as a way of coming at our existence and reality? Why or why not?

WALT WHITMAN

“When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” (Norton Vol. C 79-85).

“When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”

1. In the first four sections of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” we are introduced to the poem’s three main symbols: the lilac bush, the planet Venus, and the Hermit Thrush songbird. What does the speaker tell us about each in these initial sections, and what do these three objects appear to mean to him at this early point in the poem?
2. In sections 5-7 of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” we encounter a traditional elegiac “funeral procession,” which also opens onto a very Whitman-like panorama of people and places. What does the poet mention in this light -- what people and what places? How would you describe the balance here between nature and humanity, and why might it matter to the poem’s larger movement what that balance is?
3. In sections 5-7 of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” how do you interpret the poet’s gift of a “lilac sprig” to adorn the coffin of President Lincoln? How does the speaker transform the significance of that act when he arrives at section 7?
4. Although Venus, the lilac bush, and the Hermit Thrush are often said to constitute the symbolic Holy Trinity of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” to them we might add not only the “harsh surrounding cloud” first mentioned in Section 2 but also the coffin and funeral train of President Lincoln, which are mentioned in section 5 and elsewhere. (The train took about two weeks to travel from Washington, D.C. to the president’s burial site in Springfield, Illinois, and thousands paid their respects as it slowly made its 1,600 mile way to Springfield.) How does the poet introduce the coffin in this section of the poem, and to what effect? In responding, it would be best to consider not only the section’s content but also its structure.
5. In section 8 of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” the poet addresses the planet Venus as a portent, and then from sections 9-13 he listens to the

Hermit Thrush singing, but is detained by both Venus and the strong scent of the lilac bush in spring. How do you interpret the significance of this delay? Why, that is, can't he just go to the swamp and join up with the songbird, which we can tell he longs to do?

6. In sections 10-11 of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," the poet raises a key issue about finding the appropriate form to express his emotions about the death of Lincoln. Why is this question of how to fit one's poetic forms to one's expressive passion an important one to raise? What response does he give to his own question in these sections, and how do you interpret that response? (Consider in part the catalogs of people and places that he now mentions – this is a regular feature of Whitman's poetry, which embraces panoramic visions and large perspectives or "vistas.")

7. Section 14 of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" is vital because there the poet attains a kind of ultimate insight, an epiphany or moment of intense realization. What has he come to understand, and what seems to be the immediate catalyst for that insight?

8. Again in Section 14 of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," where does the poet go as soon as the understanding he needs comes to him? What happens when he gets there – what becomes possible now?

9. Still in Section 14 of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," the poet finally has the right words to utter for his "song," and now he freely chants them (the italics in our text mark the song itself). The addressee is obviously Death. What relationship does the poet's song establish with Death? What is the poet's present attitude towards that usually grim entity?

10. In Section 15 of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," the poet envisions the torn battle flags, wreckage, and broken bodies of the Civil War (the latest estimates by historian J. David Hacker run to about 750,000! The population at the time would have been about 31.4 million people). Why does this vision follow the utterance of the poet's song back in Section 14? What transformation has taken place in the poet's perspective on loss?

11. In Section 16 of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," the poet is finally able to cease from singing and join the Hermit Thrush in its swampy home. By now, in what relationship do the poem's major symbols stand to one another and to the poet himself? Moreover, in what sense does the poem both

return to the thought of President Lincoln and transcend or transmute that thought into a broader vision of loss and recompense?

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

A Streetcar Named Desire, (Norton Vol. E 93-155).

***A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene 1 (Norton Vol. E 93-102)**

1. On pages 93-96 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the stage descriptions render the play's New Orleans setting and Blanche DuBois makes her way into New Orleans, taking train lines with the symbolically charged names Desire and Cemeteries to get to a street called Elysian Fields (named after the abode of the blessed in classical literature) where her sister Stella lives. Once inside Stella's apartment, Blanche awaits her sister's return. If we combine the relevant stage descriptions with Blanche's words and actions up to this point before she meets Stella, how much do we already know or how much can we surmise about this character? Set down your thoughts on who Blanche DuBois is, based on what you've heard and visualized so far.

2. On pages 96-100 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche greets her younger sister Stella upon the latter's return, and the two exchange pleasantries before engaging in a rather intense conversation about their childhood estate, Belle Reve. First of all, how does Stella characterize her marriage with Stanley Kowalski? And how does Blanche defend herself while delivering the bad news that Belle Reve is no longer a family possession? What more do we learn about her anxieties and unhappiness as she makes this defense?

3. On pages 101-02 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, we are introduced to Stanley Kowalski as he makes his way towards and then enters the apartment, whereupon he and Stella have their first encounter. How do the stage directions as well as Stanley's own words and gestures help establish him for us as a strong, if by no means refined, character? How does this first brief meeting between Blanche and Stanley go?

***A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene 2 (Norton Vol. E 103-09)**

4. On pages 103-05 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Stanley rehearses his suspicions about Blanche to Stella. What are those suspicions, and how does he go about trying to back them up? What suggests that Stanley is misinterpreting Blanche and her personal effects?

5. On pages 105-08 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Stanley confronts Blanche about the loss of Belle Reve, and the two have a frank conversation about the matter. What does Blanche reveal to Stanley about the manner in which the old estate was lost? But what else happens during this conversation? What about the personal side of the interaction between these two very different characters -- how does Blanche try to maintain some control over the conversation, and how does Stanley try to undercut her or get under her skin?

***A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene 3 (Norton Vol. E 109-16)**

6. On pages 109-110 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Stanley and friends are playing poker when Stella and Blanche return home. A few unpleasant exchanges soon occur between Blanche and a very unchivalrous Stanley, but Blanche also meets Mitch and ends up talking with him at some length from pages 111-14. How does Mitch distinguish himself from Stanley during this conversation and afterwards, on 115-16 when he deals with Stanley's unruly behavior and comforts Blanche? And how does Blanche represent herself to Mitch as they talk?

7. On pages 115-16 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a brawling and out-of-control Stanley, after being treated to an unscheduled shower to sober him up a bit, starts wailing because Stella has fled the premises. This is the scene in which Stanley lets out his famous booming cry, "STELL-LAHHHHH!" Read this scene closely, including Tennessee Williams' detailed stage directions that fill us in on what happens aside from the words spoken. How does this scene epitomize the kind of relationship that Stella and Stanley have? How does it contrast with the ideal of womanhood and gender relations that Blanche seems to be trying to uphold when she meets Mitch?

***A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene 4 (Norton Vol. E 117-22)**

8. On pages 117-22 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Stella defends Stanley and her decision to marry him from the negative assessment of an incredulous Blanche, who is determined to rebuild her life and get her younger sister out of a marriage she considers disastrous. What does Stella lay out for Blanche as the basis of her marriage with Stanley? How does Blanche's subsequent response (see page 121, "He acts like an animal ...") go well beyond insulting the silently listening Stanley to constitute a passionate defense of "progress" in human affairs? What is Blanche defending under the umbrella term "progress"?

***A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene 5 (Norton Vol. E 122-27)**

9. On pages 122-27 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Stanley startles Blanche by sneeringly recounting rumors he has heard from a friend regarding Blanche's scandalous connection to the Hotel Flamingo in Laurel, Mississippi. Later, she and Stella have an intimate conversation, in which Blanche's fragility is very much on display. What deep anxieties and counteracting hopes does Blanche reveal to Stella during this conversation? How does Blanche's rather unsuccessful attempt to seduce the paperboy who shows up towards the scene's end reinforce or deepen our understanding of the dread she has already revealed?

***A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene 6 (Norton Vol. E 127-33)**

10. On pages 127-33 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, how do things stand between Blanche and Mitch? To what extent is she honest with him, and he with her?

11. On pages 132-33 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, what story does Blanche relate to Mitch about her young, now-deceased husband, Allan Gray? Why was she drawn to him, and what happened on the fateful night that he committed suicide? How does this story impact the end of the evening that Blanche and Mitch have spent together?

***A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene 7 (Norton Vol. E 133-37)**

12. On pages 133-37 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, how does the seventh scene serve as a preparation for the one that follows, i.e. Scene 8? How does the 1933 Harold Arlen song that Blanche keeps singing, "It's Only a Paper Moon," reinforce the tragic contrast between her and her increasingly hostile opponent Stanley? Look up the song's lyrics online (performance or text -- it has been sung by greats such as Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra and Paul McCartney) and study them for what they have to offer in illuminating Blanche's way of looking at things and representing herself.

***A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene 8 (Norton Vol. E 137-41)**

13. On pages 137-41 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Stanley, Stella and Blanche celebrate (if you can call it that) the latter's birthday at home. Aside from Stanley's usual cruelty towards "sister Blanche" (her "gift" is a one-way ticket back to Laurel, Mississippi), consider this scene for its representation of Stella and Stanley's marriage. What grievances are aired in this scene between these two, and what is implied about the kind of relationship they have? (Earlier scenes are, of course, also valuable in this regard -- Scene 3 in particular.)

A Streetcar Named Desire, Scene 9 (Norton Vol. E 141-45)

14. On pages 141-45 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Mitch finally confronts Blanche about the disjunction between her unhappy past and the way she now wants to be understood. How effective is Blanche's self-defense against her sometime admirer's blunt charges? To what extent does Mitch's behavior and attitude resemble Stanley's thus far?

A Streetcar Named Desire, Scene 10 (Norton Vol. E 145-50)

15. On pages 145-50 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, trace the circumstances in which Stanley sexually assaults Blanche. Why is the scene not surprising, given what we have seen and heard from Stanley up to this point? How does he attempt to rationalize what he is about to do? Finally, what about the manner in which the playwright has chosen to represent Stanley's criminal act -- consider this scene's words, gestures, and actions for what they reveal or suggest about the characters involved.

A Streetcar Named Desire, Scene 11 (Norton Vol. E 150-55)

16. On pages 150-55 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, why doesn't Stella come to the aid of her sister Blanche against Stanley's lies after he has attacked her? We have considered Blanche's illusionism or fantasy-spinning for herself the status of a southern belle. But what illusion is Stella propagating (along with Stanley) in her refusal to take Blanche's side, and why does she need to do that?

17. On pages 150-55 of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, how do the doctor and nurse treat Blanche when they come to take her away to an asylum? Explain how they neutralize her opposition to being removed from her surroundings. Finally, when Blanche invokes "the kindness of strangers," how do you unpack that statement? What philosophy, what anxiety, underlies Blanche's affirmation?

18. General question. We will have watched the well-regarded 1951 Elia Kazan film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, (based on the successful Broadway play) before discussing the text. How faithful to the text we have did you find the film? Were there any significant alterations in tone or action? If so, explain how any such differences affected your understanding of the text.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

From *Spring and All* (Norton Vol. D 346-47); Poems: "Queen-Anne's Lace" (Vol. D 305); "Spring and All" (Vol. D 306-07); "To Elsie" (Vol. D 307-09); "The Red

Wheelbarrow" (Vol. D 309); "The Dead Baby" (Vol. D 309-10); "This Is Just to Say" (Vol. D 310); "A Sort of a Song" (Vol. D 310); "Burning the Christmas Greens" (Vol. D 311-13); "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" (Vol. D 313).

"Queen-Anne's Lace" (Norton Vol. D 305)

1. In W. C. Williams' "Queen-Anne's Lace," the speaker gives whiteness a connotation that differs somewhat from the one we often give it, the simple notion of purity and innocence. What do whiteness and other colors or color references mean in this poem? If someone -- me, for example, right now -- asked you bluntly what the poem is "about," how would you respond?

"Spring and All" (Norton Vol. D 306-07)

2. W. C. Williams' "Spring and All" is of course partly a landscape description -- it helps us to visualize a patch of land alongside the road to a hospital as winter begins to turn into spring. But that isn't the most interesting thing about this poem. What does it tell us about natural process, and about the relationship between natural process and the speaker's own consciousness as a perceiver of the natural world?

"To Elsie" (Norton Vol. D 307-09)

3. In W. C. Williams' "To Elsie," the name apparently refers to Elsie Borden, Williams' mentally challenged maid, but the poem is sometimes read as representing America's failure to imagine itself in a sustainable or coherent way. What can you find in the poem's references to Elsie and others as well as its landscape description that might support such an interpretation? Or if you have some other way of understanding it, what's the basis of your own reading?

"The Red Wheelbarrow" (Norton Vol. D 309)

4. W. C. Williams himself, in a recorded March 19, 1952 interview at Princeton University, jokingly called "The Red Wheelbarrow" a "perfect poem," and suggested (seriously enough, I think) that "It means just the same as the opening lines of {Keats'} *Endymion*: 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.'" What do you suppose he meant by talking about the poem in that way? Furthermore, what is it that "depends" on the red wheelbarrow, and why so?

"The Dead Baby" (Norton Vol. D 309-10)

5. In W. C. Williams' "The Dead Baby," what perspective is offered on the departed child as well as the suffering of the parents? How do you understand the poem's conclusion from lines 19-24, with their reference to displaying the child for visitors somewhat like a curio-item in the parents' home -- what kind of strategy does the poem seem to imply for coping with the child's premature passing?

"This Is Just to Say" (Norton Vol. D 310)

6. In what way does W. C. Williams' "This Is Just to Say" challenge the ordinary way of thinking about poetic form and subject-matter? If someone were to say, "but this isn't poetry at all!" how might you defend it? Or would you?

7. With regard to his "This Is Just to Say" poem, in a June 1950 interview with John W. Gerber, Williams himself says, "everything in our lives, if it's sufficiently authentic to our lives and touches us deeply enough . . . is capable of being organized into a form which can be a poem." He also says it would be a bonus to set it down in "conventional metrical form." Do you favor something like this rationale for writing poetry with such unassuming, humble subject matter? Why or why not?

8. In his "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," William Wordsworth references the following deliberately foolish "poem" from Samuel Johnson: "I put my hat upon my head / And walked into the Strand, / And there I met another man / Whose hat was in his hand." Wordsworth explains why it doesn't measure up thus: "the *matter* expressed in Dr. Johnson's stanza is contemptible. The proper method of treating trivial and simple verses ... is not to say, this is a bad kind of poetry, or this is not poetry; but this wants sense; it is neither interesting in itself, nor can lead to anything interesting" Do you suppose that Wordsworth would say the same thing, more or less, about W. C. Williams' "This Is Just to Say"? Why or why not?

"A Sort of a Song" (Norton Vol. D 310)

9. What relationship between words and things does W. C. Williams' "A Sort of a Song" advocate? How is the metaphor of the saxifrage plant useful to the poet in that regard? What about the comparison between "snakes" and the words of a poem—how does that help deepen our sense of the relationship the poet may be asserting between words and the world?

10. In W. C. Williams' "A Sort of a Song," the speaker says in a parenthetical musing, "No ideas / but in things" (9-10). In saying that, what basic perspective on the nature and source of "ideas" does the speaker apparently reject?

"Burning the Christmas Greens" (Norton Vol. D 311-13)

11. W. C. Williams' "Burning the Christmas Greens" explores the meaning of the practice whereby one goes out and cuts little branches from trees to serve as wreaths and other Christmas decorations; some time after the holiday is done, one burns this greenery, as here it is cast into a fireplace. How does the speaker draw out the value of these ornaments, beyond their obvious decorative uses? How are they made to relate to the great power of the seasonal cycles (nature's pageantry of perpetual death and rebirth), and to the renewal of the human spirit itself?

"Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" (Norton Vol. D 313)

12. W. C. Williams' "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" is partly a description of the famous Brueghel painting in which Icarus, his wax wings having melted because he flew too close to the sun, is shown just as he has fallen into the sea where he drowns. What forces referenced in the poem seem to strive to prevent the title event from taking center stage? Even so, how does Williams keep the death of Icarus before us or in our thoughts?

13. The Daedalus and Icarus story from Greek mythology is often interpreted as relevant to the fate of flights of poetic imagination. How might we enlist that insight in reading W. C. Williams' "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus"? How, that is, might the poem be understood as a meditation on the limitations of artistic and literary representation?