

**QUESTIONS ON LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY**  
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## DANTE ALIGHIERI QUESTIONS

Assigned: From *Il Convivio* (249-50); “Letter to Can Grande” (251-52).

### **From *Il Convivio*, Book 2, Chapter 1**

1. How do Dante’s comments about interpretation (249-50) compare to those of Thomas Aquinas (243-46)?

### **From “Letter to Can Grande”**

2. Choose a passage from the Bible and offer your own brief “fourfold exegesis.” Alternately, offer a brief multi-level interpretation of any passage from any text. (general question)

3. If you have read all or part of *The Divine Comedy*, briefly illustrate how Dante follows his understanding of interpretation in his own work. In other words, find a passage that you believe signifies on more than one level. (general question)

4. Do you suppose that Augustine and Aquinas would approve of Dante’s willingness to defend figurative language for vernacular, rather than sacred, literature? Why or why not? (general question)

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## SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *Summa Theologica* (240-46).

### ***Summa Theologica***

1. What assumptions in Aquinas do you find derived from Aristotle? (general question)

2. To what extent are Augustine and Aquinas in agreement about the significance of figurative language such as metaphor in the Bible? (general question)

3. Explain “metaphor” in your own terms, but also incorporating the terms “vehicle” and “tenor” in your response. (general question)

### ***Summa Theologica*, Question 1, Ninth Article**

4. Why, according to Aquinas, is the Bible’s metaphoric language both “necessary and useful” -- what makes it necessary, and in what three ways is it useful to human beings? (244)

5. What does Aquinas suggest is the value of figurative language to God, as opposed to mere mortals? That is, how does metaphor preserve or remind us of the gap between the human and the divine? (244)

### ***Summa Theologica*, Question 1, Tenth Article**

6. Why, according to Aquinas, is the Bible’s figurative language not a threat to stable meaning or to God’s providential order -- i.e. to his all-encompassing plan for humans and the universe? (245)

7. In Aquinas' view, what is the "literal sense" of a figurative expression? Why is it important for him to define the term "literal"? (246)

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## ARISTOTLE QUESTIONS

Assigned: *The Poetics* (90-117).

### *Poetics*

1. On 90-92, Aristotle says that the imitative arts differ in media, object, and manner. What do those terms mean? Give an example of each. Also, in what sense might do his initial remarks about the purpose of *The Poetics* emphasize his scientific attitude and methodology?
2. On 93, why is it, according to Aristotle, that "everyone delights in representations"? What instincts does imitation or representation satisfy? And why, in particular, do we take "delight in looking at the most detailed images of things which in themselves we see with pain"? (93)
3. On 95, how does Aristotle first define tragedy? What are the two tragic emotions by means of which *catharsis* is achieved, and what effect does tragedy have upon those emotions? Look up the word *catharsis* – what range of meanings can you find for that term?
4. On 95-96, what six parts does Aristotle say every tragedy must have? He says that plot is "the soul of tragedy." How does he define the term "plot," and why is the plot so important in his theory of drama?
5. On 96-97, Aristotle discusses plot structure. What makes a play's action "whole" (96), and what does Aristotle advise regarding the correct "magnitude" of a given plot – how flexible is he on this point? In what sense might his theory be described as favoring "organically" constructed plots?
6. On 97-98, what key distinction does Aristotle make between the representation of history and poetic representation? Why is poetry, in his view, a "more philosophical and serious" kind of imitation than anything to be found in the work of historians?
7. On 98-99, what two kinds of plot does Aristotle outline, and how are they distinguished? Which is better, and why? What are "recognition" ("*anagnorisis*") and "reversal" (*peripeteia*)? Why are they important to the structure of a drama and to the achievement of *catharsis*?
8. On 100-03, how, according to Aristotle, should the imperative of generating "pity and terror" in the audience influence the poet's selection of the tragic protagonist? What should the playwright bear in mind when it comes to the representation of character?
9. On 104 bottom, what does Aristotle say about the nature of playwrights or poets themselves, and about the creative process? On the whole (here and elsewhere in *The Poetics*, to what extent does Aristotle seem interested in the poet as an individual creator?

10. On 111-13 (following a disquisition mostly on figures of speech), Aristotle comments on epic verse. What latitude in representation allows epic, in comparison with tragedy, the more easily and appropriately to generate “amazement” (113) in an audience? What praise does Aristotle accord Homer as a storyteller, and why?

11. On 113-14, what does Aristotle say about the handling of improbable and/or impossible events in a tragedy? When should we look kindly on an “error” in representative art – that is, when something is portrayed inaccurately or an “impossible” event takes place on stage, what might excuse this kind of representation and even make it entirely appropriate? (In responding, consider Aristotle’s example on page 114 of the painter who represents a female deer with horns.)

12. On 116-17, on what grounds does Aristotle argue that tragedy is superior to epic, in spite of Homeric epic’s undoubted virtues?

13. General question: Aristotle’s theory about drama has been called a “direct response to Plato’s theory of imitation.” How does Aristotle’s conception of *mimesis* (imitation, representation) provide the possibility of replying to some of Socrates’ objections as they are spelled out in *The Republic*?

14. General question: Aristotle’s remarks in *The Poetics* need not be read as a grandiose “defense of art,” but they go farther than refuting Plato in the name of scientific observation -- drama, in the Aristotelian view, plays a role in Greek life that cannot be dismissed as “corruptive,” and representation is seen as natural and human, not a tool of deception. To what extent might a person validate art or popular culture today on similar grounds -- including film, television, or other entertainment forms?

15. General question adapted from UC Irvine’s Prof. Albert Wlecke: does the movie *Jaws* arouse pity and fear in the manner described by Aristotle? Would it be a genuinely tragic production even if the answer is “yes”? Why or why not?

16. General question: what about movies like *Silence of the Lambs*? People seem quite capable of viewing with pleasure violent, even psychopathic behavior that (one may hope, at least) would horrify them if it were engaged in “for real.” Does such pleasure stem from a different source than the one Aristotle identifies? Is it a healthy kind of pleasure, or an unhealthy one? Explain.

17. General question: pick out those places in *The Poetics* where Aristotle compares poetry to painting. How does his use of this comparison differ from Plato’s? Relate these differences to their different notions of *mimesis* or imitation.

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### MATTHEW ARNOLD QUESTIONS

Assigned: “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (802-25). Suggested: “Preface to 1853 *Poems*.”

#### “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time”

1. What is the nature of the “critical effort” (806), and what, according to Arnold, is the “highest function of man” (808)? How do we know this to be so? Can criticism fulfill this highest function, or is it the case that only art can do so?

2. What, according to Arnold, are the elements with which literary genius works? What precisely is the “grand work” of literary genius? What is it not? To what extent is literary genius therefore dependent upon the age in which it works? (808)
3. What relationship does Arnold posit between the “critical power” and the “creative power”? Why can’t there be a truly great period of literary creation without criticism? What, for instance, was the problem with the romantics’ exercise of their creative genius? (808 bottom-810)
4. How does Arnold analyze the French Revolution? What was the Revolution’s greatest strength, and what was its “greatest error”? How does this analysis of the Revolution relate to Arnold’s claims about “the function of criticism at the present time”? (810-11)
5. How is Edmund Burke’s career, in Arnold’s view, an example of “living by ideas” and therefore a counterbalance to the errors of the French Revolutionaries? How does Arnold explain his phrase “living by ideas”? (812-13)
6. What notion “hardly enters into an Englishman’s thoughts” (813-14)? How is this missing notion essential to criticism? How does Arnold define criticism and its goals on 814-15? For example, what one italicized word on 814 sums up the rule criticism ought to follow? (813-15)
7. What forces in current British life, according to Arnold, are getting in the way of intellectual progress? What is his complaint on 817 about the newspaper headline “Wragg is in custody”? (815 bottom-817)
8. What objections does Arnold anticipate against his view of British society’s need for critical activity? What social vision is he offering -- who or what will be the agent of change, and when will that change come about? (817 and following)
9. What is Arnold’s final definition of criticism? Does this definition seem convincing after all his elaboration and argumentation? (824)
10. If you have read some of John Stuart Mill’s work, how does Arnold compare to that author in the objects of his social criticism? In what regard might Arnold differ from Mill? (general question)
11. Towards the end of his essay, Arnold describes his notions of the modern nation and the individual’s place within it. For those who have read T. S. Eliot’s claims about poetry and criticism in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” how might Arnold’s notions be a source for Eliot’s ideas? (824-25)

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Extra questions, not assigned and not in our anthology:

### SAINT AUGUSTINE QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *On Christian Doctrine*; from *The Trinity* (185-96).

#### *On Christian Doctrine, Book 1 (395 A.D.)*

1. How does Augustine define the term “sign”? What distinctions does he make between things and signs? (188-89)

***On Christian Doctrine, Book 2***

2. What are the two kinds of signs? Which does Augustine exclude from his analysis? Which does he privilege, and why? (189)
3. Compare and contrast Augustine's account of the spoken and written word with the one set forth by Plato's Socrates in *Phaedrus* (81ff) -- the story about Theuth's invention of writing. (190 and following, Augustine.)

***On Christian Doctrine, Book 3***

4. Why is metaphor, or figurative language, important to Augustine? Why might some opponents think that figurative language is dangerous and ought to be avoided altogether? (191-92 and general question)

**From *The Trinity*, Book 15, Chapters 9-10 (416 A.D.)**

5. According to Augustine, what precedes both the spoken and the written word? Why is it important that something should precede them -- that is, why important in terms of theology and human hopes for salvation? (193-95)

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**CHARLES BAUDELAIRE QUESTIONS**

Assigned: From *The Painter of Modern Life* (789-802).

**From *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863)**

1. How does Baudelaire's analysis of beauty implicitly criticize or reject Kant's treatment of aesthetics? (793)
2. According to Baudelaire, Stendhal's definition of beauty as "nothing else but a promise of happiness" (*une promesse de bonheur*) breaks cleanly with "the academic error." What does he apparently mean by the latter term? (793)
3. Baudelaire treats the obscure artist Constantin Guys as the type of the artist as *flâneur*. What are the defining characteristics of this type? How is Guys the embodiment of "genius" as Baudelaire defines it? (794-95)
4. How does Baudelaire's definition of "genius" (795) compare with Kant's (533-34)?
5. What inferences can you make about the status of the individual artist in Baudelaire's theory? In his description of the *flâneur* (and later of the dandy), is Baudelaire offering all of us a model for perceiving the world afresh, or is he implying that this kind of power is limited to an elite artistic few? (see 795 bottom - 796)
6. How does Baudelaire define "modernity"? Is this a phenomenon he claims is new in human history, or is it a recurring one? Why is it vital for artist (or critics) to attend to the details, the *ephemera*, of their own times? (796-98)
7. How does Baudelaire characterize the "dandy"? How does this rare modern type differ from the *flâneur* in his comportment towards his fellow citizens and their habits and beliefs? (798-800)

8. In the section “In Praise of Cosmetics,” what fault does Baudelaire find with his predecessors and contemporaries who appeal to nature as the foundation of morals and beauty? Why is artifice (including cosmetics) a better foundation for both morals and beauty? (800-02)

9. Much as Oscar Wilde would do a few decades later, Baudelaire privileges artifice over raw nature, defiantly showing contempt for his predecessor critics’ attempt to base art and ethics on some conception of nature. First of all, how does this defiance play out the claims of Kant and Schiller concerning art? (general question)

10. Secondly with reference to question 9, to what extent do you think this kind of “aestheticist” approach to the artistic production and experience retains genuine insight and power? (general question)

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### GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods* (253-63).

#### From *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*

1. On 255-57, how does Boccaccio ally poetry with philosophy, and on what grounds does he condemn the opponents of poetry?

2. On 258-59, to what extent does Boccaccio allow that poetry involves craft, and how does he keep from giving up his main point that poetry “proceeds from the bosom of God” (258)? What practical effects does Boccaccio attribute to poetry?

3. On 260-62, what line of defense does Boccaccio offer against the charge of obscurity leveled against difficult poetry? What does he argue is the use of poets’ tendency to “veil the truth with fiction” (261)?

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### SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *The Statesman’s Manual*; from *Biographia Literaria* (668-82).

#### From *The Statesman’s Manual* (1816)

1. What is an “allegory”? Give an example to fill in Coleridge’s description on 673.

2. What is a symbol, according to Coleridge -- in what sense is the symbol a fundamental mode of language rather than a mere literary device or figure of speech? Since Coleridge’s best example is Jesus’ “The eye is the light of the body” (*Matthew* 6:22), how does that utterance drive home the point? (673)

#### From *Biographia Literaria*, Part 1, Chapter 1 (1817)

3. How does Coleridge compare the relative faults and merits of poets before his time and of his contemporaries? (675)

4. What does Coleridge write concerning any poem whose words can be rearranged? What is wrong with such a poem? What method of composition does his observation suggest? (675)

**From *Biographia Literaria*, Part 1, Chapter 4**

5. How does Coleridge distinguish “fancy” and “imagination” in this chapter? (675-76)

6. What is “the only way to imitate without loss of originality”? Why? Against what doctrine of imitation is Coleridge writing here? (676)

**From *Biographia Literaria*, Part 1, Chapter 13**

7. What is the “primary imagination,” according to Coleridge? What affinity between divine creation and human perception does this definition advance? (676)

8. The “secondary imagination” is the creative imagination of the artist. How does Coleridge describe the relationship of this power to the world of objects? How does this kind of imagination differ from “fancy”? (676-77)

**From *Biographia Literaria*, Part 2, Chapter 14**

9. On 677-78, what respective tasks did Wordsworth and Coleridge set themselves in agreeing to collaborate on the poems that became *Lyrical Ballads*? In what sense might those tasks be said to work towards a common goal?

10. On 679-80, what definition of poetry (as opposed to a scientific treatise or ordinary prose) does Coleridge develop partly by way of distinguishing his own poetic theory from that of Wordsworth? On 680 top, what is Coleridge’s final definition poetry?

11. On 680, how does Coleridge elaborate on his definition -- what is the relationship of parts to parts in a “*legitimate poem*”? How does a genuinely satisfactory poem engage the reader’s attention with respect to its parts, and with respect to the whole? Why is the mind’s progression in reading a poem best described as resembling “the motion of a serpent”?

12. On 681 middle to end, what specific effects does Coleridge suggest flow from the poet’s imaginative efforts? Since he believes Wordsworth wields poetic imagination in the highest degree, how does that author’s poetry achieve “the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities”? Alternately, how might it be said that his poetry “blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial” without exalting art over nature?

13. On 681-82, how does the quotation from John Davies’ poem *Nosce Teipsum* reinforce the claims Coleridge has been making in favor of imagination?

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**PIERRE CORNEILLE QUESTIONS**

Assigned: “Of the Three Unities of Action, Time and Place” (363-79).

**“Of the Three Unities of Action, Time and Place” (1660)**



1. In what sense does Corneille's dramatic theory depend upon a concern for audience psychology? Describe his ideal spectator. (general question)
2. To what extent does Corneille modify or adapt Aristotle's theory of drama in *Poetics*? Consider mainly Corneille's comments about "unity of action." How does he characterize "action"? How flexible is he? (367-73)
3. Why, according to Corneille, is it best to link scenes carefully and logically? And how does he show concern for changes in audience perception from one era to the next? (369)
4. How does Corneille describe proper dramatic structure? Why should a playwright avoid referring too intensively to the part of the "complication" that supposedly occurred before the play's opening act? (370)
5. What criticism of the ancient tragedians does Corneille offer? How has modern drama improved structurally in comparison with ancient drama? (372-73)
6. Corneille discusses the unity of time -- why isn't it a good idea, according to him, to insist too rigidly on this rule? Nonetheless, what strong suggestions with regard to unity of time does Corneille himself make, and why? (373-75)
7. Corneille examines the demand for unity of place -- how does his opinion compare to that of Philip Sidney around page 356? (376-78)

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### CHRISTINE DE PIZAN QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *Book of the City of Ladies* (263-71).

#### From *Book of the City of Ladies*

1. On 265-66, what concrete method of opposing misogynistic treatises does de Pizan describe? If you find it compelling, what exactly is compelling in this author's self-representation?
2. On 266-69, what is the "city of ladies" that Lady Reason tells Christine de Pizan to begin building -- of what is it composed, and how is it to be built? Why do you think de Pizan has chosen to set forth her case against misogyny with an architectural metaphor -- what provenance and connotations might work to her advantage here?
3. On 269-70, what examples does de Pizan offer by way of opposing the common medieval notion that it's not beneficial to educate a woman? What makes these examples rhetorically effective? In responding, take into account de Pizan's concluding remarks about her father and mother.

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### FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *Course in General Linguistics* (956-77).

**From *Course in General Linguistics***

1. On 960-62, what distinction does de Saussure make between “language” (*langue*) and “speech” (*parole*)? What is the relationship between an individual speaker and language?
2. On 961-62, what importance does de Saussure attribute to “semiology”? What is, or will be, the province and mission of this science? What factors, according to de Saussure, have hitherto kept people from properly studying and understanding language, or “sign” systems?
3. On 963-64, how does de Saussure explain the parts of a sign and the relationship among them? Consider his remarks about the “sign,” the “signified,” and the “signifier.” And what common idea of how language works does the theory he sets forth attack?
4. On 964-66, de Saussure posits two basic characteristics of the sign: “arbitrariness” and “linearity.” What do you understand by the first characteristic? What implications might positing linguistic arbitrariness hold for the way we look at ourselves and the world around us? And why does de Saussure think it is important to point out that signs are linear, i.e. that utterances unfold over a given span of time?
5. On 966-68, de Saussure focuses on the social nature of the sign. What metaphors does he employ to suggest the true relationship between “thought and sound” (967), and what relationship do those metaphors suggest? Why is it wrong “to consider a term as simply the union of a certain sound with a certain concept” (968)?
6. On 968-70, de Saussure considers “Linguistic Value from a Conceptual Standpoint.” What does the term “value” mean here? Explain also, in your own terms and with the help of de Saussure’s illustrations and examples, his statement that “Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others....” What fundamental claim about the nature of “concepts” does this part of de Saussure’s text lead him to make?
7. On 971-72, “Linguistic Value from a Material Standpoint,” how does de Saussure use the conventions of writing to clarify the points he has already made in the previous section?
8. On 972-74, “The Sign Considered in Its Totality,” de Saussure writes that “Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact,” and he goes on to state that between two complete signs (each sign equals “signifier + signified”) there is not difference but opposition. Why might it be important that such oppositions, as Saussure says, in part form the basis of the “entire mechanism of language”?
9. On 975-77, “Syntagmatic and Associative Relations,” how does de Saussure define these two key types of relation? What is the major difference between them? What implications does de Saussure go on to draw from his definitions regarding the analysis of a language system?
10. General question: on the whole, what is de Saussure suggesting about the way “meaning” is created and stabilized? Why might this structural linguist’s views be rather unsettling to us if we hold common notions about “using language” and “making meaning”? What attitude does de Saussure himself seem to adopt towards his insights about the way language works?

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## GERMAIN NECKER DE STAËL QUESTIONS

Assigned: from “Essay on Fictions” and “On Women Writers” (594-604).

### From “Essay on Fictions”

1. On 597-99, what fundamental defense of fiction does de Staël offer, and why does she think realist novels (i.e. “fictions in which everything is both invented and imitated”) are better than drama or satires like Voltaire’s *Candide*?
2. On 599-602, to what extent does de Staël share Samuel Johnson’s anxiety about the moral effects of realistic fiction (review Johnson’s *Rambler* #4, 462-66)? How does she propose to address such anxiety? And in the course of addressing it, what modification does she make to the notion that realistic fiction “copies” truth or life?
3. On 603, de Staël writes that “dramatic fictions” -- unlike philosophical writing -- offer “a sort of supplement to existence.” And on 604, she declares that the best realistic fiction is capable of “suspending the action of the passions by substituting independent pleasures for them....” How do you understand these claims with regard to the broad critical issue of relating art to other areas of life?

### “On Women Writers” from *On Literature*....

4. On 606-08, how might de Staël’s remarks about “enlightenment” be taken as criticisms of the current political culture in Republican France? (The piece was written after the Revolution and before Napoleon declared himself Emperor.) How and why are the men of France not living up to their principles?
5. On 605 and elsewhere, to what extent does de Staël accept the ancient habit of essentializing male and female behavior (i.e. of saying that men and women just are a certain way, aside from any environmental factors)? To what use does she put such assumptions, in so far as she accepts them?
6. On 608-10, what special disadvantages does de Staël argue that women intellectuals must confront, and what reason does she believe underlies these problems?
7. If you have read Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, John Stuart Mill’s *On the Subjection of Women*, or Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, what basic

## JOHN DRYDEN QUESTIONS

Assigned: from “An Essay of Dramatic Poesy” (1668, 1684); from “Preface” to *Troilus and Cressida* (1679).

### From “An Essay of Dramatic Poesy”

1. How does Dryden compare Shakespeare and Ben Jonson? What are their relative merits and limitations, according to Dryden? (381-83)

### From “Preface” to *Troilus and Cressida* (1679)

2. What attitude towards the classical heritage does Dryden show in his comments about English literary artists? How is his defense of them a defense of English national literature? (384)

3. To what extent do Dryden's claims about the cause and importance of pity and fear in the audience agree with Aristotle's theory in *The Poetics*? (383-85)

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### JOACHIM DU BELLAY QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *The Defence and Illustration of the French Language* (281-90).

**From *The Defence and Illustration of the French Language* (1549), Book 1, Chapters 1-7; Book 2, Chapters 3-4.**

1. What distinction between nature and language does du Bellay offer? How does this distinction reflect his fundamental hopes for human culture? (281)
2. How does du Bellay recalibrate the traditional view of Roman power, or *imperium*? How might this reworking be described as a precursor of modern "comparative culture" and ideological critiques of imperialism? (282-83)
3. Why, according to du Bellay, isn't sixteenth-century French as rich in resources as Latin? What allowed Latin to become such a remarkably supple and powerful language? (284-85)
4. How does du Bellay characterize the strength of the French language? What do French writers still need to do? Why isn't translating even the best ancient texts into French enough? (285-86)
5. What advice does du Bellay offer young poets? And what kinds of poetry does he set forth as best suited to advance the development of a truly "French" poetry? (288-89)

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### RALPH WALDO EMERSON QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *The American Scholar* (717-21); "The Poet" (724-39).

**From *The American Scholar***

1. On 721-22, how does Emerson describe the true scholar -- what does he mean by "scholarship"?
2. On 722-23, what criticism does Emerson make of how universities and colleges conceive of education? What conflict between genuine education for individuals and the broader imperatives of American society underlies the problem Emerson describes? Does what he writes accord with your own experience as a student thus far? Explain.
3. General question: describe Emerson's method as a prose stylist -- how would you characterize his way of setting forth his claims and then backing up or qualifying them?

### “The Poet”

4. On 724-25, Emerson writes that poets are “representative.” Of what, exactly, are they representative -- what is Emerson’s definition of a poet?
5. On 727, Emerson writes that we eagerly await the birth of a great poet. But on 728-30, what errors in judgment does he say we are prone to making about poetry and poets, and how can we correct these errors and arrive at a true understanding of poets?
6. On 731-34, what characteristically “romantic” claims does Emerson make about the nature and development of language and the special relationship that poets have with language? Further, what insights does he offer about those romantic staple concepts “imagination” and “expression”?
7. On 735, Emerson writes that “Every thought is also a prison; every heaven is also a prison.” How do surrounding passages on 735-36 explain that claim? And in what sense is “mysticism” the product of an error? How do poets correct this error?
8. On 737-39, what task does Emerson set for the first genuinely American poet? Do you find his advice consistent with other comments he has made in this essay? Why or why not? To what extent do you think Walt Whitman would fit Emerson’s prescription for the qualities needed in a truly American poet?

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### SIGMUND FREUD QUESTIONS

Assigned: “The Uncanny” (929-52; pub. 1919).

### “The Uncanny”

1. On 930-32 top, Freud indicates that one methodological path to follow regarding the uncanny consists in an “examination of linguistic usage.” What insights does he present on 931-34 based upon his close study of the German words *heimlich* and *unheimlich* and variants thereof? As he traces the denotations and connotations of those words, what eventually becomes apparent about the way they relate to each other?
2. On 935-38, what are the basics of the Hoffman tale “The Sandman” as Freud recounts them? What inference does Freud draw from the story concerning the nature of the protagonist Nathaniel’s fear of suffering an injury to his eyes? What is “uncanny” about his experience?
3. On 939-42, Freud examines the uncanniness of the automaton Olympia in Hoffman’s “The Sandman,” which lead him to a discussion of the double or *doppelgänger* in literature and life. According to Freud, how did this phenomenon originate? How did it develop subsequently, and why?
4. On 943-47, Freud discusses the basis of anxiety about the “evil eye” and fear of the dead, zombies, ghosts, and those who seem to have special powers from some external agency. He employs some key terms here -- what do the terms “omnipotence of thoughts” and “animism” mean? What does the uncanny have to do with “repression,” and in what sense is Freud giving us an anthropological account of the uncanny?

5. On 947-48, Freud refers to the doubts he supposes have arisen in attentive readers of his thoughts about the uncanny. What doubts does he refer to, and how much importance does he lend them?
6. On 949-50, what insights does Freud draw from the distinction he makes regarding “repressed” infantile complexes and “surmounted” primitive ancestral beliefs? While both can lead to a feeling of the uncanny, what differences does Freud find between them, and what is significant about those differences for our understanding of the uncanny?
7. On 950-52, Freud turns to the topic of literature. How does he differentiate between the uncanny’s quality and prevalence in literary texts and the uncanny as we experience it in everyday life, outside the realm of literature? What advantages does a writer of fiction have over real-life events? Why is literature such a good thing to analyze for those interested in the phenomenon of the uncanny?

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### GIAMBATTISTA GIRALDI QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *Discourse on the Composition of Romances* (273-79).

#### **From *Discourse on the Composition of Romances***

1. On 273-76, how does Giraldi differentiate between the Renaissance genre of romance and classical epic? What freedom, according to Giraldi, should writers of romances allot themselves -- what attitude should they adopt towards classical conventions?
2. On 275-76, how does Giraldi describe the “civil function” of poetry? And as for “decorum,” what does that term involve if one is writing a romance? (On classical decorum, it might help to review Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, 121-35.)
3. On 277-78, what error does Giraldi impute to the Sieneese man who was induced by the trickster Mariano Buonincontro to write a four-volume commentary on “nonsense”? How might the unfortunate Sieneese author counter-argue against Giraldi’s assumptions about language and intentionality?

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### GORGAS OF LEONTINI QUESTIONS

Assigned: “Encomium of Helen” (29-33).

#### **“Encomium of Helen”**

1. Characterize Gorgias’ manner of proceeding in argumentation -- what assumptions about “truth” seem to underlie his argument? Why would Plato’s Socrates (if you have read some Platonic dialogues) find Gorgias’ attitude distressing?
2. On 32 and elsewhere, Gorgias offers as his key defense of Helen the assertion that she went to Troy with Prince Paris because of the persuasive, even compelling, “power of speech.” If you are familiar with what is said about and by Helen in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, to what extent does Homer’s representation back up Gorgias’ argument?

3. On 33, Gorgias concludes, “I wished to write this speech for Helen’s encomium and my amusement.” That may seem an unflattering admission, but how might it be understood as part of the Sophist Gorgias’ rhetorical strategy? In what sense does it align his argument with the nature of the subject matter?

4. General question -- aside from wanting to amuse himself, what’s the point of going so far as to praise Helen for allegedly being compelled to elope with Paris to Troy? Why not simply acquit her rather than sing her praises? What is it that Gorgias is aligning himself with (and what is he by implication opposing) when he praises Helen?

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## GEORG HEGEL QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “The Master-Slave Dialectic”; from *Lectures on Fine Art* (626-45).

### From *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “The Master-Slave Dialectic” (1807)

1. What is required, according to Hegel, for “self-certainty”? Why is it necessary in this regard that there should be a “life-and-death struggle” in which “each must seek the other’s death”? (632, paragraph 187)

2. How does Hegel characterize the immediate aftermath of this “life-and-death struggle”? How does he describe the two kinds of consciousness that he calls “lord {*Herr*} and bondsman {*Knecht*}”? (633, par. 189)

3. How do the lord and bondsman, respectively, relate to the “thing”? What does laboring or “work[ing] at” the thing turn out to be vital to the bondsman’s consciousness? (633, par 190)

4. After the struggle, what contradiction or problem besets the lord’s attempt to achieve self-certainty through his conquest of the one now called the bondsman? (634 par 191-92)

5. How does the bondsman’s “servitude” lead to the surprising development of “a truly independent consciousness”? (634-35, par 193-94)

6. How is it, further, that “consciousness qua worker, comes to see in the independent being {of the object} its own independence”? In other words, how, according to Hegel, does work, as “formative activity,” allow the bondsman to produce his own independent identity? (635-36, par. 195-96)

7. We have read only a few selections by Kant and Hegel, but what similarities and differences can you find in the two philosophers’ way of examining individual consciousness or identity? (general question, possible paper topic)

### From *Lectures on Fine Art* (1835-38)

8. How does Hegel moderate between those who say that art is merely a skill, and those who say that art is entirely a production of genius and not “a product of general human activity” (637)

9. Why, according to Hegel, is art superior to the works of nature? From what “universal and absolute need” (639) does it spring, and how, on 640, does that need link it to “all acting and knowing”? (638-40)

10. What is the first or “symbolic form of art” In what lies its chief value? What “double defect” leads to its giving way to the classical stage of art? (641-42)

11. How does the second or “classical art-form” do away with the defects of the first form? How does it achieve such progress? (642)
12. Nonetheless, what defect does classical art’s success in relating Idea and shape lead to? How does Hegel define “spirit” (643), and how, according to Hegel, must classical artists have conceived of spirit when they represented it in “sensuously concrete form”? (642-43)
13. How does the third or “romantic form of art” solve the problem with classical art? How does its success amount to “the self-transcendence of art in the form of art itself” (643-44)
14. Again, how does romantic art’s success also lead it to reach its point of failure? How is this problem similar to that of symbolic art? But what, according to Hegel, is “the essential difference” between the respective failures? (644)
15. Based on our selections, explain how Hegel’s attitude towards the link between humanity and nature compares to Kant’s. (general question, possible paper topic)

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## HORACE QUESTIONS

Assigned: *Ars Poetica* (121-35).

### *Ars Poetica* (circa 10 BCE)

Fun Exercise: lay down the rules, the “decorum,” of some popular art or cultural form today, offering your best justification for such rules and your best defense of the art or cultural form you have chosen to describe. Bring the results to class.

1. What advice does Horace offer “you writers”? How would you contrast his advice, here and elsewhere in the letter, to post-romantic tenets about the individual poet and the creation of poetry -- i.e. most particularly the emphasis on originality, individualism, and the centrality of emotion in art? (124-25)
2. Horace compares the changes that a language undergoes with the changes that nature undergoes. What is the poet’s role in shaping the language of an entire people? What might one infer from this analogy about the durability of culture itself? Can art, for Horace, embody universal and eternal values, or is that something we must not expect of it? Explain. (125)
3. Horace writes, “If you want me to cry, mourn first yourself.” Does this sentence indicate an interest in language as an expressive vehicle, or does it have more to do with Horace’s notions about imitation and decorum? Explain. (126)
4. How important is poetic tradition, according to Horace? To what extent may a poet depart from earlier traditions, and what limitations do poets face when they so depart? (126-27)
5. According to Horace, what is more important to a Roman audience than the poet’s ability to convey individuality or emotional intensity? How are his remarks here important for their reflection on his central concern with “decorum,” or artistic propriety? (127-28)



6. Concerning tragedy and the satyr plays connected with it, what, in Horace's view, is appropriate to show onstage, and what should instead be narrated rather than shown? Why? What are the proper functions of the dramatic chorus? (128-29)
7. How does Horace discuss the development of tragedy and the changes that have occurred in musical accompaniment? What do his observations suggest about his view of drama's social value, its relation to the audience's mores? Similarly, how does he view the connection between the Satyr play and the tragedy proper? (129)
8. What does Horace suggest about the artist's responsibility to the various Roman social classes? (129-30)
9. What contrasts does Horace make between Greek and Roman artists and art? He may appear to be casting his own people as pedestrian business-folk and builders, but is there more to his statements than that? Explain. (131-32)
10. What, according to Horace, is the source of good poetry? From whence comes the poet's material? Is content the first and most important thing to determine, or is form the first consideration? What is the relationship between form and content? (131-33)
11. What does Horace say is the best sort of poetry? Why should poetry both teach and delight (i.e. be "utile et dulce," useful and pleasant), rather than just one or the other? (132-33)
12. Horace writes that poetry is like painting -- *ut pictura poiesis*. Later Renaissance and Neoclassical critics made much of this statement, but what does it seem to mean here in Horace's letter? (132, line 361)
13. Why, according to Horace, is the poet, unlike the lawyer, not allowed to be second-rate? How does the poet's social purpose differ from that of the lawyer? (132-33)
14. What does Horace say were the first functions of poetry? Does he see much need to defend the arts against any detractors, or is it evident to him that art's value is beyond dispute? (133)
15. What does Horace assert about the ultimate source of good poetry? Is it a matter of genius, of cultivating one's talents, or both? What are your own thoughts about this longstanding critical debate? (133)
16. Horace ends his verse essay as he began it, with grotesque references to madness. Why do you suppose he brackets his letter with such references? What notion of poetry is he dismissing or downplaying by means of his final reference? How does the "mad poet" image invoke the Horatian poet's worst fears about the reception of his work, about his public standing? (134-35)
17. What were Plato and Aristotle interested in regarding art that Horace appears not to be interested in? How does his lack of interest here reflect a fundamental difference between the Greeks and the Romans? (general question)
18. Horace is an important figure for those interested in whether art shapes a given culture, or whether it merely or mainly reflects values already present in that culture. What do you think? Can/should art transform people and make them see things in radically new ways, or does/should it mostly reflect and validate (i.e. imitate or represent approvingly) what most people already think they know about morality, politics, and other broad areas of life? Or is the question too stark? (general question)

19. Do you think that your own generation is more “Horatian,” i.e. conformist, than rebelliously “Romantic,” or is it the other way around? Explain. (general question)

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## DAVID HUME QUESTIONS

Assigned: “Of the Standard of Taste.”

### “Of the Standard of Taste” (1757)

1. What contrast does Hume make between “matters of opinion and science” and matters pertaining to taste in art? (486)
2. What kinds of terms, according to Hume, are “the least liable to be perverted or mistaken”? Why? (487)
3. Why, according to Hume, do some philosophers rule out any chance of establishing an universal standard of taste? But what “species of common sense” does he say refutes this skeptical insistence, and what foundation underlies the “rules of composition”? (487-88)
4. Why, in Hume’s view, is it nonetheless not to be expected that “on every occasion” people will agree in their judgments of taste, even if there *is* a common standard? (489)
5. What relationship between natural objects and the organs involved in taste does Hume assert? And how does Hume’s *Don Quixote* anecdote help him illustrate what he means by “delicacy of taste” and underscore its importance to his affirmation that there is a valid standard of taste? (490-91)
6. How does Hume suggest that we can discern a person’s “delicacy of taste”? How can this delicacy be developed? (492)
7. Why, in Hume’s view, is “comparison” vital to good judgments involving taste? What kinds of comparisons is Hume referring? (493)
8. Why, according to Hume, is reason or understanding a vital component of taste? What is almost bound to happen if the critic is deficient in that regard? (494-95)
9. How does Hume summarize the “true standard of taste and beauty”? And how does he say that we may distinguish its rare possessor? (495)
10. What contrast does Hume make between philosophical and theological precepts on the one hand and “the beauties of eloquence and poetry”? (495)
11. What “two sources of variation” still need to be dealt with even after we admit that “the general principles of taste are uniform in human nature”? What pronouncement does Hume’s reasoning lead him to make about these two variations? (496-97)
12. When, according to Hume, is it imperative to find fault with the art of other times or places? Is there a potential difficulty with Hume’s argument here? Explain. (497)

13. Why isn't it usually fair, in Hume's opinion, to reproach writers for their religious convictions? When is it nonetheless necessary to do so? (498-99)

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### HENRY JAMES QUESTIONS

Assigned: "The Art of Fiction."

#### "The Art of Fiction" (1884)

1. On 856-57, James writes that moralists have long insisted that fiction should apologize for its supposed untruthfulness, its status as "make-believe." How does he begin his defense of the novel against this charge? What is it about fiction that causes greater anxiety amongst some earnest Protestant readers than a painting?
2. On 858-859, James defends the novel from certain assumptions commonly made about its form and value. How does he characterize the supposed errors of the general public and Walter Besant, and what "principle itself" does James assert over against such wrong thinking?
3. On 860-61, how does James define his key terms "reality" and "experience"? What relationship does he posit between the novel and "real life"? What, according to James, is the problem with well-intentioned rules on what constitutes realism in novel-writing?
4. On 864-67, what fault does James find with statements made by Walter Besant and others concerning the kind of "incidents" and "adventure" that constitute a good novel?
5. James saves the issue of the novel's moral status for last, 867-69. How does he propose to settle this difficult demand on the part of earnest Victorian readers? In what sense is it wrong to talk about a work of fiction as moral or immoral? What usage of ethical terms does James himself sanction as acceptable, and why?
6. A general question: to what extent does James' essay remind you of impressionist theories of art? What does he have in common with, for example, Walter Pater in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*? (See anthology.) Where does he differ from Paterian impressionism?
7. Do you find contemporary novels by authors such as Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, and Nicholson Baker, with their frequent "post-modern" departures from realistic narrative, as compelling as older works in the genre? Why or why not?

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### SAMUEL JOHNSON QUESTIONS

Assigned: "On Fiction" (*Rambler* #4); from *Rasselas*; from "Preface to Reading Shakespeare" (458-80).

#### "On Fiction" (*Rambler* #4)

1. On 462-63, how does Johnson sum up the "task of our present writers" as opposed to yesteryear's purveyors of romance epic and other such genres? In what sense has the gap between author and readership narrowed, and with

what results to the status of the new texts? In addition, what sort of people does Johnson suggest are the main readers of the new kinds of fiction?

2. On 464, why, according to Johnson, do “familiar histories” (realistic fiction, popular novels) prove more useful than “the solemnities of professed morality”? In what sense are they useful? What moral responsibility does Johnson suggest ought to be kept in mind by authors of realistic fiction, and why?

3. On 464-65, what “chief advantage” does modern fiction have in comparison with the real-life objects it imitates or represents (ordinary people, events, and things)? How does Johnson turn this advantage into a moral imperative, and how does he refute those who insist that it’s acceptable to represent morally ambivalent or composite characters?

4. General question: Johnson is obviously concerned about the moral welfare of the C18 novel-reading audience, and some politicians, social critics, and religious folk show a similar concern today, even to the point of urging legal censorship (which Johnson isn’t advocating). Plato, of course, is the father of all such “moral arguments” about the pragmatic effects of art. To what extent, if at all, do you think such arguments or concerns are valid? Discuss.

From *Rasselas*

5. On 466-67, what most surprises Imlac about people’s judgment of ancient poets? What comparison does Imlac make between the earliest authors and those who come after them? We have examined Johnson’s insistence on a writer’s duty to choose subjects judiciously. What new thoughts about the conjunction between morality and representation (“imitation”) does Imlac offer on these pages?

6. On 467, Imlac claims that poets who know their trade do not “number the streaks of the tulip.” Most readers today, as inheritors of the romantics’ love for individuality and particularity, will surely disagree. But what is the basis of Imlac’s argument — in what vital way do “tulip-streakers,” in his view, fail as artists and with respect to the potential of their audience? Furthermore, in what sense might Imlac actually *embrace* the notion artists should observe human nature and the environment closely?

7. On 467, what does Imlac apparently mean when he says that the poet must write “as a being superior to time and place”? What is he suggesting about human nature and about the function of art? Can you recall echoes of this statement in later works of literary criticism? If so, which works and authors?

From “Preface to Reading Shakespeare”

8. On 468-69, what test does Johnson suggest should be applied to literary works “of which the excellence is not absolute and definite”? How does Johnson reason in support of this test: what alone can please the majority of people over long periods of time? How does Shakespeare’s drama exemplify the kind of art that passes this test of excellence?

9. On 470-73, what praise does Johnson bestow on Shakespeare’s handling of human nature, and how does he defend the playwright from charges leveled against him over his handling of traditional heroic characters, historical periods, and generic expectations about tragedy and comedy? Why, in particular, is Shakespeare right to include comic elements in his tragedies, and tragic potential in his comedies?

10. On 474-76, Johnson meets the censors of Shakespeare half-way: what criticisms of his own does he level against the Bard? Which is the worst and least excusable fault, and why? Which faults seem less important, and partly or entirely understandable?

11. On 476-78, how does Johnson refute critics who say dramatic illusion requires strict adherence to the “unities of time and place”? What is the exact nature of dramatic illusion, according to Johnson — if we aren’t “taken in” by what we see on stage, why, then, do we respond to it, and in what manner do we respond? Another way to ask this question is, “in what sense is the audience’s experience at a drama *genuine* or *authentic* {my terms} in its own right, even though we don’t believe we are witnessing a real-life event?”

### General Questions

12. General question: on 473 and 475, Johnson shows a decided preference for Shakespeare’s comedies over his tragedies. What are his reasons for preferring the comedies? Which kind of Shakespeare do you prefer, and why? Does your response have to do mainly with your own personality (i.e. “brooders” usually go in for tragedy, while those with a sunny disposition may prefer comedy and romance), or with what you can point to as “objective” features of Shakespeare’s language, plots, and stagecraft? Explain.

13. General question: Johnson writes on 478, “if we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no more.” He’s probably right at least in the sense that *direct* viewing of such things in real life would horrify most people, at least in modern times. (Many Romans, after all, considered it “strength and honor” to enjoy watching gladiators die.) But what about *cinema*? To what extent might it be argued that we come very close to taking the powerful images on a movie screen as “real,” at least during the time we are watching the film? Does that affect your view of Johnson’s argument against extreme proponents of “dramatic illusion”? If so, how?

14. General question: how many of Sir Philip Sidney’s ideas can you find in Johnson’s “On Fiction”? In what ways do you think Johnson differs from Sidney’s expressly religious moral framework, or has transformed some of his ideas? Alternately, how much of Plato or Aristotle do you find in Johnson? For example, how close does Johnson come to Plato’s brand of moralism? How might Johnson’s explanation of how we can take pleasure in watching a tragic play be compared with Aristotle’s remarks on our response to representations of painful or otherwise troubling things?

15. General question: in Ch. 14 of *Biographia Literaria*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge observes that his contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads* involved concentrating upon “persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.” Compare his notion of poetic illusion with Johnson’s ideas about dramatic illusion and the manner in which an audience “credits” a good play.

### Discussion Questions

16. How many of Sidney’s ideas can you find in Johnson’s “On Fiction”? In what ways do you think Johnson differs, or has transformed some of these ideas?

17. If the moral purpose of literature is “to teach us what we may hope, and what we can perform,” why is it necessary “for vice . . . to be shewn”? Can literature be therefore regarded as that which presents the realm of human desire and fear? Discuss.

18. Is there anything Aristotelian about Johnson’s notion of what constitutes the “most perfect idea of virtue”?

19. What pragmatic concern governs Imlac’s advice not to number the streaks of the tulip? How, in other words, is Johnson’s theory of *mimesis* influenced by his concern for his audience?

20. What do you think of Johnson's explanation of how we can delight in contemplating imitations of objects or events which in themselves -- in "real life" -- we view with pain or disgust or horror? Compare his explanation of this phenomenon with Aristotle's. Whose, in your opinion, is superior? Why? Are these different explanations logically incompatible? (478)

21. Coleridge observes that while watching a play we neither believe nor disbelieve in the reality of the events depicted. Instead, our minds are in a state characterized by a "willing suspension of disbelief." Compare his notion of the dramatic illusion with Johnson's.

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## IMMANUEL KANT QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *Critique of Judgment*, "Analytic of the Beautiful" and "Analytic of the Sublime" (499-536).

### From *Critique of Judgment* (1790)

1. What is philosophical idealism? How does it describe the relationship between the mind and the external world? (general question)
2. What implications might philosophical idealism have for broader notions about politics and societal organization? Responding to this question helps one understand why the romantic poets borrowed so heavily from Kantian ideas. (general question)

### From Book I. "Analytic of the Beautiful"

3. Describe the mental process leading to what Kant calls an "aesthetic judgment" or a "judgment of taste." (505)
4. Why, according to Kant, isn't it possible to make "a pure judgment of taste" as soon as "interest" enters the picture? At 509 top, Kant uses the term "disinterested{ness}." How does this word encapsulate what he has been saying about the purity of a proper aesthetic judgment? (506-07)
5. How does Kant define judgments about "the agreeable" and "the good"? Why aren't these kinds of judgment aesthetic? (See 505-06 for a definition of this term.) Provide your own examples of a judgment about the agreeable and the good, respectively. (507-08)
6. Why, according to Kant, do we suppose we have the right to other people's agreement once we have declared an object beautiful? That is, we would not demand that everybody like chocolate ice cream just because we like it, but we would insist that our statement, "this rose is beautiful" is a universally correct judgment. Why? (509-11)
7. According to Kant, do we feel pleasure before making a judgment of taste, or do we make the judgment first and then feel pleasure? What reasons does he provide for his answer? (512-13)
8. What does Kant appear to mean by the terms "design" and "form"? How do these two terms differ from "charm" and "emotion"? Why is the design of a presentation or object central to a judgment of taste? (514-15)

9. Following upon question 8, what role does “sensation” play in the making of an aesthetic judgment? Does Kant disdain sensation or sensory experience, or does his desire to abstract from it stem from some other purpose? Explain. (514-15)

10. According to Kant, what is “free beauty” (*pulchritudo vaga*)? What examples does he offer? Why is it important that our liking for such objects does not refer to any definite concept, i.e. that we don’t refer the object to a fixed purpose or concept? (515-16)

11. How do you understand Kant’s terms “common sense” (*sensus communis*) and “purposiveness without a purpose”? What significance do they hold for Kant’s claims about the human value of aesthetic judgment? (518-19)

### **From Book II. “Analytic of the Sublime”**

12. In what respects, according to Kant, are the beautiful and the sublime similar? (519-20)

13. What “significant differences” does Kant address between the beautiful and the sublime? Which difference is the most important, and why? (520-21)

14. What reason does Kant give for considering the “{the concept of} the beautiful in nature” more important than the “the concept of the sublime in nature”? What can our experience of the beautiful do for us that our experience with the sublime cannot? (520-21)

15. Following upon question 14, how does Kant’s attitude towards the sublime differ from that of Longinus? (520-21, general question)

16. How does Kant define the term “sublime”? Why is it the case that “nothing that can be an object of the sense is to be called sublime”? (521-22)

17. Why, according to Kant, should we most properly turn to “crude nature” and not to “products of art” (523) in explaining the sublime? (523-24)

18. How is it that the feeling most relevant to our experience of the sublime is “respect”? What is it that we respect when we experience the sublime, and why? How does this experience entail “a feeling of displeasure” and yet “at the same time also {involve} a pleasure”? (525)

19. How does Kant define nature as a “might”? Why is it necessary for a judgment of sublimity that we “consider and object fearful without being afraid of it” (527)? What would happen to our experience of sublimity, for instance, if -- my example -- we were clinging to a flimsy branch over the edge of Niagara Falls rather than viewing the Falls from a safe distance? (526-27)

20. How does Kant argue that neither judgments about beauty nor judgments about the sublime are a matter of “mere convention”? (528-29)

21. What is Kant’s definition of the *sensus communis*, or “common sense,” and why is such a capacity important to his framework for explaining aesthetic judgments? How is it, further, that (at 531 middle), “taste can be called a *sensus communis* more legitimately than can sound understanding”? (529-31, Section 29)

22. Kant wrote a famous essay called “What is Enlightenment?” How does he characterize “enlightenment” while analyzing the *sensus communis*? (530)

23. How does Kant distinguish “art” from “nature”? What are the distinguishing characteristics of art? And how is art to be further distinguished from craft and from science? (531-32, Section 43)

24. How does Kant treat the issue of “genius”? What can the artist or genius do especially well? (533-34, Section 49)

25. How, according to Kant, is beauty the “symbol of the morally good”? (534-35, Section 59)

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### JOHN KEATS QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *Letters* (942-48 only). Originally from Online Text; not in Leitch anthology.

#### From *Letters*

##### “Negative Capability”

1. On 942-43, what is “negative capability”? How does Shakespeare exemplify this capability, while Coleridge, according to Keats, lacks it?

##### “Wordsworth’s Poetry”

2. On 943-44, what criticism does Keats make of the Wordsworthian manner in poetry? What does Wordsworth do that he shouldn’t, and what does he not do that he should?

##### “Keats’s Axioms in Poetry”

3. On 944, Keats writes that “if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all.” What do you think of that statement as a description of how poetry is generally written? Why is it or isn’t it a good description of poetic composition?

##### “Milton, Wordsworth, and the Chambers of Thought”

4. On 945-47, what comparison does Keats make by contrasting the poetry of Milton and Wordsworth? Does Keats favor one over the other, or is that not the right question to ask? Explain.

##### “A Poet Has No Identity”

5. Why, according to Keats on 947-48, is the poet like a chameleon (i.e. “camelion”)? Why, in the view Keats explores, would it be beside the point to praise or condemn poetry for its supposed moral status or tendencies?

### GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING QUESTIONS

Assigned: From *Laocoön*.



**From *Laocoön* (1766)**

1. What, according to Lessing, is the difference between the amateur, the philosopher, and the critic? (554-55)
2. To what extent does Lessing disagree with Winckelmann's view of Greek art as consisting in "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur"? Why does he disagree? (554-55ff)
3. To what extent does Lessing argue that the Greek painters were "wiser" than modern painters? What criticism of eighteenth-century art is Lessing offering here? (554-55ff)
4. Compare Lessing's comments on "expression" and, more particularly on "passion," with Aristotle's remarks in *The Poetics* (93) about our capacity to take pleasure in representations of events that would be painful to witness in real life. (557-58)
5. Why, according to Lessing, must a painter be as careful as possible in choosing the "single moment" and perspective for a representation? What will be lost if the painter fails to be as careful as Lessing requires? (558)
6. Lessing writes of the need to "create for art's sake," and he mentions Classical religion as one of the "external constraints" that can interfere with the production of excellent art. Does he hold that such external factors *always* obstruct artistic endeavor? What modern constraints can you think of? (560)
7. What does Lessing identify as the "true subjects of poetry and painting," respectively? How is the one primarily spatial, and the other primarily temporal? To what extent can the poet or painter appropriately move beyond these limits? (565-67)
8. Regarding question 7, do you find Lessing's claim that painting is mostly spatial and poetry mostly temporal a plausible one? Why or why not? (general question)
9. How does Lessing use Homer's description in *The Iliad* of Achilles' shield as an example of how a great poet deals with potentially static images? How does Homer go beyond mere "word-painting"? (569-70)

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**LONGINUS QUESTIONS**

Assigned: from *On Sublimity* (135-55).

**From *On Sublimity* (first century CE)**

1. How does Longinus define sublimity? To what extent is sublimity dependent on language? (139)
2. What relationship does Longinus develop between genius and art or artistic skill? (139 top, 141, 153)
3. Why, according to Longinus, do we need sublimity and respond to it? How does this effect accord with human nature? (152)
4. Does Longinus discuss sublimity only in terms of the individual perceiver of art, or are his standards to be taken as communal and universally valid? (139-40)

5. What are Longinus' five sources of sublimity? Which is the most important, and why? What are the main distinctions Longinus makes amongst the five sources? (140)
6. What is "amplification," and what is the difference between amplification and sublimity? (143ff)
7. How does imitation of "great writers of the past" conduce to sublime effects? (143)
8. What comparisons and contrasts does Longinus make between rhetorical visualization and poetic visualization? (144-45)
9. How, according to Longinus, do figures help the artist achieve sublimity? What role does emotion play in this achievement? (146-50)
10. By what standards does Longinus say we should assess the literary productions of genius? In what sense, according to Longinus on 152, does the literary genius demonstrate something about human nature and human aspirations? (150-53)

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### MOSES MAIMONIDES QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *The Guide of the Perplexed* (211-26).

#### **From *The Guide of the Perplexed* (circa 1190)**

1. What, according to Maimonides, gives rise to "perplexity" in the reading of texts, and who are the "perplexed" - i.e. what audience is Maimonides addressing? (214-15)
2. Why, in Maimonides' view, have the Sages always found it appropriate to employ parables and riddles? How, in discussing this matter, does Maimonides comment on the nature of learning and teaching? (216-17)
3. How does Maimonides explain the way a "well-constructed parable" works? What significant uses does such a parable have? (219-20)
4. What does Maimonides identify as the two kinds of prophetic parable? How do they differ? (220)
5. When Maimonides comments on his intentions in offering his treatise, what limitations does he try to impose upon his readers? What seems to be his main anxiety regarding his relationship with readers? (222-23)
6. Is Maimonides primarily concerned to embrace what the Norton editors might call "textual indeterminacy," or do his concerns lie elsewhere? It would help to consider what he is promising to do for his readers. (222-23, also general question)
7. What, according to Maimonides, are the seven causes of "contradictory or contrary statements"? Which one seems most important or most relevant to you as a reader and learner? Why? (223-24)

8. Maimonides employs the binary pair “outer/inner meaning,” which might be taken to imply a rigorous interpretive method for extracting the inner meaning from a text’s “surface.” But is there some more nuanced way to understand his argument here, or to modify it for contemporary purposes? Explain. (general question)

9. What contrast does Maimonides develop throughout the selection between exegesis or interpretation on the one hand, and early scientific endeavor on the other? (general question)

10. Maimonides sometimes suggests that “secrecy” is a legitimate mode of discourse, a legitimate property of a written text. Do you agree with his suggestion if it is applied to a modern and secular context? I.e., is “secrecy” or mysteriousness till something worth cultivating for some purposes, or do you think that treating a text as somehow mysterious turns interpretation into an exclusionary operation, a way to control people’s thoughts rather than expand them? Explain. (general question)

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### STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ QUESTIONS

Assigned: “Crisis in Poetry” (841-50).

#### “Crisis in Poetry” (1896)

1. On 845-47, what is the “crisis” in literature? What does the breakup of the old standard French Alexandrine form have to do with it? What promise does the advent of free verse hold?

2. On 847-48, what account does Mallarmé give for poetry’s existence at all? In what way does ordinary language disappoint us, promising things it can’t deliver? (Consider our expectation that language can “express” our feelings and that it can “point to” objects in the world around us.)

3. On 849, how does the poetry Mallarmé advocates liberate us from the disappointment owing to our dealings with everyday, prosaic language? What does Mallarmé apparently mean by his term “Transposition”?

4. Mallarmé writes on 850 that “the intellectual word at its purest point . . . must lead . . . to Music.” Consider his comments on 850-51, particularly his example, “I say: a flower!...” Why might music be the ideal towards which poetic language should strive?

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### KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS QUESTIONS

Assigned: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (759-67); *The German Ideology* (767-69); from *The Communist Manifesto* (769-73); *Grundrisse* (773-74); “Preface” to *A Contribution...* (774-76); *Capital*, Vol. 1 Ch. 1 “Commodities” (776-83).

#### From *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1844)

1. What basic philosophical error does Marx say the Political Economists commit when they enunciate the laws of economics? (765)

2. What does Marx appear to mean by his term “alienation”? In what senses are workers alienated? Why, according to Marx, is this process of alienation inherent in capitalist production? (765-67)
3. How does Hegel’s Master/Slave dialectic apply to Marx’s commentary about workers’ alienation? How, for example, does the capitalist relate to the worker and to commodified objects? How do workers relate to the commodified objects they produce and to their employers? (765-66, general question)
4. Why, by implication in Marx, is labor central to human existence? What fundamental assumption/s about human beings underlie Marx’s theory of alienation and his comments about labor? (general question)

**From *The German Ideology* (1845-46)**

5. What is a *camera obscura*? What does this term imply about the possibility of arriving at true statements about human relations? Does the figure imply that we can actually perceive ourselves and the world directly? (768)
6. What basic philosophical error does Marx accuse German Idealists like Hegel and Kant of committing? (768)
7. Why is it that “Morality, religion, metaphysics, {and} all the rest of ideology ... have no history”? What constitutes real history, as Marx sees it? (768-69)

**From *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)**

8. In what sense might Marx’s notion of history as “the history of class struggles” be indebted to Hegel? How does Marx’s formulation of the concept of struggle differ from what Hegel discusses in the Master/Slave dialectic? (769-70, general question)
9. Trace the development of the *bourgeoisie*. That is, within and against what historical conditions did this class arise -- how did feudalism generate the *bourgeoisie*, and how did the *bourgeoisie* come into conflict with the basic property relations of the feudal order? (770-71)
10. What distinguishes the “epoch of the *bourgeoisie*” from all previous ones? How does this distinction spell trouble for the continued existence of capitalism, according to Marx? (770)
11. How does Marx interpret the activities of the “executive of the modern State”? (771)
12. In what sense is the *bourgeoisie* a “revolutionary” class? How does it strip away the illusions held by members of pre-capitalist societies? With what does it replace them? (771-72)
13. On the whole, what attitude does Marx suggest that his readers should take towards the advent of the capitalist order? Is its arrival a positive development in human affairs? (772-73, general question)
14. We know that market societies produce objects for sale as commodities, but in what sense might they be said to “manufacture” new desires? Why would that be necessary? (772)
15. On 772, Marx describes capitalism as an international phenomenon that tends to give a “cosmopolitan character” to production and consumption all over the world. How would you relate his comments to what people today are calling “globalization”? Is capitalism fully compatible with the idea of separate, sovereign nation-states? (general question)

**From *Grundrisse* (1857-58)**

16. How does this selection demonstrate that Marx's status as an "economic determinist" (one who sees economic affairs as the direct basis for our ideas about the world and ourselves) is more complex than some of his "vulgar Marxist" followers?

17. What is the source of Greek myth?

18. What, according to Marx, accounts for the fact that we can still enjoy Greek art even though we no longer believe in the Greeks' mythology? To what extent is he describing a kind of "nostalgia" for an irrevocably lost stage in human development?

19. Our Norton editors call this selection from *Grundrisse* a rather hasty formulation, not a truly "thought-out" formulation of the relationship between art (an amazingly sophisticated element of the "superstructure") and the material basis of life. Nonetheless, what suggestions does the selection hold for us regarding the task of literary criticism and theory?

**From "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859)**

20. What assumptions does Marx the "scientific socialist" make in this selection concerning the process of history and our ability to comprehend that process, describe it, and even make predictions on the basis of our understanding?

***Capital*, Vol. 1, Ch. 1., Section 4: "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof." (1867)**

21. What is a fetish? Look up the word in a good dictionary or impress me with your knowledge of anthropology or comparative culture studies. What fundamental misconception about the relationship between humans and the world of nature does fetish worship indicate to a western, "scientific" philosopher like Marx?

22. What is a "commodity"? How does it differ from an ordinary object? (777)

23. How does the fetishism of commodities have its origin "in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them" (777)? What does the exchange of commodities obscure or mystify?

24. On 780 and following, how does Marx use Daniel Defoe's tale *Robinson Crusoe* to explore the assumptions of political economy?

25. Explain Marx's use of human relations under feudalism and in a "peasant family" (780-81) as a counterweight to the capitalist economic system. But is Marx actually praising feudalism or advocating that we should return to something like it?

26. How might a system function so that "{t}he social relations of the individual producers, with regard both to their labour and to its products . . . {would be} . . . perfectly simple and intelligible"? (781)

27. What basic criticism does Marx level against a commodities-based society on page 782? What is the point of his quip on 783, bottom, from Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*?

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## GIACOPO MAZZONI QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *On the Defense of the Comedy of Dante* (301-23).)

### From *On the Defense of the Comedy of Dante*

1. On 303-05, how does Mazzoni define the term “idol”? What are “icastic” and “phantastic” imitation, respectively? Which is Mazzoni more interested in, and why?
2. On 307-12 (310-12 especially), what use does Mazzoni make of Aristotle’s regard for “probability” in *Poetics*? Consider what Mazzoni says about the “credible impossible” in this regard. In addition, how does he characterize poetic representations in relation to sophistic rhetoric?
3. On 315-17, Mazzoni discusses the “efficient cause” (the Latin term is *causa efficiens*, which has to do with the maker of a given thing) of poetry. How do his remarks about the Civil Faculty help him determine this cause? In what sense, according to Mazzoni, is Aristotle’s *Poetics* “the ninth book of the *Politics*” (316)?
4. On 317-23, Mazzoni explains the “final cause” or purpose of poetry. How does he define this most important of causes, and to what extent does he enlist Plato in the service of his argument? Do you find his references to Plato here (and elsewhere) convincing, or do you think he distorts Plato’s perspective on art, at least insofar as we are familiar with it from our *Republic* selections? Explain your reasoning.

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## FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE QUESTIONS

Assigned: “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” (870-84).

### “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” (1873)

1. What attitude does Nietzsche convey about the capacity of human intellect and the claims made on its behalf? (874-75)
2. Why, at the beginning of the essay, does Nietzsche more than once imply that the “impulse to truth” is little short of a miracle? (874-75)
3. Nietzsche invokes the social contract as the way in which humans put an end to what Thomas Hobbes called in *Leviathan* “the war of all against all” (*bellum omnium contra omnes*). The social contract, says Nietzsche, gave rise to the binary or paired opposing concepts “truth/lie.” What does Nietzsche immediately thereafter imply about the separateness and stability of the terms in that paired opposition? What is “truth” in the context of his remarks about the social contract? (875-76)
4. How, according to Nietzsche, does language falsify the world, or let us falsely assert that we know things when we don’t? Why might, say, a noun (a substantive, as it’s called) harbor a lie? Why is the term “metaphor” important in this essay? (876-77)
5. Nietzsche aims a broadside against “concepts.” How do they arise, and what societal purpose does the ability to create them serve? (877-78)

6. What provisional definition of “truth” does Nietzsche offer following from his argument about how concepts are formed, and what conclusions does he draw about the value of “truth”? (878-79)
7. According to Nietzsche, if human beings were momentarily to grasp themselves as “artistically creative subject{s},” what would at once happen to “consciousness of self”? To what is there “at most an aesthetic way of relating”? (880)
8. How does Nietzsche link the pursuit of scientific knowledge to what he has written about the formation of concepts? (881-82)
9. From what impulse, according to Nietzsche, does art spring? What does Nietzsche say about the “man of intuition” -- his language, his force in culture and history? (883-84)
10. How, if at all, does Nietzsche’s essay-ending mention of the “stoic who has learned from experience” alter your view of the “man of intuition’s” accomplishment? (883-84)
11. What has Nietzsche achieved in this essay? That is, what has happened to the binary opposition between “truth” and “lying” now that Nietzsche has examined it in his “non-moral” sense? (general question)

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### WALTER PATER QUESTIONS

Assigned: from “Preface” and “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance* (1873, 1893).

#### “Preface” to *The Renaissance* (1873)

1. On 835-36, what similarities and differences do you find between Pater’s statements about the “the aim of true criticism” and Arnold’s remarks about “the critic’s task” or “the critical power” (809, 815, elsewhere) in “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time”?
2. On 836-37, what must the critic do first, before he or she can hope to achieve the “aim of true criticism”? What is the aesthetic critic’s responsibility to the work of art and to the audience?
3. On 838-39, how does Pater describe the fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance? To what extent do his remarks resemble Matthew Arnold’s ideas in “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (808, “the man and the moment”) concerning artists and the societies within which they create?

#### “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance* (1873)

4. On 839-40, how does Pater describe the “tendency of modern thought”? What examples does he provide of this tendency, and how does he enlist the language of scientific objectivity and discovery in his description?
5. On 840, according to Pater, following Novalis, what is the “service” of philosophy? How does this view differ from the philosophical aims of Kant and Hegel as we have discussed them in class?
6. On 840, how does Pater define “success in life”? Again, how does he employ the language of science to make his case?

7. On 841, do you find Pater's final statements about art's place in the hierarchy of pleasure convincing in light of the previous remarks he has made about pleasure in his "Conclusion"? Why might his "Conclusion" have been considered misleading or morally suspect by some Victorian readers?

8. General question: what sort of audience do you think might find Pater's aesthetic program appealing and viable? How might it be said that Pater's program amounts to another Victorian withdrawal from the "romantic project" of transforming the public's taste and spiritual priorities?

9. General question: to what extent does the tone of the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* suit the statements about aesthetic criticism Pater makes in the "Preface"?

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## PLATO QUESTIONS

Assigned: Plato. From *The Republic* Books II, III, VII, X; from *Phaedrus* (49-86).

### *Ion* (circa 390 BCE)

1. What analogy dominates Socrates' discussion of the relationship between the poet, the rhapsode, and the audience? What conclusion does this analogy illustrate about the true source of poetic inspiration and power? (41, 43 for example, general question)

2. Why does Socrates say that rhapsodes and poets do not speak "by mastery" of any art, as Ion insists? How, on 41, does Socrates characterize poets? (40-41)

3. What must the poet first lose, according to Socrates, that a poem might be composed? (42)

4. Why does Socrates call the poets "interpreters" and the rhapsodes who recite them the "interpreters of interpreters?" (42)

5. Defend Ion the *alazon* (wanderer or dupe) against the arguments of the *eiron* (ironic, clever character) Socrates: what argument can you make against the claim that poets and rhapsodes are not masters of any art? What possibilities is Socrates ignoring here? (general question)

### *The Republic, Book 2* (circa 375 BCE)

6. What is Socrates' notion of childhood? Why is it so important to shape a child's experience? (49-51)

7. According to Socrates, what is the worst "defect" or fault in the work of poets such as Hesiod and Homer? When and how is this fault committed? To what is this fault compared? (50)

8. What are some of the "unsuitable" fictions about the gods to which Socrates objects? (50-52)

9. Why does Socrates argue that "God ... cannot be responsible for everything"? What kind of attributes do Socrates' Gods (or his God) have instead of the ones given them by Homer and ordinary Greek mythology? (51-52)



10. Why must impious stories, either about gods or heroes, be excluded from a “well-regulated” commonwealth? Is it simply a matter of their lack of truth? Explain. (52-53)

11. Especially around pages 53-55, Socrates calls for considerable censorship, effectively limiting artistic choices and audiences. Is this kind of demand ever justified? If so, when, and regarding what audience and what images or ideas? If not, why not? (53-55, general question)

### ***The Republic, Book 3***

12. Socrates says that the Republic’s rulers may, if they find it necessary, tell lies, but the citizens cannot lie to them. Does this diminish his utopian ideal? Why or why not? (58)

13. What sorts of cultural education or activities does Socrates say should be offered, and to whom? What sorts of behavior and attitudes should be discouraged, and why? (56-58)

14. What inferences can you make about the relationship Socrates would like to see between religion, the State, and education? (general question)

15. Do you think that education today is simply about learning or arriving at truth, or is it part of the political power structure, the class structure, and so forth? Explain. (general question)

### ***The Republic, Book 7***

16. What is the basic point of Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”? Outline the story and then explain what Socrates is arguing about where we ought seek truth or the source of reality. (64-67)

17. If you are familiar with Socrates’ biography, how might this allegory be taken as a defense of his risky philosophical attempts to lead fellow Athenians towards truth and away from error? (general question)

18. Does the Allegory of the Cave leave you with an optimistic or a pessimistic feeling about people’s capacity to get free of comforting illusions, habitual ways of perceiving and thinking? Explain your response. For instance, what role, if any, can philosophy or literature play in the upward process Socrates describes? (general question)

### ***The Republic, Book 10***

19. What complexity of feeling does Socrates admit to even as he insists that we must banish all “representational poetry” from the ideal Republic? And how, more generally, can the author Plato make his character Socrates banish poetry when he himself (Plato) is a maker of fine dialogues -- texts surely not devoid of artistic ability and form? (67-68)

20. In explaining his views on representation, Socrates uses as his example the making of a bed. What does he mean when he says that there are “three different kinds of bed”? Who are the three different makers of those beds, and which is furthest removed from the “real” bed? What is this real bed”? (69-70)

21. How does Socrates criticize Homer and other poets? For example, how is the imitative poet’s product like “illusory painting” and “sorcery”? To what part of human nature do poetry and such practices appeal? Summarize Socrates’ criticisms of poetic imitation. (74-77)

22. How much hope does Plato offer us that poetry may be saved from complete banishment? What kinds of poetry might Socrates permit in his Republic? What would have to be demonstrated before he would permit poetry “designed merely to give pleasure” (80) in his state? (78-80)

***Phaedrus* (circa 370 BCE)**

23. What criticism does Thamus make of Theuth’s invention, writing? Do you find Thamus’ objections plausible? Why or why not? (81-82)

24. How, according to Socrates, is writing like painting? And how is it dangerous with regard to its potential for dissemination to a broad public? (82)

25. What opinion does Socrates venture regarding whether a philosopher ought to write? What characterizes the speech and writing of a true philosopher? (84-85)

26. You’ve heard Socrates on the differences between speech and writing. How do you relate the two? (general question)

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**PLOTINUS QUESTIONS**

Assigned: From “On the Intellectual Beauty” (*Fifth Ennead*, Eighth Treatise)

**“On the Intellectual Beauty” (*Fifth Ennead*, Eighth Treatise) (circa 300-05)**

1. On 174, what does Plotinus set forth as the purpose of his treatise?
2. On 174-76, how much of a role does Plotinus grant to individual artists in creating art? How does he compare works of art to beautiful objects in nature?
3. On 177-79 and 184-85, what view does Plotinus advance concerning the gods? How does this view compare with those of Plato’s Socrates in *The Republic* selections we have read, or with Greek mythology more generally?
4. What significance does Plotinus attach to the term “image”? See, for example, 179ff: “we cannot, therefore. . . .”
5. On 180-81, and then 184-85, how does Plotinus defend the “visible sphere” or earthly realm from charges leveled against it by Plato and others?
6. On 181, what seems to be the purpose of Plotinus’ suggestion that his readers “make a mental picture of our universe,” etc.? What should we achieve thereby?
8. On 183 bottom, Plotinus writes that “we are most completely aware of ourselves when we are most completely identified with the object of our knowledge.” How do you interpret this statement? How might you relate what Plotinus says here to encounters with art?
9. General question: to what extent would Plotinus be likely to interest himself in the formal study of art, or in the *craft* of making poetry and artistic objects?

10. General question: if you were to ask Plotinus what artistic experience *does* for us, what do you conjecture that his response might be?

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### EDGAR ALLAN POE QUESTIONS

Assigned: "The Philosophy of Composition" (739-50).

#### "The Philosophy of Composition"

1. On 742-43, Poe says he prefers "commencing with the consideration of an effect" (742), and then begins explaining how he conceived and executed "The Raven" -- a process he describes as having "the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem" (743). Why is this rather a scandalous thing for a poet to admit -- what notions about how poetry should be composed is Poe challenging?

2. On 743-45, Poe itemizes several factors he considered in the course of composing "The Raven." Discuss his rationale for each of these factors. On 744, why is he so careful to distinguish between "soul," "intellect," and "heart" while he is explaining that the proper province of a poem is beauty? On 745, what does Poe apparently mean by "tone"?

3. On 746, Poe comments on the "universal" appeal of a poem like "The Raven." What explanation does he provide for the captivating effect this poem has exercised on its readers from its publication onwards? What kind of pleasure does it afford the poem's speaker and the reader?

4. On 747, Poe addresses the romantic demand for originality in composition. In what sense does he think "The Raven" is original? How does he define originality, and how does this definition differ from the common one?

5. On 749-50, Poe offers some thoughts about the kind of "suggestiveness" appropriate to poetry. What kind of suggestiveness is he referring to, and what value does he ascribe to it? Why does it matter that the reader only emblemizes the bird at the very end of "The Raven"? What criticism does he make of the American Transcendentalists' poetry -- why, according to Poe, does it scarcely amount to poetry at all?

6. A general question: French poets such as Baudelaire and Mallarmé have been among Poe's greatest admirers, and Poe continues, as the Norton editors say, to enjoy a higher reputation in French criticism than in American. What is it about Poe's ideas in "The Philosophy of Composition" that a literary theorist dissatisfied with standard "romantic" ideas about language, intentionality, and art might find attractive?

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### ALEXANDER POPE QUESTIONS

Assigned: "An Essay on Criticism" (438-58).

#### "An Essay on Criticism"

##### Part 1

1. From lines 1-45, what problems does Pope identify with his era's literary critics – what inherent problem besets the exercise of criticism, and what additional factor makes the difficulty worse than it really needs to be?
2. From lines 46-75, what does Pope suggest good critics must understand about their capacities? Moreover, to what standard should critics adjust their individual judgments, and why should they do so?
3. Define the terms “wit” and “judgment” in Pope's eighteenth-century context. From lines 76-87, how does Pope describe the proper relationship between wit and judgment? What classical metaphor does he employ to reinforce his argument?
4. From lines 88-91, Pope identifies “Nature” as the source of poetry's “rules” – what does he apparently mean by this term, and how did Nature serve as the source of poetic convention?
5. From lines 92-117, how does Pope characterize the golden age of criticism that he says held for a time in ancient Greece -- what was the relationship between poet and critic in those times? What subsequently went wrong, and what were the consequences?
6. From lines 118-40, what task does Pope set for modern critics with respect to classical authors, and most particularly Homer? How is the work of Homer's successor Virgil a testament to proper execution of this task? Why should modern poet and critics hold ancient texts and conventions in such high regard -- what is to be learned from them?
7. From lines 141-80, how does Pope ward off an overly prescriptive or rigid understanding of what he has just written about adhering to “the rules”? Why were the ancients sometimes right to bend or even break the rules that governed their own works? What rights do modern poets and critics have in that regard?
8. From lines 181-200, in what spirit, according to Pope, should a modern critic or artist approach the ancients? Why so? In what sense is this verse passage, taken in context, more than a mere assertion of the ancients' superiority – how does Pope assert the power of excellent literature in any age?

## **Part 2**

9. From lines 233-84, how does Pope follow up on the counsel against pride of individual or capricious judgment he has given in lines 201-32 – how should a critic treat what seem to be a work's petty faults or its failures to adhere to rigorous theoretical demands? In what sense is excellence not to be confused with “perfection”?
10. From lines 285-383, Pope lays out some of the ways in which critics may be overly “fond of some subservient art” (263) -- what failings of perspective and taste does he mention in these lines?
11. From lines 285-319, a subset of the lines just mentioned, Pope offers excellent definitions of “true wit” and “true expression.” What is the relationship between “true wit” and “nature”? And how does “true expression” perform a valuable service to the objects it describes -- in what sense, that is, do apt words honor the world they represent?
12. From lines 394-474, Pope weighs in on his era's quarrel over the respective merits of the ancients and the moderns, and censures critical pretensions. Where does Pope apparently come down with respect to the quarrel over the ancients and moderns? What critical fashions and affectations does he condemn? How does excellent art nonetheless triumph over such pettiness?

13. From lines 474-525, how does Pope characterize literary longevity in his own era? How does he turn this elegiac point into an argument in favor of a critic's duty to recognize excellence in his or her own time?

14. From lines 530-559, what tendencies in his era's poetry does Pope say should obtain no pardon from critics? Why – what relationship between literary corruption and social / political corruption does he assert in these lines?

### Part 3

15. The first two parts of the "Essay" deal with the relationship between critics and literary texts. But from lines 560-642, what attitude does Pope suggest critics ought to take towards their own readers? What should readers expect from the critics they consult, in addition to sound judgments about the merits of a given work of art?

16. From lines 643-80, what examples of excellent criticism does Pope provide from his knowledge of the ancients?

17. From lines 681-744, what narrative does Pope offer for the development of criticism from the fall of Rome to his own day? What are Pope's wishes for the near future with respect to English criticism and literature?

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### QUINTILIAN QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *Institutio Oratoria* (circa 96 CE).

#### From *Institutio Oratoria*

1. How does Quintilian define the word "trope," and what uses does he suggest that tropes have? (158-59)
2. What are the main kinds of metaphor? What is the best way to use metaphor, and what are the worst abuses of it? (158-61)
3. How does Quintilian distinguish synecdoche from metaphor? (160 bottom)
4. How does Quintilian distinguish tropes from figures? What is the key distinction? What is a figure, as you see it discussed in Quintilian's discussion of irony on 166-67? (162-67)
5. In examining the ideal philosophical training for an orator, what relationship between virtue and public speaking does Quintilian assert? Against what school of thought or what tendency in politics does he argue? (167-71)
6. Do you agree or disagree with Quintilian's claims about the connection between public speaking and private morality? Explain. (general question)
7. Although Quintilian wrote during the reign of the anything but ideal emperor Domitian, public speaking was still held in high esteem. Do you think that skillful public speaking is vital to modern American politics? Do you find that our politicians speak well generally, or do you find many of them disappointing in this regard? Explain. (general question)

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## EARL OF SHAFTESBURY (ANTHONY ASHLEY COOPER) QUESTIONS

Assigned: “Sensus Communis” selections from *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*.

1. What view of human nature does Shaftesbury advance? In particular, what feeling or motive underlies a great deal of human behavior, according to the Earl? What view of human nature do the Earl’s remarks pointedly refute?
2. How would you describe the Earl’s philosophy of government, and how does it stem from his understanding of human nature? What view of governance and authority does he strongly oppose?
3. As for the Earl’s perspective on the arts (the second half of our selection), what “neoclassical” assumptions does he share with, say, Alexander Pope or (to mention a later author) Samuel Johnson?

## FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Letters 2, 6, 9.

### From *Letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795)

1. How does Schiller define the forces he says are threatening the production and appreciation of art? (573-74)
2. Why is it necessary for Schiller to resist the “seductive temptation” of turning his letters towards political discussion? (574)
3. On 574, the sixth letter, Schiller writes that “any people caught up in the process of civilization {...} must fall away from Nature by the abuse of Reason before they can return to her by the use of Reason.” How does Schiller explain this striking declaration -- why does the process of civilization first lead us *away* from nature? (cf. 575-78)
4. How does Schiller contrast Greek civilization with modern? (575)
5. One of Schiller’s concerns is the alienation between a people and their government. How does he explain this alienation, and how does his explanation fit into his wider commentary on the risks entailed in civilization as a process? (576-77)
6. What relative criticism of Kantian philosophy does Schiller make? He obviously does not dismiss Kant, so what point is he making here -- how should we understand Kant’s achievement? And in what relationship with Kantianism does Schiller place himself? (578-79)
7. Why, according to Schiller, is art the “instrument” that can restore to us “the totality of our nature” when political revolution, ethical instruction, etc., cannot serve as that instrument? (579 bottom - 580)
8. When Schiller turns to address the artist directly, how does this address diverge from Kant’s interest in aesthetics? More importantly, what responsibility and potential does Schiller attribute to the maker of art and literature? (580-81)
9. How does Schiller’s reference to Aeschylus’ character *Orestes* encapsulate or complicate the artist’s task as Schiller has described it? (580-81)
10. According to Schiller, what must artists avoid if they are to serve their age and their fellow citizens? (581)

11. What burdens does Schiller place upon the individual artist and his or her “genius,” as well as upon art more generally, in relation to the human community? Do you think that art and artists can ever accomplish what Schiller says they can? Explain your view. (581-82, general question)

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## PERCY SHELLEY QUESTIONS

Assigned: “A Defence of Poetry” (699-717).

1. On 699, how does Shelley address the difficult issue of how we may judge the excellence of a given poet? On that page, he writes that “A Poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds....” In the surrounding commentary, how does he more fully explain the relationship between poet and audience, poet and literary history? On 844, how does the issue of “morality” figure in Shelley’s analysis of poetic value?

2. On 700, why is it, in Shelley’s view, that “Few poets of the highest class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their conceptions in its naked truth...”? What does Shelley identify as “the great secret of morals,” and how is this secret connected to imaginative poetry? (700)

3. On 702, what rationale does Shelley offer for claiming that Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is the “most perfect specimen of the dramatic art”? What does he argue, in particular, about the quality of the comic dimension in that play?

4. On 702-03, what benefit does Shelley attribute to Athenian drama for those who beheld it? How were ancient Greek tragedies like “mirrors” and even “prismatic and many-sided mirror{s}”? But what happens to drama in periods when “the decay of social life” (703) sets in and a golden age of theater has passed?

5. On 704-05, how does Shelley illustrate by way of the “bucolic writers” of late antiquity the regenerative power remaining to poetry even in a corrupt age? (704-05)

6. On 706-08, in examining the Romans’ appropriation of Greek art, how does Shelley broaden his definition of poetry? After the collapse of the Roman Empire, what kept the world from “utter anarchy and darkness” (706)? And how, in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, did the Christian and Chivalric systems lead to improvements in the lives of Europeans?

7. On 708-09, how did Dante and Milton, according to Shelley, unintentionally help to lead their respective cultures beyond then-current forms of life and thought? How did they set down in permanent form what was most worthy in their eras to be preserved?

8. On 708-09, in praising Milton, what critique of *Paradise Lost*’s theology does Shelley nonetheless offer? Why does he think that Milton’s Satan is “superior” to his God? If you have read *Paradise Lost*, do you agree with Shelley’s claims, or do you think they amount to what Harold Bloom would call “strong misreading” -- i.e. to a motivated misreading that opens the way to new criticism and art?

9. On 710-11, how does Shelley refute those (like Thomas Peacock) who say that poetry should give way before the demands of modern “Utility”? How does Shelley himself define this term so that poetry emerges as the most “useful” of all human activities?

10. On 712-13, while explaining why he thinks poetry is necessary, Shelley writes, “we want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know.” Shelley was certainly no despiser of science or philosophy, but in what sense do his remarks here criticize the tendencies of modern scientific practice, and somewhat deflate the claims of philosophy to ultimate wisdom? In addition, what does he imply is responsible in modern times for denigrating both individual imagination and any sense of community?

11. In Plato’s *Ion*, Socrates argues that inspiration is a direct transmission of emotion from the gods to the poet to the reader or listener. Is that the way inspiration works according to Shelley? Explain, with reference to his “fading coal” metaphor on page 713, and his remarks more generally on 713-14, culminating in the sentence on 714, “Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.” (A few other metaphors to consider, time permitting or if you are presenting on this question, occur on 713, “the colour of a flower which fades and changes,” and 714, “a wind over a sea.”)

12. In the *Norton Theory* selection from *The Statesman’s Manual* (488-90), Coleridge suggests that symbol utterances bridge the gap between mind and matter, subject and object, and that a symbol “participates in the Reality which it renders intelligible” (488). Is Shelley’s view poetic language as optimistic as Coleridge’s? Are there differences between the two authors on this key issue? Consider Shelley’s claims on 714, final paragraph through 715 top: “poetry,” he writes, “purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being” and “creates anew the universe,” etc.

13. On 717, Shelley concludes with a stirring declaration: “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” To judge from the surrounding content on this page and elsewhere in “A Defence of Poetry,” he isn’t simply arguing that we should pay more attention to poets. Explain the paradox involved in his claim, and try to unpack its complexity as a statement about the value of poets and poetry.

14. General question: are Shelley’s definitions of poets and poetry based more on expression than inspiration? Is there a conflict between claims about a poet’s “inspiration” and claims about the social function of poetry? Why or why not?

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### SIR PHILIP SIDNEY QUESTIONS

Assigned: “An Apology for Poetry” (Read pages 326-40, 348-50).

#### “An Apology for Poetry” (1580-81, 1595)

1. How does the poet’s art differ from that of the astronomer, geometrician, moral philosopher, rhetorician, and others? What do poets “disdain,” and how do they “grow in effect another nature”? Also, what is the distinction between the “brazen” world and the “golden” one? (330)

2. In what are we to recognize the “skill of the artificer”? In the work itself? Or in something else? Explain. (331)

3. In what special way does a poet show human beings to have been made in the image of God? How does poetry provide “no small argument” for the truth of the doctrine of original sin? (331)

4. What, according to Sidney, is the relationship between pleasure and learning? (331-32) To what extent, ultimately, does he agree with Horace about the aim or “end” of poetry?



5. Does “rhyming and versing” make a poet, according to Sidney? Why must the poet be skilled in “feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else”? That is, how does Sidney explain this requirement in moral terms? (333)
6. What, according to Sidney, did the Greeks mean by the philosophical term *architectonike*? (333) How does Sidney demonstrate that poetry -- not philosophy or history -- best furthers the “ending of all earthly learning” (334 top)? (333-41)
7. How does Sidney summarize the case so far presented for giving the “laurel crown appointed to triumphing captains” to the poet? (346)
8. What are the four “most important imputations” that, according to Sidney, have been “laid to the door of poets”? How does he respond to the first one? (348)
9. How does Sidney reply to the second charge that poetry is the “mother of lies” or that poets are “the principal liars”? How is his response a defense against overzealous supporters of verisimilitude? (348-49)
10. Sidney argues that the third and most important of the charges against poetry -- that it “abuseth men’s wit” -- can be “transformed into just commendation.” How so? (349-50)
11. How does Sidney reply to the argument against poetry based on Plato’s authority? What does Plato, according to Sidney, attribute “unto poetry more than myself do”? Is his reading of Plato accurate? (352-53)
12. What argument does Sidney make concerning the unity of place -- i.e. the idea that “the stage should always represent but one place”? Do his comments seem fitting? Why or why not? (356)
13. What two-part curse does Sidney send to one who has “so earth-creeping a mind that it cannot lift itself up to look to the sky of poetry”? On the whole, how would you characterize Sidney’s argument in “An Apology for Poetry” -- is his rhetoric mainly objective or mainly emotional? Do you find it convincing? Explain. (362)

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## GIAMBATTISTA VICO QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *The New Science* (399-416).

### From *The New Science*

1. On 401-03, Vico sets forth his “three ages” and ties them to three corresponding kinds of language. What are the three ages and kinds of language, and what’s the correspondence between them?
2. On 403, how does Vico explain the “source of all poetic locution”? More generally, what does he suggest about the difference between modern ways of speaking and imagining and that of “the first gentile peoples”?
3. On 404-06, Vico writes that “the world of civil society has certainly been made by men.” How does this statement inform Vico’s explanation of the “new science” he promotes -- what is to be studied, and why?
4. On 406, what does Vico suggest about the relationship between early or theological poetry and subsequent philosophical writing? And on 408-12, what counter-theory does he provide concerning the origin of the “wisdom of the ancients” (poetic wisdom) against the one set forth by Plato, Aristotle, and certain Renaissance Italian critics?

5. On 413-16, Vico discusses the nature and significance of the four main tropes -- metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, and irony. How does he explain these figures, and why are they so important to the practitioner of the new science?

6. On 416 (as on 406 and 412), Vico states that “the theological poets were the sense and the philosophers the intellect of human wisdom.” How do you interpret that remark? What is Vico suggesting about human history and knowledge, and how does his emphasis differ from the supposedly standard Enlightenment view?

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## OSCAR WILDE QUESTIONS

Assigned: from “The Critic as Artist” (895-912).

### From “The Critic as Artist”

1. On 900-01, how does Wilde’s Gilbert define “the critical spirit,” and what is its role with regard to artistic creation? In these first few pages of the selection, what notions about such creation does Gilbert oppose, and in what way does he prepare the ground for his reversal of the traditional hierarchy between art and criticism?
2. On 902-03, Gilbert insists that the critic is more cultivated than the artist. How is that so? And on the same pages, how does Gilbert invert the usual way of talking about the respective value of language and action? What problems does he tag as belonging to the realm of action, and what potential or promise does he attach to the realm of language?
3. On 904-05, Gilbert says that “the highest Criticism . . . is, in its way, more creative than creation.” What exactly is this “highest Criticism,” and how, according to Gilbert on 905-07, does its practitioner regard and relate to aesthetic objects? How is the best criticism “impressive” (i.e. impressionistic) rather than “expressive”?
4. On 908-09, Gilbert discusses the relative qualities of artistic media. What limitations does he ascribe to painting? Why is music “the perfect type of art”? How does the critic, according to Gilbert, deal “once for all {with} the problem of Art’s unity”? What does Wilde’s analogy between the decorative artist in the presence of nature and the critic beholding a work of art add to his explication of criticism’s proper task and effects?
5. On 909-10, how does Gilbert put down the ordinary person’s way of relating to great poets such as Milton and Shakespeare? According to Gilbert, what does it *really* take to do honor to these poets and their work? Why might Gilbert’s demands be considered surprising given the impressionist theory of criticism he has been setting forth?
6. On 910-11, Gilbert addresses the “personality” of the aesthetic critic -- why is this such a vital component in his theory? What happens when a great performer or critic’s personality meets an excellent work of art?
7. On 911-12, Gilbert defends something like “criticism for criticism’s sake”: the withdrawal of those most endowed with the critical spirit from practical life and usefulness to their fellow citizens. How does he justify his claims in this regard: what is the ultimate value of “the critical spirit,” in Gilbert’s view? What can this spirit do for the individual who cultivates it?

8. General question: if we have read Matthew Arnold and/or Walter Pater on culture, art, and criticism in this course, what echoes and inflections of those authors do you find in Wilde? What does he apparently find valuable in one or both of these authors, and what does he alter or reject?

9. General question: some would say that art has a moral duty to reflect life as it is and that the critic has a duty to explicate and judge art on that basis as well as to address a broad public. Wilde's Gilbert obviously rejects the idea that the critic should *serve* the work or art or the public. To what extent, then, is it possible to suggest that Gilbert's impressionist theory about criticism and art promises any degree of social progress?

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## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH QUESTIONS

Assigned: "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1802 (645-68).

### "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*

#### "The Subject and Language of Poetry"

1. On 650, Wordsworth says that the "incidents and situations" in his experimental work *Lyrical Ballads* come from "humble and rustic life" rather than from life in England's rapidly growing urban centers ("the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers"). What ideal relationship between the natural environment, language, and the deepest, most abiding qualities of human beings does he articulate on this page?

2. On 651, Wordsworth offers a noteworthy definition: "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." How does he modify this purely expressive definition with a characterization of his meditative process, and how are his remarks on this point related to what he says about the "purpose" of his poems in "*Lyrical Ballads*" (651-52)?

3. On 652, Wordsworth expresses faith that his poems, which (contra Aristotelian orthodoxy) emphasize feeling over action, will prove satisfying because "the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants." What is the source of this faith, and what "multitude of causes, unknown to former times" does he identify as responsible for reducing urban dwellers to "a state of savage torpor" (652)? What exactly is this state of being that Wordsworth captures with his oxymoron "savage torpor"?

4. On 653-55, how does Wordsworth address the often-argued distinction between poetic language and prose? What criticism of Thomas Gray does he make to advance his argument against maintaining a broad gap between "poetic diction" and ordinary language, or "prose composition"?

#### "What is a Poet?"

5. On 655-56, what main characteristics does Wordsworth ascribe to poets? What is their relationship to their "own passions and volitions"? And what is the relationship between those "passions and volitions," or personal feelings and desires, and the "goings-on of the Universe" (655)? In your own words, what point is Wordsworth making here about poets as ideally expressive human beings?

6. On 657-58, what sort of "truth" does poetry give, according to Wordsworth? How is this truth communicated, and why, in Wordsworth's view, does the poet's "song" appeal to individuals and to societies in a way that scientific

discovery can't hope to rival, even though its dominance as paradigm and practice grows constantly in modern times?

### “Emotion Recollected in Tranquillity”

7. On 661-64, Wordsworth returns to the issue of poetic process. As in his previous reference (651), how does he modify a doctrine of pure expression with the language of meditation? How does he describe the process whereby a poet gets into the right state of mind to “compose” a poem mentally? What must the poet keep in mind so that readers or listeners will receive a given poem – one that may well have its partial source in strong emotion -- with “an overbalance of pleasure” (662) rather than simply being overwhelmed by an all-too-genuine burst of feeling? (See also 660 bottom – 661 on this issue of metrical mediation.)

8. On 665-68 (“Appendix”), what accusation does Wordsworth level against “poetic diction” and its admirers? How does such flowery language pervert what Wordsworth considers the true value of poetry for the ordinary person? How does he explain the gradual acceptance of poetic diction over time, and in what sense might his remarks on these pages be taken as an indictment of specialized literary criticism?

9. General question: scholars in the Meyer Abrams tradition have long argued that Wordsworth’s “Preface,” written after early radical support for the French Revolution had to confront the ascendancy of the Jacobin guillotine, displaces the Revolution’s three main ideals (liberty, equality, fraternity) into a theory about how poetry is composed and the effects it ought to have. If that’s the case, what are the “Preface’s” theoretical equivalents to liberty, equality, and brotherhood?

10. General question: it’s clear that Wordsworth would have no patience with popular entertainment in C21 America -- “Reality TV,” high-stakes game shows, endless crime-series broadcasts and spin-offs, shock-jock radio, the almost “mainstream” presence of pornography on the Internet, and so forth would probably drive him to despair. How might some of this popular culture be defended against assertions that it’s simply “gross and violent” stimulation for a dehumanized urban population?

11. General question: Wordsworth’s “Preface” amounts to a passionate assertion that the popular taste needs to be shaped, even re-humanized, by poets and thinkers who are wise but “*not*” elitist in their sensibilities. How tenable do you find such assertions in our own time? As you see things, what agents and factors actually shape the public’s taste in modern America? How do they exercise this shaping influence? Is that influence for better, for worse, or both, depending on the particularities of each case? Discuss.

12. General question: Wordsworth and other romantics (even Shelley, who actually admired science) often write rather negatively about what they see as the destructive effects of scientific thinking and practices – do you find their assertions about the superiority of poetry and poetic “truth” convincing? Why or why not? Do you think what they say is fair to science – if so, why? If not, what do you mean by “science” – the pure pursuit of truth, or applied science? How well does such a distinction hold up in the Twenty-First Century?

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