

QUESTIONS ON WORLD LITERATURE FROM AROUND 450 CE TO THE MODERN ERA

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This file combines questions on assigned texts within the specified period mostly from my CSU Fullerton CPLT 324 courses on World Literature to 1660 and from my E240 World Ancient Literature courses at Chapman U in Orange, CA.

Main Edition: Lawall, Sarah, ed. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. 2nd edition. Volumes 1ABC. New York: Norton, 2002. ISBN: A = 0-393-97755-2, B = 0-393-97756-0, C = 0-393-97757-9.

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Montaigne, Michel de. From *Essays*.
Motokiyo, Zeami and Nobumitsu, Kanze K. *Atsumori, Haku Rakuten, Dojoji*.
Petrarch, Francis. From "Letter..." and *Sonnets*.
Popol Vuh. From *Popol Vuh*.
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Russian Tales.

Sa'di. From *The Golestan*.

Shikibu, Murasaki. From *The Tale of Genji*.

Shonagon, Sei. From *The Pillow Book*.

Tamil Anthologies. From *The Tamil Anthologies*.

Thousand and One Nights. From *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Vega, Lope de. *Fuente Ovejuna*.

Voltaire. *Candide*.

DANTE ALIGHIERI QUESTIONS

Assigned: Dante Alighieri. *Inferno* from *The Divine Comedy* (1815-1942).

Inferno

Canto 1

1. Describe the spiritual state and time of life that the narrator is in when the canto begins. To help do this, where is he--how do you interpret the natural setting in the first 30 or so lines? The "dark wood," the "hill," and the path, the rays of light?
2. Why doesn't Virgil offer to help the narrator the minute the two meet? What is Virgil waiting for?

Canto 2

3. What's your first impression of Beatrice? How does she explain (around line 94) what led her to make Virgil assist the narrator? What does Virgil say about Beatrice? How does the news that Beatrice is involved in his journey affect the narrator?

Canto 3

4. What does the inscription on the gates of Hell imply about the divine perspective on the sinful and about the place of Hell in God's plan? Consider, for instance, the phrase "the primal love"--in what sense does that kind of language on the gates of Hell seem strange to our modern ears? How does the inscription indirectly explain why the damned are so eager to cross the Acheron and receive their punishment?
5. Why is the punishment--blindness, cacophony, etc.--appropriate to those who refused to take a moral stand as Christians? How is the punishment of such souls another instance of God's "poetic justice" rather than a strict, dull "eye-for-an-eye" kind of punishment? In other words, how is God an "artist" of sorts--not merely a strict judge--in handing out the punishments that he does?
6. What relationship is becoming established between the narrator and Virgil in this canto? Describe how they interact and talk to each other.

Canto 4

7. Around line 90 or so, the narrator is introduced to his predecessor poets: Homer, Ovid, Horace, and Lucan. Virgil is already his guide, so Dante is the sixth among the greats. The narrator says that they all talked amongst one another--why do you suppose he doesn't tell us what they said? What seems to be his attitude towards Classical literature and the pagan (pre-Christian) past here?

Canto 5

8. How is the punishment of the lustful another instance of God's "poetic justice" rather than just a strict, dull "eye-for-an-eye" kind of punishment?

9. When he meets the lovers Paolo and Francesca, the narrator is obviously filled with compassion for them. Why do you suppose that's the case? Also, is being compassionate the same thing as taking their side? Why or why not?

10. What is the narrator interested in learning from Paolo and Francesca? When Francesca tells their story towards the canto's end, why does she keep it brief rather than expanding on it to satisfy the narrator's interest?

Canto 6

11. Again, how is the punishment (this time of the Gluttonous) poetic rather than just strict and proportionate? Consider, for example, the physical setting at the opening of the canto: the rain and mud.

12. From lines 103-115, Dante asks his guide Virgil what will happen to the sinners after the "last sentence" (the Last Judgment following the Second Coming of Christ to earth) is pronounced. What do you make of Virgil's response--what is going to happen to the sinners?

Canto 7

13. Why is it logical that the avaricious or greedy and the angry should be condemned to the form of punishment that they now suffer?

14. Dante asks Virgil about "Fortune." How does Virgil explain the workings of Fortune--how does that power operate in the world, and what is its relation to God's will? How does Virgil's answer differ from one you might expect from a pagan talking about the Fates?

15. Do you see any change in Dante's attitude here regarding his perceptions and treatment of the damned--i.e. any change that would prefigure the much greater change that will manifest itself in the next canto? If so, how?

Canto 8

16. What allows Dante to show anger towards Filippo Argenti, aside from anything personal he may have against that sinner? If it isn't just Dante's personal spite, what must be happening within him to make him malign Argenti? This is an important point in the text.

17. What effect on the pagan Virgil does the fallen angels' brazen resistance have? Dante and Virgil are trying to enter the City of Dis, but the angels fiercely guard the entrance. What important transition in the Inferno's structure and theme does the resistance mark?

Canto 9

18. What use does Dante make of Classical mythology in this canto? Why, for example, would the narrator not be able to return if he looked at Medusa? What purpose do the Furies serve in this canto?

19. Around line 80 and following, a heavenly messenger arrives to help the narrator and Virgil enter Dis. What effect does the messenger have on the fallen angels? How is there a ceremonial or dramatic quality to the messenger's actions?

Canto 10

20. How does Farinata behave in this canto, and how does Dante treat him in return? Some have said that Farinata's attitude breaks the unity of Inferno's treatment of the sinful--what do you think, and why?

21. Why is the heretics' form of punishment fitting? What is the nature of any heretic's offense, and how is that offense reflected in the punishment of being partially or entirely entombed in a burning receptacle?

Canto 11

22. What does the narrator ask Virgil about God's design or purpose in structuring Hell as he has done? How does Virgil explain and help us understand the stages of the remaining journey in the process? Why is fraud such a terrible, unnatural offense, so that a species of it is punished all the way down at the bottom of Hell?

Canto 12

23. Given Virgil's explanation of the Inferno's structure in Canto 11, why should Minotaurs and Centaurs be the guardians of the regions Dante is about to enter?

24. How does Dante react when he gets his first look at lower Hell? This canto marks another transition point in the story.

Canto 13

25. Why are the suicides turned into trees in this canto? Why do you suppose suicide would be a mortal sin--what is the logic in punishing people who commit suicide?

26. Why are the squanderers pursued by hunting dogs--why is the punishment appropriate, in Dantean terms?

Canto 14

27. What sin is Capaneus guilty of? How does Virgil explain his punishment?

28. What is the source of Hell's rivers? How does Virgil explain this matter?

Canto 15

29. What future does Brunetto Latini predict for Dante around lines 55 and following? How does he describe Florence?

30. How does Dante take the news of his future troubles? What does this reaction reveal about him?

Canto 16

31. Discuss Dante's descriptive powers in this canto--how does he make things memorable for us?

32. Characterize the way Dante talks about Florence, the city of his birth, from line 58 and following.

Canto 17

33. How does Dante describe the usurers' punishment? How do their actions reflect the nature of their earthly sins?

34. How does Dante call attention to the perilousness of his transition to lower Hell? Discuss this question by paying attention to the ride that Virgil and Dante take on the monster Geryon.

Canto 18

35. We have seen many awful predicaments for the sinners in Inferno so far. What is worse than those earlier punishments about the punishments of ordinary fraud?

36. How is Jason's bearing around line 82 and following reflective of his special sin?

Canto 19

37. What is Dante's attitude towards the simoniacal popes? Is there anything unusual in his interaction with them, around lines 64 and following?

Canto 20

38. How does Dante's reaction in this canto comment on his spiritual progress up to this point in the epic? What does he say has caused him to be sorrowful in this canto, after he showed so much anger at the popes in the previous one?

39. Why are astrology, divination, and magic a violation of God's plan or "Providence"? Is what Dante the poet does--writing an epic detailing a fictional journey--liable to be considered divination? If it is, how might Dante justify his poetic task?

40. Why is Virgil more lively and talkative than usual, around lines 58 and following, where he discusses the founding of Mantua, his native city? Discuss also Virgil's rebuke of Dante for pitying the damned souls in this canto--what accusation does he level against Dante?

Canto 21

41. Describe the "comic" atmosphere of this canto. Why is it hard to take the goings-on seriously here?

42. The devils' behavior in this canto nonetheless amounts to a serious attempt to hinder Dante on his way to salvation--characterize that attempt, and explain why it's appropriate that it should take place in a pouch where "barratry" ("the purchase or sale of ecclesiastical preferment, or offices of state"; also more generally vexatious, dishonest litigiousness) is punished. Hint:--how common is "barratry," in its general sense, in human affairs?

Canto 22

43. How are the devils in this canto similar to the sinners they are tormenting? What are the devils constantly doing to one another?

44. How does the barrator from Navarre take advantage of Virgil and Dante and the devils?

Canto 23

45. At this point in the poem, what would you say the interaction between Dante and Virgil reveals about Dante's progress and Virgil's limitations?

46. Describe the predicament Dante and Virgil find themselves in during this canto, and the reason why they are in that predicament. What allows them to get out of their present location and continue on their way?

47. We see that Caiaphas is being eternally crucified. What has he done to deserve his fate, and why is his punishment--a grotesque parody of Christ's crucifixion--appropriate as "poetic justice"?

Canto 24

48. Why is there so much emphasis in this canto on the labor, the intense effort, required if the travelers are to continue downward to the center of hell? How does this concentration reflect upon Dante's task as a writer of epic poetry?

49. What does Vanni Fucci predict will soon happen in Dante's home city of Florence? Why is it valuable for Dante to keep hearing what will come to pass in Florence?

50. Why is Vanni Fucci's punishment for stealing from the Church appropriate as another of God's "poems" of justice? How does Vanni perpetually relive the common sentence on fallen humanity, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust"?

Canto 25

51. How does Dante react to Vanni Fucci's obscene gesture at God?

52. In this canto Dante describes an astounding metamorphosis of one set of beings into another--what strategies does he employ to establish authority for the tale he tells?

Canto 26

53. What does Virgil say has caused Ulysses (our Odysseus) to end up in hell as a fraudulent counselor? How is Dante refashioning Homer to suit Christian ends?

54. If we already know why Ulysses is damned, what purpose does making him tell of his own adventures and death serve? How is Dante positioning himself with regard to the values Ulysses promotes?

Canto 27

55. Here Guido da Montefeltro, a fraudulent counselor in the service of Pope Boniface VIII, tells his story--how is the tale an indictment of the Church's temporal (i.e. "worldly") power?

Canto 28

56. At the end of this canto, Bertran de Born, French troubadour poet and false counselor to King Henry II of England, explains that he is punished with the usual "law of counter-penalty" ("contrapasso" in Italian). How does "contrapasso" work, and how do the other souls in this canto suffer in accordance with it?

Canto 29

57. In this canto Dante spots an ancestor of his, and pities him. Is he making a mistake here, or do his explanation and conduct excuse his pity, which at some points in the Inferno has earned him a just rebuke from Virgil?

58. Why should alchemy--the attempt to turn ordinary metals and substances into precious ones--be punished so far down in hell, even in the tenth pouch of the eighth circle?

Canto 30

59. Master Adam is a falsifier of coinage--how is his economic sin a deep offense against his community?

60. What is the point of Dante's dramatizing for us the argument that Master Adam engages in with Sinon the Greek liar?

61. Why does Virgil reproach Dante towards the canto's end?

Canto 31

62. Why is it significant that at first, on his passage with Virgil down to the Ninth Circle, Dante sees an optical illusion--i.e. he mistakes the Giants for towers? How would you generalize from this incident to make a point about perceiving evil accurately and in proportion?

63. Concentrate on Dante's presentation of Nimrod--how is this giant (who commanded the building of the Tower of Babel) punished? Why is it significant that his speech is now unintelligible and that he is immobile?

64. By what descriptive techniques does Dante "cut evil down to size" in this canto? Why is it important for him to do that as he descends further and further into the depths of Hell?

Canto 32

65. Why does Dante fight with the traitor Bocca degli Abati? Does the narrator's violent behavior--seizing Abati by the hair--seem appropriate? Why or why not?

66. How do the traitors in this canto repeat their earthly sins?

Canto 33

67. Consider the case of Ugolino, a Pisan leader who treacherously cut a deal with the Ghibelline Archbishop Ruggieri, and was then betrayed and imprisoned by this cleric. How does Ugolino describe his damnable crime? What connection does Dante make between family, party, and state in this example?

68. How does Dante assume the role of a prophet in this canto? What does he say about various Italian cities?

69. Branca Doria is not even dead yet, but Dante places his soul down in Circle 9! How does this unusual gesture reinforce the moral immediacy of the Inferno?

Canto 34

70. How does Dante's presentation of Satan render the archfiend absurd? Why is it necessary to do that, rather than make him seem grand and awe-inspiring?

71. Satan is immobilized in ice and chomps eternally on Brutus and Cassius (Julius Caesar's murderers) and Christ's betrayer Judas Iscariot. How might Satan's predicament be Dante's ultimate comment on the consequences of human sinfulness?

72. What is the significance of the change in perspective that Virgil and Dante go through when they traverse Satan's body and find that the way down has become the way up? How might this perspectival change amount to a comment on the necessary path to salvation?

Edition: Lawall, Sarah, ed. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. 2nd edition. Volumes 1ABC. New York: Norton, 2002. ISBN A = 0-393-97755-2, B = 0-393-97756-0, C = 0-393-97757-9.

LUDOVICO ARIOSTO QUESTIONS

Assigned: Ludovico Ariosto. *Orlando Furioso* (2534-49).

Orlando Furioso

1. From 2537-42, Orlando pursues Angelica, and falls into a state of madness. What drives him insane, and why? In what sense is "love"--the reason for Orlando's long quest--already intimately connected to the insanity that subsequently overtakes this hero?

2. From 2547-49, Orlando is repeatedly said to perform feats of strength far beyond anything possible for an ordinary mortal--uprooting trees, tearing men in half, etc. Why do you suppose Ariosto employs such hyperbolic descriptions of Orlando's strength?

3. From 2542-47, Richardet, just rescued by Ruggiero, recounts what happened between his sister Bradamant and Princess Fiordispina. How is the power of erotic desire represented in this episode? How does Richardet solve Fiordispina's problem?

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FARIDODDIN ATTAR QUESTIONS

Assigned: Faridoddin Attar. *The Conference of the Birds* (1528-41).

1. The narrator's prologue tells readers that in order to get the greatest benefit from *The Conference of the Birds*, they should "Forget what is and is not Islam" for the time being. How do you understand that phrase--what does "forgetting what is and is not Islam mean," and why is it necessary to experience the poem properly?
2. How does the narrator represent the "Christian girl" who inspires so much passion in the old man Sam'an? Is she simply evil, or is her case more complex than that? Explain.
3. How does Sam'an's "close companion" (line 425ff) succeed in helping his friend where others have failed? What exactly does he do, and what role does the Prophet (Muhammad) play in liberating Sam'an?
4. When the birds hear the tale of Sam'an, they are "all on fire / To quit the hindrance of the Self" (650-51). What does the term "Self" apparently mean in this context? How, that is, has Sam'an's story illustrated the pitfalls of Selfhood, and why does it excite in the birds an unquenchable desire to "gain the Simorgh"? (652)

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JORGE LUIS BORGES QUESTIONS

Assigned: Jorge Luis Borges. From *Ficciones*. (Separate text; see below.)

From *Ficciones*

"The Circular Ruins"

1. What is the significance of circles and fire in this story?
2. Why does the old man want to dream another human being? What will he accomplish thereby?
3. Why does he at first fail in his project? How does he eventually succeed? How does the Fire God help him, and on what condition?
4. When the old man succeeds, how does he react? What is his relation to the being he has dreamed into existence?
5. What is this story ultimately about--Death? Our grasp of reality? Our relationship to other human beings and to the divine? Something else?

"The Babylon Lottery"

6. Why, according to the narrator, did the Babylonians invite the lottery into the very fabric of their lives, their reality? Why, that is, are they so taken with the idea that *chance* should pervade their existence?
7. What is the history of the Company? (See 66-68 mainly.) How did the Company finally take all public power into its own hands? From what source did it derive its strength?
8. How reliable does the narrator seem in relating the story's events and the history of the Company? (See 70-71 especially.)
9. What conjectures do the Babylonians offer about the Company? Are any of them satisfactory? Why or why not? What do you suppose to be the Company's ultimate function--or is it possible to say?

"The Secret Miracle"

10. How does Hladik's reaction to his situation change from the time he first is taken into custody to the period after his death sentence has been pronounced?
11. Why does he want to finish his drama? Is it simply to stave off death, or is something different involved?
12. As with "The Circular Ruins," what is this story ultimately about--Death? Our grasp of reality? The relationship between art and life? Something else?

"The South"

13. Describe the effects--physical and mental--that Dahlmann's injury has upon him. (See pages 168-69.)
14. Why is the black cat important to the story--what does Dahlmann say on pages 169-70 about the cat he strokes?
15. What questions emerge from pages 170-72 about whether Dahlmann's trip to his ranch actually occurs?
16. Explain, with reference to pages 171-end, how Dahlmann's trip is more than just a physical experience--what is he traveling through and where is he going?
17. How does the story's title--"The South"--come into play as a theme? What has happened to Dahlmann's identity by the end of the tale?

Edition: Borges, Jorge Luis. *Ficciones*. Trans. Anthony Bonner. New York: Grove Press, 1989. ISBN 0-802-13030-5.

ALBERT CAMUS QUESTIONS

Assigned: Albert Camus. *The Stranger* (1946). (Separate text; see below.)

The Stranger

Part One

Chapter 1

1. How does Camus set up Meursault's personality--how does Meursault respond to others' conversation, to ordinary social situations, and to the death of his mother?
2. On page 10, Meursault says that at the viewing of his mother, he felt as if the elderly people there were judging him. Offer a conjecture about why he might have had that feeling. (It is worth paying attention to such references to "judgment" because they occur several times throughout the work.)
3. From 14-18, how does Meursault describe the funeral procession--why was it a difficult experience for him? How does he say he felt after the burial was concluded? Do his reactions strike you as odd? Explain.

Chapter 2

4. Meursault meets his old flame Marie Cardona. What happens between them, and why might it be considered inappropriate? Does Meursault seem to consider his behavior with Marie wrong? Explain.
5. How does this chapter deal with Meursault's experience of time's passage after the death of his mother? How does the chapter also convey a sense of emptiness?
6. What reflections does Meursault offer at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 3

7. What is the point of Camus' including a chapter of this sort--one in which we are introduced to several of Meursault's friends and acquaintances?
8. From 26-28 top, Meursault describes his meeting with Salamano and his old dog. What is Salamano's relationship with his dog? How does that relationship contrast with the way Meursault lives his life?
9. From 28-33, Meursault describes his friendship with Raymond Sintes. What explanation does Sintes give for the fight he has had with an Arab man--what isn't quite honest about the order in which he tells his story? How does Meursault react to the story and to Sintes' offer of friendship?

Chapter 4

10. How do you connect the main episodes in this chapter--Sintes' trouble with his girlfriend and Salamano's lamentation over his lost dog--with Meursault's way of experiencing or perceiving the things that happen in his life? What contrasts between Meursault and these other characters does this chapter make?

Chapter 5

11. What changes are offered Meursault in this chapter? How does he react to them?

12. On page 40, how does Meursault introduce the trip that will prove fatal to him? Explain how this reference is characteristic of Camus' handling of events, of "experience," in *The Stranger*.

13. On page 43, what is the purpose of the episode in which a rather perky woman joins Meursault for dinner and then promptly leaves?

Chapter 6

14. What role does the sun play in the unfolding of this chapter's events, especially Meursault's shooting of the Arab man on the beach? How do references to the sun obscure our understanding of the shooting? What other possible explanations does the sun's constant presence undercut?

15. How does Meursault refer to his Algerian Arab opponents throughout this chapter? How much can one understand about them--their motives, their character, whether or not they started the fight, *et cetera*?

Part Two

Chapter 1

16. What does the magistrate want to hear from Meursault? Why is he upset with Meursault's responses?

17. What difficulties does Meursault have in responding to the magistrate the way he is expected to? Why do the expectations annoy him?

Chapter 2

18. What strategies does Meursault employ to habituate himself to life in prison while he awaits trial? Does he change as a result of prison confinement? Explain.

Chapter 3

19. Why is the "jury trial" a good vehicle for Camus in showing the absurdity of the various attempts made to interpret why Meursault has committed his crime? That is, what things matter most during a trial--the evidence, or other factors? Explain.

20. How do Meursault's friends and acquaintances explain his actions? What "spin" is the prosecutor able to give to their explanations, and why is it difficult to undo the damage the prosecutor has done to Meursault's prospects for acquittal?

Chapter 4

21. What is Meursault's complaint about the trial proceedings and especially about both the defense lawyer and the prosecuting attorney?

22. If you were a jury member--and therefore were not a reader of Meursault's own narration of his behavior--would you find the prosecutor's story about Meursault convincing? Would you buy his defense attorney's story? Explain.

23. The prosecuting attorney describes Meursault's heart as "an abyss threatening to swallow up society" (101), and on 102 he even accuses Meursault of the parricide supposedly committed by the *next* defendant to be tried in the same courtroom. How do you interpret these strange claims--what threat might Meursault be said to pose to "civilized society" even beyond the rather common crime he has committed?

Chapter 5

24. On page 109, Meursault says after his death sentence has been pronounced that there "really was something ridiculously out of proportion between the verdict such certainty was based on and the imperturbable march of events from the moment the verdict was announced." How does this comment address the strong need manifested in social and legal institutions to attain certainty about people and events?

25. Why does Meursault become so upset with the priest who comes to visit him in his cell? What is the priest trying to make him do?

26. To what extent does Meursault accept his fate? How does he arrive at his final understanding of his situation, and how would you describe that understanding?

Edition: Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Trans. Matthew Ward. New York: Vintage, 1989. ISBN 0-679-72020-0.

CANTARES MEXICANOS QUESTIONS

Assigned: *Cantares Mexicanos* (3073-76).

1. In Song IV, how does the singer's perspective compare to European-style theories of poetic inspiration with which you are familiar? (Platonic, romantic, etc.) And how are the songs themselves described metaphorically--what effect does do you suppose this description of the songs was intended to have on readers?

2. In Song XII, what role does the Aztec religion play in the singer's exhortation--what enticements and promises are offered to those the singer is trying to motivate? Why is the singer evidently so sure that the song will have the desired effect?

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BALDESAR CASTIGLIONE QUESTIONS

Assigned: Baldesar Castiglione. From *The Courtier* (2552-64).

From *The Courtier*

1. On 2552-54, in what setting does the book's dialogue take place? What kind of expectations might arise as a result of the author's description of Urbino and his brief recounting of that city's political history (i.e. his discussion of the most recent Dukes)?
2. On 2554 and throughout our selection, what role does Duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga play? How is her social rank important in Castiglione's conversational scheme, and what qualities does the Duchess have aside from her high position in Urbino?
3. On 2555-57, the first quality that Count Ludovico insists upon in setting forth his ideal of courtiership is nobility of birth. What rationale does he offer for this insistence? What objections arise against his claim, and how does he respond to them?
4. On 2558-61, Ludovico discusses other qualifications for the best courtier: what are the most important among these qualifications, and why? How does he balance the need for excellence in such things with the imperative of moderation?
5. On 2562-64, when challenged to explain how a courtier might develop a greater degree of "grace" than nature has given him, how does Count Ludovico reply—why doesn't he feel bound to answer this challenge directly? What does his term sprezzatura mean, and how does this term help him sum up the argument he has been making?

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THE FLORENTINE CODEX QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *The Florentine Codex* (3070-73).

From *The Florentine Codex*

1. What attitude do the pair of orations to mothers take with respect to death and the gods? Are they to be feared, welcomed, or both? Explain.

2. What is the true role of a mother, in these orations--where do her value and her responsibilities belong, and how is she honored in comparison to men?

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MIGUEL DE CERVANTES QUESTIONS

Assigned: Miguel de Cervantes. *Don Quixote*. Book 1, Chs. 1-5 (pages 19-45); Book 1, Chs. 7-8 (53-61 paragraph 1); Book 1, Ch. 18 (125 bottom-133); Book 1, Ch. 22 (163-72); Book 1, Ch. 52 (440 middle-446 top); Book 2, Chs. 71-74 (919-40).

Don Quixote

Volume 1, Chapter 1

1. In Book 1, Chapter 1, what are Don Quixote's circumstances when we first make his acquaintance? What factors in his ordinary life lead him to become a chivalric "knight errant"?
2. In Book 1, Chapter 1, once Don Quixote has made his decision to take up the profession of knight, what exactly does he do: what are his first steps in embarking on his new "career"?

Volume 1, Chapter 2

3. In Volume 1, Chapter 2, what occupies Don Quixote's mind as he sets out on his adventure? What delusions and preoccupations beset him?
4. In Volume 1, Chapter 2, how does the narrator counter Don Quixote's delusionary thoughts and deeds with material consequences? Consider what happens in and around the inn, and the difficulties with Don Quixote's helmet.

Volume 1, Chapter 3

5. In Volume 1, Chapter 3, how does Don Quixote come to be dubbed a knight? How does Don Quixote become the subject of manipulation in this chapter? What happens when those around him don't go along with his crazy schemes? What happens when they do? In your response, consider mainly the Innkeeper and the muledrivers' interactions with Don Quixote.

Volume 1, Chapter 4

6. In Volume 1, Chapter 4, how does Don Quixote fare in meeting his first two "serious" challenges as a knight errant? What trouble do his chivalric assumptions and absolutism cause him and others in this chapter? Moreover, how does Don Quixote interpret the outcome of the second of his two challenges — that is, the scrape he gets into with some merchants?

Volume 1, Chapter 5

7. In Volume 1, Chapter 5, what role do the old chivalric books play in the unfolding action, both with regard to Don Quixote himself and the other characters in this chapter — the housekeeper, the village priest, the barber, etc.? In addition, what answer does Don Quixote give the farmer who is trying to reason with him about his true identity? What principle seems to underlie that answer?

Volume 1, Chapter 7

8. In Volume 1, Chapter 7, what further misadventure befalls Don Quixote's beloved books, and why? How is this event explained to him, and how does he take the news?

9. In Volume 1, Chapter 7, who is Sancho Panza, and what promises does Don Quixote make to him? Why does he accede to Don Quixote's offer, and what are Sancho's concerns as the two men set out on their adventures?

Volume 1, Chapter 8

10. In Volume 1, Chapter 8, how does the "windmills" incident unfold, and how do this event and its immediate aftermath help to establish the relationship between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza? Furthermore, what symbolic or other value might account for the windmill's adventure's standing as paradigmatic with respect to Cervantes' long tale about a gallant madman? Why, that is, does it so well illustrate Don Quixote's plight and folly as a belated chivalric hero in early modern Spain?

11. In Volume 1, Chapter 8, what new adventure befalls Don Quixote not long after his fight with the windmills? What mistaken perception leads him into this adventure? What principle does he defend by entering the fray?

Volume 1, Chapter 18

12. In Volume 1, Chapter 18, what happens when Don Quixote spins his sighting of some dust clouds into a clash between himself and some shepherds — what are the immediate outcome and aftermath of this clash, and how, taken together, do they undercut at least for a time the airy idealism that generally marks Don Quixote's deeds as a supposed knight errant? What is Sancho's disposition towards his adventures by this point in the text, and how does Don Quixote respond to Sancho's attitude?

Volume 1, Chapter 22

13. In Volume 1, Chapter 22, Don Quixote's actions result in the escape of several prisoners being escorted by guards along a road. How does the knight interpret these men's predicament — what principle does he try to defend when he takes their side against their captors? How does the affair turn out, and in particular what is the symbolic value of Don Quixote's loss of his helmet and some of his clothing?

Volume 1, Chapter 52

14. In Volume 1, Chapter 52, what is the state of affairs with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza — what have they to show for all their adventures thus far, and what effect has their absence had on those closest to them? Moreover, how does the narrator describe the state of the text at this point (the end of Book 1)? How do the “Academy” poems and brief characterizations he includes set the stage for Book 2?

Book 2

Volume 2, Chapters 71-72

15. In Volume 2, Chapters 71-72, Sancho continues his penance to effect the disenchantment of the supposedly bewitched and allegedly existent Dulcinea of Toboso, while the two men meet Don Alvaro Tarfe and free him from the misinformation peddled by Avellaneda’s sequel to *Don Quixote*. Do a bit of Internet research to explain the essentials of this confusion — who was Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda, and what do Cervantes and his Don Quixote have against him?

16. In Volume 2, Chapters 71-72, what is all this about “Dulcinea del Toboso” having been enchanted? Fill in the back-story here by referring to Book 2, Ch. 10. In what sense has Dulcinea been a necessary fiction for Don Quixote all along — why doesn’t it really matter whether she exists or not?

Volume 2, Chapter 73

17. In Volume 2, Chapter 73, how are Don Quixote and Sancho Panza received when they return home to their village? What is Don Quixote’s plan now that he has come home?

Volume 2, Chapter 74

18. In Volume 2, Chapter 74, what causes Don Quixote to recover his sanity? How does he now regard the old chivalric stories? What attitude towards Don Quixote’s last days does the narrator himself (“Cervantes”) adopt? What do the words of the supposed original chronicler of Quixote’s exploits, Cide Hamete, add to your understanding of Don Quixote’s story and of the romance tales that led him to follow the course he did?

Edition: Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quixote*. Trans. Edith Grossman. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005. ISBN-13: 978-0060934347.

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY QUESTIONS

Assigned: Fyodor Dostoyevsky. *Notes from Underground* (1864). (Separate text; see below.)

Chapter 1 (15-46)

1. What is “the Underground”? To respond, consider how the idea develops in the first several pages of Dostoyevsky’s text.

2. How does Dostoyevsky's narrator create and then engage with an audience? Why does it seem important to him to talk to an audience in the first place?
3. On pages 20-23, the narrator refers to "the Wall." What is the Wall, and how does Dostoyevsky's narrator use this metaphor as a means of characterizing his era and of examining the relationship between intellect and action, between human desires and scientific fact?
4. On page 21, the narrator distinguishes between men and mice; what kind of mindset informs the behavior of the "mouse"? Who has the upper hand--the man or the mouse? And in what sense does one or the other have the upper hand?
5. On page 27, what does the narrator say is "the essence of all thinking and self-awareness"? How does his explanation undercut commonly accepted ideas about what distinguishes human beings as "special" in comparison to the rest of the natural world? (Consider, for example, common claims about the significance of morality, language, and reason as capacities that make us unique among earth's creatures.)
6. On page 29, the narrator attacks the fundamental idea that people act on the basis of self-interest (enlightened or otherwise). What does he claim is wrong with that idea?
7. On page 31, how does the narrator define "civilization"? How does his definition differ from others you have heard?
8. On pages 34-36, the narrator discusses his notion of human will. How does he explain this concept, and why is the concept of "volition" so important to him?
9. On pages 40-41, the narrator says that we are "comically constructed"? What does this phrase imply about us--about our actions and about the stories we tell to explain them?
10. On pages 44-45, the narrator explains his reasons for writing his "notes." What is the point of writing such notes, according to him?

Chapter 2: A Story of the Falling Sleet (47-123)

11. On page 49, the narrator claims that "at all times, a decent man must be a coward and a slave." Why is that the case, according to our narrator?
12. On pages 52-58 and following, the narrator tells us how an officer insulted him in a tavern. How does the narrator respond to this insult, what drives him to respond as he does, and how does his behavior illustrate what he has been saying about his mindset or character traits throughout the first part of the text?
13. What is the upshot of the narrator's attempt to pay the officer back for the insult? Who wins the "contest" (if that's the right word for it), and in what sense?
14. On page 62 and following, the narrator meets his old school friends Simonov and company. What does he think of these "friends," and why are they still important to him?

15. On pages 72-80, the friends' dinner for Zverkov takes place, and the narrator attends in spite of his old friends' reluctance to invite him. How does he behave during this dinner--how does he interact with his friends, and why does he talk and act the way he does?
16. The sequel to the dinner runs from pages 81-102; the narrator intends to confront Zverkov one more time, but instead meets Liza the prostitute. How does the dialogue between the narrator and Liza unfold--that is, what strategy does the narrator use to convince Liza that she is on the wrong path? What seems to motivate the narrator to speak and behave as he does? What effect do his words have?
17. After parting company with Liza, the narrator goes home and apologizes for his conduct towards his friends. Examine pages 102-106. How are the narrator's apology and his reflections upon his motives in dealing with Liza characteristic of him?
18. On pages 107-111, how does the narrator describe the relationship between himself and his servant, Apollon? Who has the upper hand, and why?
19. On pages 112-end, how does the narrator explain his reaction to the reappearance of Liza at his doorstep? What does the narrator do to Liza, and why do you think he behaves as he does? Consider, for example, his statements about "love." Is this view partly responsible for his bad behavior?
20. Towards the end of the text, how does the narrator sum up what he has accomplished by writing his Notes from Underground? Has he redeemed himself to any considerable degree, or was redemption in his own and our eyes not the point of the whole exercise? If not, what *was* the point?

Edition: Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from Underground / The Double*. Trans. Jessie Coulson. New York: Penguin, 1972. ISBN 0-140-44252-9.

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS QUESTIONS

Assigned: Desiderius Erasmus. *In Praise of Folly* (2490-2517).

From *In Praise of Folly*

1. On 2494-97, Folly describes her birth and makes a number of strong claims. What does she say about her birth and early upbringing? Moreover, how does she immediately begin to undermine the graver forms of philosophy (especially Stoicism)?
2. On 2497-2500, Folly insists that emotion lies at the base of wisdom and just about all kinds of human activity. How does she back up that assertion? Next, she says that people simply can't get by without illusions. What are some of the illusions she mentions, and why can't people live without them?
3. On 2501-04, Folly discusses the advantages of being unschooled as opposed to being a learned humanist "wiseman." What are those advantages? What error or errors underlie the thinking of those who advocate humanistic education too enthusiastically? Does this mean that Erasmus rejects learning, or should we interpret his argument otherwise? Explain.

4. On 2505-09, how does Folly distinguish between two kinds of “madness”? Why is the one harmful while the other (Folly’s favorite) is beneficial? What individuals and groups does she include as participants in the beneficial kind? How does Folly handle the sensitive issue of religion in this context?
5. On 2509-13, Folly discusses the sway of selflove and flattery in human affairs--what effects do these things have on the way people live their lives and on how they perceive themselves and others? Towards the end of this section, on what justification does Folly assert her superiority over other gods and goddesses?
6. On 2514-17, Folly returns for her conclusion to the connection she has made between madness and religion, but this time with greater concentration: how does she justify her dominion over human life in expressly Christian terms? To what extent does the conclusion undermine Folly’s long praise of herself?
7. General question: Erasmus’ *In Praise of Folly* has a modern ring in its irreverent treatment of human pretensions to “reasonableness” and godlike intellectual capacity. Erasmus, although he’s certainly not irreligious or nihilistic, precedes C19-20 authors such as Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, and Freud in his willingness to expose the delusory nature of people’s most deeply held beliefs. How do you see the balance in modern life between reason and passion, sanity and “folly,” cooperation and aggression? In sum, are you optimistic or pessimistic about humanity’s future?

Edition: Lawall, Sarah, ed. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. 2nd edition. Volumes 1ABC. New York: Norton, 2002. ISBN A = 0-393-97755-2, B = 0-393-97756-0, C = 0-393-97757-9.

FRENCH LYRIC POETS QUESTIONS

Assigned: *Lyrics of the French Renaissance: Marot, Du Bellay, Ronsard*. Clement Marot (21-157): read at least a few poems in each of the categories among his selections — ballades, rondeaux, chansons, epistres, epigrammes. Joachim du Bellay (159-265): read 185-97 entire (*Les antiquitez de Rome*), and at least a few poems each from among those included in the brief collections for this author. Pierre de Ronsard (267-381). Read at least five poems total from among the several collections of Odes (324-53).

Clement Marot (21-157). Read several poems in each of the poetic categories among the selections from Marot: ballades, rondeaux, chansons, epistres, epigrammes.

1. One key theme in the various types of poetry in our Marot selections is, of course, love. Choose a poem from at least two of these categories (ballades, rondeaux, chansons, epistres, epigrammes) and examine how the poet handles the theme of erotic and/or spiritual love.
2. Another of Marot’s concerns is religion. What attitudes do at least two Marot poems of your choosing express regarding spirituality and Christian institutions?

3. Often, Marot's poetry is light-hearted, but not always. Choose a couple of his poems that seem to explore a serious aspect of life and discuss the insights or problems that arise in those poems.

Joachim du Bellay (159-265). Read 185-97 entire (*Les antiquitez de Rome*) and sample the other categories of poetry in du Bellay (i.e. read several poems from each).

4. In *Les antiquitez de Rome*, what material image of the "eternal city" (Rome) does du Bellay evoke for his readers? And what inferences does he draw from contemplation of this image about the significance of an individual's life as well as the life of an entire people?

5. Choose a couple of du Bellay's love poems and discuss the Petrarchan qualities you find in them, both in terms of style and subject matter. (*L'Olive* or *Sonnetz de l'honneste amour* would be good choices from which to select.) Comment also on how du Bellay's handling of love themes differs from that of Marot.

6. Du Bellay's subjects range well beyond erotic and Neoplatonic or spiritual love. Choose and explore a few of his poems from *Vers lyriques*, *Les Regrets*, and/or *Sonnets divers*, which address topics such as the brevity and cycles or stages of life, how to attain contentment, courts, courtiers, the Church, fellow poets, and art itself, among other things. What seems most worth discussing in the poems you choose, and why?

7. Choose a few poems from among the *Divers jeux rustiques* and consider how (and to what end) du Bellay represents the natural world and what use he makes of classical Greek and Roman mythology.

Pierre de Ronsard (267-381). Read a selection from the *Odes* (324-53).

8. A stylistic or formal question: do some quick research on the Internet and try to arrive at a working definition of the ode form: what are the main kinds of ode? How does an ode differ from a sonnet? How would you describe the type of ode and categorize the subjects of most interest in the current selections by Ronsard?

Edition. Glidden, Hope, ed. *Lyrics of the French Renaissance: Marot, Du Bellay, Ronsard*. Trans. Norman Shapiro. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-0226750521.

IBN-ISHAQ QUESTIONS

Assigned: Ibn-Ishaq. From *The Biography of the Prophet* (1460-76).

From *The Biography of the Prophet*

1. From 1463-67, what attracted Salman the Persian to the new religion being propounded by Muhammad? How does Muhammad treat this new adherent, and how does Salman come to be converted?

2. From 1467-71, under what circumstances does God begin to send Muhammad the Koran (i.e. Quran)? What sustenance does Muhammad receive from his wife Khadija, his uncle Abu Talib, and Abu Talib's son Ali?
3. From 1472-75, what difficulties does Muhammad have with the people of his own tribe, the Quraysh? How does he deal with their opposition? Why do Muhammad's words "I bring you slaughter" seem to have such an effect upon them? How does Hamza achieve Islam--i.e. how does he confirm his status as a believer?

Edition: Lawall, Sarah, ed. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. 2nd edition. Volumes 1ABC. New York: Norton, 2002. ISBN A = 0-393-97755-2, B = 0-393-97756-0, C = 0-393-97757-9.

YOSHIDA KENKO QUESTIONS

Assigned: Yoshida Kenko. From *Essays in Idleness* (2326-2342).

From *Essays in Idleness*

1. On 2329, Kenko explains why the uncertainties of life matter more to him than the things we take for granted. Why is uncertainty so valuable, in his view? Consider also what he writes about "imperfection" (2336, #82) and about "the beginnings and ends" of things (2337, #137). Why are imperfection and incompleteness better, in their way, than perfection and completeness?
2. On 2332-33 and again on 2337-39, Kenko deals with a theme common in his text--death and the reaction of living people to death. What insights does he offer in this regard--is there a "right" way to regard one's death or the death of others? Is there any way to escape from the universal anxiety that besets human beings in the face of death?
3. Kenko was a Buddhist monk who lived in uncertain times, so it's understandable that he would emphasize the value of detachment from the flow of life, from strong emotions, and so forth. But that doesn't mean he has no insight into the province of accomplishment: on 2339-41, what advice does he offer about the best way to make progress in learning and, more generally, in achieving something you want to do?
4. Compare the way Kenko handles any one subject with the way Sei Shonagon deals with the same subject--which do you prefer, and why? The two authors write from very different positions, so in your response, don't dismiss Shonagon simply for being an aristocratic lady-in-waiting, or Kenko for being a rather gloomy priest in bad times.

Edition: Lawall, Sarah, ed. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. 2nd edition. Volumes 1ABC. New York: Norton, 2002. ISBN A = 0-393-97755-2, B = 0-393-97756-0, C = 0-393-97757-9.

THE KORAN QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *The Koran* (1426-60).

From *The Koran*

1. From 1429-32, what relationship does the text specify as proper between men and women? What responsibilities are allotted to them respectively?
2. From 1432-41, the text deals in part with proper ceremonial conduct and dietary restrictions for Muslims, and in part with the right way to regard Jews and Christians. Focus on the latter issue--how should a Muslim consider and behave towards these "People of the Book"? What praises are offered with regard to Jews and Christians, and what criticisms are made?
3. From 1441-46, the text addresses the status of *The Koran*, and deals poetically with the brevity of life and the faithlessness of nations. What exactly is said about *The Koran's* value as a guide and as a book of admonishment? Why have the earth's various people seldom obeyed for long the prophets God has sent them?
4. From 1446-52, *The Koran* tells the story of Joseph. In what ways is this recounting similar to the story as told in *Genesis* (see Norton Vol. 1A, pp. 66-77), and in what ways does it differ? What lesson is taught by *The Koran's* version?
5. From 1452-55, *The Koran* tells the story of Mary and the birth of Jesus. What points of similarity do you find between this account and basic Christian doctrine about Mary, Jesus, and the "End Times"? What powers are ascribed to Jesus, and what fundamental Christian tenet does the text find unacceptable?
6. From 1456-60, what orientation towards God and towards earthly life do these selections advise readers to take?

Edition: Lawall, Sarah, ed. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. 2nd edition. Volumes 1ABC. New York: Norton, 2002. ISBN A = 0-393-97755-2, B = 0-393-97756-0, C = 0-393-97757-9.

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI QUESTIONS

Assigned: Niccolò Machiavelli. From *The Prince* (2517-34).

From *The Prince*

1. On 2521-23, Machiavelli discusses the career of Pope Alexander VI's son Cesare Borgia. How did Cesare come to power? What tactics did he employ to maintain and increase his power? Why did he ultimately fail, and why does Machiavelli nonetheless set forth Cesare's career as an example of wisdom and "virtù" (forcefulness of character, masculine strength)?

2. On 2524, Machiavelli advances a striking argument about morality's place in politics: a prince "must learn how to be not good, and to use that ability or not as is required" (2524). On 2525-28, how does he demonstrate this proposition by discussing liberality versus parsimony and pity versus cruelty? Why, for instance, is being generous dangerous to a prince, and why is it less dangerous to be feared than to be loved?
3. On 2528-29, Machiavelli explores the value to a prince of dissembling and breaking faith. In what circumstances is such dishonesty necessary? What view of human nature underlies his claims that it is more important to maintain the appearance of morality than actually to observe it? Is Machiavelli abandoning the time-honored notion that there are absolute moral standards, or is his relativism itself relative--i.e. applicable only in a given set of circumstances? Explain.
4. On 2530-31, Machiavelli discusses the relative role of fortune (*la Fortuna*), temperament, and free will in human affairs--how much significance does he allot to each, and what rationale does he give for his distribution? As for his remark that "Fortune is a woman" who must be conquered violently, how does this affect your view of his other statements about political action?
5. On 2532-34, what position does Machiavelli adopt towards the unification of Italy? Why does he think it is possible--what would it take to reunify such a fragmented political entity as Italy in 1513? It's clear that Machiavelli is arguing in *The Prince* to a Medici ruler who does not share his admiration for the ancient republican forms of governance--does that contradiction invalidate his authority as a "political scientist," or can it be defended?
6. A contemporary question: political discussions today seem to turn on issues pertaining to "character" and the morality or immorality of policies. What do you think Machiavelli would say about the assumptions underlying such arguments? Furthermore, would he accept the idea that the reasons leaders give for what they do are (or should be) the ones that actually motivate them? Does it matter? Explain your reasons.
7. Another contemporary question: what do you think Machiavelli would say about America's entering into a war with Iraq and then maintaining its forces in that country? From a Machiavellian perspective, what are the potential benefits? What are the potential problems? Do you suppose Machiavelli would approve of President Bush's Iraq policy or not? Explain your reasons.
8. Machiavelli is sometimes considered the first modern political scientist. How does "poly-sci" differ fundamentally from earlier views (Aristotle's and Plato's in particular) about the nature and purpose of political organization?

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NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI QUESTIONS (FULL VERSION)

Assigned: Niccolò Machiavelli. *The Prince*. (Separate text; see below.)

The Prince

1. What are the circumstances of Machiavelli himself and of his native Florence when *The Prince (Il Principe)* is written in 1513?
2. What overt purpose does Machiavelli give in his "Dedication" (to the son and grandson of the renowned Florentine ruler Lorenzo de' Medici) for writing his book? Does his stated purpose amount to a betrayal of his republican career and principles? Why or why not?
3. Do you find Machiavelli's advice to princes in any way ironic--i.e. given in such a manner as to detract from the dignity of princes in general over against republican governors? If so, provide a few examples. If not, explain why you think his advice is straightforward.
4. According to Machiavelli in Section II, custom is among the best aids to an effective prince. Why? What does this view of his say about his opinion of human motivations and needs?
5. How might Machiavelli's treatment of his subject--politics, with particular emphasis on princely government--be described as scientific? What are some scientific elements of his method?
6. To what extent are people types or individuals (or both), according to Machiavelli? Respond both in terms of ordinary people and princes.
7. How does Machiavelli discuss human nature? What are some of the characteristics he ascribes to people in general? What motivates people to obey or disobey the prince's commands?
8. Why is "imitation of models" so important to princes? What sorts of examples does Machiavelli provide? That is, where does he get his models for princely conduct? How would Machiavelli define "history"?
9. What are some of the personal qualities that an effective prince needs? What should be the object or objects of his study?
10. What does Machiavelli appear to mean by the word "virtù" (virtue) What range of connotations does this word cover in his writing? See, for example, Section VIII--what is included and excluded as "virtù" in this section?
11. How does Machiavelli discuss the necessity for the prince to behave injuriously or unjustly towards others? When is it advisable *not* to be good? Does Machiavelli abandon more traditional, absolute standards concerning virtuous conduct or "morality"?
12. How did Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander VI, come to power as a prince? What tactics did Cesare use to maintain and augment his power? Why did he ultimately fail, and why does Machiavelli nonetheless set Cesare's career forth as an example of wisdom and *virtù*?

13. What is Machiavelli's attitude towards the people (*il popolo*) as opposed to his treatment of princes?
14. Why, according to Machiavelli, is the Italy of his day so disunited? What narrative does he spin to explain Italy's slide into foreign dependency and internal fragmentation?
15. In Section 14, Machiavelli insists that war--its rules and methods--should be among the foremost of the prince's concerns. Do you believe he is correct in this insistence on the centrality of war? Why or why not?
16. In Section 16, Machiavelli argues that it is best for a prince to keep up a reputation for miserliness rather than generosity. What reasons does he provide for this claim? How is his reasoning on this point typical of his "scientific" analysis of human affairs?
17. In his "Exhortation," Machiavelli calls for action that will re-unify fragmented Italy, or at least free Italy of foreign influence. How does he recombine and reinvoke the ideas set forth in the main part of his treatise? Do you find Machiavelli's exhortation compelling? Why or why not?
18. What is Machiavelli's conception of fortune (*la fortuna*)? To what degree, if at all, can one overcome it?

Edition: Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. 2nd edition. Trans. Robert M. Adams. New York: Norton, 1992. ISBN 0-393-96220-2.

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE QUESTIONS

Assigned: Michel de Montaigne. From *Essays*: "To the Reader," "Of the Power of the Imagination," "Of Cannibals," and "Of the Inconsistency of Our Actions" (2632-58).

"To the Reader" and "Of the Power of the Imagination"

1. Read Montaigne's introductory announcement on 2636 carefully--what exactly is he promising to do, and what does he say he does not mean to do? Although his opening remarks seem fairly straightforward, in what sense do they also suggest the complexity of Montaigne's task as an essayist?
2. On 2636-38, Montaigne begins with various observations and anecdotes--what initial perspective does he offer on his subject "the power of the imagination"? How much credence, if any, does he put in the stories he recounts, the scholarly remarks he cites, and so forth?
3. On 2639-41, Montaigne shifts his observations to a humorous take on sex from a man's perspective. Why is this subject appropriate to his essay as a whole? How does the theme of sexual difficulties address something broader than the physical act of love?
4. On 2641-44, Montaigne (after some dilatory remarks) offers some reflections on his method as an essayist and his way of handling knowledge of all sorts. How does he say he handles "fabulous testimonies" (2643)--why are they just as good as clear facts? Why does he write about the past instead of the present? What is his problem with "extended narration"?

“Of Cannibals”

5. On 2646-47, Montaigne explores the commonly held opposition between civilized and barbarous people. What alternative to this overly simple opposition does he propose--what is his general view of the Brazilian natives about whom he writes?
6. On 2648-50, Montaigne discusses his subject proper--the alleged cannibalism of the Brazilians and their war-practices. What does he suggest (by way of comparison) about European beliefs and practices? Modern cultural anthropologists often strive to adopt a “values-free” stance when they report on other cultures--is that what Montaigne is doing here, or does he seem to have another purpose? Explain.
7. On 2652-53, Montaigne recounts how he met three Brazilians who bravely returned with Europeans to the Old World. What does he indirectly suggest about the possibility of genuine communication between cultures? And how do you interpret the manner in which Montaigne choose to end his essay on cannibalism? (He concludes with, “All this is not too bad--but what’s the use? They don’t wear breeches.”)

“Of the Inconsistency of Our Actions”

8. On 2653-58, what evidence does Montaigne offer to support his proposition that human beings are supremely inconsistent? What, according to him, makes a man courageous one day and a coward the next, or a woman virtuous one day and not so virtuous the next?
9. On 2653-58, Montaigne rejects the idea that we can really tell much about a person by “external” behavior. In conclusion, he writes “we must probe the inside and discover what springs set men in motion.” But to what extent does his essay suggest this is possible--how, that is, would you sum up Montaigne’s central argument about human character and the possibilities of setting it down on paper?
10. A general question pertaining to all of our selections: the C19 philosopher Kierkegaard says insightfully about the way authors who write about “the self” (and similarly complicated subjects) go out of their way not to suggest that transparent communication or facile agreement is achievable. To what extent do you think Montaigne would agree? Explain with particular regard to his style as an essayist. (This might make an interesting topic for a full paper.)

Edition: Lawall, Sarah, ed. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. 2nd edition. Volumes 1ABC. New York: Norton, 2002. ISBN A = 0-393-97755-2, B = 0-393-97756-0, C = 0-393-97757-9.

KANZE KOJIRO NOBUMITSU AND ZEAMI MOTOKIYO QUESTIONS

Assigned: Motokiyo’s *Atsumori* (2350-55) and *Haku Rakuten* (2356-61), Nobumitsu’s *Dojoji* (2361-70).

Atsumori (2350-55)

1. What role does the chorus play? How, for example, do the chorus take the place of “action”?

2. Explain, in Buddhist terms, the nature of Atsumori's obsession--what is his error?
3. How would you describe the plot, the "action," of this play? If it represents something, what does it represent?

***Haku Rakuten* (2356-61)**

4. What contrast does the script offer between Japanese poetry and Chinese poetry? How do the Old Fisherman and the Chorus describe or define Japanese poetry?
5. Research the history between Japan and China at the period referenced by the play. Why the strong identification of art with national pride?

***Dojoji* (2361-70)**

6. What comic elements can you find in this play? But what is serious about it? What differentiates this play from the other two we have read--aside, of course, from the basic plot differences?
7. General question--what reflections do you have regarding western drama (ancient or modern) after reading these three Japanese Gno dramas?

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FRANCIS PETRARCH QUESTIONS

Of Interest: [Biblioteca Italiana](#) | [Renaissance Backgrounds](#)

Assigned: Francesco Petrarca. "Letter to Dionisio" and from *Sonnets* (2476-90).

"Letter to Dionisio" and from *Sonnets*

1. Petrarch seems to cast his "Letter to Dionisio" (2480-85) into a brief allegory after its initial composition. Explain the basics of the letter's allegory--how does Petrarch complicate the simple subject of ascending a mountain? What new themes arise?
2. Again in the "Letter to Dionisio" (2480-85), concentrate on the presence of Saint Augustine and his book *The Confessions*--why does Augustine's spiritual autobiography turn up in the letter, and what method of interpretation does it reinforce?
3. In the *Sonnets* (2485-90), Petrarch's love for Laura is clearly patterned after his older contemporary Dante's love for Beatrice. But there are differences, as the editorial introduction points out. How does

Petrarch describe Laura's physical being? How does he describe his longing for her and the spiritual aspirations connected to that longing?

4. Again with regard to the *Sonnets* (2485-90), consult the guide included beneath these questions, and, choosing a lyric or two, explain what is "Petrarchan" about it--i.e. how the lyric/s you've chosen illustrate Petrarch's habits of expression and description.

Petrarchan Conceits and Conventions (adapted from Brian Loftus, UC Irvine)

1. Love as a battle, the Beloved or Love as an enemy
2. Love as a deadly disease or wound, a torment,
3. Love as bondage
5. Love as a hunt
6. Love and/or the Beloved as ruler, master
7. The Beloved as unattainable, distant
8. The power of the Beloved's gaze (as a ray, beam, stars etc.)
9. The beauty of the Beloved's person (like flowers, jewels, etc.)
10. The name of the Beloved/Poet (puns, wordplay, etc.)
11. Apostrophe (address to inanimate object, dead person, etc.)
12. The Beloved as a star or sun
13. The virtue and perfection of the Beloved
14. Emphasis on extremes of feeling, often contradictory ("I burn and yet I freeze," etc.)

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THE POPOL VUH QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *The Popol Vuh* (3076-92).

From *The Popol Vuh*

1. In the selection from Part 1 (3079-82), what reason does the narrator give for the existence of *The Popol Vuh*? And why did the gods decide to create the world? (If you have read *Genesis*, how do these gods compare in motive and method to Yahweh?)
2. In the selection from Part 2 (3082-84), Hunahpu and Xbalanque defeat Seven Macaw. How do they manage to do that, and what can we learn from this story about the Quiché People of Guatemala's conception of the similarities to and differences between the gods' ways and human ways?
3. In the selection from Part 3 (3084-88), One and Seven Hunahpu (the parents of Hunahpu and Xbalanque) travel to "Dark House" in the underworld (Xibalba) and are sacrificed. Why are they sacrificed, and what happens after that? Why do the underground gods of Xibalba deserve to be defeated, as the narrative has it?

4. In the selection from Part 4 (3088-92), we arrive at the creation of human beings. How does that creation come about? Why might it be significant that people are said to have been created out of corn and that animals had something to do with it? Why do the gods decide to restrict humans' understanding?

5. In the concluding selection from Part 5 (3092), what things does the narrator ask for in the name of future generations? Is the request partly for restoration of lost powers (what the gods took away from humanity soon after the creation), or would you describe it another way? Explain.

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FRANÇOIS RABELAIS QUESTIONS

Assigned: François Rabelais. From *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (2591-2631).

From *Gargantua and Pantagruel*

1. On 2595-2601, the narrator recounts Gargantua's early education--what basic errors govern the boy's upbringing at the hands of such illustrious masters as Tubalcain Holofernes and Blowhard Birdbrain?
2. On 2601-07, Powerbrain takes command of Gargantua's education--what reforms does he institute to what end, and how does a "day in the life" of the boy now go? To what extent does the narrator seem to be serious about the regimen he describes--is it the perfect humanistic education, a parody, or both?
3. On 2607-16, the narrator recounts the genesis of the Abbey of Thélème. Why is the Abbey built, and by what rules do the inhabitants live? How do they relate to people on the outside, in the "everyday world"? What criticism does this ideal place make of real-life religious institutions and assumptions?
4. On 2616-21, the narrator describes the birth and upbringing of Gargantua's son, Pantagruel. What program of learning does Gargantua lay out in his letter to Pantagruel, and what purpose animates it--i.e. what are the goals of humanistic education as Gargantua sees them? Also, how does the letter set forth an argument about the relationship between historical and cultural circumstances and the flowering of education?
5. On 2622-29, Thaumaste comes from England to France to challenge young Pantagruel to a debate. Why is it imperative, in his view, to debate altogether without the aid of spoken language? How does Panurge (stepping in for Pantagruel) win the debate--how is it that Thaumaste and the audience understand his various gesticulations, and what is the final outcome of all this "talk"? What might Rabelais be suggesting about the origin of scholarly Renaissance wisdom?
6. On 2629-31, during Pantagruel's war against the Dipsodes, the narrator Alcofribas Nasier hides in the ruler's mouth, encountering an entire principality within. What sorts of things are going on there?

What does the description Alcofribas offers suggest about Rabelais' France and other Renaissance real-world places?

7. General question: the editors of our anthology (somewhat following the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin) discuss Rabelais' exuberant, sometimes outrageous methods as a writer. Why do you think he writes the way he does--i.e. all those gigantic characters, so many irreverent descriptions of real-world assumptions and practices, etc.?

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JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU QUESTIONS

Assigned: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. From *The Confessions*, Books 1-2.

From *The Confessions*

Book 1

1. What does Rousseau say on page 5 about his intentions and aims in writing the book? What do his comments imply about his views on the significance of the individual as opposed to the mass of human beings?
2. Discuss how Rousseau deals with the question of character formation on pages 7-10. What factors influenced his growth while he was a boy in Geneva, before he had to leave for Bossey to stay with Monsieur Lambercier? At what points does he introduce the complex feeling we call "guilt"?
3. From pages 14-17, Rousseau tells us how he came by a rather embarrassing sexual predilection, and then explores its consequences for his later happiness and his character. Why does he tell us embarrassing things in this manner--what do they allow him to explain? Also, do you think his confessions ennoble him for us, or do they seem more prideful than honorable? Explain your response.
4. From pages 18-20, Rousseau tells us how his embarrassing predilection was set to rest for a time by unjust punishment at the hands (pun intended, of course) of someone less attractive to Rousseau than Mademoiselle de Lambercier. How does Rousseau characterize this incident as a kind of "fall," to use the theological term? How does he employ the incident as a vehicle for his views about childhood and about society's penchant for punishing offenders?
5. From pages 21-23, Rousseau narrates how he and his cousin planted a willow sapling next to a walnut tree, only to have Monsieur Lambercier tear up the little aqueduct the two kids built with such great effort and ingenuity. What does this anecdote illustrate about Rousseau's view of the relative value in life of striving and achievement? Do you think that life is mainly about achievement (i.e. the end product of our efforts) or about the *process* of living and striving? Explain.
6. On pages 26-27, Rousseau explains that there are two different kinds of love. What are they, and how do they differ?

7. On pages 29-31, Rousseau describes his unhappy apprenticeships, first as a fee-catcher or bill collector of sorts, and then to an engraver. How does he explain the source and consequences of the first serious corruption of his nature in connection to those apprenticeships? What view of the relationship between human nature and social environment emerges from this part of the chapter?
8. From pages 33-35, Rousseau delves further into his persistent tendency to steal. How does he elaborate a psychology of crime and punishment here? And why does he steal little items even when he really doesn't need them--how does he link this unattractive tendency to a deep-rooted individual character trait?
9. On page 36, Rousseau explains that he often has difficulty carrying out simple tasks and satisfying perfectly acceptable desires--buying a pear at the grocer's, for instance. How does he explain his inhibitions in such everyday matters? How does his explanation reveal his view about the complexity of human interaction and "personality"?
10. From pages 38-40, Rousseau explains how he became an insatiable reader. What benefits does he derive from reading? How does it affect his character?
11. From pages 42-43, Rousseau explains the kind of life he might have led if his early experiences had been different. As in question 7, what view of the relationship between human nature and social environment emerges from this part of the chapter? To what extent, according to Rousseau here and throughout Book 1, does a meaningful "I," or "self," exist before immersion into social customs and relationships?

Edition: Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Confessions*. Trans. Angela Scholar. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. ISBN 0-192-82275-6.

JALÂLODDIN RUMI QUESTIONS

Assigned: Jalâloddin Rumi. "Selections" (1544-49).

"Selections"

1. In one or more poems, how does the poet reflect on his medium (the written word) as a vehicle for arriving at the sort of authenticity or truth he seeks? What can words do? What can't they do, and why?
2. Rumi's mystical poetry seems to thrive on paradoxical statements, or, to put the case another way, to thrive on exploiting the gap between seeming and being--choose any one or more poems and discuss this aspect of his poetry. ("The Question" is probably the most obvious choice, but not the only one.)
3. What relationship to God does the seeker strive for or posit in any one or more of the selected poems? What relationship does he achieve?

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RUSSIAN TALES

Assigned: *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*: "The Lay of Igor's Campaign" (167-90); "Tale of the Life of and Courage of the Pious and Great Prince Alexander Nevsky" (224-36); "The Life of St. Michael, a Fool in Christ" (300-10); "The Tale of the White Cowl" (323-32); ; "Shemiaka's Judgment" (449-52).

"The Lay of Igor's Campaign"

1. Who is Igor, and what is the cause of his campaign against the Kumans? How does the narrator describe the conduct and attitude of both sides during the battles they wage? That is, what value do they place in warfare?
2. The narrator makes many references to animals (birds, wolves, etc.) and to nature's most striking features. What effects do such references allow him to generate with respect to human attitudes and actions? Choose several examples from any part of the Lay and discuss your findings.
3. How does the narrator represent the most distressing of the events in the Lay--namely Igor's defeat and captivity? How, that is, does he foretell, describe and explain what happens to Igor? (Sections V, VII-VIII, XI would be particularly appropriate.)
4. What is the point, structurally and thematically, of the rather long series of appeals to Russian princes made in Section X — how do they affect or add to a reader's understanding of the material surrounding them?
5. Igor escapes and makes his way home in Section XII-XV. To what extent does this ending redeem or transform his failure to defeat the Kumans?

"Tale of the Life of and Courage of the Pious and Great Prince Alexander Nevsky"

6. The biography of Prince Alexander Nevsky is unusual in that it's about a political figure and not a man of the Eastern Orthodox Church. What are Alexander's main qualities and his greatest accomplishments, as the narrator gives them to us?
7. What role does religion play in events: how do they influence and structure the story of Alexander's life and deeds?
8. How is Alexander's opponent Khan Batu portrayed? What seem to be his designs with regard to Alexander and his Russian allies?

I will finish posting the questions soon....

"The Life of St. Michael, a Fool in Christ"

9. What is a “fool in Christ”? Respond mainly with regard to examples of St. Michael’s words and deeds in the story, rather than the introduction. It’s often said that Jesus set the pattern for the redemptive human life, which is lived as *imitatio christi*, an imitation of Christ. To what extent is Michael’s life a special or significant variation on this pattern?

“The Tale of the White Cowl”

10. Choose a couple of the tale’s anecdotes building up the remarkable history and symbolic power of the White Cowl: what characterizes the creation and subsequent movement of this holy object from Rome to Constantinople and finally to Novgorod? And how does the Cowl itself affect those who come into contact with it? If presenting on this question, try to craft your responses to show the importance of symbol in the religious culture in which the text as a whole is rooted.

“Shemiaka’s Judgment”

Edition. Zenkovsky, Serge A. *Medieval Russia’s Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*. New York: Penguin, 1974. ISBN-13: 978-0452010864.

SA’DI QUESTIONS

Assigned: Sa’ di. From *The Golestan* (1351-65).

From *The Golestan*

1. How do two or more anecdotes represent the Shahs’ powers and sensibilities? What strengths of judgment do some of the Shahs manifest, and to what errors in judgment or spirit do they seem liable?
2. How do two or more anecdotes represent the wisdom of the dervishes? What insights do such men possess? By what means do they instruct others, and to what extent are they listened to?

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MURASAKI SHIKIBU QUESTIONS

Assigned: Murasaki Shikibu. From *The Tale of Genji* (2174-2270).

From *The Tale of Genji*

Chapter 2 (2182-2204)

1. On 2184-96 before embarking on a frustrating courtship of the wife of the Governor of Iyo, Genji listens to several gentlemen discuss their perspective on relationships with women. What ideals and practical observations do the men set forth about their experience with women of various ranks? Do

they seem satisfied with the amatory status quo, or do you find that their complaints overshadow their happiness?

2. On 2196-2204, Genji courts the Governor of Iyo's wife (the "lady of the locust shell"), without, it seems, much success at this point. What seems to attract him to this lady, and how does she conduct herself in the face of Genji's advances?

Chapter 4 (2204-24)

3. From 2204-08, Genji continues his intrigues, but at from 2209-24, he has one of his most memorable and melancholy affairs: describe the development of an interaction between Genji and this young woman. How well does Genji acquit himself morally in this affair, and how does he take the young woman's death?

4. Again with reference to this affair from 2209-24 (as elsewhere in the novel), quotations from and adaptations of the *Kokinshu* and other key poems are interwoven with the characters' dialogue. How might the poetry quotations deepen our understanding of what happens between Genji and the ill-fated young woman? How do the verses offer a window into the thoughts, feelings, and expectations of the characters who speak them?

Chapter 12 (2224-2243)

5. In this chapter, Genji (thanks partly to an ill-considered affair with Kokiden's sister Oborozukiyo, as well as the death of the Emperor) is exiled to Suma, and must leave behind Murasaki, Fujitsubo, and his old way of life. From 2231-43, what is exile like for Genji? What are his surroundings like, how does he spend his time, and what qualities does this period of exile bring out in him?

Chapter 13 (2243-61)

6. From 2243-47, events lead rapidly to Genji's decision to return from Suma to the Court by way of Akashi--what events help him make his decision? Also, Buddhism is a complex belief system, but one of its most powerful elements is a strong sense of life's impermanence--how does this part of the chapter reinforce that point? What supernatural elements also come to Genji's assistance?

7. From 2250-57, Genji corresponds with the daughter of the old monk who once governed Harima. Reflect on how the narrator describes the letters that are written--not only what is written, but *how* it is written, in terms of calligraphic style, choice of paper, and any other considerations that matter. Why are these things so important, and why, more generally, does the act of writing letters seem so significant in our selections? (Chapter 12, 2234 also contains a description of letter-writing that you may want to draw upon.)

Chapter 25 (2261-70)

8. Judging from his behavior towards Tamakazura and his interaction with some of the other women in his life, what does Genji (now restored to grace at Court) seem to have learned now that he has

reached the relatively mature third decade of his life? Part of this chapter's selection is taken up with Genji's comments on the status of the romance fiction that his women friends read--what do those comments suggest about the wisdom he has gained up to this point?

9. A general question on any of our selected chapters: how important is the natural world and descriptions of it in this novel? What do the chapters' natural settings add to our understanding of characters and events?

10. A general question on any chapter: the Norton introduction says that Murasaki Shikibu is interested not so much in politics as in "fate, retribution, sexual attraction, and the emotional depth of sexual experience" (2174). That's surely true, but find a place or two in the text that touches upon political considerations at Court or elsewhere and discuss the observations made by the narrator or the characters. How are "politics" to some extent a vital concern in *Genji*?

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SEI SHONAGON QUESTIONS

Assigned: Sei Shonagon. From *The Pillow Book* (2270-2300).

From *The Pillow Book*

1. On 2275-79, Shonagon concentrates on the court of the Emperor and the Empress she serves. What is so appealing to Sei about the "Sliding Screen" occasion she describes? How do the Emperor and Empress seem to regard women such as Sei, and what advantages does Sei herself ascribe to those who have served their sovereigns in the Palace? On the whole, what sense do you get of the relation between the Imperial Palace and the goings-on of ordinary people outside?

2. On 2280-86, what categories (i.e. connected events, people, things) does Shonagon find "depressing" and "hateful," respectively? How would you describe her understanding of that important aspect of court life, "decorum" (adherence to the correct or socially acceptable ways of looking, behaving, feeling, etc.)? Some readers find Sei rather snobbish or punctilious in her tastes--how might one defend her from such a charge?

3. On 2286-88 ("A Preacher..."), Shonagon muses about religion. Why should a Buddhist priest be "good-looking"? And what tone does she adopt towards the courtly temple-goers she describes--is she offering us moral observations, or does something else seem to animate her? Explain.

4. On 2288-90, examine the way Sei Shonagon describes and responds to her natural surroundings. What does she notice most about nature--does she offer us "still-life" descriptions or is she more interested in nature's processes, its activities? Does she treat natural things as if they were works of art (i.e. "aesthetic objects" like paintings, sculptures, and vases) or does she maintain a strong distinction between art and nature? (2273's "In Spring..." is another good passage to examine in responding to this question. The same goes for 2293's "During the Long Rains...")

5. On 2291-94, Shonagon addresses various things, but among them is relations between men and women. What observations does she make about men and the way they treat women within her courtly environment? And what does she say about love more generally?
6. On 2295-2300, Shonagon discusses the appropriateness or inappropriateness of various things, and lists some of the things that most please her. Analyze what you consider the method (if that's the right word) behind her observations--how does she explain why a particular thing, person, or event pleases her? Is there something more than random observation at work in *The Pillow Book*? And what does she say about her reasons for writing down the thoughts that make up this work?
7. General question: make your own list of pleasant or unpleasant things, or make a list of any other sort similar to the categories you find in Sei Shonagon's text. Then set down your reflections on what this list reveals to you about yourself.

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THE TAMIL ANTHOLOGIES QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *The Tamil Anthologies* (1029-38).

From *The Tamil Anthologies*

1. The editors point out that the Tamil poets aren't much interested in nature for its own sake--so how do they relate the human realm to the natural world in a few of the poems we have in our anthology? How much specificity and nuance do you find in the nature descriptions, and what purposes do any such qualities serve?

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THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS QUESTIONS

Assigned: from *The Thousand and One Nights* (1566-1618).

From *The Thousand and One Nights*

"The Story of King Shahrayar and Shahrazad, His Vizier's Daughter" (1569-76)

1. *The Thousand and One Nights* is, of course, related to the folktale tradition. Discuss the text's way of representing how people gain insight or knowledge into "the way of the world." In this section, how do the two kings learn of their wives' promiscuity? What role do coincidence and magic, respectively, play in the process of gaining knowledge?

2. The first question asks about how characters find out about “the way of the world. “ What is that way--what distinction does the text almost immediately make between everyday and public routine and private reality? Perhaps this selection’s dark portrayal of female virtue stems from male paranoia about women’s supposed insatiability and duplicity, but how might it be read as a broader statement about human nature?

3. What is the logic behind Shahrayar’s decision to set out on a journey when he sees for himself that his wife is unfaithful? Why doesn’t he just kill her on the spot, as his brother Shahzaman did to his faithless wife--why, in other words, should it matter whether there’s someone else out there whose lot is even worse?

“The Tale of the Ox and the Donkey” / “The Tale of the Merchant and His Wife” (1576-79)

4. The Vizier tells his daughter Shahrazad a few tales--what is the point of these stories, in his view? How is the Vizier’s brief tenure as a storyteller a setup for the better performance of his daughter--what is worthwhile about his stories, and what is limited about them?

“The Story of the Merchant and the Demon”; “The First, Second, and Third Old Man’s Tales” (1580-90)

5. Shahrazad begins to tell her stories, with the assistance of her sister Dinarzad. If you find a consistent moral in the tales so far, what is it? On what principle and by what means are the “evildoers” in these tales punished? Also, what besides wickedness is responsible for suffering in some of the tales? (Consider, for example, why the Merchant is in trouble with the Demon, and why he is finally released from his sentence of death.)

6. Beyond its obvious role in staving off King Shahrayar’s intention to kill his new wife, how does delay function as an important device within Shahrazad’s stories--how, that is, do her internal narrators (the Merchant and the Three Old Men) employ it? What significance does the art of storytelling take on in relation to the supposed “real-life” dilemmas that the various characters face?

“The Story of the Fisherman and the Demon,” etc. (1590-1618)

7. Concentrate on the ways Shahrazad begins and ends her stories--what are the main devices she uses to keep her narrative thread spinning? What expectations about narrative is she exploiting in her husband, King Shahrayar (and readers more generally)?

8. How does the Fisherman’s story about Duban the Sage and the Persian King Yunan (1595-1603) indirectly characterize the kind of political power wielded by King Shahrayar? Does the story in any way reflect upon Shahrazad’s own situation with respect to her husband the King? If so, how?

9. On 1604-18, Shahrazad tells the rest of the story about the Fisherman and the Demon. How does the Demon keep his pledge to serve the Fisherman? As with the previous part of the Fisherman’s story,

does this one offer any instruction (at least indirectly) to Shahrayar, who condemns all women and who has sworn to murder each of his wives before they become unfaithful to him? Explain.

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LOPE DE VEGA QUESTIONS

Assigned: Lope de Vega. *Fuente Ovejuna* (2783-2821).

Fuente Ovejuna

Act 1

1. What initial impression of the Comendador does the play offer? Consider how he behaves towards the young Maestre, and his first meeting with the people of Fuente Ovejuna upon returning from battle against Ciudad Real. What should we know about him (his political/social situation and outlook) before he assaults Laurencia?
2. In the first act, the peasant characters--both male and female--engage in a discussion of city/courtly values in love, honor, ethics, and manners. What seems to be their opinion of those values--how do Laurencia, Frondoso, Mengo, and others see themselves in relation to their urban and aristocratic "betters"?
3. After Laurencia scorns his agents, the Comendador's evil designs on her are thwarted by Frondoso. Meanwhile, Ferdinand and Isabella have decided to send two companies to the rescue of Ciudad Real. How does the royal couple's situation parallel the one confronting Laurencia and Frondoso?

Act 2

4. Discuss how Vega heightens the audience's awareness of the Comendador's viciousness--what are his views, for instance, about women and everyone below him on the social scale? How does he pervert the values of the ancient chivalric and martial order he claims to represent?
5. How do the peasants handle the match between Frondoso and Laurencia? On the whole, what knits together the community of Fuente Ovejuna? In what ways do they prove more civil and "honorable" than many of their superiors? How have they differentiated themselves from the stereotypical view of peasants as "simple pastoral folk"?

Act 3

6. It's obvious that the historical precedent referenced by Lope de Vega--the butchery by townspeople of a hated local tyrant--was an ugly, violent event. How does Vega represent the violence committed by the peasants against the Comendador and his subordinates? What role does comedy play in making this violence tolerable?

7. The play ends with the granting of absolution on the King's part for the entire town of Fuente Ovejuna. What would have been the result of their rebellion had they not all chosen (under torture) to say, "Fuente Ovejuna did it"? What basic political premises and system does the resolution of this play uphold?
8. A general question---there isn't much that we would call "character development" in this play or many others by Spain's Golden Age dramatists. What, then, are the features that you think most likely account for the popular success of Lope de Vega's Fuente Ovejuna? What makes it both entertaining and serious?

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VOLTAIRE QUESTIONS

Assigned: Voltaire. *Candide*.

Candide

General Questions

1. Is Voltaire's work pessimistic or cynical, or is it in some sense meant to offer a relatively positive view of human potential and human affairs?
2. What criticisms does Voltaire level against religion, or at least against particular religious characters, in *Candide*?
3. What common notions about the eighteenth-century Enlightenment does Voltaire's text render difficult to believe?

Chapter 1

4. What is Dr. Pangloss' logic in saying that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds"?
5. On what basis does Candide believe Dr. Pangloss--what is the Doctor doing when Cunegonde observes him with the maidservant?

Chapter 2

6. How does the narrator characterize the military and its traditions?

Chapter 3

7. What attitude does the narrator show towards the violence of war? How can you tell?
8. What is Candide bracketing out or refusing to see when he insists that Pangloss is right about everything being for the best in the best of all possible worlds?

Chapter 4

9. Describe the narrator's treatment of the violence that occurs in this chapter--what effect does that treatment have on your own perception of such events in *Candide*?

Chapter 5

10. How does Dr. Pangloss' optimism affect your view of events in this chapter?

11. What gets Dr. Pangloss into trouble with the Inquisitor? What is it that the Inquisitor finds heretical about Pangloss' optimism?

Chapter 6

12. What is an "auto da fé"? How is it supposed to lessen the tragedy of the Lisbon earthquake? What reactions do you find in this chapter to the great earthquake of Lisbon?

13. What happens in this chapter to the notion that reason and probability largely govern our affairs? Why is it hard to believe such notions in *Candide*?

Chapter 7

14. Is it surprising that Candide meets Cunegonde? How do they treat each other after they are reunited?

Chapter 8

15. What image do you get of Cunegonde's character or virtue in this chapter?

16. How does the arrangement between the Lord Inquisitor and the Jew Don Issachar amount to a satire on religion?

Chapter 9

17. Does Candide continue to follow the principles of Dr. Pangloss in this chapter? Or is he for the moment acting on some other set of principles?

Chapter 10

18. Why do the Spanish give Candide a company of infantry?

19. What disagreement do Candide and Cunegonde have about Dr. Pangloss' philosophy? To what extent does either of them hold on to Panglossian beliefs?

Chapter 11

20. How does the old woman's tale tear apart the idea that rank is a permanent separator among people? How does her tale affect your view of Cunegonde and Candide?

21. Why does Voltaire include so many violent sexual outrages in his text up to this point? What psychological effect is he trying to visit on readers? The same question might be asked of his many mentions of extreme violence of any kind.

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