

**DAY ONE**  
**Junior Comprehensive Examination, Spring 2020**

**Part A: Explication.** Write a critical interpretation of **one** of the following passages. Your essay (1800-word max.) should include reference to at least two other texts you have studied in the COL sequence.

**1. Sophocles' *Antigone* 891-915 (Meineck and Woodruff)**

ANTIGONE:

My tomb, my marriage, my hollow, scraped in dirt,  
I'm coming home forever, to be held in  
With my own people, most of them dead now,  
And gone where Persephone welcomes them.  
I am the last of them that will go under, and my death— 895  
It is the worst by far—so much before my time.  
As I leave, even so, I feed this one strong hope:  
That I will have a loving welcome from my father,  
More love from you, my mother, and then, love  
From you, dear heart, my brother. When you died, 900  
I took you up, all three, and laid you out,  
And poured libations at your graves,  
And, Polynices, look: This is my reward  
For taking care of you, I was right, but wisdom knows  
I would not do it for a child, were I a mother, 905  
Not for a husband either. Let them lie, putrefied, dead;  
I would not defy the city at such a cost for their sake.

What law can I claim on my side for this choice?  
I may have another husband if the first should die  
And get another child from a new man if I'm a widow, 910  
But my mother and father lie in the land of death,  
And there is no ground to grow a brother for me now.  
That is the law I followed when I made you first in honor,  
Even though Creon thought I did a terrible thing,  
A rash and sinful crime, dear heart, my brother. 915

**2. Livy 1.59 (translation Selincourt)**

They found Lucretia sitting in her room, in deep distress. Tears rose to her eyes as they entered, and to her husband's question, "Is it well with you?" she answered, "No. What can be well with a woman who has lost her honour? In your bed, Collatinus, is the impress of another man. My body only has been violated. My heart is innocent, and death will be my witness. Give me your solemn promise that the adulterer shall be punished—he is Sextus Tarquinius. He it is who last night came as my enemy disguised as my guest, and took his pleasure of me. That pleasure will be my death—and his, too, if you are men."

The promise was given. One after another they tried to comfort her. They told her she was helpless, and therefore innocent; that he alone was guilty. It was the mind, they said, that sinned, not the body: without intention there could never be guilt.

"What is due to *him*," Lucretia said, "is for you to decide. As for me I am innocent of fault, but I will take my punishment. Never shall Lucretia provide a precedent for unchaste women to escape what they deserve." With these words she drew a knife from under her robe, drove it into her heart, and fell forward, dead.

### 3. Augustine, *Confessions* 2.4.9 (trans. Chadwick)

I wanted to carry out an act of theft and did so, driven by no kind of need other than my inner lack of any sense of, or feeling for, justice. Wickedness filled me. I stole something which I had in plenty and of much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong. There was a pear tree near our vineyard laden with fruit, though attractive in neither colour nor taste. To shake the fruit off the tree and carry off the pears, I and a gang of naughty adolescents set off late at night after (in our usual pestilential way) we had continued our game in the streets. We carried off a huge load of pears. But they were not for our feasts but merely to throw to the pigs. Even if we ate a few, nevertheless our pleasure lay in doing what was not allowed.

Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart. You had pity on it when it was at the bottom of the abyss. Now let my heart tell you what it was seeking there in that I became evil for no reason. I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself.

### 4. Homer *Odyssey* 6.129-54 (Fagles)

And with that woke great Odysseus.  
He sat up with a start, puzzling, his heart pounding: 130  
"Man of misery, whose land have I lit on now?  
What *are* they here—violent, savage, lawless?  
or friendly to strangers, god-fearing men?  
Listen: shouting, echoing round me—women, girls—

or the nymphs who haunt the rugged mountaintops 135  
and the river springs and meadows lush with grass!  
Or am I really close to people who speak my language?  
Up with you, see how the land lies, see for yourself now . . .”

Muttering so, great Odysseus crept out of the bush  
stripping off with his massive hand a leafy branch 140  
from the tangled olive growth to shield his body,  
hide his private parts. And out he stalked  
as a mountain lion exultant in his power  
strides through wind and rain and his eyes blaze  
and he charges sheep or oxen or chases wild deer 145  
but his hunger drives him on to go for flocks,  
even to raid the best-defended homestead.  
So Odysseus moved out . . .  
about to mingle with all those lovely girls,  
naked now as he was, for the need drove him on, 150  
a terrible sight, all crusted, caked with brine—  
they scattered in panic down the jutting beaches.  
Only Alcinous’ daughter held fast, for Athena planted  
courage within her heart, dissolved the trembling in her limbs. . .

**Part B: Thematic Essay. Write an essay of no more than 1800 words in response to one of the following questions. Center your analysis on at least three texts, of which one must be from COL 241 (we encourage you to include at least one text from another course in the sequence).**

**1. Nature and Culture.** Many transgressions in antiquity cross the boundaries of law, custom, and religion. To what extent does transgression depend upon human culture and to what extent is it a phenomenon of nature? Are society, religion, and/or culture necessary for humans and animals to transgress? What role does education play in the creation and regulation of such boundaries? What would it mean to transgress the laws of nature as opposed to those of culture?

**2. Desire.** Many of the texts that you have engaged with are concerned with the regulation of desire. Why is desire such a potent and dangerous site for transgression in these authors? What role does the regulation of desire play in ordering a society? Do different texts from different time periods consider desire differently? If so, how do you explain these differences?

**3. Happy mistakes?** The concept of a “happy mistake” (*felix culpa*) pioneered by Augustine’s teacher St. Ambrose, understands the fall of humans from the Garden of Eden as having positive

consequences. To what extent does this concept hold true in other texts? Do other transgressions produce positive outcomes? Is transgression ultimately seen as a good for human progress?

## DAY TWO

### **Part A: Explication.**

Write a critical interpretation of **one** of the following passages. Your essay (1800-word max.) should include reference to at least two other texts you have studied in the COL sequence.

### **I. Alexander Romance, Book I**

Then he came to Hipperia, a city of the Bebryces. Here there was a temple and a statue of Orpheus, around which stood the Pierian Muses and wild beasts. When Alexander looked at it, the statue broke out in a sweat. Alexander inquired the meaning of this omen, and Melampus the interpreter told him, 'You will have to struggle, King Alexander, with toil and sweat, to subdue the nations of the barbarians and the cities of the Greeks. But just as Orpheus by his music and song won over the Greeks, put the barbarians to flight and tamed the wild beasts, so you by the labour of your spear will make all men your subjects.' When Alexander heard this, he gave the interpreter a large reward and sent him away.

Then he came to Phrygia. When he reached the river Scamander, into which Achilles had sprung, he leapt in also. And when he saw the seven-layered shield of Ajax, which was not as large or as wonderful as the description in Homer, he said, 'Fortunate are you heroes who won a witness like Homer, and who became great as a result of his writings, but in reality are not worthy of what was written about you.' Then a poet came up to him and said, 'King Alexander, we shall write better than Homer about your deeds.' But Alexander replied, 'I would rather be a Thersites in Homer than Agamemnon in your poetry.'

### **II. Qur'an Sura 3: 1-9**

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

*Alif Lam Mim*

God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Step by step, He has sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth, confirming what went before: He sent down the

Torah and the Gospel earlier as a guide for people and He has sent down the distinction [between right and wrong]. Those who deny God's revelations will suffer severe torment: God is almighty and capable of retribution. Nothing on earth or in heaven is hidden from God: it is He who shapes you all in the womb as He pleases. There is no God but Him with the power to decide: it is He who has sent this Scripture down to you [Prophet]. Some of its verses are definite in meaning – these are the cornerstone of the Scripture – and others are ambiguous. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down a specific meaning of their own: only God knows the true meaning. Those firmly grounded in knowledge say, 'We believe in it: it is all from our Lord' – only those with real perception will take heed – 'Our Lord, do not let our hearts deviate after You have guided us. Grant us Your mercy: You are the Ever Giving. Our Lord, You will gather all people on the Day of which there is no doubt: God never breaks His promise.'

### **III. Dhuoda, *Handbook for William* (Prologue p.2)**

From the beginning of this book to the end, both in form and in content, in the meter and rhythm of the poetry as well as in the prose passages here—know that everything, through it all, in it all, is intended entirely for you, for the health of your soul and body. I wish that you eagerly take this work in your own hand and fulfill its precepts, after my hand has addressed it to you. I wish you to hold it, turn its pages and read it, so that you may fulfill it in worthy action. For this little model-book, called a handbook, is a lesson from me and a task for you. As someone said, *I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase*. What further can I say, my son, except that—thinking on your past good deeds—I have in this work *fought the good fight, I have kept the faith, I have finished my course?* And how is what I say of worth unless in him who said, *It is consummated?* For whatever I have accomplished in this volume, from its beginning on, according to the Hebrew speech and to Greek letters and to the Latin language, I have completed in him who is called God.

### **IV. Al-Ghazali, *Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error***

#### *The Categories of Those Who Seek the Truth*

18. When God Most High, of His kindness and abundant generosity, had cured me of this sickness, I was of the view that the categories of those seeking the truth were limited to four groups:

1. The *Mutakallimun*, who allege that they are men of independent judgment and reasoning.
2. The *Batinites*, who claim to be the unique possessors of *al-ta'lim* and the privileged recipients of knowledge acquired from the Infallible Imam.
3. The Philosophers, who maintain that they are the men of logic and apodeictic demonstration.
4. The Sufis, who claim to be the familiars of the Divine Presence and the men of mystic vision and illumination.

19. I then said to myself: "The truth cannot transcend these four categories, for these are the men who are following the paths of the quest for truth. Hence, if the truth eludes them, there remains no hope of ever attaining it. For there can be no desire to return to servile conformism once it has been abandoned, since a prerequisite for being a servile conformist is that one does not know himself to be such. But when a man recognizes that, the glass of his servile conformism is shattered—an irreparable fragmentation and a mess which cannot be mended by patching and piecing together: it can only be melted by fire and newly reshaped.

20. I therefore lost no time in following these different ways and making a thorough study of the views of these groups. I applied myself first to the science of *kalam*, secondly to the way of philosophy, thirdly to the teachings of the *Batinites*, and fourthly to the Way of the Sufis.

#### **V. Ibn Hazm, *The Ring of the Dove* (from *The Signs of Love* pp. 15-16)**

LOVE has certain signs, which the intelligent man quickly detects, and the shrewd man readily recognizes. Of these the first is the brooding gaze: the eye is the wide gateway of the soul, the scrutinizer of its secrets, conveying its most private thoughts, and giving expression to its deepest-hid feelings. You will see the lover gazing at the beloved unblinkingly; his eyes follow the loved one's every movement, withdrawing as he withdraws, inclining as he inclines, just as the chameleon's stare shifts with the shifting of the sun. I have written a poem on this topic, from which the following may be quoted.

My eye no other place of rest  
 Discovers, save with thee;  
 Men say the lodestone is possessed  
 Of a like property.

To right or left it doth pursue  
 Thy movements up or down,

As adjectives in grammar do  
Accord them with their noun.

**Part B: Thematic Essay.** Write an essay of no more than 1800 words in response to one of the following questions. Center your analysis on at least three texts, of which one must be from COL 243 (we encourage you to include at least one text from another course in the sequence). Try not to repeat what you have written about in Part 1 or on Day 1.

**1. Literary Life.** Whether teaching how life should be lived or narrating how exemplary lives were lived, the texts you've read rely upon literary precursors and genre conventions for their art, their structure, and their authority. Conversely, texts and their characters live on through their retelling and their reshaping. Consider the relation between human life and textual life. How important is literature to the validation of a life? To the legibility of a life? To imagining the potential of life and lives?

**2. Temporality.** Consider the temporalities at work in the texts you've read for this course. They may, for example, move toward ultimate fulfillment or decline; narrate a story of progress or maturation; base their assumptions upon eschatology (all times subordinated to an end-time or last days); argue that a new age supersedes a previous age (replacing the previous age and at the same time claiming its position and authority); orient themselves to the future or to the past; unfold in chronological time, cyclic time, or static time; and they may combine several such temporalities. Discuss ways that the temporalities of texts you've read relate to their arguments about how one should live, and/or to their narration of how a particular life was lived.

**3. Back to the Middle.** On February 28, 2020, a *New York Times* op-ed claimed:

There are two ways to fight epidemics: the medieval and the modern.

The modern way is to surrender to the power of the pathogens: Acknowledge that they are unstoppable and to try to soften the blow with 20th-century inventions, including new vaccines, antibiotics, hospital ventilators and thermal cameras searching for people with fevers.

The medieval way, inherited from the era of the Black Death, is brutal: Close the borders, quarantine the ships, pen terrified citizens up inside their poisoned cities.

In this course you discussed other examples of arguments that likewise depend upon a stark rhetorical division of “medieval” and “modern,” with the “medieval” signaling characteristics such as brutality, violence, and terror, and the “modern” signaling respect for humanity, rational discretion, and scientific advancement. These arguments proffer themselves as grounded in history. Choose two examples of such rhetorical arguments (you may use the above as one of the

two if you wish) and place them in the context of at least three texts from the COL sequence. Hypothesize about the ways that the issues at stake in these arguments could be differently approached, framed, and understood through attention to texts from the “medieval” era that take up those same or similar issues.

### DAY THREE

**Part A: Explication.** Write a critical interpretation of **one** of the following passages. Your essay (1800-word max.) should include reference to at least two other texts you have studied in the COL sequence.

#### 1. Michel de Montaigne “Of Cannibals”

These nations, then, seem to me barbarous in this sense, that they have been fashioned very little by the human mind, and are still very close to their original naturalness. The laws of nature still rule them, very little corrupted by ours; and they are in such a state of purity that I am sometimes vexed that they were unknown earlier, in the days when there were men able to judge them better than we. I am sorry that Lycurgus and Plato did not know of them; for it seems to me that what we actually see in these nations surpasses not only all the pictures in which poets have idealized the golden age and all their inventions in imagining a happy state of man, but also the conceptions and the very desire of philosophy. They could not imagine a naturalness so pure and simple as we see by experience; nor could they believe that our society could be maintained with so little artifice and human solder. This is a nation, I should say to Plato, in which there is no sort of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name for magistrate or for political superiority, no custom of servitude, no riches or poverty, no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupations but leisure ones, no care for any but common kinship, no clothes, no agriculture, no metal, no use of wine or wheat. The very words that signify lying, treachery, dissimulation, avarice, envy, belittling, pardon—unheard of.

#### 2. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 3, Scene 2

CALIBAN

Art thou afeard?

STEPHANO No, monster, not I.

CALIBAN Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises,  
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.

Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments 5  
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,  
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,  
The clouds methought would open and show riches  
Ready to drop upon me, that, when I waked, 10  
I cried to dream again.

STEPHANO This will prove a brave kingdom to me, where I shall have my music for nothing.

CALIBAN

When Prospero is destroyed.

STEPHANO That shall be by and by: I remember the story.

TRINCULO The sound is going away; let's follow it, and after do our work.

STEPHANO Lead, monster; we'll follow. I would I could see this taborer: he lays it on.

TRINCULO Wilt come? I'll follow Stephano.

### 3. Behn, *Oroonoko*

This great and just character of Oroonoko gave me an extreme curiosity to see him, especially when I knew he spoke French and English and that I could talk with him. But though I had heard so much of him, I was as greatly surprised when I saw him as if I had heard nothing of him; so beyond all report I found him. He came into the room and addressed himself to me and some other women with the best grace in the world. He was pretty tall, but of a shape the most exact that can be fancied. The most famous statuary could not form the figure of a man more admirably turned from head to foot. His face was not of that brown, rusty black which most of that nation are, but a perfect ebony, or polished jet. His eyes were the most awful that could be seen and very piercing, the white of 'em being like snow, as were his teeth. His nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat. His mouth, the finest shaped that could be seen, far from those great turned lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes. The whole proportion and air of his face was so noble and exactly formed that, bating his colour, there could be nothing in nature more beautiful, agreeable, and handsome. There was no one grace wanting that bears the standard of true beauty. His hair came down to his shoulders, by the aids of art, which was by

pulling it out with a quill and keeping it combed, of which he took particular care. Nor did the perfections of his mind come short of those of his person, for his discourse was admirable upon almost any subject, and whoever had heard him speak would have been convinced of their errors, that all fine wit is confined to the white men, especially to those of Christendom, and would have confessed that Oroonoko was as capable even of reigning well and of governing as wisely, had as great a soul, as politic maxims, and was as sensible of power, as any prince civilized in the most refined schools of humanity and learning, or the most illustrious courts.

#### **4. Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians***

The greatest way to worship God is to offer him sacrifice. This is the unique act by which we show him to whom we offer the sacrifice that we are subject to him and grateful to him.

Furthermore, nature teaches that it is just to offer God, whose debtors we admit we are for so many reasons, those things that are precious and excellent because of the surpassing excellence of his majesty. But according to human judgment and truth, nothing in nature is greater or more valuable than the life of man or man himself. Therefore nature itself dictates and teaches those who do not have faith, grace, or doctrine, who live within the limitations of the light of nature, that, in spite of every contrary positive law, they ought to sacrifice human victims to the true God or to the false god who is thought to be true, so that by offering a supremely precious thing they might be more grateful for the many favors they have received. For the natural law teaches gratitude in such a way that we not only do good to our benefactor but also try to repay him in an abundant manner for the benefits we have received, giving due consideration to the benefits, the benefactor, and the motive for which he confers the benefits on us.

**Part B: Thematic Essay. Write an essay of no more than 1800 words in response to one of the following questions. Center your analysis on at least three texts, of which one must be from COL 244 (we encourage you to include at least one text from another course in the sequence). Try not to repeat what you have written about in Parts 1 and 2 or on Days 1 and 2.**

**1. Self in the world.** How do the texts that you have read in this course imagine the self's relationship to the wider world? What responsibilities do different selves have to affect the world around them and what role does the wider world have shaping them (in terms of, for example, their beliefs, language, actions, form)? What role can literature hope to play in larger political, religious, and social movements?

**2. Language, Logic, Exploration, and Experimentation.** COL 244 features the first texts that you have read in this sequence that you have not read in translation. What role does language—quite literally the word—play in recording, shaping, and understanding the world? What are the

limitations of language? And what role does the multiplicity of languages—from antiquity to the early modern period, from Europe to the New World—play in these texts and their understanding of the power of the word?

**3. Freedom and Domination.** Many of the texts you've read this semester explicitly raise the question of the right to freedom as well as the right to dominate—with respect to both human/human and human/God relations. Upon what principles do they base their arguments? How do they claim authority for their arguments? How do they position themselves historically? If at all possible, consider these arguments within the long literary history that you've studied in the COL sequence.