

DAY ONE
Junior Comprehensive Examination, Spring 2018

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) Homer, *Iliad* 18.84-113

(pp.469–70, Fagles translation)

[Thetis speaking] “My child—why in tears? What sorrow has touched your heart? Tell me, please. Don’t harbor it deep inside you. Zeus has accomplished everything you wanted, just as you raised your hands and prayed that day. All the sons of Achaea are pinned against the ships and all for want of you—they suffer shattering losses.” And groaning deeply the matchless runner [Achilles] answered, “O dear mother, true! All those burning desires Olympian Zeus has brought to pass for me—but what joy to me now? My dear comrade’s dead—Patroclus—the man I loved beyond all other comrades, love as my own life—I’ve lost him—Hector’s killed him, stripped the gigantic armor off his back, a marvel to behold—my burnished gear! Radiant gifts the gods presented Peleus that day they drove you into a mortal’s marriage bed... I wish you’d lingered deep with the deathless sea-nymphs, lived at ease, and Peleus carried home a mortal bride. But now, as it is, sorrows, unending sorrows must surge within our heart as well—for your own son’s death. Never again will you embrace him striding home. My spirit rebels—I’ve lost the will to live, to take my stand in the world of men—unless, before all else, Hector’s battered down by my spear and gasps away his life, the blood-price for Patroclus, Menoetius’ gallant son he’s killed and stripped!” But Thetis answered, warning through her tears, “You’re doomed to a short life, my son, from all you say! For hard on the heels of Hector’s death your death must come at once.”

2) Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 3.82 (pp.90–92, Woodruff translation)

Civil war brought many hardships to the cities, such as happen and will always happen as long as human nature is the same... In peace and prosperity, cities and private individuals alike are better minded because they are not plunged into the necessity of doing anything against their will; but war is a violent teacher: it gives most people impulses that are as bad as their situation when it takes away the easy supply of what they need for daily life. Civil war ran through the cities... and they reversed the usual way of using words to evaluate activities. Ill-considered boldness was counted as loyal manliness; prudent hesitation was held to be cowardice in disguise, and moderation merely the cloak of an unmanly nature. A mind that could grasp the good of the whole was considered wholly lazy... The cause of all this was the desire to rule out of avarice and ambition, and the zeal for winning that proceeds from those two. Those who led their parties in the cities promoted their policies under decent-sounding names: “equality for ordinary citizens” on one side, and “moderate aristocracy” on the other. And though they pretended to serve the public in their speeches, they actually treated it as the prize for their competition; and

striving by whatever means to win, both sides ventured on most horrible outrages and exacted even greater revenge, without any regard for justice or the public good. Each party was limited only by its own appetite at the time, and stood ready to satisfy its ambition of the moment either by voting for an unjust verdict or seizing control by force. So neither side thought much of piety, but they praised those who could pass a horrible measure under the cover of a fine speech. The citizens who remained in the middle were destroyed by both parties, partly because they would not side with them, and partly for envy that they might escape in this way.

3) Euripides, *Trojan Women*, 1121–57, 1172–81

(pp.64–65, Shapiro translation)

[Hecuba speaking] “First, I’ll defend the goddesses against this woman’s libelous attack. Would Hera or the virgin goddess Pallas Athena ever be so incredibly foolish as to either sell out Argos to the barbarians or let Athenians become the slaves of Troy? I don’t believe it for a second, I don’t believe the goddesses would come to Ida for games, much less for a silly Miss Olympus Competition. Why would Hera even be concerned with being beautiful? So she can snare a husband better than Zeus? Is Athena now on the lookout for a spouse, despite her having asked her father once to let her stay a virgin, because she hated marriage? Don’t gloss over your own bad actions by making the gods out to be fools. You won’t persuade anyone with common sense. You claim that Aphrodite accompanied my son to Menelaus’s house, which is such a laughable idea, since she’s a god and could have stayed right where she was in heaven and still transported you and all of Amyclae as well to Troy, if she desired. Let’s face it: my son was the handsomest of men. You saw him, and instantly your mind itself turned into Aphrodite, who after all is just the name we give to lust run wild. It’s no coincidence that ‘witless’ rhymes with Cypris. Yes, you saw my son dressed up in Asian splendor, his gold all glittering, and you fell hard for him; he made you crazy. He made you chafe against your austere life in Argos, and dream of getting free of Sparta so the flash flood of your opulent appetites could level the rich city of Troy. Menelaus’s palace was too small; it cramped your riotous desires... You had no loyalty to anyone, but followed fortune, drifting where it went. You claim that you attempted to escape, that you would secretly shinny down the walls by rope, and that we kept you here against your will. So why did no one ever find you with a noose around your neck, or sharpening a sword that you could fall on, the kind of deed a noble woman heartsick for her absent husband would have surely done?”

4) Plato, *Symposium*, 221c–222a

(pp.74-75, Nehamas-Woodruff translation)

[Alcibiades speaking] “You could say many other marvelous things in praise of Socrates. Perhaps he shares some of his specific accomplishments with others. But, as a whole, he is unique; he is like no one else in the past and no one in the present—this is by far the most amazing thing about him. For we might be able to form an idea of what Achilles was like by comparing him to Brasidas or some other great warrior, or we might compare Pericles with Nestor or Antenor or one of the other great orators. There is a parallel for

everyone—everyone else, that is. But this man here is so bizarre, his ways and his ideas are so unusual, that, search as you might, you'll never find anyone else, alive or dead, who's even remotely like him. The best you can do is not to compare him to anything human, but to liken him, as I do, to Silenus and the satyrs, and the same goes for his ideas and arguments. Come to think of it, I should have mentioned this much earlier: even his ideas and arguments are just like those hollow statues of Silenus. If you were to listen to his arguments, at first they'd strike you as totally ridiculous; they're clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar satyrs. He's always going on about pack asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners; he's always making the same tired old points in the same tired old words. If you are foolish, or simply unfamiliar with him, you'd find it impossible not to laugh at his arguments. But if you see them when they open up like the statues, if you go behind their surface, you'll realize that no other arguments make any sense. They're truly worthy of a god, bursting with figures of virtue inside. They're of great—no, of the greatest—importance for anyone who wants to become a truly good man.”

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) Deception and Persuasion. When, and in what contexts, is the ability to persuade others a useful one? What methods of persuasion are most effective, and where does the line get drawn (if it is drawn at all) between morally acceptable and unacceptable methods of persuasion? (Do the ends always justify the means?) Is there a clear line between deception and persuasion? Reflect on the various instances of deception that have been portrayed in your texts: what motivated them, what are their consequences, and to what extent are any of them justified?

2) The Body and Embodiment. Human beings are physical creatures, and from birth we are in intimate relations with our own bodies. Discuss how the various texts conceptualize and problematize the human body and the fact of human embodiment. What are the unique capacities of the body, and what are its limitations? Are we defined by our bodies, or does our “true self” (such as mind, will, intellect) lie elsewhere? How does gender relate to these questions? Is it accurate to say that the Western tradition—at least up to the early modern period—is uniformly hostile toward the body, regarding it as either a mere instrument or as an unfortunate impediment?

3) Heroism and Exemplarity. Many of the works you have read portray heroic figures whose values, deeds, and/or teachings are meant to inspire emulation. And yet, emulation itself is a fraught enterprise in that one is *not* one's hero, nor are one's circumstances (personal, social, cultural, etc.) ever quite the same. What guidelines or methods do these texts offer us for *how* to emulate one's heroes? What are the benefits and problems that emerge in the course of doing so? And, how might an awareness of those problems inform one's understanding of what heroism is?

DAY THREE
Junior Comprehensive Examination, Spring 2018

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) Dante, *Inferno* 26, lines 91–124

(pp.98–99, Palma translation)

[Ulysses speaking] “When I was freed at last from Circe’s reach, who had detained me for a year or more near Gaeta, as Aeneas would name that beach, neither reverence for an aged father, nor a son’s sweetness, nor the love I should profess to Penelope, which she would be happy for, could overcome my ardor to possess experience of the world and humanity in all its worth and all its wickedness. But I set forth upon the open sea with just one vessel from my fleet’s remains and those few men who had not deserted me. We sailed both shores, Morocco’s coast and Spain’s. As far as to Sardinia did we go, and the other islands which that sea contains. My mariners and I were old and slow when at last we reached that narrow channel lined by Hercules with his marks so men would know that they must not go beyond the bounds assigned. On the starboard side Seville now disappeared, on the other Ceuta already lay behind. ‘Through a hundred thousand dangers we have steered, my brothers,’ I said, ‘to reach these western gates. Now has the brief vigil of our senses neared its close, so let us not forswear our fates but embrace experience, tracing the sun’s route to the uninhabited region that awaits. Consider your origins. Living like a brute is not the destiny of men like you, but knowledge and virtue ever our pursuit.’ With these few words of mine, my shipmates grew so eager to go on that even I could not have stopped them had I wanted to.”

2) Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, I.2 (pp.8–9, Brown-Grant translation)

My dear daughter, don’t be afraid, for we have not come to do you any harm, but rather, out of pity on your distress, we are here to comfort you. Our aim is to help you get rid of those misconceptions which have clouded your mind and made you reject what you know and believe in fact to be the truth just because so many other people have come out with the opposite opinion. You’re acting like that fool in the joke who falls asleep in the mill and whose friends play a trick on him by dressing him up in women’s clothing. When he wakes up, they manage to convince him that he is a woman despite all evidence to the contrary! My dear girl, what has happened to your sense? Have you forgotten that it is in the furnace that gold is refined, increasing in value the more it is beaten and fashioned into different shapes? Don’t you know that it’s the very finest things which are the subject of the most intense discussion? Now, if you turn your mind to the very highest realm of all, the realm of abstract ideas, think for a moment whether or not those philosophers whose views against women you’ve been citing have ever been proven wrong. In fact, they are all constantly correcting each other’s opinions, as you yourself should know from reading Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* where he discusses and refutes both their views and

those of Plato and other philosophers. Don't forget the Doctors of the Church either, and Saint Augustine in particular, who all took issue with Aristotle himself on certain matters, even though he is considered to be the greatest of all authorities on both moral and natural philosophy. You seem to have accepted the philosophers' views as articles of faith and thus as irrefutable on every point. As for the poets you mention, you must realize that they sometimes wrote in the manner of fables which you have to take as saying the opposite of what they appear to say. You should therefore read such texts according to the grammatical rule of *antiphrasis*, which consists of interpreting something that is negative in a positive light, or vice versa. My advice to you is to read those passages where they criticize women in this way and to turn them to your advantage, no matter what the author's original intention was... My dear friend, I have to say that it is your naivety which has led you to take what they come out with as the truth. Return to your senses and stop worrying your head about such foolishness. Let me tell you that those who speak ill of women do more harm to themselves than they do to the women they actually slander.

3) Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*

(pp.61–62, Ariew & Green trans.)

It is for God alone to know himself and to interpret his works. And he does it in our language, improperly, in order to lower himself and descend to us, who are on the ground, prostrate. How can prudence, which is the choice between good and evil, belong to him, seeing that no evil touches him? How can reason and intelligence, of which we make use in order to move from the obscure to the clear, seeing that there is nothing obscure to God? Justice, which distributes to each what belongs to him, devised for the society and community of men: how is it in God? How in God is temperance—the moderation of bodily desires, which have no place in divinity? ... As for our participation in the knowledge of the truth, such as it is, it is not by our own powers that we have acquired it. God has taught us enough of that through the witnesses he has chosen among the common people, simple and ignorant, to instruct us in his admirable secrets: our faith is not our own acquisition; it is a pure gift of another's liberality. It is not by reasoning or by our intellect that we have received our religion, it is by external authority and commandment. The weakness of our judgment assists us rather than its strength, and our blindness, rather than our clear sight. It is through the mediation of our ignorance rather than of our knowledge that we are knowers of that divine knowledge. It is no marvel that our natural and terrestrial means cannot conceive that supernatural and celestial knowledge. Let us bring to it only our obedience and subjection: "For, as it is written, I shall destroy the wisdom of the wise, and abase the prudence of the prudent. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this world? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of this world? For, since the world has never known God through wisdom, it has pleased him, by the folly of preaching, to save the faithful." [I Corinthians 1:19–21]

4) Cervantes, *Don Quijote*, 1.9

(pp.51–52, Raffel translation)

One day, when I was in the Alcaná at Toledo, a boy came by, selling some old notebooks and other documents to a dealer in silks, and since I'm always reading, even scraps of

paper I find in the street, it was perfectly natural for me to pick up one of the old notebooks the boy was selling, which I saw was written in what I knew to be Arabic characters. But although I recognized the script, I still didn't know how to read it, so I went looking for some Moor who could speak Spanish and read it to me, and it wasn't hard to find exactly the sort of translator I was looking for—in fact, even if I'd been hunting a different language, older and better [Hebrew], I'd have found it. Anyway, fate furnished me with a man who, when I told him what I wanted and put the book in his hands, opened it right in the middle and, reading a bit, began to laugh. I asked him what he was laughing at, and he told me it was something he'd found written in the margin, as an annotation. I asked him to explain what it was and, still laughing, he said: "This, as I told you, is written right here in the margin: 'The aforementioned Dulcinea del Toboso, referred to so many times in this history, was said to have the best hand for salting pork of any woman in all la Mancha.'" When I heard him say "Dulcinea del Toboso," I was stunned, absolutely astonished, for I understood at once that these old notebooks contained the history of Don Quijote. Having made this realization, I quickly asked him to read from the very beginning, which he did, making a rapid translation from Arabic into Spanish. And this is what he said: "*History of Don Quijote of La Mancha, written by Sidi Hamid Benengeli, Arab Historian.*"... I quickly drew the Moor aside, into the church cloister, and implored him to translate these notebooks into Spanish for me, every single one of them that had to do with Don Quijote, neither omitting nor adding a thing, and I offered to pay him whatever he wanted.

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).

1) Time. One way of creating order is to orient one's present in relation to the past and to the future. Choose at least three works you have read and explain by means of specific examples how each of them orders the relationship between past, present, and future. Of what significance are the differences for how meaning is constituted?

2) Madness and Insanity. Discuss how various authors treat instances of madness. What are its causes and its consequences? On balance, is it portrayed more as a social construction, or as a disability or natural occurrence? In what ways does it help to define the boundaries of the civilized? To what extent is it portrayed as endemic to the human condition? Finally, what redemptive purposes (if any) does it serve for the individual and for the community?

3) Boundary-Setting. The sequence of courses you are taking is designed to transcend disciplinary limitations endemic in the departmental structure of colleges and universities. The required readings often defy pigeonholing. What have you gained, and what may you have missed out on, by studying these works in interdisciplinary contexts?

DAY TWO
Junior Comprehensive Examination, Spring 2018

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) *Gospel According to Mark 4:2-12, 30-34* (NRSV)

He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that ‘they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.’” ... He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

2) *Augustine, Confessions 3.2* (pp.35-37, Chadwick translation)

I was captivated by theatrical shows. They were full of representations of my own miseries and fuelled my fire. Why is it that a person should wish to experience suffering by watching grievous and tragic events which he himself would not wish to endure? Nevertheless he wants to suffer the pain given by being a spectator of these sufferings, and the pain itself is his pleasure. What is this but amazing folly? For the more anyone is moved by these scenes, the less free he is from similar passions. Only, when he himself suffers, it is called misery; when he feels compassion for others, it is called mercy. But what quality of mercy is it in fictitious and theatrical inventions? A member of the audience is not excited to offer help, but invited only to grieve. The greater his pain, the greater his approval of the actor in these representations. If the human calamities, whether in ancient histories or fictitious myths, are so presented that the theatregoer is not caused pain, he walks out of the theatre disgusted and highly critical. But if he feels pain, he stays riveted in his seat enjoying himself. Tears and agonies, therefore, are objects of love. Certainly everyone wishes to enjoy himself. Is it that while no one wants to be

miserable, yet it is agreeable to feel merciful? Mercy cannot exist apart from suffering. Is that the sole reason why agonies are an object of love? ... But at that time at the theatres I shared the joy of the lovers when they wickedly found delight in each other, even though their actions in the spectacle on the stage were imaginary; when, moreover, they lost each other, I shared their sadness by a feeling of compassion. Nevertheless, in both there was pleasure. Today I have more pity for a person who rejoices in wickedness than for a person who has the feeling of having suffered hard knocks by being deprived of a pernicious pleasure or having lost a source of miserable felicity. This is surely a more authentic compassion; for the sorrow contains no element of pleasure. Even if we approve of a person who, from a sense of duty in charity, is sorry for a wretch, yet he who manifests fraternal compassion would prefer that there be no cause for sorrow. It is only if there could be a malicious good will (which is impossible) that someone who truly and sincerely felt compassion would wish wretches to exist so as to be objects of compassion. Therefore some kind of suffering is commendable, but none is lovable.

3) Dhuoda, *Handbook for William*, Prologue

(p.5 of selection in course reader)

Things that are obvious to many people often escape me. Those who are like me lack understanding and have dim insight, but I am even less capable than they. Yet always there is he at my side who *opened the mouths of the dumb, and made the tongues of infants eloquent*. I, Dhuoda, despite my weakness of mind, unworthy as I am among worthy women—I am still your mother, my son William, and it is to you that I now address the words of my handbook. From time to time children are fascinated by dice more than all the other games that they enjoy. And sometimes women are absorbed in examining their faces in mirrors, in order then to cover their blemishes and be more beautiful, for the worldly intention of pleasing their husbands. I hope that you may bring the same care, burdened though you may be by the world's pressures, to reading this little book addressed to you by me. For my sake, attend to it—according to my jest—as children do to their dice or women to their mirrors. Even if you eventually have many more books, read this little work of mine often. May you, with God's help, be able to understand it to your own profit. You will find in it all you may wish to know in compact form. You will find in it a mirror in which you can without hesitation contemplate the health of your soul, so that you may be pleasing not only in this world, but to him who formed you out of dust. What is essential, my son William, is that you show yourself to be such a man on both levels that you are both effective in this world and pleasing to God in every way.

4) Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, 118-121

(pp. 148-149, Goodman translation)

... Hayy understood that if he himself could learn to know Him, then his knowledge of Him too would not be distinct from His essence, but would be identical with Him. Thus Hayy learned that to become like Him in His positive attributes is simply to know Him, without sacrilegiously associating anything physical with Him. This he set out to do. The negative qualities all reduced to transcendence of physicality. So Hayy set about

eliminating the physical in himself ... He would stay in his cave, sitting on the stone floor, head bent, eyes shut, oblivious to all objects of the senses and urges of the body, his thoughts and all his devotion focused on the Being Whose Existence is Necessity, alone and without rival. When any alien thought sprang to his imagination, Hayy would resist it with all his might and drive it out of his mind. He disciplined himself and practiced endurance until sometimes days could pass without his moving or eating. And sometimes, in the midst of his struggles, all thoughts and memories would vanish—except self-consciousness. Even when immersed in the beatific experience of the Necessarily Existent Truth, his own subjecthood would not disappear. This tormented Hayy, for he knew it was a blot on the purity of the experience, division of his attention as if with some other God. Hayy made a concerted effort to purge his awareness-of-the-Truth, die to himself. At last it came. From memory and mind all disappeared, “heaven and earth and all that is between them,” all forms of the spirit and powers of the body, even the disembodied powers that know the Truly Existent. And with the rest vanished the identity that was himself. Everything melted away, dissolved, “scattered into fine dust.” All that remained was the One, the True Being, Whose existence is eternal... Hayy understood His words and “heard” the summons they made. Not knowing how to speak did not prevent him from understanding. Drowned in ecstasy, he witnessed “what no eye has seen or ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive.” Now do not set your heart on a description of what has never been represented in a human heart. For many things that are articulate in the heart cannot be described. How then can I formularize something that cannot possibly be projected in the heart, belonging to a different world, a different order of being?

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).

- 1) The Family.** Discuss the way in which family structure and family relationships are conceptualized across the various texts. How are different family roles defined and regarded? What obligations or duties attach to those roles, and what are the implications of one’s failure to fulfill those duties? To what extent is family regarded as an essential part of a good life? What dynamics are introduced by gender and generational difference?
- 2) Death.** Discuss how various authors deal with the issue of death, and specifically, what sorts of *attitudes* are deemed to be appropriate in the face of death. Is death something bad, good, or neither? What *meaning* (if any) should death have for us, here and now? How should we *live* in the face of death?
- 3) The Power and Limits of Language.** Discuss the unique power of language (words, discourse) in human life, and also the limits of that power. What kinds of things does language enable us to know or do? What kinds of joys and pains—or harms and benefits—does language bring? Perhaps most importantly, what are the *limits* of language—what sorts of things is it incapable of doing or revealing?