

DAY ONE

Junior Comprehensive Examination, Fall 2021

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 of colloquia.

1) Sappho 31:

He seems to me equal to gods that man
whoever he is who opposite you
sits and listens close
to your sweet speaking

and lovely laughing—oh it
puts the heart in my chest on wings
for when I look at you, even a moment, no speaking
is left in me

no: tongue breaks and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead—or almost
I seem to me.

But all is to be dared, because even a person of poverty

2) Genesis 18:23-33:

And Abraham stepped forward and said, “Will you really wipe out the innocent with the guilty?
24 Perhaps there may be fifty innocent within the city. Will you really really wipe out the place
and not spare it for the sake of the fifty innocent within it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a
thing, to put to death the innocent with the guilty, making innocent and guilty the same. Far be it
from You! Will not the Judge of all the earth do justice?” 26 And the LORD said, “Should I find
in Sodom fifty innocent within the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.” 27 And
Abraham spoke up and said, “Here, pray, I have presumed to speak to my Lord when I am but
dust and ashes. 28 Perhaps the fifty innocent will lack five. Would you destroy the whole city for
the five?” And He said, “I will not destroy if I find there forty-five.” 29 And he spoke to Him

still again and he said, “Perhaps there will be found forty.” And He said, “I will not do it on account of the forty.” 30 And he said, “Please, let not my Lord be incensed and let me speak, perhaps there will be found thirty.” And He said, “I will not do it if I find there thirty.” 31 And he said, “Here, pray, I have presumed to speak to my Lord. Perhaps there will be found twenty.” And He said, “I will not destroy for the sake of the twenty.” 32 And he said, “Please, let not my Lord be incensed and let me speak just this time. Perhaps there will be found ten.” And He said, “I will not destroy for the sake of the ten.” 33 And the LORD went off when He finished speaking with Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

3) Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, ii.53:

The great lawlessness that grew everywhere in the city began with this disease, for, as the rich suddenly died and men previously worth nothing took over their estates, people saw before their eyes such quick reversals that they dared to do freely things they would have hidden before—things they never would have admitted they did for pleasure. And so, because they thought their lives and their property were equally ephemeral, they justified seeking quick satisfaction in easy pleasures. As for doing what had been considered noble, no one was eager to take any further pains for this, because they thought it uncertain whether they should die or not before they achieved it. But the pleasure of the moment, and whatever contributed to that, were set up as standards of nobility and usefulness. No one was held back in awe, either by fear of the gods or by the laws of men: not by the gods, because men concluded it was all the same whether they worshipped or not, seeing that they all perished alike; and not by the laws, because no one expected to live till he was tried and punished for his crimes. But they thought that a far greater sentence hung over their heads now, and that before this fell they had a reason to get some pleasure in life.

4) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 249c-250a:

For just this reason it is fair that only a philosopher’s mind grows wings, since its memory always keeps it as close as possible to those realities by being close to which the gods are divine. A man who uses reminders of these things correctly is always at the highest, most perfect level of initiation, and he is the only one who is perfect as perfect can be. He stands outside human concerns and draws close to the divine; ordinary people think he is disturbed and rebuke him for this, unaware that he is possessed by god. Now this takes me to the whole point of my discussion of the fourth kind of madness—that which someone shows when he sees the beauty we have down here and is reminded of true beauty; then he takes wing and flutters in his eagerness to rise up, but is unable to do so; and he gazes aloft, like a bird, paying no attention to what is down below— and that is what brings on him the charge that he has gone mad. This is the best and noblest of all the forms that possession by god can take for anyone who has it or is connected to it, and when someone who loves beautiful boys is touched by this madness he is called a lover. As I said, nature requires that the soul of every human being has seen reality; otherwise, no soul could have entered this sort of living thing. But not every soul is easily reminded of the reality there by what it finds here—not souls that got only a brief glance at the reality there, not souls who had such bad luck when they fell down here that they were twisted by bad company into

lives of injustice so that they forgot the sacred objects they had seen before. Only a few remain whose memory is good enough; and they are startled when they see an image of what they saw up there. Then they are beside themselves, and their experience is beyond their comprehension because they cannot fully grasp what it is that they are seeing.

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 your sequence of colloquia).

1) Gender features prominently in many—if not all—of the texts read during the antiquity colloquium. This is true, albeit in different ways, both in those texts where women and men interact as well as in those texts where women may be largely absent. Write an essay discussing the role of gender and gender-roles. How do our authors see women and men as different and how do they see them as similar? Why is this significant?

2) Historicity and mythology: Your sequence of colloquia feature texts that fall under the categories both of “history” and “myth”. What is the difference between these? Is the division an exclusive one? In what ways are authors committed to a version of such a distinction and in what ways are they not--i.e., in what ways is this distinction *our* distinction?

3) Foreigners. Almost every text read in your antiquity colloquium depicts encounters with distant peoples and places: foreign languages, novel cultural practices, strange creatures, alien beliefs. Authors depict the foreign differently: sometimes these encounters are hostile and lead to conflict, other times they are an opportunity for wonder and discovery, at others still they engender bonds of friendship and unity. In writing your essay, questions to consider may be: Who counts as a foreigner and what is the distinctive mark of the foreign? What roles do foreigners play in a given text?

DAY TWO

Junior Comprehensive Examination, Fall 2021

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 of colloquia.

1) Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* Book II, Prose 4, 1-5 (p. 30)

Then I said: You are the nourisher of every virtue; what you bring to mind is true, and I cannot deny the amazingly swift course of my success. But that's the thing that bums me so painfully as I recall it: I mean, in all of Fortune's adversities the most unhappy sort of misfortune is that one was happy once.

But, she said, this is a punishment that you suffer because of your false opinions about things; you cannot in justice blame the things themselves for it. After all, if it is this empty name of Fortune-born happiness that excites you so, you may now go over with me just how multiform and magnificent is your abundance still. Then, if that which was your most valuable possession in every register of your good fortune is still kept for you by the powers above intact and safe from harm, will you be within your rights to bring a complaint about your misfortune when you still possess all the better part?

2) Quran, Sura 30, The Byzantines (30:17-27)

So celebrate God's glory in the evening, in the morning— 18 praise is due to Him in the heavens and the earth— in the late afternoon, and at midday. 19 He brings the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living. He gives life to the earth after death, and you will be brought out in the same way. 20 One of His signs is that He created you from dust and— lo and behold!— you became human and scattered far and wide. 21 Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquillity: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect. 22 Another of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colours. There truly are signs in this for those who know. 23 Among His signs are your sleep, by night and by day, and your seeking His bounty. There truly are signs in this for those who can hear. 24 Among His signs, too, are that He shows you the lightning that terrifies and inspires hope; that He sends water down from the sky to restore the earth to life after death. There truly are signs in this for those who use their reason. 25 Among His signs, too, is the fact that the heavens and the earth stand firm by His command. In the end, you will all emerge when He calls you from the earth. 26 Everyone in the heavens and earth belongs to Him, and all are obedient to Him. 27 He is the One who originates creation and will do it again— this is even easier for Him. He is above all comparison in the heavens and earth; He is the Almighty, the All Wise.

3) Al-Ghazzali, *Path to Sufism* (pp. 32-33)

The second evil likely to follow from the study of the mathematical sciences derives from the case of an ignorant friend of Islam who supposes that our religion must be championed by the rejection of every science ascribed to the philosophers. So he rejects all their sciences, claiming that they display ignorance and folly in them all. He even denies their statements about eclipses of the sun and the moon and asserts that their views are contrary to the revealed Law. When such an assertion reaches the ears of someone who knows those things through apodeictic demonstration, he does not doubt the validity of his proof, but rather believes that Islam is built on ignorance and the denial of apodeictic demonstration. So he becomes the more enamored of philosophy and evened against Islam. Great indeed is the crime against religion committed by anyone who supposed that Islam is to be championed by the denial of these mathematical sciences.

4) Marie de France, *Laustic* (trans. Jack Ross), ll. 145-60 (p. 235)

When he understood the damage
his love had done to this lady
the young man did not take it lightly.
He had a cup made out of gold,
studded with precious stones, and sealed
against the corrosive outer air.
He put the nightingale in there,
then shut it in its little tomb
and took it everywhere with him.

The tale could not be hidden long
so it was made into a song.
Breton poets tell the tale;
they call it "The Nightingale."

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 242 (we encourage you to include at least one text from another course in your sequence of colloquia). Try not to repeat what you have written about on Day 1.

1) Neighboring Faiths. Some of the assigned readings are sacred texts, or discuss the faiths, of Judaic, Christian, and Muslim communities. On occasion, some of the texts are also canonical in more than one of those religions, or converse with the beliefs of other communities and reflect on their own interpretive principles. Discuss the dialogues that Jewish, Christian, and Muslim readings establish with their neighboring faiths.

2) Means and Goals of Allegory. Allegory was a pervasive figure of thought in much of pre-modernity. Many of the assigned texts in your medieval colloquium either discuss or present allegorical figures or interpretations. To what uses is allegory put? How is it differently theorized, also as a reading strategy? What forms did it take?

3) Life Narratives. Whether fully fictional or partially historical, several of the assigned readings in your medieval colloquium tell the stories of the lives of their protagonists. What are the key elements that make up these narratives? What kind of conflicts do their characters endure? How are those resolved? Are they in any way exemplary?

DAY THREE

Junior Comprehensive Examination, Fall 2021

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 of colloquia.

1) Lorenzo Valla, *On the Donation of Constantine*, Trans. by G.W. Bowersock, pp. 9 and 11

But before I come to refuting the Donation document, which is the sole authority those people have, something that is not only false but even crude, structure demands that I go back farther. First, I shall assert that Constantine and Sylvester were not such men as, with the former, to want to make a donation, to be in a legal position to do so, and to have in his power the ability to hand over these territories to someone else, and, with the latter, to want to receive them and be in a legal position to do so. Second, even if these points were other than absolutely true and very clear, I shall assert that the one did not accept and the other did not hand over the possession of the things that are said to have been donated, but that they remained forever under the jurisdiction and authority of the Caesars. Third, I shall assert that nothing was given by Constantine to Sylvester, but rather to the previous pontiff before he received baptism, and that these were modest gifts of places where the Pope could spend his life. Fourth, I shall assert that it is falsely claimed that a copy of the Donation was found among the emperor's decrees or was extracted from the Story of Sylvester, because it is neither found in that story nor in any other, and because in it are contained various contradictions, impossibilities, stupidities, barbarisms, and absurdities. Furthermore I shall speak about donations of certain other emperors—whether fictitious or worthless—and there I shall add from abundant evidence that if Sylvester ever had taken possession, once he or some other pontiff had been deprived of it, after so great an interval of time it could not be recovered by any legal claim, human or divine. Lastly, I shall assert that the supreme pontiff's current possessions could not, in the course of time, have been administered under his authority.

2) Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote of La Mancha*, Trans. by Edith Grossman, part I, chapter 1.

Having given a name, and one so much to his liking, to his horse, he wanted to give one to himself, and he spent another eight days pondering this, and at last he called himself *Don Quixote*, which is why, as has been noted, the authors of this absolutely true history determined that he undoubtedly must have been named Quixada and not Quexada, as others have claimed. In the event, recalling that the valiant Amadís but had added the name of his kingdom and realm in order to bring it fame, and was known as Amadís of Gaul, he too, like a good knight, wanted to add the name of his birthplace to his own, and he called himself *Don Quixote of La Mancha*, thereby, to his mind, clearly stating his lineage and country and honoring it by making it part of

his title.

Having cleaned his armor and made a full helmet out of a simple headpiece, and having given a name to his horse and decided on one for himself, he realized that the only thing left for him to do was to find a lady to love; for the knight errant without a lady-love was a tree without leaves or fruit, a body without soul.

3) Montaigne, “On Some Verses of Vergil” (p. 90)

Put on a lock, confine her. But then who will guard
The guards themselves? Your wife is shrewd; with them she’ll start.

- *Juvenal*

What occasion will not be enough for them in so knowing an age? Curiosity is vicious in all things, but here it is pernicious. It is folly to want to be enlightened about a disease for which there is no medicine that does not make it worse and aggravate it; the shame of which is increased and made public principally by jealousy; revenge for which wounds our children more than it cures us. You dry up and die in quest of a proof so obscure. How pitifully have those men reached their goal who in my time have succeeded in this quest! If the informer does not present at the same time the remedy and relief, the information he gives is injurious and he deserves a dagger-thrust more than does a man who gives you the lie. People make no less fun of the man who takes pains to do something about it than of the man who is unaware of it.

4) Spinoza, *Ethics I*, Appendix:

Further, since they find within themselves and outside themselves a considerable number of means very convenient for the pursuit of their own advantage—as, for instance, eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, cereals and living creatures for food, the sun for giving light, the sea for breeding fish—the result is that they look on all the things of Nature as means to their own advantage. And realizing that these were found, not produced by them, they come to believe that there is someone else who produced these means for their use. For looking on things as means, they could not believe them to be self-created, but on the analogy of the means which they are accustomed to produce for themselves, they were bound to conclude that there was some governor or governors of Nature, endowed with human freedom, who have attended to all their needs and made everything for their use. And having no information on the subject, they also had to estimate the character of these rulers by their own, and so they asserted that the gods direct everything for man's use so that they may bind men to them and be held in the highest honor by them. So it came about that every individual devised different methods of worshipping God as he thought fit in order that God should love him beyond others and direct the whole of Nature so as to serve his blind cupidity and insatiable greed.

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 COL sequence of colloquia). Try not to repeat what you have written about on Days 1 and 2.

1) Reason and the irrational. The boundaries of language and the limits of reason are a concern of many writers. At times this is framed in explicitly religious terms; at others it is based in individual experiences of the ineffable, the mystical and the transcendent. (These are, of course, not exclusive categories). How do authors attempt to capture, using language, that which is beyond rational discourse? Is this possible?

2) Love and Desire. A number of the assigned readings in your early modern colloquium discuss questions pertaining to the nature of love and sexual desire. According to them, what is the nature of love? How is it accounted for? Why does it matter to the authors who write about these issues?

3) History and Traditions. The British novelist L.P. Hartley famously wrote that “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.” If that is so, it is a country with open borders, to which many of the authors you read in this colloquium freely traveled. On the one hand, history and tradition form a rich source of inspiration and emulation; on the other, many authors position themselves as setting a new course, sometimes explicitly rejecting past thinkers and paradigms. Sometimes one and the same author take up both positions. Write an essay exploring different ways in which authors attempt to chart a course in relation to their history.

4) Faith and Reason. The idea of a conflict or contest between reason (or “science”) and religion (or “faith”) is not an uncommon one. For example, early-twentieth century intellectual historian Paul Hazard described the late 17th century as a period in which “The champions of Reason and the champions of Religion were, in the words of Pierre Bayle, fighting desperately for the possession of men’s souls, confronting each other in a contest at which the whole of thoughtful Europe was looking on. Inch by inch the assailants gained ground.” How accurate is this analytic framework? What important features does it capture about some of the authors you have read and what does it leave out about those same authors?