

DAY ONE

Junior Comprehensive Examination, Fall 2022

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) Hesiod *Theogony* 521-34:

He bound devious Prometheus with inescapable
harsh bonds, fastened through the middle of a column,
and he inflicted on him a long-winged eagle, which ate
his immortal liver; but it grew as much in all
at night as the long-winged bird would eat all day.
Heracles, the mighty son of fine-ankled Alcmene,
killed it and freed from his evil sickness the son
of Iapetus and released him from anguish
by the will of high-ruling Olympian Zeus,
so that the glory of Theban-born Heracles
would be more than before on the nurturing land;
thinking of this, he honored his famous son, and
though he was angry quit the rage he had ever since
the Titan contended in counsel with Cronus' mighty son.

2) Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.32-51:

Whether he lives or dies is up to the gods.
May he live all the same! And I can pray for this
Even without loving him. What has Jason done?
Who, except a monster, would not be moved
By his youth, his high birth, his manhood?
Or by his beauty alone? He's certainly moved me.
But unless I help him, he will be blasted
By the bulls' fiery breath, and fight an army
Sprung up from the earth he has plowed, and be fed
To the greedy dragon. If I let this happen
Call me the child of a tigress, say that I have
Cold stone and iron for a heart. But why can't I
Look on as he dies, why is that anathema?
Why don't I cheer on the bulls against him.
And the earthborn warriors, the sleepless dragon?
Oh, God, no! But that is not a matter
Of my prayers but of what I do. Well then,
Do I betray my father's throne? Do I save
An unknown stranger so that when he is safe
He sails off without me and marries another
While I, Medea, am left behind to be punished?

3) Livy *History of Rome*, Preface:

The task of writing a history of our nation from Rome's earliest days fills me, I confess, with some misgiving, and even were I confident in the value of my work, I should hesitate to say so. I am aware that for historians to make extravagant claims is, and always has been, all too common: every writer on history tends to look down his nose at his less cultivated predecessors, happily persuaded that he will better them in point of style, or bring new facts to light. But however that may be, I shall find satisfaction in contributing – not, I hope, ignobly – to the labour of putting on record the story of the greatest nation in the world. Countless others have written on this theme and it may be that I shall pass unnoticed amongst them; if so, I must comfort myself with the greatness and splendour of my rivals, whose work will rob my own of recognition.

My task, moreover, is an immensely laborious one. I shall have to go back more than seven hundred years, and trace my story from its small beginnings up to these recent times when its ramifications are so vast that any adequate treatment is hardly possible. I am aware, too, that most readers will take less pleasure in my account of how Rome began and in her early history; they, will wish to hurry on to more modern times and to read of the period, already a long one, in which the might of an imperial people is beginning to work its own ruin. My own feeling is different; I shall find antiquity a rewarding study, if only because, while I am absorbed in it, I shall be able to turn my eyes from the troubles which for so long have tormented the modern world, and to write without any of that over-anxious consideration which may well plague a writer on contemporary life, even if it does not lead him to conceal the truth.

4) John 18: 28-38

[18] 28 Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. 29 So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" 30 They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." 31 Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." 32 (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" 35 Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." 37 Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." 38 Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him."

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) Oral and Written Composition, Reading and Recitation

Scholars of ancient literature have long emphasized a distinction between (i) texts which originated in performance and were first transmitted orally, before they were ever written down, and (ii) texts which were written by individual authors. Can texts which originated in an oral tradition be distinguished from those which first appeared in writing, and if so, how?

There is also historical evidence that Romans authors like Virgil and Livy gave recitations of texts they had written. In what ways might their works differ from those by modern authors whose work is primarily designed for silent reading? Does recognition of the fact that some texts originated in performance and others were written to be read out loud have any importance for the way we might read ancient literature today?

2) Visual Field

Ancient rhetorical theorists attached importance to the ability of a speaker to put things in the mind's eye (*subjectio sub oculos*) of his audience. Can you give an account, with examples, of the different ways in which Greco-Roman literature exploits the visual field? For instance, you may consider striking instances of imagery (simile, metaphor), physical description ('ekphrasis'), narration of spectacular episodes, and the presentation of vivid scenes in drama. Did other ancient literatures (e.g., biblical narrative) rely on effects of visualisation to the same extent?

3) Political Evolution

Present day societies show a consciousness of political evolution over long (i.e., multi-generational) periods, whether in response to key domestic historical events, constitutional changes, or the foundation of a new nation. Current political identities are often framed in response to past identities, with consequent effects on the use of language, ranging from specific political terminology, such as "democracy" or "republic", to more general concepts, such as "freedom" or "rights". Do ancient texts represent consciousness of political change in the same way that we do today? Allowing for the fact that their political systems and histories were not the same, how did different ancient societies characterize their political evolution? How did individual authors differ in their approach to this question?

4) Antiquities of Antiquity

Mesopotamian, Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian texts tend in themselves to transmit and constitute our idea of antiquity. But the writers of those texts often present their own ideas of what antiquity was. What ideas of the origins of human life, society and civilization are prominent in the oldest texts we know? Do various "ancient antiquities" have any common

features? And why is a focus on origins and beginnings such a recurrent characteristic of the oldest literature we possess?

your earlier persecutions by your teachers and that most treacherous outrage upon your body, you turn to the detestable jealousy and the ruthless attacks of those fellow-students of yours, Alberic of Reims and Lotulf the Lombard. You do not fail to mention what was done at their instigation to your famous work of theology and what happened to you yourself, when you were, so to speak, condemned to prison.

3) Hildegard *Scivias*, Part II, Vision 1:

And I, human being, neither ablaze with the strength of strong lions nor learned in their exhalations, remaining in the fragility of the weaker rib, but filled with mystical inspiration, saw: a shining fire, unfathomable, inextinguishable, full alive and existing full of life; with a flame the colour of the air, brightly burning in the gentle breeze, and as inseparable from the shining fire as a human being is inseparable from his inner organs. And I saw the shining flame glow white. And suddenly a dark sphere of air appeared, huge in size, upon which the shining flame struck many blows, and at each blow a spark flew up so that soon the circle of air was brought to completion, and heaven and earth shone forth in the fullness of perfection.

4) Marie de France *Laüstic* (trans. Jack Ross) ll. 81-100:

He asked her where she went at night
and why she rose before first light.

“Sir,” the lady said to him,
“It’s more than just a passing whim.
I hear the nightingale sing
and have to sit here listening.
So sweet his voice is in the night
to hear it is supreme delight,
the joy it gives me is so deep
I can’t just close my eyes and sleep.”

Her husband heard this glib reply
and laughed once: coarsely, angrily.
He thought at once of thwarting her
by catching the bird in a snare.
His serving men were rounded up
and put to work on net and trap
to hang on every single tree
in his entire property.

They wove so many strings and glue
the bird was caught without ado.

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). Do not repeat what you have written about on Day 1.

1) Allegory as a Form of Expression

According to the twentieth-century philosopher Walter Benjamin who studied medieval literature, ‘allegory... is not a playful illustrative technique but a form of expression, just as speech is expression, and, indeed, just as writing is’. Would you agree with this and do you consider all medieval literature to be allegorical? Are there different kinds of medieval allegorical writing, and how would you identify them?

2) Trauma and Suffering

The idea of 'trauma', the effect of shock or of sustained suffering, has attracted a great deal of interest in literary studies. In what ways is thinking about trauma or suffering, in terms of its applicability to individuals, society, and nations appropriate for the study of medieval literature? In what ways can medieval literature constitute an expression of trauma or suffering? Does the literature propose any remedies? Or can literary texts in themselves provide a way of easing or managing suffering?

3) The Soul

Numerous texts from different cultures refer to something called, in English translation, the “soul”. Explain to what extent the concept of the soul differs across cultures and individual writers. Is anything lost or gained by using a single English word to cover all such instances? Does a particular definition of soul have any wider implications for understanding a culture?

4) Technology

The medieval period saw a wide variety of technological advances across diverse domains, including agriculture, architecture, and warfare. To what extent do medieval texts recognize technology as a feature of society, either directly or in passing? Do we see such references occurring in particular periods, regions, or authors? Is an attitude to technology discernible in any of these texts? If you think that reference to technology is relatively more or less common in the medieval texts you’ve read (in comparison to other periods), suggest why that might be the case.

DAY THREE

Junior Comprehensive Examination, Fall 2022

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) Dante *Canto 26.109-42* from *Inferno*:

so that one should not go further; on the right
hand I had left Seville, on the other I had already left
Ceuta.

‘O brothers,’ I said, ‘who through a hundred
thousand perils have reached the west, to this so
brief vigil

of our senses that remains, do not deny the
experience, following the sun, of the world without
people.

Consider your sowing: you were not made to live
like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge.’

My companions I made so sharp for the voyage,
with this little oration, that after it I could hardly
have held them back;

and, turning our stern toward the morning, of our
oars we made wings for the mad flight, always
gaining on the left side.

Already all the stars of the other pole I saw at
night, and our own pole so low that it did not rise
above the floor of the sea.

Five times renewed, and as many diminished, had
been the light beneath the moon, since we had
entered the deep pass,

when there appeared to us a mountain, dark in
the distance, and it seemed to me higher than any I
had seen.

We rejoiced, but it quickly turned to weeping; for
from the new land a whirlwind was born and struck
the forequarter of the ship.

Three times it made the ship to turn about with all
the waters, at the fourth to raise its stern aloft and
the prow to go down, as it pleased another,
until the sea had closed over us.”

2) Juan Latino *Austrias Carmen* 1.30-50:

Listen now to the deeds of your John as he set sail: read about him in victory. No one more blessed than he has ever led the Spanish forces into battle. If you wish to pore over the deeds of kings, Deza, if time allows you to study our nation's annals, if you compare generals and successful military campaigns the world over, if you reflect on the deeds of blessed John: no commander has ever fought more capably, not Hector, Roman Caesar, Greek Achilles, not even Augustus as the humiliated Cleopatra fled him in her ships at the Battle of Actium. Such a victory as this was unheard of in the history of the world, and though it was long sought by our Christian kings, it was the destiny of John of Austria to deliver it to King Philip. His exploits took place at sea. Let John be remembered throughout the world- all the devastation he wrought as he conquered, all the bodies he submerged in the waves, how many captive ships he towed back, and the Turks, Pashas, and Parthians he sent to Orcus. This son of Charles marshaled the forces of his brother, Philip, the ships of the Holy Pontiff, and the mighty Venetians, whom Christ himself had joined in a sacred treaty, so that they might remember the one Father and his powerful Son, and so that the Holy Spirit might keep them safe, now united as one.

3) Shakespeare *Hamlet* Act 2 Scene 2:

Now I am alone.
O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit 505
That from her working all his visage wanned,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing?
For Hecuba! 510
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech, 515
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,

A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause, 520
And can say nothing – no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?

4) Milton *Paradise Lost* 5.224-46:

“Raphael,” said he, “thou hear’st what stir on earth
Satan, from hell scaped through the darksome gulf, 225
Hath raised in Paradise and how disturbed
This night the human pair, how he designs
In them at once to ruin all mankind.
Go therefore; half this day as friend with friend
Converse with Adam, in what bower or shade 230
Thou find’st him from the heat of noon retired
To respite his day-labor with repast
Or with repose, and such discourse bring on
As may advise him of his happy state,
Happiness in his power left free to will, 235
Left to his own free will, his will though free
Yet mutable; whence warn him to beware
He swerve not too secure; tell him withal
His danger and from whom, what enemy,
Late-fallen himself from Heaven, is plotting now 240
The fall of others from like state of bliss:
By violence, no, for that shall be withstood,
But by deceit and lies; this let him know,
Lest willfully transgressing he pretend
Surprisal, unadmonished, unforwarned.” 245
So spake the eternal Father and fulfilled
All justice.

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). Do not repeat what you have written about on Days 1 and 2.

1) Ideas of God and Government in Early Modern Literature

Conceptions of God as ‘King’, ‘Lord’, or Judge are essentially political, while concepts of might, majesty, dominion, power, and sovereignty are used of both God and the state. What parallels or analogies can you discern between political and divine authority in the Early Modern literature you have read? Consider this question even (or especially) for texts which may not be primarily concerned with political or religious questions. Do you think presentations of God in literature might reflect, and also influence, ideas of state authority and social authority more generally?

2) Effects of Discovery and Globalization on Literature

The early modern era is often characterized – or even defined – as a period of intercultural contact and globalization in which voyages of discovery, conquest and colonization heralded new forms of knowledge which also transformed traditional thought and ideas. How far did this consideration bear on the style or content of the texts you have read, or even lead to some literature being created in the first place?

Some historians, however, have argued that the knowledge of other continents and their cultures had a limited impact on Europe. In what ways might the texts you have read from the period 1400-1800 support or cast doubt on this claim?

3) Literature as Test

According to one influential reading of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, the language of the poem often operates as a kind of test, which replicates the temptations of Satanic thinking at the same time as it reveals the correct route out. On a smaller scale, the description of the plague at the end of Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* has also been interpreted as a test of how well the reader has grasped the work’s Epicurean principles. Are there other works, or key parts of works, that operate in this way - part deception and part diagnostic? What is gained or lost by thinking about literary texts as puzzles, or as exercises which require or involve finding the solutions to the problems they impose?

4) Structural Form

There are many principles of organization that might govern the form of a text: genre, circumstances of composition, materials involved in its production, intended audience, as well as a host of considerations affecting the intelligibility or appeal of a work. Some of these considerations may include the use of prefaces and other para- or metatext, the work’s divisions into Acts or Books or other organizational unit, or the choice of when to be concise or expansive, among many other such questions. In what ways are early modern authors attentive to the

structural form of their texts, both at the macro- (i.e., work) and micro-level? Which authors are especially innovative in designing the structure of their works?