

Graduate Written Exam

Prose Fiction: Mark Twain, “Huckleberry Finn”

Discuss the strategies of subversion – that is, the symbolic, metaphorical and/or narrative techniques of social criticism – that Twain uses in “Huckleberry Finn.” Focus your answer on the following aspects of the novel:

1. Twain’s handling of racial prejudice
2. Twain’s depiction of Southern society
3. Jim’s fictitious narrative of his own experiences
4. Huck’s understanding of morality

Prose Fiction: Mary Shelley, “Frankenstein”

Discuss the ways in which Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” combines features of the Romantic period and the Victorian age. Focus especially on Romantic features, such as the idealization of the individual (especially the genius), the spiritual power of nature, the interest in the supernatural and the Victorian urge toward the didactic. Be sure to articulate the moral lesson of the novel. If possible, comment on how 21st-century readers may view this lesson differently than early Victorian readers.

Prose Non-Fiction: John Henry Cardinal Newman

According to John Henry Cardinal Newman, what is the proper function of a university? In your response, be sure to compare/contrast the various concepts he covers, such as universal knowledge vs. mere knowledge, liberal knowledge vs. useful knowledge, and liberal education vs. useful education. Be sure also to discuss how a liberal education contributes to the mission of religion.

Prose Non-Fiction: Machiavelli, “The Prince”

Using examples from “The Prince,” first discuss the advice Machiavelli gives to a monarch or hereditary ruler and explain what the advice is meant to do for the ruler. Then, analyze the effectiveness of the advice, either in concrete terms of “The Prince” or in terms of the impact it had on readers (and the reputation it garnered). If possible, discuss that impact both in terms of Machiavelli’s day and in terms of the critical reputation it still has today.

Drama: Aphra Behn, “The Rover”

Although “The Rover” provided Restoration audiences with both the raucous and bawdy humor and the dazzling wit that they demanded, Aphra Behn portrays all women, ladies and courtesans alike, as enslaved. Even though Behn’s female characters achieve certain victories, Behn also suggests that these women have no real control over their lives. Referring to Florinda, Hellena and Angelica, explain how Behn draws parallels between rape, prostitution and marriage in “The Rover” in order to portray women’s enslavement and to indict her society.

Drama: “Everyman”

“Everyman” is, of course, a moral play. That is, its aim is obviously didactic. Yet the performance conditions of medieval drama also require that the play engage widely diverse spectators in the presentation of its dramatic material. Analyze the balance in the play between allegorical/didactic meaning and the anonymous playwright’s explicitly theatrical concerns.

Poetry: John Keats’s Odes

In response to the following two-part question, use examples from the six Keats odes in your essay (“Ode to Psyche,” “Ode to a Nightingale,” “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” “Ode on Melancholy,” “Ode on Indolence” and “Ode to Autumn”).

Two of the distinctive characteristics which mark Keats’ poetry are his recognition of negative capability and his dialectical thought processes. Address each of these characteristics in the odes according to the guidelines that follow for this two-part essay.

1. Keats described one element necessary to poets/writers as a negative capability created when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Explain the concept of negative capability and how this particular quality is demonstrated in one or more of Keats’s odes.
2. In addition to his ability to employ negative capability, Keats demonstrated a dialectical mind, the least dogmatic it is possible to be (Perkins 1184). Explain how Keats’ dialectical thinking is demonstrated through various contrasting elements in the odes.

Poetry: John Donne

Briefly place Donne and the Metaphysical Poets in their historical context, then discuss the major characteristics of metaphysical poetry with reference to at least three of Donne’s poems from the reading list, including one of the holy sonnets. In your description of metaphysical poetry, be sure to address both subject matter and poetic elements, such as figures of speech, voice, diction and syntax, and form.