Classical and Medieval Literature

Description: This area of the exam focuses on western Classical and Medieval literature. Students should be familiar with the texts and contexts of the authors listed below.

Classical

Plato
Excerpts from Republic (as found in Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism)

Aristotle
Poetics, (excerpts from Norton)

Homer
Iliad, Books 1, 6, 9, 18, 22, 24;
Odyssey: Books 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 21, 22, 24

Ovid
from Metamorphoses: Creation, Apollo and Daphne, Jove and Io, Pygmalion

Aeschylus
The Oresteia

Sophocles
Oedipus Rex

Euripides
Medea

The Bible:
Genesis; Exodus, Job, Psalm 19, Song of Songs, Isaiah 1-10, 40, 52-56, Luke; John 1-2; Revelation 1, 2, 4-6

Medieval

Old English
Beowulf; The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Dream of the Rood, The Wife’s Lament, The Battle of Maldon (with some attention to Anglo-Saxon language and verse forms)

Dante
Il Convivio (excerpts in Norton)
Inferno 1-5, 31-34; Purgatorio 1-3, 28-33; Paradiso, 1-2, 16-19, 23, 30-33

Chaucer
The Canterbury Tales, selections (General Prologue, Knight’s Tale, Miller’s Tale, Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale, Clerk’s Tale, Pardoner’s Prologue and Tale, Nun’s Priest’s Tale)
Troilus and Criseyde

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (with attention to Middle English and poetic form)

Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love (excerpts in Norton)

Book of Margery Kempe (excerpts in Norton)

Everyman

Second Shepherd’s Play (Wakefield Cycle)

Sir Thomas Malory
selections from Le Morte Darthur (ed. Shepherd, Norton Critical Edition)
The Tale of King Arthur (I. Merlin), p. 3-13
The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere (!-V) pp. 599-645
The Most Piteous Tale of the Mort Arthur Saunz Guerdon (I-V) pp. 646-698
Sample Questions

1. In epic and other forms of narrative poetry women often play the role of temptresses who use their guile to threaten the hero’s completion of his journey. At the same time, the feminine often personifies the object of a hero’s quest. Discuss these two problematic aspects of representations of women in at least three epic or narrative poems from the Classical and Medieval periods.

Updated 2/29/20