

Please answer one question from each of the two sections. Identify by number and letter the questions chosen. Avoid unnecessary duplication in your answers, i.e., don't use the same theorists for both questions.

SECTION I.

A. The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control...reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession; with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter 14

From the history of literary theory beginning with Plato and ending with American New Criticism, choose three theorists (Coleridge may be one), each from a different "school," to discuss the relationship of the above quotation to its predecessors and successors (both similar and different) in the critical tradition, commenting in each case on the socio-political (ideological) implications of such theories and on the possibility that an art so defined might yet prove subversive.

OR

B. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyché, liberty) beneath the work: ...In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed, "run" (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say *writing*), by refusing to assign a "secret," an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an antitheological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law.

Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"

Using the quotation from Barthes to anchor your argument, evaluate three postmodern theories of reading (you may use Barthes, if you like), at least one of which disagrees with Barthes in some significant way, and provide for each a description of how it can get beyond solipsism, if it can, and if not, why not.

SECTION II.

A. Issues like race, gender, class, subjectivity, beauty, sublime, reality, and others have been the main concerns in the history of criticism. Speculate on one issue you consider most important, describe its historical context, major theorists (three at least), and critical assumptions; and discuss if possible their intertextual or dialogic relationships.

OR

B. Characterize and critique the primary contentions of Ferdinand de Saussure, Sigmund Freud, Virginia Woolf, or Karl Marx (choose one only) in light of the critical studies of at least three recent theorists. You need to show how his/her arguments have been incorporated into the subsequent critical texts and to examine specifically the appropriations or transformations of his/her claims.

Please answer all of the three questions:

1. Arthurian legends have been told by various writers throughout the ages, from Geoffrey Monmouth, Thomas Malory, Alfred Tennyson to the modern T. H. White. Argue in terms of originality, delightfulness and the art of story telling why such legends prevail in history. Illustrate with concret examples whenever possible.
2. Escape as theme or major motif can be seen in many literary works. Some of them show the writers' preoccupation with emotion, some represent their inner light of imagination or sense of alienation. Name one Romantic poet and one poet from the twentieth century and discuss their representations of the escape theme in their works..
3. Select one major American fiction writer and illustrate how his or her fiction reflects the characteristics of modernism; and select one major American poet and illustrate how his or her poetry reflects the characteristics of post-modernism. You should first define the terms—modernism and post-modernism—before you proceed to analyze the works.