Instructions for oral test #1 (Thurs 10/11) in undergraduate face-to-face course, English

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Oral test #1 is based on preparatory small-group work, in assigned groups of 3-4 (below). First, outside of class, your group will prepare discussion questions based on assigned exam texts that will relate to course materials, but which we will not have treated together in class. Then during class time on Thurs 10/11, the test will culminate in a discussion with two other groups. I log and evaluate the discussion, but do not participate in it. Components of your grade for the exam include: quality of overall discussion; quality of your individual contribution (primarily, whether you contributed appropriately regarding both quantity and quality, with reasonable leeway in what counts as "appropriate") and quality of your discussion questions.

There are 2 short exam texts: 1) Perseus and Andromeda, and Perseus and Medusa, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book IV (pp 112-116 in the Norton); and 2) Marvell's "Picture of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers" and "To His Coy Mistress" (on Blackboard).

Before the test, you need to meet with your group to prepare and write up 4 discussion questions. Bring these to the exam, and hand in to me one copy, with the names of everyone in your group. Part of your grade comes from the quality of these questions. Your questions and discussion should draw on the skills we've been practicing in class, and at least 2 of your questions should relate an exam text to another course text.

During the discussion itself, your task is collectively producing the most trenchant analysis you can. One thing this will entail is thinking carefully (but on your feet) about how your questions relate to other people's: if your highest-priority question is too similar to one that's already been asked, you need to have multiple fallback positions. You need to realize that some questions may not ever get asked--you still get credit for them when you turn them in. Although it's important that everyone contribute to the discussion, the quality of the collective discussion is more important that strict turn-taking: make sure to notice if someone else has made the point you were about to make, and desist. **I need everyone to offer at least four remarks in order to evaluate you. Please help one another get into the conversation.**

Guidelines and advice

It takes real care to frame a question well. Questions need to be drafted, revised, revisited. As you prepare a question, keep polishing so that it becomes more incisive, more open-ended, more stimulating.

Excellent discussion questions. . .

. . .are framed in ways that allow for more than one right answer. Generally, they are open-ended enough that the direction of discussion is not fully predictable from the question.

. . .are based on textual specifics. If your starting point is broad, offer a promising passage as a starting point.

. . .get at issues in the text that do not seem trivial.

. . .open up ways the text in question relates to other texts and overarching concerns of the course. Ideally, the question leads discussion toward using the textual passage in question and larger course issues to illuminate one another. Often, good questions draw together specific passages from two different texts as starting points.

Excellent discussions. . .

. . . Demonstrate that participants are carefully listening to, and thinking about, other students' comments. Comments clearly respond to what has gone before, except when the group explicitly decides to begin a new thread.

. . . Involve participants roughly equally (in terms of number of times individuals speak).

. . . Depart from questions about which intelligent readers could disagree. (If there's one right answer, it's not a good question.)

. . . Cover ground that is clearly important for understanding the text—do not dwell permanently in points that seem trivial. (The points may indeed be small, but in this case discussion draws out why they're important.)

. . . Offer convincing and incisive readings of textual details

. . . Pursue detailed textual evidence for all claims

. . . Acknowledge different possible interpretations

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