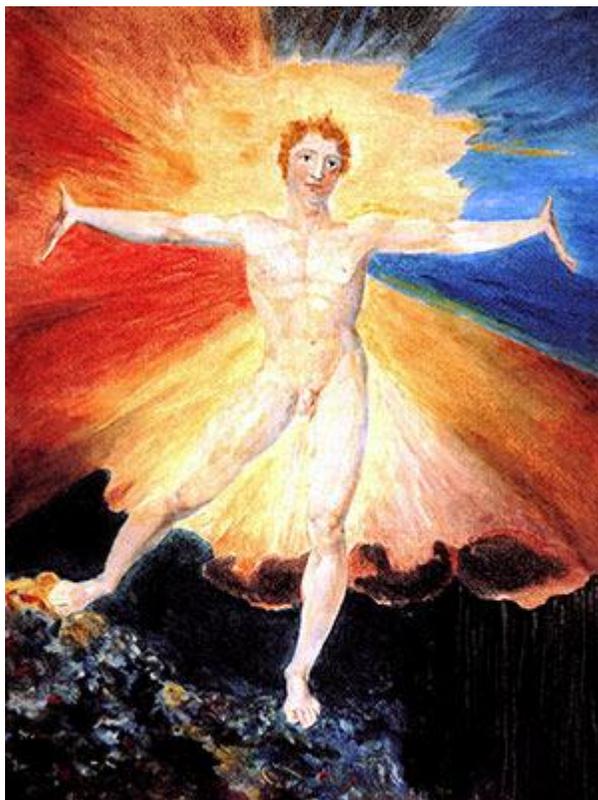


**English and Cultural Studies 3M06  
Studies in British Romantic Literature and Culture**



William Blake, *Glad Day (Albion Rose)*, 1796

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**Remarks on the English & Cultural Studies 3MO6 Midterm Examination (Term 1)**

Roshaya and I very much looked forward to having the opportunity to consider your midterm answers, in large part because the exam provides us with a snap-shot of where each of you finds yourself in the course, and, in a more general way, where the class as a whole is at this particular juncture. The exam is an important part of the learning experience of the course, and thus an occasion for you to consider how closely you are wrestling with the course materials (the lectures, the assigned texts, and the Study Questions and Course Blog). Beyond the specific question you were asked to discuss, the exam forms an occasion to ask broader questions about where you are in the course and how you are taking up the materials: Are you thinking about the larger questions and themes knitting the course together? Are you taking detailed lecture notes? Are you attending all classes? Are you reading the assigned materials before class? Are you bringing the assigned texts to class? Are you taking advantage of the regular office hours offered by Roshaya to help you with particular questions related to the course?

As it turns out, many students did quite well on the exam, while some students ran into difficulty. No difficulty struck us as insurmountable, certainly not without some focus and hard work,

including, in some cases, work on your study habits, i.e., how you go about taking this particular course. Roshaya has put together a memorandum helping students in the course consider some of the most common problems characterizing the midterm exam answers. I urge everyone in the course to take a good look at that memorandum. Roshaya's remarks are reproduced below.

Roshaya will be holding regular office hours if you would like to discuss your midterm. Before meeting with her, though, please ensure that you do the following things:

1. Carefully consider the detailed marking commentary that Roshaya has provided on your exams. Contemplate and then work with the problems to which she points, the questions she raises, and the suggestions she makes.
2. Review the examination question. Looking back, did you understand and answer the question? Did you take up the advice given in the exam question on how to write a persuasive and detailed answer? Where do your strengths in the exam answer lie? What are the areas where you can improve? For example, do you have a good handle on the course materials but find it hard to organize a strong answer to the exam question? Did you find that you weren't able to budget your time well, perhaps spending too much time discussing one author rather than another or too much time thinking about how to answer the question rather than answering the question? Perhaps you found yourself unprepared for the examination; for example, attending lectures but not taking detailed enough notes, or attending lectures but not reading the assigned material as closely as the lectures and Study Questions are inviting you to do? Answering these questions in the frankest way possible is the first step towards doing the sort of work that Roshaya and I are confident that you can do in this course.
3. Return to the work of the thinkers about whom you wrote, making sure to re-familiarize yourself with their claims, arguments, illustrations, examples, and worries. Connect those details to the exam question, your answer, and Roshaya's marking commentary.
4. Return to the Midterm Study Tips posted on the 3M06 Coursepage, asking yourself whether or to what degree you employed those suggestions in writing your exam answer.
5. Read Roshaya's detailed and welcoming memorandum with care (see below), connecting your exam answer to the questions and problems that she helpfully raises there.

I look forward to seeing you in class, where we can continue to think together!

Dr. David L. Clark

### 3M06 Midterm Examination: Problems and Solutions

Dear Class,

It has been such a pleasure reading your exams and being privileged to your ideas, unique readings of the course materials, and personal negotiations with the subject matter. Indeed, it has been quite interesting shifting my gaze between the social atmosphere of our classroom and – as the Romantics themselves did – your interior worlds. Thinking about the topics we've been discussing both as the objects of communal learning and of personal reflection is an exercise that William Blake and Thomas De Quincey were deeply invested in. Their vital interests in imagination as Romantic writers were, I believe, concerned with just that: opportunities to

witness the confluences of communal and psychological space, moments where the self becomes obscure in the face of others, and the realization that we have a profound effect on our world, even (and especially!) when we feel unproductive and the mere recipients of others' productivity. For the Romantics, imagination was a productive force that challenged the normative divide between self and other, inside and outside, good and evil, independence and dependency, reason and chaos, and regulation and freedom. After writing many assignments throughout your academic careers, you have undoubtedly realized that often your most productive moments are *not* the ones where you are sitting in front of your keyboard typing; if you are like me, your most important intellectual contributions and your most exciting insights make themselves known when you are washing the dishes or lying in bed late at night. Indeed, it is in our so-called “unproductive” moments when our imagination is unhinged from day-to-day restraints. These are the moments when we feel the world shifting under the weight of our own minds. In your examinations you were asked to consider how Blake and De Quincey saw imagination as a force that forms and deforms the world and that helps us distinguish between the world as it seems as the world as it really is. I have “marked” your work in a way not unlike the way Blake “marked” the people he encountered on the streets of London: I have taken notice of you, considered your ideas, and left an imprint on your work. From that experience we are both changed! Many of you did very well and some had difficulties. In this document I have outlined the common difficulties that many students encountered and have shared some strategies that characterized the best essays. I encourage each of you to read this document when you receive your graded exams and ask yourself if you recognize some of the difficulties you had. Remember: in a six unit course like this one you have the rare opportunity to improve over the course of the year and to make a serious commitment to your intellectual growth.

### Six Common Problems

1. The most common problem among the essays was a difficulty answering the exam question. Your exam question asked you to consider the power of the imagination to form and deform the world and the role of the imagination in distinguishing between the world as it seems and the world as it really is in Blake's and De Quincey's texts. Many students discussed how Blake and De Quincey were imaginative writers but did not address how they were thinking *about* imagination. The most common strategy was to compare and contrast themes in both writers' works without arguing how these comparisons showed an interest in the imagination as a transformative or distinguishing force. Some students responded to half the exam question (often, how imagination helps us distinguish between the world as it seems and the world as it is) rather than considering the question as a whole. The best essays were clearly and generatively answerable to the exam question. They discussed specific lines, images, passages, and moves from the texts and *explained* why and how these examples were concerned with the power of the imagination.

2. Many students also had difficulty responding to the question with enough detail and specificity. The examples students gave were often too general and vague and did not suggest that the student read the course materials thoroughly and substantively. It is important to ground your arguments in the “minute particulars” of the texts to give your arguments force and substance. Often, students reproduced material from the lectures without routing it back through the texts. Remember that the lectures should be the jumping-off point for your own responses

and are not there as a substitute for working closely and carefully with the readings. The best essays employed the level of detail in our course's Study Questions and Course Blog document. They zeroed in on *specific* lines, images, passages, and moves from the texts and used material from the lectures to put these details in context and explain their significance to the argument.

3. In a related vein, students also had difficulty explaining the significance of the examples they used to their arguments. Many students introduced images or lines from the texts without explaining the context, relevance, and significance of them. For instance, if you introduce Blake's concept of "mind-forg'd manacles," you must demonstrate your understanding of what this concept means and how it supports your argument about the power of the imagination in Blake's "London." As a student, it is your job to show your reader that you understand the material and are thinking about it critically. If your reader must guess what you mean then you have not given her enough information to evaluate your performance.

4. Some students had problems pacing themselves through the exam and giving equal detail and attention to both writers. When writing a comparative essay you must give yourself enough time to argue persuasively about both writers. The best essays had a clear thesis that focused and directed the students' arguments through both the writers' texts.

5. Watch out for basic factual errors, i.e., mixing up the names of poems and thinkers, or confusing one poem with another.

6. For your upcoming essay it will be very important to watch for grammatical errors. Some students made elementary grammatical errors, such as misplaced apostrophes and run-on sentences. Such mistakes can and do happen in examination situations. But it will be important to ensure that similar errors don't mar your essay, which will need to be free of grammatical and spelling errors.

### Some Solutions

1. The most successful essays answered both parts of the exam question clearly and thoughtfully. They suggested that the students had read the exam question closely and understood what was being asked of them. These essays were directly concerned with what the authors thought about imagination and what their writing suggested about the power of the imagination.

2. Successful essays exhibited a level of detail that suggested that the students read the readings, course blog, and attended each lecture. These essays grounded their arguments in examples from the texts and used the lecture and blog content to supplement their own ideas. The best essays also introduced *unique readings* of the texts that expanded on the explanations given in lecture and on the course blog. These readings were argued persuasively using evidence from the texts.

3. Successful essays began with a specific, unique thesis that helped organize and direct the students' arguments. In these essays, each paragraph was answerable to the thesis and the essay read smoothly and coherently.

4. Finally, successful essays realized that Blake's and De Quincey's texts are dynamic, complicated, and sometimes contradictory. They seized upon these moments and developed interesting, generative arguments. For instance, De Quincey shows himself to be both humanitarian (he states that those in disadvantaged social positions deserve care, understanding, attention, and love) and deeply xenophobic (he makes troubling assumptions about the East). This contradiction suggests that what we call the "self" is neither simple nor static. De Quincey seems to have many "selves" that often emerge in moments when his imagination becomes unhinged; his chaotic dreams send him to the East and they also send him back to Ann. His dreamy fictions seem to suggest that the self is also one fiction among many, and that perhaps the greatest fiction of all is the concept of the "single self" that regulates our lives. Think about Blake as writer of "innocent" poetry and "experienced" poetry. Doesn't he also exhibit many selves that can be difficult to assimilate? Successful essays were deeply aware of these complicated moments and built their arguments upon them.

I look forward to seeing you in class and to continue working through these fascinating texts with you. If you have not already done so, I encourage you to introduce yourself to me before the start of the lecture or on the break. If you have any further questions, please come see me during my office hours.

Roshaya Rodness