Mock M.A. Exam Literature Questions

Though unwilling to disseminate questions actually used on the M.A. exam, the faculty would like to provide students a few prompts that suggest the types of questions used on parts one, two, and three of the M.A. exam. In terms of both structure and content, this list is suggestive, not exhaustive. Questions will regularly appear on the M.A. exam which have no resemblance to the following mock questions.

The questions about poetry below presume that the following texts are on the M.A. reading list (they are not):

- Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*
- William Morris’ “The Defence of Guenevere,” “King Arthur’s Tomb,” “Sir Galahad, a Christmas Mystery,” and “The Blue Closet”
- Alfred Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*
- Christina Rossetti’s *Monna Innominata: A Sonnet of Sonnets*, “De Profundis,” “A Bruised Reed Shall He Not Break,” “A Triad: Sonnet,” “To What Purpose Is This Waste?,” and “The Dead City”

Poems on the (2010 revised) M.A. reading list which do indeed pertain to some of the questions below include:

- Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market,” “In an Artist’s Studio,” and “Winter: My Secret”
- Alfred Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott”
- Robert Browning’s “Fra Lippo Lippi” and “My Last Duchess”
- Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*
- Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*
- John Ruskin’s “The Savageness of Gothic Architecture” (from *The Stones of Venice*)

Mock Poetry Questions

1. Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (1485), a text reintroduced to the British public via a new printing in 1816, informed a number of poems written by Alfred Tennyson and William Morris. Which of these two poets most closely adhered to Malory’s own spin on Arthurian legend? Select one character or key event from Malory, and compare it with one relevant poem by Tennyson and one by Morris.

2. Does Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* celebrate or interrogate the concept of chivalry? Discuss two poems from this collection.

3. The painters who gathered around Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the middle of the nineteenth century shared a commitment to realistic detail in their paintings. Do those poets involved with Rossetti demonstrate a similar devotion to realism? Discuss one poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and one poem by either Christian Rossetti or William Morris.

4. Perform a psychoanalytical reading that weaves together the poems “Winter: My Secret” and “The Lady of Shalott.”

5. Is Christina Rossetti’s poetry “good” enough to be ranked with that of the men who formed the two Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhoods? Discuss three poems total, juxtaposing 1-2 of her poems against 1-2 poems by either William Morris or her brother (Dante Gabriel Rossetti), and use as a guideline for “good” art the criteria laid out by one of the following texts: Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (any edition), Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice*, Arnold’s *The Study of Poetry*, Pater’s *The Renaissance*, or Wilde’s “The Decay of Lying”

6. What do the poems of William Morris contribute to the Victorian-era “Woman Question”? Discuss three of his poems.

7. Should William Morris’ “The Defence of Guenevere” be classed as a conversation poem or a dramatic monologue? Make sure your analysis of Morris’ poem incorporates discussion of one conversation poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and one dramatic monologue by Robert Browning.
8. what connections between physical beauty and spiritual truth does Robert Browning draw throughout “Fra Lippo Lippi,” and how does this position compare with his contemporaries’ respective approaches to the same issue? Your argument should consider the whole of Browning’s poem, including (but not limited to) the passage provided below, and should also tackle one of the following texts: Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, or John Ruskin’s “The Savageness of Gothic Architecture” (from the *Stones of Venice*).

Or say there’s beauty with no soul at all—
(I never saw it—put the case the same--)
If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents:
That’s somewhat: and you’ll find the soul you have missed,
Within yourself, when you return him thanks.

9. the following ten lines, which open William Morris’ “The Defence of Guenevere” (1858), prefigure the various strategies that Guenever will employ throughout the poem in an attempt to manipulate her audience. What tools does Guenever use in this attempt, and why? Your response should include a close analysis of the lines below, and a detailed discussion of the entire poem.

But, knowing now that they would have her speak,
She threw her wet hair backward from her brow,
Her hand close to her mouth touching her cheek,

As though she had had there a shameful blow,
And feeling it shameful to feel ought but shame
All through her heart, yet felt her cheek burned so,
She must a little touch it; like one lame
She walked away from Gauwaine, with her head
Still lifted up; and on her cheek of flame

The tears dried quick; she stopped at last and said: