

QUESTIONS ON YOUNG AND TAINÉ

Questions on Young Conjectures on Original Composition

1. How does Young define an 'original' work of art as opposed to an 'imitation'? Which does he prefer?
2. What two kinds of literary imitation are there, according to Young? What names does he give them?
3. Identify six differences which exist between what Young terms an 'original' and an what he calls an 'imitation.'
4. With whom does Young side, the ancients or the moderns? Why?
5. What advice does Young give modern writers with regard to the ancients?
6. Identify nine differences which exist, according to Young, between geniuses and the 'merely learned.'
7. Does Young believe that genius is commonplace? Does he believe that it is largely absent from among modern writers?
8. What two rules does Young wish to borrow from the field of ethics?
9. In what does this essay represent a significant departure from the common emphases of Neoclassicism?
 - a. Some commentators believe that Young is one of the key thinkers in what they describe as the 'expressive turn' which took place in the late eighteenth century. What do you understand by this term?
10. What are the main metaphors used here by Young to describe authorship? How are they significant?

Questions on Taine History of English Literature

11. What, according to Taine, is the goal of literary criticism? What is this view of criticism a product of?
12. What, according to Taine is the goal of the historian?
13. What, according to Taine, do humans have in common?
 - a. Does Taine believe in the concept of a 'universal human nature,' the view, that is, that humans are everywhere alike?
14. What, according to Taine, are the three principal determinants of human identity which are responsible for the diversity of human beings?
 - a. What is the "root of man"?
 - b. Which philosopher is a big influence on Taine in this regard?
15. Explain the natural analogy which Taine uses to describe "how these causes, when applied to a nation or an age, produce their results."
16. What metaphor does Taine use to define the nature of a culture / civilisation?
17. What does Taine mean when he writes that literature is a "transcript of contemporary manners, a type of a certain kind of mind" and that one can "retrace, from the monuments of literature, the style of man's feelings and thoughts for centuries back"? What, therefore, is the ultimate goal of criticism?
18. What does Taine mean when he writes that literary works reveal the "psychology of a soul, frequently of an age, now and then of a race"?
19. Discuss Taine's views on canon-formation in the light of his comment that the most important sentiments which literature can represent concern the "mode of being of a whole nation and a whole age" (619) and that the more a work succeeds in doing so, the "higher its place in literature" (619).
20. Taine's essay is, in actuality, the first chapter of and theoretical preamble to his book entitled History of English Literature, perhaps the first attempt to write a comprehensive history of English literature and to form an English canon. How would you characterise Taine's conception of 'literary history' and 'canon' expressed there?

21. How would a critic influenced by Taine go about assembling or writing a literary history?