General

- For those of you unaccustomed to research, I find that it’s most effective to start on Wikipedia, so you can familiarise yourself with the subject you’ve chosen
- And you know this already, but Wikipedia itself is not a source. DO NOT STEAL from Wikipedia, and DO NOT CITE Wikipedia
- With the terms and names you got from Wikipedia, you can then do a proper search on journal databases (e.g.: JSTOR, LION etc. If you don’t have passwords, try borrowing passwords from your friends in other universities) and in the library
- DO NOT PLAGIARISE. This is easier to detect than you think, and you will lose a significant amount of marks or even fail
- I will not be too strict with the marking (given that the class started a few weeks late); and I would rather read a flawed original piece than something stolen
- Get creative if you must. If you aren’t well-read (or at least if you’re not familiar with the body of literary texts that you will be talking about) then argue for the literary value of other cultural productions, e.g.: movies, music, etc. I must stress creative; you know as well as I do that non-textual sources are considered to be of lower literary value, so you must prove its literariness, or at least pick something relevant and worth researching
- There are marks for proper citation, so allocate a few hours to make sure that your referencing is standardised and accurate
- And if in doubt about anything, ASK
Question 01: Discuss the definition of mimesis and how this notion has been applied by literary scholars in different contexts and times.

a. Discuss the definition of mimesis...
   - This should be brief, and should contain a thesis statement of the interpretation that you think best defines mimesis
   - This is because there are so many possible interpretations, and not all can be included in your assignment
   - For instance, one definition of mimesis is the imitation of reality. But as we have seen, the terms ‘imitation’ (passive copying/creative re-imagination) and ‘reality’ (the world as it is/the world as we see it/the world as it should be) are also open to interpretation
   - The possibilities in this case are endless; so choose one possible interpretation and stick to it.

b. ...[discuss] how this notion has been applied by literary scholars in different contexts and times
   - As stated above, narrow your focus to one set of interpretations, and find critics/scholars who interpret the term in the same way
   - Look for at least two critics/scholars from different contexts and times (different periods of history or different social circumstances); these critics can be either ‘famous’ (a name mentioned in the course) or not
   - ‘Mimesis’ is, of course, an archaic term, so modern critics many not use it, which will complicate your search for references; your best bet is to use other search terms that correspond with your interpretation of mimesis
   - Helpful search terms (note that not all of the terms are directly related to one another): realism, naturalism, imitation, meme (memetics), representation, magic realism, Russian formalism, Marxism, socialism etc.
   - A few interpretations and important names (these are just suggestions; feel free to choose your own)
     - Mimesis as realism—literature (Eric Auerbach, Émile Zola, Henry James)
     - Mimesis as realism—film (Italian Neorealists, French New Wave cinema)
     - Mimesis as Marxist reality (Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels)
     - Mimesis as memetics (Richard Dawkins)
     - Mimesis as representation (postcolonial, feminist theory)
     - Mimesis as artistic representation (Sir Philip Sidney, P. B. Shelley)
Question 02: To what extent do you agree that the spirit of nationalism/patriotism can be instilled through the works of a nation’s literature?

a. To what extent do you agree...
   - In your introduction (and conclusion) you must state whether you agree with the statement or not; and then proceed to justify your stand by showing just how much you agree/disagree

b. ...the spirit of nationalism/patriotism can be instilled through the works of a nation’s literature
   - The nation you choose can be any country, or even a number of countries (since you are only writing a 1000 words, it is advisable to limit your discussion to 1-3 countries)
   - Nationalism is usually instilled by a common cultural identity; and of course, one type of cultural production is literature
   - A common cultural identity can be fostered through a wide variety of means:
     - After the riots of 1969, the Malaysian government decided to foster unity through a common language, Malay; works in Malay (Keris Mas, A. Samad Said, the films of P. Ramlee) or works that display racial harmony (the cartoons of Lat) or address racial issues (Lloyd Fernando) can be said to foster a common cultural identity
     - When one or a number of authors from the same country or cultural descent are internationally recognised in a given time period (e.g.: Satyajit Ray, Ravi Shankar, Rabindranath Tagore—Bangladesh; Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, V. S. Naipaul, Arundhati Roy—India/Indian origin; Naguib Mahfouz—Egypt; Jose Saramago—Portugal, etc.) it gives people who share the same nationality or cultural heritage a new sense of cultural legitimacy
     - Even depictions which are not wholly favourable can create this effect: such as with the film City of God and Brazil, Slumdog Millionaire and India
     - Language too can be a unifying factor: Muhammad Hj. Salleh deciding to only write in Malay, Dante Alighieri deciding to write in Italian instead of Latin
     - In short, any work that makes it readers think “I am Malaysian/American/Mexican” etc. can create or give new impetus to the spirit of nationalism
     - So, pick a country, research its most notable authors and their works, and examine how or what aspects of their works (or the impressions of their works) made a group of people feel more nationalistic/patriotic than they did before
     - Now if you don’t agree with the statement, you can use the same examples: try to argue that most writers are more commonly associated with an age/movement/general quality than they are with their countries of origin (is J. M. Coetzee a good writer or a good South African writer? Do the people of South Africa care about the awards he has received any more than the global community does? Does the Trinidadian V. S. Naipaul foster ‘Indianness’ or alienate Indians? Does he seem more Indian than he does Trinidadian? When people read Lloyd Fernando do they feel more or less Malaysian?)
Question 03: With reference to TWO Romantic era critics, discuss the influence of Longinus upon the prevalent attitude towards literature at the time

a. With reference to TWO Romantic era critics...

- Pretty straightforward; just pick two Romantic poets/critics, and discuss what elements of Longinus’ On the Sublime influenced Romanticism
- If you want to be different (which is always good), you can also use the German Romantics (which isn’t covered in class) like Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, Friedrich Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel, August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, etc. If you do plan to use them, let me know and I can scan some pages from another lit theory book summarising their views

b. ...discuss the influence of Longinus upon the prevalent attitude towards literature at the time

- Major concepts of Longinus to think about: sublime, transport, rapture
- Implicit concepts of Longinus to think about: abandonment of rules, elevated poetic language, epic scale of a work, individual genius, ‘grace beyond the reach of art’, etc.
- Examine this excerpt from On the Sublime:

Come, now, let us take some writer who is really immaculate and beyond reproach. Is it not worthwhile, on this very point, to raise the general question whether we ought to give the preference in poems and prose writings to grandeur with some attendant faults or to success which is moderate but altogether sound and free from error? Aye, and further, whether a greater number of excellences, or excellences higher in quality, would in literature rightly bear away the palm?...For my part, I am well aware that lofty genius is far removed from flawlessness; for invariable accuracy incurs the risk of pettiness, and in the sublime, as in great fortunes, there must be something which is overlooked. It may be necessarily the case that low and average natures remain as a rule free from failing and in greater safety because they never run a risk or seek to scale the heights, while great endowments prove insecure because of their very greatness. In the second place, I am not ignorant that it naturally happens that the worse side of human character is always the more easily recognized, and that the memory of errors remains indelible, while that of excellence quickly dies away. I have myself noted not a few errors on the part of Homer and other writers of the greatest distinction, and the slips they have made afford me anything but pleasure. Still I do not term them wilful errors, but rather oversights of a random and casual kind, due to neglect and introduced with all the heedlessness of genius. Consequently I do not waver in my view that excellences higher in quality, even if not sustained throughout, should always on a comparison be voted the first place, because of their sheer elevation of spirit, if for no other reason.
Question 04: Write a hypothesis on the role of religion in the evolution of literature. Discuss two historical or social contexts to support your hypothesis.

a. Write a hypothesis on the role of religion in the evolution of literature...
   - Again, pretty straightforward. Choose a religion, and then pick two contexts in which that religion was at its most influential on the local culture
   - Religion doesn’t have to affect literature directly: writers don’t necessarily have to be very religious men themselves, or write about religious themes
   - The usual way in which religion penetrates literature is through the general cultural outlook/worldview prevalent during a given social milieu
   - You have two ways of approaching this subject: you can go the philosophical route or the social one
   - In the philosophical route, you can examine the way in which the morality of a certain religion is present in literature of a given period (e.g.: the exaltation of kindness, altruism, love as the chief Christian virtues over the chief Roman virtues of honour, valour, ‘might makes right’)
   - In the social route, you can examine how religion working as a governing arm of the state impacts upon the kind of literature produced (e.g.: works that conform to religious norms, or are about religion are considered moral; and more imaginative works are considered immoral, and are possibly banned)

b. Discuss two historical or social contexts to support your hypothesis.
   - Religion is so prevalent that almost any work is written as a reaction to a particular religion (either for or against); so you really must pick very specific contexts
   - Some sample contexts (philosophical and social):
     - Victorian morality is very closely tied to the morality of the Church of England; Victorian morality was not only prevalent in the Victorian era, but also beyond. This has had a number of effects on literature. For instance, it was Victorian morality that outlawed homosexuality, which Oscar Wilde was convicted of; although he only spent two years in jail, it killed off his artistic temperament, and can be seen as halting the march of British aestheticism. It was also Victorian morality that deemed James Joyce’s Ulysses immoral and vulgar, which resulted in it being banned.
     - Salman Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses was banned in many Islamic countries; the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran issued a fatwa against him, which resulted in him taking refuge in England for 10 years (full police custody at the taxpayer’s expense)
     - The rise of Christianity during the medieval ages greatly diminished literary activity, since (pagan) Graeco-Roman culture was seen as pagan and immoral; however, Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales and Dante’s The Divine Comedy were produced during this period, the latter having its entire design built upon a marriage of Christian theology and Greek mythology
     - Henry Miller’s Tropic of Cancer was banned in 1960s America that was more influenced by a puritanical strain of Protestantism than it is today, even though the book was published 30 years earlier in France without any public outcry
     - The first translations of ancient Hindu and Buddhist texts to appear in Europe affected the way the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer saw the world, which in turn influenced many other philosophers and writers, and contributed to the general pessimism of the modern age
Question 05: With reference to at least TWO major literary critics, discuss how their respective theories of literature fulfil the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy

a. With reference to at least TWO major literary critics...
- However many literary critics you use, be sure to make the case for both the Apollonian and Dionysian

b. ...discuss how their respective theories of literature fulfil the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy
- First of all, familiarise yourself with the values associated with both sides, e.g.: contemplation/poetic frenzy, creation/destruction, sky/earth, civility/primal nature, reason/passion
- Then look for those values in their literary theories (if the critics themselves make no specific reference to the dichotomy), e.g.: with regard to the creative process, William Wordsworth encourages a collected and calm contemplation of emotions [Apollonian], whereas Plato suggests, albeit in a derogatory fashion, that poetic inspiration is driven by the passions [Dionysian]
- Sometimes literary critics use different terms for the same essential dichotomy, such as Sigmund Freud’s eros/thanatos (sex/death drives), or Matthew Arnold’s Hellenic/Hebraic (Greco-Roman/Judeo-Christian)
- If you want to go back to the original source, then read Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, where he first puts forward this notion; other works of Nietzsche contain this dichotomy in some form, even if not explicitly named; your best bet would be to read any ‘introduction to Western philosophy’ book for a summary of Nietzsche’s views
- The most interesting bit I’ve read about this dichotomy is the introduction of Camille Paglia’s *Sexual Personae*—in it, she extends the dichotomy to cover sexuality and religion: for example Man is essentially Apollonian (reason), and Woman Dionysian (passion); Judeo-Christian (‘sky’) religions which have a singular male god-figure, whereas Eastern and primitive (‘earth’) religions have numerous goddesses. This book may be hard to locate in the library, however
- Something to bear in mind is that the terms Apollonian/Dionysian are in a binary relationship—they are adjectives that do not embody meaning by themselves, but only in relation to each other. For example, in the binary opposition tall/short, the individual terms tall and short do not by themselves mean anything. ‘Tall’ is not an absolute measure. Someone or something can only be tall when it is ‘not short’ or when it is ‘less short than something’ and something can only be short when it is ‘not tall’. Similarly, nothing is Apollonian by itself, but only in contrast to something Dionysian or ‘less Apollonian’. So, to use the above example, Wordsworth’s contemplative creative process does not embody the Apollonian in itself, but is Apollonian in relation to Plato’s Dionysian divine inspiration, and vice versa. In other words, the process of poetic creation according to Wordsworth is more Apollonian than it is in Plato’s interpretation. What I’m trying to illustrate here is that any given value, is not absolutely Apollonian/Dionysian, but Apollonian/Dionysian in relation to (or in opposition to) another value
- As I’ve mentioned before, it is possible to look at the different eras in the history of lit theory as a sort of pendulum swinging back and forth between the Apollonian/Dionysian. Consider this notion when you are picking your critics
- The Roman name of Dionysus is Bacchus, and his followers are called bacchanalia; other helpful search terms include bacchae and maenad