

STUDY GUIDES

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The survey “*Brains & Beauty in the Humanities*” on the following pages was prepared for the 2002 Chicago Humanities Festival: *Brains & Beauty*.

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Brains & Beauty in the Humanities

The humanities include diverse branches of learning, among them language and literature, philosophy, and art theory and criticism. The excerpts on the following pages represent a sketch of how writers, philosophers, and artists have thought about *Brains & Beauty* over the millennia. It is particularly striking how Beauty has been and remains a subject of fascination in philosophy and aesthetics. Though this primer barely begins to plumb the history of *Brains & Beauty*, it does remind us that the issues raised by this year's Festival are timeless and essential.

The texts excerpted here are intended to provide you a historical and conceptual framework on which to build your own curricula. Each text is preceded by a short introduction to clarify its context and relevance.

PLATO (427?-347? B.C.)

In the West, notions of beauty often draw from or respond to the writings of Plato, in particular to his theory of forms. Unfortunately, the theory is never presented in a systematic way in his writings; it is therefore necessary to glean pieces from the Platonic dialogues.

It may be easiest to approach the subject by thinking about geometry. Draw a line. It can only be a representation of a mathematical object with length but no width. Draw a circle. However perfectly drawn, it is an imperfect representation of a geometrical concept. Yet we of course immediately identify and grasp such sketches. Now think of common objects such as beds and tables: there are many examples, each unique, and yet a bed is immediately recognizable as a bed, a table as a table.

Plato's dialogues suggest that there are ideal forms that the concrete forms we encounter and create merely approximate. A physical chair is an approximation of the ideal form of a chair, just as a drawn line is an approximation of the ideal form of a line. A form is always what it is, whereas a particular thing is inherently changeable. For Plato, the forms are absolutely real and eternal, whereas the physical world lacks reality. The forms are often capitalized, in order to distinguish the idea from the instance.

These notions can be applied to more abstract concepts such as Beauty. A thing is beautiful because it participates in the idea of Beauty. A person or thing can possess beauty, much the way a line can possess linearity. Plato makes a distinction between beauty itself (also referred to as ideal beauty or absolute beauty) and particular beauty.

In the excerpt below, Socrates is recounting what a woman, Diotima of Mantinea, told him about beauty. The passage asserts that beautiful things point to beauty itself.

From *Symposium*

When a man has gone deep enough in the lore of love, and turned his attention to things of beauty in their due order, and has at last become a master in that school, there shall dawn upon his eyes a vision of surpassing beauty, for whose sake he endured all his former toils; a beauty which, in this first place, is eternal, without beginning and without end, unbegotten and without decay; and secondly, is not beautiful in one way and ugly in another, nor beautiful at one time or place or from one point of view and then again ugly, as if its beauty depended upon the beholders.

Nor again will that beauty to the eyes take on the likeness of a face or hands

or any other fleshly part, nor of speech or learning, nor will it have its being in any living thing, or in earth or in the heavens or in any other creature, but will have its simple and essential being ever one within itself. And of its other beautiful things in such wise partake that, while they all are born and then again decay, it neither wanes nor waxes nor suffers any change.

So when any one climbs the ladder of true love in this world till he catch a glimpse of that other beauty, he has almost attained his goal. And this is the true discipline of loving or being loved: that a man begin with the beauties of this world and use them as stepping-stones for an unceasing journey to that other beauty,

going from one to two and from two to all,
and from beautiful creatures to beautiful
lives, and from beautiful lives to beautiful
truths, and from beautiful truths attaining

finally to nothing less than the true
knowledge of Beauty itself, and so know at
last what Beauty is.

Source: Aristotle, *Symposium*, quoted in *Philosophies of Beauty*,
ed. E.F. Carritt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 16-17.

YOSHIDA KENKŌ (ca. 1283 - 1352)

Whereas the Western tradition has valued qualities such as proportion and smoothness, other cultural traditions may place value on other ideas, and have completely different notions of beauty. Donald Keene, an eminent scholar of Japanese literature, has identified four qualities that are particularly relevant to “the Japanese sense of beauty”: suggestion, irregularity, simplicity, and perishability. In a well known essay, “Japanese Aesthetics,” Keene selects passages from Kenkō’s Tsurezuregusa or Essays in Idleness to illustrate these ideas. Selected examples follow. Kenkō, born to a family of Shinto priests, eventually became a Buddhist; the emphasis on impermanence in his writings echoes Buddhist belief.

From *Essays in Idleness* (1330-1333)

SUGGESTION

Are we to look at cherry blossoms only in full bloom, the moon only when it is cloudless? To long for the moon while looking on the rain, to lower the blinds and be unaware of the passing of the spring—these are even more deeply moving. Branches about to blossom or gardens strewn with faded flowers are worthier of our admiration. . . . People commonly regret that the cherry blossoms scatter or that the moon sinks in the sky, and this is natural; but only an exceptionally insensitive man would say “This branch and that branch have lost their blossoms. There is nothing worth seeing now.”

In all things, it is the beginnings and ends that are interesting. Does the love between men and women refer only to moments when they are in each other’s arms? The man who grieves over a love affair broken off before it was fulfilled, who bewails empty vows, who spends long autumn nights alone, who lets his thoughts wander to distant skies, who yearns for the past in a dilapidated house—such a man truly knows what love means.

The moon that appears close to dawn after we have long waited for it moves us more profoundly than the full moon shining cloudless over a thousand leagues. And how incomparably lovely is

the moon, almost greenish in its light, when seen through the tops of the cedars deep in the mountains, or when it hides for a moment behind clustering clouds during a sudden shower! The sparkle on hickory or white-oak leaves seemingly wet with moonlight strikes one to the heart. . . .

And are we to look at the moon and the cherry blossoms with our eyes alone? How much more evocative and pleasing it is to think about the spring without stirring from the house, to dream of the moonlight though we remain in our room!

IRREGULARITY

In everything, no matter that it may be, uniformity is undesirable. Leaving something incomplete makes it interesting, and gives one the feeling that there is room for growth. Someone once told me, “Even when building the imperial palace, they always leave one place unfinished.”

People often say that a set of books looks ugly if all volumes are not in the same format, but I was impressed to hear the Abbot Kōyū say, “It is typical of the unintelligent man to insist on assembling complete sets of everything. Imperfect sets are better.”

SIMPLICITY

A house, I know, is but a temporary abode, but how delightful it is to find one that has harmonious proportions and a pleasant atmosphere. One feels somehow that even moonlight, when it shines into the quiet domicile of a person of taste, is more affecting than elsewhere. A house, though it may not be in the current fashion or elaborately decorated, will appeal to us by its unassuming beauty—a grove of trees with an indefinably ancient look; a garden where plants, growing of their own accord, have a special charm; a verandah and an open-work wooden fence of interesting construction; and a few personal effects left lying about, giving the place an air of having been lived in. A house which multitudes of workmen have polished with every care, where strange and rare Chinese and Japanese furnishings are displayed,

and even the bushes and trees of the garden have been trained unnaturally, is ugly to look at and most depressing. How could anyone live for long in such a place?

PERISHABILITY

Somebody once remarked that thin silk was not satisfactory as a scroll wrapping because it was so easily torn. Ton'a replied, "it is only after the silk wrapper has frayed at top and bottom, and the mother-of-pearl has fallen from the roller that a scroll looks beautiful" This opinion demonstrated the excellent taste of the man.

If man were never to fade away like the dews of Adashino, never to vanish like the smoke over Toribeyama, but lingered on forever in this world, how things would lose their power to move us! The most precious thing in life is its uncertainty.

Source: Donald Keene, "Japanese Aesthetics," chapter in *The Pleasures of Japanese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 1-22 passim.

PETRARCH (FRANCESCO PETRARCA) (1304-1374)

Petrarch didn't invent the sonnet—that distinction goes to an earlier Italian, Giacomo Da Lentini (1210-1240). But Petrarch's 317 poems in praise of his beloved Laura are a pinnacle of the form. It's not clear whether Laura was real or fictitious, but either way, his sonnets established an enduring ideal of physical beauty.

Poem XC

Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi
Che 'n mille dolci nodi gli avolgea,
e 'l vago lume oltra misura ardea
di quei begli occhi, ch' or ne son sì scarsi; 4

e 'l viso di pietosi color farsi
(non so se vero o falso) mi pareo:
i' che l'esca amorosa al petto avea,
qual meraviglia se di subito arsi? 8

Non era l'andar suo cosa mortale
ma d'angelica forma, et le parole
sonovan altro che pur voce umana: 11

uno spirto celeste, un vivo sole
fu quel ch' i' vidi, et se non fosse or tale,
piaga per allentar darco non sana. 14

Prose translation by Robert M. Durling.

Her golden hair was loosed to the breeze,
which turned it in a thousand sweet knots,
and the lovely light burned without measure in
her eyes, which are now so stingy of it;

and it seemed to me (I know not whether truly
or falsely) her face took on the color of pity: I,
who had the tinder of love in my breast, what
wonder is it if I suddenly caught fire?

Her walk was not that of a mortal being but of
some angelic form, and her words sounded
different from a merely human voice:

a celestial spirit, a living sun was what I saw,
and if she were not such now, a wound is not
healed by the loosening of the bow.

Source: Petrarch, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, trans. and ed. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 192-3.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616)

In the English-speaking world, we are more familiar with Shakespeare's sonnets than Petrarch's. Shakespeare modified the structure of the Italian sonnet somewhat: whereas Petrarchian sonnets typically have the rhyme scheme abbaabba cdecde, Shakespeare's mostly follow the scheme abab cdcd efef gg. The lavish adulation in Sonnet XVIII is reminiscent of sonnets by Petrarch; Sonnet CXXX, however, offers a conspicuously different comment.

Sonnet XVIII

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, 5
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st; 10
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Sonnet CXXX

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white, 5
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound. 10
I grant I never saw a goddess go:
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

The University of Illinois at Chicago will host a Classics in Context colloquium on Shakespeare's sonnets on September 28, 2002.

ROBERT BURTON (1577-1640)

Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy is surely one of the strangest books ever written. The massive, insanely complicated and digressive volume seeks out, as the title suggests, the diverse causes of melancholy—among those cited are bad nursing in infancy, heredity, climate, bad air, idleness, diet, and the sight of beauty. The treatise has been described as "one of the maddest and most paranoid, obsessively organized, etceterative assaults on the feeble human powers of concentration ever attempted."

Burton perched curiously between medieval and modern thought. Like many thinkers before him, he supposed that the body was regulated by the four humours, and that an imbalance of humours would affect the mind. "As they are purer or impurer," he wrote, "so is the mind, and equally suffers, as a lute out of tune; if one string or one organ be distempered, all the rest miscarry" (375). Though the volume is antiquated by modern standards, Burton's material, scientific outlook anticipated the Enlightenment.

From *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

A humour is a liquid or fluent part of the body, comprehended in it, for the preservation of it; and is either innate or born with us, or adventitious and acquisite. The radical or innate is daily supplied by nourishment, which some call cambium, and make those secondary humours of ros and gluten to maintain it: or acquisite, to maintain these four primary humours, coming and proceeding from the first concoction of the liber, by which means chylus is excluded. Some divide them into profitable and excrementitious. But Crato, out of Hippocrates, will have all four to be juice, and not excrements, without which no living creature can be sustained: which four, though they be comprehended in the mass of blood, yet they have their several affections, by which they are distinguished from one another, and from those adventitious, peccant, or diseased humours, as Melancthon calls them.

Blood is a hot, sweet, temperate, red humour, prepared in the meserais veins, and made of the most temperate parts of the chylus in the liver, whose office is to nourish the whole body, to give it strength and colour, being dispersed by the veins through every part of it. And from it

spirits are first begotten in the heart, which afterwards by the arteries are communicated to the other parts.

Pituita, or phlegm, is a cold and moist humour, begotten of the colder part of the chylus (or white juice coming out of the meat digested in the stomach), in the liver; his office is to nourish and moisten the members of the body which, as the tongue, are moved, that they be not over-dry.

Choler is hot and dry, bitter, begotten of the hotter parts of the chylus, and gathered to the gall: it helps the natural heat and senses, and serves to the expelling of excrements.

Melancholy, cold and dry, thick, black, and sour, begotten of the more feculent part of nourishment, and purged from the spleen, is a bridle to the other two hot humours, blood and choler, preserving them in the blood, and nourishing the bones. These four humours have some analogy with the four elements, and to the four ages in man.

Spirit is a most subtle vapour, which is expressed from the blood and the instrument of the soul, to perform all his actions; a common tie or medium between

the body and the soul, as some will have it; or as Paracelsus, a fourth soul of itself. Melancthon holds the fountain of these spirits to be the heart, begotten there; and afterward conveyed to the brain, they take another nature to them. Of these spirits there be three kinds, according to the three principal parts, brain, heart, liver; natural, vital, animal. The natural are begotten in the liver, and thence dispersed through the

veins, to perform those natural actions. The vital spirits are made in the heart of the natural, which by the arteries are transported to all the other parts: if the spirits cease, then life ceaseth, as in a syncope or swooning. The animal spirits, formed of the vital, brought up to the brain, and diffused by the nerves to the subordinate members, give sense and motion to them all.

Source: Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Holbrook Jackson (New York: New York Review Books, 2001), 147-8.

RENÉ DESCARTES (1596-1650)

The French philosopher Descartes made one of the most famous assertions of all time: “I think, therefore I am.” His logic is commonsensical but dizzying: here, the mind is both the means and the subject of examination. The assertion he makes is required but the fact that he is making an assertion. This first-person approach to the brain points the way toward modern psychology.

From *Discourse on Method*

I had realized for a long time that it is sometimes necessary, in our conduct, to act on the basis of opinions that are known to be uncertain as if they were indubitable. . . . But since, at that time, I wanted to focus exclusively on the search for truth, I thought it was necessary to do the exact opposite, and to reject as absolutely false everything in which I could imagine the slightest doubt and to see, as a result, if anything remained among my beliefs that was completely indubitable. Thus, because our senses sometimes deceive us, I decided to assume that nothing was the way the senses made us imagine it. And since there are some people who make mistakes in reasoning and commit logical fallacies, even in the simplest geometrical proofs, and since I thought that I was as subject to mistakes as anyone else, I rejected as false all the arguments that I had previously accepted as demonstrations. Finally, since I thought what we could have all the same thoughts, while asleep, as we have while we are awake, although none of them is true at that time, I decided to pretend that nothing that ever entered my mind was any more true than the illusions of my dreams. But I noticed, immediately afterwards, that while I thus wished to think that everything was

false, it was necessarily the case that I, who was thinking this, was something. When I noticed that this truth “I think, therefore I am” was so firm and certain that all the most extravagant assumptions of the skeptics were unable to shake it, I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy for which I was searching.

Then, when I was examining what I was, I realized that I could pretend that I had no body, and that there was no world nor any place in which I was present, but I could not pretend in the same way that I did not exist. On the contrary, from the very fact that I was thinking of doubting the truth of other things, it followed very evidently and very certainly that I existed; whereas if I merely ceased to think, even if all the rest of what I had ever imagined were true, I would have no reason to believe that I existed. I knew from this that I was a substance, the whole essence or nature of which was to think and which, in order to exist, has no need of any place and does not depend on anything material. Thus this self—that is, the soul by which I am what I am—is completely distinct from the body and is even easier to know than it, and even if the body did not exist the soul would still be everything that it is.

Source: René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Desmond M. Clarke (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 24-25.

WILLIAM HOGARTH (1697-1764)

The great English satirical artist William Hogarth wrote just one book, The Analysis of Beauty, a theoretical and practical treatise on art. In his chapter on lines, he places particular aesthetic value on curved lines.

From *The Analysis of Beauty*

It is to be observed, that straight lines vary only in length, and therefore are least ornamental.

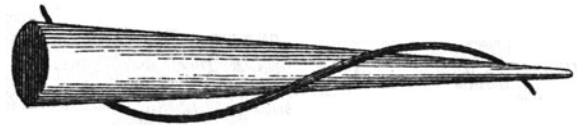
That curved lines as they can be varied in their degrees of curvature as well as in their lengths, begin on that account to be ornamental.

That straight and curv'd lines join'd, being a compound line, vary more than curves alone, and so become somewhat more ornamental.

That the waving line, or line of beauty, varying still more, being composed of two curves contrasted, becomes still more ornamental and pleasing, insomuch that the hand takes a lively movement in making it with pen or pencil.

And that the serpentine line, by its waving and winding at the same time different ways, leads the eye in a pleasing manner along the continuity of its variety, if

I may be allowed the expression; and which by its twisting so many different ways, may be said to inclose (tho' but a single line) varied contents; and therefore all its variety cannot be express'd on paper by one continued line, without the assistance of the imagination, or the help of a figure;



where that sort of proportion'd, winding line, which will hereafter be call'd the precise serpentine line, or *line of grace*, is represented by a fine wire, properly twisted round the elegant and varied figure of a cone.

Source: William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (The Silver Lotus Shop: Pittsfield, MA, 1909), 72-75.

EDMUND BURKE (1729-1797)

The political writings of British statesman Edmund Burke constitute the bedrock of conservative political thought. Burke's contribution to aesthetic theory is similarly significant—though almost certainly overshadowed by his career as a statesman.

From Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful

On the whole, the qualities of beauty, as they are merely sensible qualities, are the following: First, to be comparatively small. Secondly, to be smooth. Thirdly, to have a variety in the direction of the parts; but, fourthly, to have those parts not angular, but melted as it were into each other. Fifthly, to be of a delicate frame, without any remarkable appearance of

strength. Sixthly, to have its colours clear and bright, but not very strong and glaring. Seventhly, or if it should have any glaring colour, to have it diversified with others. These are, I believe, the properties on which beauty depends; properties that operate by nature, and are less liable to be altered by caprice, or confounded by a diversity of tastes, than any other.

Source: Edmund Burke, *"A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful" and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. David Womersley (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1998), 151.

IMMANUEL KANT (1724-1804)

One of the most crucial, most cited, and most impenetrable texts on aesthetics is Immanuel Kant's Critique of Judgment (1790, second edition 1793). The passages that follow were carefully excerpted to express two important ideas: first, that aesthetic judgment must be devoid of interest; second, that taste is universal. The latter concept is particularly noteworthy of late. Though the late twentieth century discounted notions of universal beauty ("it's all relative"), there is suddenly a resurgence of interest in this idea.

From *Critique of Judgment*

In saying that it is *beautiful* and in showing that I have taste, I am concerned, not with that in which I depend on the existence of the object, but with that which I make out of this representation in myself. Everyone must admit that a judgment about beauty in which the least interest mingles, is very partial and is not a pure judgment of taste. We must not be in the least prejudiced in favor of the existence of things, but be quite indifferent in this respect, in order to play the judge in things of taste (39).

Taste is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called *beautiful* (45).

It would. . . be laughable if a man who imagined anything to his own taste thought to justify himself by saying: "This object (the house we see, the coat that person wears, the concert we hear, the poem submitted to our judgment) is

beautiful *for me*." For he must not call it *beautiful* if it merely pleases him. Many things may have for him charm and pleasantness—no one troubles himself about that—but if he gives out anything as beautiful, he supposes in others the same satisfaction; he judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Hence he says "the thing is *beautiful*"; and he does not count on the agreement of others with this his judgment of satisfaction, because he has found this agreement several times before, but he *demand*s it of them. He blames them if they judge otherwise and he denies them taste, which he nevertheless requires from them. Here, then, we cannot say that each man has his own particular taste. For this would be as much as to say that there is no taste whatever, i.e. no aesthetical judgment which can make a rightful claim upon everyone's assent (47).

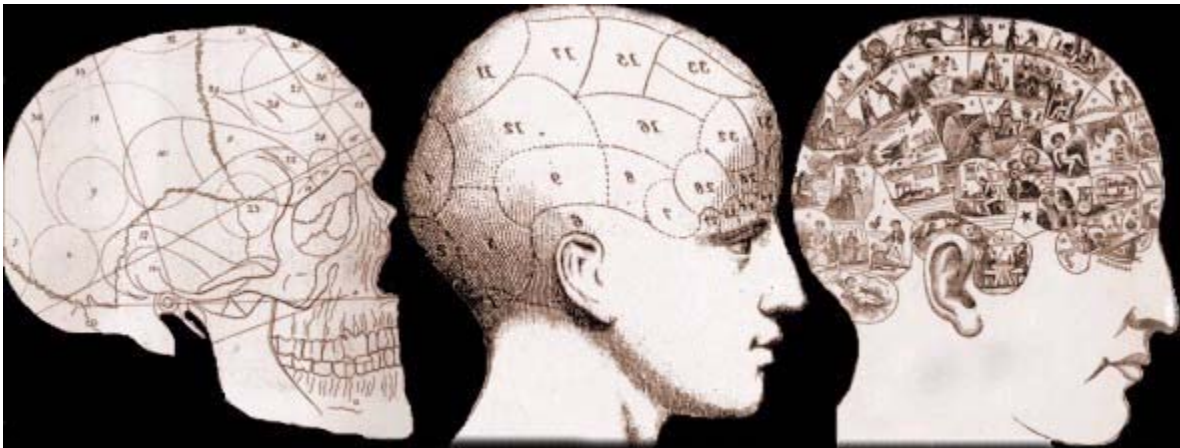
Source: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), 39, 45, 47.

FRANZ JOSEPH GALL (1758-1828)

Franz Joseph Gall was the founder of the dubious science of phrenology. The basic notion of phrenology is that it is possible to analyze a person's character by examining the shape of that person's skull. Supposedly, the brain is made up of "organs," each of which controls a particular trait. The more developed the trait, the larger the organ, the larger the bump on the skull. Thus a bump on your head might identify you as a genius or a criminal.

In the nineteenth century, phrenology found enormous popularity in the United States, as well as a tremendous derision. Advocates had little interest in evidence that contradicted the theory. Critics eventually derided phrenology into obscurity.

The practice of measuring heads in order to establish a person's character has been soundly discredited, but many of the premises behind the practice have been accepted. Today, leading experts such as Antonio Damasio and Howard Gardner acknowledge that some aspects of Gall's proposition were remarkably prescient. Notably, it is now widely accepted that various functions are localized within the brain.



This image and a history of phrenology can be found at:

<http://pages.britishlibrary.net/phrenology/>

RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803-1882)

A preacher, philosopher, and poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson was one of the most imposing American thinkers of the nineteenth century. In Nature (1836), his first major essay to be published, Emerson writes of the virtues of a life attuned to the natural world. Emerson closely aligns the idea of beauty with nature—a correspondence typical of American thought in the nineteenth century.

From third chapter of *Nature*, “Beauty”

Anobler want of man is served by nature, namely, the love of Beauty.

The ancient Greeks called the world κόσμος [*kosmos*], beauty. Such is the constitution of all things, or such the plastic power of the human eye, that the primary forms, as the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal, give us a delight *in and for themselves*; a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion, and grouping. This seems partly owing to the eye itself. The eye is the best of artists. By the mutual action of its structure and of the laws of light, perspective is produced, which integrates every mass of objects, of what character soever, into a well colored and shaded globe, so that where the particular objects are mean and unaffecting, the landscape which they compose, is round and symmetrical. And as the eye is the best composer, so light is the first of painters. There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful. And the stimulus it affords to the sense, and a sort of infinitude which it hath, like space and time, make all matter gay. Even the corpse has its own beauty. But besides this general grace diffused over nature, almost all the individual forms are agreeable to the eye, as is proved by our endless imitations of some of them, as the acorn, the grape, the pine-cone, the wheat-ear, the egg, the wings and forms of most birds, the lion's claw, the serpent, the butterfly, sea-shells, flames, clouds, buds, leaves, and the forms of many trees, as the palm. . . .

[T]he simple perception of natural forms is a delight. The influence of the forms and actions in nature, is so needful to man, that, in its lowest functions, it seems to lie on the confines of commodity and beauty. To the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone. The tradesman, the attorney comes out of the din and craft of the street, and sees the sky and the woods, and is a man again. In their eternal calm, he finds himself. The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired, so long as we can see far enough.

But in other hours, Nature satisfies by its loveliness, and without any mixture of corporeal benefit. I see the spectacle of morning from the hill-top over against my house, from day-break to sun-rise, with emotions which an angel might share. The long slender bars of cloud float like fishes in the sea of crimson light. From the earth, as a shore, I look out into that silent sea. I seem to partake its rapid transformations: the active enchantment reaches my dust, and I dilate and conspire with the morning wind. How does Nature deify us with a few and cheap elements! Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous. . . .

To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty, and in the same field, it beholds, every hour, a picture which was never seen before, and which shall never be seen again. The heavens change every moment, and reflect their

glory or gloom on the plains beneath. The state of the crop in the surrounding farms alters the expression of the earth from week to week. The succession of native plants in the pastures and roadsides, which makes the silent clock by which time tells the summer hours, will make even the divisions of the day sensible to a keen observer. The tribes of birds and insects, like the plants punctual to their time, follow each other, and the year has room for all. By water-courses, the variety is greater. In July, the blue pontederia or pickerel-weed blooms in large beds in the shallow parts of our pleasant river, and swarms with yellow butterflies in continual motion. Art cannot rival this pomp of purple and gold. Indeed the river is a perpetual gala, and boasts each month a new ornament.

But this beauty of Nature which is seen and felt as beauty, is the least part.

The shows of day, the dewy morning, the rainbow, mountains, orchards in blossom, stars, moonlight, shadows in still water, and the like, if too eagerly hunted, become shows merely, and mock us with their unreality. Go out of the house to see the moon, and 't is mere tinsel; it will not please as when its light shines upon your necessary journey. The beauty that shimmers in the yellow afternoons of October, who ever could clutch it? Go forth to find it, and it is gone: 't is only a mirage as you look from the windows of diligence. . . .

All men are in some degree impressed by the face of the world; some men even to delight. This love of beauty is Taste. Others have the same love in such excess, that, not content with admiring, they seek to embody it in new forms. The creation of beauty is Art.

Source: *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1, *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 12-16.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS (1844–89)

*Hopkins challenges the Platonic view of beauty in his famous poem “Pied Beauty.”
Uninterested in an ideal form, Hopkins revels instead in instance and diversity.*

Pied Beauty

GLORY be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough; 5
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: 10
Praise him.

SIGMUND FREUD (1856-1939)

Rarely has a scientist drawn so heavily on the humanities. Freud's writings are dotted with literary references; his theories are informed by a fascination with mythology. The converse is true as well: rarely has a scientist had such profound influence on the humanities. In Freud's wake, an awareness of psychological processes has permeated both the creation and interpretation of literature.

Peter Gay, one of Freud's most thoughtful commentators, wrote that "for good or ill, Sigmund Freud, more than any other explorer of the psyche, has shaped the mind of the 20th century. The very fierceness and persistence of his detractors are a wry tribute to the staying power of Freud's ideas." Over the course of his career, Freud created a terminology of the mind and its processes—id, ego, superego, repression, sublimation, transference—still widely in use today.

The concept of the unconscious is so commonplace today that it is startling to think Freud once had to convince the world of its existence.

From "The Unconscious"

We have learnt from psycho-analysis that the essence of the process of repression lies, not in putting an end to, in annihilating, the idea which represents an instinct, but in preventing it from becoming conscious. When this happens, we say of the idea that it is in a state of being "unconscious," and we can produce good evidence to show that even when it is unconscious it can produce effects, even including some which finally reach consciousness. Everything that is repressed must remain unconscious; but let us state at the very outset that the repressed does not cover everything that is unconscious. The unconscious has the wider compass: the repressed is a part of the unconscious.

How are we to arrive at a knowledge of the unconscious? It is of course only as something conscious that we know it, after

it has undergone transformation or translation into something conscious. Psycho-analytic work shows us every day that translation of this kind is possible. In order that this should come about, the person under analysis must overcome certain resistances—the same resistances as those which, earlier, made the material concerned into something repressed by rejecting it from the conscious. . . .

[A]t any given moment consciousness includes only a small content, so that the greater part of what we call conscious knowledge must in any case be for very considerable periods of time in a state of latency, that is to say, of being psychically unconscious. When all our latent memories are taken into consideration it becomes totally incomprehensible how the existence of the unconscious can be denied.

Source: Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader*, edited by Peter Gay (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 573-4. The quotation by Peter Gay can be found in *Time*, (29 March 1999): 66.

VIRGINIA WOOLF (1882-1941)

Freud's influence can be felt in many realms, among them literature. The novelist Virginia Woolf was perhaps the most celebrated practitioner of stream-of-consciousness, a literary technique that mimics the shifting thoughts and feelings of the mind.

From *A Room of One's Own*

The mind is certainly a very mysterious organ, I reflected, . . . about which nothing whatever is known, though we depend upon it so completely. Why do I feel that there are severances and oppositions in the mind, as there are strains from obvious causes on the body? What does one mean by "the unity of the mind," I pondered, for clearly the mind has so great a power of concentrating at any point at any moment that it seems to have no single state of being. It can separate itself from the people in the street, for example, and think of itself as apart from them, at an upper window looking down on them. Or it can think with other people spontaneously, as, for instance, in a crowd waiting to hear some pieces of news read aloud. It can think back through its fathers or through its mothers, as I have said that

a woman writing thinks back through her mothers. Again if one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall, when from being the natural inheritor of that civilization, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical. Clearly the mind is always altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives. But some of these states of mind seem, even if adopted spontaneously, to be less comfortable than others. In order to keep oneself continuing in them one is unconsciously holding something back, and gradually the repression becomes an effort. But there may be some state of mind in which one could continue without effort because nothing is required to be held back.

Source: Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1929), 97.

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY (1892-1950)

In this famous poem, Edna St. Vincent Millay, like Petrarch and Shakespeare before her, uses the sonnet form to comment on beauty.

Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!
Give me back my book and take my kiss instead.
Was it my enemy or my friend I heard,
“What a big book for such a little head!”
Come, I will show you now my newest hat, 5
And you may watch me purse my mouth and prink!
Oh, I shall love you still, and all of that.
I never again shall tell you what I think.
I shall be sweet and crafty, soft and sly;
You will not catch me reading any more: 10
I shall be called a wife to pattern by;
And some day when you knock and push the door,
Some sane day, not too bright and not too stormy,
I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me.

Nancy Milford, author of *Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay* and editor of a new edition of Millay’s poetry, will participate in the 2002 Chicago Humanities Festival.

E.Y. HARBURG (1896-1981)

If you try to quote from The Wizard of Oz, you may come up with a line from the 1939 MGM musical version. Few of the words in the film are actually L. Frank Baum's—the lyrics to "If I Only Had a Brain" are by E.Y. Harburg, whose other songs range from "It's Only a Paper Moon" (with Billy Rose) to the Depression-era anthem "Brother Can You Spare a Dime."

Though the song "If I Only Had a Brain" goes on to further speculations, namely "If I only had a heart" and "If I only had the nerve," it's the Scarecrow's lament that is most indelible. The cause of fascination may be the inherent irony—in the song and the book—of a brainless scarecrow engaging in such elaborate cogitation.

From "If I Only Had a Brain"

SCARECROW

VERSE

Said a scarecrow swingin' on a pole
To a blackbird sittin' on a fence,
"Oh! The Lord gave me a soul
But forgot to give me common sense.
If I only had an ounce of common sense."

REFRAIN

I could while away the hours
Conferrin' with the flow'rs,
Consultin' with the rain.
And my head, I'd be scratchin'
While my thoughts were busy hatchin',
If I only had a brain.
I'd unravel ev'ry riddle

For any individle
In trouble or in pain.
With the thoughts I'd be thinkin'
I could be another Lincoln,
If I only had a brain.
Oh, I could tell you why
The ocean's near the shore,
I could think of things I never thunk before
And then I'd sit
And think some more.
I would not be just a nuffin',
My head all full of stuffin',
My heart all full of pain.
And perhaps I'd deserve you
And be even worthy erv you
If I only had a brain.
Only had a brain.

Source: E. Y. Harburg, "If I Only Had a Brain," quoted in *Reading Lyrics*, edited by Robert Gottlieb and Robert Kimball (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000), 262-263.

JEAN DUBUFFET (1901-1985)

In 1951 the French artist Jean Dubuffet gave a lecture entitled "Anticultural Positions" at the Arts Club of Chicago. His speech is now recognized as one of the most influential and significant twentieth-century statements on beauty. Dubuffet was not a native speaker of English, but he wrote notes for his speech in English.

From "Anticultural Positions"

I intend now to speak of the notion of beauty adopted by Occidental culture.

I want to begin by telling you the ways in which my own conception differs from the usual one.

The latter believes that there are beautiful objects and ugly objects, beautiful persons and ugly persons, beautiful places and ugly places, and so forth.

Not I. I believe beauty is nowhere. I consider this notion of beauty as completely false. I refuse absolutely to assent to this idea that there are ugly persons and ugly objects. This idea is for me stifling and revolting.

I think the Greeks were the ones who first made this invention to purport that certain objects are more beautiful than others.

The so-called savage nations don't believe in that at all and they don't understand when you speak to them of beauty.

This is the reason one calls them savage. The Western man gives the name of savage to one who doesn't understand that beautiful things and ugly things exist and who doesn't care for that at all.

What is strange is that, for centuries and centuries, and still now more than ever, the men of the Occident dispute which are the beautiful things and which are the ugly ones. All are certain that beauty exists without doubt but one cannot find two who agree about the objects which are endowed. And from one century to the next it changes. The Occidental culture declares beautiful, in each century, what it declared ugly in the preceding one.

The rationalization of this is that beauty exists but it is hidden from view for many persons. To perceive beauty requires a certain special sense, and most people do not have this sense.

One also believes it is possible to develop this sense, by doing exercises, and even to make it appear in persons who are not gifted with this sense. There are schools for that.

The teacher in these schools states to his pupils that there is without doubt a beauty of things, but he has to add that people dispute which things are thus endowed, and that people have so far never succeeded in establishing it firmly. He invites his pupils to examine the question in their turn and so, from generation to generation, the dispute continues.

This idea of beauty is however one of the things our culture prizes most; it is customary to consider this belief in beauty and the respect for this beauty as the ultimate justification of Western civilization—the principle of civilization itself is involved with this notion of beauty.

I find this idea of beauty a meager and not very ingenious invention, and especially not very encouraging for man. It is distressing to think about people being deprived of beauty because they are too corpulent or too old. This idea that the world we live in is made up of ninety percent ugly things and ugly places, while things and places endowed with beauty are very rare and difficult to meet—I must say, I find this idea not very exciting. It seems

to me that the Occident will not suffer a great loss if it loses this idea.

On the contrary, if he becomes aware that there is no ugly object or ugly person in the world and that beauty does not exist anywhere, but that any object is

able to become for any man a way of fascination and illumination, he will have made a good catch. I think such an idea will enrich life more than the common idea of beauty (157).

Source: Jean Dubuffet, "Anticultural Positions," reprinted in *Arts Magazine* 53 (April 1979): 156-157.

HOWARD GARDNER (1943-)

In recent years, one of the most influential thinkers about the mind has been Howard Gardner, a Harvard psychologist and educator. He is known in educational circles for his theory of multiple intelligences, contesting the notion that there is a single human intelligence that can be assessed by standard psychometric instruments. Since the mid-1980s Gardner has been heavily involved in school reform efforts.

Gardner writes in an introduction to the tenth-anniversary edition of Frames of Mind:

“In my view, if we are to encompass adequately the realm of human cognition, it is necessary to include a far wider and more universal set of competencies than we have ordinarily considered. And it is necessary to remain open to the possibility that many—if not most—of these competencies do not lend themselves to measurement by standard verbal methods, which rely heavily on a blend of logical and linguistic abilities.

“With such considerations in mind, I have formulated a definition of what I call an ‘intelligence.’ An intelligence is the ability to solve problems, or to create products, that are valued within one or more cultural settings—a definition that says nothing about either the sources of these abilities or the proper means of ‘testing’ them.”

Gardner’s outlook departs from the traditional view that there are only two intelligences: verbal and computational. Here is an overview of intelligences Gardner has identified in Frames of Mind and in more recent writings.

Multiple Intelligences

LINGUISTIC INTELLIGENCE allows individuals to communicate and make sense of the world through language. Poets exemplify this intelligence in its mature form. Students who enjoy playing with rhymes, who pun, who always have a story to tell, who quickly acquire other languages—including sign language—all exhibit linguistic intelligence.

MUSICAL INTELLIGENCE allows people to create, communicate, and understand meanings made out of sound. While composers and instrumentalists clearly exhibit this intelligence, so do the students who seem particularly attracted by the birds singing outside the classroom window or who constantly tap out intricate rhythms on the desk with their pencils.

LOGICAL-MATHEMATICAL INTELLIGENCE enables individuals to use and appreciate abstract relations. Scientists, mathematicians, and philosophers all rely on this intelligence. So do the students who “live” baseball statistics or who carefully analyze the components of problems—either personal or school-related—before systematically testing solutions.

SPATIAL INTELLIGENCE makes it possible for people to perceive visual or spatial information, to transform this information, and to recreate visual images from memory. Well-developed spatial capacities are needed for the work of architects, sculptors, and engineers. The students who turn first to the graphs, charts, and pictures in their textbooks, who like to

“web” their ideas before writing a paper, and who fill the blank space around their notes with intricate patterns are also using their spatial intelligence. While usually tied to the visual modality, spatial intelligence can also be exercised to a high level by individuals who are visually impaired.

BODILY-KINESTHETIC INTELLIGENCE allows individuals to use all or part of the body to create products or solve problems. Athletes, surgeons, dancers, choreographers, and crafts people all use bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. The capacity is also evident in students who relish gym class and school dances, who prefer to carry out class projects by making models rather than writing reports, and who toss crumbled paper with frequency and accuracy into wastebaskets across the room.

INTERPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE enables individuals to recognize and make distinctions about others’ feelings and intentions. Teachers, parents, politicians, psychologists and salespeople rely on interpersonal intelligence. Students exhibit this intelligence when they thrive on small-

group work, when they notice and react to the moods of their friends and classmates, and when they tactfully convince the teacher of their need for extra time to complete the homework assignment.

INTRAPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE helps individuals to distinguish among their own feelings, to build accurate mental models of themselves, and to draw on these models to make decisions about their lives. Although it is difficult to assess who has this capacity and to what degree, evidence can be sought in students’ uses of their other intelligences—how well they seem to be capitalizing on their strengths, how cognizant they are of their weaknesses, and how thoughtful they are about the decisions and choices they make.

NATURALIST INTELLIGENCE allows people to distinguish among, classify, and use features of the environment. Farmers, gardeners, botanists, geologists, florists, and archaeologists all exhibit this intelligence, as do students who can name and describe the features of every make of car around them.

Source: This summary is taken from the web site for the Project on Schools Using Multiple Intelligences Theory: <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/sumit/MISUMIT.HTM>. Project SUMIT is a national investigation of schools using Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences.

Howard Gardner will speak at the 2002 November Festival.