**Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802**

Earth has not anything to show more fair:  
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
A sight so touching in its majesty;  
This City now doth, like a garment, wear  
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;  
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.  
Never did sun more beautifully steep  
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;  
Ne’er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;

And all that mighty heart is lying still!

--William Wordsworth

**January, 1795**

Pavement slipp’ry, people sneezing,

Lords in ermine, beggars freezing;

Titled gluttons dainties carving,

Genius in a garret starving.

Lofty mansions, warm and spacious;

Courtiers cringing and voracious;

Misers scarce the wretched heeding;

Gallant soldiers fighting, bleeding.

Wives who laugh at passive spouses;

Theatres, and meeting-houses;

Balls, where simp’ring misses languish;

Hospitals, and groans of anguish.

Arts and sciences bewailing;

Commerce drooping, credit failing;

Placemen mocking subjects loyal;

Separations, weddings royal.

Authors who can’t earn a dinner;

Many a subtle rogue a winner;

Fugitives for shelter seeking;

Misers hoarding, tradesmen breaking.

Taste and talents quite deserted;

All the laws of truth perverted;

Arrogance o’er merit soaring;

Merit silently deploring.

Ladies gambling night and morning;

Fools the works of genius scorning;

Ancient dames for girls mistaken,

Youthful damsels quite forsaken.

Some in luxury delighting;

More in talking than in fighting;

Lovers old, and beaux decrepid;

Lordlings empty and insipid.

Poets, painters, and musicians;

Lawyers, doctors, politicians:

Pamphlets, newspapers, and odes,

Seeking fame by diff’rent roads.

Gallant souls with empty purses;

Gen’rals only fit for nurses;

School-boys, smit with martial spirit,

Taking place of vet’ran merit.

Honest men who can’t get places,

Knaves who shew unblushing faces;

Ruin hasten’d, peace retarded;

Candor spurn’d, and art rewarded.

--Mary Robinson

**Essay on Wordsworth and Robinson**

Your task in this 4-page paper is to compare William Wordsworth’s “Composed upon Westminster Bridge” with Mary Robinson’s “January, 1795.” The two poems were written around the same time but offer very different visions of London, not only in terms of their subject matter but also in their presentation of that subject matter.

What I am looking for here is a *close reading* of the two poems. Do not do research on them; simply develop your argument from the poems themselves. You can certainly draw upon things you’ve learned in this class about Romantic poetry, but I’m less concerned here about seeing evidence of what you’ve learned in class than seeing what you make of the poems themselves.

Begin by looking up any words you don’t know in the *Oxford English Dictionary*—it’s unlike other dictionaries in that it’s an historical dictionary, so you can determine the possible nineteenth-century meanings of any given word (like “simpering” or “dainties”). You can access an online version of the *OED* through the UCI library website. Thus, for instance, I recommend that you look up the word “art,” which appears in “January, 1795”; given the line “Arts and sciences bewailing,” what does it mean that “art” is “rewarded” in the final line?

I suggest that you print out the poems and cover them with marginal notes. Consider every feature of the poems’ content (on what do they focus? how extensive is their vision?) and form (what is their rhythm? do they make use of metaphor or heightened poetic diction? what do they reveal about their speaker?). Then devise a thesis that can serve as a summation of your insights (or a summation of as many of your insights as possible).

The paper is short, but make it as full of detailed insights as you can. You want your thesis to be compelling, but bear in mind that strong papers will distinguish themselves most by virtue of the *richness of their local insights*. (By the way, do not simply list your observations but explain their significance. Imagine that your reader has read the poems once through but not really thought about them; you’re going to show that you have thought about them in detail.)

Make the writing as clear and straightforward as possible. When revising, consult the “paper pointers” page on the website.