Questions for review: Roderick on the Line, “A Welsh Troll”

1) Unlike most things we’ll be “reading” closely this semester, this podcast takes the form of a slowly evolving, unedited, “real-time” conversation between friends. Does it - can it? - have a “thesis”? If so, what is it? How does the podcast’s conceptual structure affect the way its main subject (the experience and social context of depression) is expressed?

2) In the first half hour of the show, John and Merlin talk about the changing societal understanding of various illnesses and disorders, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, food allergies, and ADHD. How do the mores of our society - any society - dictate how we define and cope with illness?

3) What, precisely, is the titular “Welsh troll” John and Merlin describe? How does this concept apply to John’s description of the way depression justifies itself, lives inside the personality of its sufferer? “The depression doesn’t feel alien,” he says. What does he mean by this?

4) At one point John discourages listeners from giving him advice: “Please don't send me your cures. That is the problem: trying to seek a cure.” What does he mean by this?

5) Depression, John points out, has at some times in history been seen as a signifier of creative intelligence and seriousness. In his youth, he imagined it as a “German disease,” something glamorous, and later, he says that its treatment “presupposes that there is a correct degree of humanness...I'm not sure what amount of healing I'm seeking.” Why might anyone want to remain sick? Is there something particular about depression that invites this ambiguity?