AY 2018-2019 – Master’s Comprehensive Exam Packet

SCSU | English Department

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Graduate English Comprehensive Exam: Overview

**ELIGIBILITY:** Applicants for the examination must be matriculated students who have completed or are currently enrolled in courses that will enable them to complete thirty credits with a 3.0 average. M.A. candidates must have completed the language requirement.

**REGISTERING FOR THE EXAM:** Students register for the exam by notifying the Graduate Coordinator in the first four weeks of the semester before the semester in which they plan to take the exam (to take the exam in April, you register the previous September; to take it in November, you register the previous February). If a student registers for but does not take the exam in a given semester, s/he may register ONCE more, and only once more. Students must notify the Graduate Coordinator in advance of the scheduled exam from which they plan to withdraw in order to be eligible to reregister.

If students plan to take the exam during a semester in which they are not registered for any other classes, they must consult with the graduate coordinator.

**STRUCTURE OF THE EXAMINATION:** The examination is based on a reading list that includes ten primary texts; one is always theoretical and one is always a collection of lyric poems. Each primary text on the list is accompanied by one required and three recommended secondary texts (generally essays or book chapters).

**On-Campus Component**
For each part of this three-hour component of the examination, there is a choice of questions (that is, the student selects one question from each part to answer). The English Department Comprehensive Exam Committee, in consultation with the English graduate faculty, is responsible for making up questions for the examination.

- **Part 1:** a close reading of a poem or poems from the collection of lyric poetry on the list
- **Part 2:** an applied theory question that uses the list’s theoretical text to discuss two other works on the list
- **Part 3:** a comparative question, addressing three texts from the list. The focus of this question might be formal, historical, thematic, ideological, or a combination of the above (answer one of two questions—one hour). None of the three texts discussed in this question may be the one students selected for their literature review (see below), to ensure discussion of more texts on the list.

**Take-Home Component—Literature Review (5-10 pp.)**
Each student taking the exam in a given semester selects one of the primary texts on the list and reads both the required and the supplementary secondary sources, using these sources as a starting point to prepare an overview (5-10 pp.) of the critical conversations about that primary text. The secondary sources that accompany each primary text serve as a starting point for the literature review, but students are responsible for reading an additional six sources (for a total of ten sources) as they prepare this exam question. It is due two months prior to the day of the exam (see deadlines).

**EVALUATION OF THE EXAMINATION:** Exams are read by the English Department Graduate Committee. Exams may be awarded grades of distinction, pass, or fail. In evaluating examinations, the committee will be guided by the following considerations: the essays must respond to the specific demands of the exam questions and must reflect sound knowledge of the works and ideas being examined. The entire exam should demonstrate the mastery of standard essay-writing practices. The Committee transmits two copies of the Graduate Program Comprehensive Report to the Dean of the Graduate School, who then sends one to the student and one to the Records Office.

If a student fails the exam once, s/he may write a letter of petition to the English Department Graduate Committee asking to retake the exam. Barring extraordinary circumstances (for instance, plagiarism), such petitions will be granted. Students who fail the exam a second time will be dismissed from the program.
Comprehensive Exam Reading List
Spring 2019

Collection of Lyric Poems

   Read the complete sonnet sequence (154 poems), but pay special attention to the following: 1, 4, 5, 18, 20, 29, 30, 33, 40, 41, 42, 94, 116, 126, 127, 129, 130, 137, 138, 151, 152, 153, 154.

   Required Secondary Text*

   Recommended Secondary Texts*

   * PDF items available via MA Exam Folder (Dropbox)

Theoretical Text


   Recommended Secondary Texts **

   ** There is no required secondary text.

Literature


   “The General Prologue”
   “The Knight’s Tale”
   “The Miller’s Prologue and Tale”
   “The Man of Law’s Introduction, Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue”
   “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale”
   “The Clerk’s Prologue and Tale”
   “The Merchant’s Prologue and Tale”
   “The Franklin’s Prologue and Tale”
   “The Physician’s Tale”
   “The Pardoner’s Introduction, Prologue, and Tale”
   “The Prioress’s Prologue and Tale”
“The Nun’s Priest’s Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue”
“Chaucer’s Retraction”

Required Secondary Text:

Recommended Secondary Texts:
Lochrie, Karma. “Chapter 5: Amazons at the Gates” in Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn’t (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 103-38. (See additionally Chs. 1 and 4)

* PDF items available via MA Exam Folder (Dropbox)


Required Secondary Text:

Recommended Secondary Texts:

5. Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) (Proposer: Prof. Fluhr)

Required Secondary Text

Recommended Secondary Texts

6. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818) (Proposer: Prof. Rosso)

Required Secondary Text

Recommended Secondary Texts
7. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Selected Short Stories (Proposer: Prof. Ellis; on sabbatical Fall 2018)
   “The Birth-mark,”
   “Rappaccini’s Daughter,”
   “The Artist of the Beautiful,”
   “Young Goodman Brown,”
   “The Minister’s Black Veil,”
   “Mr. Higginbotham’s Catastrophe,”
   “The Celestial Railroad,”
   “Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment”

   Required Secondary Text
   Newberry, Frederick. “The Artist of the Beautiful: Crossing the Transcendent Divide in Hawthorne’s Fiction.”

   Recommended Secondary Texts
   Bidney, Martin. “Fire, Flutter, Fall, and Scatter: A Structure of the Epiphanies of Hawthorne’s Tales.”
   Rucker, Mary E. “Science and Art in Hawthorne’s ‘The Birth-Mark.’”

8. Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway (1925) (Proposer: Prof. Neverow)

   Required Secondary Text
   Froula, Christine. “Mrs. Dalloway’s Postwar Elegy: Women, War, and the Art of Mourning.”

   Recommended Secondary Texts
   DeMeester, Karen. “Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway.”
   MFS Modern Fiction Studies Volume 44, Number 3, Fall 1998, pp. 649-673.
   Garvey, Johanna K. “Difference and Continuity: The Voices of Mrs. Dalloway.”
   Zwerdling, Alex. “Mrs. Dalloway and the Social System.”

9. Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (1929) (Proposer: Prof. Petrie)

   Required Secondary Text
   Fetterley, Judith. “Hemingway’s ‘Resentful Cryptogram.’”
   Also available in... Ernest Hemingway’s A Farewell to Arms. Modern Critical Interpretations ser.

   Recommended Secondary Texts
   Dodman, Trevor. “Going All to Pieces: A Farewell to Arms as Trauma Narrative.”
   Twentieth Century Literature 52.3 (Fall 2006): 249-274.


Required Secondary Text

Recommended Secondary Texts
Timeline for Taking the English Comprehensive Exam

To graduate in May, you should:

• Register for the Spring exam no later than the end of the previous September;

• Draft a work plan for yourself, mapping out when you will read both primary and secondary sources; do this in October and stick to your plan!

• In October or November, contact other people signed up to take the exam during the same academic year as you to form study groups and/or an informal support network;

• In October or November, acquire all the exam texts, including required secondary sources;

• Starting in November, plan times to visit faculty members who proposed texts on the list during their office hours after you finish the text; come in with a list of questions and topics you wish to discuss (you’ll need to continue this work in the spring semester, as you continue to read)

• Monday, February 18 (11:59 PM) – Literature Review deadline; email to dodsonj2@southernct.edu

• Saturday, April 13 – On-Campus Exam; time, location, and further instructions will be emailed to you one month prior

Questions? Please contact Joel Dodson at dodsonj2@southernct.edu
LITERATURE REVIEW INSTRUCTIONS

Description
For this off-campus portion of the exam (5-10 pp.) due approximately two months prior to the on-campus exam, you will prepare an overview of the critical conversation about one of the literary texts on the reading list. Your goal here is to present the issues that criticism of this text has historically grappled with; thus, the essay should not read like a report on criticism (he said, she said), but rather showcase your ability to demonstrate problems and topics for interpretation, and then situate them in relation to the available conversation.

Once you select the primary text you wish to focus on, you will be responsible for reading and demonstrating your knowledge of the following in the literature review:

1. The primary text, using any specific edition cited in the exam list.
2. Both the required and supplementary secondary sources stipulated on the exam list.
3. Six additional secondary sources, found through your own research.

While the primary and secondary sources provided on the exam list will serve as your starting point, you are thus responsible for ten (10) total sources in your preparation for this portion of the exam.

Preparation
The literature review should demonstrate your knowledge both of the broad outlines of the critical conversation about the primary text you have chosen to discuss as well as specific issues at stake in its interpretation and reception. Here are some approaches and questions to consider as you prepare to write your review (think of them as prewriting exercises):

• Compare and contrast the points made in each of your sources: where do the critics agree or disagree with one another, and why?
• Where do the sources build on or contest each other’s claims, interpretations, or emphases?
• What are the sources’ governing theoretical assumptions—for instance, about what literature should be and do, about the writers’ society and literature’s relation to it, about this text, or about the nature of authorship?
• Where are these assumptions similar and where are they different? Do the writers feel the need to acknowledge or defend these assumptions (and, if so, why?) or do they feel comfortable taking them for granted?

Keep in mind that you do not need to give equal time to all the sources you cite, but make sure to discuss at least three sources in detail and to account for a range of critical responses to the primary text.

The Review
The 5-10 pp. written review that you submit must:

• describe and characterize the critical conversation, analyzing the dominant trends and recurring questions that have emerged from it;
• identify a variety of critical responses to the text, demonstrating a knowledge of their main claims and explaining why their differences are significant.

Your list of works cited should include at least ten sources—that is six in addition to the one required and three supplementary secondary sources provided on the exam list.

Due Dates
Spring 2019: Mon. Feb. 18

Submission Protocol
Submit your review via electronic attachment to dodsonj2@southernct.edu.
Exam Assessment

LITERATURE REVIEW GRADING GUIDELINES

The successful literature review should:

• demonstrate that the writer has read and understood:
  - the primary text s/he selected, using any specific edition(s) stipulated on the exam list;
  - both the required and supplementary secondary sources stipulated on the exam list;
  - six (6) additional secondary sources, found through the student’s own research;
• identify a variety of critical responses to the primary text, demonstrating a knowledge of their main claims and explaining why their differences are significant;
• discuss at least three sources in detail;
• describe and characterize the critical conversation about the primary text, analyzing the dominant trends and recurring questions that have emerged from it;
• demonstrate problems and topics for interpretation, and then situate them in relation to the available conversation;
• include a list of works cited and consulted, properly formatted according to MLA guidelines, with at least ten sources—that is, six in addition to the one required and three supplementary secondary sources provided on the exam list;
• establish a reasonably well-written and clear line of thought and incorporate textual evidence – primary and secondary – effectively in order to convey knowledge of the critical conversation.

TIPS FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE EXAM ESSAYS

The successful exam essay should:

• go well beyond summary of the plots or themes of the texts discussed to mount an arguable interpretive claim about those texts;
• use and analyze concrete examples from the texts—key scenes, phrases, and details—to support that claim;
• plan to discuss the required and perhaps also the recommended secondary sources

SAMPLE EXAM QUESTION

The novel’s origins have been variously located as early as 1605, when Don Quixote appeared, and as late as Robinson Crusoe’s publication in 1719. Whatever date we assign its birth, however, one arresting feature of the novel is its interest in the question of how to tell the truth—a question, one might argue, that predates the novel.

In The Origins of the English Novel, Michael McKeon argues that this new genre is in part a response to “a major cultural transition in attitudes toward how to tell the truth in narrative.” The novel, he argues, asks, “what kind of authority or evidence is required of narrative to permit it to signify truth to its readers?” (20). The question of how to “signify truth” in literary narratives, of course, predates the novel and is applicable as well to a number of other literary genres. While McKeon focuses on the way novels negotiate truth-telling, this question invites you to think about the issue in any three works on the exam reading list (your choice need not be limited to novels) from at least two different centuries, analyzing their strategies and techniques for signifying that they are telling the truth. Consider what constitutes “truth” for each text, and how it signals its own truthfulness.
# English Comprehensive Exam: Essay 1 Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exam Essay 1…</th>
<th>Sophisticated ability demonstrated</th>
<th>Adequate to good ability demonstrated</th>
<th>Inadequate ability demonstrated</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>demonstrates that the writer has read and understood the primary text(s) under discussion, using any specific edition(s) stipulated on the exam list</td>
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<tr>
<td>demonstrates that the writer has read and understood the required (but not necessarily the recommended) secondary sources stipulated on the exam list</td>
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<tr>
<td>establishes and develops a well-defined argument</td>
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<tr>
<td>incorporates and analyzes relevant textual evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>demonstrates close reading skills, including an ability to move between the literal and figurative levels of the text under discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>is written in clear, graceful Standard English prose</td>
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**GRADE:** Distinction _________  Pass _________  Fail _________

**READER:** ___________________________
## English Comprehensive Exam: Essay 2 Grading Rubric

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<tr>
<th>Exam Essay 2…</th>
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<th>Adequate to good ability demonstrated</th>
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<tr>
<td>demonstrates that the writer has read and understood the primary text(s) under discussion, using any specific edition(s) stipulated on the exam list</td>
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<tr>
<td>demonstrates that the writer has read and understood the required (but not necessarily the recommended) secondary sources stipulated on the exam list</td>
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<tr>
<td>establishes and develops a well-defined argument</td>
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<tr>
<td>incorporates and analyzes relevant textual evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>demonstrates an ability to put theory and literature into dialogue, using them to illuminate each other’s arguments and assumptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>is written in clear, graceful Standard English prose</td>
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**GRADE:** Distinction _______ Pass _______ Fail _______

**READER:** ______________________________
# English Comprehensive Exam: Essay 3 Grading Rubric

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<tr>
<th>Exam Essay 3…</th>
<th>Sophisticated ability demonstrated</th>
<th>Adequate to good ability demonstrated</th>
<th>Inadequate ability demonstrated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>demonstrates that the writer has read and understood the primary text(s) under discussion, using any specific edition(s) stipulated on the exam list</td>
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<tr>
<td>demonstrates that the writer has read and understood the required (but not necessarily the recommended) secondary sources stipulated on the exam list</td>
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<tr>
<td>establishes and develops a well-defined argument</td>
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<tr>
<td>incorporates and analyzes relevant textual evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>demonstrates an ability to discuss literature intertextually, across periods, genres, and authors</td>
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<tr>
<td>is written in clear, graceful Standard English prose</td>
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</table>

**GRADE:**
- Distinction ___________
- Pass ___________
- Fail ___________

**READER:**
______________________________