

Preparing For Your Exam in Literary and Cultural Studies

Greta Olson 2011

I) Whether you are doing a teaching degree or preparing to finish your Diploma or Magister studies, your written or your oral exam will be divided into three subjects. These include, one, an author; two, a period; and, three, a genre. You can alternatively elect to choose one or more topics in cultural studies, such as 9/11 or terrorism, or in literary or cultural theory, such as feminism. In general your topics should not overlap with one another. In other words, you should not pick Virginia Woolf as an author if you wish to be examined on literary Modernism as a period. You should also demonstrate your knowledge of more than one type of literature by not just choosing, for instance, only American or British primary texts. Additionally, you should choose at least one topic that falls before 1800 so that you can demonstrate historical depth.

II) If you are completing a Diploma or Magister degree, you will also need two more topics. One of these will be the topic of your Diploma or Magister thesis. The other will be the topic of your written essay exam. In this case you need five topics in total. Consider that the topic of your thesis should be the one that is most important to you as you will be working on it for several months time. The topic for your essay exam should be the second most important one, since you will be writing solely about it for four hours. Finally, the remaining three topics for your oral exam might cover other subjects which you have studied while working on your degree. Again, these topics should not overlap.

III) Before coming to speak to your examiner, you should prepare a list of at least five or six possible topics. If you wish to be sure that I will be able to examine you in them, confirm that these are topics which I have already taught or written about. Once we have agreed on three general topics (author, period, genre), you will need to prepare a detailed literature list in which you state the type of exam you are doing, when it will take place, and your contact information. The list should contain, depending on their length and difficulty, four or more primary texts for each topic and the secondary texts you will be using in order to prepare for the exam. The list must

include all relevant bibliographical information, including the first publication or performance date of the primary texts. Two sample lists are provided here.

IV) In your oral and/or written exam you need to demonstrate thorough knowledge of the formal qualities of the texts you have chosen. In oral exams you will first be asked to identify a passage from one of your primary texts and to comment on it. This means stating, for instance, the rhyme structure and meter of a poem and naming its central metaphors or linguistic particularities, or describing the narrative situation in a novel and explaining how narrative qualities influence the reader's experience of the text. Alternatively, when talking about a play you may need to explain why it belongs to the Theater of the Absurd or the formal qualities that allow a series to be described as quality television. You will also need to say how a given text reflects on the period and/or style it belongs to: What qualities does it have which are typical of, for example, British Romanticism or American Naturalism? If relevant, you will also need to describe developments within the genre you are being examined on, for instance, the history of the sonnet, or the development of quality television. After describing the formal qualities of the text, you will be asked to identify what kind of cultural or ideological work the text can be said to be performing; or, what kind of literary or aesthetic innovations the text brought about; or, why the text is historically important.

V) In preparing for your oral exam it is vitally important to practice thinking on your feet. Practice having someone ask you unexpected questions about your chosen texts in English. Work on making connections between the individual texts and topics.

VI) Alternatively, if you are going to write an exam for a L2 or L3 examination or for the essay part of your Diploma or Magister degree, you can prepare by practicing writing an essay on your topic, or topics, in English. Your exam essay should include a clear thesis, which is explained in an introductory paragraph or section, a longer section in which you develop your arguments in depth, and a conclusion. Practice leaving enough time to go over the formal qualities of your text carefully.

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„Angewandte Fremdsprachen und Wirtschaft“
Oral Examination (Dipl.)
November 24, 2010, 2 - 3 PM

List of Literature and Topics

Epoch: Victorian Age

Areas of emphasis: Gender Roles, Labour Conditions, Class Conflict

Novels:

- Brontë, Charlotte. 1994 [1847]. *Jane Eyre*. London: Penguin Books.
- Dickens, Charles. 1994 [1860-61]. *Great Expectations*. London: Penguin Books.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth. 1992 [1848]. *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*. London: Penguin Books.
- Gissing, George. 1993 [1893]. *The Odd Women*. London: Penguin Books.
- Hardy, Thomas. 1991 [1891]. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented*. London: Penguin Books.

Plays:

- Wilde, Oscar. 1985 [1893]. *A Woman of No Importance*. Harmondsworth, et al.: Penguin Books.

Poems:

- Arnolds, Matthew. 1867. "Dover Beach."
- Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. 1842. "The Cry of the Children."
- Kipling, Rudyard. 1899. "The White Man's Burden."
- Rossetti, Christina. 1862. "Goblin Market."
- Tennyson, Alfred. 1887. "On the Jubilee of Queen Victoria."
- Webster, Augusta. ca.1870. "A Castaway."

Genre: Contemporary British Women's Writing

Areas of emphasis: Mother-Daughter Relationship, Sexuality, Gender Roles

Novels:

- Carter, Angela. 1972. *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. London: Penguin Books.
- Lively, Penelope. 1987. *Moon Tiger*. London: Penguin Books.
- Murdoch, Iris. 1980. *Nuns and Soldiers*. London: Vintage.
- Tennant, Emma. 1993. *Tess*. London: Flamingo.
- Weldon, Fay. 1995. *Splitting*. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Winterson, Jeanette. 1992. *Written on the Body*. London: Vintage.

Author or other topic: Postcolonial Feminism

Areas of emphasis: Defining the “Postcolonial, Alterity, Race vs. Gender

Texts:

- Bahri, Deepika. 2004. “Feminism in/and Postcolonialism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Cambridge: CUP, 199-220.
- Lazarus, Neil (ed.). 2004. “Introducing Postcolonial Studies,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Cambridge: CUP, 1-18.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1986. “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses.”
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. “Can the Subaltern Speak.”
- Suleri, Sara. 1992. “Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition.”

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NF Literaturwissenschaft
oral exam of 30 mins
June 14, 2009, 2 – 2.30 p.m.

List of Literature

Epoch: Victorianism

Areas of emphasis: Concepts of Femininity

Primary Literature:

- Austen, Jane (1994 [1818]): *Persuasion*. London: Penguin Books.
- Brontë, Anne (1994 [1848]): *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. London: Penguin Books.
- Brontë, Charlotte (1994 [1847]): *Jane Eyre*. London: Penguin Books.
- Hardy, Thomas (1993 [1891]): *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd.

Secondary Literature:

Calder, Jenni (1976). *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.

Digby, Anne, ed. (1999). "Victorian Values and Women in Public and Private." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 78. 195-215.

Moran, Maureen (2006). *Victorian Literature and Culture*. London/New York: Continuum. 1-5.

Nünning, Vera (2001). *Der prä- und frühviktorianische Roman (1830-1859)*. Stuttgart: Klett. 56-61.

Nünning, Vera (2004). *Einführung in den englischen Roman des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart: Klett. 7-24.

Poovey, Mary (1997 [1989]). "The Anathematised Race: The Governess in *Jane Eyre*." *New Casebooks. Jane Eyre*. Ed. Heather Glen. Basingstoke, Hampshire/London: Macmillan Press Ltd. 168-195.