

Masters of Arts in English
Comprehensive Examination Fall 2007

Section I: *In a full paragraph, answer **ten** of the following twelve questions. This section is worth 100 of 300 points, and you have one hour to complete it. You may do these in any order, but be sure to number your responses. For the two that you choose not to do, write the number and then the word “omit.”*

1. “Selling out,” a term often used in African American cultural production, can be defined as sacrificing connections to community and self for economic or social gain in mainstream society. Would you say that anyone in *A Raisin in the Sun* might be accused of “selling out”? If so, whom would you select and why? Would you contend that the character is actually co-opted by the dominant culture or merely reaching for the American dream?
2. In *Pearl*, for what purpose does the pearl- maiden tell the story of the “Parable of the Vineyard” from the Bible (Matthew, chapter 20)?
3. Discuss the extent to which you see the master/servant relationships eroticized in *Twelfth Night*. Why is that significant (or not)—critically, culturally, or otherwise?
4. Discuss one or two poems by Elizabeth Bishop that demonstrate that her poem “The Fish” is or is not representative of the techniques and themes of her other poetry.
5. John Dryden is perhaps best known as a brilliant satirist, but he was also a deeply religious man. Show how Dryden expresses his religious views in his poetry.
6. In Jane Austen’s novel *Emma*, does Emma ever acquire self-knowledge? If so, to what extent? If not, why not?
7. James R. Baker describes Fowles as one of many English authors who “complain about the discomforts of living in a country where the weight of the past, and so much pride in the past, threatens . . . to inhibit both personal and social evolution.” To what extent is this idea applicable to the action and/or characters of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*?
8. Most of Keats’s great odes were written between April 21 and the end of May, 1819. While they are all different, they naturally share many of the same intellectual and artistic concerns, and sometimes even similar imagery. Choose any TWO of the major odes and discuss what they have in common, and how they differ.
9. *The Golden Bowl* is a fine example of Henry James’s “international theme,” which contrasts American innocence with European worldliness. Briefly show

- how this theme is dramatized in the relationship between Prince Amerigo and Maggie Verver.
10. How does the careful structural design of *Pearl* contribute to the significance of the poem?
 11. After the first conversation between Olivia and Viola/Cesario in 1.5 of *Twelfth Night*, Olivia asks about Viola/Cesario's parentage. What does this illustrate about the importance of class to relationships at that time? To what extent is class a factor in other relationships in the play?
 12. Support or refute the claim that *A Raisin in the Sun* is about integration.

Section 2: *This section is worth 200 of 300 points, and you have two hours to complete it.*

According to the Stanislavski method, an actor should prepare for his or her role by searching for the character's motivation. So just imagine the problem you would have if you were going to play Viola in *Twelfth Night*! Could you say what in the world it is, other than comic convention, that drives her to cut her hair and put on boy's clothing? And wouldn't it be almost as hard to find the motivation for some of the other characters in the play? What if you were playing Olivia or Orsino?

This question of motivation is one that could profitably be asked of other characters in works you have prepared for this exam. Henry James goes into great detail about what drives the four main characters of *The Golden Bowl*. Yet Amerigo and Charlotte find themselves drawn back together after their respective marriages, almost as if in "a magic web [that] had spun itself without their toil." The narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* explicitly addresses this particular issue, noting that a modern novelist can no more account completely for his characters' thoughts and behaviors than any reader can account for his or her own.

Using at least three different works from at least two genres, write an essay in which you discuss the motives of some of the characters you have encountered in the works you prepared for this exam. You must choose one work each from early British literature, later British literature, and American literature. Be sure to discuss each work you choose in specific detail. And remember--a character's motivation might be psychological, or it might be philosophical and reflective of the author's theme, or it might be purely conventional and tied to the genre of the work.