

## English 621 Final Examination Essay - 2009

The final examination in this course will require you to prepare an essay to be written during the examination period from topics chosen from your Shakespeare play or your novel study. Since the study of English encourages students to plan and prepare good work, each student is *required* to prepare a *formal outline* for one of the following essays below. The outline must follow the rules laid out during the research process. The topics come first from *Twelfth Night* and then from your *independent novels*:

### Essay Questions from *Twelfth Night*

1. *Twelfth Night* moves from a potentially tragic situation (shipwreck and loss) into the joyous realm of romantic comedy (unions and reunions). The movement from conflict, sterility and death (two women who mourn supposedly dead brothers) to fertility, harmony and life (three couples happily celebrate marriages that may lead to future births) is typical of Shakespeare's comedies and romances (e.g. *The Tempest*). What makes the three final couples "well-matched"? How do they differ from the three potential couples that are not ultimately united in marriages? What do these pairings teach about what Shakespeare and his audience viewed as an "appropriate" match?
2. *Twelfth Night* dramatizes the seduction scenario which was a common thread in much lyric poetry of the Renaissance and early 17th century. There are six distinct sets of potential or actual couples; three involve Olivia as the female object of desire; one has Olivia as the desiring female subject; one has Viola as the desiring female subject; and one links the comic characters Sir Toby Belch and Maria. Know the characters (by name!) in each of these potential or actual couples, and be aware of the ways in which the characters and their real or imagined/potential love stories intersect and interact. Which of the couples are parallel to each other? Which are contrasted? How much do the different lovers (and love relationships) have in common? (e.g. equality or social inequity of the potential partners; motivation for desired union--social climbing? "love at first sight"-style physical desire? true knowledge of another's qualities and character?). How does Shakespeare use these parallel relationships and characters to unify the play as a whole?
3. Consider the comical effect of the gender-bending caused by Viola's masquerade as a young man, "Cesario," who is later confused with her own (supposedly dead) twin brother, Sebastian. (Given that women's parts in Shakespeare's time were originally played by young boys, the gender-bending gets even more complex.) How does the gender-bending within the play add to our picture of what the Renaissance and early seventeenth century saw as "appropriate" behaviour for women?
4. Notice the various uses of the theme of deception within the play (e.g. deceptive appearances, deceptive words/language, and the related theme of self-deception). Which characters are most clear-sighted about their own qualities and motives? Which are manipulating appearances in order to deceive others? What are their motivations for doing so?
5. Note the satire of Puritanism (personified by Malvolio). What is it about Malvolio that the other characters so dislike? Why does Olivia put up with him? Is his punishment by the trickery of the comical "low lifes" deserved? Why or why not? Is the Malvolio subplot there only for comic relief, or does it convey a more serious message? If so, what?
6. It is thought that *Twelfth Night* was first written for the "Carnival"-like festivities of the feast of the Epiphany (the "*Twelfth Night*" of Christmas, January 6); these raucous celebrations involved a temporary inversion of the established social order. This "world upside-down" theme is reflected not only in some of the mismatched (potential) couples in the play, but in the themes of folly, madness and foolishness. Which characters in the play behave most foolishly? What do you make of the official "Fool," Feste? (Note that a court jester such as Feste had the license to speak freely things that no one else would dare say openly). Is "folly" or "foolishness" an unavoidable part of being in love? Why is Malvolio punished so cruelly? (Are his aspirations and behaviour any more foolish than those of the other would-be lovers?)
7. Note the use of music and song in the play. How do the various songs punctuate or comment upon the action? Some of the songs may originally have been intended for Viola (who notes in 1.2.52-55 a talent for music that she had intended to use to get into the good graces of Duke Orsino). What is the effect of giving the songs to Feste rather than Viola (or any other of the lovers)? Do they suggest a special connection between Viola and Feste? In what ways are they alike? How do they differ?
8. Dramatic Irony is defined as: failure of a character to see or understand what is obvious to the audience. The most notable example of dramatic irony in all of literature occurs in *Oedipus Rex*, by Sophocles, when Oedipus fails to realize what the audience knows—that he married his own mother. Write an essay describing how dramatic irony enhances the comic situations in *Twelfth Night*.
9. *Twelfth Night* is said to present many themes to audiences. In an essay, comment on the following themes, using evidence from the play (situations/quotes) to support your commentary:
  - True love sees the soul.
  - Love (brotherly and romantic) is foolish at times.
  - Love vexes and presents pitfalls.
  - Love ultimately triumphs.
  - Appearances and first impressions can be deceiving.
  - Carpe Diem (Seize the Day)
10. Discuss the role of mistaken identity in *Twelfth Night*. Who is mistaken for whom, and what do these mix-ups signify?
11. Discuss the role of the explicitly comic characters: Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Feste, Fabian (to some extent) and Maria. What function do they serve? How is each one different from the others? How is Feste, in particular, different from Sir Toby and Sir Andrew?
12. What role does Malvolio serve in the play? Does his fate seem unjust? Is it out of place in a romantic comedy? If so, why might Shakespeare have included it?
13. Compare Orsino and Olivia, and discuss how their attitudes about strong emotions are similar or different. What does Shakespeare suggest about the nature of love and other powerful feelings in his portrayal of these two characters?
14. The character of Malvolio fascinates both scholars and actors. They argue that he is the perfect "pompous prig" and a character meant to be seen as getting what he deserves. They see Shakespeare as having created a character we can despise because of his undeserved high opinion of himself, be angry with for his domineering behaviour toward others, and gain satisfaction from when the plot works to reveal all that is wrong with him. Others, however, have seen him as a sympathetic character, especially at the end of the play, when they believe he displays dignity in a very humiliating situation. Actors have often played him that way. Look closely at what Shakespeare has Malvolio do and say and offer your opinion (supported by material from the play) on this great character.

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#### Essay Questions from *Animal Farm*

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1. After doing research on the Russian Revolution, point out similarities between real events and people and those in the novel. As a variation, do the same with any subsequent rebellion around the world since 1917.
2. Look at the list of good leadership qualities made at the beginning of the novel. How do the pigs fit this list? Were there any attributes that the pigs lacked? Did they have some that were not on the list? Write a paper explaining how the pigs do and/or do not qualify as good leaders. Use specific examples.
3. Discuss the importance of education as it evolves during the course of the novel. At the same time, address the distinctions that may be made between education and indoctrination.

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#### Essay Questions from *1984*

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1. How does technology affect the Party's ability to control its citizens? In what ways does the Party employ technology throughout the book?
2. Discuss this statement in an essay: Two of the major themes, which are examined in the novel *1984* are the control of information and history, and language as mind control. These are two forms of control, which are practised by the Party over the citizens of Oceania.
3. *1984* is a presentation of Orwell's definition of dystopia and was meant as a warning to those of the modern era. What specifically is Orwell warning us against, and how does he achieve this? Explain what he was warning people about. Be sure to examine the influence of political climates in the world during the time when Orwell wrote.

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#### Essay Questions from *Brave New World*

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1. Discuss the relationship between science, religion, and political power in the World State.
2. It seems undeniable that most World State members are happy, though people like John, Bernard, and Helmholtz might criticize the quality of their lives. What, then, is wrong with World State society? Discuss the relationship between truth and happiness, and the use of soma.
3. Write a paper that compares life as Huxley described it in the World State with life in North America today. Include at least three of these aspects of life in your paper: Human life/death, love and marriage, art (literature, film, architecture, etc.), consumption of goods and services, use of drugs (including alcohol and tobacco), pleasure/self-indulgence, and religion. Come to a conclusion as to the accuracy of Huxley's predictions.

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#### Essay Questions from *The Great Gatsby*

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1. The notion of the *American Dream* figures prominently in this story. How should readers define *American Dream*? How does Gatsby represent the *American Dream* (or at least the decaying of the *American Dream*)? Moreover, is pursuing the *American Dream* necessarily a good thing, as evidenced by *The Great Gatsby*? What does the novel have to say about the condition of the *American Dream* in the 1920s? In what ways do the themes of dreams, wealth, and time relate to each other in the novel's exploration of the idea of America?
2. Fitzgerald's story shows the clear delineations between different strata of society: new money, old money, some money, and no money. How are readers to interpret his comments on each of these groups? Does he hold any one group above the other? Are there ways in which people of all groups are alike?
3. Although Nick Carraway has his reservations about Gatsby, it is clear he thinks of him fondly; after all, he titles the book *The Great Gatsby*. He leads a questionable existence and comes to a tragic end, yet Nick (and by extension, the readers) feel empathetic toward him. Does Gatsby deserve to be called "Great"? In what ways is he great? In what ways is he not? In the end, which wins out: greatness or mediocrity?

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#### Essay Questions from *The Kite Runner*

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1. What did *The Kite Runner* teach you about Afghanistan? The Taliban? About friendship? About forgiveness, redemption and love?
2. Khaled Hosseini vividly describes Afghanistan, both the privileged world of Amir's childhood and the stricken country under the Taliban. How did his descriptions differ from ideas that you may already have had about Afghanistan? What cultural differences become evident in the American passages of the novel? How easy do the Afghans find it to settle in the US?
3. Examine the concept of circularity in the novel. What important cycles exist in the characters' lives and histories? How is circularity connected to redemption?
4. Explore the way in which courage is portrayed in the novel. What constitutes true bravery? What are the key moments when characters are brave and who is the bravest character, if any? Use specific examples from the text to support your argument.
5. Make a list of instances in the novel where someone is forgiven. What constitutes true forgiveness? Why is forgiveness so important? You may want to consider moments between Hassan and Amir, Baba and Hassan, Hassan and Sanaubar, Amir and Sohrab, General Taheri and Soraya, and Amir and himself.
6. Think about acts of violence in the novel individually and as a whole. Why is violence so essential to the story? Could the story occur without so much violence? Using your answer from the previous question, explain what you think Hosseini is using violence to say. You may want to consider: Hassan's rape, Sohrab's rape, the stonings at Ghazi Stadium, Assef and Amir's fight, Sohrab's suicide attempt, the story of Kamal and his father, Hassan and Farzana's murders, Sanaubar's appearance at the house, and the activity of kite fighting.

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#### Essay Questions from *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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1. Discuss how the positions held by women and the rights that they are afforded change in Afghanistan as the political environment changes.
2. Mariam and Laila were brought together due to circumstances they could not control. Describe how and when both women were able to regain power over their own lives and who was essential for them to gain this personal power.
3. Describe the focus on legitimacy and illegitimacy in the novel. Include the stories of individual characters and the political climate in Afghanistan.
4. If you have had the opportunity to read both *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, write a compare contrast essay entitled: *The Realities and the Differences*.
5. The driver who takes Babi, Laila, and Tariq to the giant stone Buddhas above the Bamiyan Valley describes the crumbling fortress of Shahr-e-Zohak as "the story of our country, one invader after another... we're like those walls up there. Battered, and nothing pretty to look at, but still standing." Discuss the metaphorical importance of this passage as it relates to Miriam and Laila. In what ways does their story reflect the larger story of Afghanistan's troubled history?
6. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has many themes. Explore any two of the following themes, with reference to and analysis of specific parts of the story:
  - the inner strength of women
  - the human capacity for evil
  - loyalty and devotion
  - the discrimination of women.

## Writing a Literary Essay

If the topics provided don't do it for you, then you may create your own (with Coffin-approval, of course). If that's your plan, keep the following in mind:

- The best topics are ones that originate out of your own reading of a work of literature, but here are some common approaches to consider:
  - A discussion of a work's characters: are they realistic, symbolic, historically-based?
  - A comparison/contrast of the choices different authors or characters make in the work.
  - A study of the sources or historical events that occasioned a particular work (Ex. comparing Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* to actual history.)
  - An analysis of a specific image occurring in several works (Ex. the use of food imagery in certain plays, poems, novels)
  - A "deconstruction" of a particular work (Ex. unfolding an underlying racist world view in Huxley's *Brave New World*)
  - A reading from a political perspective (Ex. how would a Taliban reader react to *A Thousand Splendid Suns*?)

## Literary Terms to Remember

Many literary terms describe how an author communicates his or her ideas. Look through the text and try to identify some of methods Shakespeare uses to convey the patterns of ideas you are most interested in. The following terms will help you express the methods you see:

- Characterization:** the author's expression of a character's personality through the use of action, dialogue, thought, or commentary by the author or another character.
- Conflict:** the struggle within the story. Character divided against self, character against character, character against society, character against nature, character against God. Without it, there is no story.
- Dialogue:** vocal exchange between two or more characters. One of the ways in which plot, character, action, etc. are developed.
- Imagery:** the collection of images within a literary work. Used to evoke atmosphere, mood, tension. For example, images of crowded, steaming sidewalks flanking streets choked with lines of shimmering, smoking cars suggests oppressive heat and all the psychological tensions that go with it.
- Point of View:** the vantage point from which the author presents action of the story. Who is telling the story? An all-knowing author? A voice limited to the views of one character? The voice and thoughts of one character? Does the author change point of view in the story? Why? Point of view is often considered the technical aspect of fiction which leads the critic most readily into the problems and meanings of the story.
- Symbol:** related to imagery. It is something which is itself yet stands for or means something else. It tends to be more singular, a bit more fixed than imagery. For example, in Lessing's "A Woman on a Roof," the brief red sun suit seems to symbolize the woman's freedom and independence from externally imposed standards of behavior.
- Tone:** suggests an attitude toward the subject which is communicated by the words the author chooses. Part of the range of tone includes playful, sombre, serious, casual, formal, ironic. Tone is important because it designates the mood and effect of a work.

## Essay Assessment

### Introduction & Thesis & Conclusion

- Contains strong introduction that clearly states an integrated thesis that is thoughtful, argumentative, and specific.
- Contains strong conclusion that clearly re-states the thesis and summarizes the arguments.

### Proof of Thesis, Ideas, Concepts & Themes/Supporting Details & Use of Evidence

- Integrates supporting details, examples, and quotes with insightful contextual information to support analysis.
- Incorporate highly effective, well-chosen, relevant evidence taken directly from the text and used to emphasize essay's points.
- Writing shows thorough understanding of the topic/supporting details.
- Within the essay, when material is referenced, it is done so according to the agreed-upon format.

### Analysis & Connections

- Analyses how evidence supports the main idea. Insightfully connects analysis to the thesis without summarizing.
- Develop ideas with a high degree of logic and coherence. There are no areas which are unclear or confusing to the reader.

### Organizational Elements

- Selects the most effective organizational pattern in support of the thesis. Arguments in climactic order. Section headings used.
- Essay should be very well organized. Distinct paragraphs evident. Ideas flow in a logical sequence with clear transitions.

### Mechanical Conventions

- Grammar/spelling consistent with grade level; includes using a consistent verb tense and appropriate and precise word choices.
- The essay should contain few, if any, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, or usage errors.

### Essay Conventions

- Adheres to essay conventions: uses effective transitions to link ideas; avoids slang and saying "I" or "you".
- Command of essay form {develops a strong thesis or controlling idea, organization, strong body paragraphs, conclusion}.

### Essay Style, Language & Voice

- Shows stylistic maturity; sentence variety, and paragraph development; understands the style of writing literary pieces.
- Language and voice are effective, consistent, and appropriate for the essay and the academic level.

### Guidelines & Focus

- Follows agreed-upon elements insisted upon for this examination; student shows commitment to essay form and style.
- Essay is related to the assigned topic and allows the reader to understand much more about the topic without summarizing.

### Essay Outline

- Student presents a good copy essay outline which serves as the basis for the essay. Essay follows outline carefully.
- Essay outline is presented in proper MLA format.

### Coffin Caliber Score

- Satisfying the elements required to suitably impress Coffin's demanding/exacting standards.
- Given time restraints and planning availability, student produces a piece of writing relative to his/her potential.

## Literary Essay Tricks and Tips

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### For Your Final Essay:

- ✓ Try to write about something about the play that you find interesting.
- ✓ Look through your list of topics and choose one of them that you can examine further in essay form.
- ✓ Again, read the front and back matter of your play, check out sparknotes and cliffnotes and discuss with peers.
- ✓ Give your essay an interesting title that leaves no doubt about the position you are taking with regards to your topic.
- ✓ Assume a very intelligent (and bald) reader will be looking over the work (which means he'll catch on quickly; assume he's read the play, but he has NEVER examined the theme. That's your job.
- ✓ Keep your tone straightforward and your explanations concise; which means don't waste words – be clear without being overly-verbose. Length doesn't equal quality.
- ✓ Write as directly and clearly as you can, but remember that "simple" does not mean "simplistic." In this case, simple means clear and to the point.
- ✓ Don't retell the story. A re-telling of the plot is of limited value in literary essays and is usually used only to set up the context of the quotations you plan to analyze. Instead, express an opinion about what you've read.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to take risks to interpret. Aim for a thesis that not everyone would agree with.
- ✓ Don't assume there's one correct view; in literary study there isn't. This does not mean that ANY position you take about the text is correct; some arguments fit the evidence better than others, so be careful about the argument you make.
- ✓ Make sure any argument you present is supported by text evidence (lines from the play or passages from the novel).
- ✓ Explain your arguments thoroughly and patiently. Don't expect the handsome reader to grasp your claims easily.
- ✓ Organize your paragraphs according to the development of your argument, not according to the chronological order of a text.
- ✓ Cover one aspect of your argument per paragraph or section (if more than one paragraph is necessary) of your essay.
- ✓ Use transitions to show how sections are logically connected to each other and to your thesis.
- ✓ In this examination, you shall be required to use HEADINGS for each section of your essay:
  - Introduction (but give it a creative, catchy title)
  - Section 1 Title (catchy title)
  - Section 2 Title (catchy title)
  - Section 3 Title; and so on (catchy title[s])
  - Conclusion (again, use a catchy title)
- ✓ Don't try to say everything you've figured out about the readings in one essay. Stick to a narrow thesis and don't wander around it.
- ✓ Regarding quotations: Select only those quotations that advance and support your particular thesis. Set up quotations with a brief reminder to readers of what is happening in the text at that point (but don't summarize plot). Integrate quotations into your essay so that everything reads as coherent sentences. Keep quotations as brief as you can.
- ✓ When quoting the play, make certain to use proper MLA in-text quotation: Act. Scene. Line. (Roman Numerals must be used for act/scene). For example:  
*It is clear that Dogberry is an uneducated man when he states that he and Verges are 'the malefactors.'* (III. iv. 81-82)
- ✓ Use present tense to show that literary works and the issues they raise are still alive. Not "*Malvolio was...*" but "*Malvolio is....*"
- ✓ Show that you care about your work by proofreading carefully for small errors.

### Great Essays Will:

- ✓ have a strong introduction that clearly states an integrated thesis that is thoughtful, argumentative, and specific. Strong introductions 'hook' the reader. How will you hook?
- ✓ integrate supporting details, examples, and quotes with insightful, on topic information to support analysis; shows the handsome reader that you – as a critical reader – have fully understood the play and the essay you choose.
- ✓ use well-selected textual evidence & create substantial proof of thesis; which means students will use actual lines from the play in order to support any claims they make about the play.
- ✓ analyze how the evidence supports the main idea of the paragraph; so don't just insert a line from the play without telling the reader how it supports your thesis.
- ✓ insightfully connects analysis to the thesis; remember, the entire essay is being written to support a thesis statement. If you wander in another direction during the writing of your essay, then you aren't staying on topic.
- ✓ select the most effective organizational pattern in support of the thesis; so, what is the best way to set up this essay? This is where the outline is KEY.
- ✓ adhere to essay conventions;
- ✓ use transitions to effectively link ideas;
- ✓ avoid slang and saying "you" or "I";
- ✓ show maturity through precise word choices, sentence variety, and paragraph development;
- ✓ be free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors;
- ✓ keep a consistent tense

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### The Outline

- Must be typed or neatly-handwritten on a single page.
- Must follow the rules:
  - your name in the top right corner (no number necessary)
  - parallelism is still very important
  - must include the following elements/headings:
    - title of your essay (centered at the top of the page)
    - Introduction (but use the catchy one you created)
    - Under the Introduction, write out your eventual thesis statement.
    - Section One (but use your catchy name)
    - Section Two (but use your catchy name)
    - Section Three (must have at least three – you may have many more)
    - Conclusion (again, use a catchy phrase for the conclusion)
    - Under Conclusion, write out another version of your thesis statement.
- No line in your outline may exceed eight words.
- Outlines follow the format you see on the right:

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### Essay Outline Format:

	<i>Essay Title</i>
<i>I Introduction</i>	
<i>Thesis Statement written here.</i>	
<i>II Section One</i>	
<i>A. Supporting Detail</i>	
<i>B. Supporting Detail</i>	
<i>1. More Info</i>	
<i>2. (IV. vi. 11-12)</i>	
<i>C. Supporting Detail</i>	
<i>III Section Two</i>	
(and so on...)	

### General Rules for this Exam Essay

- ✓ You will be required to stay for 1.5 hours, so you might as well use it wisely and take your time.
- ✓ Essays must be double-spaced, which gives the handsome reader a chance to correct/comment.
- ✓ You must arrive with your outline prepared or it shall receive no credit (don't try to write it up during the exam).
- ✓ Essays must be within the 1000-1500 word range.
- ✓ Since you have the topics already, you have lots of time to prepare.
- ✓ If you use quotes LONGER than four lines, then the quote must be indented on both sides AND single-spaced.
- ✓ If you still have books (*Echoes 12, Elements of Essays, Independent Novels and Twelfth Night*) you will be given an incomplete and you will not graduate.