

**Department of French and Italian**  
**Comprehensive Exam for the MA in French Language and Literature**  
(Revised Fall 2008)

**Goals and Expectations**

The goal of the comprehensive examinations is to ensure that students have acquired a thorough overall knowledge of French and francophone language, literature and culture, an understanding of their place in the world, and a strong competency in literary and cultural analysis. The exams should show proof of close detailed readings of literary texts as well as of a capacity to synthesize ideas and engage critical and theoretical texts on the field.

Candidates for the MA in French language and literature will take a written comprehensive exam and an oral exam. There will be two parts to the written exam: one a diachronic exam with a large scope, the other a series of more specific, targeted questions including identifications. Each exam will be four hours in length and will be given on different days. This exam will be given once per year, usually the week after spring break. The written exam will be in French.

The oral component of the exam consists of three sections. First, students will present an *explication de texte*. For this exam, students will be given the choice of three short texts and will have 48 hours to prepare their presentation. The *explication de texte* will be done in French and should last approximately 30 minutes. The second part of the oral component will be the occasion for a discussion between faculty and MA candidates about the written comprehensive exams. Finally, faculty and students will discuss the student's seminar paper. This paper must be distributed to the members of the exam committee at least three weeks in advance of the oral exam. The oral exam will usually take place 1-2 weeks after the written exam.

**Readings Lists**

**Primary sources**

Primary sources on the reading lists include literary texts and other documents (novels, poetry, short stories, plays, essays, tracts, pamphlets, films). Faculty select texts they deem to be the most representative of each century. When necessary, faculty may designate selections from a literary text.

**Secondary sources**

The secondary sources should be works of literary and cultural studies as well as general historical works. Students should read these works to become familiar with the main literary and cultural currents of the century as well as the different critical approaches proposed by scholars in the field.

Whenever possible, faculty will include titles from the reading lists in their courses. However, students should make every effort to be familiar with every work on the comprehensive reading list and should expect to find material not covered in their graduate courses on the exam. The comprehensive exam is intended to encourage students to study aspects of French and Francophone literature on their own, and they should be prepared to discuss and incorporate texts and material beyond those studied in the classroom.

**Preparing for the exams**

We urge students to spend the summer between their first and second year in the program reading material for the MA comprehensive. By October 1<sup>st</sup> of their third semester, students will be notified of the exact dates of the exams.

To prepare for the exams, students are required to meet with the professors who specialize in the periods of the exam. We also encourage students to form study groups when preparing for the exams.

### **Writing the exam**

The first part of the exam will be made up of targeted identifications and short essays. Students will have a choice of essay. The diachronic exam will consist of one question of large scope. Students have four hours for each exam.

### **IDs**

IDs test the students' factual knowledge of literary texts and the century. The IDs consist in a selection of dates, events, people, titles and brief passages from literary texts. Students are usually required to write a brief paragraph for each ID. In these paragraphs, the readers expect to see the most important elements associated with each term, what gives the date, the event or the person its significance. For the passages from literary texts, students should identify author, date, context, and the significance of the quote, as well as its main rhetorical and stylistic figures.

Students should allow themselves approximately 4 hours for each written part of the exam. In their essays, students have the opportunity to show that they are familiar with the material and that they can organize a thoughtful and coherent essay on the topic at hand. The exam is not open book, so students must have enough familiarity with the texts to be able to draw on them from memory. It is impossible for students to discuss in their essays all the works on the reading lists. In the second section, we recommend that students analyze three or four works in depth.

### **Grading**

Exams are given grades of H (High Pass), P (Pass) or F (Fail) (+s and –s are accepted). In reading and grading the exams faculty are looking for the following characteristics: a coherent and convincing thesis that the student supports with evidence based on works from the reading list; an understanding of the complexity of the question and an attempt to show different facets of the question; a detailed knowledge of the literary texts under discussion; a knowledge of the historical context in which the texts were produced and of historical shifts; a familiarity with different critical approaches; an understanding of their own assumptions about literary texts; an ability to describe and analyze literary and cultural phenomena in French. Students should avoid plot summaries (assume everyone has read the text) and should stay on topic. The point of the comprehensive exams is to come up with insightful and scholarly analyses of canonical literary texts. Students will receive feedback on their written exam during the oral exam and will then receive a single final grade from the committee for their overall performance on the written and oral sections of the exam.

# Reading List

## MIDDLE AGES

### Primary texts:

Entire texts in any edition:

*La Vie de Saint Alexis*

*La Chanson de Roland*

Chrétien de Troyes, one romance (a good Old French/Modern French edition of all the romances is the Livre de Poche [Classiques Modernes] edition.)

Marie de France, *Les Lais*

Bérout, *Le Roman de Tristan*

*Aucassin et Nicolette* (a good Old French/modern French ed. is the one by Jean Dufournet (Garnier-Flammarion, 1973).

Guillaume de Machaut, *Le jugement du roy de Navarre* (a good bilingual edition is the one by R. B. Palmer: PQ 1483.G5.A68.1988]

Christine de Pizan, *Le ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*, ed. Kennedy and Varty

In the Classiques Larousse editions:

*Le théâtre comique au moyen âge*, ed. Jean Frappier [PQ 1381.F7]

*La poésie lyrique au moyen âge*, 2 vols., ed. Guillaume Picot [PQ 1322.B6]

### Required secondary readings (in the manuals and dictionaries read the sections relevant to the texts on the list):

Pierre-Yves Badel, *Introduction à la vie littéraire du moyen âge* (Paris, 1992)

Dominique Boutet and Armand Strubel, *Littérature, politique et société dans la France du moyen âge* (Paris, 1979). Part I, chaps. 3-4 (pp. 68-143); part II, chaps. 2 and 3 (pp. 169-221).

Marcia Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition* (New Haven, 1997). Part IV, chaps. 12-15 (pp. 175-224).

*Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: Le Moyen Age* (revised edition, 1992)

Claude Gauvard, *La France au moyen âge du Ve au XVe siècle* (Paris, 1997). Chaps. 8, 9, 12-14.

Daniel Poirion, *Précis de la littérature française au moyen âge* (Paris, 1983)

## SIXTEENTH CENTURY

### Primary texts:

Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*

Marguerite de Navarre, *Heptaméron* (Prologue and *Nouvelles* 8, 10, 12, 21, 47).

Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (chs. 1-3, 8, 14-17, 18, 22).

Montaigne, *Essais*. Book I: "Au lecteur," and essays 1, 8, 20, 26, 28, 30, 31; Book II: 30; Book III: 2, 5, 9, 13.

Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse*

Poetry (all poems are in M. Allem, ed., *Anthologie poétique française, XVIe siècle*, 2 vols., Garnier-Flammarion, 1965. [PQ1173.A4.1965]):  
Vol. 1: Marot (pp. 109-28); Scève (pp. 219-21); Ronsard (pp. 281-306); Labé (pp. 313- 32); Du Bellay (pp. 337-48).

### **Required secondary reading:**

Denis Hollier, ed., *A New History of French Literature*. Entries for the years 1528, 1532, 1534, 1536 summer, 1539, 1541, 1544, 1549, 1550, 1555, 1563, 1578, 1595.

### **Suggested secondary readings:**

R. Aulotte, *Précis de littérature française du XVIe siècle*.

T. Cave, *The Cornucopian Text*.

C. Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism* (sections of French writers).

J. Kraye, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (chapters 1 and 2).

U. Langer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne* (chapters 1, 3, 4, 9, 10).

M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*.

G. Castor, *Pléiade Poetics*.

L. Febvre, *Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle* (pp. 307-25).

T. Hampton, *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century: Inventing Renaissance France*.

I. D. McFarlane, *A Literary History of France. Renaissance France. 1470-1589*.

G. Norton, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (sections on France).

M. Screech, *Rabelais*.

## **SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

### **Primary texts:**

René Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode* (Parts 1-4)

Pierre Corneille, *L'illusion comique, Le Cid*

Pascal, *Les Pensées* (ed. Le Guern, Folio classique) : Vanité, Misère, Raison des effets, Transition, Fr. 397 ("Infini rien") (You should acquaint yourself with Le Guern's editorial principles)

Molière, *Dom Juan, Tartuffe*

Racine, *Britannicus, Phèdre*

Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves*

La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes et réflexions diverses*, éd. Jacques Truchet, Paris, GF Flammarion, 1999 : les *Maximes* (édition de 1687) pp. 41-90.

La Fontaine, selected *Fables*: "La Cigale et la Fourmi" "Le corbeau et le Renard" "La

grenouille qui se veut faire aussi grosse que le boeuf" "Le chêne et le roseau,"  
"Les animaux malades de la peste," "L'ingratitude et l'injustice des hommes  
envers la fortune," "Le dépositaire infidèle," "Les compagnons d'Ulysse."  
Scudéry, "Histoire de Sapho" (in *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus*, extraits, GF Flammarion)  
OR *Conversations sur divers sujets* (tome I), "De la conversation," "De la  
Connaissance d'autrui et de soi-même," "De parler trop ou trop peu" (available  
on Gallica)  
Sévigné, *Correspondance* (ed. Raffalli, GF Flammarion) 19 août 1652 – 9 février 1671;  
24 avril 1671–16 mars 1672; 20 octobre 1675–29 juillet 1676  
« Le Code noir »

### **Required secondary reading:**

In Denis Hollier, ed., *A New History of French Literature*, read the following articles:  
"1634, 13 March, The Académie Française"  
"1637, Toward French Classical Tragedy"  
"1647, Subject of Modern Discourse"  
"1654, The Salons, Preciosity, and the Sphere of Women's Influence"  
"1661, From Roi Soleil to Louis XIV"  
"1668, Moralists and the Legacy of Cartesianism"  
"1678, The Emergence of the Novel"

### **Suggested secondary readings:**

Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France*  
John D. Lyons, *Kingdom of Disorder. Theory of Tragedy in Classical France*  
Hélène Merlin, *Public et littérature en France au 17<sup>e</sup> siècle*  
Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi*  
Harriet Stone, *The Classical Model: Literature and Knowledge in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century France*  
Alain Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain: Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique.*

## **EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

### **Primary texts :**

D'Alembert, *Discours Préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie*  
Isabelle de Charrière, *Lettres de Mistress Henley*  
Denis Diderot, *Le Rêve de d'Alembert (et L'Entretien) + Supplément au voyage de  
Bougainville*  
Françoise de Graffigny, *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*  
Gouges, *L'esclavage des noirs* + prefatory texts (in *Translating Slavery*, ed. Kadish) and  
« Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne »  
Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*  
Marivaux, *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*  
Montesquieu, *Les Lettres persanes*

Abbé Prevost, *Histoire de Manon Lescaut et du Chevalier des Grieux*  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions* (GF Flammarion, t. 1) Livres 1-VI  
Voltaire, *Candide*  
« La Déclaration des droits de l'homme »

**Required secondary reading:**

Articles sur le 18e siècle dans Denis Hollier, *New History of French Literature*, Harvard University Press, 1989.

**Suggested readings:**

André Bourde, Chapitre "Les Lumières, 1715-1789" in Georges Duby, *Histoire de la France*, Vol. II (de 1348 à 1852), Paris, Larousse "Références Histoire," 1991, pp. 245-302.

Michel Vovelle, Chapitre "La Révolution, 1789-1799" in Georges Duby, *Histoire de la France*, Vol. II (1348 à 1852), Paris, Larousse "Références Histoire", 1991, pp. 303-356.

Michel Delon & Sylvain Menant, *Précis de littérature française du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, PUF, 1990.

## **NINETEENTH CENTURY**

**Primary texts:**

Chateaubriand, *René* and *Atala*

Staël, *Delphine*

Vigny, dans *Poèmes antiques et modernes*, « La mort du Loup », « Le Mont des Oliviers ».

Hugo, *Hernani* ; dans *Les Contemplations*, « A celle qui est restée en France », dans *Les Châtiments*, « Souvenir de la nuit du 4 ».

Musset, *Lorenzaccio*

Sand, *Indiana*

Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*

Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*

Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

Baudelaire, dans *Les Fleurs du Mal*, « Au lecteur », « La vie antérieure », « L'Albatros », « Le Cygne », tous les poèmes appelés « Spleen ».

Mallarmé, dans les *Poésies*, « Le vierge, le vivace ... », « Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe ».

Huysmans, *A rebours*

Zola, *Germinal*

**Required secondary reading:**

Articles sur le 19ème siècle dans Denis Hollier, ed., *A New History of French Literature*,

Harvard University Press, 1989.

**Suggested secondary readings :**

Partie sur le 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle dans Mopin, Michel, préf. par Robert Badinter, *Littérature et politique*, Paris, Documentation Française, 1996.

Tadié, Jean-Yves, *Introduction à la vie littéraire du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, Paris, Dunod, c1996.

**TWENTIETH CENTURY (HEXAGON)**

**Primary texts:**

Samuel Beckett, *En attendant Godot*

Albert Camus, *L'Étranger*

Colette, *La Vagabonde*

Simone de Beauvoir, *Le sang des autres*

Marguerite Duras *L'Amant*

André Gide, *L'Immoraliste*

Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis clos*

Poetry:

Guillaume Apollinaire, *Alcools* (« Zone, » « Salomé, » « Mai, » « Rosemonde »)

Aimé Césaire, *Soleil cou coupé* (« Magique, » « Désastre tangible » « A l'Afrique »)

Paul Valéry, *Charmes* (« Le cimetière marin »)

Essays and theory:

Roland Barthes, « De l'œuvre au texte », in *Le Bruissement de la langue ; Mythologies* (Introduction, « Le vin et le lait, » « Le steak-Frites, » « Le Monde où l'on catch », « Le Tour de France comme épopée »)

Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Tome 1, Introduction)

Jean-Paul Sartre, « L'Existentialisme est un humanisme », *Orphée noir*

Jacques Derrida, « La différence, » in *Marges de la philosophie*

Michel Foucault, « Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur? »

Films:

*La Règle du jeu* (Jean Renoir)

*A bout de souffle* (Jean-Luc Godard)

**Required secondary readings:**

*A New History of French Literature* edited by Denis Hollier (Harvard University Press, 1989)

Read the following essays: "1911," "1913," "1914-1918," "1922," "1925, November," "1933, November" "1933, December" "1934, 6 February," "1939," "1940-1944," "1945,

6 February," "1945, 15 October," "1946, July," "1949," "1953," "1954, January" "1962, November," "1968, May"

Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (chapters 3, 4)

## **AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN LITERATURES IN FRENCH**

### **Primary texts:**

#### **Poetry, tales**

Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*

Birago Diop, *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* ("Introduction", "Les mamelles", "Maman-Caïman", "Sarzan")

Following poetry selections from Léopold Sedar Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*:

Aimé Césaire, "Barbare", "A l'Afrique"

Leon Gontran Damas, "Hoquet", "En file indienne", "Solde"

Léopold Senghor "Femme noire", "Nuit de Sine", "A l'appel de la race de Saba"

#### **Novels**

Mariama Bâ, *Une Si Longue Lettre*

Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*

Maryse Condé, *La traversée de la mangrove*

Assia Djebar, *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*

Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'Aventure ambiguë*

Ahmadou Kourouma, *Les Soleils des indépendances*

Camara Laye, *L'Enfant noir*

Henri Lopes, *Le Pleurer-Rire*

Jacques Roumain, *Gouverneurs de la rosée*

Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma*

#### **Essays, manifestos**

Jean Bernabé, Raphael Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau, *Eloge de la créolité*

Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Orphée noir*

#### **Required secondary reading:**

The following essays from *A New History of French Literature*, edited by Denis Hollier:  
1847, 1924, 1933 (Feb.), 1939, 1962, 1968 (Feb.)

#### **Suggested secondary readings:**

Michael Dash, *Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context*

Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*

Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans*

Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb*

