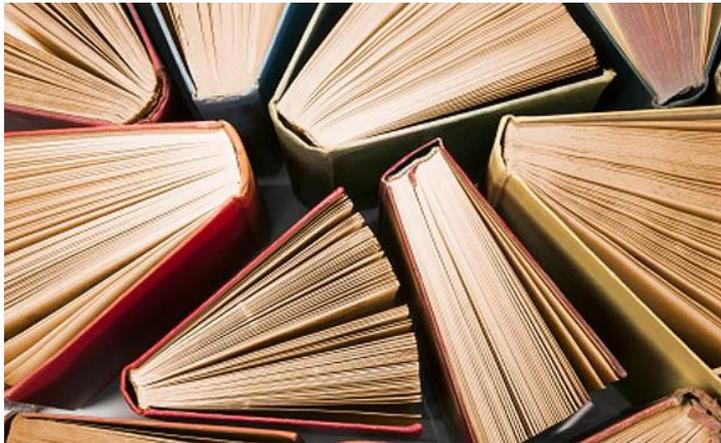


Non-Thesis & Area Exam Guidelines

MA in Literature



Inside, you will find answers to frequently asked questions, a checklist of requirements for your chosen degree track, and where to find Graduate College deadlines.

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NON-THESIS TRACK**MA Literature Degree Requirements**

___ Complete coursework requirements for Major:

___ Literary Scholarship (5301)

___ Medieval Literature (5353)

___ Renaissance Literature (5354)

___ American Literature

___ British Literature (post-Renaissance)

___ Any post-Renaissance literature

___ Complete an additional 9 hours of literature electives, background courses, or extra courses. Include course department and number.

___ _____
 ___ _____
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___ Complete 9 hours of coursework requirements for Minor/Area of Emphasis/Cognate. Include course department and number.

___ _____
 ___ _____
 ___ _____

___ Complete all parts of Comprehensive Examination:

malit.english.txstate.edu/forms/Booklets

___ **General Examination** (4 hours; written; offered the first Saturday in February, June, and October)

___ **Area Examination** (2 hours; written; completed at least 4 weeks before your commencement)

Non-Thesis-Track Guidelines for M.A. in Literature Students

I. As a non-thesis-track student, what special requirements do I need to meet to graduate?

Instead of writing a thesis, you will be required to choose an Area of Emphasis, called a Cognate by the Graduate College, and take a two-hour examination on that emphasis. As part of your coursework, you will develop that area of emphasis by taking 3 classes (9 credits) in that area, not counting any course, which you may be using to satisfy the Major requirement at the top of your degree outline. In addition to the Area Examination, you will need to pass the four-hour General Examination that is offered once per semester for all graduate Literature students.

II. How do I choose an Area of Emphasis?

Your area of emphasis needs to be related either by period, subject, or genre. It can't be something extremely broad, such as American literature, or literature by women, or poetry, but it need not be very narrow, either. Examples, among a great many, might include American ethnic literature, or literature by British women, or contemporary poetry, or children's literature.

You should choose a topic that interests you and that corresponds with the teaching interests of graduate English faculty at Texas State. For a complete listing of English Graduate Faculty and their teaching interests, go to:

malit.english.txstate.edu/Resources/faculty

III. Once I know what I want my area of emphasis to be, what do I need to do?

Make sure that you complete at least 3 courses (9 credits) of graduate study that relate to that Area of Emphasis. If you have a Minor, or if your area of emphasis involves another discipline, you may, if you wish, include as many as 3 of the 9 credits which you took outside of the English Department. For example, if you are Minor in history and you choose Irish literature as your area of emphasis, you could take a graduate-level Irish history course as part of the 9 credits. You also need to put together an Area Examination committee. You should note that only Graduate Faculty may serve. For a list of the Graduate Faculty, go to:

<https://malit.english.txstate.edu/Resources/faculty.html>

If you are still unsure whether a professor is a member of the Graduate Faculty, ask the MA Literature Graduate Assistant at 512.245.3283 or at malit@txstate.edu.

The committee members must have some expertise in the area you have chosen for your emphasis. These committee members will help you to draw up a reading list for your Area Examination. **The list will include 15-20 of the most important book-length works in the area.** Most will be primary works, but a few could be volumes of criticism or theory. A substantial group of short pieces could substitute for a book or two. The committee members will also write the exam and grade it. If you have a Minor, or if your area of emphasis involves another discipline, you may choose one of the three committee members from the Graduate Faculty of another department at Texas State.

IV. How do I start forming my Area Examination committee?

First you will need to choose someone to chair the committee. You will be working with this faculty member the most frequently, so choose a professor with whom you are comfortable and whose academic methods and viewpoints are compatible with yours. If the professor agrees to serve as chair, he or she may have suggestions regarding the other members of your committee. Ask two other Graduate Faculty members if they would be willing to serve on your committee.

V. When do I need to start putting together my Area Examination committee?

As soon as you are sure what your Area of Emphasis will be, it is a good idea to start putting your committee together. Your committee will help you draw up the reading list for your Area Examination, so the sooner you put together your committee, the sooner you can begin working on your reading list and preparing yourself for the exam.

VI. How do I decide what books to select for my reading list?

You will meet with the chair of your committee and together you will draw up a list of 15 to 20 book-length works related to your area of emphasis. The chair will then go over that list with the other members of your committee for suggestions and approval. Once all three committee members have approved the list, the chair of your committee will give you a copy of the list.

VII. When do I take the Area Examination?

Generally, students take the Area Examination during their last semester of graduate study; however, you can choose to take the Examination earlier if you wish. There are advantages to taking the Exam earlier. For example, if you do not pass the Exam, you have the option of retaking it and still graduating on time.

After you take the Exam, your committee Chair will need time to distribute your exam to the other committee members, all three members will need time to read the Exam, the committee might need time to resolve any disagreements, and then your chair and you will need time to complete the paperwork and get it to the Graduate College. To be safe, then, it would be best to take the Exam at least four weeks before Commencement. If your Committee agrees beforehand, you might, if necessary, be able to get away with a little less than this.

VIII. What is the Exam's format?

As instructed at the Exam, you will write one or two essays. If asked to write one essay, you will typically have two or three from which to choose. If asked to write two essays, you will typically have three or four from which to choose.

IX. How will my exam be graded?

All of the members of your committee will read your Exam and evaluate it as one of the following:

- Passing with Distinction
- Passing
- Not Passing

“Passing with Distinction” is rare and must be a unanimous decision.

X. What happens if I don't pass my Area Examination?

You can retake the Exam once. If your second try is still “Not Passing,” then your only option is to address a written appeal to the Department Chair, asking for a third and final attempt. The appeal letter will not succeed unless it convincingly explains, in detail, why the third attempt is likely to succeed.

XI. What paperwork is involved?

When you have passed the exam, your committee must all sign the Comprehensive Exam Report Form, available online at: <https://www.gradcollege.txstate.edu/forms.html>. You and your committee chair should decide who will circulate the form using Adobe Sign (available from ITAC: <https://doit.txstate.edu/services/esignature.html>).

The Form must end up with the Program Director, Dr. Teya Rosenberg, at least 11 working days before your commencement so that it will be received by the Graduate College no later than ten working days before your Commencement ceremony. Check the Graduate College Deadlines for specifics: <https://www.gradcollege.txstate.edu/students/deadlines.html>

Appendix: Sample Area Examination (on Modern Irish Literature)

Reading list:

1. Wilde: *The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Importance of Being Earnest*
2. Yeats: *Michael Robartes and the Dancer, The Tower, The Winding Stair*
3. Synge: *The Playboy of the Western World, Riders to the Sea*
4. Shaw: *Saint Joan, Major Barbara*
5. Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist, Ulysses*
6. O'Casey: *The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock*
7. Flann O'Brien: *At Swim-Two-Birds, The Third Policeman*
8. Beckett: *Waiting for Godot, Endgame, Three Novels (Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable)*

Questions: Write an essay on any one of the following three questions. You have a total of two hours.

1. Several of the writers on your list are regarded as experimentalists. Select two or three works from the list that break significantly with past literary conventions. Write an essay explaining what makes these works experimental and state whether you think the experimentation is successful.
2. Discuss the role of Irish political history and Irish Nationalism in the work of at least three of the authors on your reading list. Be as specific as possible regarding both the works and the historical/political events and issues the works reference.

3. Discuss how at least three of the writers on your list (choose at least one prose work and one work of poetry) use the mythical/mystical Irish past as a means for exploring "Irishness" and the Irish national character.

Passing essay:

2.

Many authors writing during the early twentieth century in Ireland included references to political history and Irish nationalism in their works. The writings of James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, and Sean O'Casey all include many allusions and occasionally direct mentions of these elements of Irish life. In fact, one could argue that this indeed creates the backbone of many of these works, reflecting not only the beliefs of the author, but of the Irish populace as well.

James Joyce included numerous references to Irish political events in nearly everything he wrote. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* begins with a small boy's realization that his aunt has different colored brushes for Michael Davitt and Parnell in her case. Dante has strong, negative feelings about Parnell and believes he lost his office, and probably his life, for good reason. Interestingly, Stephen's father feels differently in the matter and the heated exchange over this fallen demigod of Irish politics erupts famously in the argument some pages later at the Christmas table. Joyce's character Stephen, even at a very young age, can sense that politics is an extremely volatile subject in the household and the battle lines are clearly drawn. Young Stephen believes, like his father, in the goodness of Parnell, and despite what Dante says about Kitty O'Shea and the like, little sways his way of thinking at this point.

Joyce also references the Phoenix Park murders, a politically motivated hit, in this novel and more completely in *Ulysses*. In fact, throughout *Ulysses* the reader encounters characters influenced one way or the other by politics. Consider the forceful character of Mr. Deasy, Stephen's schoolmaster, who believes that "Ulster is always right" and

espouses the values of England to the young teacher. Then there is “the citizen” who believes so strongly in Irish Home Rule and the IRA that he is willing to get into a fistfight with Leopold Bloom in the bar. This character represents the far extreme, the belief that Irish men ought to be playing Irish games, drinking Irish stout, and speaking Irish in a free and united Ireland. To this, Poldy counters that he actually knew Griffith and might have given him the idea for Sinn Fein, which just about drives “the citizen” and his dog Garry Owen over the edge. The resulting biscuit-tin missile is this character’s final remark on the importance of Irish independence.

W.B. Yeats also made ample use of Irish political history in his poetry. His “Easter, 1916” is in direct response to the Easter Uprising that caused so much chaos in Dublin. Yeats refers to Maud Gonne, John MacBride, and others who were directly involved with the uprising, many of whom lost their lives, as a result in this poem. To the author, everything has “changed, changed utterly” because of this “terrible beauty” born of the Irish struggle to be free. He also references this event in “Sixteen Dead Men” and names some of the men executed because of the Easter events. He compares them to Wolfe Tone and Lord Edward, both leaders of an earlier uprising in the late 1700’s.

Yeats does not necessarily believe that violence is the best course of action, as some of his other poems relate. In “The Leaders of the Crowd,” Yeats seems to lament the common man that is caught up in the violence and fervor surrounding this struggle. Many good men and women died or found themselves in prison because of this fight for independence. He also sees, as in “The Second Coming” that this politics and violence is part of an evil with possibly world changing consequences. In another poem, “In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markeivez,” Yeats almost regrets that he cannot turn back the hands of time and redeem his lost friend from the life that politics tainted.

Additionally, nearly every poem that refers to Maud Gonne, and the loss of their potential love (be she Sheba or

Leda), has something negative to say about politics in Ireland.

Finally, Sean O’Casey saturated his drama with Irish politics and themes of nationalism. His play *Juno and the Paycock* has a great deal to do with both of these subjects. Johnny Boyle, the son of Juno and Jack, is a “soldier” for Ireland that loses an arm, plus partial use of his legs, defending his country. There is a hinted suggestion that he betrays one of his friends, who is fighting for the other side, and that the IRA assassinates this boy. At the end of the play, Johnny himself is gunned down in apparent retaliation for the killing of this friend, leaving both mothers on opposite sides to lament the loss of sons to such a cause.

In O’Casey’s *Shadow of a Gunman*, the theme of Irish nationalism and politics permeates every scene. The character Seamus is working with another fellow, MacGuire, who happens to be active in the IRA. Seamus misses his trip with him to Knocksedean where the English-backed police or Black and Tans kill MacGuire. He leaves a suitcase in Seamus and Davoren’s apartment that we later discover contains bombs. Other characters in the tenement house that Davoren and Seamus occupy are sympathetic to the cause of the IRA and want to use them as a sort of terrorist force to keep order in the building. One character, Minnie, falls in love with Davoren in the misguided belief that he is an IRA gunman. As the English Bobbies raid the tenement, Minnie takes the suitcase filled with bombs to her room and they find it. The tragic ending comes when the police force, ambushed by the IRA on the way back to the station, shoot Minnie as she tries to escape.

O’Casey’s plays contain so much Irish nationalist rhetoric and political intrigue because that was his environment and reality. His work reflects the very dangerous, impassioned fight of the Irish people to free themselves from the yoke of English rule. His characters are often pawns, on one side of the battle or the other, and have very little actual ability to change their lives because of the poverty and violence surrounding them.

The themes of Irish nationalism and Irish politics reoccur so frequently in the works of Joyce, Yeats, and O’Casey

because that was the reality of what Ireland was at this time in history. It was a dangerous place to be, and yet, it still managed to offer the fertile ground necessary for great literature to emerge. The reader cannot ignore these themes in the writings about Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth-century. The passion, the violence, and the struggles were very real, and this colored every aspect of daily Irish life from the poetry written to the plays produced.