

**Rhode Island College**

**ENGLISH M. A.**

**STUDENT**

**HANDBOOK**

# ENGLISH M. A. STUDENT HANDBOOK

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### **Program Requirements—M. A. in English—Literature**

THIRTY CREDIT HOURS of literature courses at the graduate (400-500) level. (A maximum of two courses at the 400-level may be counted in the program.)

Required course: ENGL 501—Introduction to Graduate Study.

THESIS (ENGL 591 & 592) OR COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

### **M. A. in English—Concentration in Creative Writing**

THIRTY CREDIT HOURS of courses at the graduate level. At least twelve of those hours in graduate-level literature courses.

Required courses:

ENGL 501—Introduction to Graduate Study

ENGL 581—Workshop in Creative Writing (taken for three semesters)

THESIS (ENGL 591 & 592)

### **Thesis Plan**

Under the thesis plan (optional for M.A. in English; required for M.A. in English—Creative Writing), students take ENGL 591: Directed Reading, in preparation for the writing of the thesis, followed by ENGL 592: Master's Thesis, in which the research and writing of the thesis are completed. Students register for these courses by filling out Independent Study forms and attaching proposals. (See samples at back of Handbook.) The 592 proposal must be approved by the departmental Graduate Committee or, in the case of a creative writing thesis, the Creative Writing Advisory Committee. Both 591 and 592 are three credits each and count towards the program's 30-hour credit requirement.

The thesis will be written under the direction of a faculty advisor of the student's choice and will be read by a committee that includes the advisor, an English department faculty member, and an outside reader who will chair the committee. The thesis will normally be a substantial critical / research paper of approximately 50-70 pages in length. For Creative Writing Concentration students, the thesis will consist of a substantial body of either fiction or nonfictional prose of approximately 60-80 pages, or poetry of approximately 30-35 poems. A defense of the thesis before a faculty committee is required in all cases.

## Examination Plan

Under the examination plan and upon completion of at least 24 credit hours of graduate course work, the student writes a 48-hour take-home essay examination. The exam is based on reading lists in two of the following four categories: (1) British literature before 1800, (2) British literature since 1800, (3) American literature, and (4) theory or genre. Each reading list should consist of a minimum of ten texts. With the exception of the theory category, the list should include at least six primary texts and a minimum of four secondary, critical works. The departmental graduate advisor must approve the reading lists and, in consultation with the student, will appoint faculty advisors in the two chosen areas to conduct the exam.

## Deadlines

THESIS PROPOSALS (for 591 & 592):

Fall: December 1

Spring: April 15

COMPLETED THESES:

Fall: November 15 (defense by early December)

Spring: April 15 (defense by early May)

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS:

Fall: Administered no later than the first week of December

Spring: Administered no later than the first week of May

**Other graduate policies, forms, and procedures can be found in the RIC Graduate Studies Manual, available online at <http://www.ric.edu/graduateStudies/policiesAndProcedures.php>**

## M. A. Literature Thesis Proposal Guidelines for English 591 & 592

For ENG 591: Directed Reading

In consultation with his or her advisor, the student should prepare a 2-3 page proposal for a one semester, three-credit independent study leading to the writing of the thesis. The proposal should contain the following:

- 1) A brief summary of the topic and general area of study in which the student intends to carry out research. The summary should refer to books in the bibliography (see #5) and describe the intellectual and critical context for the project.
- 2) A list of questions or statements about specific issues related to the topic that the student wishes to explore and research.
- 3) A statement about the theories, methods, and approaches the student expects to use.
- 4) An approximate time-table for the work to be accomplished in the first semester, including plans to meet with the advisor (one-hour weekly meeting minimum).
- 5) A bibliography (*at least* eight to ten works that relate to the area).

For ENG 592: Masters Thesis

In consultation with his or her advisor, the student should prepare a 4-6 page proposal along with a thorough bibliography. The proposal for 592 should be more specific and detailed than that for 591. It should include the following:

- 1) A clear description of the topic, main texts, and central argument (thesis) of the project. The description should explain how the argument fits into the intellectual context of the field and relates to previously established critical arguments relevant to the topic.
- 2) An explanation of the theoretical approach, terms, and methods to be used in the thesis.
- 3) Reference to specific texts in the bibliography and brief discussion of how they will be used.
- 4) An approximate time-table for the writing of the thesis

during the semester, including plans to meet with the advisor (one-hour weekly meeting minimum).

- 5) A complete bibliography.

The proposal for 592 will be read and evaluated by all of the members of the Graduate Committee. The writing should be intelligible to readers who are not experts in the field.

### **Creative Writing Thesis Proposal Guidelines**

For 591, the student, in consultation with the advisor, should prepare a 3-5 page proposal to accompany the Independent Study form. The proposal should include an approximate time-table for work to be accomplished, including plans to meet with the advisor (one-hour weekly meeting minimum).

For 592, the student should prepare a 4-5 page proposal accompanied by a writing sample (generally one work of prose or a half dozen poems). This proposal should also include a time-table and statement of meeting plans. The proposal will be read and evaluated by the members of the Creative Writing Advisory Committee.

Ryan Burns

Dr. Kathryn Kalinak

English 591: Directed Reading

7 April 2009

My Master's thesis will explore contemporary popular culture constructions of masculinity produced in Walt Disney's animated filmic texts. This project will draw from the "New Disney" era, starting with 1989s The Little Mermaid and subsequent films Beauty and the Beast and The Lion King. The 1980s ushered in a renewal of the animated feature film. It was the Walt Disney Company that began this animated renaissance, returning to its early roots as a successful animation producer. With this crucial moment in animated film history, my study will proceed to a range of contemporary Disney-Pixar computer-generated imagery texts including Finding Nemo and Wall-E, and end with the upcoming return to hand-drawn cell animation in The Princess and the Frog. Along the way, I will use each film as a cultural and historical marker to gauge Disney's cultivation of masculinity, a scholarly project that appears to be non-existent in recent critical studies of Disney.

I will employ this timeline of animated Disney texts to investigate the implications that destructive film narrative "type casting" have had on the acceptance of images of normative masculinity as they are coded within the discourses of power and identity, framing my study of Disney as a producer of cultural and social norms. To this end, the animated Disney film narratives reinforce the cultural roadmap that models the appropriate roles and traits of normative sexuality and gender for both men and women. In appending itself to this roadmap and in many ways *charting* this roadmap, the

company consequently takes on a complex package of cultural ideologies. This set of dominant codes, the white, patriarchal, heteronormative system, induces the Walt Disney Company to normalize or even naturalize the set of signifying traits and roles that systematically categorizes the essential woman and man, while marginalizing the lifestyle of alternative subcultures.

With this socio-cultural contestation in mind, it leads me to ask a series of questions that will help set up my course of study. What does it mean to be a man according to Disney? To what extent does Disney cultivate masculinity as a cultural norm? How has this designation of masculinity transformed from the advent of the "New Disney" era to its current formations? What role does hegemonic masculinity play within the narrative of "New Disney"? What is at stake for denigrated sexual subjectivities, given Disney's heteronormative frame of reference? Who are the characters that show signs of resistance, crystallizing the real life battle of individuals who find themselves in such subject positions and identity constructs?

There are many questions that need, at best, to be answered or, at least, to be addressed. I will raise a number of issues while attempting to answer some of these more critical questions pertaining to Disney's treatment of the various representations of masculinity from 1989 to 2009. To accomplish this task of analyzing animated masculinity as it shapes "Othered" self-conceptions, I will apply a theoretical framework that encompasses key works in masculinity studies, queer theory, and feminist criticism to a number of filmic texts that address these themes. The work of Sean Griffin and Susan Jeffords will serve as essential cornerstones to my reading of contemporary Disney texts. Steven Cohan's work in Masked Men and Screening the Male will structure the



issue of masculinity, an essential methodology that will help my readers understand the cultural and social dynamics implicit in contemporary Disney animation.

Taking a cue from Alex Doty's Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture, I will work within a poststructuralist framework proposed by the intersection of film media and queer theory. The goal will be to analyze how some of the Disney filmic texts of the last twenty years have too often accepted and even enacted the very binary hierarchal discourses of gender structuration and identification. By this process alone, the film narratives seize consciousness, diverting the focus away from the ideological project that transpires and toward the cinematic masterpiece of Disney. A study of the way the films function directly and indirectly as ideological and discursive tools of teaching and learning cultural mores should help yield a response to my preliminary questions concerning representations of gender, masculinity, and sexuality.

In the fall I will meet weekly with my advisor, Kathryn Kalinak, to gauge my progress during the directed reading. I plan to submit a series of drafts to Professor Kalinak so we can share an intellectual exchange on key concepts from my readings. It is my belief that the readings and discussions will strengthen my project by helping me to hone a more precise and cohesive written document as I prepare for the second half of my thesis project.

Filmography

Aladdin. Dir. Ron Clements and John Musker. VHS. Walt Disney Pictures, 1992.

Beauty and the Beast. Dir. Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise. VHS. Walt Disney Pictures, 1991.

Finding Nemo. Dir. Andrew Stanton. DVD. Disney-Pixar, 2003.

Hercules. Dir. Ron Clements and John Musker. DVD. 1997.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Dir. Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise. DVD. Walt Disney Pictures, 1996.

The Incredibles. Dir. Brad Bird. DVD. Disney-Pixar, 2004.

The Lion King. Dir. Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff. VHS. Walt Disney Pictures, 1994.

The Little Mermaid. Dir. Ron Clements and John Musker. VHS. Walt Disney Pictures, 1989.

Monsters, Inc. Dir. Pete Docter and David Silverman. DVD. Disney-Pixar, 2001.

Mulan. Dir. Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook. DVD. Walt Disney Pictures, 1998.

Pocahontas. Dir. Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg. VHS. Walt Disney Pictures, 1995.

The Princess and the Frog. Dir. Ron Clements and John Musker. Film. Walt Disney Pictures, 2009.

Tarzan. Dir. Chris Buck and Kevin Lima. DVD. Walt Disney Pictures, 1999.

Toy Story. Dir. John Lasseter. VHS. Walt Disney Pictures, 1995.

Wall-E. Dir. Andrew Stanton. DVD. Disney-Pixar, 2008.

Bibliography

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Bergling, Tim. Sissyphobia: Gay Men and Effeminate Behavior. New York: Southern Tier Editions, 2001.

Bronski, Michael. Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility. Boston: South End P, 1984.

Byrne, Eleanor, and Martin McQuillan. "King of the Swingers: Queering Disney." Deconstructing Disney. London: Pluto P, 1999. 133-51.

Clum, John. "He's All Man": Learning Masculinity, Gayness, and Love from American Movies. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Cohan, Steven. Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997.

Connell, R.W. Masculinities. 2nd ed. Berkley: University of California P, 2005.

Doty, Alexander. Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 1993.

Edwards, Tim. Cultures of Masculinity. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Gendered Outcasts and Sexual Outlaws: Sexual Oppression and Gender Hierarchies in Queer Men's Lives, Ed. Christopher Kendall and Wayne Martino. New York: Harrington Park Press, 2006.

Griffin, Sean. Tinker Belles and Evil Queens: The Walt Disney Company from the Inside Out. New York: New York UP, 2000.

Jackson, Earl. Strategies of Deviance: Studies in Gay Male Representation.

Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995.

Jeffords, Susan. Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era. Piscataway:

Rutgers UP, 1993.

---. "The Curse of Masculinity." From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender,

and Culture. Ed. Laura Sells, Lynda Haas, and Elizabeth Bell. Bloomington:

Indiana UP, 1995. 161-72.

Male Trouble. Ed. Sharon Willis. By Constance Penley. Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota P, 1993.

McCallum, Robyn. "Masculinity as Social Semiotic: Identity Politics and Gender in

Disney Animated Films." Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in

Children's Literature and Film. Ed. John Stephens. New York: Routledge, 2002.

116-32.

Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film. Ed. Ellis Hanson. Durham: Duke UP,

1999.

Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinemas. Ed. Steven Cohan

and Ina Rae Hark. London: Routledge, 1993.

Simpson, Mark. Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity. New York:

Routledge, 1994.

Trice, Ashton, and Samuel Holland. Heroes, Antiheroes and Dolts: Portrayals of

Masculinity in American Popular Films 1921-1999. Jefferson: McFarland and

Company, 2001.

Derick K. Ariyam

30 November 2009

Master's Thesis Proposal

I'm from Sri Lanka—at least that's what I'm told. Ask me where it is and I can point you to it, and highlight all of its geographical markers: there's the coast of India, the Indian Ocean, that little tear-shaped island. But if you ask me what Sri Lanka is like, that's a bit more difficult. To describe the country I'm from, where I identify as ("I'm Sri Lankan"), where my birth certificate brands me, I must rely on what others have told me. I've always been too young to remember.

Owing to a civil war and tensions that still grip the nation, many families like mine have left Sri Lanka and have never looked back. Some displaced Sri Lankans still have memories of the country to recount, recall, and re-live, while others, like me who left at a very young age, have none. But regardless of whether these memories exist or not, there is still with many a desire to maintain and rebuild some attachment to their homeland. It is an impulse similar to what Salman Rushdie describes in his book Imaginary Homelands as being "haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (10). This impulse is what drives my master's thesis at RIC.

For my master's thesis at RIC, I will write a thesis that will assemble a framework of understanding Sri Lanka as a nation—as a community—through a *bricolage* of literary works written by a varied selection of Sri Lankan authors. Of primary interest to me is locating the sites of contention—the cultural and language boundaries—that have defined the country in combative terms, and have been the cause for the displacement of many of its inhabitants.

My thesis will begin with a closer look at the boundaries that divide the country. For clarity, my use of the word “boundaries” does not refer to any physical/terrestrial boundaries within Sri Lanka. Rather, I’m more concerned with the intangible boundaries like culture and language that seem to be the locus of conflict within the nation. Ostensibly, the war in Sri Lanka is between two groups of people: Tamils and Sinhalese. The convenience of describing the conflict in categorical groupings is ubiquitously employed, and assumes at great risk an all-exclusiveness of involvement between the two cultures that is not representative of reality: not all Tamils are at war with Sinhalese, not all Sinhalese are at war with Tamils. But the very articulation of the conflict as “cultural” can sometimes reproduce and support those same contentions. The love affair at the center of Shyam Selvadurai’s novel Funny Boy is an example of this. The deep-seated love-interest between a Tamil woman and a Sinhalese man is eventually torn asunder, not by the couple themselves, but rather by external forces (parental figures) that (re)project a perceived incompatibility between the two cultures. Sadly, in Selvadurai’s novel, the couple gives way to the pressure of these forces and breaks their relationship.

Language also *binds* Sri Lanka. Some suggest that language issues were the initial fuse that set off Sri Lanka’s decades-long conflict. The Sinhala Only Act which became law in 1965 replaced English with Sinhala as the official language of the country. All official business was required to be conducted in Sinhala, which is the language spoken by the majority of the population. While some viewed this as a liberating move (having just been granted independence from Britain as a former Crown Colony) others, particularly Tamil-speakers, felt immediately marginalized by this gesture. Many Tamils lost their jobs for being unable (or unwilling) to quickly learn Sinhala after the passing of this law. Minoli Salgado, in a book entitled, Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place, describes the acute sense of alienation in

Sri Lanka that many Tamils felt: a feeling of homelessness and un-belonging (85). Further complicating these issues is a fact that Sinhala is a language with ancient roots spoken *en masse* only in Sri Lanka. The same does not apply to Tamil. Donald Smith, a professor of political science, describes the Sinhalese/Tamil conflict as an anxiety linked with cultural survival. He calls it the “Myth of Reconquest”: an overall sense that culture has an ancient territorial link to a country, and when the land is “overrun by enemies,” there is a need to “reconquer the land and restore the preeminence [of] sacred values” or otherwise face extinction (85).

But interestingly, the English language held a contradictory and complicated role within this whole process. Salgado tells us that colloquially in Sinhala, “English” was referred to as the *Kadwu* (“the sword”): suggesting English divides and conquers—and with a certain war-like relish. But at the same time, English paradoxically connected and linked the various communities together—a “link language” (22). The country was seemingly more united (though colonized) under the English language than under Sinhala; under English, a common system for expression throughout the country was at least established. In addition, English was seen as a type of “mask,” a way to obscure one’s identity, and thereby “mask” one’s association to any specific cultural group or language (Salgado 22). This sentiment is echoed by many critics in the literary field in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan authors who have chosen to write in English have historically not been given serious consideration. Their versions of Sri Lanka are considered inauthentic, and/or lacking cultural legitimacy.

It is at this intersection of the English language and Sri Lanka that my thesis is primarily focused. I have chosen three Sri Lankan authors who write about the country in English: Shyam Selvadurai, Romesh Gunsekera, and Michael Ondaatje. I argue that it is through their alleged “inauthentic” representation of Sri Lanka, that one can frame a more

“authentic” conception of the country. I chose these three writers in particular because their works challenge notions of inauthenticity by writing from varied dislocated, and unrepresented positions of Sri Lanka, and in effect, challenge the boundaries that contain/exclude/ignore them.

An author like Shyam Selvadurai for instance, gay and born of a mixed Tamil and Sinhalese background (now living in Canada), does not neatly fall into any category provided for him. Many of his novels about Sri Lanka provide a portrait of growing up gay in Sri Lanka and the challenges of identity that occur— especially in a country where homosexuality is still considered criminal. Though living in Canada now, Selvadurai admits in his autobiographical introduction to a short story collection, Story-Wallah: Short Fiction from South Asian Writers, that, were he in Sri Lanka, “the very real threat of physical violence and intimidation might have stopped [him] from exploring [themes of gay liberation and feminism]” (2). Interestingly, his position living outside of the boundaries of Sri Lanka, now provide a unique glimpse of a Sri Lanka that has always existed for him (and now for us), but was historically marginalized and silenced.

Similarly, Romesh Gunsekera has suffered fierce reproach by critics in Sri Lanka. One resident critic suggested Gunsekera to be the “most controversial Sri Lankan expatriate writer writing today” (149). The reasons for his “inauthenticity” are largely due to claims of an extreme and “compromised” exoticism. Having been born in Sri Lanka, and then growing up in the Phillipines, and then later moving to London, the itinerant Gunsekera writes of Sri Lanka from those perspectives. His Sri Lanka-of-the-mind—as Salman Rushdie might call it—is no less “Sri Lanka”—in fact it is more. It adds to the possible range of ways to understand Sri Lanka. Rushdie, in defense of the distortions of memory, and the freedom of writing in exile suggests in



Imaginary Homelands that expatriated authors take great risk in “pushing the work to the limits of what is possible, in the attempt to increase the sum of what it is possible to think” (15).

Michael Ondaatje on the other hand reminds us that Sri Lanka is not just a country of Tamils and Sinhalese, but is shared by other groups as well. Ondaatje is a Sri Lankan Burgher, which is a Eurasian ethnic group introduced through the local intermarrying of early European colonial settlers with native Sri Lankans (mostly Dutch). His ethnicity alone is an interesting product of cultural hybridity that has no clear ancestral track. In a sense it represents a site of possibility of synthesis rather than exclusion at the interstices of seemingly fixed cultures and boundaries.

As a common theme through the works of all these three writers is a shared sense of looking backward and reconstituting shards and fragments of memory into representations of Sri Lanka. In addition all three authors are writing of Sri Lanka from outside Sri Lanka (or outside the “boundaries” of Sri Lanka). In addition, they all provide some perspective into the existing tensions and conflicts in the country.

My thesis critically approaches and explores all the works written by these three authors concerning Sri Lanka. Rather than approach these works in a highly sequenced manner, I have chosen to place works against each other, in a variety of ways. In a sense, my thesis will hopefully perform some of the hybridized multi-perspective portraits of Sri Lanka that are at the center of my project. Ultimately, my goal is to provide a convincing and thoroughly supported argument that Sri Lanka as a nation, is better and more accurately—and inclusively—articulated in the plural: Sri Lankas. And, that the site of contention that has plagued the nation for decades in conflict and civil war may be located in a mistakenly fixed understanding of boundaries that in practice are more fluid, dislocated, and various.

## Ariyam 6

I will use several theorists to help me formulate a critical foundation for my analysis. In particular, I rely on Homi Bhabha and his work Location of Culture. Benedict Anderson and his important work Imaginary Communities provides the basis of my theoretical understanding of nations and how they are constructed. I use Salman Rushdie, particularly his collection Imaginary Homelands, for his insights into the act of writing in exile and reconstituting a pluralized sense of “home” and “country.” A working bibliography is appended to this proposal.

To help me along with my project—for critical advice and guidance—I will meet with my advisor, Dr. Daniel Scott, weekly for one hour.

## Working Bibliography

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- Spivak, Gayatri C. Can the Subaltern Speak? Turia & Kant, 2007.
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Larry O'Brien

ENGL 592

December 1, 2010

Thesis Proposal

After nearly one hundred years of publication and copious literary criticism, Emily Dickinson remains one of the most enigmatic figures in American literature and her poetry among the most inscrutable. In the deceptively simple ballad stanza, *x8a6x8a6*, which she appropriated from Isaac Watts's hymnal of 1720 (edited by Samuel Worcester in 1819 as *Watts & Select*), the song liturgy found in nearly every New England church and which Emily's mother owned (Miller 141-42), Dickinson can be, by turns, mysterious or playful or deadly serious or misleading or insightful or obscure, but, above all, puzzling. Page Richards' observation in *Distancing English: A Chapter in the History of the Ineffable* that inexpressibility is "founded in a combination of perfection and inadequacy: the human speaker falls forever short of meeting expectations demanded by the perfection of his or her subject" (3) could well have been written about Dickinson's poetry. There, "inadequacy and loss are just as prevalent to those who, seeking perfection, are wrapped up in trying to express it or achieve it in the first place" (4).

Dickinson inhabits this unstable ground between perfection and loss, and her work is best understood as a string of negotiations, sometimes simultaneous, with one, the other, or both. Melville said, "It is hard to be finite on an infinite subject" (6). Dickinson confronted this problem as well as its opposite: seeking to be infinite on finite subjects. The means of discourse found in her letters and in her poetry reveals an unusual grasp of an unusual world; she is difficult and puzzling because reality is and because of how she writes it. Her poems are rife with both visual and audible puns, solecisms, unusual punctuation, and apparent contradictions.

Dickinson uses these tools of the language of unsaying often to challenge her society's commonly accepted versions of religion, of the divine, and of order. "As if the Sea should part" is a case in point:

As if the Sea should part  
And show a further Sea—  
And that—a further—and the Three  
But a presumption be—  
  
Of Periods of Seas—  
Unvisited of Shores—  
Themselves the Verge of Seas to be—  
Eternity—is Those— (Fr720)

The parting sea clearly recalls the Biblical story in Exodus but just as quickly pushes past it; the language in this poem sends the reader off in several directions at once. The "Three," the Trinity, is but a presumption in this poem. Dickinson's speaker uses the antithetical senses of "Periods" in line 5 to serve her purposes: a period is at once a prolonged length of time and a complete stop. "Shores" in line 6 puns on "sure": the traveler's route offers no boundaries or certainties in either time or space. In "Seas to be" for "Cease to be" her speaker reemphasizes the prolonged stretch and simultaneous sudden stop. The whole stretch that goes on forever simultaneously ends with the paronomasia. The last line adds to the linguistic anarchy by using the third person singular form of the verb "to be" to link "Eternity" and "those." Her subject and predicate do not agree; grammar is neither prescriptive nor decisive, just like the nature of "Eternity."

Dickinson's pursuit of the ineffable places her within the centuries-old tradition of *apophasis*. In *The Mystical Languages of Unsayings* Michael Sells identifies *apophasis* as "a distinct dialectic of transcendence in which the utterly transcendent is revealed as utterly immanent" (6). In English usage, *apophasis* was regarded primarily as a rhetorical trope, "a mention by not mentioning," especially during the seventeenth century, but by the nineteenth century *apophasis* was connected to negative theology, the *via negativa*, the attempt to describe God by means of negation, that is, to speak only of what God is not to achieve a unity. The *apophatic* tradition has understandably been allied with the approach of mysticism which similarly attempts to know God through means beyond individual perception or organized religion.

Sells traces *apophasis* in the West back to Plotinus (ca. 204/5-270 CE) whose *Enneads* offer an account of an ordered structure of living reality, which proceeds eternally from its transcendent First Principle, the One or Good, and descends in an unbroken succession to every level of being. The work also shows how the human self is able to ascend by a progressive purification and simplification to that union with the Good which alone can satisfy it. Thus, there are two movements in Plotinus' universe: an outgoing from unity to multiplicity, the other a return to unification. Plotinus insists repeatedly, however, that the One or Good is beyond the reach of human thought or language. Language can only point the mind along the way to the One, not describe, encompass, or present It. In *Enneads* VI. 9. 3 he says, "Strictly speaking, we ought not to apply any terms at all to It; but we should, so to speak, run around the outside of It trying to interpret our own feelings about It, sometimes drawing near and sometimes falling away in our perplexities about It" (Armstrong VII, 315). The effort to "engage 'the real' in language leads to a continual turning back of language upon itself. The real is unknowable, yet

that unknowability, rather than resulting in silence, becomes the dynamic of a new discourse” (Sells 220).

Even earlier than the third century, the apophatic tradition is represented in the paradoxes of Plato’s *Parmenides*, for example, a dialogue devoted to the existence of the One. Typically, the conclusion of the dialogue is inconclusive: “It seems that, whether there is or is not a one, both that one and the others alike are and are not, and appear and do not appear to be, all manner of things in all manner of ways, with respect to themselves and to one another” (166b7-c5). Related to the self-referentiality of language is Aristotle’s definition of the Mind as “thought thinking itself” (*Metaphysics* XII, 7-9). St. Augustine’s (354-430 CE) much later *On Christian Doctrine* also testifies to the long tradition of apophatic discourse: “Have I spoken or announced anything worthy of God? Rather I feel that I have done nothing but wish to speak: if I have spoken, I have not said what I wished to say. Whence do I know this, except because God is ineffable” (I. 6).

Although it was often combined with other modes of theological, poetical, and discursive languages, apophasis played a prominent role in the traditions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity and lived on among many diverse figures, including Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), a French Beguine and mystic, Hafez (Khwaja Samsu d-Din Muhammad Hafez-e Sirazi who died in 1390), the Persian poet, Kabir (d. 1518), a mystic poet of India, and Jacob Boehme (d. 1624), a German theologian. In *The Mystic Fable*, for example, Michel de Certeau relates the linguistic struggles which took place in the Middle Ages between the Latin of the Church and the vernaculars of the mystics, between the ecclesiastical hierarchies of the time and the flowering of mysticism. Theologians controlled God through their precise language, but mystics resorted to linguistic



anarchy—solecisms, oxymorons, puns and paradoxes (the same tools which Dickinson often employs)---to give voice to that which (for them) had no words.

In “‘The Missing All’: Emily Dickinson’s Apophatic Poetics,” William Franke places Dickinson in this tradition: “If we focus on [her idiosyncratic religious faith] together with the poetry as having the character of a negative theology, much that is enigmatic, without ceasing to be so, begins also to make a clear kind of sense. I contend that Dickinson’s poetry is best understood as a form of negative theology, or as what I will call ‘Apophatic’ discourse” (1). I agree with Franke, but I also believe that apophasis occupies an important place within contemporary theoretical discussions as it has in recent years been compared to the deconstructive philosophical/linguistic theories of Jacques Derrida.

Many have pointed out similarities between apophasis and Derrida’s *différance*. In “Différance,” Derrida himself addressed the issue:

...the detours, locutions, and syntax in which I will often have to take recourse will resemble those of negative theology, occasionally even to the point of being indistinguishable from negative theology. Already we have to delineate that *différance* is not, does not exist, is not a present-being (on) in any form; and we will be led to delineate also everything that it is not, that is, everything; and consequently that it has neither existence nor essence. It derives from no category of being, whether present or absent.

Sells’s position on apophatic discourse is one that seems informed by Derrida (“Paradoxes, aporias, and coincidences of opposites within apophatic discourse are not merely apparent

contradictions. Real contradictions occur when language engages the ineffable transcendent, but these contradictions are not illogical.”). But while Derrida insists that *différance* does not apply to transcendental signifieds, Sellars thinks the rules of apophasis apply only to them. He continues:

Of course, apophasis is not the only discourse that cannot name its subject. Poetry, drama—almost any form of art—risks [*sic*] being trivialized when its meaning is defined and paraphrased discursively ... Apophatic texts have suffered in a particularly acute manner from the urge to paraphrase the meaning in non-apophatic language or to fill in the open referent—to say what the text really meant to say, but didn't. (3)

*Différance* is the something/nothing that creates all contradiction in all language and hence all meaning. In apophasis the subject of the discourse is the “non-object and no-thing” from which proceeds particular feelings and understandings, and, indeed, differences.(3). The distinctions do not seem to have much of a practical effect on how the two are deployed but rather where they might be applied.

Derrida addressed these similarities again nearly twenty years later in a speech “différentially” entitled “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials” which he delivered at a conference on negative theology in Jerusalem in 1986. Once again, Derrida insisted that apophasis and deconstruction are distinct from one another in that apophasis asserts a “hyperessentiality” (79), the transcendental signified, a unity from which disunities flow, while in *différance* not unity but continual deferral produces meaning. And differences make meaning possible.

In “Différance,” Derrida also attempts to define his terms:

What we note as *différance* will thus be the movement of the play [Difficulties appear very early on as one of the denotations of “movement” as play] that “produces” (and not by something that is simply an activity) these differences, these effects of difference. This does not mean that the *différance* which produces difference is before them in a simple and in itself unmodified and indifferent present. *Différance* is the nonfull, nonsimple “origin”; it is the structured and differing origin of differences. (286)

This space between the signifier and its multiple signifieds, this “difference” and “deferral,” creates the movements which, depending on your perspective, either bless or plague language and on which Dickinson capitalizes. Her manipulation of such principal binary sets as perfection/loss, presence/absence, reason/feeling, nothing/all, and heaven/earth structures her discourse.

As had mystics and apophatics before her (and like deconstructionist readers after her) Dickinson used language to subvert and exalt meaning. In *My Emily Dickinson* Susan Howe asserts that “in prose and in poetry [Dickinson] explored the implications of breaking the law just short of breaking off communication with a reader. Starting from scratch, she exploded habits of standard human intercourse in her letters, as she cut across the customary chronological linearity of poetry” (11). Dickinson’s poetic is about the movement between signifiers and signified, and this is the site where she finds her voice. In *A Poet’s Grammar* Cristanne Miller suggests that “Dickinson’s use of ‘Difference’ in ‘There’s a certain Slant of light’ uncannily anticipates Jacques Derrida’s idea of *différance* and of negative or deconstructive interpretation” because poems like this one have “no semantic or linguistic center, no focal word of origin or meaning”

(102). Dickinson's texts are those of semantic contradiction, structures where meanings cancel out each other. As she says,

A word is dead when it is said,

some say.

I say it just begins to live

that day. (Fr278A.1)

In its original format as part of a letter sent to her Norcross cousins thanking them for sending on some unidentified passage Dickinson asserts "How long to live the truth is!" We can perhaps read her excitement as a testament to the enduring power of words to sustain the truth. But I believe the poem contradicts that interpretation. A word "begins to live" at the precise moment it is uttered because the speaker, occasion, and audience—the rhetorical situation—are unique. In Derrida's terms, "the speaker-poet deploys a set of signifiers in an effort to construct a unique signified (the poem) that is 'anchorless,' that does not and *cannot* allude to a transcendental signified. Dickinson understood that the very act of trying to net reality with language pushes reality, like some mythic butterfly, ever farther away" (White 163).

By comparing Dickinson's style and content to other mystical writers from a variety of traditions whom she almost certainly had never read nor even heard of, and by offering readings of several of her poems, I will try to establish Dickinson as a nonreligious mystic and to place her poetry in a post-modern theoretical context that makes deconstruction and apophatic discourse viable reading strategies. I will organize my efforts in the following (tentative) chapters:

- I. Silences
- II. Verbal Discourse
- III. Visual Discourse
- IV. Logical Discourse
- V. Conclusion

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Thesis Proposal

For my thesis I propose writing a short story collection, titled *Snapshots*. Through directed reading, I have studied the work of recent and contemporary writers to examine more carefully the development of character through point of view and to use in my own writing. Through my study I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the techniques used by successful writers for characterization. I have found that point of view, through voice, perspective and tone, is intricately linked to the development of character. My short story collection will be an experiment in point of view in which I attempt in each story to demonstrate character-driven narration, engaging the reader in the lives of an eclectic mix of protagonists through first and third person narration. Throughout the semester I will continue to meet with my advisor, Dr. Karen Boren, weekly.

Point of view is the most important technical choice that a writer can make (Madden 249). Janet Burroway, in her *Imaginative Writing, The Elements of Craft*, illustrates the significance of point of view to a story: "Apart from significant detail," she says, "there is no more important skill for a writer to grasp" (44). Point of view deals with perspective as well as the distance between the narrator and the reader. It is the tool that drives the reader's experience with the story. Madison Smartt Bell, in his book *Narrative Design*, defines point of view as the "perspective on events of a narrative; the position (which may change) from which the story is told" (373). With a first-person narrator, the reader is intimately connected to the narrator and sees the situation through the narrator's eyes. Unreliable or not, the narrator interprets the action for the reader, creating bias. In third-person limited, the reader is closer to the protagonist but is able to interpret

for him or herself as well as bearing witness to the protagonist's interpretation of the events. It is a close relationship as opposed to the intimate relationship between the reader and a first-person narrator. By comparison, a story written in third-person omniscient has the greatest range, allowing the reader to be at a greater distance from the action. There still may be bias, but there is more objectivity and reliability. A story written in second person, which Burroway dubs "experimental and self-conscious," is more intimate than first or third person, as if the reader is overhearing a private conversation (46).

In T.C. Boyle's short story, "Filthy with Things," the author uses third-person limited point of view effectively to acquaint the reader with the character of Julian by positioning the focus behind Julian's eyes. Julian, in an effort to help his wife deal with her hoarding issues, hires a professional organizer to create order from the chaos of 'things' that have accumulated in the house. The reader sees as Julian sees, but is also able to distance him or herself from Julian by the cool tone of the story. The tone of the story, in a sense, becomes a structural device that provides more distance between Julian and the reader. Julian is seen through his own interpretation of events as well as through the writer's eyes while the other characters in the story are seen through his eyes. Boyle writes, "This is what she's here for, he knows it, this is what he needs, discipline, compulsion, the iron promise, but he still can't help edging away, a little dance of the feet, the condensing of a shoulder" (44). In this quote the reader is experiencing Julian's discomfort through his thought process as well as being able to see the visual movement that is indicated by the text. The perspective is Julian's, but the distance between the reader and the narrator allows for the reader to experience the story not just as Julian himself experiences it, but through the combined experiences of Julian and the reader him or herself.

In contrast, in Margaret Atwood's story "Weight," the reader is given a more intimate look at character through first-person narration. From the moment the story opens, the reader is plunged headfirst into the inner conflict and the witty internal language of the protagonist. Atwood writes, "With men, Molly was a toad-kisser. She thought any toad could be turned into a prince if he was only kissed enough, by her. I was different. I knew a toad was a toad and would remain so. The thing was to find the most congenial among the toads and learn to appreciate their finer points" (168). This quote illustrates the ability of first-person narration to create characters with a strong voice. Through first-person narration, the reader is privy to the intimate mental processes of the character but at the same time has to be wary of the subjectivity of the first person narrator. The reader is therefore given the opportunity to evaluate the reliability of the narrator. The story is being told to the reader as opposed to the reader experiencing the story. First-person point of view is the most subjective given that the narrator is the sole interpreter of the action.

In my story "Ace of Spades," I use third-person, limited point of view. This enables the reader to experience the situation as the protagonist, Mason, experiences it. At the same time however, the reader is at a slight distance. The reader is still removed enough to be able to interpret the events of the story for him or herself, while bearing witness to Mason's interpretations as well. "The blood has congealed in a small pool under the body and Mason prods it with his work boot to get the animal unstuck. With a to-do list as long as his arm, there is no time to waste. A car rumbles slowly towards him and he stands, signaling to the driver to move to the other side of the road. Mason grabs the animal's body quickly and drops it into the grocery bag. Knowing how squeamish Kelly is, he's thankful his wife isn't around." This quote illustrates the closeness between the narrator and the reader, as opposed to the intimate relationship of a

first person narrator, the opposite, the distanced relationship of third-person, omniscient narration. This point of view is effective in this story because it allows the reader to identify with Mason while allowing for the reader's own interpretations of the action. By contrast, another story that I am working on titled "Girl on Top," introduces the reader to a first-person narrator that is unreliable. The reader experiences the story through the narrator's eyes, and is only given one interpretation of the events. The distance between the reader and the narrator is close but the reader is tasked with sifting through the biased information. The reader is plunged right into action that is contrived by the narrator and experienced solely through the narrator's biased interpretation of events. It is also possible that the reader may come to a realization that the narrator does not, creating an interpretation that is removed from the narrator, and experienced solely by the reader and perhaps other characters within the story.

Through my study I have found that point of view helps to drive both characterization and plot, and is easily the most important decision that a writer makes. The stories included in "Snapshots," will illustrate diverse points of view in order to show how distance between the reader and the narrator help to drive interpretation and meaning. Utilizing a variety of points of view will allow the reader to form a multitude of relationships with characters and will allow the reader to experience the action from a variety of perspectives, all of which will showcase the integral part that point of view plays in the narration of a story.

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Dionne Irving  
Thesis Proposal

*Blank People*, my final thesis project, will be a collection of short stories detailing the minority immigrant experience. The stories that will be included in my thesis will be from the viewpoint of minority immigrants and their progeny. The unifying themes are questions of identity, displacement, and isolation.

In her essay "La Conciencia de La Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness," Gloria Anzaldua explores the idea of the mestiza, a mix of immigrant culture and American culture.

La mestiza is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the mestiza faces the dilemma of the mixed breed. (Anzaldua 765)

Anzaldua's idea of the mestiza emphasizes the idea of being sandwiched between two different cultures, the struggle between what goes on in a cultural inner life and a cultural outer life.

La mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple often opposing messages. (Anzaldua 765)

These opposing messages can often cause a sense of displacement and isolation.

However, the mestiza is not about exacerbating these feelings. The mestiza is not only the mixing two cultures but the exploration of the spaces between these two cultures and the idea of finding a common ground. The mestiza is about stretching rigid cultural borders and coming to terms with identity

It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separate pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposed powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts.  
(Anzaldua 765)

My experiences with cultural and racial difference, coupled with language barriers, are channeled into my fiction. I immigrated to the United States from Canada at the age of 14. My parents immigrated to Canada from Jamaica prior to my birth, and my great grandparents immigrated to Jamaica from India, Scotland and Hong Kong. In trying to find my own place in the mestiza, I also work through feelings of displacement and isolation as a way of coming to terms with my identity. These themes are extremely relevant in my own work and are the impetus of my own search for identity. The mestiza encompasses the idea of feeling comfortable with all parts of my identity.

My characters inhabit different cultural spaces, adapt their language, and explore the mixing of cultures that Anzaldua discusses. Exploring displacement and isolation through the ethnic immigrant experience is an opportunity for my characters to understand themselves and their identities.

In my story, *Rice and Peas*, Sonja, the main character searches to find a balance between her own desires and what her family wants for her. Her family's desires and Sonja's discovery of her American and West Indian sides contribute to her identity. While Sonja is the child of immigrants, her experiences are relatable on a level deeper than simply being culturally displaced.

The idea of being culturally displaced can also be affected by race. While Sonja struggles between two cultures in a space where race is never a factor, in my unfinished

piece *A Winter in Four Seasons* the main character Izzy explores the space between different cultures by looking at the role her skin color plays.

By examining her race within a cultural context, some of Izzy's isolation comes because of her lack of identifiable race. Suffering from albinism, Izzy's skin is without pigment and the cruelty at the hands of her classmates leaves her feeling displaced and isolated. For Izzy, finding her place in the mestiza comes through feeling comfortable with her own propensity toward cruelty.

In my story *An Open Letter*, a mother who immigrated to the United States goes to visit her son, (born in the United States) after the birth of her son's first child. Her own frustration with living in the United States and her desire to pass on cultural traditions to her grandchild are handled through a letter to the infant. The device of the letter allows me to explore cultural traditions without falling into the tedium of over explaining. In the letter, the grandmother writes not only to her grandchild but to her son. The letter is a way for cultural traditions to be passed down. The combination of her son's American traditions and his mother's cultural traditions are combined in the infant. Both the son and his child represent the idea of the mestiza.

The idea of the mestiza is what helped me to find focus for my own voice as a writer. However, even while working with the cultural combinations of the mestiza, I still struggle with not being pigeonholed into writing an "ethnic" story. In analyzing different minority immigrant narratives, the theme of trying to assimilate while trying to maintain some cultural loyalty is ever present.



Many authors who explore the minority experience struggle to write about universal themes through a cultural lens. Instead of relating to the emotions of a piece, there is a tendency for the reader to ask that the story act as a cultural travelogue. In her essay collection *The Opposite of Fate*, Amy Tan examines the struggles that authors face in having their writing characterized as ethnic literature.

University friends tell me that arguments are being staged now in the halls of ethnic studies departments about which books are more valuable than others--- all based on those stringent criteria concerning positive and meaningful portrayals of the cultures they are supposed to represent.... And a growing number of readers, educated readers, now choose fiction like cans of soup on a grocery shelf. If the book is labeled ethnic, it must contain specific nutritive ingredients: a descriptive narrative that provides lessons on culture, characters who serve as good role models, plots and conflicts that contain socially relevant themes and ideas, language that is wholesome in its political and ethnic correctness. (Tan 307)

One author who has managed to overcome this problem is Zadie Smith. Smith's *White Teeth* is one of the key influences for my thesis project. In *White Teeth*, Smith explores Jamaican, English, and Indian families trying to find some sense of identity in a society encompassing immigrant and English culture. Their search is the search to find the balance that the mestiza describes.

While Anzaldua describes balance in the mestiza, the perception of the minority immigrant from the outside can be difficult to reconcile with the mestiza. The title of my thesis refers to *White Teeth*. In the novel Smith addresses the perception of the minority immigrants as blank people "free of any kind of baggage and happy and willing to leave their difference at the docks and take their chances in this new place, merging with the oneness of this green and pleasantlibertarianland of the free." (384) Smith's sarcastic tone indicates some of the conflicted feelings between maintaining identity while balancing two different cultural norms. Thematically, displacement, isolation and identity are all

experiences that come with the idea of being a blank person. Being a blank person negates any cultural past, leaving an individual to embrace only their new home.

Working with Anzaldua's definition of the mestiza, the minority immigrant experience does not have to become the experience of the blank person, and this something I am working toward creating in my fiction. The goal of *Blank People* is to uncover my own narrative voice while embracing the duality that comes with a person straddling the boundaries of multiple cultural experiences. My goal is to insert the idea of the mestiza into my own writing. My characters all want to claim their identity and find balance between their two cultural selves.

I will continue working with Professor Karen Boren as my faculty advisor to complete my thesis project. I will meet with her weekly, for an hour, to receive feedback on my progress. I intend to submit my thesis for approval in the spring of 2005.

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Steven Lighty

Thesis Proposal

Creative Writing— Poetry

November 1, 2011

My graduate thesis, tentatively titled *Riffs on Riffs*, will be a collection of thirty or more poems that focus on the creation of music. In these poems I will explore how sounds, scales, and modes have become adapted to our human ears over the past fifty millennia. I wish to arrange my collection chronologically, from Paleolithic times to the present, in order to try and understand how some sounds and tones please the ear, while others are deemed discordant. I will also analyze the symbolic nature of certain instruments, and investigate how an artist's creative genius can be lost during the transposing and recording process.

Many of my poems I have written for my thesis are of the narrative bent, so the first poets I wanted to focus on in my Directed Reading were the epic narrators. I started with Homer and Ovid. I had never read *The Metamorphoses*, but I thought it would be especially helpful in writing my own myths detailing the creation of sounds. I found Ovid to be a great storyteller and his myths were full of colorful details. His comic violence surprised me, and I found the death of a viol player especially humorous. Ovid tells of a feast attended by Perseus, a brawl breaks out and although the banquet's entertainer was meant for "pursuits of peace and viol, lute and song" (102), one of the warriors kills him, but not before he levels some musical criticism: "Sing the rest to Styx's shades" (102). A stab to the head ends the song (a fitting place for a poet to

be stabbed) and the musician “fell and still his dying fingers swept / The strings and sorrow sounded in his fall” (102). I try to allow a place for humor in my poems, and Ovid was an inspiration in the way he mixed the serious and the comic.

Many of the poems in my thesis explore the influence of nature on music and Ovid’s mock pastoral scene with Polyphemus was especially appealing. Neptune’s son plays a pipe “made of a hundred reeds” (319) and in a lengthy blazon he attempts to woo Galatea. She is “softer than the down of swans or creamy cheese [...] harder than ancient oak [...] nobler than apples [...] falser than waves” (319). Ovid’s Polyphemus is much more comic than Homer’s. In my readings of Ovid I concentrated on the value of good storytelling and characterization, and also the importance of strong and unusual images.

The next step in my Directed Reading was *The Odyssey*. Homer struck me for the way he writes about the most basic of human wants and desires and the way he raises them to lofty heights. The poem focuses on the abstract themes of love and justice, but Homer is able to convey these themes by connecting them to the earth. In *The Art of the Odyssey*, Howard W. Clarke points out that one of every thirty lines in the poem is focused on food (15). I found that the following verses expertly captured the simple wants of humans: “In life there’s nothing worse than knocking about the world, / no bitterness we vagabonds are spared / when the curst belly rages” (25.422-424). Even the animals get in on the feast:

far from his native land,  
in some sea-dingle fish have picked his bones,  
or else he made vultures and wild beasts

a trove ashore. (24.328-331)

My thesis deals with some abstract musical theories (overtones, the Music of the Spheres, modes) and reading Homer reminded me that I need to keep those theories connected to tangible images.

Part of my thesis will contain odes to each of the seven musical modes. In *The Republic*, Plato believes that only two modes, Dorian and Phrygian, should be allowed in his ideal state: "These two harmonies I ask you to leave; the strain of necessity and the strain of freedom, the strain of the unfortunate and the strain of the fortunate, the strain of courage, and the strain of temperance" (87). While Plato might be considered a fascist for his control over modes, he was undoubtedly correct when asserting that the each of the modes have a specific effect on the listener.

I read *The Elementary Odes* of Pablo Neruda for inspiration in trying to write concrete images for abstract concepts. In "Ode to the Wandering Albatross" Neruda captures the flight and demise of a dead bird he finds on the beach; he makes it a symbol for the person cast away from his homeland in search of the unknown:

The ocean in this  
 broad track  
 has  
 no islands,  
 and the errant albatross  
 in the interplanetary  
 parabola

of the victorious flight  
 found nothing but days,  
 nights, water (49)

I was inspired by the way Neruda found fresh ways to write about common objects, especially in his "Birdwatching Ode," "Ode to Laziness," and "Ode to the Tomato."

Many of the Romantics wrote of the Aeolian harp in order to examine nature's role in inspiring the poet. Shelley explores this theme in "Ode to the West Wind" and in his *Defense of Poetry*. Of the former, James Chandler writes: "one is disposed to see... a picture of Autumn sitting like Aeolus in his cave and driving the leaves away with his mighty exhalations" (711-712). Although the Aeolian harp is not specifically mentioned by name in "West Wind" nature still stirs the poet to creation. Shelley makes the idea more apparent in his prose:

Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. (*Defense* 511).

I am also interested in another theme that Shelley explores in *The Defense*. He writes that "the mind in creation is a fading coal which some invisible influence [...] awakens to a transitory brightness [...] when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline" (531). A few of the poems I have written for my thesis explore this concept in relation to transcribed and recorded music. I am investigating the idea that some vital essence is lost when music is written down or

recorded. I believe the most sublime music cannot be captured either by pen or by modern recording device.

I have found *The Untuning of the Sky* by John Hollander an excellent primer for thinking about how music relates to poetry. He writes that the Greeks saw little difference between the singer and the poet, it was not until the Middle Ages that “text and melody became fundamentally separated” (23). Hollander also focuses on the particular images and biases associated with certain instruments. Wind instruments play monophonic music; therefore they are of an older world. The invention of the lyre introduced harmony; its strings vibrate separately but in concord. Many of the poets of the Early Modern Period were fascinated with the idea:

The lute’s importance can be partially measured by the fact that it alone possessed a unique kind of notational system [...] while other instruments were simply employed at will to play any unspecified vocal parts that might fall within their ranges.

(Hollander 46)

Hollander shows how the lyre was used as a metaphor for the state and appealed to the rational minds of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, while the flute belonged to wilder and more uncouth epochs.

With five weeks to go in my Directed Reading I look forward to exploring the poetry of Wallace Stevens, Kenneth Rexroth, and John Keats. Many of my readings up to this point have dealt more with theory than with actual poetry, but to be honest, I do not really consider myself a poet. If ten people read my thesis, I would



be surprised. I am a musician— a modest one for sure— but I feel that my Directed Reading has allowed me the structure and setting to explore musical topics that interest me.

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THESIS TITLE PAGE

TITLE IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS  
IN INVERTED PYRAMID  
FORM

By  
John Doe

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Master of XXXXXX  
in  
The Department of XXXXXXXXXXXXX

School of Graduate Studies  
Rhode Island College

THESIS PROPOSAL APPROVAL SHEET

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Mark Chekares

Graduate Exam Reading List

Post-Colonialism:

Primary

1. *Banana Bottom* – Claude McKay
2. *Annie John* – Jamaica Kincaid
3. *The Dragon Can't Dance* – Earl Lovelace
4. *After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnivale in Jacmel, Haiti* – Edwidge Danticat
5. *The Selected Short Stories of Gabriel Garcia Marquez*
6. *Kingdom of this World* – Alejo Charpentier

Secondary/Critical

7. *Black Skin, White Masks* - Frantz Fanon
8. *Decolonizing the Mind* - Ngugi wa Thiong'o
9. *Borderlands (Mestiza Theory)* - Gloria Anzaldúa
10. *Rabelais and His World* - Mikhail Bakhtin

American Literature:

Primary

1. *Kindred* – Octavia Butler
2. *Wild Seed* – Octavia Butler
3. *Mind of My Mind* – Octavia Butler
4. *Patternmaster* – Octavia Butler
5. *American Born Chinese* (Graphic Novel)– Gene Luen Yang\*
6. *21: The Story of Roberto Clemente* (Graphic Novel) – Wilifred Santiago\*

\*both writers are first generation Americans.

Secondary/Critical

7. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* - Friedrich Nietzsche (specifically, the concept of Übermensch)
8. *Representation and the Media* – Stuart Hall
9. *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form* - Joyce Goggin, Dan Hassler-Forest
10. *Posthumanism: Readers in Cultural Criticism* by Neil Badmington (Anthology)

Kate Desilets  
 Department of English M.A.  
 Exam Reading List  
 Postcolonial Literature: African and Carribean

Texts:

1. Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*
2. Ata Aidoo, Ama. *Our Sister Killjoy*
3. Desai, Anita. *Clear Light of Day*
4. Kincaid, Jamaica. *Annie John*
5. "                                 *Lucy*
6. "                                 *The Autobiography of My Mother*

Critical Sources:

1. Alexander, Simone A. James. *Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afr-Caribbean Women*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001.
2. Chrisman, Laura and Patrick Williams. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
3. Conde, Mary and Thorunn Lonsdale. *Carribean Woman Writers*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
4. Ferguson, Moira. *Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land Meets the Body*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994.
5. Nasta, Susheila, Ed. *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Carribean and South Asia*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

Kate Desilets  
 Department of English M.A.  
 Exam Reading List  
 19th Century British Novel: Representations of Women

Texts:

1. Austen, Jane, *Emma*
2. " *Pride and Prejudice*
3. " *Sense and Sensibility*
4. Bonte, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*
5. Hardy, Thomas, *Jude the Obscure*
6. " *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Critical Sources:

1. Karl, Frederick R. *A Reader's Guide to The Nineteenth Century British Novel*. New York: Octagon Books, 1975.
2. Kirkham, Margaret. *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*. New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983.
3. Looser, Devoney Ed. *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1995.
4. Morgan, Rosemarie. *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
5. Plain, Gill and Susan Sellers. *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
6. Winnifrith, Thomas John Ed. *Critical Essays on Emily Bronte*. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1997.

Christine M. Petrarca  
 Reading List for M.A. Exam  
 Topic: Modern British Novel

My focus will be on representations of gender within the selected texts and how they deter from heteronormative gender stereotypes.

**Texts:**

*Jude the Obscure*. Thomas Hardy  
*Tess of the D'Urberville's*. Thomas Hardy

*The Rainbow*. D. H. Lawrence  
*Sons and Lovers*. D. H. Lawrence

*Mrs. Dalloway*. Virginia Woolf  
*The Waves*. Virginia Woolf

**Criticism:**

*D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study*. Anaïs Nin

"Equating Performance with Identity: The Failure of Clarissa Dalloway's Victorian 'Self' in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*." Shannon Forbes

"The Foreign Woman is a Man: Gender Reversal in D. H. Lawrence's Fiction." Karl Henzy

"Gender and Language in *Sons and Lovers*." Earl G. Ingersoll

"Moving Tropes: New Modernist Travels with Virginia Woolf." Elizabeth Clea Lamont

"Sleeping Figures: Hardy, History, and the Gendered Body." Jules David Law

Amanda Boswell  
MA Exam  
Spring 2009

Topic: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Gothic Fiction

Choose one of the following questions.

1. In The Madwoman in the Attic, Gilbert and Gubar suggest that 19<sup>th</sup> century female writers such as Mary Shelley and Emily and Charlotte Bronte who take up the gothic novel do so as a way to register their anger or opposition to patriarchy. Explain the broad outlines of how Gilbert and Gubar develop this idea with respect to Frankenstein, Wuthering Heights, and Jane Eyre. And, secondly, consider whether any one of your other critical readings either reinforces or challenges this view of the function of the Gothic.
2. The works you have chosen, from Frankenstein through Dracula, span the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Choose three of the works on your list (all by different authors) and write an essay in which you discuss the Gothic as a form that allowed 19<sup>th</sup> century authors to explore socially troubling issues of race, gender, or class. At least one of your authors should be drawn from the following list: Gaskell, Dickens, Stoker. In developing your essay, refer to any critics who seem most helpful in understanding the social implications of the gothic form.

Questions for Tracey Saloman M.A. Comprehensive Exam  
Topic: Early Modern Lyric and Epic and Conventions of Masculinity/Femininity  
Feb. 22-24, 2012

Choose ONE of the following:

1. While male authors dominate the early modern English lyric and epic canons, the Renaissance marks a period in which women writers begin significantly contributing to and influencing these poetic genres. Using forms and poetic conventions created and adapted by generations of male authors, female Renaissance writers carved out “a niche of their own” by taking on, refashioning, and reinterpreting the forms and conventions of epic and lyric. This enterprise was not merely a literary one; by entering poetic circles traditionally ascribed to men, women challenged early modern concepts of gender, particularly those dealing with intellectual capability and social mobility. Using **at least three** primary sources, discuss how women’s poetic writing destabilized and/or subverted “traditional” ideas of masculinity and femininity as they are represented in these writers’ works. Your discussion can include (but is not limited to) generic conventions, imagery, formal literary devices, point-of-view, voice and narrative. In addition, you will want to reference **at least two** of your secondary sources (whether critical or biographical) to provide support for or texture to your argument.
2. When Henry VIII abandoned Catholicism and changed the trajectory of English history forever, he did so for a single reason: in order to obtain a divorce his first wife Catherine of Aragon. Marriage became a fraught subject in early modern England, a nation no longer tied to Catholic law and ruled by an unmarried “virgin” queen for an unprecedented 45 years. Using **at least three** primary sources, identify and analyze some of the ways in which English culture problematizes and refigures male/female bonds (including but not limited to marriage) and some of the cultural anxieties that arise from these ideological and cultural fluctuations. In addition, you will want to reference **at least two** of your secondary sources (whether critical or biographical) to provide support for or texture to your argument.

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Postcolonial Exam Questions:

Answer one of the following questions. Provide close textual analysis of examples from at least three or four primary sources grounded with your explanation of key ideas from at least two theoretical sources. If possible, include brief references to other readings on your list.

- 1) Consider the following epigraph to a chapter in Edwidge Danticat's *After the Dance*: "... In the fog of the forests does the migrant bird nourish itself from the flowering of cemeteries? - Rodney Saint-Eloi, *Pierre anonyms*." Using this quotation as a starting point, analyze the relationship between magical realism and the carnivalesque in several of the readings on your list. Your essay should draw some conclusions about the appeal of these "styles" for postcolonial writers.
- 2) "The work of mestiza consciousness," according to Gloria Anzaldua, "is to break down the subject/object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended." Explore the possibilities of a mestiza consciousness in characters like Bita Plant, Annie John, and Sylvia. Could a character like Aldrick or Philo be a mestiza/o, or does their sense of masculinity or machismo limit this possibility? What about the title character of "An Old Man with Enormous Wings"? In addition to close readings of specific characters, your response should take into consideration concepts of postcolonial identities in the writings of Fanon and Ngugi.

Barbara Schapiro  
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 401-456-8667

M. A. Exam Questions for Christine Petrarca  
TOPIC: GENDER ISSUES IN HARDY, LAWRENCE, AND WOOLF

Choose ONE of the following:

1. In her article, "Equating Performance with Identity: The Failure of Clarissa Dalloway's Victorian 'Self' in *Mrs. Dalloway*," Shannon Forbes draws on Judith Butler's notion that identity is constituted through "performance." Forbes claims that *Mrs. Dalloway* sets the groundwork for Woolf's later novels in which she explores "how crucial it is for women to perceive of performance as a celebration of the necessity of enacting not one, confining role, as is the case with Clarissa, but rather, the multifarious roles that constitute their sense of self" (50).

Use Forbes's ideas here about gender identity in terms of performance and multiple role-playing in relation to the other readings on your list. First of all, do you agree with Forbes that Clarissa is confined to one (acceptably Victorian) role in *Mrs. Dalloway*? In your other novels, do you see the characters as enacting a single socially dictated gender role? Or do you see them as struggling with conflicting roles? Or are they embracing and performing multifarious roles?

If possible and relevant, include ideas from some of the other critics on your list as well.

2. Elizabeth Clea Lamont's article "Moving Tropes: New Modernist Travels with Virginia Woolf" focuses on "metaphors of movement" and "tropes of travel" as they intersect with notions of "female border crossings" and female identity in Woolf's novels. Explicate Lamont's argument about how these metaphors work in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Then consider how such metaphors of movement and travel might also be applied to our view of gender identity in the other novels on your list.

Again, as much as possible, try to integrate ideas from your other secondary sources into your argument as well.