

Final Exam A, Spring, 2008
May 9, 2008
English 291/AmStud 261
Professor Amy Hungerford

Total exam time allowed: 3 hours.

I. Ids: Choose 6 of 9, five minutes each. Provide three elements in your answer: 1) the author and work, 2) what the thing or the quotation refers to and, if it is a person speaking, who said it, and 3) a sentence or two about its significance. [20%]

- 1) Marigolds
- 2) *The Courier's Tragedy*
- 3) Minerva
- 4) "US Navy"
- 5) Stamford Crow Blueberry
- 6) Chifferobe
- 7) "Let your repentance salt my shoe leather"
- 8) A very local number indeed.
- 9) Moon Orchid

II. Passage explications: Choose 4 of 7, fifteen minutes each. Identify the source (author and title; you do not need to cite specific stories within books) and relevant context for the passage, then develop an interpretation of it, attending to both the language and the thematic elements of the text. Conclude with a sentence or two describing the importance of the passage, as you have interpreted it, to the work as a whole. [40%]

1) Imagine a Carthage sown with salt, and all the sowers gone, and the seeds lain however long in the earth, till there rose finally in vegetable profusion leaves and trees of rime and brine. What flowering would there be in such a garden? Light would force each salt calyx to open in prisms, and to fruit heavily with bright globes of water—peaches and grapes are little more than that, and where the world was salt there would be greater need of slaking. For need can blossom into all the compensations it requires. To crave and to have are as like as a thing and its shadow.

2) I stood before him, poised, my mind aching as it embraced the simple nakedness of his life, feeling how completely his soul was imprisoned by the slow flow of the seasons, by wind and rain and sun, how fastened were his memories to a crude and raw past, how chained were his actions and emotions to the direct, animalistic impulses of his withering body . . .

3) *Your books are arranged by the color of their spines*, she said. *How stupid.*

4) *Monday*. Rainy morning. “*C’est matins gris si doux...*” My white pajamas have a lilac design on the back. I am like one of those inflated pale spiders you see in old pale gardens. Sitting in the middle of a luminous web and giving little jerks to this or that stand. *My* web is spread all over the house as I listen from my chair where I sit like a wily wizard. Is **** in her room? Gently I tug on the silk. She is not. Just heard the toilet paper cylinder make its staccato sound as it is turned; and no footfalls has my outflung filament traced from the bathroom back to her room. Is she still brushing her teeth (the only sanitary act *Lo* performs with real zest?) No. The bathroom door has just slammed, so one has to feel elsewhere about the house for the beautiful warm colored prey. Let us have a strand of silk descend the stairs. I satisfy myself by this means that she is not in the kitchen—not banging the refrigerator door or screeching at her detested *mama* (who, I suppose, is enjoying her third, cooing and subduedly mirthful, telephone conversation of the morning.) Well, let us grope and hope.

5) Dandelions. A dart of affection leaps out from her to them. But they do not look at her and do not send love back. She thinks, “*They are ugly. They are weeds.*” Preoccupied with that revelation, she trips on the sidewalk crack. Anger stirs and wakes in her; it opens up its mouth, and like a hot mouthed puppy, laps up the dredges of her shame.

Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth. It is a lovely surging. Her thoughts fall back to Mr. Yacobowski’s eyes, his phlegmy voice. The anger will not hold; the puppy is too easily surfeited. Its thirst too quickly quenched, it sleeps. The shame wells up again, its muddy rivulets seeping into her eyes. What to do before the tears come. She remembers the *Mary Janes*.

6) He sat watching while the sun dipped hissing in the swells. The horse stood darkly against the sky. The surf boomed in the dark and the sea’s black hide heaven in the cobbled starlight and the long pale combers loped out of the night and broke along the beach.

He rose and turned toward the lights of the town. The tidepools bright as smelterpots among the dark rocks where the phosphorescent seacrats clambered back. Passing through the salt grass, he looked back. The horse had not moved. A ship’s light winked in the swells. The colt stood against the horse with its head down and the horse was watching, out there past men’s knowing, where the stars are drowning and whales ferry their vast souls through the black and seamless sea.

7) Everybody looked like a broken-down movie extra, a withered starlet; disenchanted stunt-men, midget auto racers, poignant California characters with their end-of-the-continent sadness, handsome decadent Cassanovish men, puffy-eyed motel blondes, hustlers, pimps, whores, masseurs, bellhops, a lemon lot and how’s a man going to make a living with a gang like that... Then we had to eat, and didn’t do so till midnight when we found a niteclub singer in her hotel room who turned an iron upside down on a coathanger in the wastebasket and warmed up a can of pork & beans. I looked out the

window at the winking neons; and said to myself "Where is **** and why isn't he concerned about our welfare?"

III. Essay: Answer one of the following. Allot one hour to this part of the exam. While we do not expect you to have quotations from the texts memorized, we will look for citations of specific incidents, scenes, and key words. (You may use passages from section two of the exam if they are relevant to your argument.) You do not need to answer every sub-question in the prompt; these are meant to help you begin thinking about the general topic.

Each question requires you to write about three texts from a list of four; **only one of the three may be a text you wrote about in a paper this term.** There are two groups of four to choose from for each question. Be sure to take time to write an outline of your essay before you begin. It is *always* worth the time. [40%]

1) Since the novel's inception, love, courtship, and marriage have formed one of its central subjects. Yet few of the novels on our syllabus constitute a conventional love story. How do American novelists after World War II find new ways to approach this subject? Construct an argument about romantic love in three novels chosen from one of the lists below. Consider both *themes* of love—how is romantic and erotic attraction portrayed? Who are the subjects and objects of love? How does love shape other aspects of character and consciousness?—and *form*: what is the relation between the courtship plot (two young people meet, encounter numerous difficulties and alternate partners, and eventually end up together) and the plotting of the novels you discuss? And how does love shape language? Use specific examples from three novels in one of the two groups below to make your argument.

Group 1

The Human Stain
Lost in the Funhouse
The Known World
On the Road

Group 2

The Bluest Eye
Lolita
Everything is Illuminated
The Crying of Lot 49

2) The novels we've read this semester demonstrate a wide variety of perspectives on education. How do characters come to have the knowledge, or outlooks, they do? What kinds of students and teachers do we see? How are they received by those they intend to teach? How do institutions and their teachers—school teachers, preachers, rabbis, gurus, coaches—transmit, block, or revise a cultural legacy? Choose three novels from one of the following lists and, using specific examples, compare and contrast their vision of school or "schooling."

Group 1

Lolita
Franny and Zooey
The Bluest Eye
Blood Meridian

Group 2

The Human Stain
The Known World
Housekeeping
Everything is Illuminated

3) The post-45 period, as we've seen, is incredibly rich with novels, but it is also a time of great proliferation of other media--movies, television, radio, and digital technology--alongside artistic forms that have existed for millennia—drama, oral storytelling, painting, sculpture. How do the novels we've read, in both form and content, reflect or engage other artistic media? How do novelists imitate other forms in print, or claim a special territory that only a novel can represent, or represent best? Use specific examples from three novels from one of the groups below to make your argument.

Group 1

Wise Blood
Lolita
The Bluest Eye
Lost in the Funhouse

Group 2

The Crying of Lot 49
Blood Meridian
The Known World
Franny and Zooey