

Department of French and Italian
Comprehensive Exam for the MA in French Language and Literature
(Revised 3/2010)

Goals and Expectations

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

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

The oral component of the exam consists of three sections. First, students will present an *explication de texte*. For this exam, students will be given the choice of three short texts and will have 48 hours to prepare their presentation. The *explication de texte* will be done in French and should last approximately 20-25 minutes. The second part of the oral component will be the occasion for a discussion between faculty and MA candidates about the written comprehensive exams. Finally, faculty and students will discuss the student's seminar paper. This paper must be distributed to the members of the exam committee at least three weeks in advance of the oral exam. The oral exam will usually take place 1-2 weeks after the written exam.

Readings Lists

Primary sources

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

Secondary sources

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

If possible, faculty will include titles from the reading lists in their courses. However, students should make every effort to be familiar with every work on the comprehensive reading list and they will find material not covered in their graduate courses on the exam. The comprehensive exam is intended to encourage students to study aspects of French

and Francophone literature on their own, and they should be prepared to discuss and incorporate texts and material beyond those studied in the classroom.

Preparing for the exams

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

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

Writing the exam

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

IDs

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

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

Grading

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

single final grade from the committee for their overall performance on the written and oral sections of the exam.

Reading List

MIDDLE AGES

Primary texts:

Entire texts in any edition:

La Vie de Saint Alexis

La Chanson de Roland

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

Marie de France, *Les Lais*

Béroul, *Le Roman de Tristan*

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

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

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

In the Classiques Larousse editions:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Primary texts:

Joachim Du Bellay, *La Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse; Antiquités de Rome*, « Au roi » et sonnets 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 30; *Regrets*, sonnets 1, 4, 9, 19, 25, 31, 130.

Louise Labé, « A M.C.D.B.L. », *Sonnets*

Jean de Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (chs. 1-3, 8, 14-18, 20, 22).
Marguerite de Navarre, *Heptaméron* (Prologue et nouvelles 10, 12, 21).

Clément Marot, « Epistre à son amy Lyon »; « Au Roy, pour avoir esté desrobé »; blason
« Le tétin »

Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*. Livre I: « Au lecteur » et essais 1, 8, 21, 26, 28, 30, 31;
Livre II: 30; Livre III: 2, 5, 13.

Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêt, surtout les articles 110-111.

François Rabelais, *Gargantua et Pantagruel*

Pierre de Ronsard, « Hymne de France »; *Les Amours*, « A sa maistresse, » Ode XVII:
« Mignonne, allons voir si la rose... »; *Sonets pour Hélène*: « Adieu, belle
Cassandre... » (X) and « Quand vous serez bien vieille... » (XXIV); *Sur la mort
de Marie*, V: « Comme on voit sur la branche... »

Required secondary reading:

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

Suggested secondary readings:

R. Aulotte, *Précis de littérature française du XVI^e siècle*.

T. Cave, *The Cornucopian Text*.

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

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

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

M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*.

G. Castor, *Pléiade Poetics*.

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

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

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

M. Screech, *Rabelais*.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Primary texts:

« Le Code noir »

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

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

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

Lafayette, *La Princesse de Clèves*

Molière, *Tartuffe*

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

grenouille qui se veut faire aussi grosse que le boeuf" "Le chêne et le roseau,"
"Les animaux malades de la peste. "
La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes et réflexions diverses*, éd. Jacques Truchet, Paris, GF Flammarion,
1999 : les *Maximes* (édition de 1687) pp. 41-90.
Racine, *Britannicus*, *Phèdre*
Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets* (tome I), "De la conversation" and "De parler
trop ou trop peu" (available on Gallica)
Sévigné, *Correspondance* (ed. Raffalli, GF Flammarion) 19 août 1652 – 9 février 1671;
24 avril 1671–16 mars 1672; 20 octobre 1675–29 juillet 1676

Required secondary reading:

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

Suggested secondary readings:

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

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Primary texts :

Isabelle de Charrière, *Lettres de Mistress Henley*
Denis Diderot, *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*
Françoise de Graffigny, *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*
Gouges, *L'Esclavage des noirs* + prefatory texts (in *Translating Slavery*, ed. Kadish) and
« Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne »
Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*
Marivaux, *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*
Montesquieu, *Les Lettres persanes*
Abbé Prevost, *Histoire de Manon Lescaut et du Chevalier des Grieux*
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions* (GF Flammarion, t. 1) Livres 1-6
Voltaire, *Candide*

« La Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen »

Required secondary reading:

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

Suggested readings:

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

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

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

NINETEENTH CENTURY

Primary texts:

Chateaubriand, *René* and *Atala*

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

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

Musset, *Lorenzaccio*

Sand, *Indiana*

Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*

Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*

Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

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

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

Huysmans, *A rebours*

Zola, *Germinal*

Required secondary reading:

Articles sur le 19ème siècle dans Denis Hollier, ed., *A New History of French Literature*, Harvard University Press, 1989.

Suggested secondary readings :

Partie sur le 19^{ème} siècle dans Mopin, Michel, préf. par Robert Badinter, *Littérature et politique*, Paris, Documentation Française, 1996.
Tadié, Jean-Yves, *Introduction à la vie littéraire du 19^{ème} siècle*, Paris, Dunod, c1996.

TWENTIETH CENTURY (HEXAGON)

Primary texts:

Fiction:

Samuel Beckett, *En attendant Godot*
Albert Camus, *L'Etranger*
Colette, *La Vagabonde*
Marguerite Duras *L'Amant*
André Gide, *L'Immoraliste*
Michel Houellebecq, *Les Particules élémentaires*
Marcel Proust, *Du Côté de chez Swann*
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis clos*

Poetry:

Guillaume Apollinaire, *Alcools* (« Zone, » « Salomé, » « Mai, » « Rosemonde »)
Paul Valéry, *Charmes* (« Le cimetière marin »)

Essays and theory:

Roland Barthes, « De l'œuvre au texte », in *Le Bruissement de la langue ; Mythologies* (Introduction, « Le Vin et le lait, » « Le Steak-Frites, » « Le Monde où l'on catch », « Le Tour de France comme épopée »)
Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (tome 1, introduction)
Jacques Derrida, « La Différance, » in *Marges de la philosophie*
Michel Foucault, « Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur? »
Jacques Lacan, « Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du je »
Jean-Paul Sartre, « L'Existentialisme est un humanisme », *Orphée noir*

Films:

La Règle du jeu (Jean Renoir)
A Bout de souffle (Jean-Luc Godard)
Cléo de 5 à 7 (Agnès Varda)
La Haine (Mathieu Kassovitz)

Required secondary readings:

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

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

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

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

AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN LITERATURES IN FRENCH

Primary texts:

Poetry, tales

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

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

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

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

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

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

Novels, plays

Mariama Bâ, *Une Si Longue Lettre*

Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*

Maryse Condé, *La Traversée de la mangrove*

Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia*

Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'Aventure ambiguë*

Anne Hébert, *Kamouraska*

Camara Laye, *L'Enfant noir*

Henri Lopes, *Le Pleurer-Rire*

Sony Labou Tansi, *La Parenthèse de sang & Je soussigné cardiaque*

Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma*

Essays, manifestos

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

Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*

Required secondary reading:

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

Suggested secondary readings:

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

Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, eds., *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*

Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans*

Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Maghreb Pluriel*