Undergraduate Comprehensive Examination in English
The Catholic University of America
Sample Exam

Section I

You have three hours to answer the following questions. Please pay careful attention to the
instructions. Note that the value of each question (out of 100 total points) is given in parentheses.

Please write ALL of your answers in the bluebook.

1. Name the full name of the author of each of the following works. (10 points)

   1. “Lycidas”
   2. *The Scarlet Letter*
   3. *Fences*
   4. “Ode on a Grecian Urn”
   5. *Moby Dick*
   6. *Culture and Anarchy*
   7. *Beloved*
   8. “The Fish”
   10. “A Modest Proposal”

2. Match each of the following authors with the period of his/her literary activity. One literary
   period may have more than one corresponding author, and some of the periods listed may
   have none. (10 points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literary periods</th>
<th>Authors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Old English period</td>
<td>1. Robert Browning</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Middle English period</td>
<td>2. Mary Shelley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. The English Renaissance</td>
<td>3. Philip Sidney</td>
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<tr>
<td>D. Restoration period</td>
<td>4. William Wordsworth</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Romantic period</td>
<td>5. Seamus Heaney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Victorian period</td>
<td>6. Wallace Stevens</td>
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<tr>
<td>G. 19th century American</td>
<td>7. John Donne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. First half of the 20th century</td>
<td>8. Frederick Douglass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(post-1945) to the present</td>
<td>10. Wilfred Owen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Name **ONE** work by each of the following authors. If a poem does not have a title, use the
   first line of the poem as its name. (10 points)

   1. Christopher Marlowe
   2. Sylvia Plath
3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge
4. Edmund Spenser
5. Walt Whitman
6. William Faulkner
7. Brian Friel
8. John Dryden
9. Emily Dickinson
10. Langston Hughes

4. For **FIVE** of the following passages, name the author and the work. If you answer more than five, the first five will be graded as your answers. If a poem does not have a title, use the first line of the poem as its name. (10 points)

   a) Everybody has choices, Mother. The poorest girl alive may not be able to choose between being Queen of England or Principal of Newnham; but she can choose between rag-picking and flower-selling, according to her taste. People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them.

   b) Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll;  
      Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul.

   c) Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
      What I was walling in or walling out,  
      And to whom I was like to give offence.  
      Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
      That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,  
      But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
      He said it for himself. I see him there  
      Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
      In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
      He moves in darkness as it seems to me~  
      Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
      He will not go behind his father's saying,  
      And he likes having thought of it so well  
      He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

   d) Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed  
      In one self place, for where we are is hell,  
      And where hell is must we ever be.

   e) Attend to what I intend to tell you  
      A marvelous dream that moved me at night  
      When human voices are veiled in sleep.  
      In my dream I espied the most splendid tree.
looming aloft with light all around, 
the most brilliant beam.

f) “Hold thy peace, dear little Pearl!” whispered her mother. "We must not always talk in the market-place of what happens to us in the forest."


h) About suffering they were never wrong.
The old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along


j) Lord, what fools these mortals be!

5. Give a definition of FIVE of the following eight literary terms in a few well-formulated sentences. Make sure to name at least one example for each term you define. (10 points)

1. soliloquy
2. denouement
3. pathetic fallacy
4. anagnorisis
5. ballad stanza
6. masque
7. ode
8. romance

6. Write one paragraph describing the impact of ONE of the following events on English literature. (10 points)

1. World War I
2. The Restoration
3. The Industrial Revolution
7. Respond to ONE of the following prompts in a brief 3-5 paragraph essay. (15 points)

a) *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has the following notice on the title page:

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR
Per G. G., CHIEF OF ORDINANCE

Most people would agree, however, that the novel revolves around significant social and moral issues. Why does Twain include this notice? What is he trying to warn the reader against? What suggestions about how to read is he making?

b) Is tragedy – in the specific literary sense – possible in the modern world? Why or why not? If so, what is the nature of modern tragedy? If not, what has taken its place? Draw upon at least three plays – one of which was written in England and one written in America (the third can be from either) – in order to answer the question.

c) Plato would have excluded poets from his ideal Republic for several reasons, not least of which is his opinion that poets like to tell false and scandalous stories about the gods, leading to impiety among the people. Is poetry somehow essentially impious? What is the place of the divine in the history of British and American poetry? Draw upon examples from the works of at least three poets – one of which must be British and one American (the third can be either) – in order to answer the question.

8. Respond to ONE of the following prompts in a brief 3-5 paragraph essay. (15 points)

a) At various times, various countries (France, Germany, Italy, or Spain) or languages (old Icelandic, French, Italian, Spanish, or German) in Europe seem to have a primary influence on literature in English. Using two of the following six areas (Middle ages, Renaissance, Restoration and Eighteenth-Century British literature, Nineteenth-century British literature, American literature) explain which language or culture had primary influence and why.

b) In the early 1930s, the Irish poet, W. B. Yeats, claimed that “Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.” Like Yeats, many English writers have employed in their creative work allusions to and examples from Greek and Roman antiquity. They have done so, at times, to justify, to interrogate and to rationalize the aims of their poetic art.

Choose one work from among the list below – and write a short essay discussing the significance of one prominent allusion to or example from the Greek and Roman classics. Questions you might consider in your response: What is the purpose of the allusion or example you have chosen? What value does the poem attach to the ancient world? How
might this allusion or example impact the form and themes of the poem at hand? What does the presence of the past say about the relation between art and human experience in the modern English–speaking world?

John Keats – “Ode on a Grecian Urn”
Matthew Arnold – “Dover Beach”
Ezra Pound – Hugh Selwyn Mauberley
Wilfred Owen – “Dulce et Decorum Est”

9. Most of the works of literature that you have studied in your English courses at CUA are generally considered to be among the important ‘canonical’ works of English literature. Two points are often raised to challenge traditional canons of literature: 1. ‘The canon’ is constantly changing – for example, Samuel Johnson and T. S. Eliot’s lists of the best works of English literature would not have been exactly the same. 2. Deciding on a limited canon of important works inevitably excludes works with real literary merit, either because such decisions always involve the imperfect judgments of people shaped by a particular vision of excellence or a particular set of historical conditions/political views. However, one cannot study everything and choices must be made if we are to have a common body of knowledge that we can all discuss together.

Write a brief essay on the following topic:

What do you think should be the most important principle for deciding which texts are canonical, and why?

Using that principle as the basis of your argument, EITHER a.) argue that one of the works on the reading list ought not to be included in the ‘canon’ OR b.) argue that some work not usually considered canonical ought to be included in the canon of important works of literature.

In your answer, be sure to give evidence for your argument, referring to specific textual details to support your case.
Section II

You have two hours to answer the following questions. Please pay careful attention to the instructions. You may mark scansion on the exam itself, but please write responses to short questions and both essays in the blue book.

Part A

Read and Analyze William Wordsworth’s “The World is Too Much with Us” (first published in 1807).

The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;

Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;

The winds that will be howling at all hours,

And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,

For this, for everything, we are out of tune;

It moves us not.--Great God! I'd rather be

A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,

Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;

Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.
1. a. Scan and mark the *rhythm* of the poem.
   b. Name the typical line type (not each individual line) of the poem, by *length* and *meter*.
   c. Mark the end rhyme scheme.
   d. Clearly mark one example of: metaphor, personification, alliteration, anaphora, consonance
   e. Name the kind of poem it is. Be as specific as you can.

2. In a *sentence or two*, describe the *rhetorical* structure of the poem.

3. Use this information as part of a well-organized essay in which you develop a detailed argument in response to the following question: What is the relationship between form and content in this poem?

   As you prepare to write the essay, you should consider each of the following:
   a. How do the rhetorical and aesthetic structures of the poem relate to each other?
   b. How do the metrical variations affect the emotional impact of the poem?
   c. What meaning is Wordsworth trying to convey in the poem?
   d. How do his formal choices help to convey that meaning?
Part B

Authors use setting in multiple ways. It can be symbolic, reflective of a character’s mood, or provide a philosophical framework for a novel or play.

In Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), the narrator describes Pemberley, Mr. Darcy’s ancestral home, as Elizabeth sees it for the first time:

Elizabeth’s mind was too full for conversation, but she saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and back by a ridge of woody hills;--and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!

In Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* (1878) one character looks out on Egdon Heath and the narrator describes what he sees:

As the resting man looked at the barrow he became aware that its summit, hitherto the highest object in the whole prospect round, was surmounted by something higher. It rose from the semi-globular mound like a spike from a helmet. The first instinct of an imaginative stranger might have been to suppose it the person of one of the Celts who built the barrow, so far had all of modern date withdrawn from the scene. It seemed a sort of last man among them, musing for a moment before dropping into eternal night with the rest of his race.

There the form stood, motionless as the hill beneath. Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, and above the barrow rose the figure. Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe.

A whole host of different assumptions, aesthetic and philosophical, underly Austen and Hardy’s use of the setting, Discuss.