

Final: Comprehensive, Roughly

Desirae Matherly

NAME _____

Final: Comprehensive, Roughly

I. MATCHING

Instructions: *Using what you know about words and the way they work, match the word in column A with the word in column B with which it shares the most in common. Write the matching word beside its mate in column A. If you suffer from test anxiety, go directly to Part IV.*

A		B
crypt	_____	bear
commentary	_____	stream
quality	_____	class
bare	_____	selection
soul	_____	quantity
Descartes	_____	momentary
current	_____	cryptic
election	_____	currency
channel	_____	sole
class	_____	Dehorse

II. FILL IN THE BLANK

Instructions: *Fill in the missing word, number, or phrase.*

1. _____ is too much to pay for one week's worth of groceries.
2. I consider myself a(n) _____.
3. When I spin in place with my eyes closed, I feel _____.

III. TRUE OR FALSE

Instructions: *With a magic marker, blot out the statements you consider to be true. In ten words or less, classify the statements you consider to be false in the space at the bottom of this page.*

You can't always get what you want.

I've been a miner for a heart of gold.

I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore.

There's pow'r, pow'r, wonder-workin' pow'r in the blood of the lamb.

The fool on the hill sees the sun going down.

I'll fly away.

It took me four days to hitchhike from Saginaw.

You know me, I'm your friend, I'm your pusherman.

I've flown the house of freezing steel.

You've got to pick up every stitch.

I've seen him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps.

IV. MULTIPLE CHOICE

Instructions: *Choose the best answer*

1. _____ A better title for this exam would be:
 - a. Shaking the Tree of Knowledge, Seeing What Falls
 - b. Literati Pedagógico: The Final Exam as Literary Genre
 - c. _____
2. _____ Where is America?
 - a. East of Eden

- b. Under the Table and Dreaming
 - c. Below the Salt
 - d. On Top of Old Smokey
 - e. In a Prepositional Phrase
 - f. Over the Edge
 - g. $y = mx + b$
3. _____ The Poverty Line:
- a. divided an estimated 12.7 percent of the households in the United States from the other 87.3 percent in 2004.
 - b. termed a *threshold*, is set at \$9,570 per year in 2005 for one person living in the United States.
 - c. may lie close to what some Wal-Mart associates earn, after paying health insurance deductibles.
 - d. equates to \$797.50 a month, \$184.03 a week, \$26.21 a day, or \$1.09 per hour of life in a year.
 - e. is still more than what the majority of the world lives on, with poverty estimates worldwide usually measured as less than a U.S. dollar a day, relative to local economy.
 - f. is an abstraction, regardless of the Dept. of Health and Human Services and the Census Bureau.
 - g. is a convenient organizing concept for policy makers.
 - h. does not inspire compassion among those in the upper 87.3 percent.
 - i. is all of the above, and more.
4. _____ Art is:
- a. true
 - b. beautiful

V. TRANSLATION

Instructions: *Working collaboratively, find the English equivalences of the following.*

- 1. à la belle étoile:
- 2. alter idem:
- 3. Selbstbildnis:
- 4. El llanto:

VI. ESSAY RESPONSE

Instructions: *Using yourself as a primary source, and the lives of other people you love as secondary sources, construct a 3–5 paragraph response to three of the following questions. You may not use a separate sheet of paper, and your answer must appear directly below the question. Therefore, you must write tidily. Please don't ask me questions of clarification, as I feel that I have made this exam perfectly clear. In addition to the three elective responses, everyone must answer #4.*

1. I was in a high school trigonometry class when I first realized I had something on my mind that I needed to get down on paper. I had made the connection between two words: *Revolution* and *Evolution*. I spent the entire class covertly filling up the margins of a failed exam on the Cartesian coordinate system, explaining how the two words shared a connection deeper than nine letters. I don't know what I intended to do with my thought of that day, but I know that I did not perceive the writing of that moment as important enough for anyone else to read. Earlier that year I had begun to keep a journal, or more precisely a diary, whose pages I filled with utter drivel—"Went to the mall today, didn't see J. there," or "I love J.! I wish I could tell him how I feel." Now that J. exists only as a character I had mostly invented, I wish I could shake the 16-year-old me and explain to her the importance of time, and how little there is to write in. She should not have wasted those two years on a diary whose pages succumbed to the tortuous fancies of her teenage heart. She might have actually read that volume of Aristotle she checked out of the library, or she might have finished *War and Peace* and thought about it, or she could have at the very least noted some of her finer thoughts, which I am sure she must have had . . . the shape of her day, or the feeling of her body as it pressed out into the world. What are some of your finer thoughts for today, the ones which you will not write down?

2. We know that Montaigne read voraciously, and that his margins became overfilled, and it was because of their surplus ideas that his library's pages bred more pages, and his writing drifted from the margins into blank space, empty counties for his ideas, which were utterly original hamlets. We value this originality, his commentary on the thinkers before and of his age, because we can only hope to experience the world as uniquely as he did, though most of us have no inclination to put down those thoughts which are profitless. But if we did record those profitless realizations, we might

find something more valuable in them than either money or fame. If we were to follow the private thoughts of our days, we might find that they accrue into a sort of publication, and our words into a type of commentary. When we shout at the TV for showing us visions of idiocy or cruelty, when we mutter to ourselves about our neighbor's unkempt yard or barking dog, we are in the realm of our judgments, each active moment an evaluation of our experiences which we must have constructed in private, or with the help of those we converse with (that is, if we haven't simply bought them ready-made at the store of ideas). Somehow an inner dialogue is shaped that we appear to have no outlet for unless we channel it into our work. Ours is no less a philosophy because it is personal; the ideal is not so awfully separate from the practical. What better work then, than to be pundits of our own lives?

3. The day I began to set these thoughts down, I decided to not take a shower. I brushed my hair, which I never do, and tied it back in a scarf. I made oatmeal for my husband and myself while my son played on a blanket on the floor. We sliced up bananas to have on the oats, and sprinkled cinnamon, sugar, and raisins on top of that. This was a good moment, though I did listen to the news, to someone else's commentary on that day, which was *never* just about oatmeal and babies and cinnamon. While I ate, I philosophized at my husband, who patiently nodded without arguing with me. He went to work, and I washed dishes, did some light grading, and filed some papers away. But my most important act was the smallest, and took the lesser part of my morning. I took the scrap papers I had jotted spare ideas on, and recorded them in my journal—putting them back for the lean times to come. Now my baby is a four-year-old child, my husband and I have divorced, and I live a day's drive, *three years away* (the greater distance) from that morning. Still, I have these notes. Can you describe the least wasteful process for cooking these ideas into a dish worth consuming?

4. The most important political act of any artist is to draw the middle edge of public opinion away from itself. Is this statement true? If you think so, explain in your own words how the homogenous compensate for their banality by creating the appearance of happiness, wholeness, difference, and creativity, and how poverty has become a romanticized ideal for those who collect raw and beautiful ideas. If it is not true that the artist draws the middle edge of public opinion away from itself, explain in 50 words or less why

the only *safe* and ambitiously artistic citizen in a selfish society paints pretty pictures.

5. I used to believe that there was a hell in the center of the earth where people went when they were bad and died before apologizing. Since then, I have taken geology. Have you heard the story of the samurai who visits the Buddhist monk, and asks him where hell is?

- a. If you *have not* heard the story, tell me the joke about the man with the parrot who goes into the bar (you know, the one with the three blondes, the Catholic, the Jew, the Black Man, the Gypsy, the Indian Chief, the Hindu, or the Feminist) instead.
- b. If you *do know the story about the samurai*, relate to me the version you have heard, and be specific. In my version of the story, the monk scoffs at the samurai and says, "Why should I tell a stupid jackass like you where hell is?" to which the samurai rises, face on fire, drawing his sword. At this the monk says, "THAT, is hell." As the samurai lowers his sword, and sinks to his knees in realization, the monk quietly remarks, "and THIS is heaven."

6. Should Texas be granted diplomatic relations with (the) US?

7. One of the more serious and secretive responsibilities of the teacher is grading his or her students. I have always despised this aspect of my job. "Grading" is something we do for those things which are related to consumption: tobacco, dairy products, and restaurants. A friend of mine, a fellow essayist and teacher, introduced me to a website called *pickaprof.com*. Myself and many other instructors I know are listed there, along with the averages of the grades we've given, reviews, and other tidbits interesting to students wanting information about professors in advance. For a long time, I was one of only two English instructors at my school who had an average of 4.0 in the grades they give their undergraduate students. This fact still embarrasses me, and makes me feel that I have wronged my students by my acceptance of their work. Even though this representation of my grading history levels out A minuses, it is roughly true, though I know that a good deal of data has been omitted. Looking through my master file, I see that over a period of five years, I distributed five F's, one D+, one C+, one C, and nine B-range grades. But I've always felt violated by Pick-A-

Prof!'s evaluation of my teaching. Among the more private subjects people may keep to themselves—income, religion, politics, aesthetic desires, fears, regrets—how we evaluate the work we do must be the most private of all. Our labor transmits our secrets, if anyone would care to listen. My grading (of writing) is based upon originality, effort, sense of humor, serious revision, and philosophical maturity. These things are not quantifiable. To the contrary, when I taught Introduction to Logic as a graduate student in philosophy, my students' grades were like a bell-curve buffet. My grade book revealed A's as rare as chocolate-coated strawberries, B's like the wine that disappears early, C's like the cheese we expect. And the F's—try as I might, despite my elegantly honest multiple choice exams, even for a final that required them to demonstrate an ability to complete logical proofs, my F's were like napkins that every one of my students carried discreetly beneath their plates, hoping no one would notice. And it could have been that there was only one way to classify categorical propositions, because no one real lived in them anyway; "Mexican Hat Dancers" were simply those nouns that lived in a Venn diagram to the exclusion of "Griffins" or "Unicorns," and these metaphorical populations would never mingle or converge except syntactically. (Choose C or D if A or B seems unlikely, True or False *can* answer your question, and yes, your grade will be expressed as a decimal.) Logic and math seem honest enough I suppose, at least going into them. Spelling was that way for me, long ago, until I learned about the effect of Norman French on Old English. But then, there is a decay in American English when we must rely on quantitative expressions to describe qualitative relationships between people, places, things, or ideas. When I say *class*, do you think of tax brackets, school divisions, or that certain strain of self-respect that was once believed to accompany nobility, but cannot be purchased for the love of money without cheapening it?

8. I spent seven years of my life in a trailer, three of those in Sinking Creek Trailer Park. Lot rent there was \$75 a month. There were probably around 30 trailers in that park, and the landlord, Mr. Fisher, harvested almost \$2,250 a month. Mr. Fisher lived behind the park, on the other side of his cornfield. He was a farmer, so he allowed his tenants some garden space, which in hindsight is remarkable. For three years I lived in Nelsonville, a mostly dilapidated Victorian town that chokes a major highway (Rt. 33) running between the Capit(o/a)l of Ohio and the brick-street college town of Athens, which is 85.2 percent "white" according to the 2004 census. There are few gardens in Nelsonville. Our house payment during that time

was \$373.21, something my husband and I could afford. It was \$100 less than the two-bedroom apartment we used to rent in The Plains, which is approximately seven miles southwest of Nelsonville. It seems ironic to me that a house payment could be cheaper than rent, especially since I estimate that I threw away \$30,600 over the time I spent as a renter before my marriage, which was about six years. That amount was 72 percent of the cost of the house my husband and I lived in, and I have nothing to show for those years, except expired leases that outline what our finite freedoms were as renters. The people who lived across the street (and beside us) were renters, among them the bleached-blond woman who was on a well-known talk show several years ago. Her husband proposed to her after he had exposed his butt-crack to national TV while pummeling her unfortunate boyfriend on stage. This woman, and the family that lived next to her in the duplex, were slovenly, loud, rude, vulgar, and not at all the abstract and invisible “poor” that I like to imagine living in economic theories I am sensitive to. Someone paid the rent, but who? I remember checking the HUD website for income limits in Athens County, Ohio, and finding that my husband and I were considered “very low income.” When I would peep out through the Venetian blinds at my neighbors, I often wondered what made our families different, and what “class” really must have meant to that sad, overripe Victorian street. TWO-PART QUESTION: What is it about my former neighbors that I am trying to escape, and where is hell?

9. Sinking Creek Trailer Park was in Johnson City, Tennessee, about one mile (as the crow flies) from the grocery store where we bought our food, which is directly across from the controversial regional landfill, which is 500 yards away from the Hourglass Lounge (a “gentlemen’s” club a.k.a. topless bar), which is 500 more yards away from the Keystone Projects, which is a good mile (the crow tells me) from the ostensible center of Johnson City, whose northern border has been developing rapidly for the past ten years or more. Cow pastures have been parsed into luxury home lots to house the influx of doctors into Johnson City, which grows because of the thriving medical industry there, and the lawyers are close behind, gypsies that they are. It seems that the only people who stay in one place are the people who are trapped where they began. But for the nomadic professional, compassion doesn’t grow while just passing through, trying the dials on the radio to find something tolerably local. I might as well mention that the main radio station in Johnson City is WQUT (101.5 FM), a station that plays mostly classic rock from the ’70s. My stepfather had a huge record

collection from the '70s, so between WQUT and my stepfather, much of my musical education involved '70s rock. I still listen to '70s rock because it relaxes me. This is because I only remember the latter half of the seventies from the perspective of a young child, and the former half through my mom's high school memories. When I find myself humming songs to which I have forgotten the words, they are usually '70s tunes, and only recently, '80s pop, or its short-lived inheritor/antithesis, '90s alternative. Despite this transdecade auditory education, I only remember the words to Baptist hymns, as I was inundated with them for the first 15 years of my life, until I became old enough to resist going to services and no one argued. Music is an art form available to everyone, so it must educate our aesthetic sensibilities in ways we rarely consider significant. For that matter, magazines must do the same, if only for their ubiquitous presences in the grocery lines where we find ourselves corralled for minutes every week (unless we pay someone to deliver our groceries, unless we go to the natural foods store or the farmer's market . . . *unless*). Magazines spread us out at the same time they spread themselves open for us. Do we take the test to see how sexy we are, do we measure up to the idols offered us, do we . . . but I get ahead of myself. THREE-PART QUESTION: When we reflect on what art most influenced us, what do we remember? Do we recall the Titians and the Bachs, or the *Vogues* and the Stones most, or, if it is holy art that we have a taste for, where are our stripes? Specifically, what are the best dressed gods wearing this year?

10. A wise teacher once asked me, how would philosophy have been different if it had followed the manner of Montaigne instead of Descartes? Descartes' dualisms all arise from his ability to say "I think, therefore I exist." That he *can* say this referentially, of himself, amuses him enough to follow out the deductive consequences of this primal truth. We must have a mind and body that are separate. Not to belittle Descartes' realization, but big fucking deal. I have been realizing that "I exist" since grade school. Sometimes it would just hit me, in the schoolroom cafeteria, or in class, at my desk. I would suddenly feel unattached from my surroundings, look around, notice that everyone else was paying attention to the teacher, or doodling, or passing notes and whispering—and I would have my existential moment in utter loneliness and silence. I usually wanted to jump up and shout "Hey! I exist!," but the fear of punishment kept me quiet. In the lunchroom, when I would say, "I'm having the funny feeling like I'm alive," friends would roll their eyes and say I was weird. After high school,

whenever I met a potential boyfriend, and we would be lying somewhere peaceful and sweet, I would ask him if he had ever felt himself existing, you know, in a *serious way*. (Like all time stops and everything in you becomes still though the rest of the universe keeps moving—and there you are, just existing along, and you can do anything you want to with this realization, anything at all.) A Buddhist might say to prolong this moment as long as possible, because it is a moment of pure and perfect clarity. If we could have this clarity with us all the time, the world would reflect the difference. What a much better form Descartes' realizations would have taken if he, like Montaigne before him, would have simply said, "I think, therefore I digress." Having no need then to posit any kind of truth beyond himself, he would have simply acknowledged his thinking as a movement forward that cuts through the truth of the world like the bow of a ship, would have pressed aside all of the deep complexities that threatened to sink him (in effect being buoyed up by them), and skated across a significant volume of shit, that though truthful and logical, does not deserve to be pressed into service as philosophy, to be emulated by drones after him, like so many shakes of a bee's ass. Descartes might have found better uses for his time then, than nailing cats to tables by their paws so that he could cut them up alive, and he might have recognized their agonized howls as something more than the sound a clock makes when hammered into a thousand pieces. Or maybe I would have had the opportunity to read Spinoza instead of Descartes, or any number of neglected thinkers who had humbler truths to offer the world. *I have no need* for the truths of Descartes unless they exist in his mathematical principles, where lines can safely cross and uncross themselves like rapiers, or better yet, good Catholics, and put themselves to sleep with clean consciences. In the expression $y = mx + b$, what do we hear? Solve for m .

II. Aside from my concern that exams never accurately measure a student's range of knowledge (whether it be a 5-week, 10-week, or 16-week course, or a degree-long adventure ending in a PhD, or that swampish range of time between birth and 30 years or so), there is something to be said for those most pious of pedagogical tools: the question and one's memory. Memory alone can only offer sensibility, so our answers count for something when they begin with a jerk and a rattle to move across a page like an old Ford Model-T. But by the time we are going into our answers we wonder if we haven't left some integral piece behind. We want to be comprehensive in demonstrating that we have understood. But comprehensiveness is an

impossibility, and only an impossible question can approach it. We could say, "There are three things you must understand before we move on from here," or "It would be best if you read so-and-so on this matter," and finally, "Your test will cover all of chapter 3," but we might as well be saying, "Reveal to me how much this matters to you, because if you do not see the value of knowledge in and of itself, then you have no right to claim it." (But we have already lost our way, and cannot tell the teachers from the students anymore. If we fail the Final, we have forfeited a wealth that cannot be taken away, and have assumed a poverty that will not wear off, be bought off, or stay secret for long. With a reading list as long as all our days and nights, we have no time to wonder whether the library has been exhausted. Having been born beautiful, rich, or sad will not keep us safe, and all the stars will turn their backs on us when it is time to turn in our answers.) TWELVE-PART QUESTION: Do we always think of hell as being exclusion or separation from God, or the good, or the beautiful/true, or do we sometimes simply say "hell" and mean someplace permanently uncomfortable? Is hell private or public, do we hide in it secretly or do others peek through their blinds at us in it, shamefully turning away when we look them straight in their eyes? Do we ever look at one another at all? Is there a brutal homogeneity overtaking the world, or is this a myth—that there is more evenness in the world than there actually is? How much of our thinking is thought out of us, before we ever ripen, before we ever make it to that final examination where we are classed and filed away? Or is knowledge fed on its own increase, like a viral pap sucking its own openings and closings and growing despite all weathers? When we examine ourselves in the Socratic manner, do we find our lives worth more? Or do we decrease and waste, Solomon-like, turning in the wind of our own pinings for some lovely innocence that died too long ago to even be lightly remembered? If dying people are burning libraries, why do we encrypt their final secrets instead of letting them waste in view? Do we know what happens to flesh or do we have it on good faith that it rots away, like paper rots, and plants rot, and pages too? Does our knowledge rot on the vine the longer we let it rest unharvested? Or do we care at all that our best minds fall quietly to the ground unnoticed by civilization, quieter for having not argued anything at all, softer for having always yielded, and closer to being gone than the sunlight at evening, when dusk thickens? ■