English 2360H
Final Exam Essay Questions

Atonement Essays: For the exam itself, I will probably attach one or two useful quotations as “epigraphs” to the following essay questions, when it seems either useful or appropriate.

1. Discuss the significance of representations of class, gender and power in *Atonement*. How do history, social convention, and custom impact plot development in the text?

2. In what ways is Ian McEwan’s novel a “history” of British literature? Why does that literary history matter to the novel as a whole?

3. Discuss point-of-view in Ian McEwan’s novel. In what ways is the novel as much *about* perspective as World War II, or literature, or the imagination?

4. Explore representations of “boundaries” in *Atonement*. You may want to begin by drawing your own, of course, since this novel arguably represents a multitude, including temporal, social, sexual, and imaginative, as well as geographical and generic.

5. Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* can be read as offering a commentary on the power of the imagination (as both a tool for control *and* chaos). Does the novel privilege one aspect of the imagination over the other? And, finally, how does McEwan’s representation of the imagination contribute to an ongoing discussion about the merit and function of art, as well as the role an author plays in his or her culture.

Comprehensive Essays: In constructing each essay, you should write on at least 3 authors and at least 2 historical periods. Over the course of the 3 essays, you should write on at least one piece of literature from each of the four periods studied this semester.

1. Discuss the evolution of the personal lyric through the period we’ve studied this semester. In responding to this prompt, you should begin by arguing that the lyric “begins” at a particular moment and you must conclude by examining at least one poem written in the last seventy-five years.

2. Discuss representations of the gothic imagination in literature read this semester, particularly in its evocation of gender and authorship.

3. From the eighteenth century through the contemporary period, British literature represents the problem of establishing feminine agency in a male-dominated world. Drawing upon works read throughout the period, discuss attempts to advocate for feminine agency through literature. In responding to this question, you might want to focus on advocacy alone, but you could also structure this
essay by exploring the dialogue between writer advocating for feminine agency and those implicitly (if not explicitly) opposed to it.

4. Discuss the use of literature as a form of social protest and political activism in the materials we’ve read this semester.

5. Explore representations of Britain throughout the literature we have studied this semester, which have included insider and outsider perspectives. What difference does who you are make to how you perceive your relation to the nation?

6. What is the significance of representations of the natural world in British literature from the eighteenth century onward? Some issues to consider when forming your thesis: do representations of nature change dependent upon internal forces as well as external? Is there an essential difference between representations of nature in poetry versus prose? If so, what do you make of this?