

DEPARTMENT OF

**ENGLISH**

& FOREIGN LANGUAGES



**THESIS  
GUIDELINES**

## Thesis Guidelines

### The Master's Thesis:

The master's thesis is the capstone requirement for the M.A. degree in English. In it, you will demonstrate your mastery of the conventions of a scholarly or creative sub-field. Depending on your specialization, the finished thesis will be either a scholarly essay or a substantial creative work. Writing a master's thesis in the literature specialization requires that you become familiar with available scholarly resources and develop a good working knowledge of research methods. You will organize your ideas and present them in a single, unified argument in critical prose. In the creative writing specialization, your thesis will be a creative work or body of works demonstrating your knowledge of the stylistic conventions of the genre within which you are working and a knowledge of the relevant contemporary works in that genre.

Writing a thesis will further your understanding of the breadth and depth of advanced work in English and the humanities. Writing a thesis also:

- Helps prepare students to pursue a Ph.D. by refining the reading and writing skills necessary for professional scholarly publication.
- Provides prospective teachers in secondary education and community colleges with requisite knowledge, skills and credentials.
- Prepares students for future engagement with a wider scholarly and creative community through publication. Publication is not required for the successful completion of your thesis, but some stages in the process will require you to demonstrate familiarity with your subject area's publication standards and conventions.

Your thesis must demonstrate your ability to conceive a project of professional quality as well as prove your familiarity with the current, relevant critical conversation. It must also make a sustained attempt to contribute to the larger intellectual conversation in the subject area you choose. Creative projects should reflect the writer's knowledge of the current trends and practices of the genre to which his or her project belongs. For instance, a collection of poems in the style of John Keats could be perceived as reflecting the writer's failure have satisfactorily researched the contemporary practice of poetry. (Consult the UWF library for model theses).

### Components, Scope, and Format:

You must submit in sequence THREE separate documents to satisfy the departmental thesis requirement:

- a letter of intent,
- a formal prospectus, and,
- a thesis approved by your thesis director and reader, the department chair, and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Your finished scholarly thesis should be between 20 and 30 pages long (creative projects may vary) and conform to the *UWF Thesis Guidelines* (available from the dean's office). In all three documents you submit, MLA format and documentation are required. An example of a letter of intent and prospectus are provided in attachments A, B and C of this document. Other examples are available in the English and Foreign Languages department office. Completed theses are available in English and Foreign Languages department office and the UWF library.

### Time to Completion/Time Limit:

The time between the initial submission of your letter of intent and the final registering of the thesis varies from student to student. Generally, you should expect to work on your thesis for two terms from the time you initially submit your letter of intent to the English and Foreign Languages department chair. If your thesis is not completed and approved within three years of the initial submission of your letter of intent, you will be required to restart the thesis process.

## Thesis Hours: Rules and Regulations:

- You must be registered for at least one thesis hour whenever working on your thesis—as long as you avail yourself of UWF library facilities or faculty consultation.
- You are required to complete a total of three thesis hours (ENG 6995V000).
- These credit hours may be used to count for three of the required 33 master's degree hours.
- You may register for no more than one thesis hour in advance of the approval of your formal prospectus by your director and reader.
- You are not permitted to register for thesis hours if you have not completed the thesis within three years from the first submission of your letter of intent.
- Thesis direction and evaluation cannot be completed during the summer terms without the prior and full consent of your thesis director and reader. You are thus advised to register for thesis hours in the fall and spring terms only.

## Stages in the Process:

The following are required to complete the master's thesis:

- A. Letter of Intent
- B. Initial Meeting with Thesis Director and Reader
- C. Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography.
- D. Evaluation of Prospectus
- E. Prospectus Follow-up Meeting
- F. Drafting, Revision, and Completion of Thesis
- G. Registering Your Thesis

## Stages in the Process, cont:

### A: Letter of Intent

You must first submit a letter of intent to the English and Foreign Languages department secretary. The purpose of this letter is to encourage you to formulate and declare your plans for the thesis. This document will be reviewed by the chair and Graduate Committee who will then identify your thesis director and one reader. You are encouraged to speak with potential directors or readers in advance of submitting your letter of intent. If a faculty member has expressed an interest in serving as a director or reader, you should indicate this in the letter. The chair, however, reserves the right to recommend the appointment of a director and reader according to the professional expertise and workload within the department. Once a decision has been made, the chair will notify you of your thesis director and reader. The thesis director will be your primary contact during the remainder of the entire process. Your director will help you to design and revise your prospectus and will act as your principal consultant in the composition of your thesis.

Your letter of intent should be a one-page memo to the chair stating:

- Your subject (i.e. an analysis of poetry penned by WWI soldiers, an exploration of Shakespeare's Moors, the writing of a collection of poetry).
- The specific texts you will examine, the question(s) you will raise, and the provisional claim(s) or contribution you will make (for example, if you have chosen combat poetry of WWI, which poems will you look at? What dimension of combat poetry of WWI will you investigate? What will you argue?).
- Why you think the subject worthy of investigation.

## Stages in the Process, cont:

### B: Initial Meeting with Thesis Director and Reader:

Once you have received notification from the Chair naming your director and reader, you must arrange to meet with them to discuss the writing of your prospectus. At this point, you and your director will set a deadline for the formal submission of your prospectus.

### C: Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography:

You are required to submit a formal prospectus to your director and reader that consists of the following items:

- A three to five-page project prospectus. This prospectus should, more clearly than your letter of intent, identify the scope and target of your project. A clear statement of thesis/purpose as well as a paragraph discussing your intended audience must be included. As part of your paragraph on audience, you are required to identify one journal you believe might be interested in publishing your project once it is completed. A good source to consult is the MLA Directory of Periodicals. To your prospectus, append a photocopy of the journal's mission statement and submission requirements (this information is typically supplied in the opening or closing pages of any journal). Again, please note that publication is not a requirement for the successful completion of a master's thesis.
- An annotated bibliography of at least twenty items relating to your project (divided into primary and secondary works). In constructing this list, you are required to consult with both director and reader who will provide you with a partial list of works to include in your annotated bibliography.

When you submit your prospectus, be sure to ask your director when you may expect your committee to have completed their evaluation of your prospectus.

## Stages in the Process, cont:

### D: Evaluation of Prospectus:

Once you complete and submit the prospectus, your director and reader will meet to evaluate your prospectus. At this point, your director and reader may require substantial revisions of the prospectus before they will allow the project to proceed to the drafting stage of your thesis.

### E: Prospectus Follow-up Meeting:

Once the director and reader have finished reading and evaluating your prospectus, you must arrange to meet with your director to discuss your prospectus. In this meeting, your director will provide you with comments, suggestions for revisions, and additional readings. Again, your director may require that you substantially revise your prospectus and resubmit. Once the prospectus is formally approved, and under consultation with your director, you will be required to set a schedule for completion taking into account the deadlines concerning theses set by the College of Arts and Sciences as well as the University Office of Research.

### F: Drafting and Completion of Thesis:

After you obtain approval from the thesis director to proceed with your thesis, you will work primarily with the director until the final stages of composition. The number of drafts you produce is entirely up to the discretion of your thesis director. You will be expected to meet regularly with your director about your progress. When you submit the last draft of the completed thesis to the director, the director will critique it and send it on to the reader who will add comments and return it to the director. The director will then consult you about the suggested modifications. You will then proceed to compose your final draft, taking into consideration the recommendations of the thesis director and reader and following the *UWF Thesis Guidelines*. Once approved by your thesis director, the final draft will

## Stages in the Process, cont:

### F: Drafting and Completion of Thesis, cont.:

then be submitted to a university reader, examined for conformity to university standards and returned to the thesis director. At this point, the draft will be awarded "pass with no revisions," "pass with revisions" (returned to you for additional corrections before you formally register your thesis), or "fail."

### G: Registering Your Thesis:

Consult the *UWF Thesis Guidelines* for the final steps in registering your thesis.

## Attachment A: Letter of Intent

Mary Lowe-Evans, Chair  
Department of English and Foreign Languages  
University of West Florida  
11000 University Parkway  
Pensacola, FL 32514

March 17, 2003

Dr. Lowe-Evans,

I am submitting this letter to state my intentions for my master's thesis which I would like to begin in the Summer 2003 semester. I have previously submitted a paper for ENG 5009 in which I examine Angela Carters novel *Wise Children*, and I would like to expand this paper into my thesis.

Carter's novel chronicles the lives of the illegitimate twin daughters of a Shakespearean actor. The illegitimacy of the daughters creates problems for them in establishing their identities as part of their father's famous acting family. The satirizing of William Shakespeare's plays and Sigmund Freud's works in this novel suggests that Carter is critiquing the concept of constructed identity, particularly the construct of the literary canon. In my thesis, I intend to show how Carter uses satire to question the construct of "greatness" and emphasize the need to break from such socially constructed identities.

The primary sources I will use in my examination of *Wise Children* are Judith Butler's "Gender Trouble" and Sigmund Freud's "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ("Dora")." Since the narrator of *Wise Children* is named Dora and the novel alludes to a variety of Freud's theories, I feel this work by Freud is significant to the novel. Butler's work emphasizes gender and sexuality as factors of identity formation and will be critical to my thesis since the main characters of the novel break from the traditional concepts of gender and sexuality.

I look forward to hearing from you soon and would like to begin working on my thesis as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

## Attachment B: Sample Prospectus

Troy Urquhart

The University of West Florida

MA Thesis Proposal

28 Mar. 2002

“History Will Bear Me Out!”: The Voice of the Torture(d) in J. M.

Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians

“The night is best: sometimes when you have difficulty in falling asleep it is because your ears have been reached by the cries of the dead which, like their writings, are open to many interpretations.” (Coetzee, Waiting 110)

J. M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians, a novel filled with ambiguity and images of hopeless despair, seems to suggest that the violence inspired by the dichotomy of Empire and Barbarian, of *self* and *other*, is inescapable. Recent analyses by critics such as Susan Van Zanten Gallagher and Michael Valdez Moses focus on the issue of torture and suggest that Waiting for the Barbarians presents a move in Coetzee’s fiction away from the particular situation of South African apartheid and toward a general critique of (self-termed) “civilized” government.<sup>1</sup> Gallagher’s article

## Attachment B: Sample Prospectus, cont.

“Torture and the Novel: J. M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians” proposes that Coetzee’s novel provides a discussion of representations of torture, the tortured, and the torturer, suggesting that Coetzee resolves the split between the tortured and the torturer by “eliminating the distinction between ‘them’ and ‘us,’ the evil and the innocent,” resulting in “an assertion that everyone is guilty” (284).<sup>2</sup> While this universal guilt presents, from one perspective, a hopeless view from which torture is an inescapable aspect of “civilized” society, Gallagher concludes her article on a hopeful note, proposing that this guilt causes people to recognize their need to articulate “the truth about this kind of oppression” as well as their own inability to do so (285).<sup>3</sup> I intend to take up discussion of this point where Gallagher leaves off by suggesting that the moment noted above, in which the Magistrate constructs various interpretations of unintelligible markings on wooden slaps at Colonel Joll’s insistence, provides such a glimmer of hope by creating a space in which the victim of torture can have a voice, a space where the pain of those forcibly silenced by Empire can be represented.

In The Lives of Animals, Coetzee’s fictional novelist Elizabeth Costello points out the guilt of all members of a society in which atrocities

## Attachment B: Sample Prospectus, cont.

occur, emphasizing that these individuals repress their guilt for the sake of their own sanity yet insisting that their repressed knowledge destroys their own humanity. Costello prefaces her lecture, a philosophic approach to the discourse of animal rights, with remarks about the Holocaust of World War II, suggesting that, while the people who lived in the countryside surrounding Nazi concentration camps “might have known” what was happening within the camps, “in another sense they did not know, could not afford to know, for their own sake” (Coetzee, Lives 19). Albeit an act of self-preservation, this repression is inexcusable for Costello: “It was and is inconceivable that people who *did not know* (in that special sense) about the camps can be fully human” (21). Similarly, in his acceptance speech for the Jerusalem Prize in 1987, Coetzee asserts that the systems of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa have brought about “a deformed and stunted inner life” and that “[a]ll expressions of that inner life [. . .] suffer from the same stuntedness and deformity” (Doubling 98).<sup>4</sup> In a society based on force and oppression, the human spirit is no longer human, but deformed, and this deformity applies in a general way, including all members of society—from the overt wielders of power to the silent who proclaim to be

## Attachment B: Sample Prospectus, cont.

uninvolved. And in Waiting for the Barbarians, the Magistrate tells himself, “When some men suffer unjustly [. . .] it is the fate of those who witness their suffering to suffer the shame of it” (136). Guilt is universal, then, but Coetzee also asserts, in an interview with David Atwell, that, in the contest between “the authority of the dying and the authority of the classics,” in the contest between the oppressed and the oppressors, “the outcome [. . .] is irrelevant,” suggesting instead that “[w]hat matters is that the contest is staged, that the dead have their say” (Doubling 250). The act of speech itself, the re-presentation of the silenced, becomes an act of triumph, an act of—or at least toward—social healing.

My intended audience for “History Will Bear Me Out!”: The Voice of the Torture(d) in J. M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians, includes professional scholars of the contemporary novel and advanced students of literature. The journal I have identified as one for which this article might be suitable is Twentieth-Century Literature. Please see the photocopied information on submissions to the journal attached to my proposal.

<sup>4</sup>Also see Barbara Eckstein, “The Body, the Word, and the State:

## Attachment B: Sample Prospectus, cont.

J. M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians" in Novel: A Forum on Fiction 22.2 (Winter 1989): 175-98; and Erhard Reckwitz, "I Am Not Myself Anymore': Problems of Identity in Writing by White South Africans" in English in Africa 20.1 (May 1993): 1-23. Eckstein's deconstructionist argument seeks to allay the "fear of uncertainty and the hostility toward deconstruction" (176), instead focusing on "politics and the political novel" while still "question[ing] the metaphysics of presence which pursued *the* truth" (177). From this perspective, Eckstein posits that torture—or at least its effect, pain—escapes pain, for "the person in pain cannot doubt it" (179); however, the language which describes torture and pain (re)presents the deconstructionist problem, so Eckstein views Coetzee's novel as examining "the differences between, and difference within, body and voice" (185). Reckwitz shares Gallagher and Moses's view that Waiting for the Barbarians escapes the setting of South Africa to become "decontextualized" (9), but Reckwitz asserts that this refusal to follow a directly allegorical pattern underscores the emptiness left by the reliance on an *other* to define the *self*.

## Attachment B: Sample Prospectus, cont.

<sup>2</sup>Also, see the chapter "The Novelist and Torture: Waiting for the Barbarians" in Gallagher's A Story of South Africa: J. M. Coetzee's Fiction in Context (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991).

<sup>3</sup>Certainly, the discussion concerning the possibility for the victim of torture to have a voice involves a response to the questions of representation raised in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

<sup>4</sup>For an examination of images of deformity and disability in Coetzee's text, see Ato Quayson, "Looking Awry: Tropes of Disability in Post-Colonial Writing" in Rod Mengham, ed., An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: International Writing in English since 1970 (Cambridge: Polity P, 1999), 53-68. Quayson suggests that the Magistrate, feeling contradictory feelings of obsession and repulsion toward the barbarian girl, "seems to be in an odd position of psychological denial" in which he "simultaneously desires her to be without the marks of torture" and "[seems] to be attracted to her because of them" (59-60).

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### Submissions

*Twentieth-Century Literature* welcomes the submission of new scholarly essays on any aspect of literature written in the twentieth century. Essays should be prepared in accordance with the *MLA Style Manual*, 2nd ed. Send your essay as an e-mail attachment to [Twentieth-Century.Literature@Hofstra.edu](mailto:Twentieth-Century.Literature@Hofstra.edu). Or mail three hard copies to Twentieth-Century Literature, 107 Hofstra University, Hempstead NY 11549-1070. Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return.

## Attachment C: Example Entries for an Annotated Bibliography

Annotated Bibliography for Housekeeping

Caver, Christine. "Nothing Left to Lose: Housekeeping's Strange Freedoms." American Literature (68) 1996: 111-37.

Reading Housekeeping through a psychoanalytical interpretation, Caver focuses primarily on the types of trauma experienced by Lucille and Ruthie. Because of these traumas, Caver argues, Ruthie eventually loses her identity and "cannot differentiate between herself and the others to whom she attaches her identity" (131). Ultimately, Caver understands Housekeeping to end problematically, representing "the power of traumatic experience to destroy not only language and the illusion of a coherent self capable of agency but also a person's place within a larger community" (111).

Champagne, Rosaria. "Women's History and Housekeeping: Memory, Representation and Reinscription" Women's Studies (20) 1992: 321-9.

Champagne argues that the practice of housekeeping in Housekeeping shows "the category of place privileges male control of women's bodies and minds" (321). She further claims that the feminist, postmodern reading that her essay performs allows the reader to see "postmodernism as a prac-

## Attachment C: Example Entries for an Annotated Bibliography, cont.

tice, and thus as a hermeneutical politics of reading" (322). Although she implies that her essay has two separate though related concerns, her primary focus appears to be the deconstruction of a history that suggests an origin and the hierarchical structure that stems from it.

Foster, Thomas. "History, Critical Theory, and Women's Social Practices: 'Women's Time' and Housekeeping." Journal of Women in Culture and Society 14 (1988): 73-99.

Foster provides a Marxist-feminist critique of Housekeeping, arguing that Housekeeping uses Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time" to "organize a narrative of women's resistance to the historical limitations imposed on them" (74). Focusing specifically on the houses found in the novel, Foster indicates how Housekeeping breaks down the boundaries between the public and private sphere that confined women.

Geyh, Paula E. "Burning Down the House? Domestic Space and Female Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping." Contemporary Literature (34) 1993: 103-21.

**Attachment C: Example Entries for an Annotated Bibliography, cont.**

Concerned with the creation of a female subject, Geyh employs a psycho-analytical critique regarding Lucille, Ruthie, and Sylvie. In particular, Geyh examines the relationship between the house and the creation of this subject. She investigates “the ways in which feminine subjectivity both constitutes itself and is constituted either through or in opposition to the space of ‘house’ or ‘home’ in Marilynne Robinson’s novel Housekeeping” (104).

Hedrick, Tace. “‘The Perimeters of our Wandering are Nowhere’: Breaching the Domestic in Housekeeping.” Critique (40) (1999): 10pp. 9 November 2002

<http://newfirstsearch.oclc.org/WebZ/FSPage?pagename=tampftascii:pagetype>>

Although Tace focuses on the fissures and cracks found within Housekeeping, reading the novel through Emerson implies a structuralist interpretation. Tace suggests that “the problematics of domestic space in Housekeeping is affected by a textual accumulation of melancholic Emersonian images of loss, erasure, and fragmentation.” In examining the domestic space, Tace investigates not only the house itself, but also the water and window images along with the relationship among Ruthie, Sylvie, and the mother.

**Attachment C: Example Entries for an Annotated Bibliography, cont.**

Kaivola, Karen. “The Pleasures and Perils of Merging: Female Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson’s Housekeeping.” Contemporary Literature (34) 1993: 103-22.

The interest of “The Pleasures” appears to lie with the ending of Housekeeping and Sylvie and Ruthie’s “escape” from Fingerbone. Although Kaivola provides a feminist interpretation, she also suggests that the novel “signifies in contradictory ways for feminist critics” (672). Examining Ruthie’s subjectivity through her connection with Sylvie, her father, and her mother demonstrates that Ruthie’s attempt for escape “is complicated by an equal if not more powerful desire not to become she longs to merge with others, to lose herself” (675). Analyzing these relationships and how they relate to the ending of the novel, Kaivola argues, shows how Housekeeping “represent[s] how compelling it can be – especially in the context of significant loss and perhaps especially for women – to try to overrun boundaries between self and other, to merge, to be absorbed” (687).

King, Kristin. “Resurfacings of The Deeps: Semiotic Balance in Marilynne Robinson’s Housekeeping.” Studies in the Novel (28) 1996: 565-80.

### Attachment C: Example Entries for an Annotated Bibliography, cont.

King analyzes the language of Housekeeping to suggest that the novel maintains a tension between the symbolic and semiotic realms. Throughout her essay, King examines how Ruth's use of language creates this tension. Offering a reading that touches on both psychoanalytical and constructionist theories, King claims that "the desire for freedom and a new form of identity based on mergings rather than distinctions" develops through the "maintaining [of] a disruptive presence within, of laying claim to both the pre-Oedipal mother and the symbolic realm of language that registers that energy" (566).

Mile, Sian. "Femme Foetal: The Construction/Destruction of Female Subjectivity in Housekeeping, or Nothing Gained." Genders (8) 1990: 129-36.

Mile provides a feminist reading of Housekeeping which she argues reacts against the French feminist definition of the female. Mile insists that instead of reading in the manner of the French feminist that Housekeeping shows the constitution of the female body, she interprets Housekeeping as rejecting any notion of "the female body, the Mother Mary, the material

### Attachment C: Example Entries for an Annotated Bibliography, cont.

world, and the sexual self" since they are "useless in the process of defining a woman's subjecthood" (129). Examining the properties of the body, motherhood, and even material items in Housekeeping, Mile focuses on how Robinson disowns boundaries so that the subject can merge with the other.