

National Taiwan University
Graduate Institute of Foreign Languages and Literatures
2023 PhD Program Admissions Examination
Subject: English Literature (60%)

‘The claim that there is a distinctively literary value – like the claim that there is a distinctly artistic value – is not controversial. What is controversial is the nature of the distinctively literary value, which seems to resist quantification, definition, and even articulation. In other words, most people agree that literature is valuable in some special way, but most people cannot delineate that way with any certainty.... My argument for the *sui generis* value of literature will draw on the ancient distinction between literary form and literary content and offer a fresh perspective on the relationship between the two, which I call *literary thickness*. I shall argue that the satisfaction afforded by a literary work is realised by means of literary thickness, understood as a demand the reader makes of that work rather than a property he or she discovers therein. The demand for literary thickness reconciles two conflicting axes of reader interest in literary works – the formal interest in the mode of representation and the substantive interest in the subject of representation – and is characteristic of literary appreciation, the evaluation of literature qua literature. I shall then argue for a necessary relation between literary thickness and non-derivative or final value and thus for the claim that literature is autonomous.’

-- Rafe McGregor, *The Value of Literature* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), vii-viii

In response to Rafe McGregor’s provocative engagement with the long-standing debate on literary values, in particular his notion of ‘literary thickness’, write an essay in a succinct and sophisticated manner, with solid examples to both the context and the texts of English Literature. Your essay must address literary texts and phenomena from at least **THREE** different periods of time (from Old English to Postmodern). Critical evaluation and argumentation are necessary to express your own views and to avoid pure description of the examples given in your writing.