

Ph.D. Field Examination

Nineteenth-Century British Literature

*** SPECIALIZATION: 1845-1900 ***

Fall 2000

INSTRUCTIONS

This examination has three sections defined by time period:

Part A: 1790-1845

Part B: 1845-1900

Part C: 1790-1900

During the four hours of this examination, please answer ONE question from each of the three sections.

The question in your area of specialization is worth 40% of your total mark. The other two questions are each worth 30% of your total mark.

If you focus on a particular author in one question, you cannot focus on that author in any other question. Your answers should have a clear thesis and demonstrate both familiarity with the texts themselves and knowledge of debates and issues in the field.

SECTION A: 1790-1845 (worth 30% of your total mark)

1. It has been argued, most notably by M.H. Abrams, that the distinguishing feature of English Romanticism is the replacement of a mimetic aesthetic by an expressive one--though this view has been challenged. With reference to at least three writers from the period 1790-1845, discuss the extent to which the change from imitation to expression is a sufficient explanation for the change of sensibility that took place at the end of the 18th century.

2. Characters who are exiles or victims appear constantly in the writing of this period. This was natural enough in an age of continual wars and enforced emigration, but these characters are also employed as metaphors across a wide range of significance. Discuss how at least three writers use exiles and victims--naturalistically or metaphorically--and suggest some reasons for the cultural importance of these figures.

3. Romanticism sees the natural world as anodyne for the degrading effects of 'modern life', frequently depicted as the twin evils of commerce and capitalism. Choosing at least three writers on the reading list, discuss the human relationship with 'Nature'.

Section B: 1845-1900 (worth 40% of your total mark)

1. Even the most serious of Victorian writers exploit the resources of sentimentality and melodrama. Throughout much of the 20th century this was regarded as an artistic failing, but recent responses have been more sympathetic to Victorian practice. Addressing the work of at least three writers, discuss and evaluate their use of sentimentality, melodrama, or both.
2. "Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief" (Mark 9:24) echoes through the latter part of the nineteenth century. Select three authors whose differing views on the human condition and intimations of immortality provide a spectrum of opinion across the age. Relate these to the intellectual movements, academic and scientific discoveries and forces of reaction which served to give them form.
3. Discuss the interrelationship between literary and popular culture with reference to at least three writers from the period.

Section C: 1790-1900 (worth 30% of your total mark)

Note: In your answer to this section, you must focus on at least one author from Section A and at least one author from Section B.

1. Drawing on the work of at least three writers from this period, consider the adequacy of "culture" as an explanatory term for discussing 19th-century literature and society.
2. Sir Walter Scott, in the early years of the century, and Thomas Hardy at its close, show remarkably similar Romantic tendencies in their literary focus and subject matter. They share an interest in rural life and common folk, in earlier customs and societies. Select examples from representative works by three or more authors across the period to illustrate that humble people and subjects of every-day life found wide expression and wide acceptance as part of liberalism and humanitarianism of a new society. Develop your best case for a populist strand of literature across the entire period.
3. "We come from the country to the city; there is no return." Discuss the tension between the country and the city in the works of at least three authors.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES

- The total number of answers that an examinee must write has been reduced from 4 to 3, which is more in line with other examinations.
- The number of choices per section has been increased from 2 to 3, which is more in line with other examinations.
- The specialization is listed prominently at the top of the exam's front page so that the "Instruction" section is identical for either specialization.
- The area of specialization is addressed by:
 - i) being worth 40% of the total mark, while the other two answers are worth only 30%.
 - ii) demanding that 3 authors be discussed, while the secondary-area question demands that only 2 authors be discussed. The question on the full time-period (1790-1900) also demands that 3 authors be discussed, for a total of 8 authors.