

Field Examination in Literature

RESTORATION AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

6 May 1992

Instructions to the candidate: This Field Examination in the Literature of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century consists of four parts. Part I of the examination covers the period as a whole, 1660-1800; Part II covers the chosen subperiod, 1750-1800; Part III covers the chosen genre, Oratory; Part IV covers the chosen writer, Edmund Burke.

The examination gives you, in each of its four parts, a choice among three questions. Answer only one of the options in each part.

For the composition of the examination as a whole, you have four hours. Two of the four hours are to be devoted to the composition of your chosen Part I question. The remaining two hours of the examination period are to be divided equally among the Parts II, III, and IV questions (in other words, about 40 minutes for each of the three parts). In the evaluation of your written work on the examination, your committee will give a 50% weight to your Part I response and will divide the remaining 50% equally among the remaining three parts. The committee's expectations will realistically reflect the amount of time which you have to spend on each of the four parts of the exam.

PART I: 1660-1800 (120 minutes)

Choose one of the three topics presented below on which to write a well-substantiated and well-organized essay on the 1660-1800 period as a whole.

- 1) Referring to at least four writers, trace the change in the concept of the poet and poetry from the Restoration to mid-Eighteenth Century and beyond (e.g., Rochester and Dryden through Swift and Pope to Gray and Collins and beyond to Cowper and Burns).
- 2) Trace the evolution and development, in the representations of male writers, of one or two themes related to women (for example, the status of women, marriage, women in the social ranks, female sexuality, sensibility and refined feeling, etc.) throughout the period as a whole. Consider at least three writers and at least two of the genres (poems, plays, novels). [If you choose this topic, do not also choose topic II.3.]
- 3) Trace the interest shown during the period as a whole in those literary forms which parody, burlesque, or mock other literary forms. With reference to at least five examples, in a variety of genres, chosen from throughout the period, consider the prominence of the mock form and some possible reasons for it.

PART II: 1750-1800 (40 minutes)

Choose one of the three topics presented below on which to write a brief but well-documented essay on the 1750-1800 subperiod.

- 1) As the novel developed through the 1750-1800 subperiod, its practitioners incorporated into it aspects of other genres. Cite at least two examples of novels which display this incorporation of aspects of other genres, and comment on the effect of the incorporation.
- 2) Though Goldsmith's Essay on the Theatre presents a critical assessment of literary sentimentality, many works of the 1750-1800 subperiod (including several of Goldsmith's own) continue to manifest sentimentality. With reference to at least two genres and at least two writers, offer an analysis and a rationalization of this continuing interest.
- 3) Your reading list for the 1750-1800 subperiod includes four women writers. In what ways may at least two of these four writers be said to provide a new perspective and a new voice? Mention one or two of the prominent male authors of the subperiod, and compare and contrast female and male perspectives.
[If you choose this topic, do not also choose topic I.2.]

PART III: Genre--Oratory (40 minutes)

Choose one of the three topics presented below on which to write a brief but well-documented essay on the genre oratory.

- 1) In what ways did the rise of the novel influence political oratory?

2) Discuss the relations between religious Dissent and the political oratory of the late eighteenth century.

3) This topic asks you to deal with oratory in two forms and to recall that "poetry in the eighteenth century was commonly thought of as a mode of rhetoric, defined as the art of persuasion by means of the selection and arrangement of a multitude of traditional techniques of argument. Its nearest sister art was public speaking." Below are presented (a) the opening paragraph of Burke's Speech on Conciliation with America and (b) the opening lines of Dryden's Mac Flecknoe. Provide a close reading of each passage, attending to at least two of the following: ethos, audience, situation, style, figures of speech, traditional techniques of argument. Offer appropriate comparisons and contrasts between the passages and their rhetorical implications.

(a) I hope, Sir, that, notwithstanding the austerity of the Chair, your good-nature will incline you to some degree of indulgence towards human frailty. You will not think it unnatural, that those who have an object depending, which strongly engages their hopes and fears, should be somewhat inclined to superstition. As I came into the House, full of anxiety about the event of my motion, I found, to my infinite surprise, that the grand penal bill by which we had passed sentence on the trade and sustenance of America is to be returned to us from the other House. I do confess, I could not help looking on this event as a fortunate omen. I look upon it as a sort of Providential favor by which we are put once more in possession of our deliberative capacity, upon a business so very questionable in its nature, so very uncertain in its issue. By the return of this bill, which seemed to have taken its flight forever, we are at this very instant nearly as free to choose a plan for our American government as we were on the first day of the session. If, Sir, we incline to the side of conciliation, we are not all embarrassed (unless we please to make ourselves so) by any incongruous mixture of coercion and restraint. We are therefore called upon, as it were by a superior warning voice, again to attend to America,—to attend to the whole of it together,—and to review the subject with an unusual degree of care and calmness.

b) All humane things are subject to decay,
 And, when Fate summons, Monarchs must obey;
 This Fleckno found, who, like Augustus, young
 Was call'd to Empire, and had govern'd long;
 In Prose and Verse, was own'd, without dispute
 Through all the Realms of Non-sense, absolute.
 This aged Prince now flourishing in Peace,
 And blest with issue of a large increase,
 Worn out with business, did at length debate
 To settle the succession of the State:
 And pond'ring which of all his Sons was fit
 To Reign, and wage immortal War with Wit;
 Cry'd, 'tis resolv'd; for Nature pleads that He
 Should onely rule, who most resembles me

PART IV: Writer--Burke (40 minutes)

Choose one of the three topics presented below on which to write a brief but well-documented essay on the writer Edmund Burke.

- 1) Assume that you are teaching a fourth-year undergraduate course in the literature of the eighteenth century. Assign to the students one to two hours' reading in Burke (with a sentence or two of explanatory rationale for each item in the reading assignment), and compose a brief lecture on Burke as a rhetorician.
- 2) "Edmund Burke, from his early works like the Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, through to late works like the 'Letter to a Noble Lord,' was fascinated with excess." Discuss with reference to a range of Burke's work, including the Reflections. Consider both thematic and stylistic implications.
- 3) Compare and contrast the rhetoric of at least three works by Burke with the rhetoric of Wollstonecraft's Rights of Women. Is Burke a feminine writer?