

RESTORATION AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FIELD EXAMINATION

FALL 1997

Under Revision
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Phase for
revised list of
sample questions

Instructions to the Candidate:

This Field Examination in the Literature of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century consists of four parts.

Part I covers the period as a whole, 1660-1800.

Part II covers the chosen subperiod, 1750-1800.

Part III covers the chosen genre, Rhetoric.

Part IV covers the chosen writer, Jane Austen.

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

Part one is worth 40%. Parts two, three and four are **each** worth 20%.

Time allowed: 4 hours

Part I - 1660-1800 (40% - choose *one* option)

1. The period 1660-1800 produced a large number and variety of works on the subject of literature itself, including both works of theory and criticism and metaliterary works in several genres. With reference to at least six works drawn from throughout the period as a whole (including examples of both theory/criticism and metaliterature), define and analyze the nature of the interest in literature per se and of the points of concern to the writers of your chosen works. To what extent do the interests and concerns evolve and to what extent do they not evolve?
2. With the seductiveness of Satan in *Paradise Lost* in mind, Blake wrote that Milton was of the devil's party without knowing it. Were any of the Augustan authors (such as Dryden, Swift, Pope and Fielding) of the party they demonized (that is, sympathizers with uneducated literary innovators or with Grub-Street authors)? Discuss with respect to five or six authors.
3. According to Ian Watt, the key innovation of eighteenth-century fiction is its "formal realism." Detail the components of "formal realism" and discuss the validity of Watt's thesis with reference to four or five novelists, including Sterne and Burney.

Part II - 1750-1800 (20% - choose *one* option)

1. A key dilemma for critical periodizations of the late-eighteenth century is how to mark the boundary with the romantic period. Beginning with your definition of the literary concepts of the "romantic" and the "Augustan" (or "neo-classical"), and working with at least four authors from 1750-1800, discuss (1) how and where you would draw the line between 18th-century and romantic literature and (2) whether, on the whole, the period 1750-1800 is more "romantic," "Augustan," or of a character all its own.
2. From the context provided by Johnson's dramatic and literary criticism, by Goldsmith's *Essay on the Theatre*, and by the critical/theoretical position implied by Sheridan's *The Critic*, analyze Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* as exemplars of late-eighteenth-century comedy. On the basis of these two plays in the critical/theoretical context of their own times, offer a brief definition of the comic genre as it was practiced and understood in the 1750-1800 period.
3. What is the role of sensation (in more than one sense of the word) in the literature of 1750-1800? Draw examples from at least three works not all in the same genre.

Part III - Genre - Rhetoric (20% - choose *one* option)

1. In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton, discussing the origin of modern notions of the aesthetic in mid-eighteenth-century philosophy, underscores the role of bodily perception in the aesthetic experience: "Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body. In its original formulation by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, the term refers not in the first place to art, but, as the Greek aisthesis would suggest, to the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought."

Discuss the role or place of bodily perception in the definition of aesthetic experience in eighteenth-century British literary and rhetorical theory.

2. In the popular culture of the eighteenth century as a whole, works focusing on some type of improvement of the readership (e.g., the large number and wide variety of instructional manuals) were very common. In what ways do the rhetorical works of the latter part of the century contribute to this improving effort and to this cultural concern or theme? What is it that these works are intended to, or hope to, "improve"?
3. If rhetoric is the art of persuasion, then literary rhetoric should serve to promote or encourage an aesthetic response in the reader. Is this in fact the aim of literary rhetoric in eighteenth-century rhetorical works?

Part IV - Writer - Austen (20% - choose *one* option)

1. Suppose that, in an undergraduate course on the history and development of the English novel, you have space for only one Austen novel. Which would you choose for presentation to your students? Why would you choose that one, and not one of the others? On what basis or bases would you make your selection? Discuss at least three of Austen's novels in defending your choice.
2. Much recent criticism has focused on the political meaning of Austen's characterization of women. As a result, a debate has formed between two schools of Austen critics: those who see characters like Fanny Price and Emma Woodhouse as representative of conservative social and political values and female roles, and those who see the same characters in radical terms. In your view, which school is correct (or least incorrect)? Consider several of Austen's heroines and at least one of her minor female characters.
3. It is now a critical commonplace to see Austen as a writer responding to the literary and social debates surrounding the Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin ideologies of the 1790s. Yet three of Austen's novels (*Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*) were first drafted in the 1810s. Discuss the development of literary and social themes in Austen's work by comparing the later novels with those first drafted in the 1790s (*Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Northanger Abbey*).