

Ph.D. Field Examination

Nineteenth-Century British Literature

May 1999

INSTRUCTIONS

Complete Parts 1, 2, and 3 of this examination; also complete Part 4, since you have chosen to specialize in authors whose texts were written primarily between 1790 and 1845 and therefore have read the Supplementary Reading List to Section A.

During the four hours of this examination, you should answer a total of **FOUR** questions.

Questions are of equal value.

In each of your answers, state, and develop your thesis carefully, be sure to make specific reference to textual details, and avoid extensive duplication of your argument.

A text can be used as part of the subject of your main analysis in only one question; it is therefore recommended that you establish which questions you will answer and which texts you will focus on in each question before you begin to write your answers.

PART 1

Answer **ONE** of the following three questions testing the candidate's knowledge of British Literature from 1790-1845. Answers will be evaluated for demonstrated knowledge of texts listed in the **STANDARD Reading List for Section A**, as well as demonstrated knowledge of debates and issues in the field.

1. The interest in the individual in the period 1790-1845 led not only to a flurry of autobiographical texts, but also to an emphasis on the inner life of protagonists in fictional poetry and prose. In such literature, authors tend to emphasize the psychological, tracing, for instance, the effects of trauma, love, friendship, familial relationships, or terror. Discuss with reference to the works of at least three authors; one of your selections may be an autobiographical text.
2. The Industrial Revolution (c. 1750-1850) contributed to the polarization of rural and urban life as, for instance, country virtue and moderation was set against city vice and excess--in everything from art and economics to gender and sexuality. This polarization was represented in terms often taken from the pastoral tradition, especially its emphasis on rural space as a sequestered refuge from busy public life. With such issues in mind, discuss the representation of labour, nature and poetry in the works of at least three poets.
3. As critics such as Hanley and Brinkley suggest, poets of this period often elide the role of revision in both the creative process in general and the production of specific works--a point we might extend to novelists and dramatists. Discuss the significance of such elision in the works of at least three authors; one of your selections must be a theoretical text from the Standard Reading List for Section A (i.e., prefaces or essays on literary subjects by writers from 1790-1845).

PART 2

Answer **ONE** of the following three questions testing the candidate's knowledge of British literature from 1845 to 1900. Answers will be evaluated for demonstrated knowledge of texts listed in the **STANDARD Reading List for Section B**, as well as demonstrated knowledge of debates and issues in the field.

1. Discuss the place of violence, whether literal or metaphoric, in the erotic myth (i.e., narratives of sexual or erotic relations) in the works of at least three authors.
2. Schmitt notes, "sensation novels combined realism with the Gothic. . . . Although sensation fiction was extremely popular with the reading public, reviewers judged its assault upon the generic conventions of Victorian realist narrative to be a threat to stable gender roles" (108). Discuss the representation of gender and/or sexuality in relation to mode (sensationalism, realism, gothic) in the prose of at least three authors; at least one of your selections must be a realist text and at least one must be a work of gothic or sensation literature.
3. In "The Decay of Lying," reacting, in part, against the valorization of realism, Wilde suggests, "Art finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself. She is not to be judged by any external standard of resemblance. . . . She makes and unmakes many worlds" (1082). Discuss Wilde's remarks with reference to the representation of art (visual and/or verbal) in the works of at least three authors.

PART 3

Answer **ONE** of the following three questions testing the candidate's knowledge of British Literature across the period 1790-1900. Answers will be evaluated for demonstrated knowledge of texts listed in the **STANDARD Reading List for Section A** and the **STANDARD Reading List for Section B**, as well as demonstrated knowledge of debates and issues in the field.

1. The Romantic period is most commonly known for the valorization of private moments of feeling while the protagonist is in a natural setting and the Victorian era is best known for a broad insistence on sexual and emotional restraint in society. Addressing the works of at least three authors from across the period (1790-1900), discuss the amenability of the literature to these characterizations of the literary periods.
2. Writers from this era exhibit a fascination with the past. They often drew from its cultural materials--ballads, romances, Arthurian legend, classical poetry, myths, and so forth--to support a utopian or dystopian view of the art or politics of the present. Discuss with reference to the works of at least three authors from across the period (1790-1900).
3. Complex representations of those who have to work for a living--rather than, for instance, as simply comic stereotypes or servants--were seen as ground-breaking in the 1790s, but the innovation was arguably limited in its effects. Discuss the representation of working people in the writings of at least three authors from across the period (1790-1900). You may consider any category of working person (manual labourer, professional, teacher, author, artisan, etc.).

PART 4

Answer **ONE** of the following three questions testing the candidate's knowledge of British Literature from 1790 to 1845. Answers will be evaluated for demonstrated knowledge of texts listed in the **SUPPLEMENTARY Reading List for Section A**, as well as demonstrated knowledge of debates and issues in the field. No more than **ONE** of the texts on which you focus can be taken from the Standard Reading List for Section A; all other texts on which you focus must be taken from the Supplementary Reading List for Section A.

1. Books such as *Mansfield Park* and *Castle Rackrent* are named after places, not people--not even their protagonists, as was often the convention for the novel. Discuss the relationship between place, protagonist, and social meaning in the works of at least three writers (at least two of these writers must be novelists).
2. The turn of the century was punctuated by uprisings, wars, and political agitation throughout the British sphere of influence. Much of this activity was informed by a perceived inconsistency between the Enlightenment conception of the individual (moral, teachable, rational) and the limits placed on the rights of the individual according to race, nationality, gender, class, profession, etc. Addressing works by at least three authors, discuss the representation of the individual as caught between these two formulations of the individual's potential.
3. David Marshall points to a contradiction: scenes (dramatic or narrative) of suffering are supposed to elicit our sympathy for the sufferer, but at the same time the popularity of the gothic, melodrama, and other grisly literature suggests that part of the response of the reader or spectator of such scenes is pleasure. Discuss the relationship between sympathy and pleasure in scenes of suffering with reference to the works of at least three authors.