

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

University of London

EXAMINATION FOR INTERNAL STUDENTS

For the following qualifications :-

B.A.

American Literature to 1890

COURSE CODE : ENGLN16

DATE : 15-MAY-02

TIME : 10.00

TIME ALLOWED : 3 hours 30 minutes

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TURN OVER

Answer Question 1 and two other questions.

Candidates are reminded that the period covered by the paper ends at 1890.

Candidates must not present substantially the same material in any two answers, whether on this paper or in other parts of the examination.

1. Write on one of the following passages, commenting on the passage itself and relating it to other writing you have studied for the course.

(a)

The first week of my being among them I hardly ate any thing; the second week I found my stomach grow very faint for want of something; and yet it was very hard to get down their filthy trash; but the third week, though I could think how formerly my stomach would turn against this or that, and I could starve and die before I could eat such things, yet they were sweet and savory to my taste. I was at this time knitting a pair of white cotton stockings for my mistress; and had not yet wrought upon a sabbath day. When the sabbath came they bade me go to work. I told them it was the sabbath-day, and desired them to let me rest, and told them I would do as much more tomorrow; to which they answered me they would break my face. And here I cannot but take notice of the strange providence of God in preserving the heathen. They were many hundreds, old and young, some sick, and some lame; many had paposes at their backs. The greatest number at this time with us were squaws, and they travelled with all they had, bag and baggage, and yet they got over this river aforesaid; and on Monday they set their wigwams on fire, and away they went. On that very day came the English army after them to this river, and saw the smoke of their wigwams, and yet this river put a stop to them. God did not give them courage or activity to go over after us. We were not ready for so great a mercy as victory and deliverance. If we had been God would have found out a way for the English to have passed this river, as well as for the Indians with their squaws and children, and all their luggage. "Oh that my people had hearkened to me, and Israel had walked in my ways, I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries" (Psalm 81.13-14).

(Mary Rowlandson, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs Mary Rowlandson*, 1682)

(b)

'Twas like himself!' cried the inveterate forester, whose prejudices contributed so largely to veil his natural sense of justice in all matters which concerned the Mingoes; 'a lying and deceitful varlet as he is! An honest Delaware now, being fairly vanquished, would have laid still, and been knocked on the head, but these knavish Maquas cling to life like so many cats-o'-the-mountain. Let him go -- let him go; 'tis but one man, and he without rifle or bow, many a long mile from his French commerades; and, like a rattler that has lost his fangs, he can do no further mischief, until such time as he, and we too, may leave the prints of our moccasins over a long reach of sandy plain. See, Uncas,' he added, in Delaware, 'your father is flaying the scalps already! It may be well to go round and feel the vagabonds that are left, or we may have another of them loping through the woods, and screeching like any jay that has been winged!'

5

10

So saying, the honest, but implacable scout, made the circuit of the dead, into whose senseless bosoms he thrust his long knife, with as much coolness, as though they had been so many brute carcasses. He had, however, been anticipated by the elder Mohican, who had already torn the emblems of victory from the unresisting heads of the slain.

15

But Uncas, denying his habits, we had almost said his nature, flew with instinctive delicacy, accompanied by Heyward to the assistance of the females, and quickly releasing Alice, placed her in the arms of Cora. We shall not attempt to describe the gratitude to the Almighty Disposer of events which glowed in the bosoms of the sisters, who were thus unexpectedly restored to life, and to each other.

20

(James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, 1826)

(c)

'I turn my body from the sun. What ho, Tashtego! let me hear thy hammer. Oh! ye three unsundered spires of mine; thou uncrack'd keel; and only god-bullied hull; thou firm deck, and haughty helm, and Pole-pointed prow, -- death-glorious ship! must ye then perish, and without me? Am I cut off from the last fond pride of meanest ship-wrecked captains? Oh, lonely death on lonely life! Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief. Ho, ho! from all your furthest bounds, pour ye now in, ye bold billows of my whole foregone life, and top this one piled comber of my death! Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool! and since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! *Thus*, I give up the spear!'

The harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward; with igniting velocity the line ran through the groove; -- ran foul. Ahab stooped to clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone. Next instant, the heavy eye-splice in the rope's final end flew out of the stark-empty tub, knocked down an oarsman, and smiting the sea, disappeared in its depths.

For an instant, the tranced boat's crew stood still; then turned. 'The ship? Great God, where is the ship?' Soon they through dim, bewildering mediums saw her sidelong fading phantom, as in the gaseous Fata Morgana; only the uppermost masts out of water; while fixed by infatuation, or fidelity, or fate, to their once lofty perches, the pagan harpooners still maintained their sinking lookouts on the sea. And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight.

(Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale*, 1851)

(d)

And now, reader, I come to a period in my unhappy life, which I would gladly forget if I could. The remembrance fills me with sorrow and shame. It pains me to tell you of it; but I have promised to tell you the truth, and I will do it honestly, let it cost me what it may. I will not try to screen myself behind the plea of compulsion from a master; for it was not so. Neither can I plead ignorance or thoughtlessness. For years, my master had done his utmost to pollute my mind with foul images, and to destroy the pure principles inculcated by my grandmother, and the good mistress of my childhood. The influences of slavery had had the same effect on me that they had on other young girls; they had made me prematurely knowing, concerning the evil ways of the world. I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation.

But, O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely! If slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice; I could have had a home shielded by the laws; and I should have been spared the painful task of confessing what I am now about to relate; but all my prospects had been blighted by slavery. I wanted to keep myself pure; and, under the most adverse circumstances, I tried hard to preserve my self-respect; but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the demon Slavery; and the monster proved too strong for me. I felt as if I was forsaken by God and man; as if all my efforts must be frustrated; and I became reckless in my despair.

(Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 1861)

(e)

A word then, (for I will conquer it,)
The word final, superior to all,
Subtle, sent up -- what is it? -- I listen;
Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-waves?
Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands? 5

Whereto answering, the sea,
Delaying not, hurrying not,
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before daybreak,
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,
And again death, death, death, death, 10
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd child's heart,
But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly all over,
Death, death, death, death, death.

Which I do not forget, 15
But fuse the song of my dusky demon and brother,
That he sang to me in the moonlight on Paumanok's gray beach,
With the thousand responsive songs at random,
My own songs awaked from that hour,
And with them the key, the word up from the waves, 20
The word of the sweetest song and all songs,
That strong and delicious word which, creeping to my feet,
(Or like some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed in sweet garments, bending aside,)
The sea whisper'd me.

(Walt Whitman, 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking', first publ. 1859; text
from 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass*)

(f)

Of course a woman who had had the bad taste to marry Selah Tarrant would not have been likely under any circumstances to possess a very straight judgement; but there is no doubt that this poor lady had grown dreadfully limp. She had blinked and compromised and shuffled; she asked herself whether, after all, it was any more than natural that she should have wanted to help her husband, in those exciting days of his mediumship, when the table, sometimes, wouldn't rise from the ground, the sofa wouldn't float through the air, and the soft hand of a lost loved one was not so alert as it might have been to visit the circle. Mrs Tarrant's hand was soft enough for the most supernatural effect, and she consoled her conscience on such occasions by reflecting that she ministered to a belief in immortality. She was glad, somehow, for Verena's sake, that they had emerged from the phase of spirit-intercourse; her ambition for her daughter took another form than desiring that she, too, should minister to a belief in immortality. Yet among Mrs Tarrant's multifarious memories these reminiscences of the darkened room, the waiting circle, the little taps on table and wall, the little touches on cheek and foot, the music in the air, the rain of flowers, the sense of something mysteriously flitting, were most tenderly cherished. She hated her husband for having magnetized her so that she consented to certain things, and even did them, the thought of which today would suddenly make her face burn; hated him for the manner in which, somehow, as she felt, he had lowered her social tone; yet at the same time she admired him for an impudence so consummate that it had ended (in the face of mortifications, exposures, failures, all the misery of a hand-to-mouth existence) by imposing itself on her as a kind of infallibility. She knew he was an awful humbug, and yet her knowledge had this imperfection, that he had never confessed it -- a fact that was really grand when one thought of his opportunities for doing so. He had never allowed that he wasn't straight; the pair had so often been in the position of the two augurs behind the altar, and yet he had never given her a glance that the whole circle mightn't have observed. Even in the privacy of domestic intercourse he had phrases, excuses, explanations, ways of putting things, which, as she felt, were too sublime for just herself; they were pitched, as Selah's nature was pitched, altogether in the key of public life.

(Henry James, *The Bostonians*, 1886)

2. 'All descriptions of the unfamiliar are a mixture of the perceiver's preconceptions and what is "really" there.' Apply Stephen Fender's remark to some early writings about America.
3. What kinds of interest and suspense have you found in the writings of the Puritans?
4. The situation of the Puritan soul, for all its outward security, is thus extremely precarious. His farm is rich, and the landscape bright and open, but it sits on the brink of the abysmal woods, within whose shadows devilish Indians move.

(Richard Slotkin)

Write an essay on the representation of settlement and wilderness in any writing of the period.

5. When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

('The Declaration of Independence', 4 July 1776)

Discuss the rhetoric of American independence as you have encountered it in at least two works of the period.

6. It was about this time I conceiv'd the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection. I wish'd to live without committing any fault at any time... But I soon found I had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined.

(Benjamin Franklin)

What attitudes to imperfection do you find in the writing of the period?

7. Discuss the challenges and opportunities faced by Washington Irving, or any other prose writer of the period, in developing a distinctively American literature.

8. Never did typographed language approach so closely to painting. This is the school that literary landscape-painters ought to study; all the secrets of the art are here. This magic prose not only shows to the mind the river, its banks, the forests and their trees, but it succeeds in giving us a sense of both the slightest circumstances and the combined whole.

(Honoré de Balzac on Cooper, 1840)

Consider the significance of description in Cooper's writing.

9. No sort of comparison can be drawn between the pioneer and the dwelling which shelters him. Everything about him is primitive and wild, but he himself is the result of the labour and experience of eighteen centuries. He wears the dress and speaks the language of cities; he is acquainted with the past, curious about the future, and ready for argument upon the present; he is, in short, a highly civilized being, who consents for a time to inhabit the backwoods, and who penetrates into the wilds of the New World with the Bible, an axe, and some newspapers.

(Alexis de Tocqueville, 1835)

Write about paradoxes in the representation of the pioneer.

10. 'The problem of Poe, fascinating as it is, lies quite outside the main current of American thought' (Vernon Parrington, 1927). Discuss.
11. Transcendentalism could only have sprouted in the soil peculiar to the general locality of which I speak -- the soil of the old New England morality.

(Henry James, 1879).

Consider the relationship between Transcendentalism and locality, or between Transcendentalism and morality.

12. Thoreau's nature is bounded by an irony which applies the phrase 'Higher Laws' to a chapter that, for all its idealism, talks at some length about fried rats.

(R.W.B.Lewis)

Discuss the uses of irony in one or more works of the period.

13. Either: (a) 'It is a drama in which thoughts are acts' (Evert Duyckinck on The Scarlet Letter, 1850). Write an essay on the relation between thought and act in The Scarlet Letter.

Or: (b) 'Through all this intensity of suffering, through this blackness of narrative, there is ever running a vein of drollery' (Anthony Trollope on Hawthorne, 1879). What uses does Hawthorne make of comedy?

14. Either: (a) This volume of Moby-Dick may be pronounced a most remarkable sea-dish -- an intellectual chowder of romance, philosophy, natural history, fine writing, good feeling, bad sayings...

(Evert Duyckinck, 1851)

How digestible do you find Melville's 'intellectual chowder'?

Or: (b) Discuss ambiguity in Melville.

15. Either: (a) Write an essay on reading and writing in the slave narrative.

Or: (b) There is one thing that every individual can do, -- they can see to it that they feel right. An atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who feels strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race. See, then, to your sympathies in this matter!

(Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'Concluding Remarks',
Uncle Tom's Cabin)

Write about representations of sympathy in Stowe, or in any other writings about slavery.

16. The largeness of nature or the nation were monstrous without a corresponding largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen.

(Walt Whitman)

Consider Whitman's own 'largeness' in the light of his comment.

17. 'The complexity of [Emily Dickinson's] mind is not the complexity of harmony, but that of dissonance' (Albert Gelpi, 1965). Discuss.

18. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn sounds the contradictions of American culture so deeply that the novel drowns in them, collapsing at the end into embarrassing slapstick and bad writing.

(Myra Jehlen)

Write on the contradictions of American culture as they appear in one or more works by Mark Twain.

19. D.H. Lawrence wrote that 'when we think of America' we think first of 'her huge success', and 'never realize how many failures have gone, and still go, to build up that success'. Discuss the representation of failure in at least two works.

20. His moral anger is directed at all those who infringe human freedom, who make pawns of people, who feast on the poor, the naïve, or the powerless, who use love to use...

(William H Gass on Henry James, 1979)

Take this remark as a starting-point for an essay on James's fiction.

21. Writing in 1958 about continuities in American literary history, Waldo Frank, friend and editor of the modernist poet Hart Crane, remarked that

the great tradition, with its demand that men, here on earth, within an American social structure, work out the revelation of God, is often present only as a river flowing underground, nourishing but unseen.

Write about at least two works which seem to you to have been nourished by this American tradition.

22. In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
You never change your socks,
And the little streams of alkyhol
Come a-tricklin' down the rocks.
Where the shacks all have to tip their hats,
And the railroad bulls are blind,
There's a lake of stew, and whiskey, too,
And you can paddle all around 'em in your big canoe,
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

(Anon., 'The Big Rock Candy Mountains'. Shacks: vagabonds, worthless fellows; bulls: police)

Write an essay on American utopias, or American landscapes.

23. That is the true myth of America. She starts old, wrinkled and writhing in an old skin, and there is a gradual sloughing off of the old skin towards a new youth. It is the myth of America.

(D.H. Lawrence)

Use this quotation as the starting point for an essay about American myth-making.

24. Write an essay on the significance of one of the following in the work of any writer or writers you have studied for the course: God, Europe, the Civil War, the situation of women, work, deception, degeneration, water, newspapers, lists.
25. Give an account of the interest of any writer of the period not named on this paper.

END OF PAPER