

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON**

*University of London*

**EXAMINATION FOR INTERNAL STUDENTS**

*For The Following Qualification:-*

*B.A.*

**American Literature to 1890**

**COURSE CODE : ENGLN16**

**DATE : 02-MAY-03**

**TIME : 10.00**

**TIME ALLOWED : 3 Hours 30 Minutes**

Answer Question 1 and two others.

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)

Not long after, early in a morning, a great fire was made, in a long-house and a mat spread on the one side as on the other; on the one they caused him to sit, and all the guard went out of the house, and presently came skipping in a great grim fellow all painted over with coal mingled with oil, and many snakes' and weasels' skins stuffed with moss, and all their tails tied together so as they met on the crown of his head in a tassel, and round about the tassel was as a coronet of feathers, the skins hanging round about his head, back, and shoulders and in a manner covered his face, with a hellish voice, and a rattle in his hand. With most strange gestures and passions he began his invocation and environed the fire with a circle of meal; which done, three more such devils came rushing in with the like antic tricks, painted half black, half red, but all their eyes were painted white and some red strokes like mustaches along their cheeks. Round about him those fiends danced a pretty while, and then in came three more as ugly as the rest, with red eyes and white strokes over their black faces. At last they all sat down right against him, three of them on the one hand of the chief priest and three on the other. Then all with their rattles began a song; which ended, the chief priest laid down five wheat corns; then straining his arms and hands with such violence that he sweat and his veins swelled, he began a short oration; at the conclusion they all gave a short groan and then laid down three grains more. After that, began their song again, and then another oration, ever laying down so many corns as before till they had twice encircled the fire; that done, they took a bunch of little sticks prepared for that purpose, continuing still their devotion, and at the end of every song and oration they laid down a stick betwixt the divisions of corn. Till night, neither he nor they did either eat or drink, and then they feasted merrily with the best provisions they could make. Three days they used this ceremony; the meaning whereof, they told him, was to know if he intended them well or no. The circle of meal signified their country, the circles of corn the bounds of the sea, and the sticks his country.

John Smith, The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles (1624)

(b)

I can remember the time when I used to sleep quietly without workings in my thoughts, whole nights together, but now it is other ways with me. When all are fast about me, and no eye open, but His who ever waketh, my thoughts are upon things past, upon the awful dispensation of the Lord towards us, upon His wonderful power and might, in carrying of us through so many difficulties, in returning us to safety, and suffering none to hurt us. I remember in the night season, how the other day I was in the midst of thousands of enemies, and nothing but death before me. It is then hard work to persuade myself, that ever I should be satisfied with bread again. But now we are fed with the finest of the wheat, and, as I may say, with honey out of the rock. Instead of the husk, we have the fatted calf. The thoughts of these things in the particulars of them, and of the love and goodness of God towards us, make it true of me, what David said of himself, 'I watered my Couch with my tears' (Psalm 6.6). Oh! the wonderful power of God that mine eyes have seen, affording matter enough for my thoughts to run in, that when others are sleeping mine eyes are weeping.

I have seen the extreme vanity of this world: One hour I have been in health, and wealthy, wanting nothing. But the next hour in sickness and wounds, and death, having nothing but sorrow and affliction.

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

(c)

When Uncas had brained his first antagonist, he turned, like a hungry lion, to seek another. The fifth and only Huron disengaged at the first onset, had paused a moment, and then seeing that all around him were employed in the deadly strife, he had sought, with hellish vengeance, to complete the baffled work of revenge. Raising a shout of triumph, he had sprung towards the defenceless Cora, sending his keen axe, as the dreadful precursor of his approach. The tomahawk grazed her shoulder, and cutting the withes which bound her to the tree, left the maiden at liberty to fly. She eluded the grasp of the savage, and reckless of her own safety, threw herself on the bosom of Alice, striving with convulsed and ill-directed fingers, to tear asunder the twigs which confined the person of her sister. Any other than a monster would have relented at such an act of generous devotion to the best and purest affection; but the breast of the Huron was a stranger to any sympathy. Seizing Cora by the rich tresses which fell in confusion about her form, he tore from her frantic hold, and bowed her down with brutal violence to her knees. The savage drew the flowing curls through his hand, and raising them on high with an outstretched arm, he passed the knife around the exquisitely moulded head of his victim, with a taunting and exulting laugh. But he purchased this moment of fierce gratification, with the loss of the fatal opportunity. It was just then the sight caught the eye of Uncas. Bounding from his footsteps, he appeared for an instant darting through the air, and descending in a ball he fell on the chest of his enemy, driving him many yards from the spot, headlong and prostrate. The violence of the exertion cast the young Mohican at his side. They arose together, fought, and bled, each in his turn. But the conflict was soon decided; the tomahawk of Heyward, and the rifle of Hawk-eye, descended on the skull of the Huron, at the same moment that the knife of Uncas reached his heart.

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

(d)

A thrill of horror flashed through every soul upon the plantation, excepting Mr. Gore. He alone seemed cool and collected. He was asked by Colonel Lloyd and my old master, why he resorted to this extraordinary expedient. His reply was, (as well as I can remember,) that Demby had become unmanageable. He was setting a dangerous example to the other slaves, -- one which, if suffered to pass without some such demonstration on his part, would finally lead to the total subversion of all rule and order up on the plantation. He argued that if one slave refused to be corrected, and escaped with his life, the other slaves would soon copy the example; the result of which would be, the freedom of the slaves, and the enslavement of the whites. Mr. Gore's defence was satisfactory. He was continued in his station as overseer upon the home plantation. His fame as an overseer went abroad. His horrid crime was not even submitted to judicial investigation. It was committed in the presence of slaves, and they of course could neither institute a suit, nor testify against him; and thus the guilty perpetrator of one of the bloodiest and most foul murders goes unwhipped of justice, and uncensured by the community in which he lives. Mr. Gore lived in St. Michael's, Talbot country, Maryland, when I left there; and if he is still alive, he very probably lives there now; and if so, he is now, as he was then, as highly esteemed and as much respected as though his guilty soul had not been stained with his brother's blood.

Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself (1845)

(e)

Everything was against her. The world was hostile. The child's own nature had something wrong in it, which continually betokened that she had been born amiss, -- the effluence of her mother's lawless passion, -- and often impelled Hester to ask, in bitterness of heart, whether it were for ill or good that the poor creature had been born at all.

Indeed, the same dark question often rose into her mind, with reference to the whole race of womanhood. Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them? As concerned her own individual existence, she had long ago decided in the negative, and dismissed the point as settled. A tendency to speculation, though it may keep woman quiet, as it does man, yet makes her sad. She discerns, it may be, such a hopeless task before her. As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman cannot take advantage of these preliminary reforms, until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change; in which, perhaps, the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest life, will be found to have evaporated. A woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought. They are not to be solved, or only in one way. If her heart chance to come uppermost, they vanish. Thus, Hester Prynne, whose heart had lost its regular and healthy throb, wandered without a clew in the dark labyrinth of mind; now turned aside by an insurmountable precipice; now starting back from a deep chasm. There was wild and ghastly scenery all around her, and a home and comfort nowhere. At times, a fearful doubt strove to possess her soul, whether it were not better to send Pearl at once to heaven, and go herself to such futurity as Eternal Justice should provide.

The scarlet letter had not done its office.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (1850)

(f)

657

I dwell in Possibility –  
A fairer House than Prose –  
More numerous of Windows –  
Superior - for Doors –

Of Chambers as the Cedars –  
Impregnable of Eye –  
And for an Everlasting Roof  
The Gambrels of the Sky –

Of Visitors - the fairest –  
For Occupation - This –  
The spreading wide my narrow Hands  
To gather Paradise –

Emily Dickinson, c.1862

(g)

This second night we run between seven and eight hours, with a current that was making over four mile an hour. We caught fish, and talked, and we took a swim now and then to keep off sleepiness. It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big still river, laying on our backs looking up at the stars, and we didn't ever feel like talking loud, and it warn't often that we laughed, only a little kind of a low chuckle. We had mighty good weather, as a general thing, and nothing ever happened to us at all, that night, nor the next, nor the next.

Every night we passed towns, some of them away up on black hillsides, nothing but just a shiny bed of lights, not a house could you see. The fifth night we passed St Louis, and it was like the whole world lit up. In St Petersburg they used to say there was twenty or thirty thousand people in St Louis, but I never believed it till I see that wonderful spread of lights at two o'clock that still night. There warn't a sound there; everybody was asleep.

Every night, now, I used to slip ashore, towards ten o'clock, at some little village, and buy ten or fifteen cents' worth of meal or bacon or other stuff to eat; and sometimes I lifted a chicken that warn't roosting comfortable, and took him along. Pap always said, take a chicken when you get a chance, because if you don't want him yourself you can easy find somebody that does, and a good deed ain't ever forgot. I never see Pap when he didn't want the chicken himself, but that is what he used to say, anyway.

Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885)



2. He who would wish to see America in its proper light, and have a true idea of its feeble beginnings and barbarous rudiments, must visit our extended line of frontiers where the last settlers dwell.

(Crèvecoeur, 1782)

Discuss the light thrown on America by two or more representations of the frontier you have studied on the course.

3. 'Historical consciousness is to be found everywhere and literary self-consciousness nowhere in early colonial America' (Mary Ann Radzinowicz). Do you agree?
4. 'The Puritans lived in a hopelessly over-interpretable world. . . Everything meant too much. Nothing was simply what it is' (Tony Tanner). Discuss.
5. 'I like a little rebellion now and then. It is like a storm in the Atmosphere' (Thomas Jefferson, 1787). Discuss liking for rebellion in Jefferson, or any other writings you have read on the course.
6. According to Melville, Franklin concealed his 'deep worldly wisdom . . . under an air of Arcadian unaffectedness'. What evidence of either quality do you find in Franklin's writing?
7. It would perhaps be quite as well were we to talk less about our independence, and more about our union.

(Thomas Paine, 1782)

Write an essay on the relation between independence and union in some works you have read on the course.

8. President Jackson's 1835 annual message to Congress commented on the American Indians:

It seems now to be an established fact that they can not live in contact with a civilized community and prosper. . . The plan for their removal and reestablishment is founded upon the knowledge we have gained of their character and habits, and has been dictated by a spirit of enlarged liberality.

Comment on at least two literary portrayals of contact between Indians and the 'civilized community' of white America.

9. 'Cooper resettled the novel outdoors, made of it a form of physical action, rather than conversation and inner sensibility . . .' (Philip Fisher). Write on Cooper's work in the light of this comment.

10. The evident and most prominent aim of Mr. POE is originality, either of idea, or the combination of ideas. He appears to think it a crime to write unless he has something novel to write about, or some novel way of writing about an old thing.

(Edgar Allan Poe, anonymously reviewing his own Tales, 1845)

Use this quotation as the starting point for an essay on Poe's work.

11. Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another, and to a whole, that by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever.

(Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'Wakefield', 1835)

Consider the relationship between individuals and a system, or between different systems, in Hawthorne's work.

12. The romancer cannot often be taken very seriously . . . he seems commonly to be working out a puzzle, and at least to have produced an intellectual toy.

(William Dean Howells, 1886)

Discuss the work of any nineteenth-century 'romancer' in the light of Howells's comments.

13. There is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself.

(Moby Dick, 1851)

Write an essay on contrast in Melville's work. You may confine your answer to Moby Dick.

14. Either: (a) There is one portion of our permanent literature . . . which is wholly indigenous and original. . . I mean the Lives of the Fugitive Slaves . . . All the original romance of Americans is in them, not in the white man's novel.

(Theodore Park, 1849)

Assess the literary achievement of at least two slave narratives in the light of these remarks.

- Or: (b) 'It had never occurred to Mrs Flint that slaves could have any feelings' (Harriet Jacobs, 1861). How important is the representation of 'feelings' in writing about slavery?

15. The quality of the imagination is to flow and not to freeze . . . For all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead.

(Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Poet', 1844)

Use Emerson's comments on imagination, symbols and language as the starting point for an essay on his writing or that of any other American writer of the period.

16. In 1844 Emerson defined the modern period as 'the age of the first-person singular'. Consider some uses of the first-person singular in the period.
17. Marta Werner has said of Emily Dickinson's ambiguity that 'Fathomlessness is the risk this writing runs'. Write on the risks taken by Dickinson's poetry.
18. The title of one of Whitman's poems is "Spontaneous Me". The title of his collected work is Leaves of Grass. To what extent does each express his achievement?
19. Either: (a) James M. Cox has written of the use of the vernacular in Huckleberry Finn that 'this style is Mark Twain's revolution in language, his rebellion in form'. Discuss this comment.
- Or: (b) 'Are you an American?' Twain once jotted in his notebook; to which his response was 'No, I am not *an* American. I am *the* American.' Write an essay on at least two of Twain's works in the light of these jottings.
20. Henry James jokingly described The Bostonians to a friend as 'a remorseless exploitation of Boston'. Write an essay on exploitation in James's work.
21. In America, the mistake has been made of supposing, that, because the mass rules in a political sense, it has a right to be listened to and obeyed in all other matters -- a practical deduction that can only lead, under the most favorable exercise of power, to a very humble mediocrity.

(James Fenimore Cooper, 1838)

Discuss ambivalence about democracy in two or more works of the period.

22. Can we never be thought  
To have learning and grace  
Unless it be brought  
From that damnable place?

(Philip Freneau, 1784)

Write about some of the ways in which Europe is represented in American writing of the period.

23. If we follow through on the self-reflexive nature of these encounters with Africanism, it falls clear: images of blackness can be evil *and* protective, rebellious *and* forgiving, fearful *and* desirable -- all of the self-contradictory features of the self. Whiteness, alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable. Or so our writers seem to say.

(Toni Morrison)

Write an essay on images of blackness, or whiteness, or both, in some American writing of the period.

24. When you have made your picture of petrified New England life, left aground like a boulder near the bank of the Merrimac, does the Mississippian or the Minnesotan or the Pennsylvanian recognize it as American society? We are a nation of provinces, and each province claims to be the court.

(John W. De Forest, 1868)

Write on the representation of nation, or of province, or of the relationship between the two, in some American writing of the period.

25. Speaking of twentieth-century politics, the historian Richard Hofstadter has written of 'the American paranoid style', a style consisting of 'heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy'. Can this style be found in any American writing before 1890?

26. Yet in excess, continual,  
There is cure of sorrow.

(Wallace Stevens, 1923)

What is accomplished by a style of 'excess' in the work of any American before 1890?

27. In the 1780s, in the preface to his Spelling Book, Noah Webster wrote that America must eventually 'be as distinguished by the superiority of her literary improvements, as she is already by her civil and ecclesiastical constitutions'. How did American writers of the period try to create a distinctive national literature?
28. Characterise the use made by American writers of the period to one of the following: the short story; the sermon; the letter; the autobiography; political utterance; travel writing.