

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

University of London

EXAMINATION FOR INTERNAL STUDENTS

For The Following Qualification:–

B.A.

American Literature to 1890

COURSE CODE : ENGLN16

DATE : 18–MAY–06

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 on the course.

(a)

Mr. Hoar called them betime to dinner, but they ate very little, they being so busy in dressing themselves, and getting ready for their dance, which was carried on by eight of them, four men and four squaws. My master and mistress being two. He was dressed in his holland shirt, with great laces sewed at the tail of it; he had his silver buttons, his white stockings, his garters were hung round with shillings, and he had girdles of wampum upon his head and shoulders. She had a kersey coat, and covered with girdles of wampum from the loins upward. Her arms from her elbows to her hands were covered with bracelets; there were handfuls of necklaces about her neck, and several sorts of jewels in her ears. She had fine red stockings, and white shoes, her hair powdered and face painted red, that was always before black. And all the dancers were after the same manner. There were two others singing and knocking on a kettle for their music. They kept hopping up and down one after another, with a kettle of water in the midst, standing warm upon some embers, to drink of when they were dry. They held on till it was almost night, throwing out wampum to the standers by. At night I asked them again, if I should go home? They all as one said no, except my husband would come for me. When we were lain down, my master went out of the wigwam, and by and by sent in an Indian called James the Printer, who told Mr. Hoar, that my master would let me go home tomorrow, if he would let him have one pint of liquors. Then Mr. Hoar called his own Indians, Tom and Peter, and bid them go and see whether he would promise it before them three; and if he would, he should have it; which he did, and he had it. Then Philip smelling the business called me to him, and asked me what I would give him, to tell me some good news, and speak a good word for me. I told him I could not tell what to give him. I would [give him] anything I had, and asked him what he would have? He said two coats and twenty shillings in money, and half a bushel of seed corn, and some tobacco. I thanked him for his love; but I knew the good news as well as the crafty fox. My master after he had had his drink, quickly came ranting into the wigwam again, and called for Mr. Hoar, drinking to him, and saying, he was a good man, and then again he would say, "hang him rogue." Being almost drunk, he would drink to him, and yet presently say he should be hanged. Then he called for me. I trembled to hear him, yet I was fain to go to him, and he drank to me, showing no incivility. He was the first Indian I saw drunk all the while that I was amongst them.

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

TURN OVER

(b)

"Oneida!"

"Oneida!" repeated the scout, who was fast losing his interest in the scene, in an apathy nearly assimilated to that of his red associates, but who now advanced in uncommon earnestness to regard the bloody badge. "By the Lord, if the Oneidas are outlying upon the trail, we shall be flanked by devils on every side of us! Now, to white eyes there is no difference between this bit of skin and that of any other Indian, and yet the Sagamore declares it came from the poll of a Mingo; nay, he even names the tribe of the poor devil, with as much ease as if the scalp was the leaf of a book, and each hair a letter. What right have Christian whites to boast of their learning, when a savage can read a language that would prove too much for the wisest of them all! What say *you*, lad; of what people was the knave?"

Uncas raised his eyes to the face of the scout, and answered, in his soft voice -

"Oneida."

"Oneida, again! when one Indian makes a declaration it is commonly true; but when he is supported by his people, set it down as gospel!"

"The poor fellow has mistaken us for French!" said Heyward, "or he would not have attempted the life of a friend."

"He mistake a Mohican, in his paint, for a Huron! You would be as likely to mistake the white coated grenadiers of Montcalm for the scarlet jackets of the 'Royal Americans,'" returned the scout. "No, no, the serpent knew his errand; nor was there any great mistake in the matter, for there is but little love atween a Delaware and a Mingo, let their tribes go out to fight for whom they may, in a white quarrel. For that matter, though the Oneidas do serve his sacred majesty, who is my own sovereign lord and master, I should not have deliberated long about letting off 'killdeer' at the imp myself, had luck thrown him in my way."

"That would have been an abuse of our treaties, and unworthy of your character."

"When a man consorts much with a people," continued Hawk-eye, "if they are honest, and he no knave, love will grow up atwixt them. It is true, that white cunning has managed to throw the tribes into great confusion, as respects friends and enemies; so that the Hurons and the Oneidas, who speak the same tongue, or what may be called the same, take each other's scalps, and the Delawares are divided among themselves; a few hanging about their great council fire, on their own river, and fighting on the same side with the Mingo, while the greater part are in the Canadas, out of natural enmity to the Maquas - thus throwing everything into disorder, and destroying all the harmony of warfare. Yet a red natur is not likely to alter with every shift of policy! so that the love atwixt a Mohican and a Mingo is much like the regard between a white man and a serpent."

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

CONTINUED

(c)

Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning to spell words of three or four letters. Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. 5
To use his own words, further, he said, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master - to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world. Now," said he, "if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value 10
to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy." These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled 15
in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty - to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was just what I wanted, and I got it at a time when I the least expected it. Whilst I was saddened by the thought of losing the aid of my kind mistress, I was 20
gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by the merest accident, I had gained from my master. Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read. The very decided manner with which he spoke, and strove to impress his wife with the evil consequences of giving me instruction, served to convince me that he 25
was deeply sensible of the truths he was uttering. It gave me the best assurance that I might rely with the utmost confidence on the results which, he said, would flow from teaching me to read. What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, 30
against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn. In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both.

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

TURN OVER

(d)

I am he attesting sympathy;
Shall I make my list of things in the house and skip the house that supports them?

I am the poet of commonsense and of the demonstrable and of immortality;
And am not the poet of goodness only I do not decline to be the poet of
wickedness also.

Washes and razors for foofoos for me freckles and a bristling beard.

5

What blurt is it about virtue and about vice?
Evil propels me, and reform of evil propels me I stand indifferent,
My gait is no faultfinder's or rejector's gait,
I moisten the roots of all that has grown.

Did you fear some scrofula out of the unflagging pregnancy?
Did you guess the celestial laws are yet to be worked over and rectified?

10

I step up to say that what we do is right and what we affirm is right and some is
only the ore of right,
Witnesses of us one side a balance and the antipodal side a balance,
Soft doctrine as steady help as stable doctrine,
Thoughts and deeds of the present our rouse and early start.

15

This minute that comes to me over the past decillions,
There is no better than it and now.

What behaved well in the past or behaves well today is not such a wonder,
The wonder is always and always how there can be a mean man or an infidel.

Endless unfolding of words of ages!
And mine a word of the modern a word en masse.

20

A word of the faith that never balks,
One time as good as another time here or henceforward it is all the same to me.

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

CONTINUED

(e)

I would not paint - a picture -
I'd rather be the One
Its bright impossibility
To dwell - delicious - on -
And wonder how the fingers feel 5
Whose rare - celestial - stir -
Evokes so sweet a Torment -
Such sumptuous - Despair -

I would not talk, like Cornets -
I'd rather be the One 10
Raised softly to the Ceilings -
And out, and easy on -
Through Villages of Ether -
Myself endued Balloon
By but a lip of Metal - 15
The pier to my Pontoon -

Nor would I be a Poet -
It's finer - own the Ear-
Enamored - impotent - content -
The License to revere, 20
A privilege so awful
What would the Dower be,
Had I the Art to stun myself
With Bolts of Melody!

Emily Dickinson, c.1862

TURN OVER

(f)

Catherine received the young man the next day on the ground she had chosen - amid the chaste upholstery of a New York drawing-room furnished in the fashion of fifty years ago. Morris had swallowed his pride and made the effort necessary to cross the threshold of her too derisive parent - an act of magnanimity which could not fail to render him doubly interesting.

“We must settle something - we must take a line,” he declared, passing his hand through his hair and giving a glance at the long narrow mirror which adorned the space between the two windows, and which had at its base a little gilded bracket covered by a thin slab of white marble, supporting in its turn a backgammon board folded together in the shape of two volumes, two shining folios inscribed in letters of greenish gilt, *History of England*. If Morris had been pleased to describe the master of the house as a heartless scoffer, it is because he thought him too much on his guard, and this was the easiest way to express his own dissatisfaction - a dissatisfaction which he had made a point of concealing from the Doctor. It will probably seem to the reader, however, that the Doctor’s vigilance was by no means excessive, and that these two young people had an open field. Their intimacy was now considerable, and it may appear that for a shrinking and retiring person our heroine had been liberal of her favours. The young man, within a few days, had made her listen to things for which she had not supposed that she was prepared; having a lively foreboding of difficulties, he proceeded to gain as much ground as possible in the present. He remembered that fortune favours the brave, and even if he had forgotten it, Mrs. Penniman would have remembered it for him. Mrs. Penniman delighted of all things in a drama, and she flattered herself that a drama would now be enacted. Combining as she did the zeal of the prompter with the impatience of the spectator, she had long since done her utmost to pull up the curtain. She too expected to figure in the performance - to be the confidante, the Chorus, to speak the epilogue. It may even be said that there were times when she lost sight altogether of the modest heroine of the play, in the contemplation of certain great passages which would naturally occur between the hero and herself.

Henry James, *Washington Square* (1880)

CONTINUED

2. John Smith narrated the many 'difficulties' encountered by the Jamestown colony and 'yet', he added, 'you may see by what strange means God hath still delivered it'. Investigate the relations between the divine and secular explanations advanced for the deliverance of the colony at Virginia, or Massachusetts, or both.
3. To what extent are American discovery and settlement narratives marked by a tension between what the writers thought they knew and what was truly new?
4. Despite their tenacious struggles to achieve clarity in their expressions of purpose and design, the Puritans were frequently ambiguous and paradoxical.

(Emory Elliott)

Consider the work of any Puritan writer or writers in the light of this quotation.

5. Write an essay on the figuration of God in the work of any American writer or writers of the period.
6. In his *Autobiography* Benjamin Franklin describes himself as entering upon a 'Plan for Self-examination'. Consider the process of 'Self-examination' in any autobiographical work or works of the period.
7. Like many Americans, Poe insisted on 'the necessity of maintaining a proper *nationality* in American Letters'. Consider how this necessity manifested itself in at least two works by any American writer or writers.
8. If there is any period one would desire to be born in, - is it not the age of Revolution, when the old and the new stand side by side, and admit of being compared?

(Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1837)

Discuss any of the writings generated by America's War of Independence in the light of this quotation.

9. Write an essay on uses of the supernatural in any short fiction of the period.
10. In 1893 the historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared his 'frontier hypothesis', that the nation of America had defined itself by means of an advancing frontier. Write about national definition by means of the frontier in at least two works of American literature.
11. In defending his literary Indians from complaints about their inauthenticity, Cooper responded that he had merely exercised 'the privilege of all writers of fiction...to present the *beau idéal* of their characters to the reader'. Consider the ideal and the real, the beautiful and the ugly, in portrayals of American Indians by at least two writers.

TURN OVER

12. Write about the interaction of savagery and gentility in the fiction of Cooper.
13. Henry James declared that 'to take Poe with more than a certain degree of seriousness is to lack seriousness oneself'. How seriously should we take Poe?
14. Whether Hawthorne has simply availed himself of this mystical blackness as a means to the wondrous effects he makes it to produce in his lights and shades; or whether there really lurks in him, perhaps unknown to himself, a touch of Puritanic gloom, - this, I cannot altogether tell. Certain it is, however, that this great power of blackness in him derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free.

(Herman Melville, 1850)

Use this quotation as the starting point for an essay on the work of Hawthorne, or Melville, or both.

15. Henry James Sr. once described Emerson as 'a man without a handle'. Is it possible to get a 'handle' on the writings of Emerson?
16. Either: (a) An anonymous reviewer of *Moby-Dick* dismissed it as 'an ill-compounded mixture of romance and matter-of-fact', adding:
- ravings and scraps of useful knowledge flung together salad-wise make a dish in which there may be much surprise, but in which there is little savour.
- How well- or ill-compounded are the mixtures in Melville's books?
- Or: (b) 'The strongest and fiercest emotions of life defy all analytical insight' (Herman Melville). Write on Melville's own work in the light of this assertion.
17. Write an essay on the depiction of violence in any slave narrative or narratives you have read.
18. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was one of the best-selling novels of the nineteenth century. To what do you attribute its popularity?
19. Whitman told a friend that Emerson 'did not see the significance of the sex element' in *Leaves of Grass*. 'He did not see that if I had cut sex out I might just as well have cut everything out'. How significant is the 'sex element' in Whitman's poetry?

CONTINUED

20. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity.

(Thoreau, *Walden*)

How successfully do Thoreau's writings escape 'the ruts of tradition and conformity'?

21. In a letter of 1862 to T.W. Higginson, Emily Dickinson wrote:

When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse - it does not mean - me - but a supposed person.

Consider Emily Dickinson's poetry in the light of this quotation.

22. In the poem 'Eighteen Sixty-One' in the volume *Drum-Taps*, Whitman writes:

Arm'd year - year of the struggle
No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you terrible year

Write an essay on the responses of Whitman, or any other American writer, to the Civil War.

23. 'It was not as a moralist that James designed his stories, but as a realist' (Graham Greene, 1936). Is this true of *Washington Square*, or any other work or works which James published before 1890?
24. William Faulkner complained that 'Twain has never really written a novel.... His work is a mass of stuff - just a series of events'. Did Twain write good episodes but poor plots?
25. Write on the representation of one of the following in the work of any American writer or writers of the period: Europe, childhood, newspapers, industry, the city, the sea.

END OF PAPER