

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

University of London

EXAMINATION FOR INTERNAL STUDENTS

For The Following Qualification:-

B.A.

The Romantic Period

COURSE CODE : ENGLN08

DATE : 21-MAY-03

TIME : 10.00

TIME ALLOWED : 3 Hours

Answer three questions, including at least one from each section.

Answers to questions in Section A should refer to at least two authors. Answers to questions in Section B may, unless otherwise indicated, refer to one or more authors.

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

Section A

1. Whether the glory of Europe is set, I shall not now enquire; but probably the spirit of romance and chivalry is in the wane; and reason will gain by its extinction.

(Mary Wollstonecraft, in her answer to Burke's *Reflections*)

Does it make sense to think of the revolutionary debate in literature in terms of a struggle between reason and romance?

2. Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old Time – with a billowy main –
A sun – a shadow of a magnitude.

(John Keats, 'On Seeing the Elgin Marbles')

Why were the Romantics so fascinated by ruins?

3. Write an essay examining the political significance of private relationships as dramatised in some of the writing of the period.

4. Slowly by time matured
A happier order then for Scotland rose;
And where inhuman force,
And rapine unrestrain'd
Had lorded o'er the land,
Peace came, and polity,
And quiet industry, and frugal wealth;
And there the household virtues fix'd
Their sojourn undisturb'd.

(Robert Southey, 'Ode Written after the King's Visit to Scotland', 1822)

This quotation refers to the effects of the Union of Scotland with England and Wales; use it as a starting point for an essay on Scottish writing of the period.

TURN OVER

5. Poetry is not a branch of authorship: it is the stuff of which our life is made. The rest is mere oblivion, a dead letter: for all that is worth remembering of life is the poetry of it . . . Poetry is that fine particle within us, that expands, rarefies, refines, raises our whole being; without it, 'man's life is poor as beast's'.

(William Hazlitt, 'On Poetry in General')

Why were the Romantics so keen to argue that poetry was more than 'a branch of authorship'?

6. Neither youth nor childhood is folly or incapacity; some children are fools and so are some old men. But there is a vast majority on the side of imagination or spiritual sensation . . .

(William Blake)

In what ways did childhood kindle the Romantic imagination?

7. It may be said that we ought to read our contemporaries . . . I will cut all this. I will have no more of Wordsworth or of Hunt in particular . . . Let us have the old poets and Robin Hood!

(John Keats)

Write an essay examining the influence of the ballad tradition, or Spenser, or Shakespeare, or any other writer from an earlier period, on a Romantic poet.

8. When danger or pain press too nearly they are incapable of giving any delight and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.

(Edmund Burke)

Write an essay on the pleasures of the sublime in Romantic literature.

9. Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.

(Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Mont Blanc')

What kinds of things does nature say in Romantic poetry?

CONTINUED

10. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued that the Gothic novel typically has ‘an atmosphere dominated by the threat of violence between generations’. Discuss with reference to any two or more novels of the period.

11. Napoleon is a tyrant, a monster, the sworn foe of our nation. But gentlemen – he once shot a publisher.

(Thomas Campbell)

This is supposed to have been a toast given at an authors’ dinner. Does it give an unfairly pessimistic view of the relations between author and publisher during this period?

12. The mind beneath such banners militant
Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward,
Strong in itself, and in the access of joy
Which hides it like the overflowing Nile.

(William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*)

Write on Romantic idealism.

13. Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations . . . I am terrified by the modes of life, by the manners, and the barrier of utter abhorrence and want of sympathy placed between us by feelings deeper than I can analyse . . . My oriental dreams . . . always filled me with such amazement at the monstrous scenery that horror seemed absorbed for a while in sheer astonishment.

(Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*)

Write an essay on the significance of the Orient in the literature of the period.

14. Not all of the writers of this period are Romantic writers, nor are all of the most important writers or works.

(Jerome J. McGann)

Either: (a) Assess the usefulness of the term ‘Romantic’ for describing the literature of the period.

Or: (b) Write an essay examining some of the non- or anti-Romantic currents in the period’s literature.

TURN OVER

Section B

15. Either: (a) Examine the claim that when reading Blake's *Songs* it is our innocence or experience as readers that is the main subject.
- Or: (b) Coleridge said that one of the faults of Blake's work was its 'despotism in symbols'. Do you agree?
16. Referring to Wordsworth's failure to gain popularity with the reading public, Hazlitt described him as 'the spoiled child of disappointment'. Examine the significance of 'disappointment' in Wordsworth's work.
17. One of the leading passions of my mind has been an anxious desire not to be deceived. This has led me to view the topics of my reflection on all sides; and to examine and re-examine without end, the questions that interest me.

(William Godwin)

Use this quotation as a starting-point for an essay on Godwin's work.

18. Still harping on the same subject, you will exclaim. How can I avoid it, when most of the struggles of an eventful life have been occasioned by the oppressed state of my sex? We reason deeply, when we forcibly feel.

(Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*)

Is the subject which dominates Wollstonecraft's writings her only claim on the attention of modern readers?

19. Reflect on the significance of either conversation, or fantasy, in Coleridge's work.
20. In Andrew Motion's biography, Keats comes across as an ambitious, class-conscious and combative young man. Is any of this reflected in his writing?
21. Scott, reviewing *Frankenstein*, commented that
- the author's principal object [is] to open new trains and channels of thought, by placing men in supposed situations of an extraordinary and preternatural character, and then describing the mode of feeling and conduct which they are most likely to adopt.

Do you think this is a helpful way of thinking about Mary Shelley's fiction?

CONTINUED

22. How significant was the experience of exile in Italy to Shelley's poetic development?
23. These pages betray [Jane Austen's] secret which is that she was naturally exuberant, and her power came, as all power comes, from the control and direction of exuberance. But there is the presence and pressure of that vitality behind her thousand trivialities; she could have been extravagant if she liked . . . This is what gives a stunning weight to her understatements.

(G.K. Chesterton, of Austen's early novel *Love and Freindship*)

Either: (a) How important in Austen's work is the tension between control and exuberance?

Or: (b) How would you characterise the development of Jane Austen's art? You need not refer to the juvenilia unless you wish to do so.

24. If I have deviated into the gloomy vanity of 'drawing from self', the pictures are probably like, since they are unfavourable; and if not, those who know me are undeceived, and those who do not, I have little interest in undeceiving. I have no particular desire that any but my acquaintance should think the author better than the beings of his imagining.

(Byron, Preface to *The Corsair*, 1814)

Either: (a) How crucial is the notion of persona to Byron's poetic achievement?

Or: (b) Write an essay on Byron's relationship with his public.

25. 'Revolution is more genuinely his subject than Scotland is' observed Marilyn Butler of Scott. Do you agree?

26. So have I loitered my life away, reading books, looking at pictures, going to plays, hearing, thinking, writing on what pleased me best.

(Hazlitt)

What literary advantages does Hazlitt gain from the occasional, the journalistic and the miscellaneous?

TURN OVER

27. 'It is romantic to consider concrete expression as a decadence, a contamination', wrote Mario Praz, citing Keats's lines, 'Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/ Are sweeter . . .' What is the appeal of the ineffable in Romantic writing?

28. Write an essay showing how reference to the European context of Romanticism can shed new light on an English work.

29. Gie me ae spark o' nature's fire,
 That's a' the learning I desire;
 Then, though I drudge through dub an' mire
 At pleugh or cart
 My muse, though hamely in attire,
 May touch the heart.

(Burns, 'Epistle to John Lapraik')

Write an essay about the homely in Romantic literature. You may, if you wish, confine yourself to the work of a single author.

30. Examine the role and function of humour in one or more of the following: Blake, Wordsworth, the *Anti-Jacobin*, Lamb, Keats, Hunt, Peacock, Hazlitt, *Blackwood's Magazine*, Byron, Shelley.

31. All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted.

(Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*)

Discuss with reference to Romantic period fiction. You may, if you wish, restrict your answer to the work of just one author.

END OF PAPER