Ph.D. Specialist Examination
American Literature: 1830-1865
Spring 1997

I. (30 minutes). Identify and briefly describe the significance of SIX (6) of the following in two or three sentences each:

1. Huckleberry
2. "Compensation"
3. "Children of Adam"
4. The Dial
5. Lawrence Buell
6. "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids"
7. Jones Very
8. Catherine Maria Sedgwick
9. Woman in the Nineteenth Century
10. Nat Turner
11. Transcendentalism
12. "Economy"
13. "I taste a liquor never brewed"

II. (60 minutes). Write on ONE (1) of the following topics:


2. The canon of the American Renaissance has undergone substantial revision in the past twenty years. Describe some of the principal ideological shifts that have opened up the canon and explain how the inclusion of new works has changed our understanding of the period.

3. According to Jonathan Arac, "the tools of our critical trade inevitably determine our interpretations of a specific text." Select any ONE (1) critical approach (Marxist Criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Deconstruction, New Historicism) and show how the approach you have selected shapes your reading of one of the following novels: The Scarlet Letter, Moby-Dick, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Song of Myself, Hope Leslie, Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Fall of the House of Usher.

III. (90 minutes) Write a detailed and well-developed essay on ONE (1) of the following questions:

1. It has been argued that Emerson could not read Hawthorne and Melville, and Hawthorne and Melville could not read Emerson. Explain the intellectual gulf that separated these authors from one another. Illustrate your argument with specific references to primary works.
2. Write a detailed essay on any ONE (1) text by an African-American author of the period and examine the rhetorical strategies employed to shape the reader's response to the issue of slavery.

3. Lydia Maria Child, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Elizabeth Drew Stoddard, exploit early American history as source material for their fiction. Select at least two authors from the above list and show how they reinterpret the values of their intellectual ancestors.

IV. (60 minutes). Answer TWO (2) of the following questions in essays of 30 minutes each:

1. Our modern response to heroes in The Scarlet Letter is largely determined by our own ideological agenda that may not necessarily reflect Hawthorne's own. Does Hawthorne want his antebellum readers to admire Hester's resistance to societal convention and does a reader of the late 20th century respond to Hester's character differently from how an antebellum reader would have responded to her behavior? Be specific.

2. Moby-Dick can be read as Melville's hermeneutic quest for meaning and certainty in an inescapable universe where the "painted mask" of God crumbles and Nature "paints like a whore." Examine Melville's literary scripturalism encoded in Melville's cosmos and show how it illuminates his characters' subjective responses to Nature.

3. A large number of Emily Dickinson's poems are characterized by a tension between the Self's quest for redemption and the Self's resistance to being swallowed up by grace, by refusing to relinquish its individuality. Select at least THREE (3) poems in which you demonstrate how the poet comes to terms with this tension.

4. Does Whitman meet Emerson's expectations of what a POET is and does? Outline Emerson's criteria in "The Poet" and "The Over-Soul" and compare them with Whitman's practice in "Song of Myself."

5. In his essay "The Pond in Winter," Thoreau reveals his essential typology by reading Walden Pond, its depth, and crystal waters as "symbol." Explain how Walden illustrates Thoreau's view of Nature as physical manifestation of spiritual laws.