

DENB 2401

SECOND PUBLIC EXAMINATION

HONOUR SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE 2004

COURSE II

PAPER A1 ENGLISH LITERATURE 600-1100

Monday, 17 May 2004, 9.30 am to 12.30 pm

Time allowed – Three hours

Answer *three* questions. You should pay careful attention in your answers to the precise terms of the questions.

Do *not* turn over until told that you may do so.

Answer *three* questions. You should pay careful attention in your answers to the precise terms of the quotations and questions.

1. 'The problems involved in determining what we mean by the term "Old English literature" are not different from those which arise with regard to more modern periods. But they are even harder to answer.' Discuss any aspect(s) of this statement.
2. 'If the social conditions described in [Old English] verse seem to resemble more closely those of Tacitus' *Germania* than the complex society that England had become by the tenth century, this may be taken as a reflection of the way that the ancient traditions of verse archaize and rebuild on a heroic scale every variety of matter they touch' (R D FULK AND C M CAIN). Examine any ONE OR TWO Old English poems with regard to the relationship between the society they describe and that of Anglo-Saxon England.
3. 'Everything that survives of Anglo-Saxon literature,...along with the vast bulk of what can be known of Anglo-Saxon culture, was once selected for copying by Anglo-Saxon scribes...In the vast majority of cases...Anglo-Saxon scribes were monks or other ecclesiasts working in a regulated Christian culture' (J WILCOX). Discuss the implications of these observations.

4. Swa monige beoþ men ofer eorþan, swa beoþ modgeþoncas.

(*Maxims I*)

Do the surviving Old English literary texts leave much room for differences of opinion among their Anglo-Saxon readers/listeners ?

5. 'It is a commonplace of the literature of many other periods that admirable men and women will inevitably fall short of the highest ideals of thought and action. Anglo-Saxon writers, though, show little sympathetic interest in or understanding of human fallibility.' Discuss.
6. 'The evident incompatibility of much that is held up for admiration in the "heroic" sphere—for one thing, the rightness of revenge—with moral requirements in the Christian religious sphere is never addressed in Old English poems, let alone resolved.' Discuss.
7. Are there any points of contact between modern conceptions of a "poet" and what we can retrieve of the Anglo-Saxons' view of the composers of their verse texts ?

8. 'Virtually without exception, Old English literary texts see what is "foreign" as a threat needing to be met, not as an opportunity for the enlargement of experience. This tendency means, ultimately, that the texts convey little sense of there being much to learn about the world and the people in it.' Discuss any part(s) of this statement.
9. Examine the nature and value of 'wisdom' as it may have been understood by the composers of ANY ONE OR MORE Old English works (considering also, if you wish to, other closely-related concepts).
10. **Þæt wæs geara iu.....**

Write on the uses to which ANY ONE OR MORE Old English authors or texts puts the idea of the distant past.
11. Write on EITHER archaism OR wordplay, as a feature of the language of any Old English literary text(s).
12. 'Alliteration in Old English verse, like rhyme in some later forms of verse, is a structural requirement that nevertheless could be imaginatively used by skilful authors to reinforce or enrich meaning.' Discuss this claim, with close analysis of some representative examples.
13. EITHER (a) 'The allusive and incomplete nature of so many of the historical and other narratives in *Beowulf* show that the contemporary listener or reader must have been assumed to have an immense amount of knowledge before he came to the poem. The modern reader is therefore in a hopeless position from the outset.' Examine any of the issues raised by this statement.

OR (b) '*Beowulf* rarely, if ever, shows relations of kinship as creating anything positive or beneficial. It uses such relations almost always to point up moments of loss, or destructive conflicts.' Do you agree ?
14. 'The introduction of the term "epic" into discussions of Old English poems has been more confusing than helpful.' Discuss.
15. 'Comparison of Old English poetry with its sources shows stories adapted to a new cultural context to give them greater intelligibility' (D G SCRAGG). Assess the extent to which this is true of ANY ONE Old English religious narrative poem.

16. 'Seeing that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* can hardly be thought of as the product of a single author's mind, we cannot say anything interesting about it as a whole.'
 EITHER (a) Do you agree ?
 OR (b) Discuss the issues raised by possible multiple authorship in the case(s) of ANY OTHER WORK OR WORKS of Old English literature.
17. 'We find in the prefatory letter to the [Old English translation of Gregory's] *Pastoral Care* the rhetorical use of exaggeration to paint as bleak a picture as possible in order to underline Alfred's personal achievement and in order also to persuade the bishops to take action' (A P SMYTH). Assess the extent of the 'decline of learning' by Alfred's time, and of Alfred's 'personal achievement'.
18. 'The uses to which the works of Ælfric and other homilists were expected to be put are generally hard for us to determine. Consequently, whatever we may say about the effectiveness of their style must remain highly speculative.' Is this so?
19. We habbað nu gesæd sceortlice þis godspel anfealdum andgite,
 and we eac willað eow secgan þæt gastlice andgyt.
- Explain, with close reference to illustrative examples, the methods by which ANY ONE OR MORE Old English homilists sought to disentangle the 'spiritual sense' of scripture from its 'simple' or 'literal sense'.
20. Do modern punctuations of Old English texts distort their meaning in any way(s)? If so, what would a preferable system of punctuation need to include?