

# Midterm Examples

SYLLABUS BURNEY DEFOE FIELDING RADCLIFFE RICHARDSON SMOLLETT STERNE NOVEL PAGE

My questions are designed to allow you to show your understanding of and thinking about the novels. There is no right answer; what matters is how well you support your opinion about the novel being discussed.

Some of the following questions and answers may be about novels which will appear on your final. The novels chosen and the time when they are read are not the same every time I teach this course.

[Robinson Crusoe question](#)

[Answer 1](#)

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[Joseph Andrews question and answer](#)

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## **ROBINSON CRUSOE**

**Are critics correct in their charges that Robinson Crusoe lacks emotion?**

### **Answer 1**

I do not believe that Robinson Crusoe lacks emotions. All human beings have emotions. Robinson Crusoe does, whoever, put a great deal of energy into controlling his emotions. From his unannounced departure from his parents to his controlled writing in his journal, Crusoe keeps a heavy hand on any emotions that might escape him.

The first obvious example is the way in which Crusoe left his home. He knew he was leaving against his parents' wishes, actually his father's command, and so he leaves without stating his plans or saying good-bye. He can then completely avoid the emotions of anger or sorrow that he might feel at his departure.

Throughout the work, Crusoe frequently refers to his fear of being devoured; devoured by the sea or by the cannibals or by the waves. I believe his real fear was of being devoured by his emotions, and that explains his apparent lack of or control of his emotions.

When Crusoe lands on the island, he rants and raves about who he is going to exist on this horrible place. When writing his journal, however, he refuses to go into detail about his first days on the island. He claims this will be a waste of his ink but in fact, he would have to write a very emotional passage about his very real anxieties and fears concerning his survival and existence on the island. Exposed, as they would be, on paper, Crusoe would then have to deal with the very emotional situations he is in on the island.

Defoe's writing of *Robinson Crusoe* is so much without emotion, that any sudden outburst that Crusoe has is very dramatic and very telling. When Crusoe becomes ill and worries he cries "oh poor me." When he discovers the footprint he loses control and

considers destroying his dwelling, crops, and animals. When he sees the ships and assumes they have sunk but realizes there are no survivors, he pleads for just one person to be his companion. These are actually very few of the emotional outbursts. Most of the novel has Crusoe systematically plotting along with his daily work gathering food, building his dwelling, accumulating good, without showing any emotion at all. Crusoe is not without emotions, but his fear of being devoured by his emotions prevents them from coming to the surface in any form other than an outburst.

## Answer 2

*Robinson Crusoe* certainly does not lack emotion even though at first glance Crusoe does not seem to be very emotional. Defoe's attention to detail in his description of the tasks Crusoe must perform in order to survive monopolizes the majority of the novel but if you look a little deeper you will find in Crusoe a very human man, driven by his own passions, plagued by his fear, and hounded by his solitude.

It is his passionate urge to go to sea which Crusoe blames for his "original sin" of disobeying his father and leaving home. This "sin" plunges him into a shipwreck and captivity. Even after his escape, when already making a decent living with signs of prosperity ahead, Crusoe lets his passion for the sea again take him away, this time dropping him alone on an island far from the normal trade routes with little hope of escape. When he realizes his situation, he spends many long days bewailing his solitude and hopelessness before he is able to perform the work necessary for his survival. This does not sound like an emotionless man to me.

Perhaps it is that Crusoe (or is it Defoe?) thinks that reading all of these "dull things" (emotional outbursts) would bore the reader and so he merely slips in a sentence every now and then which tells us something like how Crusoe has lived in fear of the "footprint" for two years, or that he became so frightened when the ship was sinking that he fainted. And we must not overlook the continuous mention of Crusoe's fear of being devoured by the water, by the land (during the earthquake), by wild animals, or by the cannibals. This is a man who is almost consumed by his fears.

An emotionless man would not cry out against the shipwreck that left him no survivors to end his solitude. He would not rage madly along the beach tearing at his hair if he were incapable of passionate feelings. No, I think that the critics who see either the book or the man as lacking emotion are wrong.

## JOSEPH ANDREWS

**Question: Ronald Paulson says that Fielding, in all his novels, espouses the belief that "Action alone can be relied on as tests of men's character or inner being." Is this true for *Joseph Andrews*?**

### Answer:

In Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, there are several characters who, in the time of the novel, would be considered "high-born" or the "betters" of some of the characters that occupy lower ranks.

Fielding has little regard for rank, however, and values action more highly than any social position. His feelings are made clear when the high-born characters behave in a truly low manner.

Take, for example, Lady Booby's capricious, wanton treatment of Andrews when he refuses to be seduced by her. She fires him summarily and sends him out on the road without money

or provisions, and even fires a chambermaid falsely accused of sleeping with him. Booby comes off as venal, petty, and cruel—none of which qualities anyone could call "noble."

Fielding also shows us despicable actions committed by the "gentleman" who not only attempts to humiliate Parson Adams, but also seeks to abduct and rape the virtuous Fanny. High birth, low behavior.

Birth is not the only criterion that was supposed to enjoy automatic respect in Fielding's day. Men of law, such as justices of the peace, were also afforded deference by virtue of their titles, and not necessarily of their virtues. Fielding shows the idiocy in his notion when a judge false accuses Andrews and Fanny of robbing a man who, in reality, was attempting to rape Fanny.

Only when Parson Adams "drops" Lady Booby's name does the justice undo his injustice, and even then Fanny winds up losing her money. The official's decision was not based on any consideration of evidence of basic morality, only on who was capable of wielding the most power.

This mode of thought in, in a microcosm, what Fielding is railing against throughout most of the novel. It is your actions, not your position, that matter most, the author is saying.

On the other side of the coin, some of the nobles actions in the book are undertaken by those of the humblest birth. Take, for example, the chastity of Andrews who is only a servant. He has no reputation to uphold, not even that of a female afraid of an unwanted pregnancy. Yet he acts (or refuses to act) with the highest virtue always uppermost in his mind. In his simple strength is revealed a nobility that can never be obtained by birth, license, or appointed position.

Parson Adams, also, is a character whose acts far outrank his social status. A simple country preacher, he shows courage and righteousness over and over again against those who would abuse their power. No Don like Quixote, perhaps, but possessor of an equally noble title: that of a man of virtue.

Thus we can see that, as Ronald Paulson says, Fielding believes that "action can alone be relied on as a test of (man's) character or inner being."

## ***CLARISSA***

**Question: Richardson complained, "oh, that I could not say that I have met with more admirers of Lovelace than of Clarissa." Discuss.**

**Answer:**

Richardson's novel, *Clarissa*, tackles the question of what human nature is. When he says "Oh, that I could not say that I have not met with more admirers of Lovelace than of Clarissa" he is commenting on the characters of people he has met. He divides people, in this quote, into two categories—those that find Clarissa appealing and those that favor Lovelace. The two schools of thought content in the novel, and Richardson has fond that they also exist in reality.

One of the major themes in *Clarissa*—if not *the* major theme—is the question of human nature. Clarissa and Lovelace represent two polar ideas regarding this question. Aside from this idea both characters are somewhat similar. They are both attractive, educated, bright and interesting. The center of their differences is their definition of human nature. Richardson ascribes their idea to members of opposite sexes attempt to the best and worst of each. Clarissa—the best of females—believes that punctiliousness and virtue are intrinsic to people and that these values are to be

regarded as foremost in importance. Lovelace's definition states that people are basically animals. They are slaves to their emotions and should not attempt to control them.

Richardson's quote gives us insight into his opinion of human nature. He believes that Clarissa's ideas of virtue and honor are paramount. In the novel, he supports this view but leaves us with the question of whether or not one can exist in his world while unwaveringly holding to this belief. Anna Howe says that Clarissa is "more fit for the next" world-meaning heaven. Because she holds fast to her belief she ascends to an angelic state as the novel progresses. Richardson, by making Clarissa into an ethereal being, tells us that her idea regarding human nature are correct. The fact that she dies without experiencing earthly pleasures is not necessarily a condemnation of her beliefs. She calls this life a "weaning time," and retaining her virtue served only to hasten her preparation. If death, and subsequently heaven,

Lovelace represents the ultimate "rake." His ideas regarding human nature are reflected in the rake's creed when he says that women love uncontrolled passion, and that it is his duty to abide by his passions. He believes that people are, by nature, passionate animals that should engage in sex-gratuitously when it suits them. He questions the validity of his idea more and more as the novel progresses because he sees Clarissa's strength and character. His idea is ultimately disproved. He is shown to be a beast by his own definition—and ides alone and far away from the center stage of the novel.

Richardson, many say, approves of a "middle road" between the two ideas. Judging from his quote, however, one would have to agree that he believes that Clarissa had the better of the two ideas. He is saying that he wishes more people would relate to Clarissa's character than enjoy the depravity of Lovelace.

## ***TRISTRAM SHANDY***

**Question: Is there, as E.M. Forster suggests, a god whose name is Muddle, in *Tristram Shandy*?**

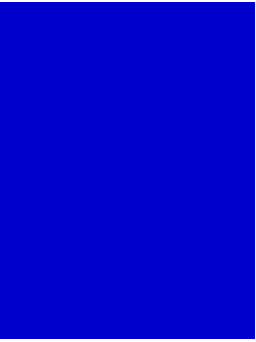
**Answer:**

A first, second, probably even a tenth quick reading of *Tristram Shandy* would make a person agree with E.M. Forster and swear that Sterne wrote *Tristram Shandy* as an offering to a god named Muddle. This is a very nice thing to believe because if Muddle is the god of the novel, then it can easily be dismissed with a coy "Oh well, I'll never understand *Tristram Shandy*., so why bother?" However, with some reflection, one may say that Muddle does not rule.

One problem with *Tristram Shandy* (TS) is that we think life moves in a linear way. We even order our lives by this fashion by separating days from nights, and watching clocks, weeks, and years progress in an orderly way. Unfortunately, these are man's contrivances in an attempt to create order. *TS* simply reveals that life does not move in this way. People think by association not linear logic. We can become stuck in time, like Uncle Toby; tortured by times progress; like Mr. Shandy; or, live from movement to moment like Tristram. Sterne wants us to see and experience this.

Sterne's stylistic method of repetition of sentences or phrases, digressions and jumps all help to imitate our thought process. When he takes three pages to bring Uncle Toby and Tristram's father down one step, I am reminded of a line from T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" on how in a moment there is time to make a thousand decisions which another moment will revise. Sterne wants the reader to have a different logic.

Stene's altered logic is also visible in his cause and effects.



Yes, it is ridiculous to blame Tristram's character defects on concentrating on winding a clock during intercourse, but how often can we trace the cause of something back to an event far removed. We usually say, "if." The "if" is rarely the event which directly precedes an action. And, as in Tristram's castration, it seems almost necessary to skip back to why the sash doesn't work. Of course, you can go too far.

I don't think that muddle rules *Tristram Shandy*. All the rules make sense within the framework.

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