

Senior Oral Exam Topics List, with Sample Questions **Early Modern Europe Field**

Topic I. Female Communitas in late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and Spain

Teresa de Avila, *The Letters of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, vol. 1, letter 99, to María de San José (1576)

Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611)

María de Zayas, *Desengaños amorosos* (1647)

Katherine Phillips, “Friendship’s Mystery, To My Dearest Lucasia,” “To My Excellent Lucasia, On Our Friendship” (posthum. 1667)

Alison Weber, *Rhetoric of Femininity* (1990)

Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (2000)

Lisa Vollendorf, *Reclaiming the Body: María de Zayas’s Early Modern Feminism* (2001)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Can you trace the significance of “communitas” in one of these texts back to its context in either Catholic Spain or Protestant England?
2. Where is God in these female communities? What does Lanyer’s praise of aristocratic women have to do with the Passion, for example?
3. What, if anything, is the connection between the respective notions of communitas found in these texts and the genres in which they are written? If Teresa’s letter had been written as poem or novella, how might it have been written differently?
4. What is the significance of the concept of “communitas” as distinguished from that of “community”? Compare the different ways in which two of your primary texts envision the sources of communitas.

Topic II. European Encounters with the New World

Hernán Cortés, “Second Letter” in *Letters from Mexico* (1520)

Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Chronicle of the Narvaez Expedition* (1555)

Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* (1578)

Michel Montaigne, “Of the Caniballes” (1580)

Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, & Discoveries of the English Nation*, Epistle Dedicatory (1589)

Anthony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism*, Introduction and Chapter 1 (1998)

Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Introduction (1991)

Beatriz Pastor Bodmer, “Hernán Cortés and the Creation of the Model Conqueror,” in *The Armature of Conquest: Spanish Accounts of the Discovery of America, 1492-1589* (1992)

Rolena Adorno, “The Negotiation of Fear in Cabeza de Vaca’s *Naufragios*” (1991)

Andrea Frisch, “In a Sacramental Mode: Jean de Léry’s Calvinist Ethnography” (2002)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. When you speak about “encounters,” what difference does it make that Cortes, Cabeza de Vaca, and Lery actually went to the New World, while Montaigne and Hakluyt were armchair travelers?
2. What has happened between the publication of Cortes in 1520 and that of Hakluyt in 1589? Is there a story here about change over time?
3. Montaigne’s “Of the Caniballes” suggests that it is not always clear by what standard barbarians and non-barbarians are to be distinguished, for “every one gives the title of barbarism to everything that is not in use in his own country.” How does he propose that we identify barbarism?
4. One of the common tropes of literature pertaining to European encounters with the “new world” is the expression of wonder and amazement. What do one or two of these texts find most marvelous or surprising? What sort of narrative or rhetorical strategies do they use to convey their wonder to readers?

Topic III. Wrangling with God

Santa Teresa de Avila, *The Life of St. Theresa*, excerpt on ecstasy (ca. 1567)

San Juan de la Cruz, “En una noche obscura,” “Cántico spiritual,” “¡Oh llama de amor viva” (1584)

George Herbert, *The Temple* (1633)

John Donne, Holy Sonnets 1-19 (imprint. 1633-35), “Goodfriday, 1613: Riding Westward” (1633), “A Hymne to God the Father” (1633)

Gianlorenzo Bernini, Ecstasy of St. Theresa (1647-52)

Peter Burke, “How to become a Counter-Reformation Saint,” in *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication* (1987)

Elizabeth McLaughlin and Thomas Gail, “Communion in *The Temple* (2001)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Can you compare Teresa’s account of “ecstasy” with Bernini’s painting? What happens to our understanding of the mystical experience when we move from word to image?
2. Can you articulate the confessional differences between these works? Is “wrangling with God” a different process for Catholics than it is for Protestants?
3. Each of the primary texts which you have selected depicts the human relationship with God as involving struggle. Is the source of the conflict the same in each of these texts? What is all the wrangling about?
4. How does Donne’s use of the sonnet form influence his depiction of the human divine relationship? Please compare his formal choices with those of Herbert in *The Temple*.

Topic IV. The Early Modern Self in the World

Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1605-15)

Francis Bacon, *Novum Organon*, The Idols (XXXVIII-XLIV), Idols of the Tribe (XLV-LII), Idols of the Cave (LIII-LVIII), Idols of the Market-Place (LIX, LX), Idols of the Theatre (LXI-LXV, LXVIII) (1625)

Francis Bacon, Essays, "Of Simulation and Dissimulation" (1625)

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (1600)

Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, "Love of Learning, or Overmuch Study" (1621-51)

Robert Alter, "The World of Knighthood and the World of Mirrors" (1978)

Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Introduction and Chapter 6 (1980)

J. Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure* (1986)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Imagine a conversation between Hamlet and Don Quixote – perhaps on an open field. What might these two "selves" say to one another?
2. What are the "idols" that Bacon lists for his reader? How do they relate to his overall conception of the human mind?
3. In Act III of Hamlet, Hamlet tells Ophelia that "God has given you one face and you have made yourself another." Is "making faces" always represented as being an act of deceitfulness in the texts you have selected, or are there contexts in which it appears to be a necessity -- or even a virtue?
4. Bacon suggests that poetry (broadly understood to include all genres of literature) can convey lessons or veil mysteries. What are some alternative understandings of the capacities of literature in these texts? For instance, in *Don Quixote*, what can literature do for us -- and what can't it do?

Topic V. The Early Modern City

Leon Battista Alberti, *On Architecture*, Book IV, “Public Works” (1452)

Jacopo Sansovino, Biblioteca Marciana (Venice) (1540)

Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *El gran teatro del mundo* (ca. 1635)

Thomas Gage, “The Great and Famous City of Mexico” (1625)

Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984)

Eugene Johnson, “Jacopo Sansovino, Giacomo Torelli, and the Theatricality of the Piazzetta in Venice” (2000)

Stephen Mullaney, “Civic Rites, City Sites: The Place of the Stage,” in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (1991)

Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (2005)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Imagine you are a fifteenth-century Italian reader of Alberti. How might his ideas about urban architecture and the “public” differ from your own empirical everyday experience? How might they confirm that experience?
2. Your works span more than a century and take us from the city-states of the Renaissance to the colonial city of Mexico in New Spain. Is there a story to tell about what happens to conceptions of the city between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, between the Old World and the New?
3. In the ancient world, urban areas were often imagined as sacred cities under the protection of the gods. How did early modern writers envision the city as a secular as well a sacred space? Please discuss with reference to Muir’s work on cities and patron saints.
4. In Gage’s “The Great and Famous City of Mexico” he makes much of the putative evidence of wickedness and sin which he encountered in his travels. Please compare the depiction of virtue and vice in Gage’s work to that of Calderon’s *El gran teatro del mundo*.

Transitional question: Moving back to the “early modern self” from the “early modern city,” how did the early modern city contribute to the development of these conceptions of the self? Or did it?

General question: Your topics touch on the great problems every student of early modern Europe must grapple with – the New World, Christianity, the role of women, and Humanism. But these are all elite texts written by highly literate individuals (some of whom wielded a great deal of power). What’s missing?