

## ENGLISH LITERATURE I

Candidates should answer **THREE** questions

*You may answer on any literature written in English*

1. 'The fact that many of the surviving Irish tales show some remarkable resemblances to themes, stories and even names in the sagas of the Indian *Vedas*, written in Sanskrit at the start of the first millennium BC, shows just how ancient they may be' (PETER BERRESFORD ELLIS). Discuss ancientness or influence in Old English literature.
2. How epic is *Beowulf*?
3. 'So he gathered together all the true and kindly people that he knew, and he dressed them in armour, and he made them knights, and taught them his idea, and set them down, at a Round Table' (T. H. WHITE, *The Once and Future King*). Discuss idealism in medieval literature.
4. 'Marguerite Porete offers an amazing account of a soul in some such condition: "Such a soul ... swims in the sea of joy—that is in the sea of delights flowing and streaming from the Divinity, and she feels no joy for she herself is joy, and swims and floats in joy without feeling any joy because she inhabits Joy and Joy inhabits her"' (ANNE CARSON). Discuss pantheism **AND/OR** ecstasy in medieval literature.
5. What do fabliaux tell us about the medieval sense of humour?
6. Chivalry or humanism?
7. 'Wyatt wrote brilliantly about being stuck' (NICOLA SHULMAN). How did courtiers deal with being stuck?
8. What influence did classical epic exert on Renaissance literature?
9. Write an intellectual biography of Shakespeare.
10. 'What of Herbert's metric? Poetry has been said to be the result of a metre-making argument. This is what sometimes we miss in this poet' (R. S. THOMAS). Discuss argument-making in seventeenth-century poetry.
11. Explore the interaction of religion and politics in women's writing during the seventeenth century.
12. 'I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall' (JOHN MILTON, *Paradise Lost*). Discuss the idea of free will in *Paradise Lost*.
13. Discuss the presentation of **EITHER** 'wit' **OR** 'judgement' on the Restoration stage.
14. What was formally innovative about the novel during the eighteenth century?
15. 'Post-Augustan' or 'pre-Romantic'? Or neither?

[OVER]

16. '[O]n Sunday last Engels said: "Oh, we all knew Shelley by heart then"' (ELEANOR MARX). What is the link between Romanticism and revolution?
  17. 'Byron's romanticism, it must be confessed, was only half sincere' (BERTRAND RUSSELL). Write about sincerity or insincerity in Romantic-period poetry.
  18. 'Disingenuousness and double-dealing seemed to meet him at every turn' (JANE AUSTEN, *Emma*). Are Austen's novels disingenuous?
  19. 'We see in splendid drawing-rooms the GREAT Squeeze in and then squeeze out again in state! As far removed from comfort as from mirth, The dullest, HOTTEST, COLDEST beings on earth.'
- (PIERCE EGAN, *Life in London*). Discuss Regency literature of social critique.
20. 'Paradoxically, whenever a writer in Wiltshire or County Antrim or Inverness-shire asserted the individuality of a local story or historical monument, he was inadvertently contributing to a collective sense of the importance of particular places' (FIONA STAFFORD, *Local Attachments*). Write about ideas of locality in Victorian literature.
  21. 'All actual heroes are essential men, / And all men possible heroes: every age, / Heroic in proportions' (ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING, *Aurora Leigh*). Discuss conceptions of heroism **AND/OR** masculinity in nineteenth-century poetry.
  22. What was transcendental about Transcendentalism?
  23. 'You may, perhaps, be surprised at my saying this; perhaps surprised at my implying that war itself can be right, or necessary, or noble at all' (JOHN RUSKIN). Discuss literary attitudes to war in the hundred years before 1914.
  24. Write about representations of homosexuality in turn-of-the-century literature.
  25. '[T]he opinion that Beethoven is comprehensible and Schoenberg incomprehensible is an objective illusion' (THEODOR ADORNO). Discuss in relation to the modernist novel.
  26. How did literary moralists deal with the tragedies of the twentieth century?
  27. 'I would never write about someone that forced me to write at a lower register than what I can write' (MARTIN AMIS). Discuss.
  28. 'I hadn't meant to go grave robbing with Richard Dawkins / but he can be very persuasive. "Do you believe in God?" / he asked. "I don't know," I said. He said, "Right, so get / in the car."' (SIMON ARMITAGE, 'The Experience'). Can poetry and science get along? Answer with reference to any contemporary literature.
  29. 'If we are to foster the kind of intelligent critical culture required to combat the effects of populism in politics, we must stop celebrating amateurism and ignorance in our poetry' (REBECCA WATTS). Does uncritical valorization do more harm than good?
  30. 'Shakespeare's naturalism in fact leads to extravagant license and improbability (Lear leaping off Dover Cliff)' (GEORGE STEINER, *The Death of Tragedy*). When critics are

as thoughtful as George Steiner, is it missing the point to complain about their minor errors?

31. '[Oedipa] looked around, spooked at the sunlight pouring in all the windows, as if she had been trapped at the centre of some intricate crystal, and said, "My God"' (THOMAS PYNCHON, *The Crying of Lot 49*). Discuss wonder in contemporary literature.
32. 'Because this is capitalism / your fantasy of being CEO / has come true. The company is yours. / And you are riding towards Yonkers / alone' (ZOHAR ATKINS). Write about the literary presentation of anti-capitalism.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE II

Candidates should answer **Section A** and **TWO** questions from **Section B**

*Note that Section A is compulsory. In Section B you may answer in relation to literature written in languages other than English if you wish*

## Section A

1. Compare the following two passages in any way you like:

- a) [...] With set jaw they are fighting,  
fighting, fighting,—some we love whom we know,  
some we love but know not—that  
hearts may feel and not be numb.  
It cures me; or am I what 5  
I can't believe in? Some
- in snow, some on crags, some in quicksands,  
little by little, much by much, they  
are fighting fighting fighting that where  
there was death there may 10  
be life. 'When a man is prey to anger,  
he is moved by outside things; when he holds  
his ground in patience patience  
patience, that is action or  
beauty,' the soldier's defense 15  
and hardest armor for
- the fight. The world's an orphans' home. Shall  
we never have peace without sorrow?  
without pleas of the dying for  
help that won't come? O 20  
quiet form upon the dust, I cannot  
look and yet I must. If these great patient  
dyings—all these agonies  
and wound bearings and bloodshed—  
can teach us how to live, these 25  
dyings were not wasted.
- Hate-hardened heart, O heart of iron  
iron is iron till it is rust.  
There never was a war that was  
not inward; I must 30  
fight till I have conquered in myself what  
causes war, but I would not believe it.  
I inwardly did nothing.  
O Iscariot-like crime!  
Beauty is everlasting 35  
and dust is for a time.

(from MARIANNE MOORE, 'In Distrust of Merits')

- b) [...] “Observe a pompion-twine afloat;  
 Pluck me one cup from off the castle-moat!  
 Along with cup you raise leaf, stalk and root,  
 The entire surface of the pool to boot.  
 So could I pluck a cup, put in one song 5  
 A single sight, did not my hand, too strong,  
 Twitch in the least the root-strings of the whole.  
 How should externals satisfy my soul?”  
 “Why that’s precise the error Squarcialupe”  
 (Hazarded Naddo) “finds; ‘the man can’t stoop 10  
 To sing us out,’ quoth he, ‘a mere romance;  
 He’d fain do better than the best, enhance  
 The subjects’ rarity, work problems out  
 Therewith.’ Now, you’re a bard, a bard past doubt,  
 And no philosopher; why introduce 15  
 Crotchets like these? fine, surely, but no use  
 In poetry—which still must be, to strike,  
 Based upon common sense; there’s nothing like  
 Appealing to our nature! what beside  
 Was your first poetry? No tricks were tried 20  
 In that, no hollow thrills, affected throes!  
 ‘The man,’ said we, ‘tells his own joys and woes:  
 We’ll trust him.’ Would you have your songs endure?  
 Build on the human heart!—why, to be sure  
 Yours is one sort of heart—but I mean theirs, 25  
 Ours, every one’s, the healthy heart one cares  
 To build on! Central peace, mother of strength,  
 That’s father of ... nay, go yourself that length,  
 Ask those calm-hearted doers what they do  
 When they have got their calm! And is it true, 30  
 Fire rankles at the heart of every globe?  
 Perhaps. But these are matters one may probe  
 Too deeply for poetic purposes:

(from ROBERT BROWNING, *Sordello*)

## Section B

2. 'There is no more reason for languages to change than there is for automobiles to add fins one year and remove them the next, for jackets to have three buttons one year and two the next' (PAUL POSTAL). Do you agree?
3. 'Pope has disguised him in foppery, and Cowper has stripped him naked' (ROBERT SOUTHEY on Homer). What do you think is the most apt metaphor for literary translation?
4. 'The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its audience.' Would you agree?
5. Does reading a ballad rather than singing it miss the point?
6. 'I mean to be heavy' (GERTRUDE STEIN). How have women writers represented the relationship between the body and the intellect?
7. 'Thou yard, three-quarters, half-yard, quarter, nail, / Thou flea, thou nit, thou winter-cricket thou!' (WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE). Write about the relationship between poetry and ordinary speech. You don't have to mention Shakespeare.
8. Discuss the differences between propaganda, public relations and political literature.
9. Are literary genres discovered or made?
10. Make a case for the literary significance of a particular bookseller, printer or periodical of your choice.
11. 'Our charge against anthologies is that they have robbed the poetry-reading publics of self-respect' (LAURA RIDING and ROBERT GRAVES). Defend anthologies.
12. What is or was the Sublime?
13. 'She'd really rather it all kept going, water in the taps, whales in the oceans' (OLIVIA LAING, *Crudo*). Discuss the representation of crisis in the work of one or more writers.
14. What do manuscript miscellanies teach us about medieval or early modern literary culture?
15. 'Chiming then to me, with exquisite consent, as I melted away, his oily balsamic injection, mixing deliciously with the sluices in flow from me, sheathed and blunted all the stings of pleasure' (JOHN CLELAND, *Fanny Hill*). Is all writing about sex bad?
16. What might an intersectional novel look like? Feel free to try writing your own.
17. 'Contemporaries would likely have had no idea that they were living in the great age of satire' (ASHLEY MARSHALL on the long eighteenth century). Should we get rid of literary period labels?

18. Are there differences between intentionality in the moral sphere and intentionality in the artistic sphere?
19. 'I ought not to read any thing of the Novel kind only what are called *good Books*' (LADY DOROTHY BRADSHAIGH). Why have novels been considered immoral?
20. Can literary rivalries be productive?
21. 'they were asked to tweet-review the play for a fee and all expenses paid [...] soon there'll be no need for proper critics, the so-called "experts" who've been running the show since forever' (BERNARDINE EVARISTO, *Girl, Woman, Other*). Has social media enabled new forms of literary criticism?
22. Is parody disrespectful?
23. 'There is an intrinsic absurdity in making current literature a subject of academic study, and the student who wants a tutor's assistance in reading the works of his own contemporaries might as well ask for a nurse's assistance in blowing his own nose' (C.S. LEWIS). Discuss.
24. Write about the representation of illness in the work of a writer or writers of your choice.
25. 'Blessed be all metrical rules that / forbid automatic responses, / force us to have second thoughts, / free from the fetters of Self' (W.H. AUDEN). Discuss.
26. What might follow the material turn?
27. Does consideration of a writer's personality have a place in literary criticism?
28. Should literary texts be minimally or maximally edited?
29. Write a lampoon.
30. Discuss the literary treatment of any **ONE** of the following topics:  
 Antipathy; bastards; [the] closet; disgust; ecstasy; farrago; gallantry; hedge-funds; insularity; joy; kissing; lassitude; misadventure; *négritude*; oddness; pandemics; quintessence; raillery; sundering; titillation; unimportance; virago; wandering; xeroxes; yesterday; zephyrs.