

ENGLISH LITERATURE I

Candidates should answer **THREE** questions

You may answer on any literature written in English

1. 'Ne sceal þær dyrne sum' (BEOWULF). What role(s) did secrecy play in Anglo-Saxon literature?
2. 'Nis þis nan lean spel: hit stent on Leden þus in ðære bibliothecan' (ÆLFRIC OF EYNSHAM). Discuss canonicity **AND/OR** translation in writing before the Conquest.
3. 'First write me a psalter or hymnal, or an epistolary or troper, or a missal or a good itinerary or capitulary ... and I'll give you good pay' (ÆLFRIC BATA). How much can print economies **AND/OR** patronage tell us about who texts are for?
4. 'tres necessaire je cuide estre aus Engleis de sçavoir la droite nature de françois' [I think it very necessary for the English to know the true nature of French] (JOHN BARTON). Is 'English' literature ever a useful category in the Middle Ages? Your response need not concern French.
5. 'Rarely obscure, and not a genre' (NICOLETTE ZEEMAN). What do we get wrong about medieval allegory?
6. 'We can draw closer to mysticism if we think *obliquely, autobiographically, vernacularly, performatively, practically, erotically, and ascetically*' (SIMON CRITCHLEY). Explore mysticism in **ONE** or more of those ways.
7. Is the search for authoritative versions of medieval texts misguided?
8. 'And then methought great shame that Saracens, which have nowhere right belief ne perfect law, should reprove us of our imperfectness' (MANDEVILLE'S TRAVELS). Were Others watched or the watchers?

9. 'A: And shall this be the proces of the play? / B: Ye, so I understonde, be credible informacyon. / A: By my fayth; but yf it be evyn as ye say / I will advyse them to change that conclusion' (HENRY MEDWALL). How secular was secular drama?
10. 'Dare you but write, you are Minervaes bird / the owle at w^{ch} these battes & crowes must wonder, / they'l crittickle uppon the smallest word / this wanteth number, case, that tense & gender' (ANNE SOUTHWELL). How did early modern women play the critic?
11. '*God's light*, these villains will make the word as odious as the word "occupy," which was an excellent good word before it was ill sorted' (WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE). Discuss **EITHER** linguistic contamination **OR** the bawdy.
12. 'If they seem wry to such as look asquint, / The fault's not in the object, but their eyes' (BEN JOHNSON). Did early modern poets hate their readers?
13. 'If thou doe but *Post-pose* the consideration of temporall gaine, and study first the advancement of the *Gospell* of *Christ Iesus* ... *you receive power*' (JOHN DONNE). Sermons: vehicles of persuasion or sites of strain?
14. How did early modern writers deal with the new science?
15. Why was the Restoration the age of the diary?
16. 'Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem, / To copy nature is to copy them' (ALEXANDER POPE). Consider the relationship between mimesis and *imitatio* in the eighteenth century.
17. 'Thy promise, Neptune keep, record my pray'r / Not give my wishes to the empty air' (PHILLIS WHEATLEY). Did odes fail by design?
18. 'I appeared as Mr. Brown, (A NAME MOST HATEFUL TO ME NOW, FOR REASONS THE TOWN SHALL HAVE SHORTLY LEAVE TO GUESS AT)' (CHARLOTTE CLARKE). Was scandal the defining characteristic of eighteenth-century life-writing?

19. 'My indolence ... has sunk into grosser sluggishness, and my dissipation spread into wilder negligence' (SAMUEL JOHNSON). Celebrate indolence.
20. 'Every Man in Great-Britain [is] responsible, in some degree, for the shocking and inhuman murders and oppressions of the Africans' (QUOBNA OTTOBAH CUGOANO). How was literature involved?
21. 'I will not see / The blood of Nimrod and Semiramis / Sink in the earth, and thirteen hundred years / Of empire ending like a shepherd's tale' (LORD BYRON). What happened to tragedy during the Romantic period?
22. 'Emma continued to entertain no doubt of her being in love. Her ideas only varied as to how much' (JANE AUSTEN). Is free indirect discourse ever objective?
23. 'They have sketched us a wild Indian girl who kisses. They, however, forgot to tell us where she learned this pleasant fashion of emotional expression' (E. PAULINE JOHNSON, TEKAHIONWAKE). Where do colonial encounters take place in nineteenth-century texts?
24. 'What is true of London, is true of Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, is true of all great towns. Everywhere barbarous indifference, hard egotism on one hand, and nameless misery on the other' (FRIEDRICH ENGELS). Were all British cities written alike?
25. 'Among English novels of the present day, and among English novelists, a great division is made. There are sensational novels and anti-sensational' (ANTHONY TROLLOPE). How useful are binaries in describing the nineteenth-century novel?
26. The Dramatic Monologue: Sympathy versus Judgment, or Sympathy and Judgment?
27. 'Squeeze! Squeeze! Squeeze! ... I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules' (HERMAN MELVILLE). Why can't Melville's characters get a grip?

28. 'Ay, count, collate, / Latins! with eye foreseeing on the time / And numbered fingers, and approaching fate / On the appropriate rhyme' (ALICE MEYNELL). What were the stakes of prosody for the Victorians?
29. 'The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling' (THOMAS HARDY). Must Naturalists always be so down?
30. Was Decadence fusty?
31. 'Don't you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse' (WILLIAM FAULKNER). Has the Gothic kept American writers from reimagining the past?
32. 'Modernism doesn't blush; it blasts' (PAUL SAINT-AMOUR). Discuss.
33. 'Asparagus in a lean in a lean to hot. This makes it art and it is wet wet weather wet weather wet' (GERTRUDE STEIN). Is there something off in how twentieth-century writers took to food with such gusto?
34. 'I walk along, remembering this, remembering that' (JEAN RHYS). Is this how pretty much every Modernist novel goes?
35. 'But the death was horrible, / The sack of gunpowder failing to ignite. / His legs were blistered sticks on which the black sap / Bubbled and burst as he howled for the Kindly Light' (ANTHONY HECHT). Should portrayals of violence be unflinching?
36. "'My ideas!" exclaimed Belacqua. "Really, my Lord, you forget that I am a postwar degenerate. We have our faults, but ideas is not one of them"' (SAMUEL BECKETT). Discuss.
37. 'The launching of Heinemann's African Writers Series was like the umpire's signal for which African writers had been waiting on the starting line' (CHINUA ACHEBE). How have publishers shaped the novel of the Global Majority?

38. 'Gauguin: When I see a wet furrow hedged with bush / and sparkling with dew, I can't / contain myself. O the fucking landscape, oh, oh, oh!' (DEREK WALCOTT). Consider derision in writing on the visual arts with reference to literature of any period.
39. 'Deep in the cave of your ear / The goblin snapped his fingers. / So what had I given him?' (TED HUGHES). How guilty were confessional poets?
40. 'What it is about sex, when we talk while it's happening I get to feel it's like a driving lesson. Left, right, a little faster, carry on, slow down' (CARYL CHURCHILL). Discuss **EITHER** theatrical dialogue in the light of this quotation **OR** literary responses to the sexual revolution.
41. 'But there's nothing between us, now that there's no money between us' (MARTIN AMIS). How much does money matter in fiction?
42. 'Suspended, The Bard's Tale II, Ultima III, Wolfenstein, Elite, Pirates!, Might and Magic II. I stack them, one on top of the other. My shy blue life climbs slowly up. My climbing life' (MICHAEL W. CLUNE). How have new developments in media rewired the coming-of-age novel?
43. Rachel Cusk's *Aftermath*; Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*; Teju Cole's *Open City*; why is so much autofiction about grief?
44. Is pastoral literature possible today?

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.

We entered a large room full of dark wooden display cases containing thousands of anatomically perfect flowers in perpetual bloom, but also models of fruit in intricate, perpetual decay: strawberries turning ghostly with mold, peaches collapsing inward on a branch, leaves curling at their edges. (I loved the names of the diseases on the placards, and read them aloud to Anisa as we moved among the specimens: brown rot, soft rot, blue mold, stony pit, pear scab, fire blight, leaf spot.)

I was astonished by what I saw. I couldn't quite believe that this moth orchid was glass, that this pear blossom was lampwork, that these objects had been blown and shaped and painted, that these impossibly delicate things were the result of a thousand rapid choices and adjustments, movements of the hand. (That I'd recently read about the firebombing of Dresden in one of my classes with Thomas, seen slides of the ruined city, added another layer of pathos to the brittle flowers.) I joked with Anisa that these must be actual plants that some conceptual artist was claiming were glass—they probably replaced them each night—but the joke masked the flowering of a new sense: I kept seeing the flower as organic one instant and as artificial the next, a kind of duck-rabbit effect, not between things the object might represent, but between nature and culture, the given and the constructed. And I carried this new way of looking, or this new hinge in my looking, outside the museum: when my sister dragged me camping, for instance, I was typically unmoved by "unspoiled" mountain views; after the glass flowers, I would see cracks in the rock face as penciled, as a history of small decisions, and then experience the view as beautiful. I could will myself to see the rose and pink of a sunset as *applied* in touches or strains and then revert to seeing it as natural; and so on. It was with Anisa that I first became conscious of this quiet but crucial technique, somewhere between a child's game, a CBT exercise, and a religion. Eventually I'd call this "fiction".

(BEN LERNER)

Luxurious man, to bring his Vice in use,
Did after him the World seduce:
And from the fields the Flow'rs and Plants allure,
Where nature was most plain and pure.
He first enclos'd within the Gardens square
A dead and standing pool of Air:
And a more luscious Earth for them did knead,
Which stupifi'd them while it fed.
The Pink grew then as double as his Mind;
The nutriment did change the kind.
With strange perfumes he did the Roses taint.
And Flow'rs themselves were taught to paint.
The Tulip, white, did for complexion seek;
And learn'd to interline its cheek:
Its Onion root they then so high did hold,
That one was for a Meadow sold.
Another World was search'd, through Oceans new,
To find the *Marvel of Peru*.
And yet these Rarities might be allow'd,
To Man, that sov'raign thing and proud;
Had he not dealt between the Bark and Tree,
Forbidden mixtures there to see.
No Plant now knew the Stock from which it came;
He grafts upon the Wild the Tame:
That the uncertain and adult'rate fruit
Might put the Palate in dispute.
His green *Seraglio* has its Eunuchs too,
Lest any Tyrant him out-doe.
And in the Cherry he does Nature vex,
To procreate without a Sex.
'Tis all enforc'd; the Fountain and the Grot;
While the sweet Fields do lye forgot:
Where willing Nature does to all dispence
A wild and fragrant Innocence:
And *Fauns* and *Fairies* do the Meadows till,
More by their presence then their skill.

Their Statues, polish'd by some ancient hand,
May to adorn the Gardens stand:
But howso'ere the Figures do excel,
The *Gods* themselves with us do dwell.

(ANDREW MARVELL)

Section B

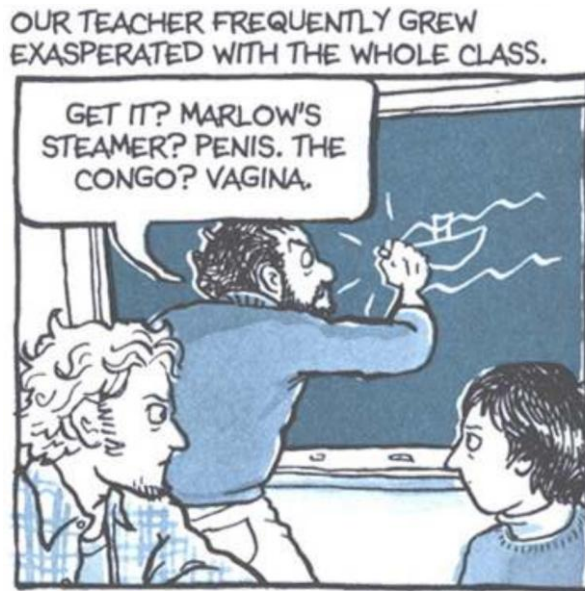
2. 'Tomorrow is another day.' Defend platitudes.
3. 'Children die, and they are not happy' (YIYUN LI). What work can conjunctions do?
4. 'In the language of screen comedians four of the main grades of laugh are the titter, the yowl, the bellylaugh and the boffo' (JAMES AGEE). Should writing about comedy make you laugh?
5. 'A man's intention in acting is not so private and interior a thing that he has absolute authority in saying *what* it is—as he has absolute authority in saying *what* he dreamt' (G. E. M. ANSCOMBE). Have literary critics got intention wrong?
6. 'How do you satirise their utterances and claims when their own words beat all fictional exaggerations?' (NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O).
7. 'To preserve ... a becoming brevity—a brevity which excludes everything that is redundant and nothing that is significant—that, surely, is the first duty of the biographer' (LYTTON STRACHEY). Is it?
8. 'It is as though a poem gave the reader as he left it a single, new *word*, never before spoken and impossible to actually enunciate, but self-evident as an active principle in the reader's consciousness henceforward' (HART CRANE). Write about a new word that a poem has given you.

9. 'A text is all the words that are in it, and not only those words, but the other words that precede it, haunt it, and are echoed in it' (A. S. BYATT). Is it time to ditch intertextuality?
10. 'Yes; she is a peacock in everything but beauty' (OSCAR WILDE). What makes for a good insult?
11. Who is the greatest unreliable narrator?
12. 'For a black writer the language is very racist; you have to have harrowing fights and hair-raising panga duels with the language before you can make it do all that you want it to do... This may mean discarding grammar, throwing syntax out, subverting images from within, beating the drum and cymbals of rhythm, developing torture chambers of irony and sarcasm, gas ovens of limitless black resonance' (DAMBUDZO MARECHERA). Discuss.
13. 'It is less important to like "good" poetry, and dislike "bad", than to be able to use them both as a means of ordering our minds' (I. A. RICHARDS). Discuss.
14. 'Character is understood as a state of continual incandescence—a person being one very intense thing' (SUSAN SONTAG). Discuss.
15. 'The ethics of translation are the ethics of closeness' (MARIANA DIMÓPULOS). Are they?
16. 'Local and temporary Politics are my aversion' (SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE). Can political writing be averse to politics?
17. 'The novel as a form is particularly dependent on the future for its pleasures. The reader reads *on*' (GILLIAN BEER). Discuss.
18. 'Why not tell women to imitate Keats or Shakespeare? There are models for such "thinking through the body"; that they are men does not vitiate their usefulness' (HELEN VENDLER). Discuss.

19. 'A serious moment for the water is when it boils' (KENNETH KOCH). Take seriousness seriously.
20. 'Life is soaked in the moral, literature is soaked in the moral. If we attempted to describe this room our descriptions would naturally carry all sorts of values' (IRIS MURDOCH). Was she right?
21. 'Overall, the novella's general effect is swirly and gunky. Limited in pages, it is implosive, impacted' (TONY WHEDON). Is the novella definable other than by its length?
22. 'In much book history, the "material text" has come to mean the book in your hand rather than the one in your head' (ALEXANDRA GILLESPIE and ARTHUR BAHR). Can book history be more than merely material?
23. What is the function of criticism at the present time?
24. 'The man who creates the music is hearing something else, is dealing with the roar rising from the void and imposing order on it as it hits the air' (JAMES BALDWIN). How do writers represent creative practices?
25. 'That the passion was Welsh and its expression English can be seen today as the source of harrowing tension' (ANNE STEVENSON, on R. S. THOMAS). Discuss; your answer need not concern R. S. Thomas.
26. 'Let's face it: Trans studies is over. If it isn't, it should be' (ANDREA LONG CHU). Discuss.
27. Are literary texts fully amenable to a strictly linguistic analysis?
28. 'They [William Faulkner and Gabriel García Márquez] were a pair of blazing furnaces, I was a block of ice. If I got too close to them, I would dissolve into a cloud of steam' (MO YAN). Discuss the influence of a writer in English on a writer in another language.
29. Terry Eagleton's *Marxism and Literary Criticism* turns fifty this year. Has Marxist literary criticism moved on?

30. If you could revive a writer from the past to write in the present, who would it be and why?

31.



(ALISON BECHDEL). Is psychoanalytic literary criticism a lost cause?

32. Write about any one of the following in relation to literature: Adventure; Blasphemy; Control; Diatribe; Exemplary; Fugitive; Guesswork; Hotels; Indignation; Jaded; Kleptomania; Losers; Malapropism; Nescience; Optics; Palimpsests; Quaint; Revivals; Sleuths; Tears; Upholstery; Venal; WTF; XXL; YA; Zone.