

**TWENTIETH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE
FIELD EXAMINATION**

FALL 1996

DIRECTIONS

You are to answer **three** questions, **one** from **each** part of the examination.

Plan to demonstrate both the scope and depth of your knowledge of twentieth-century British literature. The purpose of this examination is not to discover what you do not know about the period but to allow you to demonstrate the breadth and depth of your knowledge. In the course of the examination show familiarity with drama, poetry, and prose.

We recommend that you spend approximately one hour planning your answers and three hours writing. Spend time planning not only the individual answers but also the whole examination.

PART I: Answer **one** of the following questions. In your answer, you must concentrate on the author named in the question. You may, however, also refer to other authors on the Core Reading List or the General Reading Guide.

- (1) “Literary impressionism” is a term applied to works or passages that concentrate on the description of transitory mental impressions as felt by an observer, rather than on the explanation of their external causes. Joseph Conrad’s writing has often been described as impressionist and he himself often discusses the importance of “impressions conveyed through the senses” to his work. Addressing various of Conrad’s works, discuss why he places such importance on impressionism, and the ways in which his impressionism relates to his use of language, characters, narratives, and/or themes.

- (2) Discuss how G.B. Shaw’s representation of women demonstrates the development of his conception of the place of women in the worlds of power in at least three of the following texts: *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1907), *Heartbreak House* (1919), and *Saint Joan* (1924).

PART II: With reference to **three** authors on the “Literature Post 1930” subsection of the reading guide, answer **one** of the following questions.

- (1) The distinguishing feature of drama (excluding closet drama) as a literary form is that it is necessarily envisioned as being situated in physical time and space, that is, in a performance on a stage in a theatre. Discuss how **three dramatists** from the “Literature Post 1930” category use the limitations and possibilities of theatrical performances both to present their dramatic action and to represent the limitations and possibilities of human life outside the theatre.

- (2) So far as literature is concerned, the future is more likely to be found in the past than in the present. No one now argues about Pound’s or Eliot’s main achievements indeed the disposition is rather to swallow the verse with the name of the master. After these great technical performances, succeeding poets had a new capital to live on. The poets of the thirties and forties are unthinkable without these recently acquired riches.

-- C.H. Sisson

As Sisson indicates, Modernists such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, and others influenced many poets that came after them in the thirties and forties and beyond. Discuss some of the ways in which these influences manifested themselves in reference to **three poets** from the “Literature Post 1930” category.

- (3) During the twentieth century, authors have used metafiction--fiction that openly comments on its own fictional status--to address concerns regarding authorial power, author/character relations, and the role of the author/artist in society. Comparing **three prose writers** from the “Literature Post 1930” category, discuss the use of metafictional techniques to question the conventions of authorship.

PART III: With reference to **three** authors whom you have not discussed in Parts I or II of this examination, answer **one** of the following questions. Your discussion should range as widely as possible across the century.

- (1) The turbulence and scale of the history of the twentieth century meant that the call to political commitments, to various nationalisms, to historical struggle was immense. However, the response by artists to these calls was often ambivalent. Discuss how **three writers** expressed their ambivalence about their involvement in the history of the twentieth century.
- (2) Addressing **three writers** of twentieth-century British literature, discuss some of the ways in which gender has correlated with genre. The term "genre," in this question, need not refer only to basic modes of literary arts (such as poetry, prose, and drama), but can also refer to the variety of more specialized sub-categories, such as satire, science fiction, the sonnet, etc.
- (3) Modernism is often represented as a transformation in the ways in which the West has understood the world. One feature of this movement is the emergence of uncertainty as an expanding and limiting condition in human knowledge. In literature, this uncertainty expressed itself through many devices: the hybridization of genres and forms, double emplotment, multiple or parallel narratives, oppositional points of view in narrative, ambiguous closure, etc. Discuss how **three writers** used some of these devices to stage uncertainty.