

**TWENTIETH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE
FIELD EXAMINATION**

SPRING 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 fiction.

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) Discuss the development of T.S. Eliot's representation of character. In your answer, you may consider such questions as poetic form or genre, the self-understanding of characters, use of language, matters of time and space, boundaries between characters, or any other question relevant to your exposition.

- (2) Analyze and compare the following three passages from novels by Virginia Woolf in terms of characteristic stylistic devices and thematic concerns. Note changes, variations, and/or developments.
 - A) The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him--the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room.
(Mrs. Dalloway)

 - B) So with the lamps put out, the moon sunk, and a thin rain drumming on the roof a downpouring of immense darkness began. Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers. Not only was furniture confounded; there

was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say 'This is he' or 'This is she.' Sometimes a hand was raised as if to clutch something or ward off something, or somebody groaned, or somebody laughed aloud as if sharing a joke with nothingness.

(To the Lighthouse)

- C) And now I ask, "Who am I?" I have been talking of Bernard, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda and Louis. Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know. We sat here together. But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead; we are divided; we are not here. Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is not division between me and them. As I talked I felt "I am, you." This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome. Yes, ever since old Mrs. Constable lifted her sponge and pouring warm water over me covered me with flesh I have been sensitive, percipient. Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan's tears. I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt.

(The Waves)

PART II: With reference to three authors not included on the Core Reading List or on the "Literature to 1930" subsection of the reading guide, answer one of the following questions.

- (1) The Theatre of the Absurd gained prominence on the London stage through Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (English version, 1955) and *Endgame* (English version, 1958), works which profoundly influenced subsequent dramatists. Using the work of three dramatists from the "Literature post 1930" category, discuss the emergence of the English Theatre of the Absurd. In your answer, you should reflect on the primary characteristics of absurdist drama and on some possible reasons for its popularity in mid-century England.
- (2) In an essay entitled "The Pleasure Principle," Philip Larkin asserts that "poetry, like all art, is inextricably bound up with giving pleasure, and if a poet loses his pleasure-seeking audience he has lost the only audience worth having, for which the dutiful mob that signs on every September is no substitute." Larkin claims that the contemporary loss of the pleasure-seeking audience is in good part the result of "a cunning merger between poet, literary critic and academic critic"; the poet is now "in the unprecedented position of peddling both his work and the standard by which it is judged." With reference to three poets from the "Literature post 1930" category, discuss the merits of Larkin's claim about this merger and various possible responses to it.
- (3) Alain Robbe-Grillet has suggested that all writers regard themselves as realists, no matter how extravagant or minimalist their representation of reality may be. A magic realist and a naturalistic realist both believe that they represent the real nature of the world in their writing. Using three writers of prose from the "Literature post 1930" category, discuss the representation of reality in fiction, with special reference to formal devices of representation like emplotment, narration, characterization, and location.

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) Matters of identity, which can include gender, race, class, religion, region, and nation, arguably begin as matters of the family. Discuss the role that family plays in the creation, maintenance, and transformation of identity in the works of three writers.
- (2) Discuss the role that the metropolis--e.g., London, Dublin, Glasgow, Bombay, Hong Kong--plays in the works of three writers.
- (3) In *Something of Myself*, his autobiography, Rudyard Kipling gives credit to his mother for the well-known phrase, "What do they know of England that only England know?" Many decades later in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the stuttering Mr. Sisodia says, "The trouble with the Engenglish is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas, so they do do don't know what it means." Because England was one of the major colonial powers, its sense of nationness has always been both invigorated and troubled by this tension between home and abroad, local and global, same and other. Discuss how this tension has been expressed and examined in the works of three writers.