

Ph.D. Field Examination in Canadian Literature
November 1994

Instructions: Answer one question from each section. Questions are of equal value. In each question you should focus on three writers, although you may choose to include references to other writers to supplement your discussion. Do not write extensively on the same work more than once.

Section 1 is composed of questions that address the "early," pre-1920 portion of the reading list.

Section 2 is composed of questions that address the "modern," post-1920 portion of the list.

Section 3 is composed of questions of a broader thematic, historical, or theoretical interest.

Time: 4 hours

Section 1

1. When Susanna Moodie arrives at Grosse Isle, she is greeted by what she sees as a spectacle of chaos and confusion. Robert Kroetsch has argued that Moodie has, "unwittingly and only slightly willingly, entered the carnival world of North America -- hierarchies are breaking, labourers and mechanics are 'infected' by the spirit of 'insubordination and misrule,' the body becomes more fascinating than the mind, shame is no longer shame, sex is becoming sex, language itself is becoming 'the confusion of Babel.'" To what extent does early Canadian fiction elaborate an encounter with the carnivalesque? Refer to at least three works.

2. Early Canadian prose shows signs of such disparate elements as letters, guidebooks, fantasy, diaries, log books, romance. Discuss the generic profiles of works by three different writers, speculating on why writers of early Canadian literature might wish to draw on a variety of generic possibilities.

3. "The Confederation poets" -- Roberts, Carman, Lampman, and Scott (Crawford and Campbell are sometimes included as well) -- have been called "the first distinctly Canadian school of writers." Using examples from at least three of these authors, write an answer that appraises the validity of this description, considering both whether they are "distinctly Canadian" and whether they constitute a "school" (and, if you like, whether they were "first"). You must draw examples from their poetry; you may also discuss their critical prose.

Section 2

1. In his "Preface to an Uncollected Anthology," Northrop Frye writes that "It is not a nation but an environment that makes an impact on poets, and poetry can deal only with the imaginative aspect of that environment." The issues this statement broaches generate much of the literary criticism included on the reading list, though not all critics would agree with Frye's statement. Discuss the ways in which such issues are developed or rejected in a selection of at least three literary critics, including Frye. (You need not restrict your discussion to criticism of poetry.)

2. Linda Hutcheon has written that "Unlike the ... literature of modernism, the postmodern uses its tendency towards self-reference as a way of both engaging with its own past, usually through irony and parody, and also of engaging with its audience." Drawing from the work of at least three poets, assess whether or not this is an accurate distinction between modern and postmodern poetry in Canada. Clearly designate which poets you feel belong in each category.

3. Modern writing often interrogates the assumptions implicit in form and genre. Consider the work of three different writers who challenge formal/generic boundaries. What is the nature and significance of the challenges they present?

Section 3

1. Is there such a thing as a regional perspective (or a related set of perspectives) that traverses history? Answer this question using examples from at least three authors from a single Canadian region, representing both the "early" and "modern" periods. In your answer, include a definition of what you mean by "regional."

2. Canadian literature is well stocked with examples of the *bildungsroman*. Discuss works by three different writers that explore the coming of age of the writer/artist. In what ways do these works belong especially to a Canadian place or tradition?

3. Using examples from at least three writers to illustrate your argument, discuss the ways in which notions about "historical fiction" (poetry or prose) have been significantly shifted or directly challenged in recent texts.