

ENGLISH LITERATURE I

Candidates should answer **THREE** questions

You may answer on any literature written in English

1. Why should people want to write about dragons?
2. ‘Caedmon’s songs and his poems were so beautiful to hear, that his teachers themselves wrote and learned at his mouth. He sang first about the creation of the world and about the origin of mankind and all of the history of Genesis’ (THE VENERABLE BEDE). What was the relationship between orality and literacy in Anglo-Saxon literature?
3. ‘They sang then and played to please the hero, / Words and music for their warrior prince, / Harp tunes and tales of adventure: / There were high times on the hall benches / And the king’s poet performed his part’ (*BEOWULF*, trans. SEAMUS HEANEY). What does Anglo-Saxon poetry tell us about Anglo-Saxon poetry?
4. How far do regional identities shape English writing? You may limit your answer to any period of roughly fifty years.
5. What would medieval English literature have looked like if France had never existed?
6. ‘Spirituality is a highly localized phenomenon, emerging within specific groups and in particular places in response to particular needs’. Discuss.
7. Would it make a difference if we knew who the *Gawain* poet was?
8. ‘The spaces and institutions in which Chaucer lived and worked, and the places that he visited, shaped him as a person and as a poet’ (MARION TURNER). Discuss.
9. What do the variant versions of *Piers Plowman* tell us about the poem?

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10. What does allegory offer a poet that realist narrative does not?
11. 'Chivalry was always more a set of questions than a code'. Discuss.
12. 'I pray Almyty God that this booke com not but to the hands of them that will be His faithfull lovers, and to those that will submitt them to the feith of Holy Church, and obey the holesom understondying and teching of the men that be of vertuous life, sadde age, and profound lerning' (JULIAN OF NORWICH). How do medieval writers manage their afterlife?
13. What's lost in reading a manuscript poet in print? (You may restrict your answer to one poet).
14. How useful is it to think of English writing from any period as 'European'?
15. 'The Reformation did not immediately arrive at its meridian, and though day was gradually encreasing upon us, the goblins of witchcraft still continued to hover in the twilight.' (SAMUEL JOHNSON). Is there a case for goblins?
16. 'And may not I presume a little farther, to shewe the reasonableness of this word *Vates*, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or Prophet, and say that the holy Davids Psalms are a divine Poeme?' (SIR PHILIP SIDNEY). Discuss.
17. What is courtly about court poetry?
18. What were Spenser's failures?
19. Why did Shakespeare happen when he did? Or is that an intrinsically stupid question?
20. 'Shakespeare's early history plays became rich repositories of structural paradigms for his later works' (EMRYS JONES). Discuss.
21. Did commonplacing have as great an influence on literary culture in the early modern period as is often claimed?

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22. Who was the grandest translator of them all?
23. 'Desire my Readers to give me the same priviledge to discourse in natural Philosophy, as Scholers have in schooles, which I have heard speak freely, and boldly, without being condemned for Atheisme' (MARGARET CAVENDISH). Discuss.
24. 'All I ask, is the privilege for my masculine part, the poet in me' (APHRA BEHN). Discuss.
25. Can false beliefs about the world be a good thing for writers?
26. Is it a problem for a religious poet to have an awareness of sin without actually having experienced it?
27. Was Milton a destructive influence?
28. 'Did Milton's prose, O Charles! thy death defend? / A furious foe unconscious proves a friend. / On Milton's verse did Bentley comment? Know, / A weak officious friend becomes a foe' (ALEXANDER POPE). Discuss one or both of these couplets.
29. Mock the heroic.
30. Try to take the dry out of Dryden.
31. Consider the role of dialect in any work or works of fiction.
32. Did the emergence of copyright make a significant difference to the concept of authorship?
33. 'For if these popular bards were confessedly revered and admired in those very countries which the Anglo-Saxons inhabited before their removal into Britain, can we do otherwise than conclude that men of this order accompanied such tribes as migrated hither?' (THOMAS PERCY). Discuss the relationship between national mythologies and poetry in the later eighteenth century.

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34. Be gothic.
35. 'Blah blah blah get married'. Are early English novels much more than this?
36. 'Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore everybody, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest.' (JANE AUSTEN). Discuss in relation to Jane Austen or any other novelist.
37. 'True genius vindicates to itself an exemption from all regard to whatever has gone before' (PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY to LORD BYRON). Discuss.
38. 'It would not reduce Dickens's politics absurdly to say that he was for circulation and against stoppage' (DAVID TROTTER). Do you agree?
39. 'As realism proposes to give us fictions about how things really were, a space naturally opens up within that mode to tell us how things might have been but were not' (ANDREW H. MILLER). Discuss in relation to the nineteenth-century novel.
40. What effect did the decline in spiritual orthodoxy have on nineteenth-century literature?
41. 'American writers, it seems to me, have demonstrated both the advantages and drawbacks involved in America's brave and exhilarating apostasy from history' (TONY TANNER). Do you agree?
42. 'The war has used up words; they have weakened, they have deteriorated like motor car tires, with a loss of expression through increase of limpness, that may well make us wonder what ghosts will be left to walk' (HENRY JAMES). Was James right about the impact that the First World War would have on literary language?
43. 'The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the centre.' (RALPH WALDO EMERSON). Discuss in relation to Emerson or any other writer or writers.

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44. 'We, the people, must redeem / and make America again.' (LANGSTON HUGHES).
Has a poet ever made American democracy great again?
45. What are the alternatives to thinking about writing in English from outside the British Isles as 'post-colonial'?
46. 'Modernism' has lost its capital letter, becoming variously late, long and twinned with an infinite variety of supplementary terms' (GILL PLAIN). To what extent is it useful to view twentieth-century literature in terms of the advent, zenith, and aftermath of 'modernism'?
47. 'A rude, popular literature of the romantic possibilities of the modern city was bound to arise. It has arisen in the popular detective stories, as rough and refreshing as the ballads of Robin Hood' (G.K. CHESTERTON). Discuss.
48. Why did the Spanish Civil War have such a big influence on English writers?
49. 'The first thing a socialist writer has to realize is that there is no value in the emotions, the spiritual writhings, started in him by the sight, smell and touch of poverty.'
(STORM JAMESON). Are emotions a distraction for socialist literature?
50. 'Out of Ireland have we come. / Great hatred, little room, / Maimed us at the start'
(W.B. YEATS). Discuss in relation to any writer or writers.
51. 'Literature has up to now magnified pensive immobility, ecstasy and slumber. We want to exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap and the blow with the fist.' (FILIPPO TOMMASO MARINETTI).
Discuss.
52. 'There is no place for the Blitz in human experience; it apparently cannot make a place of its own. It will have no literature' (ELIZABETH BOWEN). Discuss.
53. 'The novel's painful question is: what have we done to our children?' (PENELOPE FITZGERALD). How did postwar fiction wrestle with burdensome inheritances?

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54. 'South African literature is a literature in bondage. It is a less-than-fully-human literature. It is exactly the kind of literature you would expect people to write from prison' (J. M. COETZEE). Discuss in relation to any anglophone writing from outside the UK.
55. 'Colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism' (AIMÉ CÉSAIRE). Discuss.
56. In what ways has film influenced contemporary fiction?
57. 'In digital technologies language is lifted off the page and therefore able to be poured into so many different forms and really be moulded and sculpted in a way that wasn't possible before' (KENNETH GOLDSMITH). Discuss.
58. 'Are memoirs now courageously speaking hitherto unspeakable things, things that we have held in silence precisely because we have refused to accept them as part of knowledge? Or is their speech in such cases culpable, compounding the original trespass with unseemly disclosure?' (PAUL JOHN EAKIN). Answer with reference to contemporary life-writing.

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 poems in any way you like.

a) *The Mower to the Glow-Worms*

Ye living lamps, by whose dear light
The nightingale does sit so late,
And studying all the summer night,
Her matchless songs does meditate;

Ye country comets, that portend 5
No war nor prince's funeral,
Shining unto no higher end
Than to presage the grass's fall;

Ye glow-worms, whose officious flame 10
To wand'ring mowers shows the way,
That in the night have lost their aim,
And after foolish fires do stray;

Your courteous lights in vain you waste,
Since Juliana here is come,
For she my mind hath so displac'd 15
That I shall never find my home.

(ANDREW MARVELL)

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b) *The Poets light but Lamps*

The Poets light but Lamps —
Themselves — go out —
The Wicks they stimulate
If vital Light

Inhere as do the Suns — 5
Each Age a Lens
Disseminating their
Circumference —

(EMILY DICKINSON)

Section B

2. Should children's fiction be wicked?
3. 'Metaphor shares a nature with a riddle'. Discuss.
4. What value does philology have for literary criticism?
5. 'I was forced to reduce my transcripts very often to clusters of words in which scarce any meaning is retained' (SAMUEL JOHNSON, Preface to his *Dictionary*). How should dictionaries use illustrative quotations and how should critics use dictionaries?
6. 'It is just as arbitrary to draw your boundary of inquiry at the author-publisher collaboration as it is to draw it around only the author itself'. Discuss.
7. 'No text is self-identical. Variation is the invariant rule of the textual condition' (JEROME MCGANN). Discuss.

8. Does rhyme always mess with reason?
9. Is performance history intrinsically banal?
10. Can writers make themselves canonical?
11. 'Fiction is about what happens next; lyric is about what happens now' (JONATHAN CULLER). Discuss.
12. Imagine that one work of fiction was never written. How would that change things?
13. Make a case either for or against reading literature politically.
14. '[T]he worst is not / So long as we can say "This is the worst"' (SHAKESPEARE, *King Lear*). Do you agree?
15. 'We can think of characters as being like persons without scanting or short-changing their aesthetic properties' (RITA FELSKI). Discuss.
16. 'Designed to disappoint'. Discuss this view of the short story.
17. Are there unconscious intentions in literature?
18. 'There is no original or primary gender a drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original' (JUDITH BUTLER). Discuss.
19. 'Why shouldn't there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way?' (GABRIEL OKARA). Discuss.
20. Why is the Indian Ocean the setting of so much recent fiction?
21. 'The history of Africa is both beautifully and tragically chaotic and African stories should, and do, reflect this' (SIPHIWE GLORIA NDLOVU). Discuss.

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22. 'The problem with speculative fiction is that it so often seems to think it knows what its ideas are.' Discuss.
23. 'Literature represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses' (JULIA KRISTEVA). Discuss.
24. 'My books don't make good films. Film companies think they will, but they don't' (GRAHAM GREENE). Defend an onscreen adaptation of a literary work.
25. 'What I feel for you can't be conveyed in phrasal combinations; It either screams out loud or stays painfully silent but I promise — it beats words. It beats worlds' (KATHERINE MANSFIELD). Discuss.
26. 'I must tell stories as if the world were a living, single entity, constantly forming before our eyes, and as if we were a small and at the same time powerful part of it' (OLGA TOKARCZUK). Discuss.
27. Describe a hanging in the style of P.G. Wodehouse **AND/OR** Gertrude Stein.
28. Should literary critics take themselves less seriously?
29. 'If poetry can terrify people by hideous fictions, painting can do as much by depicting the same things in action' (LEONARDO DA VINCI). Compare poetry with painting.
30. 'Who gives a fuck about the Oxford comma?' (VAMPIRE WEEKEND). Consider minutiae of punctuation in the light of this comment.
31. Proust or Joyce?
32. 'If you ignore the noise then you lose part of the meaning' (KAMAU BRATHWAITE). Discuss.
33. In what ways can archaeological discoveries influence the interpretation of literary texts?

34. Who should win the next Nobel Prize for Literature and why?
35. 'I just don't get what the fuck half the shit is that you're listening to / Do you have any idea how much I hate this choppy flow / Everyone copies though? Probably no'
(EMINEM). Discuss.
36. 'Nothing is my *last word* about anything' (HENRY JAMES). Discuss literary last words.
37. Discuss the literary treatment of **ONE** of the following:

androgyny; bathos; cosmetics; deliberation; elocution; flashbacks; geography; hooks;
insanity; justification; knights; lying; mountains; neverlands; optimism; phallogocentricity;
questions; robots; stupidity; telegrams; unmentionability; venereal disease; walking;
xenophobia; yellow; zephyrs