

Spring 2014

M.A. ENGLISH EXAM PART 2

Directions: Please follow the directions of the proctor throughout the exam period. You have thirty minutes to read the exam and plan your responses to the prompts below. After thirty minutes, you will receive bluebooks and you will have three hours to write three essays, one each from the three sections below. Please divide your time accordingly.

Section A

1. Define and discuss “realism” and “naturalism” in late nineteenth- through early twentieth-century English and American literature, using specific analyses of at least four representative works (two realistic, two naturalistic) to validate your claims. Your essay should discuss realism and naturalism both as literary modes and as reflections of broader currents in political, intellectual, or cultural history. One of the works you discuss must be American and one English; one of the works must be from the nineteenth century and one must be from the twentieth. You may use one play in lieu of a novel.
2. Among the most significant changes that occurred during the nineteenth century was the growth of the industrialized city. This phenomenon caused massive transformations of landscape and life, provoking a wide range of responses from intellectuals and artists. Some celebrated the industrialized city as a symbol of progress and development, while others lamented the loss of the traditional, the feudal and the pastoral. Still others were completely horrified by what they perceived as utter devastation and degradation. Compose an essay that examines and compares two 19th-century novels that center on an industrialized city (one English and one American), and two 20th-century novels that represent different tropes of city life (one English and one American).
3. For a variety of reasons, the English and American literature found recurrent themes in the drama of domestic life. Given that fact, we find it unsurprising that many writers found literal houses ripe as not only settings for their characters but actual embodiments of the beliefs, aspirations, victories and defeats of those who lived within them. Explore the thematic uses houses are put to in four works of prose fiction and/or drama (two from the nineteenth- and two from the twentieth-centuries, one from each century must be English and one American). Your essay must be a specific and detailed examination of how particular houses function in the four works you selected.

Section B

1. Analyze the contrasting strains of utopian/pastoral and dystopian/anti-technological imagery that appear in Anglo-American poetry after 1800. Write an essay in which you survey the nature and function of utopianism (and its opposite) in four or more poems by different English-speaking poets (at least one must be American and one English; at least one must be pre-1900, and one post-1900).
2. Often poets work self-consciously in a literary tradition, conceiving themselves as having significant precursors whose presence becomes palpable in their work. Compose an essay that discusses the presence of poetic influence and/or allusion in four poems (two from the nineteenth- and two from the twentieth centuries, one English and one American from each century). Be specific with reference to precursors and their works and detail how the poets you choose employ their literary inheritance.
3. Harry, one of the characters in T.S. Eliot's 1939 play *The Family Reunion*, sees human life in "waste land" terms, as:

The sudden solitude in a crowded desert
In a thick smoke, many creatures moving
Without direction, for no direction
Leads anywhere but round and round in that vapour –
Without purpose, and without principle of conduct
In flickering intervals of light and darkness; [...]

What is the modernist position on the relationship between the individual consciousness and reality expressed in those lines? Is there evidence in poetry after 1960 that Eliot's representation is sustained in the main or has been supplanted? To substantiate your answers to the questions above, include specific references to four poems--one American and one English nineteenth-century poem, one American and one English twentieth-century poem.

Section C

1. Arguing from a position that holds literary modernism in high regard, Charles Newman assails post-modernism as a “pathology of the contemporary, which amounts to Art is everywhere and Life is vague”:

The “Post-Modern “ is neither a canon of writers, nor a body of criticism. . . . The very term signifies a simultaneous continuity and renunciation, a generation strong enough to dissolve the old order, but too weak to marshal the centrifugal forces it has released. This new literature founders on its hard won heterogeneity, and tends to lose the sense of itself as a human institution. [A history of post-modern literature] is accordingly a survey of attitudes and tendencies, gestures and drifts, alibis and advertisements, clichés and obfuscations, which comprise an institution without a theory.

Write an essay evaluating Newman’s claims about post-modernism, in which you do the following: first, present a working definition of *post-modernism*; and, second, respond to the specifics of Newman’s argument, using as evidence for your position three non-Anglo American texts (may include both poetry and/or prose) that you categorize as post-modern.

2. Franco Moretti’s critical work *The Bourgeois* offers a reading of the European and American novel as a literary representation of what Max Weber called *Zweckrational*, or “instrumental rationality,” roughly a way of using the world not as an end of itself, but as a means to an end. Thus, a typical bourgeois hero does not concern himself with transcendent meaning but favors the accumulation of worldly rewards. For Moretti, bourgeois fiction is steeped in the capitalist spirit.

Looking at the fiction produced in the third world, a world where nineteenth-century capitalism was never firmly entrenched, do you see a different spirit working in them than the one that Moretti sees in the European and American traditions? If so, what are the characteristics of that spirit?

3. Examine the impact of the West/Western culture on the lives of three major postcolonial/Third World characters. Consider the specific historical/cultural context of the character as well as that character’s motivations, responses, choices, and actions. Is the character empowered and enabled or disempowered and destroyed through contact with the West/Western culture?