

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

University of London

EXAMINATION FOR INTERNAL STUDENTS

For the following qualifications :-

M.A.

M.A. English: Issues in Modern Culture: Authors

COURSE CODE : ENGLG001

DATE : 09-MAY-02

TIME : 10.00

TIME ALLOWED : 3 hours

02-N0115-3-40

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TURN OVER

Answer three questions.

Candidates must not present substantially the same material in any two answers, whether in this paper or in other parts of the examination.

1. 'Let this old woe step on the stage again!' Use this line from *The Ring and the Book* as the starting point for an essay on Robert Browning's ideas about one or more of the following: historical subjects, authorial presence, dramatic method.
2. In a letter of 1902 to his publisher William Blackwood, Joseph Conrad stated that his work

is not an endless analysis of affected sentiments but in its essence it is action . . . action observed, felt and interpreted with an absolute truth to my sensations (which are the basis of art in literature).

Discuss Conrad's fiction in the light of this comment.

3. Write on the author as observer, or on characters as observers, or on both, in Henry James's work.
4. Can a consistent idea of 'culture' be located in T. S. Eliot's work? You should refer to both his poetry and his criticism in your answer.
5. I have tried to write Paradise

Do not move
Let the wind speak
that is paradise.

Let the Gods forgive what I
have made
Let those I love try to forgive
what I have made.

(Canto CXX)

Write on Ezra Pound's attempt 'to write Paradise', or on what there is to forgive in his work, or both.

6. Discuss the theme of self-knowledge in Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

TURN OVER

7. In book I, chapter 7 of *Finnegans Wake*, Shaun says of Shem:

what do you think Vulgariano did but study with stolen fruit how cutely to copy all their various styles of signature so as one day to utter an epical forged cheque on the public for his own private profit

How important are imitation, parody, and theft to James Joyce's work?

8. Write on nothing in Samuel Beckett.

9. It is true that today everyone's curiosity is focused on the performance, but talking about it is impossible without referring to the concept.

(Stephane Mallarmé)

Gertrude Stein quotes this sentence in her book, Paris, France. What concept (or concepts), in your view, underlie Stein's 'performance'?

10. Whereas many of her modernist contemporaries wanted to reject the nineteenth-century 'realist' novelist's concern with making sense of the world, Woolf did not. For all her hostility towards established religion, she wanted — if only tentatively — to explain life in her fiction, to give an ordered and consolatory account of experience.

(Jane Wheare)

Do you agree with this view of Virginia Woolf's fiction?

11. What credibility, if any, do you attach to the idea of an 'English Auden'?

12. In looking for a rhyme, even just in mechanically trying all the consonants in turn on your suffix, you are exploring possibilities in your subject As you get more desperate, you actually start to think more deeply about the subject in hand, so that rhyme turns out to be a method of thematic exploration.

(Thom Gunn)

Write on the relation between poetic technique and 'thematic exploration' in Gunn's poetry.

CONTINUED

13. To what extent does Elizabeth Bishop's poetry display what Robert Pinsky calls 'the prose virtues'?
14. Can the fiction of Saul Bellow, or Ralph Ellison, or both, usefully be understood as an expression of what Lionel Trilling termed 'the liberal imagination'?

15. . . . what
if poetry were something else entirely, not this purple weather
with the eye of a god attached, that sees
inward and outward? What if it were only a small, other way of
living,
like being in the wind? . . .

(John Ashbery, *Flow Chart*)

How helpful are either of these definitions of poetry when considering Ashbery's own work?

16. 'Celan is essentially a religious poet' (Paul Auster). Do you agree?

17. It is up to the writer to make himself understood by those who wish to understand him: it is his trade, writing is a public service and the willing reader must not be disappointed.

(Primo Levi)

Write on Levi's work in the light of his preoccupation with writing as a 'trade', or 'public service', or both.

18. Eva Hoffman said of Sebald's writing that its mode was one of 'ironic melancholia'. Do you agree?
19. In 'Portrait of an Invisible Man', Auster writes of the impossible ambition to 'enter another's solitude'. Discuss the importance of this ambition to Auster's work more generally.
20. 'What is so precious to need all this writing-shitting?' asks Padma, in *Midnight's Children*. What answers does Rushdie's fiction offer to this question?

TURN OVER

21.

If the social novel lives, but only barely, surviving in cracks and ruts of the culture, maybe it will be taken more seriously, as an endangered spectacle. A reduced context but a more intense one.

(Don DeLillo)

Use this quotation as the basis for an essay on the work of DeLillo, or that of any other contemporary novelist.

22.

We may not know exactly what sex is, but we know that it is mutable . . . that its frontiers are often uncertain, and that there are many stages between a complete male and a complete female.

(Havelock Ellis)

Discuss the work of any modern author who seems to you to be interested in the mutability of sex, or in the idea of 'a complete male' or 'a complete female'.

23.

'The ethical cannot be stated, instead it is practiced to the point of loss' (Julia Kristeva). Write on the ethical aspect of modern literature in relation to the work of one or two modern authors.

24.

Compare the treatment of relations between parents and children, or between husbands and wives, or between lovers of the same sex, in the work of two modern authors.

25.

'Frames are always framed' (Jacques Derrida). Consider the importance of framing to any author you have studied for the course.

26.

Beware the writer who sets himself or herself up as the voice of a nation. This includes nations of race, gender, sexual orientation, elective affinity.

(Salman Rushdie)

Make a case for, or against, any author to whom you think this warning might apply.

27.

Can you remember ? when we thought
the poets taught how to live?

(Adrienne Rich)

What do we think poets do now?

END OF PAPER