

American Literature

DIRECTIONS: Answer four questions only. But choose two questions to answer from each section.

Section I: Answer any two of the following questions. (Each worth 25%)

1. James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) excelled in using nature as a vehicle for thought and as a panoramic background for sweeping action. Many commonplace elements of Western stories and movies were either invented or first used effectively by him. Can his popular Leatherstocking Tales be called an American epic? In what sense can Natty Bumppo be considered a mythic figure-- the American Adam?
2. The image that Walt Whitman projects of himself in his poetry is that of a man who deliberately flaunts and outrages tradition. Discuss some of the ways in which, both in his literary form and his moral and political ideas, Whitman violates the traditional conception of what a poet was supposed to be.
3. In a review of Mosses from an Old Manse, Melville refers to what he calls the "power of blackness" in Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories. Discuss the ways in which Hawthorne uses blackness-- or darkness-- in his work as both a means of communicating his ideas and of achieving his emotional effects.
4. In many important ways Henry James can be said to have laid the foundations for modernist fiction. Referring to specific stories and novels of his, explain some of the ways in which he established the basic techniques and themes of modernism.
5. One of the most distinctive and influential literary movements of the late nineteenth century is naturalism. It is a theory of fiction which approaches life with a detached, objective, almost scientific outlook. Man does not exercise his individual intelligence and free will to any extent. He is like a puppet at the mercy of the physical conditions which surround him. Using specific American writers and works as examples, explain what the basic assumptions are of naturalism as a literary movement.

Section II: Answer any two of the following questions. (Each worth 25%)

1. In all modern American literature, what three works do you think have the most to say about what has become of "the American dream." Explain and justify your choice.
2. One of the most striking developments in twentieth century America has been the unexpected flowering of Southern literature. Briefly identify some of the most important figures in this flowering and then explain what some of the characteristics are that distinguish Southern literature from that of other regions of the United States.
3. Arthur Miller has often acknowledged his debt to Henrik Ibsen. In fact, both dramatists play the part of "playwright as thinker." In other words, Miller manages to remain basically realistic and yet to argue seriously as Shaw does ironically. Use any one of his plays to elaborate this assertion. You may of course refute the statement and propose your argument.
4. Discuss the concept of nature in modern American literature.
5. Read the following poem entitled "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" by Wallace Stevens and discuss its basic idea so as to show your insight.

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In Kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.
Let the lamp affix its beam.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.