

PhD FIELD EXAMINATION  
in  
Literary/Critical Theory

To the Candidate:

This examination on critical theory consists of three parts:

- Part I, on the classical canon of theory;
- Part II, on other general areas of critical theory;
- Part III, on contemporary critical theory.

Each part is weighted equally.

To fulfill the requirements of the examination, you must answer each part.

In Part I, you are given three topic choices from which you are to select one.  
On the chosen topic, you must compose one long essay.

In Part II, you are given five topic choices from which you are to select two.  
On the each of the chosen topics, you must compose a short essay.

In Part III, you are given three topic choices from which you are to select one.  
On the chosen topic, you must compose one long essay.

You have four hours in which to write. Allocate your time according to the weightings.

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PART I – Choose one of three and compose one long essay.

- A. "A play which after representation would be called for and put again on the stage should be neither shorter than five acts nor lengthened beyond them."  
(Horace, "Art of Poetry")

"I will observe yet one thing further of this admirable plot; the business of it rises in every act. The second is greater than the first; the third than the second; and so forward to the fifth." (John Dryden, "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy")

Examine the tradition of "rules" criticism from among the critics represented on the "classics" list.

- B. Many of the critics on the "classics" list write more as advocates than as interpreters of literature. Discuss the dimensions of this advocacy in the works of three or more writers from the list.
- C. The theoretical (and popular) conception of the poet/artist (role, nature, and function) changed decisively around the year 1800. Using an appropriate selection of theorists from the periods prior to 1800, and an appropriate selection of theorists from the periods after 1800, define both the earlier conception and the later conception and draw some conclusions of your own on the basis of the contrasts. You should discuss a total of three or four theorists.

PART II – Choose two of five and compose two short essays.

- A. Is T. Moi's distinction between Anglo-American feminist criticism and French feminist criticism incisive and/or useful?
- B. In After the New Criticism, F. Lentriccia attacks certain schools/trends in criticism as being ahistorical. With reference to one of the following theorists (F. Jameson, R. Williams, S. Greenblatt, E. Said, or M. Foucault) discuss how this theorist historicizes criticism in response to certain of the ahistorical schools/trends.
- C. Consider the significance of the "post" in postmodernism. Is it a historical term? Does it denominate a form of literary periodization? Does it represent a break or a continuity with past theory and/or practice?
- D. Examine some ways in which reader-response theorists work to destroy (or at least modify) the perceived objectivity of the literary text.
- E. In Elements of Semiology, Barthes wrote, "Semiology is therefore perhaps destined to be absorbed into a *trans-linguistics*, the materials of which may be myth, narrative, journalism, or on the other hand objects of our civilization, in so far as they are *spoken* (through press, prospectus, interview, conversation and even the inner language, which is ruled by the laws of imagination). In fact, we must now face the possibility of inverting Saussure's declaration: linguistics is not a part of the general science of signs, even a privileged part, it is semiology which is a part of linguistics: to be precise, it is that part covering the *great signifying unities* of discourse." Assess the continuing controversy generated by this argument.

PART III -- Choose one of three and compose one long essay.

- A. Current critical practice is pluralistic, but does it also show certain common tendencies?
- B. Discuss the nature and significance of the challenge to the established literary canon posed by certain recent critical theories.
- C. What is the relationship between writing styles, strategies and forms and theoretical stance regarding the nature and functioning of language in several contemporary critical theorists?

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