

Ph.D. Field Examination in Literary Theory and Criticism

November 2006

To the Candidate:

This examination consists of three parts:

Part I: On areas 1-2 of the Reading List; weighted at 20%

Part II: On ONE of Areas 3-9 of the Reading List; weighted at 40%

Part III: On TWO or more of Areas of the Reading List, excluding texts already discussed in Part I & II; weighted at 40%

In the entire exam, you must discuss a minimum of THREE areas of the Reading List.

To fulfill the requirements of the examination, you must answer one question in each of the three parts.

Read the entire examination before beginning and select your questions and responses to avoid repetition of writers and texts.

Do not discuss a particular theorist or work in more than one answer.

Expectations: Candidates are expected to demonstrate their knowledge of specific works, schools, approaches, movements and trends, to analyze and evaluate them individually and comparatively, and to formulate carefully structured arguments. Each of your answers should demonstrate a breadth of knowledge by referring to several specific writers and works.

Part I:

Choose one of the following questions and write an essay in response, drawing from Areas 1-2 of the Reading List. This question is weighted at 20%.

1. Defending poetry is a traditional past-time of literary critics from the classical period through to the twentieth century and beyond. Why is poetry in need of defense? Refer to works from a range of historical periods including at least one post-1900 work.
2. In *Ars Poetica* Horace famously claims that the role of poetry is to “instruct” and “delight.” Discuss how a range of critics have conceptualized this relationship between the pedagogical and pleasurable functions of literature.
3. “The object of the science of literature”, Roman Jakobson argued, “is not literature, but literariness”. Discuss how a range of critics or schools from the reading list have defined literariness.
4. From the outset, generic distinctions have been crucial to literary criticism and theory. Discuss the importance of generic distinctions to some critics drawn from areas 1 and 2 of the reading list.

Part II:

Choose one of the following questions and write an essay in response, drawing from writers and texts from ONE of areas 3-9 of the Reading List. This question is weighted at 40%.

1. Discuss and evaluate the close-reading methods associated with one of the theoretical schools represented in areas 3-9 of the reading list.
2. Discuss how the agency of the author and reader is conceptualized within one of the theoretical schools represented in areas 3-9 of the reading list.
3. “The advent of theory [. . .] occurs with the introduction of linguistic terminology in the metalanguage about literature” (Paul de Man). Discuss this claim with reference to one of the theoretical schools represented in areas 3-9 of the reading list.
4. There are sometimes complaints that literary theory ignores the question of “aesthetic value”. Are these complaints justified? Discuss this question with reference to one of the theoretical schools represented in areas 3-9 of the reading list.

Part III:

Choose one of the following questions and write an essay in response, drawing from writers and texts from at least TWO areas of the Reading List, but excluding texts already discussed in Part I and II of this exam. This question is weighted at 40%.

1. Compare and contrast how the relationship between literature and history is conceptualized within two theoretical schools.
2. Compare and contrast the way in which two theoretical schools take up the concept of subjectivity.
3. Compare and contrast how two theoretical schools or critics balance the “rhetorical” or internal analysis of texts with the social analysis of texts.
4. Is there a pattern in the development of literary theory in North America between 1970 and the present? Discuss the evolution of literary theory in North America in this period, focusing on at least two areas of the reading list.
5. Compare and contrast how two theoretical schools treat the division between literary and popular texts.