

**Ph.D. FIELD EXAMINATION**

**in**

**Literary Theory and Criticism**

**Spring 2000**

**To the Candidate**

This examination consists of three parts:

Part I: Literary Theory and Criticism to 1930; weighted at 20%

Part II: The Core List; weighted at 40%

Part III: Cultural Theory; weighted at 40%

To fulfil the requirements of the examination, you must answer one question from each of the three parts.

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

Expectations:

Candidates are expected to indicate their knowledge of specific works, schools, approaches, movements, and trends, to analyse and evaluate them individually and comparatively, and to formulate carefully structured arguments.

**PART I: Literary Theory and Criticism to 1930**

Choose one of the following questions and write an essay in response. This question is weighted at 20%. In your answer, discuss at least THREE writers from the Literary Theory and Criticism to 1930 list, and refer to specific works.

1. Although the term “literature” can denote any written material, many of the pre-1930 theoretical works listed here address only poetry and/or drama. Drawing on three writers from the reading list, discuss the relationship between this focus on poetry and/or drama and the writers’ notions of literature in general and its effects.
2. Hayden White suggests, “One of the ways that a . . . field takes stock of itself is by considering its history. Yet it is difficult to get an objective history of [a field], because if the historian is himself a practitioner of it, he is likely to be a devotee of one or another of its sects and hence biased.” Discuss with reference to the formulations of or assumptions about literary history in the works of three writers from the reading list.
3. “Long before Freudian psychoanalysis appeared, literary works were routinely analysed in terms of a psychological dimension.” Discuss with reference to three writers from the reading list.

**PART II: The Core List**

Choose one of the following questions and write an essay in response. This question is weighted at 40%. In your response, be sure to consider in depth at least THREE of the theorists on the Core List and their work.

1. Many theories of literature claim to define and examine literature in terms of forms or genres, not semantic contents or themes. But is this separation actually sustained in these theories? Discuss with reference to three writers on the Core list.
2. Discuss the construction of agency in the works of three writers on the Core list.
3. The terms “new” and “post,” attached to so many contemporary theories, suggest a radical break from previous approaches. Discuss the significance of such a break and the ways in which it shapes (or does not shape) theoretical formulations in the works of three writers on the Core list.

**PART III: Cultural Theory**

Choose one of the following questions and write an essay in response. This question is weighted at 40%. In your response, be sure to consider at least THREE of the theorists and their works from the subcategory Cultural Theory, Part III of the reading list. Do not discuss in depth those works of Cultural Theory you may have already discussed in Part II of the examination.

1. Is literature historical? We can take for granted that it expresses a historical context, based on the facts of a period (modes of dress, manners, technology, etc.) – but is literature historical in any other way(s)? Discuss with reference to at least three writers on the Cultural Theory list.
2. Cultural Theory is a heterogeneous group of theories rather than a clearly defined critical school, but arguably it is dominated by two strands of thought, one derived from New Historicism and the other drawing on Marxism. Discuss the distinctions and continuities between these two strands with reference to three writers on the Cultural Theory list.
3. Literature is not only written and read, it is transmitted from author to reader or listener along specific channels and by means of specific technologies. Discuss how the effect of transmission is considered in the theories of literature of three writers on the Cultural Theory list.