



UNIVERSITY  
OF  
JOHANNESBURG

***DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH***

**JUNE 2016 EXAMINATION**

<b><u>COURSE:</u></b>	<b>ENGLISH HONOURS</b>	<b><u>TIME:</u></b>	<b>4 HOURS</b>
<b><u>COURSE CODE:</u></b>	<b>ENG8X04</b>	<b><u>MARKS:</u></b>	<b>200</b>

**CONTEMPORARY LITERARY THEORY**

**EXAMINERS:**

1. Prof. K. Scherzinger  
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2. Prof. F. Kalua (UNISA)

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**THIS PAPER CONSISTS OF FOUR (4) PAGES**

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**INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. **THIS PAPER IS FOUR (4) HOURS IN LENGTH.**
2. **THERE ARE NO COMPULSORY QUESTIONS IN THIS PAPER.**
3. **ANSWER TWO (2) OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.**
4. **EACH ANSWER SHOULD BE APPROXIMATELY THREE TO FOUR (3–4) PAGES IN LENGTH.**

## **Literary Theory 2016**

Answer ONE question from Section A and ONE question from Section B. You may not repeat material covered in your long essay for this module; neither may you refer to the same theory in both sections.

### **Section A: THEORY**

#### **1. Structuralism**

The language we use is a convention, and it makes no difference what exactly the nature of the agreed sign is.

Ferdinand de Saussure, "The Object of Study"

Using the quotation above as your starting point, examine the implications of Saussure's assertion for the study of literature. You may, if you wish, use examples from the texts that you have studied this semester to illustrate your points.

#### **2. Poststructuralism**

In his descriptions of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida observes that, paradoxically, "the centre [of any system] is not the centre" ("Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"). Using Derrida's terms (such as *différance*, presence, trace, iterability), explain what he means by this statement.

#### **3. Psychoanalysis**

Write a critical account of one of the theories discussed in the psychoanalysis seminars: Freud's theory of dream analysis OR his 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' OR Lacan's theory of desire. Your account should comment both on *this* theory's limitations and its potential as a model for literary analysis.

#### 4. Marxism

Discuss how Fredric Jameson's "On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act" defines the nature of a literary work not only as a mere reflection of social conditions, but also as a symbolic intervention into those conditions as well as an imaginative resolution to the problems that they raise.

#### 5. Gender

Write an essay in which you discuss how Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* prefigures many of the conflicting positions that later feminist theory articulates.

### Section B: PRAXIS

#### 6. Formalism

Poetics deals primarily with the question, *What makes a verbal message a work of art?* Because the main subject of poetics is the *differentia specifica* [specific differences] of verbal art in relation to other arts and in relation to other kinds of verbal behaviour, poetics is entitled to the leading place in literary studies.

Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics"

By means of a close reading of Elizabeth Bishop's 'Sestina,' and/or William Empson's 'Villanelle,' demonstrate how, according to Russian Formalism, a poem derives its meaning from its verbal environment, unlike in the case of "other arts [or] other kinds of verbal behaviour."

## **7. Poststructuralism**

Choose either:

- a) Discuss how certain binaries that characterise Elizabethan society are deconstructed in *King Lear*, OR
- b) Discuss how, from a poststructuralist perspective, Elizabeth Bishop's "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" questions the idea of foundational truth.

## **8. Psychoanalysis**

Write an essay in which you demonstrate how psychoanalysis (either Freudian or Lacanian) might help to articulate some of the repressed drives at work in *King Lear*.

## **9. Marxism**

Discuss how Fredric Jameson's interpretative model, which seeks to demonstrate the ways in which literary texts must simultaneously provoke and repress a longing for social change, may be applicable to William Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

## **10. Gender**

Either

- a) Write an essay in which you discuss how Shakespeare rewrites orthodox notions of femininity in *King Lear*, OR
- b) Write a critical and gender analysis of Elizabeth Bishop's "In the Waiting Room."

**END OF PAPER**