



UNIVERSITY  
OF  
JOHANNESBURG

## *DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH*

### JUNE 2015 EXAMINATION

COURSE: ENGLISH HONOURS: LITERARY THEORY TIME: 4 HOURS

COURSE CODE: ENG8X04 MARKS: 200

FIRST EXAMINERS:

Prof. K. Scherzinger

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EXTERNAL EXAMINER:

Prof. D. Levey (UNISA)

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THIS PAPER CONSISTS OF FOUR (4) PAGES

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**Instructions:**

1. Answer ONE question from Section A and ONE question from Section B. Each question is worth 100 marks.
2. You may not repeat material covered in your long essay for this module; neither may you refer to the same theory in both sections.
3. Please answer each question in a separate answer book, and write the number of the question on the front of the answer book.



## Section A: THEORY

### 1. 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"

Do you agree with the view that poetics constitutes the proper study of literature? Using the quotation above as your starting point, provide a critical assessment of the concept of literariness and its central place in formalist theory.

### 2. Post-structuralism

Discuss how Jacques Derrida's descriptions of *différance* – including references to presence, trace, iterability, and similar terms – relate to his contention that "the centre is not the centre" ("Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences").

### 3. Psychoanalysis

Write a critical account of EITHER Freud's theory of dream analysis, OR Lacan's theory of desire, in which you comment on both its limitations and its potential as a model for literary analysis.

### 4. Marxism

Discuss how Pierre Macherey's and Etienne Balibar's "On Literature as an Ideological Form" defines the nature of a literary work as neither a product of pure romantic imagination nor a mere reflection of social conditions.

### 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 of later feminist theory.



## Section B: PRAXIS

### 6. 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 Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. In the course of your examination, discuss the various ways in which William Shakespeare's *King Lear* dramatizes the conventional nature of language and, thus, the arbitrariness of the referential value of its signs.

### 7. Post-structuralism

Either:

- a) Discuss how certain binaries that characterize Elizabethan society are deconstructed in *King Lear*;

OR

- b) Discuss, from a poststructuralist perspective, how Elizabeth Bishop's "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" questions the idea of foundational truth.

### 8. Psychoanalysis

Either:

- a) 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*;

OR

- b) Discuss, from a psychoanalytical perspective, how Elizabeth Bishop's "Sestina" might be seen as a response to a traumatic event.



**9. Marxism**

Discuss Fredric Jameson's conception of literary texts as social symbolic acts that both reflect and react to their social situation, in relation to the applicability of this conception 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 gender analysis of Elizabeth Bishop's "In the Waiting Room".

**END OF PAPER**

