

## 21L.451 Introduction to Literary Theory

Questions for a take-home exam:

### PART ONE

Choose any ONE of the questions below and write a 4-5 page paper that responds to the chosen question. Narrow the question down to a coherent and manageable set of issues. I would encourage you to try and make your responses as specific as possible, using examples from the literary texts we have read thus far to illustrate your argument. I don't, of course, expect definitive "solutions" to the problems raised by the question -- the questions are broad and thus speculation is encouraged. However, I do wish you to take positions, to try to articulate and to defend your point of view.

1. Osip Brik, an important figure in the Russian formalist movement, once remarked that Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* would have been written even if Pushkin had not lived. What do you understand by this assertion? Defend or critique it by drawing on some of the theoretical positions we have examined this term. Use examples as and when appropriate.

2. An often-quoted phrase of Derrida's is: Il n'y a pas de hors-texte. The sentence is hard to translate. Literally, it reads, "there is no outside-text" or even more clumsily "there is not of the outside-text." In what sorts of ways might this be interpreted? What do you think Derrida might mean? Discuss, using examples as appropriate.

3. What is the relationship between structuralism and post-structuralism? Another way of asking this question is: how should we make sense of the "post" in "post-structuralism"? Since this is a broad question, you might want to try and specify it further. For example, you might want to compare the ways in which the idea of the text and of intertextuality is construed (either implicitly or explicitly) in structuralist and poststructuralist theories. Or you might want to begin by considering the different ways in which the prefix "post" functions, and develop this into an analysis of the "post" in post-structuralism. Or you could take a different tactic. Be specific and try and use examples to illustrate your points. Think about the different post-structuralist theories we have read, and how the term applies to each of them – you are *not* required to address all the theories (pick and choose as you see fit).

4. The Unconscious, Lacan writes, is the discourse of the Other. What do you think he means by this? Drawing on your understanding of Freud, Lacan and Žižek, pursue the implications of this statement. Again, be specific and use textual/filmic examples as and when appropriate. (Here, too, you will need to decide how to focus your paper. You could, for example, examine the question of the subject, that is, of the speaking voice or intending self in its relation to the structures that surround it. Or,

you could focus on Lacan's sense of how language works. Or figure out a different emphasis.)

## PART TWO

Write a 4-5 page essay -- 12pt Times Roman or equivalent, one inch margins -- on one of the following. Your essay should make use of one or a combination of the theoretical methods we have examined thus far. Be specific; make sure you have clear and cogent argument, avoid lists and unnecessary plot summary.

Adrienne Rich, "Diving Into the Wreck"

Roman Polanski, *Chinatown* or Alfred Hitchcock, *Marnie*

Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"

John Keats, "This Living Hand"

E. T. A. Hoffman, "The Sandman"

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