

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
Faculty of Arts and Science

JUNE 2015 EXAMINATIONS

# PHL388H1F

Duration: 3 hours

***Examination Aids:*** one “cheat sheet”, i.e., one double-sided piece of paper (8.5 by 11 inches) consisting of whatever information the student wishes to include

Welcome to the PHL388H1F final exam! This exam consists of six questions. **Choose and answer only five of the six questions.** (If you answer all six questions, we will mark only the first five.) Write your answers in the exam booklet provided. Each of your answers should consist of approximately two paragraphs (one paragraph for each of the question’s two sub-questions), and each of your paragraphs should consist of approximately six sentences. You may answer the questions in any order you wish, but please clearly number your answers in the exam booklet.

## QUESTIONS

Choose five of the following six questions. Each question is worth a maximum of 6 points.

You must answer both parts of the question (a) & (b) to receive full credit.

1. **Literature as art || *This Is War***

*Background:* Though works of literature should be thought of, first and foremost, as *works of art*, they can be understood in other ways as well. For example, Hannah Moscovitch's *This Is War* could be seen and read instead as a *historical document* of Canada's involvement in the war in Afghanistan, since, despite its fictional elements, the play contains a number of facts about the living conditions of Canadian soldiers, the practices of the Canadian military, etc.; and in this regard, one could read the play purely in order to become knowledgeable about these facts. Seeing the play in this way may be rewarding and valuable in its own right, yet it is nonetheless distinct from seeing the play as a work of art.

- (a) **How is seeing *This Is War* as a historical document different from seeing the play as a work of art?** That is, what does it *mean* to think of literary works as *works of art*? Make specific references to features of *This Is War* in explaining your answer.
- (b) **What reason is there for holding that understanding literary works as works of art is the *fundamental* way of understanding them?** That is, why isn't viewing literature as art just one approach among many that one may take toward literary works, no more or less valid than all the rest?

2. **What is literature? || "Story of Your Life"**

*Background:* Science fiction stories (like other works of genre fiction) are stereotypically seen as being "lesser" works of literature, or as not being literature at all. One reason commonly given for why sci-fi stories are not literary is that they are not "well written" – that their language lacks a certain sophistication or poetic quality. One might think that a work like Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life" defies this criticism, since it *is* relatively well written. Nonetheless, there may be other, better reasons for holding that it is a work of literature.

- (a) **What's wrong with thinking of literary works as works which are "well written"?** That is, why shouldn't we define 'literature' as "fine writing" or "belles lettres"?
- (b) **What considerations would the analytical institutional account of literature suggest *are* relevant in settling whether or not a particular work is a work of literature? And by these criteria, how might "Story of Your Life" be argued to be a work of literature?**

**3. Fiction & fictionality || *When Everything Feels Like the Movies***

*Background:* The character of Jude in Raziel Reid's *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* is in many ways similar to a real-life teenager, Larry Fobes King. For instance, both Jude and Larry were openly gay, and bullied in school for it; both had absent fathers and drug-addicted mothers; and each was tragically shot to death by one of their male classmates, after asking that classmate to be their Valentine. Indeed, one could imagine everything we're told in *Everything Feels Like the Movies* about Jude also being true of the real-life Larry. Nonetheless, there would still be certain ontological and epistemological differences between the two.

- (a) **Ontologically speaking, what is the difference between the fictional Jude and the real-life Larry Fobes King?** What more can we say than that Jude didn't really exist whereas Larry did? Your answer should explain the ontological differences that hold *in general* between fictional characters and real people.
- (b) **Epistemologically speaking, how do we *understand* Jude differently than Larry?** That is, in what ways are the details we know about Jude, through Raziel Reid's book, different from the details we may come to know about Larry, through news reports etc.? How do we interpret and make sense of these details differently in each case?

**4. Reading, interpretation, & appreciation || *What We See When We Read***

*Background:* Peter Mendelsund, in *What We See When We Read*, draws our attention to various distinctive phenomenological features of reading. He observes, for instance, that reading is different than picturing; that reading demands dynamic imagining; and that reading involves seeing past the words. Ultimately, he uses these observations to conclude that the experience of reading is like our very experience of the world.

- (a) **What does Mendelsund mean in claiming that reading is like our experience of the world?** In what specific ways is this so? (Feel free to ground your answer with references to specific literary works.)
- (b) **How is this conception of reading related to what we do when we *interpret* literary works?** What do interpretations seek out, how do they do so, and in what ways is this continuous with our practice of reading? (Again, feel free to ground your answer with references to specific literary works.)

5. Literature & value || *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

*Background:* Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is full of "moral content", in its vivid portrayal of the existential significance of death, its reflections on what it means to truly live, its depictions of the emptiness of bourgeois society, and so on. Relatedly, one way in which the novella might be valued is for the moral effect it has on its readers, i.e., its ability to motivate its readers to live a more meaningful existence here and now. Call this its "moral value".

- (a) **How is the moral value of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* different from the value that the work has as literature?** Your answer should explain the differences that hold *in general* between literary value and moral value.
- (b) **How is the moral content of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* related to its literary value?** That is, will the novella's moral content at all figure in one's literary appreciation of it, and if so, how? Make specific references to features of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* in explaining your answer.

6. Literature & truth || *How Should A Person Be?*

*Background:* There are many ways in which Sheila Heti's *How Should A Person Be?* might be thought of as "true". First, like other realistic stories, it is true in a mundane factual sense, in that it contains many incidental facts about Toronto, New York, Miami, the contemporary art world, and so on. Second, it is true in a biographical sense, in that many of the details of the story's plot actually happened to Sheila Heti (she actually divorced her husband, she actually struggled for years to write a play, she actually befriended artist Margaux Williamson, and so on). But it might also, like many other works of literature, be thought of as true in a deeper sense, as possessing a *sui generis* kind of truth peculiar to literature – "literary truth".

- (a) **What features and/or qualities are associated with "literary truth"?** And in what specific ways might *How Should A Person Be?* be thought of as true in this deeper sense?
- (b) **How might one object to the claim that literary truth is a genuine kind of *truth*?** That is, why might one doubt that talk of "truth" is apt in this context? And as a response to this objection, what does it mean to think of literary truth instead as a kind of *vision*?