

FINAL EXAMINATION

Due: Wednesday, 23 January, 2008

General Directions: Write three coherent, well-argued essays on three different topics, one each from each of the three sections. Each of the essays should not exceed three double spaced pages. Remember that you will have to discuss at least three different plays (one of which must be King Lear) on the examination, so plan accordingly. Remember, that these are essays, so plagiarism in all its forms, as in any assignment, is completely unacceptable and will result in a grade of zero. If you have questions as to what constitutes plagiarism, ask me. GOOD LUCK!

PART ONE - PLAYING

- 1) How does Shakespeare draw attention to his own artifice? With reference to at least two plays, assess those moments (that might include plays within the play, role-playing, or discussion of any kind of art form and its relation to the "natural" world) when Shakespeare seems to represent the power of the theatre, writing, or other artistic productions. What is the relation of playing to the "real" world?
- 2) "Poems [i.e. dramatic poems or plays] imitate both to delight and teach; and delight, to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would play as from a stranger; and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved...."
-Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry* (1595)

Discuss whether or not Shakespeare's plays may have had (or have now) the capacity to contribute to the higher moral purpose that Sidney attributes to all "good" poetry. With reference to one of the works we've read, discuss how plays teach us and move us to virtue (or don't)?

PART TWO – COMEDY

- 1) Stephen Orgel claims that the basic form of response to the Renaissance theatre for its audiences was erotic. Assess this claim with reference to at least two comedies. Some things you might wish to consider are gender relations in the plays, male actors playing women's roles, and the public representation of domestic scenes.
- 2) What does Shakespearean comedy mean to us today? One of the first things that people often notice about Shakespeare's comedies is that they're not really that funny, at least according to modern standards. With reference to one of the comedies that we've read, talk about the DIFFERENCES in the way we understand it today, compared with how it might have been understood by Shakespeare's audience. Is it true, as Michael Bristol claims, that the historical context has fallen away (i.e. we can't recover what they might have meant when they were written, so we have to recreate the play for ourselves, in a sense)? One thing you might want to consider is the mode of reception: how does seeing a play in a crowded, noisy theatre differ fundamentally from reading it in a modern edition in your room?

PART THREE – King Lear

- 1) In the course, we discussed a number of theories of tragedy (put forward by Aristotle, Hegel, Bradley, among several others). Which one (if any) is most applicable to King Lear and why?
- 2) During the Romantic period, many famous poets thought that King Lear wasn't meant for the stage, indeed that it was impossible to perform, yet they revered it as one of Shakespeare's best plays. John Keats neatly summarizes this attitude by entitling his sonnet on the play "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again," suggesting that his encounter with the play is strictly on the page. Why might someone think that King Lear couldn't be staged? Do you agree?