

RENAISSANCE LITERATURE FIELD EXAMINATION

SPRING 1996

INSTRUCTIONS

There are three sections to the examination:

- A. Contemporary Approaches to Renaissance Literature
- B. Shakespeare
- C. Renaissance Drama (excluding Shakespeare)

This examination is four hours.

During this time you will be expected to answer four questions in total.

You must answer one question from Part A and three from Parts B and C: i.e. you may choose to answer two questions from Part B and one from Part C, or one question from Part B and two from Part C.

All questions are of equal value.

Part A: Contemporary Approaches to Renaissance Literature

1. Argue for or against the New Historicist claim that the best way to teach undergraduates Renaissance drama is to "resituate canonical literary texts among the multiple forms of writing, and in relation to the non-discursive practices, institutions, and social formations in which those texts were initially produced." Support your argument with reference to at least two critics on the reading list.
2. Basing your answer on specific texts on the reading list, construct a brief history of feminist approaches to Renaissance literature since the 1970s.
3. Traditional conceptions of the "text," the "author," the "character," "man," "the Renaissance," and "human nature" have come under interrogation within Renaissance studies during the last twenty years. Select two of these terms and discuss some of the issues arising out of this interrogation. In your answer, make specific reference to at least two critics on the reading list.
4. Stephen Greenblatt, opposing reading practices of "a poetics of culture" to textual analyses attentive "to formal and linguistic design," observed that "textual analyses convey almost nothing of the social dimension of literature's power." How might one develop a textual analysis attentive to "the social dimension of literature's power"? What critical resources or tools might be of assistance?

Part B: Shakespeare

1. It has been argued that Shakespeare's plays dramatize "men's inability to reconcile tender affection with sexual desire and their consequent vacillation between idealization and degradation of women" (*The Woman's Part*). With reference to at least two of Shakespeare's plays, discuss the validity of the above assertion.
2. Select a scene or segment of a scene from one of Shakespeare's plays and explain in detail how alternative performance choices can construct different interpretations.
3. Sheldon Zitner has argued of *King Lear*, "Language is not only the vehicle for [the play's] questions, but one of them." Consider how at least two of Shakespeare's plays of your choice make language a part of their subject matter.
4. Discuss the significance of the choices Shakespeare makes between narration (telling) and representation (showing) in two or more plays.

Part C: Renaissance Drama (excluding Shakespeare)

1. Assuming you were given the opportunity to develop a new course, "English 333: Drama to 1642, excluding Shakespeare," a University of Waterloo term course to be offered to undergraduates (students majoring in English or in Drama with knowledge of a few plays by Shakespeare and perhaps one play by a contemporary of his), answer the following questions.

Only question (d) must be answered in essay format.

- (a) What course description (75 words maximum) would you publish in the Undergraduate Calendar?
 - (b) What more specific statement of objectives would you include in your course outline?
 - (c) What books (playtexts and/or criticism) would you study, and in what order?
 - (d) Why would you focus attention on those particular works and in that particular order?
2. Since the playing place was a given of a theatrical production, the playwrights clarified and intensified the impact of their plays by adapting them to the physical conditions of performance--to pageant wagons (York, Chester, Towneley mystery plays), or natural O's encircled with scaffolding (*The Castle of Perseverance*), or great halls of stately homes (*Fulgens and Lucrece*, *Magnificence*, *The Arraignment of Paris*), or banqueting halls of the court (*The Masque of Blackness*, *The Masque of Beauty*, *Salmacida Spolia*), or open-air public theatres such as The Rose (*Tamburlaine I*, *The Spanish Tragedy*) or The Swan (*The Changeling*). By analyzing specific moments in two works written for different theatrical spaces, show how two writers made effective use of the performance space.
 3. From the time of Towneley's Second Shepherd's play (*Secunda Pastorum*), English dramatists understood that more important than the anatomy of comedy was the comedy of anatomy. Discuss the importance of the uses of the actor's body and the verbal construction of it in at least two comedies.
 4. Discuss the interrogation in Renaissance drama of the drive to acquire wealth. Support your discussion with specific reference to at least two plays.