

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
FIELD EXAMINATION
RENAISSANCE LITERATURE
MAY 2007

INSTRUCTIONS

Three questions are to be answered on the examination, **one** from each Category prepared (including your special field).

Category 1: Shakespeare

1) In procession or on progress, Queen Elizabeth I realized that she was “staging” herself as monarch to her people so that “her subjects’ hungry eyes might have their fill in beholding their sovereign.” Shakespeare, it seems, may have learned something from observing his queen, for in his plays he too often attends to the stagecraft of statecraft. Discuss his representation of the theatricality of politics in at least three plays.

2) Consider the representation of gender in two plays from each of two Shakespearean genres. How is gender typically constructed in each genre, and what does this reveal about the differences and/or similarities between these genres?

3) As Sir Philip Sidney moves into his discussion of the failure of English dramatists to observe the unities, he affirms that “place and time” are “the two necessary conjunctions of all corporal actions.” Demonstrate some of the ways that Shakespeare used either time or place so as to make his tragedies more tragic or his comedies more comic. Discuss at least three plays.

4) With its argument about subversion and containment, Stephen Greenblatt’s “Invisible Bullets” was one of the most influential essays of Shakespeare criticism published in the 1980s. Two decades later, does the essay hold up? Why or why not? Discuss with reference to at least three plays.

Category 2: Renaissance Drama (excluding Shakespeare)

1) In his “Foreword” to *A New History of Early English Drama*, Stephen Greenblatt celebrates the fact that this “new” history “foregoes the satisfaction of linear narrative . . . in order to present a more capacious, confusing, and complex picture of early drama.” What theoretical reasons do Greenblatt and the editors of the *New History* (John Cox and David Kastan) give for deciding to forgo the satisfaction mentioned? What three or four plays provide the best evidence for the need to forego it?

2) Recent criticism has stressed the cultural centrality of the London stage after about 1574, granting it a role in early modern political, religious, and economic processes. Compare the cultural functions of this theatre with those of English drama before 1574, concentrating your attention on at least two examples from each period.

3) “Language most shows a man: speak that I may see thee.” Discuss the importance of styles of language to the efforts of at least three medieval and early modern playwrights to individualize their characters.

4) Compare Jonsonian comedy with that of one or two other Jacobean playwrights (excluding Shakespeare). Discuss at least two of Jonson’s comedies and two comedies by other dramatists.

Category 3: Electronic Media and the Study of Early Modern Drama

- 1) Shakespeare's plays might be said to have both a theatrical life and a literary/textual life. Consider the potential of digital media to connect these lives, as well as any risks inherent in the attempt. In your response discuss at least three items from your special field reading list.
- 2) In "Challenging Assumptions: Women Writers and New Technology," Kathryn Sutherland asks, "do we always need electronic editions of texts just because we have the electronic means?" Assuming that we do not always need electronic editions, what principles should govern the selection of texts to produce in electronic editions and what features of those projected electronic editions would make them distinctive? Illustrate your ideas by reference to at least three plays and at least three items from your special field reading list.
- 3) By 2025, how will the continuing development of digital technologies have changed the way we study and teach early modern drama? Discuss with reference to at least three items from your special field reading list.
- 4) "Shakespeare's plays were meant to be performed." If you agree with this statement, how can new technologies help us realize the performance potentials of the plays? If you disagree, how can new technologies help us realize what you consider to be 'what the plays were meant to be'? Illustrate your ideas by reference to at least three plays and at least three items from your special field reading list.