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Register Number:

DATE: 10-04-2017

**St. Joseph’s College (Autonomous)**

**Semester Examination April 2017**

**VI Semester EJP- Optional English**

**OE 6113 - Reading Shakespeare Differently**

**Time allotted: 3 hours Max Marks: 100**

**Instructions:**

**1. You are allowed to use a dictionary.**

**2. This Question paper has sections and printed sheets.**

1. **Read the following extract from “Antony and Cleopatra” and answer the questions set on it**

**Antony**: Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch

Of the ranged empire fall. Here is my space.

Kingdoms are clay. Our dungy earth alike Feeds beast as man.

The nobleness of life Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair

And such a twain can do ’t, in which I bind,

On pain of punishment, the world to weet

We stand up peerless.

**Cleopatra**: Excellent falsehood!

Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her?

I’ll seem the fool I am not. Antony Will be himself.

**Antony**: But stirred by Cleopatra.

Now for the love of Love and her soft hours,

Let’s not confound the time with conference harsh.

There’s not a minute of our lives should stretch

Without some pleasure now. What sport tonight?

**I.A. Answer the following: (3x5=15)**

1. What sort of philosophy of love does Antony propose in the above lines?
2. Do you think Antony convinces Cleopatra about his love for her? Identify phrases and suggestions for your answer?
3. What notion of “time” do you find in the above lines? Explain briefly

**II. Answer the following in about 200-250 words each:(2x15=30):**

1. Explore and comment on the complex conflict encountered by both Antony and Cleopatra between the political and public world of power and authority on the one hand and the private and personal world of romantic love and erotic pleasure on the other. Do you think that either of characters resolve such a conflict even in death? Argue your point of view appropriately .
2. Pick out one key theme or idea you have encountered while reading across the prescribed Shakespeare plays. Write a critical response to this theme or idea using evidence from the texts.
3. **Read this sonnet by Shakespeare:**

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,

So do our minutes hasten to their end;

Each changing place with that which goes before,

In sequent toil all forwards do contend.

Nativity, once in the main of light,

Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,

Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,

And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.

Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth

And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,

Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,

And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow:

 And yet to times in hope, my verse shall stand

 Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

**III.A.Write a 300-word essay** on Shakespeare’s use of the sonnet as a vehicle for exploring anxieties originating from love, art and writing. What connections can you make between this poem and the ones read in class? **(25 marks)**

**IV. Read this excerpt from an essay by Stephen Greenblatt:**

In 1998, a friend of mine, Robert Pinsky, who at the time was serving as the poet laureate of the United States, invited me to a poetry evening at the Clinton White House, one of a series of black-tie events organized to mark the coming millennium. On this occasion the President gave an amusing introductory speech in which he recalled that his first encounter with poetry came in junior high school when his teacher made him memorize certain passages from Macbeth. This was, Clinton remarked wryly, not the most auspicious beginning for a life in politics.

After the speeches, I joined the line of people waiting to shake the President’s hand. When my turn came, a strange impulse came over me. This was a moment when rumors of the Lewinsky affair were circulating, but before the whole thing had blown up into the grotesque national circus that it soon became. “Mr. President,” I said, sticking out my hand, “don’t you think that Macbeth is a great play about an immensely ambitious man who feels compelled to do things that he knows are politically and morally disastrous?” Clinton looked at me for a moment, still holding my hand, and said, “I think Macbeth is a great play about someone whose immense ambition has an ethically inadequate object.”

I was astonished by the aptness, as well as the quickness, of this comment, so perceptively in touch with Macbeth’s anguished brooding about the impulses that are driving him to seize power by murdering Scotland’s legitimate ruler. When I recovered my equilibrium, I asked the President if he still remembered the lines he had memorized years before. Of course, he replied, and then, with the rest of the guests still patiently waiting to shake his hand, he began to recite one of Macbeth’s great soliloquies:

If it were done when ’tis done, then ’twere well

It were done quickly. If th’ assassination

Could trammel up the consequence, and catch

With his surcease success: that but this blow

Might be the be-all and the end-all, here,

But here upon this bank and shoal of time,

We’d jump the life to come. But in these cases

We still have judgement here, that we but teach

Bloody instructions which, being taught, return

To plague th’inventor.

(1.7.1–10)

There the most powerful man in the world—as we are fond of calling our leader—broke off with a laugh, leaving me to conjure up the rest of the speech that ends with Macbeth’s own bafflement over the fact that his immense ambition has “an ethically inadequate object”:

 I have no spur

To prick the sides of my intent, but only

Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself

And falls on th’other….

(1.7.25–28)1

I left the White House that evening with the thought that Bill Clinton had missed his true vocation, which was, of course, to be an English professor. But the profession he actually chose makes it all the more appropriate to consider whether it is possible to discover in Shakespeare an “ethically adequate object” for human ambition.

Macbeth himself seems tormented by the question. To be sure, his anxiety derives in part from a straightforward prudential concern, a fear that what he metes out will inevitably be meted out to him, measure for measure. But his queasiness has deeper roots in his sense of ethical obligation, in this case the obligation to obey and serve the king his master. His wife, who knows her husband’s character all too well, has already cannily anticipated his inner struggle:

 Thou wouldst be great,

Art not without ambition, but without

The illness should attend it.

(1.5.16–18)

Hence faced with the perfect opportunity to seize the crown—King Duncan is a guest in his castle—Macbeth holds back. He is, he reflects, Duncan’s kinsman and subject, and at this moment he is also the king’s host, “who should against his murderer shut the door,/ Not bear the knife myself.” Above all, there has been nothing in the king’s comportment that would make his murder a remotely justifiable act. (Shakespeare characteristically altered his source in order to eliminate evidence of Duncan’s incompetence and thus to eliminate a rational basis for his assassination.) On the contrary, Macbeth broods,

this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been

So clear in his great office, that his virtues

Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against

The deep damnation of his taking-off.

(1.7.16–120)

“Meek” is a strange word to describe a king whom we have just seen conducting a bloody military campaign and ordering the summary execution of his enemy, the Thane of Cawdor. But it serves to intensify Macbeth’s brooding on the deep damnation that will befall Duncan’s assassin.

The theological language here must, I think, be understood as an expression of the would-be assassin’s inner fears and not as Shakespeare’s own affirmation of the sacredness of kingship. From time to time, of course, we hear such affirmations in his work—

There’s such divinity doth hedge a king

That treason can but peep to what it would

(4.5.120–21)

—but they tend to be treated with deft irony. The stirring words I have just quoted from Hamlet are spoken by the fratricide Claudius, successfully pacifying the enraged Laertes. None of Shakespeare’s plays, not even Macbeth, unequivocally endorses the view that any act of usurpation is automatically evil, and none condemns as necessarily unethical the use of violence to topple the established order. Unlike the most conservative voices in his time, Shakespeare did not position himself squarely against the bloody unthroning even of anointed monarchs. Violence, as he well understood, was one of the principal mechanisms of regime change.

**IV.A. Answer the following in about 200 words each: (2x15=30)**

1. Compare Greenblatt’s style in this essay to the other pieces of Shakespeare criticism you have read in Research Seminar and elsewhere. Would you describe his style as academic? Why?
2. Do you agree with the implications of what Clinton offers? Can ambition ever have an ethically adequate object? Is love in Shakespeare’s plays outside the ambit of ambition? Explain.