

## English E-130: Shakespeare and Modern Culture

Final Exam, grade: A

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### Part One: Passage identifications (approx. 25 minutes)

Please identify and provide a context for the following passages. You should identify not only the title of the play but also who is speaking to whom about what. For context, you might explain the passage's function in the plot and its thematic relevance to the play as a whole, or perhaps even the way it illustrates a particular tendency of its author. Make your answers as detailed as possible. Please write in prose (not bullet points) and with as much coherence as you can manage in the short space you have.

#### 1) **May I with right and conscience make this claim?**

This is King Henry V asking this in Shakespeare's play of the same title. King Henry is in a conversation with the Bishop of Canterbury who tries to give detailed reasons to prove that Henry can (with right) claim the French throne, despite the Salic Law. Canterbury states that the French only speak of the Salic Law to exclude Henry from claiming the French throne – the Salic Law excluded women from the inheritance of a throne, an important fact here since Henry's claim is based on aristocratic relations to a woman. Canterbury argues that the Salic Law was German, not French, and that not even the French themselves adhere to this law. Henry has already asked Canterbury to stick to facts *and* moral arguments. It is after Canterbury's first (and detailed) explanations that Henry asks him again for right *and* conscience. The reader/ audience already knows that the Bishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely have plans to convince Henry of a war against France because of financial concerns (an upcoming law would collect taxes from the church), a motive they hide from Henry. Henry's request to consider facts *and* morals underlines his status as an ethical, heroic leader.

#### 2) **If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions: but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts, whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion.**

This is Iago talking to Roderigo in *Othello*. Roderigo is desperately in love with Desdemona, but he just had to find out that Desdemona is already married to Othello. Roderigo, a passionate character, is thinking about suicide. Then Iago reminds Roderigo that he has the ability of reason and free will in order to control natural passions. Iago in a way tries to win Roderigo over since Iago himself does indeed live like that. He is jealous of Cassio who was promoted by Othello instead of him. Iago is full of hatred but uses his reason in order to place all of his tactic decisions. He will later use Roderigo for his plans against Cassio and Othello (in Cyprus). Iago's utterance here can be read as a general characterization of his since using his reason in order to control his "raging motions" is exactly what he does throughout the play.

- 3) You taught me language; and my profit on't  
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you  
For learning me your language!**

This is Caliban talking to Prospero in *The Tempest*. Prospero just talked about the evil nature of Caliban and about everything he, Prospero, had done for the wild, brutish Caliban. He had taught him how to speak in order to express himself. The “ungrateful” Caliban underscores the fact that he is a slave and was made to learn Prospero’s language and culture. By saying that he only learned how to curse, Caliban might refer to his frustration and to his very nature since still only “evil” things is what naturally comes out of him. Being frustrated about his position, he execrates Prospero. It underscores the colonial theories concerning this play since “primitive peoples” were thought to be culturally different to European peoples in the sense that they were thought to be on a different level of civilization, still even after having them “educated”.

- 4) Think on the Tower and me. Despair and die.**

This is the Ghost of Henry VI (House Lancaster) talking to Richard III (House York). *Richard III* focuses on the last years of the War of the Roses. This is before the Battle of Bosworth Field. Several ghosts (of people who were killed by Richard) appear to Richard III in his dreams, all of them are prophesying his fall. Henry VI had been put in a tower and was later ordered to be killed by Richard. The ghost of Henry VI’s son Edward also appears in Richard’s dreams. Edward had also been killed by him. The tower, an allusion to Henry VI, could also very well be an allusion to Richard’s nephews Edward and Richard, sons of the former King Edward IV, the brother of Richard III. After King Edward’s death, Richard III had confined both the boys in a tower in order to secure his position as the new King of England. He later also ordered the boys to be killed. Their ghosts will later also appear in his dreams. – Although those ghosts can be regarded as creations of his conscience feeling guilt, Richard will later wake up and call his conscience a coward. This shows that there is no conscious regret at all which underlines the badness of Richard’s character. But eventually, the prophesies come true, Henry VII (Tudor) will follow him on the throne, the War of the Roses will come to an end.

- 5) Why should I play the Roman fool, and die  
On mine own sword? Whiles I see lives, the gashes  
Do better upon them.**

This is Macbeth talking to himself, shortly before he will fight with Macduff and be killed. It takes place at the end of the play. Macbeth is brave until the very end, not willing to give up or to accept that his tyrannic deeds could make him fall, still thinking that he cannot be beaten. With his utterance about the Roman fool, he refers to a legitimate Roman practice of leaders committing suicide when realizing that there is actually nothing else left than their fall. Shortly after his utterance, Macduff informs Macbeth that he was not regularly born by a woman but “born” by Caesarian section. The witches had prophesized Macbeth that he cannot succumb to anyone having been born by a woman. This “unreasonableness” support Macbeth’s path of no return, since he still willfully goes on but will fall eventually anyway.

6) **X: What would my potent master? Here I am.**

**Y: Thou and thy meaner fellows your last service  
Did worthily perform; and I must use you  
In such another trick. Go bring the rabble,  
O'er whom I give thee power, here to this place:  
Incite them to quick motion; for I must  
Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple  
Some vanity of mine art: it is my promise,  
And they expect it from me.**

Prospero (Y) had called for the airy spirit Ariel (X), the good and loyal counterpart to the evil Caliban, both being Prospero's servants in *The Tempest*. Prospero is now giving his blessings to the relationship between his daughter Miranda and Ferdinand, son of Alonso, King of Naples. Alonso had helped Prospero's brother Antonio to depose him as the actual Duke of Milan. Prospero is now planning a masque for Miranda and Ferdinand which will be performed by the spirits Iris, Juno, and Ceres. With Ariel's "last service", Prospero refers to Ariel having made the king's ship stranding on the Island Prospero, Miranda, Ariel, and Caliban live on, as well as having put the king's crew to "sleep".