

**Master's Examination  
September 10, 2011**

**PART I (ONE HOUR): Write an explication of the following poem.**

**Canopy**

It was the month of May.  
Trees in Harvard Yard  
Were turning a young green.  
There was whispering everywhere.

David Ward<sup>1</sup> had installed  
Voice boxes in the branches,  
Speakers wrapped in sacking  
Looked like old wasp's nests

Or bat fruit in the gloaming –  
Shadow Adam's apples  
That made sibilant ebb and flow,  
Speech-gutterings, desultory

Hush and backwash and echo.  
It was like a recording  
Of antiphonal responses  
In the congregation of leaves.

Or a wood that talked in its sleep.  
Reeds on a riverbank  
Going over and over their secret.  
People were cocking their ears

Gathering, quietenting,  
Stepping on to the grass,  
Stopping and holding hands.  
Earth was replaying its tapes,

Words being given new airs:  
Dante's whispering wood –  
The wood of the suicides –  
Had been magicked to lover's lane.

If a twig had broken off there  
It would have curled itself like a finger  
Around the fingers that broke it  
And then refused to let go

As if it were mistletoe  
Taking tightening hold.  
Or so I thought as the fairy  
Lights in the boughs came on.

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<sup>1</sup> David Ward is an artist who produced a public art installation in Harvard Yard entitled *Canopy: A Work for Voice and Light in Harvard Yard*.

**PART II (THREE HOURS): Answer one of the two questions in each of the three sections. You may answer the questions in any order that you wish.**

**Section A: Answer one of these two questions.**

1. In her essay, “‘The Sign and Semblance of Her Honour’: Reading Gender Difference in *Much Ado About Nothing*” Carol Cook explores the relationship between gender differences and discourse, arguing that “what is at stake in these differences is a masculine prerogative in language, which the play itself sustains,” and she concludes that the play “masks, as well as exposes, the mechanisms of masculine power.” The implication is that men embody masculine language and masculine power, and they deploy both against each other and against the women in the play. At the same time, though, in what ways do the women either appropriate masculine discourse and power, or prop it up, and how does that deployment affect the play’s resolution?

2. In her book *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and reading in Early Modern England*, Annabel Patterson says a “hermeneutics of censorship developed in England in the middle of the sixteenth century...[which was] in effect a rediscovery of a classical system of rhetorical ingenuity, the ‘ancient freedoms.’” To what extent is Sir Philip Sidney’s “The Defense of Poesy” just such a rediscovery of the ‘ancient freedoms,’ particularly the freedom inherent in the rights of the writer, the reader, and the text—and their individual and collective pursuit of truth?

**Section B: Answer one of these two questions.**

1. In *Bleak House*, Charles Dickens takes the peculiar step of disfiguring his heroine. In removing Esther’s resemblance to her noble mother, he also metaphorically uproots her from her aristocratic heritage. That Esther catches smallpox from the street urchin Jo makes this episode even more strongly linked to class politics. How does Esther’s disfigurement resonate with the class politics of Dickens’ novel?

2. Susan Stanford Friedman draws on the concept of “planetarity” in her “re-vision” of canonical “high modernism.” Friedman argues that the depiction of planetary space often creates an “interactional set of relations throughout the globe that may also manifest differently in particular places and times.” Consider how Wallace Stevens’s “The Idea of Order in Key West” links individual consciousness in local space to a transoceanic imagining of vast “[t]heatrical distance.” Focusing on this poem and at least two others by Stevens, discuss how his modernism exemplifies the blend of local grasp and planetary reach that Friedman defines.

**Section C: Answer one of these two questions.**

1. Duane H. Smith argues that Samuel Johnson, in *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinnia*, “constantly both arouses and thwarts expectations.” For Smith, this structure, while failing to solve the problem of “choice of life,” does at least divert one’s attention from the boredom, grief and misery of life. To what extent is this repeated rhetorical structure a solution to the book’s question about the nature of human happiness? Does the book affirm the possibility of happiness in this diversion, or does it place happiness in an infinite suspension?

2. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* features an exchange in which Paul D criticizes Sethe because her "love is too thick." "Thin love ain't no love at all," counters Sethe. In *The Ethics of Memory*, Avashai Margalit argues that strong ties between people, or "thick relations," can create "communities of memory" that foster ethical responses to trauma and thus serve as coping mechanisms. To what extent does Sethe's expression of "thick love" square with Margalit's communal notion of "thick relations"? Does Morrison's novel hold out hope for an ethics of shared memory as a way to cope with the traumatic effects of slavery?