English 2080
Spring 2016 final

It's a take-home. Write two short essays of 1000 words each (Part I, Part II). You may consult course texts. Please e-mail the result as a .docx or .pdf file to sad4@cornell.edu by 5:00 on Thursday, May 19. The subject line should read: "[your name]–2080–spring 2016–final." You will receive confirmation. Your final grade in the course will be posted on Student Center by Tuesday, May 24.

Part I

The Tempest

Write a 1000-word essay in which you show how one of the works mentioned below questions a feature of Shakespeare's The Tempest and answers that question with a judgment on the original. They may do this in different ways – by reinforcing or altering a theme or relationship, by challenging a portrayal or position in the lay, by "quoting" a Shakespearean feature and parodying, subverting, or celebrating it. Taymor's change in Prospero's gender, for example, reflects a judgment on the original text and should elicit one from you; so does her casting of Caliban and Hounsou's playing of the role. Césaire's reconception of Caliban and Ariel, like his revision of the outcome of the play, works in the same way, creating and eliciting perspective. And Wilcox's reconception of The Tempest as a twenty-first century space opera touches and transforms it at key points, not uncontroversially.

These aren't the only "features" of The Tempest in play: you may choose one yourself. Don't hesitate to make your opinion clear, to use detail, or to consider relevant remarks linked at the website (Bate and Taymor's, for example, or Octave Mannoni's).
Part II

“He was not of an age, but for all time,” wrote Ben Jonson of Shakespeare. This was the first of numberless remarks that have lauded Shakespeare’s timelessness and universality. All such remarks fly in the face of the facts we have studied this semester: he was very much “of an age,” and if other ages and places than his own have chosen to appropriate his legend or his texts, they have done so for their own specific and intelligible, age-bound, time-bound purposes. The appropriators, of course, may ALSO often have celebrated the timelessness and universality of the Shakespearean legacy and Shakespearean texts, but sayin’ it don’t make it (necessarily, universally, timelessly) true. Claims about Shakespeare's universality are themselves appropriations of Shakespeare for particular, time- and age-bound purposes.

Write a short essay in which you discuss one key appropriation of Shakespeare, the Shakespeare legend, or a play of Shakespeare's other than The Tempest — disagreeing with Jonson's remark. Show why and how Shakespearean material has served the contingent, timebound purposes of the appropriators. Don’t join in the chorus of celebration or try to resolve the “of an age”/“for all time” paradox; use it as a springboard for discussion of one or two appropriations.

Here are some eligible appropriations: the film Shakespeare in Love; Bristol's "Shakespeare, the Myth"; a filmed Hamlet on which you have not written (Kozintsev's or Almereyda's); the Branagh or the Whedon Much Ado (if you have not written #4 on it); Levine's "Shakespeare and the American People; Trevor Nunn's Merchant of Venice (if you have not written on it); The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged) as performed at the Schwartz; West Side Story as performed by the Melodramatics; even the Kiss Me Kate showstopper "Brush Up Your Shakespeare," conveniently on-line at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-CSb3Xe06s.

Avoid repeating what you've said in earlier writing. Consider this an opportunity to reflect on the uses of Shakespeare from a standpoint rather different from that of your previous coursework.