English 2080 S 14
final exam

It's a take-home. Write two short essays of 1000 words each, the first on one of the Part I questions and the second on Part II. You may consult course texts. Please e-mail the result to sad4@cornell.edu by noon on Wednesday, May 14. You will receive confirmation from him. Your final grade in the course will be posted on Student Center by May 19th.

Part I
Tempest

A or B.

A. The Tempest can be read and presented as a piece of mythmaking, an elaborate idealization of Western humanity's ability to transcend its shortcomings, resolve its conflicts, perfect itself, and rule some part of the rest of the world.

Write an essay in which you discuss Aimé Césaire's A Tempest or Fred Wilcox's Forbidden Planet as a response to that myth. Consider the ways in which Césaire or Wilcox uses elements furnished by The Tempest to rehearse, qualify, celebrate, parody, or deconstruct the story told in The Tempest and the values it embodies. Consider the ways in which one work or the other treats such themes as human virtue and pride, otherness, relations of power and subordination, gender and sexuality, and exploration and discovery in terms of The Tempest's narrative -- or a narrative resembling it. Don't hesitate to draw on Octave Mannoni’s remarks on "The Prospero Complex" at the 2080 website at http://courses.cit.cornell.edu/engl2080/208.scholia12.html if you find them relevant, but don't limit yourself to these.

B. Pick a crux in Julie Taymor's The Tempest (where "crux" = puzzle, central feature, crucial or problematic encounter) and discuss how the film deals with it. Three that occur to me are these:

• The change in gender, Prospero to Prospera. (Just how radically does it affect the character and her relationships and works?)

• The casting and acting of Caliban. (How is his historic identity as a "savage and deformed native of the island" affected, changed, or enhanced by the way he is cast and played?)

• The (seeming) "turn" in Prospera's purposes at 5.1.20 et circa. (Does this production treat it as a real and profound change, under Ariel’s influence, from another plan Prospera has in mind? Or is it a gracious enactment of what was planned all along? And why should this matter?)

Or write on another crux that engages you.

* “Such themes as” does not mean “all the following themes.”
Part II

“He was not of an age, but for all time,” wrote Ben Jonson of Shakespeare. This was only the first of the many celebratory remarks that have been made down the ages about Shakespeare's timelessness, ubiquity, 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 (in Anglo-American history or the history of other cultures) 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 or two appropriations of Shakespeare and the Shakespeare legend (or a play of Shakespeare other than The Tempest) on which you have NOT YET written this term — disagreeing with Jonson's remark. Show why and how Shakespearian 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.

An “appropriation” can be any of the 20th/21st-century texts we have studied or visited: a filmed production or published adaptation of Shakespeare or any cluster of comments, imitations, or allusions we have read on-line. (Twain’s chapters in Huck Finn and Lawrence Levine’s reports on 19th-century American Shakespeare count as 20th-century, for our purposes, as do works and comments produced in the 21st century. It was a longish century.) Avoid repeating what you have already written on papers or on the ICWE: this is an opportunity to reflect on the reasons for some of the 20th century’s appropriations of Shakespeare from a standpoint rather different from that of your previous writing.