

A Level English Literature 2015: Teaching the New A Levels

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Key concepts and strategies for unseen, set texts and wider reading

Developing Literary Awareness
Developing Knowledge about Literature
Teaching Narrative and Genre
Teaching Form and Structure
Teaching Language and Style
Teaching Context and Interpretation

Sessions

- 1: Intro to the Changes
- 2: The Secret Life of Poetry
- 3: Getting to Grips with Prose
- 4: Language, Style, Context, Interpretation

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Ofqual: Aims and Objectives

2. AS and A level specifications in English literature must encourage students to develop their interest in and enjoyment of literature and literary studies as they:

- read widely and independently both set texts and others that they have selected for themselves
- engage critically and creatively with a substantial body of texts and ways of responding to them
- develop and effectively apply their knowledge of literary analysis and evaluation
- explore the contexts of the texts they are reading and others' interpretations of them

3. In addition, A level specifications must encourage students to develop their interest in and enjoyment of literature and literary studies as they undertake independent and sustained studies to deepen their appreciation and understanding of English literature, including its changing traditions.

Ofqual: Subject Content

Knowledge and understanding

5. AS and A level specifications must require students to use their detailed knowledge and understanding of individual works of literature to explore relationships between texts and to appreciate the significance of cultural and contextual influences on readers and writers.

6. AS and A level specifications must require students to show knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts. Texts for study must be chosen so that they illuminate one another and enable connections.

7. A level specifications must include at least two examples of each of the genres of prose, poetry and drama across the course as a whole.

8. AS specifications must include at least one example of each of the genres of prose, poetry and drama across the course as a whole.

9. Specifications must contain clear principles for the review and updating of texts.

10. A level specifications must cover a minimum of eight texts. Students must experience a wide range of reading in poetry, prose and drama that must include all of the following:

- at least 3 texts published before 1900, including at least one play by Shakespeare
- at least one work first published or performed after 2000

11. AS specifications must cover a minimum of four texts that must include at least one text published before 1900.

12. A level specifications must also include a text which has not previously been named for study (an "unseen text").

13. Students' study may include texts in translation that have been influential and significant in the development of literature in English.

14. Specifications must ensure that students experience a wide range of literature of sufficient substance and quality to merit serious attention.

15. AS and A level specifications must require students to show knowledge and understanding of:

- ways in which writers shape meanings in texts
- ways in which individual texts are interpreted by different readers
- ways in which texts relate to one another and to the contexts in which they are written and read

16. A level specifications must also require students to show knowledge and understanding of:

- ways in which texts are interpreted by different readers, including over time
- ways in which texts relate to one another and to literary traditions, movements and genres
- the significance of cultural and contextual influences on readers and writers

Skills

17. AS and A level specifications must require students to:

- read texts in a variety of ways and respond critically and creatively
- vary strategies for reading, including for detail, overview and gist depending on the texts being studied and purposes for reading them
- explore connections across texts
- identify and consider how attitudes and values are expressed in texts
- draw on their understanding of different interpretations in responding to and evaluating texts
- communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and judgement of texts
- use literary critical concepts and terminology with understanding and discrimination
- make appropriate use of the conventions of writing in literary studies, including accurate referencing and use of quotations

18. A level specifications must require students to develop judgement and independence as they synthesise and reflect upon their knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts and ways of reading them.

Developing Literary Awareness

Teaching Beyond the Set Texts

Where learning is organised around the atomistic study of the set text, it can become fragmented and narrow, overly focused on the aesthetic experience of the single text. Independent learning – application of what has been learnt - can be sacrificed to teacher guidance. Organising learning around a curriculum of **knowledge about literature**, with set texts as *exemplars* of wider literary issues, can be more effective.

Teach the **literary knowledge and concepts** needed to place the set text securely in a variety of contexts BEFORE, DURING and AFTER teaching the text itself by introducing students to a variety of related texts, techniques and ideas.

A focus on broader **critical, cultural and creative** approaches can build students' confidence and independence and help develop their **understanding of the discipline** ...so that they can deal more effectively with set texts and tasks

Connecting Language, Context and Interpretation

Level 1:

The immediate context & interpretation of the individual text – e.g.

- *the life and writings of the author*
- *the historical and social context of people and events in the text*

Level 2:

The context & interpretation of the genre of which the text is a part – e.g.

- *knowledge about literary forms and genres – historical, aesthetic, linguistic, etc.*

Level 3:

The context and interpretation of literature as a form – e.g.

- *what is literary language? how does it work?*
- *what is the value of literature? who consumes it? why?*
- *how does it function in the world outside the classroom?*
- *the roles of writers, readers, publishers, etc.*

Additionally:

the function of the study of literature and the way it affects issues of context and interpretation in literature – e.g.

- *the role of the teacher in aiding interpretation*
- *the context of the classroom as a location for literature*

I. Plan opportunities to introduce students to a wide range of texts and ideas in literature, e.g.

- Introduce students to a range of texts and examples of language use from a range of contexts, forms and genres, and discuss what is learnt from these. *When teaching poetry, discuss what poetry is and how it originated, show students poetic language and forms from a variety of periods, get them to think about who reads poetry and why. Teach the elements of poetic and narrative form.*
- Look at the way literature is represented in the media. Discuss questions to do with the literary canon and literary value with them. Give them short critical essays or extracts from longer ones to read and discuss. Plan short 'literary topics' between set texts *Why is Shakespeare so important? Was he really a genius? Is the Da Vinci Code bad literature? Should all school students have to study Shakespeare?*
- Create connections between ideas about literature and ideas about language, culture, politics, art, etc. *What is literary language? How is it different from normal language? What is literature and how is it different from the non-literary? What are the connections between literature, art and music? Between high culture and popular culture?*
- Help students to understand the parameters and frameworks of literary study. *Build in independent exploration of the literature section of the library. What kinds of things count as literary study? How do references and bibliographies work? How do editions of literary works work? How can you tell whether material on the internet is authoritative?*
- Don't forget multi-cultural, international perspectives. *All A Level subjects should prepare students for a globalised, multi-cultural, post-colonial world. Use some literature from the post-colonial world, literature in translation, literature in dialect.*

2. Develop a sense of the student as critic, and the many different ways in which texts are created, understood, valued and interpreted, e.g.

- Be realistic about **students' own cultural values and interests**. Allow themselves to distance themselves from the canon as presented in class and to understand the value of approaching those texts as a critic rather than necessarily as a 'lover of literature'. Ask *'why is this text in the classroom?' What can we learn from this text? How does this kind of text relate to students' own cultural interests?*
- Help students to understand that **texts have a life outside the classroom**, outside education. In order to understand a text, students **MUST** understand this. *Who / what kind of people read the text now / read the text when it was originally published? Why was it / has it continued to be considered important? What kinds of things have critics said about it? Under what conditions was it first read/performed? (NB particularly drama's life in the theatre.)*

- Help students to understand the **motivations and craft** of the writer (and actor / director / publisher etc) , and how writers work within a tradition and cultural milieu. Let them hear, see and read writers' voices: *Why do poets write poetry? What is the difference between poetry and pop music? What drives a playwright or novelist? Why do they write the kind of thing they write? Is the voice of the poem the same as the voice of the poet?*
- Help students to understand the **processes of interpretation**. *What is the role of the teacher in interpreting a text in the classroom? Does the teacher have all the answers? What kind of answers does the teacher have? What is the role of York notes? What kind of answers are acceptable?*
- Help students to focus on the **textuality** of texts by encouraging greater attention to language, style, structure, form, genre, narrative and the way these things *represent and manipulate* our sense of reality.

3. **Encourage independent learning habits, student choice, and the development of the student voice, e.g.**

- Sometimes set tasks that ask students to apply what they have learnt in a context where they have to work independently, or in groups: e.g. model essay-writing by using one whole-class example, but allow students to choose their own essay topics, and ensure that all students write on something different so that they have to apply what they've learnt independently.
- Sometimes allow students their own choice of texts, or to find texts to bring into class for a particular exercise. Encourage independent choice or exploration of critical texts or literary topics. Devote time to exploring ways forward with individual students in workshop sessions.
- Students can explore their own personal voices and gain understanding of the creativity of the writer through creative writing and performance tasks, and through preparing topics to present to the class. Writing commentaries on what they have done encourages them to reflect on their own learning processes and frameworks.
- It is often a good strategy to allow students to read whole texts independently before beginning to work through them in class. This enables students to experience the whole text as a work of art, and to engage in open discussion about the entirety of a text before the teacher begins to mould and shape their experience of it.
- Frequently withhold information from students until they have discussed their own responses and posed their own questions. It is vital that they should not see the teacher as the sole repository of meaning.

Knowledge About Literature: A Map

MODE AND GENRE

- **Mode** can refer to a variety of things but is useful for discussing the two basic modes: 'narrative' and 'argument'.
- **Narrative** is **not** just an element of prose writing – also verse; narrative structures are found in prose fiction, poetry *and* drama. Key concepts:
 - *Narrative structure, narrative time, narrative voice, narrative perspective*
- **Genre** is a very slippery term, but needs exploring. Can refer to:
 - *Fiction, non-fiction*
 - *Poetry, the Novel, the Short Story, Drama*
 - *Cross-genre genres, eg Gothic, Pastoral, Tragedy, Comedy*
 - *Sub-genres within a genre: e.g Tragedy / Comedy in Drama, Sci-fi etc in Fiction*

FORM AND STRUCTURE

- **'Form'** refers to the type of text, and the conventions and structures that typically make up that type of text (e.g. *prose; verse / poem; novel; play / sonnet; haiku; limerick / chapter; act; stanza / metre; rhyme; etc.*)
- **'Structure'** refers to the way in which a particular text uses the elements of form to shape the narrative or argument of the text, or the way in which the narrative or argument fits within the form of the text.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

- **Imagery** – figurative (metaphor and simile) and literal (description). **NB** Metaphor and simile are NOT only features of poetry
- **Diction / word choice / lexis**; Syntax - sentence lengths and structures
- **Rhetorical / literary devices** - metaphor, alliteration/assonance, etc.
- **Tone, voice, mood, style** – all quite slippery and interconnected terms
- NB The definition of **'literary' language** is highly problematic (as is the definition of literature). Similarly, the definition of **'poetic' language** is **not** straightforward. 'Poetic' language is often used in prose, etc.
- **Language change** over time; **language variety** across place, class, culture

CONTEXT, INTERPRETATION, THEORY

Context does not only mean the specific historical background of a specific text.

It also means:

- Placing a text in terms of broad literary concepts such as narrative, genre, form, and the broad history of language and literature (e.g. the origins of poetry, the origins of drama, the rise of the novel, modernism.)
- Understanding the craft and motivations of writers.
- Understanding the roles of reader, audience, student, teacher in consuming and interpreting texts
- Understanding some of the values implicit in literature and literary texts, and in literary study.
- Understanding some of the relationships between literature, politics, culture, language and society

Understanding Poetry, Drama and The Novel

When did they start? Why did they start? What were they for? How did they develop?

A Brief History of Literature: Modes of Representation

- Origins of poetry and drama in social and religious ritual, celebration, entertainment – the oral tradition, pre-printing. Originally highly **stylised**, dominated by rhythm, music, dance, narrative; often very formulaic.

STYLISATION = very different from real language or patterns of behaviour, ‘artificial’ – e.g. speaking in rhyme and rhythm, moving in dance, using repeated patterns or formulae.

Stylisation was partly a response to big open spaces (ancient theatres), and also helped poets and musicians to learn words etc.

- Poetry was the most important means of presenting story and drama until the eighteenth century. Narrative drama and poetry were mostly written in iambic Pentameter.
- The rise of the novel (and story) in the eighteenth century coincided with the growth in mass literacy, industrial printing, and the rise of private reading. The novel became the dominant form of literature.
- Drama also lost its poetic nature. After the eighteenth century, plays are usually written in prose. Theatre moves indoors and becomes more intimate. Stage technology becomes more sophisticated.
- Literature becomes characterised by increasing levels of **realism**.

REALISM = imitating real language and behaviour, attempting to be ‘natural’ or realistic.

Realism was made possible by print technology which allowed more detail in storytelling, and less need for rhyme and metre in poetry and drama; also more intimate performance spaces and technology such as lighting, etc. which could give the impression of reality.

- Increasingly writers and artists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries experiment with breaking through the constraints of realism, and return to more stylised ways of representing things, or more shocking approaches to realism, in *expressionism* and *modernism*.

Modes of representation:

STYLISATION

*Poetic language, music, dance
Formulae, patterns
Masks, stereotypes
Metaphor, symbolism
Traditional fables, myths*

REALISM

*Realistic language
Psychologically specific characterisation
Realistic costume
Individualism
Original stories about invented realistic characters*

I. The Secret Life of Poetry: Response of the Reader

Questions of Meaning, Definition and Value

Introduction to Poetry

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

Billy Collins

Lineage

In the beginning was Scream
Who begat Blood
Who begat Eye
Who begat Fear
Who begat Wing
Who begat Bone
Who begat Granite
Who begat Violet
Who begat Guitar
Who begat Sweat
Who begat Adam
Who begat Mary
Who begat God
Who begat Nothing
Who begat Never
Never Never Never

Who begat Crow

Screaming for Blood
Grubs, crusts

Anything

Trembling featherless elbows in the
nest's filth

Ted Hughes

Discuss the paintings and poem above (Lineage), and then discuss the statements below:

- *The sensual impact of poetry is as important as its meaning.*
- *Poetry is not intended to be studied in the classroom.*
- *There are good reasons for studying poetry in the classroom.*
- *Ambiguity in art is pleasurable.*
- *We can never know the meaning of a work of art.*
- *Just because we can never know the meaning of a work of art does not mean that any meaning will do.*
- *The job of the English teacher is to tell us the meaning of the poem.*

The objectives of this sequence are various:

- (a) *To open up a relatively free space for discussion of aesthetic tastes and responses.*
- (b) *To raise issues about the nature of ambiguity..*
- (c) *To highlight the significance of titles.*
- (d) *To raise issues about the role of the reader in interpretation.*
- (e) *To raise issues about the authority of the English teacher.*
- (f) *To raise issues about the motivation and craft of the writer.*

Some key points:

- If the point of a poem is simply to convey a meaning or message, why does the poet not simply say what the meaning is directly? Clearly the point of a poem is *not* just to convey a meaning or message. It is also to make and give aesthetic pleasure, both intellectual and sensual. It is about PLAYING with language and ideas.
- Poetry is not intended to be analysed in the classroom or written about in examinations (although that might be a valuable activity for many reasons). Poetry is art, and its life is in the real world, outside the classroom, where there is no-one to tell you what it means or force you to analyse it.
- Interpretations float free in the world. A poem may have more meanings than intended by the author. Not all interpretations are accurate or correct, but in the real world people have personal responses to poems and there is no-one to say whether they are right or wrong.
- The job of the English teacher is to guide the student through the maze of interpretation as an experienced reader, suggesting what might or might not be valid interpretations and providing access to contextual knowledge (linguistic and cultural-social) which might help.

Sequence of Lessons: Defining Poetry and Poetic Language

Starter

Ask students to work in pairs to come up with a definition of poetry; it is in fact almost impossible to do so. Most offered descriptions – about self-expression, description etc – will be applicable to prose too; and many – about rhyme and metre, for instance – will not be applicable to all poetry. In fact, the only really workable definition of poetry is ‘writing in verse’, although of course even that might be disputed. The following exercises are designed to examine these issues further. Each exercise could be given to a different group in the class, or all the exercises to all groups.

1. Poetry v. Prose

Ask students to discuss the differences between poetry and prose. Then, introduce the idea of poetic language, and ask them to define or give examples of it. Show them examples of ‘found’ poems (see Abbs 1990 for instance) and/or William Carlos Williams’ poem ‘This is Just to Say’ – all of which play with the distinction between prose and poetry – to focus them on the nature of poetic and non-poetic language, and the differences between prose and poetry. Finally, prepare examples of poetry transformed into prose – i.e. laid out on the page as prose – and ask students to compare the original poem with the prose version. What difference does the different layout make? Is it possible to define the language as prosaic or poetic? Prose poetry (e.g. Heaney’s collection *Stations*) is useful here too.

2. Poetry v. Rhetoric

Show students the following text and a copy of Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech and ask them to discuss whether or not they are poetry:

*Born to reveal
the woman you’ve become.
Not just a perfume
A rite of passage.
Valentino.*

3. Poetry v. Song

Show students the lyrics of a number of pop-songs. Paul McCartney’s lyrics have been published as part of their poetry imprint by Faber, so one of his songs would be a good choice. As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, Amy Winehouse, Bob Dylan and Eminem are also good choices. Ask students to discuss whether these are poetry, and why they think the definition might be disputed. Are there any examples of lyrics that students think are definitely NOT poetry?

You may want to show students the notorious Cambridge Tripos question which asked students to compare ‘As you came from the holy land’, a lyric poem by Sir Walter Raleigh, with lyrics by Amy Winehouse (‘Love is a Losing Game’), Billie Holiday (‘Fine and Mellow’) and Bob Dylan (‘Boots of Spanish Leather’). A Google search on ‘Winehouse’ and ‘Raleigh’ brings up some interesting commentary on the issue, which could be shared with students too.

5. Poetry v. Verse

(i) Show students a section of verse dialogue and a soliloquy from a Shakespeare play. Are these poetry? Are they poems? And/or are they verse?

(ii) Show students a selection of verses from greetings cards. Are they poetry? And/or verse?

Finally: Why Poetry?

Ask students to discuss the question 'Why poetry?' - What is it for? Why is it valued? What useful functions might it fulfil? Show them the following texts, and ask them to discuss the difference in function and effect between the two sets of words:

(i) The words '*War is bad*' and the complete text of Wilfred Owen's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'

(ii) The words '*The six hundred soldiers rode on bravely with gunshot all around them despite the danger that faced them*' and the complete text of Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'

(iii) The words 'Happy Birthday' and the verse:

*I'm wishing you this birthday
All the joy in the world
Surprises, fun and laughter
As another year's unfurled*

*I wish you all the very best,
As I have in other years.
Sharing with your happiness
Love and joyous tears.*

The objectives:

- (a) To challenge conventional and simplistic ideas about the nature of poetry.
- (b) To highlight the fact that 'poetic' language may be found in many types of writing, not just in 'poetry'.
- (c) To highlight the fact that the layout of words on the page affects the way they are read.
- (d) To clarify the formal distinctions and aesthetic values that underlie distinctions between poetry, verse and prose.
- (e) To highlight the links between poetry, music and art, and increase awareness of the role of pleasure in poetry.

Connecting with Poetry: Wide Reading and Thinking Activities

Anthologies: the informal selection of poems by students – perhaps for reading and/or performance to the class, perhaps for publication in a personal or class anthology – can do a great deal to build students' image of themselves as independent readers of poetry. Poetry book boxes can be tremendously useful here, and the process of preparing readings of favourite poems can be valuable too. It would be wise to ensure that students have clear guidelines and are encouraged to be adventurous in their choices.

Other potentially valuable activities include:

- Shadowing poetry competitions (for instance by taking part in the T.S. Eliot Prize Shadowing Scheme, run by the English and Media Centre for 16-19 students in conjunction with the Poetry Book Society.)
- Getting students to interview parents, grandparents, friends, etc., about their own feelings about and experiences of poetry, and/or their favourite poems.
- Gathering reviews of recent poetry books from the review pages of newspapers and asking students to discuss what the reviewers seem to enjoy or find valuable in poetry.

Performance approaches

- Bring audio recordings into the classroom, whether on CD or on the internet. A particularly rich resource is *The Poetry Archive* (www.poetryarchive.org) which contains a wealth of readings by poets of their own work – even including historical recordings such as Tennyson reading 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. *YouTube* and other more dedicated sites (such as the English and Media Centre's *Poetry Station* at www.englishandmedia.co.uk) can also bring film recordings into the classroom. One word of caution: not all poets reading their own work are inspiring – though many are. Whether inspiring or not, hearing them read can nevertheless sometimes (though not always!) illuminate their work in interesting ways.
- Engage students in performance themselves. Group readings/performances of poems can motivate students, but they can also be a way for students to demonstrate their understanding of and response to poems: ask students to ensure that their performances reflect the tone, structure and/or sound patterns of the poem – for instance through the way they divide the lines between speakers, position themselves on stage, or adapt the poem to create particular emphases. These performances can also provide a good focus for class discussion.
- Get students to reflect on how visual and textual renderings of poems could illuminate their meanings. One approach here is to get students to plan and perhaps 'storyboard' a film or stage version of a poem, suggesting both the images and sounds that will make up the scenes. There are good examples of such filmic renderings available online, found, for instance, through 'YouTube'. Students' choices about how to represent the characters, settings, voices, themes, sounds, structures and language of the poem are likely to prompt lively discussion, and at advanced level have considerable scope for revealing symbolic meaning.

2. The Secret Life of Poetry: The Craft of the Writer Questions of Form, Tone and Voice

Understanding Poetry

Art or analysis?

Poetry in school is often presented as an object for analysis. Whilst analysis of poetry is in itself a valuable intellectual activity, it must be remembered that the *primary* purpose of poetry is as *art* rather than as material for classroom study. In order to understand poetry, it is vital to think about it as a dynamic *art form* rather than as an examination hurdle.

As in visual art and music, poetry can – and usually does – have an **aesthetic, emotional** or **sensual** impact, using strong *colours, images, patterns, sounds, messages* and so on, to create *mood* and *atmosphere* and to evoke a *response* in the reader. Poetry, however, uses words – rather than visual images or music – to create these effects. Because of its reliance on words, poetry can – and usually does – also have a more concrete **intellectual** impact than art and music, often in the form of *narrative, argument, or reflection*. The *meanings* of poems are also often more *concrete* and definable than the meanings of visual art and music.

When we analyse poetry, it is easy to fall into the trap of concentrating solely on the *intellectual* side – the detailed analysis of the meaning of a poem. But we must not forget the *aesthetic* impact, the immediate impact of the poem as a work of art. We should not forget that the primary purpose of poetry is *aesthetic*, not *educational*.

Two traditions

It's also important to remember that the kind of poetry which is usually presented for study in school is only one kind of poetry – the literary kind, which tends to have a strong intellectual emphasis. This type of poetry is, however, strongly related to another tradition of poetry – the more rhythmic and popular tradition of song lyrics, performance poetry and rhyme. These two traditions share the use of rhythm, rhyme, patterns, images, verbal textures, strong messages, and so on. However, literary poetry is intended more for reflective reading than performance.

Poetry v. prose

Another way of understanding poetry as a form is to consider how it is different from *prose*. In fact, it is very difficult to establish a definition of poetry. Almost all the types of content and language use that are commonly associated with poetry – 'poetic' language such as metaphor and description, wordplay, personal expression, philosophical reflection, rhythms and patterns, and so on, can be found in prose, fiction and non-fiction – with the exception of *rhyme* and *metre*. However, we cannot define poetry as containing rhyme and metre, as not all poetry does.

What almost all poetry does have in common is the way it is laid out – in verse (lines and stanzas) rather than paragraphs – and this may be the nearest we can come to a definition of poetry. However, we should also remember that the same words set out in poetic form and prose form usually seem very different – we read them differently, and focus on different things. Poetry seems to demand that we focus more on individual words and phrases, on structures and patterns, on wordplay, and on symbolic meanings.

Understanding Poetic Form

The form of a poem is the way it is structured in terms of stanza length, shape, layout, rhyme and metre. Much modern poetry tends to play down or ignore elements such as rhyme and metre, and so often gives the appearance of being spontaneous and free. This is partly why poetry has gained a reputation for being about personal, emotional, spontaneous self-expression. But it is vital to understand that poets in fact usually write very carefully and deliberately, crafting their work, and often writing many drafts before they reach a final version, whether or not they use rhyme and metre. The form of a poem is usually carefully chosen and structured.

Different types of poetic form

The form of any poem can be described by identifying or describing the number and length of stanzas, the line lengths, and the use of rhyme and metre (although of course not all poems use rhyme or metre.)

- A poem may have a *regular* form, in which each stanza has the same number of lines, the same rhyme and metre, etc.
- There are some traditional ‘set’ forms such as limericks, sonnets, haikus, and so on, which have a specific number of lines with specific rhythms, rhyme schemes or lengths.
- Poems may have a wholly or partially *irregular* form, in which there is little or no regularity in rhyme, metre or layout.

Regularity v irregularity

Until the twentieth century, almost all poetry was written in regular forms. Many modern poets, however, have enjoyed the freedom of *irregularity*, although many others have continued to use regular forms either in a traditional way or in a new or experimental way.

In *regular* forms, the rhyme and metre can dominate, especially where lines and stanzas are short. The longer the lines and stanzas, the less dominant the rhyme and meter are likely to be. Poetry which is regular in line length, metre and/or stanza length, but which has *no rhyme*, is called **blank verse**. Poets may use blank verse if they want to have a regular structure but don’t want rhyme to dominate the poem, often in longer, more serious or reflective poetry.

Modern poets often use irregular forms to make rhyme, metre, line length or stanza length even less dominant or noticeable, and to give the impression of freedom or spontaneity. Completely irregular poetry – with no regularity of stanza length, line length, etc – is called **free verse**. However poets will sometimes continue to use rhyme, metre, and so on, but will attempt to draw attention away from the regularity of form by hiding, disguising or subverting the metre or rhyme scheme.

Lines of poetry: end-stopping, caesura and enjambement

Sometimes, the grammatical sentences in a poem fit exactly onto the lines and stanzas. Where the end of a sentence coincides with the end of a line, this is known as **end-stopping**. Sometimes, however, the sentences run onto a new line, or even a new stanza. This is known as **enjambement**. By contrast, a sentence may finish in the *middle* of a line, creating a pause – or a pause may be necessitated in some other way. This is known as a **caesura**. Both enjambement and caesura can create a tension between the artificial constraint of the form and the natural length of the sentences, drawing attention away from the regularity of the form.

Rhyme and other sound effects

There are different kinds of rhyme. 'Full' rhymes are the traditional kind – for instance where 'boat' rhymes with 'goat'. However, many modern poets use 'half rhymes' of various kinds, often again to draw attention away from the regularity of the poem's form:

Full rhyme	boat	rhymes with	goat
Half rhyme	boat	rhymes with	got
Vowel rhyme	boat	rhymes with	toad (<i>assonance</i>)
Consonant rhyme	boat	rhymes with	boot (<i>consonance</i>)
Visual rhyme	come	rhymes with	home

Sometimes there are rhymes or sound effects within a line rather than at the end of a line:

Assonance	'ground down'
Consonance	'creak and croak'
Alliteration	'gravelly ground'
Onomatopoeia	words sound like the thing they describe
Euphony	pleasing sounds – usually long vowels, soft consonants e.g. 'soothing and mellifluous music'
Cacophony	harsh sounds – usually short vowels, hard consonants e.g. 'they clashed on the bare black cliff'

The number of syllables that rhyme can have an effect:

Masculine rhyme	thorn, scorn
Feminine rhyme	water, daughter
Triple rhyme	prettily, wittily.

Masculine rhymes are heavy, feminine rhymes are lighter, and triple rhymes are usually humorous.

Metre

Metre is usually measure *rhythmically*, in which case the important element is the number of beats or stresses in a line. Sometimes it is measures *syllabically* (as in a haiku) in which case the number of syllables is the important factor.

Most metre derives from ancient Greek poetry. There are various types of metre, but the most commonly used is the iambic pentameter.

- 'Iambic' refers to the basic unit of the metre, the iambus (˘ –). (Each unit of a metre is known as a 'foot'. There are other different types of feet, such as trochees, dactyls, spondees, etc.)
- 'Pentameter' refers to the number of feet in the line. In a pentameter, there are five feet. So an iambic pentameter has five iambic feet:
(Other line lengths include tetrameters (four feet), trimeters (three feet), and dimeters (two feet)).

Metre is a very complex subject and at this point it is not necessary for you to know much about it, though it is useful to be able to recognise an iambic pentameter. It's also important to be aware that the *metre* of a poem is not necessarily the same as the *rhythm* of the poem: skilled poets often use *natural speech rhythms* and *sentence structures* to override the artificial constraints of the metre or draw attention away from it.

Wind

This house has been far out at sea all night,
The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills,
Winds stampeding the fields under the window
Floundering black astride and blinding wet

Till day rose; then under an orange sky
The hills had new places, and wind wielded
Blade-light, luminous black and emerald,
Flexing like the lens of a mad eye.

At noon I scaled along the house-side as far as
The coal-house door. Once I looked up -
Through the brunt wind that dented the balls of my eyes
The tent of the hills drummed and strained its guyrope,

The fields quivering, the skyline a grimace,
At any second to bang and vanish with a flap;
The wind flung a magpie away and a black-
Back gull bent like an iron bar slowly. The house

Rang like some fine green goblet in the note
That any second would shatter it. Now deep
In chairs, in front of the great fire, we grip
Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought,

Or each other. We watch the fire blazing,
And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,
Seeing the window tremble to come in,
Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.

Ted Hughes

a) Poetic Form

How does Hughes use the following in this poem:

Rhyme and other sound effects?

Metre and rhythm?

Line lengths, end-stopping and enjambement?

How might his methods relate to the meaning of the poem?

b) Imagery

Look at Hughes's use of imagery in this poem.

What kind of images does he use to convey the wind's powers? What do the images have in common?

Ted Hughes: Wind – notes for a commentary

Intro – sum up the poem, its meanings and effects

The poem is about a storm, initially focusing on the effects of the storm on the landscape, but then shifting focus to the house and its occupants. The poet uses vivid imagery – often images of distortion and instability – and onomatopoeia to evoke the violence of the storm, focusing on the sound, colour, light and movement of the storm. Dramatic metaphors and personifications portray the transformation of the world by the wind, and give the poem a strong sensual / aesthetic impact, whilst the poet also subverts the form of the poem – perhaps to symbolise the disruption and damage caused by the wind.

Main body of essay – examine the main techniques used by the writer and how they create meanings, either stanza by stanza or technique by technique.

- First stanza: the storm during the night – onomatopoeia, metaphor, strong descriptive language used to portray the strength of the wind and the instability of the house and its surrounding landscape. House compared with ship, landscape compared with sea.
- Second stanza: the storm during the day – alliteration, images of darkness and distortion.
- Third stanza: narrator goes out into the storm. Consonance / dissonance used to emphasise the sound of the wind; further metaphors.
- Fourth stanza: effects of the wind on landscape and animals. Alliteration, assonance and consonance used to emphasise force of wind.
- Fifth and sixth stanzas: effects of the wind on the house. Further sound effects (alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc.) for wind; metaphors emphasise the instability of the house. Focus on fear of the people in the house, despite the comfort of the fire.

Main body 2 – examine the form of the poem

- Tightly structured poem uses iambic pentameters and rhyme scheme in six four-line stanzas. However, Hughes uses three main techniques (see below) to disrupt this basic form, perhaps symbolically representing the effect of the wind on the house: it metaphorically blows the poem around, although the basic form remains steady, like the house in the poem.
- 1. Iambic pentameter is heavily distorted after the first line to emphasise the chaos of the wind. 2. An irregular rhyming pattern (abca / abba / abab / abba / abba / abab) is made up almost entirely of half-rhymes, and therefore also disguised or distorted. 3. Enjambement is used throughout the poem; and some of the stanzas run into each other – end of stanza one and end of stanzas four and five, as though they have been blown out of place.

Conclusion – summing up, comments on personal response, issues to do with interpretation

- The wind seems to represent the violence of nature and the instability of human life in the face of such forces.
- Although the poem might possibly be interpreted as symbolic of emotional tensions in the lives of the humans, there is no direct evidence for this reading.

Ted Hughes: Wind – notes on imagery, sound effects and diction

Stanza One:

This house has been far out at sea all night: metaphor comparing the house to a ship. and the land to the sea, emphasising the instability and isolation of the house and the threat from nature.

The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills, winds stampeding the fields:

Onomatopoeia – crashing, booming, stampeding; Personification – winds stampeding.

Floundering black astride and blinding wet – images emphasise water / drowning, and light/dark.

Stanza Two:

Orange sky, blade-light, luminous black and emerald: colour and imagery shows how the atmospheric effects created by the storm transform and distort the landscape – also indicated by *the hills had new places and flexing like the lens of a mad eye* (simile).

Stanza Three:

I scaled along the house-side: metaphor, as scaling usually applies to climbing up mountains, emphasises force of wind.

Brunt wind that dented the balls of my eyes: alliteration (brunt / balls) consonance (brunt wind that dented / balls of my eyes) creating dissonance / onomatopoeia and impression of force of wind. Image of wind denting eyes – metaphor for force of wind.

The tent of the hills drummed and strained its guyrope: metaphor of instability of tent and guyrope indicating the threat to the landscape from the wind. Onomatopoeia – drummed and strained.

Stanza Four:

The fields quivering, skyline a grimace: personification of landscape emphasises movement in the force of the wind.

Bang and vanish with a flap: Assonance (bang, vanish, flap) reinforces onomatopoeia (bang, flap).

Wind flung a magpie away and a black-back gull bent like an iron bar slowly: alliteration (black-back, bent, bar), assonance (magpie, black-back), consonance (flung, magpie, gull / black-back) creates dissonance / onomatopoeia.

Stanza Five:

Rang like some fine green goblet: simile, alliteration emphasising fragility of house.

Any second would shatter it – dissonance / onomatopoeia

We grip our hearts – metaphor emphasising fear

Stanza Six:

Feel the roots of the house move, seeing the window tremble to come in, hearing the stones cry out under the horizons: metaphor / personification emphasising instability of house.

Considering the Snail

1. The snail pushes through a green night, for the grass is heavy with water and meets over the bright path he makes, where rain has darkened the earth's dark. He moves in a wood of desire, pale antlers barely stirring as he hunts. I cannot tell what power is at work, drenched there with purpose, knowing nothing. What is a snail's fury? All I think is that if later I parted the blades above the tunnel and saw the thin trail of broken white across litter, I would never have imagined the slow passion to that deliberate progress.

2. The snail pushes through a green night,
for the grass is heavy with water
and meets over the bright path he makes,
where rain has darkened the earth's dark.

He moves in a wood of desire,
pale antlers barely stirring as he hunts.
I cannot tell what power is at work,
drenched there with purpose,
knowing nothing.

What is a snail's fury?
All I think is that if later
I parted the blades above the tunnel
and saw the thin trail of broken white across litter,
I would never have imagined
the slow passion to that deliberate progress.

4. The snail pushes through a green
night, for the grass is heavy
with water and meets over
the bright path he makes, where rain
has darkened the earth's dark. He
moves in a wood of desire,

pale antlers barely stirring
as he hunts. I cannot tell
what power is at work, drenched there
with purpose, knowing nothing.
What is a snail's fury? All
I think is that if later

I parted the blades above
the tunnel and saw the thin
trail of broken white across
litter, I would never have
imagined the slow passion
to that deliberate progress.

3. The snail pushes
through a green night,
for the grass is heavy
with water
and meets over the bright
path he makes,
where rain has darkened
the earth's dark.

He moves
in a wood of desire,
pale antlers barely
stirring as he hunts.
I cannot tell what
power is at work,
drenched there
with purpose,
knowing nothing.

What is
a snail's fury?
All I think is that
if later I parted the blades
above the tunnel
and saw the thin trail
of broken white
across litter,
I would never have imagined
the slow passion
to that deliberate progress.

The Bee Meeting

Who are these people at the bridge to meet me? They are the villagers -
The rector, the midwife, the sexton, the agent for bees.
In my sleeveless summery dress I have no protection,
And they are all gloved and covered, why did nobody tell me?
They are smiling and taking out veils tacked to ancient hats.

I am nude as a chicken neck, does nobody love me?
Yes, here is the secretary of bees with her white shop smock,
Buttoning the cuffs at my wrists and the slit from my neck to my knees.
Now I am milkweed silk, the bees will not notice.
They will not smell my fear, my fear, my fear.

Which is the rector now, is it that man in black?
Which is the midwife, is that her blue coat?
Everybody is nodding a square black head, they are knights in visors,
Breastplates of cheesecloth knotted under the armpits.
Their smiles and their voices are changing. I am led through a beanfield.

Strips of tinfoil winking like people,
Feather dusters fanning their hands in a sea of bean flowers,
Creamy bean flowers with black eyes and leaves like bored hearts.
Is it blood clots the tendrils are dragging up that string?
No, no, it is scarlet flowers that will one day be edible.

Now they are giving me a fashionable white straw Italian hat
And a black veil that molds to my face, they are making me one of them.
They are leading me to the shorn grove, the circle of hives.
Is it the hawthorn that smells so sick?
The barren body of hawthorn, etherizing its children.

Is it some operation that is taking place?
It is the surgeon my neighbors are waiting for,
This apparition in a green helmet,
Shining gloves and white suit.
Is it the butcher, the grocer, the postman, someone I know?

I cannot run, I am rooted, and the gorse hurts me
With its yellow purses, its spiky armory.
I could not run without having to run forever.
The white hive is snug as a virgin,
Sealing off her brood cells, her honey, and quietly humming.

Smoke rolls and scarves in the grove.
The mind of the hive thinks this is the end of everything.
Here they come, the outriders, on their hysterical elastics.
If I stand very still, they will think I am cow-parsley,
A gullible head untouched by their animosity,

Not even nodding, a personage in a hedgerow.
The villagers open the chambers, they are hunting the queen.
Is she hiding, is she eating honey? She is very clever.
She is old, old, old, she must live another year, and she knows it.
While in their fingerjoint cells the new virgins

Dream of a duel they will win inevitably,
A curtain of wax dividing them from the bride flight,
The upflight of the murderess into a heaven that loves her.
The villagers are moving the virgins, there will be no killing.
The old queen does not show herself, is she so ungrateful?

I am exhausted, I am exhausted -
Pillar of white in a blackout of knives.
I am the magician's girl who does not flinch.
The villagers are untying their disguises, they are shaking hands.
Whose is that long white box in the grove, what have they accomplished,
why am I cold.

Plath's diary, June 7 1962

The midwife stopped up to see Ted at noon to remind him that the Devon beekeepers were having a meeting at 6 at Charlie Pollard's. We were interested in starting a hive, so dumped the babies in bed and jumped in the car and dashed down the hill past the old factory to Mill Lane, a row of pale orange stucco cottages on the Taw, which gets flooded whenever the river rises. We drove into the dusty, ugly paved parking lot under the grey peaks of the factory buildings, unused since 1928 and now only used for wool storage. We felt very new and shy, I hugging my bare arms in the cool of the evening for I had not thought to bring a sweater. We crossed a little bridge to the yard above where a group of miscellaneous Devonians were standing – an assortment of shapeless men in brown speckled bulgy tweeds, Mr Pollard in white shirtsleeves, with his dark, nice brown eyes and oddly Jewy head, tan balding, dark-haired. I saw two women, one very large, tall, stout, in a glistening aqua-blue raincoat, the other cadaverous as a librarian in a dun raincoat. Mr Pollard glided toward us and stood for a moment on the bridge-end, talking. He indicated a pile of hives, like white and green blocks of wood with little gables and said we could have one if we would like to fix it up. A small pale blue car pulled through the yard: the midwife. Her moony beam came at us through the windscreen. Then the rector came pontificating across the bridge and there was a silence that grew round him. He carried a curious contraption – a dark felt hat with a screen box built on under it, and cloth for a neckpiece under that. I thought the hat a clerical bee-keeping hat, and that he must have made it for himself. Then I saw on the grass, and in hands, everyone was holding a bee-hat, some with netting of nylon, most with box screening, some with khaki round hats. I felt barer and barer. People became concerned. Have you no hat? Have you no coat? Then a dry little woman came up, Mrs P, the secretary of the society, with tired, short blonde hair. 'I have a boiler suit'. She went to her car and came back with a small, white silk button-down smock, the sort pharmacist's assistants use. I put it on and buttoned it and felt more protected. Last year, said the midwife, Charlie Pollard's bees were bad-tempered and made everybody run. Everyone seemed to be waiting for someone. But then we all slowly filed after Charlie Pollard to his beehives. We threaded our way through neatly weeded allotment gardens, one with bits of tinfoil and a fan of black and white feathers on a string, very decorative, to scare the birds, and twiggy lean-tos over the plants. Black-eyed sweetpea-like blooms: broadbeans, somebody said. Then we came to a clearing, roughly-scythed, with one hive, a double-brood hive, two layers. From this hive Charlie Pollard wanted to make three hives. I understood very little. The men gathered round the hive. Charlie Pollard started squirting smoke from a little funnel with a hand-bellows attached to it round the entry at the bottom of the hive. 'Too much smoke' hissed the large blue-raincoated woman next to me. 'What do you do if they sting?' I whispered, as the bees, now Charlie had lifted the top of the hive, were zinging out and dancing round as at the end of long elastics. (Charlie had produced a fashionable white straw Italian hat for me with a black nylon veil that collapsed perilously into my face in the least wind. The rector had tucked it into my collar, much to my surprise. 'Bees always crawl up, never down,' he said. I had drawn it down loose over my shoulders.) The woman said: 'Stand behind me. I'll protect you'. I did.

Understanding imagery and performing the creative act

Often, students have little difficulty in seeing individual images in poetry, but need help (a) to spell out the metaphorical significances of the images and (b) to see that the images in a poem might be connected, drawing on the same metaphorical field. Ted Hughes' 'Wind', discussed above, is an excellent example of a poem where most of the images metaphorically reinforce one idea – in this instance, the instability of otherwise stable objects in the face of an exceptional force. Understanding what connects the images leads to a fuller understanding of the poem. Isolating the imagery in a poem and asking students to discuss what the images have in common can therefore be an effective method to use to reveal the poet at work.

A similar approach might be to examine the images before reading the poem – an approach that can be demonstrated effectively with Seamus Heaney's poem 'Blackberry Picking'. The following is a list of selected images from the poem:

clot, flesh, thickened, blood, stains, tongue, lust, inked, hunger, scratched, bleached, burned, eyes, sticky, fur, fungus, glutting, stinking, sour, rot.

Put these on the board, and ask students to discuss what kind of poem this might be. Even better, ask students to *write* a poem – or a passage of prose – using all these words. The results are likely to verge on the obscene! Then reveal that the poem is, after all, 'only' about blackberry-picking; this will set up a lively discussion of why such images might nevertheless be appropriate and effective in such a surprising context.

In the exercises above, we are aiming to help students to see beyond the surface of the poem, to re-construct the acts of poetic imagination that have taken place in the creation of a poem, and thus to understand better the interaction that takes place between reader and writer. These exercises are effective, but perhaps there is no more powerful method than actually getting students to engage in creative writing themselves.

A few short activities can be enough to teach specific aspects of poetry and to give students a feel for what it is like to write poetry. Simple writing exercises can be dropped in to lessons, or used as very effective 'starters'.

Work on specific texts can be easily transformed into active reading/creative writing exercises – as in the examination of imagery in Heaney's 'Blackberry Picking' discussed above. The exercise on tone in relation to Plath's poem 'The Bee Meeting', also described above, could likewise be adapted, with students actually being asked to re-write the events of the poem in a different tone. The exercise on form in relation to Gunn's 'Considering the Snail' could lead to students experimenting with other ways of laying the text out on the page.

Quick and simple creative writing exercises do not have to be anchored to a specific text, however. Tightly controlled writing exercises designed simply to give students an insight into what might be going on in the mind of a poet can be very effective. The possibilities are endless. For instance, at a recent seminar, the poet Mandy Coe asked those present to suggest words and phrases they might associate with, or use to describe, snow. A long list duly appeared on the board. She then asked everyone to write a poem about snow *without* using ANY of those words: a superb lesson in how a poet might summon original and striking imagery by avoiding the obvious and embracing the metaphorical.

Modelling Writing About Poetry (and Prose)

Not Waving But Drowning

'Not Waving But Drowning' seems to be a poem about isolation and the roles we play in life. The bare, concise nature of the poem, its ambiguous voices, and the strong tension between its literal and metaphorical meanings means that it has a powerful impact, leaving the reader to imagine lives that are momentarily glimpsed, and the joys and suffering of those lives.

Ostensibly, the poem describes a moment by the sea after the death of a swimming man as his friends reflect on what caused his death. Although it's not stated explicitly, it is suggested that the man drowned whilst swimming, his 'waving' having been mistaken by friends for his usual 'larking'. The central metaphor of the poem – 'not waving but drowning' – suggests that we can easily misinterpret personality and behaviour, and that people can be isolated and troubled despite social appearances. For me, the metaphor also evokes the old idea of the sad clown, who jokes outwardly whilst suffering inwardly. The 'cold' which his friends blame for his death also has metaphorical meaning, suggesting the pain and isolation of the man's life.

The contrast between voices in the poem is effective. The voice of the dead man is heard in the poem, almost like a ghost, stating explicitly – only after death – what his problem in life was, and confirming the metaphorical nature of the poem: "Oh no no no it was too cold always / (Still the dead one lay moaning) / I was much too far out all my life / And not waving but drowning". Also heard are the voices of his friends: "Poor chap he always loved larking / And now he's dead / It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way / They said." And finally, we hear the voice of a narrator: "Nobody heard him, the dead man / But still he lay moaning". The poem does not explicitly label the voices, except for the dead man, or delineate them with speech marks, and this adds to the tension in the poem, and to the starkness of the picture it presents.

This starkness and simplicity is created by both the content and the form of the poem. It is not a poem interested in emotions or descriptions: it leaves these up to the reader to imagine. It merely presents fragments of speech. The poem's form contains this conciseness effectively – three stanzas of four short lines, with the second and fourth line of each stanza rhyming. The repetition of the title at the end of the first and third stanzas emphasise this tight structure and act as a refrain, giving the poem an A-B-A form, so that it returns to its starting point at the end.

***Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.***

***Poor chap, he always loved larking
And now he's dead
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,
They said.***

***Oh, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning.***

Commentary: Reading a poem

Remember: **IMPACT – CONTENT – FORM**

1. The most important thing about a poem is its **IMPACT** – its **aesthetic, sensual** effect on the reader. On first reading, think about your own response to the **SOUNDS, PATTERNS, IMAGES, RHYTHMS, SHAPES, COLOURS** of the poem, as well as its **MEANING, THEME, NARRATIVE**. Read slowly and try to **hear** the poem in your head. Imagine the poem is a painting in an art gallery and try to **visualise** it like that. Also, think about the possible intentions of the poet: what effect were they trying to achieve?

2. Now, read again. Try to notice how the poem develops and think more about its meaning or message is. **Look at the title of the poem** to see how it relates to the poem as a whole.

2. Ask the following questions about **the CONTENT and meaning of the poem**:

- **What is the poem about?** It could be (a) a description of, or reflection on, a place, person or event; (b) something more serious and philosophical about life or relationships or the nature of the world; or (c) something more light-hearted and playful, perhaps playing with language or humour. There may be other options. It could be a mixture of all three. Any clues about *where and when* the poem is set / written?
- **What is happening in the poem?** A poem always *develops* in some way. It may tell a story or portray a dramatic situation which leads to a final event where something has changed in a way which might produce an emotional reaction. Or it may follow a series of thoughts to end up with a new idea which allows you to understand something differently. It may ask a question or solve a problem which it then gradually answers. It may describe a relationship or a person or place about which you eventually understand something new. Does it have a particular *mood*?
- **Whose voices do you hear in the poem?** It's important to establish this. Can you distinguish between the voice of the poet, the voice of a narrator and the voice of a character or characters? Any of these voices might be 'the speaker' of the poem – or different voices might be speaking different parts of the poem. Additionally, there might be dialogue *within* the poem spoken by different characters' voices. Why have these voices been chosen? What are the voices like? What is their *tone*?
- **Does the poem seem to have a message or meaning?** Not all poems have an exact meaning which can be summed up briefly, but many do. Some poems tell stories which may not have very clear meanings, but the story is usually told for a reason. Think about why the author may have wanted to write the poem. This may give you a *rationale* for the poem, and hence a kind of meaning.

3. Now look at **the structure and FORM of the poem**. How is the poem organised? What patterns do you notice?

- *Structure*: Is it in stanzas or in continuous verse? What kind of stanzas? How many? What logic is used to divide the poem into stanzas? Does each stanza develop the poem in some way?
- *Form*: Is it a complex form like a sonnet? Or is it a simple form like rhyming couplets? Is it blank verse (regular but no rhyme) or free verse (irregular)? Is there a regular metre or rhythm? What do you think is the effect of the choice of form? Does the form seem to complement the meaning significantly? (It may or may not.)
- *Patterns*: Do you notice any other repeating patterns in the poem –rhythms, repetitions, sound effects, grammatical patterns, etc? What effects do these have on the meaning?

4. Now that you have established the basics, you can **read the poem in detail**, looking for the following, but always remembering the overall form of the poem:

- Diction / word-choice; imagery; tone; style; syntax / sentence-structure; sounds
- More detailed and precise meanings

Commentary: Writing the Commentary

In the Commentary, you need to show your understanding of and response to the poem or passage.

- *Understanding:* This means your understanding of its aesthetic effects (IMPACT), its meaning(s) (CONTENT) and how it is shaped and written (FORM), and, very importantly, the connections between the meanings and form – how the language, structure and style of the poem or passage convey its meanings. Remember – without language, there can be no meaning – so language is vital.
- *Response:* Your response to the poem or passage will generally be clear through your explanation of your understanding of it. You show your response by structuring and wording your commentary carefully and creatively to show that you have thought about the meaning of the poem or passage, and to show that you have ideas about its significance, about its rationale, and about its human purposes and effects. Additionally, you may be able to relate aspects of the poem or passage to your personal experience or wider reading as part of your response, though this is not usually necessary.

Organising the commentary

1. Introduction

It is a good idea to signal straight away that you have ideas about the poem or passage **as a whole**. Your introduction should briefly indicate some of the main issues you're going to look at in more detail in the main part of the essay.

You should address all or most of the following questions:

- What kind of poem or passage is this? What is its IMPACT on the reader? What strong effects, if any, does this passage or poem have?
- What is the poem or passage ABOUT? What kind of meanings might it suggest?
- What are the most noticeable, unusual or striking features of this poem or passage as a whole? (*Idea; voice; style; tone; structure; word-choice; imagery; mood; etc.*)
- If an extract, what kind of text does it come from? What position in the text?

2. Main body of the essay

There is no one way of organising a commentary. The poem or passage itself should suggest to you how to structure the commentary. What's very important though is to ensure that you have a balance between talking about the poem or passage *as a whole* and talking about *the parts*. It's usually a good idea to discuss the overall structure, argument and/or narrative of a poem or passage before going on to discuss the parts, and then return to the overall effect of the passage or poem at the end.

So, a good structure for writing about a poem might be:

- *Introduction*
- *Explain briefly the overall structure of the poem – how the ideas in the poem develop from stanza to stanza or section to section, and what the overall narrative or argument of the poem is.*
- *Talk through the parts of the poem, discussing word-choice, imagery and other devices, showing how the poet conveys and develops certain key ideas in particular ways. (This does not mean a boring line-by-line analysis. There is no need to comment on every single word or line. Select key quotes to support your main points.)*
- *If a poem, return to the whole poem and discuss the overall form of the poem - its use of stanza, rhyme, metre, etc*
- *Conclusion*

In many prose passages, and in some poems, it might be more effective to discuss the use of literary devices and language separately rather than as part of a discussion of each stanza or part of the passage. So an alternative structure might be:

- *Introduction*
- *Explain the overall structure of the poem or passage in some detail – how the ideas in the poem develop from stanza to stanza or section to section – and what the overall narrative or argument of the poem is.*
- *Discuss key techniques and devices used throughout the poem or passage - word-choice, imagery, sound effects, etc – showing how the poet conveys and develops certain key ideas in particular ways. (Again, select key quotes to support your main points.)*
- *If a poem, discuss the overall form of the poem - its use of stanza, rhyme, metre, etc*
- *Conclusion*

One or two hints:

- If you find the same techniques being used throughout the poem, you *should* have mentioned this early in the essay, or in the introduction. Show that you are aware of this by using phrases such as, 'here the writer uses a technique which is used many times throughout the poem' or 'again, the writer uses an image of nature to emphasise...'.
'thee overall theme of the poem is once again emphasised in the final stanza.'
- Link the parts of your commentary together with phrases such as 'in the next section / stanza, we see a change...'; 'the third stanza develops the idea in the second stanza by...';

3. Conclusion

The conclusion provides the opportunity to re-state some of the ideas from the introduction in a new way. In your introduction, you suggest some of the key issues and techniques that are significant in the poem or passage. In the conclusion, you summarise your argument about why and how these things are significant, and how they contribute to the impact of the passage or poem.

Things you're not sure about.

Don't just miss out bits you're not sure of, especially if you think they may be important. You will often get credit for asking questions or making possible suggestions. There is not always an exact meaning. You can use phrases like: 'in this section, the author may be suggesting...'; or 'On the one hand, this could indicate that...; on the other...'; or 'Perhaps this means that...'

Things you are sure about.

However sure you are about something, remember that you are offering your interpretation, your opinion and others may be possible. Be careful about saying: 'the author wrote this because...'. How do you know why the author did something? You may well be right, but it is best to be tentative: 'This seems to suggest that...'; 'The writer seems here to indicate that...'. On the other hand, you can sometimes be more definite about big ideas. It's OK to say 'this poem is about...' if you're very sure you can back up your interpretation with sound evidence.

3: Getting to Grips with Prose: Reading Language, Style and Structure

Prose: Literary features and devices

Paragraph and sentence length

These can determine the pace, mood or tone of a piece of writing.

- Juxtapositions of long and short paragraphs or sentences can be used to create particular effects,
- Many short paragraphs or sentences together often have a very noticeable effect, often indicating fast pace, irony and/or humour.
- Many long paragraphs or sentences together usually result in dense writing, perhaps strongly descriptive, or perhaps very intellectual.
- However, the effects of these things can only be judged in the context of the whole piece of writing.

Sentence structure

- Sentences may follow conventional structures approximate to ordinary simple speech, or they may use more complex, unusual or artificial structures.
- There may be symmetry or balance in the structure of a sentence. Does the sentence fall into two or three deliberately balanced parts? (Some sentences can be described as bipartite or tripartite, for instance)
 - The word order in the sentence may be conventional or unusual.
 - Punctuation may be used deliberately to create interest, surprise, etc.

Rhetorical devices

Rhetorical devices are methods of arranging words in speech for particular effect. they are particularly associated with speech-making, but are often used in written prose (and poetry).

They may include such things as:

- Rhetorical questions
 - Exclamations
 - Repetition
- Metaphor or simile (figures of speech)
- Sound effects (alliteration, assonance, rhyme, etc.)
- Symmetrical or balanced sentences (see above)
- Paradox, juxtaposition, oxymoron, enumeration
 - Allusion

Note that all these features of prose are also often used in poetry.

Silly Novels By Lady Novelists

The first paragraph of a longer article in The Westminster Review (1856) by George Eliot, whose real name was Mary Ann Evans

Silly Novels by Lady Novelists are a genus with many species, determined by the particular quality of silliness that predominates in them – the frothy, the prosy, the pious, or the pedantic. But it is a mixture of all these – a composite order of feminine fatuity, that produces the largest class of such novels, which we shall distinguish as the mind-and-millinery species. The heroine is usually an heiress, probably a peeress in her own right, with perhaps a vicious baronet, an amiable duke, and an irresistible younger son of a marquis as lovers in the foreground, a clergyman and a poet sighing for her in the middle distance, and a crowd of undefined adorers dimly indicated beyond. Her eyes and her wit are both dazzling; her nose and her morals are alike free from any tendency to irregularity; she has a superb contralto and a superb intellect; she is perfectly well-dressed and perfectly religious; she dances like a sylph, and reads the Bible in the original tongues. Or it may be that the heroine is not an heiress – that rank and wealth are the only things in which she is deficient; but she infallibly gets into high society, she has the triumph of refusing many matches and securing the best, and she wears some family jewels or other as a sort of crown of righteousness at the end. Rakish men either bite their lips in impotent confusion at her repartees, or are touched to penitence by her reproofs, which, on appropriate occasions, rise to a lofty strain of rhetoric; indeed, there is a general propensity in her to make speeches, and to rhapsodize at some length when she retires to her bedroom. In her recorded conversations she is amazingly eloquent, and in her unrecorded conversations, amazingly witty. She is understood to have a depth of insight that looks through and through the shallow theories of philosophers, and her superior instincts are a sort of dial by which men have only to set their clocks and watches, and all will go well. The men play a very subordinate part by her side. You are consoled now and then by a hint that they have affairs, which keeps you in mind that the working-day business of the world is somehow being carried on, but ostensibly the final cause of their existence is that they may accompany the heroine on her "starring" expedition through life. They see her at a ball, and are dazzled; at a flower-show, and they are fascinated; on a riding excursion, and they are witched by her noble horsemanship; at church, and they are awed by the sweet solemnity of her demeanour. She is the ideal woman in feelings, faculties, and flounces. For all this, she as often as not marries the wrong person to begin with, and she suffers terribly from the plots and intrigues of the vicious baronet; but even death has a soft place in his heart for such a paragon, and remedies all mistakes for her just at the right moment. The vicious baronet is sure to be killed in a duel, and the tedious husband dies in his bed requesting his wife, as a particular favour to him, to marry the man she loves best, and having already dispatched a note to the lover informing him of the comfortable arrangement. Before matters arrive at this desirable issue our feelings are tried by seeing the noble, lovely, and gifted heroine pass through many mauvais moments, but we have the satisfaction of knowing that her sorrows are wept into embroidered pocket-handkerchiefs, that her fainting form reclines on the very best upholstery, and that whatever vicissitudes she may undergo, from being dashed out of her carriage to having her head shaved in a fever, she comes out of them all with a complexion more blooming and locks more redundant than ever.

WATERLAND

A possible approach to teaching the novel

This approach adopts the following rationale:

1. Get the book read before the main study begins, so that the book is studied as a whole text, and the parts aren't 'ploughed through'. (It's not necessary to do it this way – it is possible to study the book as it is read – but this needs care to ensure it isn't laborious.)
2. Explore and discuss the novel as a whole with the class, bringing out all the main issues with regard to structure, interpretation, etc., and setting a variety of active tasks to increase students' familiarity and confidence, and develop ideas.
3. Having established an overall framework for knowledge about and interpretation of the novel, set final tasks which demand that students develop their interpretations more independently – both in relation to close reading and broader responses.

Reading the novel

Give students the novel to read a few weeks before the study begins (perhaps including over a holiday). Remember to factor this reading into the amount of work you are asking students to do.

- If there are readers who are less confident and might find it difficult, you can set the reading in sections, and devote some class time to students' initial reactions to each section, their developing responses, etc.
- You can ask students to keep a journal of their responses section by section – trying to get them to record their own reactions and processes of interpretation, or their problems and questions. *This book will automatically highlight issues to do with narrative sequence and style, as well as character and plot*, so encourage them to write about these too.
- You could also divide the book into as many sections as there are students and ask each student to make a short (three-five minute?) formal presentation about a section of the book, perhaps based on their journal responses.
- Pre-reading activities can be enjoyable and confidence-boosting – e.g. close reading the first page or chapter with the class to engender first reactions and predictions

At the end of the reading, a final extended session can be held, in which students work in groups to discuss their final reactions to the book – perhaps using flipcharts to record ideas. At this stage, they are likely to be concerned with questions like 'what is the novel about?' 'what is its meaning?' and 'what are its themes?', as well as reactions to character and plot.

Exploring response

Problematise and explore students' responses through discussion.

- What *kind* of novel is this? Is it the kind of book they might read for pleasure? If not, for whom is it written? (It was not intended for study.) What kind of pleasures might be got from the book? What might explain students' likes or dislikes of the book? Why might people feel differently about it?
- How does the novel keep the reader involved (if it does?) What does a writer have to do to keep readers involved? Is this just to do with plot, or other elements? Why do 'meanings' and 'themes' seem important in this book (if they do) rather than just 'plot'? Is this true of all books? What makes this book 'literary'?
- As the author is living, it is theoretically possible to ask him what he meant by it. How profitable would that be? How would students feel if he were dead and unable to answer the questions? If possible, get hold of reviews of the book from contemporary

newspapers, and interviews from papers with the author. (Critical guides sometimes contain these.)

- During discussion, many aspects of social, historical, geographical context are likely to arise – these can be researched further – e.g. the Fens, Greenwich.

Exploring narrative structure

- Students are introduced to the idea of non-linear narrative and work in groups to construct a time-line for the novel, ‘deconstructing’ it into its constituent periods.
- Afterwards, they discuss how and why Swift might have done this, rather than telling the story in order. What is the advantage or effect of a non-linear narrative? How might he have set about writing the book? How did he decide where to put the breaks and what order to write things in? Does the re-arrangement of time in the book change or add to its meaning?
- Students then work on coming up with a ‘theory’ explaining why the book is ordered as it is. As part of this work, they could be assigned a small section of the book and asked to comment on the possible purposes and effects of the narrative decisions taken in it.
- Ask students to explore other aspects of the book which give it structure – what themes, ideas, symbols, etc. do they notice recurring? Draw their attention to certain ideas such as time, cycles, the natural elements (Water/Land) which recur throughout the book. Assign a different aspect to each group for investigation.

Exploring interpretation

- Following this discussion, have students’ views about the novel changed? Can students say categorically what the novel is about? To what extent do our views about the author’s possible intentions restrict or expand our interpretations?
- During this discussion, the teacher needs to guide students to certain key literary aspects of the novel, such as the ways in which the structure might be related to the meaning, without closing down other possibilities.
- Broaden this discussion by exploring alternative readings. *Waterland* is ideal for looking at a variety of critical positions. Use the critical position sheet, perhaps using a children’s story or a folk tale as a dry run.

Other aspects: e.g. author / narrator – narrative voice, style, setting

Ask students to consider the difference between the author and the narrator, and to think about the way language is used in the book. Close reading activities are likely to be useful here.

- How autobiographical do they think the book might be? (NB The teacher can reveal that the author had never lived in the Fens. Does that alter their view of the book?)
- Whose voice do we hear? The author’s or the narrator’s? Are these things always different? Whose style are we reading? What kind of style is it? How is language used?
- Do a close reading exercise to see how narrative voice and viewpoint operates in the book – how the author/narrator shifts from present to different points in the past.

Final tasks – students working independently or in groups

- Comparison of film and novel. How does the film deal with the non-linear narrative? How are meanings rendered or altered? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the adaptation?
- Creative assignment: adaptation for stage. How would students bring out the meanings and structures of the book in a stage version? They might produce an extract of script or even a performance.
- Each student is assigned a chapter of the book to produce a close reading in the light of discussion of the whole text.

Narrative in the novel and story

(NB: also applies to narrative poems; some parts also apply to drama)

I. Narrative Voice and Perspective

Narrative Voice – FIRST PERSON or THIRD PERSON (Omniscient)

- First person: can share thoughts, feelings, etc. directly with the reader; is involved in the narrative as a character; may be unreliable; cannot enter into the thoughts of other characters
- Third person: may be invisible, or may comment on the narrative (as if the author); is not involved in the narrative as a character; can enter into the thoughts of other characters, etc (omniscient)

Narrative Perspective / Point-of-view

- First person – point-of-view is always that of the narrator character
- Third person – point-of-view may shift as the narrator writes from different character perspectives, or from a neutral perspective. Narrator may interject with personal comments, e.g.:

Mr Bennett was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand him. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper (Austen, P and P – Chapter 1)

- Where the third-person narrator not only writes from the point of view of one character but also (ironically) adopts their language, this is known as Free Indirect Speech (or Discourse), e.g.:

Mrs Bennet was quite disconcerted. She could not imagine what business [Mr Bingley] could have in town so soon after his arrival; and she began to fear that he might always be flying about from one place to another, and never settled at Netherfield as he ought to be. (Austen, P and P – Chapter 3)

2. Narrative Structure and Time

Narrative Structure

- setting the scene (exposition of status quo), developing the plot (development – something happens to change things), resolving the plot (resolution, new status quo)

Time and Structure: Some important ideas:

- **LINEAR / CHRONOLOGICAL NARRATIVE:** story moves from beginning to end in order
- **FRAGMENTED NARRATIVE:** story moves between past, present and future and challenges the reader to piece the parts together
- **LINEAR NARRATIVE WITH FRAGMENTATION:** essentially linear narrative but with elements of flashback (or forward)
- **DUAL (or MULTIPLE) NARRATIVE:** two (or more) stories intertwining or the same story with two (or more) different narrative voices or viewpoints
- **META-NARRATIVE:** a story within a story

Suspense, revelation, anticipation: withholding and revelation of narrative information

- **FORESHADOWING** (flashforward, prolepsis) – mention in a text of something which has not happened yet but will happen later. This could be in the form of a hint which is not intended to be understood until later, or it may be an explicit reference to something which is going to happen, though we do not yet know how or why it is going to happen.
- **FLASHBACK** (analepsis)

Pride and Prejudice: Aspects of Narrative

1. Scenes and Places

- The geography of *Pride and Prejudice* is important. You need to have a clear sense of the different locations in the novel (Longbourne, Netherfield, Hunsford and Rosings, and Pemberley, as well as the scenes in London) and what they signify, as well as the social hierarchy represented by these places and the families that live in them. Pemberley in particular has important particular symbolic significance.
- How do the different locations represent the social structure portrayed in the novel? For instance, what are the social significances of and conventions associated with:
 - Visiting and moving between the different locations?
 - The use of the space inside and around the locations?
 - The style, setting and construction of the different locations?

2. Time and Sequence

- Although the narrative is chronological / linear, past events are often recounted in conversation and through letters. You need to have a clear idea of the key scenes which such revelations occur, and the significance of these conversations and letters in driving the plot forward.
- What role does foreshadowing play in the novel? And how are parallels used in the plot?
- How is the novel divided into volumes and chapters? What logic can you see in Austen's placing of narrative breaks? To what extent are these connected with locations?

3. Characters and Characterisation

- Characterisation is achieved through the presentation of what characters do, what they say, and what is said about them both by other characters and by the narrator. What is the balance between these methods, and to what extent do these different modes conflict with each other?
- How are the different characters characterized by:
 - Their use of language?
 - Their dress, possessions and surroundings?
 - The way they interact with others?
- To what extent do the characters display conventional behaviours of the period, and to what extent are they related to gender and class?

4. Narrative voice

- To what extent might we see the third person narrator of this novel as a character who comments on the action, and what characterizes the narrative voice? (For instance, note the frequent use of an ironic / humorous voice in the endings of chapters).
- What is the balance between narrative and dialogue in the novel? What is the role of the narrative voice in setting up and commenting on the dialogue?
- There are alternative narrative voices in the conversations and letters. Why does Austen allow the narrative to be told like this in these instances?

5. Narrative point of view

- Although this is a third person narrative, it might be argued that the dominant point of view represented is that of Elizabeth. Why is this and how is it achieved? Can we distinguish between the narrator's and Elizabeth's viewpoints in the narration?
- How much of what we know is what Elizabeth knows, and how much do we – and perhaps other characters - know that Elizabeth does *not* know?
- To what extent does the narrator represent points of view of other characters?
- Austen often uses irony to represent the different viewpoints in the novel – especially when writing about the comic characters (e.g. Mrs Bennet, Miss Bingley and Mr Collins). How do we know that her presentation here is ironic?

6. Destination

- What is the significance of the title of the novel, and how does the overall sweep of the narrative support the development of the ideas contained in the title?
- How does the opening of the novel prepare for and inform our experience of the plot?
- What are the turning points and moments of crisis in the narrative and how do these propel the narrative towards its climax?
- What is the sequence of resolutions which takes place as the novel reaches its conclusion, and how satisfactory are they?
- How does Austen use the final chapter to bring the narrative to a close?

Commentary: Reading a prose passage

Reading a prose passage is actually very similar to reading a poem, and you can follow the same general instructions. There are some differences, which I have indicated in italics.

1. **Read the passage through two or three times.** Look carefully at the details of the text from which the passage comes, including the date and any details of the kind of text.

2. **Ask questions about the content and meaning of the passage:**

- What is it about? What kind of text is it from? Where and when is it set and written? What is its purpose?
- What is happening in the passage? How does it develop? Does it have a particular mood?
- Whose voices do you hear in the passage? Who is the narrator or 'speaker'? Are there characters? What is the tone?
- Does the passage seem to have a message, meaning or argument?
- *You will need to assess whether the passage is fiction or non-fiction. In **fiction**, you will need to look at narrative, characterisation, setting and use of dialogue. In **non-fiction**, you may need to look at the way an argument is structured. There may also be a narrative just as in fiction, using techniques very similar to fiction techniques of description, characterisation, setting, etc.*

3. **Look at the structure of the passage.** How is it organised? What patterns do you notice?

- *A prose passage will generally be organised in standard sentences and paragraphs, though you will need to look out for variations in sentence and paragraph structure and length.*
- *Unlike a poem, a prose extract is not handily organised in regular stanzas, but you still need to be able to divide the text into chunks to analyse it. It may be that you can simply take each paragraph at a time; but usually, it is best to divide the text into sections.*
- *Just like a poem, the passage will develop by means of a narrative direction or argument. Just as with a poem, use the sections of the passage to help analyse the development of the passage stage by stage.*
- *You will need to think about where the passage comes in the longer text. If it's at the beginning or end, how is it characteristic of a beginning or end? What might have happened before or after the passage?*

4. **Now read the passage in detail.** Prose uses exactly the same repertoire of language effects as poetry – choice of words, use of imagery, style, pace, sentence structures, etc. How do these features assist the writer's purpose?

- *A prose passage will not have metre or rhyme, but it might well have sound effects and rhythm.*
- *Look carefully at the narrative voice. What is the position taken by the narrator or speaker of the passage? Is it sympathetic? Distant? Cold? Warm? Ironic? Humorous? This might be just as important in a poem, but is often significant in prose narrative.*

Writing the commentary

Use exactly the same guidelines as for writing a poetry commentary.

4: Literature – Language, Style, Context, Interpretation

Data from Interviews with two students

Having established Matt's and Billy's general feelings about the module, I moved to a discussion of *The Waste Land*, the first set text of the module (studied in week three). I was curious to know what the students had made of the text, given that many had probably never encountered poetry of its kind before, and they had had to read the text completely independently. In particular, I was keen to find out what they felt they had learnt from or about the text in the context of this module, and if they were able to place it in a meaningful way in the framework of the course as a whole.

- R [...] OK. So tell me about *The Waste Land*. Have you done anything like *The Waste Land* before?
B No, it seemed really scattered and sort of confusing.
R What sort of poetry had you done at A Level?
B First world war poetry, which I enjoyed...
R So what did you think of what [the Head of Department] was saying in his lecture about Eliot having written *The Waste Land* shortly after the first world war poetry, but that it was obviously very different? Did you find that – his explanation of the relationship between the first world war poetry and what Eliot was writing interesting?
B To be honest, I didn't really think about it very much – I mean I do remember that he said it was written after the first world war, but I didn't really... I mean the thing was that with the first world war poetry, you knew what was going on because there was only one subject, whereas TS Eliot was writing from his head... you know what I mean ... you could analyse the war poetry a lot easier...
R What do you mean by 'he was writing from his head'?
B I dunno really – I mean like Wilfred Owen wrote from what he saw, and what he believed this whole thing was, sort of, about... whereas TS Eliot's writing about his own thoughts, and subjects that it's harder to ...
R Do you feel that you're expected to like the literature that's set?
B Um, yeah, to a certain extent, I suppose...
R Do you like it?
B Well, I didn't really get into *The Waste Land*... Othello I've always enjoyed, I thought it was a really good play... that's it – what else are we doing? Oh I've read a bit of *Frankenstein* which seemed quite good... but I've seen the film first
R And the first world war poetry that you did at A Level – you like that, did you?
B Yeah
R Can I ask you what 'liking literature' means to you? Does it mean that you would go away and read more of the same, or similar?
B I would read more of the first world war poetry. I wouldn't really go out of my way to do it, but if I was looking for a book in the library and I came across one, I might read a couple out of interest – but I wouldn't go out of my way...
R So, with a text like *The Waste Land*, I mean in the seminar, Julie [the lecturer] said something like that when she first read it, she thought it was really amazing and she'd never read anything like it, and she wanted to find out more about it, and really get into it.... Did you feel at all the same way about it?
B No – it didn't really strike me like that – but I don't know if I read the first few lines and found it a bit confusing and my brain sort of went, well that's not that interesting – I don't sort of get it...
R Do you feel –going back to the question of whether you're expected to like it ...
B I just feel that they expect us to know it...As English uni students, they sort of expect us to understand it straight away...

It seems clear from this that Billy lacked a clear view of what he might learn from the text, and how he might learn it. This might be partially related to his lack of familiarity with this *type* of text, as well as his lack of familiarity with the text itself; certainly his comments suggest that he finds it easier to know what to do with more straightforward narrative or discursive texts. What he identifies as 'analysis' of these texts seems to be an account of the author's intentions or probable meanings (relatively accessible from a reading of Wilfred Owen, but not of T.S. Eliot) and he seems to have few resources for understanding textual production and interpretation in broader contexts. In asking about whether Billy liked the poetry, I was trying to approach his response to the text from a more aesthetic angle, in order to find out whether he could locate it in a different mode of reading, but his reluctance to engage with this question suggested that he might have difficulty in, for instance, seeing the ambiguity of the text as valuable or interesting in itself.

Matt, on the other hand, was highly receptive to the ambiguity of the poem, and understood that that might be part of its effect, and some of the implications for interpretation:

- R How did you feel about *The Waste Land* as a literary text and what was your reaction to it, and the way you covered it as well?

- M Um, I thought it was good that they didn't try and suggest any very specific ideas about it, that we weren't limited in our interpretation or told that we had to look at it in a certain way because it's so obscure really – it was interesting, but the things they focused on were different from the things I'd expected them to and perhaps the ones that struck me as more interesting, so I don't know if that was just because of differences in interpretation or what...
- R Just thinking about the text as a text that you read, rather than a text to study in class, how did you feel about it?
- M Well again it was just interesting really – you almost have to hold back when you're reading it so that you don't try and read too much into it, and go off in all sorts of fanciful ideas in all sorts of different directions – it's quite easy to do that, really. It was interesting reading the notes, too, and realising that they were quite obscure too, and reading it and thinking that maybe it wasn't meant to be interpreted in that sort of way at all. It just ... interests me, makes you think.
- R So you're drawing an opposition between reading something and reading things into it, and reading things just to see what effect it has on you... Do you think that's how it's meant to be read...? How is it meant to be read?
- M I really wouldn't like to say... just because so many people disagree. I mean there's the idea of authorial intent, and then there not being any intent, the intentional fallacy, so it just leaves it – you can't say either way. It's interesting that with the introduction of these theories we seem to understand less because nothing can be clear-cut.
- R That's interesting. Did you like *The Waste Land*?
- M I suppose so. I don't dislike it. I'm just trying to think of a situation in which I'd think to read it...

From here, I was able to engage him in a discussion about himself as reader and student in relation to the possible original audience for the poem, in an attempt to see to what extent he could conceptualise the various contexts of textual production and consumption:

- R Is it something that could be enjoyable as a pure read, that you might just pick up and read it and enjoy it?
- M I don't know – I don't think it's the sort of thing I'd read before bed, because you'd just sit there thinking, but what about that, what does he mean by that? - I suppose so, especially if you're in that kind of mood – you might even find solace in it!
- R Do you think anyone read it for pleasure or enjoyment – I mean, who would have read it when it was originally written?
- M I don't know – I suppose it could have embodied the spirit of the time, about the war and so on – disenchanted people, perhaps.
- R So do you think it would have made more 'sense' to people reading at the time?
- M Possibly – I mean maybe I'm just too optimistic – perhaps that adds several layers of obscurity to it, that we don't think the same way.
- R OK, and going back to the question of who do you think would have read it?
- M Um, specifically, I don't know – probably people who would have been revolutionaries if they'd lived in France in 1780 –
- R What do you mean?
- M Well, going back to disenchanted people, I think they must have felt that it was time for a regime change or something...
- R OK, so you're saying that it potentially has a great deal of political significance?
- M Possibly in that it's politicians that are responsible for the state of the affairs, and so if that's the state the world's in, it must be their fault. In that respect – I can't really think of anything which is specifically targeted but.
- R So sticking with this question of who read it, you say possibly people with revolutionary ideas. Can you be a bit more specific about who might come across such a poem, what kind of people might come across or pick up such a poem, how they might be exposed to it?
- M (Pause). It all depends on... what was the date... 20s / 30s ... I can just imagine flappers running round... surely that would be the audience? The wealthy and educated, and in their social activities they were against the authorities of the time – it's not something I know a lot about though.
- R What makes you feel that the people with access to it would be educated and wealthy?
- M Just because that's traditionally been the audience of poetry and high culture – that's who it appeals to.

Matt comes across as intellectually curious and motivated. Here we can perhaps see him mobilising a set of areas of knowledge to apply to his thinking about *The Waste Land* – especially knowledge about history and politics (in particular, perhaps, ideas from the course on European revolutions which he was also following during this term); we have already seen Matt's ability to transfer understandings in this way, as well as his preparedness to take risks in discussion in seminars. His comments about the intentional fallacy suggest that he has also been doing some background reading beyond the set texts (and indeed he comments later in the interview that he has found *The English Studies Book* useful as an accessible source for the assimilation of some complex ideas, and that he has been referring to a literary dictionary at home.)

I: UNDERSTANDING MODERNISM

Thomas Hardy

The Darkling Thrush (1901)

I leant upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings from broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice outburst among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carollings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

from T S Eliot: *The Four Quartets*

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.

But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know.

Other echoes
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
Round the corner. Through the first gate,
Into our first world, shall we follow
The deception of the thrush? Into our first world.
There they were, dignified, invisible,
Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,
In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,
And the bird called, in response to
The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,
And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
Had the look of flowers that are looked at.
There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting.
So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
To look down into the drained pool.
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.
Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

W B Yeats: The Second Coming (1920)

TURNING and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Louis MacNiece: Prayer Before Birth (1944)

I am not yet born; O hear me.
Let not the bloodsucking bat or the rat or the stoat or the club-footed ghoul come near me.

I am not yet born, console me.
I fear that the human race may with tall walls wall me, with strong drugs dope me, with wise
lies lure me, on black racks rack me, in blood-baths roll me.

I am not yet born; provide me
With water to dandle me, grass to grow for me, trees to talk to me, sky to sing to me, birds
and a white light in the back of my mind to guide me.

I am not yet born; forgive me
For the sins that in me the world shall commit, my words when they speak me, my thoughts
when they think me, my treason engendered by traitors beyond me, my life when they murder
by means of my hands, my death when they live me.

I am not yet born; rehearse me
In the parts I must play and the cues I must take when old men lecture me, bureaucrats hector
me, mountains frown at me, lovers laugh at me, the white waves call me to folly and the desert
calls me to doom and the beggar refuses my gift and my children curse me.

I am not yet born; O hear me,
Let not the man who is beast or who thinks he is God come near me.

I am not yet born; O fill me

With strength against those who would freeze my humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton, would make me a cog in a machine, a thing with one face, a thing, and against all those who would dissipate my entirety, would blow me like thistledown hither and thither or hither and thither like water held in the hands would spill me.

Let them not make me a stone and let them not spill me.
Otherwise kill me.

Dylan Thomas: Do Not Go Gentle (1952)

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

- *After reading these poems, make a list of some of the features of modernist poetry.*

Modernism

Movement towards modernism began in the 1880s (with Impressionism etc) but came to its peak from 1910 to 1930. It reflected fragmentation, uncertainty and complexity in society and politics – a reaction against the order and authoritarianism of 19th century society. It also reflected the fear and ultimately the experience of major conflagration – e.g. World War.

Modernism was a vast movement consisting of many smaller movements and groups, all experimenting in different ways. Characteristics of modernism in literature include:

- experimentation with new forms and ideas
- rejection of traditional and regular verse forms and metres, narrative structures such as stanzas and chapters, etc
- fragmentation of narrative voices and viewpoints and of chronological structures; in poetry, *free verse*; *stream of consciousness*, etc.
- juxtaposition of apparently incongruous voices, ideas and images
- preoccupation with images of disorder and chaos, and social disfunction and disintegration
- exploration of a wide range of ideas about nature and society, often reflecting in unconventional or on the failure of the conventional culture of the modern industrial world
- move towards the language of ordinary life and away from formal, 'artistic' poetic and literary diction
- complexity and ambiguity in meaning, and a rethinking of the relationship between author, narrator and reader
- resurgence of sound as important in poetry (e.g. internal rhythms, alliteration and assonance)
- use of expressionism (language expressing emotion in unconventional ways through sound and shape and colour, etc.)

W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are the main names associated with modernist poetry in English in the 1910 – 1930 period. W.H. Auden is the main name of the 1930s. Auden and many of the modernists of the 1930s had a greater concern with politics, and less interest in experimental forms – though his period was clearly modernist in many ways.

We are still in the period of modernism, though it has developed in many different ways. As at all times during the modernist period, many poets continue to write in relatively conventional ways: however, almost all poets' work reflects the basic modernist move towards the use of plain language in literature.

2: UNDERSTANDING ROMANTICISM

The Dungeon by S.T. Coleridge

And this place our forefathers made for man!
This is the process of our love and wisdom,
To each poor brother who offends against us -
Most innocent, perhaps – and what if guilty?
Is this the only cure? Merciful God!
Each pore and natural outlet shrivelled up
By Ignorance and parching Poverty,
His energies roll back upon his heart,
And stagnate and corrupt; till changed to poison,
They break out on him, like a loathsome plague-spot;
Then we call in our pampered mountebanks -
And this is their best cure! uncomforted
And friendless solitude, groaning and tears,
And savage faces, at the clanking hour,
Seen through the steam and vapours of his dungeon,
By the lamp's dismal twilight! So he lies
Circled with evil, till his very soul
Unmoulds its essence, hopelessly deformed
By sights of ever more deformity!

With other ministrations thou, O Nature!
Healest thy wandering and distempered child:
Thou pourest on him thy soft influences,
Thy sunny hues, fair forms, and breathing sweets,
Thy melodies of woods, and winds, and waters,
Till he relent, and can no more endure
To be a jarring and a dissonant thing
Amid this general dance and minstrelsy;
But, bursting into tears, wins back his way,
His angry spirit healed and harmonized
By the benignant touch of Love and Beauty.

- 1) Carefully read Coleridge's *The Dungeon*, above.
- 2) It should be clear on a first reading that the poem – although it does not explicitly say so except in the title – is a description of and reflection on the plight of a prisoner in a dungeon. Before reading on, decide what you think is happening in the poem, and what Coleridge seems to be saying about the dungeon. In particular, think about the relationship between the first and the second stanzas.

In the first stanza of the poem, Coleridge seems to argue that imprisonment and the deprivation which accompany it are ineffective as a means of rehabilitation. In the second stanza, he suggests that exposure to nature, love and beauty would be a more effective approach. The poem clearly raises issues to do with the moral and social value of prisons – still important political issues in today's society.

- 3) What can you say about the contrasting language which Coleridge uses in the two stanzas? Can you identify some of the simple but powerful imagery he uses to convey his message in both stanzas?

- 4) What do you feel about prisons as a way of punishing and rehabilitating criminals? To what extent do you agree with Coleridge's argument here? (Bear in mind that in the 18th and 19th centuries, people could be imprisoned in very poor conditions for long periods for minor offences.)

*To find out more about the influences on Coleridge's thinking, look up the work of John Howard, author of *The State of the Prisons* (1777), whose work was the origin of the Howard League for Penal Reform, still the most influential organisation campaigning for reform of the prison system.*

The Little Vagabond by W. Blake

Dear Mother, dear Mother, the Church is cold,
But the Ale-house is healthy & pleasant & warm;
Besides I can tell where I am used well,
Such usage in Heaven will never do well.

But if at the Church they would give us some Ale,
And a pleasant fire our souls to regale,
We'd sing and we'd pray all the live-long day,
Nor ever once wish from the Church to stray.

Then the Parson might preach, & drink, & sing,
And we'd be as happy as birds in the spring;
And modest Dame Lurch, who is always at Church,
Would not have bandy children, nor fasting, nor birch.

And God, like a father rejoicing to see
His children as pleasant and happy as he,
Would have no more quarrel with the Devil or the Barrel,
But kiss him, & give him both drink and apparel.

Carefully read Blake's 'The Little Vagabond'.

- In the last stanza, what does Blake seem to suggest about the relationship between God, the Devil and drink? What does Blake suggest about the church as an institution and its relationship with the people?
- How would you describe the language, form and structure of this poem? How does the way it is written affect the impact of the poem?

Comparing the two poems

- What differences can you see in the language and form of these poems?
- What similarities are there in the political ideas in this poem and in Coleridge's 'The Dungeon'?
- In his book *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake writes: 'Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion.' What does he mean by this, and how does it help you to understand both *The Dungeon* and *The Little Vagabond*?

3. SHAKESPEARE: LANGUAGE AND CONTEXT

- A. Shakespeare's English and the Iambic Pentameter: See handouts
- B. Reading Shakespeare in context: see below

Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2

You are going to work in groups to prepare a reading of an extract from Act 2, Scene 2. After your reading, I will ask you to talk about what you learnt from the extract, and what you were trying to show from the way you read it. There are some guiding comments and questions to help you. (If you have one more person in your group than there are parts, that person can either share one of the parts, or take on a guiding or directorial role.)

- First, read the lines and discuss your interpretation of them. At this stage, just try to get the gist of what is going on. The idea is to become familiar with the extract well so that your interpretation can be heard in the way you read the lines.
- Then, practice reading the scene in line with the results of your discussion. At this stage, you might want to think more about the exact meanings of some of the less obvious lines.
- For homework:

(i) practise your part, and also spend some more time thinking in detail about about your group's interpretation of the extract and the detailed meanings of the lines in detail. (Use the notes at the bottom of the text if you need to.)

(ii) read the whole of Act 2 Scene 2 from the beginning to line 277.

Groups One and Two – Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius

Line 80 (It likes us well) – line 127 (Received his love?)

Line 128 (What do you think of me?) – line 170 (O give me leave)

Ophelia has told Polonius that, after she rejected his continued advances according to Polonius' instructions, Hamlet came to see her in a disturbed state of mind, apparently acting madly. Polonius assumes that Hamlet has gone mad because Ophelia has rejected him. In this part of Scene 2, he goes to Claudius and Gertrude to report these events...

- *What is Polonius trying to achieve here, and does his behaviour here fit in with what we already know of him, and of Claudius?*
- *Does the language Shakespeare gives Polonius here suggest a particular interpretation of his character?*
- *How might Claudius and Gertrude react to Polonius here? How might you play all three characters if you were acting them?*
- *What might be the dramatic purpose of this part of the scene – i.e. why might Shakespeare have included this scene?*

Group Three – Hamlet, Polonius

Line 170 (How does my good Lord) – line 220 (God save you Sir)

In this part of Scene 2, Polonius agrees with Claudius that together they will watch an encounter between Hamlet and Gertrude to see how he behaves. Meanwhile, as he finishes speaking to Claudius and Gertrude, Polonius sees Hamlet coming and decides to talk to him...

- *How do you interpret Hamlet's behaviour towards Polonius here? To what extent does it fit in with what we know of Hamlet – and Polonius - already?*
- *What kind of language does Shakespeare give Hamlet here, and how does it affect your interpretation?*

- *How would you describe Polonius's reactions to Hamlet? How might you play both if you were acting them?*
- *What might be the dramatic purpose of this part of the scene – i.e. why might Shakespeare have included this scene?*

Groups Four and Five – Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Line 220 (My honoured Lord!) – line 268 (What make you at Elsinore?)

Line 268 (What make you....) – line 323 (What players are they?)

Claudius has asked Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two old friends of Hamlet, to try and find out what is wrong with him and report back. In this part of Scene 2, Hamlet meets and greets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and later tries to find out why they are there.

- *How do you interpret Hamlet's behaviour towards and relationship with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern here? To what extent does it fit in with what we know of Hamlet, and of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, already?*
- *What kind of language does Shakespeare give the characters here, and how does it affect your interpretation?*
- *What do you make of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's reactions to Hamlet? How might you play all three of these characters if you were acting them?*
- *What might be the dramatic purpose of this part of the scene – i.e. why might Shakespeare have included this scene?*

Ignore lines 323-364!

Group Six – Guildenstern, Hamlet, Polonius

Line 364 (There are the players) – line 413 (where my abridgements come)

Hamlet concludes his talk with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, reflecting on his state of mind; he then mocks Polonius, who comes to announce the arrival of the Players (actors) to the castle.

- *How do you interpret Hamlet's behaviour towards Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and towards Polonius, here?*
- *What kind of language does Shakespeare give the characters here, and how does it affect your interpretation?*
- *What do you make of the reactions of R and G, and Polonius, to Hamlet? How might you play these characters if you were acting them?*
- *What might be the dramatic purpose of this part of the scene – i.e. why might Shakespeare have included this scene?*

Group Seven – Hamlet's soliloquy

Line 537 (Ay so, God buy you) - line 595 (the conscience of the King)

Hamlet has watched one of the actors performing a speech in which Hecuba mourns the death of her husband in Troy. The actor appears to be so moved by the speech that he cries. Hamlet compares himself with the actor and reflects on his own situation.

- *What is Hamlet's mood here? Does it change during the soliloquy? What is Hamlet's argument and what is his plan?*
- *What kind of language do you see being used in different parts of the soliloquy? How does the language of a soliloquy differ from normal dialogue?*
- *What might be the dramatic purpose of this soliloquy – i.e. why might Shakespeare have included this scene?*

Written Task:

Commentary on one short passage from Act 2, Scene 2

(Exemplars given by teacher AFTER students had completed work – NB further work to be done on supporting the arguments with textual support.)

Passage 1

In this passage, Polonius communicates to the royal couple his view that Hamlet is mad, and his discovery that this may be because of Ophelia's rejection of Hamlet, a rejection which he himself instigated. It is the same self-interest and obsequiousness which led to his **arguably** cruel treatment of Ophelia in relation to Hamlet – we later find out that Gertrude would have been happy for Hamlet to marry Ophelia – which informs Polonius's reporting of this series of events. In this speech, we see him attempting to ingratiate himself with the king and queen. He is at pains to demonstrate how loyal he is to them by banning his own daughter from seeing Hamlet.

*In order to emphasise the importance of what he has to deliver, and his own role in discovering it, **Polonius uses pompous and grandiose language. Shakespeare highlights the vanity and self-importance of his approach by making him demonstrate his weak control over rhetoric, with his unsubtle use of repetition, metaphor and other rhetorical devices.** There is also liberal use of irony, as Polonius spends some considerable time claiming to be brief in a tedious and long-winded way. This **perhaps** confirms the impression we may have already received of Polonius as tedious and bumbling – although it should be noted that **more sinister interpretations of Polonius' self-importance and pompousness are also possible.***

Passage 2

In this passage, Hamlet attempts to make Polonius believe he is mad by using cryptic language characterised by obscure metaphors, puns and wordplay, repetition and self-interruption. Whilst some of the devices are clearly intended merely to make Hamlet seem mad, others contain pungent double meanings which are intended as disguised insults to Polonius, many of which refer in a sexual way to Ophelia. These are communicated to the audience through dramatic irony; Polonius remains largely oblivious to the intended insults. The dramatic irony here is possible because the audience knows that Hamlet is only pretending to be mad, and is able to contrast his behaviour here with his previous behaviour in the play. Whilst Hamlet is clearly 'playing mad' here, his obsession with Ophelia's sexuality, and his world-weariness, are apparent in his jokes, and point to the deeper disturbance within him,

Passage 3

In this passage, Hamlet, who has just been reunited with his old friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and who does not yet know that they have been sent by Claudius to spy on him, is engaged in friendly conversation with them. **This friendly banter** – which **perhaps** indicates a certain closeness, but not the level of intimacy which exists between Hamlet and Horatio - **is characterised by jokes and wordplay which are passed between characters and developed throughout the scene. In this extract, two main extended metaphors are developed** – the first a light-hearted sexual one, the second a more serious and contemplative one about mental health which marks a darkening of the tone. This shift eventually leads to Hamlet questioning Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about their motives. **It is possible that** Hamlet's general explanation of his bad mood is a broad attempt to deflect attention away from the deeper causes of his disturbance; nevertheless, what he says here does give an accurate reflection of some of his anxieties.

Hamlet: Bringing in context

You do not need to devote whole paragraphs or separate sections of your essay to context. Try to refer to the following contexts *as you go along* - and NB you don't have to mention all of the points below, only the ones that are relevant to your essay.

Read the two 'context packs' I gave you for further contextual information, or look up some of the suggested internet sites.

1. TRAGEDY: how does *Hamlet* relate to ideas about tragedy?

- Greek tragedy – how does Hamlet relate to the Aristotelian model of tragedy? Hamlet's *hamartia* (tragic mistake), and his tragic flaw, the *pathos* of the play, the *catastrophe* at the end, the sense of *catharsis* brought about by the play, etc. (See the tragedy booklet I gave you.)
- The 'revenge tragedy' genre – revenge as the cause of tragedy; obsession with mortality, death, skulls, ghosts, etc; complex parallel plots. Originates in Roman tragedy.
- Role of women in tragedy – relationships between men and women often at the heart of Greek tragedy and revenge tragedy

2. DRAMA: how does *Hamlet* demonstrate qualities we associate with drama generally, rather than just *tragic drama*?

- *Dramatic purpose* – each scene / speech designed to show the audience something and have a particular effect on them. Is the scene vital to the plot or is it intended purely for comic, emotional, or philosophical effect?
- Use of *dramatic irony* – when the audience knows something that the characters don't
- Use of *soliloquy and asides*
- *Dramatic characterisation* – achieved through speech, gesture, costume, etc.

3. SOCIETY: how does *Hamlet* relate to things that were going on generally in society at the time?

- The religious / philosophical context - ideas about religion, values and morality in society
- The political context – ideas about government, monarchy, etc.
- The theatrical context – what was theatre like?
- The literary context – what were plays and poetry like?
- The social context – relationships between men and women, families, communities, social conditions, etc.

Bringing in Language, Form, Structure

As You Like It

Form – PLAY, traditional dialogue form with SONGS and an EPILOGUE; **Genre** – Pastoral Comedy

Structure

- Initial **intercutting** between court and country highlights contrast and creates juxtapositions (e.g. the violence of the court next to the idyll of Arden)
- **Parallel plots** (Orlando and Oliver, Rosalind and Celia, Silvius and Phoebe) examine different angles
- Key schematic **moments of climax** (e.g. 'And I for no woman') in which parallel plots are brought together (Rosalind's magic)
- The three **parallel fools/cynics** - Jaques, Touchstone, Corin – highlight the challenge to the pastoral
- **Narrative emphasis** moves from (1) focus on court corruption to (2) focus on pastoral to (3) focus on love and marriage, combining elements of pastoral comedy and medieval romance

Language

- **Title** - vague comic title (like *Much Ado About Nothing* or *All's Well That Ends Well*) but it does suggest freedom from convention
- Use of **songs** to emphasise pastoral themes and echo the music in the classical pastoral
- Particularly **stylised language** used in key scenes (e.g. 'And I for no woman') to create pathos, invoke magic and emphasise parallels. Also used in 'set pieces' – e.g. Touchstone's rules of engagement, and in Jaques' 'All the world' speech.
- **Numerous** instances of **imagery, alliteration, enumeration, repetition, puns, verbal wit**, etc.
- Note frequent moves between **verse and prose** – verse usually for serious, upper-class and/or public speech; prose usually for comic, lower-class and/or private speech. BUT NB – Shakespeare does not stick to the rules and often shifts from verse to prose to emphasise a change in action or tone (and sometimes for no apparent reason at all...)

Songs of Innocence and Experience

Form – COLLECTION OF POEMS IN TWO BOOKS; SONGS, similar to children's religious songs of the period, with short rhythmic lines and simple rhyme schemes, mainly 4-line stanzas.

Genre – lyric poetry (i.e. short, song-like poems)

Structure

- **Two books** which mirror each other, with many poems having a 'twin' in the other book. Each book starts with an introduction containing a poet figure – the 'piper' and the 'bard'
- There is often an element of **symmetry or patterning** in the poems, with patterns being repeated in each stanza, or an answer being given in the second stanza to a question posed in the first, etc.

Language

- **Title** – ‘Songs of Innocence and Experience’ suggests the dual nature of the book, and the progression from innocence to experience
- **Simplicity of language**, in contrast with much of the poetry of the time, is designed to appeal to a wide range of readers, echoes the simplicity of religious hymns and children’s songs
- Mainly **simple, song-like forms** with 4 line stanzas, simple rhyme schemes and metres. Lullaby form sometimes used.
- Some poems have longer lines and a more **narrative** structure, telling a story.
- **Repetition and alliteration** frequently used for emphasis or to create song-like rhythm
- Strong nature **symbolism** throughout, including many **metaphors**

Tess of the D’Urbervilles

Form – NOVEL, 3rd person narrative, Genre – ‘bildungsroman’ – novel which focuses on the growth of a character from youth to maturity and/or death (most ‘classic’ novels fall into this category).

Structure

- Tess’s narrative divided into **7 phases**, each charting a new phase of the story. Each phase has a significant title which sums up or symbolises the theme of that part of the narrative
- The narrative is made up of a number of **journeys** to different symbolic **locations**. After the first chapter which establishes the idea that will bring about Tess’s fall, Chapter Two sets up the **pastoral** theme which is then explored in a number of different ways throughout the book.
- Use of **coincidences, foreshadowings, repeating events**, etc. throughout the book
- The **seasons** are used to highlight atmosphere and mood and for symbolic effect (e.g. spring/fertility, the cruelty of winter, etc.)

Language

- **Title** – ironic reference to the family name which will bring about Tess’s fall.
- **Symbolism** used throughout – e.g. the ‘blighted star’, the use of the colour red, etc. References to Eden and the biblical narrative of the fall occur throughout the story
- **Dialogue and narrative** are generally ‘realist’, although there are poetic and symbolic elements especially in the narrative. Strong use of poetic language during descriptive passages.

4. LITERATURE AND CREATIVE WRITING

Experimenting with Texts 1: Creative Re-writing / Re-creative Writing

Such activities are central to progressive models of teaching literature in primary and lower secondary schools. Writing the diary of a character, part of a screenplay for an adaptation of a novel, an alternative or predicted ending, and so on, have been widely and successfully used as means of encouraging response to literature since the important developments which took place in English teaching in the 1960s and 70s. There has also been a powerful movement towards such strategies in university English, for instance through the work of Rob Pope on 'Textual Intervention' (1995) and Ben Knights and Chris Thurgar-Dawson on 'Active Reading' (2006). Adoption of these strategies in 16-19 literature courses, however, has been less consistent, often as a result of the need to teach towards high-stakes assessment in the form of critical essays under examination conditions.

Increasingly, 16-19 syllabuses include options which allow students to offer creative exercises (sometimes referred to as 'creative re-writing', 're-creative writing' or 'textual transformation') as part of their final assessment. We would like to suggest, however, that such work can be hugely beneficial whether or not it is part of the course assessment.

A variety of textual interactions is possible. Some such approaches may emerge directly from and in response to literary texts; students may, for example, be asked to:

- add scenes or stanzas in the style and form of the original text.
- predict possible dramatic or narrative developments within the text;
- imagine and construct in writing certain key locations, settings, people, objects, etc. from the text;
- construct events that have happened prior to or alongside the events included in the text;
- write empathic responses or monologues to capture characters' responses to the events of the text;
- write into a scene from the text exploring not what *is* said, but what *is not* said, and then to consider why this is significant;
- write into a scene imagining what is present but not described and how this may play a significant role;
- attribute and explore emotions, motives, etc. to characters/events;
- rewrite a particular 'moment' from the point of view of a different character;
- rewrite a first-person narrative in the third person, and vice versa.

Where creative writing experiences are carefully structured and given autonomous value, students focus not only on the literary work in question but also reflect on their own creative processes as writers. This leads to significant insights into both critical and creative dimensions of their writing.

Experimenting with Texts 2: Creative Writing

Whereas the strategies described above relate directly to the reading of specific texts and aim primarily to increase and illuminate students' understandings of the texts and of the writers' methods, we deal here with a freer, more general approach to creative writing.

Creative writing is a regular part of pupils' experience of English pre-16, and increasingly it is a formal element of some courses in post-16 English studies. Indeed, Newlyn & Lewis (2003, 2004) have written about the creative writing workshops they have run with undergraduates at the University of Oxford: their accounts of the methods they used, and the work that resulted, offer fascinating reading for anyone wanting to undertake similar work with their own students. Whilst many teachers will feel that there is simply no time available for this approach in 16-19 literary studies, it can be a very stimulating and enjoyable way of encouraging students to relate creatively to the literary texts they are studying and in developing their more general abilities as writers.

A range of exercises can be used to help students with finding ways into writing. The exercises in Panel 3 can also provide excellent starter activities for any lesson where students will be writing, warming up the creative and verbal muscles and simply getting students thinking about language. Such activities, as well as encouraging students' creative development and enhancing their sense of the potentials of language, also feed into their development as readers. Similar activities have been used effectively, with appropriate levels of support and intervention, with pupils from primary age right up to postgraduate level.

From: Teaching English Literature 16-19, Routledge 2013: Atherton, Green, Snapper

A View From The Bridge coursework – re-creative writing

Some ideas:

- A monologue by Catherine before Eddie's betrayal, reflecting her thoughts about Eddie's behaviour and accusations and Rodolpho's motives
- A letter from Marco, before Eddie's betrayal, to his wife presenting his thoughts about events in the Carbone household
- Catherine and Rodolpho have married and gone to stay with a relative in Boston for a honeymoon. Write a letter from Beatrice to Catherine.
- A monologue by Beatrice after the events of the play.
- After the events of the play, Catherine and Rodolpho **OR** Beatrice go to Alfieri for advice and reassurance. Write part of the scene between them.

When you write your text, you should think about how it might enable you, in your commentary, to reflect on aspects of tragedy – for instance drawing attention to some of the ways in which Miller used the conventions of classical tragedy and the concerns of modern tragedy, e.g:

- The role of the tragic hero and/or victims
- The narrative structure and unfolding of the tragedy
- The roles of women in relation to the tragic hero
- The role of jealousy and sexual tension in the tragedy
- The role of the chorus and/or fate/prophecy
- The use of unity of time, place and action
- The idea of domestic tragedy - the tragedy of the common man
- The conflicts of values which leads to the tragedy

Some key points for the re-creative piece:

- The re-creative piece should reflect on the actual events which took place in the play and should not focus on imagined events which did not.
- Make sure language is appropriate for the characters, and don't have them speaking in literary criticism! If their style of speaking is different from in the original, comment on this in your commentary. You do not have to use American dialect.
- If you are writing a monologue or scene, use stage directions, if appropriate, in the way that Miller does
- Include 'echoes' of the original play, but not actual quotes – refs to things that happened or that people said
- Include references to details of setting and minor characters – e.g Vinnie Bolzano, Longshoremen, Sicily, Red Hook, Mr and Mrs Dondero, etc.
- Include characters' reflections on some of the themes – e.g. gender roles (role of women, masculinity, homosexuality); pride; immigration; fate; revenge; conflict between values – but NB in characters' language and thoughts – keep your critical comments for the commentary.

A View From the Bridge: Writing the Commentary for the Re-creative Work

In the commentary, you have the opportunity to explain the thinking behind what you have written.

In order to satisfy the assessment objectives, your commentary must be written well and use appropriate literary terminology (AO1), and contain some reflection on:

- the way you (and Miller) have used language, form and structure (AO2)
- the way your piece highlights possible interpretations of the play (AO3)
- the way your piece shows awareness of contexts such as the play's setting, period, style, genre (AO4)
- the ways all these are connected with the idea of tragedy

You can:

- explain why you have chosen to write the particular episode you have written – and why you have chosen the form of a letter / diary / speech / scene, etc
- explain how your piece highlights some of the issues, debates, ambiguities, etc., in the original play, and/or enables us to reflect on Miller's ideas
- explain how it your piece conveys an interpretation or suggests alternative interpretations of the original play, and/or how it enabled you to explore certain aspects of the play
- explain how your piece reflects some of the dramatic and linguistic elements of the original play (e.g. Miller's use of stage directions, characterisation, word choice, style, imagery). *(If you have chosen a non-dramatic form like a letter or a narrative, you will nevertheless want to show how this contains some dramatic or linguistic elements similar to the original)*

As you do this, you should ensure that you show how your piece relates to the concept of tragedy and the way the tragedy is enacted in the play. For instance:

- you could explain how your portrayal of a character highlights their role as tragic hero, victim, chorus, etc; or how it emphasizes the pathos of a character or situation
- you could reflect on the way you have echoed Miller's modern interpretation of the idea of tragedy and the tragic hero, (as he describes it in 'Tragedy and the Common Man')
- you could reflect on the way your piece echoes Miller's portrayal of tragic conflict in a modern setting, and/or his adaptation of the style of ancient tragedy in a modern setting

5. LITERATURE AND PERFORMANCE

Drama

- Historical separation between the study of drama texts and the study of drama in the theatre – and yet the theatre is a crucial part of the realisation of drama in society and culture.
- Media Studies looks at tv, Film Studies looks at film, Theatre Studies looks at theatre – but all of these also have a central focus on drama which overlaps with literature.
- The physicality of theatre is also a crucial part of the craft of the playwright: concepts such as dramatic purpose, dramatic irony, stage directions, etc., only make full sense when we consider the relationship between stage, actors and audience.
- The realisation of language and interpretation in performance is also crucial in considering these aspects.
- All students who study drama should see and discuss theatre productions and experiences if possible. Now also high quality DVDs of live productions are beginning to appear (especially from the **RSC and Shakespeare's Globe and Digital Theatre**) which can be used in class alongside the text so that the text can be studied both as text and performance.
- Students can also work on simulations of directing, designing, adapting play texts for the stage or screen – as well as rehearsing readings/performances in class. Follow this activity with reflections on how this activity has helped them to understand aspects of the text, its effect on stage, and the craft of the playwright.
- See National Theatre Discover website and Digital Theatre Plus for some useful resources, and RSC/ Shakespeare's Glove for Shakespeare.

Poetry

- Poetry – historically deeply linked with song and music – started as a performance art and continues to thrive as a performance art. The sort of poetry literature courses cover tends not to be intended for performance but poetry readings have always been linked even with literary poetry, and thrive now more than ever. There is clearly a strong cultural appetite for live poetry in many forms.
- Whether intended for performance or not, hearing/reading poetry aloud can help readers/students to engage with the shape, effects and overall impact of poetry, as well as to access and understand its aesthetic pleasures in a very direct way.
- See **The Poetry Archive, Poetry By Heart, The Poetry Channel**, etc., as well as live readings locally. Get poets to come and read or perform in schools – e.g – see **Apples and Snakes**.
- Students can work on adapting poems for stage, screen or radio, as well as performing them themselves: e.g. ask groups to work out multi-reader readings where the division of voices highlights the form and/or structure of the poem, and/or to use beats or background rhythms to emphasise the rhythmic nature of a poem.

The Novel

- In some senses, the novel is the least performance-oriented of all the literary forms. But NB Dickens was in huge demand for readings of his novels, and reading novels and short stories aloud continues to be a huge cultural demand – from parents reading to children to writers reading from their works to readings on radio.
- Further the adaptation of novels to the screen and stage is one of the most prolific of modern cultural industries.
- Again, students can be engaged in performing and / or reading parts of novel, and encouraged to reflect on how they have interpreted the text, or used the language of the text, to make decisions about their readings. And simulations of adapting the text for stage or screen offer similar opportunities for reflection and engagement.

6. PLAGIARISM, REFERENCING, ORIGINALITY

A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE: PLAGIARISM AND COURSEWORK

When you submit your coursework, you will have to sign a declaration that your work is all your own, and you will have to declare if you have received help other than that which is available as standard through your teacher and general advice available from friends and family. You are also required to declare any sources you have used in a bibliography.

It is vital that you understand what this means.

I. COURSEWORK REGULATIONS

Coursework **must** be your own work. Your teacher will help you with planning and give you advice on **ONE** draft (perhaps two if the first one needs completely re-working from scratch). When you hand in your first draft, your teacher will give you **general advice** on how the essay might be improved and **point out examples** of issues that need to be addressed, but is **not** allowed to **mark** the draft – i.e. will not comprehensively mark every error or mistake in the draft. So, for instance, if you have made a lot of spelling or punctuation errors, your teacher will give examples of these but will not highlight them all. It is your responsibility to apply the advice you have been given.

If you receive help from friends or family, that is fine as long as it is general, informal advice or guidance. **It is not acceptable for anyone to formally mark or give you comprehensive instruction on re-writing your work.** Any changes made to the work must be independently done by you as a result of general advice rather than comprehensive instruction.

As a result of the work you have done in class, your teacher will know what you are capable of. If you suddenly produce work that is much better than that standard, your teacher will want to know what help you have received. If you have received any help beyond what is acceptable, you will have to declare this, and it will affect your mark.

2. QUOTING, REFERENCING AND PLAGIARISM

When you are planning and drafting, you may – indeed you should – read about the topic you are writing about to find out what others have said about it. Your essential ideas about the topic should already have been formed by the work you have done in class, but you may well develop your ideas through the extra reading you do. In your bibliography, you must acknowledge any sources of ideas that have influenced your work. This includes books, websites, films, or any other medium. In particular, **you must include any works that you have quoted from directly, or from which you have directly taken ideas.** That is all fine and above board and you will not be penalised for references of this kind.

Quotes. If you have quoted from a critical text, you must say where the quotation is taken from in the main text of the essay (e.g. put 'Eaglestone, 2000' in brackets next to the quote), and then list the text, with its date, in your bibliography.

References. If you have taken an idea directly from a critical text, but not quoted from it, you should acknowledge this in the text by means of a reference. You can do this by saying something like 'Eaglestone (2000) suggests that....', and then again listing the text in your bibliography.

Good and Bad Sources. Acceptable texts for referencing are generally **authored texts** – i.e. texts that have the name of an author attached to them, and written by established critics or writers. Websites can pose a problem. Some websites (for instance the RSC, or Shakespeare’s Globe) may contain writing which is unattributed to an individual, but may be attributed to a respectable institution. Wikipedia, however, is an un-authored text and the information contained on it is not always reliable – although it can be a very useful starting point for further investigation. Nevertheless, if you do find important ideas here which you use directly, you should reference them. A greater problem is the many websites now offering student essays, many of which are un-authored. Even where they are authored, they are not generally considered good sources. We advise you strongly not to consult such websites. However, if you do, it is of course essential that you include the source in your bibliography.

Plagiarism. If you copy words from another text without acknowledging them, this is plagiarism. Of course just one or two odd words may not matter, but if you take a sequence of words from the same sentence and paragraph, even if you change one or two of them, this could still count as plagiarism. You must *either* rewrite in your own words and give a reference *or* quote.

Assimilating ideas. However, please note that you should not be rewriting other people’s ideas extensively in your essay. The ideas should be essentially yours, emerging from the classwork you have done – although it is fine to incorporate and use others’ ideas where they are relevant and helpful in developing your argument. We call this the ‘assimilation’ of ideas – where others’ ideas become an organic part of your own. This is fine, as long as you acknowledge the sources of important ideas.

Alternative interpretations. One of the assessment objectives for the course involves showing awareness of different or alternative interpretations. This is an important skill in itself, but it is also a safeguard against plagiarism. Your work should show that you are aware of and have thought through a number of alternative ways of interpreting texts, not just taken one idea from one source and followed that.

Investigating plagiarism. Since the proliferation of the internet, plagiarism has become a major problem (although it was of course previously also a problem in relation to books and essays.) Students wishing to take short cuts can succumb to temptation easily. However, it is important to remember the following:

- teachers and examiners have as good access to internet sources as you do, and can easily check for plagiarism by simply typing groups of words in to Google. Google has now digitised vast numbers of standard critical texts, too, so it is possible to search for words from books as well as websites
- teachers are highly experienced readers, and in particular highly experienced readers of critical writing and students’ writing, who will quickly spot if there is a possibility that you have engaged in plagiarism

If your teacher suspects there is some plagiarism, they will investigate. If anything is found, you will be penalised. At worst, your work could be disqualified. You should also note that examiners see a great deal more work than individual teachers, and are if anything **MORE** likely to spot and check for plagiarism.

Safeguards. As you work, make a note of all sources you have consulted, and especially any you have used directly. Also, ensure that you keep copies of the different drafts you have written, in case they are needed later for any reason. **DO NOT** redraft directly onto a previous Word document. Retain the original document and start a new document for your re-draft.

7. THEORY

INTRODUCING LITERARY THEORY

‘Literary theory is a catch-all term for a huge range of new and different ways of reading and interpreting texts, reflecting the different concerns and ideas of a very wide range of people... [It] encourages us to think about how we interpret’ (Robert Eaglestone, 2000: *Doing English*)

I: Asking questions about literature

In groups, discuss the questions below. These questions represent some of the underlying issues of literary theory

A. WHAT IS LITERATURE AND WHAT IS IT FOR?

- What is the definition of ‘literature’?
- What is the difference between ‘literature’ and ‘fiction’ or ‘drama’?
- Is soap opera literature? Is Dan Brown literature?
- Is there a particular kind of language which is only found in literature?
- What is the purpose and/or value of literature?
- What view of literature does A Level give?

B. WHAT IS THE STUDY OF LITERATURE AND WHAT IS IT FOR?

- What does one learn from studying literature? What skills and knowledge does studying literature give you?
- How are those skills and knowledge similar or different to other subjects?
- Is it more important to study old texts or new?
- What benefit is there for society in the study of literature?
- What benefit is there for the individual in studying literature?
- What is literary criticism and what is it for?
- What might the study of literature have to do with the following areas of study: history, politics and sociology, media studies, linguistics, philosophy, gender studies, psychology?

C. HOW DO WE INTERPRET AND EVALUATE LITERARY TEXTS, AND WHY?

- What knowledge do you need to interpret a text?
- How important is it to know the author’s intention when interpreting a literary text?
- How do you evaluate whether a literary text is good or not?
- Is it possible to dislike or disapprove of a text but still think it is ‘good’ (or to like / enjoy a text but still think it is ‘bad’)?
- Why might interpretation and evaluation be important, both in studying texts and in society more generally?

2: Discussing statements about literature

In groups, discuss the following statements:

All pupils, including those of very limited attainments, need the civilising experience of contact with great literature, and can respond to its universality. (Newsom Report, 1963)

Any belief that the study of literature is the study of a stable, well-definable entity, as entomology is the study of insects, can be abandoned as a chimera. Some kinds of fiction are literature and some are not; some literature is fictional and some is not; some literature is verbally self-regarding, while some highly-wrought rhetoric is not literature. Literature, in the sense of a set of works of assured and unalterable value, distinguished by certain shared inherent properties, does not exist. (Prof Terry Eagleton, 1983)

Because it is such a profound and universal experience, Literature must be taught to school pupils, whereupon it becomes an instrument within the whole apparatus of filtering whereby schools adjust young people to an unjust social order. (Prof Alan Sinfield, 1985)

Is Literature an ideological instrument: a set of stories that seduce readers into accepting the hierarchical arrangements of society? ... Or is literature the place where ideology is exposed, revealed as something that can be questioned? Both claims are thoroughly plausible... (Prof Jonathan Culler, 1997)

English Literature is the best in the world – it is every child's birthright and we should be proud to teach it in every school. (Michael Gove, 2010)

3: Examining attitudes to literature

Each group will be given some articles about literature from recent newspapers.

- *In pairs, read and discuss two of the articles; then report back to the rest of the group on the articles you have read, explaining what they are about and what their arguments are. As a group, discuss the ideas in each article.*
- *Each person in the group should take one article and prepare a short powerpoint presentation to the rest of the class, explaining the main ideas in the article, giving your response to the article, and suggesting what issues about literature the article raises.*

ARGUING ABOUT LITERATURE: Literature in the News

- What kind of debates about literature are taking place?
- What kinds of arguments are used?
- What are the underlying theoretical issues?

Developing the following skills:

- Explaining and constructing arguments about literature
 - Identifying theoretical issues in debates
 - Discussing ideas effectively in groups

1. WORK IN A PAIR

- Read one article each
- Explain your article to the other person
- Decide what the two articles have in common and how they are different.
- What issues do they raise?
- Discuss what you feel about the articles and/or the issues.

2. WORK IN A GROUP OF FOUR

- Each pair explain to the other pair what your articles are about.
- Decide what the four articles have in common and how they are different
- What issues do they raise?
- Discuss what you feel about the articles and/or the issues.
- How might these articles / issues relate to literary theory?

3. FINALLY – FEEDING BACK TO WHOLE CLASS

- Each person in the group should briefly explain what their article is about
- Be prepared to explain the issues you feel the articles raise and what your group thinks about them.

Group One: What about Dan Brown?

- *The Lost Symbol* by Dan Brown: Dan Brown's latest blockbuster is the literary equivalent of Coca-Cola and will no doubt sell as well (Peter Conrad, *The Observer*, 2009)
- *A Word of Mouth Success: Why are people lining up to rubbish The Da Vinci Code?* Simple – it's a bestseller that doesn't know its place. (Lucy Mangan, *The Guardian*, August 2004)
- *The Da Vinci Code is as Dickensian as Miriam Margolyes in a bonnet* (David Baddiel, *The Times*, July 2005)
- *Populist Prejudice: Crime books easier to write than 'serious' novels? That attitude is frankly, cobblers.* (Mark Lawson, *The Guardian*, January 2008)

Group Two: What about 'the Classics' ?

- *A Bit of Brontë Does You Good: Victorian novels may be hard going, but they are a proper education in broadening the mind.* (Libby Purves, *The Times*, May 2005)
- *Canon Fodder: It's madness to force-feed the classics to teenagers –it could put them off reading for life.* (Stephen Moss, *The Guardian*, August 2006)
 - *Reading ruined by Classroom Dissection* (Shereen Pandit, *TES*, December 2005)
- *Highly Literary and Deeply Vulgar: If James Kelman's Booker novel is rude, it's a in good company.* (Robert Winder, *The Independent*, October 1994)

Group Three: What about Shakespeare?

- *Save us from a winter of discontent – ban the bard* (Miranda Sawyer, *The Guardian*, September 2005)
 - *Shakespeare: Time for a Moratorium?* (Dominic Dromgoole, Richard Bean, *Time Out*, April 2006)
- *Plays for Today: If we do not adapt Shakespeare for our times, the richness of his work will be lost.* (Michael Bogdanov, *The Guardian*, November 2003)
- *Bard Not That Hard To Follow: Stop teaching the plays as literature; that is what they have become, but it is not what they were.* (Paul Innes, *The Scotsman*, November 2009)

Evening Standard 27/5/08

Cambridge students asked to compare Raleigh and Shakespeare with Amy Winehouse lyrics in final year exam

They are the some of the foremost figures in English literature - Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and Raleigh. Now Amy Winehouse has been elevated alongside them -after her work was included in a Cambridge University exam.

Third-year English students asked to compare extracts by literary giants in their practical criticism paper were surprised to find one of the drug addict singer's songs included. Love Is a Losing Game was in a question with Sir Walter Raleigh's poem As You Came From The Holy Land, written in 1592.

While some academics defended its inclusion yesterday, Nick Seaton, of the Campaign for Real Education, said: 'This is another case of dumbing down. It seems the examiners are trying to be trendy rather than ensure that the exam covers traditional classical literature. This has already become commonplace in school exams such as GCSEs and A-levels and it is creeping into undergraduate level teaching as well. If they are using Amy Winehouse now, then who are they going to use next?'

A student who sat the paper said: 'It was really bizarre. I sat there looking at the paper in shock. I wouldn't consider a controversial pop singer a literary figure.'

As well as being a famous explorer, Raleigh was considered one of the foremost poets of the Elizabethan era. His work often expressed a contemptus mundi (contempt for the world) attitude. The favoured courtier of Elizabeth I composed in a straightforward and unornamented fashion known as the plain style. C S Lewis would pay him the compliment of describing him as one of the era's 'silver poets'.

Winehouse has also demonstrated a certain contempt for the world as she veers from one drug-addled crisis to another. She was recently secretly filmed at her East London home, smoking crack and snorting cocaine. Meanwhile her husband, Blake Fielder-Civil, faces charges of grievous bodily harm and has been on remand in prison since November.

Students who sat the paper last Thursday were also asked to compare the Raleigh poem with two other songs - Fine and Mellow, by blues singer Billie Holiday, and Boots of Spanish Leather by Bob Dylan. The exam question said:

'The Oxford English Dictionary defines "lyric" as 'of or pertaining to the lyre; adapted to the lyre, meant to be sung.' It also quotes Ruskin's maxim: 'Lyric poetry is the expression by the poet of his own feelings.'

Students were then asked to compare-the Raleigh poem with one or two of the song lyrics - with reference to these diverse senses of 'lyric'.

Jonathan Bate, a professor in English and comparative literary studies at The University of Warwick, defended the exam question yesterday. He said: 'Raleigh was like a celebrity figure of the day and his poems were set to music - they were the like the pop songs of the Elizabethan era - so perhaps it is quite a relevant comparison.'

A Cambridge University spokesman said: 'The idea is to assess students' abilities at dealing with unseen writings from across the field of English literature. As for choosing Amy Winehouse, why not? Cambridge dons live in the modern world and can appreciate talent from a myriad of different fields just like anyone else.'

How the question should be answered

Michael Dobson, Professor of English and Theatre Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London, assesses the relative literary merits of Raleigh and Winehouse:

Although to the best of our knowledge Sir Walter Raleigh's drug problems were confined to tobacco, and Amy Winehouse has so far been confined for spells in the Priory rather than in the Tower, a comparison between these two short lyrics does reveal definite continuities between the lute-oriented ballads of the first Elizabethan era and their louder soul counterparts of the second.

In terms of writing for music, both lyricists recognise the value of repeated syntactical structures, phrases, or refrains, with Raleigh building his lament for lost love around a question-and-answer format by then already familiar from folk balladry; Winehouse's shorter piece instead repeats variations on its title, ending each of its five quatrains with a couplet that closes on another such variation.

They differ significantly, however, in lexicon; Raleigh, in a manner characteristic of Western love poetry since Petrarch, describes earthly love using metaphors borrowed from religion (whereby his beloved is engaged in a pilgrimage, is divine, is as fair as the heavens, and so on), while Winehouse, though she does invoke 'the gods', instead uses imagery drawn primarily from gambling.

The claim that lyric poetry characteristically represents the unmediated expression of poets' personal feelings should perhaps be qualified; the imagined first person who speaks or sings a poem is always a construct, a dramatic fiction, as is particularly clear in the case of the Raleigh poem, which is in fact an imaginary dialogue between two imaginary voices.

It achieves its dramatic effect by simulating the confessional, when the poet seems to forget the framework of the first part of the poem to lapse into a longer unbroken and unresolved passage of complaint as if overcome by his own personal griefs while in the act of composition.

The Winehouse song is just as unlikely to be in any real sense confessional; writers genuinely overcome by misery are rarely in a condition to write at all, never mind in the structured, rhythmical and rhyming manner needed to fit a piece of dance music.

Both lyrics, in their different idioms, are in fact highly conventional, and each lapses blurrily at times into the poetical cliché of its own day (Winehouse's phrase 'the final frame' in this context perhaps risks confusing the vocabulary of the pop video with that of snooker); but both are clearly the work of writers with an assured grasp of those conventions, and acutely aware of the needs music imposes on, and finds within, language.



As You Came from the Holy Land (Sir Walter Raleigh)

As you came from the holy land
Of Walsingham,
Met you not with my true love
By the way as you came ?

How shall I know your true love,
That have met many one,
As I went to the Holy Land,
That have come, that have gone ?

She is neither white nor brown,
But as the heavens fair ;
There is none hath a form so divine
In the earth or the air.

Love is a Losing Game (Amy Winehouse)

For you I was a flame
Love is a losing game
Five story fire as you came

Love is a losing game
Why do I wish I never played
Oh, what a mess we made
And now the final frame
Love is a losing game

Played out by the band
Love is a losing hand
More than I could stand
Love is a losing hand

Self professed, profound
Till the chips were down
Know you're a gambling man
Love is a losing hand

Though I'm rather blind
Love is a fate resigned
Memories mar my mind
Love is a fate resigned

Over futile odds
And laughed at by the gods
And now the final frame
Love is a losing game

Such a one did I meet,
good sir,
Such an angel-like face,
Who like a queen, like a nymph, did appear,
By her gait, by her grace.

She hath left me here
all alone,
All alone, as unknown,
Who sometimes did me lead with herself,
And me loved as her own.

What's the cause that she leaves you alone,
And a new way doth take,
Who loved you once as her own,
And her joy did you make ?

I have loved her all my youth,
But now old, as you see,
Love likes not the falling fruit
From the withered tree.

Know that Love is a careless child,
And forgets promise past;
He is blind, he is deaf when he fist,
And in faith never fast.

His desire is a dureless content,
And a trustless joy;
He is won with a world of despair,
And is lost with a toy.

Of womankind such indeed is the love,
Or the word love abused,
Under which many childish desires
And conceits are excused.

But true love is a durable fire,
In the mind ever burning,
Never sick, never old, never dead,
From itself never turning.

FEMINISM

What is feminism?

Feminism is a political and philosophical movement concerned with analysis of the way in which men and women relate in society. Its starting point is the idea that society is, and always has been, 'patriarchal' - that is, controlled by men, organised to a great extent for the benefit of men, and designed to maintain the dominance of men. (This kind of power structure – where one social group has profound dominance over another - is known as 'hegemony').

One of the key elements of feminist analysis is the idea that the hegemony of men is perpetuated, often on a subconscious / unconscious level through the operation of accepted social norms and conventions and ideas about deviance from these norms; these conventions are encoded in social, cultural and linguistic behaviours and discourses. By these means, women are persuaded to accept their own subjugation.

Feminism is in many respects similar and related to Marxism, which is also concerned with the operation of hegemony – the hegemony of the upper classes over the lower. Indeed, one key element of feminism is its analysis of the way in which women are economically disempowered in society.

The idea of **gender** is crucial to feminism; feminism argues that power structures are perpetuated through the perpetuation of certain gender roles assigned to men and women in society.

What is gender?

Whilst '**sex**' refers to the physical *sexual characteristics* we are born with (i.e., in the vast majority of cases, '**male**' or '**female**') '**gender**' refers to the *socio-cultural behaviours* which we display: '**masculine**' or '**feminine**'. Whilst sex is *biologically determined*, ideas about gender – in particular what behaviours are considered typical or appropriate for the different sexes, what is masculine and what is feminine – are unfixed and *culturally constructed*.

Nature v. nurture: whilst some aspects of gender roles might to some extent be related to sexual difference ('nature'), this can be overstated. The role of cultural construction and environmental factors ('nurture') is vital, most obviously in relation to the way men and women are expected to dress and look, but in many other aspects of behaviour too (including, for instance, elements of emotional and psychological character).

Gender and sexuality: the idea of gender is related to the idea of sexuality as well as sex. Ideas about masculinity and femininity are clearly linked with ideas about heterosexuality and homosexuality – though it is vital to note that there are no simple correspondences between gender and sexuality. 'Queer theory' – a branch of feminist / gender theory – suggests that ideas about sexuality, like ideas about gender, are often culturally constructed. But queer theory is not just about sexuality: it is a broader set of ideas about the functioning of social norms, and the ways in which 'deviant' or minority behaviour operate within society.

For discussion:

Construction of gender: some questions

- **What gender behaviours and characteristics does our society encourage/validate/discourage/invalidate for men and women/girls and boys?**
- **How does it encourage or discourage them?**

FEMINISM, GENDER AND LITERATURE

Feminist literary theories are concerned with analysis of the representation of women and gender roles in literature and culture, and the way gender is constructed through language and culture.

At a simple level, feminist approaches to literature are interested in:

- the balance of power between men and women in the literary world – e.g. equality of opportunity for women writers
- the representation of women's condition in literary texts

More complex approaches may look at the ways in which texts hide and reveal patriarchal power structures, e.g:

- through the use of male narrators, voices and viewpoints
- through the construction of gender through language patterns and imagery
- through representations of psycho-social and psycho-sexual behaviours

For discussion: representation of women and gender roles in literature

1. Folk and Fairy Tales: How have women traditionally been represented in popular narratives?

i) Brainstorm as many folk / fairy tales as you can.

Examples might include: Cinderella, Rapunzel, Hansel and Gretel, Tom Thumb, Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast, Snow White, The Ugly Duckling, The Three Little Pigs, Jack and the Beanstalk, Puss in Boots, Little Red Riding-Hood, The Gingerbread Man

ii) Now put them into groups under the following headings:

- Have a woman as victim who needs rescuing (by a man)
- Have evil female character
- Have no significant female characters at all

(A tale may appear in more than one group.)

Discuss: Would it work if you did it the other way round, substituting man for woman? What does this tell us?

iii) Now examine the women in each group:

- For group 1: describe the general characteristics of the woman who is a victim
- For group 2: describe the general characteristics of the evil woman
- For group 3: if there are any woman characters, what roles do they tend to play?
- Look at the men in these stories. Do they share any common characteristics?

2. Disney and James Bond: How do representations of women in popular narratives change during the 20th century?

(i) Write down the Disney cartoons and Bond films you can think of. Divide them into older and more modern ones

- How are men and women presented?
- Does it change as they get more modern?

3. Children's Literature: How are children introduced to gender roles in children's literature?

(i) What are the roles of men and women in:

- Robin Hood? King Arthur?
- Winnie-the-Pooh? Wind in the Willows?
- Treasure Island? Peter Pan?
- Alice in Wonderland? The Secret Garden?
- The Hobbit / The Lord of the Rings?
- Others?

4. Literary Classics and Contemporary Literature: How are gender roles represented in mainstream literary texts?

(i) What are the roles of men and women in the texts you have studied at A Level and GCSE? How are gender roles and variations treated? Can you see any patterns? Are there differences between books written by men and by women?

First, texts by men:

- Shakespeare Tragedy - Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet (and any others you know)
- Shakespeare Comedy: As You Like It (and others you know, e.g. Midsummer Night)
- Modern Tragedy: Mother Courage, All My Sons
- Poetry: Keats and Auden, Blake
- Classic Novel: Tess of the D'Urbervilles / Modern Novel: The Kite Runner, Enduring Love

Next, texts by women:

- Classic Novel: Pride and Prejudice
- Modern Novel: The Handmaid's Tale, Beloved, The Color Purple
- Poetry: Sylvia Plath

MARXISM

What is Marxism?

Marxism is a philosophical and political movement concerned with analysis of the way in which class operates in society. Its starting point is the idea that wealth in society is created by the working classes but controlled by a few in the upper classes (**the bourgeoisie**) who own **the means of production**. (This kind of power structure – where one social group has profound dominance over another - is known as '**hegemony**'). The working class (**the proletariat**), despite producing society's wealth, receive the least payment for their work, whilst the less numerous middle and upper classes receive higher rewards and maintain a class system which promotes middle and upper class values and denigrates lower class values. Thus, the proletariat is **exploited** by the bourgeoisie.

Marxism suggests that the class system can only be overturned by revolution, bringing the means of production into **public ownership**. Marxism is considered by many to be a valuable philosophy rather than the basis for political action, but it does form the basis for major political movements – **communism and anarchism** – and many Marxist ideas underpin the less revolutionary principles of **socialism**. Marx himself saw communism as a post-revolutionary society in which class, inequality and the nation-state had been made irrelevant; no communist state has ever reached this stage.

Marxism is a **materialist** (as opposed to an **idealist**) philosophy. It argues that the key to a good society is the equitable distribution of **material wealth** and the power that results from it. It is opposed to idealist notions of a good society – such as those proposed by religion – which suggest that the key to a good society are essentially spiritual, but which in practice seek to perpetuate the exploitation of the proletariat.

Because of its focus on material and production, Marxism is fundamentally an economic theory. It argues that society is composed of **a base and a superstructure**. The *base* is the part of society devoted to *economic* activity – the production, distribution and exchange of material – whilst the *superstructure* is the *political and cultural* realm (education, religion, government, law, art, etc). The two are closely interrelated and influence each other, but ultimately it is the nature of the base which determines the nature of the superstructure. Thus it would require a revolution in the base for there to be a transformation of the superstructure. This area of Marxist thought is known as **dialectical** materialism (i.e. concerned with the complex inter-relationship (dialectics) between two things.)

One of the key elements of Marxist analysis is the idea that the hegemony of the upper classes is perpetuated, often on a subconscious / unconscious level, through the operation of accepted social norms and conventions; these conventions are encoded in social, cultural and linguistic behaviours and discourses. By these means, the lower classes are persuaded to accept their own subjugation. Whether they know it or not, they are suffering **alienation**; if they do not know it, this is because of the **false consciousness** created by capitalism.

Marxism also suggests that class relationships have taken several different forms throughout history. In primitive times, small communities were essentially communist. As civilisation developed, aristocracies grew and slavery/feudalism developed. Eventually, aristocratic society gave way to capitalist society. The growth of socialism would then eventually lead to communism.

History of Marxism

- Marx was influenced by a large number of 18th and 19th century (Enlightenment) writers, philosophers and economists who explored many aspects of the development and organisation of human society. The events of the French Revolution of 1789 were also hugely influential.
- **1848: Publication of Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto***
- **1917: The Russian Revolution – leading to the first communist state**

MARXISM AND LITERATURE

Marxist literary theories are concerned with analysis of the representation of class and social power in literature and culture, and the way class consciousness is constructed through language and culture.

At a simple level, Marxist approaches to literature are interested in:

- the balance of power between classes in the literary world – e.g. the relationship between the social classes of authors, readers and texts, the extent to which the voices of different classes were able to heard through literature

- the representation of class in literary texts, especially the relationships between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie

More complex approaches may look at the ways in which texts hide and reveal social and economic structures, for instance:

- through the use of bourgeois narrators, voices and viewpoints
- through the construction of class relationships through language patterns and imagery
- through analysis of what is hidden or not said about the class struggle

For discussion:

Think about the texts you have studied at GCSE and A Level so far.

What classes are represented in the texts? How are class relationships portrayed in the texts? To what extent do working class characters accept or question their social status, and that of those in higher classes? To what extent do the narrators of the texts comment on class? What do you know about the class origins or political beliefs of the writers?

Can you think of any texts in which working class characters are central, or in which the narrator is working class? Is working class language represented?

Also think about the portrayal of class relationships in a variety of other texts – traditional tales, popular culture texts, children’s books etc.

Representation of class and gender in Shakespeare

In your group, decide on one Shakespeare play you all know well (e.g. *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Much Ado*) and then discuss the following questions:

Class

Which characters would you classify as noble /aristocratic? Which would you classify as workers, servants, etc.? Which characters have money/land and therefore economic power?

How are the lower class characters portrayed? How much space or significance is given to the lower class characters? Are different types of language/dialogue given to lower and upper class characters?

What do you notice about the way that lower and upper class characters speak to and behave towards each other? What about the way they speak *about* each other?

How are power structures represented in the play? How would you describe the hierarchy? Where do you see social or economic power negotiated, challenged or threatened during the play?

Who performs work during the play? What kind of work? Where do you see the Marxist ideas of base (labour) and superstructure (culture and government) in action?

Do you think class roles are fairly and / or accurately represented? What might the play tell us about the way people have thought about class roles?

Gender

How many male characters and how many female characters are there? How significant are the male / female characters? How much space is given to each in the play?

How is the relationship between male and female characters presented? What do you notice about the way they speak to and behave towards each other, and what about the way they speak *about* each other?

To what extent can you see gender stereotypes at play in these characters and relationships? To what extent are women portrayed as 'feminine' and men as 'masculine'? What roles do men and women perform in the society represented in the play?

To what extent do women exercise social and/or economic power in the world of the play? How much of that power is inside the home and how much outside?

Do you think gender roles are fairly and / or accurately represented? What might the play tell us about the way people have thought about gender roles?

8. WRITING SKILLS AND ESSAY PRESENTATION

WRITING ESSAYS ABOUT LITERATURE

At GCSE, you are likely to have been taught about 'PEE+' (Point, Evidence, Explanation, Analysis). This is a great starting point for writing A Level essays, but you'll need to learn to be *more flexible and less formulaic* than you might have been before in the way you apply the rule.

POINT

The 'point' you are making is always a good starting point for a paragraph or section of the essay. In a literary essay, your point could be a range of things. It could be, for instance:

- About the writer's use of language, form or structure:
 - *Throughout Hamlet, Shakespeare uses images of decay or disease to highlight the corruption of the state of Denmark.*
- About the way we interpret a character, setting, description, speech or event:
 - *In this scene, Shakespeare makes Polonius seem pompous and long winded.*
- About the writer's ideas or the context of the book:
 - *There is a strong sense of the danger of popular revolution throughout Hamlet.*

EVIDENCE

You can then support your point with a well-chosen piece of evidence – but don't just tack it on carelessly. Sometimes you can just put a quote in after a colon, but usually it's best to embed it in the paragraph carefully, making it run on smoothly from the 'point'. There are many ways to do this. For instance, taking the three previous examples:

- Throughout Hamlet, Shakespeare uses images of decay or disease to highlight the corruption of the state of Denmark. *Early in the play, Hamlet remarks that 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark', and later he talks about '...' and '...'*
- In this scene, Shakespeare makes Polonius seem pompous and long winded. *For instance, Polonius boasts that he is going to be brief in what he has to say: '...' But immediately after this, he embellishes his point in a very elaborate way: '...'*
- There is a strong sense of the danger of popular revolution throughout Hamlet. *Claudius is afraid to behave badly towards Hamlet partly because he is '...'. Later, with Hamlet exiled and Polonius dead, we find that the people are supporting Laertes: '...'*

EXPLANATION

Now is your chance to explain why this is significant and/or how the writer might be using language to get the point across. Whatever you do, avoid using the phrase 'This shows that...' to connect your evidence with your explanation.

- Throughout Hamlet, Shakespeare uses images of decay or disease to highlight the corruption of the state of Denmark. Early in the play, Hamlet remarks that 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark', and later he talks about '...' and '...'. **These metaphors depict Denmark as a diseased state, comparing it with a flower or creature which is ill or decaying.**
- In this scene, Shakespeare makes Polonius seem pompous and long-winded. For instance, Polonius boasts that he is going to be brief in what he has to say: '...' But immediately after this, he embellishes his point in a lengthy and elaborate way: '...'. **Here, we see that Polonius cannot resist showing off in front of the King and Queen, self-**

centredly displaying his rhetorical skills whilst apparently unaware of the irony in what he is saying.

- There is a strong sense of the danger of popular revolution throughout Hamlet. Claudius is afraid to behave badly in public towards Hamlet partly because he is ‘...’. Later, with Hamlet exiled and Polonius dead, we find that the people are supporting Laertes: ‘...’. **Claudius is portrayed here as being aware that Hamlet’s challenge to his corrupt regime has the power to de-throne him if the people become aware that ‘something is rotten in the state’.**

ANALYSIS

This is the point at which you can extend your explanation, looking a little more deeply or widely at the significance of this point, perhaps showing how it relates to the ideas in the whole text:

- Throughout Hamlet, Shakespeare uses images of decay or disease to highlight the corruption of the state of Denmark. Early in the play, Hamlet remarks that ‘something is rotten in the state of Denmark’, and later he talks about ‘...’ and ‘...’. These metaphors depict Denmark as a diseased state, comparing it with a flower or creature which is ill or decaying. Shakespeare seems to be drawing a parallel between the **physical** corruption in the natural world and the **moral** corruption in the political world of Denmark.
- In this scene, Shakespeare makes Polonius seem pompous and long-winded. For instance, Polonius boasts that he is going to be brief in what he has to say: ‘...’. But immediately after this, he embellishes his point in a lengthy and elaborate way: ‘...’. Here, we see that Polonius cannot resist showing off in front of the King and Queen, self-centredly displaying his rhetorical skills whilst apparently unaware of the irony in what he is saying. Indeed, throughout this speech Polonius comes across as self-regarding and sycophantic, qualities which eventually lead to his downfall.
- There is a strong sense of the danger of popular revolution throughout Hamlet. Claudius is afraid to behave badly in public towards Hamlet partly because he is ‘...’. Later, with Hamlet exiled and Polonius dead, we find that the people are supporting Laertes: ‘...’. We see here that Claudius is aware that Hamlet’s challenge to his corrupt regime has the power to de-throne him if the people become aware that ‘something is rotten’ in his regime. Shakespeare reminds us that a bad monarch can be overthrown by a revolution of the people, even in an absolute monarchy, especially when led by a rival noble.

Names

Names of characters, texts, authors, places, etc have capital letters and are written in full. You usually call an author (say Margaret Atwood) by her full name the first time you mention her – ‘Margaret Atwood’ – and then by her surname only – ‘Atwood’. Never call her ‘Margaret.’

Titles

- Titles of texts are shown in italics OR underlined, NOT inverted commas. (*Macbeth*, or Macbeth - not ‘Macbeth’) Distinguish between Macbeth (the character) and *Macbeth* (the play)
- Titles of poems or short stories are written using inverted commas, to differentiate them from the collections of poetry or stories of which they are part. (The poem ‘Death of a Naturalist’ is found in the collection *Death of a Naturalist*. ‘We Are Seven’ is a poem in *Lyrical Ballads*.)

Quotations

- If the quotation is substantial, break the paragraph to insert the quotation by indenting and/or leaving space around it. Announce the quotation with a colon, and record the page, line or act/scene number in brackets after it.

The opening of *Pride and Prejudice* clearly establishes the novel’s obsessive relationship between marriage and wealth:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. [p 1]

The close juxtaposition of... etc

- Where the quotation is only brief, it can form part of your paragraph:
The fact that the action of the poem is placed in ‘the heart / Of the townland’ demonstrates the uneasy relationship between town and country life.
- Note: in poetry, where a quotation spans a line break, a forward slash (/) is used to denote this. This isn’t necessary for prose.
- If you wish to clarify an aspect of your quotation, use square brackets to demonstrate writing that isn’t part of the text:
Forest on forest hung about his [Saturn’s] head
Like cloud on cloud
- If you wish to omit a section of text from your quotation, use ellipsis:
But now it’s different for him – the same way it’s different for me ... he finally feels as though people will pay attention to what he has to say.

Writing about quotes

Some different ways of explaining the significance of quotes, other than ‘This shows that’:

This suggests that...; This seems to indicate that...; This may mean that...

Here, the author may be suggesting that...; Here, the reader may feel that...

When we read the word ... we may interpret this as...; The words indicate that...

The author uses the phrase.... to convey...; In this passage, we see the way in which....

However and nevertheless: to express a contrast

We can use either of the adverbs **however** or **nevertheless** to indicate that the second point we wish to make contrasts with the first point. The difference is one of formality: **nevertheless** is bit **more formal** and emphatic than **however**. Consider the following:

- *I can understand everything you say about wanting to share a flat with Martha. **However**, I am totally against it.*
- *Rufus had been living in the village of Edmonton for over a decade. **Nevertheless**, the villagers still considered him to be an outsider.*

Note that **however** and **nevertheless** are normally placed in initial position in a sentence when contrasting two ideas. They can, however, also come in mid position or end position:

- *There will be no more pay increases this year. That is for sure. We have, **however**, agreed to carry out a full review of pay and conditions. We have agreed, **nevertheless**, to carry out a full review of pay and conditions.*
- *He's still able to get around quite well.
His whole life has been plagued by illness, **however**.
His whole life has been plagued by illness, **nevertheless***

Less formal equivalents of **however** and **nevertheless** would be **even so**, **in spite of this**, **yet** or **yet..still**. These alternatives would be better suited to spoken English discourse:

- *She's really quite ill and has been for some time. **Even so / In spite of this** she remains in good spirits.*
- *He has over a million pounds in his bank account. **Yet he still** gets up at six every morning to go to work.*

However and nevertheless: for counter-argument

If you need to write essays, it is also useful to use **however**, **nevertheless**, **nonetheless** or **even so** to introduce the final part of a three-part structure:

- ***It is said** that water pollution is one of the greatest evils in this country.*
- ***It is true** that more and more factories are being built along this stretch of the river and that a certain amount of waste will inevitably be discharged into the river.*
- ***However**, in all the discussions that I have had with these firms' representatives, I have not found one who does not have a responsible attitude to environmental protection.*

Moreover: for adding

I often find when marking essays that **moreover** is used as an alternative to **however**. But be careful here. It does not have the same meaning. **Moreover** is the very formal equivalent of **furthermore** or **in addition** (which would be the least formal of these three). These adverbs should be used to support or to add information to what has already been said:

- *The refugees are desperately short of food. They have very little shelter to protect them from the winter winds that are now blowing. **Furthermore**, they are desperately in need of medical supplies.*
- *She had noticed that there was a man sitting in the second row of the stalls to her right who was observing her, rather than watching the play. **Moreover**, he seemed to be smiling at her as if he recognised her.*

In conclusion

Finally, remember that if you are writing essays, it is sometimes useful to introduce the final paragraph with one of these expressions: **to conclude**, **in conclusion**, **to sum up**:

***In conclusion**, it is clear that pollution will continue to plague our planet for the foreseeable future.
However, if individuals and governments act responsibly, there may come a day in the not too distant future when a more optimistic outlook is justified*