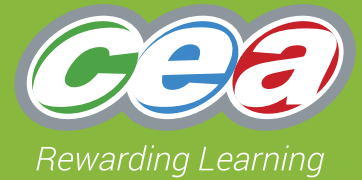


GCE



CCEA GCE
Exemplifying Examination
Performance (New Grid)
English Literature

This is an exemplification of candidates' performance in GCE examinations (Summer 2023) to support the teaching and learning of the English Literature specification.



EXEMPLIFYING EXAMINATION PERFORMANCE

GCE English Literature

Introduction

These responses illustrate Band 5 performance from the 2023 summer AS and A2 examination series of CCEA's revised GCE Specification. Band 5 is the highest mark band available for each of the GCE English Literature examination components.

Students' responses are reproduced verbatim and were awarded a mark within Band 5 (41–50 raw marks).

It is intended that the materials should help teachers and students identify characteristics of Band 5 performance regardless of the textual option studied. Commentaries have not been provided for these top band responses.

For further details of our support package, please visit our website at www.ccea.org.uk

Best wishes



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GCE: AS English Literature

**SEL11: The Study of Poetry
1900 – Present and Drama 1900 – Present**

Band 5 Exemplar

SECTION A: THE STUDY OF POETRY 1900 – PRESENT

Q2 Hughes Plath

This question is about **power**.

Read again “Pike” by Hughes and “Ariel” by Plath.

By close analysis of the **poetic methods** used, and drawing on relevant external biographical information, compare and contrast how these poets write about power.

N.B. Equal marks are available for your treatment of each poem.

Student's response

*‘Ariel’ by Sylvia Plath was written on the poet's 30th birthday, the 27th of October 1962, and details are transcendent horse ride, in which the speaker gains a sense of freedom and power. ‘Pike’ by Ted Hughes was published in 1960 in his collection *Lupercal* and encapsulates his poetic approach to nature poetry, focusing on the power and innate savagery of the natural world, allegorically implying that men too contain this innate Darwinianism buried inside them.*

Both poets use free verse to convey a sense of power. Plath's free verse is indicative of the power the speaker gains through this liberating journey as it contains no formal rhyme, but internal rhyme such as “Pour of tor” conveys the freedom of the journey and gives a sense of rhythmic movement. Furthermore, the enjambment used conveys the physical power of the horse, illustrated in “The furrow / splits and panes”, creating a sense of chaos, increasing the pace of the poem to reinforce the speed and power of the horse.

Hughes also uses free verse which gives the poem an intimate, conversational quality in the speaker recounts his awe at the power of the pike. The structure of ‘Pike’ is more formal than that of ‘Ariel’, but on closer inspection the formal structure contains varied line lengths, conveying the underlying unpredictable power of nature.

*Both Plath and Hughes use colour connotations to convey a sense of power. In ‘Ariel’, the three colours that compile Robert Graves’ *Triple Goddess* theory are evident. The prevalence of these colours suggest the speaker has the power to break free from the constraints of the patriarchal faculty in which she exists, as Graves’ theory focused on a mythical matriarchy and suggested that women should be worshipped and respected. The oxymoronic “black sweet blood mouthfuls” creates synesthesia and connotes death imagery, through the connotations of “black”, creating a sense of danger. The allusion to the “White Godiva” furthers the image of female power, as it refers to a 14th century noblewoman, who rode naked on horseback to protest her husband’s laws, creating a parallel between the myth and the speaker of the poem. the “red / Eye, the cauldron of the morning” creates a final image of danger, as this metaphor for the sun suggests the reckless nature of the speaker’s journey, but the final, single line stanza illustrates the speaker’s power by creating a definitive tone of finality and strength through the end stopped line.*

Hughes also uses colour connotations, to elevate the Pike and reflect their power, describing their scales as “green tigering the gold”. The semantic field of gold connotes powerful regal

imagery and the animal imagery in “tigering” enhances this, conflating the Pike with the king of the jungle. Similarly to Plath, the use of colour imagery creates a sense of danger and foreboding. The imagery of death and decay in “last years black leaves” is representative of the destructive, unforgiving power of the Pike, which, when used in conjunction with the “amber cavern” of weeds reinforces the dangerous power of the Pike, as amber connotes a warning of danger.

However, Plath’s ‘Ariel’ contains romanticised figurative language, while ‘Pike’ contains factual descriptions, creating juxtaposing presentations of power. Plath describes the horse as “God’s lioness” the direct translation of Ariel in Hebrew. Ariel refers to Plath’s own horse, and the religious imagery creates a tone of awe, giving the horse power and dominance over the speaker. Plath uses figurative language to romanticise the power of the horse in “And now I / foam to wheat”. This hyperbolic metaphor conveys the transcendent power of the horse as it transforms the speaker, furthered by the romantic image created through the magical, supernatural connotations in “a glitter of seas”, the figurative language creating a tone of awe and exhilaration at the magical, transcendent power of the horse.

Conversely, Hughes uses factual, concise language to illustrate the undeniable power of the Pike. The numerical description in “Pike, three inches long, perfect / Pike” creates a matter of fact tone, furthered by the plosive alliteration and repetition of Pike. The short blunt sentence “Finally one.” creates a tense tone, presenting the Darwinian nature of the Pike in its ruthless victory over the other Pike, illustrating the power of the animal.

The theme of power is explored through the lens of gender by the poets as they explore the implications of the power of their respective animals. The title of Plath’s poem ‘Ariel’ refers to her horse, and the poem is the titular poem in her posthumous collection that focused on feminine energy. The title is an allusion to the tempest, where Ariel, an enslaved spirit, is set free. This creates a parallel with the speaker in Ariel, as she feels liberated and is given power through the transcendent journey she undergoes, freeing her from the constraints of the patriarchal society which attempts to hinder her. This resistance against the patriarchy is further explored in “And I / am the arrow”. This metaphor conveys an image of power and direction, with the predominance of the “I” creating a self-assured tone. The image of the arrow is a phallic symbol in Plath’s 1963 novel *The Bell Jar*, and in subverting it here, she asserts her feminine power over the patriarchal society which she resents. Hughes explores the power of nature over man, and uses the Darwinian nature of the Pike to suggest that this nature is buried deep within the human man. This poem was inspired by dreams of Pike had by Hughes, in which he stated that the Pike became symbols of “deep vital life” to him. The simile “as deep as England” explores the awe the assumed male speaker feels towards the Pike, and invokes a sense of patriotic pride, as Hughes was an Englishman himself. The boyish repetition of the double entendre “immense” invokes the vastness of the pike and the respect they command from the speaker. The metaphor “darkness” in the final stanza of the poem is symbolic of the pike, and as it “rises slowly towards me”, an analogy is created conflating the Pike with the Darwinian power within man, constrained by societal conventions of civility. The repetition of “darkness” and assonance in the final line create an anticipatory, fearful tone, highlighting the power of the pike over the speaker.

Both Plath and Hughes explore the theme of power similarly in their use of colour connotations and use of structure, but the poems differ in their contrasting images of power through the sense of gender, a key aspect of the work of both poets.

Band 5

SECTION B: THE STUDY OF DRAMA 1900 – PRESENT

Q1 Friel: *Translations*

- (a) The hedge-school fails to benefit the community of Ballybeg.

Through analysis of the dramatic methods used in the play, and drawing on relevant contextual information, **show to what extent** you agree with the above statement

Student's response

In Brian Friel's 'Translations' I mostly agree that the hedge school fails to benefit the community, but the issue is complex. Friel centers his drama in the hedge-school of the fictional town of Ballybeg and chronicles the descent of the hedge-school into obsolescence due to the decline in the Irish language and the arrival of British soldiers and new national schools. Friel uses his cast of characters to represent ideas and shows that, despite the hedge school benefitting some characters, by the end of the play it has failed to benefit the community as a whole.

Firstly, the play opens in Act one with the stage directions describing the setting. The hedge-school is described as "a disused barn" full of "broken and forgotten implements." These stage directions immediately establish the declining state of the hedge-school, suggesting its bare, bleak and functional nature. This description is due to the material poverty in Ballybeg and all of Ireland at this time. Friel continues to build this picture of a hedge-school in disrepair by introducing Manus who is "lame", teaching Sarah who has a "speech defect" and is considered "locally as dumb". Friel insists on defects and deficiencies within the cast of Ballybeg characters which is symbolic of the state of decline of the Ballybeg community.

However, despite this material poverty, under Manus' coaching Sarah succeeds in saying "My name is Sarah", overcoming her speech defect momentarily. This tableau represents two things to the audience simultaneously: the material poverty of the community contrasted with the cultural richness and focus on education. Here, the hedge school is clearly initially very helpful to the characters, helping them to overcome challenges and representing a safe community hub despite its material impoverishment. The hedge-school is thus a symbol of Irish cultural condition, it links Ballybeg to an intellectual Arcadia and asserts that although materially lacking it is rich in education and culture.

Moreover, the character of Jimmy Jack is introduced to build upon this idea. Initially, Friel uses stage directions to elevate Jimmy Jack as a man educated in the classics: "He is fluent in Greek and Latin", suggesting that the hedge school is beneficial and allows characters to indulge in their interests and become more educated. However, Friel quickly dismisses this romantic notion, through Jimmy Jack's costuming, stating it is "filthy" and he lives in the same clothes "summer and winter, day and night." These stage directions indicate to the reader that Jimmy Jack is resistant to change and he is lost in the fantasy world of the past. For Jimmy, the hedge-school is not beneficial as it is providing him a space to be lost in his fantasies without having to confront the world around him, so much so he has poor hygiene and is not included in the dialogue between Sarah and Manus: "The Infant prodigy doesn't know what we're at." Jimmy Jack's nickname of the Infant Prodigy is ironic as he is actually an old man. Friel uses this irony to assert Jimmy Jack's inability to engage with the objective facts around him due to the protective bubble of the hedge school. If we take Jimmy Jack

to be representative of a group of people in the Ballybeg community, which Friel is no doubt encouraging us to do, we can deduce how the hedge-school is failing to benefit a portion of the Ballybeg community.

Moreover, Maire's entrance is used by Friel to present a new idea in this debate. Maire discusses with the other characters in the ensemble scene of act one "the street smell", referencing the potato crop failings in 1833. This contextual information serves us a stark reminder of the external events that the hedge-school is unable to protect the community against, suggesting there are some issues facing the community the hedge-school does not benefit. Furthermore, Maire's character is symbolic of a group in Ireland who want to emigrate and learn English, with her stating "I don't want Latin. I don't want Greek. I want English." This series of monosyllabic sentences in Maire's dialogue elucidates her desire to move on from small-town Ballybeg and the hedgeschool of the Irish speaking community. This fact is ironic as of course the play is written and performed in English. Thus it is clear Friel is using the theatrical conceit to demonstrate there is a large portion of the community who do not benefit from the hedge-school which focuses on classical education such as Latin and Greek. Maire's desire to learn English reveals in a lot of ways the hedge-school only benefits members of the community who are still entrenched in the past.

Furthermore, the arrival of the British soldiers Yolland and Lancey in Act 1 serve to further highlight the failings of the hedge-school in benefiting the community. Owen mistranslates Lancey's speech, saying the Ordnance Survey will mean that "taxes are reduced" when Lancey merely states it will result in "more equitable taxation." Friel uses the central conceit of the play to make the audience privy to the contrast between Owen and Lancey's dialogue. The community however are pleased with this fabricated information as they are unaware of the true meaning and intention behind the soldier's actions. Thus, the hedge-school has failed to benefit the community as they have not learned to speak English meaning they cannot challenge the arrival of the British Army and the change they represent.

Furthermore, Hugh, who speaks English, explains "a worthy enterprise" suggesting that despite the fact he understands what is being said he fails to grasp, at this point, the true implications behind the actions taking place of rendering Gaelic placenames into English and the danger this presents to Irish culture. Here Friel insists that the hedge-school has failed to benefit the community in another crucial way - it has caused them to be immersed in the insular nature of life in Ballybeg that they are unable to process and respond to external threats to their way of life.

In addition, due to this crucial misunderstanding of the events, the hedge-school continues to fail to benefit the community. In Act 2 Owen and Yolland go about rendering Gaelic placenames into English, with Yolland admitting, "it's an eviction of sorts." However despite this clear threat to the community's way of life, they welcome him, with Manus and Yolland meeting: "they shake warmly." Therefore this hedgeschool which is the centre of cultural life in Ballybeg is failing the community by being unable to respond or deal with external threats. This idea is even more relevant with Bridget bringing information on the new national schools and characters reflecting on their popularity with varying degrees of accuracy. They had become so engrossed in the insular, seemingly protective hedge school that they have become trapped as they cannot recognise or respond two threats. Thus the hedge-school fails to benefit them.

Finally, after Yolland's disappearance in Act 3, Lancey begins a systematic "levelling of every abode" and "a series of evictions". Lancey's functional language lays bare the true intentions and motivations of the British Army. This calculated and militaristic response contrasts the shady and underhanded response of the off-stage characters of the Donnelly twins, suggesting how the hedge-school is failing to benefit the community as they are virtually defenceless to Lancey's threats. Structurally, by the end of Act 3, Manus Owen and many other characters have exited and moved on from the hedge-school, symbolising how it has failed to benefit these members of the community. Maire who stays is unlikely to benefit as it is suggested she is never able to emigrate as she planned. All that is left is Jimmy Jack and Hugh who create pathos with Jimmy's "grotesque gesture" revealing the pitiful remnants left behind of a hedge-school that failed to protect its patrons and benefit the community.

Band 5

GCE: AS English Literature

SEL21: The Study of Prose Pre 1900

Band 5 Exemplar

THE STUDY OF PROSE PRE 1900

Q1 Hawthorne: *The Scarlet Letter*

(b) Dimmesdale is a coward.

With reference to Hawthorne's narrative methods, and relevant contextual information, **show to what extent** you agree with the above statement.

Student's response

"The Scarlet Letter" was published in 1850, written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Set in early Puritan Boston, it follows Hester Prynne, a young woman who, after becoming pregnant through adultery, is ostracised by her community. The father of her child, Arthur Dimmesdale, is the revered minister of the town and, throughout the novel, is used by Hawthorne to display the dangers of hidden shame and guilt. Unlike Hester, who shows resilience in the face of ignominy, Hawthorne indisputably presents Dimmesdale as a coward.

The novel's first scaffold scene is used to inform the reader from the outset of Dimmesdale's cowardice. The "gossips" in the town square represent a Greek chorus of public opinion and are used as a device by Hawthorne to describe Puritan views. Their description of Hester as a "brazen hussy", juxtaposed with their reverence for "godly pastor" Dimmesdale emphasises the respect he is held in in the community, and how he benefits from his hidden shame. Hester's bravery is emphasised as she "repelled" the beadle, who represented "the whole dismal severity" of Puritanism. Dimmesdale, meanwhile is "leaning over the balcony, looking down" at Hester in her "circle of ignominy". Hawthorne disapproved of the punitive nature of Puritan society, changing his name from "Hathorne" to distance himself from his ancestors who oversaw the Salem Witch trials. He believed in the innate depravity of Man, that we are all sinful and harsh punishments are innately hypocritical. Therefore, the juxtaposition of Hester's bravery in standing up to a sinful system and Dimmesdale's cowardice in retaining his both physically and socially high position while she endures shame, informs the reader of how cowardly he truly is, particularly on a second reading when we know they have both committed the same crime. When asked to name the father, Hester cries "Never" and adds "would that I could endure his suffering as well as my own". This self-sacrifice paints Hester as a martyr, an almost Christ-like figure, in the eyes of the reader. Dimmesdale, on hearing this, murmurs inwardly "She will not speak! Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart, she will not speak". With Hawthorne's use of the omniscient narrator, the reader gets insight into Dimmesdale's internal monologue, with the repetition emphasising his desperation to remain hidden. The use of the noun "strength" is anachronistic, and paints Dimmesdale as a character failing to fulfil the traditional role of masculine strength and courage. Therefore, Hawthorne uses the first scaffold scene to present Hester as a foil to Dimmesdale, exposing his cowardice in allowing her to sacrifice herself for him, and retaining his lofty position in a society he is too cowardly to defy.

One of the most prominent methods Hawthorne uses to expose Dimmesdale's cowardice is his hypocrisy and inability to reveal his true identity to the people who revere him. He knows that they "discern the sanctity of Enoch" in him, while in his chambers there hangs A tapestry of "David and Bathsheba in colours unfaded". This use of Biblical allusion by Hawthorne reveals the contrast in Dimmesdale's public and private persona to the reader - while Puritan society reveres him like the Biblical prophet, his inner world reveals him to be a sinful adulterer. Something Hawthorne, a strict Calvinist would have disapproved

of, and a sin punishable by death in Puritan New England. The fact that this is kept in his private chambers reveals his cowardice, as he is unable to give up public admiration for truth. Hawthorne creates sympathy for Dimmesdale via an authorial comment of “it is inconceivable the agony with which this public veneration tortured him”, causing the reader to pity his suffering. However, this also amplifies his cowardice, as even despite his suffering, he as yet cannot muster the strength to confess more than he was “a vile companion of the vilest”, with this strong language juxtaposing with the puritan response to the “vague confession” of “this saint on earth”. This contrast allows Hawthorne to illuminate that due to the extent that Dimmesdale was deified in the community, he would need to make a full confession in order to end his hypocrisy, which he is as yet too cowardly to do.

The second scaffold scene is a potent use of structure by Hawthorne to reveal the extent to which Dimmesdale is a coward. Though he is “standing where Hester Prynne had stood” on the scaffold (with this phrase used by Hawthorne to invite the reader to contrast the two characters), it is on an “obscure night”. The reader can see through this pathetic fallacy, the desire that Dimmesdale yet has to conceal his sin, and the extent to which his cowardice remains. Hawthorne uses his romantic genre, which as he says in the custom house shows him “as much liberty as though I had created the characters myself” to examine Dimmesdale’s heart. He described how “Remorse dogged him” to the scaffold “while “cowardice invariably turned him back with her tremulous gripe”. This use of personification reveals how his contrasting motives of remorse and cowardice are battling for dominance, but he is as yet, controlled by his cowardice. Chillingworth appears, commanding him “let me lead you home” to which Dimmesdale replies “I will go home with you”. This yielding to temptation from Chillingworth, who is described as “fiend” and “The Black Man” connotes an inverted picture of Christ’s temptation in the desert by Satan and reveals Dimmesdale’s weakness and cowardice as he allows himself to be led away rather than facing the gaze of the town come morning.

The forest scene and character interaction with Hester further reveals the extent of Dimmesdale’s cowardice. He agrees to go to Europe with her, and the pair begin to plan for their escape. Forests are a traditional symbol of giving into one’s desires, free from the confines of human law, used by Shakespeare in plays like a “Midsummer Night’s Dream”. Therefore, Hawthorne’s decision to set their meeting here insinuates to the reader that it was Dimmesdale’s cowardice keeping him from sin before, rather than strength, as he agrees to a relationship with Hester once he is out of reach of Puritan law. When Hester suggests running away, he replies “thou tellest of racing to a man whose knees are tottering beneath him”. This use of athletic imagery suggests to the reader his cowardice, as he has been running from his sin for the entire novel, so much so that it has come to take a physical toll upon him. He continues the motif of inverted gender roles crying “resolve for me Hester, thou art strong!” revealing his weakness and cowardice by contrast - he is neither fulfilling the role of the moral hero by doing the right thing, nor the Byronic hero of confidently following his desires, instead, he wants Hester to lead him. When the pair hold hands on a “fallen tree”, the Edenic imagery allows Hawthorne to suggest that their relationship is sinful, borne out of cowardice, rather than true love. Afterwards, Dimmesdale wonders if he “made a contract with [Satan] in the forest, and signed it with [his] blood?” with the Faustian imagery suggesting that the decision was sinful, not courageous. Hawthorne reveals through authorial comment that Dimmesdale had yielded to “the temptation of the dream of happiness” and let in the “infectious poison” of sin, revealing to the reader how damaging his cowardice is, that in order to escape his sin, he will run further into evil.

However, in the final scaffold scene, Hawthorne uses repeated parallels to reveal the change in Dimmesdale's character from cowardice to courage. He "repelled" the arm of "the venerable John Wilson", mirroring how Hester "repelled" the beadle in the first scaffold scene, revealing to the reader that he is now brave enough to rebel against Puritan society - an effect intensified by the fact John Wilson was a real Puritan figure, responsible for the death of the sainted Anne Hutchinson. Dimmesdale is ordered to stop by Chillingworth, who cries "Madman, Hold!", a clear parallel to the second scaffold scene. Dimmesdale, however, replies "Ha, tempter! Methinks thou art too late!" presenting himself this time not as cowardly, but as close to Christ-like. Hawthorne describes this chapter through authorial comment as "the closing scene" a "drama of guilt and sorrow", presenting Dimmesdale as a tragic hero who has overcome his hamartia of cowardice to redeem himself in the eyes of the reader. In a "convulsive motion", he reveals "his own red stigma", another parallel to Hester, that invites the reader to contrast the two and appreciate Dimmesdale's bravery in overcoming his cowardice and allowing the world to see his sin. He dies with the words "his will be done! Farewell!" which holds Christ-like connotations that enables him to die a redeemed hero in the eyes of the reader, and certainly in the eyes of Hawthorne who would have viewed confession and repentance as the only way to receive salvation.

To conclude, Hawthorne uses structure in parallel scaffold scenes, contrast with Hester and between his public and private self and authorial intervention to reveal Dimmesdale's internal thoughts and Hawthorne's own opinions establish him indisputably as a coward in the eyes of the reader. Though it is true that Dimmesdale does eventually do the courageous thing in publicly confessing his guilt, this is done after an entire novel of allowing cowardice to overpower his better instincts. In short, Hawthorne makes clear to the reader, that, like any tragic hero, Dimmesdale does not overcome his fatal flaw of cowardice until it kills him, in a cathartic ending. Hawthorne, who left the transcendental movement, did not believe human beings were perfectible, therefore he was eager to portray flawed characters who find redemption. Dimmesdale lives a coward, but dies a hero.

Band 5

GCE: A2 English Literature

AEL11: Shakespearean Genres

Band 5 Exemplar

Shakespearean Genres

Q1 Othello

Desdemona's death is the result of Othello's sexual jealousy.

By referring closely to extract 1, printed in the accompanying Resource Booklet and to other appropriately selected parts of the text, **show to what extent** you would agree with the view expressed above.

Your **argument** should include relevant comments on Shakespeare's dramatic methods, and relevant external contextual information on the nature of Shakespearean Tragedy.

N.B. Equal marks are available for your treatment of the given extract and other relevant parts of the text.

Student's response

In the Shakespearean tragedy Othello we see the development of Othello's jealousy which subsequently leads to the murder of his wife Desdemona. The play does not begin with Othello as a jealous character and it is through the manipulation of his friend and inferior, Iago, that we see the development of Othello's character. Desdemona's death can be attributed to several factors within the play such as her own weakness in being a subservient woman, the manipulation of Iago on all the characters within the play, Othello's fate as a tragic hero and arguably Othello's sexual jealousy.

Jealousy is vital when exploring the character of Othello and his motives for killing his wife in Act 5. Iago is not the only character to allude to Othello's jealous actions throughout the play as we see Emilia question Desdemona "Is not this man jealous?" after watching the couple interact in Act 3 scene 4. Iago plays on Othello's fear of Desdemona's revolt by addressing the fact that jealousy could take him over warning "O, beware, my Lord, of jealousy; it is the green eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on". The personification of jealousy, turning it into a predatory image, exposes the danger that jealousy shall pose to Othello. It is something that Othello is 'warned' to look out for as he is at the mercy of becoming its next meal. It can be questioned on if Iago intended this in good nature but it is likely that this is part of his plot to plant seeds in Othello's head of baseless lies about Desdemona. This interpretation can be enhanced as Iago states "that cuckold lives in bliss". The use of the term "cuckold" drives another one of Othello's fears forward as in Shakespearean time there would be little worse than being cuckolded by your wife. Men were supposed to hold full authority over their wives and the idea that a wife may betray her husband would be extremely damaging to one's reputation. The mention of the "cuckhold" remains with Othello throughout the play building on the idea and feeling of sexual jealousy as Othello constantly accuses Desdemona of being a "whore". He directly asks her "Are not you a strumpet?" and "Not a whore". Shakespeares use of direct questioning with vulgar, insensitive language shows the magnitude of Othello's sexual jealousy by the climax of the play. A man who once described his wife as "sweet" and "gentle" now "bewhores[s]" her. The contrasting language from the beginning of the play to Act 5 emphasises the development of Othello's character and highlights his newfound ability to kill one whom he once loved. Moreover, Othello attempts to justify this sexual jealousy claiming "she must die else she'll betray more men". The imperative "must" highlights the definity Othello felt about committing the murder whilst

the verb “betray” softens the audience attitude towards him. He feels betrayed by his wife and this has pushed him to bitter jealousy. It could also be interpreted as sexual jealousy in the form that he does not want his wife to be involved with anyone but himself and that the only way to prevent this is by killing her.

Contrary to the belief that Desdemona’s death is the result of Othello’s sexual jealousy, it could be discussed that it is simply Desdemona’s own fault for she is a woman. In the passage Othello initially defends his wife stating “To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company... Where virtue is, these are more virtuous”. The list highlights the good Othello sees in his wife, all the qualities that he admires and that he chooses to believe that she is good. This grows ironic, however, as the things that Othello loved about his wife eventually grow to be the things he loathes about her. Simply Desdemona’s choice to love her husband from the beginning of the play subsequently results in her death. Iago states in the passage “She did deceive her father, marrying you”. This phrasing is parallel to Act 1 in which it is stated “she had deceived her father” when talking in reference to the marriage. Iago uses Desdemona’s ability to love someone who many would “fear to look upon” against her to intensify Othello’s feelings of jealousy and fear of being cuckolded. This manipulation of the female characters is common throughout the tragedy as Shakespeare employs various dramatic techniques to highlight the disparity between male and female characters. An example of this is in Act 3 scene 2 during the interaction with the character of the Clown and Desdemona. Shakespeare employs word play and double entendres to show the victimisation of Desdemona across the play. Shakespeare included this scene to create comedic effect attributing to the elements of Jacobean revenge tragedy but moreover it reinforces the fact that Desdemona is a victim of all male characters across the play. It is her role of a woman that makes her vulnerable and leads to her death.

This argument that in being a woman, Desdemona’s death was nearly fated to her is enhanced by the Willow scene. Desdemona’s character contrasts with the sharp tongued, opinionated Emilia. Emilia blames Othello for Desdemona’s grief bidding “Ay wish you had never seen him”. The sharp, opinionated statement is adverse for those expected of women at the time contrasting with Desdemona who wishes “not now [to] displease” Othello despite the harm he caused to her. She is subservient, as a Jacobean woman should be, and yet she is still brutally murdered. Desdemona sings the “Willow Song” during Act 4 scene 3 and Shakespeares employment of the song is clever and methodical. The backstory of the song follows a maid who “was in love and he she loved proved mad and did forsake her”. This ironic foreshadowing of Desdemona’s fate to die emphasises how the women in Othello do not have control over what is to happen to them - it is simply their fate as a woman to suffer at the hands of men. The same is destined for Emilia as she is killed by her husband and dies singing the Willow Song.

Iago is the Machiavellian villain in Othello. The vice character who seeks his goals through plotting and manipulation and a strong argument can be made that Desdemona’s death is the result of his manipulation. He claims that all he does for Othello is “To show the love and duty” that he bears to him and yet with every seed he plants in his head, Othello grows more angry. The choice of words “love” and “duty” are ironic as these would commonly be actions attributed to a wifely figure and Iago perverts this, making it relevant to his and Othello’s relationship. He uses Othello’s feelings as a method of manipulation claiming to be honouring him and “loving” him. The tableau in Act 3 scene 3 is monumental in understanding Iago’s manipulation of Othello’s emotions in order to bring about Desdemona’s death. The couple re-enact a perverse interpretation of a

Jacobean marriage in which they kneel before one another and bear their “love” witness to the “everburning lights above”. This solidification of their duty to one another cements the concept that Desdemona must die in Othello’s mind. Iago, in the passage claims to tell Othello of Desdemona’s revolt not “out of self-bounty” and it is Othello’s choice to believe him. Moreover, it can be seen clearly that Iago directly tells Othello how to murder Desdemona when he says “Do it not with poison; Strangle her in her bed Even the bed she has contaminated”. The violent images along with the almost sexual connotations of the bed are disturbing for the audience but act as a driving force for Othello. Through bringing out the sexual jealousy in Othello, Iago is strongly to blame for Desdemona’s death.

Finally, it is the role of tragedy that can be seen as resulting in Desdemona’s death. Othello is built on the basis of Aristotelean and Jacobean revenge tragedy - manipulated by Shakespeare to create Shakespearean tragedy. Within a Shakespearean tragedy the protagonist must have a hamartia (fatal flaw) and as justified through the play Othello’s is his jealousy. Moreover, the protagonist must have free will to do what they choose and back out of a situation. In Assessing this it could be argued that Othello did not have to kill Desdemona, despite what Iago “thought to be true” of her revolt. In the passage we see several allusions to sight and “proof”. Othello states “I’ll see before I doubt; When I doubt, prove; And on the proof, there is no more but this – “ to which Iago rebounds with “I speak not yet of proof. Look to your wife, observe her well”. These repeated allusion to “proof” and images of sight highlight Othello’s desire to see Desdemona doing wrong before he believes Iago’s words, initially building a strong sense of faith for the character and yet within a matter of scenes he is prepared to kill her on the basis of a simple prop “the handkerchief”. The handkerchief is an important symbol of love, marriage and deception in the play and ultimately drives the plot forward until Desdemona’s death. Othello’s choice to believe Iago and not his wife, to kill her when even as the tragic hero in a Shakespearean tragedy could turn away from his wrong, highlights the weakness of his character and the control his jealousy had over him.

A Shakespearean tragedy alongside a Jacobean revenge tragedy required lots of death and unfortunately Desdemona fell victim to this fate. Her kind and submissive nature when brought into conflict with Othello’s ever-growing jealousy could not win the battle. She asked for mercy begging Othello “O banish me but kill me not!” and he made the decision of her fate. The exclamation shows Desdemona’s heightened desperation before her death whilst her request emphasise how even in the darkest moment she still believed that there was good in Othello and that he may save of her. In conclusion it is Desdemona’s fate as a woman to suffer at the hands of men on her obedience and subservience to Othello that caused her death.

Band 5

GCE: A2 English Literature

AEL21: The Study of Poetry Pre 1900

Band 5 Exemplar

Section A: The Study of Poetry Pre 1900

Q5 Dickinson

- (b) By referring closely to “I’m “wife” – I’ve finished that – ” (Poem **5(b)**) printed in the accompanying Resource Booklet and one other appropriately selected poem, and making use of relevant external biographical information, examine the poetic methods which Dickinson uses to write about attitudes to marriage.

N.B. Equal marks are available for your treatment of each poem.

Student’s response

Emily Dickinson discusses marriage, her own attitudes to it and how this may have conflicted with the societal expectations of the time, in a number of her poems. ‘I’m “wife”’ and ‘She rose to His Requirement’ are two such poems in which Dickinson presents a conflict between societal attitudes to marriage and the speaker’s own desires. Despite never being married, Dickinson makes commentary on this position, and the societal construct of marriage in the 19th century.

Dickinson makes effective use of form and structure to frame her presentation of differing attitudes to marriage. ‘I’m “wife”’ is structured into 3 quatrains and written in mostly iambic metre, which, when coupled with the first person perspective, gives a sense that we are being given an intimate account of a 19th century woman’s attitude towards her own state of marriage. This is intensified by the uneven line lengths within the poem, as although it is roughly in tetrameter, there are many exceptions. Furthermore, a sense of emotion is conveyed in Dickinson’s use of dashes and enjambment as they reflect a faltering quality to human speech, making it seem almost as a flow of consciousness as the speaker relates their pondering and realisation of the truth of their marriage. Dashes and enjambment are also a prevalent element in ‘She rose to His Requirement’, which is also structured into 3 quatrains. Dickinson makes effective use of iambic metre in this poem, creating a ballad like feel in alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter, which is often referred to as hymnal metre. This places the poem, and indeed 19th century attitudes to marriage, in a religious context, which would inevitably have effected the views of Dickinson’s society as she grew up in Amherst Massachusetts, which was staunchly Calvinist, and in the mist of a ‘Second Great Revival’ in Dickinson’s lifetime. Additionally, the poet makes interesting use of rhyme in this poem as the first stanza has a 2nd and 4th line rhyme, while the second has a more disjointed rhyme on the first and fourth lines, and the final stanza is devoid of rhyme entirely. This reflects the wife’s faltering confidence in her attitudes to marriage as she begins to realise it is not the perfect position that her society has made it out to be. Overall, Dickinson crafts the form and structure of these poems to effectively convey changing attitudes to marriage.

Dickinson presents the initial hopeful attitudes of the wives towards marriage, influenced by societal attitudes and expectations. In ‘I’m “wife”’, Dickinson has the speaker confidently declare her positive attitudes towards marriage in the opening lines:

“I’m “wife” - I’ve finished that –

That other state –

I'm Czar - I'm "Woman" now – "

Dickinson makes use of the repeated structure of the confident contraction "I'm" followed by a role to suggest a sense of power and status carried by marriage. In particular, the noun "Czar" carries a grandeur and elegance in being a reference to the Russian monarchy, suggesting marriage is a position of influence and opulence. However, there is a sense of doubt in the speaker's attitude presented by Dickinson through the use of quotation marks around some of these roles. This suggests that the speaker is simply reciting what has been told to her with a sarcastic tone, without truly believing it herself. Furthermore, the use of the masculine "Czar" instead of the feminine equivalent 'Czarina' suggests that the speaker is only given power as a wife by being an extension of her husband, she likes true autonomy. Societal expectations are clearly presented in this poem as the unmarried position is referred to as "That other state" an almost derogatory dismissal of spinsterhood. 19th century society looked down on spinsterhood as it didn't have a real function in society, and perhaps Dickinson, who remained a spinster her whole life, was reflecting on the societal rejection she felt because of this. Dickinson reflects a similar societal attitude to marriage in 'She rose to His Requirement':

"She rose to His Requirement" – dropt –

The Playthings of Her Life –

To take the honourable Work

Of Woman, and of Wife"

Dickinson conveys attitudes to marriage through a different perspective in this poem, as the speaker approaches the wife's story from a third person perspective. Although some have suggested this is the wife herself attempts to distance herself from her marriage as it is too difficult to consider with the painful honesty of the first person, it could also be suggested that this poem is written from the perspective of the husband, who accepts and benefits from the society's model of marriage, a perspective perhaps inspired by Dickinson's own father and his domineering character in her parent's relationship. In this stanza, Dickinson has an extra beat on the first line in exception to the pattern of hymnal metre, to place emphasis on the verb "dropt" which is juxtaposed by the verb "rose". This emphasises the presentation of marriage as an elevation, conveying the positive attitude of society towards marriage. Further opposition is presented to intensify this effect between "Work" and "Playthings" (suggesting society's attitude towards marriage is positive because it serves a productive function). Furthermore, the use of the alliterative nouns "Woman" and "Wife", which are presented as synonyms through the poet's syntax and capitalisation, presents society's belief that marriage was essential to achieving womanhood, you have to complete this rite of femininity to be recognised as "Woman". Dickinson clearly presents how the wife believes society's attitudes and adopts them for herself at "First Prospective", however in both poems there is a clear sense of doubt which intensifies as the poem progresses in its exploration of attitudes to marriage.

Dickinson presents a conflict in the speaker's doubting attitudes to marriage, as they realise it is not a perfect concept, through the poet's presentation of a comparison of pre- and post-marital states. In 'I'm "wife"', Dickinson has the speaker ponder her old life:

“How odd the Girl’s life looks

Behind this soft Eclipse – ”

The use of enjambment the assonance of the open vowel sound and words such as “how” and “odd” creates a pondering reflective tone, which is almost eerily calm when juxtaposed with the jarring aural impact of the noun “Eclipse” with its clipped consonants. The oxymoron “soft Eclipse” suggests that the speaker has been lulled into a false understanding in her marriage, as it is metaphorically compared to a huge cosmic event used often in literature to convey an ominous change, an omen of bad things to come. Furthermore, an eclipse connotes a loss of light, conveying a sense that the wife has lost the things which made her life enjoyable before marriage. This comparison sparks the speaker’s realisation and change in attitude as she begins to question whether her life is truly better in this new state. In ‘She rose’, Dickinson presents a similar message as the speaker discusses how “Amplitude, or Awe” are “missed” in “her new Play”. The alliterative nouns connote a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction in the life of the girl, which is entirely absent from the life of the wife. The only way these states can be even sensed is through longing and reminiscing, suggests that the life of the wife is empty for her, and only serves to “His Requirement”. Under this new attitude to marriage, the opening stanza is understood differently, with the opposition of “His” and “Her” suggesting that it is a construct which only benefits men. The description of the wife’s “Life”, her existence, as mere “Playthings” conveys the attitude that the 19th century had that women’s occupations and past times were dismissed if they did not fit the strict social rules which were established within the patriarchal society. Dickinson was perhaps reflecting on her own feelings of dismissal as her poetry was often rejected or looked down upon because she was a “half cracked poetess” and it was believed that women could not understand let alone create such high forms of art. Overall, Dickinson effectively conveys the speaker’s changing and doubting attitudes to marriage as they find their individuality in conflict with society’s compulsion.

Finally, Dickinson concludes the poems with the speaker’s resolution of their attitudes to marriage, which are contrasting in their willingness to deal with the situation. In “I’m “wife”, the poet presents a speaker almost panicked in their reluctance to think about the reality of their marriage, as the poet conveys a sudden change in tone:

“But why compare?

I’m “Wife”! Stop there!”

The use of exclamation marks and a question mark in what has been a relatively bare punctuation landscape in this poem conveys a sharp change in tone, as the once calm and pondering mood is replaced by a harsh conclusion. This suggests the speaker’s desperation to not think of what might be “comfort” and what “pain” as this could cause her too much mental anguish, so she chooses to simply ignore the conflict between her own attitudes towards her marriage, her desire for freedom, and the reality of her situation dictated by the attitudes of society. The speaker’s almost panicked acceptance is demonstrated in how the once lowercase “Wife” of the opening refrain is repeated in the final line, capitalised. Dickinson was personally deeply uncomfortable, not with marriage, but with the idea of one human being submitting themselves to another, which is perhaps why she never married. Dickinson knew a constriction of her free spirit would be too painful, and it is perhaps what she viewed in the lives of her many married friends, a reluctant acceptance. Such an

acceptance is also presented in “She rose”, however the reality of this is examined in a more open and accepting way. The speaker conveys how the wife’s qualms with marriage “lay unmentioned” as she came to terms with the reality of her marriage as having positives and negatives, conveyed in the metaphors of “Pearl, and Weed”. These juxtaposing symbols of value and nuisance present the speaker’s attitude that marriage can have positives, such as protection and societal approval, so one must “abide” the negatives too, such as a loss of autonomy. Dickinson makes use of oceanic imagery which is a trope of her poetry, often used when she examines a subject too vast for human comprehension; the “fathoms” of marriage are too complex to be conveyed and understood to those outside of it. Perhaps Dickinson was inspired by examples of unhappy acceptance she saw in marriages in her own life, such as that between Austin, her brother, and Susan Gilbert, her best friend - which would ultimately result in Austin having a 13 year affair with Mabel Lewis Todd. Dickinson’s key message about attitudes to relationships appears to be, in this poem, that it is better to accept the imperfect reality of marriage, than to face societal rejection. Overall, Dickinson presents an interesting contrast in the two wife’s attitudes to and acceptance of marriage.

In conclusion, Dickinson presents a clear conflict between the attitudes and desires of the individual and the expectations and constructs of society in regards to marriage. It is important to understand that Dickinson is not overtly criticising marriage but the social attitudes that restrict women within marriage, and understand that the model of marriage Dickinson explores was shaped very differently by 19th century attitudes than the partnership of balance and love which we view in the 21st century. Therefore, Dickinson critiques not marriage, but the attitudes to marriage which corrupt it.

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