



ASSESSMENT and
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GCE

English Literature B

Unit LTB6

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Unit 6: Exploring Texts

Question 1

Compare and contrast the ways in which Susan Hill, a late twentieth century novelist, and R C Sherriff, a dramatist writing soon after World War I, present fear and suffering in war.

Objectives tested: AO1, AO2ii, AO3

Possible content:

Key differences resulting from genre: expect students to be aware of differences such as language use, register, tone, character revelation, point of view, relationship between reader and subject matter, importance and development of story, setting and structure. Important that they are aware of the theatrical nature of ‘Journey’s End’, although they are only seeing the text.

Similarities and differences in the subject matter: both set in trenches and concern not the warfare itself but the men’s reactions to it, in the form of extreme fear. Hill’s text may seem at first to present the fear more sympathetically, but Sherriff develops sympathy. However, Sherriff more concerned with the idea of how one’s peers and society in general regard one, whereas Hill concentrates more on the personal relationships. Hill develops relationship between the two officers as well as the individual soldier’s crisis of fear. In both cases how the officers deal with the situation is the focus; the individuals suffering are less important.

Point of view: both write as omniscient authors, but Hill as narrator and Sherriff as dramatist letting everything be revealed by the characters themselves. Both writers sympathetic. Hill reveals her viewpoint largely through what often appears to be the synonymous viewpoint of Barton. We see his mind through narrative, interior monologue and dialogue. Events here largely seen through his eyes. Stanhope may seem at first a much less sympathetic character, but it becomes clear that he is acting in what he sees as Hibbert’s best interests. He looks at the situation through society’s eyes, not just as an individual. Less the case with Barton and Hilliard. Both writers show great sympathy with the human predicament.

Language use: students likely to notice the language change that has taken place between 1928 and 1971 and to give examples and comment on effect. Link between language and ideals: ‘sticking it’ etc. Dramatic effect of Stanhope’s variations of tone and use of language to mislead Hibbert, almost teasing him. Situation very complex but Stanhope attempts to simplify it to its essentials; reflected in the language. Much of the language is that associated with schoolboys at the time, reminding us how young these men are. Humorous exchange at the end of Stanhope’s dialogue with Hibbert leads on to Mason’s humour, that of the common man keeping control of the situation. Always an edge of irony in Stanhope’s language. Hill’s language use much more varied because she uses narrative, description, dialogue. Language to set the scene, through descriptive passages; sense of decay, dilapidation, rottenness and darkness. Language to reveal emotional states, leading up to Harris’s desperation. Use of variety of tenses for interior monologue of Barton: pluperfect and present have differing effects. Language of Barton’s letters reminds us of another world with only a tenuous connection with that of the soldiers. Association between foul smell and Harris’s fear; effective physical details to evoke Harris’s state of mind.

Setting: both use similar settings, but evoked in very different ways. Sherriff sets this scene in the front lines, while Hill is here using a camp some way behind the lines. Hill uses a lot of detailed description to evoke the scene, while Sherriff relies on such things as dramatic action, particularly the fight and use of the revolver, tension and the quiet around them (one of few scenes where there is no background shelling). Contrast between the horror of the emotional situation and the apparent normality of Mason’s ‘nice cup of tea’ points up the horror. Stage set itself would effectively convey the squalor of their situation. Atmosphere very important in both cases. Hill’s sense of decay and of something ‘old’ effective as setting for extremes of emotion. Stanhope’s determination to impose the values of integrity on this situation is at one level grotesque, at another heroic. NB Hill does make use here of the background fighting.

Structure: both are extracts. Candidates may be expected to comment on this. Nevertheless both extracts deal with a particular situation and have a structure in themselves. Hill's extract works from the normality of the letter-writing conversation through to the horror of Harris's fear. Lull follows, only to be overtaken by shelling. She builds up the emotions gradually to a crescendo. Passage punctuated by shelling; at one point Barton notes that 'nothing had come as near as that before', while at the end he is hit. Effective reminder of the source of fear. Sherriff passage also built up through emotions; Stanhope plays on Hibbert to get the reactions he expects, as a prelude to his threat to shoot him. Emotional climax as the audience wait to see how Hibbert will react. Decrease of tension leading to Stanhope's confession of his fear. Solidarity through appeal to better nature, culminating in H's acceptance. Sense of foreboding; will Hibbert accept only to die? Candidates may look at structure of individual sentences, paragraphs or speeches.

Question 2

Write about the ways in which W B Yeats explores the mind of an Irish airman anticipating his death in World War 1.

Objectives tested: AO1, AO3

Possible content: point of view: use of first person makes for immediacy and the feeling that the reader is being given an insight into an individual mind. Stress on the individuality of the airman through repetition of personal pronouns, although he also stresses the place to which he belongs, Kiltartan Cross. Persona rather than Yeats's view, although may to some extent coincide. Most of poem in present tense, as if spoken while he flies, but final quatrain makes clear his words are retrospective: the decision has been made before. The combination of past and present makes the sense of death more imminent.

Form and structure: dramatic monologue form reinforces comments above re point of view. 16 line poem traditional in form: iambic tetrameters in four quatrains with alternate rhyme. Very few irregularities in the rhythm which adds to effect of initial stressed syllables: 'Those' and 'Drove'. The regular form of the poem enhances the persona's calm acceptance of his fate and adds to the feeling of inevitability. Also draws attention to the abnormality of the airman's state of mind/ oblivious of past or future or of the possible horrors of death. Poem structured also through reasoned argument: he sets out the position in terms of his feelings, his situation and sense of the irrelevance of the war to his people. He discards any illusions we might have that he is motivated by the usual things that drive men. This takes up first ten lines. Then moves on to climax in explaining his 'lonely impulse of delight'. Some similarity to octave and sestet of sonnet. Change of emphasis occurs within the third quatrain, making a rhyme between 'fight' and 'delight' with ironic overtones. Careful balancing of lines and individual words adds to sense of balance of the poem, which is a weighing up followed by decision. Flow of thought throughout, mainly based on two line units. This changes in the last quatrain, which is driven forward as a complete unit of thought, lines 14 and 15 being closely linked through the antithesis, punctuation and careful positioning of repeated words.

Language/ imagery: simple lexis, predominantly monosyllabic shows the clarity and decisiveness of thought. Many abstract words used, suggesting basic human values and emotions. Use of contrasts: 'hate' and 'love'; 'loss' and 'happier'; 'public' and 'lonely'. Some of the contrasts establish the airman's detachment equally from either pole of feeling, leaving him to concentrate all his depth of emotion in the final six lines which express a kind of epiphany, 'A lonely impulse of delight' which highlights the irrelevance of war and public life, even of time itself. Paradox that his deepest feeling is associated with his sense of balance and use of his 'mind'. Implication perhaps that the ways of the world he rejects have little to do with rationality. Contrast between first ten and last six lines also in the number of negatives in former, giving way to positive affirmation of latter.

Setting: the thoughts seem to be going through the airman's mind as he flies his plane, 'this tumult in the clouds', an effective way of highlighting his detachment from the world below him in a much more than physical sense. Despite the war, the setting contributes to the sense of freedom as the man confirms his choice and embraces death with a feeling of triumph.

Question 3

Discuss the extent to which you have found that the central ideas of the critical commentaries on the work of Susan Hill and R C Sherriff (Items 3 and 4) are borne out by your reading of the two literary extracts given here.

Objectives tested: AO1; AO4

Possible content:

Central ideas: Passage by E R Wood:

- idea of a disillusioned audience being ready to view the grim truth of war;
- play as moving to that audience;
- play might be seen as giving pacifist message;
- could, however, be seen to espouse military virtues;
- universal aspects of play;
- language not too dated to matter;
- possible effect of class-consciousness;
- connections with Greek tragedy;
- struggle senseless but noble;
- Sherriff's honesty, understanding and compassion.

Passage by Lesley Henderson:

- Hill's maturity of understanding;
- awareness of fear, grief etc;
- imaginative projection into worlds outside her own experience;
- power and poignancy;
- impact of actuality;
- immediacy of relationships;
- convincing depiction of life from a male viewpoint.

Candidates will of course be arguing from their own point of view here, showing understanding of the critical ideas of the two passages.

Question 4

- a) Items five, six and seven give the views of a journalist, a politician and an historian on the events of war. Making use of at least two of these items, discuss the ways in which their perspectives differ from those found in *Strange Meeting* and *Journey's End*.

Objectives tested: AO1, AO4, AO5ii

Perspective of extract from 'Guardian':

Immediately speaks of 'the world' and 'its soul'; sees events from national and global perspective, rather than from the perspective of individuals, as the literary writers do. 'Sacrifice' suggests Christian as well as simply moral perspective. Death referred to euphemistically as 'the loss of capacity'. Comparison between deaths en masse and 'pestilence' takes away the sense of people actually killing each other of their own volition. Completely different from perspective of Susan Hill and Sherriff who give the perspective of individuals suffering. Verbs justify our complicity: 'could not', 'had to'. Detached perspective allows writer to look forward to a brighter future where we all behave with greater honour. In Susan Hill there is a lack of focus on such abstracts as 'honour' and 'duty'. Barton had 'no convictions about his duty in this war'. Guardian expresses sentiment attached to 'a commonwealth of man'. Optimism of belief in movement towards more effective political organisation. Views British victory as victory of democracy. Final paragraph particularly rich in abstract nouns. Susan Hill deals in the concrete and precise. Sherriff's play is very much about 'duty' but set around the individual contexts of the combatants and the realities of the front. Heroism is realistically portrayed through a man who drinks too much and can be cruel.

Perspective of Lloyd George:

Lloyd George's perspective seems to lie somewhere between that of the Guardian and those of the literary writers. Immediacy of first person brings us closer to the speaker and of course the text was written to be spoken to an audience (cf 'Journey's End'). Lloyd George seems to have a sense of the suffering of war and also the humility to know the limits of his understanding, just as Hilliard realises 'We can imagine it, that's all'. However, he has to view the war and its aftermath more as a whole than the characters in the novel or play, who are only concerned with themselves and those immediately around them. Even when Stanhope speaks of duty, a concept he sees as uniting the whole army, it is seen mainly in terms of the immediate situation he faces. Lloyd George recognises that heroism is not a word to be used in the spirit of glorification by politicians. However, his perspective is that of relative detachment, unlike the perspectives of Susan Hill's and Sherriff's characters. His view is a practical one: party politics should be subordinated to unity in the effort to deal with the aftermath of war. The characters in literary texts have not the leisure for such perspectives; they live more from hour to hour than from day to day. Although away from their homes at the front line, their view is ironically narrower, less global than that of those who stay at home.

Perspective of Niall Ferguson:

His concern is with those who objected to the war for a variety of reasons, ethical, political or religious. The characters in the literary extracts, however, show their horror of war merely from their personal standpoints and not as a result of any particular principle. The writers, however, through their evocation of that horror, show their objections to war on the grounds of what it does to human beings. Ferguson uses statistics to give an idea of how many people were involved in protest against the war, whereas the literary extracts show the individual human misery it caused. Ferguson presents the two sides of the argument, those who protested and those who supported the war, sometimes putting protesters to death. The two sides are also shown by Sherriff, but much more subtly. Hibbert makes his personal protest and Stanhope threatens to shoot him, but the confrontation develops into a probing analysis of the complex reasons why Stanhope will not let Hibbert escape. Hill concentrates on the horror of war offset by human compassion for those caught up in it. This contrasts sharply with the authorities' attitude to those they saw as being unpatriotic and out of line. The references to various movements, with their abbreviations also contrasts with the individually named men in the extracts, despite the use of surnames only.

b) The material for this examination includes examples of poetry, drama and prose. Referring in detail to some of the texts you have read over the last two years, discuss the extent to which your study of these genres has helped you to understand and appreciate the texts for this paper.

Very much a matter of individual response, but answers should be judged on the basis of the following:

- the need for reference to at least two texts;
- the need for some precise reference, although not necessarily involving the use of quotation;
- the importance of discussing texts in terms of their genre rather than simply in terms of content or without precise reference to what makes them novel, play etc
- some awareness of the key words ‘understand’ and ‘appreciate’;
- clear capacity to relate previous reading to reading of text for this paper;
- candidates may discuss the effect of performances of plays, videos etc to illustrate how they acquired understanding, using them to relate to their understanding of an extract they have only had the opportunity to read; similarly they might write about their in-depth study of poems in class and relate that to coping with an unseen poem;
- they will probably deal with how they approached the pre-release texts in terms of their genre and how far they were helped by what they had learnt over the last few years.

Marks	Skills descriptors		Marks	Content descriptors
0-12 Band 1	AO1	technical weakness which impedes the communication of meaning	0-25	basic understanding of the two extracts
	AO2ii	often irrelevant, frequent inaccuracies/misreadings		passages may well be dealt with separately, with few connecting comparisons
	AO2ii	little comparison		
	AO3	few (if any) formal/ structural/ language features identified		a few content points
	AO3	very limited (if any) discussion of how language shapes meaning		a few general comments on situations and language
	AO4	often irrelevant; little understanding of ‘qualities’		
	AO4	limited personal response based upon slender evidence/ misreading		isolated or unlinked points
	AO5	very limited (if any) grasp of what constitutes context		
13-25 Band 2	AO1	some use of a limited critical vocabulary despite technical weakness		
	AO2ii	some focus on the task with general support		
	AO2ii	some attempt to compare		
	AO3	recognition of some features of forms/ structure/ language		
	AO3	some awareness of how form/structure/language shape meaning		
	AO4	reference to ‘qualities’		
	AO4	some evidence of individual response with some support		
	AO5	some consideration of relevant contextual factors		

Marks	Skills descriptors		Marks	Content descriptors
26-38 Band 3	AO1	accurate use of a limited critical vocabulary	26-51	clear understanding of situations and relationships
	AO2ii	awareness of task in most of the response		some clear points of comparison/contrast, illustrated by reference to parallel details from passages
	AO2ii	some useful comparison		contrasts shown by attention to structure and details of language
	AO3	consideration of some features of form/structure/language		
	AO3	awareness of writers' techniques and their effect on meaning		
	AO4	some consideration of 'qualities' with evidence		
	AO4	evidence of an individual response		
	AO5	consideration of some relevant contextual factors		
39-51 Band 4	AO1	appropriate critical vocabulary used		understanding of genre differences shown by reference to eg differences of form, role of description, use of dialogue
	AO2ii	evidence of knowledge and clear understanding of texts/task		
	AO2ii	clear comparisons		
	AO3	recognition of techniques and features of form/structure/language		
	AO3	considers links between purposes/means in choices of form/structure/language		
	AO4	some consideration of 'qualities' with evidence		
	AO4	evidence of an individual response		
	AO5	examines relevant contexts		
52-64 Band 5	AO1	critical terminology used accurately in detailed commentary	52-80	comparison/contrast freely moving between the passages
	AO2ii	detailed critical response to both texts and task		systematic and thorough response, including much of the material in the possible content outline
	AO2ii	thorough and detailed comparison		clear overview of differences
	AO3	explanation of range of aspects of form/structure/language		
	AO3	understanding of how choices of form/structure/language shape meanings		
	AO4	clear evidence of 'qualities'		
	AO4	personal response sensitive and well evidenced		
	AO5	detailed exploration of contexts		

Marks	Skills descriptors		Marks	Content descriptors
65-80 Band 6	AO1	accurate use of appropriate critical vocabulary/concepts		
	AO2ii	clear conceptual grasp of issues raised by texts and task		
	AO2ii	perceptive comparison		
	AO3	sophisticated analysis of how form/structure/language shape		
	AO3	meanings		
		conceptually and analytically links means/purposes		
	AO4	clear conceptual grasp of ‘qualities’		
	AO4	perceptive and evidenced personal response		
	AO5	analysis of a range of contextual factors		