

General Certificate of Education
June 2007
Advanced Level Examination



ENGLISH LITERATURE (SPECIFICATION B)
Unit 6 Exploring Texts

LTB6/PM

To be issued to candidates on Tuesday 12 June 2007 for examination
on Tuesday 19 June 2007 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm

Pre-Release Material

- To be given out on or after Tuesday 12 June 2007.
- On receipt of this material, you are advised to check carefully that the booklet is complete and that no pages are missing or illegible. There should be 12 pages. If you experience problems, you should consult your teacher.
- You should use the time between receiving this material and the examination to familiarise yourself with its contents.
- You are permitted to make **brief** annotations on the pre-release material. Such annotation should amount to no more than cross-references and/or the glossing of individual words or phrases. Highlighting and underlining are permitted.
- You are **not** permitted to bring any additional written material with you into the examination.
- Your teacher is **not** permitted to discuss the pre-release material with you before the examination.
- **You must bring this material with you to the examination.**

Pre-Release Material**The Historical Novel****Contents**

- Item One** Extract from *Restoration*, Rose Tremain, 1989.
- Item Two** Critics on Rose Tremain.
- Item Three** Rose Tremain on Rose Tremain.
- Item Four** Extract from *What are the Rules for Historical Fiction*, Sarah Johnson, 2002.

Item One

The following is the opening of *Restoration*, a novel by Rose Tremain, published in 1989.

ONE

I am, I discover, a very untidy man.

Look at me. Without my periwig, I am an affront to neatness. My hair (what is left of it) is the colour of sand and wiry as hogs' bristles; my ears are of uneven size; my forehead is splattered with freckles; my nose, which of course my wig can't conceal, however low I wear it, is unceremoniously flat, as if I had been hit at birth.

Was I hit at birth? I do not believe so, as my parents were gentle and kindly people, but I will never know now. They died in a fire in 1662. My father had a nose like a Roman emperor. This straight, fierce nose would neaten up my face, but alas, I don't possess it. Perhaps I am not my father's child? I am erratic, immoderate, greedy, boastful and sad. Perhaps I am the son of Amos Treefeller, the old man who made head-moulds for my father's millinery work? Like him, I am fond of the feel of objects made of polished wood. My telescope, for instance. For I admit, I find greater order restored to my brain from the placing of my hands round this instrument of science than from what its lenses reveal to my eye. The stars are too numerous and too distant to restore to me anything but a terror at my own insignificance.

I don't know whether you can imagine me yet. I am thirty-seven years old as this year, 1664, moves towards its end. My stomach is large and also freckled, although it has seldom been exposed to the sun. It looks as if a flight of minute moths had landed on it in the night. I am not tall, but this is the age of the high heel. I strive to be particular about my clothes, but am terribly in the habit of dropping morsels of dinner on them. My eyes are blue and limpid. In childhood, I was considered angelic and was frequently buttoned inside a suit of blue moiré, thus seeming to my mother a little world entire: sea and sand in my colours, and the lightness of air in my baby voice. She went to her fiery death still believing that I was a person of honour. In the scented gloom of Amos Treefeller's back room (the place of all our private conversations), she would take my hand and whisper her hopes for my splendid future. What she couldn't see, and what I had not the heart to point out, was that we no longer live in an honourable age. What has dawned instead is the Age of Possibility. And it is only the elderly (as my mother was) and the truculently myopic (as my friend, Pearce, is) who haven't noticed this and are not preparing to take full advantage of it. Pearce, I am ashamed to admit, fails to understand, let alone laugh at, the jokes from Court I feel obliged to relay to him on his occasional visits to me from his damp Fenland house. The excuse he makes is that he's a Quaker. This, in turn, makes me laugh.

So, to me again – whither my thoughts are extremely fond of returning.

My name is Robert Merivel, and, although I'm dissatisfied with other of my appendages (viz. my flat nose), I am exceedingly happy with my name, because to its Frenchness I owe a great deal of my fortune. Since the return of the King, French things are in fashion: heels, mirrors, sedan-chairs, silver toothbrushes, fans and fricassées. And names. In the hope of some preferment, a near neighbour of mine in Norfolk, James Gourlay (an ugly, rather disgusting person, as it happens), has inserted a "de" into his otherwise Scottish-sounding name. So far, the only reward to come to the pompous de Gourlay is that a French wit at my dinner table dubbed him "Monsieur Dégeulasse". We giggled a great deal at this and some new scarlet breeches of mine were stained with the mouthful of raisin pudding I was forced to spit out in my attack of mirth.

So this is how you might imagine me: at table, rustling with laughter in a gaudy suit, my migrant hair flattened by a luxuriant wig, my freckles powdered, my eyes twinkling in the candlelight, my pudding being ejected from my mouth by that force within me which snorts at sobriety and is so greedy for foolishness. Do not flatter yourself that I am elegant or worthy in any way, but yet I am, at this moment that you glimpse me, a rather popular man. I am also in the middle of a story which might have a variety of endings, some of them not entirely to my liking. The messy constellations I see through my telescope give me no clue to my destiny. There is, in other words, a great deal about the world and my role in it which, despite all my early learning, I utterly fail to understand.

There was a beginning to the story, or possibly a variety of beginnings. These are they:

1. In 1636, when I was nine years old, I carried out my first anatomical dissection. My instruments were: a kitchen knife, two mustard spoons made of bone, four millinery pins and a measuring rod. The cadaver was a starling.

I performed this feat of exploration in our coal cellar, into which, through the coal hole, came a crepuscular light, augmented a little by the two candles I placed on my dissecting tray.

As I cut into the thorax, a well of excitement began to fill and glimmer within me. It rose as I worked until, with the body of the starling opened and displayed before me, I had, I suddenly recognised, caught a glimpse of my own future.

2. At Caius College, Cambridge, in 1647, I met my poor friend, Pearce.

His room was below mine on the cold stairway. We were both by then students of anatomy and, though our natures are so antipathetic, our rejection of Galenic theory, coupled with our desire to discover the precise function of each part of the body in relation to the whole, formed a bond between us.

One evening, Pearce came up to my room in a state of hilarious perturbation. His face, habitually grey-toned and flaky, was rubicund and damp, his stern green eyes suddenly afflicted with a louche brightness. “Merivel, Merivel,” he babbled, “come down to my room. A person is standing in it who has a visible heart!”

“Have you been drinking, Pearce?” I asked. “Have you broken your vow of No Sack?”

“No!” exploded Pearce. “Now come down and you will see for yourself this extraordinary phenomenon. And, for a shilling, the person says he will permit us to touch it.”

“Touch his heart?”

“Yes.”

“It’s not a cadaver then, if its mind is on money?”

“Now come, Merivel, before he flees into the night and is lost to our research for all eternity.”

(Pearce, I report in parentheses, has this flowery, sometimes melodramatic way of speaking that is interestingly at odds with the clipped, odourless and self-denying man he is. I often feel that no anatomical experiment would be capable of discovering the function of these ornate sentences in relation to the whole, soberly-dressed person, unless it is a universal but contradictory fact about Quakers that, whereas their gait, habit and ritual are monotonous and plain, their heads are secretly filled with a rapturous and fandangling speech.)

We descended to Pearce’s room, where a fire was burning in the small grate. In front of the fire stood a man of perhaps forty years. I bade him good evening, but he only nodded at me.

“Shall I unbutton?” he asked Pearce.

“Yes!” said Pearce, his voice choking with anticipation. “Unbutton, Sir!”

I watched as the man took off his coat and lace collar and began loosening his shirt. He let the shirt fall to the floor. Bound to his chest, and covering his heart, was a steel plate. Pearce, at this moment, took a handkerchief from his sleeve and mopped his moist brow. The man removed the plate, under which was a wad of linen, a little stained with pus.

Carefully, he unbound the linen and revealed to us a large hole in his breast, about the size of a Pippin apple, in the depths of which, as I leaned forward to look more closely at it, I saw a pink and moist fleshy substance, moving all the time with a regular pulse.

“See?” exclaimed Pearce, the heat of whose excited body seemed to fill the room with a tropical dampness. “See it retract and thrust out again? We are witnessing a living, beating heart!”

The man smiled and nodded. “Yes,” he said. “A fracture of my ribs, occasioned by a fall from my horse two years ago, was brought to a terrible suppuration, voiding such a quantity of putrefaction that my doctors feared it would never heal. It did, however. You can see the scone of the old ulcer at the edge of the hole here. But its ravages were so deep as to expose the organ beneath.”

I was dumbfounded. To observe, in a living being, standing nonchalantly by a fire, as if about to welcome friends for a few rounds of Bezique, the systole and diastole of his heart affected me profoundly. I began to understand why Pearce was in such a lather of excitement. But then – and this is why I set down the incident as a possible beginning to the story now unfolding round me – Pearce produced a shilling from the greasy leather purse in which he kept his pitiful worldly income and gave it to the stranger, and the man took it and said: “You may touch it if you wish.”

I let Pearce go first. I saw his thin, white hand creep forwards and tremblingly enter the thoracic cavity. The man remained still and smiling. He didn’t flinch. “You may,” he said to Pearce, “put your hand around the heart and exert gentle pressure.”

Pearce’s thin mouth dropped open. Then he swallowed and withdrew his hand. “I cannot do that, Sir,” he stammered.

“Then perhaps your friend will?” said the man.

I rolled back the lace at my wrist. Now, my own hand was shaking. I remembered that, just prior to Pearce’s appearance in my room, I had cast two pieces of coal onto my fire and hadn’t washed my hands since, but only wiped them carelessly on the seat of my breeches. I examined my palm for coal dust. It was faintly smudged with grey. I licked it and rubbed it again on my velvet buttocks. The open-hearted man watched me with an utter lack of concern. At my elbow, Pearce, in his vaporous dampness, was breathing irritatingly through his mouth.

My hand entered the cavity. I opened my fingers and, with the same care I had applied, as a boy, to the stealing of eggs from birds’ nests, took hold of the heart. Still, the man showed no sign of pain. Fractionally, I tightened my grip. The beat remained strong and regular. I was about to withdraw my hand when the stranger said: “Are you touching the organ, Sir?”

“Yes,” I said, “don’t you feel the pressure of my fingers?”

“No. I feel nothing at all.”

Pearce’s breathing, at my side, was rasping, like that of a hounded rodent. A pearl of sweat teetered on the tip of his pink nose. And my own mind was now forced to contemplate an astounding phenomenon: I am encircling a human heart, a living human heart with my hand. I am now, in fact, squeezing it with controlled but not negligible force. And the man suffers no pain whatsoever.

Ergo, the organ we call the heart and which is defined, in our human consciousness, as the seat – or even deified as the throne – of all powerful emotion, from unbearable sorrow to ecstatic love, is in itself utterly without feeling.

I withdrew my hand. I felt as full of trouble as my poor Quaker friend, to whom I would have turned for a tot of brandy, except that I knew he never had any. So while our visitor calmly strapped on his linen pad and his steel plate and stooped to pick up his shirt, Pearce and I sat down on his extremely hard settle and were, for a good few minutes, devoid of words.

From that day, I was unable to have the same reverence for my own heart as other men have for theirs.

Item Two

The following are some comments made by critics on Rose Tremain's novel *Restoration* and on her writing in general.

- (a) "The term 'historical novel' implies that the action comes first – creaking decks, funny costumes," says poet laureate Andrew Motion. "And we do get some of that in her books, but it's not the most important thing. I think what is interesting about her is that she manages to make good stories, stories which in purely narrative terms wouldn't look out of place in the middle of the 19th century, but when we read them we realise that she's up to something more ingenious than that, more modern, self-reflexive and complicated. She takes bold narrative ingredients and subleises them. So we're having a good time in an old-fashioned sense but also being made to think about things. I think that's the secret of her popular success."
- (b) The critic John Bayley suggested that Rose Tremain's writing is "a purely feminine form of history ... her purpose seems to be to use the past as a convenience for her own peculiar brand of literary intimacy."
- (c) Susanna Rustin comments that Rose Tremain's characters are hungry for power, money, sex, but susceptible too to love and loneliness: "I am erratic, immoderate, boastful and sad," is how Robert Merivel, the narrator of *Restoration*, introduces himself. Many are preoccupied with the strange and the marvellous, and influenced by powerful dreams. Everyone is longing for something, and their fervent wishes propel the stories along.

Turn over for Item Three

Item Three

The following are some comments made by Rose Tremain about her life and her views on writing.

- (a) At the age of 11, while at boarding school, Rose Tremain experienced an epiphany. “I remember standing in the middle of a very beautiful hayfield with the sun going down and thinking that I didn’t want just to describe how beautiful I thought that place was but I wanted to write down all my feelings about it, and then try to make some equation between that place and what I felt about it and what hopes I had for my own life. I can remember the intensity of it ... and it seemed to me then that my life would be a life in which this process of describing and identifying feelings would play a part.”
- (b) “A lot of writers start from the premise of their own lives. There’s this old adage which I used to try to get my students to ignore – write about what you know, because then your characters and stories will be inhabited. But invention is really the clue to everything.”
- (c) In her fiction Tremain approached her subjects from unexpected angles, concentrating her attention on unglamorous outsiders. In connection with *Restoration*, Tremain said that she did not want her focus to be “narrowly domestic”. *Restoration* was set in the 1660s, and described the picaresque adventures of a courtier to Charles II. Nominated for the Booker prize, it brought Tremain more publicity and many new readers.
- (d) Tremain is aware that she may be accused of getting historical detail wrong. “I think what happens is that I start out with an obligation to learn as much as I can, and then it goes through this other process. Because it’s impossible from this distance in history to know everything, I don’t think you should deny yourself the opportunity to imagine – the test is, does the reader of this book believe in these characters? What I strive for in my books is the landscape and the mental landscape that take the reader somewhere else.”
- (e) Tremain has strong views about changing social attitudes. She says she is interested in contentment, “the will to accept a small, monotonous life”, versus materialism and competitiveness. “I grew up in the 60s and I was really dismayed when the Thatcher mindset came along, but I also found it very difficult to write about it, so I went searching for some other time in history that might be a mirror, or a parallel ... After the English civil war and the interregnum which were years characterised by obedience to God, by everybody being in their place, there is this great explosion. The Thames [which had frozen] explodes back into life, the theatres reopen, dress is absolutely transformed – that’s what *Restoration* was about, though probably nobody realised.”

Item Four

The following extracts are from a speech entitled ‘What are the Rules for Historical Fiction’, made by Sarah Johnson (Assistant Professor, Eastern Illinois University) as part of a discussion on historical fiction at the Associated Writing Program’s annual conference, March 2002.

Let me speak first about a good definition for historical fiction. While the usual generic definition – “fiction set in the past” – is true for the most part, this seemingly simple definition brings up a number of questions.

For instance, how far back does a novel have to be set to make it “historical”? A hundred years? Fifty years? Five years? To a reader born in the 1960s, novels set during the Second World War may be considered “suitably historical,” but readers who vividly remember the 1940s may not agree. Should the definition be relative, so that a novel can be considered historical by one reader, but not by someone else? Or, given that ALL novels are set in SOME time period, should we use the broadest definition possible, saying something like, “All novels are historical, but some are more historical than others”?

Even if we can agree on a definition that historical fiction includes any works that are set, for example, more than 50 years in the past, whose past are we talking about – the reader’s past or the author’s past? Take, for example, *The Great Gatsby*, written in 1925, and set during the same time period. To us, today, the novel is obviously set in our historical past. But does it fit what we think of as “historical fiction”?

There seems to be a perception on the part of some members of the media (myself excluded, of course) that historical fiction is a genre that is very rarely done well. Historical novels have the reputation of being either costume dramas, in which modern-day characters are dressed up and paraded around in period garb with a few “thees” and “thous” thrown in for good measure, or barely fictionalized textbooks, in which the author’s need to cram all of his prodigious research into a single novel overwhelms the plot.

“Genre historical fiction,” by which I mean historical fiction that simply goes out to tell a good story, has always been popular with readers, if library circulation figures are anything to go by. Also, historical novels that cross genres, such as historical mysteries and romances, continue to be popular.

However, in my opinion, aside from these subgenres within historical fiction, it is literary historical fiction that interests mainstream publishers the most. The goal of literary historical fiction is not to show readers exactly what life was like in a historical time period, although it may have that effect. Rather, authors who write literary historicals center their tales not on the historical setting but on the plot, which may help us better understand the differences (or parallels) between then and now, and on characters who manage to transcend time and speak to us from their own perspective in a way that we, today, can understand. One definition of literary historical fiction is “fiction set in the past but which emphasizes themes that pertain back to the present”.

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Items Two and Three SUSANNA RUSTIN, *Costume dramatist*, The Guardian, 10 May 2003.

Item Four SARAH JOHNSON, *What are the Rules for Historical Fiction*, www.historicalnovelsociety.org, March 2002.