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Leaving Cert. English Notes

Paper II

King Lear William Shakespeare

Sources

The story of *King Lear* has its origins in pre-Roman Celtic mythology. Shakespeare's play was first performed in 1606 at the court of King James. It may have 'borrowed' from an earlier play *King Leir and his Three Daughters*, acted as early as 1594 and published in 1605. Geoffrey of Monmouth (*History of the English Kings* Circa 1140) provides one of the oldest written references to King Leir. He describes him as a pre-Christian warrior king. The second edition of Holinshed's *Chronicals* also refers to King Leir. Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* written in 1590 is Shakespeare's source for Cordelia. He included her death by hanging in imitation of Spenser's character. Shakespeare retells this old story to convey a strikingly modern message. He took an old story which had a happy ending and gave it an ending which is sad. According to the philosopher Aristotle, horror and pity are two emotions that the audience should feel while watching a tragedy. We not only feel these emotions watching the play, they remain embedded in the heart of the audience long after the play is over.

Man's inhumanity to man

The universal implications of the tragedy of *King Lear* have a strong resonance in the 21st century. We today, like Lear struggle to survive in a cruel and unrelenting world; a world stripped to the essence of its being, a world without power, shelter or material comfort, a world very much like ours. Lear ends up in a hovel in the earth, surrounded by the dispossessed, a refugee in a hostile environment. Is it any wonder that today the play is more popular than *Hamlet* due to the universal implications of this tragedy for the modern world?

King Lear is a philosophical exercise which examines the nature of humanity and probes the dark recesses of the human psyche. The play is extremely pagan, pessimistic and fatalistic. In Act IV Sc III Kent observes 'It is the stars/Above us, govern our conditions;' and in Act IV Sc I Gloucester suggests that 'As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods; /They kill us for their sport.' Is Shakespeare suggesting there is no God? That the comforts of religion are make-believe?

One could almost suggest that the world of *King Lear* is sadistic in nature. We see the human body torn, battered and annihilated at a whim. The vile acts carried out by Goneril, Regan, Cornwall and Edmond creates chaos and inflicts the most outrageous pain and suffering. The brutality and immorality of these characters is hard to comprehend. Today we often reflect on the same brutality and immorality, feeling a deep sense of revulsion at 'man's inhumanity to man' which most definitely 'makes countless

thousands mourn'! This play forces its audience to acknowledge that human nature is intrinsically flawed and is capable of the most degenerate acts.

Justice

In the play *King Lear* we see a serious indictment of the misuse of authority and the perversion of justice. Lear is a powerful ruler with no heir to succeed him. He makes a fatal decision to divide his kingdom among his three daughters based on the premise of who can most eloquently express their love for him. His arrogant nature is prevalent as he ignores the rites of succession and fails to take adequate steps to protect his kingdom after his abdication. In fact the only steps he takes are rooted in self interest. He wishes 'To shake all cares and business from our age/Conferring them on younger strengths'. Lear is over eighty and wishes to settle the affairs of state 'that future strife /May be prevented now'. However having abdicated all his responsibility he wishes to retain 'The name and addition to a king'. Lear abdicates his responsibility yet wishes to retain the trappings associated with it. He wants the proverbial cake and wants to eat it too! It is hard to imagine how this can bring peace and harmony to the kingdom. He divides his kingdom on the basis of how eloquently his daughters express their love for him. His desire for flattery and need to boost his self-esteem seems inappropriate in a man of eighty and in a king who commands such absolute respect. In Act I Sc I Lear is dismissive, condescending and absolute. He makes a total error of judgement for which he will pay dearly. He is closely followed by Gloucester who appears to be easily deceived by his illegitimate son Edmond.

'Justice' is meted out hastily in this play. Cordelia and Kent are banished, followed closely by Edgar, Lear and Gloucester. Right at the heart of *King Lear* is a misunderstanding about the true nature of things. Lear, Gloucester and Albany become better people as they learn the hard way about the good and evil within themselves and within the world around them. There is an element of poetic justice at the end of the play. Goneril, Regan, Cornwall and Edmund die in varying circumstances. However so too do Gloucester, Cordelia and Lear. Where is justice here? There has been an element of redemption for Lear and Gloucester. They were both blind to their children's real worth. They were easily swayed and corrupted by younger, more cunning, astute usurpers. However Cordelia's death must be the greatest injustice in the play. The danger of absolute power in monarchy deficient in wisdom and justice is evident in *King Lear* as is the danger of absolute power in any one person, government or ideology today.

Familial relationships

Lear's older daughters, Goneril and Regan are jealous of his younger daughter, Cordelia because she is her father's favourite child. Lear does not try to conceal this fact and is about to bestow on her 'A third more opulent than your sisters' I: I. He admits to Kent that he 'lov'd her most' I: I and had relied on her to provide comfort for him in old his age. As Cordelia refuses to flatter his ego she is disinherited and banished, 'begone/ Without our, grace, our love, our benison!' I: II. Should parental love be contingent to any degree upon performance or achievement?

Lear's family is now plunged into crisis. Goneril and Regan are two of the strongest female characters Shakespeare created. Both daughters, like their father, enjoy wielding their power. Goneril bullies Albany, a husband she despises. One can deduce that her marriage, like Cordelia's was at her father's will. Regan too undermines her husband, interrupting him when he tries to take charge. They are very effective in serving their own interests and in undermining Lear's authority. Goneril instructs Oswald to be negligent of her father 'And let his Knights have colder looks among you; / What grows of it no matter'. As the play progresses both children inflict ferocious pain and suffering on their father. Their subversive actions finally lead to their downfall. Their actions have subverted all codes of human behaviour and have destroyed their family and the state, bringing chaos and misrule. However their coolness and calculation are eventually destroyed by passion. It is ironic that it is not their ambition but their love for a man who cares nothing for either of them should be the cause of their ultimate demise. Edmund wonders 'Which of them shall I take? Both? One? Or neither?' This shocking demise of Goneril and Regan emphasise their fiendish nature. They are the personification of evil and along with Edmund and Cornwall must die. Goneril and Regan represent a world without morality and love, inconsequence we see a breakdown of law and order, the destruction of filial bonds, disloyalty, treachery and murder.

Conclusion

There is no happy ending in this play. The critic Mark Van Doran suggests that 'No happy ending was thinkable for a hero who had learned so much so late.' Lear comments that he is 'a man / More sinned against than sinning.' III: II. But as the play continues we see Lear assume responsibility for the outcome of his actions. The play concludes that the responsibility for human action does not lie in nature, God or the supernatural, but in man himself. As Kenneth Muir says '*King Lear* is a look at the worst; but it shows several characters refusing to compromise with evil and emerging from the struggle ennobled and purified and it also demonstrates the self-destructive effects of the ruthless pursuit of power.' This clearly has a resonance in our 21st century.

KING LEAR: Characters

Edmund

What major themes concern the character of Edmund?

How do you feel about Edmund?

What adjectives come to mind when we come to describe him?

Malignant, malevolent, murderer, manipulative, monstrous, Machiavellian, (cunning, unscrupulous, using clever trickery, amoral methods, and expediency to achieve a desired goal, especially in politics), diabolical, savage, brutal, destructive, ambitious, ruthless, selfish, egocentric, insensitive, courageous, humorous, engagingly intelligent.....

For some Edmund is their favourite character, most definably one of Shakespeare's greatest creations. He is credited for his strong characters and for the fact that he avoids caricatures and we find our sympathies always divided. Edmund is charming, clever, and clear headed. His energy, humour and self-command at once engage our interest. He wins the trust of his father and brother, the respect of Cornwall and the love of both Goneril and Regan! Coleridge remarks on his 'courage, intellect and strength of character' He also remarked that Shakespeare also provided various circumstances that that allow us to admire Edmund. In the opening scene of the play we see how heartlessly and hurtfully his father, Gloucester, has treated him, introducing him with smutty jokes. We do not need to see his face to imagine how often this must have happened and how Edmund's feelings must have been hurt by it! We know that he was sent away from home for 'nine years' and brought up in a strange house and was soon to be 'away.....again'.

Like G&R, his appearance in the opening scene is deceptive. He seems polite, charming and eager to please. He is deferential to Kent, saying that he will work hard to earn his favour: 'Sir I shall study deserving.' This, however, belies his true nature, evident in his opening soliloquy in Act1:2. His words reveal a lively, witty cynic who despises conventional moral standards, along with laws and customs. It soon becomes apparent that Edmund is an adventurer, acting in pursuance of a purpose. He is, as A.C. Bradley suggests, 'determined to make his way, first to his brother's lands, then, as the prospect widens, to the crown;', using all who come in his path as 'hindrances or

helps' to his end. His bitter resentment of his brother Edgar's primogeniture is evident as he dedicates himself to 'Nature', his 'goddess', telling us that he will have nothing to do with the law, with morality or with religious principles. We see that he is as calculating as Goneril & Regan. They use cynical flattery and lies to gain Lear's approval and half his Kingdom. Edmund uses fraud and guile to deprive 'legitimate Edgar' of his lawful inheritance stating that he 'must have [his] land'. He is filled with rancour and anger. These unscrupulous characters reveal a moral kinship that will unite plot and sub-plot, developing in intensity as the play progresses.

It must be stated that Edmond's illegitimacy furnishes no excuse for his villainy but it does influence our feelings toward him at this early stage. He evokes our sympathy as he questions 'Why bastard? Wherefore base?' It is no fault of his yet it separates him from others. He has no recognised place within the social order of the Kingdom and adopts the attitude of a 'professional criminal' according to Bradley. He seems to say to society 'You tell me I do not belong to you! Very well: I can make my way into your treasure-house if I can. And if I have to take a life in doing so, that is your affair.' He is an amoral character whose only priority is self advancement. As the play progresses we see him emerge as one of Shakespeare's most monstrous creations, a murderous and manipulative villain who is governed solely by egoism and self-love.

Edmund is certainly gifted with an exceptional intelligence and energy and is a talented manipulator. It is easy for him to deceive both Gloucester and Edgar. He gloats about having, 'a credulous father and a brother noble.../on whose foolish honesty / [his] practices ride easy'. He easily convinces his father of Edgar's treachery and his own innocence. Having attained Edgar's lands he proceeds to aim for his father's position as Earl of Gloucester.

Edmund is not seen again until Act 3, Scene 3, when we see his true despicable nature. Here again the sub plot mirrors the main: Lear on his knees ridiculed by his two daughters; Gloucester's confidential trust in his son abused heartlessly. He informs us that 'this courtesy, forbid [Gloucester], shall the duke instantly know'. (3:3) This scene marks the end of our admiration for Edmund and the beginning of our admiration for Gloucester. Edmund is motivated by pure self interest, the natural moral order overturned here as it is in the scenes with Goneril and Regan. Edmund betrays his father with cynical opportunism gaining personal advancement. His consummate hypocrisy is evident as he pretends that he is troubled by a conflict that is his loyalty to his father and his duty to his country: 'How malicious is my fortune', he feigns, 'that [he] must repent being just!' As T. S Eliot might suggest, he is adept at putting on a 'face to meet the faces that [he] meet[s]': The Great Pretender!!! His Machiavellian nature is evident as he asserts to

Cornwall that he will 'persevere in the course of loyalty, though the conflict be sore between that and [his] blood.' What occurs next is savage depravity; a profound and shocking example of man's inhumanity to man which is both revolting and shocking. We are appalled and dismayed at the extremity of human cruelty! A total disintegration of the entire moral fabric of society is apparent as we witness the inversion of the natural order. The presence of two female characters at this juncture, the scene of the most violent physical horrors, as Gloucester's blinding, reflects a world convulsed by evil, a world full of gratuitous violence. 'Hang him instantly', demands Regan! 'Pluck out his eyes', commands Goneril! A.C Bradley comments that the play King Lear 'is a tragedy in which evil is shown in its greatest abundance; and the evil characters are peculiarly repellent from their hard savagery, and because so little good is mingled with their evil.'

Plot and sub-plot now entwine in a fascinating love triangle! Edmund casually decides to use the sisters to progress his own ambition. He shrewdly plays them against each other to gain more power. His malignant malevolence effervesces in his cold marmoreal treatment of the two women willing to murder and die for him! 'Which of them shall I take? Both? One? Or neither?' he ponders in a detached heartless manner. He is mercenary. It would be easy for him to take the widowed Regan but is fully aware that this would 'exasperate[s]' her sister. He knows he cannot have Goneril while Albany lives, but realises he needs him to secure victory against the invading French forces. He leaves Albany's ultimate demise to Goneril and seals both Lear and Cordellia's death warrant.

So what do we make of Edmund's final moments? Does his final gesture redeem him somewhat? Is he filled with remorse as he begs for forgiveness and confesses that he has ordered the deaths of both Lear and Cordelia? 'Some good I mean to do/ Despite mine own nature.' These words ring hollow from the mouth of such a manipulator of human emotions. The deaths of Regan and Goneril only touch him in so far as they seem to advance his own self-worth. Edmund is an egocentric 'bastard'. Edgar's description of their father's death 'hath moved [him]' suggesting 'that it shall perchance do good'. We hold our breath awaiting his epiphanic gesture where he will save the saintly Cordellia and the much abused and maligned Lear but no! He tells his brother to 'speak ..on'. He plays on the melodrama of the moment and as he arrives at death's door still a brilliant manipulator of human response. His brother describes him as a ruthless 'toad spotted traitor' and Edmund knows that 'the wheel has come full circle; I am here.' His disingenuous behaviour marks his lack of genuine sincerity and marks the man: malevolent, monstrous, Machiavellian, misanthrope.

King Lear: Characters

Goneril and Regan

In which major themes are these two characters entangled?

In the opening scenes we meet Goneril & Regan and see their false and extravagant natures. Goneril tells us that she has 'A love [for her father] that makes breath pure & speech unable' 1:1, and unlike Cordelia, she is indulgent of Lear's fickle behaviour. Regan too asserts her love for her father, so much so that she is 'an enemy to all other joys' 1:1. Both sisters, however, behave very differently in private. Here we see their hypocrisy & duplicity. They are suspicious of Lear's 'poor judgement in banishing Cordelia.' and within a short space of time we see Lear's eldest daughter behave in a deceitful manner. She is a vicious 'fiend' who mistreats her father as soon as he makes her joint Queen of England. G & R present a picture in the opening scenes which belie their opening professions of unconditional love. As T. S Eliot might suggest, they 'put on a face to meet the faces that [they] meet.'! They are both cunning & shrewd and aim to protect themselves from Lear's 'unruly waywardness' and together join forces to plot against their father! Goneril's cynical and cruel pragmatism is evident here as she weighs up her father's flaws and tells her sister that they must 'do something, i' the heat.'

G&R represent a moral order that has been turned upside down. As daughters they show ultimate scorn for their father. G refers to him as an 'idle old man/That still would manage those authorities/That he had given away.' 1:3. She unfairly blames him for tormenting her, outrageously suggesting, 'that by day and night he does me wrong' 1:3 She is hostile, cold and dismissive, toward Lear, confronting him about his knights and instructing Oswald to be neglective of him believing that Lear must be taught a lesson. A.C. Bradley suggests that Goneril 'is the most hideous human being (if she is one) that Shakespeare ever drew.' By transferring his power he has lost his privilege and status and without his power he has become a non-entity.

Both sisters unite in their filial and regal annihilation of Lear, Goneril the most malevolent and vindictive of the two. She is a 'marble-hearted fiend' 1:4 with no redeeming qualities. Her lack of humanity reflects her marmoreal nature. Regan mirrors her sister's behaviour. The only reason that she is not as monstrous as her sister is that she lacks her energy, courage and strength. We see her cruel and malicious behaviour

when she places Kent in the stocks. Both are contradictory of their husbands and dismissive of their father.

There are many poignant scenes in the play but one of the most heart-wrenching must be their heartless treatment of their father at this central moment in the play. Lear, father and King, kneels and begs his daughters for help. His cries fall on deaf ears and cold hearts. Both sisters unite against Lear, showing no remorse. As Lear confronts his two daughter's true nature he is driven to madness.

We see a further disintegration in the moral order as Gloucester's eyes are gouged out in front of us. The mere physical horror of such a spectacle is revolting and shocking. Although Cornwall is the one to blind him it is his wife, Regan who urges him on, suggesting that he take 'the other [eye] too.' Her sadistic nature is further evident as she taunts Gloucester about Edmund's betrayal and then murders her servant who tries to intervene in this grotesque scene, stabbing him in the back in a cowardly manner.

Goneril and Regan, two of Shakespeare's strongest female characters, display a total lack of any feminine characteristics. They show no kindness, pity, concern, tenderness or gentleness and instead outdo the male characters in cruelty and primitive savagery. Their depraved actions have subverted all codes of human behaviour reflecting a world where the natural order has been completely subverted. Goneril despises Albany's cowardly 'milky gentleness',^{1:4} she is unfaithful, possessive of Edmund and jealous of Regan whom she calls a 'fiend' in a 'woman's shape.'^{4:2} and is a danger to all who cross her path. Regan too is jealous of Goneril and is willing to fight her over Edmund. She is devious and spiteful when she finds her sister's letter. Goneril's venomous meanness outstrips that of her sister as she plots to have Albany murdered and as Granville –Barker remarks, poisons Regan 'as she might a rat'. Both sisters are consumed by spiteful jealousy. It is ironic that it is not their ambition but possibly their only feminine quality, their love for a man who cares nothing for either of them, that should lead to their ultimate demise!

The play King Lear is a tragedy in which evil is shown in its greatest abundance and Goneril and Regan are the personification of this evil. They are repellent in their hard savagery. As A.C. Bradley suggests they are capable of 'atrocious wickedness', are 'formidable and loathsome', have no conscience and have an insatiable need for power. And as Kenneth Muir suggests 'they demonstrate the self-destructive effects of the ruthless pursuit of power.'

Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath was born in 1932 in Boston, Massachusetts and died a brief thirty years later in 1963. Her Journals which she began writing in 1950 open with a quotation from the poet W. B. Yeats. He states: 'we only begin to live when we conceive life as a tragedy' It is true to say of Plath that in her short thirty years she certainly lived and produced a volume of work which only gained the respect it deserved posthumously. For her life was always 'shifting, flowing, melting.like quicksand... hopeless from the start.' *The Journals*. Many people find the work of Plath depressing. Certainly she herself was prevalent to extraordinary mood swings, she contemplated and attempted suicide, she underwent electroconvulsive therapy, she had psychiatric help, she most certainly was depressed many times in her life. But what is fascinating about her work is as Ted Hughes said in his Forward to *The Journals* (1982) is that 'Her real self showed in her writing....When a real self finds language and manages to speak, surely it is a dazzling event.' Hughes continues 'It is important to distinguish between a work that is trying to reach an artistic form using a real event as its basis and a documentary of some event that did happen.' Plath basis her work on real events but takes us on incredible imaginative journey. Like the poet Emily Dickinson her poems are mindscapes which present a rich tapestry of pain and suffering. Her poems reflect the intensity of despair and one can only admire a genius who stays and understands.

Plath was most concerned with her identity as a writer. She lived in a time when there were significant curtailments imposed by society on women. There were particular expectations of the role of women in the 1950's. The world of poet and motherhood were as Eavan Boland was to suggest 'almost magnetically opposed' (*Object Lessons*). Yet Plath

Longed for both. It was a novelty in the 60's to write about pregnancy and birth. Plath did and did so in a most exciting, delicate voice.

Morning Song is a perfect example of her struggle to fuse the two. The mother's life is shadowed by the child's arrival. She is aware of the repetitive nature of looking kids and finds herself standing 'round blankly as walls.' However she is soon enriched by the joy of love as 'All night' she listens to its 'moth breath' as it 'Flickers among the flat pink roses.' And with 'One cry' she 'stumble(s) from bed, cow heavy' to respond. There is a striking difference between the immobility of the parents in stanza two and the warm domestic reality of stanza five.

Her poem *Child* also reflects the simple pleasures she derives from her child. His 'clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing' that she longs to fill with the beauty of the world. At the same time she feels an underlying threat to the child's safety and this distresses her.

Like most poets Plath struggles at times to find inspiration and searches for poetic vision. Her despondency at the lack of inspiration is expressed in *Black Rook in Rainy Weather*. The poet is surrounded by wintry bleakness and paints a psychic landscape for her audience. There is a strong association between poet's mood and the scene evoked. She desires 'some backtalk/From the mute sky'. A quiet longing is felt here, a longing for the miracle that will transform this bleakness into something radiant. That miracle is the creative impulse, that spark of the imagination that will change the ordinary into the extraordinary. Her despondent mood is lifted as she sees that 'spasmodic /Tricks of radiance' which can be called miracles occur. And she awaits once again 'that rare, random descent.'

An intense interest in what appears on the surface and what is hidden underneath fascinated Plath. In her poem *Mirror* the depths hide something frightening and sinister, something to be avoided but which

one cannot escape. Her mirror is a mirror in which each reader sees his or her own concerns reflected. For Plath it is a mirror belonging to a woman whose soul is troubled and tortured, as 'Faces and darkness separate us over and over.' Her dual identity as poet and mother are reflected in this poem. She tries to come to terms with the social pressures to reconcile the competing of artistic and domestic life. She feels her younger self is 'drowned'. She is caught between past and future. Something frightening, dark, terrible and true 'Rises toward her day after day'. Does this represent her fear of growing old? Or perhaps it is her fear of her troubled, divided self.

The apparent calm of the mirror as it 'simply meditates the opposite wall', is reflected in the opening stanzas of her masterpiece *Elm*. Yet again the hidden terrors surface as she talks. Plath's language is remarkably simple and direct. However her imagery in this poem is richly evocative. We are taken on a journey deep into the subconscious. Plath said of this poem that it contained 'the stigma of selfhood.' Colour is important and symbolic in her work and we see shadings of her most prevalent colours here. The sinister elements of **black** are prevalent in *Elm*, it knows 'the bottom' with its 'great tap root', it feels the shadowy presence of love which escapes it into the night. She is 'terrified by the dark thing / That sleeps in (her)'. The colour black elucidates her anger, depression and fear of destruction, of annihilation. **White** too is symbolically sinister. The 'merciless' moon represents coldness, it is associated with fertility but is 'barren', it cannot create life. There is a surreal, hallucinatory quality to her imagery and symbolism in this poem. The poem begins with the Elm as narrator addressing the poet. Both are compelled to explore great depths. The absence of love haunts the poet and as the poem progresses the Elm taunts her about this. As we move into the sixth tercet the Elm speaks for the poet. My red filaments burn

and stand a hand of wires.’ At this stage the distinction between the ‘you’ of the poem and the Elm become blurred. The external violence creates inner turmoil. Both Elm and poet are ‘inhabited by a cry.’ A cry that nightly ‘laps out / Looking with its hooks for something to love.’ Expressed here are the most open and intense feelings, which originate from the deepest self. This ‘dark thing’, this internal malignancy, conjures a silent inward terror. *Elm* is a richly textured poem, designed to evoke an understanding of the despair and frustration felt as a result of the loss of love, and the stigma of selfhood, that awful fear of being oneself, of being imbued with those ‘slow faults / That kill, that kill, that kill.’

Plath’s landscapes and seascapes are mostly a backdrop to the mood of the poet. What fascinates me about her poem *Finisterre* is the final stanza which paints a perfect picture postcard of the westernmost tip of Brittany. If you or I were to visit this tourist resort we would see the eclectic mixture of stalls selling postcards, trinkets, and pancakes, a myriad of colours bustling with the energy of any tourist resort. But not Plath. In contrast to the last stanza the first three are dark. The ‘black / Admonitory cliffs’ are ‘knuckled and rheumatic’. Her vista is bleak and desolate. The waves are ‘whitened by the faces of the drowned.’ The sea is a pounding force ‘exploding’ around her. It is a bottomless void. The mist holds the ‘Souls’ of the dead and as she walks ‘among them’ she feels herself almost suffocated as they stuff her ‘mouth with cotton.’ When she walks free she is ‘beaded with tears.’ This poem is a powerful and startling psychic landscape.

Martin Booth says that Plath’s poetry ‘has a beautiful weirdness to it, an inviting malevolence, that the world is dark.... And it seeks to set a mood as much as tell you something concrete.’ This is what makes her poetry fascinating. Plath’s world is undoubtedly dark. At times it is ‘only temporary’ *Arrival of the Bee Box* but finally it became an overwhelming ‘ceiling without star’.

Mary Carroll

W.B. YEATS

Yeats lived in a time of extraordinary change and his poetry explores a powerful series of tensions between youth and age, order and chaos. He explores conflicts, both at a personal and national level, in a direct and compelling manner. He was a man, as Seamus Heaney described, never simply 'content to live', who spoke with an authoritative voice and a commanding tone. His poetry is full of questions, revealing a man who was sensitive to the world around him, voicing criticism, anger, admiration, nostalgia, advice and opinion. He encountered his world with intellectual vigour while always remaining true to his heart.

Political conflict

Yeats was frequently disillusioned with Ireland, as is apparent in September 1913. Yeats protests furiously at the materialistic and vulgar values of the merchant classes, in contrast with the heroism and idealism of the patriots of the past. The events which inspired this poem were the failure to raise money for an art gallery to house the Hugh Lane collection and the Lockout in 1913 of the workers by the employers led by W.M. Murphy, one of the captains of Irish industry. The polar opposites of the poem are O'Leary (one of the founder members of the Fenians and friend of Yeats) and the Catholic Nationalists. To Yeats, the latter were more concerned with the acquisition of personal wealth than with the establishment of a nation. Yeats was disappointed that a group who were taking the lead economically could not do so culturally. He scorns and satirizes the middle-class piety and the philistine culture of Ireland; September 1913, that has 'dried the marrow from the bone'. O'Leary, the dignified patriot, represents the perfect blend of courage and learning. He placed prime importance on the cultural life of the nation and had a strong appreciation of art and culture yet was physically daring, sacrificing himself for his country. Yeats' opinion however, was to change. These very people, derided for their lack of passion had now 'resigned' their part 'In the casual comedy' and had 'changed utterly'. Easter 1916 recognises that heroic, self-sacrificing patriotism was not dead. (quote) It is not however a single-minded celebration of what the leaders of The Rising had done. This event, though heroic was also tragic. It was, in Yeats' eyes, the birth of a 'terrible beauty' achieved at the expense of life. This haunting juxtaposition highlights Yeats' conflicting and paradoxical responses to this event. The rhetorical questions of the final stanza reveal the poet's uncertainties about the process of revolution. Yeats was not in favour of militant behaviour but had always desired that Ireland be self-governed and seeing the Irish population rouse themselves and resign their part in the 'casual comedy' gave him cause to sympathise and honour their heroism.

Conflict between youth and old age.

Yeats often became melancholic as a result of his awareness of the brevity of life. This is clearly evident in his doleful reflection in *The Wild Swans at Coole*. His heart is 'sore' as he observes these 'brilliant creatures,' which function as a symbol for the poet. They represent this youth which is now long behind him. He states passively that

'Thenineteenthautumnhascomeuponme',theyearsweighingheavilyuponhim,in contrasttotheswanswhichareactiveandpowerful,they'mount'and'scatter',rising fromthelaketowheelabovehim'ingreatbrokenrings.'Yeatsobservessomething timelessintheswansandseesthepermanentpresenceofbeautythattheyembody. Theysymbolisethatwhichis eternalforYeatsincontrasttotheautumnal surroundingstowhichYeatsfeelsinextricablylinked.

SailingtoByzantiumisanotherpoemdealingwiththeissuesofgrowingoldina changedworld.Yeatsfeelsnopartofthisvibrantcountry,a'countryforold men'. The opening stanza presents a dramatic affirmation of youth where the young are in 'one another's arms' mesmerised by the 'sensual music' of love. There are conflicting claims presented between the younger generations who live in a sensual worldandthemoresedatesingingoftheoldscarecrow,reincarnatedintotheeternal artformofthegoldenbird.Themovementfromscarecrowtogoldenbirdrepresents the central theme of Sailing to Byzantium, escaping the imperfect physical, sensual worldtotheidealworldofart.Thebirdhastranscendedthedecayandinfirmitiesof thetransitoryworld;itmayclaimtobesuperiortothe'Fish,flesh,orfowl,'whohave been 'begotten, born' but must also die. The poem gathers its tension through the dramatic conflict between passion and wisdom. However though wisdom conquers, itsvictoryisalmostPyrrhic(victorygainedattoogreatacost).Thepoethassailedto Byzantium, but his heart, 'sick with desire', is full of Ireland and he cannot speak of the natural world without celebrating it. Yeats opts for the rather cold mechanical songofthegoldenbirdbutitdoesn'tquitelymatchthepassionate,vibrantmusicofthe young. The richness of nature is so powerfully evoked in the first stanza that, by contrast, the world of art described in the last stanza, seems tame, cold and uninspiring.AsEllmannsuggests'suchafatecouldonlysatisfyYeatsmomentarily. Having sailed to Byzantium, he was ready to re-embark.'(From the Man and the Mask.)Yeats hadpursuedwisdomandthatpursuit hadchangedeverything. Returningfromhisvoyagehewouldfinda'newintensity'in'allvisibleandtangible things'. Ibid. Yeats himself regarded this as a bitter poem but Eavan Boland argues thatitis'animmortalfuryagainstthetragedyofdecayandtheinevitabilityofdeath'. InalettertohisfriendOliviaShakespearehewrote,'Iamtiredandinarageatbeing old.IamallIeverwasandmuchmorebutanenemyhasboundmeandtwistedmeso I can plan and think as I never could but no longer achieve all I plan and think.' But Yeats'pugnaciousthrustneverdesertedhim'.(Heaney,FindersKeepers)somuchso, at the age of 74, 'here at life's end' he prays for 'an old man's frenzy,' He courageouslywishedto'remake'himself.His'oldman'seagle mind'stillwishingto 'piercetheclouds'.AnAcreofGrass.

Conflict between order and chaos

AnothermajorandsignificantconflictinYeats'workisbetweenorderandchaos. Yeats admired the aristocratic tradition of 18th century Ireland. The world of the GreatHousewasalignedtohisownsenseofidentity.Hefeltverymuchathomein Lady Gregory's house at Coole. As Heaney points out, he was a 'mythologizer of aristocraticceremonyandgrace'ibid.YeatsbelievedtheAngloIrishAscendancy hadadutyto setanexampleofgraciousandculturedliving.Thisisevidentinhis elegyforEvaGore-BoothandConMarkiewicz.ThegracefullivingofLissadellis beautifully evoked in the opening images: 'The light of evening, Lissadell, /Great windowsopentothesouth,/twogirlsinsilkkimonos,both/Beautiful,onegazelle.' Yeatscreatesanelegantandgracefulpicturehere.Thetransitionfromtherefined,

elegant youth of the girls to their turbulent adult lives is graphically portrayed, as a 'raving autumn[which] shears/Blossom from the summer's wreath;' Autumn is personified as a violent reaper, stripping away the youthful beauty of the girls. Their political activism as much as the passing years are responsible for their 'withered old and skeleton gaunt' appearance. The poem laments the passing of such an ideal world in the woman's futile attempt to find 'Some vague Utopia'! (Yeats at his arrogant best!). The 'conflagration' at the end of the poem points to the destruction of the traditional values that were cradled in places such as Lissadell.

Chaos, the birth of 'Mere anarchy' is graphically depicted in Yeats' masterpiece *The Second Coming*. It is a stark, terrifying and prophetic vision of a disintegrating social order with burgeoning evil born and 'loosed upon the world'. Images of the 'blood-dimmed tide' and the 'rough beast' slouching 'towards Bethlehem' show how troubled the poet is by the increasing violence and annihilation of cultural and aristocratic values. This poem is situated in the midst of great historical upheaval; World War I, the Russian Revolution, the collapse of the great Empires, the Irish War of Independence and the uprooting of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. In his major prose work entitled *A Vision*, Yeats outlines his theory of history. He believed that each major historical period, lasting approximately two thousand years, would be overthrown by some massive upheaval. He is predicting the violent, cataclysmic end of the Christian era. The collapse of civilization is dramatically conveyed in the active, force-filled words of the opening stanza. The 'gyre' is spinning chaotically out of control. The 'falcon', metaphorically representing Christian civilization, has lost contact with the essence of Christ's teachings, 'the falconer'. Very soon 'the blood-dimmed tide' will engulf the world in a wave of anarchy. The terrible desert beast, the antithesis of innocence, represents the violent, apocalyptic events that will end the Christian era in a cataclysmic wave of violence and devastation. This poem presents a nihilistic vision of a world without justice, reason and order. It is a frightening prospect and still today a realistic one.

Yeats did attempt to resolve some conflicts in his poems but in many cases he had to accept that such a synthesis was not always possible let alone probable. He did remain in contact with the world, however imperfect it seemed, and encountered it with his complex temperament that could whisper of grace, youth and beauty or clamour against injustice, old-age and decay. Perhaps we should be grateful that many conflicts were never resolved, for it was they that evoked his most difficult struggles and his most poignant poetry, granting him 'an old man's frenzy'.

EMILY DICKINSON

A staggering two thousand poems was Emily Dickinson's legacy to the world. She described it as her "Letter to the World" that never wrote back! She was born in December 1830 in Amherst, Massachusetts and retired from society at the age of 25, which was customary for a spinster of her time. During the last two decades of her life her exclusion became extreme. There is much speculation about her reasons for seclusion; however the evidence is all conjectural and fragmentary. Dickinson's inner world became her only reality and her poems trace her attempt to gain insight into the human condition. She deals with the dramatic poles of human existence – ecstasy and despair. She also examines the nature of death and the possibility of immortality. She is in pursuit of sensation as much as fact. In her mindscapes she explores states ranging from rapturous joy to debilitating despair.

In her poem, 'I taste a liquor never brewed' we meet a very energetic, playful, joyfilled characters. This poem has the essence of an intensely imagined moment. The language is highly metaphorical. She describes herself as 'Inebriate of Air--.... and Debauchee of Dew - -'. She is intoxicated with the essence of summer and the dash captures the energy of summer, its never-ending nature. Stanza 3 and 4 are imaginatively striking. We see butterflies and bees drinking the experience of summer. The poem shows us Dickinson in an ecstatically happy state. The endless summer days allow her to imagine she is in heaven where the "Seraphs" and "saints" celebrate her rapturous wonder and play full rebellion.

The euphoria of this poem is in stark contrast with the nightmarish quality experienced in I felt a funeral in my brain. This poem conveys an overwhelming sense of physical, emotional and spiritual sufferings. The funeral is internal; it is "felt" in her "Brain". The funeral ceremony dramatizes her intense suffering. The internal death or breakdown is creatively described focusing on the sense of sound. Interestingly this is the final sense to leave us when we pass away. In the first two stanzas she feels the noise, the "treading – treading— and the incessant "beating—beating— until she can feel no more. We can empathize with the torturous mind in turmoil. All sense of reality deserts the poet at this stage. She can no longer feel or see, "Space" begins to "toll". Everything becomes an aural experience. Her description "Being, but an Ear," is suggestive of a

Picassoesque scene. Her whole sensory experience is condensed into one sense intensifying the magnitude of the experience, until she is “Wrecked, Solitary, here--. The final stanza conveys the terrifying image of complete loss as she hits “a World, at every plunge”. She has lost all sense of reality, all sense of feeling, everything: “And Finished knowing”. However this is not the full story. Dickinson writes “And Finished knowing—then— .The story has a sequel! “then”— is open to interpretation. All we can say for sure is that this is not the end. We know that Dickinson deliberately left the ending inconclusive. Is she incapable of communicating with us in this complete breakdown? Or has she arrived at some sense of epiphany, some great insight or enlighten?

Looking at her other poems we see that Dickinson is ultimately optimistic. In her poem “‘Hope’ is a thing with feathers,” she compares hope to a bird. She tells us that ‘sore must be the storm -- /That could abash the little Bird’. And that she has heard the song of this bird in ‘the chillest land—/And on the strangest Sea—. This poem represents a state of mind that can see the light at the end of the tunnel. In times of anguish and exceptional difficulties it comes without asking anything for what it has given: ‘Yet, never, in Extremity, / It asked a crumb – of Me.’. It can withstand the greatest of spiritual and psychological storms and offers the warmth of consolation and encouragement. Hope is neverending”.

Her poem “There’s a certain Slant of light,” depicts the onslaught of sudden depression. It is a metaphoric dramatization of its mysterious origin. The slant of light in this poem is shadow light, that of a winter afternoon. It “oppresses’ and hurts but leaves ‘no scar,’. But here too we see that this suffering, the ‘imperial affliction’ does not remain forever. ‘When it goes’ just like the winter light, a new season is born and from the distance we can look on Death.

Similarly in ‘After great pain’ we have a strong focus on the experience of recovery. Dickinson’s emotions are all used up. She is cold and numb. Her ‘Nerves’ are rigid and pained figures, sitting ceremoniously like ‘Tombs’. Here again there is a letting go—after the great pain. There is a sense of numb relief after her experience of the ‘Wooden way’.

The French poet Mallarme says that ‘poetry is the language of a state of crisis.’ Dickinson makes great use of this language in recreating with words the many crises she experienced and ‘felt’. Her mindscapes are a rich

tapestry of pain and internal suffering. We can clearly appreciate why Dickinson has been called the greatest realist of the interior America has produced. The critic Sean Dunne described her poems as ‘concise fragments from a diary, a logbook of the mind’s voyages.... she wrote of a space equally vast: her own mind.’ She believed that self-exploration was the only worthy kind of travel.

Dickinson’s breathtaking brevity was the result of labour. She took exquisite care in composing ‘lest words would be wasted’. She is strikingly original and eccentric and her uniqueness is visually and verbally exciting. She sometimes adopts various personas in her poems. This is evident in ‘A narrow Fellow in the Grass’, where she takes on the identity of a young boy. Dickinson, the keen observer of nature, is clearly evident here. This poem is a perfect example of her condensed style and her economical use of words. The presence of the snake is brought alive aurally and visually, without ever referring to him by name. We hear him continuously throughout the poem in her clever use of sibilance. We see this ‘narrow Fellow’, living in the ‘Grass’. He appears suddenly and divides the ‘Grass.... as with a Comb’. His shaft is ‘spotted’, and moves like a ‘Whiplash / Unbraiding in the Sun’. He is elusive in nature, a mysterious creature. However any encounter with this ‘Fellow’ must not be taken lightly. Dickinson’s is very aware of the danger lurking in nature. The tone of the poem is one of controlled terror. The child’s panic is intense; he is paralyzed by this encounter. His meeting with the snake is fascinating but also fear-filled as his breathing tightens and feels a ‘Zero at the Bone’.

Dickinson once described her world as ‘Vesuvius at home’. This suggests a great emotional force and power. She had no audience for her work in her lifetime. For her the inner world of the mind, imagination, and heart were sufficient and she explored brilliantly and honestly. Philip Larkin comments: ‘If Emily Dickinson could write over 700 pages of poems and three volumes of letters without making clear the nature of her preoccupations, then we can be sure that she was determined to keep it hidden, and that her inspiration derived in part from keeping it hidden.’ He concludes: ‘The price she paid was that of appearing to posterity as unfinished and willfully eccentric.’ Dickinson brings us into her private inner world into the intensity of her ecstasy and despair and her 21st Century audience can appreciate a genius that stays and understands.

Larkin Essay

'Larkin's poems often reveal moments of sensitivity which lessen the disappointment and cynicism found in much of his work'

To what extent do you agree with this statement? Support your answer with suitable reference to the poetry of Philip Larkin on your course.

The honesty, deep reflection and sly humour found throughout Philip Larkin's poems are what make him, for me, the most enjoyable poet to study on the Leaving Cert course. Although I would agree that his cynical personality is obvious throughout his poems, I don't think his entire work can be summed up in one sentence. In some poems I'd agree that glimpses of compassion lighten the pessimistic tone but in others I felt that subtle, cynical suggestions were a welcome break from predominant sensitivity. Themes that cropped up time and time again in his poems were the inevitability of death, the search for meaning in life and change.

I found that most of his poems followed the flowing structure of moving from an observation to its description and finally a reflection on what this observation had stirred inside him. Usually, if the observation and description are sensitive the reflection is a disappointed one full of cynicism and vice versa. This is the case in 'Wedding-Wind'. The poem brilliantly demonstrates the mind-set of a woman who has just gotten married and the changes that she has to make to her lifestyle. But it also explores the difference between the simplistic, almost naive view of women versus the more practical, less romantic mentality of men. The night of the 'high wind' the woman lies in bed waiting for her new husband to return from checking on the horses. The constant presence of the wind that 'blew all her wedding day' recreates the rushed, excited atmosphere of the wedding through potent pathetic fallacy. While she waits for him she sees her face in the 'twisted candlestick, yet see[s] nothing'. I thought this was a fantastic way to describe how her role has been changed but she hasn't yet figured out what it is or who she will be. Never the less she is happy with life and by rhyming 'he came back' and 'lack', Larkin helps to show her sense of delight and when hearing that the horses were restless she laments 'that any man or beast that night should lack the happiness that [she] had'. Larkin shows his compassion by being able to replicate the emotion of such an alien person to him.

Through three rhetorical questions Larkin plants the question in our heads: 'are women too easily consumed with the unrealistic romanticism of marriage?'. Firstly, the woman wonders if her joy bear 'this bodying-forth by wind' like 'a thread carrying beads'. Because of the woman's clear delight I assumed her answer was yes but I feel that even if her relationship is beautiful like a bracelet carrying beads, it is fragile. It can snap and, all of a sudden, her relationship and joy vanish. She then asks if she will ever again 'be let sleep now this perpetual morning shares [her] bed'. This time I felt her answer would have been 'no' as she is so excited with the newness of everything around her and enthralled with her new sexual

experience with her partner but of course we know she is getting carried away and she will, of course, be able to sleep again. She finally asks the question: 'Can even death dry up these new delighted lakes?'. Using the newly formed lakes as a metaphor for her delight was a clever way to link her feelings to the events in the poem but, again, I feel her answer would be different to mine. She feels that only death, if even, can end her joy but we know that these lakes of joy will soon dry up, especially as they were only created in the frantic weather and emotion of the night before. Only by comparing my answers to her probable answers did I notice the subtle cynicism in this poem and realised that maybe this woman was denying an inevitable reality. *of marriage*

Much like 'wedding-Wind', 'Church Going' explores change and the belief that all things must come to an end. This poem, however, moves from a pessimistic but witty observation and description to a much more sensitive reflection at the end. The title itself is ambiguous. Could 'Church Going' mean going to church or could it be the idea that the church is going, as in it's close to dying out. Despite being an atheist, Larkin finds himself stopping at 'another' an old church in the English countryside. Immediately the onomatopoeic 'thud shut' creates the 'unignorable silence' and emptiness inside. I enjoyed his play on words when he says the silence was 'brewed God knows how long'. Larkin is quite unsure of himself but removes his 'cycle-clips in awkward reverence' anyway. 'Up at the Holy end' he sees the bible and reads: 'Here endeth'. I thought this showed a lack of respect as, maybe he just happened to read that line as a coincidence, but he was probably pronouncing the death of the church. To compound his dismissive attitude he donates a worthless 'Irish sixpence' and reflects that it wasn't worth stopping there. I began to wonder why an atheist bothered stopping at the church and, 'in fact, often [did]' but he tells us he was 'at a loss' as to why too. He wonders if, 'when churches fall completely out of use', they will be kept 'on show' like a museum, superstitiously avoided as 'unlucky places' or made into a Blarney stone-like attraction. Although this is the beginning of his more serious reflection there is a mocking undertone in his theories.

His earnest contemplation really begins with the line: 'Power of some sort will go on'. He acknowledges that, somehow, these places will hold meaning beyond the death of the church but then immediately states that that too 'must die'. They will then just be buildings, empty shells that are 'less recognisable' each week. I found his discursive tone refreshing, he too was searching for answers and the poem is just a physical expression of his train of thought. He wonders if the last person 'to seek this place for what it was' will be his 'representative'. Someone who doesn't believe in Christianity, is 'uninformed' of their ways yet 'tend[s] to [the] cross of ground' as it recognised and respected the important rituals in life of baptism, marriage and death. Here, Larkin partly discovers why 'it pleases him to stand in silence' in these churches: Although the 'accoutred frosty barn' is worth nothing to him, 'A serious house on serious earth it is'. The unusual 'it is' and repetition of 'serious' cleverly puts emphasis on his statement and makes it clear that, even if he can't find meaning there, it pleases him to stand where others can find meaning and comfort in life. The cynicism is long gone here and I could really sense his desire to somehow relate to what

churchgoers feel and the importance of religion in their life. The end of this poem is where we really see his sensitive side break out from under his cynical nature. Larkin feels that the church merely recognises and robes as destinies 'all our compulsions' as humans. As these desires will never be 'obsolete', there will always be someone searching these churches for meaning in life with a hunger to be 'more serious'. The incredible journey of Larkin's state of mind, from the dismissive, witty non-believer to the respectful spectator makes this my favourite of all of his poems.

Maybe introduce the 'god-hole' and Beckett quote?

'MCMXIV' is also about change but looks into a previous change in the psyche of a nation rather than one that may happen in the future. Larkin creates a tense, foreboding tone by describing sentimental images of a care-free pre WW1 England, but the knowledge of what eventually came about makes for unsettling dramatic irony. Larkin creates a psychic landscape of a simple time where, although the men of Britain are readying for war, they are as relaxed as if it was 'an August Bank Holiday'. As they stand in their rows waiting to ship out they were as uneven and unorganised 'as if they were stretched outside Villa Park with 'the sun on moustached archaic faces'. The sibilance-subconsciously adds to the sinister tone throughout the poem. He paints a picture of what life was like back then, when children were all 'called after kings and queens' and 'tin advertisements for cocoa and twist' were hung up. These pictures seem foreign to us now though. I think the poet includes ellipses such as 'the countryside not caring' to recreate the 'lazy-Sunday' attitude of the inexperienced English soldiers but even the wheat knows that these men are underprepared. It's 'restless silence' is like as if it was trying to warn the men of their naivety before it's too late. I feel Larkin demonstrates both his sensitive side and his cynical, disappointed side in the lines 'Never such innocence, Never before' and 'Never such innocence again.'. He is lamenting the loss of innocence but at the same time he is condemning the naivety of the English soldiers. The repetition really drives home his disappointment at the death of innocence and, with that, a whole era, in England.

can you bring in some technicalities here?
ominous foreboding
patetic fallacy
onomatopoeia

'Ambulances' is a strange poem as, for me, there is no sensitivity in it. Instead of mentioning their crucial, lifesaving role, Larkin chooses to concentrate on the disappointment ambulances cause as a reminder of the inevitability of death. 'Closed like confessionals', they are private and a personal preparation for death. Ellipses are used again in this poem but here they represent the way in which Ambulances speed through 'loud noons of cities' and, in their rush, don't have time to 'give back [any] of the glances they absorb' from people on the street. It's strange to experience Larkin's menacing view of ambulances. He makes it seem as if they're something evil coming to get us and 'all streets in time are visited'. No one gets away. He demonstrates his cynical attitude once more when he acts as though ambulances are disturbances intruding on ordinary life. People on the street are torn from the 'smells of [their] dinners' and forced to 'see a wild white face that overtops red stretcher-blankets'. The alliteration of the 'w' sound made me reluctantly imagine the terrified, whimpering face of the recently deceased man. The stark contrast between the homely olfactory imagery and the horrifyingly vivid visual imagery re-enforces Larkin's view

eg

that ambulances are quite unwelcome in everyday life. Their very presence is a reminder of 'the solving emptiness that lies just under all we do'. Death is final, there is no coming back from this emptiness. It is so 'permanent and blank and true'. By purposely breaking the trochee tetrameter, Larkin forces us to focus on these words and consider the inevitability of death. This poem sums up Larkin's ability to find bleakness and disappointment wherever he looked, so when his abject wit surfaced once more in the painfully bad pun: 'for BORNe away in the DEADened air', I couldn't help but grin a little at how out of place and fitting it was at the same time. While this poem is not something that should contain humor, the pun summarises its message perfectly: that, just as all of us came into the world, the cycle of life will complete and, someday, we will all die. The ambulances only act as the ferryman to the other side.

'The Trees' demonstrates both Larkin's cynical side and his sensitive, insightful side. As the trees are coming into leaf he brilliantly describes how the 'buds relax and spread' to produce the new leaves each year, but he wonders if 'their greenness is a kind of grief' for us because, as we are stifled by the ravages of time, each year they 'begin afresh, afresh, afresh'. Although he acknowledges that it is a 'yearly trick', that they only 'seem' to be reborn each spring, and in fact they too will die eventually, I feel he envies the illusion they create and he sees it, almost, as the trees mocking the fact that he will become more frail and wrinkled each year. This is just his pessimistic outlook. On the other hand I loved how he was able to appreciate the beauty of the trees. As 'unresting castles' they are strong and magnificent when they reach 'fullgrown thickness every May'. Unlike him they are able to write off the previous year and start from scratch once more.

Larkin's cynical nature and dissatisfaction with life and the people around him permeates throughout his poetry but every now and then he surprised me with a moment of gentle compassion that it seemed like he didn't possess. His ability to always astonish me with a moment of deep reflection or sly wittiness made him so enjoyable for me to study.

COMPARITIVE STUDIES

When embarking on Comparative Studies it is important to differentiate between your approach to studying Single Text and Comparative Texts. Single Text involves close reading whereas in Comparative Texts you read for the general storyline. In both you must study character and plot but in Comparative Studies you focus on **KEY MOMENTS** from your three texts. Your study should be **MODE** based i.e. **Theme/Issues, Cultural context, Vision and viewpoint** and you are expected to analyze, contrast and compare moments from your texts under these headings. You must **not** summarize your texts. Remember to compare means to look at similarities and differences. You are invited to “interact with the different worlds encountered and to make discriminations and evaluations.” P.71 Draft Guidelines.

THEME/ISSUES

In this section you are expected to focus on the central message presented by the writer and then to look at how the authors of your other texts treat the same message. For example: War/Violence, Power, Love, Revenge, National Identity/Racism, Isolation, Loneliness, Communication. Do they treat the theme similarly or differently? You should also consider both positive and negative aspects of your chosen theme. How are the main issues of the theme introduced to the audience? Are they immediately obvious or are they perhaps more subtle? Notice how the issues are developed. Who are the important characters in this development? How and where do the complications arise? How do the characters react to these situations? Always look at similarities and differences. What brings the theme to a climax in each text? What resolution do they arrive at? What insights are given at the conclusion? Is the story left open-ended and what effect does this have on the reader?

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Cultural context refers to the world of the text, the type of society we see represented in the society we are reading. We must enter “into the world of the text and get some insight and feel for the cultural texture of the world created.” P 71 Draft Guidelines. Look at how the main characters live, their values and beliefs and their day-to-day rituals. What is this world like for the men, women and children who populate the story? Are men or women the dominant force? Are children protected and innocent or are they exposed to great hardship? In what country is the text set? What are the similarities and differences between these settings? What decade/century is featured? What are the social and economic circumstances of the texts? How does the cultural context affect the happiness, fulfillment, frustration, and misery of the main characters? Look at the following list and chose about **FIVE** aspects to focus your answer on.

Historical period.

Place.

Social customs, traditions, rituals.

Class structures: upper, middle-class, working-class and the effect, if any, they have on the characters in this society.

Money, power, wealth: who are the powerful/ wealthy people? Are they male or religious?

Religious beliefs and values: evident in lifestyles, values, attitudes toward sex and marriage.

Work ethos in society.

Political situation.

Effects of poverty: helplessness, disease, desperation, violence, honour, pride.

VISION AND VIEWPOINT

This mode deals with the general vision and viewpoint of the author, director or dramatist. This study should incorporate what kind of impression of life the author portrays for the reader. Whether the overall vision is positive/negative. Is life seen as hope-filled or is the viewpoint hopeless or full of despair? What meaning of life presented to us, the audience, in this text? Sometimes our author has a very moralistic perspective. It is essential to remember that it is the ***author's vision and viewpoint*** that you are expected to deal with in this section.

Having outlined the point of view show where the author presents this, then compare and contrast this with your other texts. You can then examine the characters that are essential to displaying the author's viewpoint.

You could examine whether the vision of the text is relevant today. Is there a final moment of redemption in the texts?

A FINAL NOTE

It is essential in Comparative Studies that you use the language of comparison and that you continue to weave your texts together. Linking phrases are so important, such as; similarly, as in, texts are linked... typical of both... a corresponding moment...however, unlike...

Do not tell the story of the text. Marks are awarded for discussion of similarities and contrasts related to the modes of comparison being question.

Mary Carroll

LITERARY GENRE

<p>How is story told? Fiction/non-fiction Drama/film?</p>			
<p>Narrator: first person/ Third person?</p>			
<p>How is plot developed? tensions complications climax resolution</p>			
<p>Chronology of story i.e. Time frame flashback sequential soliloquy letter diary voiceover</p>			
<p>Music how does it create atmosphere? does it relate to any specific character or event? is there a particular instrument used?</p>			
<p>Image/motif does it relate to one specific character? perhaps express theme?</p>			

<p>Characters how well are they developed? how well is major character developed? does character use soliloquy/ diary/ voice over to reveal innermost thoughts? choices/needs of character? are minor characters important?</p>					<p>Setting. does it help the story? does it change? what is the setting in film? Scene paragraph in text <u>4. props</u></p>
<p>Setting the scene how does the setting help the story? does it change? establishing shot (film) scenery in text descriptions (novel) props: imagine the story without them</p>					
<p>Language descriptive realistic stage directions humour exaggeration farce subtle</p>					

<p>State theme: Look at positive/ Negative sides</p> <p>Is theme dealt with similarly or differently?</p>			
<p>Introduction of theme: how are the main issues introduced?</p> <p>are they subtle or obvious?</p>			
<p>Development:</p> <p>how is the theme brought forward?</p> <p>who are the important characters here?</p> <p>are there any catalyst characters?</p>			

<p>Complication /crisis:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. where does it arise?2. what is the complication in each text? <p>how do the characters react to this situation?</p>			
<p>Resolution:</p> <p>what sort of endings or conclusions are drawn?</p> <p>what are your feelings at this stage?</p>			

Cultural Context

	TEXT1	TEXT2	TEXT3
In which historical period is text set? How important is this in the text?			
Where is the text set? Country place rural/urban castle/house/apartment			
What are the social customs, traditions, rituals?			
Class structures Upper/ middle/working class What effect does structure have on characters?			
Money/power/wealth Who has it? Male/ church?			

<p>Religious beliefs Are they obvious in lifestyle? Values of group? Attitudes toward sex and marriage</p>			
<p>Work ethos in society?</p>			
<p>Political situation?</p>			
<p>Effects of poverty: helplessness Disease, desperation, violence, honour, pride.</p>			
<p>Role of men and women in society</p>			

MARY CARROLL

