# Tutorial letter 202/3/2014

GENRES IN LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE: THEORY, STYLE AND POETICS

**ENG2602** 

Semesters 1 & 2

## **Department of English Studies**

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#### **IMPORTANT**

Your Tutorial Letter 101 for ENG2602 instructs you to answer **both** sections of this assignment, namely the question on drama and conversation **and** the questions on poetry. This is **incorrect**. You should only have answered **ONE** section of the assignment: **either** drama and conversation or one question on poetry. Your marker has only marked one section.

## PRE-EXAMINATION INFORMATION

The examination for ENG2602 counts for 75% of your final mark. Your assignments count for the remaining 25%. It is therefore in your interest to be well prepared for the examination.

The examination is **two hours long**. In that time, you will have to answer **three** questions. There is one question on each of the following sections of the module:

- Fiction
- Persuasive Prose
- Poetry
- Drama
- Conversation

All of the questions are structured in the same way: they all require you to read a passage and answer questions, demonstrating your ability to read closely and with attention to the details of the text. Use the following guidelines to help you prepare for the examination:

- Read your study guide and the prescribed book. Make notes of the important features of each genre of writing.
- Read the extracts provided in your Reader. Write notes on each of the extracts, outlining the way they use the strategies that are appropriate to each genre.
- Pay attention to general features of language use, such as point of view, register, diction, tone, irony and figures of speech as you analyse the extracts in the Reader in preparation for the examination.
- Write sample essays for practice, in which you examine the way each extract in the Reader uses the resources of its genre.

### **RESPONSES TO THE ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS**

Section A: Drama and conversation

**Note:** This question required you to analyse **both** the dramatic and the conversational aspects of the dialogue. Below we provide some points that you could have mentioned in your response. There is obviously much more that you could have mentioned than we explore here.

## Dramatic features

In the extract provided, you were directed to examine the content of the discussion between Julie and Lois. In order to accomplish this examination, you needed to conduct a close analysis of the dialogue between the two women and employ quotes from the passage to substantiate your argument. A good place to start your analysis would have been the stage directions, which tell you something about the two female characters and imply something about what will happen in the play. Then you should have examined what form of language is used in the conversation between them. The contraction in the first line, "Oh, 'scuse me", is colloquial and an indication that there is an easy relationship between these two women. The relaxed nature of their interaction is further revealed in the unlocked bathroom door. You should have considered the playful tone that is present in the dialogue. The women, particularly Julie, indulge in banter but there is a certain element of sarcasm involved in the italicized line.

LOIS: (Interrupting) Why didn't you lock the door?

JULIE: Didn't I?

LOIS: Of course you didn't. Do you think I just walked through it?

JULIE: I thought you picked the lock, dearest.

LOIS: You're so careless.

This bit of dialogue provides the reader with details about both women. Lois's focusing on the door that is unlocked and the fact that she considers this careless is indicative of her conservative nature. It also implies a concern about Julie's lack of responsibility. Certain words enforce the idea of Lois's more serious approach to life "severely" and her injunction to Julie to "Grow up". Throughout the passage you should have noted the increasing irritation that Lois exhibits as well as her impatience. But, she also tries to wheedle Julie into doing what she wants in the lines "I wish you'd hurry out of the tub" and "As a favor to me will you make it ten?"

Julie's character is the exact opposite of Lois. She is carefree, happy and her remarks are all aimed at making fun of both herself and of Lois. She could be regarded as rather sensual and she appreciates the fun of singing in the bath, which makes her happy. She directly expresses her joyfulness in the lines:

"No. I'm happy as a garbage-man's dog and I'm giving a little concert" and

"there's something very beautiful about singing in a bath-tub. It gives an effect of surpassing loveliness. Can I render you a selection?"

But at the same instant, you should have noticed that she is purposely using her enjoyment of the situation to tease Lois. She offers to sing to Lois, knowing full well that Lois desperately wants to use the bath. Julie carries on teasing Lois, in order to assert that she has the power and rules the situation in the words: "This is my kingdom at present". She goes on to make a very clever and humorous dig at Lois, when she indicates that she is "Godliness" and that Lois is only "next to Cleanliness". This play on words and ideas is very funny and refers to the Biblical line "Cleanliness is next to Godliness". This indicates that Julie has a very sharp intelligence and a way with words that the conservative and serious Lois lacks.

You should also have noticed that Julie speaks more than Lois. Lois's sentences are brusque, short and to the point which again reveals her business-like nature. In the longest piece of dialogue, in which Julie tells a short and allegorical story, we realize that the crux of the dialogue and the situation is her paying Lois back for having previously stolen the remaining

warm bath water Julie had used to fill the bath for herself. Julie even mentions the month in which this occurs – last January. Playfully she goes on to call Lois the "wicked sister" and to lament the fact that she had to use cold cream to clean herself which she indicates is "expensive and a darn lot of trouble". The whole speech is conducted in a mockery of Biblical language which makes it very funny and takes the sting out of her wanting to get her own back at Lois. But this does indicate that her character, though carefree and light-hearted, can and does bear grudges. The words "Easter-rabbit smile" say something about how she perceives her appearance. What do you think this expression might imply about her looks and character? By refusing to leave the bath quickly Julie is also manipulating Lois into telling her why Lois needs the bath so urgently. Julie is far more competent than Lois at this form of behaviour and it reveals the power play or conflict between the younger and the older woman. What does this indicate about the relationship between the two women? How do you know this?

## Conversational features

To address the second part of the dialogue question, using conversational analysis tools, here are some features you could have mentioned. Your responses should explain and support the claim that any feature of conversation is present, using evidence from the given dialogue.

## **Turn-taking:**

Several aspects of turn-taking are noted in the guide, but not all of them can be observed in this interaction. Responses to this question could have commented on the following "rules" of turn-taking patterns:

- Turn-taking in conversation is organised according to the rule that one speaker speaks and then stops before another takes over. This "rule" is evidently observed by the speakers.
- Between the turns there may be a minimal gap. We observe one instance of interruption which Lois uses to get a point made before Julie can go on talking about something else.
- Criteria such as intonation and syntax mark the end of a turn. In this conversation, while the intonational pattern may not be evident, questions are used as markers of the end of a turn.
- The relationship between two utterances may form an "adjacency pair" e.g. a question is followed by an answer:

LOIS: You're so careless.

JULIE: No. I'm happy as a garbage-man's dog and I'm giving a little concert.

The utterances made by the speakers in this conversation generally use relevant turns, but in several instances a participant does not answer questions directly. For example, Julie says:

"Can I render you a selection?" to which Lois responds:

LOIS: I wish you'd hurry out of the tub.

Lois does not respond to what Julie asks. Her response implies that she does not want a rendition of a song from Julie; she wants Julie to get out of the bath tub.

Her response could be said to:

- Break the turn-taking rule;
- Be only an indirect answer, at best, to the question.

## **Cooperation, Implicature and Politeness**

Indirect utterance, mentioned under turn-taking, leads to the next conversational principle of Grice's cooperative principles:

One principle of cooperation is that the contribution we make to a conversation must be such as is required, at the stage at which it is required by the accepted purpose—it must be adequate.

The example we have given above shows that Lois's reply is not as clear as it should be, thereby violating the maxim of manner. Julie has to deduct the appropriate implicature: Lois wants to use the tub (implicature).

JULIE: Why should I?

LOIS: I've got a date.

**Politeness strategies**: The following exchange suggests a degree of familiarity.

JULIE: Why should I?

LOIS: I've got a date.

These lines include very few (if any) overt politeness markers, and the speakers are direct, using what is known as bald on-record strategies. Comments on politeness may vary here as some may feel this is impolite, while others may note that, because of the assumed/implied familiarity, this may not indicate politeness.

**Gender Differences:** There is not much to say about this aspect, so you would not have been penalised for not mentioning it.

#### **SECTION B: POETRY**

For this section, you needed to choose **ONE** poem (either Shakespeare's "Sonnet 55" (Question 1) or Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" (Question 2) for discussion.

### Question 1: Shakespeare's Sonnet 55

The assignment question on Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 ran as follows:

## Shakespeare, Sonnet 55

In this Sonnet, the themes of time, love and poetry's power are skillfully woven together. Write an essay in which you discuss how details of diction, syntax, figures of speech, structure and sound are employed in order to shape and express meaningful connections between these themes.

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme; But you shall shine more bright in these contents Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time. When wasteful war shall statues overturn,

And broils root out the work of masonry,

Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn

The living record of your memory.

'Gainst death, and all-oblivious enmity

Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room

Even in the eyes of all posterity

That wear this world out to the ending doom.

So, till the judgment that yourself arise,

You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

#### **Notes**

You (line 3): the speaker addresses his beloved.

Sluttish (line 4): slovenly, unclean Wasteful (line 5): which lays to waste

Broils (line 6): riots, tumults

Mars (line 7): the god of war in Roman mythology.

Judgment (line 13): the Day of the Last Judgment when the dead shall rise again

You might have read Sonnet 55 before now, as it is one of Shakespeare's best-known poems; if not, I am sure you enjoyed its boisterous assertion of the power of poetry to defeat the ravages of time and to achieve immortality for the poet's lover, one of its subjects.

Observe that the poem opens with a double negative: "<u>not</u> marble ... <u>nor</u> the gilded ...". In ordinary speech, we usually begin with a neutral/positive statement, which we may place in contrast to a later negative one. By beginning with a strongly negative assertion, a rhetorical structuring designed to stimulate the reader's curiosity as to what follows, the poet sets the tone and purpose of the sonnet: a strongly worded claim for the power of the written <u>poetic</u> word to deny and resist the erasures of time and, thus, to maintain the memory of the poet's beloved.

Together with this, the <u>syntactical order</u> of the elements in the sentence, also at variance with ordinary prose usage, determines a breach of expectation in the reader. Re-read the following couplets carefully, bearing this thought in mind:

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments 1
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme ...

Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn 7
The living record of your memory.

'Gainst death, and all-oblivious enmity 9
Shall you pace forth ...

You will have noticed how the poetic arrangement of these pairs of lines differs from normal syntactical order (such as you would use in speaking, for example) and how poetic diction's radical departure from the usage of ordinary speech immediately contributes to the shaping of the poem's intention. In similar ways, this effect is reinforced and the message reiterated in the centre of the poem, always a crucial site of expression:

**Nor** Mars his sword, **nor** war's quick fire shall burn 7 The living record of your memory.

Lines 1-2 ("not marble ... princes") are rich with allusions: not only to sights familiar to Shakespeare's contemporaries, such as the marble royal tombs in Westminster Abbey, but

especially to classical poetry. The allusion to a famous poem by Horace, a great Roman poet (65-27 BC), would have been immediately recognisable to Shakespeare's educated public and would have provoked comparison with the ancient poet's purpose. Horace's poem, Ode 3.30 (Exegi monumentum aere perennius ...) begins thus:

I have created a monument more lasting than bronze. And higher than the royal site of the pyramids, Which neither harsh rains nor the wild North wind Can erode, nor the countless succession of years And the flight of the seasons. I will not entirely die, and a large part of me will avoid the grave.

Constantly renewed, I will grow in the eyes of posterity....

Countless imitations of and allusions to Horace's defiant assertion of the power of poetry to challenge time's unrelenting attack on human memory may have dulled the sparkle of the original statement, but Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 gives it new lustre, and distinguishes itself from most. Horace defiantly asserts poetry's power to challenge time's unrelenting attack on human memory. His words have inspired countless imitations and allusions over centuries and across Western literature. While this in itself validates Horace's bold claim to immortality, the sparkle of his original statement has been somewhat dulled by repetition. Shakespeare's Sonnet 55, however, gives new lustre to old words, and distinguishes itself from most emulations of the ancient lines.

Why? Because it (apparently) shifts the reader's attention from the poet onto his subject: immortality will be bestowed on the beloved, not on the poet. Compare these statements from the two poems:

I will not entirely die, and a large part of **me** will avoid the grave. Constantly renewed. I will grow in the eyes of posterity [Horace]

#### and

But <b>you</b> shall shine more bright in these contents	3
The living record of <b>your</b> memory	8
Shall <b>you</b> pace forth; <b>your</b> praise shall still find room	10
Even in the eyes of all posterity	
So, till the judgment that <b>yourself</b> arise,	13
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.	14
[Shakespeare]	

The repetition and skilful alternation of the pronoun you and the adjective your compel the reader to draw away from Horace's preoccupation with the memorialisation of his own self as poet, to focus on the memorialisation of the beloved as poetry's subject. Two goals are then achieved: first, the beloved is assured of being spared oblivion; equally, the poem is recognised as the guarantee of immortality and, in consequence, the poet can renew Horace's defiant boast in a new guise. Renewing Horace's project to ensure immortality through poetry seems to me to be, after all, still the most important. Notice how the first couplet, or distich, is balanced by the last one:

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments	1
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;	

So, till the judgment that yourself arise, 13 You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

The emphasis is laid on the <u>power</u> of the <u>poem</u>, a power to confer immortality on ephemeral human existence. The power of the <u>poet</u> is left implicit: this is both a formal departure from and a contextual assimilation of Horace's claim. The repetition in outlive (I 2), living (I8) and live (I 14), positioned at important points in the poem, serves to keep notions of life and mortality in the reader's view, with a certain subtlety. Not an easy task, which the poet succeeds in performing quite deftly, without compromising clarity or efficacy. Or, at least, this is my opinion: what do <u>you</u> think?

To conclude, note how the poem's structure leads the reader from sweeping assertion in the first quatrain (*Not marble ... sluttish time*, II 1-4), set in a context of imposing monuments, to a reflection on war's wanton destructiveness, in the second quatrain (*When wasteful war ... your memory*, II 5-8), where the stone theme is carried through in "statues" and "masonry"; the third quatrain ("*Gainst death ... ending gloom*, II 9-12) reprises the theme of death from the previous lines and casts the beloved in everlasting youthful energy, stepping out against decay (*pace forth*, I 10). If you read the poem aloud, as we asked you to do, you will notice how slow and long-drawn line 12 is, reproducing the long stretch to doomsday: "*That wear this world out to the ending doom.*"

The first 12 lines are punctuated by imagery and figures of speech, which hold the composition in a tight net of rhetorical correspondences: personification in "sluttish time", "wasteful war", "broils"; alliteration in "When wasteful war"; metonymy in line 7 (the god "Mars" is substituted for "war"). Against the (at times convoluted) expression of these lines, the closing couplet stands in stark simplicity, connecting explicitly, for the first time, love and the power of the written poetic word in antithesis to the inevitable erasures of time. How do these concluding lines deliver the final "punchline" of the poem?

Now that you have looked at the poem again with my help, re-read it, slowly, and try to discover whether you agree with my comments and why.

#### Question 2: "Musée des Beaux Arts"

This question required you to "analyse in detail" how W.H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" "deals with its subject". This means that you had a fair amount of freedom to choose which particular qualities of the poem to focus on, which figurative devices to discuss, and so on. This also means that there is no model answer to this question – there are a range of potentially valid ways of interpreting and discussing the poem.

It does **not** mean, however, that the question had no specific requirements, and that you could have written absolutely anything that came to mind. For one thing, you would have had to discuss *both* **what** the poem says and **how** it says it; more precisely, you needed to account for the interaction between the two, talking about ways in which the **language** the poet uses is appropriate for or suited to **what** the poem is trying to express – **how** the inner workings of the poem make the poem happen.

Therefore, it would not have been sufficient simply to paraphrase the poem, or explain what it means. An example of **what not to do** would then be to say something like:

In the opening lines the poet talks about the "Old Masters". These are the great painters of the past. He is saying that "they were never wrong" about "suffering". This means that they painted suffering accurately, or that they represented it in a truthful way. Etc."

The idea of the kind of analysis that you are required to do in this course is **not** to decode a message hidden in the poem; simply "translating" the poem into plain English is not enough.

Another example of **what not to do** would be the following:

In the opening lines the poet uses unusual syntax. He uses inverted word order to create emphasis. He also uses negative words: "suffering" and "wrong". This gives a negative tone.

Here, stylistic qualities are identified, and claims are made about their effects, without substantiation and without any link to what the poem is expressing. What is unusual about the syntax? What does it emphasize? In what sense do the words "suffering" and "wrong" relate to each other in the context in which they are used, and can they therefore meaningfully be said to create a tone?

This example, hopefully, demonstrates another important requirement of this essay: whatever claims you made needed to be argued and substantiated. Whatever you said needed to be, first, logical, and, second, proven through close reference to the poem.

The procedure for engaging with a poem that is outlined in your study guide is meant to steer you towards this type of analysis, and if you carefully followed it, chances are your approach was on track. The first step of this process was started for you, since the question explains that the subject of the poem is human suffering. The question also already suggests something of how the poem treats its subject, since it mentions that the poem comments on how the Old Masters represented suffering in their paintings.

Perhaps you might have begun a discussion linking the poem's subject with its treatment of the subject by commenting on the slightly unusual word order in the opening line-and-a-half: the speaker places the phrase "About suffering" at the very beginning of the line, instead of after the subject and verb. This is, perhaps, a position of greater emphasis; it is also apt, as suffering turns out to be the subject of the poem itself – even while it is not the subject of the sentence (you may also have pointed out how this opening line in fact summarizes the poem's subject more clearly than its title does – again making the placement of "About suffering" at the beginning of the line pertinent and effective). Yet, after placing "suffering" in this position of prominence in the poem, the speaker goes on to describe various ways in which suffering actually goes unnoticed, relegated to the margins of various great paintings (and the painters were "never wrong" about this particular subject, so this relegation, the poem suggests, is true in general). The opening phrase therefore begins the process whereby the poem confounds our expectation that suffering be spectacular, or at least noteworthy.

Further examination of the poem's syntax, diction and versification might have revealed other ways in which this tension between the intense, concentrated distress of suffering and the casual, unexciting ignorance of mundane, everyday existence is generated. For example, you might have noted how the poem sounds almost like casual everyday conversation – more like prose than poetry: it has uneven, meandering rhythms, plenty of enjambed (or run-on) lines, it lacks a consistent discernible metre, and its prosaic quality tends to disguise even the scattered rhyme that emerges (can one even hear "wrong" rhyme with "along" at the end of the endlessly rambling line 4; or "understood" rhyme with "wood" when six lines separate them, or "be" rhyme with "tree" after seven lines; and when more regular patterns of rhyme finally emerge from line 9, does one hear them within the uneven metre and enjambed lines of this section?).

Might we have expected more "poetic" language to deal with important events such as a "miraculous birth", a "dreadful martyrdom", or a human being "falling out of the sky"? Consider the discussion of Thomas Gray's "Ode On the Death of a Favorite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Goldfishes" in your study guide: do you remember how Gray's poem uses grandiose language to describe an unimportant event – and how this is an effective way of satirizing society? Is there something analogous that happens in Auden's poem – except with the elements (at least to some extent) reversed?

In this poem the ordinary language is not simply used to create an effect: rather, it embodies the very point the poem is making about suffering going unnoticed amidst ordinary, everyday

events; and, through its meandering syntax, the poem perhaps also reflects the disordered ways in which events unfold – the important and the unimportant occur side by side. Additionally, you may have noted ways in which the poem's point is made through dissipating the weight of words such as "reverently", "passionately" (line 5), "miraculous" (line 6) and "dreadful" (line 10) through the prosaic tone discussed above, typified in phrases such as "just walking dully along" (line 4), "Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot" (line 11), "dogs go on with their doggy life", and "the ... horse / Scratches its ... behind on a tree" (lines 12-13).

If you paid careful attention to the structure of the poem's argument, you may have noticed a development in the treatment of its subject. Note, for example, how suffering is described in very general terms in the opening four lines: no specific event is described – instead, "it" simply "takes place" (line 3). Similarly, the everyday life that carries on oblivious to suffering is also described very broadly as "someone ... eating or opening a window or just walking dully along" (line 4) (and here you might have commented on how "or" is repeated when it would have been more usual to separate the first and second terms in this list with a comma: perhaps this increases the pace of the line, giving the impression, as the reader runs out of breath, of an even longer list of dull, everyday activities?).

In subsequent sections, both the suffering and the mundane occurrences that take place around the suffering are described in more detail; the final instance of suffering and the commonplace activities that continue around and despite it are by far the most painstakingly presented – their description takes up over a third of the poem. What is the effect of this development? Why present such particularities as that the "sun shone" (line 17), that Icarus's "legs" were "disappearing into the green / Water" (lines 18-19), that the ship sailing by was "expensive" and "delicate" (line 19)? Why describe the scene so thoroughly as to mention the hypothetical "splash" and "forsaken cry" (line 16) the ploughman may have heard? One answer you might have suggested is that this section is the culminating point of the poem's attempt to regard suffering within a wider landscape of human activity – and, related to this, you might have pointed out that the poem concerns specific paintings that include scenes of suffering. In this landscape (of human activity, and of a painting) suffering does not form a focal point or centre which gives other events their meaning; rather, every event is depicted in an equal amount of painstaking detail, demands and withstands an equal amount of attention.

Perhaps this realization has even more impact because the fall of Icarus is so suggestive both of humanity's potential for achievement and humanity's propensity for failure. That Icarus's father, Daedalus, was able to construct wings of wax and feathers that allowed both of them to fly epitomizes in a most illustrative way the human striving towards attaining constantly greater heights, to escape our limitations; that Icarus flies too close to the sun and thus falls from those heights is equally illustrative of the dashing of that aspiration; and the extraordinary truth that this extraordinary event is "not an important failure" is perhaps what the ordinary language used here communicates so effectively. What also becomes apparent here is that distress, sorrow or wretchedness is communicated in the poem. That is to say, the poem does not simply describe events with a detached, objective gaze; rather, there remains an unresolved tension between extraordinary suffering and ordinary activity – between the "important failure" that ends in a "forsaken cry" and the casual "eating or opening a window or just walking dully along" – which expresses a dissatisfaction with or disappointment in humanity's blindness.

A final point might be to address why all the points we have considered above take place within the poem's discussion of how suffering is represented in the paintings of the Old Masters (you may here have noted that before the section on *The Fall of Icarus* Auden describes parts of two other paintings by Breughel). If the speaker is making an observation about suffering in general, why not describe suffering in general? Why describe how it has been painted? Why not describe, for example, the fall of Icarus itself, instead of Breughel's representation of it?

Perhaps one way to look at it would be to consider that the poem deals with humanity's blindness to suffering. Is it therefore perhaps apt that the poem deals with visual imagery? Is some notion that a great painting might be a more insightful way of seeing the world than ordinary everyday activity worth investigating in relation to this poem? Could poetry – and this poem specifically – perhaps similarly be thought of as a way of seeing?

Additionally, you might have argued that the visual impact of a painting is here added to the contemplative power of poetry to create an overall effect that is more expressive than either alone; or perhaps you felt that Auden uses the Old Masters to validate his insight, or uses what the images in the paintings evoke as a strongly suggestive intertext to his poem. On the other hand, you may have argued that by describing representations of suffering rather than instances of suffering, the speaker places the reader at an additional remove from the experience itself, and that this distance at which the reader is placed mirrors the distance at which the children, dogs, horses, ploughmen, and all those aboard passing ships are removed from the event of suffering. That is, perhaps the detachment of the poem evokes and is self-consciously written from the "human position" it contemplates.

Or you might have detected, in the poem's representation of representation, a comment on art itself, hinted at above – an examination of the power that a painting or a poem has despite, or perhaps even through, its detachment from the world to draw attention to and make immediate – to make extraordinary and remarkable – those sufferings of others from which we remain distanced in our everyday activities.

#### **ASSESSMENT CRITERIA**

Your marker would have marked your work according to fairly straightforward criteria. Your answers were required to demonstrate the following:

- Close attention to the details of how language is used in the passages that were set for analysis;
- The ability correctly to identify linguistic and literary strategies that are used in fiction and non-fiction prose, as well as visual elements where appropriate, as these contribute to the communication of meaning in the passages;
- Idiomatic and grammatically correct written English of an acceptable academic register.

Best wishes for your studies in this module!

Regards

The teaching team