

Comments

Criterion A: Knowledge and understanding of the poem

- How well is the student's knowledge and understanding demonstrated by their interpretation of the poem?

3	There is adequate knowledge and understanding, demonstrated by interpretation supported by appropriate references to the poem.
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The candidate begins with an interpretive claim that is relevant. He identifies the situation in the poem although he sometimes struggles to move beyond description of characters and events, the understanding of a variety of aspects is more than superficial. However, he does seem to wander off track, doesn't develop claims sufficiently, or makes comments that are not particularly convincing (Why are they symbols of hope? What about human morality? In what sense is it asking about how the world can move on?). It is important to reward the candidate for what they do know/have done (e.g. recognizing that the holocaust is not a typical topic for Duffy), but some comment on Duffy's typical use of dramatic monologue to give voice especially to female victims would have shown greater awareness.

Criterion B: Appreciation of the writer's choices

- To what extent does the student appreciate how the writer's choices of language, structure, technique and style shape meaning?

2	There is some mention but little appreciation of the ways in which language, structure, technique and style shape meaning in the poem.
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The candidate does explicitly or implicitly discuss choices such as the title, symbolism, the person/point of view, description and contrast, but it isn't really that clear about how these function.

Criterion C: Organization and presentation of the commentary

- To what extent does the student deliver a structured, well-focused commentary?

3	The commentary shows evidence of a planned structure and is generally focused.
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The introduction does set out sufficient focus ('explores issues related to the holocaust... through the description of the persona') and the candidate moves from one point to the next in a manner that it is easy to follow, dealing with a variety of choices and eventually moving to a more thematic consideration (e.g. of morality and gender). The candidate runs out of time so there is no conclusion, but there is a sense that the candidate had a plan and stuck to it.

Criterion D: Knowledge and understanding of the work used in the discussion

- How much knowledge and understanding has the student shown of the work used in the discussion?

3	There is adequate knowledge and understanding of the content and some of the implications of the work discussed.
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The candidate is able to answer a variety of questions that are structurally related, but there is not consistently 'very good' detail. He seems better on the 'bigger picture'. He identifies several of Atwood's concerns.

Criterion E: Response to the discussion questions

- How effectively does the student respond to the discussion questions?

3	Responses to the discussion questions are relevant and show some evidence of independent thought.
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The responses are consistently relevant and the candidate moves beyond the obvious (e.g. from discussion of sexism to the relation between the individual and history). However, his response, once again, lacks sufficient detail to be deemed 'well-informed'.

Criterion F: Language

- How clear, varied and accurate is the language?
- How appropriate is the choice of register and style? (Register refers, in this context, to the student's use of elements such as vocabulary, tone, sentence structure and terminology appropriate to the commentary.)

4	The language is clear and appropriate, with a good degree of accuracy in grammar and sentence construction; register and style are effective and appropriate.
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Overall, the language is clear and formal, despite the nervous use of 'sort of' and 'um'. The candidate speaks quite slowly, but this is not a sign of lack of fluency. There is accurate use of literary terminology though this could be more consistent.

Total: 18/25

Michael Ratliff

“Shooting Stars” by Carol Ann Duffy is a poem that explores the issues related to the holocaust and the violence and the atrocities that were committed during that time. Duffy accomplishes this through assuming the persona of a victim of the holocaust to give a first-hand description of the events that took place and to force us to relate to the victims by relating to the poem.

In the title there’s a, there’s the title serves on two different levels to convey meaning to the poem. Shooting stars are normally considered to be stars in the night sky that we see shooting and in American culture these are something that you would wish upon symbols of hope of good things that are happening but in this poem the stars represent the Jewish people who are being shot by the Nazis during the holocaust so this title it does some interesting things by comparing them, Jewish people to shooting stars there is a sense that they are a symbols of hope that as stars that they are sort of immortalized. The victims of the holocaust are people who give us a sense of um where I’m just going to move on, I’m losing track of my thoughts.

Going back to what Duffy does by adopting this persona the first person point of view allows her to describe in great detail the violence in line 10 she describes her impending rape with “my bowels opened in a ragged gape of fear” this very very strong and vivid imagery that she can only accomplish through using first-hand, first person persona. She also accomplishes this in lines 12 and thir—in lines 11 and 12 where she describes a child in a pile of corpses in the mass graves and the soldiers who stand by laughing.

Which brings me to the contrast that Duffy sets up through much of this poem. She sets these soldiers who are unaffected she describes them as being unaffected by the violence that they are causing around them. This, just not ambivalence towards human life, which she describes as, which we can see from line 12 where she describes the soldiers laughing as they stand by the corpses. And in line 18 where she describes the soldier who puts a gun to her head and pulls the trigger on an empty chamber as a trick something as though it were some prank.

Duffy in the fifth stanza. lines 19-23, forces us to ask questions about how we move past the atrocities that were committed by people in the holocaust where she asks, she says “after immense suffering someone takes tea on the lawn after the terrible moans a boy washes his uniform’ she’s implicitly asking how we can move past the knowledge that as people we are capable of such terrible things. How can we live with ourselves knowing that as a world, as human beings we’re, that we can do things that were done in the holocaust which is reinforced in line 26 and 27 when she says, “Turn thee onto me with mercy for I am desolate and lost”. Duffy is really sort of explaining how she is concerned about humanity and herself as a part of that that she doesn’t understand that she doesn’t know how to feel about morality in humans and to what extent we are moral creatures.

Another element in Duffy’s poem is are her statements about gender. In the first stanza she describes the soldiers as men with guns instead of calling them soldiers and does this again in line 16 when she

refers to them as young men highlighting explicitly their gender and that role in the violence that was committed. She also does this in the description of her being raped, the persona being raped and the.

Okay Michael , I have to cut you off but perhaps you can just finish off saying why you see that gender is significant.

I think it's important Duffy's mention of gender in her statements on about morality in humans in that she may be explicitly targeting men and the morality of men in their capacity to do terrible things to other humans. But while she does make these mentions to men she also seems to include herself in the questioning of human morality again in lines 26 and 27 "Turn thee unto me with mercy for I am desolate and lost".

Do you see this as a poem that's typical of the way Duffy writes and her concerns?

This is a bit unusual for Duffy. She I have not read any other poems by her about the holocaust and she doesn't write frequently about Jewish people not being Jewish herself. I think it's interesting her reasons for writing this. I would see it...

00:10:02

Okay we need to move on to the discussion, Michael, sorry to cut you off. I would like to ask you a few questions about *The Handmaid's Tale* and I was wondering if you could start by telling me what you found the effects of the way she structured the novel were.

The Handmaid's Tale has a very interesting structure, the way that the odd, the even numbered chapters take place during the day and are largely descriptions of the actions that the narrator, the handmaid, description of her life, but then the odd chapters take place in the evening where the events are the descriptions are largely of the thought processes in her own head of her memories of the past, of her reflections on life and of her questioning of her existence and how to survive. And then, this, for the way that the plot is revealed to the reader, this is very interesting fashion because her flashbacks reveal bits and pieces of her character as we are going through the events in the present of the book. So this non-linear story telling really affects the way in which the reader sort of comes to understand the narrator and the narrator's role in the story.

Okay. She ends the novel with the "Historical Notes" what do you see as the significance of that?

The "Historical Notes" serve as... they make a number of interesting points, the first of which being that this society that she describes in her novel collapses and that she sees it as something that could not be sustained and this sort of fits in with Atwood's views that the oppression of women has it's no basis for society and a society which features that so prominently wouldn't be able to last. The other thing that the historical notes do is they serve to put in perspective the events of the novel: how one individual's life which through the entire novel is set up to be so important and we get very involved in the life of the narrator, then the historical notes take us a step back and make us look at, in historical context the lives of, not just the lives of one individual but even societies come and go and that there's nothing is permanent and it sort of forces us to reevaluate the importance that we ascribe to events because in

the long term they don't have such strong significance to the outcome of history. The other. I'll stop there.

Mike, if you have another point you go ahead and make it.

5 The other thing that is important to this is Atwood's comments on the that individual lives while not important to history are all that are important to us. So the historical notes are in one interpretation a bit of an ironic element for Atwood that she involves them in there to at one time force us to question the importance of individual lives but then at the same time also question the importance of history, because if the events of one person's life are sort of irrelevant to history the and those are so important to us how important is history if they don't take those into account?

Did you see any remnants of sexism in the "Historical Notes" or did you see it as an aspect of society that had been eradicated?

10 There are elements of sexism in the Historical Notes. The comment by the speaker to the chair communicates that sexism is still present. Atwood is doing this to demonstrate the permanence of the issue and that sort of pushing forward for a sort of gender equality is something that has to continue and it's sort of her way of fighting back at a common criticism of feminists in the late 20th century that you know they've achieved equality and that they don't still have to push forward that they should be
15 content with what they already have.

Okay. What does the speaker actually say to the Chair? Do you remember?

I don't remember the specific quote.

What aspect of it did you see as sexist?

Sorry.

20 **It doesn't matter. Okay. Can you just give me a little bit of a frame for understanding your comments at the beginning. What is the situation that the narrator finds herself in?**

The narrator is forced to reproduce with prominent males in society because industrial pollution has sort of eliminated the ability for most women to reproduce so those that are seen as, those who may be capable of reproducing are forced to have intercourse with males so that they may bear children and
25 keep mankind from dying out.

The ending prior to the "Historical Notes" is quite ambiguous. Why do you think that Atwood doesn't actually tell us what happens to the narrator?

I think that Atwood does this to reinforce the "Historical Notes" and the comments that she makes about history and about individual lives; that the "Historical Notes" would be easier to ignore if we had
30 sort of a typical denouement for the novel, the "Historical Notes" are instead given as the ending to make us go to question the things that I mentioned earlier.

Okay. This is the end of the recording (00:19:58)