

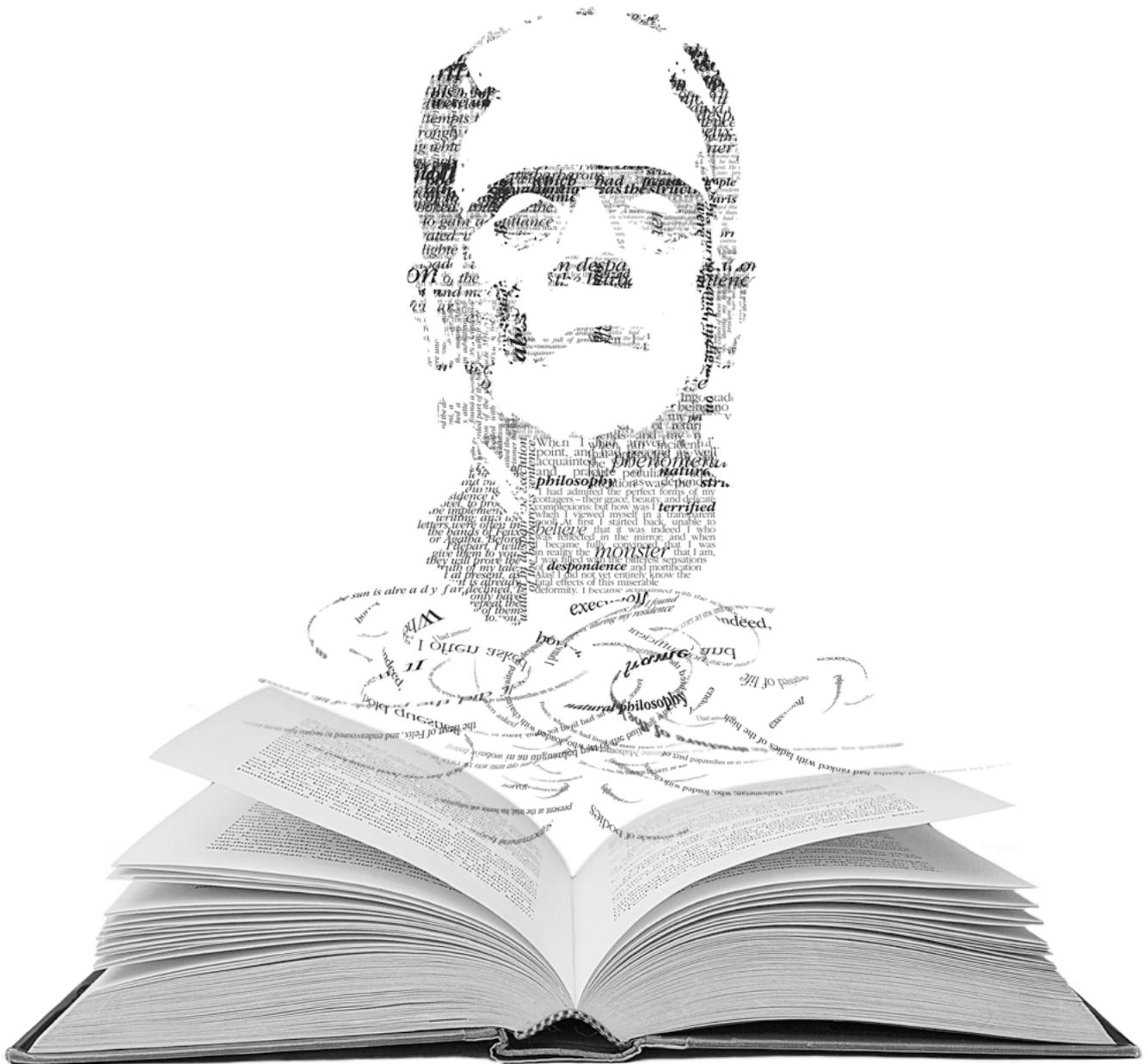
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ENGLISH LITERATURE H071 H471

EDWARD THOMAS AND JANE EYRE

Candidate style answers

Unit F661 - Poetry and Prose 1800-1945



SECTION A: EDWARD THOMAS

'I have mislaid the key. I sniff the spray
And think of nothing; I see and I hear nothing ...'

Discuss ways in which Thomas presents memory in 'Old Man'.

In your answer, explore the effects of language, imagery and verse form, and consider how this poem relates to other poems by Thomas that you have studied.

Old Man

*Old Man, or Lad's-love, - in the name there's nothing
To one that knows not Lad's-love, or Old Man,
The hoar-green feathery herb, almost a tree,
Growing with rosemary and lavender.
Even to one that knows it well, the names
Half decorate, half perplex, the thing it is:
At least, what that is clings not to the names
In spite of time. And yet I like the names.*

*The herb itself I like not, but for certain
I love it, as someday the child will love it
Who plucks a feather from the door-side bush
Whenever she goes in or out of the house.
Often she waits there, snipping the tips and shrivelling
The shreds at last on to the path, perhaps
Thinking, perhaps of nothing, till she sniffs
Her fingers and runs off. The bush is still
But half as tall as she, though it is as old;
So well she clips it. Not a word she says;
And I can only wonder how much hereafter
She will remember, with that bitter scent,
Of garden rows, and ancient damson-trees
Topping a hedge, a bent path to a door
A low thick bush beside the door, and me
Forbidding her to pick.*

*As for myself,
Where first I met the bitter scent is lost.
I, too, often shrivel the grey shreds,
Sniff them and think and sniff again and try
Once more to think what it is I am remembering,
Always in vain. I cannot like the scent,
Yet I would rather give up others more sweet,
With no meaning, than this bitter one.*

*I have mislaid the key. I sniff the spray
And think of nothing; I see and I hear nothing;
Yet seem, too, to be listening, lying in wait
For what I should, yet never can, remember:
No garden appears, no path, no hoar-green bush
Of Lad's-love, or Old Man, no child beside,
Neither father nor mother, nor any playmate;
Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end.*

ANSWER 1

The introduction is brief and efficient, offering an overview of the poem and opening up possible later discussion of other poems (AO1, AO4).

The uncertainty of memory expressed in the multiple names is an effective AO2 insight; the confusion of 'free' and 'blank verse' needs addressing.

This section is admirable clear, using an AO2 point about contrast to lead to a fluently expressed reading of the poem (AO1).

These paragraphs offer some valuable AO2 insights (e.g. sentence length) but are also inclined to repeat earlier ideas; a better organized answer would eliminate this repetition (AO1).

AO2 material is often impressive here, especially in relation to use of different tenses. Some aspects could be more fully illustrated.

The AO4 link to 'March' is apt, but could do with more development and illustration.

In 'Old Man', Edward Thomas contrasts age with youth and explores memory and its triggers. The 'Old Man' bush that is central to the poem continues the theme of nature which is prominent in the earlier 'March' as well as many future poems.

The poem is very irregular, the free verse conveying Thomas' uncertainty in dealing with the subject of memory. This uncertainty is revealed explicitly later in the poem, as he admits that he has 'misaid the key' and thus lost the memory he is so desperate to remember.

The title and the first line immediately introduce the idea of age. The plant can be known as 'Old Man, or Lad's Love' – two contrasting titles. It is interesting that Thomas chooses 'Old Man' as the poem's title, especially given that the herb is always referred to by both names later in the poem. As the 'Old Man', Thomas is reflecting on the poem via memory.

The herb is not at all attractive in itself: Thomas describes it as a 'hoar-green feathery herb', and later describes its 'bitter scent'. This is in contrast with sweet-smelling 'rosemary and lavender' which it grows alongside. The lack of attractiveness is a theme Thomas develops: that sentimental value and cherished memories greatly outrank outer beauty in importance.

Nor is it the names that give the herb its importance: they 'half decorate, half perplex, the thing that is'. The repetition of 'half' shows the inadequacy of the names to do the herb and its value to Thomas justice. He solidifies this idea with a short sentence: 'And yet I like the names'. It's not the names that give the herb its importance, but nonetheless he likes them. His use of brevity immediately after a long sentence emphasizes this.

Thomas then explicitly admits that he does not like the herb, but paradoxically continues that 'for certain I love it'. Here he is trying to convey his prioritising of sentimental value over outward appearance, as he has already implied.

What follows is a complex mixture of tenses: he writes that 'the child will love it', and yet uses the present tense to show that it has not yet taken on sentimental value for her. His description of her childlike, carefree attitude, conveyed through vivid verbs such as 'snipping' and 'shrivelling' and internal rhyme and alliteration shows that the plant has no deeper meaning to her than as the bush she passes 'whenever she goes in or out of the house'.

Thomas goes on to explore the differences of memory between different people. He 'can only wonder how much hereafter / she will remember', and yet his detailed description that follows show his own vivid memory of the moment. The use of the nature to build a scene is similar to 'March' and many other poems; he doesn't place himself in the scene until the end of the sentence, as if to leave it untainted for as long as possible.

The AO4 link to 'March' is apt, but could do with more development and illustration.

The answer is impressively focused on a variety of AO2 methods, which are consistently related to effects.

The reading here of the repeated negatives is sophisticated, and the candidate does well to recall the whole progress of the poem. The AO4 link is telling, but again lacks development.

This answer is in the lower half of Band 6, and equivalent work would have received an A Grade mark in June 2010. The essay is responsive and intelligent, showing a sophisticated understanding of the poem; the consistent focus on AO2 effects is a significant strength. Organisation is very good but not excellent (there is a slight tendency to repetition), and the references to other poems are apt but brief and undeveloped.

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The split line that follows provides a contrast between youth and age, as Thomas transitions from the recent or even present memory of the girl to the lost memory of his own experiences in youth. The finality of the end-stop following 'where first I met the bitter scent is lost' implies the hopelessness of even attempting to unlock the memory. Despite this, Thomas continues to 'shrivel the grey shreds'. It is in vain, however, as shown by the use of 'try' as a line ending, and then explicitly: 'always in vain'.

Thomas returns to his reasons for loving the plant, with the paradox that he 'cannot like the scent' and yet 'would rather give up others more sweet'. The key lies with the subordinated 'with no meaning': Old Man, despite its bitter scent, holds symbolic value. And yet Thomas has 'misaid the key'. The memory is tantalising, just beyond reach: 'what I should, yet never can, remember'.

The asyndetic list which draws the poem to a close shows a building negativity, illustrated in the anaphora of 'no'. 'Hoar-green bush' links back to the 3rd line; it's as if all the work Thomas has done in the poem to recall the memory is being unwound. This compounding gloom ends with an intensely bleak final image, which seems to reflect death. 'Avenue' is seemingly a paradox in that it should lead somewhere, while the entire line is reminiscent of an image in 'Lights Out', one of Thomas' final poems, 'the unfathomable deep'.

In conclusion, this poem is an account of Thomas' exploration of memory and his desperate attempts to recall fading moments of childhood which he associates with the 'Old Man' bush. He also touches on the contrast between youth and old age and through the final image, the frightening inevitability of death.

ANSWER 2

This is an interesting opening, with a relevant critical insight coupled with an overview of the poem's approach to memory (AO1).

This paragraph is struggling to develop a reading of the poem (AO1), arriving at a notion of 'negativity' about memory; there is some AO2 credit for quoting the repeated use of 'no', which could have been more explicit.

The candidate struggles to come to terms with methods of presenting confusion and does not always demonstrate understanding of terminology; however, he is dealing with material of some sophistication. The AO4 ref to another poem is tangential.

The 'bent path' metaphor (AO2) and the reading of 'Listening, lying in wait' are more clearly focused and expressed.

The conclusion is clear and straightforward (AO1).

This answer is high in Band 4, and equivalent work would have received a C Grade mark in June 2010. The writing is mixed in quality, seeming at times to verge on 'good' (Band 5) but lacking the necessary focus and detail for a Band 5 mark. The AO4 link shows some promise, but the candidate does not demonstrate how the chosen poem relates to the set poem. The 'best fit' mark is one of clear competence.

Jan Marsh says 'the sense of searching (for the) mislaid key, is the central theme to Thomas' life and works'. This critical quotation is a fine reflection on how well Thomas represents memory in the poem. The theme of memory in 'Old Man' is constantly illustrated as a frustrating one, as Thomas' attempts to recall memory are 'always in vain'.

Especially in this poem, it is clear to see that Thomas feels his thoughts always evade him at the last second like when 'the bitter scent is lost' which is a good example of Thomas again losing his 'scent' for memory. Additionally, in the last stanza, we see some pejorative vocabulary. This is Thomas telling us that he gives up on his search for memory. When Thomas says, 'no garden appears, no path, no hoar-green bush' this gives the indication of not only Thomas's negativity at this point, but furthermore his darker side as a poet. He also curses; 'only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end' which seems to be a logical description of what Thomas thinks now of memory.

Thomas seems to be far more confused at the beginning of the poem when there is an epistrophe of 'names' for instance and moreover, 'half decorate, half perplex' which helps us understand that Thomas is in two minds of trying to recall memory. The paradox of 'I like not' 'I love it' reiterates to us Thomas' mental confusion that could be tampering with him being able to recall memory. The first stanza can therefore tell us that by searching for the 'mislaid key', this has disrupted Thomas greatly.

In another poem of Thomas, 'The Unknown Bird' he says that he is 'Too far off for me to taste it' which is a honest point by Thomas, saying that his attempts to recall some memory is too far away now. Again, Thomas says that he is wondering beyond the shore' which highlight how he presents memory at this point, moving further from him.

However, for most of the poem, Thomas is frustrated and antagonised by memory. This is reinforced well in stanza 3 where the place of 'sniff' reignites the fact that he is constantly on the chase to find his memories but it always seems to come to 'an avenue, dark, nameless, without end'. Thomas describes memory as 'a bent path to a door' which shows that the 'bent path' could be a metaphor for memory itself. Indeed, it seems in the last stanza that Thomas wants memory to find him 'listening, lying in wait' which presents to us how he is desperate for some memory.

Thomas presents memory in some different ways in 'Old Man', but it seems that he wants to get the message across that he is frustrated by memory which is why all his attempts are 'in vain'.

ANSWER 3 (TO Q2(A))

The introduction offers some relevant AO4 material; fuller acknowledgement of the terms of the question would be helpful here.

This paragraph focuses on Jane's 'passions', offering some appropriate textual evidence (AO2). The critical reference (some AO3 credit) is offered as an aside; a fuller discussion would be helpful.

Apt literary context (AO4).

Organisation could be a little clearer here (AO1), but the answer remains on task and introduces some contrasting AO3 views.

Discussion of Jane concludes with apt textual reference (AO2); 'great force' is sensibly quoted from the question.

'Jane Eyre' was written in a time when women were portrayed as a commodity. Around the time of Jane Eyre Mary Wollstonecraft wrote the first feminist book, 'The vindications and rights of women', it showed that women were not an ornament that could be traded, and they had equal rights to men. Charlotte Bronte initially published this novel under the name of 'Currer Bell', which was her pseudonym, to hide the reality that she was female.

Jane Eyre is evidently a woman with a passion, who is not in any way constrained by social convention in her own mind by the end. She begins the novel as a very lonely and unloved character. She however believed she was "happy: happy at least in my way", as the reader we know she is not happy. Initially she is locked in the red-room (which is portrayed as a "land of patriarchal death chamber" Gilbert and Gubar), because she makes an irrational response towards a member of the Reed family as she cannot control her passion. It is stated however that once held, Jane's immediate response was to "resist all the way"; this refers to her uncontrollable passion.

Throughout the novel there are continuous references to fire which represents Jane's passion, and although fire burns and scorches you, you need it to keep warm. At the meeting of Rochester, Jane's "picture of passion" is established through him, her "unregenerate spirit" (Elizabeth Rigby) "addresses his spirit" and results in Jane falling in love with Rochester.

She begins to be able to control her passion as the bildungsroman continues and just like in 'Pilgrim's Progress' by John Bunyan, where the journey to the celestial city occurs and the interception turns into realisation; in the same way, Jane Eyre develops as a character also ends up being able to control her passion.

At the meeting of St John, a man who represents the neo-classical symbol of the 18th century, Jane is faced with a choice to marry him and lose all "the happiness in the world" (Sally Minogue). She however is unable to marry him as she needs to let her passion exist.

At the end of the novel, Jane reaches the culmination of her journey, she finds her own type of religion; not that of St John's muscular Christianity but of her own individual way through her "undisciplined spirit" (Elizabeth Rigby) and her passionate love for Rochester.

Although towards the beginning Jane is portrayed as "unhappy, very unhappy", as the novel continues Jane eventually has "gleams of sunshine" and through passionate love for Rochester, she is able to emerge with great force. Jane has "spoken her mind and can go anywhere", thus she is not restrained.

The account of Helen is effective, incorporating AO3 and AO4, relating clearly and explicitly to the question, and offering helpful comparison with Jane in a developing argument (AO1).

The account of Bertha is less confident and rather repetitive. The AO3 point is interesting and would bear some development. More use of the text would help.

The discussion of Blanche is a little confused, although the candidate remains aware at all times of the terms of the question. More textual detail would be helpful here.

The conclusion is relevant and well focused (AO1).

This answer is high in Band 5, and equivalent work would have received a B Grade mark in June 2010. Elements of AO2, 3, and 4 appear throughout, and the answer remains focused on the question. To get into Band 6, the candidate would need to achieve a more consistent use of AO2 detail, and to demonstrate a more developed understanding of his AO3 material.

In contrast to Jane Eyre, Helen Burns is a character who is metaphorically linked to 'Rasselas' (resigned stoicism). Helen is said to be the "diametric opposite of Jane Eyre" (Maria Bronte). In the face of injustice, Helen Burns is calm and peaceful. She, unlike Jane Eyre has no passion for existence; Helen is committed to Christ and is simply waiting for death. She states to Jane they will meet again in her "second" and "last life". Helen Burns does resemble a character who is possibly restrained by social convention, as she simply awaits death, her passion is expressed to Christ.

Bertha Mason is said to be the "anger and rage" of Jane Eyre (Arnold Markley), she is described as an 'animal' that "scratched" and "snarled". Bertha is Jane Eyre's alter-ego, it was unclear at "first sight" whether Bertha was a "beast" or "human-being". Bertha Mason, like Jane, has uncontrollable passion, however, in comparison to Jane Eyre, Bertha Mason is unable to speak, her passion is expressed through actions. Bertha is restrained by social convention, though not through the reality that she is female, she is restrained by social convention because of her 'animalistic' form, Bertha like Jane has passion, but that passion is purely expressed through actions.

Blanche Ingram, again is a woman of contrast to Jane Eyre, unlike Jane who was a woman portrayed as "simple and plain as myself" (Charlotte Bronte), Blanche Ingram has the typical characteristics of a beautiful victorian woman, she is a woman of beauty, who wears fine clothes ("white robes") and who has her hair in curls. Jane is very much an unattractive and simple woman. However, the passion portrayed in Jane is not possessed by Blanche. Blanche is not restrained by social convention of being a 'commodity' due to her 'beauty' from the outside she is not restrained. However there is no emergence of great force from Blanche Ingram because she contains no passion, she is simply perceived as a woman of beauty, and thus one which should be admired, however this is not the case in the novel.

In conclusion, it can be said that, although Jane Eyre at the beginning may be portrayed as a women of restraints and unhappiness, due to her passionate love for Rochester, she enables herself to be set free like a "bird" from the "close set bars of a cage". Social convention does in some ways restrain each individual female character for different reasons however passion and stereotypical analysis of the character allows them to be differentiated and emerge with their own unique type of 'great force'.

ANSWER 4 (TO Q2(B))

The introduction is not consistently focused on the task (AO1).

Discussion is generally developed in this paragraph, which makes a competent link between the ideas of 'happiness' and 'independence' (AO1). More textual detail would be helpful.

This paragraph has a very 'broad brush' effect, and appears to be informed by a general recollection of the novel's main events. The reference to Bertha is not integrated into the argument.

The generalized, plot-driven discussion continues with some inaccuracies. The AO3 critical reference is relevant, and could be more fully developed as part of the argument.

Throughout the novel, Jane Eyre is thrown from happiness in order to retain her independence. Brontë shows her character to be one of passion, controlled by reason when needed. Jane, however, towards the end of the book, is able to find happiness although does not totally lose her independence.

Rochester is the key to Jane Eyre's happiness and passion throughout this bildungsroman. However, whenever Jane is able to get close or feel a connection with her hero, she is taken back to herself being independent. The first key moment of this is at the arrival of Blanche Ingram, a stereotypical Victorian character, designed by Brontë to show the reader that love is not from looks on the surface, but instead one's passion for the other's thoughts and character. Marriage, the final bond in love, is discussed between Blanche and Rochester, hereby avoiding real love and instead basing the love between 'Lady' Ingram and Rochester's funds. Here Jane is knocked back as she has felt Rochester's love. Here, as she does many times in the novel, experiences 'resurgam' in order to be able to live on with reason controlling her as to not become Bertha Mason.

The second moment in which Jane is thrown from happiness is at Rochester and Jane's 1st marriage. Here, her happiness is almost complete as she and Rochester both feel the passion of love. When she hears the news of Rochester already having a wife, she sees it as him already finding love. Bertha Mason is a character shown to be mad with passion in order to show the reader Rochester's lust for passion. Jane being on the brink of her fairytale ending to find happiness is yet again given back her independence in return for her happiness. Jane has believed that she has found happiness, only to be destroyed as a character.

St. John plays a huge part in Jane believing where her happiness lies. Having fallen in love with St. John, not passionately, but through religion, she is asked to marry him. St. John, with his muscular Christianity, believes that women should do their duty. For St. John, this is following him on his travels to become a missionary. Jane, having been fascinated by Bertha's British Birds, finally has an opportunity to travel. Here she is forced to make the decision of passion, and going back to Thornfield Hall, or religion and travelling with St. John. This is where she identifies her true happiness and so she follows her heart, full of passion, to return to Thornfield Hall. This then shows that in order to gain happiness, she has to be with Rochester as 'Jane Eyre's religion is love' (Charles Berkhardt) rather than her love and true passion being religion. She realizes that she would rather be the slave under the Roman Emperors and have happiness in return for independence.

Finally, while with St. John, she inherits £20,000 from her uncle. This money represents her independence and so allows her to return to Thornfield Hall. It shows how she cannot be attracted to Rochester's wealth, but instead proves their passionate love. Not only this, but Rochester's handicaps of blindness and losing a hand also emphasizes Jane's love and so passion for Rochester.

The conclusion is straightforward and relevant; its ideas could have been more fully discussed in the body of the essay (AO1).

In conclusion, this true happiness is finally gained towards the end of the novel although her independence is a different question. With her inheritance she is able to do as she wishes physically and she also retains the passion and her mental independence. All in all, she is able to gain her happiness, but also her independence.

This answer is in Band 4, and equivalent work would have received a D Grade mark in June 2010. The candidate offers a broadly competent but very general grasp of the novel, and a fluent written style. There is little in the way of detailed reference to the text. One critical reference and an awareness in the candidate's own argument of different possible views show a competent AO3 response; AO4 is thin, occasionally appearing by implication.

