

1. Explain the critical approach(es) used in an essay on *Hamlet* summarized as follows: [15%]

This essay explores "cultural resonances between the politically unstable time of Judges in Israel's history, the political confusion in *Hamlet*'s Denmark, and the anxiety over succession in late-Elizabethan England" (133). While Jephthah's daughter and Ophelia share similarities, they also differ in an important way: the unnamed daughter is an obedient sacrifice, and Ophelia "develops from her status as a victim" to "an author of a potentially different story, a woman's story" (133-34). Ophelia comes to realize her subversive potential and, in a commanding oration about the weakening of Hamlet's "noble mind," laments the loss of her own political ambitions (135). But her madness empowers her with liberties, such as demanding a meeting with Gertrude. Once granted entrance, "she, like a wandering player, comes to hold a mirror up to the court" (136). Gone is her submissive voice, replaced by "a range of voices" (137). Ophelia now "commands attention" (137). Interestingly, her invasion of the court parallels Laertes' rebellious entrance: they have "competing political claims, his assertive and explicit, hers subversive and encoded in mad woman's language" (137). Because her songs "introduce the protesting voice of oppressed women in society" through the veils of a ballad culture, Ophelia is not understood by her male audience; but her "rebellion against the double standard and its oppression of women arouses fear in Gertrude, who understands" (138). When the Queen reports Ophelia's drowning, she insists "on her time and the attention of the plotting men" (138). Her description portrays "a woman who draws her understanding of her world from women's culture" (139). The Queen, "perhaps like Jephthah's daughter's maiden friends, returned from temporary exile to interpret the meaning of the sacrificed daughter's life" (140).

The essay combines a feminist and a new historicist (or cultural) approach. The latter is clearly seen right from the outset when the abstract points out that the essay examines "cultural resonances" between different political times and concerns. A historicist critic studies a literary work in the context of social, political and cultural history, assuming the cultural presuppositions and ideas of the period being studied and avoiding being influenced by those of her or his own time. While the "old" historicism sees a literary work as an expression or reflection of the "spirit" and prevalent ideas of the age, and seeks to discover the interconnections ("resonances") between the fictional world of the literary work and the larger culture, the new historicism argues that a literary work not only reflects the context but is also an agent producing meanings ("resonances") among many other products of culture, an agent of power in the interplay of ideas, either supporting or questioning the dominant ideologies. Thus, the essay views Ophelia's actions in terms of power relations with the other characters, and sees them as manoeuvres that are a "rebellion against" what was expected of her social and familial position. The essay is also a piece of feminist criticism, not only because it focuses on the female characters of Shakespeare's tragedy (in comparison with the biblical daughter of Jephthah), but also (and mainly) because it analyzes the role of these women in the context of the prevalent patriarchal culture whose ideology fosters male dominance, in the case of Jephthah's daughter as an "obedient sacrifice", in the case of Ophelia as moving from a "victim" to a more "subversive" role, with her songs introducing "the protesting voice of oppressed women in society"; and in the case of Gertrude, as a character that shows an understanding for Ophelia precisely because she is a woman. This essay is an example of how feminist criticism re-reads women in works by male writers and questions the cultural stereotypes that a male-dominated ideology has imposed on women: in the case of Ophelia, as a daughter with a "submissive voice".

2. Compare interpretations of *Hamlet* from a Marxist and a reader-oriented perspective. (Do not comment on one approach and then the other one, but use contrastive paragraphs) [One page] [10%]

One of the Marxist readings of *Hamlet* applies Raymond Williams' dynamic model of ideology that traces in aspects of every text (or cultural product) three stages or phases of ideological development: "dominant", "residual" (representing the discourse that was dominant in the past), and "emergent" (the discourse that may become dominant in the future). Thus, Pope suggests that in *Hamlet* we can see a residual model of a feudal society (as represented by Hamlet's father, the former king) that is challenged by emergent forms of individualism (as represented by Hamlet, the prince), both set against the dominant ideology of absolutist monarchy and the nation-state (embodied in the king, in Hamlet's uncle). The focus here is on meanings as conditioned by historical (ideological) factors. By contrast, reader-oriented criticism argues that meanings lie in the act of reading, in the negotiation between the work and the reader. Thus, one of the reader-oriented approaches to *Hamlet*, as practised by Stephen Booth, centres on what happens to spectators and readers of this tragedy as they find its focus being always changed and therefore in need of constant readjustment. In particular, Booth explains how the first scenes work upon the audience.

In another Marxist analysis of *Hamlet*, Bristol uses Bakhtin's dialogic criticism that sees literary works as the site of a dialectic relationship between voices expressing ideologies, that of the authority on the one hand, and on the other, the popular and unofficial ideology that questions and subverts the former (what Bakhtin calls the Carnival). In the carnivalesque tradition, a common ritual was the grotesque crowning and decrowning of a mock king or Lord of Misrule. Bristol sees in Hamlet's uncle a kind of Lord of Misrule, who had uncrowned a legitimate king (Hamlet's father) to crown himself as new king of Denmark. When this king mixes celebration and mourning in his first speech (1.2), we can see the grotesque element of the Carnival. Yet, the "uncrowning" effect is carried out by the clowns digging the grave for Ophelia in 5.1: they represent the voice of the underprivileged, are fully aware of how social differences are important in how people are treated, and make a joke of it all. By contrast, a reader-response critic such as Norman Holland, from a psychoanalytic perspective, reads *Hamlet* as his personal creation (the title of his article is very telling: "*Hamlet: My Greatest Creation*") and explores the language of the play gives readers a chance to create their own alternate meanings.

What both Marxist and reader-response approaches have in common is that they pay attention to language: Marxist critics analyze the language as evidence for the ideological undercurrents going through a literary work (how the ideological tensions give form to the work's use of language, images, etc.); reader-oriented critics examine language as either guiding or manipulating the reader's response (as in Booth) or constituting a potential space for readers to make their own interpretive possibilities (Holland).

3. Answer one of the following questions: [10%]

3A. Choose a traditional fairy tale or a well-known story (even from a film). What questions would a cultural or new historicist critic ask about it?

3B. What questions would a cultural or new historicist critic ask about the following fragment from *Hamlet*? (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in dialogue with the King)

GUILDENSTERN

Most holy and religious fear it is

To keep those many many bodies safe

That live and feed upon your majesty.

ROSENCRANTZ The single and peculiar life is bound

With all the strength and armor of the mind

To keep itself from noyance, but much more

That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests

The lives of many. The cease of majesty

Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw

What's near it with it. It is a massy wheel

Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,

To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things

Are mortised and adjoined, which, when it falls,

Each small annexment, petty consequence,

Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone

Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

fear: care, concern (Guild. praises the King for his caution)

single: individual *peculiar*: private *bound*: obliged

noyance: harm

That spirit: that is, the King's *weal*: well-being, welfare

cease: decess, cessation

gulf: whirlpool *draw*: pull in, attract

massy: massive

mortised: affixed, fastened securely *which*: so that

Attends: accompanies *boist'rous*: tumultuous

3A. On *Cinderella*: What sections of society are represented as central, and what as marginal? Which ones are omitted? How does the story of a servant turned into a princess resonate with similar aspirations of upward social mobility in the society where it is read? What relevance does it have to our own times?

If we consider Perrault's version, how did this story of unjust social oppression resonate in late 17th-century France? What do we know about Perrault's social relations to his readers? What do we know about his values, beliefs, moral principles and how these inform our understanding of the tale? Does the writer express or imply an ideological preference?

If we consider a recent film version, does the representation of this story reflect or question dominant ideologies of patriarchy and consumer society? Does it show contemporary concerns for racism or environmentalism?

3B. How does this passage reflect power relations as understood in Elizabethan times?

How important is the fact that this passage summing up the Elizabethan notion of the power of kingship is spoken by Rosencrantz, a courtier eager to fulfil the king's orders (even if it is against his former schoolfriend Hamlet)?

And if we see Rosencrantz as a marginalized character, with little or no degree of influence, how do we read this passage about power when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appear as victims of the conflict between the king and the prince?

How is the metaphor of the "massy wheel" as an image of power related to similar images in contemporary texts?

Write a "practical criticism" essay of the following excerpt (including a translation of lines 59-74) [20%]

Thanks, dear my lord. —

Exit [Polonius].

Oh, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven,	39 / rank: foul-smelling, offensive
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,	
A brother's murder. Pray can I not,	
Though inclination be as sharp as will;	
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,	
And, like a man to double business bound,	44 / bound : directed ; tied ; sworn ; obliged
I stand in pause where I shall first begin	45
And both neglect. What if this cursed hand	46 / neglect: omit
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood?	
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens	
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy	
But to confront the visage of offence?	50 if it does not confront guilt (visage: face)
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,	51 what's in a prayer: what is the use of prayer
To be forestallèd ere we come to fall	52 / forestallèd: prevented / ere: before
Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look up.	53 / pardoned: to be pardoned
My fault is past, but oh, what form of prayer	54/ past: already committed (too late to be prevented)
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder?"	55 / turn: purpose, need
That cannot be since I am still possessed	
Of those effects for which I did the murder:	57 / effects: benefits, acquisitions
My crown, mine own ambition and my Queen.	
May one be pardoned and retain th'offence?	59 / th'offence: i.e. profits gained from committing the offence
In the corrupted currents of this world	60 / currents: courses, practices, procedures
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,	61 / gilded: golden; bearing bribes / shove: push / by: to one side
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself	62 / oft: often / wicked prize: rewards of vice
Buys out the law; but 'tis not so above,	
There is no shuffling, there the action lies	64 / There : i.e., in heaven / shuffling: evasion, deceit, trickery
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled	65 / his: its
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults	66 / to ... forehead: in the very face / faults: sins
To give in evidence. What then? What rests?	67 / give in: give, submit / evidence: 'of our faults' / rests: remains
Try what repentance can. What can it not?	68 / can: that is, can achieve
Yet what can it, when one cannot repent?	
O wretched state, O bosom black as death,	70 / bosom: the front of the human chest
O limèd soul, that, struggling to be free,	
Art more engaged! Help, angels, make assay.	72 / engaged: entangled / assay: a great effort ; an attempt
Bow, stubborn knees, and heart with strings of steel	73 Bow: (<i>imperative</i>) bend forward the upper part of the body
[<i>Kneels?</i>]	
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe.	74 / sinews : tendons
All may be well.	

40 primal eldest curse: God's biblical curse on Cain, the first murderer, who killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4.11-12)

42 inclination ... will: my desire and determination to pray are equally strong

49 Whereto ... offence? : What is the point of mercy if not to confront sin face to face? ; What function has mercy except when there has been sin

64 the action lies: the sin is laid bare ; the case is admissible (legal metaphor, continued with evidence)

71 / limèd: caught as a bird is trapped by bird-lime (sticky substance spread on branches)

This excerpt takes place in Act 3, scene 3, of Shakespeare's revenge tragedy Hamlet, prince of Denmark. It shows a soliloquy spoken by the King, a little after he has interrupted the performance of the play prepared by Hamlet for the court as it was re-enacting the details of the King's murder of his brother (the former king, and Hamlet's father).

In this thirty-seven-line speech, the King expresses his inner struggle between his desire for mercy and his guilt, between his willingness to repent and his wish to "retain th'offence" [59], that is, to keep on enjoying the results of his crime: "My crown, mine own ambition and my Queen" (line 58). He finishes his speech with a praying attitude (perhaps kneeling), leaving spectators (and readers) in suspense as to whether or not he will certainly repent. In the context of the play's story, it is important to know that this speech confirms Hamlet's inference that his uncle murdered his father but only to spectators, not to Hamlet or the rest of the characters. Spectators are no longer in doubt about the Ghost's story. But interestingly, the fact that this is a soliloquy (without any other character hearing what the King confesses) has two effects: 1) it keeps the murder a secret, thus making it difficult for Hamlet to justify an open challenge against his uncle; 2) it turns the King's into a more sympathetic character as spectators see him struggling to obtain mercy from Heaven (there was a previous moment in 3.1, before the "To be, or not to be" monologue when the King acknowledged that Polonius' moralising comment on how evil can be masked by a pious appearance was punishing his (the King's) conscience [3.1.50]). That the King is seen confronting his conscience partly contradicts Hamlet's accusation of his uncle as a "remorseless villain" (2.2.)

The speech can be seen as articulated around the oppositions of "guilt", "offence" versus "repentance", "pardon", "mercy"; and is structured in such a way that follows the impulses and ups-and-downs of the King's thoughts and emotions. First (lines 39-41a), he frankly confesses his fratricidal crime ("offence"), Secondly (lines 41b-46a), he recognizes that the weight of his guilt is stronger than his willingness to pray, leaving him in a situation in which he cannot make any progress. Then (lines 46b-53), he wonders about the possibility of divine mercy for himself. After a brief moment in which he imagines himself as pardoned ("Then I'll look up. / My fault is past", 53b-54a), he confronts the reality that he cannot repent, that one cannot cheat heavenly justice (lines 54b-67a). In lines 67b-69 he impatiently revisits the above-mentioned phases, only to plunge into the concluding desperate attempt at praying.

The soliloquy uses the dominant verse form in Hamlet and in Elizabethan drama: blank verse (an unlimited sequence of iambic pentameters). I will point out those moments in the excerpt that deviate from this expected pattern.

The first part (lines 39-41a) begins with an exclamation (with a common inversion of the first metrical foot into a trochee) and refers to the biblical story of fratricide and the curse of Cain, the murderer of his "brother" Abel.

The second part (lines 41b-46a) starts again with another inversion to the trochaic rhythm ("Pray can"), leaving the negative adverb "not" in the emphatic position at the end of the line; and sets up one of the oppositions in

which the soliloquy is articulated: the tension between “guilt” (43) and “intent” to pray and be pardoned (perhaps between “will” to sin, and “inclination” [42]). This is pointedly expressed in the parallel construction that repeats the same adjective with a variation, “stronger guilt strong intent” (43): he acknowledges that his guilt, based on his willingness to keep his crown and his queen, is stronger than his intention to pray for forgiveness, but also recognizes that he neglects “both” (46). This recognition of his moral impasse (“I stand in pause” [45]) is expressed through a generalizing simile (“like a man ...” [44]). The alliteration in “double business bound” enhances its expressivity. The next section (lines 46b-53) is characterized by a series of questions with elaborate syntax, denoting an agitated soul, and is -again- initiated by a trochaic foot “What if” (46b). There are four rhetorical questions, in which the King tries to persuade himself that mercy is possible for him. The first one uses body imagery (“hand”, “blood”, and “visage”) with the ensuing personification of the abstract concepts of “murder” and “offence”. In line 46, “cursed hand” has “cursed” referring back to “the primal eldest curse” [40], thus contributing to the cohesion of the passage. It is a hyperbolic image of blood derived from a murder staining the hand of the murderer and making it thicker. The second question continues with this idea and invokes the proverbial (and biblical) saying of rain water being able to wash the stains produced by sins, with the intensifying simile “white as snow” (49) to crown it all. The third question, initiated by a trochee and spondee (“Where to / serves mercy”, with a feminine ending) suggests the image of God’s mercy encountering the sinner face to face (“visage” [50]). Finally, the fourth rhetorical question denotes the speaker’s almost total conviction that prayers can either prevent sin or pardon it, with the common trope of sin as “fall” (52).

In contrast to these series of interrogatives, the brief following section contains two four-word sentences: “Then I’ll look up. / My fault is past” (53b-54a). The King has persuaded himself that he can be pardoned if he prays (if he looks up to Heaven). But the shortness of this reassuring moment denotes the fleeting nature of this wishful thinking. From lines 54b to 67a, doubts assault the King again, uttered by means of rhetorical questions: he goes back to acknowledging that his “turn” (purpose [55], that is, to keep his crown and queen) cannot be served by any form of prayer. This section deals with the stumbling point of the King’s inner struggle: repentance. The alliteration in “Forgive ... foul” seems to reflect the King’s recognition, again, that “foul” (“guilt”) is stronger than forgiveness, precisely because he does not want to repent. The emphasis on “foul” is also achieved because it is unexpectedly stressed in a spondee (“foul murder”, with a feminine ending). This impossibility to repent is frankly confessed in the declarative sentence in lines 56-58, culminating in the three-part structure of “My crown, mine own ambition, and my Queen” (58): each noun is preceded by a possessive determiner, also producing an alliteration of nasal consonants together with “crown”, “ambition” and “Queen”. One could easily imagine an actor pronouncing this line with emphasis and pride, as if the King had no regret about possessing these “effects” (57). Another rhetorical question gives vent

to the King's internal turmoil: "May one be pardoned and retain th'offence?" (59), a sentence containing keywords to the opposition running through the speech. In the next sentence (60-67a), the King answers himself, acknowledging that while justice can be pushed aside by a corrupting criminal ("gilded hand", a hand that bears gold), there is no cheating in heavenly justice. Again, body images inform the texture of these ideas and personify abstract concepts: "gilded hand" (61) recalls "cursèd hand" (46) and, through phonetic similarity, "guilt" (43); "teeth" and "forehead" (66) emphasizes the notion that crimes ("faults") have to be directly faced. It is also interesting to point out the legal metaphor in the phrase "the action lies", the spondee in "true nature" (highlighting the adjective "true" in contrast to the idea of "shuffling" or deceit), and the lexical choice of the verb "shove by" (=push to one side) as it connotes an attitude of disrespect.

With the next short questions, "What then? What rests?" (67b), disrupting the expected iambic rhythm and denoting anxiety, the King seems to go back to the impasse expressed in the simile of a man tied or obligated to "double business" (44). He tries repentance again (line 68a) in a short imperative sentence, which is immediately followed by a short question: "What can it not?", that is, the King is back to wishful thinking, only to acknowledge (again) the impossibility of repentance (69) in the form of another rhetorical question. These two lines, 68 and 69, are constructed in a chiasmus: "Try ... repentance can ... one cannot repent" (A B ... B A). This rhetorical device (the chiasmus) reflects the King's struggle to balance his wish to repent against his willingness not to repent (to "retain th'offence").

The whole internal tension is finally released in a series of exclamations that show a parallel structure (70-72a). Again, "bosom" and, arguably, "soul" confirm the soliloquy's penchant for body imagery, later reinforced by "knees" and "heart" (73). The choice of "black" associated with "death" (a common association in Western culture) sets up a contrast with "white" (49) associated with forgiveness. The image of the soul as a bird entangled by a sticky substance spread over the branches of trees so that the more it strives to free itself the more it is entangled ("engaged" [72a]), adequately represents the King's inner struggle: the more he tries to repent, the more he realizes that he wants to "retain th'offence".

The three questions are followed by three imperative sentences (72b-74), each starting with spondees, expressing the King's desperate and impatient last attempt to pray. Perhaps "Bow, stubborn knees" is a kind of implicit stage direction telling the actor to kneel down, a fitting gesture.

Interestingly, this soliloquy does not end with a couplet, as is conventional in most set speeches. The King pronounces a couplet in his next speech (lines 100-101). This may indicate that the soliloquy is unfinished. In fact, the couplet in lines 100-101 shows the conclusion to the King's inner conflict: the recognition that he has failed to pray and therefore to be pardoned.

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To sum up, with predominant stylistic features such as rhetorical and fragmented questions, elaborate syntax, and body imagery, this soliloquy expresses the King's inner struggle with his conscience.