



English Literature A level

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from Sections 1, 2 and 4

Section 1

Love through the ages: *Othello*

Introduction

Section 1 explores Shakespeare's *Othello* in some detail, with particular reference to the theme of love through the ages. The examination question that you will have to answer will take the form of a set passage that you will be expected to analyse in the light of your knowledge and understanding of the different representations of love in the play as a whole.

You will not be allowed access to your set work in the examination, so you will need to become familiar with the text and be able to quote relevant passages outside of the key extract to support your answers.

All of the assessment objectives (AOs) 1–5) are tested in this question, so you will need to ensure that you have addressed all the areas required.

Learning outcomes

When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

- discuss the basic **plot (the story)** of *Othello*
- draw attention to **themes**, key issues and significant points in the play, with particular reference to the theme of love

- discuss the principal **characters**, how they are created and how they interact with each other
- outline how the **style** of writing contributes to the overall effect of the play
- discuss the different representations of love in Elizabethan England presented by the play
- appreciate that different interpretations of *Othello* are possible

Link to the AQA specification

Section 1 is designed to prepare you for Paper 1, Section A of the AQA English Literature specification 7712. This focuses on the detailed study of one of Shakespeare's plays in relation to the theme of 'Love through the ages' and will count for 25 marks out of a possible 75 marks for Paper 1 as a whole. In the examination you will be expected to answer the question set on *Othello*. This will take the form of a passage-based question with a linked essay.

Key terms

Like other academic disciplines, English Literature uses specific terminology. Key words and phrases important to your understanding of the topics are highlighted in **bold** the first time they appear in the text. Their meaning should be apparent from their context in the course material and textbook, but there is an explanation of their meaning at the end of the topic. You can also find them in the course glossary.

Your tutor and examiners will expect you to use the terminology accurately, so it is important to become familiar with key terms and practise using them in activities so that you can employ and integrate them confidently in the exam.

Study hint

As you read the play, try to think about how the particular section you are concentrating on can be related to other parts of the text.

Exam hint

As well as concentrating on the given extract, try to think of using it in terms of making links across the whole of the text.



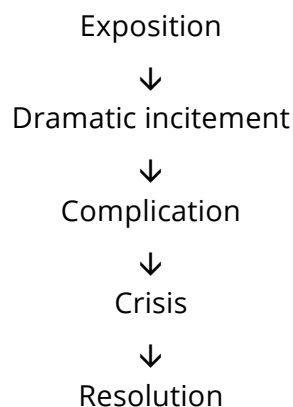
Topic 1

Introduction to Shakespeare studies

Introduction

Shakespeare has always held a dominant position in the drama element of English Literature at A level. Your experience of studying Shakespeare might be quite extensive or more modest but, whatever your experience, Section 1 will introduce you to Shakespeare's tragedy, *Othello*.

Many of the methods of analysis explained in this topic will be applicable to other works of drama too. That is because, in terms of their basic structure, many of Shakespeare's plays (including *Othello*) follow this pattern:



You will probably need 2 hours to complete this topic.

Before you start your study of this topic, read the play in full.

Objectives

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- identify the key **plot** elements of *Othello*
- explain how Shakespeare creates and **presents** character
- demonstrate instances of Shakespeare's use of **language** and dramatic technique, particularly in relation to love

Approaching the text

In approaching *Othello* it can be useful to make use of the knowledge that you already possess about the nature of drama generally. This can help you understand the plot of your Shakespeare text when reading it for the first time. For example, it helps if you know that Shakespeare's plays follow this pattern:

- introduction of characters
- problem(s) emerge and/or confusion occurs
- chain of events starts
- chaos ensues
- chain of events continues
- more chaos and confusion
- more events, leading to –
- climax (in tragedy, the death of one or more characters)
- re-establishment of order

Knowledge of the general structure helps you to follow the plot of the play in question but, more than this, it can provide you with a framework for your analysis of the play as a whole. One of the problems that students frequently encounter when studying a Shakespeare text is that they focus closely on detailed summaries of scene, character and **theme** to such an extent that they sometimes lose sight of the fact that the play should be considered as an integrated whole.

Being able to see the play in terms of its overall framework helps you to appreciate the broad pattern of the text, thus helping you to make sense of the detail when it emerges through your closer study.

The tragedies

The idea of disorder lies at the heart of Shakespeare's **tragedies**. The Roman history plays are often included as **tragedies** but the four plays regarded as 'the great' tragedies are *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*. These plays are frequently set for study at A level. At the heart of each of these plays is the central character – after whom the play is named (the **eponymous hero**, to give the technical term) – and the action focuses on this central character. However, other characters are involved too and often several innocent victims are claimed before the play reaches its end.

Overall, Shakespeare's tragedies have much in common with one another and with the concept of dramatic tragedy in general. Some key features are listed below.

- 1 At the beginning of the play something occurs that disrupts the normal order of things.
- 2 Chaos or disorder in society results.
- 3 Extreme emotions are involved.
- 4 Social restraint disintegrates.

A climax is reached, usually with the death of the main character (and often several others), before order is restored. This purging of emotions which affects the audience at the end of a tragedy is sometimes referred to as **catharsis**.

Activity 1

(Allow 10 minutes)

Think about how *Othello* fits the general pattern given above. For each of the five key features listed above, note down one corresponding event in the play.

You may have noted some of these points:

- 1 Othello marries Desdemona.
- 2 The peace of Venice is broken by Brabantio's men and deeper disorder is created by Iago's plot.
- 3 Jealousy and suspicion are involved.
- 4 Othello discards normal restraints.

- 5 Othello murders Desdemona and commits suicide; Iago kills his wife Emilia and is taken into custody.

In simple terms, the general pattern is:

- prosperity
- destruction
- re-creation

Shakespeare's plots

As we have discussed, the plots of Shakespeare's plays adhere to a general pattern common to many plays. However, when studying your text one of the first things that you will need to do is to get to grips with the details of the plot. Very often your first encounter with the play will be through a reading, perhaps in class, with students taking the various parts. However, when sitting reading the text either to yourself or as part of a group, it is easy to forget that you are studying a play. Try to remember that the text was written to be performed and brought to life on the stage. Although we now read Shakespeare's plays as 'literary texts' we must not lose sight of this central fact and you should view the 'text' as a 'script'. A 'script' suggests something that in itself is incomplete and needs dramatic enactment to complete it. This then opens up the whole area of how it is to be enacted and leads on to the idea of the play having many, rather than one single meaning.



It will be useful to watch the play as a drama before you proceed. You'll find clips from the Globe Theatre production on YouTube, for example.

So, in coming to terms with the plot of a Shakespeare play, you first need to understand generally what is happening and then think about ways in which this could be enacted on the stage. Watching a staged or televised version should help to bring the play to life for you.



Topic 2

Othello Act 1

Introduction



Before you start your detailed study of this section of the play you should re-read Act I and be aware of what happens in each scene, keeping a tight focus on love.

You will probably need about 3 hours to complete this topic.

Objectives

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- identify and understand the events that occur in Act I
- offer initial assessments of the various characters and their attitudes to love
- detail the key themes raised in relation to love
- show an awareness of Shakespeare's dramatic technique

Scene 1

At the start of Topic 1 you were presented with a basic structure for plays by Shakespeare and others. The first element was 'exposition' (essentially, explanation) and so we might expect that Act I will 'set the scene' for what is to follow in terms of the characters and their status within the framework of the play. Remember that you are reading a 'script' of the play, so you know from the list of roles, for example, that Roderigo is 'a gulled gentleman of Venice' and that Iago is 'a villain'. An audience is not party to this information, so Shakespeare has to show rather than tell. One of your tasks as you read the play is to be alert to how he does this.

The play opens at night in a Venetian street, outside the house of the senator Brabantio. Roderigo, a young gentleman, seems to be involved in some dispute with another character, Iago. The play begins half way through an exchange (**in media res**) between Roderigo and Iago; the audience only gradually forms an understanding of who the characters are and what is happening as the scene develops.



Activity 1

(Allow 5 minutes)

Re-read lines 1–74. From this extract only, what do you gather is happening between Roderigo and Iago?

It is evident that Roderigo is angry with Iago, who at first has difficulty in engaging Roderigo in the subtleties of his explanation. At this stage the audience does not know the reason for this anger. (This is not revealed until the next part of the scene in which Brabantio's speeches make it clear that Roderigo has been a suitor for Desdemona and Roderigo announces to her father that she has secretly married the Moor.)

What is immediately established is that Roderigo has a grievance against Iago whom he has trusted even as far as giving him access to his money: '... who hast had my purse / As if the strings were thine' (lines 2–3). It is significant that the first moments of the play present us with a situation of apparent betrayal of trust between friends. We also see Roderigo as the dupe of Iago in the field of love. It can be suggested that from the outset of the play Roderigo is governed by foolish, lustful desires for what is unattainable in terms of his suit for Desdemona and in consequence becomes the victim of Iago's exploitation and unrequited love.

Furthermore, Iago's responses seem to indicate that Roderigo thinks that Iago has been withholding information from him to the Moor's advantage for some reason.



Section 2

Topic 1

The Great Gatsby: Chapter 1

Setting the scene

Introduction



Before you begin your detailed study of *The Great Gatsby* make sure you have read it carefully, keeping in mind the way your knowledge will be tested in Paper 1 of the exam. The Section C question will ask you to write an essay linking the presentation of love in *The Great Gatsby* with some relevant poems in the pre-19th century poetry anthology (Section 3).

The opening chapter of any novel is important in introducing key elements such as character, setting, **narrative standpoint** and tone, and the first chapter of *The Great Gatsby* is no exception. In addition to catching a first glimpse of the novel's enigmatic **protagonist** or main character, we are introduced to Nick and Jordan and bear witness to the dynamics of the Buchanans' relationship.



You will probably need about 3 hours to complete this topic.

Objectives

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- explain how Fitzgerald's choice of narrative voice shapes the narrative and influences the reader's response to the narrative

- outline what we learn about setting and character in this opening chapter
- explain how Fitzgerald conveys the nature of the relationship between Tom and Daisy Buchanan

The epigraph and opening pages

Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;
If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,
Till she cry, 'Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,
I must have you!'

Thomas Parke D'Invilliers

An **epigraph** is a brief extract or quotation used at the start of a text. Not all editions of *The Great Gatsby* contain the short epigraph above. Read it carefully in the light of your knowledge of the novel as a whole and then attempt the first activity.

Activity 1

(Allow 10 minutes)

What does the epigraph suggest about the novel to come?

Think about:

- what the function of the epigraph might be, both in general and in this novel
- to whom the epigraph is attributed and the significance of this (you'll have to do your own research to answer this)
- the imagery used in the epigraph
- the tone of the epigraph
- any links to the novel's **themes** (key ideas)

- Prefaces such as epigraphs have an intriguing position. Are they outside or inside the text? Are they part of the text or commenting upon it? The answer is, probably, a bit of both. As such, having an epigraph is perhaps suitable for a novel such as this, which often draws attention to its own nature as a literary construct.
- The person to whom it is attributed – Thomas Park d'Invilliers – does not exist. He is a character from Fitzgerald's first novel *This*

Side of Paradise, said to be based on a friend of Fitzgerald's, the poet John Peale Bishop. Attributing an epigraph to a fictional character in this way is an unusual decision. Arguably, it is appropriate because it appears at the start of a novel which includes a character (perhaps more than one?) constructing a persona to present to the world – thus signalling that this constructed fiction of a novel is in many ways a novel about constructed fictions.

- The image of 'a gold hat' is one of extravagant outward appearance, worn in order to attract the object of one's affection. In this respect, it appears a clear symbol of Gatsby's use of ostentatious wealth as he attempts to attract Daisy. The 'bounc[ing] high' suggests changing one's behaviour as well as using material objects to attract someone. Again, this has clear parallels with Gatsby's behaviour in the novel. 'Bounc[ing] high' also suggests rising in status – but perhaps, too, the temporary and incomplete nature of that rise. The use of objects heavy with symbolic meaning is, as we shall see, a key trope (or well-known convention) of Fitzgerald's writing.
- The image of the 'gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover' has a ridiculous aspect to it as it suggests someone trying too hard, and in quite a simplistic way. The 'cry' of the object of affection is similarly ridiculous, suggesting an assumed inevitability that the wearing of this prop, the hat, and the changing of behaviour will be successful. In this naïve and simplistic view of affairs of the heart, we see something of Gatsby's own perspective.
- The epigraph therefore establishes the importance to the novel of shows of ostentation, of material possessions, of love and relationships and of Gatsby's naivety.

The narrator

The **narrator** or storyteller is key to the reading of any novel. We have to make up our minds fairly early on what sort of person is narrating the events – and how this is going to affect our reading of them.



Section 4

Love through the ages: Unseen Poetry

Topic 1

Unrequited love

Introduction

In this first topic, we will look closely at two pieces which take as their subject unrequited love – ‘Never Give All the Heart’ by W B Yeats and ‘Havisham’, by Carol Ann Duffy – and its effects on a man and a woman, respectively. We will look at how the writers express their ideas and consider the differences and similarities between the two.

Yeats’s poem was published in 1904 and takes the form of a sonnet; Duffy’s is a short poem from the 1993 collection *Mean Time*. Yeats’s speaker or persona advises the reader not to love too deeply for fear of its being unrequited. Duffy presents the aftermath of the protagonist having been abandoned on her wedding day and the effect on her mental state.



You will probably need about 2 hours to complete this topic.

Objectives

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- outline the thoughts and ideas about love expressed in Yeats's ballad and Duffy's poem
- comment on the tone and mood of both pieces
- analyse the language, form and structure employed
- demonstrate an awareness of the context within which each poem was written and its relevance to the work
- explain the similarities and differences between the two poems in terms of these various elements.

Contextual background

William Butler Yeats

Yeats was born in Dublin in 1865. His father was a lawyer and a well-known portrait painter. Yeats was educated in London and in Dublin, but he spent his summers in the west of Ireland in the family's summer house at Connaught. He was very much a man of his time and mixed in elevated circles in London. However, he was also active in societies that attempted an Irish literary revival and, like Robert Burns in Scotland, attempted to celebrate Irish customs and folklore. His first volume of verse appeared in 1887, but in his early career he was a dramatist and produced many plays. Together with Lady Gregory he founded the Irish Theatre, which was to become the Abbey Theatre, and served as its chief playwright until the movement was joined by John Synge. His plays usually deal with Irish legends; they also reflect his fascination with mysticism and spiritualism. *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), *The King's Threshold* (1904), and *Deirdre* (1907) are among the best known.

After 1910, Yeats moved towards poetry and, despite being a patriot, his work is characterised by protests against nationalism. In 1922 he was appointed to the Irish Senate; he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. His poetry, especially the volumes *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928), *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933) and *Last Poems and Plays* (1940), has made him one of the outstanding and most influential twentieth-century poets writing in English. His recurrent themes are the contrast of art and life, masks, cyclical theories of life (the symbol of the winding stairs), and the ideal of beauty and ceremony contrasting with the hubbub of modern life.

Carol Ann Duffy

Carol Ann Duffy was born in the Gorbals, Glasgow, on 23 December 1955, the first child of May and Frank Duffy; May was Irish and Frank had Irish grandparents. They subsequently had four sons. The family moved to Stafford when Carol Ann was 6. Duffy attended Roman Catholic primary and middle schools, and then Stafford Girls' High.

Her early passion for reading and writing was encouraged by two of her English teachers, and developed by the poet-artist Adrian Henri with whom she lived from the age of 16 until 1982. She went to the University of Liverpool, and obtained a degree in Philosophy in 1977. Having already published three poetry collections – *Fleshweathercock and Other Poems* (1973), *Beauty and the Beast* with Adrian Henri (a pamphlet, 1977) and *Fifth Last Song* (1982) – she became more widely known when she won the National Poetry Competition in 1983 and an Eric Gregory Award the following year.

Duffy became a lecturer in poetry at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) in 1996, by which time she was living with the writer Jackie Kay. She subsequently became Creative Director of the MMU Writing School. Her very productive writing life includes plays, edited anthologies, poetry for children, and a very successful collection for Anvil, *The World's Wife* (1999).

Duffy was appointed Poet Laureate in 2009. Her first laureate poem was a sonnet on the British MPs' expenses scandal; other subjects include the deaths of Henry Allingham and Harry Patch, the last two British soldiers to fight in World War I. She is the first female Scottish Poet Laureate in the role's 400-year history.

The poems

Start by reading both poems and considering your own response to them.

Never Give All the Heart (W B Yeats)

Never give all the heart, for love
 Will hardly seem worth thinking of
 To passionate women if it seem
 Certain, and they never dream
 That it fades out from kiss to kiss;
 For everything that's lovely is
 But a brief, dreamy, kind delight.
 O never give the heart outright,
 For they, for all smooth lips can say,
 Have given their hearts up to the play.

And who could play it well enough
If deaf and dumb and blind with love?
He that made this knows all the cost,
For he gave all his heart and lost.

Havisham (Carol Ann Duffy)

Beloved sweetheart bastard. Not a day since then
I haven't wished him dead. Prayed for it
so hard I've dark green pebbles for eyes,
ropes on the back of my hands I could strangle with.

Spinster. I stink and remember. Whole days
in bed cawing Nooooo at the wall; the dress
yellowing, trembling if I open the wardrobe;
the slewed mirror, full-length, her, myself, who did this

to me? Puce curses that are sounds not words.
Some nights better, the lost body over me,
my fluent tongue in its mouth in its ear
then down till I suddenly bite awake. Love's
hate behind a white veil; a red balloon bursting
in my face. Bang. I stabbed at a wedding cake.
Give me a male corpse for a long slow honeymoon.
Don't think it's only the heart that b-b-b-breaks.

New Selected Poems 1984–2004, (2004, reprinted 2011)
Originally published in Mean Time (1993) © Carol Ann Duffy

Analysis



Read both texts again carefully. Poetry is written to be heard as well as read, so try reading each of them aloud. Go online and see if you can find a spoken version to listen to. You can hear both of these poems, and most of the others in this section, read aloud on YouTube for example.



Note: If you're not familiar with the character of Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations*, you might want to look this up before you consider Duffy's poem in more detail.

Exam hint

Please don't worry that you won't be able to pick up on contextual information like this. If there is any background information you need to understand the poem, this will be provided for you.

Making comparisons

When you've thoroughly familiarised yourself with both poems, you can start to compare the poems.

To make comparisons, look for similarities and differences. To refer to points of similarity, use words and phrases like 'similarly', 'likewise', 'in the same way', 'in a similar fashion', 'which mirrors the ...' etc. To refer to points of difference, you could use phrases like 'by contrast', 'on the other hand' and 'in a different way'. Using phrases like these will make it clear to your examiner that you are picking up similarities and differences between the given texts.

Activity 1

(Allow 15 minutes)

Make notes on the situation in each piece, as it appears to you. In your response, identify similarities and differences between the two pieces.

Here are some ideas to add to your own.

It is possible to read the Yeats poem in different ways. On the one hand, you might read it as a piece of advice or warning to the reader not to fall too deeply in love. On the other hand, it seems to reveal the state of mind and character of a speaker who is apparently rather cynical about love. Its subject might primarily be seen as the speaker's relationship with a woman who spurned him, and its effects. Thus the speaker presents himself as alone and suspicious of any future relationships

In Duffy's poem the persona is Miss Havisham, who is also alone after her aborted wedding. She is depicted in her faded, yellowed wedding dress and wedding veil, near to her uneaten wedding cake. In the novel, she has been jilted on the morning of her wedding. This accounts for the descriptive details in Duffy's poem, as well as for the fact that the lover is absent. By contrast, there is no temporal setting in Yeats's poem; in consequence, although the speaker seems to be the victim of unrequited love, he remains more aloof than the persona of Duffy's poem. There is a sense that Miss Havisham exists entirely in her room and makes no effort to alter or augment her appearance: she wears her faded wedding garments and the detail 'I stink' implies that she has neglected herself for some time. In Yeats' poem the speaker seems to imply that his advice stems from a reflection on his own state of affairs

but is on the whole a general warning, whereas 'Havisham' depicts a static situation in which the poem's persona looks at her own mental state rather than using her experience to warn others.

Exam hint

Bear in mind that the Paper 1 Section B question in the examination requires you to compare the ways in which the authors of the two given poetry texts have presented their thoughts and ideas, so your answer should refer to points of comparison between the two.

What next?

We hope this sample has helped you to decide whether this course is right for you.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us using the details below.

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