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Revision

Scoring a 7 in your IOC

Carolyn P. Henly

Tristan

Listen to the first part of Tristan's assessment, the oral commentary. Listen for the following features.

Tristan opens his commentary with a general statement, similar to a thesis, which shows that he understands the text as a whole entity and intends to work toward showing how that meaning was constructed (0:47). By contrast, a commentary that consists of a collection of named strategies, each analysed for function, but all of which form a more or less random collection, will not score as well.

Take note of the strategies that Tristan identifies. Over the course of the commentary, he names several different strategies, all of which are present, and he attempts to explain their role in constructing meaning. This student understands what is required of him, and he is clearly making an attempt to do that. The reason that the commentary doesn't earn higher marks is that the understanding demonstrated here is sound, but basic. The analysis lacks precision and depth. Let's take a close look at one of the strategies analysed here: the break in meter.

On the plus side, Tristan has made the decision to attempt to analyse meter, which in itself shows a level of sophistication greater than average. He correctly identifies the standard Shakespearean meter as iambic pentameter, and he draws attention to the line in the sonnet on which the metrical break occurs (0:57). What the analysis lacks, however, is precision: he does not identify the exact words or phrase where the break occurs, nor does he name the metrical pattern that replaces the iamb.

The teacher picked up on this problem and, in the question period, gave him an opportunity to clarify and expand his idea (7:34). At that time, the student makes an effort to contrast the meter of line 2 with the meter of lines 1 and 3, and he makes the argument that the metrical variation makes this line stand out, and so represents the idea of how powerful the rhyme is (7:43). Tristan is, then, able to offer an interesting idea about how metrical variation can contribute to meaning, which is a fairly sophisticated understanding. However, he is unable to precisely identify the exact place of the break, nor can he name the variation. In fact, it is possible to read line 2 of Sonnet 55 as varying from iambic pentameter as shown below (U indicates an unstressed syllable while / indicates a stressed syllable):

U / U / U / U U /

Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme

The variation arises from the fact that the line, read this way, with 'powerful' pronounced as three syllables, has 11 syllables rather than the ten that iambic pentameter would have. Most people would be likely, though, to read the line as having ten syllables, as shown below:

U / U / U / U /

Of princes shall outlive this pow(erful) rhyme

A truly sophisticated reading would acknowledge that two interpretations are possible and discuss the effect of choosing the reading that retains an extra syllable. This student may well understand those complexities, but he was unable, in the moment, to articulate them, so the understanding he was able to demonstrate is not sophisticated enough to earn him higher marks.

Note that it would still be possible for a student whose analysis of meter fell a little short in terms of detail and precision to earn higher marks for the commentary as a whole if he or she were able to develop the other strategies in the commentary more fully. However, in this case, the depth of analysis of the metrical variation is typical of all the analysis of this commentary, so the mark is a 5, representing good solid work, but not a 6, representing sophisticated understanding. Tristan's work is largely accurate and shows some sophistication of understanding, but the discussion is neither deep nor precise.

Now listen to the discussion section of Tristan's recording. As you listen, take note of the fact that he answers the questions which are asked, without wandering off onto loosely related (or unrelated) topics. In the discussion, he is able to demonstrate a better ability to analyse in detail, and he is able to convince the listener of his good understanding by amplifying his answers to follow-up questions.

Let's take just one example: he initially states a contradiction, but the teacher catches it and gives him a chance to clarify when she asks him to explain his statement that readers can get a more objective view of Gatsby by seeing him through Nick's perspective, even though, as he claimed, Gatsby is not what Nick thinks he is (15:10). Tristan is able to discuss the concept of an unreliable narrator and how authors can use such a narrator to direct the audience to notice things the narrator does not notice (15:32).

Another strength of this discussion is that Tristan's answers get more detailed and more insightful as the interview goes along. This means that the listener is left at the end with a strong impression, which may offset any impression of weakness at the beginning of the discussion. Tristan finishes with a particularly strong comment about an important scene at the end of the novel (19:03). The strengths of this answer are:

1. He chooses to discuss a quiet moment rather than one of dramatic action, so its import will not be a matter of influence on the plot or on character development. This is an unexpected scene that many readers would not necessarily even notice, and it suggests that Tristan is offering something that he truly responded to as a reader, rather than something he simply remembers from class discussion.
2. He explains the significance of the scene in terms of what it reveals about an overarching idea in the novel. This is an excellent way to end the discussion, as it helps tie together the earlier conversation in a theme.

In Tristan's case, a strong interview helps to elevate the overall mark for the assessment. Had the interview been of the calibre of the commentary, the overall mark would likely have been a 4 rather than a 5.

Shazina

Now let's move on to Shahzina's assessment. Since we found that Tristan's good solid commentary lacked a certain depth and precision, we'll listen to see where Shahzina's assessment might have shown more of those features. First listen to her oral commentary. Like Tristan, Shahzina begins her commentary with an overarching statement to give herself something to demonstrate through the

examples she chooses in the text (0:20). She also accurately names several strategies: structure, contrast, and the difference between the author's purpose and the narrator's purpose (0:50). One primary feature of this commentary that makes it worthy of a higher score than the first sample is the stronger sense of organisation. Shahzina chooses structure as the main strategy she wishes to analyse — note that structure is another of those more sophisticated strategies — and she organises her comments around the structure of the poem, treating each quatrain and the couplet as a unit of structure (1:02).

It is important to remember that you have to be careful, in organising a commentary, not to resort to trudging stolidly line-by-line through the text. Such an organisational choice generally signals that the student does not really know how to develop the commentary around a central idea. While it might at first seem that a quatrain-by-quatrain structure runs the same risk, in this particular case it does not, because Shahzina is using the fact that the quatrains each contain a particular idea to make her point that the narrator is contrasting poetry with a variety of different types of earthly substances. What keeps this commentary from earning a 7 is that she does not make that point clear until the end of the discussion. For a few minutes, it appears that she is simply summarising the poem. After she does so, however, she does specifically state that she finds it interesting that 'within the structure the narrator uses contrast; puts the poem up against monuments, war, and death to show that he has the ability to preserve her through this poem' (5:12). Here she demonstrates that her discussion of the quatrains and couplet do, indeed, support her initial contention that Shakespeare used structure to help make his point.

Shahzina's commentary has a clearer organisational plan than Tristan's did, and she shows herself to have a pretty good conscious understanding of where she is going with her analysis. In order to score a 7, however, she would have needed to keep the listener apprised of her intentions all along. She could have introduced her comments about the quatrains and couplet with a statement to the effect that Shakespeare used each of the quatrains to introduce a different kind of strong element that fails to measure up to the lasting power of poetry, and then, in moving from her discussion of one quatrain to the next, she could have included a clear transition that focused on the contrast. She might, for instance, have said something along the lines of 'where in the first quatrain Shakespeare used man-made memorials as a foil for the poem, in the second quatrain, he uses man's destructive behaviour instead'. The ability to use such clear transitions to remind the listener of why she is talking about this particular segment of the sonnet would create an organisational plan of greater sophistication (criterion C), and it would reveal a richer understanding of what the poem was about (criterion B).

One other strength of this commentary is the ending: Shahzina finishes by identifying a significant difference between the narrator's purpose and the author's purpose (5:47). She claims, compellingly, that the narrator wants to flatter his beloved by showing her that he has immortalized her, while the author has a greater purpose: he wishes to demonstrate that poetry has the power to immortalise, a power that could be expended on any subject, not just this one woman. That understanding is particularly nuanced, and it shows Shahzina as an experienced and sophisticated reader.

Now listen to Shahzina's discussion over *The Great Gatsby*. Similarly to Tristan, Shahzina seems more confident about her understanding of the novel, and so you can hear, in her voice, a little more enthusiasm and a little more certainty. These help earn good marks for criterion E. Like Tristan, too, Shahzina does a good job of answering the questions as they are asked, and not wandering off into unrelated territory.

Her knowledge of the text is good, as she demonstrates by bringing up a variety of important elements: the symbols of the car crashes, the falling clock, and of Gatsby's staring across spaces towards lights (13:42). Even more sophisticated is her understanding that Gatsby has never grown up, and that his failure arises from his inability to accept reality (11:47). She is also able to create a sense of continuity and structure to her discussion by tying her other answers into that same central idea: she ends the discussion with comments about how the parallel scenes of Gatsby staring at lights that represent Daisy reveal a change in the narrator, Nick, who comes to realize that Gatsby is out of touch with reality (16:37). As with Tristan's discussion, the ending of Shahzina's discussion leaves the listener with a good impression of her knowledge and ability as a reader.

What keeps this discussion from being a clear 7 is a lack of precision in Shahzina's explanations of the significance of these elements. In response to the first question, for example, she neglects to explain that she understands the importance of a line in the novel that says that Jay Gatsby was the Platonic conception of James Gatz. She speaks as if she assumes the listener will know what she knows, and so her answer lacks the detail necessary for her listener to be able to determine that Shahzina really knows in detail what she is talking about. She shows her knowledge more clearly as the discussion progresses precisely because she is able to answer the questions, which are all framed in such a way as to elicit more detailed explanations of ideas that Shahzina herself brought up.

As with Tristan's assessment, here the discussion is a little stronger than the commentary and probably helps raise the overall mark from 5 to 6, but both show good understanding and good ability to complete the task as expected. For all these reasons Shahzina's commentary gained her 21 marks (a 6).

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