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Practice exam question

In love and war

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Guidance for the question on p. 41 of the magazine.

The middle of an answer

Like *The Great Gatsby*, 'Who so list to hount' explores love that seeks to cross a social divide. But the ways in which they do this differ. Fitzgerald, through the form of a novel, is able to include different details and incidents from a wide time span, showing Gatsby and Daisy's relationship from the varied perspectives of Jordan, Nick and Gatsby himself. By contrast, Wyatt, using the sonnet form, has a much narrower scope, and presents thoughts and feelings about a relationship from the perspective of a single speaker. This more intense and focused expression of the boundary-breaking relationship only suggests the nature of the boundary, something that is made much more overt in *The Great Gatsby*.

The subjective nature of the sonnet, with its first-person perspective full of details of physical and emotional feelings, suggests the compulsion of the hunt, the exhaustion that results from it and its futility. The speaker is presented as one of numerous men who are on a deer hunt. Despite the hunt being 'a vayne travail' and being 'weried ... sore', the woman/deer still draws him, with the effect of the imagery being reinforced by Wyatt's use of fricative alliteration, which enacts a sense of panting breathlessness: 'as she fleeth afore/ Faynting I followe'. The paradoxical sense of compulsion and futility culminates at the end of the sestet in the image of trying to catch air in a net, which, through rhyme subtly connects futile action – 'hold the wynde' – with the object of his desire – 'an hynde' – and his 'weried mynde'.

By contrast, Fitzgerald can present more variety of emotion around Gatsby's quest for Daisy. At the novel's midpoint there is both hope and futility, as Gatsby and Daisy resume their relationship 'possessed by intense life', but not before there is symbolic rain and the knocking over and catching of a clock, which seem to foreshadow sadness and the inability to turn back time.

Both texts present their breaching of a significant social boundary in ways that also operate on several levels of meaning. The sonnet suggests that the reason the hunter and hunted can never be together is that the deer belongs to a powerful ruler – in a biographical reading, the hind is Anne Boleyn and the Cesar figure is Henry VIII. In addition, the sonnet might serve as a warning to others who might consider breaching significant boundaries. Both the octave and the sestet begin by involving the reader, through the near repeated phrase 'Who so list to hount' / 'whoso list her hount', and the sonnet concludes with a couplet. This communicates the warning command on the deer's collar, which is

...graven with Diamonds round abowte:

'Noli me tangere for Cesars I ame
And wylde for to hold though I seme tame.'

Thus, the poem climaxes and concludes with a close-up image of ownership and adornment. It is also a warning: 'Noli me tangere' (don't touch me). This might remind us of the 'string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars' that Tom gives Daisy on the day before their wedding, perhaps also both an item of jewellery and a symbol of ownership. But Fitzgerald does not give the same prominence to this in his text as Wyatt does. Its movement from Daisy's neck to the 'waste-basket' (when she tries to call off the wedding) and then back on her neck (when she 'married Tom without so much as a shiver') charts the progress of her feelings towards the two men in her life. It is also one of many indications of Tom's wealth and the way in which he uses it.

There is no neat sense of any of the characters representing characters from real life, as in Wyatt's poem. Rather, in Fitzgerald's novel there is more the sense that social boundaries in America – despite what conceptions of the American Dream might have us believe – are rarely crossed lightly or with impunity. Nicola Onyett explains that 'in taking "Daisy under false pretences" and "let[ing] her believe that he was a person from much the same strata as herself", Gatsby enacts a symbolic revenge on the elite society that suggests that the American Dream is his for the taking.' But Fitzgerald, in the broader form of the novel, rather than the more sharply focused form of the sonnet, can offer a broader range of interpretations. Through the doomed nature of their love and Gatsby's death he suggests the revenge is short-lived. A significant boundary is not breached for long. Ultimately, Tom triumphs and the social order reverts to the norm. Tom and Daisy face no consequences regarding the tragic accidents and retreat 'back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made...'.

Commentary

This is a perceptive and assured comparison. It engages closely with the wording of the task by focusing on the idea of love attempting to cross significant boundaries and applies this to both texts in a sustained and purposeful way. The student makes clear cross-genre comparisons, contrasting Fitzgerald's use of the novel form with Wyatt's sonnet form. This keeps the line of argument sharply relevant while also demonstrating awareness of how different literary forms shape the presentation of love and boundaries.

There is strong analysis of authorial methods. In Wyatt, attention is paid to imagery, sound and form: the student comments on alliteration, rhyme and paradox, as well as the implications of the sonnet's perspective. In Fitzgerald, they identify symbolism (the rain, the clock) and the broader narrative technique of multiple perspectives. Methods are not only identified but explained in relation to meaning, showing how they contribute to the sense of compulsion, futility and hope within each text.

The student demonstrates confident comparative cross-genre analysis, setting up productive parallels between the deer's collar in Wyatt and Daisy's pearls in Fitzgerald, showing how both texts use imagery of adornment to suggest possession and social control. The commentary on how Fitzgerald's novelistic scope allows him to present more variety of emotion, compared with the concentrated intensity of Wyatt's sonnet, is especially perceptive. This comparison across form as well as theme adds depth and sophistication to the analysis.

Context is used assuredly. The link between Wyatt's poem and the Tudor court gives clarity to the boundary being crossed in the sonnet, while the reference to Nicola Onyett's reading of Gatsby shows effective integration of critical material. Importantly, both contextual and critical points are used to develop the student's own argument, rather than being bolted on.

The style is fluent and confident. Sentences are generally well controlled and critical terminology – such as ‘octave,’ ‘sestet,’ ‘symbol’/‘symbolic’ and ‘foreshadow’ – is used precisely. While there are some less common critical terms used, such as ‘fricative alliteration’ (alliteration of ‘v’ or ‘f’ sounds), the emphasis is on using terminology for precision and to aid analysis. Quotations are integrated seamlessly, and the expression is mature. The answer consistently demonstrates perceptive understanding of both texts and maintains a strong comparative line of argument throughout.

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