A Level

English Literature

Sample Extracts and Sample Writing

"Great works of literature move you emotionally and intellectually like great music, and this is not an idle matter of private enjoyment. If we cannot recognise and celebrate great creative work then something will go dead in us and in our society."

A level English Literature

Year 12 texts

Dr Faustus by Christopher Marlowe

Contemporary Poetry

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley

Possible alternate prose texts

The Lonely Londoners by Sam Selvon

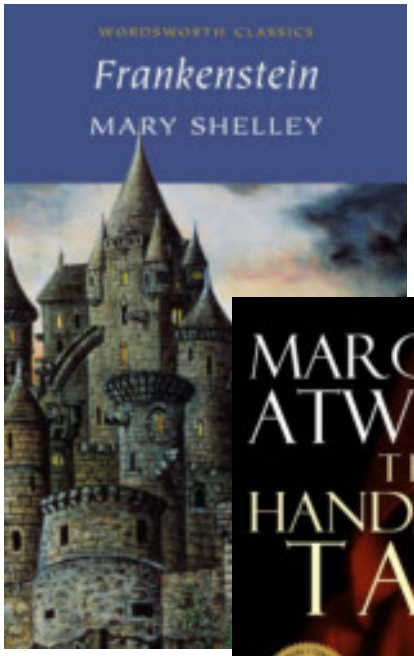
Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad

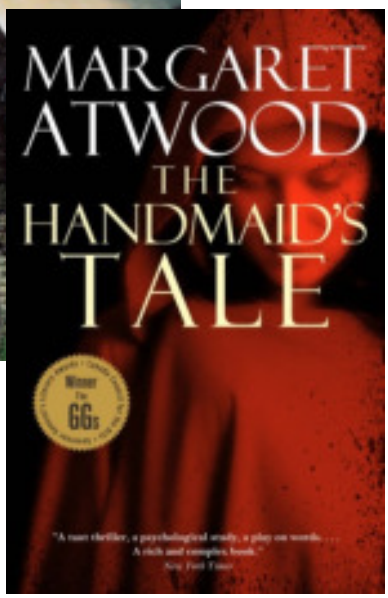
Year 13 texts

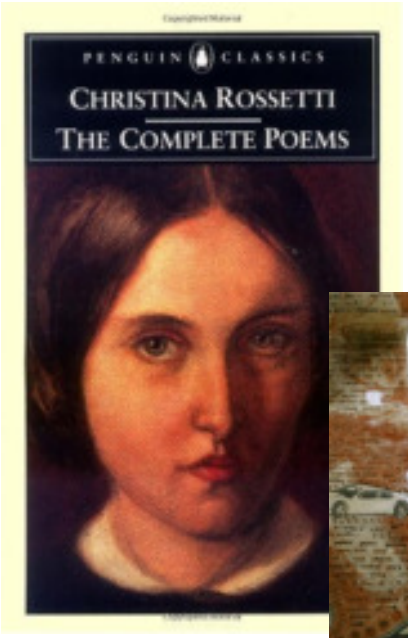
Othello by William Shakespeare

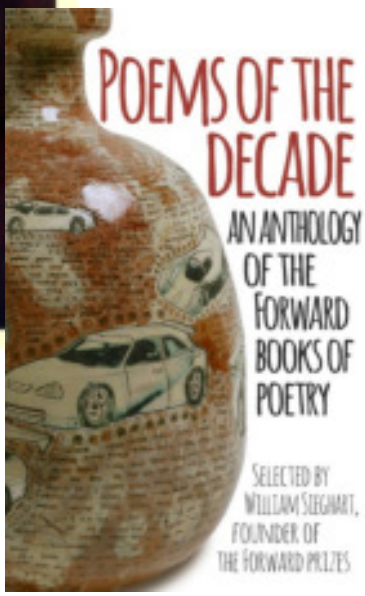
Christina Rossetti's poetry

PLUS: Two texts *of your own choice* for coursework


WORDSWORTH CLASSICS
Frankenstein
MARY SHELLEY

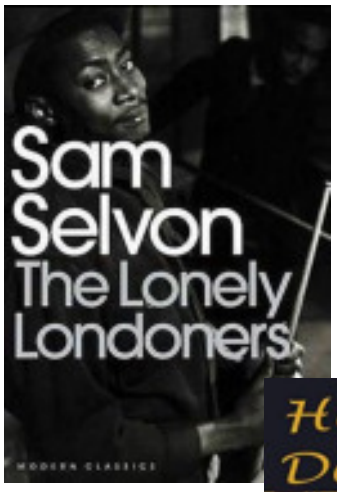

MARGARET ATWOOD
THE HANDMAID'S TALE
Winner of the 6Gs

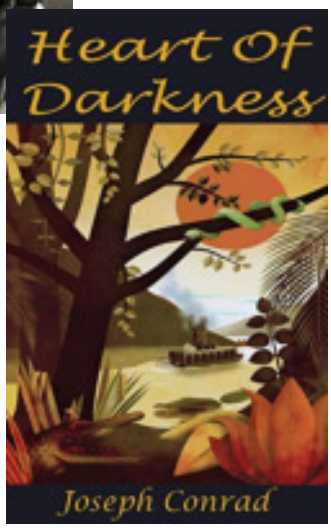

PENGUIN CLASSICS
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI
THE COMPLETE POEMS


POEMS OF THE DECADE
AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE FORWARD BOOKS OF POETRY
SELECTED BY WILLIAM SIEGHART, FOUNDER OF THE FORWARD PRIZES


Cambridge School Shakespeare
Othello


Signet Classics
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE
Doctor Faustus
EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY SYLVAN BARNET


Sam Selvon
The Lonely Londoners
MODERN CLASSICS


Heart Of Darkness
Joseph Conrad

Dr Faustus by Christopher Marlowe

A bold and thrilling Elizabethan play written by one of Shakespeare's contemporaries, *Dr. Faustus* tells the story of the eminent eponymous scholar from Wittenberg in Germany. Dr. John Faustus has overcome his humble origins to reach the pinnacle of academia. But his success is not enough for him: Faustus chafes against the theological and cultural restrictions of early modern society and turns to necromancy to satisfy his intellectual curiosity and restless ego. Accordingly, and sensing an opportunity to enlarge his following in Hell, the devil strikes a deal with Faustus and gives him twenty-four years of magical powers in exchange for his soul.

Faust. Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damned,
and canst thou not be saved:
What boots it, then, to think of God or Heaven?
Away with such vain fancies, and despair;
Despair in God, and trust in Belzebub:
Now go not backward; no, Faustus, be resolute:
Why waver'st thou? O, something soundeth in mine ears,
"Abjure this magic, turn to God again!"
Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.
To God? he loves thee not;
The god thou serv'st is thine own appetite,
Wherein is fixed the love of Belzebub:
To him I'll build an altar and a church,
And offer lukewarm blood of new-born babes.

Enter Good Angel and Evil Angel.

Good Ang. Sweet Faustus, leave that execrable art.

Faust. Contrition, prayer, repentance – what of them?

Good Ang. O, they are means to bring thee unto Heaven!

Evil Ang. Rather illusions, fruits of lunacy,
That makes men foolish that do trust them most.

Good Ang. Sweet Faustus, think of Heaven and heavenly things.

Evil Ang. No, Faustus, think of honour and of wealth.

[*Exeunt Angels.*]

Faust. Of wealth!
Why, the signiory of Embden shall be mine.
When Mephistophilis shall stand by me,
What god can hurt thee, Faustus? thou art safe:
Cast no more doubts. – Come, Mephistophilis,
And bring glad tidings from great Lucifer; –
Is't not midnight? – come, Mephistophilis,
Veni, veni, Mephistophile!

Enter Mephistophilis.

One interpretation of the play is that, as Marlowe was writing during the Renaissance period of 'rebirth', the play takes the form of a classical Greek tragedy. Faustus displays most of the traits of a tragic hero, those being: hamartia (a character flaw), hubris (immense pride) and nemesis (a downfall). On top of this, the play makes use of chorus sections to emphasise the didactic nature of the story; this is most obvious in the prologue when the Icarus myth is referenced as 'his waxen wings did mount above his reach' offering a prolepsis for Marlowe's story to come and shunning Faustus' ambition before he is even seen on stage. Faustus, in Act 1 Scene 1 is displayed as very arrogant and ambitious. He seems to challenge the natural order of things for 'Wouldst thou make…them to life again?' Furthermore, his seemingly insulting arrogance is displayed as orthodoxy is 'too servile and illiberal for me'. Thus, an interpretation of Faustus' ambition is that Marlowe uses his tragic hero's goals to achieve 'omnipotence' as a hubristic character flaw which his Elizabethan audience should learn from in order to avoid a similar fate to Faustus in Hell.

- Year 12 Student

Contemporary Poetry

We work with an anthology of eighteen contemporary poems, some written by famous and established names such as Simon Armitage and Andrew Motion, others written by new and emerging talent such as Tishani Doshi and Leontia Flynn. All the poems in the anthology are drawn from 'Poems of the Decade' itself an anthology of poems nominated for Forward Poetry Prizes between 2002-2011. The anthology poems – written in a range of forms – tackle themes such as growing up, family life, love, and masculinity.

'Giuseppe' by Roderick Ford

My Uncle Giuseppe told me
that in Sicily in World War Two,
in the courtyard behind the aquarium,
where the bougainvillea grows so well,
the only captive mermaid in the world
was butchered on the dry and dusty ground
by a doctor, a fishmonger, and certain others.

She, it, had never learned to speak
because she was simple, or so they'd said.
But the priest who held one of her hands
while her throat was cut
said she was only a fish, and fish can't speak.
But she screamed like a woman in terrible fear.

And when they took a ripe golden roe
from her side, the doctor said
this was proof she was just a fish
and anyway an egg is not a child,
but refused when some was offered to him.

Then they put her head and her hands
in a box for burial
and someone tried to take her wedding ring,
but the others stopped him,
and the ring stayed put.

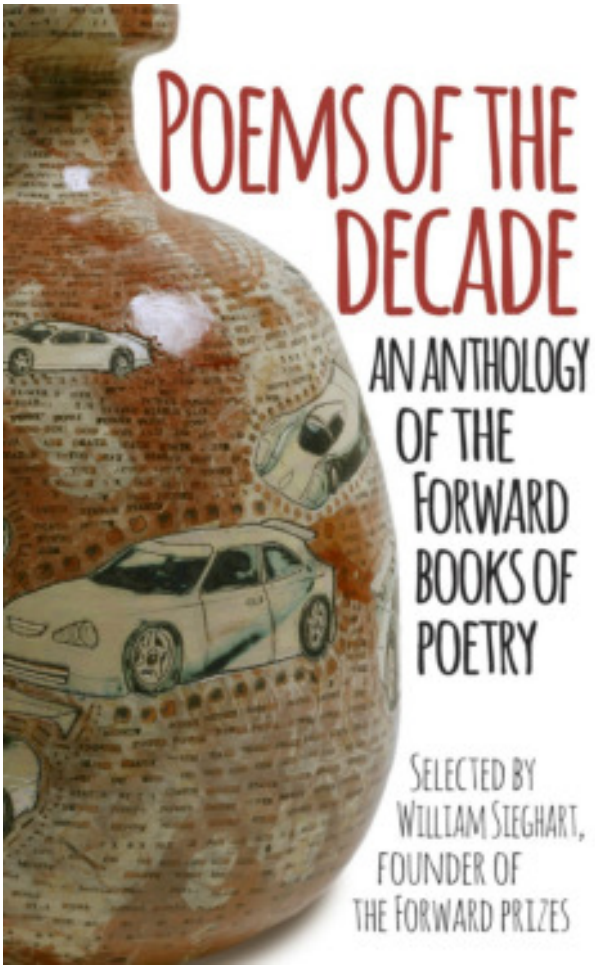
The rest they cooked and fed to the troops.
They said a large fish had been found on the beach.

Starvation forgives men many things,
my uncle, the aquarium keeper, said,
but couldn't look me in the eye,
for which I thank God.

In 'Giuseppe', the mermaid is shown to be dehumanised by the men as it serves as a means to justify the murder for the uncle making him less unsure of the moral void in his acts. This can be seen by the objectification of 'She, it,' alongside the 'proof she was just a fish' directly implying that there was uncertainty to begin with. With these attempts of justification however, the

men’s acts remain divided as ‘she screamed like a woman’, ‘the others stopped him’ from taking the wedding ring and the mermaid was given ‘a box for burial’. In many ways, Ford’s demonstration of the passivity of the men and uncertain stance on the mermaid’s humanity could be a reference to the “banality of evil” during the Holocaust (which would make sense as the poem is in WW2) which argues that evil only exists when people lack the moral fibre to intervene in moments of injustice. An alternative view however would be that Ford’s poem attempts to highlight the desperation caused by war as the beauty of the mermaid is sacrificed for the sake of giving food ‘to the troops’ as ‘starvation forgives men many things’.

- Year 12 Student



The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

A dystopian fiction set in an imagined future world where environmental disaster has reduced human fertility and increased birth defects. Fertile women must be Handmaids and have babies for sterile couples. Gay people are labelled Gender Traitors. Abortion is banned. People who won't take their place in the new order are sent to the Colonies – a toxic wasteland. Will Offred, the narrator, survive?

A group of people is coming towards us. They're tourists, from Japan it looks like, a trade delegation perhaps, on a tour of the historic landmarks or out for local colour. They're diminutive and neatly turned out; each has his or her camera, his or her smile. They look around, bright-eyed, cocking their heads to one side like robins, their very cheerfulness aggressive, and I can't help staring. It's been a long time since I've seen skirts that short on women. The skirts reach just below the knee and the legs come out from beneath them, nearly naked in their thin stockings, blatant, the high-heeled shoes with their straps attached to the feet like delicate instruments of torture. The women teeter on their spiked feet as if on stilts, but off balance; their backs arch at the waist, thrusting the buttocks out. Their heads are uncovered and their hair too is exposed, in all its darkness and sexuality. They wear lipstick, red, outlining the damp cavities of their mouths, like scrawls on a washroom wall, of the time before.

I stop walking. Ofglen stops beside me and I know that she too cannot take her eyes off these women. We are fascinated, but also repelled. They seem undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this.

Then I think: I used to dress like that. That was freedom.

Westernized, they used to call it.

The Japanese tourists come towards us, twittering, and we turn our heads away too late: our faces have been seen.

There's an interpreter, in the standard blue suit and red-patterned tie, with the winged-eye tie pin. He's the one who steps forward, out of the group, in front of us, blocking our way. The tourists bunch behind him; one of them raises a camera.

"Excuse me," he says to both of us, politely enough. "They're asking if they can take your picture."

I look down at the sidewalk, shake my head for No. What they must see is the white wings only, a scrap of face, my chin and part of my mouth. Not the eyes. I know better than to look the interpreter in the face. Most of the interpreters are Eyes, or so it's said.

I also know better than to say Yes. Modesty is invisibility, said Aunt Lydia. Never forget it. To be seen – to be seen – is to be – her voice trembled – penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable. She called us girls.

me, Ofglen is also silent. She's tucked her red-gloved hands up into her sleeves, to hide them.

The interpreter turns back to the group, chatters at them in staccato. I know what he'll be saying, I know the line. He'll be telling them that women here have different customs, that to stare at them through the lens of a camera is, for them, an experience of violation.

'Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary.'

The final chapter of Offred's narrative seems hopeless, Offred even muses that she could "noose the bedsheet round my neck, hook myself up in the closet, throw my weight forward, choke myself off". In this chapter full of despair, the one source of hope is Nick who tells Offred the people coming for her are "mayday" and asks her to "trust me". It seems a very deliberate choice of Atwood's that at no point are Nick's intentions completely transparent. The fate of Offred, whether one of hope or despair, depends on how much the reader trusts Nick's "human heart". It is completely possible to read Nick as the nearest example to the typical dystopian trope of a rebel against the establishment, an example of compassion amongst so much greed, but it is equally possible to read Nick as being driven by more selfish motivation – the fatherhood that a relationship with Offred could offer. True to Atwood's style, the novel resists one conclusive reading, and leaves it up to her reader to deicide whether it is an ending of hope or despair.

Year 12 student

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley

Considered by some to be the first science fiction novel in the English language, Frankenstein tells the story of a scientist – Victor Frankenstein – and his efforts to defy death by creating life out of human bodies parts. The resultant creature is monstrous to behold but only becomes monstrous in its behaviour as humans reject his attempts to befriend them. A relentless pursuit and multiple murders are the result.

"You are in the wrong," replied the fiend; "and instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you. I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me? You would not call it murder if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands. Shall I respect man when he condemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness, and instead of injury I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that cannot be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union. Yet mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery. I will revenge my injuries; if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear, and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred. Have a care; I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you shall curse the hour of your birth."

A fiendish rage animated him as he said this; his face was wrinkled into contortions too horrible for human eyes to behold; but presently he calmed himself and proceeded—

"I intended to reason. This passion is detrimental to me, for you do not reflect that *you* are the cause of its excess. If any being felt emotions of benevolence towards me, I should return them a hundred and a hundredfold; for that one creature's sake I would make peace with the whole kind! But I now indulge in dreams of bliss that cannot be realised. What I ask of you is reasonable and moderate; I demand a creature of another sex, but as hideous as myself; the gratification is small, but it is all that I can receive, and it shall content me. It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another. Our lives will not be happy, but they will be harmless and free from the misery I now feel. Oh! My creator, make me happy; let me feel gratitude towards you for one benefit! Let me see that I excite the sympathy of some existing thing; do not deny me my request!"

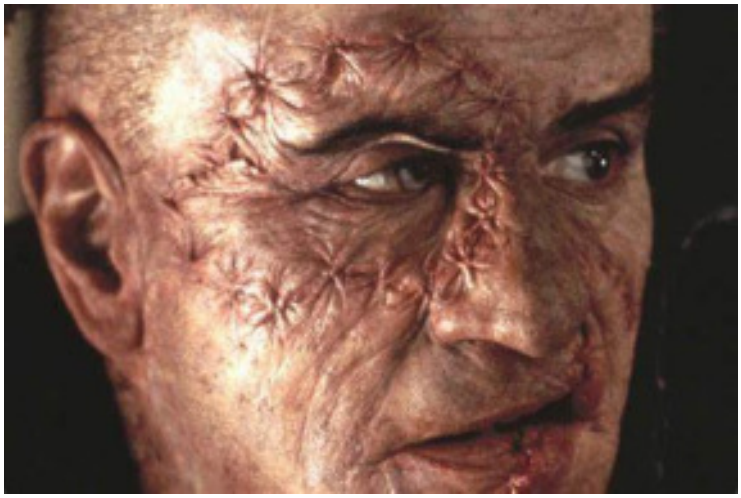
I was moved. I shuddered when I thought of the possible consequences of my consent, but I felt that there was some justice in his argument. His tale and the feelings he now expressed proved him to be a creature of fine sensations, and did I not as his maker owe him all the portion of happiness that it was in my power to bestow? He saw my change of feeling and continued,

"If you consent, neither you nor any other human being shall ever see us again; I will go to the vast wilds of South America. My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment. My companion will be of the same nature as myself and will be content with the same fare. We shall make our bed of dried leaves; the sun will shine on us as on man and will ripen our food. The picture I present to you is peaceful and human, and you must feel that you could deny it only in the wantonness of power and cruelty. Pitiless as you have been towards me, I now see compassion in your eyes; let me seize the favourable moment and persuade you to promise what I so ardently desire."

'I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs'

Shelley's presentation of romance is that of an almost unattainable ideal which when denied, pushes the creature to "hellish rage". By contrast the idea of desire as a component of companionship is explored subtly in the relationship between Frankenstein and Elizabeth and is insignificant to Frankenstein compared to his scientific ambition and ensuing despair brought by his Promethean creation. Frankenstein can be seen as fearful of women and sexuality as symbolised when he is "trembling with rage" while destroying the female creature in utter fear. This is further developed as the personification of uncontrolled science (the creature) intrudes and destroys his wedding night, a traditional occasion connoting desire and consummation. Shelley was writing in the early 1800s when sexuality was a taboo topic for authors especially for female writers and as a result her presentation is subtle. Science is set as a binary opposition to desire in Frankenstein as he is distracted from it by his experiments and their consequences. As a result, the reader is left with only infrequent moments of admiration from Frankenstein by which to gauge his desire. These expressions are notably more directed towards Clerval than to Elizabeth. This develops the reading of Frankenstein as homosexual or homosocial and places this desire as the cause of his greatest misery; his sufferings are such that "the human frame could no longer support" upon learning of his friend Clerval's death. Desire combined with science forms the eagles which torture Frankenstein as "The Modern Prometheus", both being at the root of his despair.

Year 12 student



The Lonely Londoners by Samuel Selvon

Selvon published *The Lonely Londoners* in 1956. The novel presents the experiences of West Indian immigrants in London in the post-war era of the 1950s. Selvon was born in Trinidad and moved to London as a young man. The book is based, in part, on his own experiences. Selvon writes the entire novel in a Creolized form of English to echo the voices of the migrant community. It is a story that is as heart-breaking as it is funny.

The fellar, as soon as he see Moses, walk straight up to him and say, "Ah, I bet you is Moses!"

Moses say, "Yes."

"Ah," Henry say, looking about the desolate station as if he in a exhibition hall on a pleasant summer evening. "Frank did say you would come to meet me in Waterloo. My name Henry Oliver."

"You not feeling cold, man?" Moses say, eyeing the specimen with amazement, for he himself have on long wool underwear and a heavy fireman coat that he pick up in Portobello Road.

"No," Henry say with surprise. "This is the way the weather does be in the winter? It not so bad, man. In fact I feeling a little warm."

"Jesus Christ," Moses say. "Where your luggage?"

"What luggage? I ain't have any. I figure is no sense to load up myself with a set of things. When I start a work I will buy some things."

Now Moses is a veteran, who living in this country for a long time, and he meet all sorts of people and do all sorts of things, but he never thought the day would come when a fellar would land up from the sunny tropics on a powerful winter evening wearing a tropical suit and saying that he ain't have no luggage.

"You mean you come from Trinidad with nothing?"

"Well, the old toothbrush always in the pocket," Henry pat the jacket pocket.

'London oh lord Galahad say when the sweetness of summer get in him he say he would never leave the old Brit'n as long as he live and Moses sigh a long sigh like a man who live life and see nothing at all in it'

One of the first moments of dialogue Selvon uses is between Moses and Henry Galahad, when Henry Galahad first arrives to London via the SS Hindebrand. These characters are presented in contrast with each other. Moses is the "veteran" disillusioned migrant who meets with the new arrivals, whilst Galahad is naïve. Indeed, Galahad says "what luggage? I ain't have any" and naively states "when I start a work I will buy some things", assuming there will be work readily available to him in London.

Here, Selvon introduces an important idea that recurs throughout the novel: new migrant arrivals had the belief that they would arrive to a London "paved with gold" and would be welcomed by native Londoners. However, it is clear by Moses' shocked response to Galahad's lack of preparation that the welcome migrants faced was hostile and hard.

Moses' role as "welfare officer" for new arrivals is one that he begrudges but also knows is necessary as "things bad enough already" and "he remember how desperate he was" when he first arrived. Selvon therefore introduces the socio-economic discrimination that migrants faced on arrival, and the disillusionment they suffered as a result.

Year 12 student

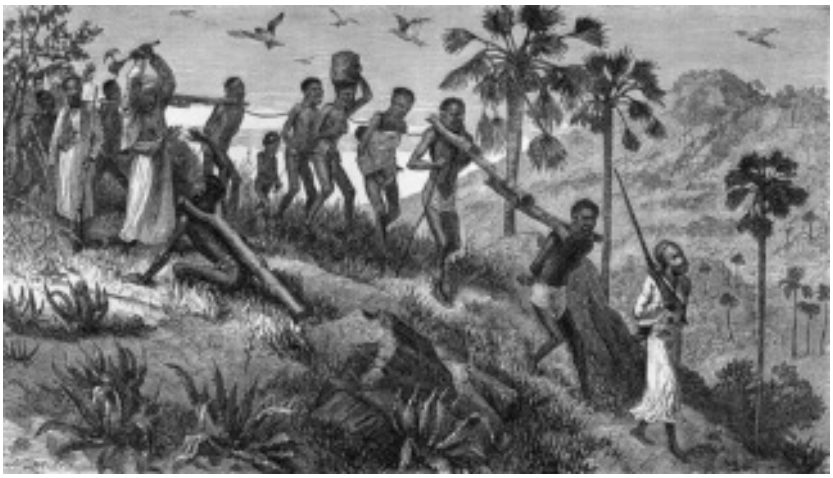
Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad

Heart of Darkness is set in the late Nineteenth Century when European colonisation of Africa was at its height. The main story is told from the perspective of London-born Marlow, a sailor who is employed by the Company, a large ivory-trading firm working out of the Congo. He journeys up the Congo River to meet Kurtz, reputed to be a "remarkable man". Marlow encounters widespread inefficiency and brutality in the Company's stations. The cruelty of imperial enterprise contrasts with the jungle that surrounds the European settlements, making them appear to be tiny islands amidst a vast darkness.

"At last I got under the trees. My purpose was to stroll into the shade for a moment; but no sooner within than it seemed to me I had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno. The rapids were near, and an uninterrupted, uniform, headlong, rushing noise filled the mournful stillness of the grove, where not a breath stirred, not a leaf moved, with a mysterious sound -- as though the tearing pace of the launched earth had suddenly become audible.

Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die.

They were dying slowly -- it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now -- nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air -- and nearly as thin. I began to distinguish the gleam of the eyes under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. The man seemed young -- almost a boy -- but you know with them it's hard to tell. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede's ship's biscuits I had in my pocket. The fingers closed slowly on it and held -- there was no other movement and no other glance. He had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck -- Why? Where did he get it? Was it a badge -- an ornament -- a charm -- a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it? It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas.



"The horror! The horror!"

It can be argued that the intense and shocking imagery depicted in Heart of Darkness provides authenticity to the story, perhaps due to Conrad's involvement in visiting the Congo, resulting in a strong emotional reader response.

The grove of death scene, likened by Marlow to Dante's 'gloomy circle of some Inferno', conveys a morbid scene of 'disease and starvation', with the motif of dark and light used to portray the deathly 'shadows' of Congolese reduced to 'nothing earthly'. Despite this suffering, Marlow has an objective and detached tone, and his descriptions dehumanise the enslaved Africans, referred to as 'moribund shapes' and 'acute angles'. Indeed, although the vivid visual imagery constructs a powerful and profound scene, it is also possible that at times Marlow dramatically exaggerates the sights he witnesses, for example the structurally juxtaposed description of the accountant is portrayed in direct opposition to the 'black bones', as a 'sort of vision' with 'big white hand', 'snowy trousers' and 'white cuffs'. Hyperbolic and even religious language is used to describe the 'miracle' accountant. This is an uncomfortable read, particularly for a modern reader who can better understand the suffering the Congolese endured than a contemporary reader.

Heart of Darkness is based on truth, as millions of African people were killed or worked to death under colonial rule, therefore the sights that Europeans such as Marlow, and even Conrad as a member of the merchant navy, would have witnessed would have been deeply unpleasant. However, the extent of the realism of characters he presents here such as the accountant should be questioned - the differences in European and Congolese characters is so very extreme and one-dimensional that some readers and critics have criticised Conrad for being a 'thorough-going' racist.

Year 12 student

Othello by William Shakespeare

Set in 16th century Venice, Othello is the story of a man whose attempt to defy his stars ends in tragedy. Born in Africa, Othello has become a highly respected general in the Venetian army. Secretly he marries Desdemona, the daughter of Brabantio, a Venetian senator. The mixed-race union is sanctioned by the liberal Duke but as soon as the newlyweds arrive in Cyprus, Iago – an officer working under Othello – begins a plan to undermine their marriage. He convinces Othello that his wife has been unfaithful and as this poison begins to work, Othello is transformed from an articulate, charismatic, free-thinking and loving man into an unreasonable, violent 'beast' who smothers his wife before killing himself. About jealousy, manipulation and male pride, Shakespeare's forward-thinking play examines ideas of racial and gender equality – and finds the world is not ready for them, yet.

OTHELLO
Had it pleased heaven
To try me with affliction; had they rain'd
All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head.
Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips,
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,
I should have found in some place of my soul
A drop of patience: but, alas, to make me
A fixed figure for the time of scorn
To point his slow unmoving finger at!
Yet could I bear that too; well, very well:
But there, where I have garner'd up my heart,
Where either I must live, or bear no life;
The fountain from the which my current runs,
Or else dries up; to be discarded thence!
Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads
To knot and gender in! Turn thy complexion there,
Patience, thou young and rose-lipp'd cherubin,--
Ay, there, look grim as hell!

DESDEMONA
I hope my noble lord esteems me honest.

OTHELLO
O, ay; as summer flies are in the shambles,
That quicken even with blowing. O thou weed,
Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet
That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst
ne'er been born!

'Perdition catch my soul, But I do love thee! and when I love thee not, Chaos is come again.'

A key element to Desdemona's characterisation is how she is treated by men, largely in misogynistic and proprietorial relationships; as McDonough realises, she's a "a commodity within the Venetian society." Desdemona can be viewed entirely as a sexual commodity throughout the play, her actions precipitating sexual jealousy as the ultimate nemesis of the tragic Othello. Descriptions such as "sport for Jove," "lewd minx" and "cunning whore of Venice," establish her character as one categorised by sexual endeavours and not much more. This idea is controlled largely by Iago in his bid to make Othello jealous. Even in a more positive light we see Desdemona existing in a misogynistic sphere, despite Shakespeare choosing to set the play in cosmopolitan and liberal Venice. Refrains such as, "divine Desdemona," "the more angel she," and "truly an obedient lady," are intended genuinely as compliments however to a modern audience arguably appear disingenuous and condescending. That the 'compliments' refer largely to religious considerations may be said to show a true reverence and pure intention. However, I take the biblical imagery to demonstrate a fantastical view of Desdemona by those who have commended her. In doing so they remove her identity as an individual entity and categorise her in a band of idealistic attributions which in not fulfilling, she is seen as all the more impious. It is proleptically pertinent that Desdemona means 'misery' and the anticipation of her demise in the hands of men is how Shakespeare develops her as a victim of the patriarchal norms. Whilst I would argue against her being characterised solely as a "sexual object," it is undeniable that this is one aspect of how she is portrayed and whether complimented or chastised by men, all treatments to some extent reveal her as trapped in the patriarchy.

Year 13 student

The Poetry of Christina Rossetti

One of the most important female writers of the Nineteenth Century, Christina Rossetti's poetry explores ideas about death, gender and love. Her devotion to God also features heavily in her writing.

Memory

I.
I nursed it in my bosom while it lived,
I hid it in my heart when it was dead;
In joy I sat alone, even so I grieved
Alone and nothing said.

I shut the door to face the naked truth,
I stood alone,--I faced the truth alone,
Stripped bare of self-regard or forms or ruth
Till first and last were shown.

I took the perfect balances and weighed;
No shaking of my hand disturbed the poise;
Weighed, found it wanting: not a word I said,
But silent made my choice.

None know the choice I made; I make it still.
None know the choice I made and broke my heart,
Breaking mine idol: I have braced my will
Once, chosen for once my part.

I broke it at a blow, I laid it cold,
Crushed in my deep heart where it used to live.
My heart dies inch by inch; the time grows old,
Grows old in which I grieve.

II.
I have a room where into no one enters
Save I myself alone:
There sits a blessed memory on a throne,
There my life centres.

While winter comes and goes--O tedious comer!--
And while its nip-wind blows;
While bloom the bloodless lily and warm rose
Of lavish summer.

If any should force entrance he might see there
One buried yet not dead,
Before whose face I no more bow my head
Or bend my knee there;

But often in my worn life's autumn weather
I watch there with clear eyes,
And think how it will be in Paradise
When we're together.

'I have a room where into no one enters
Save I myself alone:
There sits a blessed memory on a throne,
There my life centres.'

The poem Memory presents the speaker's emotions after feeling forced to end a relationship. Typical of Victorian poetry, Memory is written in the first person with a close focus on the self and emotional state: feelings of 'joy' contrast with feeling 'grieved'. Rossetti had experience of rejecting suitors because she felt her relationship with God was more important. In this way, Memory appears to be an exploration of feelings she was no doubt familiar with.

The poem is divided into two sections. Interestingly, the second was written eight years after the first. This is perhaps representative of the speaker's developed emotional state. Section one presents the idea that love can cause huge pain. The speaker experiences utter isolation as they 'sat alone', and 'nothing said'. Repetition of 'I' and 'alone' heightens the sense of loneliness, and monosyllabic language with lexical choices of 'dead', 'broke' and 'crushed' used to emphasise the speaker's anguish. The poem is not florid; imagery is straightforward and focuses on emotion. Rossetti seems to convey the 'truth' of love - that it does not solely result in 'joy'.

In the second section, the narrative voice is far more controlled. Although the memory of the lover is 'on a throne', there is a sense that time has enabled the speaker to gain some perspective on the loss they initially felt. Pain is still there as 'winter comes and goes', but this is now the voice of an experienced speaker.

Year 12 student