Love through the ages: Exemplar student response (AS Paper 2, Section B)

This resource is an exemplar student response to a Section B question in the specimen assessment materials for AS Paper 2.

Paper 2, Section B, Band 3

Sample question

'Women characters are presented primarily as those who suffer and endure'

By comparing two prose texts, explore the extent to which you agree with this statement.

Sample response

Within Bronte’s “Jane Eyre”, the female characters of Bertha, Rochester’s first wife, and Jane Eyre both suffer due to Rochester. With Maurier’s “Rebecca”, the suffering that the narrator experiences is definitely due to Rebecca but could be argued to be of her own creation.

Within “Jane Eyre” the most suffering is endured by Rochester’s first wife Bertha Mason. Bertha suffers due to the fact that she has been imprisoned within the attic of Thornfield for fifteen years in a foreign nation as she is a native of Jamaica with a complete different kind of life to the United Kingdom. The sole reason for the imprisonment is due to the fact that she is said to be “mad” described by her husband Mr Rochester as “little better than the devil” with “red holes” for eyes. The appearance of Bertha would have been notably different to all of the white people in England at the time as she is said to have had darker skin so it is possible that her noticeable difference in colour and the fact that she is described to be unchaste and promiscuous by Rochester could constitute his definition of madness. As he would have had no prior knowledge of Caribbean culture and the difference in their possible sexual nature makes it possible that her difference was mistaken for extreme madness, which created her hatred for him due to the suffering he causes her. Mr Rochester has dehumanised Bertha making her unhinged due to her isolation. Bertha’s physical description prior to her imprisonment was what tricked and supposedly deceived Mr Rochester into marriage. After her captivity she is described to have “grizzled hair, wild as a mane” and a “purple face” she looks as if she has been tortured and is physically unwell due to her treatment by Mr Rochester which leads her to act in the way she does, attacking Rochester, “grappled his throat”, in addition to her setting his
bed on fire which are all attacks on Mr Rochester and only the people who have mistreated her. The attack on his bed could have been seen by Jane as a symbol of the fault in him. The greatest warning from Bertha could be seen as her tearing the veil in two as her warning of the separation between Jane and Rochester due to his first marriage.

Bertha is seen to physically suffer by her treatment as she is restrained by “rope.. bound to a chair” showing the extent of the humiliation she has received for fifteen years being treated as if she was a dark secret and had done something wrong.

Whereas in “Rebecca” the suffering that is experienced by the main character is that of her own creation as she seems to believe that Maxim is still in love with his first wife due to her obsession with Rebecca. An example of this would be when she breaks the china cupid and feels the need to hide the broken pieces from Mrs Danvers when she is the lady of the house and its belongings and how for her, the significance of her reaction to her breaking the cupid shows the feelings of being out of place which are shown throughout the book. Also it highlights her feelings of inadequacy with Maxim stating, “That's one of our treasures” although the “our” he refers to is not seen by the narrator as her and Maxim rather Maxim and Rebecca as she feels as if all in Manderley is the property of Rebecca. This is highlighted by her seeing Rebecca’s handkerchief and noting the “tall sloping R and the letters de W interlaced” which the narrator finds in Rebecca’s coat which she is wearing. The presence of Rebecca and her power being felt by the narrator are the closest the narrator feels to suffering. As it could be argued that the narrator does not suffer due to Rebecca as she is not there, rather the narrator has insecurities which makes her feel inadequate, making it possible to state that the narrator does not have to suffer or endure the worst. She is made to feel uncomfortable by Mrs Danvers treatment of her which she could very easily detach herself from if she stopped listening to her advice but rather started to command her own house and live the way she wishes.

**Examiner commentary**

This is a Band 3 answer, upper rather than middle. It is consistently straightforward and relevant, clear and intelligible.

**AO1** – The candidate takes a sensibly ordered approach to constructing the argument. It is straightforward and clear rather than using a specifically literary register.

**AO2** – There is a straightforward understanding of and engagement with authorial methods. A more confident response would perhaps have given more consideration to the authors and the authors’ use of prose narrative techniques.

**AO3** – There is a straightforward understanding of the significance of time, gender and cultural contexts, particularly when looking at Jane Eyre. Some
relevant connections between these contexts and the literature of love are established.

A0s 4 and 5- The candidate explores straightforward connections and there is a straightforward engagement with the debate sustained.