
Elements of political and social protest writing resource package

A-level English Literature B (7716/7717)

Paper 2B, Section B

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

We have developed a range of resources to help you plan your teaching and to create practice exam questions for every component of AS and A-level English Literature B.

In this package you find a variety of resources, including:

- creating your own questions guidance document, to give you the power to create your own practice exam questions
- specimen question commentaries, which explain how a question taken from the sample assessment materials addresses the assessment objectives, and which give some suggestions of how the task might be approached
- exemplar student responses with marking commentary, including two responses of different mark bands are given to a specific question from the Sample Assessment Materials
- text overviews, which show you how the texts you have chosen can be read through the lens of the genre of political and social protest writing.

Resources in this package

- Creating your own questions - Paper 2B, Section B
- Exemplar student response - Paper 2B, Section B - band 5 - *Harvest*
- Exemplar student response - Paper 2B, Section B - band 2 - *Harvest*
- Specimen question commentary - Paper 2B, Section B
- Text overview - *Harvest*

How to use these resources

These documents are clearly an excellent starting point when planning your teaching. If you haven't yet decided on which texts or text combinations to teach, the text overviews and specimen mark schemes give you details about some of the elements of the genre each text covers, which can help you decide. Don't forget to consult the specification for a list of possible elements. Once you have decided, these documents will help you to focus your teaching on those elements and to work towards the relevant exam question in the specimen assessment materials. The exemplar student responses with marking commentary act as models for the students and help you to assess their work.

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Creating your own questions

A-level English Literature B (7716/7717)

Elements of political and social protest writing

Resource package: Paper 2B, Section B

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

Below you will find instructions on how to use the accompanying resources to create your own exam practice questions. This example shows you how to use this resource package to set questions for Paper 2B, Section B.

Paper 2B, Section B

If you have used the relevant question from the specimen assessment materials and want to set a question on a different text combination or a different element of political and social protest writing, you can use these documents in the following ways.

1. Look at how the relevant questions from the specimen assessment materials are constructed, for example:

'In Harvest, the world is unmade in seven days and it is those with political power who are solely to blame.'

To what extent do you agree with this view? Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed exploration of Crace's authorial methods.

The question wording (To what extent...authorial methods) can remain unchanged, with the exception of the name of the writer (here 'Crace'). You will need, however, to construct a different 'view' depending upon the element of political and social protest writing you want the students to explore.

2. Read the relevant text overview to help you construct a different 'view' to debate. Look for elements of political and social protest which occur in the text but don't forget that the absence of elements in a text is equally valid for debate. Other sources can be used to construct a view:

- look at the list of elements of political and social protest in the specification and make up a critical view around one of these
- take a view from one of the writers in the critical anthology around which to structure a debate

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- research critical views about political and social protest writing, on this or other political and social protest texts, and adapt the quote in a more general sense so that students can consider how far this can be said to be true of the text they have studied.

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Exemplar student response and examiner commentary

A-level English Literature B (7716/7717)

Elements of political and social protest writing

Resource package: Paper 2B, Section B

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

Below you will find an exemplar student response to a Section B question in the specimen assessment materials, followed by an examiner commentary on the response.

Paper 2B, Section B

‘In *Harvest*, the world is unmade in seven days and it is those with political power who are solely to blame.’

To what extent do you agree with this view? Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed exploration of Crace’s authorial methods.

Band 2 response

In *Harvest* the real enemy is Master Jordan and he is to blame for what happens. He is an unkind man and he does not have any positive feelings for the villagers. He is not like Master Kent who is part of the community. Jordan comes to the village and destroys the happy lives that the people have. He wants to make a profit and get lots of money through sheep farming. His plan is to enclose the land so that they can’t grow barley. He can then sell the wool for profit in the towns. At the start of Crace’s novel, the people are harvesting their crops. They have worked hard but afterwards they have time to drink and be merry. ‘This evening there’s ale to drink, there’s veal to eat, and we will choose the prettiest to be our Gleaning Queen’. The writer uses a list here to make it seem as if there are plenty of things to make them all happy. The Derby twins and Brooker Higgs even have some magic mushrooms. Everyone seems to get along well and Master Kent is one of them, having supper with them and relaxing. This is a happy time for them all and is like the beginning of the bible when Adam and Eve were happy in the garden of Eden. Things then change when Jordan arrives. He has a lot of political power. He doesn’t talk to the villagers or share things with them. They do not really know what he is doing. He believes in ‘Progress and Prosperity’. But this is only for him. He says that when he brings in sheep farming there will still be some jobs for some people. But you can’t trust him. Other changes that he makes are to do with the law. When Willowjack is killed he says he will find out who did it and before the end of the day that person will be punished by law. He makes people

afraid in the way he goes about trying to find out who did it. He also says he will build a church with a big steeple. This could be seen as a good thing but Jordan makes it seem threatening. In a sense he causes the deaths of Mr Quill.

The main changes he brings about though are that he turns all the people against each other by playing on their suspicions. No-one seems to trust anyone; he encourages them to tell him who might be involved in witch-craft. Gradually people are then made to leave the village, first the Carrs and at the end Walter Thirsk leaves. He seems very sad 'I am left to gather up my bags of modest assets and removable, my sturdy stick, my roll of unmarked vellum chart, my silver and my bulky burdens of remorse and memory. This is my heavy labour now. I have to leave behind these common fields. I have to take the first step out of bounds. I have to carry on alone until I reach wherever is awaiting me, until I gain wherever is awaiting us.' The writer here uses some lists and some repetition to make the mood seem really heavy, to show that the world is sort of at an end. This is all the fault of Master Jordan who is powerful and destructive.

Examiner commentary

This is a fairly simple and general response though it is focused on the task. The candidate has a view and follows it through in a simple way. There is no doubt about what the candidate is arguing and there is some relevant contact with the text, but too much is of a general nature.

AO1

The essay has a simple structure and it is consistent though not all ideas follow on from each other. There is a clear attempt to engage with to what extent. The expression is fairly simple and there is a generalised use of literary concepts.

AO2

There is a simple understanding that Crace has constructed this novel. Some simple comments are made about structure, voice and language and how they shape meaning.

AO3

There is simple understanding of how contexts operate in relation to the question and the candidate comments on moral and social contexts. These are simply linked to the political and social protest writing genre.

AO4

As the candidate writes about power and who is to blame for what happens to the villagers, the candidate connects with the wider genre of social and political protest writing.

AO5

There is a simple and generalized argument here but the candidate does have a clear view. This response seems consistent with the Band 2 descriptors.

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Exemplar student response and examiner commentary

A-level English Literature B (7716/7717)

Elements of political and social protest writing

Resource package: Paper 2B, Section B

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

Below you will find an exemplar student response to a section B question in the specimen assessment materials, followed by an examiner commentary on the response.

Paper 2B, Section B

‘In *Harvest*, the world is unmade in seven days and it is those with political power who are solely to blame.’

To what extent do you agree with this view? Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed exploration of Crace’s authorial methods.

Band 5 response

The novel was written in 2013 and set in an ill-defined past and in it Crace sets up all sorts of ambiguities and tensions. It could easily be argued that although Crace sets his story in the past (seemingly the 15th or 16th centuries) he is actually commenting on the complexities of political power and its impact on ordinary people in the 21st century. He chooses as his narrator an outsider to the village, though one who has been there ten years, but it is not entirely clear who Thirsk speaks for. Are his attitudes those more associated with the sophisticated world than with the people about whom he writes? Does Thirsk somewhat idealise the world of the village before it is ‘unmade’?

In this respect, the given quotation is interesting. It is built on the premise that the world in *Harvest* is actually unmade. Presumably here there is sense that the novel replicates the Creation story in reverse: whereas God creates man, Jordan destroys him. The novel therefore becomes more of a dystopian text than a pastoral one. The quotation also claims that the finger of blame can be pointed solely and directly at those with political power— perhaps more specifically Master Jordan and his acolytes since he is the one who wants to forcibly enclose the land of The Village and introduce sheep farming. Although Jordan is a cruel and tyrannical man and although he clearly wants to make money for himself, his desire to introduce ‘sheep’ is interesting in pastoral terms. It could be argued that he is carrying out the wishes of God and restoring order - Cain, the tiller of the land murdered the favoured gentle shepherd Abel and Jordan is simply putting sheep back firmly

where they belong. In this sense, therefore, the world is not so much being unmade as being remade, taking the world back to the Golden Age and idyllic arcadian beauty. Besides, although Jordan abuses his power, he cannot be said to be solely to blame for what happens. The novel is far too complex for that.

If readers were to agree with the claim that the world is 'unmade', then they would have to see the world at the start of the seven day story as a perfect one. While it is true that there is a sense of beauty in the opening account of the gathering in of the harvest (there is joy in working together, in looking forward to the harvest supper, in electing the Gleaning Queen and the master who presides over them is benevolent), Thirsk reminds us that the work is hard and life is modest – much labour is spent putting a simple meal in front of them each day and after the gathering of the harvest, the next yearly round will start with the ploughing of the fields. It is no country idyll. From Thirsk's account it is clear that any sense of country life being perfect is a myth. Sickness has robbed him of his wife and Master Kent's wife Lucy has died, along with his daughter, in childbirth. As a result both men are wracked with sadness and this overshadows the happy gathering in of the barley.

However, it would be a mistake to claim that Edmund Jordan's arrival makes the lives of the fifty eight villagers better in any way. It would also be a mistake to think that his town ways are made better by his contact with the country. He has political power (rather dubiously gained through Crace's invention of a law which enables Jordan as Lucy Kent's nearest blood relative to inherit her property after her death) and he uses it ruthlessly. After he arrives he usurps Kent's power and when Kent's horse Willowjack is killed, although it seems likely that the villain is the female stranger, Jordan stamps his authority on the villagers and fills them with terror. Thirsk's description of him is significant: 'But what holds our attention and most persuades he is a man we should not trifle with is his high-crowned hat, his copotain, which he's adorned not only with the Jordan family badge but with both feather and gemstone clip. That hat alone says power, wealth and provenance. That hat alone could purchase each of us'. The collective fear here is made clear through Thirsk's use of the third person plural and the build up of detail of Jordan's hat steadily enforces Jordan's dominance (no wonder he became known locally as King Edmund). Jordan threatens and bullies and in order to secure his power, he shows how willing he is to find and punish scapegoats. He plays on the villagers' superstitions and claims that there must be sorcery amongst them and then terrifyingly he arrests two women and the child Lizzie Carr claiming they are witches. Like any skilful modern despot he turns the people against each other, demonstrating exactly what fear can do. What happens afterwards reminds us of what happened in Hitler's or Stalin's purges. Men and women betray each other and many run away while they can. Thus the village is depopulated; they are all harvested.

However, the blame cannot be placed entirely at the hands of Jordan. Kent also has political power but he uses it (or misuses it) in an entirely different way. Perhaps because Thirsk has a bond with Master Kent and because Kent is so benevolent, Thirsk becomes an unreliable narrator as he does not foreground Kent's ineptitude. (Thirsk is often a recorder of events rather than a critic). However, the reader can see further than Thirsk. As master, Kent allows the village to decay, his own manor house has fallen into disrepair through his negligence and when he is called upon to exact punishment he is not discerning. He wrongly places the blame for the fire in his dovecote on the strangers because it is convenient to do so. He then orders the shaving of their heads and he puts the men in the pillory, a disused form of ancient punishment erected on the site of the church which is not built. Crace makes the pillory a symbol of a curious crucifixion with the old man dying there in a horrible way: 'His wrists and throat were purple with bruising. It looked as if he'd tried to pull himself free and didn't care whether or not he left his head and hands behind'; one of his feet has been gnawed by someone's loose pig. The description is starkly matter of fact and all the more gruesome. At the end of the novel, Thirsk sees Kent riding away with Jordan and although no

sense is given of what happens to him, there is a sense that ‘an alliance has been forged’, that they have ‘joint interests’ and will both look forward to profiting.

It could be argued that Kent’s carelessness and lack of firm leadership also encourages similar behaviour in his people. When they could stand together and rebel against Jordan for taking their women, they do nothing. When they do choose to act it is too late and it is misdirected (they attack his groom and Mr Quill but Jordan is untouched). Crace’s presentation of both Kent and the villagers suggests that they are in need of change – though not of course the change that Jordan brings.

Crace’s position in this novel is interesting. By choosing a narrator who is articulate but often non judgemental ambiguities are set up and there is no final solution. At the start of the novel, when there is peace and harmony, there is also stagnation. It is not a vibrant community bustling with children. When strangers arrive who could revitalize the community, they are not welcome. It is therefore suggested that without the arrival of Jordan, the villagers could not survive anyway. As a result I do not think that the world is unmade in seven days and I do not think that those with political power are solely to blame.

Examiner commentary

This is a very confident and well-shaped response in which the candidate constructs a sophisticated argument. There is a real sense of grappling with the ideas set up in the quotation and although the ideas are a little awkwardly put together at times and although the argument is not clearly driven home, there is engagement and some interesting thinking going on. The candidate has good knowledge of the text and uses the open book well for relevant sections to comment on. Overall, this is an assured and perceptive response.

AO1

The essay is well structured and the argument proceeds systematically. The task is clearly in the candidate’s mind though at times ideas seem a little forced and over complicated. Nonetheless, the candidate writes with a strong and assured personal voice using literary critical concepts and terminology in an appropriate way. The written expression is mature. Quotation is well integrated into the argument.

AO2

There is perceptive understanding that *Harvest* is a novel that could be labelled in a number of ways and that Crace has deliberately constructed the novel to shape meanings. There is some insightful discussion of structure and language.

AO3

Relevant contexts are perceptively discussed, including the historical context and the context of when the text was written. Social and moral contexts are linked well to that of the genre of political and social protest writing.

AO4

As the candidate fully engages with the task and focuses on power and blame, there is perceptive exploration of the political and social protest writing genre thereby establishing connections with the wider genre. The focus on power is secure and ideas are thoughtfully interrogated.

AO5

There is perceptive and confident engagement with the debate set up in the question. The candidate is clearly thinking and takes an unusual angle. There is some complexity in the answer. This response seems consistent with the Band 5 descriptors.

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Introduction

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To what extent do you agree with this view? Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed exploration of Crace’s authorial methods.

Band 2 response

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Things then change when Jordan arrives. He has a lot of political power. He doesn’t talk to the villagers or share things with them. They do not really know what he is doing. He believes in ‘Progress and Prosperity’. But this is only for him. He says that when he brings in sheep farming there will still be some jobs for some people. But you can’t trust him.

Other changes that he makes are to do with the law. When Willowjack is killed he says he will find out who did it and before the end of the day that person will be punished by law. He makes people afraid in the way he goes about trying to find out who did it. He also says he will build a church with a big steeple. This could be seen as a good thing but Jordan makes it seem threatening. In a sense he causes the deaths of Mr Quill.

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Examiner commentary

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AO1

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AO2

There is a simple understanding that Crace has constructed this novel. Some simple comments are made about structure, voice and language and how they shape meaning.

AO3

There is simple understanding of how contexts operate in relation to the question and the candidate comments on moral and social contexts. These are simply linked to the political and social protest writing genre.

AO4

As the candidate writes about power and who is to blame for what happens to the villagers, the candidate connects with the wider genre of social and political protest writing.

AO5

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Specimen question commentary

A-level English Literature B (7716/7717)

Elements of political and social protest writing

Resource package: Paper 2B, Section B

For teaching from September 2015

Introduction

This resource explains how a question taken from the specimen assessment material addresses the assessment objectives, with some suggestions of how the task might be approached. The suggested ideas that are included are not exhaustive, but the explanation will provide a workable way into the question and the intention is to offer some support for teachers preparing students for the examination.

Paper 2B, Section B

This type of question from Section B of Paper 2 Elements of political and social protest writing invites students to write about the extent to which they agree with a given view. Students are reminded to include in their answer relevant detailed exploration of the writer's authorial methods. The student will of course have to be mindful of whether the text is poetry, drama or prose to show how these major genres operate in terms of the sub genre (crime or political and social protest writing) which they are discussing. In their chosen question, students can show how their text can be interpreted in different ways and they can also offer a strong personal view which is rooted in the text. It should be noted that because this is an open book exam students are required to use specific parts of the text for detailed discussion.

Sample question

'In *Harvest*, the world is unmade in seven days and it is those with political power who are solely to blame.'

To what extent do you agree with this view? Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed exploration of Crace's authorial methods.

How the question meets the assessment objectives

In this question, as throughout the paper, the assessment objectives are all assessed. The application of the AOs in relation to the task is similar to the way it works in Section B questions on Paper 1. The key words and phrases in the question are: to what extent, relevant detailed exploration and authorial methods, and these are clearly connected to the assessment objectives.

Students also need to engage with ‘those with political power’ and think about whether those with power are ‘solely to blame’.

AO1 will be tested through the way the students construct their arguments and express their ideas. Here they will be using literary and critical language appropriate to political and social protest writing. **AO2** is set up in the requirement for students to include a detailed exploration of Crace’s authorial methods and in doing this they will show how these methods shape meanings. Here students will specifically have to address narrative methods and the post modern form. **AO3** will be addressed through the students showing their understanding of the political and social protest writing contexts of *Harvest* as they focus on political power; and in addition, their debates will incorporate comment on the social and historical contexts of the novel. In writing about ‘blame’ students will necessarily be engaging with moral and judicial contexts (**AO3**). **AO4** will be addressed as students will be connecting with the wider political and social protest writing genre as they debate the issue of political power. **AO5** will be addressed when students assess the viewpoint that it is those with political power who are solely to blame for the world’s being unmade in seven days in *Harvest*. Students will need to think about just who Crace presents as being responsible for the unmaking of the world. Here they will be able to use their texts in an explicit way to select apposite material in support of their argument; they can also use this material to write about authorial method. Comment on structure, voices, settings and language can be woven into the argument. Students need to think about how the methods selected help them to decide to what extent they agree with the given view.

Possible content

There are plenty of ways in which students can approach this task as they discuss to what extent they agree with the given view. Some will focus on the early modern historical setting that Crace chooses and discuss the power of Master Jordan and by association the power of his class in the destruction of the semi pastoral existence of the villagers. Focus will be on the demise of the feudal society and the impact enclosures have on the lives of ordinary workers; much could be said about the introduction of sheep farming and the way it changed the communal reliance on arable farming. It is likely that Jordan’s lack of affinity with the people and the land will be discussed and how his main concerns and interests are money, profits and economic advantage. Jordan can be contrasted with the old order and the benevolent ruling of Master Kent. It may be that some students will see Jordan as an anti-God figure, reversing the creation process, destroying human lives. Focus might also be on his machinations and his tyrannical power. He does not tell the villagers what he is doing, but makes use of their innocence and ignorance (playing on their superstitions) as he empties the village. His power is shown through his bullying and his oppression of the people.

Jordan can also be seen as a destroyer of beauty, out of tune with the earth’s natural rhythms and unable to appreciate what the land gives. If this argument is pursued, students might well discuss the part played by the narrator here and the essentially elegiac and nostalgic tone. There will be plenty of opportunities to discuss language choices and how they shape meanings.

Some students might argue that Master Kent is more to blame than Jordan because he is essentially backward looking. He does not prepare his people for change and encourages complacency. Although he has power, he does not use it in an effective way and in many ways is inept. For example he punishes the wrong people for the fire which destroys his barn and dovecote and the punishment he metes out is not well considered. In his hands justice is rather random and when he does act it has terrible consequences. Kent could be held responsible for the stagnation of the village. It is a village where life is not being revitalized; it is backward looking. For years, it

seems, the villagers have accepted that the land beyond the village – Turd and Turf – is simply a cess pool. There seems to be no desire to improve the conditions of their lives. Although Thirsk clearly likes Master Kent, his attitude towards him is ambiguous; there is criticism in the subtext because the stagnating world is the world Kent oversees.

Students might also focus on the culpability of this inward looking community themselves. They do not welcome outsiders and their attitude towards the three strangers is negative and short sighted. These people could clearly have brought some spirit and revitalization, as Thirsk suggests in his fascination with Mistress Beldame. The villagers, though, are full of fears and superstitions, locked into rituals and pagan ceremonies. They also show little resistance to Jordan. Thirsk does not suggest they are thinking political beings and although he has some astuteness, he struggles to act and to make decisions. Their attitude towards women is also unprogressive and some of their problems emanate from this. Perhaps, it could be argued, this society is crying out for progressive leadership.

It could be that some students will challenge the idea of the world being 'unmade' by enclosures. Some might argue that it is a misconception to think that the world Crace presents is perfect and idyllic. Students might concede that for the particular fifty eight inhabitants, life is destroyed but it could be argued that the novel suggests that there has to be sacrifice and suffering if humanity is to develop and move forward. Given that this is a post 2000 novel, appropriate comment might be made about later historical periods, for example the agrarian, industrial and technological revolutions. It might be argued that changes might be lamentable for some readers as they are for the villagers, but for others they are necessary and human beings have to embrace change. If such an argument is pursued, students might challenge the idea that the world readers enter at the start of the novel is a well made Eden. Far from being idyllic, life is hard. The world entered at the start of the novel is somewhat beguiling. It seems to be a world of plenty; harvest is being celebrated with much rejoicing. However, Thirsk reminds readers that after the harvest, ploughing customarily recommences and life is hard. There are constant reminders that life is a challenge.

Students will also have to understand how to effectively use their open book texts. To do this they will need to have been specifically taught how to respond to open book examinations. They need to know that it means more than looking up quotations. Selecting key passages for detailed focus is essential and clearly students need to be able to navigate their way around their texts in an efficient way so that they are not wasting valuable examination time looking for those passages. It is expected that students will choose relevant sections of their texts on which to base their discussion and use specific details as they construct their answers.

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Text overview - *Harvest*

A-level English Literature B (7716/7717)

Elements of political and social protest writing

Resource package: Paper 2B, Section B

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Introduction

Read our overview which shows how teachers can consider *Harvest* in relation to the genre of political and social protest writing. We haven't covered every element of this genre. Instead we hope this guide will provide a springboard to help you plan, and to get you and your students thinking about the text in more detail.



'I fear his harvesting. I think he means to shear us all, then turn us into mutton.'

Overview

Set in an indeterminate Medieval, Tudor or Elizabethan era, *Harvest* tells the story of the swift destruction of an isolated rural community due to the decision of the new master, Edmund Jordan, to enclose the land and begin sheep-farming. Thus this will be their "last harvest" and the only world they know will be "unmade" in merely seven days in an inversion of the Christian story of creation.

The disregard of a rural community and destruction of their natural way of life for profit

The central issue that the novel explores is the manner in which the people are dispossessed and their way of life is destroyed in the name of profit and progress. The land that the community has known and worked for generations ("since Adam's time" seemingly) is to be enclosed; the new master intends "the enclosing and engrossing of our fields with walls and hedges, ditches, gates. He means to throw a halter round our lives. He means the clearing of our common land. He means the cutting down of trees". Thus there is destruction of the villagers' natural rhythms where they work harmoniously with nature, in contrast to the materialistic and aberrant urban existence where

people believe food is “magicked up from God knows where”. It is this prospect and the knowledge that “our final harvest might have come and gone” that ominously haunts the entire novel. The new master’s acts are seen in purely materialistic terms – he has no affinity with the land but would “prefer to remain in his great merchant house...and simply check the figures”; he has no regard for old feudal codes where a master has responsibility to his people, but rather claims “we should not deceive ourselves that in a modern world a common system such as ours which only benefits the commoners...could earn the admiration of more rational observers.” Rather, he intends to make the land profitable, even if this means destroying its natural beauty, so he questions “How can it profit us that there are trees...We would be wise to hew it down and trade its timber”. “Profit, Progress, Enterprise...are his [Jordan’s] private Muses”. Thus regardless of the fact that this enclosure results in the disenfranchisement and eviction of the people who have maintained and loved the land, he intends to rob them “of their spirits and their futures, as well as of their fields” for personal gain. As such, Crace condemns this destruction of rural living and English countryside and the way in which the people are seen as mere commodities. Jordan intends to “quantify and measure” them and so they become a kind of human harvest, dehumanised by their landlord and replaced by sheep (as perhaps anticipated by the shearing of Mistress Beldame and her fellows).

Progress and modernity

Although Jordan’s behaviour is presented as callous and driven by greed, there is an ambiguity about the necessity of his actions. This is a community where “Plenty, here, has wed itself to Leanness” and where their sole task is “to defend ourselves against hunger [although]...The clamour deafens us.” It is an introspective community, where justice is poorly managed and where rivalries and arguments dangerously flare up. It is not a way of life that appears sustainable – it is too hard and bloody and thus some form of progress however unwelcome does indeed appear necessary.

Isolationism

The novel could also be said to examine the dangers of isolationism (a particularly poignant political issue given the debates over Scotland’s independence, immigration and Britain’s position in the EU). The villagers in *Harvest* are a community that does not welcome outsiders and their determination to isolate themselves can be perceived as part of their downfall. Despite being amongst them some twelve years, Thirsk counts himself “amongst those aliens” and is aware that he will be one of the first they turn upon and yet their failure to involve him means that they do not gain his knowledge about their land. The three strangers are greeted with violence and hostility that results in loss of life and tragedy when they could have proved useful extra hands. This is perhaps particularly ironic given the fact that the villagers, by the end of the novel, will be placed in the same position as the earlier strangers, begging for acceptance in a foreign community. The Village itself is cut off from the outside world, which is “two days by post horse, three days by chariot” away, and thus the villagers have no knowledge or understanding of the world beyond their boundaries, which places them in a precarious position when they are forced to emigrate. Their closed community has also evidently resulted in struggle and inbreeding so they “live in a rookery...just like rooks we have begun to sound and look the same,” which in turn means there are not enough women for the men to marry (hence their lustful excitement at the appearance of Mistress Beldame). Their situation also means they have “not had much success with breeding their inheritors or raising sturdy offspring”. They are also a Godless community (there is no church) and there are no law courts or vestiges of human civilisation. In cutting themselves off from the outside world and failing to welcome new blood, the members of the community could be seen to

be the authors of their own degeneration and so the novel could be read as a condemnation of blind isolationism.

Mob mentality and violence

The novel could also be said to explore the dangers of mob mentality and violence. It was written in the wake of the London riots of 2011 so in this respect it could gain significance. The people of the village “unmake” their own world as much as their new master does. Their fears about the outsiders, who announce their arrival with an ominous smoke signal, are understandable given the fact that their living is so meagre that it barely sustains their own people, so they view newcomers as “funguses that seek to feed on us”. Nonetheless, their brutal welcoming as they march towards the newcomers and “strike the dwelling on its roof”, leaving its inhabitant with “blood...marking her cheeks like tears”, is savage and inhuman. It is this first act of mob mentality that then leads to further tragedy – the death of Mistress Beldame’s father, the killing of Willowjack in revenge and the imprisonment of the “three witches” who are accused and tortured.

Likewise, although the village has a just grievance against its treatment by Jordan and his men, the violent manner in which they tackle and express their frustration when they attack his groom and horrifically slash his face with a pruning blade “widening his...quipping mouth, from lip to cheek” is grotesque and barbaric. It is an attack that turns the people into animals – “a hundred angry, waspy fists” – and ultimately results in their self-removal from the land as they are all too aware that their attack on their new master’s man will result in severe punishment. Thus Crace, even as he sympathises with the villagers’ plight, condemns their mob violence and presents it as bringing about their own eviction from Eden.

Social division

The novel explores the deep divide between the rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless. With the arrival of Jordan, this division is made all the more obvious, as is the inequality of a social system that keeps the poor oppressed and rewards those who already have status and riches with yet more. This comment, from a Marxist perspective, also resonates beyond the novel. Whilst Thirsk points out that “all we require for our estate is earth for carpeting, rubble walls and a pair of heart cross-beam timers”, by contrast the wealthy “want cossetting” and “sleep in fine linen or silky camlet sheets”. More significant still, whereas the ordinary labourers work on the land, know it intimately and have been there for generations, it is still the rich who own it and can dispossess their tenants on a whim – a right that Jordan crudely and cruelly exercises.

Abuse of power

Politically, the novel also explores the abuse and misuse of power. Whilst Master Kent is described as an “even-handed, subtle Caesar” who attempts to sustain and protect his village, he is ultimately seen as inept. He fails to recognise who the true culprits are concerning the burning of his dovecote; he is unable to stand up to his cousin Jordan or prevent his torture of the local women; his “modest punishment” for the newcomers of a week in the pillory and for each to humiliatingly “have your head shaven” proves thoughtless and unjust. Moreover, Thirsk says “he’d rather tolerate a wrongdoer amongst his working hands than rob a family of their father, husband, son” implying that he is unable to control or maintain justice over his flock.

His soft-handed approach to ruling, however, is juxtaposed with the savage tyranny of Jordan, whose abuse of power is obvious. Jordan rules by instilling fear in the village occupants – threatening the killer of Willowjack that he “cannot expect to walk these lanes tomorrow” – and

allowing the women, including a mere child, to be taken into “custody,” and forced into confession through torture (Thirsk speculates that he “must have promised a free hand in their tormenting”). Even his treatment of his own men smacks of abuse as he straps the injured groom to a horse, forcing him to ride with the party, though Thirsk himself observes he is unlikely to survive the journey. Yet all this is intended to stamp his authority upon the people for, as Thirsk observes, “There’s nothing like a show of heavy justice – and a swinging corpse – to persuade a populace not used to formal discipline that compliance in all matters – including those regarding wool and fences – is beyond debate.”

From a political perspective, Crace thus asks the reader to contemplate these different styles of leadership, both of which are found wanting and prove destructive and to perhaps question how such an unruly populace could be justly and efficiently managed.

Treatment of women

It could also be argued that the novel explores the treatment of women and the roles into which they are almost stereotypically cast. Some women in this novel are cast as whores, such as Mistress Beldame, after whom the men lust and can use merely to satisfy their sexual pleasure, and the Widow Gosse, who Thirsk treats similarly. Alternatively, some are “sorceresses” – dangerous and dark when they are not controlled by men (Mistress Beldame is both object of desire and sorceress). Otherwise, they are either child bearers or seen as idols, such as Thirsk’s and Master Kent’s wives who, in death, are presented as pure and perfect despite their failure to bear their husbands children. Yet in all these roles, women remain ultimately powerless, their bodies inscribed with the identities their male counterparts place upon them and frequently suffering for the men’s sins.

Injustice and punishment

The term ‘justice’ recurs repeatedly in this novel and Crace forces us to consider not merely the injustice of enclosure, but the injustices that occur in community life. For instance: the treatment of the newcomers, who are “punished unjustly because of our men’s deceit and silence”, results in the older stranger’s gruesome death as well as the younger’s suffering. Consequently, Thirsk admits “a mighty storm of reckoning was on its way. The air was cracking with the retributions and damnations that...I knew that some of us deserved” and thus the community’s exile from their own land is in some way seen as a kind of poetic justice. Likewise, the treatment of the women, “dragged away like sows to face the consequences of their meddling” and then tortured without evidence in the “Jordan Court”, is perceived as unjust as Jordan’s men use the word “witchery” as license “to do precisely what they want”. Yet, equally, the rough justice meted out by the mob on the groom, on whom “a thousand stinging grievances are” settled, is equally unjust and is an act for which the community is indirectly punished. Thus Crace presents a lawless world where justice is misapplied and inadequate. Those who suffer the most are often seen as the most innocent, such as Lizzie Carr, whilst the primary culprits, like the Derby twins, are allowed to slink away and the only individual who shows any courage or sensitivity to the notion of justice, Mr Quill, is savagely murdered and abandoned.

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