

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate 11

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for this piece of the Portfolio writing.

The candidate was awarded **15 marks**.

Genre: Creative – poetry Title: Sonderkommando Man

This is an extremely ambitious subject for this candidate and is realised with a high degree of success. The persona of the poem is identified as a Jewish prisoner preparing the bodies of his fellow Jews for the cremation ovens in a Concentration Camp. The poet conveys the desire the persona has to give dignity and identity to the dead and his fear that when he is inevitably killed, no-one will be left to remember his existence and motivations.

The poem begins powerfully: "When I collect my friends...". The poet repeats "I", conveying the sense of guilt and responsibility, as well as the isolation brought on by this terrible role. Yet, the persona retains the language of intimacy and humanity. He imagines the victims have died calling on God – or cursing him. The placing of: "He lurks there / even while their skin crusts / In the wake of their suffocation." implies that God is still part of this universe for the persona; his duty is to perform the destruction of the bodies in such a way that their humanity is not lost, not forgotten: "It is I who fastens mouths and eyes, / Shapes immortalised in my mortal mind." (Verse 3)

The second verse contains two powerful metaphors to convey the suffering and emaciation of the victims and the fact that they have been objectified by the Nazis. However, they retain their individuality for the persona:

"I reach for a hand; / a body hangs over my shoulder."

"Its bones jab me..." The dead are demanding attention from him. He sees the beauty of "the piano keys", "a stole", but we are reminded of the horror of the treatment which has brought humanity to this point.

In verse 3, the change of verse form indicates the change to a personal reflective stance from the persona in an insightful and imaginative passage:

"Each new shell feeds my fear / Of never being known / Like I know them." The enjambment conveys the uncontrollable nature of this fear and demonstrates the poet's control of material and form.

Verses 4, 5 and 6: The isolation that has been emphasised in the previous verse is developed by the introduction of the Man in the Moon who seems to oversee an empty and disinterested universe:

“His flat face... / He does not believe... / We know no common language... / He and his stars mock us together...”

However, the final line emphasises that judgement is being passed on humanity and the persona’s complicit guilt: “Sheltering the ground from their glare.”

Within this reflection the poet develops an understanding of the guilt felt by the persona, using the lexis of religious crime, guilt and punishment:

“conscience; torment; scarlet letters; not on my hands; remains; stain; ash; a wandering” (Jew?)

By this means the crime of the Holocaust is a burden that the whole of humanity must take responsibility for – a powerful conclusion from this writer.

The final three lines re-iterate the persona’s knowledge that he too will perish in the camp and be turned to ash:

“In a few hours, mine rise in ash:

A wandering canopy,

Sheltering the ground from their glare.”

The cadence of this verse indicates the skilful use of style, technique and particularly language, which characterises this piece of writing.

The poetic form is closely tied to the development of the content of the poem.

The first two of the six verses each contain six lines of “free” verse and describe the actions undertaken by the persona. The remaining four verses each have five lines and convey the persona’s reflection on the burdens he has been given and his inevitable fate. The repeated use of long and short lines brings effective emphasis to the ideas contained in the poem and indicates skilful shaping which contributes significantly to impact:

The writing is characterised by a sureness of tone throughout. The word choice, word-placement, use of stress and sound are considered and poetic. The writer has created a powerfully credible persona in a considerable act of imagination and a clearly distinctive authorial voice.

Content

Treatment of central thematic concerns / ideas/ feelings which reveal sustained thoughtfulness, insight and imagination throughout.

Structure

Skilful shaping and sequencing which contributes significantly to impact.

Tone/mood

A tone and mood which are skilfully created and rigorously sustained, revealing a committed and clearly distinctive authorial voice.

Expression

A skilful use of style, technique and language and a high degree of originality.

The poem fully meets the descriptors of the range 15-13 and is therefore awarded a mark of 15.