**IB ENGLISH A LITERATURE: POETRY OF THE ROMANTIC ERA**

**INTRODUCTION TO PAPER 2 – THE ESSAY**

This is an example of an essay that a student at this school wrote. It was the first essay of the course, just as you are writing your first Paper 2 essay this week. This is not a very good essay, scoring 10/25 and this student made huge improvements throughout the course and finished up with a 5 in HL English. The essay has some good bits but mostly, it is imprecise, with underdeveloped ideas. Read it and pay attention to the annotations in the margin.

The essay topic was this:

**In many poems there is a moment when there is a discernible shift in tone or attitude. Using evidence of such a moment in poems by at least two poets you have studied, show how this works and to what effect.**

Things can only be measured when there is something to compare it to. For this reason poets often have moments of contrasts that change the tone or attitude of a poem. A very effective method as it helps us to understand just how strong the feelings and emotions are due to this contrast. This occurs in ‘the daffodils’ by William Wordsworth where, although subtle, the change in Williams’s physical position itself adds to the wonder of the daffodils. Similarly, ‘London’ written by William Blake has multiple contrasts which focuses the reader’s attention on the most upsetting facts of London’s previous state of affairs.

Wordsworth was having a shocker of a day, until that is he stumbled upon a beautiful field of daffodils. He gazes at them for a long time and the next time he’s feeling down he thinks about them to cheer him up. An ‘abab’ rhyme scheme is used to link imagery and help emphasise the beauty of these daffodils. Hills is rhymed with daffodils, trees with breeze, way with bay and so forth. This continues throughout the first three stanzas in where the rhyming of the words join to give positive connotations to nature and the beauty of these daffodils. In the fourth stanza however the connected words have a less upbeat mood to them. Mood and solitude, ‘on my couch I lie’ with ‘inward eye’. This shows the difference in Wordsworth’s mood between being happy and enjoying the company of the daffodils compared to him alone and bored at home. Thanks to the comparison we can further understand His joy when experiencing the daffodils and after when he missed them.

Connotations to numbers appear three times throughout the poem which further explains his emotions. In the very first line the word ‘lonely’ clearly shows he’s down and feeling low. In the second stanza however, among the daffodils, the phrase ‘ten thousand’ shows us that these majestic daffodils have fixed his loneliness and he’s now ecstatic. ‘Vacant’ in the final stanza however shows us with the lack of the magical daffodils he’s now worse than ever due to the missing of the daffodils. The three stages of the poem clearly depicts Wordsworth’s sheer joy in seeing the daffodils and therefore the amazement of said daffodils.

William Blake isn’t quite as complimentary to his surroundings in ‘London’ as the other William was in ‘the Daffodils’. In fact Blake doesn’t have anything nice to say at all. He is disgusted by the present state of society, by oppression of the lower class and by a poor moral compass shown by the majority of Londoners.

The third line is very interesting in that it has internal contrast. The first and third line talks off chimney sweepers and soldier’s, considered to be of lower class and also organic beings. Whereas the second and fourth line talk of churches and palace walls that are clearly considered property of the higher class an inanimate objects. No matter the socio economic or physical state however all are having it tough and have dark correlations attached to them in their respective lines. The contrast between high and low class shows that this plague of moral decay seems to affect all the inhabitants of London. The contrast between living and inanimate object however shows the individuals ability to deal with these issues. The lower class must personally handle them, with their miserable lives of war and poverty. The rich however are able to protect themselves by throwing money at a problem, having only their possessions affected.

It’s fair to conclude the third stanza is politically based due to the presence of classes and therefore contrasts with the fourths stanza’s theme of morals, or rather the lack there of. This isn’t hard to pick up on due to the fact that he is describe young prostitutes and new born babies crying. “And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.” Another piece of evidence is found in the word plagues which has multiple connotations. Firstly a link to the idea of prostitution it could simply be referring to a sexual disease brought about by poor moral behaviour. Or secondly, as it’s a plural Blake may have intended it to relate to the seven biblical plagues. Suggesting the state of London is so appalling it mirrors Egypt’s which took divine intervention to reverse. These two stanzas show how there is nothing good in London, that everything seems to suffer from being inside city boundaries.

Contrast, no matter how subtle helps us understand more of what these poets try to tell us. Whether it be superficial like Wordsworth’s the daffodils or slightly more controversial like the division of upper and lower class in Blake’s London recognising this is a building block to understanding the poems full vision for a poem. Because although generally it simply adds emphasis to the point at hand some examples like that of London have entirely new thought provoking thinking tangents that arguably say more than the poem as a whole.

**General remarks:**

* The biggest flaws in this essay are these:
  + The essay topic is at best implicitly addressed. It does not explicitly build an argument.
  + The poems are treated separately; they are not compared.
  + Some expression is unclear and/or too colloquial.
  + There is not enough evidence quoted from the poems and then unpacked.
* This student really does understand the poems pretty well. He also understands a little about the context(s) of the poems. That understanding is not made clear. As a marker, I am doing the work, looking for evidence that the student has identified a shift in tone, and giving the student the benefit of the doubt
* Punctuation and expression are not appalling, but the titles of the poems are not correctly punctuated. This is never a good look because it will undermine your argument.

**Here are the grades this student earned, and the feedback I gave him:**

A 2

B 2

C 2

D 2

E 2

TOTAL **10/25**

A good implicit understanding of the content of the poems and some flashes of understanding about how techniques used can affect the reader.

Aim to have one over-arching thesis that unifies your whole essay and attacks the essay topic directly and explicitly. You wrote a series of fairly discreet paragraphs, each half of the essay focusing on a different poem. It's better to show close comparisons rather than deal with the poems separately.