

393/01

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

ELang3: Exploring Language in Use

A.M. WEDNESDAY, 17 January 2007

(1½ Hours)

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

In addition to this examination paper, you will need an 8 page answer book.

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

Answer **one** question.

INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

Both questions carry equal marks.

In this unit you will be assessed on your ability to:

- communicate clearly the knowledge, understanding and insight appropriate to the study of language, using appropriate terminology and accurate and coherent written expression;
- know and use key features of frameworks for the systematic study of spoken and written English;
- understand, discuss and explore concepts and issues relating to language in use;
- distinguish, describe and interpret variation in the meanings and forms of spoken and written language according to context.

Remember that marking will take into account the quality of written communication used in your answers.

Answer one question.

Either,

1. The following three texts are reviews of a production by the Welsh National Opera Company of the opera 'The Merry Widow' by Franz Lehar, in October 2005. The production starred Lesley Garrett, a well-known singer on television.

Text A is from a review by Hugh Canning in *The Sunday Times Culture Supplement*, 9 October 2005.

Text B is from a review by Rupert Christiansen in *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 October 2005.

Text C is from a review by Anna Picard in *The Independent*, 9 October 2005.

Analyse and discuss the use of language in these texts.

Your answer should include exploration and analysis of some or all of the following:

- lexis;
- grammar, including syntax (the structure of phrases, clauses and sentences);
- tenor (register) – especially the degree of formality or informality;
- how the writers use language to convey their opinions and attitudes – to the production, the star, the singing, etc.;
- how language is used to interest or entertain the reader;
- similarities and differences between the reviews;
- any other points that you find of interest.

You should deal with Text A briefly, and spend longer on Texts B and C.

TEXT A (from *The Sunday Times Culture Supplement*)

The return to the opera stage, after an absence of more than five years, of the popular English soprano Lesley Garrett should be cause for rejoicing. She is the diamond in the dunghill that is Welsh National Opera's dreary new staging of Lehar's *The Merry Widow*. Looking gorgeous in Agostino Cavalca's My Fair Ladiesque frocks, she works her famous bottom off to inject some life into Patrice Caurier and Moshe Leiser's leadenly spoken, unfunny and drab-looking production. Garrett, Donald Maxwell (Baron Zeta) and Linda Ormiston (Praskowia) deliver hints of champagne operetta effervescence in an evening of purgatorial tedium, but the real flattener is the pedestrian conductor, Michal Klauza.

© Hugh Canning/*The Sunday Times*, 9 October, 2005

TEXT B (from *The Daily Telegraph*)**Merry, perhaps – but still a wretched widow** by Rupert Christiansen

A lively, useful soubrette at the London Coliseum during the 1980s, Lesley Garrett subsequently transformed herself, through miracles of marketing and promotion, into "England's most popular soprano", capitalising so cunningly on her aggressively cheerful personality and high-street glamour that nobody seemed to notice that her gung-ho singing, amplified by kindly microphones, was pretty mediocre.

But her televisual celebrity - recently redoubled by appearances on *Strictly Come Dancing* - draws crowds, and one can hardly blame Welsh National Opera for booking her for the title role in a new production of Lehar's *The Merry Widow* - her first venture into staged opera since 1998.

Alas, the gamble only serves to expose the limits to her skills. The singing is solid enough and she's careful with words, but the voice has no sheen or glow, her range is narrow and her technique cautious. She offers no nuances of style or grace of phrasing, and I didn't think much of her perfunctory waltzing either.

Her characterisation of the Widow is pure Lesley Garrett - plucky, pert, brash. Yes, Hanna Glawari is meant to be vulgar, but she isn't just a suburban gold-digger out of *OK!* magazine.

Where was the erotic allure, the cool wit, the loving heart? Still, the svelte and shapely Garrett provides an object lesson in how to make a little talent go a long way, and for that she must be admired.

She was not much helped by her Danilo, overplayed as a feckless silly-ass by a hoarse-sounding Jeffrey Black. Neither the Valencienne (Ailish Tynan) nor the Rosillon (Tracey Welborn) was up to much either and, embarrassingly, the loudest final applause justifiably went to Geoffrey Dolton, whose Dickensian caricature of the revolting hunchback lackey Njegus was touched with comic genius.

Michal Klauza's conducting only spasmodically caught Lehar's magical lilt, and the less said about the production the better, because Patrice Caurier and Moshe Leiser have fallen flat on their faces with a cramped, ugly and clumsy staging which dragged on for more than three dreary hours.

Carl Rosa's shorter, swifter (and unsubsidised) version, which toured the country last summer, offered a far more entertaining, sensitive and attractive version of this masterly operetta than WNO's wretched misfire.

Reproduced by kind permission from "The Merry Widow" by Rupert Christiansen, *The Daily Telegraph* - 3 October 2005

TEXT C (from *The Independent*)

The Merry Widow

By Anna Picard

A serviceable soprano of perennially perky demeanour, Lesley Garrett has become the Moira Anderson de nos jours. Welsh National Opera's decision to build a production of *The Merry Widow* around her therefore seems likely to be endorsed by the box-office. Whether it will win any floating listeners to this arthritic romantic comedy is another matter.

5 The first night audience was dominated by those who could - and did - hum every note of Lehar's Viennese trifle. They cooed contentedly whenever Garrett appeared, and gave off a warm, malty glow like several hundred mugs of Horlicks. How I envied them their happiness. For directors whose reputations were built on tight, glamorous comedies, Patrice Caurier and Moshe Leiser's period production is unaccountably drab of appearance, low on laughs, and devoid of sexiness. Like sportsmen, opera singers rarely impress when they're talking, and despite Jeremy Sams's witty translation, the spoken dialogue was as seductive as varicose veins. Caesurae stretched to infinity like Hollywood sunsets, cues were dropped like paper wrapping on Christmas morning. Then, every 20 minutes or so, the band struck up, Ms Garrett clicked her fan, the hummers cleared their throats, and off we waltzed again.

15 Garrett (Hanna Glawari) excepted, the singing is of poor quality. Geoffrey Dolton (Njegus) excepted, the acting is atrocious. Michal Klauza's conducting, meanwhile, has all the élan of a tepid electric blanket. I assume that Caurier and Leiser were sexing things up by hanging Egon Schiele's jaded paintings of his nude sister on the velvet walls of Maxim's pleasure palace. In fact, they cast a morbid, venereal pall over the belated consummation of Hanna's autumn romance, and the feather headdresses and saucy petticoats of the half-dozen can-can dancers were more effective. Thus, while Garrett played to the grey-pound gallery, six chorus girls and a slapstick gofer stole the show.

25 Were *The Merry Widow* a blind date, I'd have run to the loo, called a friend, and arranged to be phoned with the news that my Great Aunt Billie had been rushed to hospital and was calling my name with her last breath. Alas, Great Aunt Billie passed on several decades ago and the phone call never came. Instead, I sat in a stew of depression for 210 long minutes while vowing never again to attend operettas unless in France; where, as Mark Minkowski and Felicity Lott have shown, they take light music more seriously.

Reproduced with kind permission from "The Merry Widow" by Anna Picard, The Independent - 9 October 2005

Or,

2. The following two texts are reviews of the film 'Oliver Twist', released in October 2005. The film, based on the Victorian novel by Charles Dickens, was directed by Roman Polanski

Text A is from a review by James Christopher in *The Times* 'Screen' section on 6 October, 2005.

Text B is from a review by Cosmo Landesman in *The Sunday Times* 'Culture' magazine on 9 October, 2005.

Analyse and discuss the use of language in these texts.

Your answer should include exploration and analysis of some or all of the following:

- lexis;
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- similarities and differences between the reviews;
- any other points that you find of interest.

TEXT A (from *The Times* 'Screen')

Please, Roman, can we have some more?

The horrors of two childhoods 150 years apart inform a brilliant retelling of a classic story, says **JAMES CHRISTOPHER**

Oliver Twist

PG, 130 mins

- 5 **Who better to frame** the horrors of a 19th-century workhouse than a Jewish director orphaned by Auschwitz? Roman Polanski's gripping **Oliver Twist** is clearly inspired by his harrowing childhood, and he is unsparing about the brutality of the parish poorhouse. Despite being mounted like a period documentary, the film is not the cobble-licking grind you half expect. In fact, the power is in the witty detail: bewigged worthies tucking into Beef Wellington while Oliver comically demands more gruel; bracing slogans that look wildly out of place on these cruel walls, and characters as cherishable as moth-eaten dolls.
- 10
- 15 Polanski and Dickens had ringside seats at ghastly spectacles in different centuries, and the wisdom to wear their grievances lightly. You can't fault the child-friendly satire. Ronald Harwood's adaptation slices out the blubbery melodrama that matches Oliver to a 'lost' family and Cinderella fortune, concentrating instead on the hero's picaresque adventures.
- 20
- 25 Barney Clark plays Oliver just the right side of sweet. If he were a kiss-curl more cherubic he would be unbearable. It's his evergreen view of the capital, with all its foibles and iniquities, that makes the film such a pleasurable watch. London is a place of endless fascination and scrapes; an immoral stew and a huge, heaving, Hogarthian scum.
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- The fairytale irony is the curious security that Oliver enjoys in the most dishonest corners of the city after he's scooped from a doorway by Harry Eden's sharp-as-a-pin Artful Dodger. The thieving band of urchins shares a touching, tribal loyalty. Ben Kingsley's Fagin is the magnetic joy in this backstreet kingdom. He is Polanski's Shylock, with teeth missing and hair so wispy it's hardly there. The rheumy squint, the frail arthritic posture and easy cackle hide a shrewd mind and a surprisingly genial heart.
- 35
- 40
- 45 But the film is impressively stingy with sentiment, and quietly scathing about the institutional hypocrisy of pompous beaules and power-mad judges. It's impossible not to be affected by the climactic Newgate reunion between Oliver and Fagin, where one of them has found his marbles and the other has lost all his.

© James Christopher/*The Times*, 6 October, 2005

TEXT B (from *The Sunday Times Culture magazine*)

Please sir, no more

Weak performances and a dearth of ideas make Polanski's *Oliver* a gruelling affair, says COSMO LANDESMAN

Oliver Twist PG, 130 mins **

Between television and the cinema, there have been nearly 20 adaptations of *Oliver Twist*. We now have a Twist to suit every taste. So, do we really need another telling of this story?

Polanski and his screenwriter Ronald Harwood (*The Pianist*), have gone back to the basics of Dickens's novel. To their credit, they've cut off a lot of the subplot fat – including the whole bit about Oliver's mother – and the fanciful additions of the musical version. And the film gets off to a very good start, with Oliver (Barney Clark) being introduced to the harsh life in the paupers' workhouse. Polanski has said that after *The Pianist*, his study of the horrors of Nazism, he was looking for a new and different project. Yet the opening scene of these pale, starving workhouse children, in their sackcloth uniforms, evokes the horrors of the concentration camp. This promises to be Dickens with the gloves off and not a touch of cosiness in sight.

But then the tale unfolds with all the familiarity of a favourite bedtime story: Oliver asks for more; Oliver goes to work for an undertaker; Oliver runs away to London; and so on. It's your typical big-screen adaptation of a literary classic, and Polanski is the exam swot who knows his stuff, but has nothing original to say. He's respectful of the source material, and is anxious to make his people and period look as authentic as possible. But the trouble with authentic-looking sets and costumes is that they look like authentic sets and costumes. His fog is as phony as a spray-on tan. You would expect something different from Polanski, but he never goes beyond the clichéd view of Victorian London, with a familiar parade of 'omeless little mites, pox-ridden prostitutes and swaying drunks. Sorry, Roman: been there, seen that, got the Gustave Doré T-shirt.

Polanski has said that the reason he made *Oliver Twist* is that he wanted a film his

children, and younger audiences, could enjoy. In theory, it's a great story for kids. It's about an orphan who goes on an amazing adventure in an attempt to escape from the dark England of workhouses and cruel adults, to find that other England of the kind and caring. But Twist – unlike that other famous orphan, Harry Potter – is too passive for today's young. He's a hero who's always in need of rescue.

Still, Polanski's film has child abuse, murder, guns, gangsters, buxom wenches and a hanging – what more could our bloodthirsty children want? What it doesn't have is any dramatic urgency, excitement or exuberance. Where are the scary bits, the thrilling bits that will burn into the memories of a new generation?

The film bears Polanski's name, but not his signature. A perfect example is Oliver's first night as an undertaker's apprentice, sleeping in the basement with the coffins. A boy trapped in a dark room, alone and surrounded by boxes for the dead; it's a perfect setting for the director of *Repulsion* and *Rosemary's Baby* to work his magic. Instead of experiencing Oliver's terror, though, we get a scene of mere spookiness that quickly fizzles out.

Polanski has certainly failed to get first-rate performances from his cast. Barney Clark has a naturally melancholic look, but he has trouble projecting Oliver's tortured emotional life. As for the casting of Jamie Foreman as Bill Sikes: what can I say about a performance that would look bad on *The Bill*? His Sikes is just nasty.

The only decent acting on display here is Ben Kingsley's Fagin. He's done the near impossible, and turned the most infamous Jew in fiction into a gentile! Maybe that's a little far-fetched, but this Fagin comes across more as an old thief and not primarily as a Jewish one. Still, one masterful performance can't save this film. Give me one chorus of *Food, Glorious Food*¹ rather than the entire 130 minutes of this plodding, lifeless Polanski production any day.

¹ a song from the musical *Oliver!*