

Paper 1 – Example Prose Commentary
Higher Level
November 2005

The passage 'Regeneration' is centered around one particular character, Burns, and follows his journey from sheer panic and desperation to a calmer state when he assess his situation more logically and regains a sense of perspective through the return of memory. Barker portrays nature initially as very hostile in a world of the unknown, but also shows that it can be both accommodating and forgiving.

Comment [KH1]: Introduction clearly outlines the main content of the passage

Comment [KH2]: Good sense of development and a more complex and subtle organizing principle than simply forcing the character to adopt one stance throughout

Comment [KH3]: Again a good sensitivity to the text that allows nature to be both hostile and forgiving

Burns' vulnerability and lack of familiarity with his surroundings is highlighted in the opening paragraph when 'He didn't know what to do ... it was so long since he'd been anywhere alone.' The setting of the passage intensifies this sense of the unknown and the repetition of the action of 'looking up and down' the lane underlines Burns' uncertainty and vulnerability. Barker uses a triad to underline the power of nature in the phrase, 'big, splashy, persistent,' describing the raindrops, which is juxtaposed to the apparent fragility of Burns.

Comment [KH4]: Clear topic sentence that outlines the focus of the paragraph

This fragility is further reinforced by the softness of the 'tuft of grey wool' compared to a 'fence whose wire twitched in the wind.' The personification of the wire highlights the hostility of the environment at this point and is juxtaposed to the fragile image of Burns created by the soft sound of the word 'tuft.' The connotations of lightness of this word and the alliteration of the letter 's' in the phrase 'slipping and stumbling' suggests Burns' weakness and also the fact that he is struggling against nature.

Comment [KH5]: Clear focus on literary features and their ultimate effect on the reader throughout

Comment [KH6]: Ideas developed clearly and in depth

At this point in the passage Burns appears to have no sense of direction or logic and the phrase 'a burning round the knees where the tight cloth chafed the skin' suggests that he has been a prisoner and is perhaps an escapee. Barker writes in the third person, as the omniscient narrator, and although the passage is centered around Burns, the reader has no insight into his thought of his confused state of mind and is further detached by Burns' lack of organisation in his actions.

Comment [KH7]: Good identification of this feature – although the effect on the reader is not very clear – why would the author prefer to leave us in the dark about Burns' state of mind

The tempo of the passage increases as Barker emphasises the aggression of nature. The 'rain beat' against Burns and the phrase 'the wind that seemed to be trying to scrape him of its side' particularly highlights Burns' insignificance and lack of power in comparison to the environment. The word 'scrape' especially highlights the futility of fighting against nature. The use of the short sentence, 'He stopped and looked across the field,' combines with the long descriptions of action, 'He didn't know where he was going ... but he ought to take shelter and began to run clumsily' to increase the pace of the passage. There is a definite sense of panic in Burns' actions, although the use of alliteration and onomatopoeia to show the tempo again highlight nature's resistance to his actions. The alliteration of the phrase 'the mud dragged' creates a long drawn out rather blunt sound which underlines the effort of Burns to escape the hostility of his environment.

Comment [KH8]: Nice, clear topic sentences that help develop the sense of a coherent argument that runs throughout the essay

An ominous threatening atmosphere is created with the faster pace of the passage at the point at which Burns is 'stumbling, almost

Comment [KH9]: Ideas developed in some depth with each new quotation revealing a new aspect of the idea that hasn't yet been explored – note that later quotations don't just repeat exactly the same ideas as the earlier ones – they take the idea in a new direction or reveal a new facet of it

Comment [KH10]: Good exploration of this more complex literary feature

blindly,' which creates a heightened sense of panic. The defensive actions of Burns at this point as 'he snatched' back his fingers from 'the slime' also increases the sense of the unknown and the anticipation of the reader. Barker centers the action of the passage around the image of 'the tree ... laden with dead animals' by building up to a crescendo for the revelation of this image. The phrase 'something brushed against his cheek' heightens the anticipation for this revelation, but the panic of Burns prevents him from discovering the tree calmly in a composed and logical manner.

Comment [KH11]: Continual focus on the effect on the reader

Barker manipulates the reader's response to the confronting image both through language and Burn's reaction to the tree. The repulsive simile 'bore them like fruit' juxtaposes the connotations of growth and life associated with fruit with the rather harrowing description of the 'dead animals.' The fox 'its lips curled back from bloodied teeth' at this point elicits not sympathy from the reader, but revulsion; fear dominates the reaction of Burns to the tree and again the use of alliteration and personification in the phrase 'twigs tore at him' highlights his panic. However, it is not the power of nature, but the abuse and destruction of nature that confronts both Burns and the reader.

Comment [KH12]: Good awareness that the whole of the character and his reaction to the tree is being used as a literary feature to create an effect on the audience

Comment [KH13]: Good ability to identify the key idea here

The introduction of the ominous and threatening character of Rivers is the turning point of the passage which marks the overcoming of sheer panic by Burns. There is a sense of danger in the fact that Burns 'heard River's voice as 'distinctly as he sometimes heard it in his dreams,' suggesting that Rivers is a haunting figure of fear for Burns. However, the return of memory and some sense of familiarity for Burns highlights a change in his state of mind and in his perception of nature. The word 'calmer' conveys this familiarity and the beginning of a logical assessment of the situation. Barker emphasises the courage of Burns in his determination and insistence that 'the voice was only a voice in his head.' The overcoming of panic is reinforced in the passage by an easing of the tension previously created by the desperation in Burns' desire 'to run' from the dead animals.

Comment [KH14]: Good sensitivity to shifts in tone or mood

Comment [KH15]: Good interpolation of ideas from subtle hints in the text

The maltreatment of the animals that were 'not nailed to [the tree] but tied by wings or paws' is emphasised by the fact that Burns 'had seen trees like this before.' Barker suggests Burns' tenderness as he 'releases a magpie' because 'his teeth 'were 'chattering' as a wing came away in his hand, showing a repulsion not towards the animal, but towards the cause of its suffering. Barker, at the end of the passage, portrays also nature's vulnerability and fragility, because the animals are shown as a part of nature. It is the final paragraph of the passage that encapsulates the softening of nature and its vulnerability to abuse by man, as well as its capacity to destroy. The threat that surrounds the character of Rivers suggest that he is linked to the 'corpses' of the animals and perhaps inflicted this cruelty on them. The calculated action of tying the animals 'by wings or paws or tails' and leaving them in 'various stages of decay' is almost sadistic. However, the ambivalence of the character of Rivers makes it unclear of his culpability for the tree, although it does not detract from the cruelty and thus the vulnerability of nature.

Comment [KH16]: A good development of this idea which nicely contrasts with the vulnerability of Burns at the start of the passage

Comment [KH17]: Good awareness of the ambiguity or ambivalence in the text

Burns, who even with the 'roughness of the bark against his 'knobby spine' seems much calmer and more comfortable at this point in the passage in the presence of the animals' corpses is able to work with nature through the cruelty. The phrase 'the circle of his companions'

suggests the extent of the comfort that they provide Burns and shows that nature can also be accommodating and forgiving.

The final line of the passage reflects the cyclical nature of life and natural processes and makes a reference to the title of the extract 'Regeneration.' Despite the cruelty that they have endured the animals can now dissolve into the earth as they were meant to do.' Burns seems much clearer on this point than with regards to his surroundings at the beginning of the passage, which highlights is journey from sheer panic to a calmer and more reflective state of mind. This line also alludes to the ability of nature to recover from adversity and in doing so highlights that it too can be fragile and vulnerable. The parallels between the tied animals, representative of the more fragile elements of nature, and Burns further underlines the importance of Barker's suggestion of working in harmony with nature rather than fighting it.

Comment [KH18]: Clear ending that does not simply sum up the previous ideas but draws the analysis to a close

Marks Awarded:

Understanding of the Text	4	Clear understanding of the events of the passage and some ability to explore the ambiguities and ambivalences of the passage. The majority of the text is covered.
Interpretation of the Extract	4	Convincing interpretation that is nicely drawn together into a coherent progression of ideas
Appreciation of Literary Features	4	Literary features are generally well used, although some of the more complex features such as narrative stance or structure, etc. could be more effectively used
Presentation	5	Overall the essay is very well structured with a clear development of individual ideas and a sense of overall progression as we move from one idea to the next
Language	4	Good clear language at points, although there is an absence of any really sophisticated vocabulary
	21	Level 7