

Paper 2 – Example Novel Essay
Standard Level
May 2006

Question 3b)

In what ways and for what purposes have your writers made use of the fantastic and / or unusual in two or three works you have studied?

The usage of the fantastic and unusual is explicit in both *Like Water For Chocolate* written by Laura Esquivel in 1989 and *Wide Sargasso Sea* written by Jean Rhys in 1966, giving a similar aspect to these unique novels.

This usage is brought out by not only insightful narrative techniques but also structure and symbolism, and it serves a myriad of purposes such as character portrayal, setting of tone and atmosphere and plot development. By incorporating various narrative and literary techniques and interspersing these with vivid visual imagery, these dexterous authors manage to highlight the distinctiveness of their novels.

The main narrative technique in *Like Water of Chocolate* is that of magic realism, a style that combines the fantastical and the ordinary, a style that Esquivel uses to include myth and folktale in a work that otherwise maintains an objective tone of realism. The first instance of magic realism is Tita's entry into the world, 'Tita was literally washed into this world on a great tide of tears ... As is evident, while this style introduces an element of uniqueness into the novel, it also sets an atmosphere of suffering, foreshadowing that suffering will be an integral part of Tita's life and anticipates the main conflict in her life, the denial of her marriage. Another incident of magic realism is utilised when Tita bakes the wedding cake for Pedro and Rosaura. As soon as people took their first bit of the cake, everyone was flooded with a great wave of longing. It is undeniably clear that food is a medium for Tita to express her emotions and one's attention is drawn to Tita's struggle and pursuit of love. Various other instances of magic realism are noted as the novel progresses and combined with a personal tone that resonates throughout this work, the reader is able to follow Tita's development and growth.

The narrative techniques used in *Wide Sargasso Sea* can also be described as unusual. Firstly, Rhys gives a voice to a marginalised character from *Jane Eyre*, that of Bertha Mason, and views her madness in an entirely different perspective, managing to simultaneously evoke elements of the Creole culture. This atypical nature of her novel is accentuated by the use of different narrative perspectives which contributes to character understanding. The novel begins with Antoinette describing her bleak and desolate state in the years before her marriage. The opening line itself, 'They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks,' sets a tone of loneliness and an atmosphere of isolation which directly parallels Antoinette's life. In the second part, Antoinette's husband, inferred to be Rochester from *Jane Eyre*, states, 'so it was all over ... everything finished, for better or for worse. While the author appears neutral by giving Rochester a voice, because he begins on a tone of negativity which continues throughout the second part, one is aware that he is not trustworthy and feels sympathy for Antoinette. The narrative voice of Grace Poole in Part Three informs one of the change of setting as an English woman is speaking. Also, due to the fact that she and not Rochester recounts what passed in the time lapse, one can infer that Rochester has distanced himself from Antoinette. Rhys utilises dialects when the natives are speaking to reflect their culture and this lends an aura of authenticity to the novel. Therefore her narrative techniques have used the unusual for the purpose of delineating character traits and

Comment [Kev1]: More detail would be good here and general comments (about the greatness of the texts or, in this case, their uniqueness) should be avoided otherwise the introduction ends up sounding like a blurb on the back of a book.

Comment [Kev2]: Some good details here, but these should feature as part of the main introduction

Comment [Kev3]: Once again, generalised praise like this should be avoided.

Comment [Kev4]: A nice degree of eloquence and linguistic control demonstrated throughout the essay.

Comment [Kev5]: Good specific reference to the effect of these features.

Comment [Kev6]: Good references to specific details from the text and some good use of quotation as well as a clear account of the effect on the reader

Comment [Kev7]: Clear structure and comparison

Comment [Kev8]: Consistent references to the text with clear comments on their effect on the reader

Comment [Kev9]: Although the candidate does need to stress the idea of 'the unusual' a little more. Perhaps by reinforcing the idea that this change of narrative voice is unusual as most novels have a consistent narrator.

Comment [Kev10]: This point is rushed and should either be left out or developed in a little more detail with the link to 'the unusual' made clear

setting an appropriate atmosphere which corresponds to the events taking place.

In *Like Water for Chocolate* a phrase on the front cover, 'A novel in monthly instalments. ...' reflects its structure. While this book is indeed divided into twelve chapters, one for each month of the year, it is important to note that the time span covered is much longer. The unusual structure of this novel reflects that of a cookbook and this serves to not only put the book in context for a feminist analysis but also a stress on food as a dominating theme and symbol. Each chapter begins with a list of ingredients for a recipe and the process for making the recipe is intertwined with the events that take place in each chapter. The recipes are not only a reflection of Mexican tradition but also reinforce the emotional oscillations of Tita. Thus, while the structure of this novel is extremely unusual it pertains to the book completely, allowing the author to explore aspects from the domestic realm and the kitchen.

The structure of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a tripartite structure, and while this may not seem very unusual, Rhys, like Esquivel, uses the structure as a means to trace stages in the growth of the principal characters. The structure of this book also traces the changes in setting which allows one to understand the importance of the landscape and brings out the themes of identity and belonging.

Symbolism is the act of endowing various objects with representative meanings. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the symbols of food, birds, tears, the bedspread and fire are all very prominent. 'Tita's domain was the kitchen.' This phrase immediately informs one that food will be the defining quality in Tita's character and as the novel proceeds, it is clear that food is a medium into which Tita transfers her emotions. The fact that the novel begins with the act of crying foreshadows that suffering will be an integral part of Tita's life and one is given an inkling of the struggle she will undergo. The freedom of the birds represents the freedom Tita craves from the fetters of tradition. Also, the absence of the cooing of the doves pre-empts the silence that will permeate Tita's life and the pigeon that dies from over nourishment is in stark contrast to Roberto who dies from a lack of nourishment. Tita knits the bedspread during her endless nights of insomnia. Thus the bedspread is an apt indicator of her sorrow and another medium into which Tita transfers her emotions. Tita leaves the ranch with the bedspread signifying that her misery is not over and that she will be compelled to return. Fire acts as a symbol of passion and destruction in the end of the novel when the fiery bodies of Tita and Pedro ignited the entire ranch.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the prominent symbols are fire, birds, garden, forests and the looking glass. Fire in this novel is a force of destruction contrary to its usage in *Jane Eyre*. It burns down Coulibri Estate, and therefore is a symbol of the existing racial tension while also foreshadowing the means of Antoinette's death. Coco the parrot is a symbol of Antoinette. Its clipped wings represent her dependency on her husband and its death pre-empts her death in a similar manner. The act of the cock crowing is used to foretell Rochester's betrayal of Antoinette. 'It had gone wild' is a description of the garden at Coulibri. It represents Antoinette's neglect of Antoinette and introduces a tone of disease and decay. Forests appear in Antoinette's dream, reflecting on the fact that she is lost and can tie in with her later words, 'Between you, I often wonder who I am and where did I come from.' The looking glass is symbol of Antoinette's search for identity. She feels a lack of belonging due to her mixed origins and the manner in which different people treat her, 'Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name.' It is evident that symbols are used in both books in unusual ways and they help to not only evoke certain themes but also reflect on character traits.

Comment [Kev11]: There is a clear topic switch here, although the candidate should make it clear how this links back to the question and the idea of 'the unusual'

Comment [Kev12]: This needs to be explored in more depth

Comment [Kev13]: The candidate appears to be trying to explore too much in one essay and would have been better off trying to cover less ground but in more depth as some of these ideas have the potential to be very interesting

Comment [Kev14]: Ultimately, if it is not unusual it should not really be explored in this essay. The candidate does not have to talk about the structure of *Wide Sargasso Sea* just because they have talked about the structure of 'Like Water for Chocolate' as it would be perfectly acceptable to compare the unusual structure of *Like Water for Chocolate* with something else that is unusual from 'Wide Sargasso Sea'

Comment [Kev15]: These definitions are unnecessary – the candidate should focus directly on answering the question in relation to the two texts.

Comment [Kev16]: The focus has also been lost on the unusual which means that the candidate is no longer really answering the question. It seems as if the candidate originally thought that the question about the fantastic / the unusual was well suited to the magic realist nature of 'Like Water for Chocolate' but has subsequently realised that they don't have enough relevant ideas to talk about. Careful planning at the start should help to avoid this situation.

Comment [Kev17]: This seems to repeat a point explored earlier

Comment [Kev18]: However, there continue to be good references to the text!

Comment [Kev19]: Once again it is clear that the focus on 'the unusual' has been lost and the candidate is now re-hashing general points from the text rather than talking directly about the key ideas.

Comment [Kev20]: Although relatively interesting points, they seem to be unrelated to the question and it is as if the candidate is forcing everything they know about the text into this essay.

Comment [Kev21]: There is an attempt to link back to the question here but it is too late to be convincing. References to the unusual / the fantastic need to be woven in throughout the essay.

As one can see both Rhys and Esquivel have utilised narrative techniques, structure and symbolism to make use of the fantastic and unusual in order to set the tone and atmosphere, bring out important character traits, contribute to plot development and gain the reader's curiosity through elements of foreshadowing. Both these unusual novels represent multiculturalism in literature as while *Like Water for Chocolate* is rooted in Mexican culture and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is rooted in Creole culture, they were both universally renowned. Another aspect that adds to the unusual nature of both books is the personal tone generated by each author's involvement in her respective novel. Rhys herself was of mixed origins, part Welsh and part Creole, and thus also experienced racial tensions. She witnessed the fall of the aristocracy and despised not only the dreariness of England but also the harshness of a male dominated society, aspects explicit in her work. Esquivel was greatly influenced by her grandmother and therefore we see the importance given to Hacha. She once stated that she remembers her grandmother in the kitchen and that was where she got her idea for the basis of her novel. Thus, through both explicit and implicit literary techniques, both authors make use of the unusual for a variety of reasons, rendering their novels and yet paradoxically unique in their own manner.

Comment [Kev22]: The candidate may be making an interesting point here about the unusual nature of the texts as they both come from ethnic minorities ... this is a potentially interesting idea but needs to be explored in more depth.

Comment [Kev23]: There is little relevance here and, once again, it seems as if the candidate is attempt to force ideas into the essay when they do not really belong there.

Comment [Kev24]: Unfortunately the candidate reverts to general comments in the final line, which creates an underwhelming end to the essay. Draw the two essays together, perhaps using an evaluation, is a much more effective way to end.