

9ELO 03

GCE English

Language & Literature
Coursework

Folder 1

Commentary

‘Society and the Individual’ serves as the over-arching theme of both my literary and non-fiction piece, exploring in detail society’s attitude to mental health. ‘Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs’, through its focus on feminist journalism regarding current issues, inspired the creation of ‘Suicide Letters: The Sylvia Plath Effect Mark #2’. The article, in which I discuss the spike in mental health issues among teenage girls is aimed at regular readers of *The Guardian’s* women section. ‘The Kite Runner’ inspired me to write about friendship and how pivotal it can be, in my fiction piece ‘Aftermaths’. As the epilogue to an epistolary novel, the protagonist, via internal monologue, discusses life in the aftermath of their best friend’s death. This is weaved into a fragmented narrative and serves as a conclusive ending for the reader. The novel is intended as a bildungsroman to raise awareness of the dangers of undiagnosed mental health problems.

‘Aftermaths’ employs a cyclical structure to reinforce the idea of the grieving process. In the first paragraph, the idea of grief is quite impersonal. The piece contrasts the disposable idea of washing ‘chalk from the streets’ with the very permanent idea of ‘carvings from the trees’ to create a metaphor for the process of death and the idea that your legacy will stand the test of time in the wider world. The concept of binary opposition in the metaphor is then paralleled by the abstract idea of ‘disguising the tears’ and the more concrete ‘but not erasing the scars’ in the final paragraph. By personalising the metaphor at the end, the audience see a multi-dimensional portrayal of grief and how it affects both the central character and everybody else.

In ‘Suicide Letters’ juxtaposition is used to contrast ideas of male and female behaviour, which reinforces the idea of how attitudes in society may lead to mental health issues among teens. This was inspired by ‘The Bell Jar’ and the message it conveys about the

emptiness of social expectations, this is particularly evident in 'Young women are backed into corners, taught to be quiet, look pretty,' as this is the exact thing the piece advocates against. This is further challenged by the antithesis of 'whilst girls learn to idolise failure, boys are taught to idolise success' as the direct comparison between the binary opposites of 'success' and 'failure' really emphasise the gender split. Syntactical parallelism is used here, indicated by parenthetical dashes, to convey society's attitude to the upbringing of boys and girls and how they are not seen as being different. Binary opposition is also employed in 'Aftermaths' with the thematic allusions to life and death and the contrasting ideas of how 'beautiful' death was, but how 'messy' everything has been since- this is done to provide absolute clarity to the readers about the distinct difference in the protagonist's life before and after death.

So sophisticated
evaluation
of effects
on
shaping
meaning

'Aftermaths' uses rain imagery, this serves as a pathetic fallacy, however, the imagery is multi-layered as it is also a biblical allusion to the idea of purification and being cleansed on wrong-doings. This reinforces the idea that grief does not just fade or disappear. 'Suicide Letters', on the other hand, alludes to features of social media websites by using hashtags- '#edgy', '#deep'- this mimics the behaviour of the users on the websites, however, '#glitch' references the 'Glitch Campaign' which was released in support of World Mental Health Day 2016 and encourages the reader to think about, and interact digitally with, social media in a much more positive way.

really
evaluation
of
writing
choices

'Suicide Letters' employs the plosive alliteration of 'pixelated pedestals' at the beginning of the article to immediately engage the audience and draw attention to the overarching topic used in discussion of the article. 'Aftermaths' on the other hand, uses the repetition of 'fun' to create fricative alliteration that emphasises the impossibility of having fun and the ridiculousness of the mother's suggestion. Repetition of 'about'

evaluation
concerns
between
writing

creates a sense of intimacy in the letter that the audience are privy to, whilst reinforcing the idea that they are not the intended audience. The anaphoric sentences also create a sense of defeat in the protagonist's voice and the graphological isolation of 'about you' acts as a marker, explicitly highlighting the focus of the piece. Anaphora is used again in the repetition of 'I don't want...' in a feeble attempt to distribute blame. This reveals to the audience how passionate the character is about the issue and also hints at a sense of resignation in their voice. In 'Suicide Letters' triplets are used to create a cumulative effect and 'Sylvia Plath, Amy Winehouse and Effy Stonem' are used to explain to readers, who may not be familiar with these individuals and their lifestyles, how they are having a detrimental effect on the mental health of young girls and how vast the issue is.

Both pieces use literary allusions to Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes to build common ground with the audience. In 'Aftermaths' the protagonist uses the major themes of 'Birthday Letters' and Hughes' grieving process for Plath to write their own birthday letter to their best friend. The piece employs irony when the character by explaining that 'Ted Hughes' wrote poems about suicide and whilst that's 'usually' the theme of the protagonist's, it is 'not' the theme of the letter even though the whole piece is about suicide, whether they believe it or not. Sylvia Plath comes into mention over the discrepancy about who was first quoted to say 'death must be so beautiful'. This idea is recycled in the very last line, in which the protagonist accepts that death may be beautiful but that 'everything since has been so messy'. This final clause serves as acceptance of the protagonist over their best friend's death after earlier mentioning that various suicide methods had been ruled out on account of being 'too messy'.

Thematically, this was inspired by 'The Kite Runner' as both the protagonist in 'Aftermaths' and Amir felt like they had betrayed their best friend. In the non-fiction piece, even the title, 'Suicide Letters', is an allusion to 'Birthday Letters' but serves as a

reprisal in that the original text is causing all the teenage girls mentioned in the article

to write these suicide letters. The piece also alludes to the psychological phenomenon

known as 'The Sylvia Plath Effect' and compares it to the new phenomenon of mental

✓ health issues among teenage girls. Direct speech is used to engage the audience in

'Suicide Letters' as by applying the idea to a real example, in this case- Emma Carter, a

young girl who fits the demographic that the article focuses on, creates investment in

the important of idea and causes the readers to care. That is then paired with an

✓ accusatory tone to exploit the the emotional investment of the audience and make the

harsh reality of issues in society explicitly clear. This is further implied with the use of

collective pronoun 'we'- by saying that 'we are to blame' and 'we allow', the audience

begins to feel guilty and reflect on the issue at hand. In 'Aftermaths, the audience is

expected to take a sympathetic view of the protagonist, despite their own self-blaming

nature, especially when the piece uses the metaphorical idea of a bedroom becoming

'like a cell', rather than an 'actual cell' to again reinforce the thematic use of the concrete

and abstract ideas as binary ✓ opposite. It also employs the lexical field of imprisonment

to convey the sense of guilt the protagonist feels as they reflect on the issue ✓ at hand.

WORD COUNT: 1253

- A critical, evaluative approach throughout.
- Exploratory examination of literary and linguistic choices with sophisticated use of terminology.
- Sophisticated style throughout.
- Perhaps a little more evaluation of the connection between the stimulus texts & the candidate's own writing would have been seen as a more sophisticated level of analysis.

Sustained
examples in
the
critical
application
of language
analysis

AFTERMATHS

2 years later

The rain is falling again, washing the chalk off the streets but not the carvings from the trees. My room is poorly lit –one light casually flickering- but the only shadow is that which casts itself from my broken chandelier. And today I've been thinking and eating and working and thinking and reading 'Birthday Letters' again, and it got me thinking.

About you.

About the way you turned shower knobs like you were opening a safe, about the resignation in your voice upon realising that you were wrong, about your sunshine laughter and I just wanted to write your birthday letter. I know Ted Hughes wrote those poems about suicide and that's usually the theme of mine, but not this. No, this is about those running away times- the times when you were *actually* happy as opposed to just *saying* you were.

Your death still feels so fresh but the space between your hand and mine has been vacant for fourteen months now. Even your voice has been lost in the sadness.

My mother says I should get out and do *stuff*.

Go to parties,

get drunk,

and quote dead poets- all the *stuff* that we did.

All the *stuff* that killed you.

She tells me to have fun. It is SO HARD to have fun when you don't want to have fun. ✓

Even harder when you do but...can't. Impossibly hard when having fun with your best (or worst, depending how you look at it) friend involves a graveyard and only one pair of tired eyes. ✓

My mother does not think that I'm coping.

I am.

TRYING.

But...

C O P I N G is a kite, we as children, did not fly. ✓

Sophisticated

And as you now soar high, I am firmly on the ground with all the parts of you that still beat and bring joy. ✓

If coping is getting a 2:1 at Uni and remembering to visit my Grandparents then, sure, I'm coping. But we both know the absence of happiness and inability to look at a bottle of vodka and see just a bottle of vodka (instead of a closed off motorway, the failing rise and fall of your chest and a coffin being lowered into the ground) is not the basis for coping. ✓

I have been trying to write this letter for four days now. I was told letting it out would give me closure. But no one told me closure would bring thoughts. 'Thoughts' being the unwanted cousin from out of town 'closure' was forced to bring to the party. Thoughts, ✓

after all, are a currency that only buys more currency and so, replaying that day minute by minute has left me with an awful lot of grey matter.

There is a fragile line between life and death- that night it was "*death must be so beautiful*", I never thought your obsession with proving me wrong could transcend life itself.

You couldn't make it up.

I was quoting Plath at you that night (well, Plath quoting Wilde, but that's almost irrelevant in light of your death). And I mean, I was always quoting *something* but how cruel and classically Hollywood.

Except, it was nothing like the movies.

I'd like to think in your last moments that we understood each other perfectly, that I had let you go peacefully.

I didn't.

Sorry.

I should never have got so attached to you- but after laying all my cards out on your table, I've been playing a losing game for a long time now.

As you lay dying, I tried to argue with you, told you I would never forgive you. As the life left your body, I found myself shaking you, screaming and trying to shock you back over the line. But there was nothing left. ✓

-----Just flat lines.-----

Sometime later, your mother called me up, shaking (and yes, I heard the pain wailing through the static), she needed a favour and I couldn't quite mask the reluctance in my voice when I agreed. It made sense, after all- I don't want to diminish a family's affection for their youngest child but- I certainly loved you most. ✓

I know that I suggested it, in planning for the apocalypse, but you know that I never intended for full-scale self-destruction; I even ruled out pills for being too messy.

Wrapping your drunken ass round a lamppost and watching your wrecked car crumple was pretty clean after all. I could let it go, if I had not been riding shotgun that night, equally drunk and stumbling. ✓

It was I who knew you best, which is why I'm struggling with what the police describe as your 'suicide'. ✓

I don't want to blame you. I don't want to blame them. I don't want to blame the pub, or even myself. But whilst your legacy fades like happiness, or any dream left too long in the light, somebody must be responsible. ✓

*clever use
of verbs
throughout*

*lovely
description*

You wanted to drive and I didn't even try to stop you. How could I? Since we got our red cards and crap cars, all we'd done is drive- to the beach, to the city, home for the weekends. Mostly, we drove each other up the wall. It had been more vital, in sustaining our sanity, than breathing. But now, I feel more alone in a crowded room than I did on the ground with your lifeless body.

crafted
effectively
for maximum
emotive impact

It seems to be a gross injustice to you that I am writing this from my bedroom which has become like a cell,

instead of an actual cell when I am shackled with guilt.

Survivor's guilt? How about delinquent's guilt?

Because honestly, I feel more like an accomplice in your murder than a victim of your death.

So, clad in more black than you would've thought possible, I stood at a lectern, in a church we were banned from (dead best friend makes for a good sob story) and spoke about your life. When we met, I learned a new language, punctuated by your name, filled with our stories. For the first time, in your company, I found myself speechless. I couldn't damage people's perceptions of a 'dead' good kid (all the breaking and entering was best staying between us).

Distinct
voice
throughout

Nothing about our stories are for public consumption. They are all filled with illegal endeavours, ASBOs and too much rum. If people knew that we were the things that went 'boo' in the night, a vicious chain of mindless chatter would've been created.

In the interest of privacy and self-preservation,

I don't think anyone should tell stories

about our stories but us. ✓

At the wake, there was an open bar, courtesy of your parents (I knew you'd be jealous, after they rejected that idea for your 18th) and whilst you and I staggered home at 7am most Sundays, I haven't drunk or driven in months. Champagne is for celebrating, so I thought it to be wildly inappropriate as I watched it flow by the bottle. ✓

Our friends were stumbling into tables, your dad could barely speak and I sat sober. I couldn't help but laugh at the irony (you would've been hysterical). ✓ After all, the kids we once were and too much alcohol ruined you and all of our lives.

✓ The rain is falling again, disguising the tears but not erasing the scars. Death may be beautiful, but everything since has been so messy.

cyclical
structure

WORD COUNT: 1241

A really impressive story. Emotive throughout. Crafted beautifully.

SUICIDE LETTERS: THE PLATH EFFECT #2

'The Sylvia Plath Effect' was first coined in 2001, but as we move into the 'selfie' era, explores the new phenomenon surrounding the infamous woman and the pixelated pedestal teenager girls place her on.

Since its rise to popularity, circa 2012, social media giant Tumblr has perpetuated the glamorization of depression and suicide, with a large proportion of the 15-18 demographic feeding into the mentality. 'Reblogging', a feature of the site, allows these users to share generically-depressive text posts overlaid onto monotone pictures of dangerously thin or dangerously mutilated girls to their blog. Usually this is done in keeping with a theme, in hope that the user will be perceived as #edgy or #deep. The website has taken heat from the media over the recent increase in mental health issues among teens and have now removed all blogs promoting self-destruction and anorexia from the site. However, the number of ill teens continues to rise; recent studies show 1 in 3 teenage girls suffer from depression or anxiety.

Mental Health has, since the turn of the century, become a more prevalent issue than ever before. Since its conception in 1992, World Mental Health Day (celebrated on October 10th) has aimed to spread awareness and eradicate stigma. But, if the already all-time high rates of mental illness continue to soar, depression is set to be the leading illness globally by 2030 and a major underlying cause in female deaths.

So what's happening? How has this sudden spike in depressed teenage girls, addicted to the internet and idolising dying poets come about?

The 'Sylvia Plath Effect' refers to the unexplained trend of female poets becoming depressed and commit suicide. Statistically, they are more likely to kill themselves than

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any other eminent female. The body count includes Plath herself, Virginia Woolf and Sarah Kane.

Suicide is the biggest killer of men aged 25-40 but, looking at the younger demographic the pattern is starkly different. In the last 12 months 22.4% of females 15-18 have seriously considered committing suicide compared to 11.6% of males. This becomes less shocking when you realise 76% of Tumblr's user base are women.

Again, use of statistics makes the argument stronger

The big issue is threefold: Sylvia Plath, Amy Winehouse and Effy Stonem. The holy trinity of soft grunge culture. The glorification of their twisted and dangerous lifestyles has led them to household-name status among teens. The fictionalisation of Stonem's character does not deter the idolization and if anything encourages the girls to emulate her character more than famous artists. Plath's suicide was notorious, maybe more so than her words, and the mass appeal of 'The Bell Jar', as well as its appearance on the 'Banned Book List' in American high schools romanticises the very essence of complete and isolating depression.

David Beckham, Alan Sugar and Steve Jobs are among the most popular icons boys aspire to be, and that just about nails the problem. Whilst girls learn to idolise failure, boys are taught to idolise success. Boys are taught to eliminate a problem and girls become the problem. Statistically men are more likely to shoot up - be it their senior class, or drugs in their bloodstream - in an attempt to exert power, albeit often misguided. Females, on the other hand, cut - their calorie intake, social circles and often their wrists - removing pieces of themselves to fade away quietly.

Relevant and almost sardonic tone

So maybe the problem stems from female suppression. Young women are backed into corners, taught to be quiet, look pretty, stay silent. Scream to be heard and you'll end up

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dead. Teenage girls get told they are 'just going through a phase', flattening their issues and depleting self-worth.

20% of girls go through a major depressive phase before turning 21, only 7% of those girls receive help. We are all to blame; we allow teachers and parents to mostly skirt around the idea of mental health, unable to take blame for creating a society where mental health is the most prevalent issue of its time.

Emma Carter said her internet addiction was almost fatal. "I found Tumblr when I was 14 and finally felt like I wasn't alone. I didn't seek medical help for 2 years." Carter said.

"My parents thought I was fine until I tried to kill myself. Being suicidal became my new normal. Nobody should feel like that."

Teenage girls turn to Tumblr, to escape the paradox. The mixed messages are confusing; they are being told that everyone goes through the same issues but they feel so alone.

They turn to the platform to see for themselves, to understand that they are not the only ones. But with 'anorexia buddies' –two people who track each other's daily intake, offering 'support' and walk down the path of self-destruction side by side- just a click away, these young impressionable girls often fall deeper into their issues.

Most teenagers are somewhat unstable, they experiment with drugs and alcohol, they act out and rebel and maybe they quote dead poets, looking for someone or something who understands them. We have raised a generation where depression and anxiety are desensitised to be more common than a cold and by generalising their issues, we allow thousands of young girls to sink into the enigmas that are themselves or into a coffin.

✓ Ignoring the problem does not eliminate its existence. #Glitch

WORD COUNT: 886

Again, a sophisticated, highly emotive piece. Cleverly crafted throughout. 3
...and publishable

use of anecdotal evidence to further support the writer's POV

A strong, emotive ending

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