

*ESSAY TITLES: PROSE*

6. The following extract is from near the opening of Carson McCullers' novella The Ballad of the Sad Café. Write an analysis of the passage using any suitable model in stylistics.

If you walk along the main street on an August afternoon there is nothing whatsoever to do. The largest building, in the very centre of the town, is boarded up completely and leans so far to the right that it seems bound to collapse at any minute. The house is very old. There is about it a curious, cracked look that is very puzzling until you suddenly realise that at one time, and long ago, the right side of the front porch had been painted, and part of the wall – but the painting was left unfinished and one portion of the house is darker and dingier than the other. The building looks completely deserted. Nevertheless, on the second floor there is one window which is not boarded; sometimes in the late afternoon when the heat is at its worst a hand will slowly open the shutter and a face will look down on the town. It is a face like the terrible dim faces known in dreams – sexless and white, with two grey crossed eyes which are turned inward so sharply that they seem to be exchanging with each other one long and secret gaze of grief. The face lingers at the window for an hour or so, then the shutters are closed once more, and as likely as not there will not be another soul to be seen along the main street. These August afternoons – when your shift is finished there is absolutely nothing to do; you might as well walk down to the Forks Falls and listen to the chain gang.

7. The following two extracts are taken, respectively, from the beginning and middle of South African writer J. M. Coetzee's novel Life and Times of Michael K. The "K" of passage B is the "Michael K" of passage A, but by the time of passage B, Michael is living alone, on an abandoned farm in the country, hiding from guerrillas and security forces.

- A. The first thing the midwife noticed about Michael K when she helped him out of his mother into the world was that he had a hare lip. The lip curled like a snail's foot, the left nostril gaped. Obscuring the child for a moment from its mother, she prodded open the tiny bud of a mouth and was thankful to find the palate whole.

From the first Anna K did not like the mouth that would not close and the living pink flesh it bared to her. She shivered to think of what had been growing in her all these months. The child could not suck from the breasts and cried with hunger. She tried a bottle; when it could not suck from the bottle she fed it with a teaspoon, fretting with impatience when it coughed and spluttered and cried. "It will close up as he grows older," the midwife promised. However, the lip did not close, or did not close enough, nor did the nose come straight.

- She took the child with her to work and continued to take it when it was no longer a baby. Because their smiles and whispers hurt her, she kept it away from other children. Year after year Michael

K sat on a blanket watching his mother polish other people's floors, learning to be quiet.

- B.** Among the seeds he had sown had been a melon seed. Now two pale green melons were growing on the far side of the field. It seemed to him that he loved these two, which he thought of as two sisters, even more than the pumpkins, which he thought of as a bank  
5 of brothers. Under the melons he placed pads of grass so that their skins should not bruise.

Then came the evening when the first pumpkin was ripe enough to cut. It had grown earlier and faster than the others, in the very centre of the first; K had marked it out as the first fruit, the  
10 firstborn. The shell was soft, the knife sank in without struggle. On the wire grid he had made he laid strips of pumpkin over a bed of coals that glowed brighter and brighter as the dark came on. The fragrance of burning flesh rose into the sky. Speaking the words he had been taught, directing them no longer upward but to the earth on which he  
15 knelt, he prayed. With two wire skewers he turned the strips, and in mid-act felt his heart suddenly flow over with thankfulness. Now it is completed, he said to himself.

Provide a general account of transitivity patterns in the two extracts concentrating particularly on those processes in which Michael K occupies a participant role.

What does your analysis of the two passages reveal about the developing character of K?

*(This exercise follows the suggestions made about this text in Michael Toolan's book Language in Literature London: Arnold(1998).*

7. Basing your response on the five passages below, outline some of the principal techniques that are available for representing point of view in prose.

- (i) Things were becoming clear; he would know how to act from now on. The thing to do was to act just as others had acted, live like they lived, and while they were not looking, do what you wanted. They would never know. He felt in the quiet presence of his mother, brother and sister, a force inarticulate and unconscious, making for living without thinking, making for peace and habit, making for a hope that blinded. He felt that they wanted and yearned to see life a certain way; they needed a certain picture of the world; there was one way of living they preferred above all others.

*(Native Son, Richard Wright)*

- (ii) Mr and Mrs Doyle are both aged 56. Mr Doyle retired early on medical grounds 10 years ago, Mrs Doyle has just taken early retirement. Mr Doyle receives £1,200 a year of pension from his former employer, the hotels and

leisure group Granada. He also receives disability and mobility allowances. Mrs Doyle receives unemployment benefit of £30 a week.

(The Independent on Sunday; [“Money” section])

- (iii) Shaking off from my spirit what *must* have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal features seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discolouration of ages had been great. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling of the individual stones. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinising observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure . . .

(The Fall of the House of Usher, Edgar Allan Poe)

- (iv) His eyes searched the street: there was no sign of them. Yet it was surely half-an-hour since he had seen the clock of the college of surgeons. Would Corley do a thing like that? He lit his last cigarette and began to smoke it nervously. Suddenly he saw them coming towards him. He started with delight and, keeping close to his lamppost, tried to read the result in their walk. They were walking quickly, the young woman taking quick short steps, while Corley kept beside her with his long stride.

(“Two Gallants”; from Dubliners, James Joyce)

- (v) It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action, and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts just as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a constraint.

(Jane Eyre; Charlotte Brontë)