

## Extended response: complex transformation and its defence (Assessment instrument 2)

This sample is intended to inform the design of assessment instruments in the senior phase of learning. It highlights the qualities of student responses and the match to the syllabus standards.

### Dimensions assessed

- Understanding and interpreting
- Applying and analysing
- Evaluating and synthesising

### Assessment instrument

The sample is in response to an assessment task.

#### Task

This task requires you to:

- create a written complex transformation of a short story of your own choice
- present a spoken defence of your complex transformation.

#### Complex transformation

Select and apply aspects and strategies from text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches to intervene in a self-selected short story to offer readers an alternative position.

#### Defence

Your spoken defence must explain how you applied theoretical approaches to rewrite the text and evaluate how the rewritten text offers readers an alternative position. In the defence you will:

- identify the key assumptions and values underpinning the short story that you would like to challenge
- show how the relevant textual features and language details of the short story support/construct these assumptions and values
- explain how you applied the theoretical approaches in the intervention in the text
- evaluate how the rewritten text offers readers an alternative position through the application of theoretical understandings.

#### Context

Your spoken defence will be presented at the “Serious Play: Mucking Around With Meanings” conference, which is interested in academic papers that explore how literary texts can be rewritten and reconceived to shift reader positioning in purposeful ways.

#### Length

Complex transformation: written: 100–800 words  
Defence: spoken/signed: 8–10 minutes

Assessment instrument 2 requires students to produce two texts: a written or multi-modal complex transformation and a spoken/signed defence. This sample includes only the script of the spoken defence. The complex transformation was the script of a radio interview.

The short story used as the basis for the complex transformation has been referred to throughout as “the base text”.

## Instrument-specific criteria and standards

Student responses have been matched to instrument-specific criteria and standards; those which best describe the student work in this sample are shown below. For more information about the syllabus dimensions and standards descriptors, see [www.qsa.qld.edu.au/17601.html](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/17601.html).

Standard A	
<b>Understanding and interpreting</b>	<p>The student work has the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>discerning</b> understanding of <b>the complexities of</b> a self-selected short story and its social, historical and cultural context to produce a <b>discriminating and defensible</b> interpretation</li> <li>• <b>discerning</b> understanding and <b>insightful interpretation</b> of text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches</li> <li>• <b>discerning</b> understanding of the social, historical and cultural contexts of text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches and of <b>subtle</b> similarities and differences between them.</li> </ul>
<b>Applying and analysing</b>	<p>The student work has the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>discerning</b> application of text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches and ways of valuing literary texts to produce <b>insightful and defensible</b> interpretations of a self-selected short story</li> <li>• <b>discerning</b> analysis of how the genre, structure and textual features of the self-selected short story supports interpretation</li> <li>• <b>discerning manipulation</b> of the roles, relationships, patterns and conventions associated with academic communication, including terminology</li> <li>• <b>discerning</b> use of textual features to <b>consistently</b> achieve <b>desired</b> effects for the <b>specific</b> audience.</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluating and synthesising</b>	<p>The student work has the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>thorough and discriminating</b> evaluation of text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches used to produce <b>insightful</b> and defensible interpretations of a self-selected short story</li> <li>• <b>thorough and discriminating</b> evaluation of own interpretations, making explicit the theoretical approaches that underpin them</li> <li>• <b>thorough and systematic</b> synthesis of relevant ideas, interpretations and viewpoints with <b>discriminating</b> supporting evidence.</li> </ul>

**Note:** Colour highlights have been used in the table to emphasise the qualities that discriminate between the standards.

**Key:** **Qualities that differentiate the standards**  
Cognition additional to syllabus objectives

# Student response — Standard A

The annotations show the match to the instrument-specific standards.

Comments	
<p>discerning understanding of the complexities of a self-selected short story and its social, historical and cultural context to produce a discriminating and defensible interpretation</p>	<p>Ernest Hemingway's short story focuses on male selfishness and female dependence. Set in the 1920s, the story describes a conversation between a couple as they wait for a train to Madrid. Throughout, the man presses 'the girl' to allow him to maintain a carefree, hedonistic lifestyle. While the woman dislikes his proposition, she eventually accedes. However, her final capitulation and the outcome of their conversation are deliberately ambiguous.</p>
<p>discerning understanding and insightful interpretation of text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches</p>	<p>Textual features in the story promote an invited reading that relationships are inherently patriarchal. The text constructs men as selfish beings who consider their authority to be valuable and a means to manipulate women. The story presents women reciprocally as both vulnerable and dependent. This reinforces a male/female binary where power is contingent on gender.</p>
<p>discerning analysis of how the genre, structure and textual features of the self-selected short story supports interpretation</p>	<p>Close textual analysis under New Criticism and Structuralism helps to explain how the textual features in the story "work together" to promote this invited reading (Tyson, 1999, p.120) Throughout the story, the man's concern for the woman is compromised by self-interest, where he monopolises the authority of knowledge to sway her decision. He asserts seven times that he 'knows' things that the woman does not. The man manipulates the woman and this highlights her vulnerability. In this way, the story works to reinforce a "loaded" male/female binary (Bertens, 2008, p.127). While the text positions readers to feel sympathy for the woman, underlying textual features highlight her subordination. The 'girl' as she is called, is dependent on the man: she relies on him to translate her desires from English to Spanish and to pay for their drinks. Also, the woman is deferential, asking the man things like "wasn't that bright?"</p>
<p>thorough and discriminating evaluation of text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches used to produce insightful and defensible interpretations of a self-selected short story</p>	<p>Textual features in the text also work to reinforce gender stereotypes. That is, they promote culturally acceptable denotations for the terms 'male' and 'female'. While structuralists such as Ferdinand de Saussure acknowledge that there is no natural link between a word and what it denotes, they do not explore the consequences of challenging this gap (Bertens, 2008, p.102). Post-structuralist Jacques Derrida extends structuralist thought by asserting that all words have their origins in 'différance' – a process of difference and deferral that means words never achieve 'closure' (Bertens, 2008, p.102). For this reason, my transformation seeks to create new denotations for the terms 'male' and 'female'.</p>
<p>discerning understanding of the social, historical and cultural contexts of text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches and of subtle similarities and differences between them.</p>	<p>I have created an intervention into the text which provides an alternative reading of the nature of men. This is based on the post-structuralist notion that "a univocal reading [of a text] is impossible" and "that every reading has a deconstructive as well as an obvious reading" (Miller in Lye, 1998). By creating a transcript of an interview, my transformation analyses how men are also the victims of the cultural norms that determine acceptable gender roles. By establishing the interviewer as the voice of conservative masculine principles, my transformation seeks to challenge hegemonic masculinity. In this way, it draws upon contemporary text-centred and world-centred theories to validate Pierre Macherey's claim that "the text has not said everything" and that "there remains the possibility of saying something else" (Macherey in Rivkin &amp; Ryan, 2004, p.708).</p>
<p>discerning manipulation of the roles, relationships, patterns and conventions associated with academic communication, including terminology</p>	

discerning application of text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches and ways of valuing literary texts to produce insightful and defensible interpretations of a self-selected short story

thorough and discriminating evaluation of text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches used to produce insightful and defensible interpretations of a self-selected short story

thorough and discriminating evaluation of own interpretations, making explicit the theoretical approaches that underpins them

thorough and discriminating evaluation of text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches used to produce insightful and defensible interpretations of a self-selected short story

discerning understanding of the complexities of a self-selected short story and its social, historical and cultural context to produce a discriminating and defensible interpretation

There were moments in the base text where the totalising male/female binary “came undone” (Eagleton, 2008). Here, the man hinted at emotional sensitivity. For example, during a wayward moment of the couple’s discussion, the man urges the woman simply to “Come on back in the shade”. Despite being represented as selfish and manipulative, this maternalistic statement indicates that the man may in fact feel some concern for the welfare of the woman. Instances such as these are labelled by Terry Eagleton as “moments of aporia”, the “impasses of meaning where the text gets into trouble, comes unstuck [or] offers to contradict itself” (Eagleton, 2008 p.116). Since Derrida asserts that all binary opposites have their origins in ‘différance’, I was able to use this ‘moment of aporia’ to set up an alternate signification for the signifier ‘male’.

My transformation emphasises the ‘moment of aporia’ by subverting rather than inverting the male/female binary. This approach has theoretical grounding. Deconstructive theorist Rob Pope (2001) maintains that:

The role of deconstructive thinkers is not simply to invert hierarchies... but to reopen the play of differences around these terms (p.131).

His case is strengthened by Margery Hourihan’s (1997) argument that “subversion not inversion is the more socially responsible path for textual intervention work” (Hourihan in Johnson, 1997, p.52). To create meaning independent from binary thinking, Derrida puts the binary “under erasure”, allowing the privileged term to remain in place, but partially undermining it to affect a shift in reader positioning (Derrida in Pope, 2001, p.190).

To partially undermine the privileged term, I created a “hybrid” character: an authoritative male who also displays attributes inconsistent with traditional masculinity. This draws upon Homi Bhabha’s method of “hybridity” which “turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention” (Bhabha in Prabhu, 2002, p.9). In the interview, the man’s authoritative diction is juxtaposed against his feminine traits, constructing him as emotionally attuned to his partner’s needs. When questioned, the man argues “I love her... I wanted to do everything I could to help her”. Thus, my transformation challenges traditional gender roles and dualistic, binary thinking, revealing “the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority” (Bhabha in Prabhu, 2002, p.9).

Another way my complex transformation forces readers to challenge totalising perspectives of gender, is through Pierre Macherey’s technique of ‘setting the silences to speak’ (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p.705). Macherey maintains that:

The book is not self-sufficient: it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, without which it would not exist...for in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said. (Macherey in Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p.705).

In the base text, the woman’s attitude seems to be deliberately ambiguous ~~and the fact~~ that women can be assertive and steadfast is silenced. In order to alter this perspective, my transformation gives the woman a voice. In the interview, she explains confidently how she has been persecuted. This subverts the binary because it reveals that the woman has control over her own choices ~~but also~~ shows that she is being persecuted because of her decision.

Rechronologising the base text further affects this change. By altering the temporal context from the 1920s to 2009, my transformation challenges traditional male/female roles. This is because texts “cannot transcend their own time but live and work within [a] horizon of culture constructed by ideology” (Bertens, 2008, p.147). Shifting the time period promotes an alternative viewpoint because readers approaching the text know that twenty-first century women are better equipped to direct their own destiny.

Changing the genre of the base text also helps to promote an alternate viewpoint. This is because genres are limited and restrictive. Post-structuralist Tzvetan Todorov (1978) theorises that “individual texts are produced and perceived in relation to the norm constituted by that codification” (p.157). This notion is extended by Derrida (1992) who maintains that “as soon as the word *genre* is sounded...a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind” (p223). Under New Critical theory, the base text fits into the ‘tragedy’ genre. This limits meaning because readers assume that – consistent with the traditions of the tragedy genre – the outcome of the couple’s discussion will be negative and mutually unsatisfactory.

thorough and discriminating evaluation of own interpretations, making explicit the theoretical approaches that underpin them

Because genre can both limit and contribute to meaning, my transformation draws upon the discursive properties of a ‘radio interview’ to reposition readers. It exploits listeners’ preconceptions that radio interviews elucidate issues, rather than making moral statements about them. Given that the radio interview follows a question-and-answer format, my transformation takes advantage of the fact that listeners expect that the interviewee’s answers are spontaneous and truthful **and** therefore a more honest representation of the nature of men. Also, changing the genre of the base text frees it from the “norms and interdictions” of the tragedy genre (Derrida, 1992, p.223). That is, it removes the presumption that the couple’s end decision will inevitably be negative or mutually unsatisfactory.

discerning application of text-centred and world-centred theoretical approaches and ways of valuing literary texts to produce insightful and defensible interpretations of a self-selected short story

Textual cues in the base text lend themselves to a world-centred transformation grounded in masculinity studies. Taking its lead from feminism, masculinity studies is dedicated to what have often been viewed as implicit facts: that most societies are patriarchal where men have historically enjoyed social, political and economic supremacy (Adams & Savran, 2002). Thus, the starting point for a world-centred masculine deconstruction is acknowledging the “centrality of men’s power and privilege and [recognising] the need to challenge that power” (Kaufman, 1994, p.157). This not only advances the female perspective, but recognises that the social construction of masculine power is “the source of the malaise, confusion and alienation felt by men” (Kaufman, 1994, p.157). My transformation seeks to deconstruct the idea of a homogenous, dominant masculinity by showing that patriarchal structures are also repressive to men.

In my transformation, the man’s initial curt and dispassionate responses in the interview are revealed to be performative; a method of self-preservation and a shield against the interviewer’s emotional interrogation. This validates philosopher Judith Butler’s argument that gender is not essence but a performance (Butler in Aboim, 2010, p.32). While the man’s responses at the beginning of the interview are authoritative and dispassionate, later his response reveals compassionate and caring tendencies. This undermines the notion of hegemonic masculinity by showing it as a process whereby men “come to suppress a range of emotions, needs, and possibilities such as nurturing, receptivity, empathy and compassion” Kaffman, 1994, p.148). Psychoanalyst Carl Jung supports this strategy by asserting that:

No man is so entirely masculine that he has nothing feminine in him. The fact, is rather, that very masculine men have – carefully guarded and hidden – a very soft emotional life, often incorrectly described as “feminine”. A man counts it as a virtue to repress his feminine traits as much as possible (Jung in Connell, 1994, p.20).

By revealing that the man is emotionally attuned to the woman’s needs, my transformation reveals the way in which “sex roles” are permanently “being done and undone” (Butler in Aboim, 2010, p.32).



thorough and systematic synthesis of relevant ideas, interpretations and viewpoints with discriminating supporting evidence.

discerning manipulation of the roles, relationships, patterns and conventions associated with academic communication, including terminology

Also – through a power play between the interviewer and interviewee – my transformation highlights that masculinity is defined by “fluid difference rather than fixed identity” (Aboim, 2010, p.14). This notion that masculinity takes on “multiple, hybrid, even paradoxical forms”, extends Butler’s notion of “sex roles”; a theory often criticised for favouring dualistic thinking (Aboim, 2010, p.5). According to Scott Coltrane (1994), the plurality of gender is best highlighted by “focusing on men’s emotions” and “studying men in groups” (p.55). The contrast between the interviewer’s arguments grounded in science and reason, and the man’s emotive diction foregrounds the plurality of gender, again decentring hegemonic masculinity.

I further undermined hegemonic masculinity by giving the woman a voice. This is because adding her defence challenges the still entrenched societal expectation that men be held accountable in the public domain. While my transformation shows that the man feels pressured to justify his partner’s choices, it also gives the woman an opportunity to express how she has been persecuted. This is consistent of the aim of masculinity studies to also improve outcomes for women (Renzetti & Curran, 2003, p.3).

In my complex transformation of the base text, I employed various text-centred and world-centred theories to dismantle the existing male/female binary. By placing the base text ‘under erasure’, I was able to challenge the notion of hegemonic masculinity and impose an alternative reading of the nature of men. In this way, my transformation validates the post structuralist notion that texts are “irreducibly plural, an endless play of signifiers which can never be finally nailed down to a simple centre, essence or meaning” (Eagleton, 2008, p.120).

The student response incorporated a complete reference list that has not been included here.

## Acknowledgments

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