

ANSWERING THE QUESTION: Malik

In general your answers on music need to refer to the musical qualities of the album as well as to its lyrics: song is not the same as poetry.

'Despite his claim that Gibraltar presents 'moi tout entier dans un disque', Abd Al Malik is fact primarily interested in universalizing the themes of migration and assimilation in the album. To what extent do you agree? Answer with reference to AT LEAST THREE songs from the Gibraltar album.

This question proved problematic to some of you for the following reasons::

- Failure really to define the terms of the question in the introduction. For instance, you could explore
 - the initial quote. Who is the 'moi' that Malik refers to here? Remember we addressed this questions when we examined 'authorship and intentionality' earlier in the year.
 - Note also that the term 'assimilation' has a particular political resonance within France associated with the notion of Frenchness. Is this important?
 - What does the term 'universalizing' mean here? Is there a conflict between the presentation of the self celebrated in the quote and an ambition to be 'universalizing' in one's message?

Perhaps because of a lack of certainty about these terms, there was a tendency for some of you simply to repeat the terms of the question over and over, perhaps in an effort to make what was being said appear relevant to the question when you hadn't quite understood it or sought to pull out its nuances.

Abd Al Malik's music has been described as 'un rap conscient et fraternel' (Christine Albanel). To what extent do you agree with this assessment? Answer with reference to AT LEAST THREE songs from the Gibraltar album.

Rather similarly to the last question, this one was problematic because of a failure to define the terms 'conscient' and 'fraternel' sufficiently. One way to approach this would be to look up the terms and related terms in *Le Petit Robert* (**fraternel** = 'qui concerne les relations entre frères et sœurs ; propre à des êtres qui se traitent en frères' ; **fraternité** = lien existant entre les hommes considérés comme les membres de la famille humaine ; sentiment profond de ce lien' ; **conscient** = 'qui est lucide, connaît et juge soi-même'). Some background reading on contemporary French society / identity would also help, as the term 'fraternel' links with the notion of 'fraternité', one of the three fundamental tenets of the La République française. If these terms are thoroughly understood, your introduction can explore how you will

examine them. Think particularly about how you might find qualities within Malik's songs that link with this definition of 'conscient'.

'Derrière le statut, le vêtement, la couleur de peau, n'est-ce pas qu'on est semblables [...] ?' (Abd Al Malik, 'Saigne', Gibraltar, 2006). In what ways does Abd Al Malik seek to raise questions about contemporary French identity in Gibraltar? Answer with reference to AT LEAST THREE songs from the album.

To answer this question demands some contextual knowledge about 'contemporary French identity'. This is not to say that you have to devote significant space in the essay to providing this background information, but it will give you confidence in talking about the topic and in identifying which aspects of the album have a particular contemporary resonance (or not...)

It would also be helpful to explore the terms of the quotation: what is Malik raising questions about here: race? Image? Class?

Clear understanding of these terms should help you develop a *problematique* in your introduction that you can take forward in the essay.

ANSWERING THE QUESTION: film

In general, when writing on film, you need to comment on camera motion, lighting, sound, and so on, as well as the narrative, themes, character and so forth.

*'The protagonist in each of Renoir's *La Bête humaine*, and Audiard's *Un héros très discret* is deeply flawed, but these flaws are more an indictment of the failings of French society than of the characters themselves.'* How far do you agree? Answer with reference to ONE OR MORE of the films studied.

This is a classic 'debate' style essay in which you may either agree with the statement or choose to challenge it. There are a number of elements that may be challenged here: the notion that the protagonists are flawed; whether their behaviour may be attributed to the society within which they operate; whether it is not wider society but other forces, such as the family, or biology, that are to be blamed for their situation.

The quotation links the central protagonists – Lantier and Dehousse – with the social setting presented in each film, but it also allows for consideration of the social context within which the films were made (eve of WW2; era of the Papon trial in France)

In answering this question you need to think about the way in which the flaw mentioned is presented cinematographically.

Analyse the cinematic techniques employed by film makers in seeking to create sympathetic or interesting characters. Answer with reference to ONE OR MORE of the films studied.

This is a different style of question, asking you to come up with an analysis of the way in which your chosen film is crafted. In some ways, preparing to answer such a question involves conducting a commentary-style close reading of the film, linking form with content. However, since this is an essay, it is also important that you generate an argument. Your introduction is crucial here in setting out how you intend to approach the question. Can you think of a 'problématique' that emerges from the task you have been set here, for instance? Perhaps engaging with the terms 'sympathetic' and 'interesting' will open up lines of enquiry.

Take care in an essay of this kind not simply to present your reader with a list of examples. Each paragraph needs to have its own argument that you support with examples and analysis. Reading for such a question will include critical material dealing with the film itself, but could also usefully include consultation of a generic work on film and cinematography.

'Un héros très discret breaks new ground by suggesting that in the historiography of Vichy the filmic distinctions between fiction and documentary and the literary distinctions between the novel and history are irrelevant (JILL FORBES)'. Explore how and why Audiard collapses these distinctions in the film.

This is a different style of question again. Unlike the debate-style question, here you have a question in two parts, where the quotation offers a point of view on a key feature of the film – the distinction between fiction and documentary, which can be read in literary terms as a distinction between novelistic writing and historical writing. You are asked to analyse why A collapses these distinctions, using Forbe's quotation as a way into such a discussion.

First of all it's important to be clear about the terms used in the title. What is 'historiography'? The OED defines this as 'the writing of history'. Secondly, the quote clearly assumes an understanding of the Vichy regime, which you need to share (doing a little background reading will increase your confidence in talking about the topic). Thirdly, you are asked to examine HOW Audiard collapses these distinctions (here you should be analysing cinematographic techniques used to blur these traditional boundaries) and WHY he chooses to do this (here it may be useful to read articles that interview Audiard to gauge his opinion on this, as well as reading other secondary works; it is also important not to neglect your own analysis). Note that the term 'historiography' implies the considered representation of a past event. Part of

what the film does is to present its audience with the processes of re-writing history at different historical moments. So in the film we see Dehousse's attempts to re-write history in the aftermath of the war, and in Audiard's use of mockumentary and non-diegetic music we come to question the processes of re-telling a story in the more immediate past (the time of Papon's trial).

'Renoir's adaptation of La Bête humaine is a tour de force because it powerfully combines symbolism, metaphor and realism.' How far do you agree? Answer with reference to the film. '

Here we're back to the classic debate-style question. There are three clear terms that need unpacking in the introduction: symbolism, metaphor and realism. Since these are such huge terms, it would be helpful to know something of their pertinence in the work of Renoir and in the context of film. For instance, if you do some research you'll see that Renoir was associated with a genre called 'poetic realism'. How is this defined? Symbolism and metaphor are rather closer in meaning and may perhaps be considered as opposing realism. Both suggest the representation of one thing in terms of another (whereas realism suggests efforts made to depict something *as it really is*), but symbolism may be said to have a narrower meaning, as an *individual object or image* associated with an emotion or abstract idea. Preparation for this question will involve

- identifying particular symbolic images or objects within the film and establishing how cinematographically Renoir renders them symbolic (using lighting, sound, camera angle etc...);
- examining whether its narrative (the central themes of passion and the journey) might be read metaphorically as representing other ideas (such as the inexorable march of history),
- and discussing whether the achievements of poetic realism (strong evocation of place; attention to contemporary social questions; depictions of working class life) add richness to the symbolic and metaphoric qualities of the film. Here again examining how cinematography contributes to the creation of poetic realism would be an important dimension within your discussion.

GENERAL FEEDBACK:

As a general point of principle, really analysing the terms of the question in depth before embarking on the planning process is crucial. Your planning will then be focused around a series of debates / questions / analyses that emerge from the close examination of a number of different forces suggested in the question. This process of disentangling ideas in a structured way is what sets a good essay apart from a weaker one. A good introduction will show a confident awareness of these different issues at play and will show how you intend to discuss them. An introduction that simply discusses the question in a vague and abstract way is not providing enough signposts to guide the reader through the essay that follows.

Questions of style and structure

- Be clear in your introduction where your argument is heading. Perhaps write your introduction last when you know how your argument will develop
- If you introduce your own 'key terms', you need to explain these. I found there was a tendency to bring in a clever sounding phrase and repeat it throughout without ever explaining what was meant by this - avoid jargon.
- Stick to one main idea per paragraph and try to signpost this in a clear manner, without being too methodical about this. Use the Point – Evidence – Explain model, followed by a concluding sentence that can lead into the next idea.
- Is there a thread running through your whole essay? Can a reader trace your argument from start to finish? Is it always clear the point that you are working toward in each paragraph? (I found that in these essays in particular, they moved to and fro between points in paragraphs)
- Punctuation
 - Apostrophes, especially 'it's / its'
 - Difference between comma and semi-colon
- Indentation after quotation. Your quotations should be incorporated within your paragraph unless they are more than 40 words long (see <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/french/current/ug/assessment/essaywritingconventions/>)
- Embedding quotations correctly within your English syntax (you may need to adapt your quotation grammatically in order to make it fit correctly within your English sentence)

General questions of content

Beware assuming too much knowledge on the part of the reader, and therefore not 'setting up' the essay and its argument sufficiently at the beginning - with, for example, contextual information. This can also be an issue when you use quotations: though your reader knows the film / album, they need to be clear about who is speaking, and to whom, in the quotations you present. Pronouns like 'lui' and 'la' are not self-explanatory.

All statements need to be supported by the primary material. If you cannot find evidence for it in the essay, then is your point a valid one?

Useful web links:

On paragraphing

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/french/current/ug/modules/firstyear/strategies/formative/commesswriting/paragraphing/>

On generic advice available at Warwick one to one

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/scs/skills/awp/advice/>

On punctuation

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/page_55.htm

General academic writing advice :

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/scs/skills/awp/online/>