

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress
Higher Tier

The purpose of this pack is to provide centres with the question paper, mark scheme and a set of exemplar materials with commentaries.

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Included in this pack:

- Question and extract from Summer 2012 Paper
- Marked scripts with the mark and band
- Examiner commentary and mark scheme

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress

Extract taken from Part III, Section 1.

It was a mystery to me why Luo, who seemed so daring in all things, should have such a dread of heights. He was an intellectual type, and had never climbed a tree in his life. I still remember the afternoon in our boyhood when we were seized with the idea of climbing the rusty iron ladder of a water tower. Right from the start he scraped the palms of his hands on the rust, and when we were fifteen metres up he said, 'I keep having the feeling the rungs will collapse under my weight.' His hands were bleeding and painful, which only increased his fear. In the end he gave up, leaving me to climb the rest of the way on my own; from the top of the tower I leaned over to spit down on him for a joke, but my spittle was swept away by the wind. Five or six years had passed since then, but his dread of heights had not diminished. And he was quite right about the Little Seamstress and me having no trouble at all running over the narrowest mountain ridge. In fact, once we had reached the other side we would often have to wait for Luo to catch up with us, which could take a long time because he had to get down and crawl.

One day, for a change of air, I decided to accompany Luo on his pilgrimage to the Little Seamstress's village.

By the time we reached the perilous path Luo had told me about, the soft morning breeze had made way for a mountain gale. I gasped when I saw the risk Luo had been taking every day. Even I started trembling when I set foot on the ridge.

My left boot dislodged a stone, and almost at the same moment my right boot pushed some clods of earth over the side. They tumbled into the depths, and it was some time before we heard them hitting the bottom at different intervals. The sound reverberated into the distance, first on the right, then on the left.

I should never have looked down: to my right gaped a rocky crevasse of dizzying depth, at the bottom of which the trees were swathed in mist. My ears started buzzing when I looked to my left, where the earth had fallen away to create a sheer drop fifty metres deep.

Fortunately it was not quite as far over the ridge as Luo had said. On a boulder at the other end perched a raven with a red beak, its head ominously drawn into its shoulders.

'D'you want me to take your hod?' I offered casually. Luo was hanging back at the beginning of the path.

'Yes please, you take it.'

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress – Higher Tier – part (a)

3 Answer all parts of the following question.

(a) Explore how the language in the extract influences your view of Luo.

You **must** include examples of language features in your answer.

(16)

Script 1 response to part (a)

Band 4 – 12 marks

The character of Luo is portrayed as a daring and ~~adventurous~~ extrovert. This ~~idea~~ is shown by the narrator's description of him being 'daring in all things' the use of the adjectives 'daring' and 'all' suggests that it is out of character for him to be afraid of heights. This ^{subordinate clause} is ~~further shown by the minor~~ ^{in the} opening sentence, 'It was a mystery to me'. The noun 'mystery' reinforces the idea that it influences the reader's view to believe that this was out of the ordinary and ~~rein~~ suggests to the reader that this is his one main weakness. The description of him being an 'intellectual type' juxtaposed by his failure to climb a tree, suggests to the reader that the character of Luo was not very

The character ~~is~~ is also presented as a risk taker for the person he loves, 'his pilgrimage to the LCS' village' the use of the verb 'pilgrimage' has sentimental and special connotations suggesting he needs to see her and that it in some ways fulfils something in him. ~~There~~ and that it is a routine visit. He ^{puts aside} ~~puts~~ his fear of height in order to see her. The ^{writer} uses a lot of adjectives to make the path to the LCS more reminding

and dangerous to cleave ~~the~~ ^{the} fear of the heights. 'dizzy-
-ing depth' 'membranes' 'swathed in the mist' The use of
alliteration in ~~the description of the~~ 'dizzying depth' emphasizes
the height of the pathway, making it seem more deathly and
~~and~~ mimics the sound of stuttering, which ~~are~~ both boys could
be doing out of fear. ~~Then~~ Luo's character is also portrayed
as someone who exaggerates, a good quality of a story-teller
~~as the power~~ This is shown when the narrator states that
the ridge was 'not quite as ~~over~~ ^{over} ~~the ridge~~ as Luo had said.
This suggests that he exaggerates to make his fear of heights
seem more understandable and relatable and less like it has
been a deep rooted fear from childhood. The ^{use of the adjectives} ~~character of~~
~~Luo~~ ~~has~~ ~~also~~ ~~been~~ ~~portrayed~~ ~~as~~ ~~a~~ ~~role~~ ~~model~~ not quite
is an example of elegant language to downplay the exaggeration
given by Luo, this may be because the narrator looks up to
Luo and respects him a lot. This is shown by the opening sentence

U, 'It was a mystery to me why Luo... should have such a dread
of heights' The use of the comparative 'such' suggests it is
a lot worse than it seems and has a deep fear of heights. A
fear of heights is a common phobia, however the writer states
that it was a mystery, followed by a positive reinforcement of

two's character 'who seemed to do everything in all things' this shows that he elevates Leo and ~~he~~ works up to ^{him} and respects him and influences the view that Leo is like a role-model and that for his hero to have a weakness is a great shock to him.

Examiner summary:

The candidate shows assured understanding of the text and the writer's ideas with pertinent reference to the extract to support how the writer uses language.

Band this response achieves in the mark scheme:

| | | |
|---|-------|---|
| 4 | 10-13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assured understanding of the text• Assured understanding of the writer's ideas• Assured understanding of how the writer uses language• Pertinent reference to the extract to support response. |
|---|-------|---|

To move up to the next band: This response needs to refer more closely to the writer's use of language and support these points with discriminating references to the extract.

Script 2 response to part (a)

Band 5 – 16 marks

a) In this extract we see a different side to Luo. Throughout the novel he is perceived and presented as in charge, strong and capable. Luo helps Ma in the coal mine and is a year older. Here we see that this is not the whole picture.

Luo is presented as 'daring' but his life-long fear is also addressed. His "dread of heights" implies to the reader that Luo may also not be as strong as his façade in other things. Words such as "dread", and "fear" suggest that it is not just a dislike but more, maybe even a phobia.

Ma decides to "accompany Luo" to see the Seamstress. This journey has been referred to as "Luo's 'daily pilgrimage'" which tells us that it is a journey he makes often. Ma is greeted by a "perilous path". This alliteration intensifies the effect of the language. Perilous suggests death, which everyone is afraid of. Through this description ^{Dai Sijie} ~~the author~~ is telling ^{the reader} that anyone would be scared of the ridge, implying that ~~the~~ Luo's fear means this daily routine is a terror. The "mountain gate" creates a nervous and tense atmosphere, the word "mountain"

also suggesting that it is huge. This is also a metaphor for Ma's realization or change of thought. The words "...Luo had told me about" tell us that the narrator already had a picture of the ridge in his head, painted by Luo. The "soft morning breeze" refers to Ma thinking it was Luo's phonic talking. "...made way for ~~the~~ a mountain gale" shows that Ma is surprised and frightened by the reality of the situation.

If Ma is scared of the height ~~suggestion~~ we know that Luo must be terrified. The reason for Luo's trip is to visit the little Chinese seamstress. This shows the extent of his love for her that he is willing to endure that test everytime he goes. This shows the reader that perhaps the seamstress is the one thing in his life which is truly his. Re-education took everything away from him and they know they have an "infinitesimal chance of $\frac{3}{1000}$ " in ~~1000~~. Luo is able to teach her, to love her and to spend time with her away from reality. He can leave Phoenix Mountain and the veil is lifted, he can be his true self.

The way Luo says "yes please" to Ma's offer of taking his hood shows the extent of his terror he suffers everytime he takes the trip. This also shows the extent of his love for the seamstress.

The red beaked raven Ma sees is a symbol of death. In western culture red is a symbol of danger and of love or passion. This connotation speaks eloquently of Luo

will to put himself in that danger ~~in~~ order to see the person he is so in love with. Also Ravens can be perceived as omens of death perhaps because of the black colour or their way of scavenging for food. This metaphor is repeated through out the novel reminding the reader of the constant danger and the forbidden love of Ivo and the Seamstress.

overall, in this extract we see that Ivo is not as brave as he is first presented. However, the little seamstress gives him the power to overcome his fear, or at least to face it. This extract illustrates the extent of Ivo's devotion to the Seamstress.

Examiner summary:

This is an excellent response, with perceptive analysis of language and perceptive understanding of the text and the writer's ideas. There is a passing reference to ravens in another part of the novel but this does not impact on the final mark.

Band this response achieves in the mark scheme:

| | | |
|---|-------|---|
| 5 | 14-16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perceptive understanding of the text• Perceptive understanding of the writer's ideas• Perceptive understanding of how the writer uses language• Discriminating reference to the extract to support response. |
|---|-------|---|

This response receives full marks.

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress – Higher Tier – part (b)

(b) In the extract, we find out about Luo's character.

Explore **one other** part of the novel which tells us more about Luo's character.

You **must** use examples of the language the writer uses to support your ideas.

(24)

Script 1 response to part (b)

Band 4 – 17 marks

pages 4 - 6

(Section A continued)

b) In the ^{couple of} first pages in the first chapter, the character of Luo is portrayed as cunning, and quick witted and immediately shown as the dominant one in the friendship, this is shown by when they ~~was~~ were inspecting the violin. Luo 'casually' ^{on a stated that the narrator was a fine musician} corrected them that it is a musical instrument and not a toy. The use of the adjective casually shows confidence and ~~in~~ despite the overwhelming atmosphere ^{created by the} of villagers and the headman, he remains laid back which suggests to the reader, he had a plan. This further implies to the reader that he is witty and a quick thinker and works well under pressure. ~~the~~ Luo gives the narrator a 'surreptitious' wink, the adjective of 'surreptitious' implies that they can communicate with each other without the others around ^{this} ~~it also~~ suggests that the character has a very close bond with the narrator and have known each other for a long while as they have developed the ability to communicate with each other in code. It also suggests that Luo is sly and cunning and that he has a trick up his sleeve.

narrator's victim was cursed as a toy and was about to be thrown in the fire, the hopelessness of the situation is further shown by the metaphor 'this verdict' it provides imagery that the narrator is ^{a defendant} in court and Luo is his barrister, coming to his aid. Luo ~~was~~ through a cool calm pretense ^{was} managed to save this monument. He ^{inferred} referred to Thomas 'Comrade', as it is a musical instrument. The use of the ~~an~~ adjective/noun comrade is significant as it is an important referral in communism as it implies equality, brotherhood and togetherness suggesting that they are all on the same level, further suggesting that ~~knows~~ they are supporters of the communist regime and not against it, like ~~was~~ implied by the headline - an referring to it as a ^{bourgeois} 'toy'. The narrator is shown to be the less dominant of the two, elevating Luo by when he begins playing the violin. The description of him being nervous and running his 'swollen fingers' over the violin makes him seem more pathetic and less confident than Luo who appears to be cool and a smart thinker.

Examiner summary:

The candidate displays an assured understanding of the text and selects a relevant part of the novel to discuss Luo's character. There is pertinent reference to the text and an assured understanding of how the writer uses language.

Band this response achieves in the mark scheme:

| | | |
|---|-------|--|
| 4 | 15-19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assured understanding of the text • Assured understanding of the writer's ideas • Assured understanding of how the writer uses language • Pertinent reference to the extract to support response. |
|---|-------|--|

To move up to the next band: This response needs to refer more closely to how the writer uses language to explore Luo's character and support these points with discriminating references to the candidate's chosen extract.

Script 2 response to part (b)

Band 5 – 24 marks

B) extract: Iuo's story - part 3 "what ^{she has discovered...} ~~is~~ again some day."

In this extract Iuo speaks for himself ^{for} the first ^{and only} time in the novel. We see his own opinion and this ^{bring about} ~~is~~ a more personal and intimate connection between his character ~~and~~ and the reader.

Iuo describes his fear not as Ma had done but as a "horror of heights" this alliterative and powerful quote suggests that maybe Iuo was keeping the extent of his fear as secret as he could. He describes his "horror of heights" as making him "dizzy", an aspect he does not confront to Ma or the Seamstress.

This could be ~~as~~ as a result of his love for the Seamstress. If he tells the Seamstress of his fear, to the extent it is, she may tell him not to come as she would not want him to have to endure that daily. This also shows the little Seamstresses love for Iuo.

The fear of heights is mirroring the Seamstresses diving talent. ~~Her talent was not something that could be taught~~ This talent was "not something that could be taught", she was born with it, as Iuo was with his fear of heights. This creates an idea that it is the Seamstress protecting Iuo, and in a way it is. She is protecting him from reality, from re-education. The way Iuo describes his key ring, a birthday

present", a "talisman", ~~was~~ "goldplated" with "tiny jade leaves", this shows that it is a precious possession. ^{Representing} ~~Attaining~~ how precious his former life was. The importance of this item is heightened by Luo's overall lack of possessions.* The way Luo 'flung' it into the pool shows that he has given up hope. Also the turtle Luo releases supports this.* Luo says, "who will ever release me from this mountain?" This suggests that he will never be released, this ^{is an} idea that he is in captivity.

In the time of the Chinese Cultural Revolution intelligence was frowned upon. Also young people were not supposed to have ^{even} contact with one another, not being allowed to marry until the age of 25.* This shows that Luo was rejected in society for being the son of a dentist and for attending school. Also his relationship with the seamstresses must be a secret, as it is against Chairman Mao Zedong's ruling. Culture is a huge part of the novel and this literature from western authors was very seriously forbidden, this shows that all Luo's feelings were being held captive. His love for ^{the} ^{seamstress} his family origin, his love of literature was all frowned upon and suppressed.

In this extract we find that Luo has given up hope of his life getting any better. But the seamstress has not. The seamstress's ~~was~~ "instantaneous" reaction of retrieving the keys was a display of how she believed in Luo. This shows the strength of their bond, the tacit

understanding between them. Also Iuo says, "She ^{must} have been the only person in the world who still had faith in my ultimate release from reeducation." This shows that she has stood by him and that their love is strong. ⁴*

This extract tells us ~~the~~ about the extent of Iuo's fear in his own words, but also that his hope, once lost is restored by the little seamstress.

¹* As a result of the cultural revolution, and eventually of his reeducation in the early 70s.

²* The ending shows that he has given up hope for literature and bourgeois intellectual ideals. He has not deserted them, yet he has given up hope ~~of~~ of ever being permitted to support his true views freely.

³* The ideal course of action for love in the time of the cultural revolution was to marry who the parents had chosen and to fall in love with them after marriage.

⁴* Perhaps this is ^{a convincing} ~~the~~ reason for her leaving at the end. She is what is holding Iuo down keeping him from despair. If she left perhaps he would soon be free to follow.

Examiner summary:

The candidate shows perceptive understanding of the chosen extract from 'one other part of the novel'. Examples are discriminating and commented on perceptively.

Band this response achieves in the mark scheme:

| | | |
|---|-------|---|
| 5 | 20-24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perceptive understanding of the text• Perceptive understanding of the writer's ideas• Perceptive understanding of how the writer uses language• Discriminating reference to the extract to support response. |
|---|-------|---|

This response receives full marks.