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Teaching English for Academic Purposes

The language of literary analysis in postgraduate essays: demonstrating disciplinary knowledge and developing critical voice

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Abstract

The discursive practices of academic disciplines have social and epistemological dimensions, reflecting a field's orientation to knowledge. As disciplinary apprentices, university students are required to think and write about their subject in ways valued by their field in order to demonstrate their disciplinary knowledge for assessment. Often, however, the valued ways of communicating this disciplinary knowledge remain hidden in the curriculum rather than explicitly taught. This study addresses such tacit discursive practices in the context of a postgraduate Literature programme. The study aims to understand what representations of disciplinary knowledge and types of critical engagement are valued in postgraduate literary analysis in order to inform English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teaching. Drawing on analytical tools from Systemic Functional Linguistics, the study analyses these discursive practices in high and lower-scoring essays to provide a rich description of their linguistic realisation in successful student writing. Results show significant differences in the ways high and lower-scoring students represent the aesthetic and semiotic properties of literary texts and develop critical stance. The implications for EAP curriculum and pedagogy are discussed and a model of disciplinary literacy that addresses meaning-related needs in close collaboration with the discipline is recommended.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Disciplinary discourse and hidden values

As social fields, disciplinary areas have their own discourses relating to specific orientations to knowledge and knowledge practices (Hyland, 2004, Maton, 2014).

Alongside the content knowledge of a discipline are valued dispositions, attitudes and aptitudes (Maton, 2014) reflected in specific ways of thinking and writing about the subject. Often these valued ways of communicating disciplinary knowledge are tacit in the curriculum rather than explicitly taught (Jacobs, 2007; Knoetze, 2025; Wilder, 2011), particularly in humanities subjects such as Literature where the principles and procedures of the discipline tend to be less visible (Maton, 2014). In assessment genres like the Literature essay, designed to help students develop specific aspects of their disciplinary thinking and writing (Nesi and Gardner, 2012), these valued practices or ‘rules of the game’ remain hidden for some students. As Christie and Macken-Horarik argue: ‘A powerful invisible pedagogy often applies, such that what is evaluated as success is tacitly understood, rather than clearly articulated’ (2007, p.157). While Christie and Macken-Horarik refer here to school subject English, I suggest their claim is equally relevant in tertiary contexts.

The need to make these hidden values more explicit is particularly important in current Higher Education (HE) contexts where students bring a variety of linguistic, sociocultural, and, at postgraduate level, disciplinary backgrounds to their studies (Macnaught, 2024). To enable more equitable outcomes, an approach to academic writing development is

required that supports students in developing control over language and texts to meet the demands of disciplinary writing (Martin, 2009; Coffin, 2006; Coffin and Donohue, 2014; Dreyfus et al, 2016).

1.2. Pedagogical context and motivation

The motivation for this study is my pedagogical context, teaching in sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to postgraduate students on a one-year MA Literature programme at a UK university. Weekly EAP writing classes support students in developing the language and skills required in their disciplinary writing, particularly in relation to their dominant assessment genre: the literature essay. In this genre, essay titles are abstract and open, with students given relative freedom in their interpretation of concepts, choice of literary texts, and arrangement of their response, reflecting the idiosyncratic tendencies of writing in the discipline (Parry, 1998, Wilder, 2011). Despite this freedom, students are required to conceptualise and write about literature in ways valued in the field, demonstrating literary analysis that meets disciplinary expectations, for example building interpretations from close reading of the literary text and engagement with critical perspectives (University of Leeds, 2024). How to demonstrate this ‘close reading’ and ‘critical insight’ in their assessments, however, is not always clear to students, typifying the tacit disciplinary knowledge of the programme. To make this tacit knowledge more visible, it is necessary for the EAP practitioner to understand how the valued discursive practices of the discipline can be linguistically realised in student writing to inform pedagogical interventions.

1.3. Aims and approach

While there have been detailed studies of student writing in school English (Christie, 1999; Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2007 & 2011; Christie and Dreyfus, 2007; Macken-Horarik, 2017), and some research into tertiary student writing in the discipline (Bruce, 2010, 2016, 2020; Wilder, 2011; Li, 2025), there has been little analysis of literature essays at Postgraduate level. My aim is to gain a better understanding of areas of meaning central to thinking and writing about literature for postgraduate students to inform curriculum and pedagogical interventions in my teaching context. More specifically, I aim to understand what representations of disciplinary knowledge and types of critical engagement are valued in their writing by comparing high and lower-scoring essays.

Addressing this aim requires a functional orientation to language and the analytical tools to make possible a rich description of situated and specialised discursive practices. This study draws on analytic frameworks from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) that provide a multi-perspectival lens on meaning-making and allow me to examine the relationship between text and disciplinary context (Martin, 2009).

1.4. Dissertation outline

Chapter 2 situates the discursive practices of literary studies within the discipline's broader orientation to knowledge and reviews relevant research into student writing in the discipline. Chapter 3 outlines the study's methodological approach, explaining the application of analytical frameworks to the data. The results are presented in Chapter 4

with integrated discussion, and Chapter 5 concludes with the study's implications for pedagogy.

2. Literature Review

This chapter first considers the epistemological and social aspects of disciplinary knowledge in literary studies as important dimensions in disciplinary discursive practices, before reviewing research into writing in the discipline from different research perspectives. The chapter argues that more research is needed into how students linguistically realise literary analysis at postgraduate level to make the valued 'gaze' expected in literature essays more visible in the curriculum.

2.1. Knowledge practices in literary studies: the invisible gaze

As a field's discursive practices are influenced by its orientation to knowledge (Clarence and McKenna, 2017), it is important to consider the nature and structure of knowledge in literary studies to help surface the values that students are expected to demonstrate in their writing practices. Literary studies is a weak-boundaried discipline (Becher and Trowler, 2001), with varied specialisms that draw in different ways on theories and concepts from the humanities and social sciences. The nature of knowledge in this field is elusive with no clearly defined object of study or unifying theoretical paradigm (Eagleton, 1996; Knoetze, 2025; Wilder, 2011) and purposes and methods of literary scholarship and criticism that vary (Eagleton, 1996; Wilder, 2011; and Knoetze, 2025). Wilder, for example, highlights the many 'subspecialties' and 'enormous theoretical divides' among individual

scholars (2011, p.28) indicating a horizontal knowledge structure where different research areas form series of discrete or 'specialised' languages, with their own approaches and modes of interrogation (Bernstein, 1999).

We find this reflected on the Literature MA, the context of this study, where students select varied modules, for example, 'Postcolonial Encounters' or 'Shakespeare's Tyrants', and employ diverse lenses such as postcolonial or ecocritical theory. Development of knowledge in this field involves the addition of new, segmented areas of research as opposed to their integration into a more unified and cumulative knowledge base (Bernstein, 1999). This poses a challenge for students who may encounter modules that require them to think and write about texts in very different ways.

'Knowing' in literary studies involves adopting a particular gaze on the object of study (Maton, 2014; Christie, 2016; Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2007) and emphasises perspective and positioning over explicit methodology or procedures. This characterises literary studies as a 'knower-code' field (Maton, 2014) where knowledge claims have a social rather than epistemological basis and gazes are cultivated through a process of socialisation into or immersion in the discipline over time (Maton, 2014). As Christie and Macken-Horarik (2007) point out, this type of tacit acquisition advantages students who have already been socialised into particular ways of reading and writing about literary texts and this has implications in the context of the one-year Literature MA where students' educational backgrounds in the discipline vary.

Research has highlighted the knower-code of the field in relation to school subject English in various contexts (Christie, 1999; Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2007) with Christie identifying one of the goals of school English as developing a sensibility for appreciating literary works in students (1999). Christie and Macken-Horarik (2007, 2011) provide useful summaries of different approaches to school English and its required 'gazes' over the years of schooling, for example the cultivation of a particular 'attitudinal stance' towards literary work and an exploration of human values through their interpretation (Christie, 1999, p.159).

In tertiary contexts, Knoetze has looked in detail at the cultivated gaze in the context of an English Literature curriculum at a South African university (2025). Using Legitimation Code Theory's specialisation dimension, she highlights two orientations within the cultivated gaze that are legitimated in her curriculum of focus: the aesthetic and the socio-critical. The focus of the aesthetic orientation is on the literary text as object of study, with close attention to how aspects of genre, form and language create meaning, exemplified in the practice of 'close reading'. This is where discipline-specific methods of inquiry come into play as students are required to demonstrate their knowledge and analysis of literary forms and techniques in their interpretations. The focus of the socio-critical orientation is the relation of literary texts to social and ideological issues. Importantly, Knoetze found that these orientations become increasingly integrated in the curriculum as students progress through their studies, requiring students to relate their close reading abilities (often the focus at lower levels of study) to theoretical readings and concepts.

Knoetze's orientations within the cultivated gaze are very relevant in the context of this study. While there is often a socio-critical framing of modules on the MA, for example, 'Fictions of citizenship in contemporary American Literature', students need to evidence both orientations in their writing, building broader arguments from the close reading of literary texts (University of Leeds, 2024). This requirement, however, is not always made explicit to students. 'Close reading' often remains a tacit practice (Wilder, 2011) and, by this level of study, it is assumed that students have already acquired the tools and skills of close analysis and know how to evidence this in their writing.

This research into the knowledge practices and dispositions valued in literary studies (Maton, 2014; Christie, 1999; Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2007) and how they underpin curriculum (Knoetze, 2025), helps to conceptualise important epistemological and social aspects of the discipline. To help students understand the demands of their assessment genres, the EAP practitioner next needs to understand how the invisible knowledge practices of the 'cultivated gaze' can be demonstrated in student writing. Section 2.2. will review research into student writing in the discipline, grouped by theoretical approach.

2.2. Writing practices in literary studies: demonstrating the gaze

Genre-based research approaches to writing in Literature include rhetorical genre studies (RGS), English for specific purposes (ESP), and socio-cognitive genre studies, which emphasise social, linguistic and cognitive aspects of writing to varying degrees (Bruce,

2008). This section reviews relevant studies from these research perspectives before focusing on SFL genre approaches in 2.3.

2.2.1 Rhetorical genre studies

Scholarship in RGS has contributed to understandings of what is characteristic of and valued in scholarly and student writing in the discipline (Fahnestock and Secor, 1991; Wilder and Woolfe, 2009; Wilder, 2011). Building on Fahnestock and Secor's research into the rhetoric of literary criticism (1991), Wilder (2011) investigated more recent scholarly writing in the field and identified recurring 'special topoi', understood as particular methods and patterns of interpretation across otherwise diverse literary criticism, for example appearance/reality, social justice, and paradigm (using a conceptual framework to elucidate the literary text). These topoi appeal to shared values of the discourse community, including assumptions around effective argumentation. Important were 'assumed values of complexity and nonreductive argumentation held by both the arguer and the audience' (p.22), resonating with Becher's characterisation of the discipline as concerned with 'particulars, qualities [and] complication' (1994, p.154). Interestingly, despite the evolving practices of literary criticism, Wilder's findings support Fahnestock and Secor's earlier conclusion that there is 'one fundamental assumption' behind critical inquiry in the discipline:

that literature is complex and that to understand it requires patient unraveling, translating, decoding, interpretation, and analyzing. (1991, p. 89)

Turning attention to student writing, Wilder's research into literature professors' evaluations of undergraduate writing (2011) found that highly valued student analyses follow the discourse patterns of professional writing through employing the special topoi, align with the discipline's overall value of complexity, and engage with the contemporary criticism of the discourse community.

Specific valued practices, reported by Wilder, include the importance of a central thesis claim supported with 'evidence and sophisticated reasoning' (2011, p.81) dependent on students' ability to close read the literary text engage with the surrounding critical debates. Despite the different educational contexts, these valued practices appear to correspond to the two orientations identified by Knoetze (2025): the aesthetic and the socio-critical orientations, respectively. Valued demonstrations of close reading included 'the use of multiple, specific, and potentially obscure textual examples' directly quoted from the literary work with explanations that highlight their significance within the writer's overall interpretive argument (Wilder, 2011, p.84). Professors also valued student abilities to situate a literary work in relevant contexts, using professional criticism to 'complicate and enrich' their own interpretation (p.103).

A further feature of successful texts identified was originality of argument, achieved by building on previous interpretations or exploring an interpretive gap. Interesting was the observation that successful students craft an image of themselves as 'potential colleague' by projecting an authoritative 'voice' or 'stance that is confident and unhesitant' (p.103).

Student writing evaluated as weaker by the professors included scripts that largely summarised rather than analysed the literary work, showed misunderstanding of literary techniques, and offered simplistic or surface-level interpretations. In contrast to the selective and purposeful use of textual examples in valued scripts, weaker writing used direct examples from literary texts ineffectively in block quotation, with insufficient purpose or explanation. This resulted in a lack of ‘close reading’ to support a clear thesis.

Wilder’s findings resonate with my experience of tutor guidance and feedback on student writing in my present teaching context, with successful scripts praised for sophistication of argument and critical engagement, a clear central thesis and ‘excellent selection and use of evidence’ in its support (University of Leeds, 2024). Comments on weaker scripts frequently reference a lack of close reading and undeveloped analysis, too much description of plot or character, and interpretations that oversimplify and overgeneralise. The School’s approach, and assessment criteria, seems to align with the literature that argument in this disciplinary context can be understood as persuasive interpretation (Wolfe and Wilder, 2016).

While Wilder’s studies highlight valued practices in disciplinary writing in literary studies, analysis from the RGS approach remains at the level of broad rhetorical moves, offering little analysis of the different ways these moves can be linguistically realised. What does, for example, a ‘voice or stance that is confident and unhesitant’ (Wilder, 2011, p.103) look like in student writing? Although Wolfe and Wilder (2016) offer some ‘typical phrases’ in their student textbook, description of linguistic choice beyond this is limited.

2.2.2 English for specific purposes

While there appear to be no ESP studies that focus on literary studies specifically, ESP research into humanities writing broadly confirms Wilder's findings (2011), emphasising the importance of stance (Hyland, 2004), realised through explicit evaluative strategies such as adverbial comment and 'argumentative reporting verbs' (p.37), and the construction of an authorial self in relation to other named disciplinary voices. While Hyland's approach adds some linguistic detail, the analysis is not specific to the discipline or to student genres and so offers limited pedagogical guidance. Hyland also notes the challenges of applying the type of move analysis common in ESP (see Swales, 1990) to humanities writing due to the diversity of the discourse; this difficulty certainly resonates with my attempts to define move patterns in literary studies writing where complex moves appear to realise several functions.

2.2.3 Social-cognitive genre studies

Bruce's work on tertiary student writing in the discipline of English provides relevant insights into organisational patterns relating to different rhetorical purposes within English essays (2010) and expressions of critical stance (2016, 2020). Applying his social-cognitive genre model (Bruce, 2008), Bruce found that body sections of English essays consist of elaborated Recounts (reference to chronologically staged events/episodes from the literary text with extensive interpretive comment) and Explanations (that present information with an orientation on means). Although looking only at essays' macrostructure, importantly, Bruce's work notes the different cognitive purposes of

sections of tertiary writing (for example, to argue or to explain), highlighting that this complexity is not always captured in approaches that define genres in terms of a single rhetorical purpose (2010).

In terms of critical stance, Bruce looked at statements providing student-writers' own evaluation in relation to the essay topic, identifying grounds-conclusion and concession-contraexpectation as the most common coherence relations in the English critical statements (2016). While these findings indicate the type of reasoning important in the discipline, it would be useful to look in more detail at what, for example, constitutes 'grounds' in literary analysis in the present study.

2.3. SFL approaches to student writing in literary studies

SFL genre approaches consider the social and linguistic aspects of discourse, viewing language as meaning-making resource operating within a particular social context (Martin, 2009).

2.3.1 SFL studies of student writing in English Literature

While SFL studies of writing pedagogy in Literature predominantly focus on school-level English (Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2007 & 2011; Christie and Dreyfus, 2007; Macken-Horarik, 2017), they provide useful insights into developmental trajectories in student writing in the discipline.

A common theme in this research is that successful writing has strong thematic organisation through macro- and hyperThemes, aligning with Wilder's (2011) findings about the importance of a central thesis. Christie and Dreyfus' study of secondary English writing (2007) identified strong thematic organisation as central in literary response genres noting that thematic organisation crucially enables students to relate points to the text's overall purpose, building a sense of unity.

A second common theme is the increasing requirement for capacity in handling abstraction in the advanced years of schooling. This includes abstracting notions or ideas about texts, often in macroThemes, (Christie and Dreyfus, 2007) and the ability to 'shunt between concrete particulars [of the literary text] and abstract significance' in constructing interpretations (Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2011, p. 191). Key linguistic resources in the realisations of symbolic readings of texts include lexical and grammatical metaphor, embedded clauses, and elaborated nominal groups (Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2007 & 2011). These abstractions are then exemplified through selected details from literary texts and expanded through enhancing clauses (Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2011).

In a study of evaluative meanings, Li (2025) analysed undergraduate student writing in introductory literature courses in the US, focusing on students' use of appraisal resources to demonstrate abstract qualities of literary interpretation such as nuance. She found that proficient writers draw on appreciation resources to position themselves as sensitive to literary subtleties. For example, students draw on resources of composition:complexity to unpack literary elements of form and language. This resonates with Knoetze's 'aesthetic orientation' and the overarching value of complexity previously discussed, suggesting that

appraisal resources are significant in demonstrating the literary gaze. Li also found that proficient writers use engagement resources to expand and contract the dialogic space in ways that explore the ambiguity and multiple layers of meanings in literary texts.

Resources of heteroglossia are also identified as important in argument genres in history (Coffin, 2006), appearing significant for this study's focus on how students demonstrate critical engagement.

These SFL studies of student writing in literary studies highlight areas of meaning-making central to the demonstration of disciplinary knowledge and identify important resources in their realisation. However, research into specific practices in tertiary literary analysis is limited and does not extend to postgraduate study.

2.3.2 SFL studies of 'analytical exposition'

While 'analysis' does not constitute a genre in SFL, it is used to specify 'analytical exposition' as a subtype of the exposition argument genre (Humphrey and Economou, 2015), and there have been a number of studies exploring characteristics of analytical writing in various disciplines (Humphrey and Economou, 2015, biology and education; Donohue, 2012, film studies; Humphrey and Dreyfus, 2013, linguistics).

Successful analytical writing in these studies contained the deliberate arrangement of information to serve the text's purposes through ideational and textual resources. As Humphrey and Economou explain:

analysis involves use of Taxonomical relations (e.g. class-member, part-whole) in association with logical relationships (time, cause, contrast) in order to provide a structure or framework for information or ideas (2015, p.39)

In the film studies context, the success of undergraduate film analysis relied on students' arrangement of elements of film (compositional aspects of 'mise en scene') to form an analytical framework, with hyperThemes clearly relating to the central macroTheme ('mise en scene makes meaning') (Donohue, 2012, p.10). This resonates with Christie and Dreyfus' findings about the importance of strong thematic progression in literary response writing (2007).

Similar to findings from school English, a second characteristic of successful analysis identified was resources to convey abstract meanings. In both education and biology, for example, abstraction enabled entities to be classified into categories and put into relationship, for example through comparison (Humphrey and Economou, 2015). In film studies, while lower-scoring students described concrete details of film, high-scoring students were able to move between material aspects of the film and their semiotic properties and abstract meanings, revealing significant differences in how students approached film as an object of study. This highlights abstraction as highly significant to literary analysis which also centres on an object of study with aesthetic and semiotic properties.

Importantly, Humphrey and Economou (2015) argue that the functions of description, analysis, persuasion and critique play interdependent rather than hierarchical roles in critical analysis (2015). We find this in literary analysis in the interaction of close reading

and critical engagement, highlighting the need to investigate how these aspects of writing work together rather than in isolation.

In terms of genre, Humphrey and Economou (2015) highlight the analytical exposition as one of the most common genres realising persuasion in tertiary writing, following Coffin's identification of three stages: thesis (or overall position); arguments; and reinforcement of thesis (2006). Within the argument stage, Humphrey and Economou identify typical 'claim' and 'grounds' phases in persuasive discourse patterns, which are linked through implicit or explicit causal relations (2015). As identified earlier, the work of literary analysis concerns persuasive interpretation (Nesi and Gardner, 2012), so it will be useful to see whether student literature essays follow a similar staging to the analytical exposition.

2.4. Chapter summary and research questions

The literature reviewed provides insights into the valued knowledge practices of literary studies as a knower-code field, requiring students to adopt a particular gaze on the literary text that sees both its aesthetic properties and its relation to broader socio-critical concepts. To demonstrate this gaze, students need to employ language to move between particulars of the literary text and abstract ideas, purposefully stage an argument, and engage with critical voices to establish their own interpretive stance. However, there has been little research into how students linguistically realise these functions in tertiary literary analysis tasks to inform pedagogy, particularly at postgraduate level. The findings of this chapter inform the research questions of the present study:

- RQ1: What representations of disciplinary knowledge are valued in postgraduate literary analysis?
- RQ2: How do students develop stance and voice in their essays in ways valued in the discipline?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Methodology

This study takes a qualitative and comparative approach to discourse analysis. Drawing on analytical tools from SFL, I analyse 15 Postgraduate Literature essays, comparing 10 awarded distinctions with 5 ranging from pass to bare merit.

SFL was chosen for its functional orientation to language. Considering language use in its social context, as a meaning-making resource (Halliday, 1978, 1985), SFL provides descriptive and interpretive analytical frameworks that have been extended for use in educational linguistics by many theorists since Halliday (e.g. Martin, 1992; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Martin and Rose, 2007). These frameworks look at language across different levels (strata) and in relationship to the three functions it performs (metafunctions): the ideational, representing experience; the interpersonal, enacting relationships; and the textual, organising text (Martin and Rose, 2007). Figure 1 illustrates SFL's relation of strata and metafunctions.

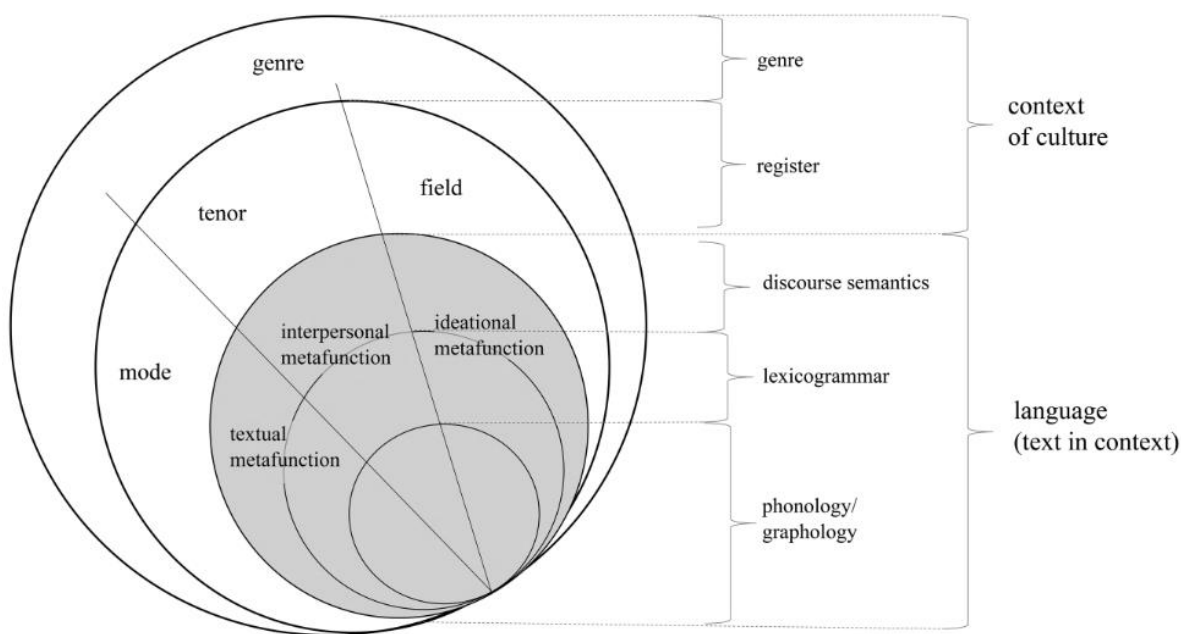


Figure 1: An SFL modelling of context (Macnaught, 2024, p.23)

This multi-perspectival approach to language allows me to explore the relationship between the essays and their disciplinary context and examine how students' language choices create meanings related to the different functions the task requires. SFL's analytical tools also aid a rich description of how students realise literary analysis from the level of genre to the more delicate levels of lexico-grammar.

The study took the form of a genre analysis of all 15 essays, followed by detailed analysis of one generic stage in a smaller sample (6 high-scoring; 5 lower). The focus on one essay stage (approximately two pages per essay) allowed a more detailed examination of how different language systems and functions interact. The decision to look at a range of systems stems from my pedagogical motivation; the interaction of different functions was identified in Chapter 2 as central to successful realisation of analytical writing in general, and literary analysis in particular. However, the study also needed to be feasible, so

systems were prioritised in line with the research questions, literature reviewed, and knowledge of my teaching context. I started with broad analysis to ensure nothing important was ‘missed’ before focusing on resources most critical to successful realisation of the genre, identified through taking a comparative approach to high and lower-scoring scripts.

The next section identifies the SFL analytical tools most relevant to my analysis and details their application to the data.

3.2. Analytical frameworks and their application to the data

3.2.1 Analysing Genre

In Martin’s model, genre is defined as ‘a staged, goal oriented, social process’ (Martin, 1992, p. 505), operating within ‘the culture at large’ (Coffin, 2006). Genre analysis involves examining a text’s overall social purpose in relation to this cultural context and identifying the stages that a text progresses through to realise this purpose and achieve its goal (Martin and Rose, 2007). For this study, it was important to analyse genre to examine how the demands of this assignment type relate to the broad disciplinary context and identify key stages in its realisation to aid a closer analysis.

To conduct the genre analysis, I read the essays several times for familiarity before identifying and recording generic stages for all 15 (illustrated in Table 1).

Table 1: Generic stages of Essay_E

Stage	Indicative text	Phases
Background	<i>'Engages with Gilroy quote from title, concept of 'postcolonial melancholia''</i> <i>Links socio-political context of 21C Britain to effects on communication and identity</i> <i>'NW depicts a society in need of systemic change'</i>	Orientation to text & title Orientation to socio-political context Orientation to critical context (perspectives on Smith's writing) and own position
(Preview)	<i>'In this essay I will focus on three aspects of the novel: communication between the central characters [...] moments of communication with strangers [...] and the implications of Leah and Keisha/Natalie's reconnection in the final section.'</i>	
Thesis	<i>'Overall, I will argue that NW is a novelistic representation of multicultural Britain defined by miscommunication and failures of communication, in which the 'melancholic mood' that Gilroy sets out has become part of its individual characters' psyches [...]'</i>	
Argument 1	<i>'The dysfunctional friendship between NW's central characters, Leah Hanwell and Keisha/Natalie Blake, exemplifies the novel's depiction of people unable to bridge their differences or communicate their feelings in the contemporary British multicultural.'</i> <i>[...]</i>	Claim Grounds Close reading Critical / theoretical engagement (recursive)
[...]		

The process of labelling stages was guided by the literature about argument genres, particularly the analytical exposition (Nesi and Garner, 2012; Coffin, 2006; Humphrey and Economou, 2015), and text response genres, particularly thematic interpretation (Christie and Dreyfus, 2007). This process was recursive; I edited labels for stages as patterns

emerged. I also looked for recurring phases as these work together to realise the overall function of a stage, helping in their identification (Martin and Rose, 2007). For example, ‘thesis’ was originally labelled as a phase within the ‘background’ stage; however, this was moved to stage constituent level as its crucial function in realising the genre became clear. High-scoring scripts were analysed first as successful genre realisations before the staging of the weaker scripts was compared to identify significant differences. I was subsequently able to analyse language within a particular genre stage at a more delicate level. Table 2 provides key SFL systems for analysing academic texts as a reference point for analytical tools outlined in the next section.

Table 2: SFL systems for analysing academic texts (adapted from Dreyfus et al, 2016; Martin and Rose, 2007; and Eggins, 2004)

	Genre and register (whole text)	Discourse semantics (phases)	Lexico-grammar (clause and word)
Ideational meanings	Resources for constructing specialised and formal knowledge of discipline area (field) Ideas unfold in expected stages.	Ideation: kinds of activities, participants, lexical strings, taxonomic relations Conjunction: how these are connected	Transitivity: participants and processes Logico-semantic relations: elaborating, extending, enhancing; projecting
Interpersonal meanings	Resources for convincing the reader in critical yet authoritative ways (tenor)	Appraisal: evaluation	Resources of attitude, engagement and graduation
Textual meanings	Resources for <u>organising</u> clearly scaffolded abstract texts (mode)	Periodicity: rhythm of discourse; layering of <u>MacroTheme/New</u> and <u>HyperTheme/New</u> Identification: tracking people, places and things	Theme and New Unmarked Theme

3.2.2 Analytical tools & application: ideational meanings

Ideational systems consist of ideation and conjunction at discourse semantic level and transitivity and logico-semantic relations at the level of lexico-grammar (Table 2). These frameworks allow the examination of discipline-specific activity (Humphrey and Economou, 2015; Donohue, 2012) and were, therefore, crucial in analysing how students represent disciplinary knowledge to address RQ1.

At discourse semantic level, I focused on ideation, looking at lexical strings and taxonomic relations concerning the ‘chains of relations between elements as the text unfolds’ that construct ‘taxonomies of people, things, places and their qualities’ (Martin and Rose, 2007, p.75). Martin and Rose (2007) identify two types of taxonomies that construe fields of experience: classifying (concerning relations of ‘type’) and composing (how parts relate to a larger whole). Taxonomic relations were prioritised as these were identified as important in the organisation of information in analytical texts (Humphrey and Economou, 2015; Donohue, 2012).

At the level of lexico-grammar, I looked at transitivity and logico-semantic relations. Transitivity examines the process types, participant roles and circumstances in clauses (Figure 2).

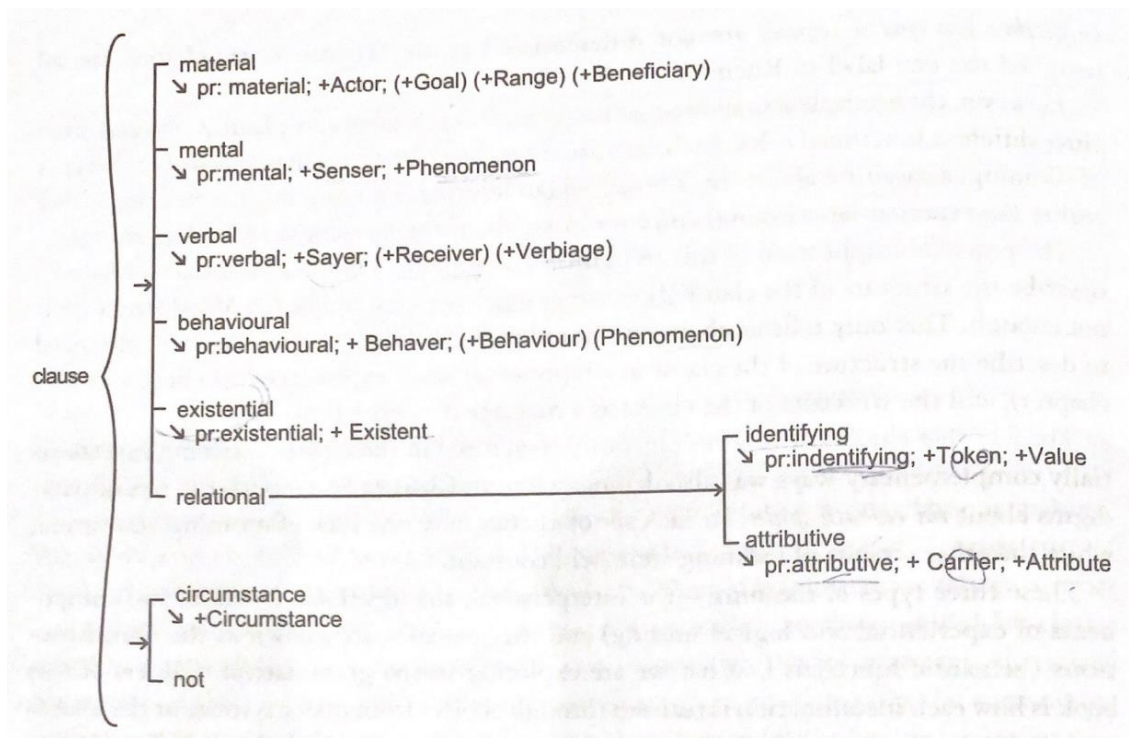


Figure 2: transitivity system (from Eggins, 2004, p.214)

This system details the different possible process types (e.g. material), realised in the verbal group of the clause, the associated configurations of participant roles (e.g. Actor and Goal), realised in nominal groups, and circumstances, expressed through adverbial groups or prepositional phrases (exemplified in Table 3).

Table 3: transitivity clause elements example

She	helped	the man	onto the bus.
Actor	<u>Process:material</u>	Goal	Circumstance

Logico-semantic relations consist of projection and expansion. As logical relations were identified as a key aspect of constructing analysis to serve the persuasive function (Humphrey and Economou, 2015) and provide critical reasoning (Bruce, 2016), I focused on expansion at clause complex level to see how one clause develops or extends the meanings of another through elaboration (relations of 'restatement or equivalence'), extension (addition), or enhancement (development) (Eggins, 2004, p.259). The literature identified enhancing clauses as an important meaning-making resource in this discipline (Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2011) so particular attention was paid to enhancing clause

patterns, which were further categorised into the following types: temporal, spatial, manner, causal, conditional and concessive (Eggins, 2004, pp.283-84).

In terms of application, for ideation analysis I highlighted the samples on Microsoft Word for lexical chains relating to the hyperTheme and studied their relation, particularly taxonomies of composition and classification within the stage. Recording of lexical chains is exemplified in Figure 3:

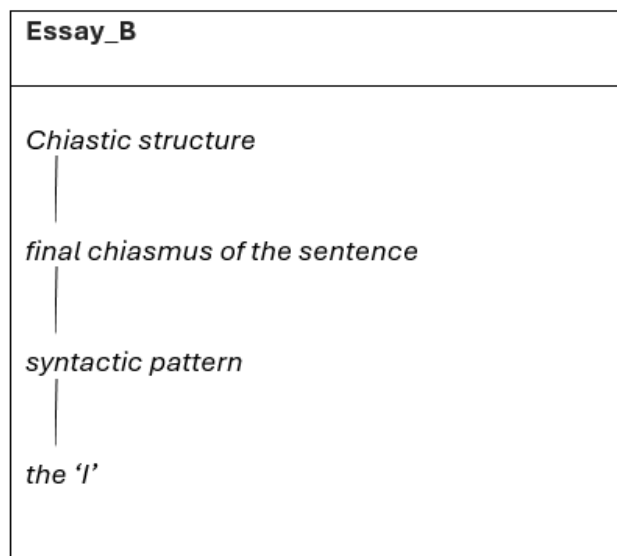


Figure 3: lexical chain showing compositional taxonomy in Essay_B

Nvivo software¹ was used for Transitivity analysis to code process types, participant roles and circumstances in the 11 argument stages. Quoted language from literary texts was omitted from analysis of ideational meanings to focus on discourse surrounding the literary text rather than the world represented within it. Figure 4 shows code categories and Figure 5 illustrates a section of coding from Essay_C, with 'actors' highlighted.

¹ Nvivo qualitative data analysis software was used to analyse transitivity and periodicity only. With other systems it was difficult to view results using Nvivo in a way that aided comparison across data so Microsoft Word was preferred.

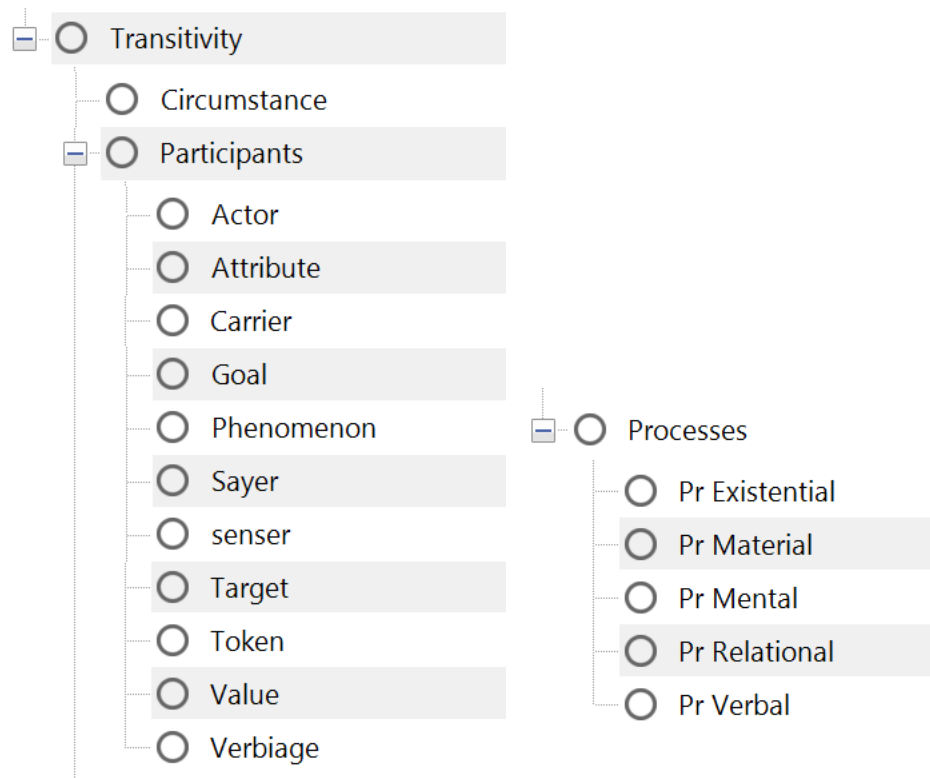


Figure 4: code categories for transitivity

The primacy of the heteronormative family and motherhood as social forms in early twentieth-century Ireland is represented as damaging to women's health and freedom in *The Pull of the Stars*. Donoghue writes a historical novel set in Dublin in 1918, a fraught time for Ireland due to local and global conflict, and the influenza epidemic. Levine describes the 'affordances of form' as 'the potential uses or actions latent in' different forms, suggesting that specific arrangements of elements carry particular possibilities. Jerome de Groot suggests that the affordances of the historical fiction are the ability to 'critique and queer a normative, straightforward, linear' history, by rearranging the past into new shapes, highlighting neglected or overlooked elements of history. Donoghue does this in *The Pull of the Stars*, as she critiques male-centred versions of Irish history. Instead, Marisol Morales-Ladron finds that she 'engages in the unveiling of the silence, marginalisation and



Figure 5: illustrative section of transitivity coding

Challenges included classifying processes that realise metaphorical meanings. For example, ‘suggest’, usually a verbal process, was frequently used to attribute symbolic meaning to details from the literary text: *The connotations of ‘disguises’ in the final line suggest Keisha/Natalie experiences a sense of subterfuge and shame in her vocal transformation* (Essay_H). My decisions were guided by meanings that make most sense in the disciplinary context; the above example was coded as relational attributive process to acknowledge its function in relating a literary technique to symbolic meaning.

For analysis of expansion types in logic-semantic relations, texts were annotated on Microsoft Word following Halliday’s notation, outlined in Eggins (2004, p.279):

Elaboration: =
 Extension: +
 Enhancement: x

While initially noting subtypes for each example (Table 4) following the descriptions in Eggins (2004, pp.279-84), enhancing clauses of ‘manner: means’ soon appeared salient in drawing attention to the craft of the literary text so subsequent analysis focused on enhancing clauses and their subtypes.

Table 4: initial annotation of expansion relations

In her analysis of Julius Caesar (x spatial), Gayle Greene highlights the manner in which ‘powerlessness and incapacitation are suggested by terms such as “silence,” “speechless,” and “tongue-tied.”’³ (x manner: means). This is an astute observation which I do not dispute (= clarification), but I argue that these same concepts are also suggested by references to blindness (x manner: means), or other states in which one may close their eyes (+ variation), such as sleep (= exemplification).

3.2.4 Analytical tools & application: interpersonal meanings

Evaluation is a key area of interpersonal meaning, analysed using frameworks from the system of Appraisal (Martin and White, 2005). Appraisal looks at how evaluation is established across a text, including its sources and targets. This system was therefore important for analysing how students construct stance and voice to address RQ2.

Within appraisal, the system of attitude looks at value types in a text, engagement relates to dialogic positioning, and graduation concerns the intensification of meanings (Figure 6). Importantly, while these resources can be realised in lexico-grammar, evaluative meanings are also constructed through the interaction and patterning of appraisal resources across a text (Martin and White, 2005) so different levels and their interaction were considered.

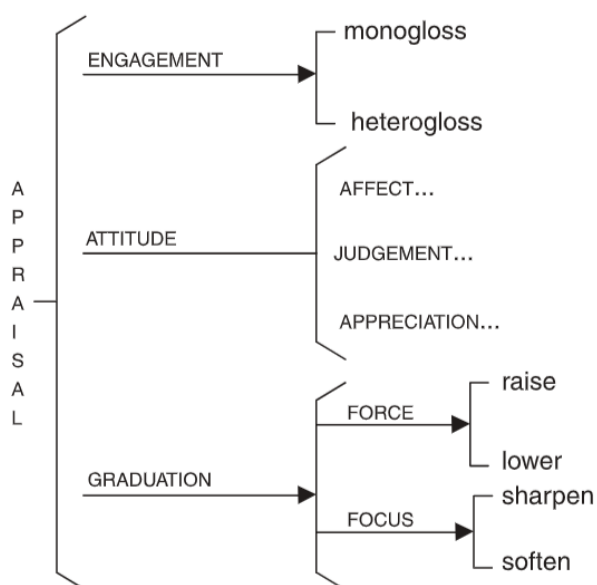


Figure 6: an overview of appraisal (Martin and White, 2005, p.38)

Within attitude, salient areas for literary analysis are judgement and appreciation (Li, 2025). Judgement concerns evaluations of people and behaviours and is categorised as evaluations of social esteem (normality, capacity and tenacity) and those of social sanction (veracity and propriety) all which can be positively or negatively charged. Appreciation concerns evaluations of ‘things’ in terms of our reactions, their composition and their value (Martin and White, 2005). Evaluations in a text can be directly inscribed through attitudinal lexis (*the **effective** use of imagery*), or more implicitly invoked through ideational resources (Martin and White, 2005).

Engagement resources were also identified as important as students need to effectively manage multiple critical voices in their literature essays (Li, 2025; Coffin, 2006). Figure 7 outlines the engagement system with illustrative resources for contracting and expanding the dialogic space.

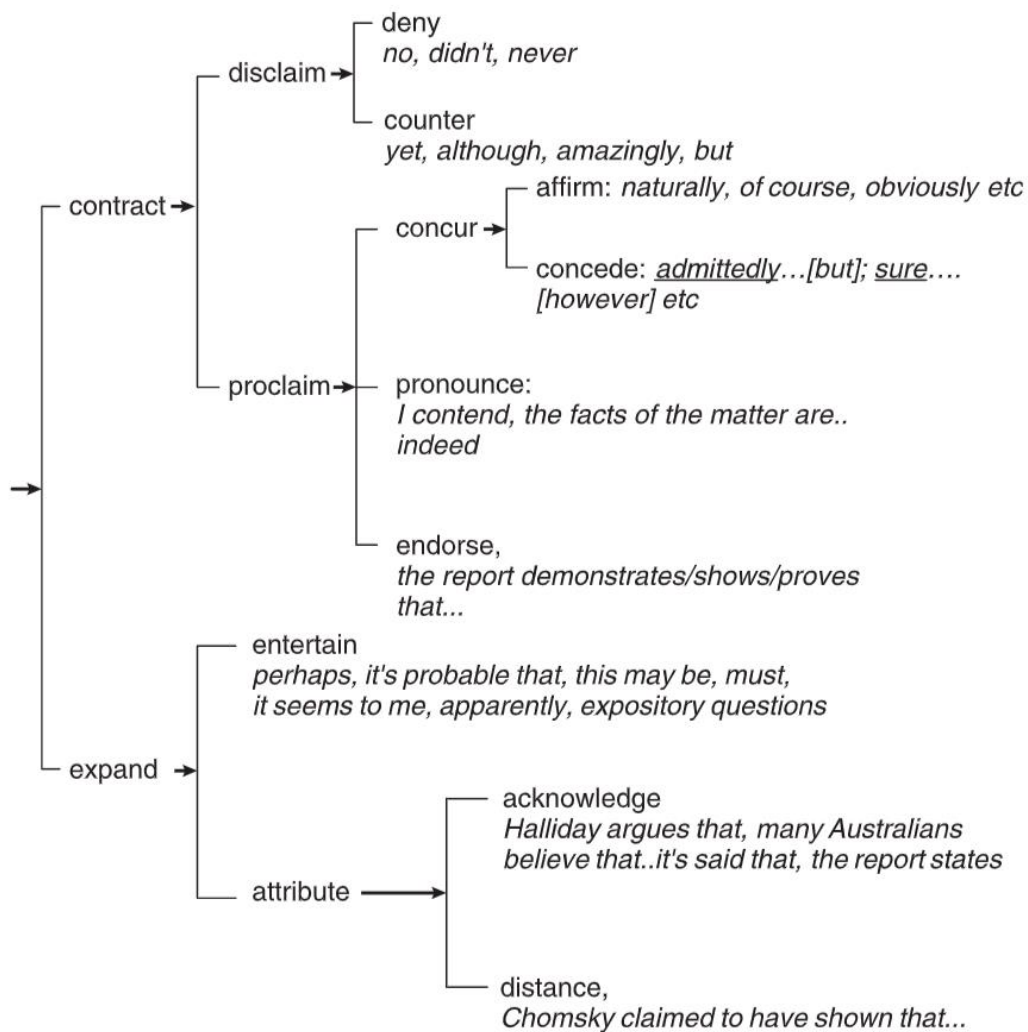


Figure 7: the engagement system (Martin and White, 2005, p.134)

To analyse attitude, examples of evaluative language were manually highlighted and organised into a table (adapted from Martin and White, 2005) to aid comparison across texts (Table 5).

Table 5: Attitude in Essay_I

Targets (appraised)	Appraising item	Evaluation (type)	Charge + and -	Appraiser	Sample from data (target + appraising item + appraiser)	Context notes
form	Can articulate	Appreciation, Valuation	+	Student (implicit)	<i>a form that can articulate the indescribability of grief</i>	Also invoked appreciation of the writer's craft; complexity and value of form have already been framed positively through hyperTheme.
autotheory	Method of sourcing collective strength	Appreciation, Valuation	+	Student (implicit)	<i>autotheory also acts as a method of sourcing collective strength for the narrative</i>	
repetition of poetic fragments	Further made evident	Appreciation, Valuation & Composition	+	Student (implicit)	<i>This pain is further made evident through the repetition of poetic fragments</i>	
[...]						

At discourse semantic level, items were considered collectively, in relation to the main claim of the argument stage and overarching thesis (final column). Table 5, for example, shows the form of 'autotheory' evaluated positively in terms of what it enables the literary text to communicate and achieve. While these are inscribed examples of *appreciation*, *valuation*, they also invoke positive evaluation of *appreciation*, *composition*.

For engagement analysis, I annotated samples with positions being advanced (underlined) and types of engagement:

Hallingey highlights that communication is not neutral, and that identity is often bound up with a specific local voice and sound in the contemporary British multicultural [heteroglossia, contract, proclaim, endorse]. For example, Leah recognises Shar as local by the way she talks. She ‘knows the way people speak around here’, the ‘rhythm’ of their sentences (p. 6). Focussing not only on accent, but language, rhythm and tone, Leah recognises Shar as an authentic voice of north-west London [monoglossia].

I compared results across the samples, looking for patterns in students’ use of engagement resources in aligning their reader to a particular perspective on the literary text.

3.2.6 Analytical tools & application: textual meanings

Periodicity is the discourse semantic framework that concerns the flow of information across a text (Martin and Rose, 2007). While the textual metafunction was not central to this study, resources of periodicity were highlighted in the literature as key to successful realisation of literary analysis (Christie and Dreyfus, 2007) through the scaffolding of unfolding information (Dreyfus et al, 2016); this whole-text coherence is also frequently raised as important by disciplinary colleagues in the teaching context.

For these reasons, I analysed the predictive layering of macroThemes (concerning the text overall) and hyperThemes (relating back to the macroTheme and referring forward to the next phase of text) that orient the reader to the field in a particular phase of discourse (Martin and Rose, 2007). These were labelled using NVivo software, allowing them to be viewed in one document to aid analysis (Figure 8).

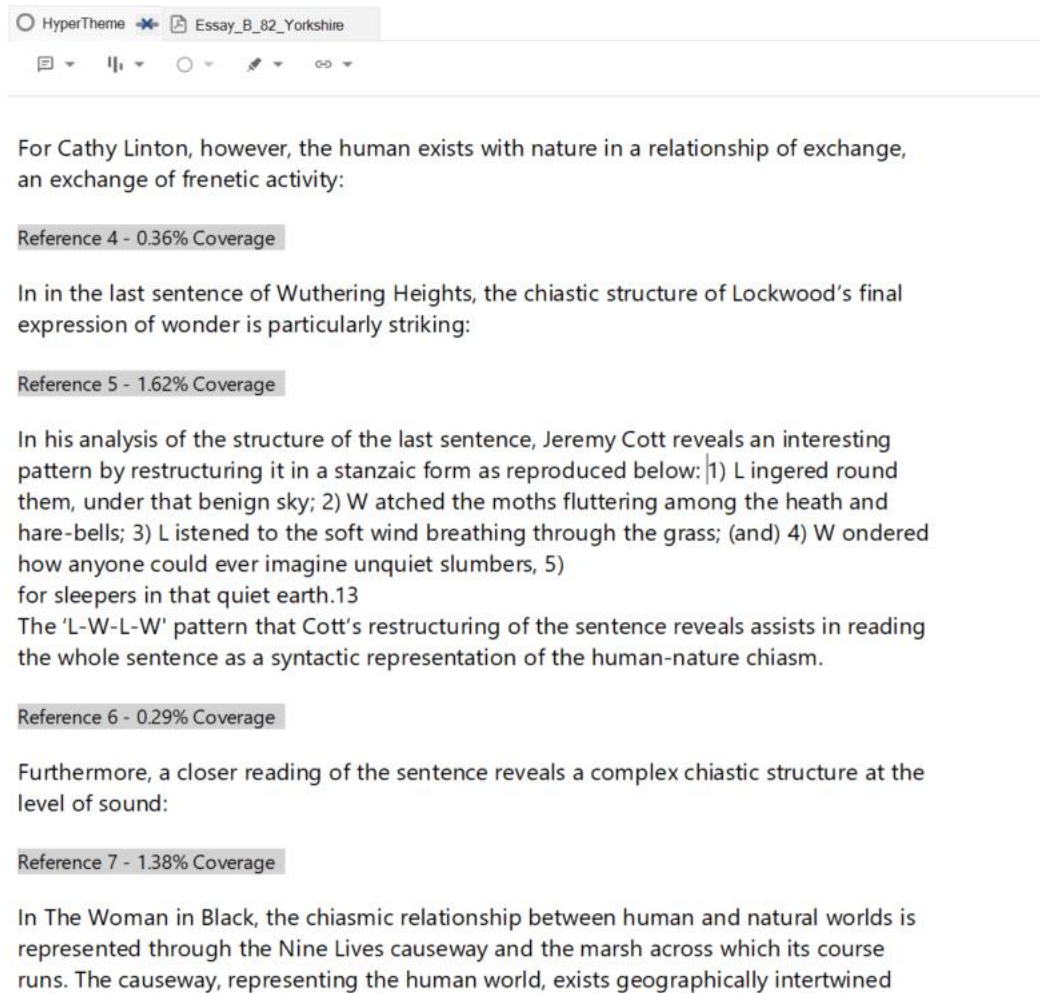


Figure 8: sample of hyperthemes from Essay_B

3.3. Data sources & collection

My data comprises 15 literature essays ranging from 2363 to 4400 words. An overview of essays is provided in Table 6, with full details in Appendix 1. One full essay is provided in Appendix 2.

Table 6: essay overview

Essay_Label	Module Keywords	High/Low Scoring
Essay_A	Yorkshire	H
Essay_B	Yorkshire	H
Essay_C	Contemporary_Novel	H
Essay_D	Yorkshire	H
Essay_E	Shakespeare	H
Essay_F	Shakespeare	L
Essay_G	Yorkshire	L
Essay_H	Multicultural_Britain	H
Essay_I	Global_Lit_Terror	H
Essay_J	Victorian_Media	H
Essay_K	Yorkshire	H
Essay_L	Yorkshire	L
Essay_M	Yorkshire	L
Essay_N	Planetary_Aesthetics	H
Essay_O	Victorian_Media	L

Essays were sourced from students on the 2024-25 MA Literature programme, invited by email to participate once ethical approval was granted in September 2025. While I originally accessed 23 essays, 15 were selected due to length and the time-consuming nature of manual analysis: 10 scored distinctions (from 72–88) and 5 pass to merit (50-60).

Distinction essays were selected to provide examples that amply met the expectations of literary analysis. While fewer lower-scoring essays were available, five provided a useful point of comparison. I selected no more than two essays from each student to provide a variety of writing styles and approaches. Samples representing several modules on the MA ensured core disciplinary knowledge was captured, rather than module or assessment-

specific. This was important for pedagogical relevance as I teach mixed-module classes for insessional EAP.

Although beyond this project's scope for formal analysis, conversations with disciplinary colleagues, course documents, tutor feedback and analysis of student needs also informed the project.

3.4. Research ethics

This project was granted institutional ethical approval (AHC_FREC_2305), and I followed guidelines for ethical data use, storing anonymised essays securely. Participants were provided with full project details (Appendix 3), and the option of providing informed consent for use of specified essays (Appendix 4). All participants were students I taught at some point during the academic year in EAP sessions. However, my role does not involve assessing students and all essays were completed and graded at the point of data collection. These factors minimised the risk that students would feel pressured into participating or believe that participation might influence their academic results.

A growing ethical consideration in research is transparency around the use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). I have not used GenAI in this project aside from functionality to check spelling and grammar in Microsoft Word and for formatting references on the institution's library website, which I checked and edited.

4. Results & Discussion

This chapter begins with a brief summary of findings from the genre analysis, providing an overview of how this assessment genre unfolds through particular stages. While I undertook a broad analysis of the genre across language levels and metafunctions (summarised in Table 8), here I report only on the most significant findings in relation to generic staging and macrostructure, before discussing in more detail one generic stage to address my research questions.

4.1 The literature essay genre analysis

4.1.1. Genre and register

Analysis of the broad generic structure of the literature essays confirmed the genre as analytical exposition, with the overall social purpose to demonstrate the ability to put forward a complex and persuasive interpretation of literary texts. The genre unfolds through the following stages: Background ^ Thesis ^ (Preview) ^ Arguments* ^ Reinforcement of Thesis. These are similar to the analytical exposition stages identified in the literature (Coffin, 2006) with the addition of the background stage and optional preview. Table 7 elaborates stage purposes.

Table 7: Genre stage purposes

Stage	Purpose
Background	To introduce literary texts and relevant critical/theoretical contexts
Thesis	To signal or propose the central argument/overall position
Preview (optional)	To outline the essay structure
Arguments (recursive)	To provide elaborating evidence that supports the thesis
Reinforcement of thesis	To consolidate the main points of argument and highlight their significance

Table 8 summarises findings from the genre analysis across language levels and metafunctions:

Table 8: linguistic patterns in the literature essay

Text levels Metafunctions	Genre & Register (whole text)	Discourse Semantic (stage/phase)	Lexico-grammar (clause/group/word)
Ideational meanings	Resources for analysing and interpreting meanings and their representation in literary works.	Ideation: Strong lexical relations across stages build conceptual and analytical frameworks. Integration of description, means-focused explanation, and relation to symbolic meaning within argument stages. Movement between abstract and concrete/general and particular.	Nominalisation and elaborated nominal groups. Enhancing clauses, particularly of manner:means. Integrated quotation from the literary text. Lexis relating to the material world of the literary text (characters, places); lexis relating to abstract meanings. Specialised and technical lexis relating to literary form and technique; processes related to semiotic meaning (<i>depicts, symbolises</i>) Relational clauses connecting aspects of literary text to abstract meaning.
Interpersonal meanings	Resources for construing an authoritative interpretation of the literary text in light of broader critical debates.	Appraisal: Integration of critical and theoretical perspectives within all stages through projection. Evaluations of literary works through appreciation of craft and judgment of authors and social/ideological issues.	Monoglossic interpretive claims Resources to expand and contract the dialogic space Integrated quotation from secondary sources. Frequent use of endorsing resources. Attitudinal lexis
Textual meanings	Resources for organising an argument in progressive stages.	Periodicity: strong relationship between essay title, MacroTheme and HyperThemes to stage the argument. Internal conjunction as organisational strategy.	Resources for internal addition and comparison within argument stage. Resources for internal consequence in final stage.

4.1.2. Macro structure

Analysis revealed that the high-scoring scripts centre their analysis around a central thesis claim, echoing findings from Chapter 2 (Christie and Dreyfus, 2007; Wilder, 2011). All distinction scripts clearly signal the direction of their argument in the thesis stage, with seven stating their argument explicitly:

Overall, I will argue that NW is a novelistic representation of multicultural Britain defined by miscommunication and failures of communication, in which the ‘melancholic mood’ that Gilroy sets out has become part of its individual characters’ psyches. This leaves the people of Smith’s north-west London without the language to express themselves and their identities, or to communicate with others.⁹ (Essay_H)

Importantly, this thesis stage marks the genre as ‘conceptually orientated’ (Coffin and Donohue, 2014, p.43), where the cognitive work of the assignments involves evaluation of the semiotic properties of literary texts through the exploration of their *representation* (Essay_H). While some essays broadly follow the structure of the literary work, for example analysing the development of themes or events, the conceptual relevance to the essay title and thesis is foregrounded in each case.

Resources of periodicity are used to scaffold this analysis across the essays. With the thesis forming the macroTheme and operating at a general and abstract level, each argument stage centres on a related claim that operates at a more specific level, predominately positioned as hyperTheme. This strong thematic progression is an important organisational strategy for students as they manage abstract meanings and their relationship across their essays, supporting Christie and Dreyfus’ findings in secondary

English (2007). Presenting complex information in ways that clearly highlight its relevance becomes even more crucial at this advanced level of study.

It is notable that weaker scripts are largely unsuccessful in realising the thesis stage and subsequently lack this strong thematic progression across the text. Where this stage is attempted, key concepts tend to be vague or unexplained, or the relation to the essay task is unclear. For example, in Essay_F the student's thesis contains several broad and abstract concepts (in bold) that are not unpacked or related to the literary text in the essay's background stage:

*Shakespeare's focus on **women's self-awareness** and **value realization** is reflected in these figures' journeys, which show how **political opposition** and **ethical behavior** merge in a world where **male authority** rules. (Essay_F)*

These findings underscore the need to draw students' attention to the importance of overall text organisation centred around the thesis and signalled through strong thematic progression in successful realisations of the genre.

4.2. The recursive argument stage

Within the recursive 'argument' stage the high-scoring students build their interpretation of literary text through the integration of close analysis of textual evidence and engagement with critical and theoretical sources. Phases within this stage consist of claims and grounds (aligning with Humphrey and Economou, 2015) and embedded descriptions and explanations build layers of meaning (Szenes, 2022). As this stage is critical to successful

realisations of literary analysis, it will be the focus of the remainder of the chapter. The discussion of results follows the order of my research questions.

4.2.1 Representing disciplinary knowledge (RQ1)

Analysis of ideational meanings in the six high-scoring sample stages shows that the literary text is represented as technically crafted and complex in meaning potential. The following section discusses how students achieve this through objectifying the literary works, drawing attention to the craft of the writer, relating details to symbolic meaning, and evaluating the literary texts' aesthetic and semiotic properties. Comparisons with lower-scoring scripts are integrated to show how, in contrast, these essays tend to build a material model of the literary work with less connection made between students' interpretation and literary representation.

4.2.1.1 Representing the literary text

High-scoring essays: objectifying the literary text

In all high-scoring samples, students represent their literary texts of focus as technically crafted. For example, all identify and name aspects of literary form and specific techniques used by the authors, as illustrated in Table 9:

Table 9: Technical/specialised lexis

Language relating to literary form and technique
<i>metaphor; imagery</i> (Essay_E)
<i>narrative voice; ode; repetition; the act of citation; citation; autotheory</i> (Essay_I)
<i>rhetorical device of chiasmus; chiastic structure; final chiasmus; stanzaic form; syntactic representation; ‘the ‘I’; clause; subject and object</i> (Essay_B)
<i>voice; accent, language, rhythm and tone; vignettes; connotations</i> (Essay_H)
<i>imagery; protagonist; the historical novel</i> (Essay_C)
<i>protagonists; imagery</i> (Essay_A)

The use of language in these technical (*stanzaic form*) and specialised (*voice*) ways allows students to demonstrate their knowledge of the literary texts in terms of their form and construction. Notably, the students show their understanding of this disciplinary knowledge through exemplification from the literary texts in their analysis rather than definition or explanation of the terms themselves, indicating that this knowledge forms an implicit part of the way these students ‘see’ the literary work by this point in their studies; certain technical knowledge has become ‘subsumed’ as shared knowledge in the field (Hao, 2020, p.189).

Seeing the technicality of the literary text allows students to objectify the literary works and isolate aspects of significance for close analysis. Four high-scoring essays, for example, identify elements of form or technique in their hyperThemes, framing their subsequent close analysis in terms of how these crafted elements (in bold) create meanings:

*Smith pays close attention to the nuances of **voice** in NW, highlighting relationships between place, communication, and identity. (Essay_H)*

*Angelo and Cassius certainly share some methods of manipulation, but this essay will begin with an assessment of the success of a technique exclusive to Cassius: the creation of a persisting **metaphor**. (Essay_E)*

*In in [sic] the last sentence of Wuthering Heights, the **chiastic structure** of Lockwood's final expression of wonder is particularly striking (Essay_B)*

*As well as finding a form that can articulate the indescribability of grief, **autotheory** also acts as a method of sourcing collective strength for the narrative. (Essay_I)*

These terms become analytical categories under which the students can organise details from the text. As noted in Chapter 2, this deliberate selection and arrangement of information, here relating to literary elements, is a central feature of analytical writing (Humphrey and Economou, 2015). Looking more closely at Essay_H, we can track the identified element of 'voice' as it progresses through the stage:

*Smith pays close attention to the **nuances of voice in NW**, highlighting relationships between place, communication, and identity. **Characters' voices** are not free from the 'politics of race', with Keisha/Natalie's storyline representing how **a character's mode of communication** can be brought into crisis by the racial and economic power structures of contemporary Britain. [...]*

***For example, Leah recognises Shar as local by the way she talks.** She 'knows **the way people speak around here**', the 'rhythm' of their sentences (p. 6). Focussing not only on **accent, but language, rhythm and tone**, Leah recognises Shar as an **authentic voice** of north-west London. **Keisha/Natalie, however, changes her voice** throughout her life. The novel's third section, 'host', details in a long sequence of vignettes how she changes her name, and **the way she speaks** [...]*

*The connotations of 'disguises' in the final line suggest **Keisha/Natalie experiences a sense of subterfuge and shame in her vocal transformation**. She feels herself to be, 'In drag', while using both her **new and old voice**, 'strugg[ling] to think what would be the most authentic, or perhaps the least inauthentic' (p. 245). [...]*

*Smith humanises the seemingly cold Keisha/Natalie from Leah's narrative, by explaining how **her very ability to communicate with others** has been warped by Britain's lingering racist and classist power structures. **By paying attention to the particulars of voice, place and identity, NW demonstrates how open and honest communication will not be possible in the British multicultural** until such power structures - Gilroy's 'politics of race' - are acknowledged and redressed. (Essay_H)*

In this example, 'voice' is introduced as an abstract literary element, crafted by the literary author to signify meanings relating to the concepts of *place, communication and identity*. This framing immediately ties the semiotic properties of the novel to its form and methods of construction. The stage moves from abstract to more concrete entities (*voice - character's voices*) before specific characters are named and material details from the text are described and quoted. We can see at work here various types of taxonomy in the way the student has organised their ideas around the concept of 'voice'; character's voices are deconstructed into their different elements (*accent, language, rhythm and tone*) in compositional taxonomies, classified as *authentic / inauthentic*, and contrasted with the voices of other characters (*Keisha/Natalie, however, changes her voice*). In this way, the notion of 'voice' is used to organise representations of experience in the literary text. The student's overarching claim of this section, that *characters' voices are not free from the 'politics of race'*, is supported by phases that exemplify and explain instances of this at work in the novel, evidenced through direct quotation. Over the stage, the accumulation of this support provides the grounds for the student's interpretive claim, which is reiterated in the final sentence. The analysis, then, is arranged and framed in a way that serves the persuasive function (Humphrey and Economou, 2015).

Other essays establish analytical frameworks in similar ways, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: analytical frameworks

Essay_E	Essay_B	Essay_I
<i>Persisting metaphor</i> <i>references to blindness</i> <i>Cassius as Brutus' 'glass'</i>	<i>Chiastic structure</i> <i>final chiasmus of the sentence</i> <i>syntactic pattern</i> <i>the 'I'</i>	<i>Autotheory</i> <i>repetition of poetic fragments</i> <i>act of citation</i> <i>citation of Adrienne Rich's poem 'Diving into the Wreck'</i> <i>avoidance of the 'I' for distance and protection</i>

Again, elements of literary form or technique are exemplified and explored through instances in the literary texts resulting in interpretations of meaning that are tied to its craft; attention is paid to *how* meanings are made in students' close reading of textual evidence. In this way, students demonstrate technical knowledge of the discipline alongside disciplinary methods of inquiry through close reading that foregrounds literary forms and techniques. We can see at work here the 'aesthetic orientation', identified by Knoetze (2025) as part of the cultivated gaze.

Two of the high-scoring essays do not name a specific literary technique or aspect of form in their hyperTheme, instead identifying an aspect of representation relating to theme or character:

*The opposing attitudes to the effect of the past on a character is furthered through **the manner in which Carr and Brontë’s protagonists handle their memories.***

(Essay_A)

Here the student abstracts from the material details of the text an analytical focus (the protagonists’ handling of memories) for the exploration of meanings (different effects of the past). Importantly, this centres the student’s analysis on issues of *representation* allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge of how meanings are constructed in ways similar to the previous examples. The student realises this focus through an elaborated noun phrase in their hypertheme and they then move between this abstraction of representation and concrete instances in the literary texts through the stage (Table 11), also using concepts from trauma theory to frame and organise their analysis.

Table 11: analytical framework_Essay_A

Essay_A
<i>Protagonists handling of memories</i>
<i>impact of trauma</i>
<i>a focus on Birkin [character]</i>
<i>fragmented memories and ‘unspeakable’ aspects</i>

So far we have seen that high-performing students objectify elements of their literary works of focus and relate these to specific instances in the texts. Importantly, this requires of students an ‘awareness of how to manipulate and exploit such general-to-particular and abstract-to-concrete relations’ as they learn skills of analysis (Coffin and Donohue, 2014, p.99; Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2011). Literary analysis demands linguistic resources that realise disciplinary meanings relating to the craft of the literary text including the technical and the abstract. This literacy demand becomes particularly apparent when looking at the lower-scoring scripts.

Lower-scoring essays: describing the literary text

While the higher-scoring essays construe elements of the literary work as technical and meanings as abstract to allow for their analysis, lower-scoring scripts tend to realise experiential meanings in the literary text more congruently:

*Since their working content is about taking photos for customers from all works of life, Gertrude and her sisters present **becoming able to get in touch with many kinds of people's worlds**. If they were not photographers, they might never have contact with some of the customers because of poverty, including Lord Watergate and Darrell. Besides, as she has more accessibility of moving through the city because of her job, like going across London at night to find Phyllis³, in which process she demonstrates great courage and strength in the face of men's threats, she gains the adventurous experience that most women who are not photographers would not get through their life. Thus, she is characterized as exploring the social world that was only open to men before. With the richer life experience due to photography, as well as her wisdom, Gertrude's constructed gender identity is more advanced than many women in her period. (Essay_O)*

In this example, the hyperTheme (underlined) presents meanings in their congruent grammatical form (*able to get in touch with many kinds of people's worlds*, for example, could be nominalised as 'social opportunity'). The student does not objectify, or construe as 'things' (Halliday and Martin, 2003), elements of the text and the meanings they create to identify and distill them for analysis. Aspects of the text cannot, then, be put into relationship with each other or information organised into taxonomies with an overarching analytical focus as in the higher-scoring examples. This results in a more 'common sense' commentary, reliant on describing events of the story, that remains superficial through a lack of supporting evidence for claims. For example, the claim that *[Gertrude] demonstrates great courage and strength in the face of men's threats* is not related to specific aspects of the literary text and is not exemplified through direct quotation. While there is some evidence the student is beginning to grasp the requirement to focus on representation (*Gertrude and her sisters **present; characterized; constructed***) there is little explicit attention paid to *how* meanings are constructed and so the demonstration of disciplinary knowledge and methods of inquiry is limited.

Also notably lacking in the lower-scoring essays is a precise, technical vocabulary to describe the craft of the literary text to aid a close analysis:

*In "Wuthering Heights", the **tricky relationship** between humans and nature plays an important part [...] Here are three key parts in the novel where this relationship is particularly evident:*

[...]

*This **sentence** is Catherine's heartfelt confession to Heathcliff*

[...]

Catherine's **words** indicate that

(Essay_G)

The words in bold lack the precision of the higher-scoring samples. While there is some reference made to the detail of the novel (*sentence, words*), this is infrequent and general, and textual evidence is listed with no sense of strategy in its selection and organisation (*Here are three key parts*). The absence of attention to issues of representation again means that technical knowledge and disciplinary methods of inquiry cannot be demonstrated.

4.2.1.2 Representing the literary author

These different orientations to the literary text in high and lower-scoring essays are also evident in students' choices of participants and processes. High-scoring essays draw explicit attention to the constructed nature of the literary work through construing authors and textual elements as actors in material clauses (Table 12):

Table 12: example material clauses

	Actor	Material process	Goal
Essay_I	[the author]	<i>repeats</i>	<i>The ode ‘This is a lament for many. Who will gather and hold these fragments? Who will, O who will?’</i>
	<i>Aftermath’s narrative</i>	<i>stresses</i>	<i>The importance of citation in this ‘drive for women’s community’</i>
	<i>Taneja</i>	<i>is emboldening</i>	<i>the narrative in Aftermath (with a choral strength to help ‘hold these fragments’)</i>
Essay_B	<i>The verb ‘lying’</i>	<i>reveals</i>	<i>Linton’s understanding of human existence as placement.</i>
	<i>Such a relationship</i>	<i>advances</i>	<i>the notion of submergence</i>
Essay_C	<i>Donoghue</i>	<i>uses</i>	<i>the historical novel here (to illustrate how social forms of the past caused women significant, unseen suffering.)</i>
Essay_H	<i>NW</i>	<i>demonstrates</i>	<i>how open and honest communication will not be possible in the British multicultural until such power structures – Gilroy’s ‘politics of race’ - are acknowledged and redressed.</i>

In these examples, the author or craft is often in the position of thematic prominence, orienting the reader to the constructed nature of the literary text as the ‘starting point’

(Martin and Rose, 2007) for analysis. In each case, the students' observations are described and exemplified through direct quotation in the immediate co-text. Material processes often work metaphorically in these essays (*advances, emboldens, uses*), shifting meaning from the 'physical realm' to the 'symbolic' (Coffin and Donohue, 2014, p.110), describing what the literary author or text achieves more broadly, and we see positive evaluation of these achievements realised in some of the processes (*embolden, demonstrate*).

A further significant finding is students' use of enhancing clauses drawing attention to literary authors' methods, with clauses of manner:means common in all but one of the samples (Table 13).

Table 13: *manner:means enhancing clauses*

<i>The opposing attitudes to the effect of the past on a character is furthered <u>through the manner in which Carr and Brontë's protagonists handle their memories.</u> [...] This is perceivable throughout the novel, and can be seen explicitly in Birkin <u>through an early interaction in which Moon asks about his experience in the war:</u></i> (Essay_A)
<i>This is an astute observation which I do not dispute, but I argue that these same concepts are also suggested <u>by references to blindness, or other states in which one may close their eyes, such as sleep.</u></i> (Essay_E)
<i><u>Through Keisha/Natalie,</u> Smith represents how for black women pursuing neoliberal dreams of success in the British multicultural, such adaptation of voice feels equally disorienting and unavoidable.</i> <i><u>By paying attention to the particulars of voice, place and identity,</u> NW demonstrates how open and honest communication will not be possible in the British multicultural</i>

until such power structures - Gilroy's 'politics of race' - are acknowledged and redressed. (Essay_H)

This search – for language, friends, and those whose 'dear life'⁸ was lost – depicts the dejecting loneliness of grief by the indefinite 'nothing'. This pain is further made evident through the repetition of poetic fragments.

Similarly, there is a sense of insecurity evoked through the descriptive language.

In referencing a wealth of work by intersectional feminists, Taneja is emboldening the narrative in Aftermath with a choral strength to help 'hold these fragments'. (Essay_I)

These clauses provide a further way for students to demonstrate their disciplinary reasoning by relating interpretations of the literary texts to the methods of their construction. Positioned as enhancing clauses, this is subtly achieved, forming an implicit part of the students' gaze.

It is notable that no instances of manner: means enhancing clauses were found in the sample sections of the lower-scoring essays.

4.2.1.3 Symbolic meanings

High-scoring essays: relating text to symbolic meaning

Students' interpretations build from the accumulation of details from the literary text and their broader meanings through relational clauses. Relational processes, often with semiotic meanings (*depicts, represents*), are common in high scoring scripts, relating aspects of text to symbolic meaning (Table 14):

Table 14: Relational clause examples

Carrier	Relational process	Attribute
<i>The pleading repetition</i>	depicts	<i>a lack of security in language after terror (Essay_I)</i>
<i>Characters' voices</i>	are not	<i>free from the 'politics of race' (Essay_H)</i>
<i>This search – for language, friends, and those whose 'dear life' was lost</i>	depicts	<i>the dejecting loneliness of grief (Essay_I)</i>

Here, carriers relate to aspects of text exemplified through quotation in the co-text, and attributes denote the inferred meaning or interpretation. In this way, relational clauses play a key role in the 'shunting between concrete particulars and abstract meaning' (Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2011, p.191) required in literary analysis.

Over a longer passage, we see this interplay between details and interpretation:

Rather than focussing on male-dominated conflict like the First World War, Donoghue deploys warlike imagery on a different frontline, a makeshift 'maternity-fever' ward for pregnant women suffering from influenza.⁷ Nurse Julia Powers, the novel's protagonist, describes each shift as 'another day of battle' (p. 183). Her job as a midwife is presented as exceptionally difficult due to the extreme poverty and ill health of the women she treats. For example, an early casualty in the novel, Eileen Devine, is described as 'an underfed daughter of underfed generations' (p. 23). Eileen's death certificate is symbolic of the erasure of women's issues from certified history, as Julia notes: 'only medical observations were permitted [...] instead of poverty, I'd write malnourishment or debility. As code for too many pregnancies, I might put anaemia, heart strain, bad back' (pp. 23-24). Donoghue uses the historical novel here to illustrate how social forms of the past caused women significant, unseen suffering. (Essay_C)

Table 15 illustrates participants and processes in this extract:

Table 15: Participants and processes Essay_C

<i>Donoghue</i> actor	<i>deploys</i> Pr:material	<i>warlike imagery</i> goal
<i>Nurse Julia Powers</i> actor	<i>describes</i> Pr:material	<i>Each shift (as ‘another day of battle’)</i> goal
<i>[Donoghue]</i> actor	<i>presents</i> Pr:material	<i>her job</i> goal
<i>[Nurse Julia/Donoghue]</i> actor	<i>describes</i> Pr:material	<i>Eileen Devine (as ‘an underfed daughter of underfed generations)</i> goal
<i>Eileen’s death certificate</i> carrier	<i>is</i> Pr:relational	<i>symbolic of the erasure of women’s issues from certified history</i> attribute
<i>Julia</i> sayer	<i>notes</i> Pr:verbal	<i>‘only medical observations were permitted’</i> verbiage
<i>Donoghue</i> actor	<i>uses</i> Pr:material	<i>the historical novel (to illustrate...)</i> goal

Construed frequently as the actor in material clauses, the literary author’s agency in the deliberate crafting of the novel is emphasised, here in terms of representations of the maternity ward (*Donoghue deploys warlike imagery*). There is movement between clauses focusing on author’s method, and their exemplification in the material detail of the novel where characters become the actors and sayers (*Julia notes ‘only medical observations were permitted’*), and this is a common pattern in higher-scoring essays, demonstrating students’ capacity to move between the general and the particular. In this way close readings of *how* literary texts construct meanings are realised and interpretations are developed through the relation of material details to broader meanings: *Eileen’s death certificate is symbolic of the erasure of women’s issues from certified history*.

Lower-scoring essays: building a material model of literary texts

In contrast to this relation of textual detail to symbolic meaning, in lower-scoring scripts experiential meanings denoting the characters, actions and events within the world of the literary text dominate:

The reason Heathcliff is finally determined to acquire power is closely associated with Catherine's betrayal. Catherine is so fond of him that 'the greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from him' (42). Heathcliff also acknowledges his love for Catherine: 'Two words would comprehend my future-death and hell-existence, after losing her, would be hell' (148). Their subtle relationship breaks down when Heathcliff realizes their ideals diverge: one pursues improvements in society while the other wishes to degenerate and live a decadent life. Nevertheless, Catherine chooses to give up Heathcliff and marries Edgar Linton for various reasons: Heathcliff's humble status, unknown background, different race, and identity as an outsider. [...] Heathcliff's departure signifies the turning point of a power transfer, reconstructing the openness of Wuthering Heights. (Essay_M)

Table 16 illustrates participants and processes in this extract:

Table 16: Participants and processes Essay_M

Senser	Mental process	Phenomenon
Heathcliff	acknowledges	his love for Catherine
Heathcliff	realizes	their ideals diverge
the other [character]	wishes	to degenerate
Actor	Material process	Goal
Their subtle relationship	breaks down	-
one [character]	pursues	improvements
Catherine	chooses	to give up (Heathcliff)

<i>[Catherine]</i>	<i>marries</i>	<i>Edgar Linton</i>
Carrier	Relational process	attribute
<i>The reason Heathcliff is finally determined to acquire power</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>closely associated with Catherine's betrayal</i>
<i>Heathcliff's departure</i>	<i>signifies</i>	<i>the turning point of a power transfer</i>

Clause participants tend to be characters in the story, with only occasional abstraction (*their subtle relationship*), with processes focusing on their actions, thoughts and feelings. This builds a material model of the literary text that struggles to move beyond description. There is minimal relation through the passage of these material details to the abstract notion of *power* mentioned at the start and so the final sentence appears to jump quite abruptly to the interpretation that *Heathcliff's departure signifies the turning point of a power transfer, reconstructing the openness of Wuthering Heights*; this means that the final sentence reads as 'evaluative reference' rather than 'analytical application' (Coffin and Donohue, 2014, p.93). No attention is drawn to the craft of the text and the passage remains rooted in the experiential world of the novel. The student is, therefore, unable to demonstrate a specialist knowledge of the text through a focus on representation. Overall, the writing lacks both an aesthetic orientation to the object of study and successful relation of textual detail to symbolic meaning; this is not currently part of their literary gaze.

4.2.1.4. Evaluating the literary text

High-scoring essays: evaluating craft and message

In the higher-scoring samples, evaluation is achieved in subtle and complex ways, with inscribed and invoked attitude closely interwoven with ideational meanings and engagement resources. The appraiser is predominantly the student (implied) with some examples of critics as appraiser.

Resources of attitude vary according to the nature of the essay task. Essay_I, for example, which has a socio-political leaning, positively evaluates the literary text in terms of how it brings to light complex power structures underpinning issues of identity in contemporary British society (Table 17):

Table 17: Attitude in Essay_I

Targets (appraised)	Appraising item	Evaluation type	Charge + and -	Appraiser	Sample from data
Smith	<i>Pays close attention</i>	Judgement, capacity (invoked)	+ Graduation: close	student	<i>Smith pays close attention to the nuances of voice in NW</i>
Racial and economic power structures of contemporary Britain	Crisis	Judgement, social sanction (invoked)	-		<i>A character's mode of communication can be brought into crisis by the racial and economic power structures of contemporary Britain</i>
voice	authentic	Appreciation, valuation	+		<i>Leah recognises Shar as an authentic voice of north-west London</i>

Smith	humanises	Judgement, capacity	+		<i>Smith humanises the seemingly cold Keisha/Natalie</i>
Britain's power structures	racist classist	Judgement, social sanction	-		<i>Britain's lingering racist and classist power structures</i>
NW	demonstrates	Appreciation, complexity (in the context)	+		<i>By paying attention to the particulars of voice, place and identity, NW demonstrates how open and honest communication will not be possible in the British multiculture until such power structures - Gilroy's 'politics of race' - are acknowledged and redressed.</i>
communication	open and honest		+		

In this example, societal elements are negatively evaluated targets while the literary author (*Smith*), their novel (*NW*), and their strategies (*voice*) are targets of positive evaluation. We find here the synthesis of the socio-critical and the aesthetic orientations that Knoetze (2025) highlighted as an expectation as students progress through the study of literature at university; the student considers the literary text in relation to social and ideological issues (socio-critical orientation) and positively evaluates the complex ways these issues are explored in the novel (aesthetic orientation).

In Essay_E, which focuses on characters' manipulation of language, the evaluation across the extract centres on the effectiveness of a character's use of metaphor, realised through resources of positive appreciation for the specific techniques they employ (Table 18).

Table 18: Attitude in Essay_E

Targets (appraised)	Appraising item	Evaluation type	Charge + and -	Appraiser	Sample from data
Cassius' imagery	<i>suggests</i>	Appreciation, composition/ valuation (invoked)	+	student	<i>Cassius' imagery suggests that Brutus is blind</i>
<i>Cassius' referencing to names</i>	effective	Appreciation, valuation	+		<i>Cassius' referencing to names is effective in manipulating Brutus</i>

Notable here is that it is (Shakespeare's) use of language that is being evaluated, rather than judgement of the character, in line with the essay title's aesthetic leaning. Across the extract, and the text, is invoked appreciation for the writer's craft and specific instances of attitude (such as *suggests* above) become apparent as evaluation only when they are read in the context of the whole essay and central thesis. As Doran (2019) points out, some instances of attitude appear neutral on the surface but imply positive or negative meanings depending on the reader's position and disciplinary context. This highlights subtle disciplinary meanings at work in the high-scoring essays and the need to consult disciplinary experts to identify this implicit evaluation.

Lower-scoring essays: misplaced evaluations

In contrast to the high-scoring essays, there are few examples of the literary author or aspects of text as targets in the lower-scoring samples. Instead, evaluations focus on the material world of the literary texts, with frequent use of judgement (social esteem and

sanction) and some use of affect to evaluate the abilities, behaviour and feelings of characters, who feature as frequent targets (Table 19).

Table 19: Attitude in Essay_G

Targets (appraised)	Appraising item	Evaluation type	Charge + and -	Appraiser	Sample from data
Heathcliff	Tenacious; indomitable	Judgement, social esteem	+(when taken in context)	student	<i>His [Heathcliff's] tenacious and indomitable character echoes the storms</i>
Catherine	Feels a deep sense of belonging	Affect, inclination	+(graduatio n: deep)		<i>she [Catherine] feels a deep sense of belonging and breaks free from the constraints of social order</i>
Social order	breaks free constraints	Judgement, social esteem Judgement, social sanction	+ -		
Catherine	fond of him	Affect, inclination	+		<i>Catherine is so fond of him that 'the greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from him'</i>

Missing in these essays is the invoked evaluation of the aesthetic and semiotic properties of the literary text, notable through the lack of appreciation resources for composition and valuation. While lower-scoring essays include resources of social sanction in their discussions of the socio-political contexts of the literary texts (*constraints of social order*),

the lack of evaluation of the aesthetic and semiotic properties of the literary works means they read as superficial evaluations of the social issues themselves rather than explorations of their complex representation. This can lead to conclusions that branch into hortatory rather than analytical exposition:

*This offers a model for modern people to define their relationship with nature. When facing ecological crises, **we ought to** [...] work hand in hand with nature in a humble manner to achieve sustainable development. (Essay_G)*

These differing evaluations in higher and lower-scoring essays highlight both the inseparability of the socio-critical and aesthetic orientations in successful realisations of literary analysis in this assessment genre, and the need to make this expectation clear to students. The lack of appreciation resources in lower-scoring scripts also reinforces the need to equip students with the tools of close literary analysis and the application of critical lenses (Rothery and Stenglin, 2000) as part of the MA curriculum so that these evaluations become possible.

The next section will move on to the second research question to discuss how the students situate their analysis of literary texts within a broader critical conversation through their engagement with critical perspectives.

4.2.2 Developing stance and voice (RQ2)

All high-scoring scripts demonstrate engagement with the broader critical conversation around the literary texts, bringing voices from critics and theorists into their writing in every argument stage. Successful essays skilfully manage the dialogic space to construct a

coherent and confident stance in their interpretations. The lower-scoring essays, in contrast, engage fewer critical voices overall and are less successful in managing voices to establish their own position.

4.2.2.1 High-scoring essays & managing the dialogic space

Monoglossia and heteroglossia

As seen in the previous section, in the higher-scoring essays, students typically open an argument stage with an interpretive claim as hyperTheme. This claim asserts a position, most frequently the students' own, relating to the central thesis, as seen in the following examples (position being advanced is underlined):

As well as finding a form that can articulate the indescribability of grief, autotheory also acts as a method of sourcing collective strength for the narrative. (Essay_I)

Smith pays close attention to the nuances of voice in NW, highlighting relationships between place, communication, and identity. Characters' voices are not free from the 'politics of race', with Keisha/Natalie's storyline representing how a character's mode of communication can be brought into crisis by the racial and economic power structures of contemporary Britain. (Essay_H)

The opposing attitudes to the effect of the past on a character is furthered through the manner in which Carr and Brontë's protagonists handle their memories. (Essay_A)

In in the last sentence of Wuthering Heights, the chiastic structure of Lockwood's final expression of wonder is particularly striking. (Essay_B)

The monoglossia of these claims (Martin and White, 2005) serves to frame the argument stage with the authorial voice of the student. There is confidence in these bare assertions,

with only one example of modality (*can*, Essay_H); this resonates with findings outlined in chapter 2, where students' projections of authoritative, unhesitant voices were positively evaluated by subject specialists (Wilder, 2011). Placed as hyperThemes, the asserted positions are presented as the 'focal point' for discussion and argumentation (Martin and White, 2005, p.101), and graduation resources highlight this discussion as significant (**close** attention; **particularly** striking).

Monoglossic interpretive claims also recur throughout the argument stages, punctuating the close reading and frequently appearing as hyperNews, as exemplified in Essay_C:

HyperTheme: *The primacy of the heteronormative family and motherhood as social forms in early twentieth-century Ireland is **represented** as **damaging** to women's health and freedom in The Pull of the Stars.*

[...]

*Donoghue **uses the historical novel here to illustrate** how **social forms of the past** caused women significant, **unseen suffering**.*

[...]

***In this case**, those 'real' citizens are the **impoverished** mothers **sacrificing their health, and often lives**, in order to have multiple pregnancies and large families, due to **a patriarchal and conservatively religious society** which values its replication over female citizens' freedom.*

[...]

HyperNew:

*Donoghue **represents** Julia's **struggle** to save the pregnant women in her care as a consequence of the **often-overlooked** effects of Ireland's past on women's lives, with many **mothers' deaths** resulting from **their society's prioritisation of futurity and the institution of the family** over their own care.*

These claims operate at different levels of abstraction depending on whether they address overall representation in the novel or specific instances in the text. However, together they advance one clear position: that the novel represents particular social forms as damaging. This position is shown through a similar patterning in each statement that makes a causal link (underlined) between the social form (blue) and negative outcome indicated through attitudinal lexis (yellow), resulting in a clear stance across the section.

Crucially, these claims are contingent on the co-text (Martin and White, 2005) and must be based on adequate support to be convincing. We have seen previously how the close analysis of the literary works forms these grounds; a further form of support comes through the inclusion of critical voices.

Endorsing and extending critics

Academic sayers in the form of critics and theorists are used to shape and support students' interpretations in high-scoring scripts. Common is the frequent use of endorsements when integrating critical voices (underlined):

The opposing attitudes to the effect of the past on a character is furthered through the manner in which Carr and Brontë's protagonists handle their memories. [...] As Rosemarie McGerr explains, A Month in the Country withholds a lot of information from the reader with regards to Birkin's past, offering us only 'fragments that [we] must piece together on [our] own'.⁸ This is perceivable throughout the novel, and can be seen explicitly in Birkin [...] (Essay_A)

Submerged in the thickness of relations, the 'I' is both touching and being touched. As Cott puts it, the 'I' is 'experiencing not the headstones or the wind or the sleepers

or the earth themselves; he is experiencing the relations and interactions of many processes of nature to and among one another'.¹⁴ (Essay_B)

He is affirmed as a good judge of character with the ability to, in John W. Velz's words, 'penetrate the façades which men erect, consciously or unconsciously, before their true natures'.⁴ (Essay_E)

In these examples, the academic sayers are used to support the students' analysis and interpretation of the literary text through elaboration and extension. All the examples 'extra-vocalise' by ascribing the proposition to an external source (Martin and White, 2005), and use direct quotation that is integrated into the students' own text and acts as a form of 'authorisation', adding authoritative force to the position (Hood, 2010, p.41). However, it is the student that does the 'rhetorical heavy lifting' (Martin and White, 2015, p.127) through aligning the critical viewpoint with their own. The naming of critics in enhancing clauses (*as Rosemarie McGerr explains*) or prepositional phrases (*in John W. Velz's words*) functions to attribute the idea to a critical voice while keeping the focus on the propositional meaning in the main clause, while the choice of verbal processes (*explains, puts it*) assume validity of the viewpoint being expressed. In this way, the critical views are aligned seamlessly with the 'inner authorial voice' of the student (Martin and White, 2005, p.127) and work to advance the student's position.

In addition to endorsing specific interpretations of textual detail, critics and theorists are used to provide contextual and conceptual support:

*Donoghue uses the historical novel here to illustrate how social forms of the past caused women significant, unseen suffering. **In particular**, early twentieth-century Ireland appears in thrall to what Lee Edelman terms ‘reproductive futurism’.*⁸
(Essay_C)

*[...]the act of citation is a practice that rebuilds a sense of community and strength. Living a Feminist Life by Sara Ahmed, referenced by Taneja, recognises that ‘citation is feminist memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured.’*¹⁰ (Essay_I)

In the first example, the critic provides a concept that serves the student’s reading of the text in light of its socio-political context. The second critical voice supports the student’s claim that the act of citation builds community. Graduation resources highlight the relevance and significance of these readings (*In particular*) and verbal processes endorse the critical viewpoints expressed (*recognises*). Both students demonstrate the relevance of the critical concepts through applying them to their own close analysis in the co-text.

Engagement with critical voices in these ways allows the student to acknowledge the ‘heteroglossic backdrop’ (Martin and White, 2005, p.127) to the literary text (the broader critical conversation) while constructing a confident and sustained interpretation of their own. This is achieved through contracting the dialogic space in ways that position the reader to accept the propositions being advanced, made more persuasive through the integration of academic sayers in endorsing roles. Notable in all examples in this section is the naming of critics and use of direct quotation, reflecting the perspectival nature and social basis of knowledge claims in this knower-code field, as discussed in Chapter 2.

A further significant finding in the high-scoring extracts is students' capacity to extend the analysis of the expert sayers. While students achieve this in a variety of ways, they commonly employ engagement resources that first expand and then contract the dialogic space:

*In her analysis of Julius Caesar, Gayle Greene highlights the manner in which 'powerlessness and incapacitation are suggested by terms such as "silence," "speechless," and "tongue-tied."'*³ [expand, attribute, acknowledge] *This is an astute observation which I do not dispute* [contract, proclaim, concur], *but I argue that these same concepts are also suggested by references to blindness, or other states in which one may close their eyes, such as sleep* [contract, proclaim, pronounce]. (Essay_E)

Here, the student first expands the dialogic space through acknowledging Greene's reading. They then signal a shift with *but* (here functioning as internal conjunction) and contract the space back to their own proclamation (*I argue that*). This rhetorical concur+pronounce pairing works to acknowledge common ground before a new insight is offered (Martin and White, 2015), and the subjectivity of the student's viewpoint is made explicit (*I do not dispute; I argue*). In this way, the student is able to demonstrate independent thought by pointing out an additional original insight into the 'persistent metaphor' that is the focus of this section of their analysis.

In Essay_B, while the student similarly acknowledges a critic's interpretation, they then deny and counter the critic's perspective by calling their terms into question and proposing an alternative reading:

For Veronese, this sense of ambiguity in the novel stems from Brontë's dichotomic view of the world, whereas the chiasmus, as a recurring rhetorical device in her works, suggests her obsessive, albeit vain, attempts to solve the world's dichotomies [expand, attribute, acknowledge]. While Veronese makes a compelling argument, her usage of the word 'dichotomy' suggests that Brontë's conception of the world was caught up in oppositional binaries. However, this is not true [contract, disclaim, deny]. A close reading of the last sentence of the novel allows us to view her conception of the World not as dichotomous but dipolar, and the relationship between humans and nature as not chasmic but chiasmic [contract, disclaim, counter] [...] (Essay_B)

The student again first expands the dialogic space, showing awareness of critical perspectives on the literary work, before contracting back to their own interpretation through internal conjunction (*However*), aligning the reader to accept their new insight. The use of concessive clause (*While Veronese makes a compelling argument*) softens the denial of the critic's voice of authority and demonstrates a recognition of nuance in the debate. In both cases, the students' claims are followed by quotation and extensive analysis of the literary text, providing their grounds.

By using critical voices to advance their own claims, students can demonstrate the 'critical insight' and 'sustained independent thought and/or originality' valued in the discipline as noted in chapter 2 (Wilder, 2011) and reflected in the MA assessment criteria (University of Leeds, 2024).

4.2.2.2 Low-scoring essays: unclear positions

In contrast to the careful managing of the dialogic space in high-scoring essays, lower-scoring scripts struggle to establish and sustain a clear position through an argument

stage. For example, while Essay_L includes a critical voice (underlined), the relevance to the student's interpretation is unclear:

In The Month in the Country, memory is linear. The structure of memory is very clear, moving from Birkin's arrival in Oxgodby, to the restoration of the mural, then the finish of the restoration, and finally to his departure from Oxgodby [monoglossia]. Michael Holroyd comments, "It is a timeless book recreating a propitious season, another world, a place of healing. The narrative proceeds rather like Birkin's exploration of his medieval wall picture. . . . A Month in the Country is a novel of resurrection." ⁷ [heteroglossia, expand, attribute, acknowledge]. Whether it is Moon who believes that the memory of war makes him different from others, [...] or Birkin who has acute stammer and nervous tics which can be seen as some physical symptoms caused by war trauma, both cases show that memory can affect the recognition of their own identity [monoglossia]. (Essay_L)

While we find a similar patterning of monoglossia and heteroglossia to the higher-scoring scripts, the student's engagement with critical voices is less successful. The initial monoglossic claim focuses attention on an aspect of the literary text (*structure*); however, the effects of 'structure' are not elaborated and so the hyperTheme remains at the level of description rather than interpretation. Importantly, the student's evaluation that *the structure of memory is very clear* does not align with the discipline's overarching value of complexity (Wilder, 2011), reducing rather than opening discussion. The critic is introduced through neutral acknowledgement (*comments*), meaning it is unclear how the quoted viewpoint relates to the internal authorial position. Ideationally, the critic's perspective that the novel creates a *place of healing* and *resurrection* is not elaborated in the co-text, with no evidence from the literary text provided through quotation. This example, then, despite following the surface conventions of naming and quoting critics,

may be open to accusations that it lacks a clear line of argument or ‘voice’, common in tutor feedback.

A second example from the lower-scoring scripts highlights how some students struggle to relate broad theoretical or critical approaches to the interpretation of specific literary works in their analysis:

In Shakespeare's “King Lear”, The three sisters—Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia—are not only the family's daughters, but also the heirs to the property in the palace. They represent different women's reactions and strategies towards patriarchy.

[...]

During this conversation, Goneril and Regan collaborated to have King Lear cut back on his followers, thereby weakening his authority. Their savagery is obvious in these actions. [...] Besides, it is clear from the view of female criticism that Goneril has several difficulties because Regan's power struggle targets both their father and her. Regan spilt the sisterhood and forgot her role as a relative just to increase her power.
(Essay_F)

Here, the monoglossic hyperTheme highlights three characters as the focus for the section. While the section is framed with an interpretive claim, this operates at the level of broad abstraction (*different women's reactions and strategies; patriarchy*) with no contextualisation of specific reactions or strategies that can be examined in relation to the literary text. There is an attempt to engage with a critical perspective (*female criticism*) in an endorsing role but this lacks specificity (no named critic, no direct quotation, no specific concepts to be unpacked) and undermines the acknowledgement of heteroglossia through homogenising (**the** *view of female criticism*). As with the previous example, rather than introducing complexity and nuance to the discussion, the engagement here is

reductive, with simple causation (*it is clear/because*). The surrounding monoglossic claims are unconvincing due to the lack of supporting close analysis.

The student has understood that there are critical ‘lenses’ through which the literary work can be explored. However, they have not yet grasped how to relate a theoretical or critical approach to the interpretation of specific texts in the work of literary analysis.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored areas of meaning central to successful realisations of literary analysis in postgraduate essays, revealing significant differences in how high and lower-scoring students represent disciplinary knowledge and engage with critical perspectives. The study highlights the linguistic resources that realise these valued discursive practices in successful student writing, meaning that these abstract practices can be exemplified and made more visible to students in the classroom. This chapter will summarise the main findings from the study before unpacking their implications for pedagogy. Finally, the chapter will discuss areas for further research.

The study found that successful students construct analytical expositions that are rhetorically organised around a central thesis, utilising resources of periodicity to scaffold the unfolding argument for the reader. These scripts employ a variety of resources to objectify the literary text, using lexis in technical and specialised ways, abstracting literary elements and meanings, and constructing analytical and conceptual frameworks to enable the literary text’s ‘close reading’ and their own disciplinary knowledge and methods of inquiry to be demonstrated. Students draw explicit attention to the constructed nature

of the literary text through enhancing clauses and material metaphorical processes that highlight authors as craftsmen and relate literary elements to symbolic meaning as a way of demonstrating disciplinary reasoning. Evaluation is achieved in successful scripts in explicit and more subtle ways, showing appreciation of literary works and evaluation of critical voices. In this knower-code field, students assert confident, authoritative voices through carefully managing the dialogic space and using critics in endorsing roles, demonstrating critical insight and nuance by extending critical perspectives in ways that draw attention to the complexity of the issues discussed. Importantly, these resources are closely integrated within each argument stage, demonstrating that synthesis of aesthetic and socio-critical orientations to the object of study is central to the required 'literary' gaze of this assessment genre.

Weaker scripts, by contrast, lack resources to effectively isolate and abstract literary elements and concepts in order to objectify these for analysis. This results in writing driven by descriptions of characters and events with ideational resources construing the experiential world within the text. Representations of the literary text in these essays, then, are predominantly material, with symbolic meanings not effectively related to textual details. Noticeably missing from these scripts are resources demonstrating an aesthetic orientation to the literary text, through a lack of technical and specialised language and minimal appreciation resources to evaluate the literary authors' craft. While a socio-critical orientation to the literary texts is visible through references to critical voices and discussions of social issues, students are less able to construct a coherent stance through resources of engagement and, critically, the lack of attention to and connection between

the aesthetic and semiotic properties of literary texts results in weaker grounds for interpretive claims. In these ways, students are less able to demonstrate the valued practices of disciplinary ‘knowers’ in their writing.

These findings highlight valuable areas of disciplinary meaning-making for inclusion in the EAP syllabus and classroom; to demonstrate the discursive practices present in high-scoring scripts, students need the relevant linguistic tools in their repertoire. The findings also make a strong case that the teaching of these resources needs to focus on how they work together to realise valued practices rather than addressing systems in isolation. It makes pedagogical sense, then, to organise the EAP syllabus around aspects of disciplinary writing that are meaningful to students such as ‘engaging with critical voices’ and ‘developing your analysis’ within which relevant systems and resources can be exemplified and analysed in student texts, before students are supported to practise these in their own writing.² Using a variety of student samples and discussing the effects of different choices in realising particular purposes avoids prescriptivism, rather equipping students with knowledge about how language makes meaning in texts to inform their own choices.

Significantly, the linguistic patterns evident in the high and lower-scoring scripts reveal important differences in the ways students conceptualise the literary text. This means that disciplinary literacy work should be a collaborative endeavour with disciplinary experts if it is to be effective in addressing the ‘meaning-development needs’ of students (Donohue,

² See, for example, Dreyfus et al, 2016 for a discussion of how the Sydney School genre-based Teaching and Learning Cycle has been applied in tertiary contexts.

2012, p.15). For students to ‘see’ the aesthetic and semiotic nature of literary texts, they need knowledge of literary genre, form and technique as well as disciplinary methods for their analysis and interpretation. While some students have acquired this knowledge through an educational path that has socialised them into this cultivated gaze, for example, by completing an undergraduate degree in Literature, students now come to the MA from a variety of educational trajectories and include many who are newer to these disciplinary practices. These practices, therefore, need to form an explicit part of the MA curriculum. Ultimately, disciplinary literacy must be approached holistically, considering the epistemological and social aspects of disciplinary knowledge, alongside the discursive.

Coffin and Donohue (2014) provide a good model of how this might happen, through their ‘Language as Social Semiotic’ approach to disciplinary literacy in tertiary contexts. However, it should be acknowledged that this approach requires institutional support, itself often determined by the broader socio-political landscape, and a stable EAP provision that is in close relationship with academic schools. EAP practitioners also need appropriate academic status and opportunities to develop the knowledge and expertise in academic language and communication that underpins this work. Even with these factors in place, effective collaboration has significant time demands on colleagues and curriculum: demands exacerbated on intensive one-year Master’s degrees. Despite these challenges, forms of practitioner-scholarship such as this study provide an effective way to target specific areas of need, providing opportunities to collaborate with disciplinary experts and develop interventions with immediate pedagogical relevance.

While guided by the literature, knowledge of the teaching context, and some previous study in the discipline, my position in this study is one of disciplinary outsider (Jacobs, 2007). An essential next step, then, is discussions with disciplinary experts to verify, clarify and further understand the discursive practices evident in the data. This can also serve to surface tacit knowledge practices for disciplinary specialists, essential if these practices are to be explicitly addressed in the curriculum.

This study could be extended to analyse in more detail how postgraduate literature students write about social and critical contexts. Further studies could also explore gazes required in particular modules, for example those that are more interdisciplinary or in which theory plays a central role, and assessment genres such as the critical review or the dissertation could be considered. Systems that appeared salient but were beyond the scope of this project could also be looked at in more detail, for example, conjunction and further resources for abstraction such as elaborated nominal groups and grammatical metaphor. The findings from this study could also be confirmed across a larger sample and collaborative analysis with colleagues could provide inter-rater reliability.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Essay details

Label	Grade	module	Title	Wordcount
Essay_A	78	Yorkshire literary landscapes	XXXX	3210
Essay_B	82	Yorkshire literary landscapes	XXXX	2602
Essay_C	78	Contemporary novel	XXXX	4400
Essay_D	80	Yorkshire literary landscapes	XXXX	3256
Essay_E	75	Shakespeare's tyrants	XXXX	3006
Essay_F	53	Shakespeare's tyrants	XXXX	2363
Essay_G	50	Yorkshire literary landscapes	XXXX	3129
Essay_H	88	Imagining multicultural Britain	XXXX	4400
Essay_I	73	Global literature and terror	XXXX	4328
Essay_J	72	Victorian New Media	XXXX	4252
Essay_K	72	Yorkshire literary landscapes	XXXX	3159

Essay_L	60	Yorkshire literary landscapes	XXXX	2449
Essay_M	54	Yorkshire literary landscapes	XXXX	3187
Essay_N	78	Planetary Aesthetics	XXXX	4338
Essay_O	57	Victorian New Media	XXXX	4094

Appendix 2 : Essay_C

Exploring the relationship between social forms and queer female agency in *The Pull of the Stars* and *Conversations with Friends*.

In 2015, Caroline Levine made an influential case for ‘expanding our usual definition of form in literary studies to include patterns of sociopolitical experience’.³ Taking the term at its broadest sense, to mean, ‘*an arrangement of elements – an ordering, patterning or shaping*’, Levine suggested form could as easily refer to politics - which involves ‘imposing and enforcing boundaries, temporal patterns, and hierarchies on experience’ - as it could to the arrangements of literary elements in a novel.⁴ When considering literature through this lens, the ‘gap between the forms of the literary text and its content and context dissolves’.⁵ We can consider how the arrangements and shapings of elements in the social world are represented in literature, and how literary forms in turn represent and shape the wider world. In this essay, I will explore the representation of social forms in two contemporary Irish novels, Emma Donoghue’s *The Pull of the Stars* and Sally Rooney’s *Conversations with Friends*. I suggest that the novels, set in Dublin approximately a hundred years apart, depict the forms of Irish society as restrictive and oppressive for women. *The Pull of the Stars* represents the struggles of childbirth and motherhood in a deeply religious, patriarchal and impoverished society during the 1918 influenza pandemic. *Conversations with Friends* demonstrates the damaging effects of neoliberal social forms on its female characters in the twenty-first century. However, I argue that these texts also utilise the novel form to imagine new worlds in which women might enjoy greater freedom. In particular, the novels create spaces for queer female agency in Ireland, relating queerness to social forms as an insurgent or negating force against existing

³ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 2.

⁴ Levine, p. 3.

⁵ Levine, p. 2.

societal orders. Queerness has the capacity to reshape women's lives in the Ireland the novels depict, although the extent and nature of this transformative power remains ambiguous. Exploring the relationship between social forms and queer female agency in these novels will enable me to consider this relationship, focussing first on how each text represents social orders as repressive for women, before exploring how each rearranges the elements of society to offer potential for a better world.

The primacy of the heteronormative family and motherhood as social forms in early twentieth-century Ireland is represented as damaging to women's health and freedom in *The Pull of the Stars*. Donoghue writes a historical novel set in Dublin in 1918, a fraught time for Ireland due to local and global conflict, and the influenza epidemic. Levine describes the 'affordances of form' as 'the potential uses or actions latent in' different forms, suggesting that specific arrangements of elements carry particular possibilities.⁶ Jerome de Groot suggests that the affordances of the historical fiction are the ability to 'critique and queer a normative, straightforward, linear' history, by rearranging the past into new shapes, highlighting neglected or overlooked elements of history.⁷ Donoghue does this in *The Pull of the Stars*, as she critiques male-centred versions of Irish history. Instead, Marisol Morales-Ladron finds that she 'engages in the unveiling of the silence, marginalisation and neglect of the lives of women [...], placing them at the center of narratives from where they recover their own agency and visibility'.⁸ Rather than focussing on male-dominated conflict like the First World War, Donoghue deploys warlike imagery on a different frontline, a makeshift 'maternity-fever' ward for pregnant women suffering from influenza.⁹ Nurse Julia Powers, the novel's protagonist, describes each shift as 'another

⁶ Levine, p. 6.

⁷ Jerome de Groot, *Remaking History: The Past in Contemporary Historical Fictions* (Taylor & Francis, 2015), p. 2.

⁸ Marisol Morales-Ladron, 'Conspicuously Silent: The Excesses of Religion and Medicine in Emma Donoghue's Historical Novels *The Wonder* and *The Pull of the Stars*', in *Narratives of the Unspoken in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Silences that Speak*, ed. By José Carregal-Romero and Teresa Caneda-Cabrera (Palgrave MacMillan, 2023), pp. 21-41 (p. 22).

⁹ Emma Donoghue, *The Pull of the Stars*, (Picador, 2020), p. 17. Further page references are given after quotations in the text.

day of battle' (p. 183). Her job as a midwife is presented as exceptionally difficult due to the extreme poverty and ill health of the women she treats. For example, an early casualty in the novel, Eileen Devine, is described as 'an underfed daughter of underfed generations' (p. 23). Eileen's death certificate is symbolic of the erasure of women's issues from certified history, as Julia notes: 'only medical observations were permitted [...] instead of *poverty*, I'd write *malnourishment* or *debility*. As code for *too many pregnancies*, I might put *anaemia*, *heart strain*, *bad back*' (pp. 23-24). Donoghue uses the historical novel here to illustrate how social forms of the past caused women significant, unseen suffering. In particular, early twentieth-century Ireland appears in thrall to what Lee Edelman terms 'reproductive futurism'.¹⁰ Edelman suggests that under reproductive futurism - the dominant social system in Western society - the linear continuation of existing social orders, symbolised by the figure of the child as embodiment of the future, is the only acceptable belief.¹¹ The child of Edelman's argument is the imagined beneficiary of all political policy, and often used rhetorically to justify limiting the rights and freedoms of 'real' citizens, in the name of societal progress.¹² In this case, those 'real' citizens are the impoverished mothers sacrificing their health, and often lives, in order to have multiple pregnancies and large families, due to a patriarchal and conservatively religious society which values its replication over female citizens' freedom. Julia observes: 'In other countries, women might have taken discreet measures to avoid [so many pregnancies], but in Ireland, such things were not only illegal but unmentionable' (p. 24). Donoghue represents Julia's struggle to save the pregnant women in her care as a consequence of the often-overlooked effects of Ireland's past on women's lives, with many mothers' deaths resulting from their society's prioritisation of futurity and the institution of the family over their own care.

¹⁰ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004), p. 3.

¹¹ Edelman, p. 3.

¹² Edelman, p. 11.

While Donoghue represents the repressive nature of Ireland's political order, I argue that she also grants her female characters agency by creating social forms that challenge patriarchal values in the novel – such as the 'maternity-fever' ward setting, and the network of female relationships in *The Pull of the Stars*. Selen Aktari-Sevgi's analysis of the hospital setting uses psychoanalysis of the ward as a space of self-formation rooted in 'plurality, connectivity [...] and compassion' (in contrast to models of the self as formed in opposition to others).¹³ She finds that 'the ward becomes an affective site that transforms its inhabitants by means of female bonding'.¹⁴ This analysis suggests that the ward is represented as an alternative social form in the novel, one which provides female solidarity, away from the patriarchal society of the outside world. Julia invites her patients onto first name terms (p. 29), establishing intimacy between the ward's 'sisterhood' (p. 60). This move's effect is emphasised by the lack of speech marks in the novel, suggesting the women reject traditional codes of speech in favour of close, intimate connection. The women share stories of pregnancy and childbirth, counteracting a culture of shame and silence in Ireland around these topics. Furthermore, although traditionally 'marriage was a private business' (p. 260) in a conservative religious state, Julia is able to advise a patient to escape an abusive relationship: 'Tell him you won't stand for any more' (p. 263). The line, 'So many rules I was getting used to breaking' (p. 204), has a double meaning, as Julia not only breaks hospital procedure, but uses the ward space to flout the social order of the patriarchy. Male presence in the ward is felt as an intrusion – with male doctors and orderlies characterised as rude, inexperienced and unhelpful. Instead, relationships between women are this novel's primary concern. Another subversive social formation is the triangular relationship of central characters Julia, Dr Kathleen Lynn, and Bridie Sweeney – each shown to learn from and support one another. Dr Lynn is introduced as an extremist: a 'socialist, suffragette, anarchist firebrand' (p. 60). However, she is characterised as calm, empathetic and efficient, a vital support to Julia. Whereas initially

¹³ Selen Aktari-Sevgi, "'Stories Last a Long Time After You Go': Female Solidarity in Emma Donoghue's *The Pull of the Stars* and Elaine Feeney's *As You Were*", *Irish Studies Review*, 31.3 (2023), pp. 391-404 (pp. 393-395), doi:10.1080/09670882.2023.2237782.

¹⁴ Aktari-Sevgi, p. 396.

Julia has ‘no time for politics’ (p. 209), she learns from the educated Dr Lynn – a mouthpiece for Donoghue to share information - the political nature of her work, and develops anger with a society that ‘lose[s] half again as many lying-in cases as they do in England’ (p. 141). Furthermore, while performing an autopsy, the symbolism of searching for a root cause of death compliments Dr Lynn’s speech proclaiming that the origins of Ireland’s ‘rotting heart’ were in British colonial rule (p. 144). From Bridie, a young volunteer, Julia learns of the abuse and mistreatment the Irish state and religious institutions levelled against unmarried mothers and children in so called ‘mother-and-baby home[s]’ (p. 131). Bridie, a survivor of one such ‘home’, suggests that to enter this system is to ‘Go into the pipe’ (p. 131), characterising the suffering of poor women and children as a walled tunnel from which they cannot escape. Through her sorority with Bridie and Dr Lynn, Julia is represented as learning how her job is part of larger societal systems. She considers not just sending women back to ‘barely bearable’ lives (p. 26), but what happens next to mothers and children in Irish society. By creating alternative social forms championing female solidarity and mutual learning, Donoghue provides her characters space to challenge existing social forms rooted in women’s oppression.

The most profound rebellion against heteronormative patriarchy in the novel arrives when Julia and Bridie share a passionate kiss on the hospital roof, a kiss that Julia describes as ‘against every rule I’d ever been reared by’ (p. 250). This scene, in the final section of the novel, can be read as demonstrating queerness as a force providing women with agency and freedom from social forms. For Edelman, queerness is the antithesis of reproductive futurism, the ‘refusal of the coercive belief in the paramount value of futurity’, which ‘dispossesses the social order of the ground on which it rests’. Within this argument, the queer subject appears as a threat to the existing social order, and to any order based in the logic of futurism.¹⁵ Julia and Bridie’s same-sex desire is ‘against every rule’ of the religious patriarchy in which Irish women are expected to fulfil a duty of motherhood in the

¹⁵ Edelman, pp. 6-11.

heterosexual family unit. The scene's setting above the hospital emphasises the idea that Julia and Bridie's actions have taken them beyond the existing social order. However, within the scene and throughout the novel is a sense that the pair's time together is temporary. For example, the novel is structured in four sections named 'Red', 'Brown', 'Blue', 'Black', resembling the four fatal stages of cyanosis in influenza patients – and Bridie's frailty is emphasised upon her introduction, foreshadowing her demise (p. 45). The day after their kiss, Bridie succumbs to a severe case of influenza. The phrase 'the tunnel straightened' in Bridie's final moments highlights that her beleaguered body, underfed and bearing marks of her abuse, has ultimately failed to escape 'the pipe' (p. 282). Julia's final act in the novel's conclusion is to take home an orphaned baby from the ward, hoping to spare the child from the institutions her lover experienced (p. 285). By closing the novel with an image of futurity, albeit an unusual one for an Irish child at the time – Julia's home will be unconventional – *The Pull of the Stars* compromises Edelman's definition of queerness as a negation of all social forms, as Julia appears 'psychically invested in preserving the familiar familial narrativity of reproductive futurism,' providing a child with a family unit rather than the horrors of a mother-and-baby home.¹⁶ However, for José Esteban Munoz, queerness is 'primarily about futurity and hope' – a force that takes us away from the here and now to imagined, utopian futures, and 'an insistence on [...] possibility for another world'.¹⁷ Munoz rejects Edelman's association of queerness with negation of social order, suggesting that queer possibility must be tied to the concrete hope for another world. Julia and Bridie's kiss seems to provide such hope for Julia, awakening in her a desire to 'go to that place where you lived, Bridie, and knock it down. Tear it apart, brick from brick.' (p. 253). Julia's assertion that she wants to destroy Bridie's institution marks her fully realised journey from rule-following citizen to angry dissenter. Her disenchantment with the social orders of Irish society is evident in her anger, and her thought that 'I'd stepped so far away from my old life, I wasn't sure I could ever go back' (p. 258). When aligned with Munoz's theory, Julia's decision to provide a better life for the

¹⁶ Edelman, p. 17.

¹⁷ José Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia*, (NYU Press, 2019), pp. 1-11.

infant Barnabas does not counteract her enthralling moment of passion with Bridie; it becomes instead a first step towards enacting a better future, inspired by this moment of queer possibility. Donoghue represents Bridie's kiss as providing Julia with agency to fight against the oppressive social forms of her country, and attempt to create a better world for women than that of Ireland in 1918.

In Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends*, written and set around a century after *The Pull of the Stars*, there is initially a sense that the novel's characters have a greater awareness of the restrictive power of social forms, and the potential to define themselves independently of these. Aktari-Sevgi describes how the 'Celtic Phoenix' period of twenty-first century Irish economic growth and productivity – three years prior to the publication of Rooney's novel – was imbued with 'political discourses of recovery' from previous suffering and injustice in the nation.¹⁸ In this seemingly optimistic milieu, discussions of politics and oppressive social orders are commonplace between the novel's university-educated central characters. Early on, the protagonist's ex-girlfriend Bobbi is able to comfortably declare, 'Well, I'm gay [...] And Frances is a communist' – suggesting the characters are free to rebel against capitalist hegemony.¹⁹ However, beyond such conversations, Rooney's novel is defined by miscommunication and frustration. *Conversations with Friends* demonstrates how contemporary Ireland's neoliberal social structures, championing individualism and certain desirable models of success – in particular, heteronormative marriage and economic prosperity – seem to damage and warp relationships, especially those of women. Frances – while identifying as a 'communist' – is represented as having taken on these models of success, which drive her decisions in the novel. Meeting a wealthy art critic and her actor husband, Frances – a single woman from a working-class background – seems to desire everything in their home, and life. She reflects, 'A family could live here' (p. 4), representing the heteronormative family model that

¹⁸ Aktari-Sevgi, p. 393.

¹⁹ Sally Rooney, *Conversations with Friends* (Faber & Faber, 2017), p. 6. Further page references are given after quotations in the text.

remains idealised in Irish society. After beginning a relationship with the ‘trophy husband’ (p. 12), it is noticeable that Frances is ‘infatuated’ not only with Nick, but ‘with the house he lived in’ (p. 76). Meanwhile, Frances is consistently represented as struggling to express the contrastingly less glamorous realities of her life, including her mental health problems, traumatic family upbringing, and endometriosis diagnosis. In one passage, after returning from an upsetting trip to the hospital, Frances thinks: ‘It was okay to cry because nobody could see me, and I would never tell anyone about it’ (p. 171). In another scene, her difficult relationship with her father is presented as upsetting because it fails to fit the ideal family model Frances believes in: ‘I wanted to be speaking to someone who lived in a clean house, [...] whose life I didn’t have to know about’ (p. 190). Furthermore, Frances remains invested in the logic of reproductive futurism, worrying that she will appear defective or undesirable to Nick following her diagnosis, which may prevent her from having children (p. 275). The representation of Frances in *Conversations with Friends* endorses Jose Carregal-Romero’s view that the culture of self-interest and social success associated with neoliberalism ‘reimposes silences and reconfigures old types of shaming’.²⁰ He argues that Ireland may not have progressed as far from the restrictive social order of *The Pull of the Stars* as it appears, suggesting that ‘some physical and emotional injuries – like mental illness, self-harm or realities like domestic violence and financial stringency – are experienced as unspeakable [...] signs of abnormality and weakness, in a competitive society which equates vulnerability with failure.’²¹ Frances feels unable to communicate her vulnerability due to societal pressures to appear happy and successful according to particular, exclusive models of success. Frances consistently keeps secrets from her mother and her closest friend, Bobbi, representing Carregal-Romero’s argument that neoliberalism also ‘entails a deactivation of feminist ideals of social equality – [...] advocating that female empowerment depends on individualism, consumerism and body image’.²² Contemporary Ireland is depicted in *Conversations with Friends* as a space which

²⁰ Jose Carregal-Romero, ‘Unspeakable Injuries and Neoliberal Subjectivities in Sally Rooney’s *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal People*’, in *Narratives of the Unspoken*, pp. 213-233 (p. 215).

²¹ Carregal-Romero, p. 215.

²² Carregal-Romero, p. 219.

prevents female solidarity by promoting an exclusive model of success as the route to happiness, leaving its citizens to interpret their failure to reach this as a personal failure or weakness.

Rooney highlights the workings of neoliberalism as a social form in *Conversations with Friends*, but throughout the novel she also formulates ways of responding to and altering the dominant social order. One way she does so is linked to theories of ‘affect’, a term conceptualised by Brian Massumi as representing the ineffable intensity of experience, in contrast to ‘emotion’, which is codified and fixed, a way of ordering experience.²³ Sara Ahmed links codified forms of emotion and feeling to neoliberal social forms and structures, suggesting that personal fulfilment and the possibility of ‘happiness’, the emotion which appears most desirable, is represented in contemporary media, politics and society as only attainable by subscribing to individualist ideologies and neoliberal mandates of self-improvement.²⁴ For Ahmed, affect theory, studying the intensity of experience, can expose such politics of emotion as flawed, highlighting that people are encouraged to pursue specific, value-laden versions of feelings like happiness – that most will never achieve. I suggest that *Conversations with Friends* aligns with Pieter Vermeulen’s reading of the contemporary novel form, to which he ascribes the ‘freedom to evoke as well as frustrate generic expectations’ – including upsetting the expectation of the novel to deal with ‘emotive engagement’, rather than the affective.²⁵ Vermeulen finds that many contemporary novels create, or draw on, ideas of the novel as a genre which is in decline. In doing so, they reinforce ‘traditional’ views of the affordances of the declining novel form, while enabling themselves to differ from them - ‘to explore what forms of life and affect emerge after the dissolution of that genre’.²⁶ I suggest *Conversations with Friends* aligns

²³ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 26-27.

²⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 9-13.

²⁵ Pieter Vermeulen, *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel: Creature, Affect, Form*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), pp. 3-7.

²⁶ Vermeulen, pp. 3-5.

the 'traditional' novel with the illusory politics of emotion that defines contemporary political life, while positioning its own affective narration in contrast to this. Illustrating this point, Frances' experiment with prose writing in the novel is a disastrous attempt to gain control over her disordered life. She submits a story to publisher Valerie - a character aligned with old-fashioned, conservative values - in which she rearranges the elements of her life in order to help herself understand them. For example, Frances 'characterised Bobbi as a mystery so total I couldn't endure her, a force I couldn't subjugate with my will, and the love of my life' (p. 224). This series of statements is not entirely true: earlier in the novel she learns that 'hurting Bobbi's feelings was within my power' (p. 82), by doing so almost unthinkingly. Bobbi's upset reaction to the story reminds the reader that her relationship with Frances was founded not on traditional novel writing, but the more unconventional form of the pair's performance poetry, which perhaps comes closer to genuinely capturing affective experience than Frances' piece (pp. 265-267). Rooney's novel explicitly contrasts itself with Frances' writing, by prioritising affective experiences over emotional ones. For example, in a passage before her affair with Nick has been exposed, Frances' experience is described like this:

I felt a growing sense of dread, a thin and physical presence that began in my shoulders, as I listened. At first I couldn't figure out what it was. [...] It was only when I remembered the night before that I knew what it was. I felt guilty (p. 147).

Here, the intensity of physical experience is given primacy. Frances is only able to translate her experience into an identifiable emotion after she comes to terms with its 'thin and physical presence'. By including affective experience as a physical presence in the novel, Rooney uses the contemporary novel form to articulate feelings and experiences beyond those accepted by the forms of neoliberal society.

Furthermore, Rooney presents her characters in *Conversations with Friends* as forming alternative relationships and social arrangements as the novel progresses, which have the possibility to provide Frances with agency, freedom, and clarity over past misconceptions.

Frances and Bobbi's relationship is rekindled into something more than friendship, following a tender moment outside a café: 'Bobbi kissed me. I accepted the kiss' (p. 256). Bobbi's kiss is represented as bringing Frances back into Bobbi's subversive, socially analytical world. Rooney represents Bobbi as a character aligned with Edelman's model of queerness as negating social orders. She disregards socially acceptable terms like 'girlfriend' for Frances, describing their relationship as taking place without 'imposing some prefabricated cultural dynamic on us that's outside our control' (p. 306). The pair's relationship is represented as existing beyond the demands of neoliberal society. Bobbi notably perceives non-monogamy as an explicit disavowal of reproductive futurism:

She said that monogamy was based on a commitment model, which served the needs of men in patrilineal societies by allowing them to pass property to their genetic offspring [...] Non-monogamy could be based on an alternative model [...] Something more like spontaneous consent (p. 252)

The novel endorses Bobbi's non-monogamous relationship model as an alternative social form providing queer female agency, by representing the different pleasures and benefits brought to Frances by her romantic involvements with both Bobbi and Nick. However, I suggest that while Frances too is invested in the act of queerness as challenging existing social forms, her queer female agency is closer to Munoz's utopian model, tied to a belief in futurity and a better world. When Frances discovers that she may not be able to have children due to her illness, a devastating shock, she is represented as viewing Bobbi and Nick as a potential alternative family model to the traditional, nuclear family in which she may not be able to participate. While the pair are caring for her, Frances thinks: 'I loved them both so much in this moment [...] Thank you, I wanted to say. [...] You are my family now' (p. 230). Just as Bobbi's kiss brings Frances into a world of queer possibility, and Bridie's kiss opens new worlds for Julia, Frances has done the same for Nick - 'I kissed him. He let me' (p. 58) – who is able to embrace his unconventional desires and uncomfortable struggles with mental illness when with her, away from the social norms of neoliberal society. Frances asks Bobbi, 'Is it possible we could develop an alternative model of loving each other?' (p. 299) – the phrase 'alternative model' representing the fact that she wants

to form a new kind of kinship, a new social order. This could be what Carregal-Romero deems the novel's central ideology: 'Interdependency [...] a situation where caring for one another takes precedence over false illusions of self-sufficiency and personal independence'.²⁷ The concluding lines of *Conversations with Friends* represent Frances' increasing awareness of forms in Levine's sense, an understanding that forces more powerful than her shape her actions: 'Things and people moved around me, taking positions in obscure hierarchies, participating in systems I didn't know and never would. A complex network of objects and concepts. You live through certain things before you understand them' (p. 321). Frances' queer experiences open her eyes to social forms. Rooney represents Frances' newfound queer female agency as driving her wish to create alternative social forms away from the neoliberal mandates of specific, exclusive kinds of success.

Although they are set one hundred years apart, both novels discussed in this essay demonstrate the power of social forms to restrict women's freedom and agency. Reproductive futurism is presented as a sinister societal form in *The Pull of the Stars*, in which Julia Powers fights to save the lives of women valued not for themselves, but for their roles as mothers, in a religious, patriarchal society. In *Conversations with Friends*, the pervasive nature of neoliberalism and its individualist ideologies deprives the novel's central female character of agency to express uncomfortable feelings, for fear of falling outside of idealised visions of happiness and success. However, in this essay I have explored the power of these novels to represent social forms which provide a queer female agency to their characters, doing so by depicting social forms which promote female solidarity, and alternative modes of experience – with a particular focus on queerness as an oppositional force to repressive societal formations. Levine's discussion of form as 'sociopolitical experience' highlights how the arrangement of elements in these novels functions not only on the level of literary form, but enables the authors to reshape and

²⁷ Carregal-Romero, p. 223.

recreate the societies they depict, providing female characters with greater agency. Both *The Pull of the Stars* and *Conversations with Friends* provide formal critique of women's oppression in twentieth and twenty-first century Ireland, but also create hope for the future possibility of better, more just, models of society.

Word count: 4400 words

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Appendix 3: Participant information sheet.

Participant Information Document



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Title: Academic Writing in English Studies

Part of the wider project: A study of Disciplinary Discourse at the University of Leeds

Participant Information Sheet

This research is conducted by Catherine MacBean, one of the Academic Writing teachers working in the School of English. The study aims to understand the language and literacies needed to demonstrate knowledge in English Studies in the programme assignments. This will help me better understand the language which students need to master to do well in their studies and will enable me to produce teaching materials for future students and publish my findings for other scholars and teachers to use.

If you consent to take part, I will access one or more of your assignments to analyse. You can choose which assignments I can / cannot access. That's all the participation that is required from you.

The results of the study may be discussed with colleagues from the School of English and used to develop teaching materials. All data is anonymised, and you cannot be recognised from the publications and teaching resources I will produce.

Please read the details below to understand more, or ask any questions to Catherine MacBean c.e.macbean@leeds.ac.uk

Then, please complete the consent form if you wish to participate.

Thank you for your support and your time.

Wishing you all the best with the end of your programme,

Cat

Details

Purpose and background

The purpose of the project is to analyse features of disciplinary language and discourse within schools. The project will be led by Lecturers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) from the University of Leeds. The EAP lecturers are already working in schools across the university. Within their work, EAP lecturers routinely analyse texts and other forms of communication to inform curriculum design. They also discuss aspects of language and literacy with colleagues within schools and with students. These form part of ongoing needs analyses. This project aims to continue this work in a systematic and collaborative way. The research team would like to develop a comprehensive picture of the most salient features of academic communication within their respective schools in order to review and enhance the EAP syllabus and pedagogies.

What is the purpose of the project?

To explore features of disciplinary language and communication within subject areas within Schools. This will happen via:

- Analysis of texts. With the permission of staff and students, this will include analysis of module reading lists and learning materials (e.g. lecture and seminar materials) and student writing including assignments.
- Discussions with staff and students via interviews, focus groups and possibly questionnaires.
- Observations of teaching or seminars - this might involve staff-student learning situations (like in a lecture) or student-student interactions (in a group project for example) or staff-staff interactions (in module or programme meetings for example).

Who can take part?

Selected staff and students will be invited to take part via email recruitment or other school communications.

- Staff may/will be asked to share information about aspects of academic language and literacies in their field. This might include discussions about the relevance and salience of various features related to: academic and student genres in the subject; credible knowledge generation and recontextualisation for/ with students; information structure at different levels (e.g. whole-text, paragraph and sentence level which may include lexico-grammatical items). Staff may/ will also be encouraged to discuss ways in which academic language and literacies feature within curriculum design and pedagogies.

- Students may/will be asked to discuss aspects of their learning within their subject area. The focus may/ will be on the development of knowledge and skills about disciplinary language and literacies. Students may also be asked to discuss their writing, including assignment writing.
- Staff and students may agree to be observed within a teaching context e.g. within a lecture, seminar or student group project. This would allow an analysis of academic language in use in authentic situations.

Project in the School of English:

What do I have to do? What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to participate you will:

- Agree that I can access and analyse the language in one or more of your written assignments on your MA English programme. You can specify which assignments I can and cannot access.

When will the research happen?

The project will start in April 2025 and finish in December 2028.

Ethical Approval

This study has been given ethical approval by University of Leeds Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee on 29th May 2025

Approval Reference: **AHC FREC 2305**

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There should not be any disadvantages or risks in taking part.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm that you understand what the project is about and that you agree to take part. You can take up to two weeks to decide whether you want to take part.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential? / What will happen to the results of the research project?

All of the work undertaken within the project will be confidential and remain within the research team only. Any information about you that is shared will be agreed beforehand.

The University's confidentiality, anonymisation and security procedures for data will be maintained. The project will follow the University of Leeds guidelines on security, storage and use of research data (including research participants' personal data). We must comply with the Data Protection Act (1998), the Human Rights Act, and the University's Code of Practice on Data Protection. These will be discussed at the beginning of the project.

Electronic consent forms will contain your names. These will be password protected. Any hard copies of consent forms will be scanned and be password protected. Original hard copies will be destroyed following university guidelines for destroying confidential information. If you do not want to be identified, only one pseudonymisation document will be used and will also be password protected. This will include your name and those of other participants who take part in interviews, together with and their pseudonymisation. After the write up, this document will be erased so that re-identification is not possible.

Sometimes it is not possible to keep everything confidential, for example if you or others discloses an intention to harm themselves or others but this it is unlikely that this project will solicit information about potential harm or abuse or other situations that require reporting.

The data that you and others provide will need to be stored password protected by the researchers/academics for up to 10 years so that it can be available for any further analysis by University auditors or regulatory authorities post-dissemination.

The results of the project will be used to inform EAP curriculum and teaching practices. The results may also be shared more widely with other members of the EAP and Higher Education community possibly via conference presentations, peer-reviewed journals, other publications including a publication on the Language Centre Insessional website. The results may also be shared in a webinar or a podcast.

Research Participant Privacy Notice

If you agree to participate in a research project being undertaken by one of our members of staff or students, we may need to collect personal data. We need to tell you about the types of personal information we collect, the purposes we use it for, the legal reasons contained in the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018 which allows us to use it in these ways, how long we retain the information for and how you can exercise your rights.

The University of Leeds' Research Participant Privacy Notice (<https://dataprotection.leeds.ac.uk/research-participant-privacy-notice/>) explains how and why

the University uses personal data for research; what individual rights are afforded under the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and who to contact with any queries or concerns.

For more information about the notice please access the link below.

<https://dataprotection.leeds.ac.uk/research-participant-privacy-notice/>

Withdrawing

You are able to withdraw up to 2 weeks after the data collection.

Who is organising/ funding the research?

The research is being undertaken as part of a collaborative scholarship project by lecturers of English for Academic Purposes at the University of Leeds.

Where do you sign up?

If you would like to get involved please complete the consent form

Date: 31st August 2025

Appendix 4: participant consent form

Participant Consent to take part in, 'Academic Writing in English Studies: A study of Disciplinary Discourse at the University of Leeds'	If you agree to the statement please sign with your initials below
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 31 st August 2025 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to 2 weeks after the data collection without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. The researcher I can contact is Catherine MacBean, c.e.macbean@leeds.ac.uk	
I understand members of the research team will have access to my identifiable responses.	
I understand that identifiable data collected about me as part of this research project may be linked with other data as described in the participant information sheet. However, this study will be collecting minimum personal data.	
Where my data has been anonymised/pseudonymised I understand I will not be identified or identifiable in the report/s or publications that result from the research.	
I understand that data may be shared with stakeholders as described in the Participant information sheet (if applicable)	

**Participant Consent to take part in, ‘Academic Writing in English Studies:
A study of Disciplinary Discourse at the University of Leeds’**

If you
agree to
the
statement
please sign
with your
initials
below

Agreement for restricted data sharing: I agree that the (de-identified) research data collected from me can be shared for future research and teaching, as explained in the participant information sheet. Where my data is identifiable, I understand that I can request removal from the dataset at any time by contacting Catherine MacBean c.e.macbean@leeds.ac.uk

I agree that de-identified research data can be collected from **ANY** MA module assignments that I have completed

OR

I agree that de-identified research data can be collected from the following MA module assignments **ONLY** (select from the list below):

ENGL5551M Yorkshire Literary Landscapes: Writing Places and Identities

ENGL5842M Research Project

ENGL5103M Global Literature and Terror

ENGL5115M Postcolonial Encounters

ENGL5343M Africas of the Mind

**Participant Consent to take part in, ‘Academic Writing in English Studies:
A study of Disciplinary Discourse at the University of Leeds’**

If you
agree to
the
statement
please sign
with your
initials
below

ENGL5700M Writing, Archives, Race	
ENGL5756M Fictions of Citizenship in Contemporary American Literature	
ENGL5817M Shakespeare’s Tyrants	
ENGL5852M Language, Society and Fiction	
ENGL5854M Reader, Writer, Text	
ENGL5940M Planetary Aesthetics: Animism, Mimesis and Indigeneity	
ENGL5950M George Orwell: The Politics of Literature	
ENGL5161M Language After Empire	
ENGL5225M Children’s Literature: Language, Discourse and Education	
ENGL5540M Thinking with the Contemporary Novel	
ENGL5635M Imagining Multicultural Britain in the 21 st Century	
ENGL5666M Ways of Reading: Novels in the Age of Information Excess	
ENGL5837M Victorian New Media	
ENGL5847M War, Mourning, Memory: 1914-1939	
ENGL5851M The Brontes	

**Participant Consent to take part in, ‘Academic Writing in English Studies:
A study of Disciplinary Discourse at the University of Leeds’**

If you
agree to
the
statement
please sign
with your
initials
below

I understand that other researchers may use my words (direct quotes) in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if all direct identifiers (such as names, locations, birth dates and contact details) are removed and I or any stakeholders involved (deleted if not applicable) cannot be identified.	
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by auditors from and on behalf of the University of Leeds	
I agree to take part in the above research project.	

Name of participant	
Participant’s signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher	
Signature	
Date	

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/ pre-written script/ information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the study's main documents which must be kept in a secure online UoL sever location or as detailed in the approved Participant Information Sheet.

Secretariat, Research Ethics, Version 1.3, September 2024