

JUDGE'S REPORT ON THE KONSTANTIN SOFIANOS SCHOLARSHIP ESSAYS

In writing an open-ended critical analysis about specific poems, it is generally true that any author must be careful to deal with a number of facets, without letting any of these assume dominance to the extent that others are missed.

The question given to the candidates for the Sofianos Scholarship was specifically targeted in order to show how well the candidates dealt with a variety of such issues.

- Firstly, the fact that the poems dealt with a theme that must have a socio-political dimension – the theme and experience of exile - ensured that any answer would need to look at the biography of the two poets, and the similarity and/or difference in their experiences of exile.

- Secondly, the examination above cannot simply be based on, or stop at, intentionality and the exigencies of personal biography. Thus, the essayists would need to examine the manner in which the poets used their personal experience to express their wider understanding of the condition of exile, within – but not wholly dependent on – their specific contexts. This may lead in turn to a discussion to the psychological ramifications engendered by the experience of exile, as well as (necessarily and crucially) to the literary choices made by the poets, and how their experiences were embodied in the language and texture of the poems they brought into being. This would open up, and include, ideological, generic and stylistic issues for further analysis.

- Thirdly, given the differences that emerge between the two poets and their poems, the relationship of the poet to wider social groupings was a factor. During critical analysis, these two individual, personal experiences would need to be measured within the larger global and historical issue of exile; the political choices each poet made; and their understanding of the political milieu involved as these emerge in each poem. Here the use of first person singular *vis-à-vis* first person plural within the politics of the poems was an issue worthy of mention.

- Fourthly, attention needed to be given to the manner in which linguistic and stylistic devices (images, tropes, unusual parts of speech, type of verse used and so on) were made manifest and utilised within the poems: and how those furthered, or inhibited, the poems' thrust and effect.

- Finally, the essayists' expressiveness was a paramount factor, which meant rewarding those who seemed to be able to express their points and conduct and further their arguments with most skill and conciseness. Their abilities to deal with nuance and ambiguity was also noted.

In judging the essays submitted for the Konstantin Sofianos Scholarship this year, these were the basic elements I was looking for in the analysis of the given Darwish and Breytenbach poems. In addition to these, I also looked for signs that some research had been done (most easily noticeable in the references given), and that there were signs of original thinking about the issues raised as well. I was happier with writing which avoided insufficiently explained statements, or which eschewed expressive embellishments where the seeming profundity of explanation did not stand up to scrutiny.

I had a great deal of trouble choosing the runner-up, as there were three strong contenders for this position. However, I eventually decided on "**Desire-in-death and diverging poetic characterisations of exile in Breyten Breytenbach's 'Eavesdropper' and Mahmoud Darwish's 'Winds shift against us'**". While I was initially slightly taken aback by this essay's use of the example and critical commentary around Ovid's exile, and the mention of the Hmong, on rereading I found myself impressed both by the initiative this showed on the part of the author and the pertinence of these analogies: they did not dilute a sufficient focus on the groundings of the poets in contemporary South Africa and Palestine respectively. The discussion of the biographies of the two poets was also noticeably impressive.

However, in my opinion the essay which emerged from my judging as the winner was “**The Echoes of our voices – translating the paradoxes of exile through the poetry of Breyten Breytenbach and Mahmoud Darwish**”. This candidate demonstrated a careful and nuanced understanding of how the poets dealt with the ambiguities of exile. In addition to the general elements I have mentioned above, (which were skilfully covered in this essay) the poet gives a nuanced account of the antinomies of exile, and addressed stylistic, linguistic and ideological issues more than adequately. I felt the essayist’s exposition of the poets’ use of address and focalisation was noteworthy, and the remarks made about the overdetermination of history in the different experiences and goals of Breytenbach and Mafhouz subtle. The use of critics – especially Edward Said – was apposite. Clearly, here was a penetrating intelligence at work, and a student who would benefit from the Scholarship.

There were a number of essays it was a pleasure to read; and I would like to thank the organisers for giving me the opportunity to act as judge.

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