

# 2015 VCE Literature examination report

## General comments

**Note:** Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Some excellent responses were given to the 2015 Literature examination. These students showed a thorough knowledge and understanding of the text and its construction. They explored and analysed the language of the passage(s) using a sophisticated vocabulary, and they were often able to move easily from one passage to another. These students offered interesting and often complex interpretations, securely based on the passages and supported with reference to the wider text. They demonstrated an awareness of how the views and values of the text were embedded in the work. Above all, these students offered a sense of personal engagement and often conveyed a sense that they were enjoying the chance to share their ideas with the reader. The students were using their own voices and language of which they had a competent understanding.

The following are excerpts from responses that demonstrate students working extremely well with the language of the text.

*In the third passage the surface constructs are etched into the stuttering quality of 'scratched' with the organic, tangible nature of 'old' and 'wood' hinting at erosion, the envisioning of a separate realm and landscape away from the regimentation present in the 't' clicks of 'typing stand' 'typing' and 'late report'. [Adrienne Rich]*

*The harsh consonants present in 'thumbtack' and 'protruding' and the self objectification of 'small fixed dot' and 'hard little head' are representative of the somewhat forced, somewhat removed, third person experience of birth and rebirth, giving rise to a construction of a graphic nature, present in the alliteration of 'blurring' 'burnt red' and 'burning green'. [Adrienne Rich]*

*Although Antony is not present, the metaphorical nature of 'methinks I hear Antony call' 'rouse himself' is imbued with a sense of physicality, to celebrate the overwhelming nature of Antony's presence.*

*The sensuous sibilance of 'juice' 'moist lip' 'kiss' coalesces with the duality of life and death present in the 'mortal wretch' 'venomous' and 'life' and the symbol of the asp is one which bridges the extremes of life and death.*

*Dualities are affirmed, boundaries are dissolved and the political is at once rendered transient through the lyrical flights of verse. [Antony and Cleopatra]*

*Eliot's earlier works are deeply immersed in the cities of post-war Europe. His imagery of 'grimy scraps' and the sibilant 'stale smells' and 'smell of steaks' conjures a pervasively sordid metropolis that overwhelms the individual with its visual and olfactory decay.*

*In Preludes the fragmented 'short square fingers' 'hands' and 'eyes' suggest disjointed existences where people lack a whole sense of being.*

*Rossetti uses words such as 'dream' 'speaking' 'stream' 'years' 'tears' and 'death' which all use the same internal combination of vowels to create a visual and aural echo, again connecting to the subject of the poem.*

*Through the elemental imagery and grand language of passage three, Shakespeare showcases the multiple facets of Egypt's vivacious queen, unlimited by cultural divides. The ritualistic solemnity of 'Give me my robe', 'Put on my crown' invokes the orderly ambience of Rome, where suicide is perceived as a 'noble act', itself seems to be of the 'High Roman fashion'. Yet, juxtaposing this, is the sensuous sibilance of the 'juice of Egypt's grape' which invokes the decadence of Egypt amidst such a noble suicide. Cleopatra's declaration of 'I am fire and air' lends her an amorphous quality, separating her from 'this dungy earth'.*

The following excerpt demonstrates a sophisticated discussion of the views and values implicit in the text.

*Passage one immediately foregrounds the central oppositions of the play between Rome and Egypt. The stage directions for Cleopatra to 'enter' followed by her 'train' with eunuchs fanning her in an extravagant 'flourish' compels the audience to forego the Roman soldier Philo's previous condemnation of her as a 'tawny front' and a 'gipsy'. Philo's imperative 'Look where they come' and 'take but good note' are directed both at his fellow soldier and the audience but the impression we receive of Cleopatra alongside Antony is hardly compatible with his dismissive condemnation.*

This student has a clear appreciation of the play as drama, which many of the lower-scoring responses on the play texts lacked. The introduction to the essay immediately engaged with the concerns of the play. The same essay continued:

*Even when enraged with each other in passage two, Antony and Cleopatra are so wholly alive and powerful. Cleopatra's magnificent speech 'let Heaven engender hail and let the first stone drop in my neck' employs a lexicon so energetic and powerful that the audience cannot help but feel that the language of Octavius is brusque, mechanical and ultimately anodyne. Shakespeare furnishes his protagonists with the most inspired and mellifluous speech in the play, all the more indicative of his endorsement of an existence exuding life and dynamism.*

The biggest difficulty faced by students with essays in the medium to lower ranges was an inability to work closely with, and analyse, the language of the passage(s). These students fell back on paraphrase and explanation rather than close analysis. Their responses often lacked specificity and the very low-scoring responses sometimes showed a poor knowledge of the text. Students are reminded that such knowledge is vital.

Some students seemed unable to express their ideas clearly or were hampered by a lack of suitable vocabulary. Some students seemed to have little understanding of the relationship between language and meaning. Others attempted to impose a learnt or prepared interpretation on the passages, which largely ignored the passage(s). Some students made an attempt to discuss views and values but often in a superficial way.

The following are excerpts from essays in the middle range, which demonstrate some of these problems.

*Shaw often uses Mr Higgins's unpredictable character to make comments on society that Shaw either agrees or disagrees with.*

*The first passage denotes Antony's affection towards Cleopatra. Antony states that there is beggary in love that can be reckoned which indicates to the audience the degree Antony's infatuation with Cleopatra is dominating him. The romance is frequently mentioned throughout the entirety of the play and reinforces a feminist view which can be doubly observed in the play.*

*Persuasion is a book by Jane Austen set in Georgian England at the end of the Napoleonic War. This period saw many changes and threats to the structure of the old English nobility as well as the emergence of the 'new order' and ways of thinking, both of which are concepts that Austen explores in her book.*

Responses in the lower range were often very short and therefore the students were unable to address all the criteria. These students often treated each of the passages in isolation rather than engaging with the text as a whole construction. Some students virtually ignored the passages; this was occasionally also a problem for otherwise higher-scoring students. Sometimes lower-scoring students appended a comment on the views and values of the text that was not related to the rest of the essay. Historical inaccuracies still persist in student responses; for example, some students suggested that Bronte wrote in the Elizabethan era and others suggested that Austen and Shaw wrote in the Victorian period. Students are reminded that discussions of historical contexts or the author's biographical details should be accurate and relate to the selected passages.

All students need to practise writing to time. There were very few students who offered only one response but clearly a number were unable to finish their second essay within the allocated time. Students should spend time in the examination planning their essay, underlining particular passages that they intend to analyse. It is inappropriate to spend time on a detailed introduction that does not address any of the criteria, engage specifically with the passages or lay the foundation for an interpretation.

A few students attempted a comparative essay covering two texts within the one essay. This did not fulfil the set task: two pieces of writing are to be attempted, each on a separate text.

## Specific information

### Response 1

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | Average |
|-------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---------|
| %     | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 7  | 9  | 13 | 13 | 13 | 10 | 8  | 5  | 3  | 1  | 1  | 12.6    |

### Response 2

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | Average |
|-------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---------|
| %     | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7  | 9  | 12 | 12 | 12 | 9  | 7  | 5  | 3  | 1  | 1  | 12.1    |

## Novels

By far the most popular text was *Jane Eyre*. Students explored and analysed the first passage well, using it to show the sense of entrapment and alienation Jane felt at the hands of her family and society. The second passage was not as well handled. Few, if any, students explored the idea of Jane facing the bar, putting herself on trial and judging herself as a dupe. Some students thought Mrs Fairfax was speaking in the passage, and not Jane. Many students viewed the novel as a feminist text without expanding on this idea. Some referred to the Gothic elements in the third passage. *Persuasion* was another popular text and again there was some misreading, with some students wanting to set passage two in Lyme, not Bath. Students could have considered Anne's mechanical playing in passage one as suggestive of the way she wished to distance herself from the merriment of the party and as an indication of how deeply she had been wounded. Many students ignored Austen's wicked wit in passage three, and this passage also allowed for a discussion of views and values. There were more responses than previous years on *All the Pretty Horses* and some were excellent. The second passage allowed students to comment on the concerns of free will and destiny explored in the novel and the different standards of morality in Mexico as opposed to Texas. This passage also highlighted the restrictions placed on upper-class women. Few students commented on the literary features of this text and the vivid descriptions of the landscape. Passage three offered an opportunity to talk about the importance of horses in the novel. *My Brilliant Career* was quite popular, but responses often lacked detailed analysis and

discussion of the passages. The passages showed the development of Sybilla's character to a sense of resolution and also demonstrated the social decline of her family. Most students concentrated on the second passage, showing the lack of career opportunities for women, and the entrenched and restrictive social attitudes. The passages from *The Cat's Table* offered students an opportunity to look at the boys' literal and metaphorical journey to England. The first passage, set in the garden in the bowels of the ship, was rich in exotic imagery and offered the boys a glimpse into adult sexuality with the painting of the nude woman astride the cannon. Not many students engaged with the revelatory nature of the book, or with its many secrets and the importance of different points of view, especially over time. A further discussion point could have been the way the plants were being shipped to England, suggesting how imperialist Britain was plundering her colonies. There were a number of responses on *Mrs Dalloway*, and some were very competent. The second passage posed some difficulties as some students had trouble placing the extract in time and place. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Love in the Time of Cholera* were not attempted by many students, but there were some good responses on each. With both these novels there could have been much more discussion of the literary features. Very few students wrote on *That Deadman Dance*, despite this being an accessible Australian text that offers opportunities for exploration of complex language.

## Plays

Responses in this section demonstrated the same problems with analysis and close reading as was evident in the responses on the novels. In addition, many students failed to comment on the various important elements of stagecraft; for example, how the set reinforced the issues in the play. This was especially significant in *A Doll's House*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Arcadia*. Some students commented on how the audience is often aware of concerns of which the characters are ignorant.

*Antony and Cleopatra* was the most popular choice in this section and there were many excellent responses and very few poor ones. The richness of the language offered much to discuss, and the students did not seem so confined to the separate passages but were able to move between them easily, exploring the characters and the main concerns of the play. *A Doll's House* was also extremely popular and seemed an accessible text. Many students felt that Nora's crime was simply borrowing money, whereas in fact she was guilty of fraud. There was sometimes confusion over whether Nora was planning suicide and the nature of the miracle she was expecting. There were many responses on *Pygmalion*, some not very strong, and these tended to ignore the third passage. All three passages considered ownership, and this concern could have been used to link the passages. Some students wrote on *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* There were many references to the American Dream, however, references to the Cold War were difficult to support from these passages. The extracts offered students plenty to discuss on views and values. Students writing on *Agamemnon* tended to downplay the sheer horror and excessive violence in the text, particularly in passage three. They often wrote as if they had been witnesses of a minor domestic tiff. The passages offered opportunities to discuss the role of women and of the gods, revenge, justice and the images of being trapped and of blood. There were some competent responses on *Coriolanus* but *Antony and Cleopatra* was much more popular. There were very few students who selected the works by Ionesco and Stoppard.

## Short stories

The stories by Peter Carey and Cate Kennedy were almost equally popular, with those by Annie Proulx rather less so. With all these texts, students are required to make some comments on the text as a whole and to use the passages to demonstrate this understanding. Students tended to discuss the passages separately, overlooking their common concerns or linguistic features. The Carey stories offered a range of views and values to discuss, some being authorial power, the nature of reality and illusion, the unbridgeable gap between cultures and the seeming

powerlessness of human beings or unicorns to change their situation. Few students commented on the bizarre world of these stories and their often multi-layered quality. Each of the featured Kennedy stories showed characters undertaking immoral or vengeful acts, yet few students commented on the way Kennedy is able to manipulate her readers to condone these actions. Many missed the humour in the first two passages. The inability to communicate with others was a common consideration. The stories by Proulx were less well handled in general. High-scoring students concentrated on looking at the descriptions of the landscape and the sense of the place – the loneliness, isolation and violence experienced by the characters.

### Other literature

There were many responses on *In Cold Blood*. The first two passages allowed insight into the natures of Perry and Dick and allowed the reader to feel some measure of sympathy for them, demonstrating Capote's belief that evil is not a simple matter of black and white. The third passage evoked the horror of the death sentence and Capote's implicit view that such a sentence is wrong. Some students ignored the last passage and tended to offer only a fairly superficial analysis. There were several responses on *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Passage one introduced a discussion of the nature of poverty and the author's attempt to engage the reader in the experience rather than adopting an objective view. The nature of poverty was further explored in passage three, where Orwell adopted a strong sense of logic and rhetoric to argue with the preconceptions of his readers. Many students treated the passages, especially numbers one and two, as a narrative and tended to overlook the strongly explicit or implicit arguments Orwell was making. There were very few responses on the texts by Barnes and Stanner.

### Poetry

The poetry passages encouraged students to respond to the language and to engage in thorough analysis, considering also the features of the text. Some responses approached this discussion in a somewhat formulaic fashion; it is important to think why a particular rhyming scheme or rhythm has been used and to what effect. How does the use of imagery enrich a poem? Often the links between the poems could have been more widely discussed; there was a tendency among the low-scoring students to look at each poem in isolation, perhaps only discussing two passages and not in very much detail. The higher-scoring students were able to make references to other poems to support the claims they were making.

The poetry of Seamus Heaney was the most popular text in this section. The first and third passages were accessible, and most students handled these well. Both poems dealt with memories, and the child's voice in the first poem was easily appreciated. Some students who wrote on *The Swing* thought it was the Madonna, rather than Heaney's mother, who was watching the children swing. Some students had trouble incorporating the final stanza of this poem into the discussion. Many students were able to appreciate how the rhythm of the poem matched the sensation of the swing's movements. The second extract was less well handled and some students spent a lot of their response talking about the Irish political situation. There are ways in which Heaney reflects on the situation in this poem to link it with his own country of the present, but these need to be handled with care, and with an understanding of the shift in perspective.

The poetry of TS Eliot was also a popular choice. High-scoring students were able to explore the imagery and to work closely with the passages; low-scoring students tended to treat the passages in isolation and simply extracted one or two images in each to discuss in a fairly limited way. There was plenty of opportunity to discuss Eliot's familiar motifs: the passing of time, a morally tainted world, the fragmented lives of individuals, the difficulties of communication and humanity's damaged psyche. Similarly, many features of the text were evident in the selected passages. As with responses to the Eliot poems, the responses to the Adrienne Rich poems were either very well handled or fairly abstruse. Many students were able to show how the poet made her views on the



oppression of women obvious and the necessity of the search for identity. Responses on the second passage were often confused, but students should have been able to appreciate the never-ending cycle of violence, symbolised by the city of Jerusalem and by the children stoning each other. Some students wrote on the poems by Christina Rossetti. It was important that they responded to the language here, the lyricism of *Song*, with its implied criticism of the Victorian rituals of mourning, and the more impassioned, sumptuous natural imagery of *Echo*. Students commented on how this poem seemed almost an echo of itself. *Maude Clare* offered a chance to discuss the work as a ballad and also to comment on expectations of women in Victorian England. Many students did not fully explore what this poem offered. More students wrote on Szyborska's poems this year but the responses were not always as detailed as required and there seemed to be some misreading. Szyborska explores the importance of language but also the difficulty of having absolute control of it. She also comments on the difficulty of achieving freedom, which is seen, through the window, but not in reach. There were not many responses on the poetry by Dobson. The passages offered plenty of opportunity to explore the language and metaphors. The different verse forms could also have been discussed.

### Sample essays

The first six essays are in the very high range, exemplifying work at an excellent level. The next is of work in the high range and the final essay represents work in the upper medium range.

#### Sample 1

**Nominated text:** *Collected Poems 1909–1962*: TS Eliot

*The motif of time across passages one and two – “At four and five and six o’clock” “talked for an hour” – encapsulates Eliot’s lamentations for the banal, ritualized quotidian routines plaguing Modernity. For Eliot, this lack of spontaneity or spiritual vivacity seems a symptom of his increasingly materialistic society and its overwhelming focus on secular pursuits. In this industrialized era, the modern individual cannot “speak” as they become paralyzed by their own inferiority. In this scene, the crux of Eliot’s anguish is epitomized by the bleak imagery of “death’s twilight kingdom” – a symbol of Western Civilization’s metaphysical apocalypse as a result of the choking strength of the physical realm and its trite distractions.*

*The “lonely cab-horse” of ‘Preludes’ exemplifies the toxicity of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century’s unrestrained secular pursuits as we see nature subsumed into a working agent. Here, Eliot accentuates that the natural purposes of individuals in this culture are smothered by an intense focus on labour and the needs of the physical realm. In this sense, the prevalence of the repeated imagery of the “street” in all four stanzas, encapsulates the omnipresence of industry and inorganic creations to further the sense of a loss of natural life forces. Readers see Eliot further lament the existential ennui and lack of a metaphysical pulse through the alliterations of “broken blinds” “steams and stamps” and “lighting of the lamps”, paired with the almost insignificant rhymes of “wraps/scraps”, “lots... pots”. Together, these alliteration and predictable rhymes generate a lethargic tone to allow readers to share in Eliot’s anxiety towards the deadening monotony choking Western civilization. For Eliot, all that remains in his society driven by working tempos, is the physical detritus of stony rubbish”. In line with this, the poetic subject’s admission in passage two, that “in the mountains, there you feel free” implies that within the cyclical routines of the industrialized cityscape, the individuals are trapped by their own artificial constructs. Hence, the condemnatory tone of the poetic voice as it declares, “Son of man... you know only a heap of broken images”, urges readers to recognise the toxic dominance of their secular pursuits as the poet attempts to leave us with a sense of fear at the deeply fractured, inorganic quality of the modern world.*

*It is in this trivial existence of “coffee” and “tea” that Eliot accentuates the inability of the modern individual to perceive the importance of the spiritual and intellectual realms. The multitude of languages and voices in ‘The Burial of the Dead’ – “Bin ger... echt deutsch”, “Frisch... no weilest du,” “Oed ‘und leer...” – obfuscates the poetic meaning to the readers as we see Eliot demonstrating his society’s inability to perceive any meaning in art. The notion of the feckless impotence of the modern individual when faced with the intellectual realm is understood in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ as the women merely “come and go, talking of Michelangelo.” Here Eliot suggests that in an age of anxiety, his culture’s increased focus on judgement has choked any possibility for profound communication, as we understand these women to engage in violable non-communication and surface patter, rather than attempting to comprehend the meaning of the art itself. Moreover, the female monologue, against the male inferiority of*

*this passage exposes Eliot's anguish for the loss of any meaningful relationships in the culture. In this sense, the poetic subject's admission that they "talked for an hour" underscores that for Eliot, any interpersonal connections in Western civilization are reduced to desiccated husks of ritualized intimacies. Perhaps more gravely for Eliot, alongside these meaningless relationships is the paranoia of the society, manifesting in the "raising" of "dingy shades" in passage one. In this bleak imagery, Eliot highlights the reluctance for communication in this society focused on the physical realm and the outward appearance of "hair" and image. That they are raised in a thousand rooms in particular, illustrates the prevalence of their cultural "silence". In this sense, the insidious command for us to "wipe" our "hand" across our "mouth, and laugh", ultimately offers an imagery of jarring apathy to urge us to recognise the dominance of self-satisfying consumption, rather than interpersonal connection.*

*However, even amongst this despondent imagery, the poet punctures his abject despair as the first person, "you", reveals his underlying sympathy for this society. This direct pronoun possibly communicates directly with the readership, as we see glimpses of hope in Eliot as he tries to illustrate the consequences of our metaphysical destruction and artificial creations. Indeed, the imagery of "light" – a natural force – still, lingering in this civilization, somewhat undermines Eliot's pessimism as it is portrayed as weakened and lethargic rather than entirely lifeless. To further dampen the poet's anguish, the reverential symbols of the "perpetual star" – with its connotations of the Virgin Mary – and the "multifoliate rose" – a symbol for the Eastern spiritual lotus, and resurrection – implies that for Eliot, the hope for a metaphysical revival can be fulfilled with the embrace of intangible grace. Yet even here, this hope is only that of "empty men". Thus, ultimately, we see Eliot's despair brought to the fore in this passage, as the previous, familiar landscape of a "city block" is replaced by a "hollow valley" to not only reflect the metaphysical emptiness of this society's inhabitants, but to also compound upon our sense of confusion and a lack of place or stability.*

*The final descending cadence, "This is the way the world ends... Not with a bang but a whimper" removes any hope from the readership. Moreover, Eliot's misanthropy is exposed as he labels this modern "lost kingdom" as a "broken jaw" to suggest the imminent demise of the Western world. Thus, readers see the transformation of Eliot, a social poet sympathetic for humanity's plights, to a more despondent poet, merely declaring the inevitable apocalypse for humanity.*

## Sample 2

### Nominated text: Antony and Cleopatra – William Shakespeare

*Shakespeare reveals his appreciation for the ennobling power of unrestrained, emotional language through Cleopatra's exclamation, "Husband, I come!" Here, Shakespeare urges the audience to celebrate a form of lyrical poetry, able to elevate rather than deceive or deflate. Contrastingly, Caesar's detached referencing to himself as the third person as "Caesar", to create a statuesque vision of supposed perfection, illustrates how language is rendered a political weapon under Caesar's Machiavellian politics. However, in passage one, as Cleopatra taunts Antony, "Fulvia perchance is angry" we see the playwright disintegrate any reductive binaries between Rome and Egypt as he illustrates the pervasiveness of performances and disingenuous facades. In this sense, Shakespeare seems to lament the struggle for unrehearsed expressions of emotion to survive in the public discourse of Jacobean England as we see the necessity of performances in a society where every word and action is judged and scrutinised.*

*In passage three, as Cleopatra declares, "I am fire and air", Shakespeare celebrates her ability to embrace the power of language and the beauty of the "knot intrinsic" of life. In particular, that these elements are ever-changing and fluid, reveals Cleopatra's acceptance of her human oscillations and her appreciation of the beauty of these fluctuations. Indeed, it is through her unrestrained, resplendent language that we see glimpses of a transcendent queen as she proclaims "I have immortal longings in me." This notion of immortality and timelessness contrasts with the multiple messengers in passage one, and the atmosphere of urgency created by their presence, to demonstrate how Cleopatra is unhampered by time in her resignation to a god's splendence. Thus, as she hears Antony "mock the luck of Caesar," we comprehend Shakespeare as undermining the significance of Caesar's strategic, mortal victory to further our appreciation of Antony and Cleopatra's lyrical speech. The playwright further emphasises the transformative prowess of the lovers' language in passage two as Cleopatra promises, "since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra." Here, Cleopatra's acceptance of the fluidity of identity is underscored as the audience perhaps views her understanding the futility of maintaining unchanging identities. Moreover, as he playfully tells Antony, "It is my birthday," Shakespeare suggests the deeply generous, bountiful nature of Antony's language as he seems to give Cleopatra happiness and satisfaction with his poetic promises to be "treble-sinewed, hearted, breathed". In line with this, as Antony heroically declares,*

*"I and my sword will earn our chronicle," the audience possibly sees the power of language as he unites his identity of emotion with his soldierly valour, as represented by the sword. Hence, ultimately, Shakespeare underscores the power of iridescent, emotive language as the lovers' abstract imagery urges us to celebrate their appreciation for the complex, grand scope of life.*

*However, even here, the notion of a unity within Antony's identity, and the cosmic, transcendent ability of language is undermined by Enobarbus' observation. "A diminution in our captain's brain restores his heart". Here, Shakespeare accentuates the incompatibility between reason and emotion in Antony. This tension between the brain and the heart is furthered in passage one as Philo notes, "his captain's heart... hath burst the buckles on his breast", suggesting that as Antony's more indulgent emotive existence waxes, his discipline and ability to fulfil his duties as a triumvir wanes. This yawning rift between the two tensions pulling Antony is brought to the fore as he hastily orders, "Grates me! The sum." As he attempts to absolve himself of responsibility so that he is able to pursue his own desires, we see Shakespeare further underscore the impossibility for his inflicting identities to coexist. Moreover, his willingness to "Let Rome in Tiber melt" echoes his lack of responsibility when he admits that though he married Octavia for "peace", "I 'th'East" lies his "pleasure." These two declarations encapsulates Antony's inability to achieve any strategic or political victories as he displays a myopia and lack of political cunning whilst driven by passion. Indeed, the multiple enjambments and caesuras puncturing his speech in both passages one and two – "our dungy earth alike / Feeds beast as man", "For when mine hours / were nice and lucky", - suggest a lack of order. In this case, this somewhat disorderly speech seems to epitomize his identity as Shakespeare highlights the inferiority and intrinsic flaws to the lovers' deeply emotional union and the lyrical language they use to channel the passions of the "heart."*

*Furthermore, Shakespeare further discourages the audience from embracing Antony and Cleopatra's love and courage as entirely pure and authentic as their union in passage one is characterised by performance and competition. Cleopatra's demand "if it be love indeed, tell me how much," suggests her desire for Antony to quantify the intangible emotion of love. In this sense, the playwright accentuates her human instability in needing a vocalized proof of Antony's sentiments. This notion of mortal vulnerability puncturing Cleopatra's love for Antony, is mirrored in her reminder to Antony to hear "the messengers." Whilst initially, it seems, on the surface, an encouragement of Antony to accept his responsibilities as a triumvir, on the other hand, we see Cleopatra attempting to establish herself as a powerful, independent director; she simultaneously endeavours to undermine her significance to Antony in an attempt to evoke a vocal expression of her importance to him. Perhaps more obviously contributing to the disingenuous nature of the lovers' act in this passage the presence of minor characters on-stage to open the play, immediately encourages the audience to question the authenticity of Antony and Cleopatra's emotional language. Therefore, even amongst the resplendence of passage three, Cleopatra's "robe" and "crown," trimmed with Charmian's efforts to "mend" her crown and then "play", leave the audience with an understanding of the prevalence of facades in the public eye of Jacobean England.*

*However, even in passages one and three, as Shakespeare reveals the deeply performative nature of the lovers' union, that their language is centred around "love" demonstrates how it is emotion, rather than an insidious desire for power, that is fuelling these performances. Hence, as Antony and Cleopatra are politically defeated on a moral level, Shakespeare reveals his lamentations for the passing of lyrical beauty in language as words are increasingly politicized in his Jacobean era. In line with this, the instability driving Cleopatra's taunting projects Shakespeare's humanist philosophy in a play which ultimately celebrates intrinsic human flaws and passion.*

### Sample 3

**Nominated text:** *The French Lieutenant's Woman* – John Fowles

*At the heart of Fowles' metafictional novel is Charles' odyssey to self-discovery; initially an indolent landed gentry transformed into a dispossessed yet resilient individual enduring 'the river of life.' Charles' metamorphosis is fundamental to Fowles' intention, and it is only through the epic love story between Charles and the enigmatic Sarah that the metafictional narrator can give meaning to the world of manners, prohibitions and hidden passion. Indeed, Fowles' ubiquitous ironic voice breaks through the restraints of Victorian values – as represented by the sanctimonious Mrs Poulteney, and brings forth the liberated and progressive individuals, Charles and Sarah.*

*Pointedly, Fowles drenches his landscape in social criticism; the rigid and suffocating conventions of the Victorian age symbolised in Mrs Poulteney – a caricature of the strict times. The description of Mrs Poulteney is imprinted with the metafictional narrator's ironic voice, at first labelling her as an 'awesome lady' which juxtaposes the imagery of a 'plump vulture' and 'incipient sadist' which soon follows –*



illuminating her cruel and dictatorial nature. Her property, Marlborough House, is likened to Hell with its appearance being that of a 'Stygian Domain' with 'bilious leaden green' walls and a garden constructed of 'man-traps.' Mrs Poulteney's tyrannical nature is further captured in Fowles' metafictional comments, his 20<sup>th</sup> century perspective intruding as he suggests 'there would have been a place in the Gestapo for this lady.' Thus, it can be seen that Mrs Poulteney serves as a symbol of the unforgiving social mores of the age, and is essentially a conglomerate of the old, evil villains which appear in so many Victorian tales.

Moreover, Mrs Poulteney's piety develops Fowles' social criticism, as it intimates the sanctimony behind the Puritan tendencies of the era. The superficiality of Mrs Poulteney's piety is very clear – indeed Fowles humourously comments that her ascending to heaven is a 'highly practical consideration, implying that her renowned charity is simply to assure her place in the after-life. Her dialogue with the vicar with its melodramatic language ('transgression' 'solemn oath') echoes the drama when Fowles writes that a failure to attend church was 'proof of the worst moral laxity.' Mrs Poulteney's false piety, emphasised in Fowles melodramatic language, strengthens his moral indictment of Victorian society.

Interestingly, many of the intense encounters between Charles and Sarah occur in Ware Commons, a place where the sanctimonious Mrs Poulteney divined 'satanic orgies' behind every tree. Ware Commons, and 'the Undercliff' does in fact arouse twin connotations of innocence and sin; the robust landscape brimming with life and sexual promise. Thus, during the meetings between Charles and Sarah in the Undercliff, Fowles beautifully blends innocence with the stirrings of sexual promise. When the couple interacts, both individuals speak in platitudes, yet it is clear, through Fowles' potent imagery, that their emotions are raw and passionate. The recurring motif of Sarah's looks ('look like a lance') appears once again, providing Charles insight into Sarah's enigmatic and inscrutable nature, as her stare reveals 'a new dimension of herself.' In fact it is here, due to their accidental voyeurism of Sam and Mary that the truth of Sarah's feelings are revealed. Her smile, is that of a co-conspirator, and is a frank sexual acknowledgement of her true feelings for Charles. Charles is finally able to acknowledge that if 'he reached out his arms he would meet with no resistance.'

This new insight into Sarah, however, prompts Charles' inner conflict as his personal desire is hindered by his sense of duty and propriety which lock him out of Sarah's door ('the man without the key'). Inserting himself into Charles' conflicted mind, Fowles enables us to comprehend the torment of Charles as he struggles to contain his passion. Although his excitement incited by Sarah stems from 'the very roots of his being,' Charles' sense of duty forces him to repress his desire, symbolised in the recurring imagery of flushed cheeks. Here, Charles is still incapable of relinquishing his Victorian values, Fowles' romantic voice shifting to one of formality once more as Charles' sense of propriety ('we must never meet alone again') stands 'like castle walls' against his passion for Sarah.

Eventually, Charles does find freedom as he casts off the hypocrisy of the age and allows emotions to govern his decisions. However, as Fowles unfurls his second metafictional ending, we see the pain which results in this decision. With the destruction of the love between Sarah and Charles, Charles is left embittered and disillusioned, convinced that Sarah manipulated him and 'would do so till the end.' Exiting the Rossetti household, Charles stares out towards the grey river, this melancholy image imparting the resentment and hopelessness Charles now feels. In the rhythmic lilt of Fowles words 'all in vain, in vain, in vain,' we are able to grasp Charles' sense of futility that he likens to the struggles of his life; the fluidity of the phrase deepening Fowles' 'river of life' metaphor. The dark imagery of 'the black avalanche' further captures Charles' damaged state of mind, as he is weighed down by the bleakness of his past.

Nonetheless, there is a clear shift in tone which coincides with the shift in Charles' mindset as he finds within himself the resilience to ensure. The metafictional narrator intrudes once more, observing that there is 'no intervening god,' thus alluding to the primary message of existentialism where people are 'in pursuit of their ends.' In this way, Fowles is granting Charles his freedom, allowing him to become the author of his own future. Installing a greater sense of resilience in Charles, Fowles notes his newfound endurance ('he walks to a self-given imminent death? I think not') as Charles now finds the inner-strength to continue through the river of life despite 'the mysterious laws and mysterious choice' which flows through one's lifetime.

Hence, Fowles mediates on both the freedom and the insecurity of the contemporary man by offering an inconclusive experience. Yet, it is clear that Charles will not allow his past failures and loss defeat him, instead he has found resilience and has freed himself of his existential angst. By virtue of his language and the constant reminder of connections and dissonances between the Victorian and contemporary forces, Fowles achieves a complex imagery of perspectives that allows many paths of interpretation, yet both forge a potent journey to liberation for Sarah and Charles.

## Sample 4

### Nominated text: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* – Edward Albee

*When George comments that society has reached the point that there 'is something to lose,' Albee's play is directly linked to a moral indictment of not only the New Carthage academic sphere, but society at large. Indeed, the psychological games constructed by George and Martha in an alcohol-driven night are Albee's tools in elucidating the moral failure of society. Yet as the facades and illusions are stripped away, Albee's moral viewpoint emerges through the character of George and his defence of human values. George's destruction of the greatest game of all, the fictitious son instills within the audience a glimmer of hope as George salvages his own marriage, and by extension, American society.*

*Accordingly, George is constantly assailed by Martha in their verbal jousts, her vitriol representing what she perceives as her husband's stagnant failure. George constantly refers to his position of forced submission to Martha, her ascendancy is evident even prior to the guests' arrival through her bossy and aggressive exterior ('give your mommy a big sloppy kiss,' 'go answer the door') as she gives George orders. Later, her lacerating language (an old bog... swamp... HEY SWAMPY) further delineates Martha's attempts to beat George down psychologically, undoubtedly due to his inability to advance through the university milieu and his failure to fill her 'daddy'[s] role both professionally and psychologically. It is Martha's diatribe that serves to create a perturbing tone throughout the play, and is the trigger for George's many forms of retaliation.*

*So too does the excessive alcoholism and brash behaviour of the couple serve to create a confronting atmosphere for the audience. Indeed, from the outset the play is shrouded in vulgar language ('you pig!' 'Oink! Oink!') which forms the basis of George's and Martha's struggle for dominance. Their alcohol consumption ('I can drink you under any goddam table you want') similarly adds to the often aggressive and inflammatory tone of the dialogue as both the couple and their guests grow increasingly inebriated. Both alcoholism and vulgar language are hallmarks of moral decay, this building Albee's criticism of the superficiality within the academic sphere and within wider society.*

*It is in the double-handers between Nick and George, however, that the moral demise of society is clearly elucidated. Although these double-handers provide some relief from the dramatic tension inherent in George's and Martha's battle, the discussions probe the essence of morality and are therefore at the core of Albee's viewpoint. George's black humour underlines Albee's satirising of the New Carthage academia and its intellectual virtues.*

*Interestingly, in their double-hander within Act II ('Walpurginschnact') George talks in a far more genuine and serious tone, as established in the stage directions ('silence. then quietly'). Even more intriguing is George's advice to Nick (I'm trying to give you a survival kit) which contradicts his attempts to 'get the goods' on Nick. This suggests the gravity behind his warning to Nick of New Carthage and its quicksand and by extension it's moral decline. Echoing his far more satirical observation in Act I when he likened the University of Gomorrah, George is suggesting that like this ancient landscape of punishment and sin, New Carthage is of similar moral depravity which drags down its inhabitants. Thus, through George's startling advice, Albee destroys the image of sophisticated culture associated with the academic sphere, instead showing a hotbed of deception, materialism and immorality.*

*Albee's liberal humanist views are further articulated by George in his defence of civilisation and the values he stands by. Paralleling the marital contest is the ideological schism between George, the historian, and Nick, the scientist. Whereas George's work studies the endless variety of human motivation and endeavour, Nick's work focuses on the creation of an ostensibly perfect and homogenous society which threatens to rob mankind of its individuality. George, in his sustained monologue, attacks the threat which science poses, suggesting that civilisation has reached 'the point where there is something to lose,' and the downfall of human values will be at the hands of the amoral 'wave-of-the-future' boys that Nick embodies. This is undercut by the trumpet of the Dis Irae – a metaphor for judgement which recurs at the conclusion of the play. George is casting his judgement on the moral decline of society by amoral individuals such as Nick, whose destructive stance is represented by his crass 'UP YOURS!' Thus, at the heart of the schism is Albee's poignant warning as to the kind of society America is to become, expressed in a morally edifying speech delivered by George.*

*In contrast to Act I where George was degraded by Martha, there is a clear power shift in Act III ('Exorcism') as Martha's vulnerability is the controlling feature. Following her infidelity, Martha's facade of aggression is destroyed as she delivers a revelatory and poignant monologue. Finally, Martha understands the immorality of her actions and rediscovers her real allegiance to George – imparting his*

capacity as a husband. Here, as George destructs the illusion of their imagined son, Martha's misery and desolation is revealed. Complicit in Albee's stage directions ('tearfully', 'crying') we see Martha's grief as the crucial element of her existence – her motherhood is destroyed. In her staccato elliptical speech, the fragmented state is exposed, as is her immersion in her private world of fantasy ('I forget and I... want to mention him'). Martha's psychological damage and fragility is paramount in this final sequence, highlighting the necessity of the cessation of the illusion in order for Martha to begin living an authentic life and face her fears.

In George's bizarre inventiveness, his role as the agent provocateur is imminent. There is an air of unreality pervading the penultimate scene, George's absurd response 'I ate it' illuminating Albee's deliberate construct which forces the audience to question reality. Accordingly, George's moral decision is his attempts to 'obtain a relationship devoid of illusion and absurdity'. Hence, although his orchestration of his son's death may be seen as cruel, it is also necessary for his and Martha's healing and resolution. George recognised that their son had to remain in the private realm of their marriage ('just don't start on the bit'), and it is Martha's disclosing of the son to Honey that destroys the perfection of their fantasy ('You broke our rule baby'). George's recitation of the Latin Mass for the Dead brings the 'exorcism' to its closing, exorcising the phoniness of his and Martha's marriage in order for a better life to begin. With the passing of their son ('requiescat in pace') comes the possibility of reconciliation and a life of authenticity and harmony.

In the strong redemptive quality of the final scene, Albee attempts to offer hope to his audience ('It will be better.'). The illusions have been stripped away so as to allow the possibility of rebirth, both for the couple and for society at large. With George's moral decision to destroy the illusion of the son, Albee sends both the characters and the audience into a state of catharsis, with a deep recognition of what is important in human relationships.

## Sample 5

### Nominated text: All the Pretty Horses – Cormac McCarthy

Passage Three marks John Grady Cole's thorough contemplation of death and suffering. "He lay in the dark" of the Mexican prison, a microcosm of the ruthless world based on rules of "mindless" violence. Amidst this atmosphere of brutality and darkness, underscored by the "dark" ambience of the room itself, Grady comes to understand the transience of life. Aware of his father's passing, it dawns on the American that the "father he knew was all the father he would ever know", emphasising the mutability of any relationship or existence – hence his reluctance to contemplate Alejandra because "he didn't know what was coming" and a life can be taken rather easily, as he sees when killing the cuchillero sent to murder him in the prison. Initially thinking about "horses" – all that is good and noble for Grady and "always the right thing to think about", his thoughts turn darker and more menacing, indicative of the trajectory of his journey and his own experiences. Images of "the dead standing in their bones" serve as a *momento mori* and evoke the scene of Grady witnessing the Comanche tribe pass him in a "chorale" after his grandfather's funeral. The "terrible intelligence common to all but of which none speak" is the "parasite" of evil which seeks out "human souls to therein incubate". Passage One marks the first encounter with misfortune on the American's quixotic adventure. McCarthy use of the ominous setting in a "thunderstorm", "shrouds" of clouds, and finally in the passage "rain coming down the road... like some phantom migration" further parallels the opening "migration" of Comanche warriors, yet this instance is far more unnerving. Grady's journey furnishes him with a Gnostic appreciation of the darkness and "evil of the world" which saturates the manifest cosmos.

Grady's spiritual connection to horses is one, however, which allows him to maintain a sense of hope. He exhibits a powerful connection to the creatures, and it is this relationship which prompted him to venture into Mexico, a *terra incognita*, in search of a pure life with horses. In Passage One he is able to "slid[e] one boot out of the stirrup" and "lean... down", picking up Blevin's hat "without dismounting". The polysyndetonic syntax of this sentence compounds and blurs the separate actions together, conveying the remarkable feat as a graceful manoeuvre even when mounted on a horse. This sense of unity and connection provided by McCarthy's sentence structure emphasises the interconnectedness of man with horses and nature, and McCarthy's references to "bloodstained gauze" serves to highlight the blood imagery throughout the novel. "Blood and the heat of the blood which ran them" is a powerful life-affirming force which links Grady to horses. Blood is not merely in life but 'runs' life, contrasting Alfonso's allusions to violence and "bloodshed" in Passage Two. We see in Passage Three that Grady's devotion to horses and that which is "ardent hearted" occupies such a portion of his very soul and being that even in a frightening atmosphere of death and savagery in the prison, he thinks "about horses" which he believes are divine creations which stand against the foreboding prevalence of brutality.



The three set passages emphasise the notion of alienation. Rawlins and Grady in particular felt that San Antonio was not their “home”, and that a pristine Edenic paradise awaited them in Mexico where they would no longer be outsiders. The landscape of Passage One, however, is unforgiving. The young boys encounter small birds impaled on the “spikes” of cacti, and throughout the passage the weather and environment grow increasingly hostile. “Spits of rain” turn into “phantom migrations[s]”, and the image of the boys riding through “willows” to find Blevins under the “roots of a dead cottonwood” underscores the unnerving landscape foreign to the “Americans”. In the company of Duena Alfonso, Grady is constantly reminded that he is an ‘outsider’. Alfonso’s officious tone when lecturing Grady of the “consequences of the real world” serves to highlight the relationship between ‘native’ and ‘foreign’. “This is another country” where rules and structures are different to those of America – where “a woman’s reputation is all she has”. There is a strong sense of injustice about the “gossip” and “grave” “consequences” which entail being poorly spoken of in Mexico, and this unfamiliarity with its laws and rules is what causes the three boys so much strife in the first place. As the reader’s own thoughts resonate through Grady’s words in Passage Two: “that doesn’t seem right”, Alfonso’s terse response “Right?” emphasises that justice is not “a matter of right” in this foreign land. Finally, Passage Three follows Grady’s traumatic experience in prison and his murder of another man. Not only is the setting unfamiliar, but Grady finds he has sinned and seeks to atone for these sins by speaking to the judge after Passage Three. The prominence of Spanish dialogue alienates the reader from the dialogue and storyline, and thus McCarthy replicates feelings of being an outsider in his readership by abruptly changing pace into foreign speech from the comfort of English prose.

Although his experience in Passage Three sees Grady become a changed man, he is nevertheless motivated to search for his ‘promised land’, where he is no longer looking on as an outsider. He gleans a mature understanding of the universe, but still continues out with “the sun coppering his face” just as he did at the beginning of the novel, riding into the world of darkness and suffering with which he is now familiar ahead of him.

## Sample 6

**Nominated text:** *The Fact of a Doorframe: Selected Poems 1950–2001* – Adrienne Rich

*Whether it is through the nightmarish landscape of ‘Jerusalem’, the tentative rebirth of a lost voice in ‘Necessities of Life’ or the pondering imaginative quality of ‘Dreamwood’, Rich gives voice to those silenced by patriarchy’s debilitating constructs, favouring the honest voice and charts a return to the organic ‘landscape, veined’.*

*Trapped in a wretched, decaying landscape, idyllic innocence is grotesquely warped in ‘Jerusalem’, as Rich expresses the destructive forces of hegemonic constructs. The plodding, dull rhythm of ‘old grey mare / to a half-dead war / on a dead grey war’ encompasses a sense of an endless landscape of desolation. The repetitive effect of the line engenders the feeling of a noose tightening, ‘grey’ and ‘dead’ latching onto our minds as the line is leached of life. It is in this woeful image that Rich laments the stifling nature of patriarchal society and their ability to bleed dry the vitality of the untainted voice. With ‘In my dream’, readers are immersed in a fluid gentle landscape and yet the innocence of children, suggested by the protective, loving gesture of swaddled turns sinister as the gesture becomes almost suffocating with harsh ‘k’ of smoke. It is precisely in this contortion of serene purity into the harsh oppressive substance of smoke that Rich exposes the smothering nature of male dominated language. The clear, crisp consonants of ‘uncut hair’ contribute to a sense of crystal clear clarity, here Rich endorsing the pure, unburdened voice and yet this clarity dissipates when confronted with the burning intensity of ‘smolders’, the consonants almost molten as the ‘m’ gives way to the rolling ‘r’. An image of ‘smoke’ and fire permeates through the poem, exacerbating the sense of restriction. The shift from her dreamscape to reality is almost indiscernible as her nightmare spills over the enjambment, ‘half dead war / and I wake up in tears’, the smoke and fire seeping into reality with the keening sound of ‘sirens screaming’. In the inability for the voice to escape her nightmare, Rich mourns the loss and the inner turmoil of female expression.*

*Even amidst the waste of ‘Jerusalem’, Rich weaves a tenuous thread of hope as she steers away from conventionality in the form of her poem. Rich deploys heavy handed enjambment and a lack of punctuation to mirror the incoherency of a dream, the form of the poem coming alive despite the carnage painted by the discourse. It is precisely in this that she ruptures the laws of the language causing pain, creating a tear in the laws to allow a glimmer of hope. This hope allows readers to find a message of reclamation in the poem. ‘Only the stones and the hairs of the head’, have memories, Rich suggesting the possibility to reclaim one’s voice by grasping for the raw, physical expression, similar to grasping for the ‘blood stained splinters’ of ‘The Fact of a Doorframe’.*



*The fragile hope of 'Jerusalem' blooms in 'Necessities of Life', Rich poignantly charting the passage for a devoured individuality re engagement with the world. The undecorated phonetics of 'small fixed dot', 'dark blue thumbtack', crisp and clear paint the image of preserved individuality, pure and uninfluenced by external influences. Yet with the molten phonetic's of ooze coating the throat, this defined dot begins to loose its shape. The deluge of influential names, sometimes emphasized with biting exclamations, 'Jonah! I was Wittgenstein / Mary Wollestonecraft, the soul / of Louis Jouvet,' coalesced with its sinuous curving syntax mimicks the flow of a tidal wave, painting an image of the speaker gulping for air. With the underlying violence of 'blown-up' exploding into the savage image of 'Wolfed almost to shreds', Rich bemoans the destruction of the voice, the intensity of such an image forcing readers to deeply acknowledge this destruction.*

*However with the acceptant flourish, 'So much for those days,' the only sentence to commence and conclude in the same line, Rich sets aloft the notion of reclamation of this identity. The line 'solid as a cabbage head', casually turns its back on verbal adornment, its words mundane rendered in the steady drop of the 'd'. It is in the simplicity of this notion that Rich affirms the need to engage with the true essence of expression buried under layers of patriarchal facades, endorsing the unembellished voice. This voice is rendered almost tangible in the evocative sensory delicacy of 'a curl of mist', reminiscent to the softness of 'wisps' in 'Harper's Ferry', symbolising glimpses of true articulation of self, Rich lending a lingering sense of hope.*

*In 'Dreamwood', the 'curl of mist' becomes the tangible 'wood' motif as Rich delves beneath the surface of the patriarchal veil (typing stand) to engage with the 'landscape, veined', the 'old, scratched, cheap wood', representing the honest, flawed voice. The reminiscing softness of 'a child can see / or the child's older self', lulls readers into this landscape only to be harshly jerked back with the thudding consonants of 'should'. In this gnawing tension between 'dreaming' and 'typing', Rich unearthing the oppressive nature of patriarchal constructs. With 'if this were a map', readers are plunged into a confronting landscape. Whilst the discourse paints an unforgiving image, 'ridge upon ridge', 'hazed desert', as though the speaker is a victim of it, the form of the poem with its curving form enacts the fluidity of a wave, lending a reprieve to the dryness of the landscape. It is in this chasm between form and discourse that Rich deconstructs and reconstructs the patriarchal 'map' to 'see an end to touristic choices'. Like 'Diving Into The Wreck', where the sea was the element of the feminine, home to the vitality of the female voice, the 'aquifers' and 'one possible wateringhole' allude to the hidden voices embedded in this patriarchal landscape. It is these voices Rich desires to release as she paves a path unembroidered by patriarchal history. The plain, hard edges of 'massproduced yet durable, being here now', is an ode to the enduring nature of the feminine experience as Rich strips bare the 'distances blued and purpled' by the metaphors and symbols of patriarchal language and sees each individual voice beyond the 'mass produced' entity.*

*Neither Rich nor her speakers remain subservient despite the onerous restraints placed upon them, allowing them to dismantle the 'myths' and 'metaphors' of hegemonic language to seek the true voice. United in their message, these poems, be it in the jarring tones of 'Jerusalem', the tentative tread of 'Necessities of Life' or the meandering exploration of 'Dreamwood', rip away the blinding veil of patriarchy to attempt to set free the shackled collective female voice.*

## Sample 7

### Nominated text: A Doll's House – Henrik Ibsen

*Through 'A Doll's House', Henrik Ibsen immerses us, as readers, into a time of societal oppression, psychological manipulation and gender conformity. Through this, Ibsen conveys the vastly detrimental consequences of lost individuality and the constraints upon fluidity in thinking and understanding that serve to limit the flourishing nature of humanity and individualism. the progression of Nora Helmer, as an oblivious victim of the gender roles placed upon her, to a woman willing to reject the patriarchal idealisms of her society and discover a life of purpose serves to depict the potential of women and the multitude of possibilities available when unhindered by the dominance of societal norms and standards.*

*The introduction of Nora immediately allows an understanding of the extent of her conformity to the constraints placed upon her – although she is initially unaware and ignorant to the limitations she has adopted. this is evident through her perception of her husband, Torvald whom she believes dotes upon her. However, the consistent objectification of Nora is ingrained within their marriage as Torvald's condescending comparisons of "squirrels" and other animals continually belittles her intelligence, often in the tone used to speak to a child. Nora's delusional view of her marriage stems from her perception of gender roles within a marriage. Her interpretation of love is seen to be at its best, enormously superficial as she claims to her friend, "when Torvald isn't as fond of me as he is now – when my dancing and*

*...dressing up and reciting don't amuse him any longer. It might be a good thing to have something up my sleeve...". Her own erratically worded explanation of the relationship between herself and her husband allows the dynamics of their relationship to become clearer, as she excessively romanticises their marriage in order to validate her own sense of self worth and belonging. Nora's tonal variations are evidently implied to be initially excitable, irrational and haphazard, further evidencing her lack of individualism and psychological independence. Furthermore, Nora normalises the patriarchal constructs of her society. She is neither uncomfortable nor perturbed that her husband would be, "terribly hurt and humiliated if he thought he owed anything to me". Her own agreement with his discomfort, as she states, "It'd spoil everything between us", is imbued with a sense of earnest, as she justifies, in her mind, the gender roles of their time. through these initial introductions of Nora and Torvald, Ibsen portrays how debilitating the psychological manipulation of societal pressures are, and how once adopted, they become justified despite the irrationality of its basis.*

*However, as Nora is challenged with issues beyond her specified role of a woman, she begins to grasp a sense of her own individuality as she struggles with the stress and impending collapse of her marriage and societal standing. Although through her transition towards individuality, she believes her husband truly loves her, she begins to purposefully defy past restrictions and gains more power over her independence. this subliminal shift is incomprehensibly vital, however, as she finally challenges aspects of the patriarchal surroundings. In an effort to distract her husband, Nora displays her own intelligence and ability to comprehend the nature of her husband, deliberately manipulating his sense of masculinity to prevent him from discovering her secret. The extent of Torvald's inability to comprehend the capacity of women is his downfall, and ultimately makes him a victim of the patriarchal constructs he has been brought up in. Torvald is seen to dehumanise Nora throughout the play and is not able to come to the same conclusions as his wife. the consistent labelling of Nora as, "his little skylark", "baby" and "over-excited, like a child", and the condescending almost pitying tone in which he delivers them, portrays the extent of his own blindness to humanity. Nora's "wild" exposure of her emotional turbulence through her anxiety infused dancing of the tarantella and her erratic demands, used as distractions, enables Nora to begin to experience her own emotional and intellectual capacity, without the influence and dependence of a male figure. Thus, Ibsen encourages the ability and possibility of change as well as the potential for individuality to be achieved, regardless of the constraints imposed by society and patriarchy.*

*the completely shifted mental frame of Nora by the conclusion of the play is significant, admirable and fulfilling. Ibsen's refused to conform to the tradition of a well-made play, by imposing ambiguity and uncertainty at the conclusion, rather than a conformist ideal of reconciliation, amplifies the magnitude of Nora's progression as a woman, and as a person. Her final moments in the play observes a prominent shift from flourished and childlike tones to one of cold realisation as her interactions with Torvald become acutely sharp. It is torvald who finally loses his composure as he is exposed to the vulnerability expected only of a woman. As his wife prepares to leave his frantic questions of, "Is this the way you neglect your most sacred duties?", "How can you say that?" and "What's that you say?", evidences his inability to reject the irrationality of his upbringing. His frantic and bemused tone contrasts that of Nora, who has become empowered through her realisation, as she conversates with only curt and coldly abrupt and brusque responses to her husband's incredulity. Ultimately, however, a sense of accomplishment is achieved as Nora confidently replies to Torvald's question of, "what duty do you mean?", with "My duty to myself." This final blow to Torvald's comprehension of his world is severely undermined as we celebrate the progression of Nora as a woman and the ambiguous, yet optimistic possibilities and potential that Nora is yet to experience and discover.*

*Conclusively, Henrik Ibsen's exploration of society, patriarchal constructs and ingrained conservatism to tradition, through Nora's experiences, reiterated the importance of rationality, individualism and independent thinking. Ultimately the detrimental nature of oppression can be challenged and once achieved the potential of women, men and humanity is fluidly limitless.*

## Sample 8

### Nominated text: Antony and Cleopatra – William Shakespeare

*The characters of Antony and Cleopatra are portrayed as leaders beyond earthly power, often compared to earthy "elements" and represented to be outer-worldly in their nature. Their relationship provides example for excessiveness and is often scrutinised by other characters. Antony and Cleopatra symbolise the extremes of emotion, love and hate. The turbulence of their emotions relating to their outer-worldly powers as, similarly to mother nature, are unpredictable. This is contrasted to Roman culture, which is contained and dictated to by ritual and law.*

Antony is represented as a brave, loyal and honourable man. He is described as having “goodly eyes” that have “glowed like plated Mars”. He is thus compared to Gods and described to have Godly Strength. He is described by Cleopatra as her “brave lord”. Antony’s men, however, are critical of his relationship with Cleopatra. They describe his love of her as “dotage”. Antony and Cleopatra share character in that they are both passionate and overcome by their love for one another. Their love has a sense of foreshadowing death all throughout the play. Enobarbus claims their love “eats the sword it fights with”. This thus has a foreshadowing element to it, foreshadowing their death. Antony claims “Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch of the ranged empire fall!” The power of Antony is suggested here as it is implied that without Antony’s support in Rome, such atrocities are possible. Thus his outer-worldly power is suggested, as he can control disaster as such magnitude.

The co-dependency of their relationship is suggested all throughout the play. Antony claims “Here is my space”, implying that his “space” is only with Cleopatra, in Egypt. Antony says to Cleopatra, “Where hast thou been, my heart”. The extreme nature of their co-dependency is thus suggested as the heart is the organ of life. It pumps blood, a life-giving source, around the body to sustain it. Thus Shakespeare suggests that the lovers give each sustenance, and give each other life. This again is implied as Cleopatra claims, “since my lord Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra.” She again reiterates this idea that one cannot exist without the other. Their respective identities are non-existent without the other owning their identity. In preparing for suicide, Cleopatra calls Antony, “husband”. This confirms the unification of their hearts and love. There is sense of the equality in the relationship, with neither holding more power over the other. They call each other, “my lord” and “my queen”, thus suggesting they both respect and acknowledge each others power and status. Their arrival together is accompanied by a “Flourish”, which suggests the regality of the position. The musical introduction of their entrance highlights the theatrical entrance of them together, which relates to their theatrical nature.

Cleopatra explores the idea of love, saying that “The stroke of death is as a lover’s pinch, which hurts, and is desired.” She suggests that love may be desired and lusted for but provides also pain. The symbolism of the “pinch”, suggests that it provides short attacks of pain, which evaluate to a nothingness.

The outer-world, god-like natures of Cleopatra and Antony are referenced all throughout the play. Antony claims that we will “send to darkness all that stop me.” Antony here suggests he holds the power of death as he implies he can control death and life. This is an implied god-like trait, as he holds the power of mortality. He claims he can too “make Death love me”. He thus implies the irresistible charms he holds, having power over death’s preferences. He thus, again, highlights his god-like power in controlling life and death.

Enobarbus claims the Antony could “outstare the lightening”. Lightning holds much power, also having the ability to control life and death. It can cause fire, which relates to hell and the afterlife. This suggests that Antony can hold power over the terrors of hell, as he can “outstare” one of its sources. This idea too that he can “outstare”, suggests the strength of his power. The sense of vision holds strong power in itself as it suggests a strong awareness and sense of direction. To “outstare” suggests that Antony’s powers of vision and movement are stronger than any other.

Cleopatra claims to have “Immortal longings”, suggesting that her “longings”, or wants, go beyond human understanding or earthly comprehension. The “Immortality” of her “longings” relate to the god-like nature of Cleopatra’s existence. She exclaims “my courage prove my title!” This relates to the importance of “courage” in the Roman culture. She highlights the importance of her title, the use of the exclamation mark for further accenting the line. The repeated “t” consonant sound in the word “title” further accents this line.

The god-like natures showed by both Antony and Cleopatra is suggested all throughout the play with the “[nobleness]” and “[courage]”. The passion, and unpredictability, of their love is reflected in their god-like natures.