

2018 VCE Literature examination report

General comments

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

The Literature study design recognises that the ways readers create readings of literary works are informed by both the detail of moments in the text and the conscious or unconscious reading perspectives brought by the reader.

Students were required to complete two pieces of writing – one for Section A and one for Section B. Each text selected needed to be from a different category (novels, plays, short stories, other literature and poetry). Students are not permitted to write on two texts from the same category. This point has been stressed in many previous examination reports. It is also stated on the front cover of the examination and in the separate instructions for each section of the examination. Most students understood this, but there were a few who wrote on two texts of the same type, and in these cases only one response could be assessed.

Most students wrote two complete essays. There were very few cases of brief or unfinished responses or responses not attempted, indicating that in general students were well prepared and confident in undertaking the examination.

Students responded to all texts in both sections of the examination, although some texts were markedly more popular in Section A and some more so in Section B. There were many texts receiving few responses in either section. It is acknowledged that teachers may choose their texts with a view to assessing particular areas of study during the year but it should be noted that all texts on the list are selected as suitable for the examination and, by implication, for both areas of study in Unit 4. Teachers and students are encouraged to explore the possibilities in all their chosen texts for writing in the examination.

The clarity and expressiveness of students' writing remains important in their assessments. Students should aim to express their ideas clearly, persuasively and with sensitivity to the language appropriate to the text. Some students tried to adopt a very abstruse vocabulary, which was not always well used; no benefit is gained from obscuring meaning by overly convoluted sentences or rarefied vocabulary. Some students, on the other hand, used many slang expressions, some of which have been noted in previous reports, but it is still worth stressing that students' language needs to reflect an appropriate discourse for the text they are discussing.

The order in which students attempt the essays does not matter; students may choose to begin with the task with which they are more confident, the text that is fresher in their mind or the text they like best.

Section A – Literary perspectives

This section required students to present an interpretation of the text in response to the topic, drawing on a literary perspective to inform their reading of the text, with the text always remaining the focus of the essay. It is not merely a case of responding to the topic, as responses must also be informed by a literary perspective, even if students do not name it or quote from critics whose works they have studied. Some students included two perspectives, but this approach did not usually serve them well as it was difficult to know which perspective was their focus. On the other hand, some students did not appear to address a perspective, or did so in only a vague or cursory way. Although the topics are broad, they foreground certain ideas that students must address. Some students who scored in the middle and low ranges appeared to offer prepared responses that did not engage with the topic.

The most popular texts for this section were *Heart of Darkness*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Twelfth Night*, *North and South* and *A Room of One's Own*.

While students may use evidence from the passages for Section B in their Section A response, those who limited their supporting evidence to those passages tended to offer a narrow interpretation that may not have addressed the question fully. High-scoring essays were characterised by a comprehensive knowledge of the text, including an ability to locate their evidence clearly, an ability to draw readily on detail from across the text, a clear response to the topic and evidence of having engaged with the perspective and its implications. The writing was highly expressive, coherently and logically structured and clearly focused on the text and the task.

Examples

Heart of Darkness

Having claimed that ‘the intrusion of Europe’s androcentric enterprise into the Congo damages Africa with the corrupting influence of civilisation and perpetuates the subjugation of European women’, the student goes on to develop a feminist critique; while the essay is mindful of a potential post-colonial reading, in this context the colonial venture is construed as masculine in its endeavour.

Conrad personifies the Congolese jungle as a female entity with the “colossal body” of a “fecund and mysterious life”, the pairing of “fecund and mysterious” characterising the land as maternal and creational. Further anthropomorphised as “pensive” and “sorrowful”, “looking upon the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul”, Conrad condemns the symbolic rape and violation of something cognisant and free as Marlow’s ship of the phallogocentric European enterprise penetrates and conquers the jungle in a ravening lust to satiate its desire for power. Although Conrad’s pairing describes the Congo as “monstrous and free”, its inevitable submission to the violent colonial exploitation is foreshadowed in the contrasting metaphorical description of the continent of Europe as now only “the shackled form of a conquered monster”. The desire to dominate the land is reflective of Europe’s patriarchal tendency to suppress women, portrayed in the contrasting embodiments of both the Congo, in the “savage and superb” native woman”, and Europe, most explicitly in Kurtz’s stereotyped and idealised ‘Intended’.

Twelfth Night

The student here directly addresses the topic, with terms such as ‘ultimately’ and ‘inescapable’. The perspective is evident, with terms such as ‘questioning the norm’, ‘gendered relationships’ and ‘performativity in gender roles’. The student has not identified a particular theorist or critical article but the perspective is clear.

At the crux of ‘Twelfth Night’, Shakespeare reveals the fallacies in conventional power structures, regarding gendered relationships and social hierarchy, questioning the norm

perpetuated and accepted by the masses. In exposing the empty performativity in gender roles, Shakespeare demonstrates the freedom in escaping rigid societal roles, however the play acknowledges that ultimately an adherence to inherent conventional structures is inescapable. He highlights the temporality of such transgressions, demonstrating that anyone who strays from the orthodox will be consequently punished, their narratives lost to history.

Section B – Close analysis

This section required students to work with the detail of the language in the given passages to develop and present an interpretation of the named text. It relied on the exploration of many aspects of the text, as appropriate, such as characterisation, dialogue, staging, concerns of the text, imagery, allusions, rhythm, tone, views and values, and overall structure of the text. The highest scoring responses worked from the detail of the passages to create a sense of the whole, rather than presenting an argument and finding evidence from the passages to support it. As in Section A essays, students with high scores were often able to locate the detail very precisely in the text.

Quotation is one way of attending to the passages but on its own is insufficient; comment and analysis are needed to demonstrate how the nuances of the language in those quotations shape the student's response to the text. Some students described the rhyme scheme or meter in a poem but seemed unable to move beyond such labelling to elucidate how that form contributes to the creation of meaning. This often gave the impression of a disengagement between the reader and the poem. In contrast, the highest scoring essays were highly eloquent and were able to draw thoughtful and subtle connections between observations about the text and the inferences made.

The following excerpts are two examples of close reading of the passages that build towards an interpretation.

The Leopard

Imagery of the Prince's overwhelming physicality is used ... to represent his domineering power of those around him. Simply by "sitting up" and "[pretending] to be angry", he is able to gain a "position of prestige" over his own wife, causing her to [whine] in a low voice like a frightened puppy", and question the importance of "Tancredi ... or even Concetta", in comparison to the great leader next to her, "vital and proud". This superiority is also evident through the Prince's own perspective and thought processes, in his view of others as "mere driftwood", the "ruin" of whom does not even motivate the God-like man to "make any move towards saving" his own class. By demonstrating the Prince's power through his physical domination and arrogant view of those below him, di Lampedusa paints him as above the mortal man, as he himself looks back on his ancestor with nostalgia and respect.

Selected Poems, Robert Browning

Browning evokes the vibrancy of Old Venice, conjured up by a logical speaker, enjoying the complexities of Galuppi's Tocatta. However, an initial imbalance is exposed, as whilst the imagined lovers revel in the 'balls and masks' and intimate pleasure, the speaker remains consumed in the ominous 'sixths diminished', the inconclusive chords which he perceives as Galuppi's reminder of the creeping nature of death. However, the lover's simple delight in the physical celebrates the evanescent yet intense nature of human existence, despite the inevitable question 'must we die'. Whilst the rhyming tercets, in their complex trochaic octometer rhythm reflect the complexity of Galuppi's Tocatta, through Browning's poetic forms they simultaneously highlight the imbalance of life. The absence of a fourth line, which provides symmetry to each stanza, leaves an inconclusive sigh, as the reader anticipates a fourth rhyming line. This seems to reflect the speaker's view of the omniscient presence of death and the brief nature of life.

The most popular texts in Section B were Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Browning, Wallace-Crabbe and Dobson. More than half the Section B responses were written on the poetry texts. Most students who wrote on poetry did so in this section, although several students discussed their chosen poet in relation to a literary perspective, and poems of their choice, in Section A.

Specific information

Essay 1 (Section A)

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	2	4	5	5	7	9	12	12	12	9	7	5	3	2	1	12.2

Essay 2 (Section B)

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	5	6	6	7	9	13	12	11	8	6	4	3	2	1	11.9

Novels

Heart of Darkness was overwhelmingly the most popular novel, although there were also many very good and considered responses on *North and South* and some on *The Leopard* and *The Passion*. There were few responses on the other novels. Novels were chosen chiefly for Section A responses; there were, however, rich opportunities offered in the passages for a Section B response and students are encouraged to examine those possibilities closely in their preparation for the examination.

Plays

Students were adept at recognising the structural features of drama and made use of them in their responses. They noted settings, costuming and stage directions and envisaged how a performance would enact the written text. The skills developed in Unit 3, Area of Study 1 may well have informed these insights. As a result of their awareness of form, their vision of the plays was enriched and they offered multidimensional views of the texts.

A popular choice in both sections was *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Students engaged very well with this play and seemed equally comfortable in offering and analysing a perspective and in engaging with the precise details of language and stagecraft offered by the passages. There were also many fine essays on *Twelfth Night* and *Agamemnon*, some on *Buried Child* but fewer essays on other plays.

Short stories

Students who wrote on the short stories showed clearly that they had engaged with the texts. *Foreign Soil* was the most popular, followed by *Only the Animals* and then the Gogol stories. Students need to be aware that, as with poetry, they need to put forward a discussion of the collection, not just the three stories from which the passages are selected. They may consider the ways in which the narrative voices and concerns differ from story to story as well as the features and concerns they share. They may incorporate incidental references to stories not represented on the examination in order to make their case about the work as a whole.

Other literature

The most popular text in this category was *A Room of One's Own*. There were many very good responses that showed a developed understanding of Woolf's argument and the stylistic means by which she advances it. They were aware of the shifts between the powerful fictionalised elements and the more direct advocacy she adopts, and displayed an awareness of the context of the essays, originating in lectures to female undergraduate students. Students who wrote on Voltaire's *Candide* generally showed detailed knowledge of its historical context and philosophical ideas; there were many accomplished essays. Other texts, such as Stanner's essays and Fitzpatrick's memoir, drew very few responses.

Poetry

Sylvia Plath's work was by far the most popular poetry choice, followed by Browning, Wallace-Crabbe and Dobson. Many students writing on Sylvia Plath's poetry appeared to read the poems as autobiographical documents, not works of art, in a way that was not evident in their writing on other texts. They often confused the persona with the writer herself, missing opportunities to focus on the language of the poems, particularly their sharply detailed observational starting points, and thus did not perform the essential task of close analysis of the poetry. The exception was *The Applicant*, in which more students seemed to recognise the satirical and mocking tone and were therefore able to offer more analytical discussions of the poem as an artistic construct.

Many of the essays on Browning revealed a thorough and detailed knowledge of the poetry, not limited to the three passages on the examination, and presented very thoughtful and fine-grained discussions of the language and its effects.

Students writing on Wallace-Crabbe generally showed an awareness of the existential questioning in the poems, especially *The Swing* and *The Rescue Will Not Take Place*, and were able to discuss the imagery and tone with some sensitivity.

Rosemary Dobson's poetry was popular. Many students wrote confidently, with thoughtful understanding of the sources of the imagery and the way these poems reflected an exploration of the artistic endeavour.

Responses on *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia and Beyond* and *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* were fewer, but the highest scoring of these were able to recognise aspects of cultural dissonance and the ways in which language was being forged differently from traditional forms, creating different voices.

Responses on the poetry should not be conceived as a discussion of two or three passages set on the examination, or even the three poems from which they are extracted, but as a discussion of the poet's work (as offered in the poems selected for study, but not necessarily excluding other poems in the collection). It is often useful to make comparisons or allusions beyond the selection on the examination in order to make a point, although such references will usually be brief and pertinent.

Sample essays

The following complete essays illustrate a variety of ways of approaching the tasks and responses on a range of texts. While achieving very good scores, they are not necessarily in the highest scoring range. They are published as illustrations of possible approaches, potentially useful as teaching resources, but are not intended as exemplars or models for students to follow. A number of students borrowed heavily from essays published in the 2017 examination report, but are reminded that assessors want to see the fresh, engaged, authentic voices of students, not the re-presentation of the work of others.

Section A samples

Sample 1

Nominated text: *Ariel*, Sylvia Plath

Although much of Plath's oeuvre is rooted in her own struggle against the 'black shoe' of habitual oppression as well as the fractious binary of domesticity and poetry, the 'Ariel' poems speak not only for the poet but for the collective fabric of female experience. While contentious, her use of Holocaust imagery reveals hidden gender oppression through comparison to a far more public horror. Plath's personal 'grave cave' of despair and suffocation is made to serve as metonymy as she uses her own experience to liberate all women's voices, rising from the ashes of Patriarchal control to 'eat men like air'.

Plath borrows universally recognised symbols of oppression to represent the misogyny largely ignored by 1950s society, depicting them against the backdrop of her own vicissitudinous existence. The critic Van Dyne writes that the persona in 'Daddy' is a 'woman in the guise of a child'. The echoing assonance of the oo rhyme scheme 'shoe, do, achoo' mimics nursery rhymes. This is not merely Plath's rage against her own father in the voice of a tantruming child but the voice of a woman infantilised by the cultural construction of masculinity enacted by the titular patriarch. While the line 'At twenty, I tried to die' seems to be directly referencing Plath's own suicide attempt, the psychic slideshow of Nazi images 'Panzer man', 'Aryan eye', 'a swastika' mirrors the personas gradual awakening to her own subjugation. Recognising herself as one who 'may well be a Jew', Plath's persona directly identifies with the oppressed. While some critical discourse felt that Plath was trivialising the Holocaust, the balked rage that erupts into speech is not only Plath's but that of generations of oppressed women, the oppression of whom is often devalued. Although the persona liberates herself from the Nazi-father's control, the final word 'through' harks back to the recurring claustrophobic rhymes hinting that the persona is not entirely free.

The brazen, cynical persona of Lady Lazarus 'enacts the male metaphor of woman as monster' (Van Dyne). On the surface, this is a deeply autobiographical poem, a linguistic theatricalisation of Plath's own attempts to 'annihilate each decade'. However, a strictly confessional reading limits the extent to which it can be seen to speak for broader concerns, a proto-feminist call for female defiance. Despite her opening bravado, the 'I' seems to be desperately asserting agency in its half-rhymes, suggesting the idea of a self fractured into 'a million filaments, and it is an anonymous 'them' who 'unwrap [the persona] hand and foot'. In the later stanzas, Lazarus identifies herself as the 'opus' of the male enemy. While this seems to echo Plath's own divorce and her struggle to reinvent an identity separate from her husband, it also reflects wider female suffocation by a masculine hierarchy. The cynical 'Do not think I underestimate your great concern' derides the false sympathy of the (male) doctor, resisting his appropriation of female pain for his professional gain. The poem's denouement sees Lazarus triumphant and taunting, her 'red air' waving like a victory banner of female vitality. She escapes not only Plath's despair but the systematic oppression of countless women.

The poems that explore the dichotomy between maternal obligation and poetic freedom seem more explicitly linked to Plath's struggle to exist as a woman poet in a regressive patriarchy. Dame Kindness, the ideal mother, 'glides, 'snake-like, about the domestic sphere, bearing saccharine 'poultices' of sugar and cups of tea. Her pinning of 'desperate butterflies' hints at the effacement of creative ambition at the hands of domestic obligation. The 'blood-jet' of poetry is nevertheless vital and uncontrollable; even the intended recompense of the 'two children' cannot tamp the wellspring of the woman-speaker's fertile imagination. This contrasts with the closure of 'Balloons', where the harsh, monosyllabic rhyme of 'red' and 'shred' signals the death of the speaker's poetic vision as her small son forcibly demands her attention. However much these women-speaker's mirror Plath, the persona splits from the poet and they capture a broader lack of fulfilment within the domestic confines of the suburban ideal that women of Plath's generation were urged to strive for.

However maternity seems to stifle the creative self, the persona of 'Ariel' also finds ephemeral bliss in the blood issue of her children. The opening stanzas of Nick and the candlestick are preoccupied with an encroaching sense of dread among the 'black bat airs of the persona's despair. 'The light burns blue' suggest imminent asphyxiation, reflecting cold war anxiety about nuclear annihilation. The sanctified 'baby in the barn', however, offers hope, to the persona and by extension to all mothers, that the child will endure and also be the Christ-like salvation of others.

While autobiographical imagery abounds in the 'Ariel' poems, Plath is an incisive cultural critic who interrogates the patriarchal restrictions of her society through the lens of her own personal pain and suffering. Through macabre humour and searing wit, Plath rages against the 'red lead sinkers' of stifling domesticity, yet the newborn's 'handful of notes' is irrepressibly hopeful. Plath weaves her own experience into the tapestry of women's history.

Sample 2

Nominated text: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Tennessee Williams

As Maggie becomes the lively "cat on a hot tin roof", Williams portrays the suffocating confines of the female existence within the rigid walls of this 1950's patriarchy. This is a post-war society that upholds the notion of conformity as a way of information stability, yet in doing so, the world of the play becomes swarmed by broken facades, as those enervating demands leave a character like Brick "crippled" and emotionally intransigent. With that said, however, the spectral presence of a "tenderness which was uncommon" subtly alludes to the potential for genuine love to allow the characters to usurp and survive the demanding expectations of their society.

The figure of Brick appears to audiences as the paragon of the All-American athlete, yet the "cool air of detachment" that masks the violent and jarring "flashes of lightning" exposes the fragile and vulnerable pretence of detached nobility he offers. As Williams makes clear, this is a man who his society crowned with "early laurel", a society seemingly cultivated around the strong, heterosexual man given how the American footsoldier emerged as a cultural icon of resilience in this era. Yet in the examination of Brick's potentially ambiguous sexuality across the play, the existence of something perhaps "not normal" in the words this "system" of mendacity, in doing so, forcing the extinction of familial ties and rendering the characters combative. The way in which Mae and Maggie call each other "honey" and "sister woman" ironically captures, in its overbearing suffusion of Southern gentility, the catty and vengeful relationship that they share. They both are, after all, expected to perform the role of "breeder", "producin'" offspring in order to vicariously contribute to the patriarchal descent. In the way that Maggie sadly proclaims that she is "childless" and therefore totally "useless", Williams implicates the extent to which the female becomes little more than a utility in this plantation setting for aiding the inexorable pursuit of the material. Yet even Mae, whose "five head" of children delineates her as a conspicuous and successful breeder, is not guaranteed the inheritance she likely sees as hers. In this way, therefore, Williams exposes the largely insurmountable demands placed on the female subject. So, as Mae devolves from her initial performance of "smiling" warmth and tenderness with a "hissing" and comfort[ed]" subject, the sibilliance works in conjunction to represent the broken and grotesque self that emerges under then demanding expectations of this culture.

Even Big Daddy, the powerful patriarch and possessor of great material wealth, is crippled by the constrictive yoke of societal expectations. As the head plantation owner, he is expected to actively participate in the glorious American Dream and cultivate his "worth", as he gracefully does in Act Two, through the material, "ten million in chips and blue stocks" he has a grasp over. Yet in the corrosive "eerie greenish glow" – a likely allusion to the green of American money – and the hollow fricative of the "puff" of fireworks, Williams undermines any sense of this expenditure offering any tangible form of fulfilment as it lays claim to. Such is the 'false light' of Big Daddy's illusion. Even as he tries to meet the demands placed on him, going so far as to define his sexual fantasies through material largesse – "smother in minks" – he is plagued by the powerful "fox teeth in his guts" that ultimately affirm his premature denouement. Thus, in this

image of consumption and avarice, Williams establishes the patriarch's cancer as a motif of a corruptive pursuit of the material. Moon is, in Big Daddy's words, a beast that "dies" and "buys", with the carnal link establishing a form of death and erosion inherent to his material existence. Thus, in a culture defined by the harsh imperatives of capitalism and materialism, the play explodes this idyllic society and suggests how its demands corrupt and become "malignant".

However, in the character of Maggie, Williams crafts a figure who can ultimately usurp the stringent demands placed on her. Throughout the play, audiences are presented with her lilting voice and "liturgical chants" that pair with the burgeoning and vivacious sexuality to establish her strong and dignant performance of the 'temptress' demanded of her as young women. Tragically, these expectations force to revel in the "unconscious lech" Big Daddy has for her, as though it were somehow a tacit affirmation of her femininity. Nonetheless, even as her allure is tamped in the presence of the oppressive and dominating patriarch, it confidently re-emerges in Act Three as Maggie walks to "centre stage" to deliver her announcement. In this moment, Williams communicates metatheatrically to his audiences her ability to still command the spotlight of her own audience's gaze. Additionally, as she is once more left alone with Brick, as she "exhales with relief" and precariously seeks after her husband for physical support, the playwright captures the enervating demands placed on her. With that said however, her voice becomes infused with command, as she plans on powerfully "making" Brick satisfy her demands, and "tak[ing] hold of" him in an image of loving amour. Indeed, given the prevalency of this motif of "holding" throughout the play as suggestive of a suffocating and mercenary grip, its inversion here affirms the potential of Maggie exploring the expectations of her society and allowing her affection to survive. Even as she is forced to throw the pillow she held "forlornly" and turn off the "rose-silk lamp" in gestures of suppressing this tender side of hers, the curtain fall allows her to finally escape the eyes of Williams' audiences, thereby suggesting the possibility of this "lie" of her pregnancy and also "love" of surviving the cold and demanding climate she finds herself in.

So, despite the "black thing" that has infected the house, suggestive of the cancer of lies and broken performances, Williams crafts in Maggie a testament to the power of genuine romance and tenderness as a means of combatting the restrictive demands that render this bed sitting room a "cage". As Big Mama yearnfully proclaims that the family has to "love each other", the play offers a didactic message, one that insists on a possible emergence from the harsh world of 1950's orthodoxy.

Sample 3

Nominated text: *The Passion*, Jeanette Winterson

The Passion by Jeanette Winterson explores the 'doom of paradox' – passion, the expression of gender and sexuality unrestricted by the heteronormative paradigm, serves simultaneously as a liberating force and as one that is generous and disempowering. While succumbing to passion may lead to a world where one's 'possibilities' are 'multiplied', it may also be all-consuming and self-destructive.

If we consider Venice, the 'mercurial city', to be a liminal space, a place free of the cultural norms enforced by Bonaparte's regime which is representative of the dominant cis-centric society, the inhabitants of Venice are able to pursue their passion. Boatmen, with webbed feet, are granted the ability to walk on water, metaphorical of their ability to transgress the gender binary and the boundaries of heterosexuality, and water, which surrounds the city of Venice, becomes symbolic of gender fluidity, the idea that one's gender is not necessitated by their sex, but instead, tenuously constituted in time. There are 'women and not all are women', from the 'three-breasted woman', embodying hyper-femininity, to Villanelle with webbed feet, indicative of her androgyny, and the 'Lady of Means', masculine in that she is involved in business and that the image of feminine beauty has disappeared with her 'appearance of subterranean devil'. Thus, Venice celebrates the indulgence of one's gender and sexual passions, which proves to be a vitalising force; the carnivalesque atmosphere of the night in Venice, with 'fireworks' and 'swinging apes', provides Venetians with 'so much life', and Villanelle dreams of being

'drop[ped] gently into the canal', perhaps metaphorical of how the dissolution of gender binaries and compulsory heterosexuality may be a form of baptism.

However, Winterson also warns of the danger of freely expressing one's gender and sexual identity that falls outside of the heteronormative framework – gender and sexual minorities, by pursuing their passion, may become marginalised and alienated by a rigid, intolerant society. Whilst Venice may be a place of liberation and life, it is also a refuge for the Other, a place for those who are disempowered and neglected. There are 'thieves and Jews and children with slant eyes, without father or mother' and 'exiles too', those who seek shelter from alienation, living in the 'shadows'. Villanelle, too, empathises with them; she is afraid that if she gives in to her homosexual passion, her 'real life, the most solid, the best known will disappear', seemingly alluding to the security of being accepted and validated by society being taken away from her upon choosing to stray from societal norms. She is also afraid that she will have to 'feed on shadows like those sad spirits whom Orpheus fled', – like the thieves, Jews and orphans in the 'city within the city', she will have to live in the darkness, segregated from the rest of the world. Perhaps the allusion to the myth of Orpheus is also a comment on being trapped in the underworld like his wife Eurydice. Villanelle fears that if she were to turn back in a moment of impulse, yielding to her passion for the Queen of Spades, like Eurydice, her soul will vanish and be detained by Hades forever; Villanelle will be forever damned by a heteronormative society.

Furthermore, Winterson elucidates how internalised homophobia and self-destruction may arise from one's passions that do not align with the rules of society. Henri, under the heterosexist attitudes instilled by the dominant paradigm, represented by Napoleon's army, his love for Napoleon 'turns to hatred'. The longer he stays in the army, the more he feels that 'disgust is close and dignity is far away', and he experiences 'hatred not only for the once loved but for [him]self too', seemingly a comment on how the negative attitudes towards homosexual relations advertised by society become reflected in oneself, causing self-hatred. Henri's hatred becomes an 'obsession', a determined attempt to reject homosexual aspects of his identity in order to purify himself, and he substitutes his love for Bonaparte with his love for Villanelle, conforming to the expectation of heterosexuality. By denying his true sexuality, he therefore falls into derision and self-destruction. Additionally, Patrick too suffers the same fate; by yielding to passion and deserting the army with Henri, he rejects societal norms of gender and sexuality. His homosexual experience with the farmer's son, who physically tackles Patrick to the ground, leaving him 'groaning beneath', results in him wanting to ask the Bishop to 'give (him) parish again', an attempt to purify him from the experience of homosexual passion. He hallucinates that 'the Devil is breathing damnation in him', suffering from his own shame as a result of internalised homophobia.

Winterson presents passion as both a medium to achieve liberation and a 'leopard in the house' that we must tame in order not to be devoured by it. Whilst the expression of gender and sexuality outside of the heteronormative culture may vitalise us and provide us with 'possibilities', in a world of distinct, polarised genders and compulsory heterosexuality, these 'possibilities come with a price'.

Sample 4

Nominated text: *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia, and Beyond* – Tina Chang, Nathalie Handal and Ravi Shankar (eds)

Chang et al's "lyrical exploration of place and time" was compiled in the hope that "words, not weapons [could] define our civilisation". It is with this in mind that they suggest a Language for a New Century. They tackle with Edward Said's propose "occidental/oriental" dyad from his post-colonial theoretical text "Orientalism", by providing poetry over 60 different countries and cultures, celebrating difference in a culturally aware fashion. It is the ultimate goal of the text as a collection to celebrate and not shy away from otherness, and yet scrutiny of the poetry individually yields a more anxious outlook. Ha Jin's Homework for example ostensibly shows a child, pen in hand, creating a "pear shaped island". However, it becomes abundantly unclear as

to who is creating this land. The creator of the drawing oscillates between the boy as “he paints”, “he draws” and “he crayons”, and the natural landscape itself: “a land is unfolding”, “a blue bay opens”, “and “a plain extends”. This passive voice alters the reader to a more sinister element of the poem, that landscape, especially that of the “natal space” proposed by Mehrotra, is influenced by past experiences of humanity even as the environment struggles for dominance. The differences between the needs of the land are ignored by the presence of humanity “imposing timelines” and “rattling nukes”.

This notion is furthered by Mehrotra’s poem The World’s a Printing House as he struggles “to be true to” the “mountain in [his] mind”. His distortion of the “inverse peak”, created by the diminishing syllables in each line of the stanza, fails to provide what the landscape requires of him. Anxiety pervades this poem, as each monosyllabic line of each stanza falls away into nothingness, dispersing into a “cone of light”. The differences humanity impose upon the natural environment is shown to be a major source of anxiety throughout the anthology.

Differences between culture within one person is also highlighted as a source of concern for “the Middle East, Asia and Beyond”, especially within the “parsed into colours” section. Nathalie Handal’s introduction tells of her belief that the poems within this section celebrate the feeling of “unified utterances” against the voices of the “Western media”. However, thematically, this section tells of “the devastation of Exile, of the unwillingness to “think of [oneself] as hyphenated”, as is the case with Two Voices. Der-Hovanessian mainly unanswered questions come from the unwillingness to be “parsed into colours”, and yet separates herself from the image of “a New England lady”, declaring that her “blood/speaks in Armenian”, showing her preferences between her “Armenian... or... American” background. The Indian-American poet and editor Ravi Shankar portrays the anxiety of choosing between one’s own split culture, especially when it falls on either side of the oriental/occidental dyad. “The smell of camphor and meatloaf equally repel” Shankar, as he becomes unable to escape the torture of being mixed race, sitting “towel head”, “dot boy” and “camel jockey” as a tricolour of “imprecise” abuse hurled at him from half of his own heritage. The identification of oneself as both sides of the same coin effect the views and attitudes of the coloniser and the colonised alike.

It is ultimately the viewpoint of Chang et al. that otherness is worthy of celebration, Language for a New Century’s existence is proof enough of this, however the poets of this anthology almost unanimously disagree, their poems borne of the anxiety of being nominalised as “the East”. A Child Who Returned From There Told Us displays this in the most vivid form. The personification of genocide, “Anfal”, is representative of Western ideals within “modern media” outlined by the preface of this anthology. First, the West attempts to “separate toddlers from their babble”, “steal the “goodmornings” and “tear the letters”, or in other words, silence the East of their native tongue. Next, the West “separated wood from stone”, “strangled the wheat stalks” and “swallowed two green villages”, affecting the environmental pastoral elements of the land. Finally, the West listens, to the East’s “heartbeats as they are dying”. After affecting such grotesque, and abject change upon the East, the West vanishes, leaving behind the destruction and foreign elements of its own culture. Ping Kwan’s Postcards of Old Hong Kong echoes these notions, as the narrator “flips over in disgust” the “sepia toned”, erotised and Westernised view of their country of origin. Wracked with anxiety, the narrator struggles to find a picture removed from “the gaudy pictures of/ exotica”. It is this phrase which highlights best the view of the East through the lens of the West, that, just as “exotic” lies upon a separate line within the poem, so too does the violent effects of the west lie removed from their responsibility. “Gaudy pictures” of the East are all that remains after the West have completed their conquest, and it is this that the poems of Language for a New Century refuse to celebrate.

Section B samples

Sample 5

Nominated text: *Ariel*, Sylvia Plath

Amidst a collection of incantatory poems, the views of ephemeral existence and eternal forces collide, as Plath evokes an imaginative awareness of human experience. Through an exploration of internal contradictions and conflicted self-identities, Plath uniquely delves into inner torment and the search for the “delighting” beauties within a life that has an inevitable “end”. These endeavours to transcend the unknowability of existence and partially escape from societal bonds are illuminated, as various dichotomies are affirmed, boundaries are dissolved and the preoccupation with the self is simultaneously rendered transient through the lyrical flights of language.

Plath’s evocation of societal expectations frames a contemplation of entrapment. Through the repetition of the words “rubber...rubber” and “empty?... empty”, reinforced through the evocation of the “waterproof shatterproof, proof” that echoes the “bombs” in the following line within the ‘Applicant’, Plath conveys the notion of entrapment, whereby the repetition of the language forms an unbreakable barrier that cannot be penetrated. This is further emphasised through the striking, final line – the repetition of “will you marry it, marry it, marry it”, the line of ‘it’ portraying a central theme of the objectification of women. Moreover, Plath’s evasion of the confines of convention, namely the exclusion of a question mark at the end of the sentence, transforms the phrase into a statement, whereby the bridal figure is trapped, without question. Plath depicts that the “living doll” was “naked as paper to start”, portraying the recurring notion of the self deprecation which echoes throughout her poetry – whereby the speaker views herself as the ‘shadow’ of thin and tenuous “cut paper”, reflecting the “effacement” of her self identity. However, Plath then goes on to describe how the value of the woman will rise during the years of marriage, whereby in “twenty-five years” she will be “silver” and in “fifty, gold” – delving into an exploration of women as commodities. This is further illuminated through the exploitation of women’s tears to make “new stock from the salt”, the sibilance emphasising women to be “intolerable, without mind” – as conveyed in Plath’s ‘Munich Mannequins’. Plath evokes critical contemplation of women being dismembered; atomised into nothing but “salt” and domesticated beings that can “cook” and “sew”. Thus, Plath portrays an indictment of a culture that requires a specific “sort of person” to please the “peanut-crunching crowd”.

Plath continues this notion to portray a sense of isolation, licensing internal conflict. Plath’s evocation of an environment that is “cold and planetary” conveys an awareness of the eternal cosmos in contrast to the transience of her “mind”, illustrating the realisation of human loss as definite. Moreover, the psychological state of this “mind” is reflected in the landscape, replete with “spirituous mists”, the sibilance underscoring the “Gothic” surroundings, further evoking a sense of foreboding. Plath then goes on to describe the speaker’s relationship with nature, whereby the “grasses unload their griefs”, the alliteration imposing the notion of a constant burden of suffering and “despair”. Plath ends the first stanza of the ‘Moon and the Yew Tree’ by stating that the speaker “simply cannot see where to get to” – the line break emphasising the loss of direction. Further, the additional line of “space to cross” also allows for the speaker to consider the meaningful associations of the “moon and the Yew tree” as possible aids in navigation. Plath begins the contemplation of the moon as an aperture, but immediately concludes that the “moon is no door”. Moreover, when the speaker’s “eyes lift after” the yew tree, they “find the moon”, implicating an association between the two. Thus, if the “moon is my mother”, the yew tree, by extension, may symbolise a paternal figure. Plath collapses the archetypal notion of maternal “tenderness”, stating that the moon is “not sweet”, further conveying a sense of isolation. Further, Plath states that the speaker has “fallen a long way”, illustrating the literal progression of the poem to the final stanza. However, when intertwined with the descriptions of the “church, the saints”, it could be inferred that Plath is also conveying the fall of mankind, whose values have allowed for the sense of detachment that the speaker feels. Plath does offer a sense of positivity, stating that the “clouds are flowering”. However, they are “flowering..., over the face of the stars”, whereby the stars could symbolise a path of

direction, further portraying a loss of self. Finally, the “message” of the paternal figure, the yew tree, is “blackness and silence”, symbolising the recurring notion of an inability to communicate, the “telephone is off at the root” in ‘Daddy’, whereby the speaker is detached from her origins – her ‘root[s]’ due to the phones that are “glittering” radio static. Thus, Plath concludes with “and silence”, rendering ‘silence’ eminently visible – offering no reductive resolution through a rise in language.

Through an exploration of the potential of children, Plath conveys the contrast of innocence and adulthood. Plath states that the “Balloons” of the title are “oval soul-animals”, reflecting the unique imagination of a child, further illuminated through the “yellow cathead, blue fish”. Moreover, the enjambment across the stanza divide of the “queer moons ... instead of dead furniture!”, allows for the contrasted portrayal of the innocence and purity of childhood, to that of the responsibilities of adulthood, reinforced through the alliteration of the “white walls” – their bleakness in direct conflict with the child’s colour palette of “red, green, delighting”. However, the balloons are transitory in nature, as they will soon “pop” and “then...rest”, conveying a microcosm of the temporal existence that is mortality. This is further illustrated through the “starry metals”, illustrating the presence of the astronomical lexis that is infused within Plath’s poetry. Plath states that the child will see “a funny pink world”, portraying the rose coloured glasses of absolute novelty and the limitless potential that children and poetry can have – a “clean slate with your own face on it”. However, the world then turns “clear as water”, indicating the transparency of the suffering in the world, illustrated through the “red/shred” in the intensification from “pink” to “red” epitomising the very duality within Plath’s poetry in which suffering and creativity are inextricably intertwined; the “blood jet is poetry”, implicating pain as a catalyst for meaning. Thus, Plath evokes that amongst the “dark crime”, there will always be possibility for “blessing[s]”, constituting the essence of her poetry.

Plath’s poetry offers a courageous truth that elucidates the plight of those attempting to understand the ambivalence of the human experience. Through illuminating the contemplation of identities and the confines of convention, Plath ultimately creates a raw depiction of experience – encapsulating and employing the mechanism of literature to depict the transiency of humanity amongst the timeless capacity of the elements.

Sample 6

Nominated text: Selected Poems – Robert Browning

In ‘Two in the Campagna’, ‘Toccata of Galuppi’s’ and ‘My last Duchess’, Browning depicts man’s weary attempts to seize the unattainable. By adhering to the traditional forms of poetry, Browning deplores the limitations that restrict mankind in reaching the transcendental heights of desire. Whether it be immortality or freedom from emasculation, the highly confined poetic form entraps the speakers in a constant state of ‘yearning’. Speakers of both ‘Two in the campagna’ and ‘Toccata of Galuppi’s’ wish to transcend the barriers of their physical embodiment and delay the impending fate of ‘dust and ashes’ only to realise that their desires can never find permanence in the mortal realm. Restrictions are further expressed in ‘My Last Duchess’ whereby the Duke’s submission to the metric patterns of iambic pentameter and rhyme renders his desires of liberty unattainable.

Against the expensive backdrop of time, the speaker in ‘Two in the campagna’ wishes to exist in constant climax with his lover only to ‘learn’ that his ‘finite heart’ cannot transcend the ephemeral moment. The romantic sibilants of ‘soul’s springs’, ‘fleece’ and ‘kiss’ illicit the tender compassion between both lovers wishing to connect physically and spiritually ‘through the land’. However, the pure transient name of time as a ‘wash of air’ and its imperishable vigour against manmade constructs such as ‘brickwork’s cleft’ and ‘old tomb’s ruin’, posits man’s inability to ever preserve time, subject to the confines of the physical realm. Soft gossamer imagery of ‘fennel’, ‘thread’ and ‘thistle ball’ emphasize the ephemeral nature of time that men are unable to ‘hold’ onto. The poetic form, framed with a highly structured rhyming pattern and scored with a perpetual trochaic octameter, reveal the speaker’s mortal attempt to seize control over language, keeping it ordered and refined at his will. However, the lyrical paradigms are

disrupted by irregularities in punctuation that create dissonance and disrupt the melodic harmony of the poem thereby betraying the inconsistencies in nature as it runs amok. The discordances by erratic exclamations of 'Hold it still!' and disjointed expressions of 'catch your soul's warmth, - I pluck the rose,' only grounds the speaker more finitely to the corporeal realm whereby physical limits preclude the possibility for two bodies to merge at constant intensity. As the speaker surrenders fluid expressions, he resorts to the visceral metaphors of 'eyes' and 'heart', highlighting his inability to dissociate himself from the corporeal. His desire to preserve the moment is ultimately transgressive and goes beyond the bounds of his existence which is brief, relative to 'such lengths of hours' of nature. As the 'good minute' goes, the speaker's desire is compromised by the 'pain[ful]' reality of his physicality where he can only 'touch' a thought before it 'wefts away'.

Unlike the mortal dismay of 'Two in the Campagna', 'Toccata of Galuppi's' echos a deeper suffering in 'some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well undone'. In 'Toccata of Galuppi', Browning unearths the despairing fate of human existence in 'dust and ashes' through the temporary suspension of time in escapist art. As the speaker listens to Gallupi's performance, he is 'very sad' to realise the ephemeral nature of his existence as the music evokes questions of 'Must we die?', triggering an onset of anxiety expressed in the precipitous exclamations of 'heavy mind!' and 'find!' at the end of each line. However as the music persists, the speaker's urgency and apprehensions transpire as he envisions the streets of England. Browning follows the Keatsian structure whereby the speaker, so possessed by art, is transported to a metaphorical excursion. Like the speaker of 'Ode of a Grecian Urn', the listener conjures languid fantasy where he imagines lovers bearing masks, attending balls during midnight. Following the melancholic 'suspensions' and 'sixth diminished' notes, Gallupi's 'commiserating sevenths' provides the listener with a momentary release from mortal trappings. As the piece approaches its climax with exclamations and a cry of 'we can but try', the truth of mortality is divulged in the fragmented poetic form and dark imagery of death and decay that opposes the beauty of music. The n-dashes in 'were you happy? – 'yes' – and are you still happy? – 'yes!' break the lyricism and the legato performance of the legato, revealing the return to the present moment, away from the fantastical realm. The speaker returns to confront the reality of man kind to only 'bloom and drop' before being 'dead and done'. The lugging 'd' sounds emphasizes the speaker's earthbound existence and here highlights his eternal bond to the natural cycle of life. Continued discordances by irregularities in punctuation of '- you'll not die, it cannot be!' outlines a setting of chaos that emphasises the struggles of life where the truth of unattainable immortality begins to settle. Browning posits that while it may bring solace in the moment, and cannot delay mankind from its inevitable collapse. Initially lulled by the promise of 'immortality', the speaker comes to realise the limitations of out as Galuppi's resolved chords, 'octaves' and escapist sensibility proves unable to stop the incessant march of time. His desires to exist in the fantasy world forever is unrealistic as even Gallup's song is unable to mute the impending fate of 'death' upon corporeal beings.

Within the sinister rhetoric of the Duke looking at the painted selpechure of his last duchess, Browning expounds in the immortality achieved in art though use of present tense to depict the duchess as she 'look(s) and stand(s)', subverting all mortal powers. From the very outset of 'My Last Duchess', the duke's eloquent cadence and relaxed composure serves to conceal his masculine insecurities borne from his last wife's infidelity. The tense metric patterns of an iambic pentameter and structured AABB rhyming pattern is submerged within a prose-like conversational dialogue through the use of enjambment: 'looking as if she were alive. I call/That piece a wonder, now: Fra 'Pandolf's hands.' The loose cadence conflicts with the highly structured poetic verse, revealing the Duke's constant regulation of his speech in order to retain masculine authority and elevate his power. However, the awareness betrays his innate fear over loss of power, a feeling triggered by the silent presence of the Duchess who exerts an emasculating force. The seductive sibilants of 'depth and passion of that earnest glance' evokes the Duchess's feminine sensuality whilst also echoing the Duke's seething frustrations. The condemnation in her heart 'too soon made glad' with its harsh consonants emphasizes the Duke's anger and insecurity. His desire to liberate himself from the shackles of emasculation is expressed in the 'curtain' he draws over the Duchess. However, in preserving her physicality, frozen in time by the brushstrokes of Fra Pandolf, her emasculating pressure is ironically

rendered eternal. Thus the Duke acquaints his listener with a painting of his 'last duchess' who 'is' rather than a memory of a girl who 'was'. Not subjected to the confines of the mortal world, the Duchess transcends the passing of time and evades confinement; instead, imprisoning the Duke with her 'spot of joy'. The Duke's inferior state of being is highlighted in his failure to maintain meticulous control over language, thereby emphasizing his oppression by the forms of poetry and by the Duchess herself. The discordances in his language by an array of hyphens, commas and exclamations appear as he begins describing the Duchess's adulterous endeavours: '(She) thanked men, -good! but thanked/somehow – I know not how". This renders his powerlessness against language and fluid expression. Further, the consistent meter and rhyme throughout the monologue reveal the Duke's inability to ever reach the liberation, subject to the fixed traditions of poetry. Thus, Browning posits that it is ultimately these rigid linguistic limitations that deconstruct the Duke's artificial facade of importance, leaving behind the remnants of emasculation. The Duchess in the immortal state of being incarcerates the Duke's physical existence, making him the 'official fool' to his own monologue.

Ultimately across his 'Selected Poems', Browning draws and extends from the ideas of John Keats whose works such as 'ode of a Grecian urn' echo the same mortal limitations Browning wishes to expose. Under the confines of the physical world of 'infinite passions', both poets lament man's desire to permanently transcend into the fantasy world of fulfillment and security found in art. The Speakers of 'Two in the Campagna' and 'Tocata of Galuppi's' echo the strains of their existence under the oppressive nature of traditional poetic verse. 'My last Duchess' expands these restrictions through the upholding of metric patterns which reveal mankind's tethered bond to order. Through those oppressive restrictions Browning implies his own sense of imprisonment within Victorian society where the poet himself is unable to diverge from the traditions of meter and rhyme.

Sample 7

Nominated text: *A Room of One's Own* – Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf's seminal literary work 'A Room of One's Own' is in its essence an examination of the ideal economic conditions for the creation of works of fiction for women; her thesis being that all a woman needs is 'five hundred pounds and a room of one's own'. However, on a more complex level, the essay is a discussion of the historical impediments that have barred women entry into the literary canon and attaining intellectual and creative freedom. In it, Woolf first masters and then subverts the traditionally masculine forms of classical rhetoric, essay writing and lecturing, using a more feminist or modernist stream-of-consciousness writing style in order to gently persuade her reader. With her creation of A Room of One's Own, Woolf attempts to 'capture the freedom of the soul', just as the work of Montaigne did, an essayist Woolf greatly admired.

The first passage, situated in towards the beginning of the essay, discusses the impediments faced by women in history in order to be acknowledged for their works of literature. Here, Gaskell opens with "it was a woman", paying tribute to the history of women that have been ignored by men. As discussed earlier in the essay, Woolf calls into question the history of works of fiction and questions the validity of history being written by men. Woolf seemingly merges fact and fiction with the inclusion of "Shakespeare's sister". There, Woolf alludes to the impediments she would have faced in the "sixteenth century" and how her world would have been "twisted and deformed" in the patriarchal society. The inferior status of women in history is discussed as when living in the nineteenth century, women still "veiled themselves by using the name of a man", as they were "victims of inner strife". The allusion of 'Judith Shakespeare' ending "her days in some lonely cottage" is again referenced at the end of the essay when Woolf mentions 'Elephant and the Castle' a tribute to perhaps 'Catherine of Aragon'; a woman whose life was thwarted and dictated by men. In this opening passage, Woolf highlights the desire of "truth". Rather than merely handing over the "nugget of truth", which the masculine classical rhetoric seemingly does, Woolf takes us on journey to find the "essential oil of truth" in her more modernist stream-of-consciousness. As this first passage discusses the historical impediments faced by women, the second passage discusses the paucity of women in the literary canon.

The second passage, found in Chapter Four of Woolf's essay, discusses the inferior status of women compared the men in the literary canon. The meandering sentences hinged together by semicolons and dashes is evident in the passage, and indexed throughout the whole essay. It merges Woolf's thoughts together and her thought processes resembles a quest or a journey around London. This is exemplified as Woolf details the ways in which women were "dictated by men." Here Gaskell alludes to the paucity of women in the literary canon as she suggests the "values of women differ from the values which have been made by the other sex". Woolf presents the influential writers of the nineteenth century, "Jane Austen" and "Emily Brontë," who subverted the traditionally masculine form of rhetoric and "wrote as women write, not like men write." Much in the same way, Woolf aims to do throughout her essay as she subverts the masculine classical rhetoric and presents her own uniquely feminine writing style. The subversion of masculinity is made evident with Woolf's reference to "anger". Rather than adopting the aggressive didactic tone of men, Woolf contains herself in her writing and "aggressive" notions only enter her modernist stream-of-consciousness when "protesting that she was as good a man". The paucity of women is again exemplified through Woolf's use of an "orchard" conceit there, Woolf makes evident that through time women "altered [their] values in deference to the opinion of others", elucidating the patriarchal view that women need to change. The repeated use of 'but' evident in this passage and throughout the entirety of Woolf's essay, calls into question what has gone before, opening the possibility of multiple perspectives of dialogue. It signals to the reader that the essay will not proceed directly, but circle around and rethink its point in order to arrive at a complex truth. In this second passage Woolf deals with the great influence writers such as Emily Brontë and Jane Austen made in the world of literature.

The third and final passage is taken from the 'peroration' situated in chapter six and sees Woolf shedding of the collective narrative voice of 'Mary Beton, Mary Seton [and] Mary Carmichael', and instead return to her own narrative voice. Again Woolf stresses the importance of "money and a room of one's own", however justifies this with the explanation that "women have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry". The need for the material requirements in order to combat intellectual and creative freedom, is what Woolf is alluding to here as she suggests "intellectual freedom depends upon material things." In an inspirational ending or call to arms for the young women in the audience at Fernham to "write all kinds of books", Woolf educates them on the fight for rights of women. She suggests in this final passage that it would be an "injustice" if one did not recognise the work of "Sappho,...Lady Murasaki,...Emily Brontë". The mention of "Florence Nightingale" in which "the European heir...opened the doors to the average women" acknowledges the history of women's writing, and the impediments women faced in order to achieve the recognition they deserved. This final passage registers hope in the young girls at Fernham "to go out and write".

A Room of One's Own can be seen as a vivid polemic and criticises the history of a male-dominated world of literature. In it, Woolf both pioneers a modernist style of rhetoric and creates her own uniquely feminine style of writing 'shaping a sentence' much in the same way she says in the essay Jane Austen did. Woolf's repeated stress that in order to write well and freely women need, "five hundred pounds a year and a room of one's own", which the essay has been known for. However it is not the materialistic necessities which forms the basis of her essay, but Woolf's complex analysis and identification of the impediments women faced by the 'patriarchs and professors', which has earned its place as being one of the most influential texts of the twentieth century.

Sample 8

Nominated text: *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* – Samuel Wagan Watson

Aboriginal Australian 'Murri' poet Samuel Wagan Watson explores Aboriginal spirituality and connection the land, and how this is damaged by the invasive influence of colonial culture across his anthology, *Smoke Encrypted Whispers*, further developing a discourse between the ancestral and the contemporary.

Watson demonstrates a "hybridised imagination" (Bode) in his introspective poem 'for the wake and skeleton dance', with the oxymoronic "dreamtime Dostoyevskys" representing a fusion of Indigenous lore with Western influence. The violent imagery of "blood drenched sands" condemns colonial invasion and its destruction of once sacred land, reiterated in the metaphor of imposed Christianity "infecting the dreamtime with the ghosts of a million lost entities". Watson's plosive 't's and 'd's here accentuate his resentful and accusatory tone as he denounces the savage oppression of Aboriginality which characterises Australia's history and reality. In 'we're not truckin' around', Watson's authorial voice develops from the tentative pondering of "better to forget?" to an assured defiance against western suppression of Indigenous culture. The "Invader" is personified as an "inventive/blindfolded" truck driver, developing the motif throughout the anthology of the road as symbolic of aggressive and destructive colonial invasion. Watson's metaphor describes it as a "bitumen vine of wandering impetus" emphasising the sinister mature of its forever "encroaching" suppression of Aboriginality as it "drove straight through the bora ring" of complex Indigenous culture and understanding of the land. The italicised, stand alone line "– where'd ya get ya license!" establishes Watson's denunciatory tone as he condemns the careless and unfounded destruction of Indigenous Australian land and culture. Culmination in his "textual postcard" 'smoke signals', Watson employs a further matured poetic voice an encompassing atmosphere to explore how Australia's violent history effects current reality, and how it will echo through to its future. The spiritual, entwining imagery of "a brown snake-coiled river" remains as a contrast to the change occurring around it as a result of colonial invasion. The consonance of "construction cranes", repeated twice in the poem, adds aggression to the condemnation of colonial violation of the land, with "smoke" equivocally representing pollution and the suffocating colonial presence whilst also alluding to its spiritual significance in Indigenous Australian traditional ceremonies. The concluding haiku – its philosophical nature demonstrating Watson's enlightened, wisened voice – foreshadows a dystopian future where "highrises dictate" "the sky", exposing the ultimate effect of colonial influence as all – encompassing, forever eliminating the sacred spirituality of the land.

Watson's fusion of the ancestral and contemporary is established in 'for the wake and skeleton dance', wherein the "night creatures" of Australia's history begin to feel the metaphorical "pinch/of western rationality" which threatens ancestral customs. Watson describes the "dwindling souls" of an Aboriginal past as "fenced in" by the contemporary destructive influence of "assimilation". This is developed in 'we're not truckin' around' as Watson proffers insight into the experience of being denied one's ancestral culture and identity, but marginalised to the fringes of the contemporary dominant culture. Watson's sibilance communicates the insidious evil of the colonial culture "forcing us to stand out on the shoulder of the road", subjected to "the fringes of the big road" symbolic of the margins of society. This notion of marginalisation introduced in the earlier poem "white stucco dreaming", is furthered with the metaphor of colonialism "(knocking) our phone off the hook/forever", the dropped line emphasising the irreparable impact of being permanently discarded from one's historical culture and the core of the imposed, contemporary one. Finally in "smoke signals", Watson oscillates between a nostalgic mood of an ignorant childhood, with naïve imaginings of "the Lucky Country", italicised to emphasise his sardonic tone as he now reflects with a mature, contemporary viewpoint, and resentful awareness of the inevitable degradation of Australian land and culture. His understanding is exemplified in the declaration "I came to recognise the segregation of Smoke" and the littering of "black" and "white" throughout the poem to indicate the continued racial separation in society preventing Indigenous Australians from being admitted to the core of dominant Australian culture.

Thus with a maturing poetic voice, Watson discusses the damaging impact of colonial invasion on Aboriginal spirituality and connection to the land, developed in the discourse between ancestral and contemporary viewpoints, which gives insight into the marginalisation experienced by the narrator as an Indigenous person, denied his historical culture and the culture of his contemporary time.