



## GENERAL COMMENTS

In the 2013 Literature examination, there was again a pleasing number of outstanding responses. These were defined by excellent expression, detailed and appropriate use of the passages and an individual perspective on the texts. Students engaged fully with the passages, showing both how meaning is created and the depth of meaning attained. There was a sense of the students having enjoyed their engagement with the text. There were few very poor or incomplete papers.

The study of Literature requires the student to focus on **how** a text is created. This involves a detailed analysis of the language. The less competent responses were those where the student selected from the passages to illustrate a point about a character or 'theme', rather than analysing the passage in detail. There was a reliance on description and a summary of the narrative rather than analysis.

The following excerpts are from student responses that were assessed at a very high level and that demonstrated an ability to work with the language of the passage(s).

*The power of the tigers is further emphasised by Rich as the bright 'p' sounds of 'prance' 'topaz' and 'pace' engulf the stanza in power, the sound cutting through the fear of centuries of female oppression...These vibrant and proud consonants are replaced instead in the next stanza by the tremulous cadence of 'fingers fluttering through wool', the timidity of the 'f' sound creating an aura of fragility surrounding Aunt Jennifer.*

*In 'Memory', while the speaker's now fervent desire to repudiate any sense of a desire for love is implicit in the words 'broke', 'blow' and 'crushed in my deep heart', Rossetti's repeated use of the word 'alone' throughout the poem actually elevates the speaker's yearning for love.*

*Pentheus's dialogue is stabbed with violent imagery and threats, 'punish' 'sacrificed' 'an onslaught on these maniacs' and militaristic references to 'shields', 'twanging bows' and 'fast horses' which paint him as a ruthless, inexperienced and brash ruler.*

*This Cleopatra is almost incorporeal, a breathing, subtle, deliciously synaesthetic sensory impression. Her magnetic personality here provides an explanation for Caesar's description of Antony as emasculated, even at Antony and Cleopatra's first meeting he is 'barbered three times o'er'. Cleopatra is entrancing, enough to make the 'winds lovesick'... Here we have Cleopatra's very being delicately traced and masterfully delineated. She herself, not just 'the strange invisible perfume' that accompanies her, is exotic and enticing, at once unknowable and essentially graceful.*

*Rich's employment of contrasting imagery throughout her poetry serves to demonstrate the absence of cohesion between nature and male-derived constructs, hence exposing woman's allegiance to the organic. Through the use of gentle verbs 'swaying' 'curving' and 'circling' Rich suggests the fluidity of the ocean itself thus her employment of form sees the poem replicate the aqueous realm in which it is set, its alternating long and short lines much like the ebb and flow of the oceanic current.*

Some students offered introductions that largely ignored the passages or led to a very restricted discussion. The best introductions were those that implied a perceptive understanding of the text and its concerns, and that allowed for some discussion of the views and values of the text. These responses were able to lay the groundwork for the interpretation that the student intended to develop from the passages. Other students started their response by addressing one of the passages and subsequently developing the interpretation. The weaker responses outlined a number of 'themes' and drew on the passages, often very superficially, to illustrate them. Such an approach did not allow for a focus on language or for any detailed analysis.

The following are introductions from excellent responses that were able to address a range of criteria in a perceptive way.

*The past exists within us, not behind us. The memory of the 'massive weight of Uncle's wedding band', of the gutting of villages, of the 'stress' that we all bear, remains within us and, for Adrienne Rich, this should be acknowledged. In a world filled with destruction and silent suffering and weighed down by oppression it is the 'dissident story' that will break this cycle of corruption and despair.*

*The reader is betrayed by Ian Mc Ewan's novel. The confirmation of BT, the novel's omniscient, yet ultimately unreliable narrator, at the end of part three and into the metanarrative of 'London 1999', much like the identification of Marsall as the rapist in passage three, forces the reader to reconsider what he has just read. This highlights the text's factitious nature and the*



*constructed nature of novels and fiction in general, McEwan using the very form he is criticising to challenge the reader's own literary impulses.*

*In his genre-defying non-fiction novel 'In Cold Blood', Truman Capote compiles a provocative and compelling investigation of the murder of the Clutter family in 1950s Kansas. Capote challenges societal beliefs by chronicling the bafflingly 'cold blooded' murders, not motivated by a personal vendetta but resulting haphazardly from marginalisation and mental illness that are agonisingly misapprehended.*

*In 'Mrs Dalloway' Woolf evokes a visceral and vibrant recreation of the power of 'time' to overcome the isolation and alienation felt by humanity, ultimately celebrating the power of moments, of memories, to unite the tenuous and disparate fragments of human consciousness, uniting and celebrating their vast diversity. Within the novel, the role of the clocks takes on the utmost importance. The tolling of the clocks is a constant reminder to the reader of the present moment, as the clocks toll 'hard' 'imperishable' 'flooding the room with a melancholy wave', the 'leaden circles dissolving in the air'.*

*The exclamation of Wentworth at the opening of passage three- 'the match' directs the reader to see the directness of his character, as Austen portrays the final reconciliation of the protagonists. The epithet 'horrible eligibilities' depicts the ironic situation of the past, with the necessity for socially approved match-making overwhelming the deeper need for a spiritual connection between the characters.*

*Many of the adjectives used by McEwan, or indeed the older writer Briony, in describing Briony's surroundings in passage one can be used to describe the young girl herself, 'orderly' 'straight-laced' and 'poised'.*

*'The Bacchae' tears away the veil of human rationale to expose a bleak reality in which man is made subservient to the Gods. Euripides demonstrates man's inevitable inner conflict that lies in the simultaneous compulsions both to maintain control through logic and to succumb to the reverie of worship, with the inability to reconcile such conflict catalysing one's demise.*

*Throughout 'The Tempest' many characters strive for power, be it through 'open-eyed conspiracy' or 'high charms'. Invariably, the latter is more successful and magic defeats political intrigue at every turn, which makes Prospero's decision to renounce magic, 'break his staff' and 'drown his book' all the more intriguing.*

The best responses were those that showed how the text endorsed and reflected the views and values of the writer and were able to weave an understanding of these through the essay. Too often, the student added a few lines at the conclusion of the essay to indicate the writer's concerns but this was, at best, very superficial. The following are examples of students completing this task very well.

*When contrasted with the stark, blunt tone of Caesar throughout the play 'You may see, Lepidus, and henceforth know...' the richness of Shakespeare's poetry with regard to his 'couple so famous' denotes how the playwright himself ultimately values the heroic age to which his protagonists belong over the machinations of the rising imperial Rome.*

*It is the word 'natural' here through which Mansfield crafts a sharp irony that invites us to rate Edna's obsession with her own performance.... It is this satiric impulse that also leaps to the fore through the image of Edna, 'clasping the black book in her fingers as though it were a missal'...the poignant economy of Mansfield's characteristic style explores her views on the fragility of the human condition.*

*Less insidious, but more overtly targeted by Blake, is the idea of possession. The possession of people and of emotion, in the case of Theotormon the obsessive possession of jealousy, are all an anathema to Blake. These are slights on God's creation, for 'all that lives is holy'.*

*'In Cold Blood' provides a challenging exploration of the value placed on human life. The seemingly pointless murders undermine every concept of morality that reigns in Middle America, the 'Bible Belt', as well as the wider community. Capote insinuates his personal abhorrence of the death penalty and the disregard of mental illness in the justice system.*

The more able students demonstrated an ability to write complex and perceptive responses. This was illustrated in the use of sophisticated and expressive language, the depth of the analysis, the lively and personal engagement with the language of the passages, and the appreciation of the wider text and its construction and values. The following example is the conclusion from a response that demonstrates many of these qualities.

*Ultimately, it is myopic to seek to understand 'Beowulf' solely through the mythologised or didactic methods. Only by utilising both approaches synergistically is it possible to gain a truly deep and rich understanding of the poem and of the complex relationship of its concerns with both society and the archetypes of myth and story.*



Competent students were able to move comfortably within and between the passages, perhaps comparing or contrasting the use of language or their concerns, or showing how a character had been developed. The less able students tended to see the passages as discrete entities, and many wrote what were, in effect, three mini-essays. These responses tended to adopt a narrative approach or be overly concerned with ‘themes’. They were often far too short to develop any sort of interpretation.

Many students continue to make historical and factual errors, such as: Brontë wrote in Elizabethan times, Eliot converted to Christianity, Lady Bruton had a glass eye and Cleopatra sailed into Rome on her barge. There was also sometimes a lack of appreciation of the form of the text. Short stories were described as novels, as were plays, and there was often little real understanding of how poetry is constructed. Poor expression continues to make it difficult for some students to convey their ideas coherently and effectively. Words such as ‘encapsulates’ and ‘juxtaposition’ were often misused.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

**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 errors resulting in a total less than 100%.

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	1	2	3	4	6	8	11	12	14	11	10	7	5	3	1	13.3

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	1	1	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	11	12	12	10	9	6	5	2	1	12.7

## Novels

The most popular texts in this section were *Atonement*, *Jane Eyre* and *Persuasion*. There were some excellent responses on all three texts, but there was still some confusion about the construction of *Atonement*. Most students concentrated on the first passage. There was some good use of language, particularly in the attempt to understand and develop Briony’s character from her arrangement of her toys in her nursery and her delight in writing. The *Jane Eyre* responses tended to concentrate on a narrative approach. In some cases, students could have better used the passages and the imagery that underpinned them. Many students wrote at length about religion, while others offered a feminist interpretation of the text. When writing on *Persuasion* some students did not analyse the language in any real depth and little attention was paid to the considerable alteration of Wentworth’s financial, and therefore social, standing. The most successful answers were able to explore Anne’s feelings and growing self-assuredness very well. The responses to *Mrs Dalloway* were in most cases particularly good. This would seem to be a challenging text but many students were able to work closely with the passages and offer a real understanding of the text’s concerns. There were fewer than one hundred responses on each of the other novel texts, but they were often competently handled.

## Plays

Students were often able to demonstrate a sense of engagement with texts from this part of the course. Both the Shakespeare plays were very popular, as was *The Bacchae*. Students responded to the language in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and even the less able students were able to write enthusiastically about the barge scene in passage two. Students would be well advised not to use Greek terms when discussing *The Bacchae* unless they are confident in their ability to use them correctly. This was a common failing and lead to unrealistic claims. Many students wrote well on *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* There were some excellent responses on *The Freedom of the City*, which seemed to enable the students to consider the play as a play, which was often missing in essays on the other play texts. The following excerpt shows a student doing this very well.

*In passage one, as the audience peer through the ‘cold blue’ gloom, the difficulty of discerning the truth is implicitly suggested. The stage is in darkness, it is only illuminated by the brief ‘flash’ of the photographer’s camera. Each time the stage lights up, the audience experiences a fleeting moment of insight into the three ‘bodies’ which lie’ grotesquely across the front of the stage.... After a silence is established ‘the wail of an ambulance’ builds dramatic tension.*



There were a number of responses on *Two Brothers* but students, in general, found it difficult to analyse the language in any depth or to discuss the staging. They dealt better with the views endorsed by the text, but often only in a fairly superficial manner. There were many fewer responses on *No Sugar* and very few on *Arcadia*. Responses on *Arcadia* were generally very sophisticated and showed a good understanding of the play's concerns. Some of the essays on *No Sugar* commented on elements of the production, such as the difficulty in communicating in passage one, which could be related to the lack of understanding between the two cultures.

### **Short stories**

The most popular choice was *Collected Stories* by Peter Carey, and some of the responses showed a sound understanding of Carey's concerns and of the features of the text. Some students, however, offered only a short summary of each story and could not really engage with the sophisticated ideas. Both the Mansfield and Chekhov stories were chosen by more students than in previous years, and some were handled very well, particularly *Miss Brill* and *The Little Governess*. Students need to remember that this section asks them to comment on the collection and not just on the individual stories.

### **Other literature**

A very popular text this year was *In Cold Blood*. Students found much to comment on in the given passages and were able to discuss the views and context of the text effectively, although some discussed the American Dream at length. The more sophisticated responses looked at the position of the writer but also the way he was able to evoke sympathy for Perry while depicting the horror of the murders and their effect on the local people. *The Tall Man* was, in general, competently handled, but in many cases students needed to focus more on the passages. Some students considered the effect of the experience on Hooper herself, picking up on the last line of passage three, '*I wanted to leave Townsville as fast as I could*', showing how she had started her job as an objective writer but finally became deeply involved with the Doomadgee family, as evidenced by her relationship with, and admiration for, Elizabeth in passage three. Students wrote quite well on Orwell, but many effectively misread the first passage. The second and third passages offered the chance to look at the different styles of writing used by Orwell, but too many students wrote general essays on poverty that seemed too far removed from the passages. There were no responses this year on *Istanbul: Memories and the City*.

### **Poetry**

This is a popular section of the paper. It allows students to look more closely at the language of the poems and to explore their responses to them. Some of the works are very challenging and allow for a range of interpretations. As long as an interpretation is plausible and can be supported with close reference to the text, multiple interpretations are acceptable.

The poetry of Blake was a very popular choice this year. A wide range of abilities was demonstrated in the responses, and some of the very best papers were on these poems. The selected passages offered plenty of scope, and even weaker students were confident with the first and third passages. Students were able to develop an interpretation based on the passages and to discuss Blake's views and values. Some made appropriate references to other poems such as *Mary* and some of the other works from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Eliot's poetry was another popular choice, but students seemed to find it challenging in some cases. There was a sense that some students would have preferred to be writing about *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, and many chose to do so anyway. Few tackled *Burnt Norton*, despite the passage offering much scope for analysis. Often the essays lacked a clear sense of direction and a clearly developed interpretation. There were some excellent responses to *Beowulf*. Many students clearly enjoyed the opportunity to discuss the visual and aural aspects of the passages, and some of the responses were perceptive and quite complex. The poetry of Adrienne Rich was another very popular choice. There was a wide range of interpretations, especially of the second and third poems, some more plausible than others. *Aunt Jennifer's Tigers* gave students an opportunity to discuss the poetry and Rich's views. Students tended to focus on the first two sections of *Rusted Legacy* and largely ignored the personal voice in the later part of the poem. There were some excellent responses on the Rossetti poems. Some students needed to focus much more on the language and the different forms of the poems. Many students chose not to discuss the *Goblin Market*, despite the opportunity to discuss the richness of the imagery. Few students chose to write on the Porter poems, and most of those who did used only the first two passages. Some students were able to make apposite references to other poems that supported their interpretation and their discussion of Porter's views and values.



## Student responses

The following are samples of student responses. The first four meet all the criteria at a very high level, the next two at a high level and the remaining two at a medium level.

### Student example 1

**Nominated text:** *Mrs Dalloway* – Virginia Woolf

*In “Mrs Dalloway,” Virginia Woolf evokes an unreal and vibrant recreation of the power of “time” to overcome the isolation and alienation felt by humanity, ultimately celebrating the power of moments, of memories, to unite the tenuous and disparate fragments of human consciousness, uniting and celebrating their vast diversity.*

*Within the novel, the role of the clocks takes on an importance of the utmost calibre. The tolling of the clocks is pervasive, a constant reminder to the reader of the present moment, as the clocks toll, “hard, imperishable”, “flood[ing] the room with its melancholy wave,” the “leaden circles dissolving in air.” The clocks are an irrepressible force, inescapable, and as such connect all the characters – Rezia declares “it is time,” Clarissa marvels at “the hour - three already.” and even the anonymous “old lady” climbs the stairs to solitude amidst the “striking” of the clock. Thus, the clocks unite all characters, tethering them to the present, and yet such arbitrary notions of time also cast them forward, into the future, onwards as “with overpowering directness and dignity” the clock propels the characters into the future, and yet this propulsion is evidently cloying, unnatural, as the short sentences of “Peter Walsh was back. Mrs Marsham had written. Must she ask Ellie Henderson?” seemingly spurred on by the striking of the clocks reveals a meagreness, an inability of true expression of emotion to be achieved amidst the “leaden circles”, the overpowering heaviness of such an image destroying the delicateness of the tenderest of emotions, of thoughts, “the melancholy wave” “gathered itself to fall once more,” fall upon the intricacy of human emotion unable to be contained within “the hour.” This is demonstrated by Septimus, as Rezia’s adherence to linear time, her repeated asking of “the time, what is the time” acting as a jarring, an abrupt interruption, against the lyrical flow of Septimus’ prose. The tumbling, unravelling motion of Septimus’ language, of “a few moments, only a few moments more, of this relief of this joy, of this astonishing revelation” reveals a crescendo transcendent of the current moment, the sea of commas buoying the “moment” beyond the linear time’s bounds, and yet Rezia’s interruption grasps the “riches” Septimus is uncovering, and confines him within the realm of the present, as he states “I will tell you the time” very “slowly, very drowsily,” the ecstasy of revocation of linear time clouding his ability to revert back to the mere concept that “the quarter struck.” Thus, Woolf reveals the secondary sense of time perpetuated by the clocks – one that “splits its husk, poured its riches over him, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to time, an immortal ode.” The tolling of the clocks, the power of time, casts the reader, and the characters back into the past, into a realm where the constraints of linear time have no credence, and instead time is living, breathing, capable of “pouring their richness” and delivering an emotion “odd, incredible” - “nothing could be slow enough, nothing last too long.” As time paves the way for the recollection of memories, of emotions, a sense of triumph is felt – “no pleasure could equal” and yet the ecstasy, the joy inherent within such memories, is unable to escape the nature of linear time, as “she must go back. She must assemble,” the short sentences casting the reader back into the future, into responsibilities unavoidable yet devoid of meaning, and yet the lyrical, exclamatory prose is perpetuated by both Septimus and Clarissa, as the littering of commas, of hyphens, of exclamations throughout the passages crescendos, creates a vibrance in memory, in observation, albeit of a delusory sense, as Septimus sees “Evans himself.” Thus, Woolf creates a juxtaposition between the “forward trajectory of the characters into the future, yet these same notions of time cast them back into the lyrical landscape built by the fascinat[ion]” of “the triumphs of youth, the process of living.” Thus, despite the apparent insufficiency of time, of “let us sit down for five minutes” to deliver the potency and authenticity of emotion of “for ages they had sorrowed” “just as he always was.” Woolf celebrates, exalts, the uniting power of such notions. For, in spite of the internal discrepancy, the incompatibility of linear time with that of memory, it is this very discrepancy that creates an intensity, a richness, a “shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank”. This is revealed, as though often linear time is refined, constrained to short sentences, as “all the chairs were against the walls” and “they shut themselves up” at times it possesses a lyricism evocative of the deeper pools of memory, as the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him” carries the same fluency, the same subtle poignancy of Septimus lost in the throes of memory’s failings, as he “cries raising his hand, raising his hand like some colossal figure who has lamented”.*

*However, amidst this overflow, this excess of language, tumbling forth as time tumbles back, exists a silence, one vast world of meaning, existent in the realm of what is left unsaid, most distinctly demonstrated by Richard, whose arrival is seen as an interruption of the “melancholy wave” of time - something “distractingly, something fumbling, something scratching.” Thus Richard’s silence is perpetuated by the very fact that his actions create a soundscape of disturbance, thus amidst this disturbance, he is unable to express deeper meaning. For how can the awkward movements of a man, “holding out flowers” contain in words the emotions of what he wishes to convey. Thus, Woolf displays the innate human clinging to tangible objects to reveal intangible, nebulous, yet poignant and painstakingly vital emotions. “Roses, red and white roses” contain within their physicality all that Richard is unable to say – “he could not bring himself to say he loved her; not in so many words”. Yet “Clarissa understands, she understood, she understood without his speaking” the meaning contained in such flowers, the alliteration of “how lovely they looked” revealing beneath it Clarissa’s own auditory admission of beauty, of perhaps, love, in the soft lilting cadence of her language, in the simple gesture of “putting them in vases on the mantel piece”. Thus, Woolf reveals the ability of silence to convey meaning, for Richard “could not tell her he loved her” and yet “happiness” for him exists in “holding her hand.” Beneath the façade of polite conversation, of discussion of “our dear Miss Kilman,” of Hugh the “intolerable ass”, cynicism and sarcasm prevalent, lies a poignancy in, despite a lack of words, for he “had not said “I love you”, but he held her hand,” and within such a tiny gesture lies the depth and intricacy of “happiness”.*



Thus, Woolf exalts, though often times melancholic, the ability of humans to form tenuous connections in the realm of intangibility. Time unites, yet it reveals the division inherent between “Peter observing” and Septimus perceiving “Evans”, between Clarissa, the old woman and Richard, and thus it is within “moments” – moments of silence and moments of noise, this connection occurs, that meaning can be expressed, and thus Woolf both exalts yet laments the quiet poignancy in expression, or lack thereof, of the human endeavour to traverse the gulf that separates them, despite the risk of failing “once more”. Thus, at its heart, “Mrs Dalloway” celebrates human consciousness in “an ode to time, an immortal ode.”

### Student example 2

**Nominated text:** *Blake’s Poetry and Designs* – William Blake

William Blake’s poems are all-encompassing. In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, we perceive his desperate fury at sexual oppression, comingled with a joyous, adulatory exploration of human sexual energy and identity. The entrapment of such pure, elemental joy forms the core of *Song*, while *Infant Joy* places the beautiful delivery of human life in a more tranquil setting of tactile intimacy. The corruption, denial and deprivation of love are an anathema to Blake. The dark images of lonely masturbation are placed in “shadows”, with a depressingly “silent” and unresponsive pillow as the only bedfellows of “the youth shut up from lustful joy.” The bleakness of sterility (“forget to generate”) indicates not merely Blake’s celebration of the sexual act as a free, open expression of love but his condemnation of any limitations placed on love by society or shame. If this “lustful joy” is denied the “youth” by shame, Theotormon’s own callous asceticism is the target of Oothoon’s (and Blake’s) next attack. Here, only a ghostly shade, the “reflections of desire”, reach the “horrible darkness” of Theotormon’s pious abstemiousness. This poignant, touching reflection on the inanity of senseless self-denial accompanies the aforementioned limitations of shame on sexual expression.

Along with them goes Oothoon’s deploring of what some will call “love, that drinks another as a sponge drinks water”. This consumptive love surely does not refer to Bromiong who seems incapable of love, rather, she comments on Theotormon’s cruel deprivation of love – like the pebble in “The Clod and the Pebble”, she believes “Love seeketh only self to please | Joys in another’s loss of ease”. His is “self-love that envies all”, but just as Theotormon’s moralising annuls their love, she comments more harshly on the deadening effect of marriage on connection. The sexual connection here is only a correlative for a loss of personal connection – the “marriage-bed” is metaphorically “frozen”, deadening life and love and intimacy all at once. Theotormon’s frightening reduction to a “creeping skeleton | With lamplike eyes watching” reminds us of other connections Blake draws between marriage and mortality – in *London*, a “marriage-hearse” is blasted by the prostitute to whom an unloved husband resorts.

Less insidious, and more overtly targeted by Blake, is *possession*. Possession of people, of emotions and – in the case of Theotormon – obsessive possession of jealousy are all an anathema to Blake. These are slights on God’s creation – for “all that lives is holy”. Blake particularly views a malicious joy in such possession as unconscionable. Though the “lilies” and “roses” seem to suggest the fertility of a blossoming love, (and “blushing roses” imply the narrator’s own smiling coyness at her suitor’s attentions) they are merely traps. The irony of the narrator’s evident observation and appreciation of the “golden pleasures” is that she, too, will shortly be held in a ‘golden cage’, her “golden wing” cruelly outstretched. Having been possessed, Blake subtly delineates her captor as a malicious young “Prince” who enjoys his beautiful trophy’s talent: “he loves to sit and hear me sing”.

Further to this, Blake demonstrates the true horror of this loss of agency by the captive by making her the literal *object* of the Prince’s cruelty. She does only three actions throughout the poem, actions which in captivity appear as the nostalgic joys of a lost “liberty” “roam’d...tasted...beheld”. For the majority of the poem, she is truly bereft of agency, particularly when Blake condemns the Prince’s control and proud possession with verbs of gleeful malice: “laughing...sports...plays...stretches...mocks”. If we are to take *Auguries of Innocence* as a guide, this action would certainly “put all heaven in a rage”, just as surely as, putting a “robin redbreast in a cage”. In both poems, we can see a loss of agency, a cruel entrapment. The narrative persona’s identity as a bird only enhances this effect. Blake could well, in his fairytale description of a “Prince” suitor, be reworking a childish fantasy of married bliss to deliver a condemnation of marriage as a ritual of stifling constriction.

Yet the purity of life, Blake suggests, provides hope among such disillusion, cruelty and consumption. Oothoon’s bold, heartening celebration of the female sexual identity (and the human capacity for joyous, free sexual expression) articulates this hope of Blake’s: “the moment of desire! The moment of desire!” The repetition of this ecstatic phrase suggests (appropriately) orgasmic delight, a pure and unadulterated sexual expression. It connotes, further, a *freedom* to desire which Oothoon later imagines she could share with the ascetic, gloomy, self-punishing Theotormon: “Red as the rosy morning”. Red here is passion, a metaphor for unrestrained, healthy, natural lust. It is touching that Oothoon wishes to *liberate* Theotormon from his own asceticism – she promises that she will not “e’er with jealous cloud/Come into the heaven of generous love; nor selfish blightings bring”. Such duality of the possession and freedom of love irresistibly evokes “Infinity”: the “selfish blightings”, a disease, are here the destruction of “viewing a life” by a man “binding it to himself”. Yet Oothoon wishes to “kiss the joy as it flies”, to allow Theotormon to live freely and to thereby “live forever in eternity’s sunrise”.

Such simple, corporeal joys of free, sweet love are expressed through a different aspect of the generative process – the post-natal bliss of a quietly contented mother. The sweetly neat rhyming couplet “Thou dost smile/I sing the while” perfectly encapsulates the mother’s “joy”, which her new, perfect infant perfectly embodies.



*Blake shows us love corrupted, caged, perverted and denied. Yet ultimately he dreams of a very real love. This love is at the core of Blake's work – any anguish is caused by its absence.*

### **Student example 3**

**Nominated text:** *Atonement* – Ian McEwan

*Many of the adjectives used by McEwan, or indeed the older writer Briony, in describing Briony's surroundings in Passage One can be used to describe the young girl herself. "Orderly", "straight-laced" and "poised", Briony is depicted throughout much of Part One of 'Atonement' to be a controlling, selfish child. In conveying Briony as such, the reader is able to see why, when confronted with the complexities of "the arena of adult emotions" that are beyond her understanding, Briony feels that "order must be imposed". While Briony in Part One is intentionally painted as a "priggish", "hysterical little girl" by McEwan, and indeed her older self as the writer of the novel, the reader can see why she behaves as she does; which is perhaps a means for the older Briony as the author to explain or in some sense validate her actions. Unable to make sense of the "chaotic swarm of impressions" prompted by her exposure to the developing adult relationship between Cecilia and Robbie, it is ironic that the child determined to be "above such nursery-tale ideas as good and evil" reverts back to exactly that. Hungry and desperate for drama and to be the centre of attention, prompted by her immaturity and selfishness, Briony delights in the idea that she could play the "heroine" in her fabricated, dramatized interpretation of life. Thus in her blinkered determination to "help her sister" she jumps to conclusions and mis-casts Robbie as the villain, "the incarnation of evil".*

*Irony and tragedy are made extremely apparent to the second-time reader of McEwan's novel, as the realisation that Briony has deliberately constructed the text to facilitate her atonement reveals her contrived narration of events. The line "she could never forgive Robbie his disgusting mind" becomes ironic upon deeper interpretation, as in the end it is Robbie who will never forgive Briony for her actions. Furthermore, any possibility for him to do so is lost when he dies as an indirect result of her very decision to "never forgive him". Briony's narration depicting Robbie's perspective in Passage Two seems only natural and understandable for the first time reader: that Robbie's "business was simple" in finding Cecilia and to "love her, marry her and live without shame" should be his next step in life. However the tragedy of this line to the cognisant reader will be clear: that Robbie never gets to do so. These references to a life the couple could have had, where they "survive to love" ultimately build up hope for the first time reader, as they believe that Robbie "would be cleared", his future with Cecilia a possibility. This only makes the emotional impact of McEwan's eventual twist- that the couple never get to fulfil their love – all the more upsetting and moving.*

*Briony's revelation in the narration of Passage Three that Lola married "her rapist" Paul Marshall is both disturbing and confronting, to the first time reader particularly. The connotations inherent in Lola, "a child", being "prized open and taken" of rape and force are horrifying, and add to the upsetting nature of the scene. In Part One of the novel, where Lola's rape occurs, Paul Marshall is never overtly implied to be the rapist; rather it is here, when Briony and McEwan remind the reader of "the memories, the needling details", listed in a factual tone, that the reader comes to the dawning realisation at the same time Briony herself does. The line "was it really happening?" is the start of the intertextual shift in Part Three of the novel, wherein Briony the older author in 1999 transitions from relaying actual events to fabricating the final scene, the confrontation between the reunited lovers and herself. McEwan almost hints to his reader through his style that the narrator Briony isn't entirely staying true to "what really happened", as the series of questions proposing an alternate reality wherein Briony takes "her chance to proclaim in public and purge herself of all that she had done wrong" is believable to the reader, only to be undermined when she returns to reality and her "cowardly" actions.*

*The idea that at the church, the "debt was paid" again takes on a greater meaning to the reader privy to Briony's construction of the novel. Briony in Part Three of the text has developed a great deal from the child in Part One, and is truly coming to understand the full consequences of her "crime". However Briony believing here that the "debt was paid" goes to show that she still didn't fully comprehend. Briony spends the remainder of her life trying to pay her "debt" to her "spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince" by allowing them to live on and love through the power of storytelling, something her character is only just beginning to grasp at the age of 18.*

*Ian McEwan's 'Atonement' is rich with intertextuality and many levels which can be greater appreciated upon a second reading, wherein his characterisation and narrative voice reveal many more layers of complexity in their meanings in the readers mind.*

### **Student example 4**

**Nominated text:** *The Bacchae* – Euripides

*Euripides' 'The Bacchae' explores the dualities between the seemingly contrary concepts of nature and the human construct of civilisation. The alternating lines of dialogue between the hubristic young king Pentheus, representative of nomos (civilisation) and the controlled, omnipotent god Dionysus, who extols the joys of primal instincts and physis (nature) directly juxtapose these ideas. Pentheus' language, rife with imperatives – "Go quickly", "tell all", "Bring out my armour here!" – shows his commanding nature and reveals him to be a demanding, almost impetuous King of Thebes. His dialogue is also punctuated with violent imagery and threats, "punish", "sacrificed", "an onslaught on these maniacs" and militaristic references to "shields", "twanging bows" and "fast horses" to paint him as a ruthless, yet brash ruler. Euripides does this in order to convey to his audience the notion that Pentheus' refusal to embrace his primal, natural side has resulted in those urges manifesting themselves*



*in violence and is one of the key messages in his play. This lack of control over himself or his Kingdom Thebes is antithesised in Dionysus' cool and calm demeanour, an embodiment of the utter control and power the gods possess over mortals.*

*To have a god onstage, "manifesting [himself] before the human race "was extremely rare in Ancient Greek theatre, and utilised by Euripides in The Bacchae to evoke a sense of dramatic irony. His presence in the "likeness of a man", posing as an "effeminate foreigner" established in the prologue would have caused the audience to have been highly amused and entertained to observe Pentheus undermining Bacchus unwittingly to his face. Dismissing Dionysus' "Bacchic arrogance", exclaiming the Bacchae on Cithaeron "deserve to be massacred", with each impious comment the audience would have been alert to the fact that Pentheus is sealing his fate as the sacrifice in the sparagmos. This dramatic irony is further enhanced by Dionysus' words – openly warning Pentheus his "army will be put to flight", offering to 'help' by bringing "those women here" to the king, and even expressing he has "planned this....with the god himself", Dionysus comes across almost as if he is giving Pentheus a chance to redeem himself and giving clues as to his identity. Again through this Euripides conveys the power of the gods and warns against denying their power, and also aims to make them seem just and fair.*

*The chorus' role in Ancient Greek theatre was to serve as the playwrights' 'moral mouthpiece', explicitly conveying the playwright's messages to the audience and effectively telling them what they should take away from the story. "There is no greater god than Dionysus" relays to the audience that not only is Dionysus a god that should be worshipped, but that to refuse to do so will result in a fate as grim as Pentheus' "justly merited" death at the hands of his own mother. In contrast to this dramatic, almost bloodthirsty style of speech observed in the exodus and later stasimons of the play,, the chorus of "worshippers" in 'The Bacchae' also convey the ecstasy and joy found in the rituals pertaining to Dionysic worship, through which Euripides explores the all-consuming cult practices and aims to remove the stigmas which may lie in his audience's minds. Indeed, throughout the play, Euripides constantly references the pleasures in the "holy dance[s]" "of the Bacchae aiming through his rhythmic prose and language: "raise the music", "raise my Bacchic shout", to encourage the audience to champion Dionysus and his religion.*

*The way in which Dionysus "vindicate[s] his mother Semele by ensuring Cadmus' "whole house [is] crushed and broken" by his anger may come across as harsh and perhaps cruel to Euripides' audience, especially as the playwright chooses to depict Agave distraught with what she has done. Her "whole life" "shattered", as a result of Dionysus being "insulted" (as Cadmus puts it) does come across as upsetting to the audience, the unnatural act of a mother killing her own child is almost unimaginably cruel and ruthless. Thus one may see that perhaps Euripides aimed to question the vindictive, vengeful nature of the gods and their omnipotent control over mortals. However, regardless of this, Euripides' message still remains a warning against "impiety", lest his audience suffer the same grievous fate as Pentheus, and Cadmus' entire house.*

## **Student sample 5**

**Nominated text:** *Jane Eyre* – Charlotte Brontë

*'Sense would resist delirium: judgment would warn passion' captures Bronte's belief that a woman needs a balance of passion and reason. Jane, Bronte's Bildungsroman heroine, embodies a woman conflicted by religion, society and what she, herself desperately desires. Bronte warns throughout her novel that 'Conventionality is not morality. Self righteousness is not religion', which through Jane she expresses. Jane attempts to balance love and duty, but through self-realization she discovers her 'path'.*

*Bronte conveys the male dominance that oppresses Jane throughout the novel, and her desire to escape it. Jane portrayed as a passionate individual desires love and equality, however her religion influenced by St. John causes her to 'do what was right' rather than what she wants. 'Religion called-Angels beckoned-God commanded', thinking 'only of duty' highlights Bronte's concern of losing oneself to the conformity of a male dominated society. In attempting to do what was right, Jane looks to God and the Heavens, and in return hears a voice cry 'Jane! Jane! Jane!'. Not only does Bronte allude to the supernatural and superstition of kindred spirits, but also to the summoning of one's soul. Bronte emphasises that 'religion' does not mean sacrificing oneself, or giving up 'love' for 'duty'.*

*The continuous expression of the ideas 'Fire and Ice' are portrayed through the actions of characters, which Bronte uses to show vast differences of individuals. St. John 'pressed his hand firmer' on Jane's head, conveying his coldness, and distance showing no love or affection to Jane. Jane from childhood, desired to be loved and knows a relationship with St. John would contain none. Between St. John and Jane, 'the candle' was 'dying out', emblematic of their relationship end. Bronte contrasts St. John's ice-like character to the heated passionate character of Rochester. Rochester sends Jane into a 'feverish' state conveying the intensity of their 'passion', especially of Jane's growing love. Bronte conveys Rochester, after having his life saved by Jane, with a 'strong energy' and a 'strange fire' in his look, revealing his change of emotion towards Jane. Bronte portrays Rochester lost for words as he 'stops' and proceeds 'hastily'. Rochester places both his hands on Jane's, showing affection she is not used to, Jane is 'tossed on a buoyant but unquiet sea, where billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy highlighting the joy and happiness she feels when with Rochester, but also signalling the trouble it will bring.*

*Bronte uses Brocklehurst to convey the hypocrisy of religion, where he uses religion as a justification for punishment. This results in Jane's dislike for evangelism doctrine, but enables her to find a place for her own religion in her life, without giving up her soul. Jane is conveyed as a rebellious and 'naughty' child where she is taught 'they go to hell' 'a pit full of fire' which if she had not found a balance of passion and reason could have resulted in a death such as Bertha's. Jane also reveals the entrapment religion can bring, as seen with the manipulation of St. John.*





*Bronte portrays Jane's development where she eventually finds a balance between her 'passion' and reason, and 'love' and 'duty'. Jane controls her rebellious nature, controlling her passion and desire for love, to find freedom and equality. Bronte conveys not being too passionate can be dangerous, but sacrificing yourself for duty can cause misery, hence articulating that life needs a balance of passion and judgment.*

**Student sample 6**

**Nominated text:** *The Freedom of the City* – Brian Friel

*'We are not conducting a social survey' highlights the irony of the bloody-Sunday-like events in Friel's play. The Judge personifies all that oppresses individuals such as Lily, Michael and Skinner. Friel reveals the corruption of the British Government, where anything will be said to maintain power and status quo, highlighting the power of language to create one's own reality and evade the truth.*

*The 'stage is in darkness', where 'three bodies lie grotesquely' preventing Friel's audience with a picture that captures the sectarian violence and discrimination that has occurred. Starting where the story ends, Friel creates a fragmented, non-linear play that is emblematic of the fragmented, non-harmonious society. The 'Judge high up in the battlements' establishes the power his men has over the 'three' innocent civilians symbolic of the corruption and abuse he can administer. Friel establishes a sense of foregone conclusion where the Judge and policemen manipulate the facts to create their own reality of events, 'I wasn't the first on the scene', attempts to allude that other people could have tarnished the crime scene. Friel highlights the misguided and manipulated reality that individuals in power create.*

*With the use of military styled language the 'Army press officer' states to the media unknown and incorrect facts, twisting the way in which the situation can be perceived. 'At approximately 15.20 hours today a band of terrorists took possession'... 'up to forty persons are involved.' The use of 'terrorists', 'took possession', 'disturbance' all are associated with negative connotations, that aim to convey the innocent Lily, Michael and Skinner as criminals, guilty of their actions when it was all a mistake Skinners cynical realism, 'because your presumed, boy. Because this is theirs, boy, and your very presence here is a sacrilege', reveals the bitter truth that they will be charged as guilty, and pay the price for entering the Guildhall accidentally. Friel contrasts Skinners realism, to the naivety of Michael who believes 'violence done against peaceful protest helps your cause' which Skinner retorts 'or shoot you! This response is bitterly sad as this is the three individuals's fate. Friel through Michael articulates the idea that they 'must win' if they are not provoked, but it is Skinner that reveals there will be no freedom, until they are equal.*

*Lily is the human face of poverty, who Friel uses to highlight the degradation of the disenfranchised. 'God forgive me I can't stand them polis' conveys the uneducated bogside dialect, where it isn't until death that Lily can articulate the 'terrible mistake' that could have been prevented if the truth wasn't manipulated. Living in a 'condemned property' Lily highlights the plight of the poor, and their suffering. Friel creates irony, as Skinner states 'You drank municipal whiskey. You masqueraded as a councillor. Theft and deception' which is what the British government did, they stole the lives of these innocents and lied, manipulating the truth. The reality the British create as Friel portrays to his audience, highlights the injustice of such an institution, and the degradation and suffering it causes.*

*Friel conveys the corrupt system, where it is deemed more important to maintain power than it is to care for the people of Derry, being those especially of a Catholic background. Friel condemns the fragmented society the British create by its misuse of power and sectarian discrimination. It isn't until the Catholic Irish are equal that they can 'ultimately' win and escape the British's oppression.*

**Student example 7**

**Nominated text:** *Collected Stories* – Peter Carey

*Throughout "Peter Carey's Collected Stories" Carey deals with those whom blindly accept and do not actively question their surroundings, that they accept a position of powerlessness, that they do this without any real attempt at discerning why.*

*Throughout A windmill in the west the soldier, in the face of colonization, does not know even which side he is protecting. He simply continues along a singular goal with not even an afterthought as to why. He has lost all sense of direction yet "there is an army issue compass on the shelf above his head". He elects to actively refute knowledge of his surroundings, finding solace in the few things he knows are real.*

*In Room No 5 the ideas of refuting knowledge and colonization remain, the landscape and unknowable border replaced with a distant unknowable woman. Although she is full of knowledge he chooses to accept ignorance, to sit idly by, her eyes behind sunglasses. She sits with him but also alone, "alone with your reflection in the dusty fly marked glass". He yearns for contact but can hardly see her face. His acceptance of the ambiguity has already sealed his fate.*

*The idea of colonization as a catalyst for ignorance are rife within Carey's writings, the idea that people will happily accept a cultural invasion, through no fault bar their own. The soldier although yearning for geographical scope, with all his thoughts hung on possibilities, his waning certainty, 'he was sure that the windmill was in the United States....but it is possible he*



*misunderstood". This fleeting certainty shows that those without power who shun investigation in fact still cling to whatever they can.*

*The focus of the man in Escribo is often on the terrain, the "flat grey granite", "the large rocks" these strongly parallel the clinging to the playboy of the soldier or the clinging to the pamphlets in the South Side Pavillion.*

*Carey's stories deal strongly with the thoughts of uncertainty and of clinging to what you know and not seeking anything further, whilst also conveying the lack of fulfilment and unrest that results.*

*The fact that the Soldier in A windmill in the west can so readily dismiss telephoning the base to clarify his uncertainty as well as dismissing his other items shows truly how little free thinking he does possess.*

*The acceptance without questioning portrayed by the man in Escribo again shows a severe lack of free will of his own volition, he blindly accepts and follows what other tell him. Accepting her ambiguity, accepting her distance, accepting these things from a woman he professes to love.*

*The soldier is so blinded by his goal that even though he has lost sight of what it is he must protect he remains at his post. Carey is intensely critical of his behaviour and portrays the soldier as someone so desperate and out of his mind just from not having a purpose. He shows that without a purpose, you lose what it is to be part of society, without a purpose you cease to be human.*

### **Student example 8**

**Nominated text:** *In Cold Blood* – Truman Capote

*Truman Capote in his text "In Cold Blood" deals with a society which ignores the injured, ignores the mentally unstable, casts them aside and then outcries when a tragedy occurs.*

*Truman Capote never develops sympathy for Perry, only varying degrees of pity, he develops Perry not as a man, but as a boy in a man's body, a boy which although abandoned by society is still to blame. Capote shows Perry's childlike mental state by his interactions with Don Cullivan, Perry laments that "they (the Clutters) never hurt me..... its just that the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it". This childlike ideal of retaliation truly gives insight into the mind of Perry.*

*Capote however is also strongly critical of the Society of Kansas, that they abandon the unstable and then in the result of a crime repaying blood with blood, "four shots which ended six lives". Capote shows the ability of Perry's nature to change at the drop of a hat and the hypocrisy which results, Perry referring to a murder of a family in Florida, that it must have been committed by "a lunatic". Perry's inability to acknowledge his mental state in fact portrays it to us.*

*Capote shows not only the effect of the tragedy on individuals but also on the community as a whole, Mr Ewalt and his daughter portray the attitude of the townsfolk, people whom don't lock their doors at night, people whom are the least suspecting of such a violent occurrence, Capote shows that the actions of so few can affect the lives of so many.*

*Perry is presented by Capote as so convoluted that although he is a brutal murderer he still "refused to expose his injured legs – he feared the sight may offend". Perry in his way reveals how truly unrepentant and somewhat unaccepting, he shows how skewed his ideas of right and wrong are and again shows his childlike nature.*

*The way Perry can refer to taking human lives as like "picking off targets in a shooting gallery" and rationalise such behaviour allows Capote to show just how let down by society people like Perry are, still wholly accountable but let down. The contrast of Capotes way of showing that this event never need have happened, not just with Perry but in other cases, that casting aside humans who do not fit the mould is senseless, and Perry acts as their foreman.*

*Capote however is a lot more critical of Dicks actions, in that Dick came from a supportive family and then actively chose to break out of it, his choice to turn his back on a supportive society means that he in fact has no excuse, that he is deserving of not even pity, that in Dicks case his crime was largely unpreventable.*

*The fact that Perry considers himself human because he can feel sorry for himself albeit not others shows again his convoluted childlike mood, it is by Cullivans own statement that it was "not possible for any man to be that devoid of conscience or compassion". Capote shows that Perry's view of society is so skewed by his life experience and mental state that he has lost what it is to feel.*

*Capote is so intensely critical of a society which calls itself civilised when it lets down what amounts to so many of its people, he is critical of the idea that sweeping it under the rug or relying on physical manifestations is ever appropriate and a society which deserts so many has itself lost what it is to be human.*