2024 VCE Literature external assessment report

General comments

Almost 4000 students sat the 2024 Literature examination. The majority of responses demonstrated well-developed skills and knowledge, and exhibited a high level of engagement, familiarity and assurance in approaching the examination.

In 2024 the examination was divided into two sections of equal weighting, drawing on two different texts from two different genres. This was the second year of the new examination format, and students demonstrated confidence and familiarity with Section A: Developing Interpretations, which was structured into two extended responses. Section B: Close Analysis retained the same structure and format as past years. Each section was awarded marks out of 20.

Student responses were assessed against the expected qualities and criteria. These were applied holistically by assessors; therefore, there was no expectation that responses follow a prescribed format or style. Student responses were varied; they displayed different qualities and choices in their writing, while adhering to the requirements of the task. In applying the expected qualities and criteria, the assessors aimed to reward student's achievements rather than to penalise.

There is no expected word limit for either Section A or Section B. Well-prepared students were able to develop their analyses in a complex and detailed way in the time available. It is important that students undertake regular timed practice responses in the lead-up to the examination to ensure that they can comfortably complete both sections in the time available.

Overall, this year there were many excellent responses that confidently demonstrated a perceptive knowledge and understanding of the texts and clearly distinguished between the requirements of each task. Students should work closely with their teachers during the course of the year to hone their skills in interpretation, analysis and the expression of their ideas in handwritten responses. Reflecting on, and applying, teacher feedback is crucial to ongoing improvement.

Students should be given opportunities to practise and strengthen their handwriting skills, and consider the extent to which inaccuracies in spelling, grammar and punctuation can detract from the clarity and power of their writing. Brief, careful planning before writing is essential to produce a logically structured and purposeful piece of writing. For instance, some students wrote at great length, yet responses could be unfocused and repetitive.

On the whole, students made good use of the Answer Book, which was divided into two sections, and indicated if they had used the extra space provided at the end of the Answer Book for their responses. In 2024, for the first time, students were permitted to bring a dictionary into the examination. This provided them with the ability to check any unfamiliar terms and concepts.

General comments and areas for improvement include the following:

- Students are reminded they should not write on two of the same text types; for example, two novels, or two responses on the same text. Unfortunately this occurs occasionally and means that the student can only receive a score for one response. Students should familiarise themselves with the examination specifications on the VCAA website. Students and teachers are also reminded that the text book listed

by schools must be the edition specified on the relevant annual VCE Literature text list published on the VCAA website.

- Students should aim to use precise and appropriate language. In the 2024 examination, some students tended to invent new words or to misuse language. For example, 'juxtapose' was a term often used incorrectly to mean 'contrast'. Students should also pay careful attention to their use of appropriate analytic verbs. For instance, a verb such as 'showcase' does not adhere to the expected academic register for the examination nor give a sense of the author at work. Other commonly confused terms included 'simple' and 'simplistic', 'material' and 'materialistic', 'pastoral' and 'pastoralist', and a 'collection' (of poetry) and an 'anthology'.
- In their responses, students should consider the importance of genre and form**.** For example, when writing about a play, students could note how character interplay, stage directions, staging and light and/or sound effects all give a sense of the drama, and what the audience (contemporary or modern) might experience. Similarly, when writing about poetry, students should analyse the function and effect of poetic devices rather than merely listing them.
- Students are reminded that both Section A and Section B of the examination require the close analysis of how language creates meaning in the text. Paraphrasing a passage does not meet the requirements of the task and will score very few marks.
- As each section is worth the same number of marks, it is recommended that students spend an equal amount of time responding to each section. This approach will enable some students to avoid running out of time or rushing to finish.

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 been included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

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

Section A: Developing interpretations

This two-part task required students to complete two responses based on one set passage from one text from the 2024 VCE Literature Text List.

- Question 1 required students to address the **significance** of the set passage within the context of the whole text. This question was worth 6 marks.
- Question 2 required students to address a **key concept** from the text, taking into consideration both the set passage and the whole text. This question was worth 14 marks.

Section A was worth a total of 20 marks.

Many of the responses to Section A were articulate and considered; very strong responses were elegant and a joy to read. The quality of this writing was impressive, made even more remarkable by coming from young authors.

Students needed to know and understand their texts thoroughly to do well in the two questions. Regular practice responses using different passages and concepts will ensure students build the knowledge and skills needed for Questions 1 and 2.

The most popular text choices for Section A were *Dracula, Picnic at Hanging Rock, Uncle Vanya* and *The Remains of the Day,* followed by *As You Like It* and *The Winter's Tale*.

Question 1

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	2	14	32	34	16	3	3.5

It was pleasing that most students could identify where in the text the set passage was from.

High-scoring responses explicitly explored the significance of the passage, not only in terms of its thematic ideas but also its structure – for instance as a turning point or foreshadowing. These responses were able to show an appreciation of the way a particular moment in the text interacts with other moments around it.

Lower-scoring responses summarised the passage rather than exploring the various ways in which the passage was significant. These responses also tended to focus on the key concept in their responses to both Question 1 and Question 2, demonstrating insufficient understanding of the difference between the two tasks. While there may be some overlap between the two questions, the focus of each question and its analysis should be different.

In their response to Question 1, students should keep in mind the various ways they can explore the significance of a passage. The VCAA website recommends students:

- identify and discuss where the passage is taken from and why it might be considered a key moment in the context of the whole text
- explore the significance of developments in the text such as plot, characterisation, setting, structure, authorial language and style, point of view and ideas (beyond the concept identified in Question 2)
- include textual evidence judiciously selected from the passage to support the discussion
- include some discussion and textual evidence (where relevant) from other moments in the text to demonstrate their breadth of knowledge and understanding of the text.

When considering the length of time they should spend responding to Question 1, which is worth 6 marks, students should be guided by its weighting compared to Question 2, which is worth 14 marks, and calculate accordingly.

Student samples

The following high-scoring responses reflect a range of approaches. They should not be seen as models to be copied, but as examples of how different students wrote, as they fulfilled the criteria and demonstrated the expected qualities.

As You Like It, William Shakespeare

It is in this passage, taken from Act II(i) of William Shakespeare's As You Like It, that the audience is first introduced to the 'golden world' of the Forest of Arden. As such, it is firstly significant in its setting; Duke Senior praises the 'life exempt from public haunt' of the forest in lofty blank verse, which immediately distinguishes the passage in a play that is 57% prose. In its 'tongues in trees, books in the running brooks … and good in everything', Arden is the very antithesis of the 'envious court' in its evident liberty – indeed, immediately prior to the passage in Act I (iii), Rosalind and Celia formulate their disguises of Aliena and Ganymede and devise to flee 'to liberty, and not to banishment.' Additionally, the passage represents the first characterisation of multiple members of the collective of pastoral types which makes up the comedy. Duke Senior immediately undermines his depiction as a 'traitor' by Duke Frederick in Act I, displaying a jovial optimism and persistent capacity to perceive 'sweet[ness]' in 'adversity'. Indeed, Amiens aptly proclaims 'happy is your grace/ that could translate the stubbornness of Fortune into so quiet and sweet a style,' recalling Rosalind and Celia's debate in Act I(ii) on the concepts of 'Nature' and 'Fortune.' The Duke finds an unorthodox 'Fortune' in the natural world and creates a community of the

exiled courtiers, cheerfully addressing 'co-mates and brothers in exile' and giving weight to his denunciations of the corruption and moral murkiness of the court from which he has been exiled.

Yet this optimism is not the sole tone of the passage; it is further notable in its characterisation of 'the melancholy Jaques', the play's classic malcontent. Jaques' efforts to 'moralise' the killing of venison and affected scholastic desire to categorise and define, hyperbolically proclaiming (through the narration of a Lord) that '[Duke Senior does] more usurp than [his] brother' comprehensively reflect his pessimism. As such, the passage also evinces aspects of As You Like It's vibrant comedy – the image of Jaques' exaggerated emotive spectacle 'augmenting [the brook] with tears' brings an evident humour to the Lord's recounting of 'Monsieur Melancholy' (as he is mockingly dubbed by Orlando in Act III(iii). The play is, ultimately, underpinned by its comedy, a playfully contrapuntal celebration.

The Yield, Tara June Winch

This passage is significant in its placement near the middle of Albert's dictionary as Winch foregrounds the reclamation of land in restoring Indigenous custodianship. Here, Winch utilises Albert's role as an indigenous elder to convey the process of passing down indigenous language and heritage. This passage is placed before August's revelation at the museum, when she witnesses indigenous artefacts such as the 'map', 'nardoo stones' and 'spear' behind 'glass'. In this key passage, Winch forewarns readers of the reductive Western lens which relegates indigenous history as abject, diminished into objects that are non-sentient depictions of the past. Here, Albert subverts this linearity of time to introduce 'songlines' which 'means song having line.' This symbolic relationship is paralleled to 'birrang-dhuray-gudhi' meaning 'journey having song.' Here, Winch depicts indigenous storytelling, truthtelling as a 'journey' that is unconstrained by Western notions of time and embodies a non-linear quest for learning and discovery. Furthermore, Winch guides readers beyond the western abjections of indigenous history seen as dead and embodied as 'maps' as Albert reveals indigenous history is powerful and alive, a warning to the colonial settlers, 'The Gundimindi lost the gudhi only now it's coming back to us again.' Thus, in this notable passage Winch subverts western beliefs of an expired indigenous civilization and forewarns readers of the 'journey' to reclaim the land, 'Native Title', restoring rightful Indigenous primacy.

This passage is also significant as it foregrounds Albert's narrative strand, and is a climactic turning point to the thematic concern of reconnecting a fragmented community which is extended throughout the rest of the novel. Following the trauma of Jedda's death and his unfortunate cancer diagnosis, Albert externalises his struggles through 'Nguwanda' who similarly 'didn't want to leave the daughters without protection.' This is metaphorical for a spiritual 'protection' in the transit to reincarnation, as Albert is later revealed to be a reincarnated 'plover bird' and Jedda a 'brolga.' Thus, in this notable passage Winch foregrounds Albert's construction of the dictionary as a moment of which embodies the rich cultural knowledge so that 'the daughters found out the only way to reach their father.' Thus, as an embodiment of Albert's tangible existence, Winch foregrounds Albert's decision to craft the dictionary as a heirloom to his daughters and more broadly, Indigenous descendants.

Dracula, Bram Stoker

This passage reveals the significance of sexuality, particularly female sexuality, as a dangerous tool within the world of Dracula. The passage, written from Dr Van Helsing's perspective, precludes the climactic victory of the crew of light over Dracula in Transylvania.

Van Helsing is unwillingly enamoured by the sensual nature and appearance of the vampire girls, depicted as 'radiantly beautiful' and 'exquisitely voluptuous' by Van Helsing, despite a 'motive for hate'. This use of language parallels Jonathan's interaction with the vampire women at the start of the text, as he too is paralysed by their coquettish and forthright advances. The capacity of the vampire women through their primal sensuality to not only influence Jonathan, characterised as morally motivated but somewhat vulnerable, but a man like Van Helsing, who is depicted by the other protagonists as sturdy and righteous, illustrates the significance of sexuality as a pervasive threat within the text.

Yet Van Helsing's remembrance of Mina's 'clarion' call and 'soul wail' removes him from their sirenic clutches. This is notable as Mina is continually characterised by Stoker as the epitome of Victorian moral righteousness; pious and practical. The fact that it is Mina's visceral 'soul wail' that reminds Van Helsing of this morals demonstrates how English propriety, particularly shown through 'good' and pious women, is vital to avoid moral ruin in Stoker's novel.

The clarification of 'the fair sister' being so sensually described by Van Helsing as 'exquisitely voluptuous', and consequently dangerous, reveals a parallel with Lucy Westenra. Lucy's portrayal as 'fair' and sweet becomes reviled and subhuman descriptions of a 'thing', as she is subject to Dracula's attack. The repeated use of 'voluptuous' when she emerges 'undead' from the tomb speaks to her loss of morality, becoming a 'wanton' vixen in the eyes of the protagonists, and a threat to the morality of the men she pursues. This passage echoes this sentiment as it is the 'fair' vampire girl who's sexual sensibilities are illustrated to prey on Van Helsing's masculine 'instinct' again portraying the Victorian idea of the 'fallen woman' as a threat to morality.

The passage is also significant in its setting within Transylvania, which reflects Dracula's power. Dracula's tomb is described by Van Helsing as 'more lordly', 'huge' and 'nobly proportioned': this illustrates Dracula's power within the region, as well as his status as an influential foreign aristocrat. The size of the tomb being 'huge' in contrast to [illegible] of the women signifies his masculine power, whereas its depiction as 'lordly' indicates Dracula's own early assertion to Jonathan, meet here in Transylvania he is 'noble' and 'boyar'. This depiction preluding the battle between Dracula and the 'crew of light' sets him up to be a fearsome opponent, but also amplifies the scale of the Crew of Light's victory when he is defeated. This, along with the threat of the 'vampire women', who are ultimately under Dracula's control, purports the 'Crew of Lights' victory as morally significant.

Picnic at Hanging Rock, Joan Lindsay

As answers concerning the 'girls' disappearance' remain elusive, Lindsay establishes British Imperialism's lofty yet idle occupation of the antipodean landscape as discordant. Certainly, belying claims of a benevolent institution signified by 'the College for Young Ladies', this passage serves to affirm the true, acquisitive and avaricious nature of the colonial campaign: the Headmistress aims to 'present … the perfect picture of a fashionable boarding school'. It is telling that the College gardens are a mere 'symbol of prestige' and the 'continuous array of showy blooms' are only to be 'admired', typifying Mrs Appleyard's – and by extension settler society's – concern about appearance above all. So, readers are reminded of the Headmistress' earlier feigned concern about the senior girls' disappearance, exposed her to be a mere mercantile angst for losing the College's 'prestige and social standing' and her 'richest pupils' as Lindsay would see her utterly bereft of the gentility the British Empire claim to possess. In turn, and of equal salience, is the preponderance of European impositions (signified by 'Easter' and the 'grand piano') which mark Appleyard College as a microcosm of Europe (earlier seen flying the 'Union Jack'). Tellingly, the narrator's tenor is distinctly mocking in appraising the 'long drawing room' 'revamped' in a 'ghastly shade'. Surely such symbols of European intrusion appear incongruent against the native landscape – readers know the 'immense and formidable' Hanging Rock is 'rising up' beneath an enigmatic 'misty summit', appearing powerful against such a quaint vision of the College. The motif of time, then, is significant in affirming the relative brevity of British occupation – the Headmistress is perturbed by the 'passing of time', a visceral realisation of the impending dissolution of the College, being 'totally destroyed by bushfire' as nature reclaims that which has been purloined in colonial invasion. Against this, the scene exemplifies settler society's retreat into speculation, both sordid and sensationalised, in the dearth of knowledge concerning the girls' disappearance. Certainly, during their trip to the Matinée, the public 'stare … and whisper' about the boarders; this is redolent of the likening of settler society's to 'hyenas drawn to the smell of blood and scandal' as Lindsay exposes the colonial campaign's claim to be a paragon of enlightenment in a land benightedly deemed other wholly rent. Thus the culmination of the novel proves the weight of this moment: the euphemistic language ('College

Mystery') wryly arguing the case of the missing girls will remain temporally equivocal and 'forever unsolved'.

The Fire Next Time, James Baldwin

This passage, situated near the conclusion of the second essay of The Fire Next Time, marks a significant shift in Baldwin's perception of the white world. Having been enraged by the white world's cruelty throughout the collection, with him bitterly lamenting his father's "terrible life" in the very first page of the collection, and describing the "crime of [his] countrymen" the page after, this passage signifies a development in Baldwin's perception of white Americans. Admitting that it is "impossible for one to hate" the "white man [who] came to the Negro for love," this passage evinces a newfound pity, a resigned sympathy for white Americans. This development, from adamant, direct outrage, into a kind of thoughtful acceptance, is signified by a shift in Baldwin's prose style; the discursive, layered syntax of the opening sentence of the passage, with its listing and layered clauses, emblematises Baldwin's considered, thoughtful reexamination of white America and his perception of it. This is crucial in facilitating Baldwin's call, in the final pages of the collection, for African Americans and white Americans to, "like lovers, create the consciousness of others"; the greater empathy for white Americans that emerges within this passage catalyses and enables Baldwin's call for African Americans to similarly view their countrymen with compassin, and liberate them with "love."

Moreover, this passage functions as a significant culmination of several of James Baldwin's realisations about the white world, which have been explicated throughout the essay. In describing Americans perceiving themselves as "invincible in battle and wise in peace," Baldwin reiterates his repudiation, earlier in the essay, of white America's aggrandisation of its soldiers, with him noting that after World War II, a "certain hope, a certain respect for white Americans died," due to their treatment of African American soldiers. Similarly, his portrayal of American men perceivng themselves to be the "most direct and virile" connects to his earlier claim that the the white man's "virility" depends on the "emasculation of the blacks." Thus, in compiling the white world's self-aggrandising perceptions of itself, which he has denounced throughout the essay, as a "collection of myths" within this passage, Baldwin brings his destabilisation of America's preconceptions to its conclusion. And it is this final, and conclusive, labelling and denouncing of these flawed perceptions, which catalyses Baldwin's call, in subsequent pages, for white Americans to "discard" the "assumptions" they have previously held, in order to "survive" as a people; to forsake its "ignorance and intransigence" in order to avoid the prophesied "fire next time."

Question 2

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average
%	0.7	0.2	0.4	0.7	2	4	7	10	16	14	17	12	10	5	2	9.1

High-scoring responses to Question 2 tended to approach the question by acknowledging the concept and then using the passage as a springboard to develop an interpretation of the text as a whole. Overall, responses to Section A Question 2 in this year's examination were confident, and demonstrated that students understood that the concept should be the focus of their response.

Some students limited their response by using only the passage provided as a focus and not branching out to the text as a whole. Some students tried to address each of the verbs in the question – 'endorsed', 'challenged' and 'marginalised' – in turn. There is no expectation that students need to address all three.

While the focus in Question 2 should be on the concept, responses should go beyond a views and values essay. Close analysis of the language and literary features is necessary to build a highly developed, detailed and perceptive response.

Student samples

The following high-scoring responses reflect a range of approaches. They should not be seen as models to be copied, but as examples of how different students wrote.

As You Like It, William Shakespeare

As You Like It toys with the characteristics of the pastoral genre, both embracing and challenging its archetypes in a comic depiction of a literary style well-known to Shakespeare's contemporary audience. In the passage, Duke Senior presents the Forest of Arden as a prelapsarian civilisation, where 'feel we not the penalty of Adam' – it is a palimpsest of pastoral paradises, be they Arcadia, Eden or Thomas Lodge's 'Ardenne'. In such a way, Arden embodies the pastoral genre as a kind of collective fantasy, replete with 'good in everything,' where there is 'no clock' and its denizens may 'fleet the time' – the antithesis of the duplicitous court suggested by the Duke, which is indeed governed by the laws of material time and the 'working-day world.' This is exemplified in Act I (iii), when Duke Frederick demands Rosalind 'get … from this court within ten days.' In the dichotomy of the court and the country-side, such reliance on temporal markers is contentious – and comprehensively dissolved in Arden, exempt from 'the seasons' difference.'

Yet just as it constructs it, the play swiftly challenges the concept of a pastoral idyll. Touchstone is perhaps the most prominent example of this, as the ribald licensed fool who 'uses his folly like a stalking-horse, and under cover of that shoots his wit.' His debate on the merits of court as opposed to country with Corin in Act III(iii) exposes negative aspects to the agrarian life – his faux-scandalised account of January-and-May marriages between livestock, 'betray[ing] a she-lamb of twelvemonth to a cuckoldly … old ram' epitomises this, applying the controversies of the courtiers to the pastoral landscape. In the passage, despite its bucolic presentation, Arden is not without dangers and realities – certainly for the deer, 'native burgers of this desert city', who 'should in their own confines … have their round haunches gored.' The very landscape has an undercurrent of savagery, though it does not often emerge, personified in such terms as 'the brook that brawls along this wood', wherein the violent verb 'brawls' conveys a harshness to the otherwise sylvan scene. Thus, imagery of the dying 'wretched animal' is strikingly vivid, a 'poor sequestered stag', 'languishing[ing].' Evidently, the Forest of Arden is not merely a paradisal, pastoral locale, or the moral exemplum which Duke Senior describes it as.

Indeed, the conflict between endorsing the pastoral and comically satirising its features is apparent in the notion of love. The pastoral-Petrarchan lover, a fixture of the genre, is notable in the characters of both Silvius and Orlando, mocked in Jaques' Seven Ages of Man speech (II.vii) as 'the lover, addressing woeful ballads to his mistress' eyebrow.' Particularly, Orlando's poetry employs such features as the Elizabethan traditional blazon to itemise the features of an imagined 'Fair Rosalind' – her 'face ... eye … heart … ', pinning verses to trees in a caricature of the pastoral tendency to carve the lover's name on branches and trunks. The passage mocks such excess through the character of Jaques and his 'thousand similes', and indeed both Orlando's mawkish, trite romance and Silvius' status as the archetypal pastoral 'sighing shepherd' dissipate with the resolution of the marriages in Act V(iv).

And yet, just as the harmony of the idealised pastoral is restored, it is destabilised by Rosalind's epilogue: a reminder of the play's comic nature and a refusal to embrace a truly traditional ending. With her cascade of conditional 'if's' and the pivotal fronted adverbial 'if I were a woman', Rosalind occupies a liminal space between stage and audience, actor and character, masculine and feminine. She is the very incarnation of 'if', exhibiting a refusal to adhere to the limiting conventions of the pastoral and its often one-dimensional character types. Challenging the audience to consider their own perceptions of the play, the Rosalind of the epilogue reflects that central question – what is 'as we like it'?

The Yield, Tara June Winch

In Albert's didactic narrative strand which forms a third of the polyphonic narrative of 'The Yield', Winch challenges the colonial identity imposed upon Indigenous custodians. In the micronarratives of Albert's

dictionary, he begins to reveal aspects of Indigenous civilisation previously unbeknownst to Western literature. In the definition for 'star constellation the Southern Cross – gibirrgan', Albert espouses a sense of patriotic pride, 'this country's flag decorated by the awe-inspiring imagery of the five bright stars.' This harks back to August's narrative strand when she is waiting in line when a 'guy with a tattoo of the Southern Cross' cruelly belittled her in an antagonistic 'Go back to where you came from.' Winch draws a tension between Western values of control and subjugation and the Indigenous struggle to reclaim identity as patriotism is used against Indigenous nationhood as they are vilified as outcasts. However, Winch challenges the colonial impetus for dominion and homogenising Massacre Plains through Albert, as he places 'their father [Nguwanda] who was the brightest Star– Centaurus. In this subversive parallel between Greek mythology and Indigenous spirituality Albert reclaims the rightful primacy of Indigenous nationhood as the earliest settlers, the 'brightest star'. Thus, Winch challenges the imposed colonial identities onto Wiradjuri custodians as Albert reveals the long overlooked Indigenous civilisation.

By drawing a tension between western strictures of recorded history and the indigenous struggle to reclaim identity Winch endorses the indigenous language in embedding identity. Importantly, Albert's backwards dictionary not only includes English but also Wiradjuri terminology, as seen in 'Songlines – yarang gudhi-dhurag.' Here, Winch champions the importance of language, revealed by Albert in the beginning of his dictionary to be 'the key to all time.' By including both languages in this bilingual dictionary, Albert propounds a need for coexistence, an unhomegenised society. It is through language Albert is able to embed the orality of Indigenous ontology in the metaphor 'These lines are our early map-marking.' In straying from the reductive codification of language, harking back to the Reverend's list of '115 words' at the back of the novel, Winch instead embraces the transportive orality of Indigenous language and the untold stories, and identities they herald. Here, language, songlines, is given a supreme authority in the scientific language of 'measure' that is subverted by the hyperbolic 'impossible distances.' Albert reveals the Indigenous tradition of storytelling, 'passed down through story songs and dances' revealing to readers the repressed Indigenous identity that has not been written but orally transcribed. Thus, Winch exposes the oppressive written history of colonial settlers in reductive codification to instead endorse the Indigenous reclamation of identity through the orality of Indigenous ontology.

Winch not only endorses Indigenous reclamation of identity through language but also through reclaiming country, 'Nagurambang.' Albert embeds his storytelling with the land, 'we'd go and sit by the fire at the riverbank' to parallel how Indigenous identity is similarly entwined into the land. Here Winch harks to the 'Author's Note' which reveals the contested land of Australia in the 'Mabo decision, 1992.' As Albert evidences Indigenous custodianship, Winch reveals the rightful Indigenous primacy that has now been contested by colonial settlers through their brutal machinations of dominion, eroding the land rich with Indigenous History and identity through the project 'Rinepalm Strip Mining.' Here, Albert's [sic] introduces a metanarrative, 'Nguwanda – a great leader' who had 'four beautiful daughters' – paralleling Albert's own identity as a Wiradjuri elder with only two daughters, August and Jedda. Here, Winch reveals Albert's urgence to his community to 'help you all come live in the sky with me.' As Albert occupies the expansive 'sky', Winch weaves Indigenous society into the fabric of country, both terrestrial and avian. The land facilitates Albert's reincarnation in this post-humous dictionary to embrace readers in a progression to move past the Western lens of 'yielding' from the land to an Indigenous perception of land as a nourishing terrain sustaining the lives and identities of all individuals. Thus, Winch endorses the urgency to reclaim land in order to ultimately reclaim Indigenous identity.

Dracula, Bram Stoker

Bram Stoker's Dracula reveals Victorian anxiety surrounding England's waning geopolitical power and shifts in societal morals amidst the Fin de Siècle. Stoker warns of a knowledgeable obsession with the West from foreign powers, yet endorses the scientific and spiritual dedication harnessed to combat these same powers.

Stoker characterises Van Helsing as knowledgeable and focussed, yet differentiates him from the English protagonists through slightly erratic and emotive behaviour. His research of vampirism and how to combat

it is instrumental in the defeat of Dracula, particularly through the use of scientific knowledge and spiritual tokens such as 'communion wafers'. This unwavering pursuit of Dracula and fight to save 'pure' English women such as Lucy and Mina from his predation illustrates Van Helsing to be morally righteous in the quest against 'evil'. Stoker therefore endorses this notion of obsession in the pursuit of good prevailing, through his descriptions of Van Helsing's toil by other English characters also portrayed as 'good'.

However, this endorsement is not absolute as Stoker challenges obsession as a force for temptation. Van Helsing's admission that he has a 'sweet fascination' and 'was moved' by the vampire women in the passage undermines the notion of obsession having scope for dangerous desire. The somnambulant description of 'lapsing into sleep' as he is 'transfixed' by the women speaks to a moral lapse in judgement, as Van Helsing nearly loses consciousness of what is right. The 'voice of dear Madam Mina' being the vehicle to disrupt this obsessive temptation illustrates morality as a driving force in combatting 'instinct[ual] desire', Mina, being portrayed as the idea, pious Victorian woman. Here, Stoker challenges obsession through the notion of it being a dangerous subconscious entity.

Stoker additionally challenges obsession by utilising it as a hallmark of Dracula's characterisation, particularly his knowledge of England and its customs. In Jonathan's journal at the start of the text, Dracula is portrayed as being intelligent and well educated, particularly in English affairs. This is illustrated through Jonathan's discovery of his library full of books pertaining to English law, travel and trade, and his explicit desire to learn more about England, expressed to Jonathan himself. The inference that this is to better assimilate into English society is somewhat insidious and speaks to Stoker's illustration of Dracula as a physical manifestation of pervasive Eastern power, and its invasive capacity towards England. This use of Dracula's unwavering fascination with Western custom, and his ability to speak 'good' English and buy property in the heart of English societal homes demonstrates how Stoker contests obsession to be a threat to England's security and dominance, particularly in the hands of an Eastern foreign power. Perhaps Van Helsing's characterisation as Western, yet still foreign to England, suggests a malignant potential in this capacity for obsession that could parallel Dracula's own.

The notion of obsession beyond the control of the individual it consumes is somewhat marginalised by the text, as its multi perspective, epistolary structure negates the first hand experience of those plagued with it. This is demonstrated through the, in John Seward's words, 'case' of Renfield. Renfield's 'zoophagous' affliction for collecting and eating flies and spiders is portrayed as obsessive as he yearns for a 'strong life'. Additionally, his behaviours such as begging John Seward for a 'little kitten' and tallying numbers in a notebook with 'account' like precision. Yet, while it is revealed his behaviours are a result of Dracula's control, the clinical narration of his experiences by Seward and his continual depiction as a 'lunatic' marginalise sympathies for unconscious obsession. Indeed, even his gruesome death lacks a sense of empathy as Seward and Van Helsing look to utilise it to their own advantage, despite Renfield being an English casualty at the hands of Dracula's power. Perhaps this reveals a Victorian ostracism of those considered mad, as Stoker's depiction of Renfield's obsessive affliction marginalises the notion of obsession being out of the bearer's control.

Picnic at Hanging Rock, Joan Lindsay

Joan Lindsay's novel, Picnic at Hanging Rock, challenges British Imperialism's attempt to exert apparent 'wonderful order' onto that it benightedly deemed other – both ostensibly errant woman and menacing landscape.

In this scene, Lindsay criticises Mrs Appleyard's exertion of control as repressive; her attempt to exert a 'tighter rein' over the boarders typifies her authoritarian persona. Indeed, her attempt to restrain the girls' 'confident chattering' is evidently born from a fear that their conversations will engender irrepressible disorder. Readers, then, are reminded of the College Maxim 'Silence was Golden', seeking to ideologically and physically oppress the boarders – yet, Lindsay's denouncement of such repression is realised as the very quietude they seek is ironically transposed onto settler society as the 'mysterious disappearance' of Miranda and Marion remains an 'endless moment of silence'. Here, then, the

Headmistress's yoke of control sees the boarders repressed in 'uniforms and ugly straw hats' – this, of course, exemplifies the stifling accoutrement of Victorian morality. Earlier, the girls are chastened in 'silk muslins' but as they depart for Hanging Rock, the 'delicious freedom' of the natural world sees them relinquish their 'gloves' and at the Picnic Grounds they indulge in a timeless lassitude, away from the College's 'suffocating routine'. With this, readers recall the senior girls' liberating ascent of Hanging Rock – there, they relinquish their stifling 'stockings and shoes' and 'dance … barefoot' in a euphoric consonance with nature. Yet, Irma alone is deemed worthy of 'finding and saving': characterised as perpetually 'shaking out blue-black curls' she embodies the freedom the British Empire seeks to repress. So, Lindsay's endorsement sees Irma found 'without a corset', symbolising her libidinous liberation from imperialism's restrictive regimes that would deem her an ingenue 'doll' and 'lamb'. But that Miranda and Marion are condemned to remain 'lost forever' (Marion embodies the controlling cartographic gaze in her desire for 'a map of Hanging Rock' and Miranda's blithe delineation of the 'forests [as] home' represents the repressive imperatives of colonial invasion) appears fraught to post-colonial critics as they are not permitted the same freedom from colonialism's repressive strictures. In this scene, then, the preponderance of militaristic lexicon that likens the boarders to a 'female chain gang', walking 'two and two along' in a prescribed orderly fashion has Lindsay criticise the Headmistress' exertion of command and discipline.

Certainly here, the repressed vision of the 'well kept beds and lawns' exemplifies settler society's delineation and demarcation of the natural landscape. It is conspicuous, then, that the 'flowers are fading' and the 'garden held no autumn delights' as Lindsay challenges such unnatural repression. This reminds readers of the earlier vision of the College gardens, attempting to maintain 'well-trimmed lawns' and 'immaculate flowerbeds' – but this only betrays imagery of acquiescence as the imported 'heavy-headed dahlias' are impotently 'drooped' and the lawns 'steamed' under the sun, exposing Lindsay's contestation of this European paradigm as a faltering exertion of power. Such a bastion of apparent control is later utterly destabilised: the College becomes 'filled with shadows' and bears only 'pallid torches' as Lindsay scathingly reveals the sordid nature of the colonial campaign. Eventually, the College wears the visage of its own moral depravity, 'like a body already dead' – presented as a dire requite against the repressive edifice of Europe.

In turn, the characterisation of Mrs Appleyard here as waking from an 'uneasy sleep' in the 'dragging hours' of the night reveals her impending psychological dissolution and ultimate loss of control. Initially likened to a 'galleon in full sail', the Headmistress is the embodiment of control – her hair is repressed in a 'high, greying pompadour' and she has a 'respectable chest'. Then, as the 'pattern of the picnic' unfolds and facts concerning the girls' disappearance remain obscured, we see her descend into utter disorder. She takes on an 'uncontrollable tremor' and develops pendulous 'saggy breasts' as her inner turmoil can no longer be controlled, manifesting in her corpse-like 'flaccid' visage. By the novel's close, Mrs Appleyard lets out a scream 'more like a wild animal than a human being' as Lindsay challenges the colonial campaign's bigoted fears of the moral depravity ostensibly intrinsic to the landscape which they attempt to control and sees it, instead, realised in the Headmistress' 'savage' behaviour. Ultimately, her oppressive exertion of discipline has her reduced to a mere 'clumsy body … bouncing and rolling' as she meets her bathetic demise, acquiescing to the 'elemental rhythms' of Hanging Rock.

Mrs Appleyard's dissolution is earlier assured as Irma's return to Appleyard College incites the boarders' erotic liberation. Certainly, there, the 'voice of authority' is teasingly described as 'light' by the narrator and 'too late to control' the girls' unbiddable will. Their desires to be inducted to the carnal knowledge Irma now embodies is manifest in a rapturous, even violent, uprising as they plead 'tell us … Irma tell us'. With this, Lindsay celebrates their ecstasy as immutable – the undeniably homoerotic imagery of the girls 'pressed on [Irma's] sensitive breasts' realises this. As the 'weight of grey disciplines and secret fears' of Victorian morality 'bursts into flames' Lindsay would have us mirthfully relish in the girls' unabashed freedom from the Headmistress' control, ultimately realised in their 'wholesale exodus' of the College at the novel's close.

The Fire Next Time, James Baldwin

Opening with an extensive list of the "collection of myths" that white Americans "cling" to, Baldwin exposes, and thus challenges, the ignorance that he portrays as the crux of the white American identity. The verb "cling" in particular suggests a wilful, desperate desire to deny the truth, to delude oneself with a series of fictions, implicitly conveying Baldwin's criticism, or at least pitying of, this self-delusion. It also echoes his claim, earlier in the essay, that white Americans "cling to chimeras," and thereby "abdicat[e] any real effort to be free," furthering his critique of the way in which a lack of awareness about the nature of reality only creates a sense of entrapment. Moreover, his layered syntax, the accumulating clauses as he lists these "myths," creates the impression that America's national narrative, its self-perception, is an extensive accumulation of untruths, with Baldwin exposing, and thus criticising, the denial of truth that the white world "believes" in and relies upon.

This is reinforced by his portrayal of African Americans "having never believed" such "myths" as a "great advantage," which conveys his endorsement of truth and reality, and thus inversely implies that white America's delusion and unawareness is detrimental to itself. However, Baldwin does not appear to entirely criticise, but instead pities, white America's ignorance of its self-delusion, with him claiming that African American people feel "little hatred" for their white counterparts, viewing them as the "slightly mad victims" of their "own brainwashing." This characterisation of them as "victims" suggests that in convincing themselves of such falsehoods, such self-aggrandising myths, they have become entrapped in a state of untruth that they are unaware of, in a way that Baldwin portrays as almost pathetic or pitiful rather than deserving of hatred. This is furthered by his description of the "excuses that they gave themselves," suggesting that white America convinces and deceives itself, to preserve their sense of self, as conveyed by his earlier claim that white Americans visit the African American community with "spiritual travellers' checks after dark," desiring a love and company yet unable to face this reality. In this sense, Baldwin appears to sympathise with, even lament, the way in which ignorance can be cultivated out of necessity; deluding oneself enables a belief in "excuses," giving one the chance to "c[o]me to the Negro for love" without losing one's sense of self.

Yet fundamentally, Baldwin portrays white Americans, in being unwilling to accept the truth of their own needs, as creating a society in which it is "impossible to hate him, but ... also impossible for one to love him." The isocolon here, these parallel phrases, highlight the antithetical way in which self-delusion renders one estranged from others, equally and simultaneously unloveable and unhateable. Thus, in suggesting that unawareness renders one unable to "become a man," Baldwin challenges the possibility that one might exist, permanently, in a state of ignorance; that until one accepts the truth, one cannot achieve what one wants; one cannot be "love[d]" despite "c[oming] to the Negro for love." As such, whilst he criticises the white world's lack of awareness earlier in the text, claiming in the first essay that it is the "innocence which constitutes the crime," within this passage Baldwin appears to pity them, suggesting that they remain trapped and unfulfilled. Nonetheless, this crystallises into the warning, in the text's final pages, that the white world's "ignorance and intransigence" might make the universe's "vengeance inevitable."

Section B: Close analysis

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
%	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.8	1	2	3	4	6	9	11	13	13

15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
11	9	6	5	3	0.9	13.1

This section of the examination required a sustained interpretation of one text from the 2024 VCE Literature Text List. Responses needed to draw on a detailed analysis of two or more of three set passages as a basis for a discussion of the text as a whole.

The set passages were of sufficient length for students to engage with them and to allow students to fulfil the assessment criteria.

The set passages were presented in the order in which they appear in the original text. For collections of short stories, the title of the story from which each set passage is selected was provided. Likewise for other text types, such as collections of essays and poetry.

Section B was worth a total of 20 marks.

Lower-scoring responses on poetry and short stories in particular wrote on the passages discretely, with little linking commentary. We encourage students to consider the ideas and language in the passages in terms of the text as a whole and how meaning is made overall.

Higher-scoring responses fulfilled the ‘expected qualities’ requirements in different ways, developing individual approaches that reflected subtle, perceptive and complex insight into both text and task. These pieces were grounded in the exploration and analysis of the complexities of language and ideas in the passages as they developed their justified, tightly structured interpretations of the text. Students’ writing was expected to be coherent and sophisticated, to enable them to sensitively and accurately analyse precisely how the authors created meaning. Teachers and students could examine how the expected qualities build in sophistication and depth in the higher bands, so that ‘relevant and plausible’ remains the core of an interpretation.

Some responses this year offered interpretations that could not be considered plausible; this suggested inadequate preparation. As a result, such responses could not be awarded a score of more than 12 out of 20. Some responses used the concept from Section A to direct their close analysis in Section B. This was not always productive, as it could lead to a narrow or irrelevant interpretation that did not draw appropriately from the Section B passages. Similarly, some responses used the verbs ‘endorsed’, ‘challenged’ and ‘marginalised’ from Section A, which was not always appropriate or constructive for creating a sustained interpretation; this approach could in fact limit the ability to complete a relevant and plausible response to the three passages as a basis of an interpretation of the text.

There was not a wide range of texts chosen in Section B. The poetry of Emily Dickinson and Carol Ann Duffy were by far the most popular choices, followed by WB Yeats. More than 25 per cent of students wrote on Dickinson; these responses ranged from perceptive, complex and sophisticated to superficial.

Student samples

The following high-scoring responses reflect a range of approaches. They should not be seen as models to be copied, but as examples of how different students wrote.

Carol Ann Duffy, The World's Wife

Carol Ann Duffy's poetic collection 'The World's Wife' reclaims marginalised voices of women from throughout history, mythology and literature, offering them agency and autonomy often denied in their original narratives. She condemns the corruption of male selfishness and the stifling oppression of patriarchal forces in 'Mrs Faust', yet illuminates the potential for women to reclaim mediums of domestication and oppression in Circe's scathing critique of sexual objectification, and subversion of her original androcentric narrative. Duffy's final poem, 'Demeter', elevates the restorative potential of the female bond, asserting her satirical feminist collection to be above all a celebration of women's inherent resilience in the face of male domination.

'Mrs Faust' explores the intrinsic connection between patriarchal forces and the capitalist system, both of which confine the narrator to a perpetual cycle of dependency on her husband. Her detached recount focuses on Faust's rapacious exploits, mirroring the subjugation of female perspectives. His disregard and objectification of women is epitomised in the demeaning, artificial image of 'a virtual Helen of Troy', undermining women's intrinsic value through the dehumanising pronoun, 'its'. This self-indulgent superiority is further in conjuncture with his belittlement of 'Mephistopheles' as merely 'the Devil's boy', and sexual references 'gagging for it, / going for it, / rolling in it' accentuating Faust's insatiable sexual rapacity. Hereby, Mrs Faust's subjectivity comes to the fore; it is only through her husband's visceral demise and descent into purgatory 'straight down to Hell' that she is revitalised out of indifferent monotony. The forced removal of her male counterpart emancipates and enlivens her, as distanced, truncated and brief lines give way to elegiac, detailed language. Sensory imagery 'a serpent's hiss', 'knew it's smell', and 'scaly devil hands' assert Mrs Faust's final engagement with the form, and her rejuvenation. Subversively, she chooses to detail the 'terracotta Tuscan tiles' rather than underscoring any sentiment in relation to the loss of her husband; the spitting, consonant 't' alliteration cements her purposeful nonchalance. However, through the enjambed simple rhyme 'hell' and 'well', the narrator returned to her listless tone – her enumeration of material acquisitions 'the yacht, the several homes, the lear left 'to me' underlines the superficiality and ridiculousness of these materialistic conquests and objects; all meaninglessly reduced to 'the loot, et cet, et cet' The poem ends focused on Mrs Faust and her perpetual indifferent 'c'est la vie', 'then I got well'. Duffy suggests that her continued exposure to 'hellish' corruption has desensitised her to both pain ('it hurt like hell') and men's deception ('I kissed its lips'), highlighting the dehumanising effects of both capitalist and patriarchal exploitation. Her final condemnation 'the clever, cunning, callous bastard' reveals a lingering respect for her husband, connoting her continued complacency in the system she critiques. Through Mrs Faust's reliance on her husband's materialistic acquisitions and unique narrative voice, Duffy critiques the destruction of male hegemony.

Duffy's 'Circe' reclaims the medium of cooking to be more than a mere domestic duty, but a potent assertion of agency for the speaker to revenge the sexual objectification and abuse she suffered at the hands of men, who she dehumanises as 'pigs'. Circe addresses 'nereids and nymphs', minor mythological female characters often relegated to background roles in Greek mythologies, symbolising that her dramatic monologue will illuminate the marginalised female perspective. Unlike 'Mrs Faust's detached observations of her partner's exploits, 'Circe' establishes herself as a figure of authority – rather than a victim of oppression – through repeated first-person reference to herself 'I'm fond', 'I'm familiar', 'I've stood'. This is furthered through the assertion of 'all pigs have been mine' and 'under my thumb', mirroring language of sexual conquest and bodily ownership. The porcine semantic cluster 'boar', 'swine', 'pork' and 'swill' furthers her degrading metaphor of men as 'pigs', reducing them to base, animalistic lust as revenge for their own objectification of her. Within the next stanza, the infinitive 'skills of the tongue' – 'to lick, to lap, to loosen, lubricate' carry a double entendre of men's dishonesty and manipulation with sexual connotations. The lineation 'to lie/ in the soft pouch of the face' suggests men's deceit to be as intrinsic to them as physical form, and the lilting 'l' alliteration reinforces the poem's incantatory quality, paralleling Circe's power as a formidable enchantress. Duffy invites the reader to question whether men have, 'listen[ed], ever to you', underscoring the silencing of women's voices in both patriarchal literary

spheres and wider relationships. The juxtaposition between women's almost ethereal 'chimes', 'singing and clear' and violent instruction to 'mash' and 'chop' suggest that brutality is not inherent to women, but rather cultivated by the relentless cruelty and objectification they endure from men. The final stanza's volta conveys a wistful pathos as Circe reminisces having 'once knelt' before men, a powerless that sharply contrasts her earlier formidable violence. However, her employment of the alliterative epiphet [sic] 'shining shores' coupled with the 'burning sun' display her reclamation of Homeric phrases, often used in narratives focused on male heroism. By illuminating Circe's subjugated interiority, Duffy exemplifies the importance of elevating female voices and calls for a reclamation of tools for oppression to become mediums of empowerment.

The final poem in the collection, 'Demeter', depicts the revitalisation of a mother in abject grief, epitomising the potency of the female bond. She subverts the traditional Shakespearean sonnet to elevate not romantic but maternal love. The caesura in the first line conveys Demeter's struggle to articulate her sorrow in her daughter's absence, and harsh consonants in 'winter and hard earth', 'tough', 'granite', 'flint' evince Demeter's sterile and barren desolation. This complements the long assonance of 'cold, stone room' which invokes the isolated privacy of mourning. Polyptoton in the second stanza 'break' and 'broken' physically manifests Demeter's heartbreak and suffering for her daughter's pain and the absence of their matrilineal connection. However, the poem's second half is imbued with warmth as phrases lengthen to celebrate the renewal Persephone's return brings. Long assonance and dipthongs [sic] of 'long, long', 'walking', 'daughter' elongates the moment, conveying Demeter's desire to savour her daughter's return. The fiercely proprietorial asyndenton [sic] of 'my daughter, my girl' evokes Demeter's tender endearment and humanises her as a grieving mother rejuvenated. The emergence and subsequent alteration of voices within Duffy's collection is epitomised in the connection between Persephone's 'bringing all of springs flowers', which recalls her first poem, Little Red-Cap's 'out of the forest I came, singing with flowers.' Duffy depicts femininity as an inherently natural force, and subtly connects all voices within her collection despite their individual stark differences. The renewal of 'Demeter's second half is manifested within the soft tenderness of 's' and 'm' sounds: 'softened and warmed as she moved.' The poem – and thereby The World's Wife collection – ends with the Shakespearean couplet's neat rhyme 'soon' and moon', wrapping her poems with a relieving sense of finality. Persephony [sic] is embodied by the 'new moon', a symbol of hope, spring and girlhood, evincing Duffy's central aim to explore the vitality of feminism.

Through the myriad of sources from which Duffy's unique narrative voice emerge, she explores the complexity and diverse nature of women's experiences outside of restrictive patriarchal narratives. By illuminating historically effaced characters and subverting traditionally androcentric narratives, Carol Ann Duffy ultimately advocates for the rejection of myths that glorify male superiority, and simultaneously celebrates the potency of the female bond.

The Complete Poems, Emily Dickinson

In Emily Dickinson's collection 'The Complete Poems' binaries are nullified, and careful observation reveals the undulating uncertainties that surround the junctures of human existence. From Poem 254's depiction of the gentle persistence of nature to Poem 258's revelation of a fragmented identity Dickinson nurtures a growing curiosity about the world below, above and beyond the horizons of human nature in an equally disturbing and intimate way.

In Poem 258, brimming with the cosmic splendour of ['light'] Dickinson reveals the fragmented identity of individuals. In the definitive reportage 'There's a certain' the speaker confidently emulates a growing anticipation for an ascension of the human spirit, connoted by the ethereal divinity of 'light'. Yet, this is suddenly disoriented by the bleak imagery of 'Winter Afternoons –', the chilling pathetic fallacy subverting the warmth of the celestial 'light'. A similar tension is paralleled in Poem 465, where the speaker observes an anticipatory tension 'Between the light – and me'. Yet in this poem, the panoramic light instead casts an internal affliction heightened by the synaesthetic imagery 'oppresses, like the Heft / of Cathedral

Tunes'. Here, the speaker's hearing, vision and touch are blurred in this sensory turmoil which mirrors the speaker's realisation of their fragmented identity. As the speaker shifts away from the collective cognition emphasised by the plurality of 'we can' Dickinson instead places importance of discovering individuality, hidden beneath the layers of 'internal difference' a metaphor for the unresolved tensions that lie within the speaker's fractured identity. Within this intimate realm of the self the speaker begins to probe at the symbolic 'meanings', encapsulations of the speaker's epistemological doubts. Here, the speaker's estrangement from the rationalist binaries of society as the reject the hierarchical education system […]. The blunt statement 'none may teach it'. This internal confliction grows increasingly intense as it is externalised into the world, mirrored by the full [rhyme] of 'Despair' and 'Air' to reflect the permeating quality of this grief. Dickinson personifies the 'Air' as almost a tangible presence warning the speaker, sending 'an imperial affliction' as their fragmented identity is revealed by the imposing 'light'. In the poem's denouement, the personification of 'shadows – hold their breath –' reflects this moment of mortal hesitation hinting at the speaker's unease. This unease is left as an unresolved tension as Dickinson crafts an elusive imagery 'the look of Death – ' the end line clash drawing the speaker's uncertainty into a quivering silence. Thus, Dickenson reveals the fragmented identity of individuals who yearn for divine sanctity despite their troubled internal worlds.

Where Poem 258's crafts a tension between mortality and individuals Poem 389 reveals the inability of weaving death into the ritualistic cycles of mundane life. The speaker's definitive reportage 'There's been a Death' establishes an air of familiarity and depersonalisation, heightened by the objectification of 'Death' in the monosyllabic phrase 'I know it'. Here, the static quality of death slips into the reality of the speaker, embodied by 'the numb look \ such houses have'. Yet, Dickinson subverts this certainty in the clashes before and trailing '– alway –' creating an air of suspicion and unreliability in the speaker's once-certain voice. However, the speaker's adoption of impersonal titles 'the neighbours' – 'the Doctor' – 'The Children' – 'The Minister' further estranges society from the formalities of death. Dickinson emphasises the clockwork predictability of life in the blunt tone of the speaker suggesting the rituals surrounding death as 'Abrupt – mechanically'. However, this numbed atmosphere is called into question by Dickinson in the jarring imagery of 'the Man/ of the Appalling Trade'. Here, Dickinson uses this sardonic euphemism of a mortician to mock the speaker's incomprehensibility of death. This unsettled certainty is further emphasised as confliction slips into stanzaic structure disjointing the fifth stanza. This contrasts the speaker's conviction in 'There'll be that' instead isolated and lingering like a tremulous afterthought. Dickinson critiques the speaker's limited perspective in attempting to normalise death as an 'easy' event instead materialising this air of grief and despair into 'The Intuition' that permeates the atmosphere. Finally in the humble imagery 'In just a country town' Dickinson carves the universal experience of death into also a uniquely intimate event in the localised setting of 'a Country Town'. Thus, Dickinson reveals the impossibility of weaving death into the quotidian instead revealing the innate fear that charts the struggling human condition.

Where Poem 389 carves a growing unease, Poem 254 lulls readers into the healing, beautiful grandeur of nature. Here, the speaker personifies this intangible feeling of 'Hope' into the avian imagery of 'the Thing with feathers'! Here, this human feeling is anthropomorphised into a bird, livened by the kinetic diction of 'perched' – 'sings' – 'never stops'. This fleeting […] existence harks back to Poem 533 where the 'Two Butterflies' 'waltzed' – stepped' and 'rested'. This symbiotic relationship between nature and the divine is heightened by the synaesthetic imagery of 'the [time] without the words'. Here, the speaker surrenders their sense, deprived of the man-made binaries of 'words' to achieve sensory peace, a respite from their bleak existence. Dickinson weaves the gentle persistence of nature in the terse lineation '– never stops – at all'. Yet, the speaker's wavering relationship with accessing the divine nature is paralleled by the metaphor of those 'that could abash the lithe Bird'. Here the descriptive 'little' engenders nature as a fleeting presence, an ephemeral beauty and a temporary salvation. The speaker's hyperbolic phrasing '[chilliest] land' and 'strangest sea' mirror the speaker's incomprehensibility of nature and yearning to access this divine presence. Yet, this yearning is unreconciled as the speaker is relegated to the end of the final verse '– of me'. In this structural depiction, Dickinson reflects humanity's insignificance in the

grand cycle of nature, a perpetuating cycle that exists as an elevated plane of life beyond the mundane reality the speaker is relegated to.

Through Poem 254's fashioning of Nature as a divine yet elusive entity and Poem 389's unveiling of the fear that charts the human condition Dickinson examines an unknowable world which form the foundation of an eclectic human existence. Amongst unresolved tension, opaque voices and varying prosody Dickinson dissects the universal experience of epistemological questioning to also be uniquely individual, beyond the binaries of a Victorian society. It is through this array of distinct voices that Dickinson weaves an indelible thread of ambivalence into the fabric of the human condition.

The Winter's Tale, William Shakespeare

Set between the dual worlds of Sicilia and Bohemia, Shakespeare's late problem play The Winter's Tale contends with the 'problem' of linage and fidelity, in a world where continuing one's bloodline is seen as an act of self-preservation. Act 2, Scene 1 reveals the baselessness of Leontes's accusations against the "good queen" Hermione, who innocently reveals Polixenes's desire for his 'boy eternal' days. Act 3, Scene 1 demonstrates the consequences of Leontes' hubristic rejection of his 'baby', which culminates in Perdita's and Florizel's respective rejections from their paternal figures in Act 4, Scene 4, revealing the depth of Polixenes's entry of Florizel's paternal romance.

Such is it that Act 2, Scene 1 is punctuated by Leontes command to Hermione:

"Tongue-tied our queen? Speak you."

The playful, euphonic tones of the alliterative phrase 'tongue-tied' is harshly reparted by the short imperative phrase 'Speak you', revealing not a buoyant offer to speak but an order. Notably, despite her physical presence on state, Hermione is vocally absent, not speaking until Leontes's entreatment to. This displays the depths of Hermione's obedience to Leontes as a wife, thus making her following attempts to 'win' Polixenes merely an extension of a performance of her wifely duties, not spoken out of her own free will. This, in turn, makes Leontes subsequent asides and outbursts – "Too hot, too hot!" – lose their validity, as the unshakeable first impression of Hermione is that of a deferential wife. This is in concordance with Paulina, an arbitrator of justice through the text, who confirms the queen's moral righteousness:

"Good queen, my lord, good Queen, I say 'good Queen'"

Here Pauline's epanaleptic repetition of the phrase "good Queen" emphasizes this quality of 'goodness' henceforth confirming Hermione's piety to the audience while simultaneously trying to convince Laontes of it. In this sense, Hermione is characterised as a pure, deferential 'wife' character who, through her morality, functions as a mouthpiece for the truth and for justice. Indeed, Leontes, who seeks to assert himself higher in the Elizabethan Chain of Being than the gods, shown by his rejection of oracular truth for his own subjective ideals, is demonstrably envious of Hermione's natural affinity for the Gods. This, combined with his lashing out at the women of the court, catalyses his need for an ascetic redemption, beginning the restoration of his character.

This longing for purity is captured in a similar sense, in Polixenes's recollections of his youth to Hermione when he longs to become "boy eternal" again. Such is it that Polixenes states: "The lads that thought there was no more behind/ But such a day tomorrow as today." In doing so, Polixenes creates a still paysage of the "twinned lambs" Polixaes and Leontes, by referring to "behind" and "tomorrow" it leads his speech the notion of being stuck in one unmoving moment. It could be seen, then, that the longing for childhood, indeed, is rather a longing for simplicity: the still pastoral images of boyhood seem idyllic when compared to the shifting, ever-changing relationships between the men and their wives, which are portrayed as taxing in their volatility. Indeed, the bucolic imagery of Polixenes "boy eternal" is evocative of the rural strings of Act 4, Scene 4, where Florizel and Perdita contend with the fallout of Polixenes enraged outbreak. The fact that Polixenes condemns Florizel on his wedding day, the day of consummation, speaks to his own suppressed idealisms of an unchanging, paradisic childhood,

"unbreech'd" and not yet exposed to the "cursed" forces of female sexuality, wanting to maintain Florizel's innocence. Indeed, Shakespeare presents the notion of a parallel narrative, spanning the disparate spheres of Sicilia and Bohemia, yet making up one "bawdy planet", through Polixenes and Leontes "twinned" storyline: they both condemn a family member they love for a perceived unloyalty against them. The dangers of such brash action is punished by the forces of the text, which burden both kings with the temporary losses of their children, punishing rejection with rejection.

Amidst condemning unfair punishment against the innocent, 'The Writer's Tale' similarly condemns the association of women as witches, and rather, positions them as restorative forces. The stage direction of Paulina "Laying down the baby" describes her actions with a sense of tenderness, officiousness, which belies a maternal figure. Yet, this is followed, and sharply contrasted by, Leontes tricolon of sharp exclamatives:

"Out! A mankind witch! Hence with her, out o' door!"

The use of high modality orders such as 'out' demonstrates the extent of Leontes tyranny, with his diatribe against Paulina. Paulina's referral as a "mankind witch" mirrors Perdita's insult of "unused wretch" and Hermione's attempted character assassination, demonstrating how all three main women are, in the text, subjugated to accusations of their "witch" powers. Significantly, Perditas ""mingling" with ""the prince" Florziel, demonstrates her upwards mobility in seemingly ascending to royal status, which is a threat to Leontes and Polixenes patriarchal systems.

In the final analysis, at the heart of 'The Winter's Tale' is a parallelism of two kings, Polixenes and Leontes, who undergo similar arcs of anger followed by familial retribution – Leontes's loss of his family, and Florizel's entreatment to be "wipe[d]" from "succession". In doing so, a [reveal] for the simplicity of homosocial friendships is revealed, where Polixenes and Leontes harsh diatribes against women are revealed to be projections of their rejections of royal duties and longing to be "boy eternal". Yet, as the curtains close on Shakespeare's tragicomic experience, through the miraculous revival of Hermione, women are indeed the restorers of the world.

WB Yeats: Poems Selected by Seamus Heaney, William Butler Yeats

From the reverant figure of Charles Parnell alluded to in 'To a Shade', the reflective speaker of 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931', to the despondent persona of 'The Curse of Cromwell', alienation for several misfit minorities, contemplating the role of poetry and the arts amidst a time of declining cultural appreciation for artistic endeavors, and music, upon the terrifying power of "the pack" to shun, silence and set aside the misunderstood few.

Respectfully addressing the "thin shade" of the Irish Nationalist, Charles Parnell, the speaker to 'To a Shade' links a bleak picture of "the town" of Dublin with the alliterative imagery of "grey gulls" and "gaunt houses". Here, the lifelessness of the ghostly figure parallels the lifeless town, which seems to only come alive at night as the personified houses "put on majesty". Through this depiction, Yeats implies that without strong-willed figures such as Parnell, towns lose their vitality and slip back into monotonous paradigms. Admonishing the shade to "be gone again" to avoid the public who are "at their old tricks", the speaker maintains his respect for Parnell, but evinces the Dubliners' disdain for the main through the harsh plosive 't' sounds in the final line of his first stanza.

The dropped line to begin the second stanza visually amplifies the connection between the "thin shade" and another man of the same "passionate serving kind", understood to be the art dealer, Hugh Lane. Breaking the iambic pentameter, to convey how Lane tried to give to Dublin what could have "given [the townspeople] children's children loftier thought", Yeats elongates the line to accentuate the power for art to enhance the psyche.

Indeed, the simile of Lane's proposed offering of art to the town as "working in [people's] veins like gentle blood" suggests that art has the capacity to enlighten not only the mind, but also the body. As such, Yeats implicitly affirms the importance of art for humanity. Yet the noble intentions of the man are met with

"insult" and "disgrace", highlighting the power of the philistine "pack" to repudiate offerings that go against normalcy and tradition. In the final stanza of the poem, the speaker again employs apostrophe, urging the "unquiet wanderer" of Parnell to "gather the Glasnevin coverlet about [his] head". The gentle imagery here, coupled with the soft alliterative 'g' sounds coalesce to confirm that the ghost is "safer in the tomb".

Turning instead to consider the general public's ability to push aside tradition, 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931' opens with lively imagery of the "waters rac[ing]", and "run[ning] for a mile undimmed in Heaven's face.' However, the tone quickly shifts as the water "darken[s]" and "drop[s] into a hole", and the speaker's uncertainty with the rhetorical question in the final line of "what's water but the generated soul" is betrayed. While water, as in the "fountain" in 'Ancestral Houses' (1921), often represents a source of eternal artistic inspiration to Yeats, the grim imagery here suggests a demise of the creative psyche, once akin to purity of Heaven, but now "run[ning] underground". Furthered by the desolate imagery of "dry sticks under a wintery sun" and the "tragic buskin" of nature, and then the "sudden thunder" of a mounting swan", the notion of a decline in the value of poetic tradition is foreshadowed. The paradoxical "arrogantly pure" swan which "sets to right / What knowledge or its lack had set awry" is suggestive of the power of art and poetry to dispel ignorance. From the rumination of the estate grounds, the speaker shifts in the final stanzas to honour the house and its owner, alluding to an ailing Lady Gregory who "toils from chair to chair" in the Coole Park house to pay tribute to her for her role in providing a haven for artists and writers on her estate. The listing of "beloved books", "old marble heads" and "old pictures" that comprise the house are redolent of the "long galleries" in 'Ancestral House' and the sculptures with "marble or bronze repose" in 'Among School Children'. As in his other works, here Yeats appears to celebrate the power of art to provide both beauty that transcends beyond a person's own lifetime, as in the motif of the "golden bird" in his poems 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'Byzantium'. As such, Yeats' ouvre is pervaded by a celebration of the transcendental potential for art to unite body and soul, ancestor and descendent. Thus, the volta in the final stanza of 'Coole Park', as the speaker melancholically reflects that "we were the last romantics" who wrote of "traditional sanctity and loveliness" but are now in a world where "all is changed" signals the loss of poetic tradition, as it is cast out of "fashion" in a modernising time. Alluding to the Pegasus, as in 'Easter 1916', Yeats concedes that the "high horse" is "riderless" and the ominous final imagery of the swan as it "drifts upon a darkening flood" solidifies the idea that the poetic tradition of the past has been pushed aside. Thus, Yeats laments, as he continues to in his later works such as 'The Curse of Cromwell', that "we and all the muses are things of no account", censuring the Irish masses for "beat[ing]" the "lovers and dancers" who create art "into the clay".

Ultimately, in his poetry, Yeats considers both the capacity for "the pack" to reject progress and the preservation of tradition, leaving non-conformist and once-valued artists to become misplaced.