

# 2020 VCE Literature examination report

## General comments

In 2020 the *VCE Literature Study Design* was adjusted to accommodate the circumstances of remote learning, but the format and assessment criteria for the examination remained unchanged, ensuring consistency of assessment. Thus, teachers and students remained familiar with the examination specifications and the expected qualities for the mark range, as published on the VCAA website. Any special arrangements were applied subsequent to the marking of the student scripts. Despite the very difficult year experienced by students and teachers alike, the mean total scores for the examination were similar to previous years and serve as a testament to the hard work and adaptability of both students and their teachers.

It is impossible to determine the extent to which the adjustments to the study design affected student choice for the examination, but the spread of choices was diverse, an indication that more possibilities were being recognised.

There are two sections in the examination, each scored out of 20 marks. Students must write on two different texts, each from a different category, such as novels, plays, short stories, other literature and poetry. They should not write on two texts for the same category.

Section A required students to respond to a proposition about the text, drawing on a literary perspective of their choice to develop their own view of the text. They needed to make precise and effective use of textual evidence to substantiate their reading, by reference to specific moments in the texts or by quotation. In general, students understood the demands of this task, although there were some shortcomings apparent. Most significant was the evidence of prepared responses which were general in nature and did not address the specific issues raised by the topic. These might be described as 'one size fits all' responses; while they may have interesting and valid points to make about the text, they will not score as highly as they would if they engaged with the topic on the paper.

While it is expected that students have undertaken a certain amount of writing practice during the year and rehearsed ideas that they would like to use, that is different from presenting a prepared and memorised response. A prepared response is almost immediately identifiable, as it is written in a way that describes the concerns of the text in a general manner, does not specifically engage with the terms of the topic (or mentions them and then proceeds on another line of argument) and offers evidence that is not always the most pertinent to the topic. It will read like a general introduction to the text, even though it may include some minor links to the topic.

Students do not have to agree with the proposition and merely illustrate it, but nor should they completely reject it and create a proposition of their own. High-scoring essays were able to explore the terms of the topic and present their own thoughtful response to it.

Teachers are encouraged to give their students practice in analysing the terms used in the questions, exploring potential lines of argument. For instance, Question 24 asked 'In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf is not arguing for significant social change. To what extent to you agree?'. Several broad responses were open to students. They could have begun by examining the concepts of 'significant', 'social change' and even 'arguing for'. To what extent is Woolf's quasi-narrative and fictionalised account an 'argument'? They could have defended, as many did, the notion that envisaging 'a more androgynous sensibility' would allow more

women writers to flourish and thus be a significant change, ultimately leading to a change in the role of women in society as a whole, and that economic self-sufficiency ('A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction') was essential to this. On the other hand, some chose to argue, using the historical context of the production of the text, that Woolf's address to an already privileged group of women who had access to tertiary education ignored the social inequality that lay behind that access and thus failed to address fundamental economic and social change that would or could generate more equal social outcomes. It would not be inappropriate to use the latter social-analytic perspective to combat and critique the former, but it should be clear from which dominant perspective the student is reading.

To offer a second example, in Question 19, students were asked to 'Reflect on the idea that Clarke's *Foreign Soil* is about the challenges of adapting to unfamiliar territory'. A key word here is 'adapting'. Students could consider whether the stories all argue the need for adaptation or whether maintenance of culture or resistance to change are ideas explored in the stories. They could have approached this topic by exploring what it is like migrating to 'foreign soil'. They could also have recognised that some of the protagonists were living on foreign soil even in their home country, or speaking the mainstream language in a country that had long been their home but still not belonging, thus opening up a discussion of 'location' or 'territory' in relation to 'unfamiliarity'. Who are the 'outsiders', the 'insiders', and how is power exercised by them or against them? This topic lent itself to post-colonial, feminist, historical, class, racial and other perspectives.

Regardless of which text they were writing on, some students were very vague about their literary perspective in Section A, perhaps mentioning it in the introductory paragraph or waiting until the conclusion to indicate it. While the examination specifications do not require the students to name a perspective or cite critical works or schools of thought, it is expected that students will demonstrate a grasp of the way their chosen perspective influences their reading and will use appropriate discourse to reflect that understanding throughout the essay, not merely as part of a framing paragraph.

Furthermore, students are asked to choose only one perspective for this task. Although they will have studied at least two in their coursework, they need to understand that this examination task is not the same as Outcome 1 in Unit 4. Many students discussed one perspective then moved on to a second or even a third, with the consequence that no single perspective was analysed in depth and the essay was somewhat fragmented. Although it is possible to adopt a hybrid perspective, such as feminist post-colonial, this should be made clear.

In Section B, students were offered three passages from each text, with the instruction to 'Use two or more of the set passages as the basis for a discussion of [text name]'. Students were required to examine closely the moments in the text represented in the passages and use them to build their response to the text as a whole. They must work upwards from their reading of detailed moments to their reading of the whole. To do this successfully requires close attention to the nuances of language in the selected passages, recognising such features as recurring motifs; narrative development; how characterisation is achieved; how narrative voice and tone suggest the ways readers are asked to respond to characters; shifts in time as the narrative develops; how the features of the text, which include structural choices and features of the form, setting and context create the world of the text; and, especially in the cases of short stories, poetry and other literature, how the given passages may reflect different facets of the writer's work and concerns. Students are encouraged to give detailed discussion to the individual passages, recognising the distinctiveness of each moment in the text or the individuality of each of the component works, not jump frequently from one to another.

Again, there was evidence of prepared essays, characterised by introductions that were very general in nature and the inclusion of extended discussion of passages not offered on the paper. It is appropriate for students to allude to passages beyond those on the paper but these references should be incidental, aptly chosen to reinforce a claim or to counterpoint an argument, perhaps prefigured by connectives such as 'in contrast...', 'whereas...', 'similarly...' or 'just as...', always returning to the main argument. This is often done competently by students who know their text thoroughly. Students who dwelt on passages not set on the

paper, instead of those that were, often gave the impression that they did not know the text well enough to address the given passages but preferred to write on what they knew better.

In the case of novels, plays and some other literature texts, the students are responding to a single entity; in the case of short stories, poetry and some other literature, they are asked to create a reading of a more diverse collection. To do this, they need to develop a sense of the work as a whole and also recognise that each individual work in the collection is its own entity. Many students referred incorrectly to these collections as 'anthologies'; the only anthology on the text list is *Language for a New Century*, a collection of works by numerous authors and edited by Chang, Handal and Shankar. The short story, essay and poetry texts are all collections, curated by a single author.

Students need to be prepared to recognise and confront the uncertainties and ambiguities that the highly condensed language of poetry may offer, including its often-unusual syntax, rhythm and line structure. This is also true of such deliberately ambiguous texts as *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Passion* and *Buried Child*.

Most students understood the general demands of these tasks and responded to them appropriately. Overall, there were slightly fewer responses in the very top range, more in the mid-range and few very low-scoring or incomplete papers.

There were, nevertheless, some students who appeared to have written two Section A essays or two Section B essays or even two essays that appeared to blend the two tasks, using the Section A topic and writing about the passages in the same essay. Each of these papers was individually reviewed. While students are not prevented from quoting from the Section B passages in their Section A response (indeed, the passages often encapsulate moments that are formative in shaping our readings of the texts) and may conversely draw on a literary perspective in constructing their response to Section B, they should keep the focus of the different tasks, and the criteria for assessment, firmly in mind. To restrict their evidence in Section A to only that which can be drawn from the passages would be a considerable limitation of scope and, conversely, to focus on the Section A proposition in writing their Section B response would be to miss many of the rich possibilities for close discussion of language that the passages offer.

Although there were responses on all texts, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Ariel* were by far the most commonly chosen texts. *Northanger Abbey*, *North and South*, *Othello*, *Twelfth Night* and *A Room of One's Own*, however, were also popular choices. A significant number of responses were on texts new to the list, such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Ladies' Paradise* and the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Kenneth Slessor.

Novels, plays and other literature texts were most commonly chosen for Section A and plays, short stories and poetry were most commonly chosen for Section B. As we know from the data, there was a small increase in the number of students choosing short stories and poetry in Section A, a choice that ensured they discussed the work as a whole and were able to draw on a wider range of evidence than that offered in the Section B passages.

Teachers are encouraged to consider the range of possibilities offered by the list. Texts in their early years on the list will repay the investment of time and preparation over several years, as well as providing new stimulus and professional conversation.

## Specific information

Responses to Section A generally followed a conventional essay structure, with an introduction orienting the reader to the student's interpretation of the topic and an indication of the literary perspective being adopted, followed by body paragraphs or sections developing the argument and a concluding paragraph to draw the essay together. As indicated above, this perspective did not have to be named, but it was usually clear to assessors what perspective was being acknowledged. It may have been a school of thought, a particular author or critic or even a particular article. Some students took a little longer to indicate through their

language what perspective they were using, or through what 'lens' they were viewing the text and some lower-scoring responses introduced the perspective only at the end.

In Section B, students adopted a variety of ways of approaching the task. Some wrote a general introduction, recognising ideas suggested in the passages. Some engaged immediately with the language of the passages and used that to build an essay, developing towards a conclusion that demonstrated an understanding of the text as a whole. Some established a contrast between two of the passages and used that to play out a discussion of the text. High-scoring essays were able to show how these moments in the text lead the reader to develop a sense of the whole. They were also, of course, able to show how their close examination of the language led to a coherent, complex and subtle reading of the text.

## Novels

Students appeared to feel very comfortable with prose narratives, in general showing an awareness of the social context of the novel's setting and production, an understanding of the plot and character development and the ways in which assumptions and values are represented in these texts, through explicit narrative commentary, dialogue, and the qualities that are rewarded or challenged by the text as a whole. A few students confused one character with another or misunderstood plot details but, on the whole, student knowledge of texts was very sound. Students were able to convey an understanding of the construction of the texts, such as the multiple voices in *The Passion* or *The Anchoress*, or the ironic narrative stance in *Northanger Abbey*. Where some were less successful, however, was in conveying the effects of intentional uncertainties of a text. *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, for instance, quite deliberately leaves some moments and events rather intractable to rational explanation but many students seemed unable to deal with such ambiguity.

## Plays

Students generally knew their texts well and appeared to enjoy engaging with them in both Section A and Section B. Students paid attention to the staging of the plays, revealing an understanding of how positioning on the stage, costuming and stage directions have an influence on the way we understand the text. As well, they understood the way dialogue is used to convey character, views and values, and commented readily on tone in dialogue. This was particularly evident in discussions of *A Taste of Honey*, *Twelfth Night* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and adept use of such detail enriched the students' discussion of the texts.

## Short stories

*Foreign Soil* was the most popular choice and responses showed clear engagement with the stories. In Section A, a post-colonial reading was the one most commonly adopted and in Section B students were able to make some generalisations about the effects of the dislocation experienced by different characters. Students who wrote on *Only the Animals* often revealed a limited understanding of the historical and political contexts of the individual stories; they would have been well-advised to be familiar with these backgrounds in order to understand the collection as a whole.

Few students wrote on *Dance of the Happy Shades*, but these stories are worthy of consideration; evocative of a particular period and setting, they are very accessible and offer rich opportunities for connections among the stories.

It often seemed that students saw the task in Section B as merely a discussion of three passages, or the three stories from which the passages were drawn, rather than a discussion of the way the given passages illuminated the text as a whole.

## Other literature

Although there were few answers on Winton's *The Boy Behind the Curtain*, a similar point could be made in relation to that text. Students appeared to feel more comfortable with *A Room of One's Own* and *Candide*, which have a greater narrative unity, but they would have benefited from closer engagement with the language of these texts and appropriate quotation to support their arguments.

## Poetry

As has been noted above in relation to the short stories, it is important for students to recognise that the task is not to discuss three passages, but to discuss the text as a whole (as represented in the poems set for study). Students may make pertinent references beyond the poems selected on the examination paper but should not dwell on them.

A significant number of students seemed to search for or present a reductive idea to underpin their discussion of the poems, such as 'nature', 'death' or 'motherhood'. It is not helpful to the discussion of the text as a whole to reduce the poems to illustrations of a single idea.

A number of students wrote on the anthology *Language for a New Century*, chiefly in Section A, responding well to its contemporary appeal.

Many students were unable to adequately handle the condensed syntax and punctuation of Emily Dickinson's poems. They often discussed the poems as texts whose meanings needed to be explicated or decoded, instead of responding to them as tightly composed works of art in which the language creates the meaning. In discussing the poems, students need to capture the voice of each poem, with its hesitations, pauses, contrasts and even apparent contradictions, and be prepared to work through those to demonstrate their own understanding.

Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* was the most popular poetry choice. Some students wrote extremely well, engaging with Plath's moments of acute observation and insight into experience, working closely with the language to show how the imagery, rhythm and patterning of the poems create complex and sometimes ambiguous meanings. Other students, however, often forced rigid symbolic equivalences onto the images, particularly in relation to references to colour, ignoring the ways the poems work as literary works. Others seemed to assume that the speakers of the different poems were identical, frequently equating them to Plath herself. While it is important to have some understanding of the cultural background of the poems, particularly in relation to a poem such as *Daddy*, a poem about which many students displayed little awareness of the Holocaust imagery, students should not assume either that the 'I' of the speaker is the writer herself.

The poetry of Kenneth Slessor, new to the list, was discussed very well by students who responded to the vivid and sometimes striking imagery and to the assured control of poetic forms; other students, however, tried to generalise across the three passages to impose a kind of unity on them, such as reading them all as explorations of 'death' in a reductive way. In fact, the poems were drawn from different periods of his poetic career and reflected different concerns; to the extent that imagery of death was present in the poems, it was explored in very different ways.

Samuel Wagan Watson's *Smoke-Encrypted Whispers* and Petra White's *A Hunger* were both also popular choices and the quality of the responses, which were chiefly found in Section B, was high. Many students were clearly engaged by this contemporary poetry and presented fresh and thoughtful discussions that relied on close observation of the imagery, the layout on the page, the rhythm of the lines, the voices and the cultural contexts of the text.

# Sample essays

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

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

The following essays are all high-scoring, although not necessarily in the top range. While they may demonstrate a sophistication of ideas beyond what some students bring to the task, they illustrate different ways of approaching the tasks and different styles of writing, from which all students can benefit. They are offered not as models or as essays to be emulated, but as resources for teacher and student discussion.

## Section A – Literary perspectives

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.5	1	1	2	4	5	4	6	8	11	13	13	10	8	5	4	2	1	12.6

### Sample 1

#### *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Tennessee Williams

While every family's dynamic is unique, Tennessee Williams' portrayal of the Politt family in his play, 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof', allows him to question, scold and challenge the gender constructs of the 1950s Mississippi Delta. With expectations for men and women to fulfil their respective roles, Williams affirms how it is not only the Politt family members who apply this pressure to themselves to comply, yet that it is also American society which destroys individuals' identity and true self expression. Essentially, it is Williams' decision to subvert the power and control of gender expectations which conveys his questioning of the need for such stringent social constructs.

Through the construction of his characters, Williams scrutinises 1950s American society's expectations that women are subordinate, obedient beings, questioning why the dormant strength that he has granted to each of his female characters cannot escape. In his stage directions, before he even grants Margaret her first line of dialogue, Williams notes that Margaret should be a 'pretty young woman' who the audience quickly ascertains in a stereotypical housewife. The playwright manipulates her costume, having her wear a 'slip of ivory satin and lace' and who willingly offers Brick, her husband, an alcohol rub' to make his feel 'fresher'. Williams does not provide Margaret with any chance to express herself in a unique or powerful way, thus he seems to lambaste the way in which 1950s society accepts only one portrayal of a woman. Williams does, however, give his audience the opportunity to perceive glimpses of Margaret's concealed feminine strength as she is unafraid to be 'shouting against the room of the water' as Brick showers to get his attention. As Big Mama enters Brick and Margaret's room. Williams continue to confront his audience with Margaret's loud dialogue as she cries '[pleasure] works both ways' as Big Mama accuses her of not making Brick 'happy in bed'. Williams seemingly affirms that face that women can endeavour to protect their own strength, yet by portraying Big Mama as a woman with the strength of a 'charging rhino' and a 'loud voice' that seems to be 'everywhere' who chooses to scold her daughter-in-law for seeking the same strength and gender equality, the playwright questions why women contradict their own attempts to create an impactful identity for themselves. Even Mae, who evidently passes on her belief that women's sold purpose is to bear children through her child, Dixie's 'precious instinct for the cruellest thing', berating Margaret for being 'childless', is Williams explication of how these female family members all possess the fortitude to reject feminine constructs, yet choose not to do so. Therefore, by constructing characters who fail to cling onto their inner strength and instead comply with gender expectations, Williams portrays a family that implores his audience to question the restrictive nature of 1950s American society.

The playwright also delves deep into the experiences of his male characters to convey that, while 1950s men are not as likely to outwardly complain about the stringency of the patriarchy, they will internally suffer at the hands of male expectations, their identities and emotions, severely damaged. In his 'Notes of the Designer', Williams dictates that Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, the 'original owners' of the Politt's plantation have, left Brick and Margaret's bedroom 'haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon'. While the audience is unaware of the presence of this homosexual relationship that inhabited the space, Williams insinuates the effect of a couple who happily defied social expectations through Brick's forced 'cool air of detachment'. The playwright creates this illusion that Brick is a stoic man, yet through subtle use of symbolism in his broken ankle which is 'bound and plastered', the audience can perceive that some unknown force has damaged him. By having Brick and Margaret believe that they simply 'occupy the same cage' and elucidating that Brick's fear of social rejection cause him to '[hurl the] crutch' at his wife at the mention of Skipper, Williams questions the stringency of 1950s society which prevents the couple from accepting themselves as they truly are. Unlike Straw and Ochello, Brick and Margaret are 'restless' and are Williams' depiction to his audience of a family who suffer at the hands of society which scorns any relationship that is not a wife and husband with children. In Act Two, when Big Daddy forces Brick to sit with him and talk, Williams exemplifies how even the emblem of the patriarchy struggles to maintain an unrealistic, emotionless appearance. In fear of his death from 'malignant cancer', Williams manipulates his set design with a 'sweetly chiming' mantel clock to represent a *momento mori*, a reminder to Big Daddy that his patriarchal status cannot live forever. Yet even this dying man 'quietly, shyly' glances at his own son, Williams conveys that he cannot express his love for Brick. Thus, through tragic portrayals of a family whose men quietly fail to express their true selves, Williams not only questions 1950s gender expectations, yet also pleads his 1950s audience to see the unnecessarily damaging influence of gender constructs.

After having berating the confining 1950s gender roles, Williams stops criticising the downfalls of society and instead begins to portray a family who embraces progressivism, allowing gender fluidity to free them from their suffering. In Act Three, Williams removes Big Daddy from the stage entirely, symbolising his apparent rejection of the patriarchy. As a result, Williams has Big Mama 'gratefully [take] over' this role as patriarch, represented as Big Mama echoes Big Daddy's dialogue as she yells 'CRAP too, like Big Daddy'. The playwright again manipulates costume as she 'snatches the withered corset from her breast' and 'steps on it', symbolising his desire to have his audience stop questioning the awful constraints of 1950s American society and instead share in his apparent celebration of its destruction. Margaret similarly inverts gender roles as she 'boldly crosses to the centre of the room' and announces her false pregnancy, creating a focal point for the audience as she finally has her voice heard. By stealing away Brick's 'liquor' and crutch, which reveals his true vulnerability, Williams seems to suggest that she becomes the baby-maker rather than the bearer as she goes to 'make the lie true'. Therefore, by portraying a family which transforms into a group of people who represented unprecedented defiance of gender roles, Williams presents his audience with his belief in the need for a more progressive, gender fluid society.

While Williams' initial portrayal of the Politt family ostensibly complies with the stereotypical gender expectations of 1950s American society, his subversion of these roles and his presentation of a family who in fact rejects such constraints questions the authority of this society. Ultimately, Williams berates stereotypes and stringent expectations, eventually conveying his belief in the necessity for gender liberation.

## Sample 2

### *Smoke-encrypted Whispers*, Samuel Wagan Watson

In Samuel Wagan Watson's 'Smoke Encrypted Whispers,' the poet's signature fragmentation and subversion foregrounds the sense of loss and despair that permeates modern Australia. Through the imagery of the road, Watson demonstrates the deleterious effects that dominant ideologies have on Indigenous culture. Moreover, the hegemonic adherence to commercialism and Enlightened ideals of logic and reason further prevent a genuine connection to the dreamtime. Yet importantly, Watson doesn't solely respond to this loss

with grief; indeed, the sense of anger oftentimes overpowers despair. Channeling this anger into a lightly postmodern, subjective message of hope, Watson responds to loss by evoking the 'happy dark in [his] mind'.

The ubiquitous motif of the road evidences the sense of disconnection that Indigenous people face in modern Australia. In 'we're not truckin' around,' it is a 'bitumen line of wandering impetus', ignorantly destroying the culturally significant 'bora ring' in its wake. Through the interjection 'where'd ya get ya license [!]' Watson impugns the authority of the 'Invader,' for Indigenous peoples have had their 'phone' 'knocked' 'off the hook forever,' the means of communication and spiritual connection stripped away. Indeed, in 'jaded olympic moments' they are 'city people without a language,' forced into existence that is at odds with the ways of the dreamtime. Watson further epitomises this in 'we're not truckin' around' with the line 'we're too used to feeling a kinship with the discarded and shredded,' demonstrating the ostracisation their dominant powers elicit upon those who live in the 'fringes of the big road.' Through the banal, dull imagery of the 'black pieces of truck time,' Watson bemoans this subjugation of Indigenous peoples. In 'a verse from the cheated,' the poet's weary enumeration of those he has lost to roadside accidents, with its postmodern fragmentation, powerfully evidences the sense of despair that these metanarratives of urban expansion and expedient progress can have. Hence, Watson laments the loss of culture that the road represents.

Compounding the damaging effects of the road is Watson's exploration of an undiluted consumer culture, further distancing society from the sacred and the authentic. In 'jaded olympic moments,' the dance of the 'ochre kissed women' who 'did their thing' is revealed by the poet to be a mere simulacrum, for 'only a romantic would think that' it accurately portrayed the state of race-relations in modern Australia. Indeed, the concept of multiculturalism, espoused and celebrated by the media, exists only in an 'airline format,' in 'hotel bone,' epitomising the way in which knowledge is formulated by those in power. Then the poet reminds his reader that 'it's still very much an US and THEM kind of deal in this modern dreaming' reinforces the sense of grief that runs throughout the poetry, with enormous facades impeding us from understanding reality. In 'a verse for the cheated,' the 'tourists' purchase 'postcards of pristine beaches that were nowhere near' the Sunshine Coast hence perpetuating the Baudrillardian, hyperreal simulation created by dominant ideologies. Indeed, that they merely take 'photos of the roadside crosses' exemplifies the damaging loss of not only reality but also morality, with the commodification of grief only exacerbating the sense of despair that Watson channels. In 'cheap white goods at the dreamtime sale' the 'critics' 'vomit' when presented with the 'pure soil' that is authentic Indigenous art. Instead, 'dot paintings and ochre hand prints' manufactured in 'Manhattan' are splashed 'across the arse of designer jeans.' This unsuccessful attempt to mimic 'the land of the original dreaming' further engenders the loss of Indigeneity, reminiscent of the 'waning down of culture' that postmodern theorist Frederic Jameson forewarned of. This hyper-commercial, globalised world dilutes authenticity, distancing Indigenous peoples from representation in the power structures that dominant society.

The dogmatic adherence of hegemonic cultures to Enlightenment ideals of logic and reason precipitates the loss of individuality and identity. In 'labelled,' the 'cold floor of the locked ward' represents the sense of imprisonment that Indigenous peoples experience as a result of strict rationality and objectivity. Moreover, that the labels of differentiation; 'full blood?/half blood!/half breed-/half caste ...' are in perpetual flux epitomises the instability and identify of the 'rational' methods of the 'doctor.' Indeed, it further demonstrates the failure of these attempts to 'label' a person in realising what it sets out to achieve; a precise delineation of an individual's essence. Hence, that the 'doctor' continued to 'probe' despite the fallacies of their strict logocentrism tends to a loss of individuality in the speaker. By embodying the voice of a horse, Watson satirically epitomises the fragmented self that undiluted reason can create, resolving to be 'a goddamned pedigree of some sort.' This lack of an authentic self is further evidenced by the poem 'waiting for the good man.' That the speaker 'felt the good man leaving' epitomises the absence of a continuous self. Hence, the speaker 'is missing' the 'god' aspect of his self, demonstrating the instability of this discontinuous personal identity. This yearning for a complete, whole self reinforces the grief that modern Australia elicits upon those living on 'the fringes.'

Yet simultaneously, there is an overwhelming sense of anger that runs throughout the poems, rather than despair. In 'cheap white goods at the dreamtime sale,' the plosive accusation of 'copyright and copious character assassination on the menu' lambastes the practice of cultural appropriation. Further, the idea that

the 'lead foots' should simply 'fend for [them]selves' creates a sense of enmity between those in power and those on the fringes, assailing against rather than lamenting the metanarrative of progress. In addition, the poet's sarcastic tone further establishes an active criticism of hegemony. In 'hotel bone,' the idea that the '1967 referendum' represents progress because it granted the speaker 'the freedom to practice the voodoo of semantics within the marrow of Hotel Bone,' evidences a critical tone that does not demonstrate despair, but sheer anger. Adding to this oppositional tone is the passive aggressive 'Oh yeah?' in 'labelled,' directly challenging the ignorance of the 'doctor.' Hence, the poet's tone in postmodern fashion oscillates between a sense of grief to combative language.

Watson channels this sense of anger into a hopeful message for the future of Indigenous culture. In 'a verse for the cheated,' the poet admits that the road 'prepared to deliver us on our future paths of success.' In contrast to his denunciation of the road as an 'encroaching absalom,' this is perhaps the most postmodern aspect of Watson's poetry. The sense of ambiguity and subjectivity flows through his fragmented writing. How this 'success' may manifest itself is epitomised by the poem 'night racing,' with the speakers 'racing through the suburbs of white stucco dreaming' and consequentially decentering the poem balance, with the 'custodians of the estate domiciles' hiding behind 'lace curtains' in fear. Further, Watson empowers those who are oppressed and forced onto the periphery, describing them as 'hard' and 'reachable' and celebrating their ability to tentatively 'watch and observe.' Despite the overwhelming sense of loss that the poems manifest, Watson moves beyond passive despair and decenters the structures that enable this oppression.

In Watson's 'Smoke Encrypted Whispers' the poet powerfully evokes the injustices inflicted upon Indigenous culture. Yet, rather than simply dwelling in despair, the poet channels his anger and dismantles the metanarratives espoused by those in power.

## Sample 3

### *Twelfth Night*, William Shakespeare

Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night, or what you will' stages the comedic breakdown of social norms and conventions within the setting of Illyria. This descent into saturnalian misrule allows a number of characters to recognise and confront their personal shortcomings. However, on a more tragic note, this process of moral improvement belies a greater class struggle present within the play. A more politicised reading asserts that those who are economically and socially disadvantaged are even more entrenched within a ruling class ideology come the conclusion of the play.

The comedic disruption of the Elizabethan status quo allows the more privileged characters of the text to gain self-actualisation and betterment of character. Orsino for instance is at the beginning of the play, a product of his own self-love. He sees himself as a lover par-excellence, 'as all true lovers are', indulging in petrarchan tendencies which see him conflating. Love and madness – 'so full of shapes is fancy' that it is 'high fantastical'. This act, we see, is simply a self-serving protective mechanism, shielding the Duke from any true hardship that may come from a physical romance of flesh and blood. As such the arrival of Viola/Cesario is wholly shocking to Orsino. She speaks masterly 'to the Duke, teaching him of 'what love women to men may owe'. Thus, by providing him with a physical object of affection, he begins the process of moral improvement, whereby he opens himself to the reality of a mutual-beneficial relationship. This leads to Orsino, at the conclusion of the play, referring to Viola as her 'master's mistress', the alliteration here demonstrating his newfound understanding of tenderness and reciprocity. Therefore, we see the comedy of *Twelfth Night* to not necessarily lead to tragedy, as this can result in self-fulfillment, and an appreciation of humane values that lead to a fuller sense of society upon the reinstatement of the status quo.

Despite this humane assertion, however, it would be unfair to suggest that *Twelfth Night* did not contain elements of tragedy as a number of characters suffer under an oppressive social system. Malvolio, Olivia's supercilious steward, appears to hold a similar self-love as Orsino, as he dreams of one day becoming a 'Count Malvolio' emerging from his 'daybed' in his 'velvet gown' This ambition however, as an affront to the rigid social hierarchy of Elizabethan society, sees Molvolio being ultimately punished. Initially, this comes

through direct insult, as Sir Toby condemns him to 'wipe [his] chain with crumbs', the imagery of chains here suggestive of his servitude and entrapment within the Illyrian class struggle. On a greater note though, his class-centric ambition can be seen as the key motivator behind his eventual gulling. This sees him being made a 'mockery' to his court, as he is tricked into wearing 'yellow cross-garters' in front of his social better, Olivia. Thus, by being made a 'contemplative idiot', we see that Malvolio tragically, becomes a victim to the oppressive confines of conventional social binaries. Feste is another character who we see suffers from social disadvantage. His related stage directions – 'giving him money' and 'giving him coin' – identify him as being wholly economically enslaved to the ruling class. As a 'trapping' of the mobility, he is utterly reliant on their coin, simply to ensure his own survival. This leads to his constant search for money, which is ultimately summed up by Maria, as she conflates 'being turned away' and a 'hanging'. Thus, by likening unemployment to death, we are soberingly reminded of the plight of the jester, who must appeal to the ruling class simply to continue living within the 'winds and rain' of an oppressive social regime. For those characters who face disadvantage in the text, the play's comedy quickly turns to tragedy, as their struggle is seen to be horrific and commonplace.

However, this tragedy does not totally subsume the play, as we are given brief but hopeful displays of resistance towards social superiors. Feste, as the most intelligent character in the play, uses his wit to confuse and mock Sir Andrew Agvecheck, as the clown uses made up words – 'impeticos thy gratility' – to fool those in higher class positions. This reveals an intense irony, whereby Feste is beholden to the nobility of the play, despite these characters ultimately being the most half-witted. This challenge is continued through his dialogue with Orsino, which sees Feste exclaiming that he would 'have men of such constancy put to sea', before taking a blatant jab at Orsino's aristocratic privilege, which always ensures a 'good ride out of nothing'. Thus, through his subversive class role, Feste is able to somewhat rebel against the very figures that keep him enslaved to a ruling class ideology. Molvolio too is able to reject the social conventions through his role as a steward. In response to the revelrous Sir Toby – who sees 'care as an enemy to life' – Molvolio is given agency to scold the noble, question his 'respect of persons, place or time'. Shakespeare's to also leave Molvolio's character on the note of his 'revenge' can be read subversively, as this may indicate his refusal to hide – the suffering of the working class characters of the play. As such, we see that Shakespeare does not totally dwell on hardship, as he utilises comedic conventions to allow the disadvantaged of the play to resist their class uppers.

Therefore, Shakespeare's Twelfth Night does have elements of comedy, as well as tragedy. He reveals the plight of the working class as a symbol of this social struggle, but refuses to accept this as a marker of the overall tone of the play. In fact, through a recognition of the humane elements of Twelfth Night, he is able to demonstrate how comedic the breakdown of social norms in Illyria eventually lend to self-fulfillment.

## Sample 4

### *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen

Decency and integrity are rewarded.

As Austen satirises the social, literary and gendered conventions of her society in Georgian England in her novel *Northanger Abbey*, she aligns a sense of decency, integrity and authenticity with Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney's unconventional heroism and escape from these patriarchal constraints that subjugate, marginalise and silence women. It is through Austen's celebration of Catherine as an alternative model to female success, who achieves the ultimate goal of marriage, that she endorses the deconstruction of hegemonic gender roles and imbibes Catherine with her own individuality, growth and goodness.

Austen challenges the conventional roles of a sentimental heroine from the poem's very onset, in her opening line describing Catherine as someone who 'no one would have supposed ... to be a heroine', establishing the novel as a subversion of gender roles. The omniscient voice of the self-conscious narrator repeatedly describes Catherine's status as the novel's heroine, while ironically narrating her qualities as having 'nothing heroic about her', 'fond of all boys' plays', greatly prefer[ring] cricket' and 'hating confinement

and cleanliness', thus offering Catherine as a model of femininity outside of patriarchal boundaries, and ultimately rewarding this subversion in Catherine's reward in the novel's end, of the 'perfect happiness' of marriage. Hence, in her exposition of Catherine as untutored in the ways of the world, inadequately educated with incomplete and random 'quotations' that do not prepare her for her 'entree into life' and the gendered politics of the society of Bath, Austen juxtaposes Catherine's sense of freedom Fullerton to Isabella's rigid adherence to social norms and expectations later in Bath. As she attributes Catherine's decency and integrity to her being unrestrained by convention, Austen condemns patriarchal restraints as a flaw of Georgian society.

The females of the novel exhibit a conventionally feminine preoccupation with material, pulling Catherine toward an obsession with appearance. However, Austen critiques these materialistic values that permeate Bath society as a source of indecency, in her depiction of Isabella and Mrs Allen as truly engrossed in the roles society has dictated for them. Austen condemns Mrs Allen as an archetype of that blind adherence to patriarchal moulds of femininity, in her resigned passivity 'placid[ly] wish[ing for Catherine to] get a partner', obsession with 'dresses of the newest fashion' and inadequate education of Catherine. Isabella, however, demonstrates a more active desperation to fulfil these roles, ventriloquising sentimentality in her hyperboled speech and exaggerated fixation on 'gown[s]', 'bonnet[s]' and 'coquelicot ribbon[s]'. Austen indirectly critiques the values these females embody in the reductive and patronising comments of the omniscient narrator, in the expression of 'surprise at there being any men in the world that would like [Mrs Allen] well enough to marry' her and the ironic gap between Isabella's rhetoric and actions as she sets off 'in pursuit of the two young men' she had previously described as 'odious' and having put her 'quite out of countenance'. Therefore, Austen critiques the inauthenticity and lack of integrity of these characters as a result of their subscription to hegemony, and condemns Isabella to an ending that does not result in marriage and 'security'.

Austen also reconfigures models of masculinity in the ironic juxtaposition between Henry Tilney, John Thorpe, and the values they each represent. She critiques Thorpe's aggressive and dominant demeanour that is consistent with hegemonic moulds of masculinity in Georgian England, slandering his sisters as 'ugly' and silencing Catherine as he dominates the conversation. Austen elucidates Catherine's dismay at his behaviour, as she 'become[s] less and less disposed to find [him] agreeable', juxtaposed with her comfort in Henry's company and gentle composure, and thus denies Thorpe the plot he aims towards in marrying Catherine, punishing his bombast and lack of decency. Austen elevates Henry's reverence for conventionally feminine pursuits in his fascination with 'true Indian muslin' and assertion that anyone who 'dislikes [novels] must be intolerably stupid', endowing him a 'happy' ending in marriage and thus endorsing his dissolving of gender divisions and the voice he provides Catherine.

Austen locates the novel within a fusion of ordinary reality and Gothic realms, incorporating elements from both worlds in her plot structure that loosely mimics that of a Gothic novel as Catherine is swept away on various carriage rides to medieval castles. As she constructs deliberately elusive boundaries between Gothic realms and the 'common feelings of common life', Austen exposes the tyranny of Gothic villains as not so far from reality, rather than restricted to the deeds of otherworldly, fantastical monsters. Austen, rather, suggests tyranny as a product of oppressive convention and indecent behaviour towards women, in her condemnation of her villainous characters who all share a common trait in their adherence to convention. In Isabella's objectification of herself for the male gaze, obsessing over the 'yellow gown' and 'braids', Thorpe's disregard for the conventionally feminine pursuit of novels as 'so full of nonsense' and General Tilney's subjugation of his own daughter in not allowing her to marry the 'man of her choice', Austen ascribes malice to these characters in their subscription to hegemonic discourse and roles that subjugate women and punishes each of these characters in undoing the plot they each strive towards.

Constructing the novel as an ironic parody of Gothic fiction, Austen mimics the plot of the Gothic novels that fascinated Georgian England. While she endorses the Gothic genre as an opportunity for female agency and voice, repeatedly referencing female-authored novels throughout the text, Austen actively deconstructs the literary conventions of the genre that encourage indecent behaviour and female disempowerment. Whereas the typical Gothic dynamic illustrates dominant male heroes and villains who exhibit toxic behaviour and

control female characters with a passive, helpless damsel-in-distress-type heroine, Austen reconfigures these gendered frameworks to empower the characters who embody more integrity, authenticity and kindness. Elevating both Catherine and Henry as unconventional heroes who escape these Gothic gendered frameworks that disempower women and promote male cruelty, Austen endows these characters with ‘felicity’ and ‘perfect happiness’ in marriage in the novels conclusion, once they escape the structures of the Gothic setting of *Northanger Abbey*.

## Section B – Close analysis

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	0.4	0.3	0.4	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9	13	12	11	8	7	4	3	2	1	12.1

### Sample 1

#### *Othello*, William Shakespeare

The first passage presents the malignancy of the Machiavellian Ensign, Iago, as is used by Shakespeare to allude to how Iago’s malicious machinations catalyse the tragic plots. Speaking in prose to the ‘poor trash of Venice,’ Roderigo, Iago implores the ‘snipe’ to ‘speak ... too loud’ or ‘taint... his discipline’ immediately making the helpless Roderigo complicit in his evil plots. The use of prose initially speaks to the baseness of Iago’s evil, yet it is perhaps concomitantly used to imply the stupidity and foolishness of Roderigo and how Iago does not require to dress his rhetoric up in blank verse to convince Roderigo to comply. The use of prose is juxtaposed immediately with Iago’s oratory in blank verse in his soliloquy in the first passage, which is used to illuminate how Iago can deftly manipulate language to suit his own malicious purposes. Iago opens his soliloquy declaring ‘That Cassio loves her, I do well believe’t/That she loves him, ’tis apt and of great credit’ and Shakespeare makes use of a balanced rhythm and syntax through the use of dialogue to imply how the Machiavel creates his plots in a most measured and considered manner—which is the hallmark of an adept villain. Furthermore, the rhyming couplet in the very same phrase illustrates the pure revelling and delight Iago takes in piecing together such intricate and malicious plots. While disguising the motivations for his evil as revenge for ‘the lusty Moor /hath lept into my seat’ – the use of assonance in ‘lusty Moor’ elongating his speech and placing emphasis on Iago’s sheer contempt for Othello – Shakespeare presents Iago as being truly motivated by an unquenchable thirst for revenge. Shakespeare elucidates this through the consuming connotations of Iago’s desire to ‘diet [his] revenge’ and the image of the ‘poisonous mineral gnaw[ing] [his] inwards’ implying that Iago has an insatiable appetite for vengeance, something which totally engrosses him and dominates the outcome of the play. Moreover, the venomous description of the ‘poisonous mineral gnaw[ing] Iago’s inwards’ conveys the innate evil that resides within him, and is so poisonous that it quite literally is brought out from his gall and poisons the rest of the characters. The poison imagery is echoed later in the play as Iago pledges to ‘pour the pestilence in [Othello’s] ear’, the plosive, yet soft alliterative ‘p’ sound serving to amplify the stealth which Iago acts to achieve his evil ends and the silent invisible nature of his pernicious insinuations for the almost oblivious Venetians.

Unlike the use of prose to dupe the foolish Roderigo, in the second passage, Shakespeare presents Iago as speaking in blank verse, elevating his speech in order to snare the ‘valiant Moor’ with his trap. Iago is astute in his recognition of this, yet in the first passage still sees Othello as debased and foolish as he pledges to ‘Make the Moor thank me, love me and reward me/ for making him egregiously an ass.’ The use of the triplicate injects Iago’s speech with a bouncy playful rhythm which intimates how he relishes in bringing his superior, Othello, undone. Furthermore, as Iago likens Othello to an ‘ass’ Shakespeare reveals the way in which Iago considers the Moor to be foolish and degraded. Reference to Othello being an ‘ass’ are seen earlier in the play, as Iago vows to lead Othello ‘by the nose as asses are’ which serves as an image to imply that Iago will be able to wield his evil in such a way that he can so subtly lead the ‘Moor’ astray to fulfil his

wicked plots. In this sense, Iago is depicted as a kind of shepherd figure – one with ironic Christian overtones which would resonate with the highly religious Jacobean audience as Shakespeare subverts the reverend image of a shepherd with the sheer depravity of Iago who controls all. Indeed Othello views Iago as ‘honest’, claiming in the second passage that ‘this fellow’s of exceeding honesty and knows all qualities ... of human dealings’ which illustrates how Iago has succeeded in curating a trustworthy image of himself and infiltrating the mind of the once ‘noble’ Othello. As Iago plants the seed that Desdemona may have committed an act of infidelity he paradoxically and concomitantly beseeches Othello to ‘hold her free’, thereby implying that Othello was going to punish her before the thought had even entered Othello’s mind. This sense of doubt is amplified by the triplicate in Othello’s soliloquy as he declares ‘she’s gone, I am abused, and my relief / must be to loathe her’ – the use of tricolon mimicking the way in which Othello’s doubts are accumulating within his mind. Furthermore, the use of enjambment places emphasis on Othello’s relief to ‘loathe her’ which is reminiscent of the the-filled speech of Iago in the first passage as his soliloquy delineates his unjustified contempt for the Moor, much like Othello unjustifiably resorts to detesting his beloved wife. Such reveals the truly pervasive and lingering nature of Iago’s words as Othello’s once noble mind is infiltrated by Iago’s pestilence, in the play’s climax, which gives rise to the play’s abhorrent events.

Although Shakespeare suggests Iago’s depravity is the primary cause for the play’s tragedy, Shakespeare also litters all three passages with sexist references to imply the undertones of misogyny within the play. In Othello’s soliloquy in the second passage, he declares his wife a ‘haggard’ – a wild hawk – whose ‘jesses’ are his ‘dear heart-strings’ following his discovery of a potential sexual encounter between Cassio and Desdemona. The image of the ‘haggard’ conveys how Othello – and by extension the men of the time – viewed women’s sexual autonomy as something wild and uncontrollable which like a predatory beast evoked fear within them. Moreover, the image of the ‘jesses’ speak to Othello’s desire to control Desdemona and her sexual proclivities, an image also symbolic of the enfettering social norms for women. The symbol of the ‘haggard’ and its savage implications are echoed later in the soliloquy as Othello laments that ‘we can call these delicate creatures ours/ and not their appetites’. The animalistic diction of creatures echoes that of the ‘haggard’, and the linking between women’s sexual autonomy and their ‘appetites’ imply how Othello sees women’s lust as something consuming and insatiable, and thus something to be feared. Othello’s oratory becomes further degraded as he speaks to Desdemona’s ‘corner... for others’ uses’ which portrays Othello as degrading the virtuous Desdemona to her sexual function. In fact, Othello’s repugnant preference to become a ‘toad’ in a ‘dungeon’ speaks to how men misogynistically imagine women’s sexuality to be disgusting and debasing for their husbands. Instead Shakespeare posits that men prefer to control the women, as elucidated through the image of ‘jesses’ and his declaration that women are ‘our creatures’, implying that men have a right to the propriety of women and their sexual ‘treasures’. This is echoed briefly in the first passage as Iago calls his wife Emilia a ‘night cap’, reducing her to an object and one associated with the bedroom and thereby sex. Shakespeare implies men’s craving for control and their preoccupation with women’s sexual chastity as in the last passage he laments that Desdemona is ‘cold, cold... even like thy chastity’, the image of frigidity implying his desire to preserve her sexually and thereby preserve her image as a chaste, obedient woman.

Contrary to the play’s rapid rhythm in ‘double time’, Shakespeare imbues the final passage with a sombre reflective tone to force his audience and characters to pause over the irreversible repercussions of impetuous and vain decision making. In Emilia’s singing of Desdemona’s ‘song of Willow’ in ‘willow, willow, willow’, Shakespeare makes use of iambs and assonance to draw out the long vowel sounds and amplify the plaintive ‘o’ sound and thereby the suffering of Emilia. Additionally, Othello’s possession of a ‘good sword’ within the intimate realm of the bed chamber elucidates the sheer incongruity of violence and impetuous actions within domestic affairs – something which played a part in the play’s terrible consequences. Othello, finding comfort in war, is seen as reverting to his military tendencies as he declares ‘here is my journey’s end, here is my butt/ and very sea-mark of my utmost sail’ the use of nautical and military imagery elucidating his desire to revert to his comfort within it. The use of enjambment within the same phrase illustrates the sense of momentum with which Othello’s actions are taken which is akin to the uncontrollable force of the compulsive sea he references. His lingering self-questioning of ‘where should Othello go?’ uses detached language to illustrate the disconnect from the ‘valiant Moor’ of the play’s beginning. It is Othello’s self which

is newly enslaved to Iago which Othello condemns, and Shakespeare too as he depicts the lingering irreversible impact of Iago's malicious machinations conceived in the first passage at the play's close.

## Sample 2

### *Ariel*, Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath's 'Ariel' presents a series of pensive poems that reflect the temporal beauty and contentment interspersed among life's most poignant challenges. Throughout the agonising lens of the psyche, Plath depicts a range of raw and conflicted identities who encounter both life's transient 'blessings' and isolating challenges; the anthology ultimately concludes there is both hope and suffering to be found intrinsically linked to idiosyncratic human experience.

The 'Night Dances' introduces a speaker who considers childhood's most fleeting moments, trivialised by the vastness of the universe only to render each more beautiful. The delicate image of 'a smile' having fallen in the grass oppose the sharp starkness of the word 'irretrievable' as the poetic voice's feelings of bittersweetness are elucidated, both mesmerised and saddened by the fragility of infancy, much like the 'temporary nature of life within 'The Arrival of the Bee Box.' Such a juxtaposition is further developed as the child's alluded to rhythmic 'night dances' contrast the strict connotations of 'mathematics' with the implication that childhood moments are lost to the inevitable obligations of adulthood, the 'baggage' of existence. Plath lists a series of moments in crafting a kind of unreality; 'the drenched grass, smell of your sleeps, lillies, lillies' while the evocation of the child's 'small breath' is reminiscent of the soft, maternal imagery developed in the latter half of 'Morning Song'. The 'lillies' exist as a metaphor for the threat of the outside world, as elucidated through the internal rhyme of 'cold folds', while the white 'ego[tistic]' 'calla' and dangerous tiger orange cement the imposition of time on treasured moments of infancy. The poem shifts into the vastness of physical and metaphoric space. The 'comets' of the realm have 'such a space to cross', whereby Plath's alliterative rhythm seems to downplay the speaker's melancholy in comparison. The universe at large presents a 'coldness' and a 'forgetfulness' uncaring of life's beauty; 'Ariel' often aggrandises the timeless capacity of the elements in trivialising ephemeral human experience in this way. Humanity's 'warm' 'gestures' are reduced to little more than flaking paint, while Plath's employment of enjambement between stanzas evokes their movement. Plath reels between scales; these 'lamps' are 'planets', are snow 'flakes' with not place worth enough to momentarily catch them. Inevitably the plaintive voice of the poem gazes down into a dwarfing cold cosmos, trivialising fleeting human experience and the effection to be located therein, 'melting' only to be lost permanently within time and 'nowhere'.

Where it is the the perpetual movement of time that threatens life within 'The Night Dances', 'Nick and the Candlestick' depicts a speaker who grapples with the frightening possibility of the immense new life of their child will be superseded by an innate, and perhaps genetically transmissible sadness. A sense of both literal and metaphoric darkness inhabits a womb likened to a cave; the waxy stalactites that 'drip' with tears could both reflect the melting of the speaker's candle as they walk in the dark and the eerie otherworld she imagines. Both images convey a profound imposition of all encompassing gloom.

The speaker's 'earthen womb' is oxymoronic having both supported new life, now inhabited by a 'dead boredom'; Plath underscores the dismaying collision between death and fertility that underscore a consideration of both the fear and hope inherent in pregnancy throughout 'Ariel'. The lingering 'cold' and 'icicles of this realm exude a sense of foreboding, that starkly juxtaposes the effusive intimacy expected of new motherhood; the recurrence of such ambivalence subsumed within the feminine experience is prevalent within the 'Ariel' anthology. Plath's overt reference to 'fish' both allude to the development of the child in its once embryonic state, and further the religious motifs interspersed throughout Plath's poetry; where religion is often censured in its inability to offer any means of comfort amidst life's turmoil, the child is depicted as a religious saviour, with the capacity to alleviate pain like 'Christ'. The tone of the poem shifts with a return to the literal candle image. The personified flame 'gulps' echoing the action of a child in breastfeeding while the sense of positivity is regained with the connotations of 'recover[y]' preceding 'yellows' and 'heaven' on the

following line; suggested is that the child brings a blaze of light that juxtaposes the 'blue' of the earlier image, transforming the speaker's surrounds into a place of darkness into one of lucidity. Although the infant has obligation to shoulder the sorrow of his mother, Plath underscores her central concern – that he will inevitably wake to the 'pain' of losses he had no part in creating, much like the child tanned by the 'shard' of balloon that shatters the transient lens of naivety in 'Balloons'. Plath's final divulging lines are purposefully punctuated to exude impact; the child is 'the one', a stand alone line, interjected by comparisons of 'space' and envy', as the melancholic 'blue' of the speaker's surrounds transcend into a place of light. The infant is a literal symbol of renewed life and redemption – 'the baby in the barn'.

Where it is death and demise itself that cripple the sorrowful voice of 'Nick and the Candlestick', 'Daddy' depicts a narrator who harnesses the power of death, battling torturously with her electra complex in freeing herself from the intrinsic possession it has over her life, by metaphorically 'killing' her father and 'model' husband. Within the presented fragment of the poem, the line endings of 'you' and 'gobbledegoo' and 'blue' reinstate the 'oo' sound amplified by internal rhyme, as earlier introduced, echoing the dark resonance of a train 'chuffing' off on its final death march toward a Nazi concentration camp, and foreshadowing Plath's later Nazi parallels. In constructing the father in the image of Hitler, Plath cements her risky metaphor; he has a 'moustache' with an 'Aryan eye bright blue', while the speaker suffering is aligned to that faced by a 'Jew'. 'Ariel' often appropriates a range of troubling and startling images of historical mass, widespread trauma, in aggrandising the emotional intensity and expressionistic violence of the anthology. In allusion to the 'boot in the face' a sense of physical pain is added to the complex dynamic of the depicted relationship, as childhood innocence and pain are juxtaposed; physical setting is often constructed in this way in amplifying a sense of inner turmoil. The reinterjection of the title 'Daddy' in the speaker's reference to their father further cements the impact of their truncated relationship; although now an adult, they remain scared by unresolved tribulation, granting their father the childlike and exulting title of 'Daddy'. The intensity of the electra complex is intensified as Plath positions it as the cause of the speaker's attempt to 'die' and 'get back, back, back to you' repetition sealing their sense of desperation. The notion of being 'pulled ... out of the sack' echoes the 'call' required to coax the persona of 'Lady Lazarus' back from the precipice of near death; where 'Ariel' ordinarily considers the comforting oblivion the mournful speaker's find in death, 'Daddy' instead depicts the phenomena through a twisted electra framework. Ultimately asserted is that if the speaker has 'killed one man, I've [she's] killed two', whereby the father and husband figures exist as one conflated, complex identity, later 'staked by the speaker. With the final lines of the poem, the speaker is released triumphant with the declaration the exorcism is finally 'through', victorious, unlike many of the self effacing speakers within 'Ariel'.

In removing all censorship, Sylvia Plath weaves intricacies and nuances into the tapestry of the human condition. In illuminating the contemplation of various identities, 'Ariel' transmutes incidences of everyday living into personal testimonies of hope and elation, agency and loneliness, underscoring the palpable emotion tied to ephemeral human experiences.

## Sample 3

### *A Hunger, Petra White*

As the computer system softly 'crashes' like a wave on the shore in 'Southbank 1,' White alludes to the way in which contemporary work lulls its servants into faithful submission. Employing a stilted structure to the poem, White observes the 'quiet' that 'settles' as the work is halted in the office and workers are left dumbstruck by the immediacy of their surroundings. The 'palm-hugged/beaches that saved' the computers screens minutes before, a pun on the term screen saver, now 'crinkle out' tediously as the illusion of their vision has been removed from the reality that now awaits their attention. Just as the 'office tilts like the ship' the poem carries a sense of dread as the workers become 'seal[ed] in boredom,' suggestive of a vestige that now occupies their otherwise occupied minds. As in 'Feral Cow,' wherein the cow 'on the edge of the road' is 'unfenced from dream/ of herd,' the worker's minds 'rise from [their] bubble; the plosive 'bs' elucidating the soft yet sudden liberation from the trance as a result of the system's failure. Embedded through parenthesis,

the speaker envisions 'a little man' who 'tweaks' the thermostat, further enhancing White's evocation of work that consumes the worker's sense of connection with the 'furry square windows' or 'seasons' of time. Harking to the poem, 'Southbank 9' White insinuates that work merely performs the function of a 'necessary evil' that, as in 'Southbank 9', must be sustained through 'labour' to prevent the threat of human rage'. As the speaker addresses the 'rises' out of an office chair to 'walk like someone freed', White infers that the 'illusion' sustained through work is merely a tool that tethers individuals to subservience and entraps them within the condition of human society.

Involving 'time with nothing to smother it' to demonstrate the farcical notion of work, White's 'Southbank' is permeated by the frustrated passing of time to which the worker is a slave. Personified in nature, time replaces boredom by issuing the dread embodied by the man, 'pacing in his pod' in an expression that alludes the perpetual need to be productive or face the wrath of a 'deadline as real to him as his wife'. There is a distinct sense of agitation amidst the controlled pace of the poem as someone else 'cracks his finger joints' in anticipation of the resuming 'chorus' of work. Yet the speaker, in italicised emphasis, warns that 'nobody' is aware of the 'dream' in which they are held hostage, as time, the parent of work, perpetuates its threatening control. Indeed, as the workers 'slip back' into their chairs the poem shifts into self-containment 'with out with-out purpose,' which implies the desire to work as a condition in society. In 'Southbank 9' as the child is served with the 'dinnerplates of language' to fulfil her duty and 'grow up', so, too must the workers assume their roles, enslaved by the ever-quickenening passing of time as they, in the very format of office vernacular, seek to be 'fulfilled and/or consumed'.

Employing the sibilance as the repetitive swing of the lines embedded with caesurae 'swirl' and 'slow', White reinforces the conflict of self-obligation and inevitable destruction in 'Karri Forest' that arises out of a fulfilment of the human condition. As in 'Southbank 1' the logger must construct 'his future together' while withstanding the 'protester chained to a tree' much like the workers bow to the 'rise-again joy' of working. Yet White poses a juxtaposition as the rolling rhythm of 'Karri Forest' pulsates against the confining five-line stanza, evoking the sense of inner disturbance as the 'pace of chessmen' incites the flowing sibilance of speed contrasts to the fixed and plosive vision of 'moral ground stodgy of mud.' The combative imagery White applies here of a 'battle' that is waged 'one-tree-at-/a-time', conveys the minor impact an individual against the vastness of the insidious 'battle', yet the hyphenated 'one-tree-at-/a-time' suggests the unavoidable tether between one tree and another that composes a forest as it is gradually devastated by a single chainsaw. Again, casting focus on such a juxtaposition, White alludes to 'Feral Cow' which enhances the notion of a state that lies between the 'dream' and the danger of an 'infinite cry of road', as the cow 'tap dances', isolated from either fate yet 'yoke[d]' by her own 'freedom'. In 'Karri Forest' White ultimately postulates that in the 'sepai tangles' of the human condition are complicated by the transience of time and the pressure to provide for the self's 'future' against the subtle threat of the unknown.

Yet, as the speaker wanders the dim-lit forest, or as more truthfully suggested by parenthesis '(what remained),' White accepts that an attachment to 'guilt' and deliberate destruction lies at the heart of the burden of living. An allusion to light introduced by an emdash, 'Is it light?' situates the glaring truth against the ghostly paint of 'moonlight' as it is brazenly exposes the morbidly 'scabby wood,' of the decaying environment that, painted by 'red Xs' has arrived under human-perpetuated annihilation. As the speaker assumes the pronoun 'I', the notion of self-defined guilt is assumed and withheld, given, as in 'Southbank 6', 'only when things break down do we begin to see'. Evoking the moral crossroads of a 'path [she] couldn't seem to cross', White offers an argument of self-blame as what 'always feels right' in light of the horror of hindsight. It is the 'guilt' that arises as the speaker recognises 'the corpse I killed and buried and forgot' that White decides is the painful contradiction of the human condition.

In her collection, 'A Hunger', White deliberates into the restless woefulness of self-preservation that incites human action, even as it defeats itself. Against time and the larger fabric of life, the self is subordinated to the preoccupation of 'labour' in order to 'fulfil and/or consume' the 'illusion' of the self's success in the contemporary world.

## Sample 4

### *Desdemona, Toni Morrison and Rokia Traoré*

Evident within these passages is a critique of the social structures of 16th century Venice. In Passage One, Morrison delineates the patriarchal nature of Desdemona's mortal life. That these 'many men' 'came into [Senator Brabantio's] house' simply according to his 'invitations' and 'paternal duty' epitomises the authoritative role of the father in arranging their daughter's marriage. Indeed, that Desdemona's father 'instructed [her] on the virtues of each offer' reinforces the didactic role of men in Venetian society. The 'doting smiles' described by the eponymous character seems almost predatory; coupled with the sibilant alliteration of the line 'slid in soft shoes,' Morrison describes the powerlessness of women in this society. Indeed, 'men made the rules; women followed them.' Moreover, the emphasis on quotidian objects and lucrative 'riches' demonstrates the banality of Venetian life and the economic benefits of marriage. Epitomising this are the 'empty ornate boxes, designed to hold coins of dowry gold,' evoking the desire for economic benefit rather than a [indecipherable] relationship.

Reinforcing this is Desdemona's description of the extremities of the 'giantess, a miniature' and the 'horse-faced shrew'. That any of these would have passed as suitable to these 'suitors' shows the reduction of the female sex to a mere source of economic gain for men. As a result, the intrinsic value of a woman is lost and their sense of individuality is diluted, ranked 'with other virgins on their menu'. The harsh, irreversible imagery of the 'cusp of unmarriageability' foregrounds the emphasis on fertility that pervades 16th century Venice. Theat this 'lightless abyss' brings with it the 'fall of her 'family' insinuates that Desdemona is only valuable in the sense that she maintains 'the clan' and perpetuates the honour of her noble family. Further supporting this is Traore's song 'Dongori' in Passage Two. The imagery of the 'vine of thorns at the heart of marriage' serves as a critique of the inauthentic nature of romantic relationships, dominated by the patriarchal role of men. Through the repetition of 'Dongori,' a word representative of the African proverb 'Your bridal veil will be your funeral shroud,' coupled with the abstract nouns 'violence,' 'obliteration' and 'enslavement,' Traore lambastes the sense of entrapment and insecurity that the subjugation of females engenders.

In order to heal the wounds of patriarchy, Morrison empowers Desdemona throughout these passages. In Passage One, the eponymous heroine relates to the audience her 'revolt' against the structures that limit her freedom. That she 'refused' her father's 'offer' is indicative of a sense of rebellion and determination to extricate herself from the limitations imposed upon her. Yet this passage occurs earlier in the play, and this Desdemona's sense of empowerment receives minimal. Indeed, she is still 'chastised' as 'stubborn' and 'fastidious', dominated by the authoritative rule of her father. Moreover, that she still yearns for 'talk,' 'meaning' and 'winds from a wider world' insinuates that liberty is yet to be achieved, with the alliterative 'w' sounds here creating a sense of romanticisation that further distances her from liberation. Through this narrative exposition, Morrison allows the audience to track the development of Desdemona's character throughout the play. This is expanded upon by Traore's lyrics in Passage Two, with the strong, empowered tone of the voice complementing the growth of Desdemona's individuality. That 'Beautiful' will be [the speaker's] plan' is evident of a departure from the tendency to objectify women and to reduce them to mere economic benefits epitomised by Passage One. Importantly, that Traore uses inverted commas around the word 'beautiful' adds depth to this idea, simultaneously suggesting that this state of beauty is yet to be achieved, and that what constitutes one as 'beautiful' is subjective. In the line, Traore clarifies where her version of beauty is; 'Strong up to the task and filled with pain.' Here, that the words 'strong' and 'pain' are used together to describe beauty suggests that it can only be achieved through a realisation of one's suffering. Indeed, the line 'I push back the hurt' adds autonomy to the voice of the speaker, overcoming pain and 'harnessing' themselves 'to every good thing [they] can produce.' That the speaker 'break[s] the cord' and 'undoe[es] the knot' establishes a potency and individuality that is opposed to the power structures in Passage One. The song works powerfully with Desdemona's revelation that 'they knew the system, but they didn't know me,' separating the character from repressive social constructs. In Passage Three, this desire for empowerment has been realised. The explosive energy of the revelation then 'in our privileged position in

timelessness, our answer is a roar' shatters the silencing of women that dominates Shakespeare's original play. The need to overcome suffering in order to achieve greatness is further explored by Morrison, with the maxim 'I can only shine in the light of adversity' establishing a nascent state of enlightenment in the titular heroine. The desire for 'adventure in my mind no less than in my heart' in passage One thus becomes the foundation upon which Morrison's play revolves, granting liberty and freedom to the 'underwater women,' the silenced and the oppressed.

The importance of Morrison's setting in facilitating 'honest talk' is paramount in these passages. In Passage One, Desdemona 'yearned for talk, for meaning.' By creating a setting 'between all time' and 'all space,' Morrison grants her characters the potential for growth. In Passage Three, it is Desdemona's celebration of her 'privileged position in timelessness' that foregrounds the role of Morrison's 'afterlife' – to overcome adversity and grow like 'a seedling' towards 'the sun it yearns for.' Moreover, the line 'while we talk' reinforces the need for dialogue to enlighten interpersonal relationships. It is this setting that enables the characters to overcome the 'pain' and 'hurt' of the past. In Traore's 'Dongori', the anaphoric use of the word 'today' grounds the speaker in the presence, with the 'timelessness' distancing the characters from the exigencies of mortality. Moreover, the unconventional setting enables the use of temporal distortion throughout the play, evidenced by the use of narrative exposition in Passage One. Here, Morrison is able to fill in the lacunae of Shakespeare's 'Othello' and consequently produce a 21st century interpretation of the play.

Celebrated by Morrison and Traore is the ability to transcend sociocultural differences and connect with others through shared experiences. In Passage Three, Traore's lyric 'whether we are from the same place [/culture] or not' transcends the prejudices that dictate our relationships with other people. Indeed, it is the shared experiences of Desdemona, Sa'ran and Emilia that ultimately allows them to achieve reconciliation.

Lambasting the deleterious effects of 'foolish pride,' Morrison and Traore dissolve repressive structures of power and facilitate an honest open dialogue. Granting Desdemona 'adventure', the play celebrates liberty and the potentiality of individuals to overcome trauma.