

# 2022 VCE Literature external assessment report

## General comments

In the 2022 VCE Literature examination, students were asked to complete two distinctly different tasks, writing on two different texts chosen from the prescribed text list, and writing on two different types of text as laid out in the VCAA text list: novels, plays, short stories, other literature and poetry. During their Literature study, students were expected to study six texts, using them for their school coursework, as well as in classroom learning activities. As a result, it is expected that students will have made informed choices as to which texts they write on in the examination, and will be able to utilise the work they have put in during the year as overt and intrinsic preparation for the examination. Most students attempted to complete the examination tasks; very few responses were incomplete.

The two sections of the examination are worth equal marks, and an important piece of advice is to ensure that students divide their writing time equally between Sections A and B. In doing so, they are allowing themselves the best chance to maximise their score in both sections. Detailed knowledge and understanding of the chosen texts, drafting and modelling, lively classroom discussions and questioning, and as much timed writing practice as possible will all help students feel confident and efficient as they approach these tasks.

There were few students who wrote on two novels, or two plays, for example. Unfortunately, if this occurs, the student can receive only one score – the higher one awarded out of the two responses. We encourage teachers to check that their students are very aware of this requirement, and thus unlikely to make such mistakes.

Several assessors remarked on the range of texts written on by students. Although Plath was, once again, popular, all 30 of the set texts were written on, which is perhaps indicative of teachers choosing to extend their own and their students' range of literary experience. Overall, the impression was of a lively, engaged, knowledgeable and perceptive group of students.

It does not matter in which order the two tasks are completed. Many students choose to do Section B first, as they have just read the passages in the reading time. All they need to do is to clearly indicate which task they are doing. There is no need to leave a space for Section A at the start of the booklet.

A few students seemed confused as to whether a response was to Section A or B. Some were mislabelled; however in these cases the assessors could clearly see which task was A and which was B, no matter what the student had written. Students should also note that there is no suggested word length for either section of the examination.

Many students' writing was expressive, clear, nuanced, engaged and insightful. There was evidence of their building an appropriate, varied, sophisticated and accurate vocabulary.

A small number of students clearly had difficulty expressing their ideas and knowledge effectively in writing. Some responses circled around a point rather than addressing it with clarity and precision. Practice and discussion should help, as well as the development of understanding of what constitutes appropriate language. It is a good idea to check that key words are spelt accurately. Accurate understanding of historical contexts is also important, for example avoiding confusion of 'Victorian' times with 'Elizabethan'. Assessors must be able to decipher students' handwriting to ensure their responses can be assessed.

Not all responses in a particular scoring band will look the same, in spite of fulfilling the VCAA-expected qualities for the range. Both the topics in Section A and the passage combinations in Section B invite students to make choices about their approach, and they will write in their own voices. The selection of sample responses in this report demonstrate this point.

## Specific information

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

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

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

## Section A

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	1	0.3	0.2	1	1	1	2	3	6	6	7	9	12	11	12	9	8	5	4	2	1	12.4

The most popular texts written on in Section A were *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Dracula*, *Othello*, *Northanger Abbey* and *The Ladies' Paradise*.

For Section A, the examination asked students to complete **one** piece of writing in response to the topic set for **one** text, as well as requiring that 'Your selected text must be used as the basis for your response to the topic. You are required to produce an interpretation of the text using one literary perspective to inform your view'.

Clearly, much of the students' preparation for Section A is grounded in Unit 4, Outcome 1. However, it is important for teachers to impress upon their students that the tasks are not identical.

Most students were able to write a plausible, relevant and developed response to the topic in which they drew on a literary perspective as they discussed topic and text. In some cases, it was interesting as well as a learning experience to see students refer to critics not familiar to assessors.

We have included four Section A samples with this report, as 2022 was the final year for the Section A format. But these essays will demonstrate the importance of close reading and analysis in this task. The highest-scoring writing was clearly and thoroughly prepared for, but not rote learned, rather relying on skills and knowledge. Textual familiarity will form the basis of a relevant response.

Overall, the high-scoring responses in Section A demonstrated excellent textual knowledge and sophisticated ideas in response to the questions. Many responses to the novels presented subtle and complex interpretations that utilised established literary perspectives. Specifically, the writing on *Dracula*, *The Remains of the Day* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* provided some unique and well-considered perspectives, with students able to focus on some of the more unusual elements of the texts.

Mid-range responses incorporated a literary perspective into their writing and made some valid observations regarding the questions. While the depth of textual understanding may not have been as complex, these responses were competently able to apply a particular lens to their interpretation and use a range of textual evidence.

## Sample essays

### *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Joan Lindsay

*In her novel, Picnic at Hanging Rock, Joan Lindsay gives voice to First Nations – victims of the merciless ‘silence’ British Imperialism inflicted. Lindsay’s interrogation of colonial claims to bring enlightenment to a land assumed terra nullius reveals a faltering façade, as the machinations of conquest are rendered ‘woefully inadequate’ against the ‘million-year-old patterns’ of the antipodean landscape they fail to apprehend. So while the ‘something terrible’ that befalls the girls remains inexplicable to the characters’ nescient gaze, for the reader, the dream like narrative is punctuated by a palpable presence ‘actually teeming’ with ‘the truth, at last’; a reckoning made manifest for the violence Empire perpetrated against Indigenous Peoples and their land.*

*Appleyard College is presented as a manifestation of British Imperialism’s impulse to ‘silence’ that which endangers its specious claims of dominion upon a ‘prehistoric’ land. Mrs Appleyard deems the rock ‘extremely dangerous’ and ‘that is all’, espousing a Eurocentric perspective and ‘thing’ that does not reflect colonial values of civility is other – but Lindsay’s description of nature’s harmony (‘cicadas shrilling’ and synaesthetic ‘golden motes dancing’) destabilises such a benighted view. Indeed, colonialism’s impulse to repress that which it fears is manifest in the surrounding bush-scape being eviscerated into a ‘flat sparse...country’, locating the menacing sentience within settler society itself. Tellingly, that the ‘original owner’ (an ascription that would elide Indigenous history) is ‘long ago forgotten’ proves claims of hegemony mutable (destabilizing the college maxim ‘silence is golden’) and Europe’s aggrandising spectacle of dominion in the ‘Union Jack’ – symbolic of the ‘endless loops’ of conquest – appears feeble against ‘Mount Macedon rising up’. The ‘sense of power’ Miss McCraw gained from having the world ‘rearranged to miraculous new conclusions’ through mathematics, alongside Mr. Hussey ‘flicking...his long-handed whip’ at the ‘amazing thing’ (the Rock) bespeaks the epistemic and physical violence colonialism exacted to quell the land and anxieties of the unknown. As the dray travels ‘soundless’ and ‘no traveller’ passed by, however, this ‘sun flecked silence’ inflicted on First Nations reverberates with a palpable uncanny quality that sees the girls ‘unconsciously [fall] silent’, auguring this absence British Imperialism inflicted will be transposed back on to them in their eventual disappearance.*

*Yet despite this subliminal awareness of the land’s history, the girls resume ‘talking in blissful inconsequence’. As the narrator sardonically introduces the ‘so-called Picnic Grounds’, readers recognize supposed bastions of civilisation as absurd impositions on a land already ‘vibrating’ with Indigenous history and culture certainly, Miranda, despite a whimsical ‘feeling there used to be a track’, still ‘expertly manipul[at]es’ the gate, exposing frontier society’s arrogant insouciance to the displacement of First Nations, wrongfully permitting them to call the ‘forests...home’. Evidently, their desire to have ‘Nature’ merely ‘selected and recorded’ (elucidating colonialism’s desire to subjugate that beyond its understanding) proves devastating; ‘frail starlike’ flowers lay ‘crushed under [their] tramping boots’. Lindsay, then, refutes the ‘miasma of hidden fears by which the colonial imagination presumed the land untamed, as readers witness the ‘hidden depths’ of vital but hitherto repressed history of the antipodean landscape - ‘beautiful if only you could see it clearly enough’.*

*As the girls ascend the Rock, Edith ‘put her hands over her ears’ as the ‘horrible’ thought of ‘peaks...a million years old’, elucidating a desire to erase the history she cannot reconcile. Miranda’s recollection then, of the ‘people in old fashioned dresses’ in the William Ford painting ‘Picnic at Hanging Rock’ bespeaks colonialism’s attempts to overlay a veneer over the bush-scape presumed to possess a menacing sentience. Yet Irma is cognisant of colonialism’s faltering imposition; she observes the picnickers as ‘tiny figures coming and going’ against the ‘million year old patterns’ of the Rock. Edith’s feared appraisal (the benighted epithet ‘those nasty old stones’ bespeaks a colonial gothic psyche delineating the Indigenous past as abject) is inverted as the girls disappear ‘out of sight,’ subsumed by the very ‘unknown future’ colonialism sought to master. Tellingly, the*

fallibility of their reliance on the teleological explanations – seen in Marion ‘immediately produc[ing]’ a ‘pencil and notebook’ to record the ‘monumental configurations of the Rock’ – is exposed as Edith’s terror comes out as a ‘whisper’ and her later attempts to explain the ‘mystery’ are engulfed in ‘awful silence.’ Thus, Lindsay reveals the girls’ disappearances to not, in fact, be ‘pranks of destiny’, but a necessary part of the pattern of the picnic – exacting a just reckoning upon those who embody colonialism’s wanton violence against First Nations. Lindsay, then, endorses Michael’s rejection of the ‘well-spared’, ‘smug little community of Lakeview’ – sequestered in their own ‘holiday background’ and ignoring their violent past. Just as Irma relinquishes her ties to her colonial ancestry (making ‘handsome donations’ of her family’s wealth), Lindsay has Michael ‘spared’ for his willingness to relinquish his colonial identity (giving up his ‘name...a valued personal possession’). While his eventual being ‘domiciled on a station property’ (apprehended by a contemporary audience as problematic in its intimation of rightful dominion upon a violently effaced land) proves a dissonant tenet in her otherwise progressive condemnation of British Imperialism, Lindsay has Michael ‘spared’ for his willingness to truly understand his ‘feeling’ of the history ‘impregnated’ within the Rock. Upon the Rock, Michael ‘actually...listen[s]’ to the ‘murmuring life’ and hears ‘laughter’, a tacit recognition of Indigenous nationhood predating colonial invasion – similarly, Irma hears ‘the beating of far-off drums’ and is returned. Lindsay uses Michael’s growing dislocation from ‘suffocating’ values of gentility (a ‘comfort’ to the girls reflected in the college maxim ‘silence is golden’ deemed ‘too English’ by Michael to nostalgically portray the burgeoning movement towards a Sovereign, egalitarian ‘Australia’ in the lead up to Federation. Surely this is reified in Michael (the ‘English Youth’) and larrikin Albert at first appearing an ‘ill-assorted pair’ to being ‘of one’. Indeed, Michael’s hair is likened to the ‘yellow crest’ of a native cockatoo as Lindsay seeks to reconcile the continent’s colonial past that silenced the land, and its egalitarian future giving voice to Australia’s varied social classes. As the narrator adopts the demotic moniker ‘Mike’ – on behest of his entreats to ‘sound like Australia’ – and valorises Albert’s apparently ‘native wisdom’, readers see the text to, in some ways, perpetuate the elision of Indigenous voice.

Despite the characters remaining oblivious to their part in the ‘spreading pattern’, Lindsay reveals they are ‘weaving their own threads’ into it. As Michael likens his grandfathers to God, ‘interfering with everyone down below’, Lindsay reveals beneath a proclaimed grandiose purpose, the ruthless impetus for control at the heart of colonial conquest – certainly, that Lake View’s once ‘ornamental Lake’ later appears a ‘slab of cold grey stone’ exposes the moral depravity that lies beneath such a ‘rambling façade’. In turn, the ‘breathless silence’ colonialism inflicted upon the land (witnessed in the ‘giant tombstones’ at the Rock) is transposed back onto them in an elemental reckoning: ‘[fatbellied] clouds exploding’ with ‘fury’ ravage Lake View. Certainly, the readiness with which they ‘dismissed the entire animal kingdom in one stroke’ (that is ‘to Edith, so still and silent’, exposing the blatant ignorance and reductive gaze), is utterly inverted as the storm ‘within minutes wash[ed] the gravel from the carriage [Dring]’ and reduces a non-native dove – symbolic of claims to bring benevolence – to only a puerile mechanical toy! Lindsay’s personification of the storm – ‘moaning gusts’ – underscores the anguish of First Nations colonialism sought to mercilessly erase, and proves claims of rightful dominion wholly spurious. Equally, Mrs Appleyard’s attempts to impose a ‘tighter rein on the...chattering’ to uphold the college as a ‘symbol of prestige’ prove fallible, as they are met with ‘hot beds of gossip’ – colonial values of restraint and repression are destabilized as they become ‘hyenas drawn...by the smell of blood and scandal’. Here, Lindsay subverts the white vanishing trope of early colonial gothic literature that would justify colonial expansion, as the college itself is ‘filled with shadows’ locating the menacing sentience colonialism thought existed intrinsically in the land (and this must be silenced) to in fact exist within themselves. Indeed, as Mrs Appleyard appears with ‘pendulous breasts’ she embodies the ‘everlasting tick tock’ of the grandfather clock – colonialism’s mechanism of control ironically portending her demise. Just as all watches ‘stopped dead’ at the Rock, the post colonialism sought ‘obliterated’ punctuates through. Europe’s conquest of the continent then, proves a pyrrhic victory; Mrs Appleyard is seen in a state of abjection from Britain’s purported civilising sensibilities, becoming the very violent, uncivilised ‘thing’ she fears; (she

*'kicked savagely' and 'scream[ed] more like a wild animal'). As the headmistress is diminished to an 'old woman with head bowed', imagery of her acquiescing to her deserved 'fated' 'doom' confirms colonialism's loss of hegemony: her 'clumsy body' – redolent of the 'clumsy mansion' that is 'totally destroyed' by a bushfire – humorously tumbled down the Rock; and her 'hateful presence' is subsumed by 'Nature' – capitalised conspicuously to affirm its rightful primacy – as Lindsay intended.*

*As Bumpher, acting as the readers avatar, is 'forever turning back' to 'meagre notes', colonial claims of hegemony are destabilized by the English language's inability to articulate the 'elemental rhythms' of nature. That the 'college mystery' remains 'forever unsolved' unmoors the colonial impetus to erase the land's history, so while the characters believe 'nightmares belong in the past', readers witness 'rustlings' of a voice hitherto repressed as Lindsay sees the spreading pattern reverberate with the rightful primacy of First Nations.*

## Dracula, Bram Stoker

*As the "langorous, voluptuous grace" of Lucy and the Vampire sisters horrifies Dracula's Victorian male protagonists, Bram Stoker's ultimate adherence to gendered notions of good and evil finally asserts itself. Where the gothic novel does leave room for subversions of expected essentialist gender roles of the "mother" or a domineering man, Stoker's Biblical, and moral allusions drive the epistolary text back towards a simple black and white dichotomy.*

*For as the vampire sisters "writhe and foam" at the mouth upon their phallic "staking" and ritual execution, Bram Stoker reinforces a linguistic dichotomy of "pure" heroism and "hell-fire" evil. Portrayed only through the men's point of view, [by] [out] the vampire sisters are relentlessly demonised and linked to "ideas of the pit" who embody Satanic influence. Granted no autonomy to address readers through that [our] journals or letters, these "caring" and "unspiritual" women directly embody a conventional expectation of evil in Victorian society. As the "Bloofer lady", Lucy feeds on children and in this light begins corrupting young impressionable minds – some in the "[born] white" purity of her precious 'Angel in the House' role as Arthur's fiancé. Lucy is perhaps the conventional embodiment of both good and evil, her "eyes of hell-fire" implying her status as a sort of fallen angel, a sacrifice who must be made in order to preserve the sanctity of conventional Victorian gender roles. For her fall is the indirect result of open and unabashed "exultation" of sexuality, a sexuality that Stoker affords no grey area between girl and all notions of female gender expression. Instead, her capitalised "THREE proposals" in a letter to Mina dooms her as an aberrant figure who must be punished to restore conventional order. It is in this light that the blatant gendered bias of her description comes to light, as Stoker refuses to challenge the "very essence of man" that drives even Van Helsing to experience attraction to the "voluptuous" "weird sisters". No person outside of the bounds of heterosexual masculinity describes the "Bloofer Lady", and so Seward's or Helsing's disgusted lust can take over and cast them as sexually abhorrent. As such, Stoker only reinforces [conventional] notions of good and evil as to protect the sanctity of Victorian society from subversive portrayals of sexuality.*

*Yet, it may initially appear as if incorporating feminine qualities into prominent male characters reflects Stoker's shifting attitude towards conventional evils of masculine preservation. A subdued victim, Jonathan Harker is the first to experience vampire desire, and the first to be subject to what is arguably Dracula's lust. "I want him... he belongs to me!" marks Stoker's attribution of homoerotic subtext to the notion of Dracula's "baptism of blood", and equates Jonathan with the female [characters] of the later text. Indeed, both Jonathan and Renfield experience feminising mental deterioration upon exposure to Dracula, Jonathans "upset" upon seeing "The count" but "younger" in London irrevocably linking him to the same infantilisation that Mrs Westenra undergoes. As her weak heart would fail at any "sudden shock", the only similar experience within 'Dracula' is in Renfield and Jonathan's hospitalisation and mental breakdowns.*

*As such, it seems as if Stoker has made room for unconventional forces of good in the context of Jonathan Harker, as he, despite emasculation, narrates much of the text and leads the charge against Dracula. However, this is only possible through a reclamation of his lost masculinity by phallicly staking Dracula at the end of the text, just as Arthur Holmwood reclaims his “husband’s” ownership over Lucy by “staking” her like “a figure of Thor”. After Arthur “stakes” Lucy, he becomes an exemplar of the conventional and thus essentialist Victorian man of good, an example to whom Jonathan can strive. Importantly, Jonathan’s conventional devotion to his wife Mina, a “pearl among women” may be what enables him to reclaim his embattled masculinity. This is because Renfield, similarly victim to Dracula, differs to Jonathan in his relationship to others in Victorian Britain and thus to Dracula. Renfield’s constant subservience, first to Seward as his “pet lunatic” and then to his “Master” is what connotes his continual feminine subservience to conventionally outcast masculine gendered expression. Which, in Stoker’s eyes, is antithetical to the dominant essentialist “Thor” and this must be punished. At last, Renfield is graphically murdered, his “brain” visible whilst he gasps for air, a death of such gory detail it is akin to that of an “animal.” Betrayed by the force of evil he was so smitten to, Stoker treats Renfield’s fate as an allegory for [young] men who willingly exceed Victorian boundaries of ‘good’ gender expression.*

*However, nowhere is a challenge between conventional gender roles and a satanic corrupting force more apparent than in the battle between the “lady journalist” and the “mother.” Mina Harker is lauded as one of the few only “good and pure” characters of the text, so in her vampiric corruption Stoker explains the struggle to condemn her. She only wants to help the men, yet she is “marked” like the [lepers?] of [old] his [mantle] “with an unclean” “stain” upon her forehead, symbolising the ideological battle taking place in her body. It may [thus] seem as if her mind has remained “pure” and her body is now evil through this “baptism of blood”. But, because she exists for weeks in this state, is cured, and then is happily portrayed as a “mother” in Stoker’s final “Note”, Stoker invites a slight, creeping unconventional existence of a force of good into the text. Much like Jonathan’s feminization whilst remaining male, Van Helsing believes Mina to possess a “man’s brain” but a “woman’s heart”.*

*This portmanteau of gender may in fact be allowed in Victorian society, provided it lies on the side of good. Stoker thus implicates the final “Note” alluding to the fact that a man’s brain has not in fact prevented Mina from her womanly role as a “mother”. Thus, Mina’s role as a collator of Dracula’s epistolary texts may in fact reveal the underlying prevalence of unconventional notions of good, where Mina as embodiment of both the essentialist woman and a “man’s” intelligence, can shape how the text is presented to readers. Had it in this light that the very existence of women actively on the side of good may be an unconventional addition to gothic horror that Stoker has chosen to endorse. Despite this alteration of women’s roles from mere victims to active investigators, conventional notions of gendered evil do seem to persist in Mina’s “repulsion and horror” at being viewed as a “sister” by the “weird sisters”. Even so, Mina embodies a gap within conventional notions of gendered good and evil, a gap that, once filled, seems closed off for any other aspiring paragons of unconventional gender.*

*Comprehensively, Bram Stoker’s ‘Dracula’ firmly upholds conventional essentialist notions of gendered good and evil within an embattled Victorian Britain. Yet at the very heart of convention lies the rare space for unconventional existence during times of crisis, provided, of course, that this challenge to hegemony remains only temporary.*

## Carpentaria, Alexis Wright

*As the novel invites outsiders to “sit and listen” to the “real story” of Australia, Carpentaria presents an uncompromising epic of Aboriginal identity and orality that unashamedly confronts the stories of colonial oppression and intergenerational trauma of its Aboriginal characters. In tandem, colonial narratives and standards of literature are subverted to reveal a culture and community of Aboriginal*

people that value and embody resilience, hope and vivacity, allowing them to overcome the injustices born at the hand of colonialism and reclaim Australia's story and country as their own.

*Carpentaria* opens with "A NATION [CHANTING] BUT WE KNOW YOUR STORY ALREADY" as it exposes a colonial tradition of repression and recontextualisation of Aboriginal narratives that aims to undermine Aboriginal culture and storytelling. The consequent "olive branch that never lands" in its biblical allusion and parochial language denote the historical erasure of Aboriginal narratives with a lack of retribution. However, it is from this context of oppression that Wright writes of an iconic symbol of Aboriginal dreamtime and storytelling: *The Rainbow Serpent*. Described as a "being of creative enormity" that "came down billions of years ago", "before man was a creature", this symbol of Aboriginal culture reveals an established Aboriginal orality and history that existed far before the "white hands" of colonialism attempted to "reshape, push [and] mould" Australia's history into something "completely different". A reflection of the Aboriginal community's ecological integration of body, story and country, the Rainbow Serpent "sticks to the river people like skin", "scouring" deep within the novel's words and "permeating everything" as its very breath pervades the tide of the country's waters as well as the rhythm of the novel's words. This symbol of Aboriginal orality and dreamtime is a consistent reminder of the Aboriginal characters inherent connection and value of the land, the "sanctified country" that colonialism has "no place" in. It is the vital "jingling of hot blood" that runs through Norm's veins and the safety that Will feels in knowing he could "fall straight into [...] destiny" within the Marshlands.

Furthermore, the novel goes onto directly address the colonial repossession of Aboriginal narratives through the use of an authentic Aboriginal voice as it tells its stories. With verbal interjections of "Oh!", "Gee whiz!" and "Wink Wink! Nudge Nudge!" scattered throughout the novel, the stories of the characters are infused with a colloquial tone of intimacy and familiarity that invites the identity of Aboriginal culture to be listened to. Laughing in one moment and lamenting in the next, the stories of Aboriginal characters are depicted as sentient and wilful as the Rainbow Serpent itself as they disrupt the colonial boundaries of story and country. Indeed, as Angel Day paints her "Aboriginal Mary" and "brandishes" it as her "crucifix" as she openly mocks the "religious posturing" of the characters of Uptown, the novel itself seems to utilise this story of one of its Aboriginal characters to blatantly parody colonialism's erasure of Aboriginal narratives, mocking it for being as ridiculous as Angel's obstreperous actions. Thus, through the creation of an authentic Aboriginal orality, the stories of Aboriginal characters are able to be brought to the forefront in a way that is entirely incomprehensible to colonialism's definitions of reality, revealing a unique Aboriginal identity built upon a value and connection to the land.

In direct contrast to this ecological identity of the Aboriginal characters in *Carpentaria*, colonialism is revealed in its identity built upon a value for tangible ownership. In the same way that the Rainbow Serpent is a symbol for the Aboriginal dreamtime and culture of oral history, Smith's book of books is representative of the inferior definition of colonial reality. Described as "Volumes wasting away in dozens of cardboard boxes" with "yellowing pages chewed by defecating vermin" language of deterioration is used to denote the lifelessness of colonialism's history, a tenuous hold on history whose fragile tangibility is able to be utterly destroyed in a mere fire. The weaknesses of colonialism's stories are further highlighted in their "puerile dreams of stone walls, big locked gates, barred windows, barbed wire rolled around the top to keep the menace of the black demon out." Despite the derogatory language used to denigrate Aboriginal people into "demons", this flimsy copy of Aboriginal dreamtime and storytelling reveals a subtle admittance at the strength of Aboriginal history. However, despite this subtle jealousy at Aboriginal culture, narratives of colonial oppression within the novel reveal a culture of abuse and white privilege within *Desperance*. As Kevin Phantom is destroyed in the mine growing from the "unchallenged brains trust of the family" to being "burnt and broken" in a way that could not be "undone" his story serves as a microcosm for the unrealised potential of the generations of Aboriginal, born into a context of intergenerational trauma and colonial oppression that neither welcomes nor "[pretends] to know them". Within the town, the colonial

definitions of power in the form of law enforcement are characterized as immoral and willfully ignorant. From stories of “trashed homes” to “ramshackle bodies recovering from sexual abusers that wallowed with joy”, the police in *Desperance* subvert expected notions of nobility and are merely a symbol of colonial oppression within the town. Thus, though stories of colonialism within *Carpentaria* exhibit the fragility of colonial identity and history, they also depict a gritty reality of abuse and discrimination that have come to influence the Aboriginal identity and reality.

From the context of this cultural oppression due to the warring values and identities of colonialism and Aboriginal culture, however, the novel offers a resolution in the form of a cultural reset. Though the “fighting” of the “past four hundred years” of colonialism has no “ultimate solution” that “[either] side could resolve”, the nature of *Carpentaria* exercises its transcendent agency to reclaim the story of the novel as its own. As Will Phantom lies on his desolate island in a “half dreaming” state, he senses a “quickenings in the atmosphere” that “spelt danger”. Not only foreshadowing the oncoming natural phenomenon, Will’s “half dreaming” mind demonstrates an unconscious awareness of the unsustainability of his hybridity as irreconcilable influences of colonial and Aboriginal stories plague his mind. However, as “the Flood” hits *Desperance*, “cars, boats [...] telephone poles” are “scrambled like licorice allsorts”, symbols of colonial encroachment trivialised in their impermanence and incongruity. Gone is the witch hunt for Will, the tragic deaths of three boys in police custody, the countless injustices wrought on the Aboriginal community as nature takes precedence over all. A symbol of the Aboriginal connection to the environment while simultaneously being identified under the religious allusion to Noah’s ark of “the Floods”, the flood that overtakes *Desperance* is an amalgamation of the Aboriginal and colonial stories that have influenced the land. In the wake of the flood’s destruction, a “new reality” is formed that has “nothing to do with the order of man”. An act of dismantling that is “nothing monstrous or hideous” but “salubrious”, the flood presents a sense of hope and rebirth of a world in which colonial and Aboriginal perspectives and narratives may coexist harmoniously.

*Carpentaria* exhibits an authentic voice of Aboriginal identity and orality, a voice of Aboriginal stories that not only reveals the inherent Aboriginal connection to the land but also unashamedly addresses the colonial oppression that has influenced the identities of Aboriginal communities of today. It is only through the natural reclamation of agency over the novel’s story that the “unresolved tensions” between the irreconcilable stories and cultural identities of colonialism and Aboriginal culture may be resolved and the hope of the “real story” of Australia being heard becomes a reality.

## Othello, William Shakespeare

Even the play’s title, *Othello, the Moor of Venice* implicitly denotes a struggle of power between the protagonist’s ethnic alienation as a “Moor” and perpetuation of societal institutions as a general “of Venice.” Despite Othello’s initial ability to subvert the oppressive potency of Brabantio’s accusations steeped in ethnic and patriarchal prejudice, this fragile balance in power between subversive minority and conceited aristocrat crumbles at the hands of Iago, the Machiavellian ensign who weaponises society’s pervasive biases on race and gender. In reading Othello’s fall as a product of the uneven power differentials between ostracised others and [debased] institutional ideologies, a postcolonial-feminist reading reveals the brutal pitfalls of such imbalanced societal structures, as it explodes into the destruction of both minority and oppressor. Yet, by prefacing the play’s tragic end with an intimate, feminine moment in which oppressed female victims meta-theatrically penetrate the confines of Venetian androcentric institution, Shakespeare counteracts the destructive potential of such power imbalance with an ambivalent sense of hope.

At first, powerful portrayals of Othello’s subversive rhetoric against Brabantio’s aristocratic prejudice constitutes a victory of minority power. From the onset, Brabantio echoes Venice’s debased ideologies that seek to marginalize and disenfranchise. He not only commodifies Desdemona as a “jewel” “stol’n” from her paternal owner, but degrades Othello’s ethnic blackness as a literally dirty

*“sooty bosom.” The image of “soot” here evokes Eurocentric fears of contamination and dirtying in the 1600s, and figures visually in Othello’s portrayal in Jacobean times – the smudging of black make-up on other characters. In so doing, Shakespeare likens Brabantio’s views to mere theatrical illusion, a fictional construct that reflects not the objective truth but the depraved subjectivity of the white, Venetian elite. Indeed, such falsehoods are fragile against the Moor’s restrained confidence. Othello’s confident claim that his “services...shall out-tongue his complaints” immediately foregrounds the aural dominance of his grounded rhetoric – “keep up,” “Hold” – over Brabantio’s “complaints” of “drugs” and “minerals”. This assertion of minority power is further amplified by Othello’s composure: his physical restraint vehemently juxtaposes Brabantio’s violent and agitated occupation of the stage (implied in his excessive use of threatening exclamations), thereby elevating the Moor to a powerful dignitary to whom the white supremacy of the senator is but an empty threat. By thus closing the first act with the resounding victory of an oriental other in a society fraught with powerful elites like Brabantio who attempt to abuse “the bloody book of law” to suit their “own Sense,” Shakespeare unsteadies the racial imbalance in power inherent in the Eurocentric society of Venice.*

*Yet, such ethnic equality is temporary: it crumbles at the hands of Iago, the Machiavellian ensign who weaponizes perverse ideologies that selectively empower white, male elites. He echoes Brabantio’s prejudice from the onset. His complex “if she be black...she’ll find a white that shall her blackness fit,” invokes binary oppositions to display not just the superiority of “white” over “black,” but the androcentric ownership of the disenfranchised “she.” But Iago makes the insinuation with his light-hearted delivery in rhyme, and Desdemona’s amusement at these “old fond paradoxes” compels the audience to accept them as jest rather than insult: She, a subversive woman who defied her father’s power in the line “Nor I; I would not there reside,” would have rebuked any genuine attempts to dominate her femininity. But it is this deceptive layer in Iago’s manipulation that fosters and enlarges debilitating power imbalances. His framing of Cassio as a young, white sexual threat far above Othello’s in appeal is potent because his play on institutional inequalities on race and gender. By imposing commonplace but oppressive views on interracial incompatibility and female infidelity, on a white Venetian native like Desdemona, Iago fabricates a convincing plausibility that she will return to those “of her own clime, complexion, and degree” – after all, Othello has no basis to assume that she is the exception to society’s degrading portrayal of women. Indeed, the ensign’s use of prevailing prejudice engender a collapse in the very rhetoric that enables Othello to overcome ethnic power imbalances. His precise deployments of Latinate descriptors of “antres” and “aguise” give way to the stuttering prose of “Confess? Handkerchief? O Devil,” articulating a linguistic regression that reduces him to the stereotypical “black ram” that is coarse and primitive. Faced with the overwhelming chasm between white and black, man and woman, which Iago has perpetrated, the audience’s likely shift in reaction from amusement to shock underlies precisely Shakespeare’s point: that subtle structures of power imbalance of the sort Iago propagates are dismissed and tolerated until they “enmesh” ethnic targets and enlarge existing inequalities.*

*In a dramatic spectacle at the play’s conclusion, Shakespeare extends the pitfalls of societal power imbalance to their zenith as they destroy both oppressor and victim alike. Corrupted by Iago’s manipulation, Othello condenses the oppressive dynamic between white and black, occidental and oriental in his self-eulogy, where he metamorphoses his ontological struggle as an uneven conflict between antagonised racial other (the “Malignant...Turk”) and a valiant defender of Venice’s White and patriarchal institutions. In so doing, he exposes the ways in which institutional perpetration of ethnic and gendered imbalances oppress and debilitate, dichotomising expectations of ethnic inferiority and patriarchal superiority into a suicidally split psyche. What is furthermore striking to pinpoint is the universality of female suffering at the hands of men elevated by Society to exercise dominance and control. It is not just the naïve Desdemona, who refuses to “abuse [her] husband” “for all the world,” but the defiant Emilia, who seeks “revenge” against uneven patriarchal power dynamics, that are killed by their husbands’ masculine violence. Here, the proximity between the women’s corpses on stage converges disparate female experiences to articulate the necessarily*

*tragic fates of all women disempowered by society's androcentric institutions: faithful or subversive, they must die. Even the white men like Iago and Brabantio who benefit from ethnic and gendered power imbalances are destroyed by such structures, as they die undignified deaths on stage. By closing the play not with the individual "Tragedy of Othello" but rather the tragedy of all, Shakespeare elucidates a disturbing addendum: no one can emerge victorious from a society enmeshed in power differentials.*

*And yet there is an extra layer of complexity to Shakespeare's examination of power. However abused and marginalised, the women themselves are nonetheless granted a rare moment of female liberation. The poignant cadence of Desdemona's "willow, willow, willow" is only heightened by the women's lone stage presence, constituting an intimate, female space free from the overwhelming patriarchal powers. In this way, they temporarily transcend the confines of the society's imbalanced structures. Apostrophizing all "husbands," Emilia dissolves the partition between stage and audience to subvert universal gendered inequalities both within and without the play. This re-assertion of equality figures on a syntactic level, as "husbands" and "wives" melt into each other, adopting indistinguishable forms as successive, genderless, third-person pronouns. In the line "like their [husbands]: they [wives] see and smell..." By counteracting the play's tragic end with so memorable a female voice, Shakespeare articulates the possibility of dissolving oppressive and destructive power imbalances: the very construct of the play, which upholds the women's innocence and condemn the men's patriarchal and racist views, constitutes a feminist and egalitarian, rather than phallogocentric and racialised, truth.*

*That the main cast winds up dead nevertheless speaks to a repressive Venetian society whose institutional imbalances of power destroys not just the disenfranchised but the privileged elites. Yet, through revealing the women's powerful assertion of equality, he gestures towards the possibility of disrupting such inequalities to circumvent the brutal destruction of all like that in the play.*

## Section B

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	1	0.1	0.2	1	1	2	3	4	6	6	7	10	13	11	11	8	7	5	4	2	1	12.2

There was some excellent close analysis of the passages provided, and high-scoring responses demonstrated a strong control of ideas and language. These students were able to analyse and explore the passages in isolation and were also able to draw subtle connections between the passages. Interpretations of the text were polished, and the specific passages were incorporated effortlessly to support these ideas. Many students wrote well on the poetry of Plath and Dickinson, while there was a range of complex responses to *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale*.

Mid-range responses demonstrated strong knowledge of the texts and some of their features. They did, however, lack the subtlety of the higher-scoring responses and weren't able to adapt their interpretations to suit the passages as effectively.

It is important for students to use the passages effectively, as they discuss and analyse how language makes meaning. Some students 'skated over the passages', so that there was little close analysis in an otherwise fluent piece of writing. It is easier and more effective to use all three passages, though not necessarily in the same depth and detail. Having said that, one of our included Section B samples uses only two of the passages and is clearly a high-scoring piece.

## Sample essays

### *The Remains of the Day*, Kazuo Ishiguro

*Kazuo Ishiguro's novel 'Remains of the Day' follows a travelogue style journey following English butler Stevens as he embarks on a physical journey to the west country and a journey of emotional catharsis and realization. Ishiguro recognises the shift in society away from a servant class in Stevens 'shortage' of staff yet his inability to adapt to new ways and rigid adherence to old structures allows Ishiguro to condemn the inescapable consequences of internalized professionalism. Ishiguro excoriates the hierarchy and Aristocracy in its suppression of the lower class which suppresses emotion, vulnerability and human connection yet Ishiguro suggests 'you've got to keep looking forward' and encourages all to live for oneself and make the most of the 'Remains of the day'.*

*Ishiguro creates an atmosphere of emptiness and loss to amplify the shift away from the servant class as facilitating of growth and connection. Stevens "Anxiety" to win the support of the girls reveals an anxious realisation in the fall of the servant class hence an inability to fulfil his 'staff plan'. This anxiousness translates to a deeper internal struggle which presents opportunity for growth yet fear in moving away from a lifetime of service. The use of verbose language and convoluted syntax as Stevens 'did not perhaps asses' and continues to justify his actions reveals an intended tension and struggle in the realisation of his own limitations that Stevens gave himself 'more than I could carry out'. Through the atmosphere of instability and overthought, Ishiguro exemplifies the rigid structures as consuming and positions the servant class as disposable, seen in the shift from a house full of great affairs yet Stevens lack of business in the new world. Within Stevens' mistakes lies a greater threat in the emergence of the similar deterioration of his father hence through these similarities Ishiguro condemns the systematic structure as outdated and destructive. Through the didactic tone of the passage as 'one is not stuck by the truth' Stevens presents lessons and morals in attempts to remove himself from the central action and fault hence conveys a sense of distress. The reading of Kentons letter and the 'distinct desire' to return to Darlington hall yet later discovery she has more to 'live for' with her children enforce the unreliable narration as Ishiguro presents the devastation of a life without connection and denial of ones own life and to accept the truth. Kentons 'exemplary professionalism' is viewed as the key to a 'satisfactory staff plan' and to fill the void in Darlington hall. Kenton symbolizes hope and the imposition of reality whilst the unrequited love between Stevens and Kenton suggests Kenton would fulfil more than just the staff plan, but Stevens emotional void. Hence, this reflects on the suppression of Stevens emotion due to an inability to admit to a pursuit of Ms Kenton on more than just professional grounds but yearning for connection.*

*Ishiguro utilizes this inability to be emotionally vulnerable as destructive seen in the loss of a future together, catalysed by Stevens devotion to work and Darlington hall hence criticizes the internalized professionalism as destructive to the human needs. However, the journey to Ms Kenton acts as a catalyst for Stevens emotional growth and realisation underpins the journey as equally fulfilling. Stevens again asserts he is not 'merely imagining it' hence fuses the assertion physically and on an intangible level to convince the professional nature of the journey. Stevens inability to reveal emotion is condemned as limiting to an individuals fulfilment whilst Ishiguro celebrates the movement away from a servant class as reinvigorating to the lives stolen by service to the aristocracy.*

*Ishiguro depicts a clear separation of the working class and Aristocracy to depict duty as suppressive of human emotion, Through the declaration of Stevens fathers 'stroke', as she begins to 'cry' Ishiguro exhibits the physical human emotional response to devastation as natural and allowed. Juxtaposed against Steven physically turning away to depict a physical turn away from emotional confrontation as he 'must return downstairs' acts as a criticism in Stevens inability to feel emotion for his own father. As Stevens returns 'downstairs' Ishiguro uses setting to suggest an emotional decline and fall into the nature of service as a loss of connection yet inability to express. This inability to express emotion is seen in the repetition in asking if Stevens is 'all right' hence exposing the physical*

*signs of sadness yet inability to articulate or confess such emotion. The use of setting creates a stark dichotomy as the atmosphere of loss shifts to one of 'celebrating' in movement to the 'banqueting hall' as Ishiguro demonstrates the [subservience] of putting ones suffering aside for the aristocracy. Through the stark difference, Ishiguro suggests the out of touch nature of the aristocracy with individuals and true humanity that is translated into the decisions of the world upon personal relations. As the footmen looked 'relieved' to see Stevens, Stevens inadvertently heightens his role to accentuate the nature of others depending upon him reducing his moral culpability in the abandonment of his father. As Mr Cardinal asks Stevens about 'fish' Stevens rejection of conversation that he is 'quite alright' reveals the inner turmoil of emotions 'The connotations that emerge as Mr Cardinal would like to come back in the 'Spring' suggests the power of the room as cold and elusive and suggests the beauty of the Hall in a warmer setting and time of less tension. As Stevens proceeds to serve port to some of the 'other guests', Stevens movements become almost mechanical to accentuate the inability to exhibit emotions and refuge within profession. Ishiguro however suggests regardless, emotion is inescapable as Stevens looks as though 'crying' to recognize despite an inability to admit pain, the external reveal is unavoidable.*

*As Stevens takes a 'handkerchief' and 'wipes' his face, this confirms the tearful display as Ishiguro creates an atmosphere of pathos in Stevens retreat to duty alone his father support. As Stevens denotes his struggles to the 'strains of a hard day', Ishiguro depicts the working class lives as inescapable and destroyed as the prioritization of the Aristocrats is condemned due to suppression of human nature to mourn and experience connections as second to duty.*

*Ishiguro suggests that although one 'can't' do their job as well as they used to Ishiguro celebrates the autonomy and fulfilment that lies away from a life of service to adopt a more 'positive outlook' and hope for the future. The colloquial language 'now look mate' evokes an atmosphere of raw honesty and authenticity within the advice as Ishiguro exhibits the friendship and kindness that can be formed in regular people which Stevens has been denied. As suggested that Stevens attitude is 'all wrong', Ishiguro creates the character as a symbol of the future and reality to employ Ishiguros value of human warmth and connection. The exemplary nature that 'I've been as happy as a lark' yet alignment with Stevens in the working class heightens the connection between the two to create a turning point in the novel for Stevens emotional journey and growth. The advice that 'you've got to keep looking forward' or else your 'bound to get depressed' acts as a complete rejection of Stevens perfection and meticulous attitudes to suggest that fulfilment does not lie within the rigid social conventions. As 'Anybody will tell you, the evening's the best part of the day', the contrast in language between Stevens verbose and proper speech against the opposing conjunctions and slang suggests happiness and connection thrives away from social [propriety]. Additionally, the statement evokes a sense of loss in the connection with Ms Kenton and their evening 'cocoa chats' to enforce a determination to regain a sense of happiness. As the pier lights 'switch' 'on', the light represents the emotional enlightenment of Stevens and a switch towards a new attitude in the 'remains of the day'. Stevens didactic tone returns as 'for the likes of 'you and me' we cannot look back as Stevens addresses an unseen butler and character with the assumed same views to create a sense of growth and realisation that he is not alone.*

*Stevens iterates that 'ultimately' the fate of the world is in the hands of the 'great gentlemen' who 'employ our services' to validate his own life and ensure a sense of achievement. Through the expose of Darlington in the novel, Ishiguro validates the nature of good intentions yet devastating and misguided outcomes for Stevens also to recognize the value within autonomy and encourages individuals to think for oneself and to attain fulfilment and connection.*

*Kazuo Ishiguros exploration of the impacts of duty as oppressive to both connections and emotions condemns the aristocracy that prevails over a rigid hierarchy that destroys the lives of the working class. Regardless of choices, Ishiguro iterates that it is never to late to realise that true meaning lies within human connections and autonomy and suggests that individuals should take control of their lives and think for oneself for a fulfilling life and the 'Remains' of all days.*

## Othello, William Shakespeare

*When Othello evokes “another world of one entire and perfect chrysolite” in the final passage, Shakespeare confronts the audience with an image of cold perfection that captures the dangers of the problematic absolutism that underpins Othello’s worldview. In constructing his heroic persona upon a foundation of perfection, a state embodied by the “divine Desdemona” who is regarded within Venice as the acme of chaste femininity, Shakespeare implies that Othello leaves himself vulnerable to even the smallest cracks within this unreasonably lofty conception of himself, allowing the malignant Iago to poison his relationship through the ostensibly trivial, yet ultimately potent emblem of the handkerchief in the second passage.*

*The dismissive imperative that opens the first passage – “go to; farewell” – establishes from the outset the power that Iago wields over men whose psyches have been tarnished by rumours of spousal infidelity. It is clear that Iago is infected with the same sexual jealousy; his use of “sport” to euphemise his nefarious schemes minimises the heinous subtext of his deeds and elevates them to the level of recreational activity. His “suspicion” of Othello having “done [his] office” is imbued with a latent sense of sexual insecurity that accentuates the misogynistic reduction of his wife, Emilia, to an “office”, evoking a sense of propriety and commodification. Yet this base treatment of women is not reflected in the lucidity of his blank verse, his schemes conveyed mellifluously with smooth iambic pentameter, his adoption of the soliloquy form enhancing the sense that he feels great relish in revealing his plots to the audience. The balance syntax of his declaration that “Cassio’s a proper man : let me see now” renders his speech harmonious and eloquent, presenting his schemes as something natural, rather than abhorrent. There is a disconcerting sense of eagerness evident within his repetition of “how? how?”, seemingly drawing the audience into complicity with his crimes by inviting their active consideration of the methodical process behind his plots. When Iago declares that Othello will be led “by the nose”, seemingly analogising Othello to a common animal and thus playing upon the prevailing racial tropes of the Jacobean period, Shakespeare also plays upon the phallic connotations of “nose” to suggest that Othello, like most men within the Venetian milieu, is driven by sexual desire. Iago extends this notion when likening Othello to an “ass”, an animal proverbially associated with stupidity, presenting himself as a shepherd controlling flocks of ignorant Venetians. This comparison is undoubtedly steeped in irony, given that shepherds were associated with goodness within the Judeo-Christian tradition, a fact that Shakespeare uses to further emphasise the malignancy of Iago, given that his base schemes corrupt even the most pious of emblems. Yet this evident malignancy is concealed beneath his mellifluous manner of speech, the playful rhyming couplet that concludes his soliloquy – “hell and night must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light” – evincing the relish he takes in concocting such schemes. The image of his plan as a “monstrous birth” is somewhat oxymoronic, given the natural connotations of “birth” and the miscegenation evoked by “monstrous”, introducing a sense of hybridity that echoes the tensions that underpin Othello himself.*

*Much in the same way that Iago’s plot to ensnare Othello is “monstrous”, so too is the subject of this scheme portrayed as an unnatural fusion of identities, being both a “Moor” and “of Venice”, a man of heroic, gentile strength and savage otherness. His uncertain rank and status within society is what ultimately allows Iago’s heinous schemes to prevail, all whilst Othello is left thinking that he is “honest, honest Iago”, the repetition of this epithet heightening the irony. The eloquence that Othello displays when landed in the polis of Venice soon dissipates upon his arrival in the liminal chaotic Cyprus, wherein his speech is reduced to abrasive, rapid question – “is’t lost? Is’t gone?” – that capture his despair and angst. The elisions that mark these questions are indicative of the speed with which these lines are delivered, evoking the furious pace with which Othello confronts Desdemona about the misplacement of the handkerchief, a fetishised token of her chastity as suggest by the sexual “strawberries” that dot its appearance suggests that Othello has absorbed much of the attitudes of Iago by demonstrating how he has also adopted his vernacular, with repeated “ays” and “ha[s]!” interrupting once lucid verse. The blunt, monosyllabic syntax that open*

his lampooning of Desdemona – “that’s a fault” – is similarly disconcerting, establishing an air of foreboding that is accentuated by his disturbing fixation on an ostensibly trivial object.

When Othello declares that “there’s magic in the webs of [the handkerchief], Shakespeare alludes to the mysticism with which men invest female chastity, simultaneously steeping these remarks in irony, given that Othello is seemingly confirming the racial tropes alluded to previously by Brabantio in declaring that his racial forebears possess the power of “magic”. The choice of “web” is particularly pertinent, in that it evokes the complex interconnected nature of the demands placed upon women by men, all whilst echoing Iago’s plot to ensnare Cassio in “so great a web” in Act II and thus heightening the foreboding of this image. The eerie calm that settles over Othello’s verse in these lines is quickly disrupted by Desdemona’s repetitive allusions to Cassio. The disconcerting asyndetic tricolon of “the handkerchief!” that interrupts her pleas is indicative of the decline of Othello’s mental state, with the unprovocative deference of Desdemona – as captured within her frequent use of the formal “my lord” to address him – proved to be incapable of satiating his rage. The [“zounds!”] that concludes this passage is likewise evocative of the emotions that have overwhelmed his previously detached, magnanimous manner, subtly alluding to the emotions that will come to result in Desdemona’s death at the play’s denouement.

The shocked rhetorical question that Emilia poses at the end of the second passage – “is not this man jealous?” – is one that prefigures her disbelief and rage upon discovering the malignancy of her husband. Her horrified tricolon of “my husband?” is one that evokes her crescendoing emotions as she comes to comprehend the injustice of the play and the deeds of both of its central men. When she describes Othello as “ignorant as dirt”, an insult enhanced by the emotive “o gull!” and “o dalt!” that precede this slander, the audience is positioned to regard Othello as one whose previous glory has been undone by jealousy and manipulation. Yet this brown sepia tones evoke by “dirt”, coupled with her problematic use of the racial epithet “Moor”, seemingly implies that her rage at Othello’s violent misogyny has been contaminated by the same racial tropes that infected her husband. Shakespeare positions the audience to laud Emilia for her self-assured, blunt statement that she “care[s] not for [Othello’s] sword”, the power of which is accentuated by the caesura that follow it, repudiating this emblem of violent male power whilst unfettering herself from the expectations of passivity that inhibited Desdemona. Yet there is a lingering sense that all is not healed at the denouement of the play; the “monstrous birth” of Iago is exposed, but not readdressed, with the Venetian milieu interpreting this image more as a hideous aberration, rather than evidence of the ways in which “monstrous”, that is, exotic, hybrid identities, are ostracised and thus left vulnerable to manipulation within an ostensibly cosmopolitan milieu.

## The Winter’s Tale, William Shakespeare

As a late play in Shakespeare’s oeuvre, *The Winter’s Tale* mirrors Shakespeare’s own transition from the “infection” of the Elizabethan court to the “joy” of the retirement in the English countryside. The play impugns the notion of a universal truth, presenting a dizzying conflation of truth and perception. Moreover, the play explicates the potency of betrayal, whether perceived or real. As a reimagining of Robert Greene’s *Pandosto*, *The Winter’s Tale* deviates from *Pandosto*’s tragic ending through delineating the transformation and redemption of Leontes.

Deconstructing the nexus between truth and perception, *The Winter’s Tale* suggests that one’s own assumptions often belie reality. Passage 1 reveals the performative nature of identity, whereby Leontes bemoans that “entertainment may a free face put on” but become the “agent of deception,” connecting identity to be nothing but a façade. Increasingly, the use of antanaclasis through the repetition of “entertainment” ascribes sexual connotations to Hermione’s hospitality towards Polixenes, thus undermining her appearance of grace and respectability. Decrying that “women...will say anything,” Leontes disparages the honesty of the feminine sphere due to his assumption of Hermione’s infidelity, positing that women are inherently deceptive. Moreover, in alluding to the black

of funeral attire, Leontes asserts that women are as “false as over dyed blacks,” connoting their emotions and presentation of decorum to fail to validate their truth. However, Leontes’ interrogative, questioning how one can “communicate with dreams” ironically exposes the limitations of his endeavours to fashion his perception of Hermione’s adultery as truth, connoted as being as vacuous as forming “art” with “what’s unreal.” Passage 2 furthers this exploration of the transiency of truth, whereby Leontes’ assertion that Hermione’s infidelity and “actions are [his] dreams” evokes the unsubstantial and vacuous connotations of dreams to expand that perception has been mistaken for truth. Indeed, Leontes postulates that the “shame” of Hermione’s accusations is “so past truth,” underscoring the fragility of Leontes worldview, predicated on intangible notions of proof. Therefore, Hermione’s maintenance that assumptions of her transgressions are merely “proofs” that “jealousies awake,” catalysed by envy and suspicion rather than measurable truth. Thus, *The Winter’s Tale* propounds the dichotomy between what is perceived and what is real.

Furthermore, the ruinous consequences of both perceived and actual betrayal are elucidated by the play. Leontes’ use of epizeuxis in Passage 1, decrying Polixenes and Hermione’s relationship as “too hot, too hot” connotes his consternation at perceiving to have been betrayed, and therefore emasculated, by Hermione’s supposed affair with Polixenes. The use of antanacsis suggests that the “mingling” between Polixenes and Hermione is sexual and exceeds mere “friendship,” underscoring that the perceived infidelity that Leontes fears to have slighted him seemingly disguises itself as an amiable and platonic relationship. Leontes’ aversion to “neat” animals, adducing the “steer...and the calf,” draws upon the horned nature of these animals to elucidate Leontes fear of being cuckolded by Hermione’s perceived betrayal, alluding to the horns Elizabethans believed cuckolds grew. It is the perceived betrayal of his masculine honour that causes Leontes to question Mamillius “art thou my calf,” seeking to reclaim power over the feminine domain he perceives to have betrayed him through eliciting the connotations of a suckled calf under his ownership. Bewailing the “infection of this brain and hardening of [his] brows,” Leontes ironically alludes to the fact that his perception of being cuckolded is born of the “infect[ed]” assumptions of deceit that plague his psyche.

Passage 2 reifies the potency of this perceived deception through Hermione’s assertion that her life “stands in the level of [Leontes’] dreams,” juxtaposing the severity of death with the intangible nature of dreams to underscore the power of perceived betrayal, foreshadowing her iniquitous death. However, Hermione also propounds the ruin of actual betrayal, lamenting that losing “the crown and comfort” of her life, Leontes’ “favour” voids the importance of life. Having been degraded and falsely incriminated before the public sphere, Hermione bewails that she “prize[s] life not a straw,” underscoring the ennui and dolour that arises in the wake of real betrayal. Hence, the play warns against the ruinous consequences of both perceived and actual betrayal of honour.

Increasingly, *The Winter’s Tale* subconsciously reflects Shakespeare’s own yearning for reconciliation after a lifetime away from his family, embodied in Leontes’ transformation from tyranny to remorse. Leontes subverts the joy of a “danc[ing]” “heart” in Passage 1, with the use of epizeuxis through the repetition of “not joy” eliciting a sombre mood, connoting how Leontes’ lack of faith in his wife foredooms Sicilia for tragedy. The plosive alliteration of Leontes’ fear of “padding palms and pinching fingers” between Polixenes and Hermione viscerally conveys his fury due to believing himself to have been betrayed and cuckolded. Passage 2 augments the descent of Leontes’ into a despotic rage, threatening Hermione that the punishment for her supposed adultery ought to be so terrible that “death” would be the “easiest passage,” connoting the seemingly endless desire that Leontes possesses for revenge, seeking retribution that exceeds the severity of death. Asserting that the court is beset by “rigor and not law,” Hermione delineates the tyranny that overpowers reason and justice in Sicilia, catalysed by Leontes’ rage. However, Passage 3 elucidates Leontes’ progression from fury to penitence. Leontes laments the death of Hermione’s “sainted spirit,” with the use of sibilance and euphony verifying Hermione’s inherent grace and innocence, qualities that Leontes is finally cognizant of. The meta fictive depiction of Leontes “on this stage...soul vexed” connotes his grief and ineluctable sorrow, aware of his own folly in a contrast to his adamantine

belief in Hermione's infidelity. In a moment of anagnorisis, Leontes decries his eyes as being "dead coals," with the connotations of blackness and coldness evincing Leontes' recognition of his own ignorance. Thus, Leontes commits to marrying only by Pauline's recommendation, despite this being "no remedy" for the tragedy he caused, representing his remorse. However, Paulina foreshadows Hermione's apparent resurrection by positing that Leontes shall not find a new wife until the "first queen's again in breath," alluding to Hermione's return and the restoration of Sicilia. Therefore, the play suggests redemption to be possible for even the most unscrupulous.

As a reinvention of Pandosto, *The Winter's Tale* exhorts the audience to "be stone no more," and cast aside their preoccupation with realism, deconstructing the binaries of truth and perception, honour and betrayal, and tragedy and redemption.

## The Fire Next Time, James Baldwin

The lyrical ability to explore power that brings people together and separates the masses is the fundamental attribute that enables greater understanding of the 'difference' that segregates the African-Americans and white Americans. In the progressive piece of James Baldwin's 'The Fire Next Time', Baldwin questions the radical thinking and control of charismatic leaders in endorsing egalitarian values, however posits that the power of the Christian Church and its visceral vibrancy ignites a collective love that permeates throughout the community. During the Civil Rights Movement, Baldwin's piece begins with the rhythmic and melodic cadence of his voice transitioning to a monotonous and critical tone to question society as a whole and what values we espouse. Finally, to "end the racial nightmare", Baldwin pleads to seek the power of love in order to strive to an egalitarian and accepting society filled with love for all people, irrespective of race.

By employing a charismatic and powerful voice redolent of a preacher, Baldwin laments his first encounters in the Church during his formative years. A sense of vibrancy and intrigue is apparent within the poem, framing the anticipation of his words later to come. Baldwin's utilisation of anaphora describes a new and interesting institution he has committed towards as the anaphoric "no" is described to be unfamiliar and not quite like anything Baldwin has experienced as "no drama like the drama" and "no music like that music" like what he has seen. Baldwin espouses a positive perception of this institution, and emphasises a collective love and passion in the Church that has led to the excitement that was "equal [to] the fire." As Baldwin ruminates how he "immobilized his father," Baldwin emphasises through the diacopic "no pathos quite like the pathos" of religion that he escaped towards in order to create his own power against his father. Religion was the defense mechanism he sought to overpower his father and "immobilized [him]self." As Baldwin's crescendo of the pacing of his words emulates the atmosphere and cadence of Church songs, he adopts this sermonic structure in order to convey the power and persuasion of religion, resonating with church attendees. The familiarity of the cries of "Hallelujah," "Yes lord," and "Praise His name," coupled with the emphatic use of exclamation marks are in quick succession, mimicking the fast pacing and energy of the Church, as he describes this reverberating sensation that "sustained and whipped on [his] solos," ultimately leading to a climactic end an acknowledgement to Jesus which would never fail [him]." However, this phrase foreshadows an epiphany in Passage 2, where powerful individuals like Jesus and Elijah Muhammad, fail to use their power to empower the populace to strive to a cohesive and egalitarian society.

Thus, Baldwin's sudden shift to a realistic and disappointed tone is encapsulated in the short sharp sentence of "He failed His bargain," emphasizing how religion has failed his expectations, and thus circles back to the beginning of the passage. Baldwin describes how his "slow crumbling of fate," through imagery allows him to realise the escape to the power of religion was thus "from nothing whatever."

Relinquishing his sermonic voice from Passage 1, Baldwin adopts a argumentative tone in order to critique the validity of Elijah Muhammad's power to control the masses. Baldwin's depiction of Elijah

*Muhammed is painted through irony, where he laments “isn’t love more important than colour?” leading the readers to a false sense of perception and security in Elijah Muhammed’s values. However, Baldwin continues this realisation, and challenges Elijah’s commitment to empower equality, in which he subtly alludes to the façade of his leadership which casually promotes segregationist attitudes. Baldwin describes this through his belief that “one cannot argue with anyone’s experience or decision or belief” and through the tricolon, emphasises that these values that Elijah espouses cannot be questioned, reinforcing the hypnotic and segregationist attitudes he empowers to his followers, and to go against his words should be confronted. Baldwin’s employment of legal language such as his “evidence would be thrown out of court” to the main body of the case, and through these terms, emphasises a sense that he is dissecting Elijah Muhammed’s character as something that should be legally accounted for. Baldwin further parallels ideas of failure from Passage 1, where he questions again the “justice of indictment” being failed. Baldwin further espouses the lack of motivation and change by Elijah despite all his power, and those “who had tried to change the world” has thus failed. Baldwin concludes his critical deconstruction of Elijah Muhammed’s power, where he provides a sentimental solution through the “power [that] is real,” and the power of love to move towards social harmony and equality.*

*Baldwin mirrors ideas from Passage 1 and 2 of the motif of love as an extended metaphor for adequate social reform, where in order to change the trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement, love is the answer for that change to happen. Through this idea as a backdrop to his idea, Baldwin thus adopts a powerful voice reminiscent of activists like Martin Luther King Jr in order to lull the readers in through his voicing. Baldwin posits the colour is “not a human or personal reality,” but a “political reality”, and through the paradox, these elements suggest a need to advocate for institutionalised change that the US government must take action towards. Baldwin further dismantles the ideas of a separate race that society has perceived, and describes through epiphora, as he repetitively emphasises to not “take refuge in any delusion” for the colour of one’s skin will “forever [be a] delusion.” Thus, Baldwin poses colour as inherently problematic, and a Social Construct derived from what stereotypes white people were taught. Baldwin extracts ideas from Passage 1 and 2, in which he references “God’s – or Allah’s vengeance,” where he circles back to the Christian ideologies of their great Allah in Passage 2. The motif of vengeance is described throughout the passage through mesodiplosis, repetitively expressed through “vengeance [that] is inevitable, a vengeance that does not really depend on,” a “cosmic vengeance” and a “historical vengeance” that cannot be reinforced by “person[s] or organisations,” like Christianity and the Nation of Islam. As their power to influence spreads the sentiment of hate for the counter race, rather than to embrace love. Thus, Baldwin proffers a notion that these influential leaders like Elijah Muhammed spread a cognitive dissonance within their followers which leads to no adequate change in society. Thus, Baldwin finalises his epistle to society with a sermonic voice once more, positing an effort that one must take responsibility of to possess a spiritual love, where “like lovers” must not take a “conscious” refuge in vengeance and hate, and instead embrace everyone of all races for the betterment and future of society, to “change the history of the world.”*

## The Complete Poems, Emily Dickinson

*Emily Dickinson, a characteristically ambivalent poet, challenges the cultural and literary tenets which her contemporaries find absolute. Namely Dickinson stages a broad exploration of despair, elucidating both its excruciating suffering and ability to engender revelation. This is evident in passage two, as Dickinson explores the psychological anguish of a troubled speaker through the conceit of a ‘funeral’ in their ‘Brain’. Opening into a characteristically jarring opening line ‘I felt a funeral, in my brain’ – the tactile –verb felt along with the visceral brain implies a sense of befuddled anguish which manifests itself as physical pain. The speaker then complains of the ‘Mourners’ – their anguished thoughts [on] – who are ‘treading – treading’ – the epizeuxis provide a concrete representation of the uncompromising barrage of thought associated with despair. Even when these*

thoughts 'all were seated' the funeral is filled with acoustic images of a drum that keeps beating – beating, onomatopoeically describing the footfall of 'tread[s]' morphing into a 'Drum', with full rhyme to numb linking this to their pain. A 'Box' then, is 'heard' by the speaker, the switch to a completely auditory description of pain highlighting their depersonalization, as the oblique metaphor of 'Box' represents both their casket and the enclosed 'Box' of the speaker's mind, leaving them trapped.

This omnipresent yet soundless description becomes but 'space' that 'toll[s]', echoing the conceit of *Blank*. Enjambling into the next stanza, the liquid consonance of 'all' and 'Bell' precede 'the minimisation of the speaker as 'but an Ear', as the experience again depersonalises the speaker, leaving them 'wrecked' and 'solitary', almost a 'strange Race' to themselves – as in the 'internal difference' of *Slant*, as a 'Plank in Reason, broke'. The Plank 'break[ing]' represents the speaker's thoughts breaking through reason, as they 'dropped down, and down', emphasised by the mournful consonance of 'O', into insanity, where they 'hit a World', describing their final dissociation from all earthly comprehension. However, a more romantic view, also present in *Blank* sees the 'Plank' break[ing] as an epiphanic revelation enabled by despair as they escape despair into 'a world' the preposition implying this is new to the speaker, as 'finished knowing – then' describes the end of the pain they have only ever known. Thus, Dickinson captures the duality of despair in its ability to inflict excruciating suffering as well as engender an epiphanic sense of revelation.

Having utilised the ambivalence of death in an explanation of despair's duality, Dickinson in *Something Quieter*, explores the ambiguity of the physical and spiritual experience of death. Thus, Dickinson is speaker, through implicit metaphor, explores the glorious mystery of death. In the opening line – 'There's something quieter than sleep' – the implicature coupled with the trochaic stress mystifies death moving away from the Christian claim of total understanding of the afterlife, as the sprig, implying the youthfulness of the corpse, reminds readers of death's looming over even the youngest of life. Elusive death, or its corpse, thus 'will not tell its name', the high modality of 'will' maddeningly concealing death's tenacious mystery. Into stanza two, the speaker begins a series of anaphoric inquiries in 'some touch it', 'some kiss it' and 'some chafe its idle hand', beginning a pattern of dictation of the kinetic verbs, with the abrasiveness of 'chafe' being particularly harsh, necessitating the disruption of an otherwise iambic meter. To the speaker, death has a 'simple gravity', emplacing simultaneously the softness and harshness of nature's reality, all of which is beyond mortal reach indefinitely. Moving into stanza three, Dickinson enters a subjective mood in 'I would not weep if I were they', as she becomes openly critical of the interruptive rituals of *Ars Moriendi*, strengthened by the exclamatory 'how rude in one to sob'. Here 'sob' belies a performative display of emotions, akin to the Neighbour, of *opposite House*, displaying fruitfulness of these rituals in the presence of a beautiful yet unknowable force such as Death. In contrast to 'rude' and 'sob', the 'quiet fairy', as a metaphor for the human soul, Dickinson warns, may be scared back to her 'native wood', as she suggests that puritanism may actually hinder the great mysterious processes of death. These processes are the focus of vate poets who are 'prone to periphrases', as the eloquence of poetry, Dickinson captures is required to turn the 'simple' process of the 'Early-dead' into a sublime, romantic experience revealed in 'Remark that the birds have fled'. Thus, Dickinson castigates the interruptive demands of [romanticising] in their disruption of the beauty in death – which Dickinson, as a vate poet celebrates the exploration of.

As such, in passage three, Dickinson utilizes this vate capability in a visceral exploration of the rain's revelation. Eschewing her traditional common meter in favour of regular rhythmic rhymic ballad meter, the speak[er] introduces the elusive referent – Like Rain it sounded, 'till it curved' – as the pronoun it, coupled with the aural 'sounded' and kinetic 'curved' obliquely begins this exploration of nature as powerful beyond mortal comprehension. This is strengthened by the tentative similes 'Like rain' and 'as wet as any Wave', which endows the downpour with a sense of broad, divine power. Then, the rain itself begins, as it 'filled the Wells', and 'pleased the pools', as the pleasing liquidity of // coupled with the percussive /p/ depicts the fall as mercilessly harsh yet infinitely soothing, akin to the pentecostal ascension of Elijah to the heavens, as a 'coming of the Hosts was heard'. The rain,

*then, intensifies, as it pulled the 'spigot from the Hills' and 'let the floods abroad', as it is incapable of containing its own immense power, with 'spigot', representative of human agency, helpless in the face of this complete domination of nature over mankind. Moreover, the switch to 'loosened acres' and 'lifted seas', through intense liquid consonance, which is now notably fronted, reveals a great heavenly upheaval only divinely possible. Just as quickly as its 'arrival', the storm then settles, as it 'like Elijah' rode away / Upon a wheel of cloud, simultaneously capturing the stunning disappearance of the storm and revealing the crux of the poem – a vate speaker, who, through this biblical reference, is suggested to have become closer to God whilst capturing this sublime experience. Therefore, Dickinson, through the heavenly power of the downpour, reveals the ability of the vate poet to communicate this divine journey to reading through poetry, which Dickinson sees as an awesome power.*

*Ultimately, these three passages provide powerful insight into the duality of despair, nature and death, and the universal ambivalence explicable only through vate capability. As such, Dickinson's opus as a whole embodies this characteristic ambivalence, allowing discerning readers to access the very edge of mortal human perception.*

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

*W.B. Yeats' prophetic and reflective poems 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'The Wild Swans at Coole' present the intangible notions of senescence, decay, and eternity as intrinsically linked to the human ability to create. Creativity is an understanding Yeats has returned to across his life, often contemplating the act of creation as an act of crafting an eternity. Legacy and remembrance are the factors that distinguish 'monuments of unaging intellect' from those of 'passion or conquest'. While Yeats imbues his esoteric philosophies surrounding immortality within 'Sailing to Byzantium', he fabricates the notion that this 'is no country for old men'. Unravelling time as a concept that has no weight on creation, as 'mortal dress' cannot obscure 'the artifice of eternity'. While he lingers on the memories of those 'in one another's arms', he offers the stark reminder that 'whatever is begotten, born, and [dies]'. Highlighting the inevitability of age, yet the human capacity to create an eternal being beyond oneself. This idea is reiterated within 'The Wild Swans at Coole', where the 1919 poem envisions a 'woodland path...dry' to encapsulate the natural cycle of life and death. Yeats' depiction of the 'nine-and-fifty swans' demonstrates an isolation through the odd number, establishing the understanding that Yeats is the other swan – yet has not transcended to the purest form of creation he can. While the swans 'scatter wheeling in great broken rings', he returns to this idea in 'Sailing to Byzantium' through the 'holy fire, perne in a gyre', from which the repetition of cyclical structures arise. Relating to mortality and eternity, from which an idea may spiral outwards into obscurity or maybe 'such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make!'. The 'calamitous wings' of the swans echo the 'hammered gold and gold enameling' in 'Sailing to Byzantium' where sound is implemented to convey creation, industry, and ultimately remembrance as it 'keep(s) a drowsy Emperor awake' or 'Delight(s) men's eyes! Thereby, conveying eternity as a tangible construct, from which the individual has the capability to craft and immortal legacy – 'unwearied still'.*

*Aging and death are the lingering fears that Yeats confronts within 'Sailing to Byzantium' and 'The Wild Swans at Coole', as he assures the reader – but more importantly himself – that man is mere prologue to the 'Holy city of Byzantium'. While the final stanza of 'Wild Swans' suspends the reader in ambiguity as Yeats' persona 'awake(s) some day to find they have flown away?', the overall recollection of the swans is the fundamental aspect of the poem – not their eventual departure. Through this, Yeats is contending that the establishment of memory and the captivation of the mind beyond physical absence is the 'artifice of eternity' the artist can be gathered into. Because Yeats reflects on the swans, beyond their initial presence – beyond the decaying 'autumn beauty', he returns to them nineteen years 'since (he) made (his) first count'. Although, they are not the same swans, he sees them this way. As if they were eternal beings. This is the 'holy fire/as in the gold mosaic of a wall' that Yeats mentions in 'Sailing to Byzantium.' While the swans are natural beings,*

*he represents them as ethereal, otherworldly forces that exist beyond the realm of 'sensual music' and 'desire'. Instead, they exist in the soul, where all things may be eternal and constant. This is the Byzantium Yeats envisions, this is the liberation from becoming a 'tattered coat upon a stick.'*

*While the swans' hearts in 'The wild swans at Coole' 'have not grown old', the 'lords and ladies of Byzantium' in 'sailing to Byzantium' do not take their 'bodily form from any natural thing'. Yeats' even approach to both poems' structures lend themselves to a clear, simplified display of deep, philosophical thought. The octava rima rhyme scheme of 'Byzantium' with an even separation of four, numbered stanzas involves the sense of clarity Yeats aims to project. As his visionary poem requires this dissection to fully grasp and pace the flow of spiritual ideas of mortality and transience. Similarly, in 'Wild Swans' the five stanzas, simply broken up into a sextet rhyme scheme allows for fluidity and clarity. The even lines contradict the uneven stanza amount however, with only five stanzas and not an even six – the sense that something is being unsaid by the persona becomes apparent. This is further enhanced by the question mark that punctuates the closing line of the poem, leaving the resolution ambiguous and mysterious. Much like how Yeats describes the swans, 'mysterious, beautiful'. Similar to the 'lake's edge or pool' that 'mirrors a still sky', Yeats contends that the natural beauty of this mortal world can never truly be captured. Yet, through his poems he attempts to craft a Byzantium for himself where the 'October twilight' reflects a 'monument...of its own magnificence.'*

*The artistic endeavour W.B. Yeats strives for in the poems 'The Wild swans at Coole' and 'Sailing to Byzantium' demonstrate the individual undertaking to establish an eternity beyond the confines of a mortal coil. Through his poetry and depiction of eternal life, Yeats crafts one for himself as he is remembered as we reflect on 'what is past, or passing, or to come'.*