

Examiners' Report

June 2025

GCE English Literature 9ET0 03

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Introduction

This paper is now well-established and examiners have commented on how well-prepared candidates are, in the main, for the demands of the exam. There were fewer rubric infringements and, in the vast majority of cases, candidates produced responses that were clear and relevant and answered the question. There were also a pleasing number of candidates who are able to produce relevant, personal and highly critical responses to the questions with consistent and insightful analysis, which is hard to do under exam conditions. These nuanced and discriminating responses, which teach examiners new things, are what keep them coming back to mark and makes it a pleasure to work on the paper.

Overall, better responses tended to offer sustained analysis of longer quotations, engaging with multiple layers of meaning, structure, and context. They analyse the poems as poems, analysing in-the-round, rather than zooming in on single words or techniques. In contrast, weaker essays relied on short, undeveloped quotations or embedded quotations presented without commentary or an overreliance on the listing of features. Examiners noted an issue of the overuse or misuse of literary terminology. While many candidates correctly identified features such as enjambement, caesura, asyndetic list, and volta, these were frequently deployed without sufficient analytical integration, with general comments on things like the “flow” of a poem. In particular, volta was often applied indiscriminately—even in non-sonnet forms—suggesting it has become a default term rather than a precise analytical tool. Centres are also reminded that a caesura is a stop or pause in a metrical line, and not all punctuation counts as a caesura.

There is also a tendency among some candidates to argue from absence, particularly in contemporary poetry (e.g., the lack of rhyme or caesura), which often results in speculative or unfocused analysis. This may stem from an overemphasis on covering a wide range of technical features, sometimes at the expense of depth.

Handwriting and presentation remain a significant concern. Examiners noted increasing difficulty reading scripts due to cramped, small, or irregular writing styles. Encouraging candidates to write with clear spacing (6–10 words per line), use black ink, and leave lines between paragraphs could greatly enhance legibility. The use of asterisks for additional points should be systematised (e.g. numbered and referenced “at end”) to aid clarity. Some candidates struggled to balance their time across both sections, occasionally leaving essays unfinished. Completing an essay—even briefly—can make a crucial difference at level boundaries.

Nevertheless, to return to the original point, many candidates demonstrated clear engagement with the texts, producing thoughtful, controlled, and contextually aware responses.

Question 1

Question 1 was generally the more popular option in Section A, likely due to the familiarity of 'The Lammas Hireling'. Most candidates responded positively to the term "significant events," though some found it vague, leading to varied and sometimes confused interpretations. Stronger candidates clearly defined what counted as a significant event in their introductions, while others struggled to move beyond general narrative summaries.

High-level responses identified specific significant moments such as death, dreams, or the loss of innocence, structuring their comparisons around these, while weaker candidates referred vaguely to tone shifts or nature, often without saying what the significant events were. Some mid-to-lower-level responses descended into descriptive speculation or used the anthology poem as a crutch, failing to interpret the unseen in its own right. More confident responses explored tone and ambiguity effectively, particularly in 'The Lammas Hireling', and linked structural choices (such as shifts in light or dream imagery) to thematic content. Stronger comparisons were thematic and conceptual rather than superficial or forced, often structured around a moment from 'Cows' and linked meaningfully to 'The Lammas Hireling'.

Most candidates were able to make some links between the poems, with common comparisons including death, the supernatural, farming imagery, and the role of dreams. However, many forced connections – such as supernatural readings of 'Cows' or dubious symbolic links – that strained credibility. Some weaker interpretations included the daughter turning into a cow, being possessed, or being in a sexual relationship with the cow.

A large number of misreadings occurred, particularly with pronoun confusion in 'Cows' – candidates mistaking the mother cow for the daughter and vice versa – which led to odd or implausible interpretations. Others focused too much on the set poem, trying to align the unseen to pre-rehearsed ideas. Overly symbolic or far-fetched readings (e.g., the cow as a metaphor for immigrants, trans identity, or aliens) showed creativity but lacked textual grounding.

The best responses were those that approached both poems with fresh eyes, made careful and reasoned comparisons, and understood ambiguity as a deliberate poetic strategy rather than a problem to be solved.

In both 'Cous' by Laura Scott and 'The Lammas Hireling' by Ian Duhig, the poets explore significant events through looking at the relationship between humanity and nature, and the impact of boundaries being transgressed. Whilst 'Cous' focuses on the development of the speaker's farm and the impact the calf has on it and the family, 'The Lammas Hireling' depicts a mythical and magical transgression of boundaries with a fantastical hireling. Both poems explore significant events of humanity and nature, however 'Cous' demonstrates the reality of being around farm animals and whilst 'The Lammas Hireling' pictures a far more fantastical event.



The best responses are able to demonstrate a controlled argument from the opening paragraph.

This candidate has spent time planning their response before beginning their answer. They have thought carefully about the presentation of significant events and have used the introduction to signpost to the examiner how they are shaping their answer. They are also bringing out points of contrast as well as points of similarity, which demonstrate a strong understanding of the named poem and of the unseen. The rest of the response was equally controlled and sophisticated and they received a Level 5 for this answer.

In her poem "Cows", Scott presents the idea of unconscious fear experienced in the unconscious mind, leaking into reality and expressing itself as a deluded apathy. The comforting scene that Scott establishes in the sixth quatrain as the mother cow was "licking [her calf] dry, his frame buckling under the weight of her tongue", paired with the companion line of "the way he leaned into her" in which the "the way" is never specified but silently understood; is then immediately undercut by the final line in the stanza that drips its enjambement into

the next as "that night a sound came from the cows throat and folded it into the creases of my dream". The enjambement used here ~~as~~ creates the idea that the speaker has begun to blend reality, evocation, and fantasy in a panic that ~~begins~~ becomes prophetic in her prediction ~~of~~ that the cow will die - as displayed to her through her vision. Scott's presentation of the metaphysical amongst a previously realistic syntax with ^{small} allusions to "cow on a tin of Caran D'Ache pencils" presents a stark contrast in which readers themselves may begin to question the speaker's reliability as a narrator. The suspenseful ambiguity of the "something" that "pulled him back to her", leaves the reader with ^{and finished} a tension that is difficult to disperse when followed by a blunt reveal of the truth with a monosyllabic "She was gone."

The best responses analyse language, form and structure as part of their overall argument, not in a formulaic way, but as a way of developing the answer.

Here, the candidate makes a specific point about enjambement - not a general comment about "flow" but one that is linked to the idea of significant events and how the speaker is now blending reality and fantasy. They have also made a number of sophisticated points about syntax, ambiguity and the blunt monosyllables of 'She was gone'. All of these demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the writer's craft and develop the argument, rather than simply feature spot.

This candidate went on to receive a high Level 5 mark for their response.

Whilst the transformation and rebirth of GWS
in 'Cows' is more psychological, however, the
transformation of the Hwylwg seems more physical.
In 'The Cows Hwylwg' Pugh employs a tension and
serenic field of Goll-wre, associated with the
pagan and Goll-Christian beliefs of Cows. And
Pugh perhaps exemplifies this transformative nature
of Goll through the transformation of the Hwylwg.
The speaker tells us that ^{'his lovely head turned.'} ^{'his top lip gathered.'}
^{'his eyes rose like bread.'} The tricolonic listing
here of the state of the Hwylwg creates an
overwhelming sense of change in the physical
appearance of the Hwylwg. Whilst this event, or
transformation, in 'Cows' seems one for the better,
whether this is the case in Pugh's poem seems
ambiguous. The meaning of the Hwylwg 'top lip'



The best responses use the unseen poem to draw out ideas from the taught poem that have previously remained hidden, or at least not brought to the fore in an initial reading. Through your analysis of the unseen poem, you are demonstrating your understanding of poetry, and how there can be different readings of poems you know well. By developing the idea of change across both poems, this candidate was able to demonstrate consistent analysis and evaluation, and produce a Level 5 response.

calf. The speaker describes the cow as 'licking him dry' with the 'weight of her engine', with the ~~an~~ adverbial participle of 'licking' and ~~the~~ ~~at~~ heaviness of the noun 'weight' emanating a lexical field of continuous and unconditional love she holds for her son upon his birth, thus constructing this significant even in a much softer and pure light in comparison to the depraved, sexualised, and deeply disconcerting nature of the birth of the Hireling and Farmer's relationship. Moreover, the enjambment of the lines within 'Cows' is further juxtaposed against the emphatic end-stopping and the monosyllabic of caesura in 'Lovers' ~~to~~ 'knew when to shut up'.

This again reiterates the semantic and thematic juxtapositions between the two texts in their portrayal of birth, as the enjambment paints the birth of the relationship of the cow and the calf as soft, continuous, and unconditional, whereas the birth of the farmer's relationship with the Hireling proves rigid, conditional, and perhaps dependent on the Farmer's sexual desires and needs as opposed to an overflowing sensation of ^aaffection for the Hireling.

Through this, both poets create different effects, with Scott celebrating the ~~beauty and~~ ~~sanching~~ and beautiful intimacy between a mother and her offspring, in contrast to the uncanny and disturbing relationship

between the Hiveling and the farmer - which arguably involves a sense of unease and discomfort within the reader, as something as pure as the birth of a new connection and intimacy is violently subverted. Thus, both ^{while} Scott and Dunig explore significant events through the concept of 'birth', ~~Scott~~ Scott depicts it at its most physical and literal level, portraying the tenderness between a mother and son, ^{whereas} ~~quite~~ Dunig in contrast subverts its purity and sanctity through the perverted and debased 'birth' of a relationship between the farmer and the Hiveling - perhaps evocative of the paradoxes life within human relationships.



A good candidate will look for points of contrast as well as points of comparison when producing a fully connected and integrated answer.

Here, the candidate uses points of contrast to demonstrate their understanding of both the unseen poem and the named poem. They continued their response in a controlled and discriminating way and were awarded a top Level 4 for this answer.

Question 2

Although this was the less popular of the Section A questions, many examiners found more convincing and focused interpretations—particularly of the unseen poem, 'Cows'. The theme of protecting loved ones provided a clear lens through which to engage with both poems, and stronger responses moved beyond word-level analysis to explore broader emotional and structural patterns.

There was considerable variation in how candidates interpreted 'A Minor Role'. There has been discussion online as to whether the speaker is the patient or the carer, and examiners did comment that candidates who interpreted the speaker as the patient did not always convincingly link the poem clearly to the idea of protecting others. In contrast, candidates who understood the speaker as caring for a loved one were better able to construct coherent, nuanced responses that directly addressed the theme of protection.

Candidates often grasped the poem's theatrical conceit, and stronger responses explored the extended metaphor meaningfully, linking the role-playing to the emotional performance involved in caring for someone terminally ill. Some insightful interpretations also examined the stoicism, domestic imagery (bed, cat), and the tonal shift at the poem's end as signals of inner resolve. However, others focused too narrowly on isolated techniques (e.g. listing, enjambement) without connecting these to broader meanings, which limited the depth of analysis.

Stronger responses demonstrated more nuanced understanding by analysing how techniques contributed to meaning and tone. Structural and tonal shifts, the use of light and metaphor, and the poems' narrative ambiguity were all areas explored thoughtfully in higher band essays. Successful answers examined the emotional labour of caregiving, stoicism, the complexity of familial love, and the limitations of protection. Several candidates showed an ability to explore different forms of "protection" - whether practical, emotional, or symbolic. Weaker responses tended to compare poems only at surface level, often relying on generic feature-spotting (enjambement, caesurae) without discussing the function or impact of those techniques. Some responses veered into misinterpretation -conflating speakers or constructing implausible narratives in 'Cows' (e.g. affairs with cows, murder). These misunderstandings typically stemmed from either insecure knowledge of the set text or limited ability to interpret ambiguous poetry.

Scott's 'Cows' em The poetic voice ⁱⁿ of 'Cows' presents the reader with a passivity and reserved nature that acts to suggest the protection of loved ones is achieved through calm and conscious support. Such a notion is complemented by the poem's narrative form, in which the nine consistent quatrains ^{to convey} suggest a support

given to loved ones in the form of a continuous and caring presence. This is perhaps similarly supported by the poet's use of enjambment, in which the way that the stanzas flow freely into one another acts to complement a sense of continuous protection offered by the mother in the poem, to her daughter experiencing the grief of losing her son. Alternatively, the enjambment ~~amen~~ between ~~stanzas~~ the rigid formation of the stanzas can ~~be~~ also be interpreted to convey the idea of the continuous cycle of life and ~~its~~ our inevitable experience of mortality, where the support offered ones reflected in the rigid quatrains can aim to protect from grief but cannot impede the flow of life. ~~Thus Farther Scott has arguably depict~~ This notion is arguably supported by the passivity in the imagery of death presented by Scott's poem, the image of the dead son 'like something washed up by the tide' makes use of the serene connotations of the sea and the pastoral to detract from the harsh reality offered by death, in which ^{long phrases of} the soft sibilant sounds of 'something washed' perhaps acts to mirror the motion of the

^{through the calming 'sh' and phonemes}
'hide' ~~draw~~ conveying a comfort in death to the speaker's daughter in order to protect her from the pain it creates. Yet just as the rigid stanzas and passive imagery of the poem ~~set~~ to attempt to express the comfort and protection afforded the daughter, the inevitability of death conveyed by the enjambment is also complemented by the 'tide' - in which 'washed up' depicts an image with an undertone of discardment and the poet's use of the simile, 'like', reinforces the fact that ~~the~~ the car has truly died and the image of the sea is solely intended for comfort. As such, Scott has arguably presented a poem in which the protection of loved ones is presented through imagery of comfort and support whilst also instilling the notion of its futility amidst the horror of death, reinforced by the ending of the poem in which ^{the speaker's} ~~her~~ 'daughter's face had changed' suggest conveying the inevitable and unavoidable consequences of death despite the protection of loved ones, as is denoted by 'changed'.



The best responses analyse the poems holistically and don't fall into discrete analysis of structure or form.

Here, the candidate has begun looking at the poetic voice (often a feature of high-level responses) and then used this to analyse the form and structure of the poem. They integrate references to stanzaic form, enjambement, sonic features, and imagery, all with a focus on the poem and on the question, not as feature spotting. This was a very good high-level response, although it occasionally missed opportunities to make connections with the named poem to keep it at the bottom of Level 5.

In 'A minor Role', however, death is presented as a unifying force, on the assumption that the reader is acting as a carer. The speaker seems to suppress their own feelings by focusing on their mundane responsibilities of 'checking dosages, / dates; getting on terms with receptionists'.

all while 'sustaining the background music of civility'. The complex inner psyche of the speaker is reflected here, as they seem to merge the mundane with the deeply profound, signifying that their inability to protect their loved one from death has deeply affected their own worldview. This is reflected in the extensive use of punctuation that ^{highlights} ~~effects~~ the fragmentation of ~~the~~ their life, given playing the role of protector seems to be such a massive part. The conversational tone of the poem as a whole also indicates the speaker's refusal to fully acknowledge the presence of illness and death in their relationship. Thus perhaps, as in 'Cous' their ~~relationship~~ connection is undermined by the loss of the protective role that allowed them to stay united. More broadly, this poem reflects the universal experience of desiring to stay busy and avoid the heaviness and gravity of reality, allowing Fortinbras to make the taboo topic of death more commonplace. Both poems, therefore, reflect how death can mutate a relationship, both for the better and worse, ~~with~~ yet Scott's ambiguity somewhat isolates the reader whereas

Fanthorpe reflects the universal experience to make acknowledgement of death and human struggle, mental and physical, more commonplace.



This is a good example of a candidate who is not feature-spotting, but is using their understanding of the named poem to draw out a critical and evaluative argument.

This is also a good example of a candidate who is not over-using terminology - they realise that not all punctuation is caesurae. This was a high Level 5 response.

word and matter. The speaker in 'A Minor Role' is desperately lonely, reflected in the contrast between ^{the} dialogue with others and their inner monologue. The speaker even admits "O, getting on, getting on better" is a "formula" for communicating with other people, denoting insincerity and a repression of true feelings. The protection of a loved one for Fanthorpe's speaker is presented to be a lonely and isolating task, whilst in 'Cous' we can see a more pleasant and organic space for it.



Candidates who make connections throughout their responses often are rewarded with the highest marks, particularly when it draws out different readings and understandings of the named poem.

Here, the candidate has made a lovely point about the difference in the feelings of protection in the two poems, exemplified with embedded quotations and references to the texts.

On balance, both Scott's 'Cows' and Frankthorpe's 'A Minor Role' explore ~~the~~ tragic and emotional journeys of the protection of loved ones, allowing both poets to place themes of sacrifice, love, selfishness and inevitability for tragedy at the heart of their respective lyrical poems.



The best responses are planned and controlled, and a good concluding paragraph demonstrates to the examiner a well-planned argument.

This was a discriminating and controlled response that received a Level 4 mark.

Question 3

It was very pleasing to see responses from Medieval Poetic Drama this year. This was the more popular of the questions, with most responses looking at The Crucifixion as a second passage to explore the idea of working together, but there were also references to the shepherds, and also to separate passages in Noah's Flood.

The best responses were able to analyse both the didactic meaning of the Mysteries, but also the entertainment value of the plays, and many displayed nuanced understanding of the text and of relevant contextual factors. Responses referred to biblical, socio-economic and historical context as a way of furthering their understanding and analysis of the text, not in lieu of textual analysis. It is heartening to see candidates respond so well to these texts which offer such a rich understanding of the religious and cultural landscape of Medieval Britain, and an insight into the development of dramatic literature and performance.

Camley: Noah's Flood (Chester) lines 49-80
Camley: Noah's Flood (Chester) lines 161-200

In the Chester Author's medieval miracle play, Noah's Flood, particularly in lines 49-80, working together is presented as being fundamental and natural between men and women and as an act of worship. The extract presents clearly that men and women compliment each other in work and they both take great satisfaction in building an ark for the Lord. Hamener, in lines 161-200 of Noah's Flood working together is presented as an opportuni-

ty to restore order to the world and find peace. Noah's family works together to create a new world in God's image, better than the broken one ~~before~~ that existed before.

In lines 49-80 the Chester Author presents women as submissive facilitators to the labours of men. This allows the men to be active patriarchs and it makes them working together appear natural. Noah uses repeated imperatives 'help' and 'work' to tell his family what to do. This highlights the nature of his authority as being dominant and authoritarian. His sons then profess they'll use a 'hatchet', 'axe' and 'hammer' to help build the ark, ~~all~~ all of these words having violent and masculine connotations which again highlight the nature of the men's authority. ~~When~~ However when the wives are introduced the Chester Author juxtaposes their

presentation with the men's to make them appear very compatible. The women are introduced with no names and only referred to as their husband's wife, reinforcing the idea that the men stand above them. Furthermore, when all but Noah's wife state their tasks, they're of aid to the men's aforementioned roles. Ham and Japheth's wife both use the intense modal verb 'I will' expressing their intense desires to provide. The women's desires to 'gather', 'dight' and 'bring' compliment the men's active need to 'bite', 'make' and 'knock', with the masculine and feminine nature of the verbs reinforcing harmony. This presentation of men and women in such a complementary way is likely connected to the contextual information surrounding the play's performance. Noah's Flood was a part of the Chester Cycle of medieval miracle plays, first performed in 1422. The plays were didactic in nature and performed on wagons in village streets to educate the

public. This explains why working together is presented as being driven by traditional gender roles. The Chester Author likely wanted to remind audiences of their roles in society (men as patriarchal and women as submissive). This message even connects to the religious messaging of the play as the Old Testament God's 'Great Chain of Being' placed men above women. This is why lines 49-80 also appear to be an act of worship. All the family is fulfilling God's wishes and (excluding Noah's wife) behaving as he desires. 15th century Catholicism in England stressed God's might and vengeance and as such behaving appropriately, as the characters are, was understood to be an act of supplication and praise to God. The eight-line stanza rhyming aababccb and occasionally aabbaab, with four and three stresses in a and b give the poem consistency and uniformity which in this extract all the cha

racters uphold. The consistent rhyme scheme makes the appear happy to work and labour together, suggesting they enjoy worshipping God, carrying out his will and that women and men working together is fundamental and natural.

In lines 161-208 the Chester presents working together as a chance to restore order and find peace, by using the ordering of the animals to represent unity. The first animals to be loaded on the ark are the monarchic animals, lions and leopards, as the monarchy was the most significant and superior force in the Middle Ages. The iambic stress on lions highlighting their significance as the first animal likening them to the king. The next animals to be loaded are those useful to society or 'the iumenta' which in the 15th century were believed to be animals humans couldn't live without. They provided

food, materials, labour and transport. The entire family order the animals by importance and it creates a sense of order and unity. This desire for unity might have been expressed to connect the audience with the characters. In 1422, the year of Noah's Flood's first performance, King Henry V died and was replaced by his infant son. This led Cardinal Beaufort and Humphrey Duke of Gloucester to compete for the title of Lord Protector. Noah and his family's desire for order whilst working together likely reflected the attitudes of late 15th century English society and their need for political stability. This possibly helped to humanise the characters and help the didactic message resonate. The only character who rejects the trend of order is Noah's wife whose list contains animals of no significance or those associated with poaching and thus rebellious. Noah's wife's present-

ation as a rebel who rejects the prospect of working together to restore order is a comic depiction of the 'shrew' a 15th century idea of a rebellious woman as wife, popularised by 'The Merchant's Tale' by Geoffrey Chaucer with an irritating wife and Eustace Deschamps' 'Miroir de Mirage' where he professes that all marriage ends in torment. Noah's wife's use of the imperatives 'set' and 'ran' when speaking to her husband present her as rebellious and rude, in line with a traditional shrew. However, Noah's wife is only disruptive because she subverts the natural order of working together to find peace. The Chester Author uses 8 line stanzas between a pair of the family to represent this unity. Working together is presented as an opportunity to restore order and find peace in lines 161-200.

Lines 49-80 of Noah's flood present working together as something to be done by men alongside women to worship God. The Chester Author possibly does this to send a message to his audience about social harmony and the need to praise God. Lines 161-200 however present working together as a chance to restore order. Noah's wife is rebellious in nature, however this only highlights how finding peace through work is essential.



This is an excellent response that demonstrates understanding of the role that Medieval Mystery plays had in society. Contextual information is used judiciously to help illuminate the argument, not to drive it. At heart, the candidate has retained a focus on the text and analysed the passage as a piece of poetry, choosing a relevant second extract.

This received a Level 5 score.

Question 4

There were fewer responses on salvation and most chose a second extract from Noah's Flood to accompany the named passage. As with Question 3, the better responses were able to analyse the drama as a piece of poetry, and focus on the poetic techniques and how these helped shaped meaning. This was understood in context of reception, where the audience were hearing the poetry as part of the mystery plays, and meaningful analysis noted the aural quality of the language with reference to the question focus. Slightly weaker responses tended to describe the narrative, rather than analyse the language.

The presentation of salvation is explored in both The crucifixion (c) lines 283-288 as well as in Noah's Flood (NF) lines 246-299. As we see sacrifice, spiritual limitation as well as the reforming of the covenant. All in the name of human Salvation. In c we are more aware of the

Sacrifice and suffering of christ for the sins of man and salvation. Where as in NF we see the first in a long cycle of salvation history and the development of ^{the relationship between} man and the divine. However both texts present human salvation ~~achieved~~ by suffering and ~~broodship~~ ^{Sacrifice}.

Both poems present salvation through sacrifice. Firstly we see ^{and sacrifice} salvation presented through suffering. In the crucifixion we see this through the suffering of christ. The obvious imagery of christ suffering was rare in the 1400's but became more popular around the 1450's when this play was performed as it was popularised by Saint Francis of ^A Assisi through his writings and teaching. This is why the imagery exploring christ's suffering is so visceral. we initially see ~~the suffering of christ as he says~~ christ's sacrifice for salvation as he says "forgive these men that do me pine" this line is almost a direct quote of the bible as on the cross jesus says "forgive them father for they know not what they do." The majority of this play is eisegesis (additions to biblical stories) however this line is not. This arguably suggests the author wanted to make clear christ's words and suffering to gain sympathy from the audience.

As well as this the author also displays Christ's sacrifice through his language as he says "behold my head, my hands, my feet" this asyndetic listing and diction displays Christ as different to the scribes as he is presented as more intelligent, again reinforcing this idea of sacrifice. Following the biblical narrative, this idea of sacrifice is also seen in Noah's flood through the death of the world in the flood as Noah says "God hath done some grace" this is ironic from the perspective of a modern audience due to all of the destruction, this irony is intensified through the diction of "grace" as in the biblical narrative, grace is defined as the love of God. But to contemporary audiences this would have been accepted and not seen as ironic or sarcastic. The death of the world is seen as the cost of God's love in Noah's Flood and leads to the reformation of the covenant and in the end salvation. Overall both poems explore salvation through sacrifice and suffering. In the crucifixion this takes the form of divine suffering as Christ suffers on the cross for the sins of the world where as in NF this sacrifice is taken by the people so God can reform the covenant and bring

salvation, to all.

As well as this ~~po~~ both poems emphasise the need for salvation by presenting people as spiritually limited or unaware of the spiritual significance of the moment. This is initially seen in NF through the shrew archetype of N's wife. The shrew archetype was a comic archetype found in medieval plays in which a woman was spiritually limited and disobeyed her husband. N's wife embodies this archetype in NF. As she "boxes him on the ear" these stage directions demonstrates N's wife's rejection of Noah and in turn rejection of God. This presents her as spiritually limited and unaware as she is directly opposing God. To a modern audience N's wife is arguably admired as the only one to value human life. But to contemporary audiences her "box^{ing} him on the ear" would have been an aspect of slapstick misogynistic comedy. As she fulfils her purpose as a reason why the world is in need of redemption and salvation. This reason for salvation is more abuzzly seen in the crucifixion through the soldiers' ignorance of the spiritual significance of the

death of christ. As they begining to make fun of him on the ~~stage~~ cross as they say "well hauh! he jangles like a jay." The syntax of the explanation points demonstrates there excitement at the death of christ as well as ~~emphasises there teasing and mockery~~ this the repetition of the 'j' sound emphasises there teasing and mockery of christ's death. They also mock him by saying "he was God's son almighty?" this is the only reference to christ being the son of God and the syntax here demonstrates there questioning appraisal of christ's parentage. In the crucifixion the soldiers here demonstrate why the world is in need of salvation as they are unaware of the spiritual significance of the death of christ. This mockery is taken directly from the bible so would have resonated with the audience as "demonstrated the sacrifice of christ for there sins. Overall, both poems explore a world in need of salvation and express this through limited spirituality seen in the individual.

Finally, both poets present salvation through the use of a covenant or the lack of the

covenant. In Noah's flood the covenant is expressed by God ~~to demonstrate~~^{demonstrate} forgiveness, salvation and a promise that he would not send another flood. This is seen through the presentation of a "dove" and "olive branch" the diction of this is imperative, as the use of "dove" is a suggestion of peace and the "olive branch" a suggestion of forgiveness. As well as this God commands Noah "to grow and multiply" this is a direct reference to Adam's ~~grow~~^{go} faith and multiply^{seen} in Genesis. Here this command acts as a symbol of forgiveness and the birth of a new covenant between God and man representing that salvation has been accomplished and God has forgiven man for his sins. In opposition to this the crucifixion is different as the crucifixion is the result of an accumulation of salvation history. The death of Christ here represents true eternal salvation through the son of God. This can be seen when Christ says "let never there sins be sought / let see there souls to save", the simile here emphasises Christ's wish for universal salvation for all united ending salvation history and allowing all

to be saved through him. We can also see this through the suggestion that by the end of the play the soldiers have some spiritual understanding as soldier 2 says "through the world both east and west" this emphasis on direction here through the direction of "east" and "west" emphasises the need for Christ's message to be spread around the world. But also shows that his message is universal and that he died for the salvation of all mankind. Overall both poems highlight the covenant, in NF this is highlighted through the restoration of ~~reaching~~ ^{and restoration of the covenant.} and the forgiveness of God ~~and~~. In the crucifixion the ~~the~~ lack of covenant is highlighted demonstrating Christ as the final act of salvation for all mankind.

In Conclusion, the presentation of salvation is explored in both poems/plays. Through sacrifice, a demonstration as to why the world is in need of salvation and the culmination of that salvation in Christ or a covenant. Both poems highlight the overall importance and impact of salvation on mankind.



This is a candidate who is well-prepared for the exam, but does not produce a rehearsed and revised response, but one that keeps a focus on the question throughout. Contextual information is used to develop their argument, but the focus remains on the text with relevant analysis of the poetry of the play.

This received a good Level 4 mark.

Question 5

This was vastly the more popular of the Chaucer questions, with many candidates producing nuanced, high-level answers. Most candidates selected sensible accompanying extracts, often the opening of the Prologue or the ending of The Tale. Weaker responses showed knowledge of the text but lacked focused analysis. Most candidates grasped the concept of the Wife as a teacher, but weaker responses merely described her opinions or presented her as a proto-feminist without addressing how she teaches. Weaker responses were likely to have an over-emphasis on narrative and content, with little attention to Chaucer's craft; they often viewed the Wife as a real person rather than a poetic construct; and there was confusion demonstrated between Chaucer's views and those of the Wife. They also tended to lack coherence or lost focus on the "teacher" aspect, instead offering general comments on gender roles or the Wife's life story

Stronger responses presented sustained, evaluative arguments, often exploring different interpretations of the Wife's role and how Chaucer crafts her as both a comic and provocative figure. Candidates who explored contradictions in the Wife's role (e.g., serious vs. comic, feminist vs. misogynist construction) were more successful. As always with Chaucer, AO2 proved the discriminating factor when it came to the higher-level responses. The best responses considered Chaucer's use of voice and direct address; the use of humour; and the layered narrative (Wife's Prologue, Tale, and Chaucer's authorial voice). Strong responses evaluated Chaucer's intent: was the Wife a mouthpiece, a critique of antifeminism, or a satirical caricature? Some very perceptive discussions noted that Chaucer might be mocking both misogynists and proto-feminist readings through the Wife's character.

AO3 was consistently strong and candidates showed secure contextual knowledge. Better responses used context analytically, showing how it shaped the Wife's arguments or Chaucer's presentation of her. Weaker responses tended to use rote-learned material or generic points about patriarchy or church control without applying these to specific lines or techniques.

In both lines 257-292 and lines 139-150 the wife of Bath sets her example as how to live as a medieval woman freely, in a ~~to her~~ society steeped in religion that seeks to undermine every act and authority of women. In her spinked exclamations and ^{numerously ironic} ~~truly~~ Serman Joyeaux, the wife displays usurps the accepted role of women and teaches her crowd of pilgrims, and Chaucer's audience more widely how to succeed in a society stacked against you.



It is always best to identify clearly your choice of second passage to the examiner.

Here, the candidate shows a clear line of argument from the opening paragraph, which was reflected in the rest of the response which was controlled and critical, and they received a Level 5 mark.

In lines 287-292, Chaucer sets up the Wife's digression about men's complaints about wives as an emphatic digression, leading to the Wife being strategically created

an emphatic yet yet disorganised 'teacher'. Chaucer has the Wife list "Thou seist that oxen, asses, hors and hounds / They been assayed at diverse stoundes", with the listing of animals, in particular giving the Wife an added layer to her tone of outrage being that women are lowered to the status of animals when considered by man, especially in relation to the verb 'assayed', which ~~is~~ draws attention to the Wife's real issue of women treated as property needing to be assessed because of the 'sussuration' in "assayed" ~~is~~ used by Chaucer to imbue an aural sense of the Wife's frustration to a listener. This then, ~~show~~ alongside the fact that throughout the passage the Chaucer has the Wife's use of "seistow" increase and appear increasingly metacally dispersed, means that Chaucer can create her as a teacher overwhelmed by

her emotions, thus conforming to antifeminist ideology & perpetuated by those such as Jerome or Theophylact about the nature of women being rooted in emotional instability compared to men. This is significant because



The best responses remember the poetry of the Wife and remember the context of reception, where this would have been heard by a majority of its audience.

This candidate kept a firm focus on the text and the poetry throughout, receiving a Level 5 mark.

Finally, the wife engages the audience and presents herself as a teacher in the line "I pray you, telleth me. Or where ~~ke~~ commaded he virginitee?". Chaucer's use of a rhyming couplet and a rhetorical question engages the audience, adding to the wife's authority as a teacher. Through this, the wife is able to challenge the audience's views of the church and ask them to consider her own controversial views on sex. Indeed, Chaucer may have done this to challenge the authority of the church and religious teachings himself.



Keep up a line of argument throughout all of your response, using key words from the question in your topic sentences.

Here, the candidate has developed a controlled argument throughout, using their knowledge of contextual information and of the text to lead to a strong conclusion. They have kept an eye on the fact the Wife is a literary construct that Chaucer may use to hide his own intentions, rather than treat her as a real-life character. This candidate received a strong Level 4 mark for their controlled and discriminating response.

Question 6

This was less popular than Question 5, possibly due to uncertainty around what constitutes the "supernatural" in a medieval text. As always with English Literature responses, candidates are encouraged to set their own terms and interpretation of the question. Candidates often chose this question because they felt confident with the given extract (on astrology), but many struggled to sustain focused discussion on supernatural themes. There was a sense that some candidates defaulted to familiar gender/lust content instead of fully engaging with the supernatural. However, stronger answers defined "supernatural" clearly, addressing how it appears symbolically, thematically, and generically (e.g., fairy-tale elements, magic, allegory), alongside the setting of the Tale in Arthurian times. Most choices of second passage used either the Loathly Lady's transformation at the end of the Tale or the opening of the Tale (friars/fairies). The Loathly Lady offered fruitful discussion for those who explored the symbolism of her transformation and her supernatural power as a device for moral instruction or critique.

The best responses analysed the poetic features, particularly in the Tale, where Chaucer's language is richly allegorical and symbol-laden. They were also able to look at the use of irony, the blending of genres (romance, fabliau, moral tale), or the way supernatural elements are constructed poetically. Some candidates paraphrased or summarised the Tale without exploring how Chaucer's language presents the supernatural.

In terms of context, the better responses explored medieval beliefs in astrology, fairies, magical transformations, and how these were interwoven with Christianity. They also considered medieval genre conventions, such as the fairy-tale structure or moral allegory. Some insightful candidates used the supernatural allegorically to comment on transformation, justice, and gender roles.

Examiners noted there were often missed chances to explore religious context (e.g., magic versus miracle; the role of divine justice; the conflict between Christian belief and supernatural folklore). Some candidates attempted to fold in religion under "supernatural", which occasionally worked but often lacked clarity or coherence. Examiners speculated whether this was down to less familiarity with the Tale.

In Geoffrey Chaucer's narrative poem 'The Wife of Bath', Chaucer utilises the motif of the supernatural to convey feminine emotions and spiritual yearnings of women. The use of the supernatural to represent female emotions of love and spirituality transcends conventional and arbitrary ways of expression, where the supernatural, ~~not~~ connecting astrological language and readings, to religion, a more patriarchal expression of supernatural, ultimately is used by Chaucer to frame The wife of Bath's ^{female} emotions as a woman in medieval society. Torn between obligation and autonomy, Chaucer therefore ~~not~~ portrays the supernatural as a way of expression for femininity that empowers female emotion trapped in ^{enslaved} a patriarchal ~~and~~ society.

Chaucer continues to portray the supernatural as a method of ~~representation~~ representing the wife of Bath's emotions and role as a woman in medieval society through how she reflects femininity in her use of astrological language and beliefs. In lines 605-626, astrology is a way for the wife of Bath to be empowered as a woman in her emotions of love, where she is transcendent of arbitrary roles in marriage, ~~placed~~^{rooted} in religious patriarchy. Her astrological beliefs empower the wife of Bath to pursue love, shaping her intentions towards of being loved, where her charged sexuality is not the reason for her pursuit of love, but complementary to her character. Astrology does not demote sexuality or love, ~~as does~~ compared to its antithesis of religion, demonstrated through empowerment and shaping of character in the lines 'I folwed as myn inclinacioun, by vertu of my constellacioun.' Chaucer's use of the half rhyme in 'inclinacioun'

'constellation' creates a dichotomy between the wife of Bath's autonomy in her own 'inclination' and the bond with the 'constellation'. The supernatural, through astrological imagery, ~~provide~~ ^{with no constraints} creates the wife of Bath's space for her to pursue love: 'I loved never by no discretion.' This triple-negative construction connotes how the wife of Bath did not love discriminatingly 'al were he short, or long, or black or whit'; through astrological empowerment, where Venus justifies her sexuality, and Mars justifies her abrasiveness, the wife of Bath rejects any constricted form of love, illustrated in her triple-negative construction, as Chaucer presents the supernatural as empowering the pursuits of feminine love. The stark antithesis



The best responses have a confident introduction where clear thesis statements and lines of argument are established.

Here, the candidate has defined their analysis of the supernatural, a line of argument they followed throughout their response, keeping a focus on the text. They have exemplified their argument, with strong analysis of the language of the passage, and received a good Level 5 mark for this answer.

Question 7

This was a popular question, with a wide range of second poems selected – though this was most commonly Donne. A variety of poems allowed for some interesting contrasts in tone and method. However, Donne's 'The Flea' was a frequently chosen second poem and examiners noted that it did not always suit the theme of mortality well, limiting the depth of comparison.

Most responses showed clear understanding of the named poem (Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress'), though analysis of mortality specifically was sometimes underdeveloped. Some candidates misunderstood the term "mortality", confusing it with morality or mentality, or treating it too loosely - as simply "death" without exploring its implications. Better responses formed structured comparisons, often highlighting how different poets responded to the inevitability of death or the passage of time.

Stronger candidates engaged confidently with metaphysical conceits; persuasive techniques (especially in Marvell and Donne); imagery of time, decay, death, and the body. However, some responses became straightforward or descriptive in their analysis of methods, relying heavily on paraphrase or quoting without exploring effect. Better candidates explored the satirical elements of Marvell's poem, and the nuances of how death is presented (e.g. mock-seriousness, erotic manipulation, or metaphysical tension).

Contextual understanding was generally strong, with many candidates analysing the *Carpe Diem* ethos of Cavalier poetry, e.g. "seize the day" in the face of mortality. Better responses made use of religious, philosophical, or historical context (e.g., 17th-century attitudes to death, plague, war, or the soul). Some responses displayed limited or generic context, and in weaker cases, context was tagged on rather than integrated.

Better answers defined mortality clearly and kept the focus on how it is constructed poetically. There was clear understanding demonstrated of mortality as a concept. There was often perceptive and insightful engagement with form, argument, and imagery, paired with confident analysis of voice and rhetorical strategies, especially in seduction or meditation poems. Weaker answers drifted into general reflections on time, sex, or love without directly addressing mortality. They treated the poems as narratives rather than crafted poetic texts; relied on quotation over analysis, especially from well-known lines; and often omitted discussion of form, metre, or rhetorical strategy.

The speaker's attitude towards mortality are concluded in the last third of the argument, as Manvell's reticent take on a seductive poem carries of genuine morals. He seems to urge his mistress to make the most of pleasure now, in the moment, the ending of the poem taking on an overtly sexual tone as the repeated "Now" perhaps echoes a speeding up pace, or language that seems to approach a sexual climax. This is intensified by the romantic field of desire intertwined with despoilation Manvell creates, as he urges to 'tear our pleasures with rough stuff'. There is an insistence and urgency here, a drive to make the most of their life and mortality passionately, as the speaker decides

"Thus, though we cannot make our men
Stand still, yet we will make him run."

The modal verb of 'will will' highlights this strength and decisiveness that now echoes that of the structure, as Manvell's 'aspirations to impossible purity' are concluded in the idea that despite our mortality, which is frequently

threatened by everyday events, we must make the most of life's sexual climactic pleasures.



The best responses don't waste time explaining concepts the examiner will understand.

Here, the candidate mentions Marvell's satirical take on seduction poetry, but swiftly moves on to their own argument and analysis of the climax of the poem, with a close reading of the text. This was a focused and critical response that received a Level 5 mark.

Question 8

There were relatively few responses to this question, but those who chose it generally did so with confidence and clear textual knowledge. Some candidates took the opportunity to contrast Philips with another poet, such as Donne or Bradstreet, others picked another Philips poem.

Most responses had a secure focus on the theme of personal relationships, and stronger responses avoided vague assertions about “love” or “friendship” by offering clear definitions or distinctions (e.g. romantic vs platonic love). Weaker candidates fell back on generic claims about “the role of the sexes” or vague impressions of “intimacy”. Most responses showed secure engagement with Philips’ poetic voice, her use of apostrophe, metaphor, classical allusion, and emotional register. Candidates often commented effectively on the use of natural imagery (e.g. sun, seasons) to evoke emotional turmoil. More sophisticated answers explored the use of Neoplatonic ideals to frame female friendship as elevated and pure; alongside the poem’s structure and rhythmic control, including how Philips tempers emotion through metrical constraint.

Context was often the strongest aspect of candidates’ responses. Many were confident in discussing biographical context, particularly Philips’ circle of female friends, her marriage, and the Orinda persona. Better responses integrated ideas around Neoplatonism (love as an idealised spiritual bond); the possibility of coded homoeroticism in a restrictive 17th-century context.

In both, Katherine Phillips' 'Orinda to Lucania' (Orinda) and George Herbert's 'Love III' (Love) personal relationships are explored alongside the metaphysical notions that characterise the 17th century poetic landscape. Whilst 'Orinda' depicts the relationship between a character 'Lucania' and Phillips' poem depicts the relationship between two friends through the conceit of Lucania and as the 'sun' and Orinda, arguably Phillips' herself, as the decaying landscape malnourished from an absence of sunlight. Contrastingly, George Herbert's poem 'Love' portrays, through the relationship extended metaphor, of God as to a humble host and the speaker as his guest, the personal relationship of a religious follower and God. Both poems, however, explore the vital importance of these relationships and the complex dynamics that permeate both friendship and religious devotion.



Comparison is not assessed in Section B, though many successful candidates choose to use their introductions and conclusions to tie together ideas and their line of argument.

This candidate confidently stated their choice of second poem and placed both poems clearly within the focus of the question and within the context of the Metaphysical period in their introduction. They went on to get a good Level 5 mark for this response.

Question 9

Donne continues to be a popular choice, with centres teaching the poet well and with many candidates demonstrating strong analytical and contextual skills when it comes to his poetry. The named poem, 'Love's Growth', was generally well understood, although some examiners noted missed opportunities to engage with the seasonal/time-based metaphor in the poem's core conceit. Responses covered a broad range of interpretations of time: as fleeting (*carpe diem*, love's impermanence); as philosophical (metaphysical, abstract); as a force to be overcome or controlled (e.g. in 'The Sun Rising'); in relation to mortality, religious belief, and Donne's shifting worldview. Candidates generally showed secure understanding of Donne's methods, particularly his use of conceit, paradox, and argumentation.

Most candidates maintained good focus on Donne's presentation of time, though some drifted into adjacent themes (love, mortality, change). These could be valid, provided the link to time was maintained. Stronger essays kept a philosophical lens, addressing how time is conceived, manipulated, or resisted. Weaker responses struggled to define what "time" meant in the context of the poem and lost coherence as a result.

AO2 was often a major strength with candidates demonstrating confident close reading and secure knowledge of metaphysical conceits, paradox, and rhetorical structures. Many candidates successfully explored how his tone and form reflect emotional intensity or philosophical resistance.

Contextual knowledge was generally strong and well-applied. There were frequent references to Early Modern views of time, influenced by astronomy (Copernicus, Ptolemaic model, heliocentrism) and the Age of Discovery and new temporal/ geographical horizons. Candidates often made astute links between Donne's personal life (e.g. religious doubt, romantic passion) and the poems' treatment of time.

In 'Love's Growth', Donne examines how time can affect love, thus consequently emphasising the mutability of love. He opens the poem in a smooth mellifluous way, surprisingly akin to Elizabethan conventions rather than a typical dramatic metaphysical flourish for an opening. He examines utilises the seasons and the changing pastoral

landscape as imagery to grapple with the changing nature of love, a concept so uncharacteristic of Donne who was an urban poet as described by Philip ~~Spence~~ Sydney who wrote about what he knew:

"Metliinks I lied all winter, when I swore/
my love was infinite, if spring make 'it more."

Evidently the intense use of personal pronouns render this an intimate poem as Donne then juxtaposes winter with Spring in order to examine his growing love such as associated with the rich fertile connotations of spring. ~~Indeed~~ The intensifier 'all' propels the reader to understand how much the issue of growing love plays on the speaker's mind, and the conditional but logical marker 'if' provides a structured but intellectual examination of love across time. Perhaps



When bringing in your wider reading and revision about poems and poets, make sure it is relevant and adds to your analysis and argument.

Here, the candidate has brought in some good contextual knowledge of Donne, but used it to support their line of argument and analysis of the natural imagery of the poem.

Question 10

This question was less frequently attempted than Question 9, but there were some excellent, deeply informed responses. Examiners noted that success almost always correlated directly with candidates' theological understanding and contextual awareness of Donne's complex spiritual life. Weaker responses often defaulted to general religious commentary or broad moral discussions on forgiveness, lacking specific engagement with Donne's theological urgency, rhetorical strategies, and conflicted spirituality.

Stronger candidates defined forgiveness clearly in Christian theological terms – especially within the Catholic vs. Protestant divide – and built their arguments around Donne's spiritual dilemmas. A few high-level responses engaged with Donne's spiritual psychology, asking probing questions: is Donne sincere; does he feel forgiven; is he demanding, submissive, or fearful before God? Many weaker essays interpreted forgiveness in vague, humanistic or emotional terms (e.g., forgiving others, being kind), which led to loss of focus and shallow argumentation.

Theological context was key to high achievement. Many top answers explored Catholic and Protestant views on salvation and grace. Some engaged with the Reformation-era anxiety about certainty of salvation, drawing links to Donne's personal conversion from Catholicism to Anglicanism. The best essays used biographical context subtly: not to excuse or explain the poetry, but to illuminate its contradictions, for example, questioning whether Donne's dramatic language reflects true repentance, guilt, manipulation, or doubt.

In "Holy Sonnet XIV", the voice engages in an arguably pitiful plea for forgiveness and salvation that is centred around his desire for a violent, punitive correction. Not only does this augment the reader's impression of the voice's utter conviction regarding his own sinful nature, arguably it ~~also~~ also deviates from the classical New Testament God of forgiveness that is characterised by his loving and merciful nature (as is suggested by the Beatitudes that argues "blessed are those that suffer"). The voice's desire for forgiveness is embedded within the structure of Holy Sonnet XIV; radically deviating from Elizabethan poetic conventions that viewed the sonnet form as a vehicle for the expression of love due to the influence of Petrarch, the voice in Holy Sonnet XIV transforms the

sonnet into a device to express divine reverence.

Consisting of an octet and sestet, with an ABBAABBA CD CD EE rhyme scheme, the sonnet rigidity of the sonnet form ~~became~~ becomes an exercise of devotion - this is amplified by the fact that 'Abba' means 'father' or 'God' in Hebrew. This arguably reveals the voice's desire for forgiveness by indicating his total submission to divine will.



When demonstrating your understanding of the writer's craft, and of relevant contextual features, make sure you keep a focus on the question and that you serve your line of argument.

Here, the candidate has covered a wide range of relevant contextual and literary features of the poem to develop their critical argument on forgiveness. The response received a mark in Level 5.

Question 11

The Romantics remain the most popular collection of poetry across Section B and the range of responses demonstrate that this works well for all abilities of candidates. This was a popular question with a wide range of responses. Most candidates showed secure knowledge of 'Tintern Abbey' and its thematic focus on time, memory, and emotional development. However, the length and complexity of the poem led to uneven treatment, with many candidates focusing disproportionately on the opening section and neglecting the later philosophical and reflective moments. The best responses engaged conceptually with the "passage of time" and explored the evolution of perception and loss across the poem. The second poems most frequently used were Byron's 'On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year'; Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'; and Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'.

Stronger candidates unpacked the phrase "passage of time", linking it to memory and recollection; loss of immediacy or youthful passion; gains in moral/spiritual insight. Weaker answers lost sight of time as a philosophical concern and some responses became biographical summaries of Wordsworth or Romanticism, rather than structured, critical arguments.

The best responses explored Wordsworth's method of conveying time through the shifting tone and movement from sensory recollection to philosophical reflection. Key moments such as: "Five years have passed"; the "roe" as symbol of lost vitality; the "other gifts" of age and spiritual insight. Some candidates relied too heavily on paraphrase, failing to engage with the poetic craft that shapes the representation of time.

Context was generally strong in responses to this question, though sometimes not fully integrated. Effective essays made good use of individual development, and nature as moral teacher; Wordsworth's revolutionary disillusionment, his return to nature as consolation, and preoccupation with poetic legacy. There was occasional reference to *Lyrical Ballads* and the poet's relationship with Dorothy or Coleridge, used to illuminate the emotional arc of the poem. Weaker candidates often offered broad contextual overviews without linking them clearly to the poem's treatment of time.

~~Both Keats and Wordsworth~~ In Romanticism there was a unique interest in the passage of time in how it relates to the individual sense of mortality and loss, as well as paradoxically, ~~and~~ also the transcendence of time into an insight into an enigmatic eternal truth. Both Wordsworth and Keats in 'Tintern Abbey' and 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' ~~explore~~ the lament the mortality of the passage of time whilst also celebrating the poet's vision and imagination in its ability to transcend the constraints of time. Wordsworth's poem explores the poetic power of memory and imagination to recollect the 'spots in time', as Wordsworth called them, of past nature and childhood as an escape from the adult world and into an insight of eternal truth. On the other hand, Keats's poem ~~and~~ explores the extent to which art and imagination can transcend mortality and the passage of time.



When introducing contextual factors with Romanticism, it is important to go beyond biographical details and general comments on nature and the Industrial Revolution. Whilst these can be pertinent points to make, the best responses show an understanding of Romanticism that is deeper than surface level comments on the sublime, and focus on the poems and the question.

Here, this Level 5 response begins with a strong understanding of other Romantic ideas, namely that of imagination and poetic vision, to help develop their line of argument.

Question 12

This was the most popular of all the Section B questions, and a full range of responses was seen. Many candidates showed sound understanding of Shelley's poem and of Romantic themes. Some responses offered a clear central argument linking the imagery of winter to death or personal loss. However, examiners also noted that there was frequent drift from 'seasons' to 'nature' - a general discussion of natural imagery led to vague or off-focus responses. Some answers became biographical essays on Shelley or Byron, particularly when discussing Harriet Westbrook or Byron's aging, without a clear focus on the poems.

The most frequent choice of second poems were Wordsworth's 'Lines Written in Early Spring' - often successful, especially when maintaining focus on seasonal contrast; Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' and 'The Question' - the latter occasionally used well, though not always explicitly tied to seasons; and Byron's 'On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year' - relevance was tenuous for many (e.g. symbolic 'autumn of life'), but some managed valid connections.

Some candidates successfully analysed the symbolic role of winter and spring in relation to grief and renewal. A few noted structural features, e.g. Shelley's use of repetition or bleak tone. However, examiners did feel that AO2 was underdeveloped across many responses. Analysis often lacked specificity, e.g. stating that 'cold' = death without exploring Shelley's precise phrasing or rhythm. The best responses were able to analyse how seasonal imagery developed across the whole poem, not just in isolated lines.

In terms of AO3, there was a strong awareness of Shelley's personal context, especially grief and loss. Better answers integrated Romantic ideas rather than just focusing on biographical ideas. Examiners did note that weaker responses mentioned Shelley's atheism, without connecting it to the poem's meaning, or to the text. Heavy biographical focus, especially on Harriet's suicide, often dominated the argument rather than serving it.

Firstly, in ~~Percy~~ Shelley's poem 'The Cold Earth Slept Below' - a poem written following the death of his late wife Harriet that is ~~describing most~~ likely describing her cold and ~~casual~~ body - takes a gothic approach, ~~to illustrate is~~ ~~suggests~~ depicting ~~seasons~~ the season of winter as an all-consuming and death-like force. ~~For~~ This reflects ~~Edna~~ the sublimity of nature, echoing Edmund Burke's idea that 'pain and terror ~~is~~ can seem delightful' through the overwhelming ability of nature ~~and the~~. For example, Shelley ~~employs~~ ^{winter's} foregrounds ~~nature's~~ barrenness and hostility in the first two stanzas, especially in the first line - 'The cold earth slept below' - which creates a sense of ~~status~~ ^{status} and but also ominous feel due to the personified season of winter. The adjective 'cold'



Make sure you remember the question focus and don't slip into general comments on nature when discussing the Romantics.

Here, the candidate has corrected themselves to keep the focus on "seasons" rather than general comments on nature, and made a pertinent point on the personification of the season of winter. The candidate maintained this focus and received a Level 5 mark for this response.

the embodiment of God. Shelley, as a
 proclaimed Atheist, as evidenced by his expulsion
 from Oxford University in 1811 for writing "Necessity
 of Atheism", clearly ~~sees~~ views nature as this
~~harsh~~ force of "death" ^{rather than God} ~~and~~ Shelley's
 crafting nature with life and power ^{to} express
 the Romantic ideal that humans are deeply
 rooted in nature. Thus the regular structure of
 "Cold Earths slept below" with four regular
 stresses implies the ~~omnipotence~~ and harsh,
 unforgiving nature of winter, ~~which is~~ due
~~to its omnipotence, is~~ and ~~it~~ conveys its
 inevitability of facilitating death.



Make sure that any biographical contextual details you bring in are relevant and add to your line of argument.

The candidate here makes a reference to Shelley's atheism, but rather than this being a general comment they then link this purposefully to the structure of the poem and to the focus of the question. This was a controlled and discriminating response, with flashes of sophistication that tipped it into Level 5.

Question 13

Keats remains a popular choice of study for centres, and examiners do find that candidates are often well-prepared on his poems. In this instance, candidates generally felt confident tackling the theme of suffering in Keats. Suffering was often linked to broader Romantic ideas (e.g. the *vale of soul-making*, emotional intensity, poetic inspiration). Stronger answers showed insight into Keats' literary craft (e.g. structure of the sonnet, use of apostrophe, tone). Context was usually well-integrated, especially when linked directly to the poems' content or composition. Examiners also saw some thoughtful treatment of *negative capability* and Keats' philosophical view of suffering.

Many candidates over-relied on biography, often recounting Keats's life events in a list-like way (tuberculosis, opiates, deaths, Fanny Brawne). This information was not always closely connected to the poem's content or literary features.

Stronger responses anchored points in precise textual evidence and used context to enrich, not dominate, analysis. They considered form and structure (e.g. sestet, volta, Petrarchan elements). Candidates explored Keatsian philosophy (e.g. suffering as creative, part of being human) and analysed the interconnectedness between content and craft.

Some weaker answers drifted into writing primarily about death, bypassing the broader emotional, existential or philosophical elements of suffering. Some over-read images (e.g. "embalmer" or "poppy") as literal death references rather than as symbolic or metaphorical. It was also felt that some candidates could be made more aware of Romanticism's view on suffering - emotion, experience, the sublime - as distinct from personal trauma.

.....
In 'To Sleep', Keats presents the theme of suffering throughout the sonnet as something the speaker expresses a true desire for.

in order to relieve oneself from the sensation of suffering. Through the bracketed "midnight", Keats applies emphasis to night, emphasising the speaker's underlying wish to enter the night physically and emotionally in the state of sleeping. It implies the initial sense that the traditional negative connotations with the night and darkness is not going to be followed by Keats, but rather that ~~from~~ these connotations will apply to the day, where the human mind is most active and aware, exposing the greater prevalence of suffering. This inversion of light and dark imagery is expressed in "embowered from the light" and "enshaded", where it is portrayed that the speaker wants to be hidden and away from the daylight through the state of sleep, implying a sense of danger that is permanent to the "light", presenting it as a menacing force that perpetuates suffering. The way in which Keats utilises iambic pentameter furthers the idea of how sleep is the relief to suffering, providing a lyrical form that suits the softness in which sleep is presented with: "O soft embower" and "O sweeter sleep". The utilisation of apostrophe implies



The best responses are able to skilfully and confidently handle the different elements of Keats' poetic craft.

Here, the candidate has analysed the form, the metre and the imagery of the poem to develop a controlled and critical line of argument about suffering. They went on to receive a

good Level 5 score.

Question 14

This was not as popular a choice for Keats, even though “change” as a theme offered wide-ranging possibilities - from seasonal transformation to emotional, existential, and philosophical change. There was a variety of second poem choices. Responses made good use of a wide selection of Keats’s work, particularly ‘To Autumn’, and ‘Grecian Urn’, allowing for both contrast and development of ideas.

Better responses focused specifically on change, not just nature or suffering, and explored different dimensions (emotional, seasonal, artistic, philosophical). There was close analysis of language and structure, with stronger answers dealing confidently with rhetorical devices shifts in tone, and the nuances of sonnet form.

Contextual connections were generally used thoughtfully, such as reflecting on Keats’ ideas about impermanence, mortality, and artistic legacy, with references to the permanence of art vs. the transience of life (particularly in ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’).

Keats' crafting of 'In Dream-tighted December', originally given the modest but sonically significant title 'Song', is simultaneous with and a development of his emerging philosophical and aesthetic attitudes in the

winter of 1817 - in a letter to his brothers in December of that year Keats coins ~~the~~ term negative capability, "which Shakespeare possessed so enormously", to describe a poetical ability to entertain oppositions or contradictions "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason". This view is central to the presentation of change in this poem written in the same month, because to capture nature's relationship to change is to engage in paradox: though cycling through "Hollo's summer look" to "crystal fretting" in incessant flux, the natural world's ~~un-~~conscious existence that would "ne'er remember" these fluctuations of experience render that experience in some sense uniform - to the tree there are no seasons, nothing but seamless being. Yet to access this



When bringing in concepts such as negative capability when analysing Keats, it is important to show an understanding of the concept and ensure it is relevant to your line of argument.

Here, the candidate deftly weaves in lots of relevant contextual information, but uses it to support their line of argument rather than dominate it. This was a highly critical and evaluative response that received a high Level 5 mark.

Question 15

The question on landscape in 'Drummer Hodge' generally brought out some nice responses, with candidates choosing a variety of poems to accompany, such as 'Meeting at Night', which offered useful contrast through its more intimate, romantic use of landscape.

Many candidates engaged confidently with the theme of landscape, particularly the alien, war-torn terrain in 'Drummer Hodge'. Contextual knowledge around the Boer War, imperialism, and Hardy's anti-war stance was frequently included and often helped deepen analysis, though occasionally examiners felt it did not add to the response and felt a little bolt-on. Generally speaking, candidates were comfortable identifying features such as the unfamiliarity of the South African landscape; the use of Afrikaans as a marker of alienation; and the symbolic role of stars/constellations and their implications for fate and isolation.

Many responses identified key symbols or ideas (e.g. stars, language, rhythm) but did not fully explore how poetic techniques created meaning. Examiners also felt that fewer responses analysed Hardy's diction and syntax; the poem's metrical regularity and the relationship between form and theme (e.g. isolation mirrored in stanzaic pattern). Some candidates drew on Hardy's prose (*Tess*) — a thoughtful move, but this often took time away from close poetic analysis.

Thomas Hardy's appreciation of nature and ~~the~~ of meaning imbued in landscape shines through his poems 'Drummer Hodge' and 'The Dorking Throsh'. In 'Drummer Hodge', landscape symbolises the final resting place of a young soldier, creating tension between space and land: the ubiquity of nature creates comfort in death. 'The Dorking Throsh' presents landscape as a representation of the changing of time: the ~~time~~ of ^{new} ~~the~~ century is ~~solidified~~ personified ^{and juxtaposed} ~~against~~ the death of the old. Hardy's inspiration from the Romantics is evident in both poems, where landscape is used as a vessel for deeper considerations of death and time.

Hardy uses landscape in 'Drummer Hodge' to ~~just~~ emphasise the unfamiliarity of Hodge's resting place compared to his English origins. ~~in order to~~ ~~create tension in the poem~~ An onslaught of local jargon meets the reader's eyes, presenting the 'kopje-crust / That breaks the veldt around', the ~~ill-mannered~~ 'broad Karoo' The Bush, the dusty loam.' Probably intended for an English audience, the poem thus creates an image of foreign mysticism and a sense of danger in the unfamiliarity. This underscores the pitious nature of Hodge's death: ~~he does~~ familiar only of 'his Wessex home', he cannot understand

'the meaning of the broad Kuroo'. Although he is so far from home, he is permanently part of this strange landscape:

Yet portion of that unknown plain
Will Hodge forever be.

This tension between familiarity and the unknown therefore ~~stirs~~ stirs a sense of pity, an ache of the reader's heart, in knowing that Hodge will never be able to return home. To a Victorian reader at the time of publication, 1899, this would be highly poignant in portraying the reality of war. Hardy was very interested in war, observing over the Boer War of the late ~~18~~ 1890s.

~~Therefore~~ ^{Hardy} Hodge would therefore ~~signify~~ be attempting to highlight the tragedy of loss in the Boer War, stirring the pathos of the reader by juxtaposing the strange, foreign landscape with hints at the English landscape known by the reader; the 'homely Northern breast and brain' of Hodge are forever stranded in 'some Southern' place.

However, an alternative interpretation of the poem may point to the focus on space and the universe in the poem. A sense of comfort overweighs the grief felt by the reader at the ~~sentiment~~ ubiquity of the stars and sky: this ~~is evident~~ ^{emerges} in

the first mention of 'foreign constellations' in the first stanza. Arguably, this further reinforces the 'foreign' nature of the landscape; ~~however~~ conversely, on a deeper level, there is comfort in the appearance of new stars. Although they are 'strange stars amid the gleams', the light source creates a sense of glowing hope, an image that expands in the final stanza with the lines:

And strange-eyed constellations reign

His stars eternally.

The vibrant consonance of /s/ and /t/ sounds create a scintillating image of sparkling light glittering above Hodge. The reader may almost imagine these stars reflecting in Hodge's blank eyes, illuminating them with life once more. Although the stars may be 'strange' and 'foreign', the same shines the over Hodge's 'Wessex home', creating a deep sense of comfort and joy in the landscape. This reflects Hardy's love for Romantic poetry, which prized nature and ~~the~~ sublime landscapes as filled with meaning and emotion. Indeed, a sense of the sublime is evident in 'Dunster Hodge': ~~the~~ each stanza seems to expand in space, with ^{increasingly} ~~an~~ stronger focus on the universe and sky in each section, so that by the last line, reminding us of the 'eternal' nature of stars,

the image has zoomed out and the perspective seems to be far above Hodge, hovering with the stars themselves. This creates a sense of reverence in the vast universe, the sky which exists above us no matter the physical landscape.^[*] This interpretation of the poem, therefore, presents the landscape as consoling, a vast universe watching over Hodge, that he indeed becomes part of. [* that almost seems represented in the white space around the text of the poem.]

Hardy presents the juxtaposition of old and new through landscape in 'The Dorking Thru'. A dead, wintry landscape is presented from the first stanza, ~~When Frost was spectre-gray~~

When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dogs made desolate

The weakening eye of day.

~~totour imagery of winter~~ is an image of a colourless landscape emerges in the Hardy's use of language in phrases like 'spectre-gray', 'the cloudy canopy', and 'bleak twigs'. This evokes a sense of death: the landscape seems brittle, dry, icy, cold, and lifeless. This is further emphasised through the almost crispy consonance of /c/, /sh/, and /s/ sounds, especially evident in the lines
The land's sharp features seemed to be

The Century's corpse outleant,

His crypt the cloudy canopy...

~~This~~ The cold, harsh sounds created by this alliteration ~~as~~ connote the lifelessness of the landscape, evoking dry, cracking branches and frost-covered grass. This creates a permeating sense of death, with the landscape symbolising the effects of winter on life and nature. However, ~~the~~ a ~~slightly~~ more nuanced reading of the poem may highlight an implicit focus on the passage of time: the mention of 'The Century's corpse' and the date of writing of the poem (1900) ~~both~~ ^{both} indicate a representation of the turn of the century. Fascinated and disturbed by the inevitable moving of time - something ~~the~~ Hardy also explores in his poem 'I look into My Glass' - Hardy may have been exploring the significance of a new era. The ~~the~~ nineteenth century is personified as a 'corpse', ~~and~~ ^{and} represented by the 'land's sharp features'; the death of the old century is accompanied by the arrival of the new, symbolised by the 'aged thrush'. This arrival of 'hope' and the new is overwhelming to the speaker, who knows not how to respond.

This feeling of uncertainty and confused awe in

the arrival of the new century is explored by Hardy in a landscape of sound. The 'tangled bine-stems' that are 'like strings of broken lyres' may represent the death of the old century, which no longer produces any music, but this precedes the arrival of the new century, heralded by 'a voice' in a full-hearted even-song. An 'ecstatic sound' is described, with a summative field of joy and beauty created in phrases like 'full-hearted', ~~even~~ 'joy unlimited', 'happy good-night air', and 'blessed Hope'. This language creates a sense of revelling ecstasy, but one that is nevertheless incomprehensible by the persona. Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew And I was unaware.

A tension between the pure joy of the music described and the bitter disappointment of the speaker at not being able to understand it is thus created. This 'blessed Hope' is visible but seems just out of reach. That said, it is felt by the speaker, evoked in the musical rhythm of the poem: written in alternating iambic tetrameter and ~~to~~ iambic trimeter, a dancing, light-hearted ^{music} ~~rhyme~~ is carried throughout the poem. ~~the~~ Therefore, although the speaker does not understand the hope

of the new century, it could be inferred that he nevertheless embodies it. This leaves the reader uplifted, feeling that ~~although~~ despite the presence of the unknown, the new century must not be dreaded, but embraced. The musical landscape is therefore presented as a representation of hope and joy.

In conclusion, Hardy presents landscape as a multifaceted representation of hope and time in 'The Darkling ~~The~~ Thrush', and as both a source of comfort and of grief in 'Drummer Hodge'. Landscape is used as a vessel for deeper meaning and emotion in both poems, ^{confronting} ~~allowing~~ the reader ~~to~~ with complex ideas of time, grief, and the incomprehensible vastness of the universe. In 'Drummer Hodge', Hardy's intention may be to highlight the tragedy and uselessness of war, but simultaneously to provide comfort in the fact that there is more to death than an absence of life. In 'The Darkling Thrush', Hardy perhaps intends to demonstrate the swelling beauty of ~~the~~ hope, even in the fear of passing time. He presents landscape as symbolic of the passing of time and as a ~~rep~~ representation of death. a



This was a very strong Level 5 response that chose to write about another Hardy poem to help generate a critical and evaluative argument. There were references throughout to context and the writer's craft which demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the poems.

Question 16

This was the least popular of the Victorian questions, even though the question focus of "powerful emotions" offered a lot of scope for personal interpretation and engagement. There was generally good analysis of the named poem, though contextual analysis of 'The Best Thing in the World' could revert to general biographical comments on Elizabeth and Robert Browning. As always, centres are encouraged to explore the full range of the Victorian time period and for answers to be rooted firmly in the text and on the question focus, not general biographical context or fixed temporal viewpoints of the vast time period. There were a wide variety of choices of second poem, including Browning, Rossetti and Tennyson. The better responses were able to analyse the way emotions are presented through the language and form, with thoughtful analyses of imagery and structure. Weaker responses explained the emotions, often reverting to biographical comments for context, rather than a focus on the poems as literary constructs.

In both "The Best Thing in the World" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and "Dark House" by Alfred Lord Tennyson, the speakers are arguably consumed by ~~the~~ powerful emotions, ^{with} their respective psyches enveloped with both an exuberant joy and a lamentful melancholy as consequence of their positions within society. In "Best Thing," Browning's utilisation of the lyric form, in which self-reflection ingests an arguably autobiographical account, highlights the speaker's meditation on the joys of humanity and perhaps ~~explains~~ reinforces faith as a guiding principle amidst the growing agnosticism.

within the Victorian era. In "Dark House," Tennyson's similarly avaguably autobiographical account serves as elegy, in which his overwhelming grief for his friend Arthur Hallam's death envelopes his soul and predisposes a tragic nihilism; perhaps his grief is made more severe due to his lack of assimilation to the Victorian sphere of patriarchal 'respectability'. In both poems, joy and grief serve as the foundations to their soul rather than simply fleeting mental thoughts, with possibly pre-Raphaelite elements to their bases.

In "The best thing in the world," Browning's appreciation for humanity is ~~avaguably~~ ~~illuminating~~ avaguably consumes her psyche, as she overcomes life's 'flatitudes'. ~~is~~ Immediately established through the speaker's use of hypophora in the first two lines, the reader realises Browning's adoration ~~for~~ for life; ~~the~~ the speaker comments on the imposed "best thing" being

"June-rose, by May-dew incensed", which possibly alludes to Browning's love for the agricultural landscape, which is so 'precious' and worthy of praise that it symbolises a "pearl". Browning's emotion is palpable here, evoking John Ruskin's notion that "poetry is the nature of idyllogues" as Browning could possibly be in such a state of 'ecstasy' in describing life due to her love for Robert Browning. Perhaps the "beauty, pleasure, and light" are all symbols for her beloved; ~~where~~ these three classical allusions to the 'greek charities', in which they are the 'foundations' of human joy, arguably ~~also~~ reflect how the speaker perceives Robert.

In "Dark House", grief contains Penryson, rendering him unstable and disorientated in what is arguably a "spartanous world of pensive feeling" (Woodworth).

The speaker's melancholy impels their psyche, as they wander the "house" in which he "waits for a hand, a hand that can be clasped no more" - Tennyson's ~~writer~~ this elegy embodies his personal grief for Hallam, using this first stage of the elegiac tripartite structure to submit himself to unremitting inhibition. Unlike later ^{an earlier} carter, this poem remains enmeshed in grief and desperation for the death of Tennyson's beloved. His use of epigram with "a hand" perhaps illustrates how Tennyson's need for a connection and an indulgence in this hand consumes his soul. Here, Tennyson arguably takes inspiration from the 'lyric' form, as he depicts a vignette of heightened emotion and self-reflection, arguably conforming to the 'melancholic' nature of the 'spontaneous' movement and embodying Victorian romanticism; this grief is not only his entire identity* but also dictates his walking and "sleeping". * and thus "overflows" his mind

In "Best Thing", the speaker illustrates a transition from self-inspection to religious reverence. A repeated refrain from the beginning of the stanza, Browning arguably cements life's "best thing" as "something at of it", alluding to God's omnipotence and transcendent power as the source for life's joys. Evocative of the lyric form, the speaker appears completely absorbed with their emotions despite it "compelling them" - perhaps the speaker exists in a liminal space between consciousness and unconsciousness. Here, spiritually connected to God. Perhaps this reinforcement of religion as a 'moral guide' illustrates Elizabeth's attempt to retain religious conservatism and amidst a Victorian society in which agnosticism and rising empirical knowledge such as Darwin's "Origins of Species" dominated the religious sphere.

In "Dark House", the speaker's personal grief results in them embodying a depraved state, void of human connection or optimism. Heightened by Tennyson's use of enjambment in the final two lines, the speaker's lack of purpose and utter nihilism paint a portrait of isolation. The speaker notices that "the bald forest breaks the dark day", its balance arguably mirroring his inflamed discontent over how nothing important remains in his life. Perhaps this elegy demonstrates such suffering because the Tennyson had "spiritualised passion", some sort of homosexual bond with Hallam, therefore he grieves not only his friend but ~~it took him~~ his social stance, as Victorian respectability would condemn such a 'tinged' indulgence within one's 'private sphere'.

To conclude, both Browning and Tennyson illustrate figures consumed by painful emotion; in "Best Thing," the speaker finds so much solace in their religious and romantic reverence, while in "Dark House," the speaker's "overflow" of grief predisposes utter nihilism.



This was a very strong response to the question, which brought in relevant biographical context, but did not rely on this to drive the argument. There was a clear focus on the poems and on the writer's craft, with relevant contextual points weaved in throughout such as literary context (e.g. the lyric form) or references to religion and Darwin. This received a Level 5 score.

Question 17

Rossetti remains a popular choice for centres, and candidates were generally engaged and well-informed, with strong contextual knowledge, especially around Rossetti's religious beliefs, Victorian gender norms, and her work with "fallen women." Most understood desire as a theme in Rossetti's work, especially its links to sin, temptation, and female agency. 'Goblin Market' proved a rich source of a second poem, enabling sophisticated discussion of bodily desire, temptation, and the consequences of indulgence. Better responses generally moved beyond sexual desire to consider materialism, spiritual longing, or power/control, especially in stronger interpretations of 'Babylon the Great' and 'The World'.

Some essays relied too heavily on Rossetti's life (e.g. broken engagements) with limited connection to textual evidence. Many responses focused only on sexual desire, missing Rossetti's critiques of materialism or spiritual neglect and the complexity of temptation and repentance. Weaker responses saw Rossetti as simply moralistic, condemning all female desire without nuance. Better responses also saw candidates fully exploring Rossetti's use of poetic form (e.g. Petrarchan sonnet in 'Babylon'), metre, or voice.

Christina Rossetti Born 1830 is a Victorian poet of a pre-raphaelite era, who observed the world with a pre-raphaelite intensity. Through a religious, female and victorian lens combined she explores desire, desire to deceive, to destruct, to sin but also desire for God, self improvement and self-awareness. In her poem 'Babylon the Great' desire is primarily presented negatively. Through an allegory of the whore of Babylon in the book of Revelation. It presents desire as a sin, something the reader must refrain from to live a content, fulfilling life. On the other hand in her poem 'What would I give' she presents desire more positively, the desire to be good, to be devoted, to be 'clean again'. Therefore in these two poems the reader comes

to grapple with Rossetti's often conflicted teachings of the world in which she was a part, where she perceives desire to be sinful in the submission to temptation, desire is simultaneously indicative of the passion of devotion, commitment to faith and to purity. Desire in itself sheds light on the conflicted poet Rossetti is at heart, a poet who wrote passionately about the female experience, an experience so different to the life she pursued.



The best responses don't rely on fixed biographical details of Rossetti and instead understand that she is a complex figure who writes complex poetry rather than focus on shallow and general readings of the poet and her poems.

This candidate produced a nuanced response to the question which received a Level 5 mark.

Question 18

This was considerably less popular as a question, with one examiner speculating that the choice of named poem was off-putting for candidates as it is quite brief and relatively obscure. Centres are reminded that all poems named in the collections have been chosen as they offer enough opportunities for analysis for candidates.

Many candidates showed a strong engagement with the theme of hope, especially in a religious or spiritual context, though there was a clear reliance on more familiar second poems such as 'Goblin Market', where candidates could more confidently articulate Rossetti's moral or spiritual worldview. Top answers explored doctrinal understandings of hope and Rossetti's association with Tractarianism and its emphasis on suffering as a route to salvation. These candidates framed hope not simply as optimism but as a spiritual aspiration grounded in Christian belief. Strong responses acknowledged Rossetti's tension between Earthly love and divine calling and the struggle between doubt and devotion. Some interpreted froth as a metaphor for the ephemeral nature of human life, linking this to a hope that rests in the afterlife, not earthly fulfilment.

'Goblin Market' enabled wider thematic exploration - hope through sisterly redemption, contrasting with the stark brevity of 'As froth...'. 'Up-Hill' allowed for a more direct engagement with Christian hope and certainty of salvation. 'Twice' enabled commentary on the transformation from romantic hope to spiritual hope.

Weaker responses were descriptive, identifying hope but failing to analyse how Rossetti constructs it. Better responses showed engagement with poetic technique, especially form and structure (e.g. metre, rhyme, enjambment, etc.). They were also able to explore the tone of the poems, which supported more subtle readings of hope as uncertain or qualified.

Both "Up-Hill" and "As Froth on the Face of the Deep" treat religion and profound faith as a redemptive source of hope. In "As Froth on the Face of the Deep", Rossetti models, through a unique synthesis of form and content, the hope that

The Divine offers to earthly believers. The poem starts with a dazzling array of similes, structured by the anaphora of "as", and the ebullient rhythm of the dactyl - the first line, "as froth on the face of the deep," falls into this boisterous rhythm, with the earliness of the plosives ("froth and face") falling on the strong beat of each dactyl. Such rampant enumeration and rhythmic drive at the start of the poem, ~~however~~ is far from comforting, however: in fact, the linguistic disorder, rampant repetitions, and sheer plurality of the first 6 lines, are ~~too~~ overwhelming, spilling into a collapse into disorder and chaos. This sense of earthly chaos, however, is redeemed at the poem's end by the redemptive and hopeful potential of the Divine. The reader finds out that these overwhelming enumerations are 'have if it ching not anight, / O my God, unto Thee?' The last line falls comfortably into the regularity and the ~~grounded rhythm~~ grounded-ness of the iambic iamb. Clearly, the Divine offers a respite from unwelcome earthly disorder, a source of ~~some~~ hope and place for ~~the~~ the believer, just as it becomes a moment of structural release within the poem. The iambs bring our attention to the



The best responses are able to analyse and evaluate Rossetti's use of poetic form and structure, rather than rely on feature spotting. This was a very critical and evaluative response that demonstrated sophisticated understanding of the writer's craft and was awarded a high Level 5 mark.

Question 19

The Modern Poets is not the most popular collection, even though there are a number of excellent poems and poets featured. Some candidates struggled to get a handle on the idea of "impermanence", even though it is quite a central theme in Modernist poetry. On the other hand, there were some strong responses seen, with often subtle analysis of impermanence as a contextual concern of the inter-war years, allied to analysis of the language and structure of the poems.

The image of the 'struggle of midnight' also has, arguably, connotations of a fairy tale, implicit of a child-like recognition of impermanence. This idea is strengthened by the nature of the poem, taking the form of a lullaby, which connects the relationship that Auden describes with a sense of innocence and freedom. However, in a typically Modernist manner, Auden inverts the convention of a lullaby, synthesising it with modernised forms of allude and carpe diem poetry to ~~change the~~ modify the connotations of the poem's form. Instead of describing a child's perception of eternal romance, that is innocent and eternal, extending even beyond the confines of 'midnight', Auden depicts a physical and transient relationship, which both parties recognise as such. In inverting this childish form, Auden's poem becomes painfully aware of the impermanence of the relationship and the pressures of society, perhaps largely influenced by ~~the~~ Auden's own perception of society, alluding to the promiscuity of his youth.

and his homosexuality (which was not decriminalised until 1967), suggesting that, although ^{the speaker} ~~Auden cannot~~ does not experience this childish vision of love, he finds that the reality: the recognition of the impermanence is transcendental in an individual manner. ^{moreover} This is reinforced



This is a good example of a candidate correcting themselves, and realising that the speaker of the poem is not necessarily the poet themselves. Whilst they have brought in some relevant biographical information, the majority of their context is literary understanding of the Modernist movement. Poems are literary constructs, not biographical letters or diaries, and it is always worth remembering this.

Question 20

This was slightly more popular than Auden, with candidates often engaging well with the playful and inventive language of Cummings. The notion of innocence was often well placed into the context of the poems, looking at the post-war period and how the collective worldview had changed, with reference to childhood and innocence. Analysis of language was often confident, with candidates able to refer to Cummings' playful use of capital letters and his often broken syntax and invented compound nouns. Some candidates also cleverly used the idea of a lack of innocence, or innocence being stolen, to analyse their second choice of poem, often to great effect – for example 'Out out' by Robert Frost.

Whilst ~~also~~ acknowledging the beauty of innocence, Cummings' poem 'in Just' also explores how it will inevitably be destroyed. This is perhaps most evident in the symbol of the "Balloon Man", whose "goat" feet possibly serve as an allusion to Pan, the ^{Greek} god of sexuality, in an exploration of how ~~innocence~~ a child's innocence will inevitably be corrupted by their pubescent sexual desires*. This idea of corrupted innocence can be developed with ~~the~~ Cummings' capitalisation of the "M" in "balloon man", representing ~~the~~ intrusion of adulthood and its tribulations on the innocence of ~~the~~ youth. The idea that this corruption of innocence is inevitable can also be explored through Cummings' experimental use of typography, with the cascading formation of ~~the~~ ^{the enjambed lines} "and the goat-footed" suggesting that the ~~Ballon~~ Balloonman's arrival (and subsequent corruption of innocence) is of a powerful, unstoppable force. Such as an experimental



When analysing Cummings' use of typography and interesting capitalisation, it is important

to always keep a focus on the question.

This candidate produced a good Level 5 response that maintained a line of argument on innocence throughout, while bringing in relevant Modernist contextual points.

Question 21

Eliot did not seem to be as popular this year, even though there are rich opportunities for candidates in the study of his poems. 'A Game of Chess' was slightly more popular than Question 22, and the question focus on "sensory imagery" ensured that candidates were engaging with AO2 and looking at his methods. The better responses were able to look at all aspects of sensory imagery, such as aural imagery and heteroglossia, and not focus purely on visual images. Lots of candidates brought in relevant contextual information on post-war England, but better responses also brought in literary context and insight into the Modernist worldview.

In a ~~game of~~ Game of Chess the ~~loss~~, sensory imagery allows us to fully grasp how the speaker's misplace of value has caused her a loss of connection in her relationship. As she is utterly consumed by her surroundings and indulgences, she does not care to put in the time and effort into knowing and ~~empha~~ having empathy for her husband's ~~to~~ pain.

From the ~~at~~ very beginning she's established in a 'burnished throne,' this imagery denotes connotations of royalty and significance, which is what her materialism deludes her into thinking she possesses. ~~When is it in reality, this irony~~ Ironically, in reality, she's sitting on a toilet with excessive 'marble', 'jewels', ~~or~~ 'candle-flames' and coloured stone; ~~as~~ these items blind her to reality, as she attempts to block out the pain the disconnect with her husband causes. This is also prevalent in Eliot's 'Sweeney Earth', as we see shameful scenes depicted through an almost absent 3rd person narrative. The blunt brutality ~~of~~ can be seen as after Sweeney's sexual desires are fulfilled, 'the epileptic' curves backward, clutching at her sides'. Eliot paints this dark picture reinforced by use of ~~the~~ painful sounds like 'shriek' to create a sensory field of hopelessness. As Sweeney has distracted his lack of meaningful connections with short-term pleasure sex he disregards her pain. The cutting 'C' consonants not only symbolise the pain she is enduring but the pain Sweeney cannot escape, ~~his ignorance~~ that his ignorance of precious connections that bring purpose to life. This is



This was a question where the candidate had to define their own line of argument as to how Eliot makes use of sensory imagery.

This candidate developed a clear and controlled argument on the loss of meaningful

connections, and maintained a controlled focus on the question throughout their response, making sure that all analysis of the writer's craft served this argument of connections.

Question 22

The question focus of memory was very suitable for Eliot, and the best responses were able to link this very clearly to AO2 and to his methods, such as stream-of-consciousness, and the fragmentary or repetitive structure of his poems. Better responses were able to analyse imagery in his poems and link this to Modernist concerns. Weaker responses were a little narrative and did not always fully grasp the presentation of memory in his poetry, beyond the surface level.

Firstly, both poems function as a series of collages, differentiated by their subject matter in 'Gerontion' and the times of night in 'Rhapsody.' This is a demonstration of Modernist techniques, in which traditional subjects are explored in unconventional ways. Through the structure Eliot uses, he explores how memory shapes people with a focus on its emotional impact, without distracting the reader with a compelling narrative. For example, 'Rhapsody' explores how a man's reality is shaped by his past. However, it does not focus on the events of his past but rather creates an evocative sense of his psychological state. For example, the simile "As a madman shakes a dead geranium" is confusing and nonsensical. The significance of the geranium is not specified, and is only linked to how "Midnight shakes the memory." Therefore, the reader does not understand on an intellectual level the meaning of the simile. However, a sense of the man is clearly evoked, suggesting he is the "madman" in question and demonstrates how his memory bleeds into his present as he walks at midnight.

Similarly, 'Gerontion' uses an extended metaphor of rain and dryness to represent how the man's lack of action in his past has affected his emotional wellbeing.

in the present. He describes how he was "neither at the hot gates/Nor fought in the warm rain," suggesting that he did not fight in any wars. This leaves him feeling worthless, which is present in the metaphor "a dull head among windy spaces." Therefore, his past informs his present, like in "Rhapsody," as he now feels the emotional sterility of an unfulfilled life and is "waiting for rain" which could imply waiting for something to happen in his life, or waiting for death. In this way, Eliot uses Modernist techniques of ambiguous imagery to demonstrate the significance of the past on the present.



Comparison is not one of the Assessment Objectives of Section B responses but some candidates find it useful to develop a line of argument.

Here, the candidate has made a comparative point on the use of collages, but then kept their focus on one poem per paragraph. This helps to ensure there is meaningful and sustained analysis of the poems.

Question 23

A handful of responses were seen on the Peter Porter poem, and it was pleasing to see that all questions were attempted this year. Most were able to grasp the concept of societal expectations in the named poem, with a few pertinent analyses of the language and form of the poems. There was a reliance on general comments on literary and historical context, though better answers were able to move beyond surface comments on post-war Britain and instead look at the form and structure of Movement poetry and how this reflects societal expectations, alongside analysis of language.

The movement poetry tends to put societal expectations at the core of their poems and narratives. With aftermath of war time and experience of it, societal expectations flux and shift with poets such as Peter Porter and Elizabeth Jennings were challenging those societal expectations.

Elizabeth Jennings, ~~also~~ in "One flesh", discusses the societal expectations of marriage for women and the expectations of a Catholic marriage, ~~but~~ challenging these societal ideas ~~the~~ and the angry young men rhetoric of the movement. One flesh, focuses in on the distinct separation within the marriage using an inconsistent rhyming scheme. "He with a book, keeping the light on late, she with a girl dreaming of

childhood." Jennings purposefully uses the ~~late~~ rhyming scheme to emphasise how ~~that~~ that the man in the marriage can separate himself by reading whilst the woman can't due to the dominant patriarchal society. She further emphasises the societal expectations of a woman in marriage to not complain or ~~argue with the do~~; "Her eyes fixed on the shadows overhead." The imagery of the 'shadows' enforcing the idea that she used to be in love and in 'one flesh' with her husband but grew out of love. Jennings, known for her emotional intensity, then emphasises the societal expectation for women that they cannot file for divorce even with the rise of divorce reform laws in Britain. Unlike the other movement poets she discusses the struggles for women in these times, "How can they lie;" The passion in the marriage has faded, with the ~~so~~ bored tone reflecting the escape the woman wants from the marriage. Elizabeth Jennings then makes reference to it being ~~her~~ a set of parents, "These two are my ~~mother and father~~ father and my mother whose fire from which I came, has now grown cold?" the rhetorical question and reflection ~~to~~

amplifies ~~stated~~ how Jennings' Steaming up about marriage is an anomaly within the movement. Online, the movement posts, she does not avoid herself and topics that the 'aspy group her' would have wrote about. She ~~it~~ explores the how society and religion put too many expectations and restrictions on marriage.

Furthermore, Jennings further encapsulates the societal expectations of a Catholic marriage and the tradition of 'one flesh.' She also puts forth the idea that because it's a Catholic marriage, there can be no divorce due to their marriage being 'one flesh.' The only intimacy they face is, "it is like a Confession," the simile implying the Catholic confessions. She enforces the idea of Catholicism making marriage a huge sacrament, "a devotion for which their whole lives were a preparation." The tone of criticism highlighting perhaps the idea of that Catholicism societal expectations are too much and how, as said previously, their Catholicism stops the divorce, "Do they know they're old," and how they "snuggly close together" because of their 'one flesh' oath/sacrament.

Jennings is aware that his marriage is breaking down but societal expectations continue to break it down further. The critical tone throughout exemplifies Jennings's Cynicism, Catholicism and how society goes along with it. Compared to other poets like Larkin and Conquest, she's not only an observer of this marriage but she becomes a part of it by criticizing her parents allegedly and critical of it. With rise of Secularism in the background, Jennings also questions ~~father~~ religious marriage as a whole and whether their expectations are too ~~conservative~~ conservative.

On the other hand, Peter Porter explores the societal expectations of the working class and ~~lower~~ working labour. He uses the imagery to begin with to highlight how the narrative voice is defined by his suit, labour and class. "new Deans Suit, greeny brown, silver Coloured buttons, single vent, A [:-:] A Suit to show responsibility." The This Suit becomes a part of the narrative voice and the murky dull colour of the ~~that~~ suit emphasises the dullness of work and societal expectations of labour. Porter explores a ~~mess~~ ~~the~~ ~~mess~~ of

a critical one, like Jennings, to highlight the societal expectations of men being defined by ~~the~~ being the breadwinner of a household. Similar to the female poets of the movement like Elizabeth Jennings, Molly Holden, Terry Joseph, he challenges the societal expectations of men and turns the 'angry young men' concept into a different direction of being angry with society opposed to himself like how Larkin who is seen to be angry to himself. Porter further reiterates the societal expectations of career by the opening of "Below the cover - my fingers crack, my tyrant suit chokes me as it hugs me in its fire." ~~Thus~~ This

accentuates how the narrator will never be separate from his suit and work life. Peter Porter is then ~~not~~ commenting on ~~how~~ how society will always associate ~~metaphor~~ men as the main breadwinner / source of income.

Porter also further goes on to iterate the societal expectations of the working class, where class enmity and boundaries were still prominent in the background. He amplifies the expectations of the working class to have no luxuries ~~and~~, "More than

about his car, his drink, his friends." The
tore of jealousy re-exhibiting the desires
of the working class to not be constrained
by their work life and have those higher
income jobs. "I stand in glass [...] I stop, expect
to look at wedding rings." The desperate tone
is again repeated to emphasise the class
divides in Britain during the movement and no
matter how much money he makes, he will
still be constrained by his job and class.
"If only I had a car, if only." The repetition
of "if only" is Peter Porter making those
critical commentaries on societal expectations
and what it is to be a 'man'. Peter Porter being
Australian, is able to grasp that outside look into
Britain and see the suffering within. Even
in a time when class boundaries are being
challenged and blurred, society still
expects men to work. So, Peter Porter both
explores the societal expectations of work for
men and expectations of the working class, whilst
maintaining a different outlook on the
'angry young men'.



This is a good example of a candidate who understands the Movement poets and where

they sit within the literary and social context of the times.

This candidate kept a clear focus on the poems and on the question, demonstrating a controlled response, which was awarded a mark in Level 4.

Question 24

Again, only a handful of responses to the Movement poetry. There was understanding shown of the surface simplicity of language in Jennings poem, which hides the personal anguish of the speaker, with good reference to relevant contextual factors.

Both poems present personal anguish as something ~~to~~ to be avoided and pushed ~~as it~~ back into the hidden depths of ~~the~~ mind whilst their mere existence reflects the general attitude of movement poetry and the increased focus on self and reflection.

Elizabeth Jennings' 'Answers' is the epitome of movement poetry in some ways: the simple language, the focus on self were all clear markers of the time period she was writing in, a reflection of the move away ~~re~~ from romanticism and long, flowery poems embed in metaphors and imagery that were often confusing and used language that ~~could~~ be accessible to lower classes and.

towards the accessible, easy to grasp poems of the movement. As Larkin proclaimed, most modern poets wanted their poems to be on the same level as pub talk. Jennings achieves this effect by writing a short poem with simple language that's easy to understand and yet gets her point across perfectly. 'Answers' is exploring personal anguish as something to be avoided when Jennings writes 'all small answers build... my spirit'. This constantly repeated idea of 'small' 'answers' or 'things' and 'big' 'answers' or questions is really the main ~~to~~ tool in the poem. 'Small' and 'big' are incredibly simple adjectives that, yes, feed into the movement poetry idea of ~~is~~ keeping things relatively uncomplicated but also sound ~~da~~ almost childish and it could be that Jennings is ~~ref~~ alluding to the idea of personal anguish being scary and so the narrator is reverting back, making small hints of the wish to return to childhood. Furthermore, it's truly impressive that Jennings has been able to use such simple words and give them a wide range of possible meanings. 'Small answers'

could be referring to half-truths or deliberately plain answers that don't hold much weight if Jennings took something close to a literal route. Or it could be could be implying kindness or denial. But this lack of clear way to interpret both 'small' and 'big' ~~can~~ leads way to ~~the~~ ~~one~~ one of the most defining features of movement poetry; the unique relationship ~~between~~ poets ~~try~~ to form between their poem and the reader. In addition, Jennings throughout the poem reveals a lack of what to self-reflect in an ironic display of reflecting about not wanting to reflect. 'Big questions bruised [her] mind' and that violent verb of 'bruised' really reveals plainly, already in the first stanza, the 'unwilling' tone of the poem. The unwillingness to face anguish, the want to avoid it instead. Establishing this so early on is a masterful technique to fully immerse the reader in the feeling, the sensations, ~~and~~ that the poet wants them to feel.

'Felo De Se' by Thomas Blackburn

is another poem that presents this avoidance of personal anguish beautifully. Upon reading the poem, the most obvious thing about it is the tone, the intensely ~~casual~~ casual tone in the face of ~~the~~ ~~the~~ the attempted suicide the poem is actually about. ~~The poem~~ Blackburn has the doctor and narrator agree the 'night was damp', ~~focus~~ puts focus on a 'shoe-lace [that] was untied' and the overall use of plain language that seems to hint at exhaustion, suggesting that perhaps the avoidance of personal ~~language~~ ~~ang~~ anguish is not so much deliberate as it is just sad, a result of too much. Or perhaps not. Perhaps the tone is ~~a~~ ^{the} result of ~~as~~ Blackburn's own experiences of abuse at the hands of his father and a mentally ill mother that ~~can~~ seep through, into the poem, to imply an emotional distance, ~~as~~ one put up by the narrator to prevent upset for himself. Furthermore, despite the poem being written in first person, there is a startling lack of actual personal thoughts and feelings from the narrator until ~~p~~ arguably, possibly, the final stanza. This lack was a purposeful choice by Blackburn, used to plainly demonstrate

that ~~lack of~~ avoidance of anguish, of emotion. Movement poets were sometimes called the 'Angry Young Men' and perhaps this is because anger was, is, the one emotion men can show without feeling weak or ridiculed - to the point where some men seem to have convinced themselves that ~~that~~ anger isn't an emotion. ~~and~~ In addition, Blackburn shillily implies that the care is there, the narrator is ~~s~~saddened and does feel care. There's just a lack of knowledge as to what to do or say, perhaps a projection of Blackburn into the narrator. One of the more beautiful ways Blackburn does this is with 'blue is for romance'. This line may strike readers as odd because blue is associated with many things, with sadness or royalty, ~~and~~ but not romance. But this is how Blackburn adds that personal touch, implying blue was romance, but only for them. Blue ~~was~~ had romantic significance for them and them alone and the unnecessary reference to it (unnecessary implied by the brackets, implying that it could've been left out but Blackburn

is drawing attention to the fact that he left it in) reveals a level of care, of reverencing, of closeness. It's a telling line and Blackburn succeeds in using it successfully to deliver the desired effect



This was a clear response with the candidate demonstrating good understanding of the poems and of Movement poetry in general. A bit more controlled analysis of the writer's craft, and some more specificity and detail in the analysis of relevant contextual factors, would raise this into Level 4.

Question 25

This was the more popular of the two Larkin questions and invited nuanced thematic engagement. However, some candidates struggled to pin down the concept of “observation” in a focused way. The named poem, 'Lines...', prompted a wide range of responses - some insightful, some distracted by Larkin's tone or perceived creepiness. Better candidates moved beyond superficial comment to see observation as a philosophical act (how Larkin perceives the world). Some very strong responses suggested that Larkin treats poetry itself as a mode of observation - a way to fix the fleeting or to unpick appearances. Top answers avoided biographical overreach and instead focused on the persona Larkin constructs. Some perceptively explored awkwardness, voyeurism, self-awareness, and emotional distance in 'Lines...', linking this to Larkin's typical discomfort with intimacy or nostalgia.

Strong responses placed Larkin within the anti-romantic, observational, and ironic milieu of the Movement. Some explored the history and culture of photography, which enriched interpretations of 'Lines...' and the act of capturing fleeting youth.

Weaker responses fell into shallow biographical referencing of Larkin's personal life, and his collecting of pornography, often tacked on without shaping analysis or linked to tone or form.

Better candidates were alive to Larkin's tonal shifts (irony, sarcasm, tenderness), his use of everyday diction and precise imagery. Examiners noted that Larkin's technical skill was sometimes underexplored, despite being crucial to how he observes and critiques. Some candidates treated observation as simply noticing things, rather than interrogating how or why Larkin observes. A few candidates expressed moral discomfort with Larkin's tone in 'Lines...', labelling it as “creepy” or voyeuristic without critical development. While this can be valid, stronger answers turned discomfort into analysis, e.g. discussing the tension between affection and detachment, idealisation and irony.

Philip Larkin's 'The Less Deceived' (1955), confronts the disillusionment of a post-war Britain face on, favouring ~~truth over~~ empirical truth over false hope, which he did not submit to, despite his observations of many others doing so. Larkin's self-deprecating style, makes observational experience introspective, echoing Adler's notion that 'to be human is to feel inferior', a common thread started in Larkin's childhood. Though Larkin felt himself a social outsider in many ways, his persistent cynical and argumentative tone, synonymous with The Movement, to which he belonged, present tensions between his own feelings of inadequacy and his observations ~~of other people the~~ ~~universes~~ of the futility in social conventions. These tensions can be examined in Larkin's poems 'Lines on a young lady's photograph album' and 'Reasons for Attendance'.



The best responses use the question focus to bring out the tensions and oppositions in the poems, rather than viewing them as fixed entities with one meaning.

Here, the candidate has foregrounded the tensions evident in Larkin's poetry and uses the

question to elicit a strong line of argument. This was developed throughout the response and the candidate received a mark in Level 5.

Larkin presents 'Observation in Lines' as ^{of the girl's part} overwhelming yet satiating, however the speaker progresses beyond these base desires and shifts to a philosophical tone concerning observing the nature of photography; perhaps to highlight his love of photography. The semantic field of gluttony immediately presents observation as fulfilling ~~and~~, the photographs being 'glossy... thick', the speaker 'choking' on such nutritious images'; ~~so~~ this demonstrates how the girl is objectified and dehumanised by the speaker as they observe these photographs as a commodity for him to consume, paradoxically illustrating that ~~if~~ the speaker loses self-control and their ability to accurately observe through viewing the photographs. Furthermore, the speaker shows self-awareness as the anaphora of 'too much confectionery, too rich' indicates that they know the photographs are too sweet for them, yet they're unable to stop themselves as their 'sated eye hungers'. The personification emphasises how their viewing of the photographs leads to a loss of the speaker's inhibitions as they see the girl as ~~an~~ object for consumption, further highlighting the paradoxical nature of observation.



Whilst it can be tempting to bring in lots of biographical detail and assume the speaker is Larkin himself, here the candidate has developed a controlled line of argument by recognising that there is a more fruitful approach to see the speaker as a literary construct. This ensures that the focus remains on the poem and the writer's craft, rather than making dubious assertions and judgements about Larkin the man.



Question 26

Candidates generally engaged confidently with the theme of restriction in Larkin's poetry. Many candidates demonstrated sound understanding of Larkin's poems and ideas, though the balance between thematic and technical analysis varied across scripts. 'Toads' was the most popular second poem. 'Reasons for Attendance' was another strong choice, facilitating nuanced discussions about social expectations and self-denial.

Although considered one of Larkin's less distinguished poems by some examiners, candidates often made intelligent points about its technique and meaning. Candidates analysed well the symbolism of the 'steers' (individual, youthful) and 'cattle' (passive, conformist). The rhyme scheme was linked to the theme of enclosure, and one candidate even identified a palindromic rhyme scheme, impressing the examiner. The line 'purer water / Not here' and the phrase 'muscle-shredding violence' prompted phonetic and semantic analysis, though this varied in depth. Many students connected the poem to Larkin's biographical context and the post-war generational shift, with stronger responses integrating this context into their analysis rather than foregrounding it.

Larkin continues his criticism on human restrictions on freedom in 'wires' by presenting the inevitability of conformity of individuals to what is socially considered right and wrong, reinforcing his lament for the loss of individual autonomy. Larkin creates a generational divide between 'young steers' and the 'old cattle' who 'know they must not stray', the modal verb 'must' suggesting internal obligation and exposing how conformity to social values becomes internalised over time, reflecting Larkin's personal contempt for social norms such as marriage and emotional commitment. Larkin ^{explores} ~~states~~ ^{how} ^{youthful} ~~that~~ ~~the~~ ambition is destroyed as the naive young cows 'blunder up against the wires / whose muscle-shredding violence gives no quarter', the verb 'blunder' suggesting a level of naive foolishness, while the graphic description of the pain enforced by the wires presents Larkin's view on the consequences of

trying to escape typical social norms - displaying the disillusionment in England towards normal standards of polite society, ^{exemplified by groups} such as the 'Teddy Boys' who challenged traditional fashion by dressing flamboyantly. Similarly, the repetition of wires from the end of stanza one and the start of stanza two causes the reader to feel claustrophobic - highlighting the oppressive nature of typical social restrictions, while the enjambment within both stanzas ~~highlights~~ illustrates the internal desire for autonomy. Larkin repeats the superlative in the final line of 'wires', 'electric limits to their widest senses', thus suggesting the inevitability of conformity imposed by harsh social restrictions.



The best responses bring in detailed knowledge of literary and contextual features, without feeling they are foregrounding them too heavily or allowing them to drive the argument.

The candidate here has made cogent comments on the writer's craft and Larkin's use of language, form and structure without feeling they are regurgitating what they have learned in an unqualified and unfocused way. Instead, they are using this sophisticated knowledge to develop an argument, lightly bringing in knowledge of relevant contextual factors as well.

Paper Summary

Section A

The unseen poem 'Cows' worked well as a comparative text for both 'The Lammas Hireling' and 'A Minor Role'. It produced a wide range of responses and candidates, on the whole, responded well to the content. Candidates generally found 'Cows' accessible, especially in the context of maternal care and emotional protection. Many successfully explored the symbolic connections between the mother-daughter and cow-calf relationships, and high-level responses identified the poem's ambiguity and tonal shifts. There was a clear awareness of death, sacrifice, and powerlessness in the face of loss as recurring themes. The naturalistic, conversational tone helped candidates navigate the emotional layers of the poem, and many were able to write confidently about its central concerns.

There were a significant number who misinterpreted lines such as "heads as big as dogs," reading them literally or misidentifying the metaphorical intent. Several candidates struggled to distinguish between the cow, the bullock, and the calf, with some confused about animal identities or reading the animals as extended metaphors for humans, capitalism, or patriarchy. Some responses demonstrated creative but unsupported interpretations, occasionally inventing symbolic readings that detracted from textual analysis.

Examiners praised candidates who recognised shifts in tone, or those who noted how the narrative voice and structure shaped meaning. Interestingly, some candidates wrote more effectively about the unseen poem than the anthology one, which led examiners to question whether familiar poems had been sufficiently revised.

While the unseen was generally approached with confidence, many candidates gave disproportionate attention to one poem - usually the anthology poem - or, conversely, focused more on the unseen. Examiners emphasised the importance of a balanced response, especially given the need to fulfil AO4 (connections across texts). Some candidates delayed comparisons until later in the essay, which tended to weaken cohesion. More successful responses integrated connections throughout, using linking sentences to bridge between texts and to maintain focus on the task.

A few guidelines for candidates based on the experience of this year's examiners:

- Take time to read and understand the unseen poem, and plan your response accordingly. Level 4 responses are those that demonstrate a controlled argument, rather than the quantity of response. Introductions that signal the direction of the response help examiners understand the thinking of candidates.
- The unseen poem is chosen to help bring out nuanced and different readings of the anthology poem, and this can be done through points of comparison and contrast. Don't force points of similarity or put contrived readings on the unseen poem.
- Read the unseen poem closely and carefully, but also read the anthology poem closely and carefully too. Don't rely on pre-prepared responses but look at the focus of the question to guide your analysis and the connections between the poems.
- Engage with the poems in an equal manner, with sustained connections made between

them. Discourse markers such as 'similarly' or 'contrastingly' cannot be a substitute for meaningful comparison.

- Think about the overall meaning, message and impact of a poem before rushing to spot features of the writing. Embrace any difficulties and ambiguities of the unseen poem and use the question focus to help guide your reading of it.
- Titles are important, and it is good to bring this into your response, but they can usually be analysed in a sentence or two and don't need to be the focus of a whole paragraph.
- When writing about structural points use specific examples, rather than making general comments. Enjambement and caesura do different things in different poems, and need to be considered in terms of your exploration of the impact of each poem as a whole.
- A learned essay structure is often limiting in terms of your thinking about the poems, particularly if there is a specific focus on language or structure. It can often lead to comparisons that don't mean anything compared to looking at ideas across the poems as a whole.
- Use terminology carefully and accurately – and remember you are analysing poems. Sometimes in the rush to identify language and structural points, there is no meaningful analysis of the genre of the poem. Analysing how an idea is presented and developed across a whole poem is often more insightful than identifying the type of stanza, or use of caesura for example.
- Don't waste time explaining what terminology means for the examiner; focus on your analysis and the reason why you are making the point.

Section B

Section B continued to be a clear differentiator of candidate ability, with a noticeable gap between thoughtful, text-driven responses and more superficial, rehearsed essays. While there were many articulate, conceptually confident essays, the section also exposed familiar issues with AO2, timing, and overreliance on biographical material. That said, some candidates showed real flair in their handling of poetic texts, especially in relation to Chaucer and the Metaphysical poets, suggesting deep engagement and strong preparation.

The best responses showed sustained focus on the question, moving beyond summary or topic-based answers to offer a critical argument developed through close engagement with language, structure and meaning. These candidates often structured their essays with clarity and maintained a clear line of thought across both texts.

Stronger essays also handled context deftly. Rather than bolting it on, candidates integrated relevant literary, cultural or historical context into their interpretation. These responses avoided biographical trivia (e.g. Keats' family, Byron's reputation) and instead explored movements (e.g. Romanticism), religious thought, or gender politics as they shaped reader response or authorial intention. It is often best to approach context through the text, and not the other way around.

High-level responses did not just mention poetic techniques but explored their effect within the argument. These candidates embedded concise quotations, and were selective with their references, using them to drive interpretation. They also understood that naming a technique is not analysis - they went further to explore how methods contributed to meaning. The best

candidates offered readings that were nuanced, sometimes original, and often flexible. Rather than seeking “the right answer,” these candidates explored ambiguity, competing ideas, and multiple perspectives. Their writing was evaluative in substance, not just in tone.

A few guidelines for candidates based on the experience of this year’s examiners:

- Avoid feature-spotting. Many candidates named features like enjambment, caesura, rhyme scheme, or grammatical word classes (e.g. “powerful verbs”) without offering any exploration of how they shaped meaning. Generalised labels like “aggressive verbs” or “short sentences” were frequent but rarely justified or analysed.
- Don’t overuse biographical context. Examiners noted a widespread tendency to begin essays with irrelevant facts (Keats’ tuberculosis, Shelley’s expulsion from Oxford, Larkin’s personal habits). Examiners also noted candidates appeared to have learned “biographical dumps” and deployed them regardless of the question’s focus. This often interrupted the line of argument and detracted from AO3 and AO1. Teachers might usefully reinforce the idea that what matters is context that shapes or challenges meaning.
- Not answering the question. Candidates often defaulted to familiar topics, particularly with the Romantics questions, writing on topics such as nature, the sublime, or revolution - even when the question did not require it. Some candidates appeared to choose a pre-prepared second poem and attempt to bend it to fit, rather than selecting a poem/extract that responded to the question. This issue often arose when candidates had over-practised comparison, treating Section B as if it demanded AO4 (comparison), which it does not.
- Unbalanced responses. A number of responses were heavily weighted toward the named poem, with only cursory attention to the second. In some cases, this seemed due to poor planning or timing. Where candidates did choose to compare, success varied: fluid interweaving helped, but mechanical comparison or shoehorned similarities often led to muddled thinking.
- Timing issues and incomplete responses. As previously noted, some examiners felt there were noticeably more unfinished or brief responses in Section B than Section A, with some scripts ending abruptly or lacking conclusions altogether. Centres may wish to encourage more time-aware exam planning, particularly with regard to structuring both halves of the response.
- Evaluative Language vs. Evaluative Thinking: Candidates often used phrases like “masterful” or “ingenious” to sound evaluative, but without showing how the writer’s choices supported that judgement. Teachers may wish to revisit what genuine evaluation looks like at A Level: it’s less about superlatives and more about weighing effects, considering alternatives, and judging impact.
- Literal vs. Interpretive Reading: Some candidates treated poems like codes to crack, overly focused on “what it really means” rather than exploring how meaning is created and experienced. This led to functional rather than interpretive readings.
- Poem Title Abbreviations: Candidates struggled with long poem titles (e.g., ‘On this Day I Completed My Thirty-Sixth Year’) - some resorted to unhelpful acronyms. It’s fine to use a few recognisable words from the title (‘On this day...’) for clarity and speed.

Grade boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
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