



# **Examiners' Report**

## **June 2023**

**GCE English Literature 9ET0 03**

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## Introduction

Although we are now in the second year of full-scale public examinations and things are 'back to normal' anyone who works in education is aware that we are still dealing with cohorts of candidates who don't have a shared understanding of what constitutes 'normal'. The A level students this year were, for the vast majority, sitting their first set of public examinations. That the standard has been maintained from the pre-Covid years is a testament to the hard work of centres across the country, but most of all to the candidates themselves, and they should be justifiably proud of what they have achieved. One examiner wrote that the candidates 'deserve congratulations for their fortitude in the face of the disruption to their education from the pandemic'. The vast majority of responses seen were clear and relevant and demonstrated strong personal engagement with the poems. As more than one examiner commented, it makes marking this paper a real pleasure.

There are some aspects of the paper that did not work so well and in most part this can be attributed to the effects of the pandemic and the lack of examination practice. Examiners did notice that in some instances an unequal amount of time was spent on the two questions, resulting in short and occasionally missing Section B responses. There were a few cases of handwriting that was poor and very hard to read, which did make marking the response a challenge. Examiners also commented on some students' lack of paragraphing, which limited coherence to the response and again made it difficult to mark. We can only urge centres to support candidates and take appropriate remedial action or ensure that arrangements are in place for these candidates.

## Section A

The unseen poem, 'Now We Are Things Invisible' was broadly accessible on all levels to candidates. Some students did pick out the relevance of the date of the poem and the subject matter and realise that it was a poem inspired by the pandemic. Nevertheless, it didn't inhibit candidates who didn't pick up on the Covid-related lockdown theme, and it proved as similar in difficulty to previous unseen poems from the exam. More candidates chose the second question and to compare it to 'The Gun' although a good number did choose the first named poem from the anthology and compared it to 'History'. In the main, students compared the poems well, and we would like to remind centres that the best responses are able to find fresh meanings in the anthology poems. There was sometimes a sense that candidates came in with ready-made ideas of the named poems, and a ready-made structure to look for comparisons of language, form and structure. These did less well than the candidates who could compare themes and ideas across the poems and treat them as a whole. Where candidates did zoom in at word-level it sometimes led to decontextualised analysis and misreadings of the unseen poem. Centres should remind candidates to spend time reading and understanding the unseen poem before beginning to write their response.

Weaker responses took language too literally. For example, claiming that the homeless were dirty or that the park was full of dangerous people. The best responses could see the satirical nature of the poem; that the writer did not see the park as 'inessential' at all, but a place of safety, comfort and beauty. Better candidates were able to probe the tone of the poetic voice and analyse the ambiguity of the imagery. The poet's use of symbolism encouraged candidates to engage with nuances and move beyond surface-level meaning.

There is a tendency for some candidates to identify poetic techniques (such as the ubiquitous asyndetic listing, enjambment, caesura, and rhyme scheme) as if these in and of themselves convey meaning. There is a need for candidates to explain clearly why these techniques are significant and to consider whether or not they actually matter in terms of shaping meaning. A number of examiners also commented that candidates confused oxymoron and juxtaposition. It would be worth centres reviewing the various forms of contrast and clarifying misconceptions as this will help deepen the analysis of their candidates.

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

- Embrace ambiguity and difficulty in poems, particularly the unseen poem, and analyse if an image or phrase is unclear to you. Better answers always probe the text rather than rush to judgement on what something means.
- Think about the themes, messages and overall impact and effect of a poem before rushing to analyse specific words or structural points.
- Focus on key imagery in the poems and how this fits in with overall ideas and messages.
- When writing about structural points use specific examples, rather than making general comments. Enjambment 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.
- There is time in the exam to allow for reading and analysis of the unseen poem and planning a response. This is rarely wasted. A clear introduction which indicates a sense of direction for your response and a sense of overview of the poems will help the examiner understand where you are taking them. Higher level responses are 'controlled' and 'critical'.
- Do remember to read the question carefully. This forms part of your critical response to the poems and you will be limited if you don't answer the question and only make vague points. The purpose of the unseen poetry comparison is to draw out new ideas and insights into the anthology poems. Use what you have learned and been taught, but be alive to new ideas and readings of the anthology poems.

- 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 fricative alliteration or anaphora, for example.

## Section B

The questions on the anthology poems followed the pattern and standard set in previous, presenting students with similar levels of challenge in response. All questions appeared accessible, with a full range of responses seen across the ability range on all texts. Centres are reminded that AO4 is not assessed on this section and, while comparison might well be a natural feature of a controlled and critical argument, candidates are encouraged to put their focus on their analysis of the poems, rather than on comparisons. Contextual factors are assessed in this section, and whilst some poems and poets do encourage a level of biographical detail, this is unlikely to ever be as relevant and useful as literary context, or socio-cultural factors. This should always be interweaved into the response and related to the text of the poems. Some examiners did note that they often felt like they were reading history essays, rather than literature responses. Students should also be wary of making blanket statements, such as about what Romantic poets thought – as there is a wide difference in the beliefs of Blake and Shelley, for example. The best responses always used contextual factors as a way into discussing the relevant aspects of the poems.

Chaucer, the Romantic collection, Keats and Rossetti were again the most popular choices, with Donne and Larkin following behind. There were reasonable numbers of responses on the Metaphysical poets, Eliot, the Victorian and the Modernist collections. There were only a few entries on The Movement anthology and sadly no responses were seen on Medieval poetic drama.

Examiners noted that, as with the Section A responses, better candidates looked at the themes of the poem and explored these, rather than a discrete analysis of language, form and structure. Students can lose the essence of the poems where there is so much focus on listing and short sentences, for instance. There was also a sense that some students were determined to write on poems they knew and liked from the collections, regardless of the questions. Centres are reminded to prepare students for all poems and any range of question that may be posed.

Higher level responses were able to choose a second poem, or extract of equivalent length, that was pertinent to the question and allowed for a range of discussion of poetic craft. As in Section A, confidence in analysis of ambiguity and nuance is likely to reveal discriminating understanding and critical evaluation, rather than blanket assertions of what poems mean and what poets meant by writing them and how readers interpreted them.

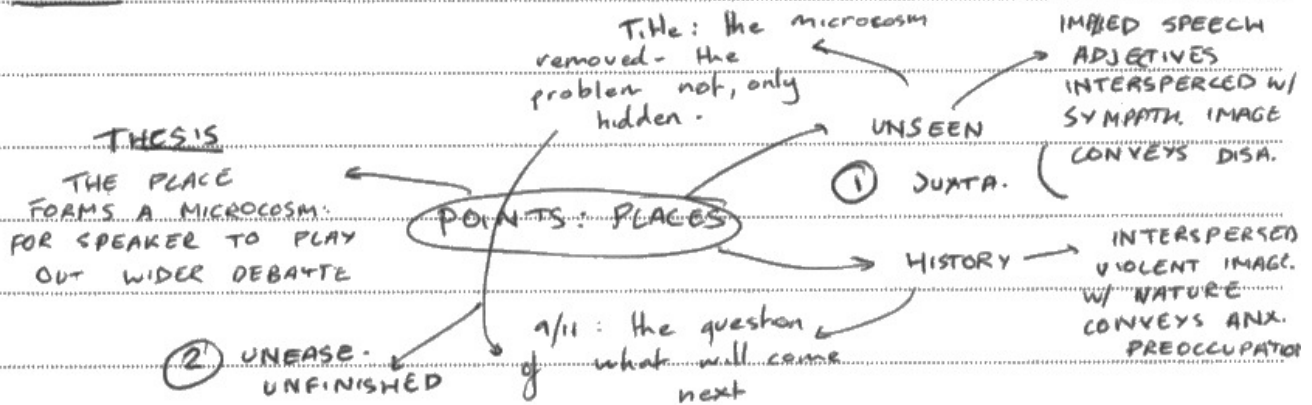
## Question 1

The pairing of the Capildeo poem with the Burnside poem, 'History', offered a lot of opportunities for pertinent comparison and insightful commentary. Some candidates picked up on the setting of the unseen poem being the Covid-19 lockdown, and were then able to make nice links with external events on the individual locales of the poems – the macro to the micro. Nevertheless, candidates who did not make the link with lockdown still wrote well on the unseen poem, and many picked up on the sarcasm / irony in the labelling of the park as 'inessential'. A number of candidates were able to make relevant comments on the form and structure of the poems: the single stanza block of the unseen poem resembling an official announcement; the untethered lines of the Burnside poem resembling the tide.

The breadth of the question on 'thoughts and feelings evoked by places' gave candidates a lot of scope to choose their own interpretation and pathway through the question, and there were some very thoughtful connections drawn between the ability of places to exist vividly within the speakers' minds despite their physical distance from the locations. More successful approaches embedded analysis of structure and form into their overall argument and higher-level responses were able to comment thoughtfully on the contrast between the brief interludes of iambic pentameter and the use of free verse and spacing of the lines on the page in 'History'. Some less successful responses became overly focused on discussing the context of 9/11 for Burnside's poem at the expense of fully developing their analysis. Whilst the setting of the Burnside poem in September 2001 does make connection with the 9/11 attacks, some candidates put so much focus on this contextual element that they missed the opportunity to explore other possibilities and make connections to the unseen poem.

Many students identified a concern in both poems for the natural world, and the importance of having access to the natural world as a source of solace and/or sanctuary in times of crisis. This argument was often connected to contemporary fears and anxieties around the potentially catastrophic consequences of technological advancement in relation to shifting social interactions from real life to the virtual as well as to climate crisis and the destruction of the environment. Slightly less successful responses reduced this to a way of deciding what was classed as positive or negative in each poem. Confusion then clustered around readings of the much-discussed lines: 'Cigs, wasteful pansies, gratuitous / marigolds, dogs running like flames' and 'The sky is roof only to birds / and drones' in 'Now We Are Things Invisible' which required a more nuanced interpretation.

## PLAN



## ESSAY

Both 'History' and 'Now We Are Things Invisible' are poems which present natural places as microcosms of wider societal issues, creating analogical stages on which the respective speakers can play out their thoughts and feelings with reference to a localised, tangible example. As such, the authors in both cases allow the reader to appreciate the safety which nature provides, but likewise the fear threat of its removal evokes.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This candidate has spent time thinking about their response and planning their answer before beginning to write. This was time well used as a clear direction of travel is indicated in the introductory paragraph. The candidate went on to produce a level 5 response.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

Spend time planning your answer and coming up with your 'thesis' statement. This will help direct your response. Use key words from the question in your introduction to ensure you produce a focused and controlled response.

more than a mere disdain<sup>u</sup> for the poem. In the ~~line~~ phrase 'The sky is not only to ~~the~~ birds', the author is associating the closure of the poem with a wider ~~idea~~ comment on freedom; the 'birds' connote freedom, which is juxtaposed by the entrapment ~~of~~ implied by 'roof', and thus this phrase becomes a perversion of the ~~concept that the very colloquial phrase 'the sky is the limit'~~. Thus, the narrator suggests that the closure

of a poem is an extended metaphor to comment on the wider loss of freedom in society today.

Similarly, in history, Burnside uses the physical to allude to the theoretical through continued contrast between the ~~poem~~ setting and ~~the~~ the narrator's internal monologue. One instance of this is in the juxtaposition between the thought that 'we are confined by property' yet 'retuned' to gravity and light. This suggests that physical settings of property confine mankind, yet we still have a connection to a greater purpose through the intangible properties of 'gravity and light', which contrast the ~~concrete~~ presence of property as they are not visible to the naked eye. Further, 'the shapes we find in water' is suggestive of the unknown, as water is ~~known~~ prone to distortion of images and is ever-changing. This fluidity is ~~thus~~ therefore mimetic of the narrator's internal dialogue that considers ~~large~~ issues beyond human comprehension. Therefore, it is clear that both authors use places to spark inspiration for considerations of more philosophical concepts such as freedom and ~~inner~~ concepts beyond human comprehension.



This candidate has been prepared well for the anthology poem 'History' and has used this knowledge to guide their reading of the unseen poem into a controlled and discriminating argument with regard to freedom.



Use your knowledge of the anthology poems to help guide your reading of the unseen poem and look for over-arching and thematic connections. Think also about how your reading of the unseen poem can bring out new ideas and insights into the anthology poem as well.

Capides provoke - despite the continuous loss of mentioned places and moments - a feeling of contentment. The poem may be "closed", however "memory recycles it like a scroll", a beautifully written line which emphasises the feeling of control in the poem. The narrator is calm and composed as the knowledge ~~that~~ appear that physical absence is not absence at all. This is different in Burmides poem, we get the sense as a reader that the narrator is not at peace with the idea of a loss of environment. In fact their "dizzy with fear" implies that mentally, "losing ... forests, estuaries" is depriving and almost physically draining. Therefore, although the parallel can be drawn of the concept that both poems evoke feelings in regards to the ~~dis~~ possible (or absolute) disappearance of places, Capides provoke a positive mood whereas Burmides provoke distress and anxiety."



This candidate has thought carefully about points of difference in the poems and has used embedded examples to explore how these differences reveal meanings in the poems.



Comparisons of the poems also make you look for points of difference as well as points of similarity. Take time to reflect on the differences and what they tell you about the overall themes and meanings of the poems, rather than just simply listing how they are different.

To conclude, both Burghside and Capildeo emphasise  
the specificity of our thoughts and  
feelings as produced by equally specific  
localities of natural life are at constant threat  
& being subdued by the domestication,

practices of modern life. Even where the  
most mundane of items, even an "essential  
part" to "ornamental carp" seem to  
have no purpose, they are actually  
deeply ingrained in terms of our slow  
collective enjoyment as both speakers  
reject the isolationism of individual  
experience in an affirmation that human  
life at its heart, must be shared.



This candidate has kept a controlled argument throughout their response and has finished with a strong conclusion, which maintains their embedded connection to the two poems.



A controlled and discriminating argument will lead to a strong conclusion that will reference both poems. This is much more easily achieved when candidates take time to plan their responses. Successful candidates will consider a thesis statement that leads to a conclusion as to the overall impact of the meanings and messages of the two poems.

## Question 2

This was the more popular of the two questions on the unseen poem, and it was clear that centres had prepared candidates well for discussions of 'The Gun'. The theme of 'transformations' lent itself to a real range of responses: the lower-level responses tended towards narrating any transformations they could find in the poems without a clear argument; higher-level responses were sensitive to the transformations in the form and features of the poems as well as in the content. Better candidates were able to explore the idea that the gun in Feaver's poem is not necessarily a negative, but may be seen as a positive source of transformation as well. The repetition of 'the inessential park is closed' and the parallel of the first and fifth stanzas of 'The Gun' were frequently observed: higher-level responses successfully used this towards a larger argument.

While nearly all candidates were able to engage purposefully with the transformations of the domestic space and the speaker's relationships with her partner and with the gun itself in the Feaver's poem, some students found it more difficult to comment clearly and meaningfully on different types of transformations in the unseen poem and to make purposeful connections. More confident responses considered, for example, mental transformations as well as physical, or the transformations of safe and mundane environments into more sinister spaces. Man's effect on nature, transformations of individuals, households and communities, transformations in perspective, and gendered representations of transformation were ideas frequently discussed. There were also some interesting connections drawn between the endings of the two poems in more nuanced responses, considering the transformation of the park in the speaker's memory and the symbolism of the 'King of Death' in Feaver's poem.

There were frequent discussions of the significance of the use of caesura and enjambement. However, the identification of these poetic techniques was often co-opted into making assertions about their meaning that required more supporting evidence. Although the discussion of these and other poetic terms were usually accurate they were not always integrated into a convincing interpretation of how meaning is shaped in a poem. On this point, it would be useful for candidates to indicate line breaks when using more than one line of poetry as textual evidence for their discussion of these poetic techniques. Better responses included line break distinctions as an integral part of their evidence.

Firstly, the two poems are directly contrasted through the extent of the transformation, whether it is one of loss or gain. Capildeo presents the opening line of the poem with a sense of blessedness stating 'the essential part is closed.' The end stopped line at the beginning of the poem conveys a sense of hopelessness, the transformation has already happened therefore emphasizing its immediate finality. The statement comes across as

almost abrupt and authoritative, the transformation seems to have been imposed and not welcomed. Similarly, Feaver used an isolated sentence to begin her poem. The line 'Bringing a gun into a house changes it.' is similarly end stopped yet hints at further transformation. The words 'closed' and 'changes' directly contrast each other, establishing the extent of which these transformations are different. Capildeo makes use



This is a good example of a candidate who has developed an overall thesis and idea of the theme of transformations in the poems and is looking at how these are presented in the opening lines of the poems. Because they have considered the overall presentation of transformation, these points are pertinent and suggest a strong comparative response. Here, the candidate has looked at the end-stopped opening lines, but made their comparison with reference to their wider ideas about the poems.



When making points about structure, ensure this is specific and evidenced, and links to wider ideas about the poems, rather than just commenting on the use of full stops or short sentences.

with the narrator of 'Now we are things invisible' <sup>'adopts'</sup> adopting a wistful, reflective tone throughout <sup>reminiscing</sup> ~~reminiscing~~ upon the important ~~po~~ role the park played within society and commenting upon its absence where now the 'sky is not for only birds and drones'. Despite this apparent wistful tone, the narrator perhaps embraces the imperfections of the park using irony to <sup>through</sup> the repetition of words beginning with 'in' <sup>through 'inward', 'indoor' and 'invention'</sup> including ~~the~~ <sup>(invisible)</sup> part of the title to highlight the human need for the outside as a means of escapism which he achieves through the abundant natural imagery seen throughout the poem. <sup>Surprisingly, the narrator &</sup> ~~when he~~ mentions 'wasteful passies'.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This candidate has engaged well with the unseen poem, and has noticed the tone of the speaker and made insightful observation on the repetition of 'in' words in relation to the whole poem.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

Consider the tone of the speaker of the poem and how this reflects overall meanings of the poem. Always look to make points that consider the whole poem rather than focusing in on single words or images decontextualised from the rest of the poem.

comical piece. However Cyprien creates a sense of the fadness and a excitement with the juxtaposing simile 'dogs that running like flames', evoking ideas that this poem is capturing and contains such energy that could be likened to sparks, electrifying and inspiring its ~~without~~ ~~inspiration~~, thus forcing the reader to search for joy and excitement in their personal narrative. This dichotomy of joy



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

The candidate has identified the image of 'dogs running like flames' and tried to unpick the meanings of this simile in relation to their overall argument.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

Always think about the imagery contained in a simile or metaphor and why the poet, in this instance, has decided to compare dogs to flames. However, be careful of using phrases such as 'juxtaposing simile' or 'forcing the reader' without fully explaining or developing your point. This was a good response that achieved a level 4, but with some more thought and control in the development of the argument this could have achieved higher.

## Question 5

Chaucer remains a popular choice and it is pleasing to see candidates engaging well with the 'Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale' as it is clear they enjoy writing about the character. However, some candidates did not always choose a second passage or mentioned one in their introduction without referring to it. Whilst it is permissible, and indeed natural, for candidates to refer to the whole prologue and tale, the focus of the response must include two extracts of similar length. Examiners noted that candidates who made this clear in their introduction were likely to have a stronger control to their argument and achieve the higher marks.

The concept of the war between the sexes proved one that was highly engaging for candidates. Examiners commented on how well many responses dealt with the ways in which Chaucer delineates the war between the sexes and there was some very effective use of contextual material both from the contexts provided in the text itself (e.g. the biblical references) and beyond. Indeed, it was noted how the level of contextual information distinguished the level of response. Higher-level candidates were specific in their use of, for example, misogynistic literary traditions (Theophrastus, Jerome, St Paul) where others were more general in their reference to the inferior status of women. One examiner noted that better responses were able to discuss how Chaucer used the Wife to challenge societal norms, often referring to feminist theory; and top level responses were able to consider the impact of the presentation of the Wife as being a man's construct. Another examiner also noted that better responses considered the possible ambiguities in Chaucer's presentation and showed more thought about his audience.

Another discriminating factor was the ability to analyse the poetic form of the Tale beyond the general use of iambic pentameter and rhyming couplets.

It is an ongoing, contemporary debate<sup>amongst scholars</sup> whether 'the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale' is a 'confessio', morality poem, or an autobiography of sorts (though the term was not yet invented in Chaucer's time); the wife can be seen to embody a somewhat revolutionary standpoint and has been read by some as one of the first ~~feminist~~<sup>feminist</sup> figures' in her stark argument against the patriarchy in the 'war of the sexes', and by others as a misogynist nightmare, acting as a satirised vision of the sort of wife the medieval audience would not want, for humankind's sake - Horatian satire.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This is a good example of a level 5 candidate who deals with the ambiguities of the character of the Wife and is open to multiple readings to help probe the text in more detail.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

Consider the different ways the Wife can be interpreted as a way to develop an argument that contains the nuance and subtleties of the writer.

Within the poem, Chaucer continually reiterates the idea of what women most desire, choosing the character of Alisoun to express clearly and loudly that women desire sovereignty over their husbands. Throughout both her prologue and tale, the Wife of Bath continues to emphasise the importance of female sovereignty by explaining how she gained control over her 5 husbands, even if it was done with force - as ~~it~~ was the case with her fifth husband, Jankyn. Alisoun explains from lines 788 - 828 about her successful altercation with Jankyn in which she claimed "soverainete" over him through physical violence. "I with my fest so took him on the cheke," describes how Alisoun became so fed up of hearing from the same book daily, that she took her anger out physically on the man giving her grief for simply being a woman. By saying that she "took him on the cheke", Alisoun shows clearly, that

she ~~refused~~ refuses to be belittled and attacked in any way by a man. Hitting him on the cheek is an obvious sign of dominance and a completely unexpected ~~so~~ power shift to a Medieval reader, who may potentially be furious with Alisoun's actions. At the time Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury*



This candidate clearly knows the text well and has a good understanding of the passage but is mostly just explaining the narrative and making quite general surface statements.



Avoid describing readers as being 'furious' or 'shocked'. Instead, interrogate the text in more depth and allow your analysis to look more specifically at the language used by Chaucer, rather than just explaining the action and making general statements about the reader response.

Firstly, Chaucer uses the Wife's deceptive nature to

show how she attempts to gain full maistrie over her husbands. This can be seen in her merchant like nature, particularly the trader aspects, as she is willing to trade her "wores away for a man's 'chest'". This links to the medieval rise in the merchant class, as traders ~~and~~ would be looking to spread their goods for something in return. The Wife argues similarly by using her first three husbands, who were "goode men, riche, and olde", and thus were ~~ad~~ easy to gain maistrie over, as a symbol of her gaining her power over men. This deceptive nature can also be seen during her and Jenkin's fight, where she is struck by him ~~and~~ she plays dead, saying "O, hastow slain me". The idea of "slain" is important, as ~~she never~~ this could mean murderously or sexually, linking back to her treacherous manner. The ~~repetition~~ repetition of "wyf" and "lyf" also signifies the ~~level~~ level of control she has over Jenkin now, as he pronounces his full loyalty to her, giving her control over his books, which were highly expensive in the 1300s, especially Theophrastus' Golden Book of Marriage, thus showing the war between the sexes is in the Wife's favour as she can use her sexuality to deceive her husbands and take their money and land.



This candidate demonstrates a strong understanding of the Tale and is able to weave analysis of language and context into their overall point and analysis of the Wife and the battle of the sexes.



Try to weave context into your answer and allow these factors to support and develop your point by making sure they are closely linked to the text and the evidence you have used.

## Question 6

This was slightly less popular in terms of the Chaucer questions, but there were a number of good responses seen. Many candidates were able to reflect on the narrative voice of the Wife, the use of interruption and the contemporary reception of the tale with its Arthurian romance incorporating the widespread theme of the 'loathly lady'. As with all Chaucer responses, the choice of second extract and the ability to interweave context proved to be the discriminating factor in the responses. Likewise, an ability to be nuanced in approach to the character and to the reader response, rather than general and concrete, also produced more interesting answers.

society. In her mercantile status (an up-coming class at the time), her anti-fraternal beliefs and rowdy, rambling storytelling, ~~the~~ Wife Chaucer, through the wife, capitalises on England in a period of reversion. The wife draws people in, in lines 163-173 and 379-402, the wife draws in ~~the~~ the listener through her dialect, allowing Chaucer to speak conversation about his real-life concerns.

At line 163, we are immediately reminded of the frame narrative of the Canterbury Tales. Modelled on the ~~Boccaccio~~ Decamerone by Giovanni Boccaccio, it involves a group of pilgrims meeting at a tavern to go on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Sir Thomas à Becket. Underneath the religious pretence however, there is drinking, immoral conduct

and resource storytelling to pass the time. The interruption of the ~~par~~ Pardoner is a key example. 'Now dame, quod he, by God and by Seint John'. While the Wife chooses elsewhere to speak on behalf of her husband, ~~she~~ not using speech makes the Pardoner is given such a liberty. His ~~speech~~ direct speech reminds of the oral nature of the text; not only is the frame narrative changed this way, it would likely have been told out loud, also; literacy was very low at the time. So, the change in narrative voice serves to provide a point of interest from the Wife's rambling narrative, to keep the reader attentive for the questions he plans to ask in ~~said~~ narrative.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

There is a lot of contextual information here, but it is directed back to the question and to the text, and demonstrates a good understanding by the candidate of the character of the Wife and how the Canterbury Tales as a whole were received at the time. Occasionally this candidate did focus too much on AO3 at the expense of looking more closely at the text, but this was still a solid level 4 response.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

Signal clearly to the examiner your choice of second extract, as this candidate does at the end of the paragraph. Make sure that all contextual points are relevant to the question and the focus of your response – and ideally use specific textual references to support these points.

## Question 7

This question provided lots of possibilities for candidates to approach the named poem and to choose a second poem from the collection. Candidates were able to consider Herbert's restrained and troubled response alongside other more conventional views of pleasure. Generally speaking, with Metaphysical poetry, we do see a good range of responses that are able to deal with the rich symbolism and imagery of the poems in the collection.

Q7) The metaphysical poets

• The collar by George Herbert + Batter My Heart -  
Donne

Both Herbert and Donne explore pleasure in a plethora of ways. The religious tone of both poems present both the painful absence of pleasure and pleasure being withheld while simultaneously exploring the greatness of divine pleasure given only by the New Testament God.

The absence of pleasure is forged in Herbert's 'The collar' almost immediately. ~~As rather than~~ This is seen instantly through the title of the metaphysical poem as Herbert wittily uses a double entendre. The collar alludes to the white piece of fabric worn by priests and clergymen, however there is also here an allusion to one of the four

medieval humours, namely cholera, which is associated with extreme ~~bad~~ anger and rage. There is an intentional juxtaposition on Herbert's part as rather than basking in the pleasures that priesthood should bring, there is instead a close affiliation with discontent and rage within the title. Herbert's poem



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This is a confident beginning to a response that achieved a level 5. The candidate is able to consider a number of different ideas of pleasure, and link this to contextual factors, whilst keeping a close eye on the text.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

Always consider more than one reading of a text and link this closely to the question focus. Consider how contextual factors can support and illuminate the point you are making, and weave these into your argument.

Pleasure is presented similarly by both poets as necessary and crucial in terms of contentment, and survival, to a certain extent. Herbert emphasise

the importance of material pleasures in life by use of a desperate tone in relation to gaining these pleasures, with the use of consonance as, 'All blasted? All wasted?' ~~emphasises~~ to support this, creating a harsh sound in the poem, as if he is being punished for not having access to the pleasures that religion holds from him. The use of rhetorical questions near the start of the poem also emphasise the desperate need for <sup>these</sup> pleasures, making it seem as if they are necessary for the speaker's survival, with, 'what? shall I ever sigh and pine? ... shall I be still in suit?' This dramatic monologue is continuously structured with mentions of the pleasures the speaker desires, 'cardial fruit,' 'wine,' and, 'corn,' ~~and demonstrates the how much freedom~~ setting in place ~~the~~ the notion of the importance of pleasure, since the speaker feels miserable without them, with the negative imagery of a skull, 'call in thy death's head there,' symbolising the extent to which he feels that pleasures are perhaps needed for survival.



This candidate is successfully approaching the poem by keeping a firm focus on both the question and the poem. All points made are supported with evidence from the text, and literary analysis considers the presentation of pleasure across the poem as a whole.



Consider a range of poetic techniques when analysing the writer's craft – and focus your analysis on the poem as a whole and to the focus of the question.

## Question 8

Donne was the more popular choice of the two questions, and there were a lot of highly engaged responses to the named poem and the ways in which persuasion is used. Occasionally, candidates do refer too much to Donne's biographical context and his rakish youth. Whilst this is of interest, it does not always develop analysis as much as focusing on the rich imagery of the Metaphysical poets. A few candidates were able to include notions of the readership of the poems, and how the writing of the poems was a purely private activity for some.

Both poems open with an imperative to immediately command both the reader's and recipient's attention: 'The Flea' opens with its declarative line: 'Mark but this flea'; and with this opening, the tone of the poem is established, albeit deceptively. Although 'The Flea' does take the form of a syllogism, the content of its argument remains absurd. The speaker, in a ridiculous attempt, tries to convince the passive female listener into engaging in sex with him on the grounds that their bodily fluids already mixed within the creature itself. The 'A Validation of Weeping' too, establishes this imperative, but in this case the tone remains fixed and the argument markedly sincere. The speaker attempts (instead of cajoling into sex) the listener of the sincerity of and value of his love. Rather than the more abrupt and abrasive 'Mark but this flea', the opening of 'A Validation of Weeping' is decidedly more soft and authentic, instead taking the form of a request with ~~Let me to~~ 'Let me pour forth'. We see this contrast in the ways of which each speaker undergoes their form of persuasion. The speaker in 'The Flea' with his petulant, incessant and pedantic arguments and the better sense of equality that shrouds the relationship in 'A Validation of Weeping'.



This candidate has made a good connection between the use of language, the tone of the speaker, and how this fits into overall ideas of persuasion. This interconnected approach suggests a level of control that was reflected in the rest of the response which received a level 4.



Better responses consider a range of factors when answering the question. The nature of the speaker of the poem, and the tone of their diction, can be a rich vein of analysis for candidates.

## Question 9

Examiners noted that centres teach Donne's poetry well and that the responses seen demonstrated a good understanding of form, structure and contextual factors that all helped to develop candidates' responses and arguments. For this question, occasionally examiners noted where the key word of 'combine' was missed by candidates, who then only focused on learning or devotion. The key was to look at this combination and draw out the nuance of both the question and the poems, and the possible conflict this caused.

In 'Hymn to God my God, in my sickness,' Donne's combining of learning and devotion not only highlights his own intellect, but proves how learning can strengthen one's devotion. The 'South-west discovery' he speaks of probably refers to the Strait of Magellan. Yet his use of the word 'strait' (translated from the Latin 'Fretum') ~~also~~ could be a play on words since straits can also be trials or sufferings. Clearly, Donne is quick to highlight his own intelligence here, this pun on words reinforcing the 'Wit' - wonder - exciting vigour' that romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge believed Donne possessed. Furthermore, the speaker here is combining learning with devotion to suggest that, together, they can bring him

salvation. Saying how 'West and East In all flat maps - are one' would foreshadow ~~the~~ a resurrection since the sun sets in the West (symbolising death) but rises in the East. Referencing the physicians and cosmographers from the time, Donne presents his knowledge about the discovery that was happening, but the use of personal pronoun 'my' to draw attention to ~~him~~ <sup>that combines learning + devotion</sup> the speaker's own discovery. The latest contemporary scientific discoveries - the revolution of the earth around the sun, newly found stars and planets, anatomical dissections ~~of~~ of corpses - worried Donne, particularly about the uncertainty of insoluble scientific problems. This concern is illustrated in the poem by the numerous questions and skeptical tone created by these: 'What shall my West hurt me?', 'Is the Pacific Sea my home?' However, the regular stanza length and rhyme scheme would indeed suggest that this learning can still be beneficial if combined with a sense of devotion. His religious imagery highlights his attempts to show

devotion to God, telling the Lord to 'Look'. Such imperative would suggest a confidence in the speaker that his learning has not interfered but strengthened his devotion, even ending by saying this is 'my sermon to mine own'.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

A confident analysis of the combination of learning and devotion, with a number of relevant contextual points interwoven into analysis of language.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

Be careful with your use of paragraphs in the exam. This candidate has made a number of excellent points, but the lack of paragraphs indicates a lack of control compared to the higher level 4 responses.

## Question 10

This was slightly the more popular of the Donne questions, possibly as 'mourning' allowed a clear response. Some examiners noted that stronger responses were able to be more specific about the idea of mourning and the specific ways it was presented or explored in the chosen poems, rather than just discussing sadness in poems. As with many questions in Section B, the choice of second poem is key, and candidates must be aware of all options available to them in the collection and choose the most appropriate one for their argument. With both Donne questions, the better responses looked beyond biographical context to interweave literary and socio-political context into their answers.

The tone of St Lucy's Day however is ~~not~~ less self-critical. Rather Donne presents himself solely as the victim of love in his mourning of his lover. In order to do so, Donne personifies 'Love' and depicts the entity as deliverer of the speaker's mournful state. This dynamic is most acute in the final image of stanza three: '[Love] ruined me, and I am rebegot of absence, darkness, death.' The biblical allusion of creation is emphasised by the scriptural language ~~set~~ 're-begot', however the inversion of creation as an image - compounded in the listing 'absence, darkness, death' - suggests that

Donne's speaker has endured a complete denaturing. More than simple death, which his Christianity would render no more than the end of earthly life, the speaker has actively become an absence - a total lack of life. This motif is carried hence to the end, underscoring the speaker's mourning as a total state of loss.



Whilst this response does include a number of biographical details about Donne, they have focused on the construct of the speaker in the poems, rather than consider it to be purely written from his perspective.



Always remember that poems are constructs and however pertinent biographical details might seem, the most important thing is to focus on the text and analyse what is there, rather than speculate on other matters.

## 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. The poem 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' provided lots of opportunities for candidates to explore notions of the 'power of the creative mind' and elicited some thoughtful and effective analysis. This was paired with a number of poems from the collection, some of which suggested candidates had come prepared to use a set poem regardless of the question. 'The Question' proved particularly popular as a choice of second poem, but not all candidates were able to explore the focus on the idea of the power of the creative mind when discussing this poem.

There were some more successful answers which chose Blake's 'The Tyger' or Keats' 'Ode on Melancholy' or 'Ode to a Nightingale' and these were really reflective about the nuances of how 'the creative mind' was presented in the poems, admitting the limitations as well as the 'power' of creativity. Contextual information sometimes over-relied on the biographies of the poets, though this information could be used to good effect. Negative capability was often discussed, to varying degrees of success — candidates should be sure to explain it carefully and to make it relevant to their argument and to the text.

We did see a number of rubric infringements this year, where candidates who study the Keats collection answered this question instead, using a Keats poem not included in the Romantics cluster. Candidates are reminded that they must select a poem from the prescribed list, and these are listed in the source booklet with clear instructions above the title of the prescribed text.

In both Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and PB Shelley's "The Question", the power of the creative mind is both something to be revered, but also to be wary of. In both poems, the voice eventually finds themselves dissatisfied with having lived in a world of creativity and individualism alone. Having both been written during the ~~romantic~~ revolutionary years of Europe, such dissatisfaction may not be surprising as the birth of the social conscience indicates the beginning of having to work together, rather than living in a ~~total~~ world of total individualism. Moreover, as Marilyn Butler defines Romanticism using the three I's of individualism, intensity and imagination, these two poems encapsulate these to a high degree, leading both to present the power of the creative

mind as one that can be used to create a new world, but can just as easily be squandered in aesthetic pursuits.



This is a confident introductory paragraph that demonstrates a clear understanding of the poems and maintains a focus on the question. Contextual detail is included, but with a clear signal to the examiner of where the argument is going and how this detail will support it. This candidate achieved a level 5 with their response.



The Romantic period featured a huge social uprising across Europe, including in England. When it is appropriate, examiners like to see this commented upon as it shows a wider understanding of the movement and the poets.

Kent's power of his creative mind is undoubtedly demonstrated in his ability to inquire and question about the unknown. Perhaps ~~again~~ utilizing his ideal of negative capability in which Kent did not feel it necessary to have all questions left answered, he begins his poem 'Grecian Urn' with questioning, "What men or gods are these" "Whom maidens love? What maid pursue?" Not only does this bombardment of rhetorical questions highlight his power over his creative mind, but superficially, but the very act of investigating a poet the invited so many questions is a daunting feat to attempt to grasp, furthering Kent's established power of his mind. This is considered further in 'Grecian Urn' when Kent adopts a more personal line of questioning, asking "What little town [...] Is empled at this folk this epoch morn?" While this deliberate use of the present tense emphatically evokes the image of Kent's being enveloped in this ~~Grecian~~ Urn's world, the questioning of the day-to-day simple activities of its inhabitants powerfully illustrates the extent of Kent's power of his creative mind through his ability to think so deeply-into the mundane.



The candidate has included contextual detail of negative capability but dealt with this in a confident manner that demonstrates understanding of the concept and of the poem. The key focus on the question and the power of the creative mind is foregrounded throughout the paragraph – and indeed in the rest of the response, and this was given a level 4 mark.



When including contextual details, such as negative capability, always ensure it is pertinent and relevant to the question and that you have evidence and direct reference to support your points.

## Question 12

This was the most popular Section B question, and innocence proved an interesting focus here. Again, we did see some rubric infringements, where candidates used 'Songs of Experience: Holy Thursday'. Centres are reminded to encourage students to read the question very carefully and ensure they have chosen the correct text.

There were interesting second choices of poem made, including Byron's 'Lines Inscribed upon a Cup Formed from a Skull' and 'So We'll Go no more A Roving'. Other very popular choices were 'Songs of Experience: Holy Thursday', 'The Sick Rose', and 'London'. Candidates who chose another Blake poem for this question, often became quite repetitive in their comments and contextual links, whereas there were some more successful answers which selected Wordsworth's 'Lines written in early spring' or 'Tintern Abbey' as a means of exploring the relationship between nature, humanity and innocence.

Children are displayed as innocent in both 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' and 'Songs of Innocence: Holy Thursday' as both poets believed that children were wise and innocent. Blake's view that children are innocent is displayed by the divine metaphor 'multitudes of lambs' as Blake is clearly comparing the children to Jesus. This displays the innocence of the child as this metaphor of divinity becomes more potent when Blake's own religious views are taken into account as Blake was a devout Christian of the Swedenborg Sect and claimed that he saw visions of Ezekiel and even the 12 apostles in Westminster Abbey. This heightens the magnitude of this metaphor as Blake is comparing the children to God and Jesus as a devout Christian. Furthermore, Blake explicitly describes the children's 'faces' as 'innocent' and the use of the direct use of the adjective innocent epitomises his belief that children are innocent.



The candidate has kept a clear focus on the question of innocence, and analysis of the writer's craft and the introduction of contextual factors maintain this focus.



When including biographical detail, make sure it is relevant and develops the analysis and the argument.

virtue of their holiness and youth. Furthermore, Blake suggests that the innocence of the children is powerful, more so than the religious authority of the adults guiding them. He claims they are 'like a mighty wind' or 'like harmonious thundrings,' with the use of both similes emphasising that despite their physical vulnerability and lived inexperience, the pure innocence of these children is powerful enough to reach heaven, much like how Jesus although a 'lamb' was powerful enough to return to life. Thus, Blake's views that children are closer to God than adults due to their purity of mind become apparent. However, despite the natural godliness of the children, Blake implies that the men taking them to St Paul's are not innocent and in fact morally bankrupt, using the children's innocence as a facade for the Church's corruption. The polysyndetic tricolon



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

There is a clear sense of control to the argument, that the presentation of innocence by Blake is done so in order to display his anti-establishment views, particularly with reference to the Established church. This argument is clearly driven by the poem, though supporting contextual details help to develop the argument. This is from a high level 4 response.

## Question 13

Strong feelings proved a good focus for the question, which allowed candidates to develop sometimes quite individual interpretations of the poems. As long as these are backed up with textual detail this will always be a valid response. Keats is a popular choice of poet and it is clear that candidates are prepared well. However, there is a lot more to say about contextual factors with Keats than to simply focus on biography, such as TB and his relationship with Fanny Brawne. Better responses were able to look at his own standing as a poet, his relationship with his literary peers, and his own feeling towards Shakespeare – alongside a close reading of the text and the relevance of the sonnet form. It was also sometimes noted that candidates skimmed over some of the rich imagery and the sonorous quality of many of his poems.

push and intensified, effusive excitement. The luxurious semantic of 'golden-tongued, serene, Queen, fair...' intensifies the abstract feeling of Romance, perhaps linking to his 1818 relationship with Fanny Brawne. This hyperbolic Romance, possibly becomes too good to be true, Keats, in 1820, feeling constrained and that his love was limiting his poetic abilities. The sonnet's synaesthetic ~~and~~ undertones through the gustatory 'tongued', ~~a~~ auditory 'melodizing', and visual 'Siren' and 'Queen', highlights how through the overstimulation of his feelings towards the idolised Shakespeare, the individual experience of consummation in his favourite play, has transgressed the original effect



The candidate has kept a close eye on the text and the focus on the question of 'strong feelings'. The speculative allusion to Fanny Brawne does not really add anything to the analysis here and the candidate would be advised to ground analysis more closely to the poem.



Keats' biographical detail does not always add much to responses. Candidates are better off looking at the Romantic movement as a whole, and removing speculation from their analysis.

## Question 14

Another popular question for Keats, with more than one examiner commenting on how this is their favourite Keats poem and how delighted they were with how well students respond to it. It should be noted that we did see a few rubric infringements this year, with candidates answering on this question with a poem from the Romantics collection, such as Shelley. As with question 11, we do remind centres that candidates must answer questions only from their prescribed list – all of which is clearly indicated on the question paper.

Examiners noted that the question was quite subjective in its wording, which suited some candidates very well as they were able to develop their own thesis on the 'power of poetry'. There was some confident engagement with 'Ode to a Nightingale', particularly where candidates considered both the escapism which the imagination could provide and the limitations of poetry to provide more than a fleeting respite from the reality of suffering and mortality. Whilst some biographical detail did add to arguments, such as placing the poem within the other odes, there was also the reliance on facts about Keats' life that did not always enhance responses and often strayed too far from the text.

Firstly, within both poems Keats captures how poetry can explore the wonders of the world, allowing the imagination to create a beautiful utopian image, creating feelings of bliss within reader and writer. Within 'Chapman's Homer' he explores through the Petrarchean sonnet how poetry captures rich details of the world. There within the ~~first~~ octave there is a semantic field of ~~discovery~~ exploration, suggesting with geographical terms such as 'realms of gold and western islands' linking to the vastness nature of experiences poetry can explore. There is an element of exoticism implemented by these references, suggesting that literature can capture the wonders of the world rather than is limited to certain societies and cultures. The second quatrain has a new semantic field of discovery, linking to how poetry has the ability to answer many questions about the world. Several references to famous explorers throughout the poem further this idea. Keats makes a historical error when referencing 'Cortez', linking two events within American history inaccurately; despite many critics seeing this as a flaw, many saw it to be adequate for Keats to do this. They argued that this error highlights his idea of prioritising emotional truth within poetry rather than facts and reason, which links to the idea of negative capability, also explored in 'Ode to a



The candidate has made a good choice of second poem and has developed a strong statement of how the power of poetry is shown by Keats in the poems. There is a sense of evaluation when it comes to the 'historical error' Keats has made, and this is dealt with confidently by the candidate.



Bringing in your wider reading and understanding of the poems can be helpful when developing your argument and demonstrating your understanding of the literary context. However, this should always support your points and your thinking about the poems, rather than replace it.

In "ode to a nightingale", Keats presents the restorative power of poetry to act as a tool for his imagination and a means of escape from the pains of living. Both the "dill quinate" and "hemlock" are not powerful enough to transport the speaker from reality where "a dreary rubiness" torments him therefore the speaker yearns "for a draught of vintage" to free him. Keats employs the ode form ~~to~~ to retain a disguised tone, where simultaneously we can talk of his worries and ailments whilst presenting a cure in the "voiceless wings of poetry" where the assurance of "voiceless wings" vocally separates the reader from the heavy massive bonds of the mortal world. Keats ~~to~~ aligns the poetic voice with supernatural "light-winged dryads" and rich Hellenistic imagery to present it as a force unhound by logic and time, able to transcend barriers which his mortal being cannot through the vehicle of poetry. At this period, Keats would have been tormented by the rough, sordid conditions of "Guy's hospital" and his work as a surgeon in which he was confined to the city and hospitals ~~to~~ therefore the only escape available to him in reality was the escape of imagination which poetry allowed him to experience.



This candidate makes a number of points concisely which demonstrates discriminating understanding and a controlled argument. There is reference to the form of the poem, the sound and rhyme of the poem, imagery and some supporting contextual details.



Precise and concise responses are often the best, provided all points are evidenced and supported by the text and form part of your larger argument.

## Question 15

There were a number of choices of second poem, with most candidates choosing poems by the female poets. Stronger candidates were able to explore more nuanced ideas about the complexities of women's lives and experiences, but for many candidates the trap of generalised (and often incorrect) context generally applied proved unavoidable. Centres are to be advised that Victorian womanhood was neither straightforward nor uniform in its nature, and candidates need to be aware of this. There is also a lot more to Elizabeth Barrett Browning than her relationships with her father and with Robert Browning.

Both Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'let the worlds sharpness like a closing knife' and Christina Rossetti's 'Echo', present the role of women to be desperate for love and a sense of belonging. ~~through their femininity~~ Women are also presented to be dissatisfied by violence and promise a happy relationship. This is ~~not~~ <sup>the</sup> relevant to Victorian beliefs at the time that women were <sup>perceived as</sup> 'physically inferior' in comparison to men, but 'morally superior'.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This candidate has presented a number of relevant ideas in the introductory paragraph with regard to the role of women, but the lack of a cohesive thorough argument suggests there is going to be lack of control and clarity when it comes to the overall response.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

Take some time to consider your choice of second poem and your overall thesis. Also, remember that Victorian women are not a homogenous mass, and the best responses will tease out nuances and subtleties of the presentation of women.

## Question 16

Candidates engaged well with the question and found a number of options to use as a second poem, including 'Remember', 'Maud I xxii' and 'Drummer Hodge'. Examiners noted that contextual factors were not always dealt with particularly well, and centres should be reminded that the Victorian era covers a huge number of years of social and literary change, and candidates should avoid writing about a fixed Victorian viewpoint.

The passage of time and the effects of temporal transformation are presented as unwelcome yet inevitable in 'I look into my glass' and 'The darkling thrush' as Hardy in both texts explores not an unwillingness to accept death of any nature and a regret for a life that has passed him as he's aged. The symbol of the thrush in 'The darkling thrush' can be perceived not only as the effect of the industrial revolution and the general damage met in industrialised Britain was incurring of Hardy's beloved countryside locations, but also an insight of the way he views himself as he ages: a songbird whose frame and physicality has grown weaker with age, or was never there at all. His stature of 5 feet is also a significant contextual point in the exploration of both poems, as it affected the other's perception of him, but mostly his own self-perceived masculinity and physical youth was impacted by and his brow height. His solemn loneliness ~~is~~ can be seen to be exacerbated by the passage of time too, ~~the~~ as the reflection that time has provided him makes evident his regrets and reflections upon his own life are apparently despairing in 'I look into my glass'.



This is a confident introduction which suggests a strong knowledge of Hardy and the poems, and has considered the ways that time is presented. There is also a confident use of embedded quotations and contextual factors to help establish a controlled argument.



A focused introduction with embedded quotations helps to ensure a clear focus is kept on the poems.

## Question 17

Rossetti remains a popular choice for candidates and centres, who engage well with her ideas and her poetry. One examiner found these responses the most critical and interesting to read from across the section.

The question on 'self-denial' was generally tackled well, although some candidates did veer off topic to look at 'self-doubt' or being in denial, which led to a much less confident and successful response. The most popular second poem was 'An Apple Gathering', with other choices being 'Twice', 'At Home' and 'Goblin Market.'

Those who considered the two-part structure of 'Memory' in relation to Rossetti's life tended to build a suitable argument. Many looked at Rossetti's religion and how it informed her response to suitors; some, using 'An Apple Gathering', tried to impose an argument related to fertility rather than temptation. Thoughtfully selective use of 'Goblin Market' usually resulted in successful arguments.

Alongside Keats, Rossetti does seem to encourage a reliance on biographical context for some candidates and centres. Examiners did note this sometimes took the form of unnecessary and irrelevant detail about Rossetti's life with no explicit link to the task. Candidates often mention one or more combination of her strong religious beliefs, her rejection of marriage proposals, and her work with 'fallen women'. Often these aspects of Rossetti's life were left as a sufficient explanation of the meaning of the poems. These aspects were then reiterated in different variations in relation to specific lines and phrases without developing the whole into a more nuanced account. The best responses showed an appreciation for the complexities of Rossetti's life and were able to explore how that influenced her work.

In 'Memory', Rossetti highlights how sacred ~~the~~ love ~~idea~~ on this temporary earth can cause an individual to ~~even~~ fall into a spiral of self-denial and abstinence. The speaker places their ~~memory~~ 'blessed memory in a shrine'. The noble noun 'shrine' emphasizes how ~~the~~ the speaker glorifies and, almost, worships her memory. ~~But~~ It can be argued that this ~~contrast~~ undermines their religious devotion as they have placed their memory parallel in Gods' status. The memory's elevated status further suggests that the ~~poet~~ speaker still cherishes ~~their~~ the memory even if it detrimental to their ability to wholly devote themselves to God.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This candidate is confidently probing the idea of self-denial in the poem and ways it can be read. The idea that the speaker's religious devotion might be undermined by the elevation of their memory gets to the heart of the tensions often found in Rossetti's poetry.



Always be prepared to look for different readings and interpretations that will enhance your analysis and develop your argument.

## Question 18

This was a slightly more popular Rossetti question, and the theme of 'guilt' was generally dealt with well, though examiners did note some occasions when this was unsuccessfully shoehorned into debates about grief or regret, or candidates slipped into a more general discussion of sinfulness in 'What would I give'.

Context was usually covered well: most responses linked Rossetti's work to the concept of the 'fallen woman', which offered some interesting analysis. Another concept was the role religion played in Victorian society and Rossetti's life, which was handled best when looking at the poem and the concept of guilt. Better responses managed to explore the emotional complexities of guilt and the nuances of ideas conveyed in the poems with assurance and sensitivity.

*Living in a patriarchal society, guilt was an emotion felt greatly by Victorian women, and this feeling would have been further amplified by Christina Rossetti's devotion to her Anglo-Catholic religion if she ever performed a sin. Rossetti presented expressed this guilt in her poems 'What Would I Give' and 'An Apple Gathering'. In 'An Apple Gathering' the speaker feels guilt for losing her virginity too soon, and in 'What Would I Give?' the speaker feels guilt for their cold-hearted actions and sins.*



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This opening paragraph shows good general understanding of the poetry of Rossetti and the concept of guilt, but also suggest a slightly broad-brush approach which was reflected in the rest of the response and its mark in level 3.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

Try to avoid generalities, such as 'an emotion felt greatly by Victorian women' and instead aim for specific feelings of guilt in the poems.

In both 'What would I give?' and 'An Apple Gathering' by Christina Rossetti, the sentiment of guilt permeates both poems, causing ~~the~~ a melancholic tone to ~~be~~ manifest itself. Although both poems ~~are~~ are ambiguous ~~in~~ in regard to the sin the narrators have done to accumulate this guilt, it is evident that the wrong they have done leads to <sup>to</sup> guilt ~~in~~ a very high degree resulting in segregation and grief.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This is a better example of an opening paragraph that is much more specific in its understanding of guilt and its presentation in the poems.

Moreover, within 'what would I give', Rossetti demonstrates how guilt inflicted by a loss of purity and virtue can lead to a conflicted mental state. Rossetti presents this using an irregular structure, representing the disjointed state the speaker is in due to their guilt. This is powerfully illustrated in the line 'hard and cold and small'. This polyphonic list highlights the inner turmoil of the speaker as it uses guttural sounds of 'hard' and 'cold' to create a harsh tone. The polyphonic list also slows down the pace of the poem, suggesting that the speaker is dwelling on their guilt, reinforced by the almost gothic adjectives creating a lexical field of self-depreciation and a negative tone. This internal dwelling and guilt is reinforced by 'O merry friends go your way'. Here, Rossetti uses caesura to highlight the polarisation between her pre-raphaelite friends and her ostracisation from society. The



The candidate is developing their argument to include how structure develops the feelings brought on by guilt in the speaker. This is linked closely to the language and the question, and this interleaving of analysis is a strength of this response which achieved a high level 4.



When using terminology such as polysyndetic lists or caesura, make sure you are not just feature spotting, and instead this adds to your analysis and your argument.

## Question 19

The Modern Poets is not the most popular collection, even though there are a number of excellent poems and poets featured. Indecision was a good stimulus to thinking about the set poem and worked interestingly when paired with the second choice. The most popular was Frost's 'The Road Not Taken', though 'Snake' was also successfully chosen.

Frost presents indecision as futile through his religious allusions to God in the opening stanza. The ~~speaker~~ first line ~~is~~ holds a traditional rhyme meter and ~~the~~ plays with words in a lyrical way. Frost introduces ~~these~~ idea of God through the ~~possessive~~ <sup>personal</sup> pronouns "Whose woods", "his house" and "his woods hill up with snow". This unnamed man has an ominous presence and shows the speaker feels like a trespasser. It is implied that God is the unnamed man and ~~forgets~~ the

speaker's desire to not be seen is therefore futile.\* Frost often explored traditional themes and values such as religion through unconventional means, which is shown here through the personification here of God. The stanza reaches a tone of acceptance as the speaker resolves to "watch (ing)" his woods fill up with snow". The inevitability and suffocating ideas of ~~that~~ the woods filling up ~~the~~ with snows ~~the~~ the speaker feels predestined to his fate of death and chooses to wait passively. His indecision as to whether he is morally correct in ~~tr~~ metaphorically trespassing is overshadowed by the acknowledgement that we must all die and accept ~~the~~ our fate.



A confident response that demonstrates an understanding of the poem, of the question focus and of the poetry of Robert Frost.



The better responses are always able to refer to the poems as poems, such as through the recognition of rhyme and metre, but always connected to the ideas and language of the poem, and with a focus on the question. Having an evaluative overview of your chosen poet or collection is also a good way to develop a confident response.

## Question 20

There were only a few takers for this question, even though Cummings provides a rich area of study and the focus of contradictions offered a lot of possibilities. Candidates who did answer this question would be advised to remember that Modernism was not a unified movement or concept. There can be a tendency for candidates to rely on rather generalised contexts without a nuanced sense of the different ways in which Modernist writers framed their work, and indeed of different ways in which the Modernist world was shaped. This would allow for a greater depth of analysis across all modernist questions in the paper.

In addition, Cummings uses contradictions as ~~the~~ in the end, humans are the ones who survive and are indomitable.

This is highlighted as 'the single secret will still be man', emphasising the contradictory relationship between nature and humanity, with humanity winning which mimics the increasing mechanising world-taking over. In addition, the final stanza ends by stating that 'the most who die, the more we live'.

Here, this is essentially ~~implying~~ <sup>mirroring</sup> the Darwinism theory of 'survival of the fittest' whereby with more people dying, comes more resources thus helping others to survive, which highlights the contradictory nature of humanity.



This is a clear response and the candidate demonstrates good understanding of the Cummings poem and later their choice of poem. However, the use of context is a little general 'increasing mechanising world' without fully probing how this viewpoint helps develop understanding of the poem and its contradictions.



When making contextual points, link them very closely to the text and make them specific.

## Question 21

Death provided an excellent focus for the poem and for the study of Eliot as a whole, with a number of choices of second poem for candidates. Eliot provides a wealth of opportunity for literary analysis but AO2 was often missed at the expense of generalised contextual points.

of the 'cactus land.' Death within *The Hollow Men* is primarily conveyed as without violence or passion, but caused mostly by lack - the 'stuffed men', resembling the scarecrows, are 'quiet and meaningless', 'empty' or 'empty' death reinforced by the repeated image of a 'paling star.' This barren, inert sense of stagnation is not only reflected by the sparseness of its visual structure and lack of rhyme or commas (the enjambment only really serves to emphasise the ~~blank~~ bluntness of the lines), but also for the inability of the 'hollow men' to have any agency or hope - the repeated fragment of the Lord's Prayer, 'For thine is the kingdom,' seems to suggest an inability to complete ~~that~~ the prayer, or even attempt salvation. Rhapsody, although



Here we can see the candidate has kept a real focus on Eliot's craft with reference to the imagery, the repetition and the lack of punctuation. There is a clear sense that the candidate understands the way Eliot fits into the Modernist genre and how this helps shape meaning in his poems.



Eliot is a poet that provides lots of poetic techniques to analyse. Don't forget the importance of AO2 in this question and ensure you keep a focus on the writer's craft.

## Question 22

The question focus was again very suitable for Eliot, and the best responses linked the form and structure of the poems with poetic techniques and relevant and specific contextual factors. Better responses were also able to consider where Eliot sits in the literary landscape of the Modernist movement.

Contrasting, in Eliot's post-war poem 'What the Thunder said' (The Waste Land), Eliot uses to a newer style of poetry, where he fragments the structure, thoughts and images / allusions displayed to connote to the how WWI devastated faith and the minds of those who lived through this time. Similarly, Eliot uses images to display fragmentary thoughts, however, he uses allusions which he dots around the poem too, to display how the mind of the persona of the poem is disorderly and mundane. Eliot refers to Genesis, where Judas had betrayed Jesus leading to his crucifixion, "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces after the frosty silence on the gardens". The use of this allusion to begin the section along with the bleak use of diction immediately will disorientate the reader with its abrupt introduction. Furthermore, Eliot then ~~completes~~ abandons the



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Examiner Comments

This candidate has focused on the poem when discussing the fragmented style, and not lapsed into general comments on Modernist technique. There is some reference to relevant historical context of the post-war period, explored later on, and to the diction and language of the poem.

## Question 23

This anthology attracted only a handful of entries this summer, with the vast majority answering question 23. Cruelty was a great focus for a question, with Thomas Blackburn's 'Hospital for Defectives' the most popular choice of second poem. The Movement proves a challenging literary movement to contextualise, not least because it is such a loosely framed thing and was never really a defined group, mostly defined by what it is not. One examiner described it as 'a literary reaction rather than a literary movement'. Nevertheless, the poems and the setting of post-war Britain often offer lots of scope that is not always explored.

This can be mirrored to Larkin's life. The last stanza emphasises how the children's cruelty lead to the death of the animal. The metaphor 'but it soon wears off somehow' emphasises how the children's boredom has lead to a cruel act. This again implies how Larkin was 'observable' and judgemental of others around him; he makes fun of humans and their unsatisfaction. The irony of the last line 'mam, we're playing funerals now' emphasises the carelessness of individuals. The juxtaposition of 'playing' and 'funerals' emphasises Larkin's view point of human nature and how cruel humans can be due to fill their own desires. The juxtaposition



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Examiner Comments

This is a relatively clear response, although there are elements where opportunities to explore in more detail are not taken and instead it lapses into description or general comments on Larkin's viewpoint.

## Question 25

Larkin remains a popular choice of poet and it is clear that candidates often embrace the main ideas of his poems well. Some examiners felt that some responses didn't always grasp the different personas Larkin presents in his poems, and that the reliance on biographical detail leads to narrow analysis of both Larkin the poet and the poems themselves. References to his childhood are often quite forced, and don't often add to the analysis. As one examiner put it, it's often not accurate or helpful to link any dissatisfaction in Larkin's poems to his unhappy childhood.

Quite a range of second poems were seen, including 'Spring', 'No Road', 'Going' and, perhaps the most popular, 'Skin'. Most candidates were able to say something about the unusual (for Larkin) upbeat quality of 'Coming' and contrast it with his more usual approach. There were mostly general comments made about 'The Movement', with very few offering any thoughts about how the context of post-war Britain might relate to Larkin's perspective. As always, stronger responses kept a close focus on the text and the structural development of key ideas throughout the poems.

The changing of seasons forces Larkin to remember his childhood, which he describes as "a forgotten boredom" - making clear ~~his~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~pers~~ unhappiness he felt in the past. The act of Larkin considering the past is also present in 'At Grass', the last poem in the collection 'The Less Deceived' in which Larkin - as a detached onlooker - imagines the glory days of a racehorse "fifteen years ago". The tone here is different, he shows contempt for his past yet ~~wonders~~ imagines wonderful events in the pasts of the horses. He considers yet again the theme of change and how, through aging, and the passage of time, a change has undergone the horses much like it has on himself.

He questions whether "memories plague their ears like flies?" in reference to the racehorse's' pasts but applies the same idea of being plagued by memories in 'Coming'. He remembers the "forgotten boredom" of his childhood and the "unusual laughter" of his parents who had a rocky relationship - thus leading to Larkin's own fears of commitment in his adult life.



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Examiner Comments

This candidate has produced a clear, and sometimes controlled response, that looks in detail at the theme of change in the named poem and in their choice of poem 'At Grass'. Occasionally, the candidate lapses into speculation on Larkin's childhood, which doesn't add to the theme of change or to their overall argument.



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Examiner Tip

Keep ideas firmly focused on the question and on the text of the poems, rather than get drawn into speculative comments on Larkin's life which may not add to your own argument.

## Question 26

As with Q25, answers tended to centre on Larkin's biography: there was a temptation for weaker responses not to probe at the idea of 'inner life', but to analyse any element of the poem as reflecting Larkin's 'inner life'. Stronger responses were reflective about the way the inner life was presented by Larkin and were also thoughtful in their discussion of Larkin's misogyny.

A number appeared to have chosen 'Dry Point' in advance of reading the question, so they could write about sexual metaphor. More popular and adaptable was 'No Road'. Responses to the given poem often started confidently by discussing the 'Alice' reference but foundered in the self-mocking depiction of a poet's mind that moves further away from the literal and tangible. Examiners did note that there was often an uncertainty about Larkin's subtle use of half-rhymes with candidates interpreting poems that used such a rhyme scheme as having none and thus developing an account of the freedom of Larkin's thoughts that, while sometimes relevant, was based on a fundamental misreading.

Larkin presents his inner life in 'If My Darling Hired a Gun' through the extended metaphor of the contents of his brain as if it were an explorable (yet notably uninhabitable place), emphasising Larkin's negative sense of

self-worth and characteristic feelings of being an outcast, a common theme within his poems. Tarkenton uses two distinct sections of explanation (expectation and reality) to emphasise the difference between his outward presentation and his sense of self. He thinks 'my darling' - the term of endearment suggesting a close connection - would expect 'mahogany claw-footed sideboards', 'small-printed books' and a 'butler', imagery that conjures a wealthy country house. This could be indicative of his partner's hopes of settling down with him - a hope she 'would not find' in him, due to his lifelong aversion to marriage - or perhaps it could suggest a sense of refinement society expects from a distinguished poet, as his first collection was received positively. However, Tarkenton's true inner life is riddled with diseased imagery like '~~infection~~' 'infected circles', 'delusions', 'sicken', <sup>and</sup> 'the skin of a grave', all of which are suggestive of his decreased sense of self-worth and perceived diversion from what 'his darling' and

under society would expect, left only with the 'incessant mental' of 'technical knowns' and 'meaning and meaning's rebuttal' to characterise him as the poet. His inner life is presented as non-stop chaos, as ~~was~~ suggested by the adjective 'incessant' and negative diction in 'stopping', 'landed' and 'rebuttal'. If, My Darling suggests his inner life to be ~~negative~~ and like a sickness of or 'disease' he cannot escape, which would 'sicken' even those he finds 'darling'.



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Examiner Comments

Although occasionally touching on elements of Larkin's biography, the candidate does this in combination with the question and the text of the poem, which adds to the development of their argument. There is also a confidence in the way they describe the extended metaphor of the brain as being 'explorable (yet notably uninhabitable)' which demonstrates a confident analysis and understanding of the poem.

## **Paper Summary**

This report is illustrated by short extracts from candidates' work. Whilst there is an indication here of the overall assessment of the response it is not possible to show all the evidence for that final mark, which will have taken into account possibly less – or more – successful work elsewhere in the essay. To supplement the extracts here teachers will be able to read complete answers to a selection of questions which will become available in the autumn, accompanied by a commentary.

## **Grade boundaries**

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

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-boundaries.html>

