



GENERAL COMMENTS

There were several outstanding responses to the 2011 Literature examination and many slight and poorly expressed ones. While the majority of students based their response on the passages, many were unable to analyse language or convey ideas with any degree of complexity. Many of the weaker responses offered short essays that comprised a brief introduction outlining the plot of the text, paragraphs looking at each of the excerpts in isolation and finally a brief recapitulation, often repeating much of what was written in the introduction. The work in the weakest responses was characterised by poor language skills and a propensity to retell the 'story' of the text.

High-scoring responses were able to make the interpretation clear from the outset and indicate how the student planned to use the passages to develop this. Such responses often addressed one of the passages immediately or used the introduction to outline the concerns of the text as demonstrated in the passage(s). The following are examples of opening paragraphs that did this effectively.

Katherine Mansfield's short stories expose the reader to characters who are left isolated, alienated and suppressed by the conventions and social pressures that dominate their worlds. For Beryl in 'Prelude', Linda in 'At the Bay' and Edward in 'Sixpence' we see how people may be stifled by the terrible tension that exists between the rich potentialities of life and the simultaneous existence of disappointment and despair.

The world of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' has been defiled by the poisonous sins of the usurping, murdering King Claudius, the 'bloody, bawdy villain'. The unease of Denmark is compounded by the pervasive corruption that flows through the court and infects the entire state, so that madness, pretence and 'seeming' spread throughout the court and beyond.

Blake's poetry is ultimately an examination of social and psychological subjugation, characterised by religious authority, 'mind-forged manacles' and corrupting social 'envy'.

Belikov's plight in passage 1 is symptomatic of the many individuals in Chekhov's short stories who search for fulfilment in life. His attempts at love are ruined by Barbara's 'laughter' which 'marked the end of everything'. He subsequently locks himself away, unable to face the world, but Chekhov demonstrates that these self-imposed restrictions, just as extrinsic shibboleths, destroy the few connections in life that enrich our existence, such as love. In passage 2, the reader observes Startsev's sudden explosion of warmth and love as he gazes into the moonlight and Chekhov demonstrates that a fulfilled life inside a 'coffin' is impossible and that we must accept doubt and uncertainty in order to fully appreciate life.

These examples also demonstrate an ability to include some awareness of the views and values of the text. Not all students were able to offer effective introductions.

Jane Austen's 'Emma' is quite the satirical novel, fluttering with key themes that prove to be significant of the context but can be interpreted and related to that of the present.

The play 'Hamlet' shows themes of madness, revenge, corruption and sin throughout the whole play. It shows how these things make different parts of the play happen.

The Literature examination expects students to understand the text through analysis and exploration of language. The student is expected to be able to convey a sense of engagement that is based on a close textual study. The following examples show students doing this effectively.

This allows us to feel the true pleasure and joy evoked by the vibrant and light-filled descriptions of her eyes, 'greeny blue with little gold points in them' and her hair 'the colour of fresh fallen leaves, brown and red with a glint of yellow'. We see the impressionistic and cinematic quality of Mansfield's writing, as a character's thoughts seize upon the seemingly commonplace and transform this into luminescent and life-filled details; the use of 'glint' truly evoking a joyous celebration of vivacity and the joy Beryl feels as 'at the words her bosom lifted' and 'she took long breaths of delight, half closing her eyes'.

'On the Sea' invites the reader to exult in the duality of the ocean, and shows Keats's appreciation of all experience, whether a 'gentle temper' or 'uproar rude'. The ebb and flow of the rhythm of the poem reflects that of the sea, as the sonnet swells with the 'desolate shores' and breaks upon the hard Ts of 'gluts twice ten thousand caverns' before diffusing itself on the sand with the soothing Ls of 'till the spell'.

The self-castigation evident here is shown in Hamlet's frequent questioning and self-examination. 'Am I a coward?' 'Who does me this?' His utter anguish at his inaction is demonstrated as he calls himself 'dull and muddy –mettled rascal' 'John-a dreams,



unpregnant of my cause' and 'pigeon-livered', his pain compounded by his incremental labelling of Claudius as 'remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain', the frenzied and despairing rhythms building to the painful crescendo 'Oh vengeance'.

The elegiac qualities present in passage 1, 'Estuary', sees Harwood use the personification of natural imagery 'Paddocks rest in the sea's arm' to pay tribute to the role played by the narrator's Grandmother as a mentor and role model.

Hamlet similarly tries to use the language of the revenger to try and convince himself and the audience of a change in his character. Shakespeare uses the almost crude language of the revenger as Hamlet damns Claudius as a 'bloody, bawdy villain', a 'remorseless, treacherous, lecherous kindless villain'. However, the obvious and distinct use of theatrical alliteration, assonance and rhyme are at odds with the rest of the speech and this makes the conventional language of the revenger appear hollow and almost absurd.

The poem is permeated with the imagery of light, wind, water and air - all suggesting the transience of things. The 'wind that crosshatches shallow water' is akin to the ephemeral patterns we trace on life's surface, as the 'paddocks' or life we cultivate 'rest in the sea's arm', as if underpinned by the encroachment of death. The landscape is described in terms of musical notation - 'a crazy stave- wind for a song' which is indicative of the speaker's understanding of the auditory rhythm of life as fleeting and transient. The syllables that 'flow in the tide's pulse' can be seen as a metaphor in which our words rest in the beating heart of time- that which slowly moves away like the tide as death approaches.

The highly sexualized imagery used to describe Victor as he 'collected the instruments of life' to 'infuse a spark' into the 'lifeless thing', reveals Shelley's preoccupation with the way in which Victor's act will destroy the domestic harmony and inter-relationship the female represents. The 'convulsive motion' that jolts the creature into animation can be equated to the climax of an egotism that seeks total autonomy and independence; denying the female's role in a bid to be 'sole' creator and benefactor to a new 'species'. The dream that follows the animation of the monster encapsulates, symbolically, what the 'accomplishment' of Victor's toils really means: the destruction of any reliance on the female and of the domestic harmony this represents. When Elizabeth's lips 'imprinted' with a kiss', become 'livid with the hue of death' this sequence becomes an ominous foreshadowing of what is to come.

The following examples illustrate the difficulties some students experienced in attempting to analyse language in any depth.

Gwen Harwood uses enjambment throughout the poem to make it flow. She does this with all her poems and this is what they do.

'Slate' has a rhyming pattern of abab, the lines are regular and the lay out fits the poem perfectly.

Students should be encouraged to develop their literary skills throughout the year, to expand their vocabulary and to familiarise themselves with literary terms. Students must ensure that they understand the meanings of the words they are using and it is apparent that this is not always the case. Many students are unable to express themselves coherently, and some seem confused by words they have read in literary commentaries or misheard at lectures. The following examples suggest these difficulties.

The reader is transgressed by the concept of complexity of Harwood's ability to picture nature.

Mansfield's fascination in the dichotomy of life is ardent throughout her oeuvre.

The reader is succumbed by the uncanny heroism that pertains to Bonehead.

Euripides suggests a current temporal prolepsis.

'At the Bay' highlights the sufferages of life.

Some words were made up, misspelt or used inappropriately, particularly when attempting to use Greek terminology in *The Bacchae*.

A further problem was the inability to show a detailed or accurate knowledge of the text. Passages were often discussed in isolation without any real acknowledgment of the wider text. There were some serious errors of interpretation, such as the following.

Hamlet's father is thought to have committed suicide.

Toby reluctantly agrees not to take the rifle with him when he and his Mother make their escape.

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Briony writes a novel called 'The trials of Arabella'.

Hannele is anxiously waiting for her husband to come home.

Many students thought that Cecilia and Robbie had survived the war and others confused the two sisters in the first two Mansfield passages. Others are still unsure of the genre of some texts, thinking that *This Boy's Life*, *Stasiland*, *Two Brothers* and *Hamlet* were novels, and that *Emma* was a play and a film.

The more able students could move smoothly between and beyond the passages to use them as a basis for a comprehensive analysis and discussion. Some students made reference to other poems by Gwen Harwood in which she discusses the demands and rewards of motherhood, such as *A Kitchen Poem* and *The Twins*. Others referred to other poems by John Keats or to additional stories by Katherine Mansfield, which helped to support their contentions.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Essay 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	3	4	6	8	12	14	15	11	10	6	4	2	1	13.3

Essay 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	3	3	5	6	8	11	13	13	10	9	6	4	2	1	12.7

Novels

The most popular texts were *Emma*, *Atonement* and *Frankenstein*. *Emma* was generally well handled, with responses achieving a range of marks. Some included references to the Box Hill picnic as another example of Emma's thoughtless nature or referred to the ending of the text, showing Emma's developing conscience, contrition and compassion. Responses on *Atonement* tended to be either of a very high standard or a very low one. This was a very challenging text for less able students, with its post-modern construction and its complex intertextual references. Some students were unsure about what had actually 'happened' in the novel. Responses on *Frankenstein* reflected a wide range of abilities, but many students could have made further use of the first passage, which offered considerable scope for language analysis and a discussion of Shelley's implicit views and values.

Bleak House, *Wuthering Heights*, *A Passage to India*, *Sixty Lights* and *The Death of Napoleon* were attempted by fewer students, but there were some excellent essays, particularly on *A Passage to India* and *Bleak House*. The responses to *Bleak House* often focused on the second passage, using it to show the centrality of Krook's evidence to the court case, the effects of which are shown in the third passage. Many students did well in exploring the importance of the echo in *A Passage to India*. There were very few responses on *The Aunt's Story*.

Plays

The most popular text was *Hamlet*. There were some outstanding responses and the selection of passages gave students plenty with which to work. Able students showed a thorough knowledge of the play and responded sensitively to the language. The weakest answers tended to list the play's themes in the introduction and talk about each of these in very general terms. The very weakest responses could only offer a summary of the text's plot. Answers on *The Bacchae* were often poor. Many students seemed confused about what they thought the play was saying and made little use of the opportunities to explore language. Many ignored the third passage. Similarly, there were very few excellent responses on *Two Brothers*. Some students made good use of the stage directions in passage 1. The naming of Eggs Benedict clearly meant nothing to several students. There were some excellent responses to *The Freedom of the City*. The most successful students referred to the placement of the priest on the battlements and to the fact that we know of the deaths of the central characters before the audience meets them. Other students focused on the different styles of language used in each passage. There were few answers on *The Tempest* but these were generally quite good. *No Sugar* and *The Death of an Anarchist* were attempted by fewer students. *The Death of an Anarchist* proved too challenging for most of the students who attempted it. There were very few answers on *Copenhagen*.

Short stories

Responses to the short stories were evenly divided among the three texts offered. Responses on Mansfield were excellent in many cases, with students able to show a good understanding of the author's ideas and a knowledge of several stories. Many responses on Lawrence lacked complexity and analytic skills. Many students focused solely on



the effects of the war on the characters and interpreted the stories as representative of Lawrence's anti-war views. Many weaker responses did not really consider the relationships between the characters and the effects of the power struggles between them. Further language analysis could have been attempted. Responses on Chekhov were often weakest, with students usually offering only a brief summary of each of the passages. There was little attempt to consider the text as a whole.

Other literature

The most popular choice was *This Boy's Life*. Many students wrote well on this text with a lively sense of engagement, although there were sometimes inaccuracies of interpretation. Fewer students than previous years wrote on *Stasiland* and some were determined to focus their answer almost exclusively on Miriam, who was only mentioned very briefly at the end of the third passage. There were few responses on *The Tall Man*, but some suggested that this was an accessible text. There were very few answers on *Istanbul: Memories and the City*.

Poetry

Generally, students resisted the temptation to focus on plot and looked instead at poetic techniques and their response to the language of the poem. The poems of Blake, Harwood and Keats were the most popular choices, with many students responding to these poems very well. Some excellent writing was produced in response to Harwood, although *Estuary* proved challenging for some students. The reference to the smoked glass made little sense to some students. Many were confused about the reference to Caesar in the second poem, some suggesting that the two women had been born by caesarean section. Students should be encouraged to clarify points on which they are unsure with their teachers. Very few students made any acknowledgment of the fact that the first and last stanzas of the third poem were omitted from the paper. Responses to Keats often included references to the other odes, and students were able to make Keats's views, as expressed in these passages, implicit. This year students were comfortable with the selection of Blake poems offered, and there was some polished writing. A few students did not understand that Tom, in passage 1, had been dreaming. The three passages were often combined very effectively to give a sense of Blake's views and values. There were some thoughtful answers on the Beveridge poems, but given the richness of Beveridge's language, more detailed responses could have been given in some cases. There were very few responses on the Porter poems, although these seemed accessible to the students. Likewise, there were very few answers on *Beowulf* and in general these tended to look at the passages in isolation, rather than using them to convey an impression of the text's overall concerns and language.

Student responses

The following are samples of student responses. The first three meet all the criteria at a very high level. The fourth and fifth lack some of the complexity of the others but nevertheless address the criteria at a high level. The final example meets the criteria at a medium level.

Student example 1

Nominated text: *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare

Hamlet is a revisionist revenge tragedy in which Shakespeare causes his highly intellectual hero to demonstrate his powers of reason and exquisite moral sensibilities by hesitating before avenging the murder of his father after having been prompted to his revenge by heaven and hell. It is Hamlet's rationality, Shakespeare argues, which causes him to reflect so deeply upon the moral and political corruption within Denmark throughout the play. Hamlet therefore becomes a channel through which Shakespeare explores the problems faced by a moral man who must live and take action in a corrupt world. Ultimately however, Shakespeare argues that Hamlet's rationality and capacity to reason are not compromised.

The playwright frames Hamlet's 'heavy disposition' against the licentiousness and corruption of the Danish court in order to create an image of a truly 'noble mind' who is 'free from all contriving', yet inextricably bound up in the 'prison' of Denmark that has turned his admiration for the 'paragon of animals' into the 'quintessence of dust'. The delicate and lyrical qualities of Ophelia's language as she laments: 'that unmatched form and feature of blown youth blasted with ecstasy' allow Shakespeare to create a poignant image of the extent to which the 'rank and gross' nature of the corruption festering in Denmark has claimed not only the innocence of Ophelia, who is used as bait in her father's plan's to 'loose' her to trap Hamlet, but also highlights the extent to which Hamlet rues the emotional burden placed on him to cleanse Denmark of this corruption and reconnect the woman he loves with her morality: 'O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right.' In order to illustrate the extent of this corruption in Denmark, Shakespeare uses prose through which he has Hamlet spit harsh invective to Ophelia: 'God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another'. However, this use of prose indicates not only Hamlet's disillusionment with the inconstancy of women which he laments in his 'sullied flesh', but his feelings of profound disgust for the inconstancy of the entire world around him; springing primarily from the 'canker Claudius, the 'candied tongues' of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Polonius the 'fishmonger', who attributes Hamlet's behaviour to 'neglected love'. However, Hamlet does not let the corruption



surrounding him compromise his moral principles. While he is 'besetted round with villainies', his morality dictates that God's 'canon' is set 'against self slaughter'.

Shakespeare establishes the play's dramatic tension through Hamlet's intense self-analysis, which occurs against the backdrop of Claudius's corrupt kingdom in which one can 'smile and smile and be a villain'. The King should be the man who sets the moral tone in the world over which he rules, yet all of Claudius's scheming against Hamlet in 'quick determination' are compounded by Hamlet's emotionally charged curses against him 'remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!' – thereby inviting the audience to perceive Claudius as the epitome of Denmark's 'foul pestilent congregation of vapours'. In Hamlet's 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I' soliloquy, Shakespeare manipulates his regular use of iambic rhythms in order to convey the fluctuation in Hamlet's emotional state as he grapples with his mighty moral dilemma that appears to torment him to the core, evident in Shakespeare's use of repeated questions: '...had he the motive and the cue for passion that I have?', and 'Am I a coward?'. In this soliloquy alone, the audience are confronted by the entire spectrum of Hamlet's emotions, including his feelings of self-loathing, anger and uncertainty, which Shakespeare emphasises through the iambic stresses placed on words like 'dull', 'horrid' and 'ignorant', highlighting the fact that unlike other true revengers like Fortinbras and Laertes, Hamlet's 'capability and God-like capacity to reason' prevent him from acting so rashly in the act of murder.

Despite his belief that he is 'pigeon livered' and 'lacking gall' in his inability to avenge his father's murder and prevent Denmark from becoming a 'couch for luxury and damned incest', the audience appreciate, as does Ophelia, that Hamlet is a man far too 'noble in reason' to 'sweep' to revenge impulsively. This belief is echoed by the words of German philosopher Nietzsche, who stated: 'Hamlet is not a man who thinks too much, but a man who thinks too well.' In this thinking, Hamlet as a character reflects Shakespeare's belief that a moral man must always act with 'most sovereign reason', even in a corrupt and morally bankrupt society. Therefore, the audience admire Hamlet's resolve to 'play something like the murder of my father' in order to test the ghost's provenance and 'catch the conscience of the King', and it is this use of a 'play within a play' that allows Shakespeare to explore the notion of appearance and reality, reflected in the duality of Hamlet's language when he makes references to 'play', 'scene' and 'players'. This draws the audience's attention to the role of Claudius, who is arguably one of the greatest actors in a play of his own. It is in this sense that the audience perceive the disturbing insincerity beneath the formal balance of his lines when he speculates about Hamlet's 'madness', obfuscating meaning in his warning: 'And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose will be some danger.'

Hamlet's hesitation in avenging his father's murder with 'wings as swift as meditation' highlights that he is a modern avenger, a thinker and a reasoner, making him the highest form of man on God's Great Chain of Being. Despite imagery of physical bodily decay and 'pocky corses' that pervades his conversation with the Gravediggers at the beginning of Act V, the audience appreciate that he has an aura of calmness around him, signalling that he has left his personal angst from the previous four acts behind him, and can now reflect rationally upon the notion of death, and indeed the transience of his own life, and of all men's lives: 'How long will a man lie in the earth ere' he rot?'. Despite the comic relief this scene brings to the play after the death of Ophelia, Hamlet's calm and controlled language indicate a new found belief in the notion of divine providence, that is truly caring of man in the way it 'shapes our ends'. This allows Hamlet to carry out, with new found equanimity, the deed over which he had deliberated throughout the entire play. Hamlet dies a dignified and moral man, having 'proved most royally' by honouring his father's ghost and cleansing Denmark of its corruption. This corruption, Shakespeare argues, does not defeat Hamlet's rationality or capacity to reason at any point during the play.

Student example 2

Nominated text: *Emma*, Jane Austen

Jane Austen constructs her comedy of manners novel *Emma* through the prism of nineteenth century class and gender constructs. In foregrounding marriage customs while never losing sight of the complexities of human relationships, Austen ensures that she is never morally neutral in the portrayal and development of her characters. Frequently merging the omniscient narration with the voice of her protagonist, the gently ironic authorial tone delivers Austen's unambiguous perspective on the importance of self knowledge in the maturation of her heroine.

Austen structures *Emma*'s journey to maturation through her emotional entanglements with Mr. Elton, Frank Churchill, and Mr. Knightley respectively, gently undercutting Emma's 'confidence' and 'satisfaction' through a series of moral mistakes, thereby highlighting the importance of self-knowledge in forming the basis for wise marriages and honest relationships with others. While Emma's confident tone and self-assured speech throughout the novel are used by Austen to endorse the notion that female independence was regrettably rare for women in the Regency Period, her bold statements to Mr. Knightley such as: 'There is no admiration between them' and 'I am delighted to find you can vouchsafe to let your imagination wander' are deliciously ironic, as Emma's own 'blind folly' partly nurtured by Frank Churchill, lead her to make 'unpardonable' judgements about Jane Fairfax and Miss Bates throughout Volume II. In Volume I, Austen uses this irony to foreshadow the way in which Emma's wilful delusions prevent her from seeing the reality of the relationship between Harriet Smith and Mr. Elton, using subtle phrases which conflate the omniscient narration with Emma's thoughts in telling of how Mr. Elton 'sighed out his half sentences of admiration just as he ought.' This imparts a wry smile in the reader as he/she can see the extent of Emma's immaturity in her belief that the world is exactly as she sees it. Emma's belief that her matchmaking scheme was 'more and more justified and endeared ...' adds to this sense of Emma's over confidence, indicated by her continual use of 'I' throughout Volume I that is gently mocked by Austen in foreshadowing the moral mistakes that she will make throughout the novel. Paradoxically, Emma must 'sink' to her



lowest point of over confidence and condescension at Box Hill before she truly comes to realise the importance of achieving an equilibrium between her imagination and her judgement, that signalled true propriety in a woman valued by Austen so highly.

As Emma begins to perceive herself as a moral example for others in her community, the reader is invited to attribute a great deal of her maturation to wise moral judgements made by Mr. Knightley throughout the novel, who acts as Emma's moral centre. Austen speaks through Mr. Knightley in order to allude to the secrecy masking the Churchill relationship, and she affirms his wise, moral standards in his question to Emma: 'Have you never at any time had reason to think that he admired her, or that she admired him?' Austen's diction is describing Mr. Knightley's 'earnest kindness' and how he was 'so much displeased' at Emma's match making schemes, allow Austen to affirm the idea of the 'gentleman', over the 'gallant' embodied by Frank Churchill, who is anything but 'frank' in his dealings with Emma and the rest of the Highbury community. Mr. Knightley's tone of contempt for 'the joke' that 'seemed confined to you and Mr. Churchill' allows Austen to create a stark contrast between the 'vigor and resolution' of Mr. Knightley's speech and behaviour throughout the novel, and that of Frank Churchill's, who publically reflects that he is the wretchedest being in the world at civil false hood'.

Austen's forlorn tone in depicting Emma's innate unease with Mr. Knightley's 'grave looks' which showed that she was 'not forgiven' for meddling in the lives of Harriet Smith and Robert Martin, who he correctly perceives are a suitable match, offer early hints to the reader about the natural inclinations of Emma's heart, and how much 'her happiness depended upon being first with Mr. Knightley, first in intellect and emotion'. Just as Austen uses Mr. Knightley to foreshadow the moral mistakes, the 'deplorable blunders' that Emma will make in her ill fated match making schemes, he also foreshadows the 'variety of evils' that will come as Emma's 'vanity is flattered' by the 'levity and carelessness' of Frank Churchill. The clear and simple diction of Mr. Knightley's belief that 'He owed it to her, to risk any thing that might be involved ...' highlights that Mr. Knightley is so much more than merely 'quite the gentleman' that Mrs. Elton believes him to be; he is unflinching in his efforts to see his 'dear Emma' mature into the woman of compassion and humility that he knows she is capable of becoming. In doing so, Mr. Knightley becomes a channel through which Austen endorses the notion of the 'revised gentleman'. Such a title denoted not only social position, but it symbolised the author's moral approval of the individual as it carried an understanding of good manners and consideration for others. This is exemplified in the way he detects the 'sting' that Frank Churchill and Emma's callous jokes brought to Jane Fairfax.

Austen highlights Emma's capacity for introspection and genuine self-honesty as the integral elements in the final stages of her development, as she ameliorates Emma's vanity in order to have Emma see the wrongs in her condescension of Jane Fairfax, which is foreshadowed by Austen through the emphasis placed on words 'presume' and 'answer' – highlighting Emma's genuine belief in her awareness of the games that were, ironically enough, being played behind her back. It is this sense of Emma's acquired self knowledge that allow the reader to admire Emma's strength of character, as she is saved from the 'pert pretension' of a Mrs. Elton who is pithily satirised by Austen for her blatant class snobbishness. It is in this mature frame of mind that Emma can genuinely reflect upon the consequences of her 'moral mistakes, and take her place as 'first consequence' in Highbury in more than merely a financial sense. Therefore, reader can draw from the conclusion of the novel what might be described as a sense of 'Wordsworthian inwardness', as Austen unites in 'perfect happiness', not only the social and natural worlds of the novel, but Emma's emotions and her intellect, her rationality and her imagination.

Student example 3

Nominated text: *Atonement*, Ian McEwan

*The seemingly profound, intense questions of Cecilia in passage one demonstrate the power of words and literature to inform us of human experience and emotion, as they quickly rise in a crescendo as the reader is shown that in one moment Cecilia's awareness of herself is changed. Ian McEwan's *Atonement* comments on the nature of the novel, to better inform us of human experience and demonstrates the intricate relationship between life's realities and the composition of a novel. The power of Robbie's letter, indeed of that one word, to alter the fates of Robbie, Cecilia and Briony leads to a greater respect for literature to explain what life's realities may not; the image of her life's mysteries clearing before Cecilia's eyes invites the readers to similarly clear their own eyes, to remove their prejudice and embrace the plot of the novel. As such, the author is here foreshadowing the dimness and ambiguities of the novel, for the intertextual allusions and suggestions of the highly contrived nature of *Atonement* are constant throughout the text.*

*The repetition in the first passage, 'of course, of course', establishes the immediate significance of the letter, and leaves the reader in suspense of the content of the letter – from the way which Cecilia discovers why she had been restless and indecisive all day, 'why else take so long to choose a dress or fight over a vase', the reader is lead to comprehend that it's a declaration of love, for the similar moments of understanding have been portrayed in modern literature. Yet, the allusion here to William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is clear, as it seems that Robbie's declaration of love is paralleled by Malvolio's attempt to usurp his servant's status. As such, the distinctions in class are demonstrated to be surpassable through literature and words. Thus the reader can see the author's celebration of literature. In particular, the way in which time seems to halt, 'many seconds had passed', (and her realisation declares that Cecilia is unaware of how much time has passed) in combination with the drive of force which the letter has, where 'a unit of meaning, whose force and colour was derived from the single repeated word', evokes an image of a wave of force hitting into Cecilia absorbing the colour of her face, into the black vacuum of the typescript. Such an image clearly demonstrates the power of the written word.*



Furthermore, the concept of Briony's own letter seems powerful. Robbie, even in his delirium, holds the power of a letter in his mind, where he believes that it can change everything, as it did in passage one. Yet, the novel through Briony's tangible guilt and anguish, exemplified in her belief that 'sorry' is not adequate, demonstrates that indeed literature cannot alter the truth. Cecilia's call 'come back' in passages two and three seems to call Robbie and Briony back from their nightmares, but for Robbie, it's clearly seen that despite her calls and Briony's novel, what has happened cannot be undone, and indeed there is nothing that can undo Briony's crimes. Nonetheless, the simple truism, 'the attempt was all' later in the novel highlights McEwan's contention that whilst literature and thus Briony's novel 'Atonement' cannot atone for her role in Robbie's arrest and our past mistakes, that is in fact not the role of literature – it is the purpose of the novel to allow us to empathise with the human condition.

Through constant intertextual references, the author indicates how, unlike the fairytale 'Trials of Arabella', life does not end perfectly, with the hero and heroine rewarded: the allusions to Wilfred Owen's poetry in passage two, where the men wait 'placid as cattle' encourages the reader to condemn the useless enterprise of war. Similarly, the repetition of 'waiting' seems to reveal the fallacies of the British mythologising of the war and retreat from Dunkirk; the lack of action seeming to halt time. The contrast of Robbie's delirious sensations, 'the floor still seemed to list, then switch to the rhythm of a steady march' disconcerts the reader, who seems to then feel the stillness of the floor coupled with the pounding beat of a military march, images which when juxtaposed, bring about an uneven stillness. As he feels the pressure rising, the repeated 'waiting' builds anticipation, and the reader too is left waiting for the reunion of Robbie and Cecilia, yet the dehumanising nature of war seems to hinder this. The further allusions to 'The Shropshire Lad' for the educated reader suggest that despite the reader's desire for a happy ending, like that of the fairytale 'Trials of Arabella' the two lovers will not be reunited.

The nature of time in these passages is ambiguous and the layered perspectives invite the reader to take the plot of the novel to their own interpretation. As Robbie hopes in his delirium that Briony will write a letter to change her story and in passage three to do it, it seems that what is happening is hyper real. Similarly, the time in passage two is twisted, for Robbie's haze as he places his rescue of the twins next to that of the dead boy in Dunkirk this image is unsettling for the reader who is shocked with the notion that the twins may have been killed thus, highlighting the possibilities of life which literature can provide.

The intimate monologue of Briony's as she leaves Cecilia's home in passage three allows the reader to engage with the woman they suppose to be the author, for her assertion that she will 'begin a new draft' in response to CC's letter of appraisal leads to the belief that this is a subsequent draft. The density of McEwan's prose and its intricate complexities confuse the readers, for they know that indeed 'Briony cannot be the author, for the novel they are reading is McEwan's. As such the firm and aspirational hope of Briony's statement, 'Not simply a letter, but a new draft, an atonement, and she was ready to begin' is challenging, for the reader has engaged with Briony's anguish and her close desire to reunite the lovers, and thus, as all readers are wont to do, naturally becomes involved with her characters' hopes and dreams. Nonetheless, McEwan clouds the reader's ability to discern the truth of the novel with his 'pointillist approach to verisimilitude'; he inserts factual events, like the war in Dunkirk so as to develop detail which the reader can immerse themselves in.

Indeed, through the detail and density of his prose, McEwan demonstrates the complex relationship between the composition of a novel and the realities of life, highlighting that fantasy should not be confused with reality, a mistake which Catherine Morland of Austen's 'Northanger Abbey' and the young Briony are guilty of. However, he does not denigrate the novel, rather praising its transformative power to allow us to empathise with those outside of our own reality.

Student example 4

Nominated text: *Collected poems 1943–1995*, Gwen Harwood

All three passages taken from the panels 'Estuary', 'An Impromptu for Ann Jennings' and 'Slate' exemplify a common theme in Harwood's work being her value of time and memory, more specifically the purpose the reminiscent nature of her poems have in exploring the notion of time 'My earliest memory turns to be air' and the 'anguish' and regret of time lost.

The elegaic qualities present in passage one of 'Estuary' sees Harwood use the personification of natural imagery 'Paddocks rest in sea's arm' to pay tribute to the role of the narrator's 'Grandmother' now 'Great Grandmother', as a mentor and role model figure to the narrative voice with the line 'Look Remember this.' said by the Grandmother. Harwood conveys the presence of the Grandmother to be one of wisdom and reflects the fond quality of the memory. The elegaic connections attached to the line also parallel such poems as 'Mother who gave me life' and 'Father and Child' both of which celebrate the role of parents as 'stick-thin comforters' and figures of wisdom. 'Old No Sayer.' By use of the word 'comforter' Harwood further asserts the value she herself holds for connotations attached to the word.

Harwood's reference to light and religion can be seen through the line in Estuary 'Light falling like a benediction' which paints a vivid image of peace and a kind of consciousness in the readers minds. Such phrases establish an air and atmosphere of fondness which can also be seen in 'Father and Child' as the narrator describes the 'walk' that the Father undertakes for the narrator's 'sake'. As in Estuary it is implied that even when the narrative voice is adult and is reflecting on the memories of elderly parents, the role of a parent is described as evolutionary and never ending. The reference to 'women bearing women' in 'Mother who gave me life' alludes to this evolutionary process and is continued in Estuary through the last line 'on moments that renew the world.' Here the word 'renew' is used by Harwood to subtly hint at the process of life and death explored in these elegaic poems as both an inevitable and natural process that 'renews the world'.



Similarly, 'An impromptu for Ann Jennings' explores the notion of parenthood through the semi-autobiographical introduction of the poem 'Sing, memory, sing'. The word 'sing' can therefore be taken as a way for Harwood to welcome and celebrate such a memory. Filled with the natural symbolism of a scene of 'tree ferns, gullies' and 'eye pleasing... paths along the mountain face' the narrator describes to her friend a time spent 'minding' children and 'Nursing babies'. However, the initial fondness that the poem starts with is later undermined by the use of words such as 'anguish', 'wild', 'sickness' and 'appalling orifice' which suggest Harwood's contrasting and multiple views of parenthood. Such poems as 'The twins' where the mother experiences an early death as a result of 'Labour' and the wife is a 'Kitchen Poem' who is 'Too great with child to sit at ease' suggests Harwood's view of motherhood as not merely a celebratory experience but sometimes an act of 'balancing' and a burden. The auto-biographical quality of 'An Impromptu for Ann Jennings', therefore suggests Harwood's personal experience of being a mother as although a 'joy' also as a constant effort that can sometimes lead to 'near defeat'.

The auto-biographical reminiscent qualities also extend to passage three of 'Slate' but are, contradictory to 'Estuary,' an unpleasant memory which condemns and criticises Harwood's views of the educational system she was brought up in. The line that sparks the narrator's memory in the first stanza describes how her 'chronic, nostalgia swells to recreate' and builds tension in the readers mind and foreshadows the condemnatory tone of the next four stanzas. The way Harwood vividly describes how 'we sat ranked by examination' and those with the 'best marks at the back' suggests her negative view of the school system. The character of 'Bonehead' is used within the classroom as a microcosm of society in order to reflect the untold 'cruelties' of society and the 'inexpressable' delight some take in judging others, paralleled in the 'Secret life of frogs' when the 'big boys' gleefully 'Spiked' and showed their brutality and power. The vivid nature of such a memory as in 'Slate' implies the lasting effect memories have on Harwood and the importance they have in her writing whether they are treasured or 'unpleasant' and 'morbid'.

Student example 5

Nominated text: *The Collected Stories*, Katherine Mansfield

Katherine Mansfield's modernist stylistic ability saw her create short stories where although action and plot wise nothing happens, for the development of her protagonist everything happens.

Mansfield expresses this by contrasting the externally mundane and drab external environments of her characters as in passage one of 'Prelude' and passage three of 'Sixpence', with the vivid descriptions of the characters's internal monologue.

The flow of interior monologue of the female protagonist, Beryl in 'Prelude' sees her over the space of just a few minutes experience dual personalities. Her obsession with her external appearance is conveyed through such lines as 'Her eyes, her eyes were perhaps her best feature' and 'a pointed chin – but not too pointed'. Through Beryl's character, Mansfield's ability to parody and satirize such superficialities is conveyed through Beryl's need to almost constantly reassure herself of her outward appearance. The phrase 'chin – but not...' exemplifies the protagonist's vanity deliberately in order to allow Mansfield to further mock the shallow nature of her character. The repetition of such adjectives as 'fascinating', 'exaggerated' and 'lovely' builds up a sense of inner conflict for her character and foreshadows a later realisation of her 'false' appearance for readers by portraying her to be almost too perfect.

Paradoxically the young girl in 'Taking the veil' is used by Mansfield to both mock the superficiality of such appearance-orientated women 'it was very hard to be unhappy when you were 15 years of age and very pretty', and challenge the two faced nature of such characters.

Mansfield's reference to theatre, performance and acting allows her not only to parody the melodramatic nature of such young women but also place a condemnatory view back onto some women during the twentieth century who like the young girl in 'Taking the Veil' believed her only two options to be marriage and if that was not possible she would 'Join a convent'. Mansfield cleverly and deliberately juxtaposes these two extremes; marriage and becoming a nun in order to project her feminist criticism of such conventionally minded women in society who believe not only these to be their only options but lack the mind set and the passion to strive for other independent options as Mansfield herself did. Instead she portrays both Beryl and other female protagonists to be too concerned about society's expectation of them and judgement to want to change.

The notion of the importance of society's judgements and prejudice is criticised by Mansfield and is conveyed through the confused parents in passage three of 'Six pence.' Paranoid about what society, represented through friend of the mother's, might think, her decision to have her husband 'whip' their son causes a later reaction of guilt and regret from the father 'What have I done'. Mansfield again suggests the superficiality and incompetence of the middle and upper classes who are not even confident enough to adequately make decisions as parents without out worrying about society's judgement and conceptions of them.

Student example 6

Nominated text: *This Boy's Life*, Tobias Wolff

Through '*This Boy's Life*', Tobias Wolff portrays his childhood progress into maturity, and his desperate search for a sense of identity. Toby's lack of a secure family and good male role models, leaves him unsure of how to act and face his problems –



consequently he feels the need to lie and maintain a pretence. However it is through his attachment to his mother that the reader gains insight into Toby's growing understanding of his true self.

Toby's desire for consistency in a family is acknowledged, when he hopes '[our family] would all be together again, as we were meant to be.' Use of the phrase 'meant to be' shows how important the concept of a 'family' is to Toby. To him it represents stability and belonging, in a world that is otherwise constantly changing. Most importantly however, is that with the notion of a family, comes the idea of a decent father figure. The role of a father in a 1950's family was to provide structure and discipline duties which Rosemary shirked, yet Toby required. It is this severe lack of discipline that can account for Toby's insecurity in how to act, – hence he tries out the way other people live, often untrue to his own character. From this, the reader can see that Toby does not know how to achieve what he desires, leaving him with the notion that his 'dreams are rights'. Hence Toby believes that the 'good life' comes from 'good luck' – often leaving the reader feeling less sympathetic with Toby's undesirable circumstances – due to his constant lies and lack of hard work. Therefore it is from Toby's mother, from whom he draws influence.

The impact Rosemary had on Toby's life is not always a positive one, as Toby recognised that 'she was ready to put up with almost anything to make [the marriage] work.' This act of almost quiet submission parallels Toby's tendency to 'put up' with his lot in life, and not to actively try to improve it. Here it can be seen that Toby drew this from his mother, and demonstrates it throughout the memoir. This is reinforced when Rosemary takes Toby 'once more on the run', a technique of running from problems, rather than facing them. Toby's actions of 'leaving for California' are indicative of this, as running away is how he knows to cope best. However it is Toby's attachment to his mother that gives him the greatest sense of belonging and place.

Toby recognises that 'I was my mother's son. I could not be anyone else's.' This shows the way in which Toby attributes his sense of self and identity to his mother. Toby's solidarity on this point gives the reader the impression that this is one of the few ways by which Toby is able to define himself, and therefore incredibly important to him. This desire to hold onto any sense of identity he has, is reinforced to the reader when Toby states 'I don't want to change my [last] name.' His last name symbolises his connection to his mother, and recognition of self. It is in this attachment to Rosemary that Toby demonstrates some certainty in who he is, giving the reader first glimpse of his maturation into the enlightend author of the memoir.

Toby's lack of family can be seen to have left him with strong insecurities in regards to himself, and his exposure to his mother's flaws gives him both positive and negative influences. However it is primarily from his attachment to his mother that he is able to draw a strong sense of identity.