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# A LEVEL

*Delivery Guide*

H472

# ENGLISH LITERATURE

Introduction to Close Reading  
and Approaching Unseen Texts

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# INTRODUCTION TO CLOSE READING AND APPROACHING UNSEEN TEXTS

## INTRODUCTION

At A Level, candidates are required to study at least 8 texts across the three main genres of poetry, prose and drama. At AS level candidates must study a minimum of four texts.

'A Level specifications must also include a text which has not previously been named for study (an "unseen" text).'

-GCE AS and A Level subject content for English literature, (Department for Education, April 2014).

At AS, the study of an unseen text is not compulsory, however because OCR have developed their new AS and A Level with the view to them being co-teachable, they have decided to include the study of an unseen at AS Level. It is also worth mentioning that candidates will have been used to preparing for unseen texts at GCSE, for both English Language and Literature, and it would therefore seem counter intuitive not to continue to develop this skill as they move through to AS and/or A Level study.

## Assessment Objectives

<b>A01</b>	Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression. <i>Note: 'Informed' means the candidate's own knowledge of the texts; 'terminology' means the use of suitable words at this level, so 'comedy' might be expected, but not 'anagnorsis', 'sonnet' but not 'villanelle'.</i>
<b>A02</b>	Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts. <i>Note: The phrase 'meanings are shaped' acknowledges that authorial intentions cannot be definitively known.</i>
<b>A03</b>	Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.
<b>A04</b>	Explore connections across literary texts.
<b>A05</b>	Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations.

## Where can I expect to encounter the unseen extract?

At AS the unseen is an unprepared passage containing thematic links to a set text previously studied. The unseen question targets A01, A02, A03 and A04 with A03 (context) and A01 (Articulating a response) being the most heavily weighted.

At A Level, the unseen is an unprepared passage on a topic area previously studied. The unseen question targets A01, A02 and A03 with A02 (ways in which meanings are shaped) being the most heavily weighted.

## Preparing candidates to respond to unseen texts

Reading the set texts will help candidates develop skills for the unseen section of the examinations, but it is important that you give them plenty of opportunities to respond to unseen texts, using a variety of strategies.

In preparing candidates to respond to unseen texts, you should draw from as wide a range of material as possible, also to encourage reading and engagement with literature beyond the set texts. This will probably include candidates' own choice of texts, reflecting their own interests and enthusiasms. There is scope to explore different traditions, forms and genres, as well as different literary styles and techniques. Having said that, at AS and A level, the unseen texts that appear in the examination will always be prose.

The work on literature set texts can be carefully integrated with work on preparing candidates to respond to unseen texts. At AS and A level the unseen text will always be from the candidates chosen topic area, which will be either American Literature 1880-1940, The Gothic, Dystopia, Women in Literature or The Immigrant Experience.

At A level, candidates choose two set texts from a list of ten to prepare for the essay question in the Comparative and Contextual Study examination. The remaining texts from the topic area could provide useful material which could be used for practicing how to approach unseen passages in preparation for the unseen question in the examination.



# THE TRANSITION FROM GCSE TO A LEVEL

The 'unseen' elements at A and AS build on skills acquired at GCSE, extending candidates' knowledge of the major genres of English literature and their close reading skills, in both breadth and depth, as well as extending the range and complexity of inter-textual links explored.

At GCSE, candidates will have become confident in responding to unseen texts and will have built up 'cross-over' skills through their study of a wide range of texts of different forms and genres. To consolidate this knowledge and prepare students successfully for the unseen texts they may encounter at AS and A level, responding to unseen texts ideally needs to be embedded in English curriculum teaching and learning. GCSE students will be used to tackling new material within time constraints and can respond to short to mid-answer questions when they meet a text for the first time\*. At A level, the challenge is to encourage development of these brief, often content based responses into the ability to write a cogent, informed and original extended response. One of the key differences is the focus of AO2 at each level:

<b>GCSE</b>	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate	<b>AO2</b>
<b>A LEVEL</b>	Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts	<b>AO2</b>

\*NOTE: GCSE students taking the first exams in 2017 may not be so familiar with strategies for close reading and approaching unseen texts, having studied the pre-2015 GCSE specifications.

## Function of the Assessment Objectives at AS Level

'Unseen' work at AS level is at its terminus essentially a test of candidate aptitude and practised skills without prepared content, with focus mainly on AO1 and AO3, though AO2 and AO4 are also assessed. The 'scaffolding' of bullet points and writing frames, commonly provided during the teaching process at GCSE, should be withdrawn at this level so that in the examination students depend on the freshness and openness of their individual responses, together with the analytic skills they have acquired. The onus is, therefore, on making candidates 'think on their feet'.

## Function of the Assessment Objectives at A Level

In A Level Exam 2, Comparative and Contextual Study, candidates are expected to explore the content of a substantial unseen passage in a chosen topic area with contextual materials and works previously studied in that topic area. Links to set texts can be credited as exploration of context (AO3) but these texts should not be discussed in their own right, but always in relation to the unseen passage. It follows that prepared analysis of the set texts will not be rewarded unless related to the unseen passage. This passage will thus always set the agenda for a response. Candidates are asked to present their findings in the form of a 'critical appreciation' of the unseen passage, which is understood to entail an 'informed, personal and creative response' to both unseen text and texts previously studied (AO1), and to analyse the language of these texts in such a way that sensitivity to the ways meaning is shaped by writing will emerge (AO2). Prepared chunks of historical material should be avoided: contextual issues must be woven into discussion of the unseen text. All the topic areas have been chosen to emphasise the importance of contextual study in English Literature, whether social, political, historical, geographical, concerned with literary genre, or any other of the vast number of ways of addressing context in relation to literary study.

## How to Approach Unseen Passages

As the unseen texts prescribed on the AS and A level papers will always be prose, it is unlikely that technical comment on literary effects will be as detailed as when writing on other genres. Elaborate analysis of rhetorical effects ('powerful anaphora') or sound effects ('liquid labials') is not expected. Candidates should be discouraged from developing a checklist of stylistic elements to look for, as this invariably impedes the flow of ideas in an answer, even when the material is of high quality. As far as possible the approach to the task should be open-minded and pragmatic. Sensitivity to prose rhythm, use of parenthesis, the introduction and management of direct speech, the use of internal monologue, and recognition of broad tonal effects, such as humour or irony, are all desirable approaches that may be practised. Analytic formulae, especially those involving mnemonics, such as DIR (diction-imagery-rhythm), are not generally a good idea, as they often leave awkward skeletal traces in the form of an answer, or make the exercise too like form filling. Students welcome not having to write to a formula, and the opportunity to express their own views.



## Approaching the Unseen text at AS Level

We have only exemplified one of the five topic areas at AS, as the focus is not so much on the content of the unseen text but how to relate the novel the candidate has studied to the unseen passage they are presented with in the examination paper.

### AS Level Drama and Prose Post-1900 (Exam 2, Section 2 Prose)

Making connections with an unseen text: This question is worth 25% of the AS Level qualification.

Assessment Objective	Percentage Weighting (%)	
AO1*	7.5%	* Heaviest weighting (equal to AO3)
AO2	5%	
AO3*	7.5%	*Heaviest weighting (equal to AO1)
AO4	5%	

### Sample question at AS Level

**Discuss ways in which Fitzgerald presents the sense of things coming to an end in *The Great Gatsby*.**

**In your answer, make connections and comparisons with the following passage, which is an account of Americans in Paris at the end of the 1920s.**

'I feel for me the party is just beginning.'

'At your age, it's only natural. But the fact is, you arrived a little late.'

'I came as soon as I could.'

'And very wisely too. You have brought a fresh vision to bear on a dying epoch. But you can't reanimate it all by yourself, just by looking at it. The twilight of the gods is drawing in, the international bankers are rolling down their iron shutters. No more credit, the game is over, the world must go back to work.'

These metaphors were disturbing. But I was unwilling to admit their validity. I was young and in love.

Just then Caridad appeared; she agreed with Schooner. 'It will be sad without you, but it would be more sad to see you around looking hungry.' She fixed me with a swift look. 'I suppose there is no chance of you finding a rich woman to keep you.'

'I don't think so.'

'Would you have dinner with me for a change? I am rich tonight.'

Schooner excused himself, and Caridad and I went to Chez Salto where she plunged gracefully into a mound of spaghetti. Emerging after a while, she looked at me gravely. 'You have a horrible problem which you are hiding,' she said. 'Do not deny it, I know, because I am full of the female intuition of my ancestors, who were gypsies. So I ask myself, "What is a young man's greatest problem?" and I answer "It is love, of course."'

I admitted I was in love.

'And this is the true reason why you do not wish to go back home.'

*-John Glassco, Memoirs of Montparnasse (written 1932-33)*

Note: Candidates are asked to write a piece on the 'sense of things coming to an end' in *The Great Gatsby*; links must be made with the John Glassco extract, but the primary source is the novel they have studied.

Candidates might consider:

#### Narrative voice

*Gatsby* is narrated by a character who does not seem quite comfortable with the hero whose life he is describing. Carraway is not sure how much he admires Gatsby, nor how fatal (as opposed to heroic) he thinks his life choices. Glassco's narrator also shows signs of knowing less than the characters he moves among. Both narrators may be classified as 'limited'.

#### Ways meanings are shaped by the writer

Fitzgerald writes about his own 'lost generation' to which limited opportunities were given in the First World War, and who had to 'find themselves' in the subsequent decade, often with a sense (Like Gatsby) that life had passed them by; Glassco also writes of limited opportunities, and a sense of belatedness, and his cast, like Fitzgerald's, are young – especially his narrator.

Part of the appeal of *Gatsby* is the sumptuousness of its detail and lifestyle described in the book: the shirts, the illicit booze, the cars; Glassco's Paris seems much less lavish, with an ordinary pasta meal the key event of an evening out.

#### Character

*Gatsby*, the embodiment of the brilliant, futile partygoer, is destroyed by love – or rather, someone else's sordid love affair. Glassco's characters also seem preoccupied with romantic love. A key feature of both texts is love as a rather reckless means of shaping life, as the famous final passages of *Gatsby* make clear.

#### Contextual information

There is a sense throughout *Gatsby* of a Romantic epoch drawing to a close, of *Gatsby* 'beating back the current' into the past, trying to recapture a glamorous moment; Glassco hints darkly that the 'roaring twenties' will end thanks to the efforts of the international bankers, so both texts seem to foreground the sense of a way of life ending. Schooner suggests that Glassco's



narrator 'can't reanimate' a 'dying epoch' all by himself. This might be a summary of Gatsby's career.

### Theme

*Gatsby* frequently uses parties and party-going as symbols and representations of the fleeting glamour of life; Glassco suggests that the American partygoers have turned up too late to the party of Paris in the twenties.

## Approaching the Unseen text at A Level

We have exemplified all five topic areas at A Level as the focus here is much more heavily on the content of the unseen text compared to the approach at AS. The most heavily weighted Assessment Objective at A Level is AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts. Candidates are invited to write a 'critical appreciation' of the Unseen text, relating their discussion to their wider knowledge of the topic area.

The emphasis of the question here differs from that of the AS. At AS the focus is on the studied text, with the expectation that the candidate relates their discussion of the studied text to the unseen text. At A Level, the focus is strictly on the unseen text, with the expectation that the candidate brings some of their contextual knowledge of the studied topic area to bear in their answer.

### A Level Comparative and Contextual Study (Exam 2)

Close Reading (of an unseen) in a specific topic area: This question is worth 20% of the A Level qualification.

Assessment Objective	Percentage Weighting (%)	
AO1	2.5%	
AO2 *	15%	* Heaviest weighting
AO3	2.5%	



# AMERICAN LITERATURE 1880-1940

These notes are not designed to provide a template or formula for your answer; they may, however, provide some broad general patterns emerging from American Literature you may wish to consider:

## Historical narrative

The date of the unseen passage should give a hint as to how it relates to broad historical matters, though don't expect every passage to fit neatly into a template such as the one that follows. Very generally, nineteenth century passages may feature the build-up of wealth on the Eastern seaboard, often introducing social concerns that mirror those of Europe. A date early in the twentieth century may foreground the rise of realism and or the work of the first significant generation of writers from Continental Europe (eg Dreiser and Cather). The twenties may feature angst at the legacy of the First World War and/or hedonistic lifestyles during the economic boom. The thirties are likely to mirror economic depression. The literature of the South is likely to revisit the Civil War and possibly the legacy of slavery.

## Cultural diversity

Unseen passages often foreground the cultural diversity of America. They may introduce clashes between partially established racial groups (such as Jews and Irish in the Northeast); they may offer a cultural panorama listing the diversity of those who enter the 'melting pot'; there may be a sense of an amorphous if tentative American identity in spite of (or because of) diversity, that an American is more than the sum of his or her parts. Remember that the further you go back in time (eg to Henry James) the more likely you are to be dealing with mainly White Anglo Saxon Protestants.

## A society 'on the move'

Many unseen passages (and much American writing) will introduce you to a society on the move, crowded with the details and energy of technological progress, the opening up of the Pacific Coast by railway, the coming of cinema, telephone and typewriter, mass production of the automobile. Candidates might look for hints that people are desperate to get somewhere, never put down roots. There could be AO2 opportunities here.

## American Dream

The American Dream is so celebrated a feature of this period you may be tempted to pass it off as a cliché, but it covers a complex bundle of aspirations and frustrations, and is never more potent than in the work of those writers, like F Scott Fitzgerald, who endorse and satirise it simultaneously. It most often shows itself in literary texts as a Romantic desire to impose yourself on the universe, no matter how often and brutally you are disappointed in the attempt. American Dreamers are thus rarely happy, and subject to agonies of fruitless longing. But the disappointments are offset by a fixed belief in the importance of the individual, indeed his centrality. The American Dream is (as Whitman put it) a Song of Myself.

## Class

Class is sometimes downplayed in American literature, but where almost everyone pursues the rewards of capital, social divisions rapidly widen. In John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* where the mid-West meets California, the clashes are essentially between have and have nots, but so they are in Wharton's pedantically snobbish New York, or in Henry James, where a bequest turns moderately well-off Isabel Archer overnight into a Princess.

Note: Candidates should be careful not to focus too much on contextual aspects in their discussion. The weighting of the Assessment Objectives indicates clearly that the focus here should be how meanings are shaped in the unseen text.

## Sample question at A Level

**Write a critical appreciation of the passage, relating your discussion to your reading of American Literature 1880-1940.**

They had labored, these solid citizens. Twenty years before, the hill on which Floral Heights was spread, with its bright roofs and immaculate turf and amazing comfort, had been a wilderness of rank second-growth elms and oaks and maples. Along the precise streets were still a few wooded vacant lots, and the fragment of an old orchard. It was brilliant to-day; the apple boughs were lit with fresh leaves like torches of green fire. The first white of cherry blossoms flickered down a gully, and robins clamored.

Babbitt sniffed the earth, chuckled at the hysteric robins as he would have chuckled at kittens or at a comic movie. He was, to the eye, the perfect office-going executive—a well-fed man in a correct brown soft hat and frameless spectacles, smoking a large cigar, driving a good motor along a semi-suburban parkway. But in him was some genius of authentic love for his neighborhood, his city, his clan. The winter was over; the time was come for the building, the visible growth, which to him was glory. He lost his dawn depression; he was ruddily cheerful when he stopped on Smith Street to leave the brown trousers, and to have the gasoline-tank filled.

The familiarity of the rite fortified him: the sight of the tall red iron gasoline-pump, the hollow-tile and terra-cotta garage, the window full of the most agreeable accessories—shiny casings, spark-plugs with immaculate porcelain jackets tire-chains of gold and silver. He was flattered by the friendliness with which Sylvester Moon, dirtiest and most skilled of motor mechanics, came out to serve him. "Mornin', Mr. Babbitt!" said Moon, and Babbitt felt himself a person of importance, one whose name even busy garagemen remembered—not one of these cheap-



sports flying around in flivvers<sup>1</sup>. He admired the ingenuity of the automatic dial, clicking off gallon by gallon; admired the smartness of the sign: "A fill in time saves getting stuck—gas to-day 31 cents"; admired the rhythmic gurgle of the gasoline as it flowed into the tank, and the mechanical regularity with which Moon turned the handle.

"How much we takin' to-day?" asked Moon, in a manner which combined the independence of the great specialist, the friendliness of a familiar gossip, and respect for a man of weight in the community, like George F. Babbitt.

"Fill 'er up."

"Who you rootin' for for Republican candidate, Mr. Babbitt?"

"It's too early to make any predictions yet. After all, there's still a good month and two weeks—no, three weeks—must be almost three weeks—well, there's more than six weeks in all before the Republican convention, and I feel a fellow ought to keep an open mind and give all the candidates a show—look 'em all over and size 'em up, and then decide carefully."

"That's a fact, Mr. Babbitt."

"But I'll tell you—and my stand on this is just the same as it was four years ago, and eight years ago, and it'll be my stand four years from now—yes, and eight years from now! What I tell everybody, and it can't be too generally understood, is that what we need first, last, and all the time is a good, sound business administration!

"By golly, that's right!"

"How do those front tires look to you?"

"Fine! Fine! Wouldn't be much work for garages if everybody looked after their car the way you do."

"Well, I do try and have some sense about it." Babbitt paid his bill, said adequately, "Oh, keep the change," and drove off in an ecstasy of honest self-appreciation.

Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (1922)

<sup>1</sup> 'flivvers' were small, cheap automobiles that gave a rough ride.

### Notes on approaching this unseen passage

- AO2. This is third person narrative. Often the thoughts are those of George F. Babbitt. These are jolly, positive, just a little sentimental, with a liking for robins and kittens and proper respect for what hard work and the spring can do. But there are hints of authorial irony, too, suggesting that Babbitt's Republican ideals (he wants a government that is 'good for business') may be a mixture of prejudice and self-seeking, the American Dreamer, even in this business-like incarnation, an intriguing mixture of contradictions.
- The date (1922) suggests post war prosperity, and the motor trade, at least, seems to symbolise American individualism and prosperity. Babbitt is not obviously a dreamer, but does seem transfixed by technology (the pump's automatic dial). He has plenty of community feeling, for his 'clan', who probably think like him; but he is also an individualist, 'honestly' (an odd word in this context) 'appreciating' himself. Sylvester Moon is obviously downmarket from Babbitt, but knows how to please him, with a toyshop-like garage, an appreciative manner, and some gentle flattery of Babbitt's wisdom on both politics and motor car tyres. Their relationship reflects many aspects, positive and negative, of the capitalist system.
- It would be helpful if some context (AO3) was supplied by the other texts you have studied. Though the setting is well downmarket from the illicit drinking set in Fitzgerald's New York, everything in Babbitt's home city too seems governed by the well-being of the motor-car. In the unseen passage the car seems a docile pet, not the polished death dealing beast it becomes in *Gatsby*, and Moon's garage seems better run, and Moon himself better adjusted, than Wilson. But in both texts the car is centrepiece. This is true too of the fleet of archaic Hudson waggons in *The Grapes of Wrath*, customised with parts from the scrap-heap, which allow an unlikely pilgrimage for the Okies from damaged middle America to the shining Western sea. In all three texts America is 'on the move', whether it potters about the suburbs, mounts the great highways, or crosses the valley of ashes. However the contextual comparisons and contrasts cited must be precise: this question does not provide an opportunity to write an essay on a text previously studied in the light of a cursory examination of the unseen passage. All comment must be linked directly to what is in the unseen text.





# WOMEN IN LITERATURE

These notes are not designed to provide a template or formula for your answer; they may, however, provide some broad general patterns emerging from Literature about Women you may wish to consider:

## Attitudes towards women

The assigned texts span the early nineteenth to the twenty-first century, so it is worth noting (in broad terms) that the early nineteenth century novels (eg Jane Austen) handle women's issues generously and sensibly, but the mid-Victorian novel can be very squeamish about them. Here look for generous efforts by novelists of both sexes to expose the double standard by which male sexual delinquency is treated much less harshly than female. Female sexuality (like male) only becomes part of mainstream literature in the Modernist years, and is not fully accepted until the 1960s. First wave feminism belongs to the decades leading up to the First World War and essentially reflects a struggle for equality before the law. Second wave feminism is reflected in the literature of the closing decades of the twentieth century and reflects moral and spiritual struggles for equality (or distinction) between the sexes.

## The female viewpoint

Many of the unseen texts will offer a female voice or viewpoint, or otherwise provide direct access to a woman's inner life. This may reflect how many of the 'outer' battlegrounds of life are in male possession, especially early in the period. There should be many opportunities to analyse inner monologues.

## Marriage

Before the industrial revolution marriage (managed by the law) was the most important and efficient means of transferring wealth, and became a life-defining vocation for many women. Marriage was also a sacrament of the established Anglican Church and almost impossible to break for ordinary people in the early part of the period. It follows that this topic will provide many opportunities to write about marriage and its impact on women.

## Women in the workplace

*'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart / 'Tis woman's whole existence'*

-Byron.

Few of the novels written early in our period offer middle class girls opportunities to earn a living. No woman earns money in *Sense and Sensibility* and only Lady Bruton, faintly managing her committees, offers much of a working female role model in *Mrs Dalloway*. Generally the work the women do in these books is unpaid. Their dreams are not male dreams of parliament or empire, but of marriage (marrying the hero) and love.

## Women being defined by relationships with men

Women, even Esther Greenwood as late as her early 1950s adventures in *The Bell Jar*, typically define the roles they seek (and even follow) in terms of male role models (or obstacles). Lawrence's insistence that his female characters could define the nature and course of a relationship (as Gudrun does with Gerald) was ahead of its time, but some of the later texts in the selection (Winterson, Hurston, Morrison) have gone on to show place and race as stronger determinants of female experience than the fact of gender.

Note: Candidates should be careful not to focus too much on contextual aspects in their discussion. The weighting of the Assessment Objectives indicates clearly that the focus here should be how meanings are shaped in the unseen text.

## Sample question at A Level

Write a critical appreciation of the passage, relating your discussion to your reading concerning Women in literature.

By his own wish the funeral had been as simple and private as possible. One or two distant relations, whom Constance scarcely knew and who would probably not visit her again until she too was dead, came--and went. And lo! the affair was over. The simple celerity<sup>2</sup> of the funeral would have satisfied even Samuel, whose tremendous self-esteem hid itself so effectually behind such externals that nobody had ever fully perceived it. Not even Constance quite knew Samuel's secret opinion of Samuel. Constance was aware that he had a ridiculous side, that his greatest lack had been a lack of spectacular dignity. Even in the coffin, where nevertheless most people are finally effective, he had not been imposing--with his finicky little grey beard persistently sticking up.

The vision of him in his coffin--there in the churchyard, just at the end of King Street!--with the lid screwed down on that unimportant beard, recurred frequently in the mind of the widow, as something untrue and misleading. She had to say to herself: 'Yes, he is really there! And that is why I have this particular feeling in my heart.' She saw him as an object pathetic and wistful, not majestic. And yet she genuinely thought that there could not exist another husband quite so honest, quite so just, quite so reliable, quite so good, as Samuel had been. What a conscience he had! How he would try, and try, to be fair with her! Twenty years she could remember, of ceaseless, constant endeavour on his part to behave rightly to her! She could recall many an occasion when he had obviously checked himself, striving against his tendency to cold abruptness and to sullenness, in order to give her the respect due to a wife. What loyalty was his! How she could depend on him! How much better he was than herself (she thought with modesty)!

His death was an amputation for her. But she faced it with calmness. She was not bowed with sorrow. She did not nurse the idea that her life was at an end; on the contrary, she obstinately put it away from her, dwelling on Cyril<sup>3</sup>. She

<sup>2</sup> **celerity**, swiftness of movement

<sup>3</sup> **Cyril**, Constance's son



did not indulge in the enervating voluptuousness<sup>4</sup> of grief. She had begun in the first hours of bereavement by picturing herself as one marked out for the blows of fate. She had lost her father and her mother, and now her husband. Her career seemed to be punctuated by interments. But after a while her gentle commonsense came to insist that most human beings lose their parents, and that every marriage must end in either a widower or a widow, and that all careers are punctuated by interments. Had she not had nearly twenty-one years of happy married life? (Twenty-one years—rolled up! The sudden thought of their naive ignorance of life, hers and his, when they were first married, brought tears into her eyes. How wise and experienced she was now!) And had she not Cyril? Compared to many women, she was indeed very fortunate.

Arnold Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908)

<sup>4</sup> **enervating voluptuousness**, exhausting luxuriousness (of the grieving process)

### Notes on approaching this unseen passage

- AO2: This is free indirect speech – an attempt on the part of the novelist to record the thoughts of the character as they arise, keeping hold of some of their spontaneity and independence. Viewpoint is restricted to the widow, Constance. She seems anxious for closure, now the funeral is over, but her prose is excited and gasping rather than conclusive or decisive, with lots of exclamation marks, dashes and parentheses, despite her insistence that her key motives are stoicism and 'gentle common sense'. The extract seems oddly tentative in tone, too, as if its speaker had lived her life in one way, or in Samuel's way, and must now live out the remainder in another. There is a sense that, no longer defined by marriage, she doesn't quite know what to do, though there are many signs she is a strong and resourceful woman.
- AO3: The passage's indecisive tone possibly reflects the difficulty a Victorian woman would feel starting life on her own account in middle age. Constance doesn't quite say so outright, but she never really knew Samuel, and her attempts to find him more considerable than herself seem to reflect hidden depths now quite inaccessible. The one thing she is sure about is that people found him funny, as she does, reflecting on the appearance of his beard in the coffin. She finds his chivalry and sensitivity towards herself his chief charm. In truth she has worked hard to be his wife, as he her husband, and they have become defined by their roles. The final reflection, that both husband and wife were naïve about life when they started it, suggests that ignorance of the ways of the world and even of the facts of life, is not always just the bride's portion. Constance reflects that she has been 'more fortunate' (not 'done better') than other women as if being a fulfilled woman at this date is a very specialised destiny.
- It would be helpful if some context (AO3) was supplied by the other texts you have studied. In *Sense and Sensibility* Mrs Ferrars is altogether more brutal and self-serving in using her widowhood than Constance is likely to be, while Mrs Dashwood lacks Constance's 'gentle commonsense', tending to drift through life on a mixture of dreams and hope, rather than feeling herself

marked out for the 'blows of fate' as Constance does. As in Mrs Dalloway women seem to come into their own on the high days (parties and funerals) and the snapshot of the funeral defines Samuel and Constance, much as Clarissa's party defines her day (and underwrites much of her existence). Both the unseen and the Woolf novel find the central characters questioning the shape and even purpose of their existence, as if marriage might merely be an accumulation of social rituals, not what one wished to do at all. Both texts make developed use of early twentieth century internal monologue conventions. However the comparisons and contrasts cited must be precise: this question does not provide an opportunity to write an essay on a text previously studied in the light of a cursory examination of the unseen passage. All comment must be keyed directly to what is in the unseen text.



# DYSTOPIA

These notes are not designed to provide a template or formula for your answer; they may, however, provide some broad general patterns emerging from Dystopian literature you may wish to consider:

## Setting: futuristic or archaic?

Much dystopian writing involves updating to a more sophisticated, often technologically advanced setting (as in Fritz Lang's seminal film *Metropolis*); very frequently however an artificial catastrophe (classically a nuclear holocaust) has reduced the surviving population to a primitive standard of living and politics, as in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. Both settings may involve the development of a specialised language, or the re-coining of certain words ('newspeak'). Both the slick futuristic and the rough retrospective Utopia should give plenty of opportunities to engage with AO2.

## Fallen Utopia or Dystopia proper?

Sometimes the dystopia may possess utopian aspirations or some desirable features; it will sometimes be possible to discern good intentions on the part of a would-be architect of social change that foundered due to miscalculation or overreaching. In darker dystopias the accent will be on social engineering, usually in the service of a tyrannical regime.

## Satirical purpose

Often the dystopia satirises some aggressive aspect or tendency within human nature, often the compulsion to wield power, or to preserve social, racial or gender difference.

## Narrative approach

Commonly the writer will make use of a 'limited' narrative viewpoint, caught up himself or herself in the action, and sometimes several layers of narrative (messages found in cylinders etc) to distance the reader from fantastic events. The illusion of verisimilitude may be increased by using manuscripts, retrieval systems and courtroom transcripts to trap data.

## Context

A key feature of dystopia is that, whatever the situation ostensibly described, the writer's real subject is invariably his or her own society. This is most commonly exemplified by the number of 1950s science fiction stories which are ostensibly about invasion from another planet, but which now seem more obviously about the threat of communism or the threat to democracy represented by anti-communist hysteria. In a similar way *The Handmaid's Tale* foregrounds debates associated with second wave feminism in the 1970s, and *A Clockwork Orange* anxieties about brainwashing in the early 60s. The date of an unseen passage may well suggest contemporary concerns linked to the excerpt, and offer many opportunities to engage with AO3.

## Sample question at A Level

**Write a critical appreciation of the passage, relating your discussion to your reading of dystopian literature.**

When I was quite small I would sometimes dream of a city – which was strange because it began before I even knew what a city was. But this city, clustered on the curve of a big blue bay, would come into my mind. I could see the streets, and the buildings that lined them, the waterfront, even boats in the harbour; yet, waking, I had never seen the sea, or a boat . . .

And the buildings were quite unlike any I knew. The traffic in the streets was strange, carts running with no horses to pull them; and sometimes there were things in the sky, shiny fish-shaped things that certainly were not birds.

Most often I would see this wonderful place by daylight, but occasionally it was by night when the light lay like strings of glow-worms along the shore, and a few of them seemed to be sparks drifting on the water, or in the air.

It was a beautiful, fascinating place, and once, when I was still young enough to know no better, I asked my eldest sister, Mary, where this lovely city could be.

She shook her head, and told me there was no such place – not now. But, perhaps, she suggested, I could somehow be dreaming about times long ago. Dreams were funny things, and there was no accounting for them; so it might be that what I was seeing was a bit of the world as it had been once upon a time – the wonderful world that the Old People had lived in; as it had been before God sent Tribulation.

But after that she went on to warn me very seriously not to mention it to anyone else; other people as far as she knew, did not have such pictures in their heads, either sleeping or waking, so it would be unwise to mention them.

That was good advice, and luckily I had the sense to take it. People in our district had a very sharp eye for the odd, the unusual, so that even my left-handedness caused slight disapproval. So, at that time, and for some years afterwards, I did not mention it to anyone – indeed, I almost forgot about it, for as I grew older, the dream came less frequently, and then very rarely.

But the advice stuck. Without it I might have mentioned the curious understanding I had with my cousin Rosalind, and that would certainly have led us both into very grave trouble – if anyone had happened to believe me. Neither I nor she, I think, paid much attention to it at that time: we simply had the habit of caution. I certainly did not feel unusual. I was a normal little boy, growing up in a normal way, taking the ways of the world about me for granted.

John Wyndham, *The Chrysalids* (1955)



**Notes on approaching this unseen passage**

- AO2. This is first person narrative. It is clear the narrator is more resistant to the dominant regime than his sister, yet he has a 'habit of caution' regarding the gift of second sight he thinks he possesses, because he knows that deviations from the norm (even apparently benign ones, like left-handedness) are despised and possibly persecuted by the regime under which he lives. Capitalisation of 'Old People' (some previous civilisation?) and 'Tribulation' suggest that a common narrative about the past disaster has grown up. The circumlocutions used in describing the dream-city (the narrator has no words for aircraft or automobiles) confirm this as a technologically impoverished dystopia, almost certainly as a result of a man-made cataclysm to be revealed later in the text. The narrator's metaphor for strings of electric lights ('strings of glow-worms along the shore') suggest he does not know what an electric bulb is.
- AO3. Both characters show an apparently unreasonable fear of stepping out of line, suggesting an oppressive dystopian regime. The narrator's eldest sister, particularly, seems preoccupied by a culture of conformity and fear. The narrator instinctively chooses repression over openness ('I did not mention it to anyone'). He protests his normality very loudly – too loudly, as strong hints of his coming deviance at the end of the passage may suggest. The date of the passage (1955) means Wyndham was writing during the most emotive phase of the Cold War. It is impossible to deduce what the great 'Tribulation' that has visited these people might have been, but there is a strong possibility of post-nuclear holocaust; the anxieties about deviancy might reflect fears about the 'otherness' of Communists at this time, especially in the United States.
- It would be helpful if some context (AO3) was supplied by the other texts you have studied. *Nineteen Eighty Four*, for instance, will supply material on attempts by the dystopian state to control imagination - the narrator's dreams of his city, like Winston's of the past, are driven underground by a perceived culture of disapproval. Memories of former regimes (the 'Old People') percolate to the surface in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, too (the bosses, the authors of nursery rhymes). *The Handmaid's Tale* is about the way a patriarchal God can be brought in to underwrite oppression or explain disaster. This seems to be happening in the unseen passage, with its talk of how 'God sent Tribulation'. Both Wyndham's unseen extract and Atwood's novel, like most speculative fiction, are very much products of the times in which they are written. However the comparisons and contrasts cited must be precise: this question does not provide an opportunity to write an essay on a text previously studied in the light of a cursory examination of the unseen passage. All comment must be keyed directly to what is in the unseen text.



# THE GOTHIC

These notes are not designed to provide a template or formula for your answer; they may, however, provide some broad general patterns emerging from the Gothic you may wish to consider:

## Presence of the past

Gothic literature originated as a way of writing about the past, most often the Middle Ages (formerly known as Gothic ages) with their legacy of Catholic superstition and folk belief. That past is made simultaneously fascinating and threatening. It follows that a familiar Gothic approach is to show how the past of an old house or a community or even a nation can resonate in the imagination of present-day inhabitants. The historian, the antiquarian and the keeper of oral memory are thus important figures in the Gothic tradition.

## Unusual narrative voice/viewpoint

From early days writers of Gothic made use of multiple narrators, unusual viewpoints and/or narrative voices. This is often to convey a confined, obsessive experience (the narrator imparting his or her own fear) but it may also communicate a strong sense of verisimilitude.

## Suspense

Gothic writing majors in suspense. Description is often expansive, dialogue hesitant and nervous, narrative voice can shift, there may even be cross-cutting from one scene to another to delay revelation. The effect is to build inner tension and to strengthen emotional response.

## Setting

The most significant feature of a Gothic passage is usually setting. This may involve conventional materials, eg ecclesiastical ruins, xplanatio or pointed windows, but it may also feature swishing trees and windy spaces. The key point is that an internal state of mind becomes externalised on the fabric of a building or landscape, with effects of mental absorption or distortion very like those of expressionist theatre or cinema. The important thing is not to list the architectural features but discuss their emotional impact.

## Supernatural

Often Gothic makes use of the supernatural. If there is no doubt about the ghosts (Count Dracula is certainly a vampire) the reader is invited to suspend his or her disbelief and read the story as a kind of literalised metaphor; if the supernatural content remains in doubt, so does the possibility of direct psychological explanation.

## Dark laughter

Almost all Gothic invites a humorous response. This may be part of an ironic fashion statement; it may be an attempt to cloak transgressive content in humour and irony; but it also reflects that a formidable human preservative against horror is

(dark) laughter. It is always worth exploring the 'camp' quality of Gothic if you are sure of your ground.

## Example question at A Level

**Write a critical appreciation of the passage, relating your discussion to your reading of the Gothic.**

'Without giving myself time to think, I knocked away the cement all round the marked stone, and then gave it a prise on the right side with my crowbar. It moved at once, and I saw that it was but a thin light slab, such as I could easily lift out myself, and that it stopped the entrance to a cavity. I did lift it out unbroken, and set it on the step, for it might be very important to us to be able to replace it. Then I waited for several minutes on the step just above. I don't know why, but I think to see if any dreadful thing would rush out. Nothing happened. Next I lit a candle, and very cautiously I placed it inside the cavity, with some idea of seeing whether there were foul air, and of getting a glimpse of what was inside. There was some foulness of air which nearly extinguished the flame, but in no long time it burned quite steadily. The hole went some little way back, and also on the right and left of the entrance, and I could see some rounded light-coloured objects within which might be bags. There was no use in waiting. I faced the cavity, and looked in. There was nothing immediately in the front of the hole. I put my arm in and felt to the right, very gingerly...

'Just give me a glass of cognac, Brown. I'll go on in a moment, Gregory...

'Well, I felt to the right, and my fingers touched something curved, that felt—yes—more or less like leather; dampish it was, and evidently part of a heavy, full thing. There was nothing, I must say, to alarm one. I grew bolder, and putting both hands in as well as I could, I pulled it to me, and it came. It was heavy, but moved more easily than I expected. As I pulled it towards the entrance, my left elbow knocked over and extinguished the candle. I got the thing fairly in front of the mouth and began drawing it out. Just then Brown gave a sharp ejaculation and ran quickly up the steps with the lantern. He will tell you why in a moment. Startled as I was, I looked round after him, and saw him stand for a minute at the top and then walk away a few yards. Then I heard him call softly, "All right, sir," and went on pulling out the great bag, in complete darkness. It hung for an instant on the edge of the hole, then slipped forward on to my chest, and put its arms round my neck.

'My dear Gregory, I am telling you the exact truth. I believe I am now acquainted with the extremity of terror and repulsion which a man can endure without losing his mind. I can only just manage to tell you now the bare outline of the experience. I was conscious of a most horrible smell of mould, and of a cold kind of face pressed against my own, and moving slowly over it, and of several—I don't know how many—legs or arms or tentacles or something clinging to my body. I screamed out, Brown says, like a beast, and fell away backward from the steps on which I stood, and the creature slipped downwards,



I suppose, on to that same step. Providentially the band round me held firm. Brown did not lose his head, and was strong enough to pull me up to the top and get me over the edge quite promptly. How he managed it exactly I don't know, and I think he would find it hard to tell you. I believe he contrived to hide our implements in the deserted building nearby, and with very great difficulty he got me back to the inn. I was in no state to make explanations, and Brown knows no German; but next morning I told the people some tale of having had a bad fall in the abbey ruins, which, I suppose, they believed.

M.R James, *'The Treasure of Abbot Thomas'* (1904)

or pedagogical purposes, M.R. James's purpose is primarily to make your flesh creep. Both James and Carter are arguably conscious of female sexual spaces (James's dark cavity, Carter's bloody chamber). However the comparisons and contrasts cited must be precise: this question does not provide an opportunity to write an essay on a text previously studied in the light of a cursory examination of the unseen passage. All comment must be keyed directly to what is in the unseen text.

### Notes on approaching this unseen passage

- AO2. This is first person narrative, obviously recalling an adventure that retains a powerful tang of unpleasantness, even after some time has passed. Gregory is listening, and Brown, the narrator's assistant on the night in question, is also present, lending authenticity. The opening paragraph is given with an air of business-like instruction, as if the speaker were used to prising open sealed vaults in quest of treasure. Accumulation of circumstantial detail heightens suspense, until, at the key moment of putting his arm in the cavity, the narrative fractures altogether, with the narrator asking for a glass of cognac to still his nerves. Irregular use of narrative voice in this way, to heighten both terror and a sense of verisimilitude, is characteristic of Gothic. There is a good deal of creative understatement. It is not clear exactly what Brown may have been disturbed by (though we can guess), and there is a repeated admission in very general terms that the narrative can only give a vague sense of what the experience was really like.
- AO3. Though precise details of what the narrator and his sidekick are doing are not given they are clearly looking for treasure in an ancient sealed space and in a foreign country (Germany). They interfere with the past and the dead and something with plenty of arms and tentacles (the vagueness of the description makes it more horrible) drops onto the lead treasure-seeker's neck. The creature could not have survived in the foul air of the cavity (they have previously tested it) so it is clearly not of flesh and blood. Exactly what it is not determined, though it had 'a cold kind of face', that is, not really a face at all.. The setting is dark, damp, secretive and accessible only to initiates (or fools) possibly suggesting that the narrator's ambition, greed or curiosity has overcome him. The narrator tells us the stories he told at the inn to explain away his shocked state, but the supernatural explanation seems the preferred one.
- It would be helpful if some context (AO3) was supplied by the other texts you have studied. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is full of comparable descriptive passages, managing suspense with carefully compiled details (Stoker's research for his novel was impeccable). The broken, indirect narrative method also recalls that of *Dracula*. Both Stoker and Angela Carter show how threats from the primitive past can destabilise the present, though M.R. James's scholarly style is rather less knowing than Carter's, and his narrator altogether more vulnerable to supernatural manifestations. Where Carter is using the Gothic for moral



# THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

These notes are not designed to provide a template or formula for your answer; they may, however, provide some broad general patterns emerging from the Literature of Immigration you may wish to consider:

## Linguistic confusion/cross-purpose

A lot of writing about the immigrant experience in English focuses on the United States, with its determination to forge one entity from many. The classic pattern is set by accounts of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe, often in the years immediately before the First World War. The immigrant generation tend to be separated by language from the culture they join, preventing them joining with it in other than basic senses, and the linguistic barrier may impede their children if they too have made the journey, as in Henry Roth's *Call it Sleep*. If the passage set deals with first generation immigrant experience, linguistic awkwardness and confusion is likely to feature.

## Conflict between generations

Second generation immigrant writing often concerns the pressure or desire to assimilate with the new culture on the part of the children, and sometimes resistance on the part of the first arrivals to let go the experience or culture of their homeland. Philip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus*, where the children of Jewish immigrants embrace all the novelties of the new consumer society, exemplifies the tensions of this phase.

## Social mobility

Sometimes the second generation moves upmarket, or to a new district, as Philip Roth's immigrant Jews so often quit New Jersey for New England or New York; sometimes the immigrant group remains trapped in the declining industrial spaces it was first able to afford, and becomes entangled in poverty and crime. As much writing about the immigrant experience is in realist modes there will often be clues in the setting of an extract as to how far the immigrant experience has progressed.

## Prejudice

Sometimes differences of ethnicity and faith setup indelible tensions with the receiving culture, showing up in passages of bigotry and misunderstanding - though cultural exchange, is never just one way: witness the impact of Bangladeshi cuisine on British culture.

## Keeping in touch with roots

Most writing about the immigrant experience in English shows concern about retaining cultural 'roots' under pressure to assimilate with the receiving culture.

## Example question at A Level

**Write a critical appreciation of the passage, relating your discussion to your reading concerning the immigrant experience.**

It had a Jamaican fellow who living in Brixton, that come to the station to see what tenants he could pick up for the tenants that now live in Brixton. This test when he did first come open up a club, and by and by he save up money and buy a house. The next thing you know, he buy out a whole suite of houses in Brixton, and let out rooms to the boys, hitting them anything like three or four guineas for a double. When it come to making money, it ain't have anything like 'ease me up' or 'both of we is countrymen together' in the old London. Sometimes he put bed and chair in two or three big room and tell the fellahs they could live together, but each would have to pay a pound. So you could imagine – five-six fellahs in one room and the test coining money for so. And whenever a boat-train come in, he hustling down to Waterloo to pick up them fellahs who new to London and ain't have place to stay, telling them how Brixton is a nice area, and they would feel at home in the district, because the Mayor on the boys' side and it ain't have plenty prejudice there.

While Moses smiling to see the test hustling tenants, a newspaper fellow come up to him and say, 'Excuse me sir, have you just arrived from Jamaica?'

And Moses don't know why but he tells the fellow yes.

'Would you like to tell me what conditions there are like?' the fellow takes out notebook and pencil and look at Moses.

Now Moses don't know a damn thing about Jamaica – Moses come from Trinidad, which is a thousand miles from Jamaica, but the English people believe that everybody who come from the West Indies come from Jamaica.

'The situation is desperate,' Moses say, thinking fast, 'you know the big hurricane it had two weeks ago?'

'Yes,' the reporter say, for in truth it did have a hurricane in Jamaica.

'Well I was in that hurricane,' Moses say. 'Plenty people get kill. I was sitting down in my house and suddenly when I look up I see the sky. What you think happen?'

'What?'

'The hurricane blow the roof off.'

'But tell me, sir, why are so many Jamaicans immigrating to England?'

'Ah,' Moses say, 'that is a question to limit, that is what everybody is trying to find out. They can't get work,' Moses say, warming up. 'And furthermore, let me give you my view of the situation in this country. We can't get no place to live, and we only getting the worst jobs it have –'



But by this time the infant<sup>6</sup> feel he get catch with Moses, and he say 'Thank you,' and carry off.

Moses was sorry, it was the first time he ever really get a good chance to say his mind, and he had a lot of things to say.

Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956)

<sup>6</sup> The reporter is much younger than Moses, but, ironically, quickly gets the measure of him.

### Notes on approaching this unseen passage

- AO2. This is third person narrative, written with both energy and irony, but in the same patois as the episode's comic hero, Moses, suggesting that the narrative is sympathetic to Moses's point of view. However the slum landlord, called 'the test', also speaks a similar idiom, leaving it hard to judge whether the narrative criticises him as exploiter or mildly commends his opportunism. The only 'standard' English voice is that of the reporter, courteous but detached and in a hurry.
- AO3. The passage is taken from a classic of the 'Windrush Generation', when, in the early 1950s, immigrants came to the UK from the Caribbean in large numbers (though you wouldn't need to know the historical details here). The issues are those of first generation immigrants: where to settle, what to do, what the receiving culture thinks of you. There are dark hints of crowded living spaces, extortionate rents, that immigrant is not above preying on immigrant. Moses's interview with the reporter shows that the home culture, not the West Indians, are likely to call the shots: Moses's tall story about the hurricane is ignored, as is all local colour or discriminative detail about the Caribbean. The reporter does not want, or need, Moses to 'perform' in 'character', nor to talk about his 'roots'. To the English, who need to simplify in order to understand, and whose prejudices are becoming fixed, all West Indians are Jamaican. It is likely (though we can't be sure from the passage) the reporter is gathering copy for a piece on social issues (or problems) with West Indian immigrants.
- It would be helpful if some context (AO3) was supplied by the other texts you have studied. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, for example, might suggest how 'lonely' (never fully understood) the voice of the immigrant becomes in the modern mega-city. *Call it Sleep* will offer innumerable parallels of linguistic barriers, exploitation, and misunderstanding of and prejudice against immigrant Jews. However the comparisons and contrasts cited must be precise: this question does not provide an opportunity to write an essay on a text previously studied in the light of a cursory examination of the unseen passage. All comment must be keyed directly to what is in the unseen text.







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