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Candidate Style Answers with commentary

H474

ENGLISH LITERATURE

H472/02

Comparative and contextual study

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CONTENTS

QUESTION 1	4
QUESTION 2A	8
QUESTION 2B	11
QUESTION 3	14
QUESTION 4A	18
QUESTION 5	21
QUESTION 6B	25
QUESTION 7	28
QUESTION 8A	32
QUESTION 8B	35
QUESTION 9	38
QUESTION 10A	42



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INTRODUCTION

At the time of publication, authentic answers from the work of students were not available so OCR senior examiners have created these candidate style answers.

These exemplars should be read in conjunction with sample assessment materials and mark schemes (and Principal Examiner's Reports once they become available) on the OCR website. This content has been selected to illustrate how questions on the new texts might be answered, and to demonstrate that approaches to question setting and marking will remain consistent with past practice. The candidate style answers are intended to exemplify work which would fulfil the top band criteria, supported by examiner commentary and conclusions. These exemplars should in no way be regarded as model answers.

OCR is open to a wide variety of approaches, and answers will be considered on their merits. It should be remembered that the standard used in marking these candidate style answers has not gone through the usual rigorous procedures and checks applied to live material.



AMERICAN LITERATURE 1880 - 1940

QUESTION 1

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

Eugene remained in the furnace of Norfolk for four days, until his money was gone. He watched it go without fear, with a sharp quickening of his pulses, tasting the keen pleasure of his loneliness and the unknown turnings of his life. He sensed the throbbing antennae of the world: life purred like a hidden dynamo, with the vast excitement of ten thousand glorious threats. He might do all, dare all, become all. The far and the mighty was near him, around him, above him. There was no great bridge to span, no hard summit to win. From obscurity, hunger, loneliness, he might be lifted in a moment into power, glory, love. The transport loading at the docks might bear him war-ward, love-ward, fame-ward Wednesday night.

He walked by lapping water through the dark. He heard its green wet slap against the crusted pier-piles: he drank its strong cod scent, and watched the loading of great boats drenched in blazing light as they weltered slowly down into the water. And the night was loud with the rumble of huge cranes, the sudden loose rattle of the donkey-engines, the cries of the overseers, and the incessant rumbling trucks of stevedores within the pier.

His imperial country, for the first time, was gathering the huge thrust of her might. The air was charged with murderous exuberance, rioting and corrupt extravagance.

Through the hot streets of that town seethed the toughs, the crooks, the vagabonds of a nation-- Chicago gunmen, bad niggers from Texas, Bowery bums, pale Jews with soft palms, from the shops of the city, Swedes from the Middle-West, Irish from New England, mountaineers from Tennessee and North Carolina, whores, in shoals and droves, from everywhere. For these the war was a fat enormous goose raining its golden eggs upon them. There was no thought or belief in any future. There was only the triumphant Now. There was no life beyond the moment. There was only an insane flux and reflux of getting and spending.

Young men from Georgia farms came, in the evenings, from their work on piers, in camps, in shipyards, to dress up in their peacock plumage. And at night, hard and brown and lean of hand and face, they stood along the curbing in \$18.00 tan leathers, \$80.00 suits, and \$8.00 silk shirts striped with broad alternating bands of red and blue. They were carpenters, masons, gang overseers, or said they were: they were paid ten, twelve, fourteen, eighteen dollars a day.

They shifted, veered from camp to camp, worked for a month, loafed opulently for a week, enjoying the brief bought loves of girls they met upon the ocean-beach or in a brothel.

Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929)



This passage is an extract from a novel published in the late 1920s but apparently set in America late in the First World War.¹ At this time, America gained a global economic advantage since it did not suffer from the war in the way Europe did, and was able to dominate European markets. There was rapid economic growth in America at this time and **this is reflected in the industry and rapid gains in wealth depicted in the passage: 'the war was a fat enormous goose raining its golden eggs on them.'² **The passage is written in the voice of the narrator, but expressed entirely from the point of view of Eugene, who is presumably a central figure in the novel.**³**

The extract starts by making it clear that Eugene is anything but prosperous at this point: he remains in Norfolk 'until his money was gone'. **He is not daunted or oppressed by his poverty, however, unlike the Joad family in *The Grapes of Wrath*, published ten years later;**⁴ in *Look Homeward, Angel*, there are still apparently fortunes to be made in America, so Eugene watches his money go 'without fear'. Thomas Wolfe generates a great sense of excitement and a world of possibilities by using a number of descriptive techniques: he suggests that **Eugene can physically sense his own potential, 'tasting the keen pleasure of his loneliness' and 'sensing the throbbing antennae of the world'; although there are 'ten thousand threats' around him, the threats are 'glorious'. Wolfe also uses mechanised imagery, for example 'life purred like a hidden dynamo', which matches the rapid industrial development described later in the passage.**⁵ It is interesting that 'loneliness', usually perceived as a negative condition, is experienced by Eugene with 'pleasure': **American literature often celebrates individualism, and Eugene is delighted by the sense that he can achieve greatness by and for himself.**⁶

Wolfe suggests that success is there for the taking with a rhetorical flourish: 'He might do all, dare all, become all'. This is the essence of the American Dream, which provides the drive and energy for much American Literature in this period.⁷ **It may be that this passage occurs early in the novel, because structurally Eugene seems to be starting out; it would be interesting to know if his dreams are realised or if they end in failure and disappointment, as Gatsby's do in *The Great Gatsby*.**⁸ At this stage, Eugene is in the grip of a 'rags to riches' dream; at the end of the first paragraph, Wolfe slightly undercuts his grandiose ideas of roles he might play in the war, in love and in fame.

1. The answer starts sensibly by putting the passage into historical context (AO3).

2. The candidate usefully ties her contextual material to the passage (AO3).

3. The candidate identifies the narrative method of the passage in her introduction (AO2).

4. The candidate makes a contextual link to a set text; she avoids the temptation to leap into an extended discussion based on prepared material, however, and returns immediately to the passage (AO3).

5. This is the first piece of detailed textual analysis; the candidate picks out apt examples and keeps an eye on the way that the imagery of the whole passage hangs together (AO2).

6. Here there is a clear awareness of an important aspect of American writing which is closely tied to the passage (AO3).

7. The American Dream is likely to be a popular source of contextual discussion; the candidate avoids offering a 'mini-essay' on the topic, and wisely stays close to the passage (AO3).

8. Interestingly, the candidate is wrong about the placement of the passage in the novel, but will still receive credit for a thoughtful insight; the link to a set text provides useful context (AO2, AO3).



In part, the passage seems to function like a historical record of an exciting period in American history; however, if a 'historical record' sounds quite dry, in this case history is made to come alive by use of vivid description which brings into play the senses of the reader. **Eugene can hear the water 'lapping' and see the 'crusted pier-piles'; Wolfe goes further in engaging the senses by his use of synaesthesia in expressions like 'he heard its green wet slap' (combining sight, hearing and touch) and 'drank its strong cod scent' (combining smell and taste).**⁹ **The descriptions of huge cranes, engines and trucks build on the earlier mechanised imagery and remind the reader of the energy of technological progress at this point in American history; there is a sense of enormous confidence and opportunity everywhere Eugene looks.**¹⁰

The third paragraph is strikingly brief, made up of just two sentences: here, Wolfe widens his focus to include America's political position in the world. His use of the term 'imperial' is interesting, since we usually associate it with the Old World of Europe rather than the democratic vision of the United States. **Perhaps a question is raised as to whether America will use her power with fairness and justice, or simply impose 'the huge thrust of her might' for her own advantage.**¹¹ The second sentence of this short paragraph gives an even greater sense of foreboding: 'The air was charged with murderous exuberance, rioting and corrupt extravagance'. For the first time in the passage, **we are reminded that with great wealth there is always the possibility for great corruption, as is seen in *The Great Gatsby* in characters such as Wolfshiem, and even perhaps Gatsby himself.**¹²

The next paragraph features a colourful list of all the different kinds of people who are 'seething' through the streets of Norfolk, the heat adding to the atmosphere. All of them are seen as 'toughs, crooks and vagabonds' – that is to say, everyone who can see the opportunity to make a quick fortune by fair means or foul. **The descriptions of different cultures used by Wolfe are essentially stereotypes, and now would be seen in some cases as offensive: for example, he refers to 'bad niggers' and 'pale Jews with soft palms', perhaps suggesting a soft lifestyle and a tendency to make money on the back of other people's hard work.**¹³ 'Chicago gunmen' are based on a soon-to-be notorious image of gangsters operating in Chicago, embodied by historical figures such as Al Capone. **The list includes people from many different nations who have emigrated to the USA in the hope of making a better life for themselves: this cultural diversity and sense of purpose are key features of much American literature.**¹⁴ The women in this company might be diverse in origin but are all 'whores'; the capitalist frenzy is driving everyone to exploit whatever they can in a drive for profit, and the women seem generally to be limited to selling their bodies.

Wolfe refers to the atmosphere in the town, saying in a series of short, striking sentences that 'There was no thought or belief in any future. There was only the triumphant Now. There was no life beyond the moment.'¹⁵ These statements sound impressive, but may fill the reader with a sense of foreboding that these people may be disappointed in their dreams. This fear is underlined in the last sentence of the paragraph where the 'getting and spending' habit is described as 'insane': surely this cannot come to any good?

9. The candidate fulfils the dominant objective, **AO2**, by discussing in detail features of the style; she also fulfils **AO1** by showing a command of literary terminology.

10. **AO2** and **AO3** are combined here with a reference to history and a sense of the tone of the passage; combining AOs in this way is likely to be a feature of stronger answers.

11. Here, the candidate is not certain about the contextual implications of the passage, but offers a thoughtful suggestion (**AO3**).

12. Another useful reference to wider reading, which is again achieved with a light touch; there is no need for detailed discussion of the set text.

13. The candidate shows her awareness that the reception of literary works can change over time (**AO5**), and notes how certain ideas and expressions can become offensive to later audiences (**AO3**).

14. The candidate shows a clear awareness of distinctive qualities of American culture and can relate them to the passage (**AO3**).

15. The candidate has discussed imagery, and now finds interest in the variation of sentence structure (**AO2**).



The characters seem to work hard but play hard too, and to enjoy their money as soon as they get it: Wolfe describes the 'peacock plumage' of the young men dressed up for a night out suggesting that they have spared no expense in the effort to impress. **He contrasts their 'hard', 'brown' and 'lean' appearance, which gives a strong sense of their dedication to hard physical work, with the luxury and colour of their expensive clothing: 'silk shirts striped with broad alternating bands of red and blue.'**¹⁶ **Wolfe actually tells the reader the dollar price of the suits and shirts, underlining the capitalist interest in the bottom line; this might remind the reader of other American texts which are very specific and detailed about their interest in money, such as Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* which more than once evokes the presence of 'soft green' dollar bills.**¹⁷ Wolfe gives a sense of the endless supply of money to be earned by these workmen by listing the increasing amounts they can expect to make as 'ten, twelve, fourteen, eighteen dollars a day'. His list of professions claimed by the young men (carpenters, masons etc) is wryly concluded with the statement 'or said they were', which once again gives a whiff of dishonesty and possible corruption; also, perhaps, the need for people in this capitalist society to sell themselves dear.

The conclusion of the passage describes a shifting population of men who alternately work and 'loaf opulently' or 'enjoy the brief bought loves of girls they met... in a brothel'; this makes the men sound almost like animals with no finer feelings or aims in life, and no ideals. It seems as if they are all driven by money and pleasure, and the reader can't help thinking that this easy life of getting and spending can't last for ever. **Overall, the passage seems to celebrate America as a land of cultural diversity and enormous opportunity, and also as a vibrant and exciting place just to stand and watch, for example the 'great boats drenched in blazing light as they weltered down slowly into the water'. Throughout, however, there are suggestions of corruption and harm which it is difficult to ignore.**¹⁸

Examiner commentary

This is a top band answer which is consistently focused on the passage and question. The candidate supplies detailed AO2 analysis which is especially successful in her discussion of synaesthesia and her treatment of the detailed pricing of the clothing. She supplies context (AO3) in various forms: an awareness of significant historical events and trends; a clear sense of key features in American Literature such as individualism and the American Dream; and literary context based on her wider reading. She consistently keys her contextual insights to aspects of the passage, and avoids the common pitfall of lapsing into the use of prepared material at the expense of focus on the set passage. AO1 quality is evident at all times in the clarity and organisation of her essay and in her confidence in employing literary language.

16. A writer's use of contrast is often a telling aspect for analysis (AO2).

17. This awareness of writers' use of detail, both in the set passage and in wider reading, is a sign of a top band answer (AO2).

18. The candidate sensibly supplies an overview of the passage as a whole in her conclusion.



QUESTION 2(A)

F Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*

'Much American literature explores the theme of isolation.'

By comparing *The Great Gatsby* with at least one other text prescribed for this topic, discuss how far you agree with this view.

Both *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck explore the theme of isolation in a number of significant and sometimes ambivalent ways. **Fitzgerald introduces classic Modernist themes of alienation from the Big City and its dominating culture, thus making his protagonists lonely among people, while Steinbeck concentrates mostly on the predicament of a rural people forced to migrate *en masse*, and therefore compelled into some kind of unified activity.**¹ Nevertheless it is also possible to argue the case that both works present an important meditation on the darker aspects of the theme of isolation – and the significance for the very idea of the 'American Dream', what critic Malcolm Bradbury has described as 'the dream of an innocent pastoral America created by man's desire for wonder'. Isolation is often depicted during this period as the negative manifestation of American individualism: in other words, alienation.² We see this demonstrated clearly in *The Great Gatsby* in the presentation of – amongst others – Jay Gatsby ("I usually find myself among strangers") and the polarisation of roles in *The Grapes of Wrath* between the haves and the have nots. ("...the quality of owning...cuts you off forever from the 'we'").³

The theme of isolation is central to *The Great Gatsby*. Jay Gatsby – the novel's titular character – is perceived to be isolated throughout the book even when (ironically enough) he is throwing lavish parties attended by hordes of guests. As Gatsby himself states: "I like large parties. They're so intimate. At small parties there isn't any privacy." Gatsby's 'isolation', like everything about him, is always viewed by the admiring but baffled narrator Nick from a distance so that, though Gatsby seems convivial, when the lights go down at his parties, it's as if he knew no-one, and no-one had been there. There is a vulnerable, self-absorbed side to Gatsby, whose dream does not involve companionship, but reconstructing the ghosts of his personal past. Other characters in the novel, like Gatsby, also feel at odds with their age: Nick, who keeps himself apart from his work, Jordan, afraid of commitment or telling the truth, Wilson, carrying about with him an isolated world of grudge and misconception, consumed with murderous despair. **But though the upmarket characters, at least, spend plenty of time together, they do not work as a team, or become implicated in one another's sufferings. As Nick himself states: "The loneliest moment in someone's life is when they are watching their whole world fall apart, and all they can do is stare blankly."**⁴

1. The candidate introduces both texts, offering contrasting contexts for each (AO1, AO3, AO4).

2. The answer demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the topic area (AO3) and introduces a comment from a critic (AO5).

3. Textual reference is an excellent method of developing the comparative argument (AO1, AO4).

4. This paragraph establishes firmly the theme of isolation in *The Great Gatsby* (AO1).



The landowners in *The Grapes of Wrath*, in contrast, stare blankly not because their worlds are falling apart, but because no one is talking to them. They eat up all the land to feel better about themselves, but it cuts them off from the rest of their community. As the shrewd preacher Casy argues in Chapter 18 of *The Grapes of Wrath*: 'If [a landowner] needs a million acres to make him feel rich, seems to me he needs it 'cause he feels awful poor inside hisself'.⁵ Fitzgerald's characters are clearly also into improving their self-esteem by means of an extravagant lifestyle. They feed off America's enhanced economic status after the war and the accompanying boom; Gatsby may live off the prohibition laws. But the novel's judgment of these activities, indeed its attitude to politics generally, seems faint in comparison with Steinbeck's. In his novel, as Casy suggests, America is a divided nation: the impoverished victims of the Great Depression forced to struggle along together like clouds of insects, but sometimes too hungry or depressed to touch or talk; whereas in Oklahoma their former landowners and in California the resident population, who feel their jobs threatened by migrants, refused to recognise them not only as fellow Americans but sometimes even as human beings. **Steinbeck views the enforced human division and the widespread sense of isolation in the depression years as fuel for a political homily on a desperate predicament.⁶**

As critic Lionel Trilling puts it, 'Gatsby, divided between power and dream, comes inevitably to stand for America itself.'⁷ It follows that *The Great Gatsby*, too, has plenty to say about the alienating side of the American Dream. Gatsby's 'backstory', sure enough, is of vigorous individualism (and we can note in this context especially those episodes involving Dan Cody) and of self-improvement (again witnessing the demanding schedule from James Gatz's college years). Despite the yachts and colleges, though, he has also been something of a loner, with his combination of relentless aspiration, romantic addiction to Daisy and to his own past, and dark and possibly sordid secrets. The Gatsby who befriends Nick, and who earns enough respect from him to ensure he is not quite unmourned at his funeral, never truly unbuttons himself to his new friend (and 'friend' in Nick's case never seems the right word). His isolation is increased by the fact that his real cultural centre of gravity seems to be in the mid-west as he 'drift[s] here and there trying to forget', thus increasing the sense of his cultural isolation in New York (a sense of isolation all the other characters, who are also mid-westerners, share). He does business at the end of a telephone, and dies and is buried (in spite of Nick) almost alone – to the extent that the ultimate message of the novel may be, for all the polish and charm of its upmarket New York lifestyle, that the American Dream frequently leads to frustration, failure and isolation.

Thus a common theme in both texts is that the ambitious reach of the American Dream can only be attempted at the cost of probable frustration and failure. The famous last page or so of Fitzgerald's novel depicts excited, lonely men pinning all their hopes on rewards which may come tomorrow, arguing that such cross-grained isolated dreamers, trying to row back into personal pasts, may be typical Americans. The share-croppers and squatters of *The Grapes of Wrath* rented and tilled and farmed a piece of America that turned not into rich profits but a dustbowl.⁸ There is little sympathy on the part of victorious characters in this novel for the defeated, and no safety net for them provided by a state that has always distrusted socialism. In Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* a similar combination of ruined hope and exhausting nostalgia is also visible. The 'ragged man', who knows there are no jobs in California, prefers to go back home 'to starve'. **The American Dream has failed for the Joads as for thousands of other families, and in a significant number of later works by other American writers such as Arthur Miller in his play *Death of a Salesman*.⁹**

5. Having established the theme in one text, the writer is in a position to develop comparison (AO4).

6. Isolation is seen here more as a political than a personal issue, underlining the contrast between the texts (AO3, AO4).

7. The candidate offers a critical insight into the novel (AO5).

8. The two texts are drawn together in the argument via a common theme of frustration and failure (AO1, AO4).

9. The candidate offers a sense of wider literary context (AO3).



The boom years of Fitzgerald's 'roaring twenties' were succeeded – following the Wall Street Crash of 1929 – by challenges such as the 'ragged man' faced in the Great Depression. Steinbeck develops themes of social exclusion, financial hardship and isolation from privilege ('he was a stranger to all the world') in the presentation of the Joads and the other families migrating from Oklahoma.¹⁰ *The Grapes of Wrath* uses both conventional narrative and documentary-style evidence to present a vision of both the individual members of a community who are alone and helpless, and also of a larger society in which division has led to isolation and tragedy. Like *The Great Gatsby*, with its flashbacks and narrative ambiguities, it is a work which makes much use of varying viewpoint. **Steinbeck's introductory paragraphs and inter-chapters set the Okies' journey in the context of nature, weather and infrastructure (particularly the seemingly endless roads leading west). When the book turns from this enormous setting to the tiny people and diminutive trucks the contrast is striking. The migrant human beings are dwarfed by their epic predicament. The members of the Joad family are isolated ('They's times when how you feel got to be kep' to yourself') from privilege, altruism and success of the kind often presented so vividly in *The Great Gatsby*.¹¹ They suffer as a result of the fact that they have – in effect – been removed from the benefits of the 'American Dream' as a sort of sacrifice to those with power and wealth. The only means of escape from this social isolation offered in the novel are the power of family and community on the one hand ('the citadel of the family') and the catharsis of 'wrath' itself on the other. We may compare this with another ill-fated attempt to escape from loneliness and poverty (but via very different means) in Myrtle Wilson's disastrous affair with Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*.**

We may conclude, therefore, that both *The Great Gatsby* and *The Grapes of Wrath* present – in their different ways – a chilling vision of the effects of isolation (whether social, financial or emotional) in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century.¹²

Examiner commentary

This essay offers consistently detailed insight into both novels, making excellent use of textual reference in developing its argument. The writer has chosen to use both the core texts, and develops comparison often by showing how different in kind they are. Context is sharply indicated with a good grasp of the topic area in terms of history and literature. AO5 is realised through two quotations from critics, but also through the candidate's strong presentation of a range of views of both texts in his own argument.

10. The texts are placed into historical context (AO3).

11. Close reference to the text is an effective way of supporting the argument and developing the strong contrast between these two novels (AO1, AO4).

12. The conclusion is very brief, but crucially includes both texts and relates them to each other, the topic area and the question (AO1, AO3, AO4).



QUESTION 2(B)

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

'Poverty and the struggle to make a living are common themes in American literature.'

Compare the handling of these themes in *The Grapes of Wrath* with at least one other text prescribed for this topic.

The characters of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Native Son* show overwhelming desire to survive poverty and prejudice against all odds, though in some cases it eventually leads to their downfall.¹ As Aristotle states, ambition is a common fault or *hamartia*, but in the case of the Joads and of Bigger Thomas it is not ambition but the social and political situations in which they find themselves that cause their tragedy. Bigger wishes to get out of the Chicago slums and better himself. He does not wish to live among rats. The Joads need to get out of the Oklahoma dust-bowl if they are to find anything to eat. **All of them believe in the American dream, thinking that by behaving responsibly and working hard they will rise to the top of society. But they are naïve in attempting to gain this desire. The American Dream disappoints as often as it fulfils, and as victims of the depression and of racism they seem 'born to suffer' in a way that belies America, the 'land of opportunity.'**²

1. The candidate starts by including both texts in his opening sentence, which is a promising start from the point of view of comparison (AO4).

2. The American Dream is helpfully invoked here, and the essay makes it clear that disappointment is likely to be its outcome in both texts (AO3, AO4).



Bigger and the preacher, Casy, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, both come to understand how people are victims of their origins and situations and it is only by recognising the unity of humankind that people can break out of the poverty trap, or overcome snobbish or racist understandings of it. **Steinbeck had studied marine biology under his friend Edward F. Ricketts and became convinced that human beings were at their most powerful when 'on the move' like a shoal of fishes.**³ The preacher tells the senior Joads that nothing is right if a man betrays the group by running 'off his own way, kicking and dragging and fighting.' The secret is to work together, 'one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang.' Casy argues this is 'holy'. Steinbeck proves it to be mighty effective, a fleet of old Hudson wagons moving like insects across the continent of America until they find what they hope to be the sunshine of California. **As critic Walter Allen has put it, 'Steinbeck is at his best as a novelist when he is dealing with human beings living at something approaching the animal level.'**⁴ Bigger is, by contrast, a born loner, defying his family, friends and employers as he realises that they are all tainted by the institutional racism of mid-century America. **His story seems little more than a series of disasters as he tries to come to terms with the poverty that surrounds him. This is in stark contrast to the more constructive endeavours of the Okies in *The Grapes of Wrath*.**⁵ But when he finds a solution to his problems it is, like Casy, through Jan's belief in group empowerment, in this case believing the group must be raised at the expense of the individual if necessary. **Thus both characters go against the normal view that America is a country for individuals and individualism,**⁶ at the cost of a terrible revenge. Bigger, who becomes a Communist, ends the novel in the death-cell, condemned for murder, while Casy is killed. Meanwhile, bigotry is everywhere. One of the most powerful symbolic moments in Steinbeck's novel is when excess oranges are hosed down with kerosene and burnt so that the hungry Okies cannot eat them. One Californian suggests the 'goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling . . . They ain't a hell of a lot better than gorillas.'

Both novels suggest that the poor are barely responsible for their actions and sometimes find themselves doing not what they wish to do, but what their historical situation determines. In the 'migrant road' chapter of *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck writes as if Route 66 were a great river rather than a human structure. **Following it the Okies pass from state to state without the need to look at a map: Route 66 is a force of nature. 'And the concrete road shone like a mirror under the sun,' writes Steinbeck, 'and in the distance the heat made it seem that there were pools of water in the road.' Meanwhile the cars behave less like machines than 'wounded things, panting and struggling'. Steinbeck's novel describes the epic journey of the Okies in not just heroic but arguably biblical terms.**⁷ They are like the Israelite exodus from Egypt in search of the right to bring up their families healthily and earn their food. Wright's presentation of Bigger's behaviour makes it even clearer that his life is pre-determined. Time after time Bigger seems to do what a prejudiced white man might expect him to do, from taunting his sister with a live rat to killing Mary, who has befriended him. **In *Grapes* some of the Okies, if they work or fight hard enough, may get out of the poverty-trap. But in *Native Son* Bigger never finds a satisfactory way out.**⁸ He seems haunted, and driven, by an inner self that expects him to fail and ensures he does, and many of the book's first black readers empathised. **As the major African American novelist James Baldwin put it, 'No American negro exists who does not have his private Bigger Thomas living in his skull.'**⁹

3. Useful biographical context (AO3).

4. The comment from a critic is well integrated into the argument (AO5).

5. The candidate ensures that the texts keep coming into contact with each other, to enable performance against AO4.

6. The candidate shows awareness of the context of the topic (AO3).

7. The answer includes some detail from the text, which cannot be rewarded against AO2, but receives credit because it enables detailed comparison of this novel with *Native Son* (AO4).

8. The candidate is successful in finding both similarities and differences between these two texts (AO4).

9. A valuable insight from a critic (AO5).



Both novels, as I have said, turn away from the conventional American belief in a free-market economy. They were both published just before World War Two, when Roosevelt's 'New Deal' was remedying some of the worst sufferings of the depression with elements of a welfare state.¹⁰ Max, the Jewish Marxist attorney who defends Bigger and tries to save him, views American society as a collection of 'buildings' like prisons which 'a few men' are 'squeezing tightly in their hands.' Bigger, and all the injustice that has created and sustained him, lives in a particularly squalid building, overrun with rats. Max's image recalls the career of the liberal father of the girl Bigger has murdered, Mr Dalton. He has screwed extortionate rents out of his poor black tenants, including Bigger's family, while appearing a pillar of society and donating to every African American charity he can find. **Wright believes that if there is a political solution to the race question it will need to be radical, for instance Marxist Revolution. Steinbeck is more moderate, refusing to preach, and trusting to the New Deal 'Government Camps' with their enlightened administrations and modern sanitation, to improve the situation.**¹¹

Suiting its tougher political stance, the scenes in which impoverished characters glimpse a better lifestyle are always strongly ironic in *Native Son*. When Bigger goes to the movies the Hollywood dream factory shows him images of white sophistication contrasted with primitive black dancers. **One of his aspirations seems to be a game in which he and his friends 'play white'. In the most telling scene his eyes follow the white 'flyboys' writing 'speed' across the sky with their vapour trails, while Bigger remains firmly on the ground: 'They get a chance to do everything,' he comments wryly. By contrast, Steinbeck seems to suggest that the poor should take comfort from the beauty of nature, as in the scene where the Okies watch the Great Valley of California open beneath them, 'the peach trees and the walnut groves, and the dark green patches of oranges.' This is essentially the vision of the frontier, so deeply rooted in American culture, emerging again.**¹²

To conclude, neither novel pulls punches when it comes to presenting abject poverty. Rose of Sharon offers her breast-milk to a starving man. Ma Joad carefully sorts and burns the whole of her past life when she clears out for the journey. **Her native country becomes a dust-bowl, the dust thick 'as mist', the 'ruined corn' indistinguishable from it. Wright imprisons Bigger in the poorest quarter of one of the richest cities of America, Chicago, when organised crime ran rife there**¹³ and everyone, except the African-Americans, could take a piece of the action. **'He lives,' writes Wright in his Preface, 'amid the greatest possible plenty on earth and he is looking and feeling for a way out.'**¹⁴ **The Okies survive-some of them-but Bigger is not so lucky. Whatever these novels suggest about possible political or charitable solutions to the problems of poverty, they confirm that America is not a pleasant place to be poor.**¹⁵

Examiner commentary

This answer offers consistently detailed insights into texts and question, showing a confident command of the topic area of American Literature. The candidate compares texts and contexts throughout the answer, and has a strong sense of historical and literary contexts. Argument and expression are fluent and clearly expressed. Critical insights are occasionally given by means of quotation, but the candidate is equally able to advance different interpretations in his own words in the course of his argument.

10. Effective use of historical context (AO3).

11. The answer thoughtfully distinguishes between the writers' political approaches (AO3, AO4).

12. This is an excellent example of a consistently detailed approach, where textual reference is effective in developing comparison between the texts (AO4).

13. The candidate compares the contexts for the two novels (AO3, AO4).

14. Here, the novelist himself supplies a critical insight (AO5).

15. The answer finishes as it started, insisting on keeping both novels in view (AO4).



THE GOTHIC

QUESTION 3

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

Shaking off from my spirit what must have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine, tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old woodwork which has rotted for years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.

Noticing these things, I rode over a short causeway to the house. A servant in waiting took my horse, and I entered the Gothic archway of the hall. A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me, in silence, through many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the studio of his master.

The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all.

Upon my entrance, Usher arose from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length, and greeted me with a vivacious warmth which had much in it, I at first thought, of an overdone cordiality—of the constrained effort of the ennuyé¹ man of the world. A glance, however, at his countenance convinced me of his perfect sincerity. We sat down; and for some moments, while he spoke not, I gazed upon him with a feeling half of pity, half of awe. Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher!

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1840)

¹ ennuyé: weary of life



This extract from *The Fall of the House of Usher* presents many of the features typical of Gothic genre writing both from the period of Edgar Allan Poe himself and from other eras. By this stage in the mid-nineteenth century, the Gothic genre was both firmly established and enormously popular. Edgar Allan Poe, writing in America, but making use of the characteristically European settings and themes of Gothic, was the author of haunting Gothic poetry such as 'The Raven', and of short-stories, such as 'The Pit and the Pendulum', which have generated many horror films. His work would have been seen as rather decadent in its day; but the use of Gothic elements in this passage, as a way of signalling heightened or unusual states of mind, now looks more mainstream.¹

This extract from *The Fall of the House of Usher* takes the form of a first-person narrative – although the specific identity of the narrator remains unclear throughout.² This is a familiar pattern of Gothic narrative. The main character is 'filtered' to us by the perceptions of an outsider. In this case the narrator shows sympathy with the predicament of his friend, but remains detached from it. He shows mild distress rather than understanding: he looks on Usher with a feeling 'half of pity, half of awe.' **It is clear the narrator cannot offer us an explanation of his friend's appearance or behaviour, merely share with us a mystery in which his own contribution will be experiential, subjective and incomplete. Gothic writing often depends for its key effects on limited narrators like this one.³**

The opening mention of 'what must have been a dream' indicates a possible reference to the classic Gothic trope of a supernatural **visitation (of a kind familiar in works from Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* to Dracula's night time manifestations wrapped in silver mist)⁴** therefore establishing a tone of foreboding and suspense at the very start of the passage. We note also, at the start of the passage, the narrator's desire to shake off the dream and to attempt to offer a dispassionate description of the building, thereby gaining – to some extent - the trust and sympathy of the reader.

The description of the building itself is central to the passage (and – as the title of the work suggests – will be to the tale as a whole).⁵ The narrator of this passage even makes a conscious architectural reference to 'the Gothic archway of the hall', reminding the reader not just of a revived Medieval style, but also of the presence of the past ('excessive antiquity') in so much Gothic writing, a shadowy backstory falling across events in the present. Crumbling, haunted structures like this one, probably foreshadowing characteristics of their owner or inhabitants, are general features of Gothic writing in all eras. The very first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* is named after a castle that reflects its cruel owner's personality, not least by persecuting him.⁶ Another anthropomorphic castle is Montoni's in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which seems to look out on the heroine when she arrives there as its vicious master might look out, with a baleful, patriarchal stare.

1. The introduction offers a clear context for the passage from the topic area. The candidate has some knowledge of Edgar Allan Poe and makes appropriate use of it; there is of course no expectation or requirement for candidates to offer such specific context for the writer of an unseen passage (AO3).

2. Identification of the narrative voice is an important first step (AO2).

3. The analysis of the narrative method places the passage in the context of the topic area (AO2, AO3).

4. The candidate includes an apt selection from appropriate literary contexts (AO3).

5. The candidate outlines an important element of the extract, and shrewdly makes a judgement based on the title of the work (AO2).

6. Details from the description are picked up to make a telling point about the presence of the past in this passage and generally in Gothic writing (AO2, AO3).



As part of its antique credentials, the setting is an intricate depiction of dereliction and dilapidation. The scene is dominated by an air of decay (accompanied by appropriate terms: 'discoloration'; 'fungi'; 'rotted'; 'decay'; 'tattered') and this inevitably lends a general uneasiness – and a sense of fear and doom – to the scene. In this context it is also worth mentioning that there are overtones both of the tomb ('neglected vault') and of the chapel (the high windows) in some aspects of the description in this passage: familiar Gothic elements once again but this time – perhaps – suggesting a premonition of death. This is backed up by the curious mixture of solidity and dissolution in the description of the structure, as if a show of 'specious totality' were being put on, while decay is spreading its undermining 'web-work' over the whole building, which is clearly ready to fall. Grimly the passage also suggests that this is a sealed space, a confined one, so its decomposition can only proceed slowly. It is a lightless and airless dungeon, without 'disturbance from the breath of the external air.' **Already the reader may have a suspicion that the house is an expressionist presentation of Roderick Usher himself.**⁷

The 'barely perceptible fissure' in the building also invites a symbolic interpretation – perhaps especially in the context of the tale's mysterious and suggestive title, which seems to incorporate the potential fall both of a dwelling and its occupant. If this fissure is likely to lead to the physical collapse of the building then there is also a chance that a moral or psychological crack could reveal itself and lead to disastrous ends on a personal level.⁸ It will not be a simple or direct fall, the 'zigzag' passage of the crack down the masonry suggests that. And however strong and mysterious the outside of the house may seem to be, it is undermined by the 'sullen' waters of a tarn, which seem to douse all meaning in oblivion. **This is another familiar feature of the human element of the Gothic genre from the beginning– in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, for example, where fissures in Manfred's character and intentions tend to show in the piecemeal appearance of an enormous ghost, who ultimately breaks his castle to pieces.**⁹ It is notable, however, that the quiet, flippant humour that so often accompanies Gothic fictions, and is everywhere in Walpole, is nowhere to be seen in Poe.

There is indeed a broader sense in the extract that an internal state of mind (either in the narrator or in Roderick Usher himself) is being hinted at throughout the passage. The narrator's comment that 'Surely, man had never before so altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher!' invites us to speculate on his possibly sinister situation. Elements of sensory overload are hinted at in the passage (Usher's rather chilling 'lying at full length' and 'overdone cordiality', for example) and alert us to the fact that the narrator's intention to provide detached observation has – in fact – become swallowed up in feeling. Usher's languid appearance may suggest fashionable Romantic attitudes, but may also be a clue that deeper, even more troubling emotions are subdued, even resting, beneath that apparent 'weariness of life'. **As in the opening description of the house, there are further clues to his state of mind in the description of its interior, though these offer suggestions, not conclusions, generally indicating that Usher, like his mansion, is no longer open with – or to – the world.**¹⁰ A ghostly crimson light creeps into his chamber, but it only illuminates the more prominent objects; most of the room is significantly in shadow. The windows are too high to be reached from inside, soaring off into the impenetrable Gothic gloom of the 'vaulted and fretted ceiling'. To reach Usher the narrator has passed through 'many dark and intricate passages'. The books and musical instruments 'scattered' about suggest at first that Usher treats his studio as a kind of child's playroom, but on second thoughts the narrator decides that the Gothic atmosphere of the 'tattered' chamber with its stifling tapestries may indicate that books, instruments and Usher himself are all more or less prisoners here, attempting 'vitality', achieving only 'stern, deep... gloom.'

7. At the end of a consistently detailed analytical paragraph, the candidate moves to an overview of the writer's literary purpose (AO2).

8. A detail from the passage leads the candidate to make an appropriate speculation about the progress of the story (AO2).

9. The candidate tends to structure the answer by making detailed analysis of the passage backed up by specific literary contextualisation (AO2, AO3).

10. The candidate develops his idea that the house offers an expressionist representation of its owner (AO3).



This sense of mystery – with strong, rather terrible hints that something is very wrong - is hinted at regularly throughout the passage. The narrator of *The Fall of the House of Usher* feels that he is breathing ‘an atmosphere of sorrow’ but – so far – the only explanation of this has been presented in the form of a sort of sympathy in the atmospheric and physical descriptions. **Even the ‘stealthy’ servants (a conventional feature of Gothic literature of the period which confirms a context of social hierarchy) and the presence of a causeway at the entrance to the house (denoting a sinister sense of isolation) bring their own mysteries to the passage.**¹¹

In conclusion, therefore, there is a great deal that is familiar to the reader of Gothic literature (from any period) in this passage. At the same time, we are aware that a master of the genre is at work in this opening section of one of the major and most influential works of the Gothic from the mid-nineteenth century. With the use of suggestion, hints and – it might be said – teasing and unsettling techniques (whilst also providing the reader with some familiar devices and motifs) Poe is anticipating many of the versions of Gothic around us today.¹²

11. Further details from the passage are identified as contributors to an overall scheme (AO2).

12. The conclusion makes a judgement about the place of the unseen passage in Gothic literature as a whole (AO3).

Examiner commentary

This is a consistently detailed response which recognises a range of Gothic qualities in the unseen passage and relates them convincingly to ideas about Gothic writing as a whole, but also importantly to specific examples from wider reading in Gothic literature. The passage has been chosen from the work of a well-known Gothic writer, and it is not surprising that the candidate has some knowledge of Poe and his work. It is important to remember that specific knowledge about the writer of an unseen passage or the work itself is obviously not a requirement; also, where candidates do have such knowledge, they should not be tempted to use it as a substitute for a detailed AO2-based response to the passage itself. In this answer, the candidate moves on quickly from a brief outline of Poe’s place in the Gothic tradition to offer a full and fresh consideration of the passage.



QUESTION 4(A)

'The conflict between reason and emotion is characteristically Gothic.'

Consider how far you agree with this statement by comparing *Dracula* with at least one other text prescribed for this topic.

Nineteenth Century Gothic texts, from *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, often seem to be deeply concerned with apparent dualities. The binary opposition found in these texts between reason/rationality and emotions/humanity may arise from historical factors. Scientific and technological advances of the Nineteenth Century such as electricity, Darwinism and mass industrialisation arguably laid the foundations of modern 'Western' society. However, as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* show, this progress also raised serious questions about what it means to be human in an era where 'godlike science' (*Frankenstein*) was changing the world beyond recognition. Both texts are concerned with the limits and dangers of (especially male) rationality. However, Shelley seems more concerned than Stoker with creating an emotional complexity in her characterisation of the novel's ostensive 'monster'.¹

Both texts use settings to question how far the rise of the 'rational' powers of contemporary science and learning can impose order on a seemingly chaotic world.²

By leaving Victorian London, the heart of the British Empire and centre of global financial and intellectual power, to visit *Dracula*'s 'vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light' in Transylvania, Jonathan Harker can be seen as an emissary from the world of apparent rationality to an ancient place where he feels the 'powers' that 'old centuries had, and have... which mere 'modernity' cannot kill'. Also, despite apparently being at the cutting edge of the new 'science' of psychology as head of an asylum for the mentally ill, Seward is unable to diagnose the influence of the Count on Renfield's psyche. Similarly *Frankenstein* ends with two men of science, Victor and Walton, in the then-unexplored region of the North Pole and face to face with a Sublime and ancient landscape which reminds them of their human limitations.

Indeed, the way the very ice 'split and cracked with a tremendous and overwhelming sound' thwarting Victor in his pursuit of the creature may suggest Nature (often personified as female in the novel) intervening to reassert its dominance over 'rational' human science.³

1. This is a well-crafted introduction which shows a sophisticated understanding of both literary and historical contexts and establishes a promising basis for comparison between the two texts (AO1, AO3, AO4).

2. A thematic paragraph on contrasting use of settings is an effective way to develop the comparison (AO4).

3. Use of textual detail is invaluable in developing the argument and building opportunities for comparison between the texts (AO1).



The narrative methods and language of the novels both seem to offer 'rational' accounts of apparently fantastical occurrences, a common trope in gothic writing. In *Dracula* there is no central narrative voice, but the novel is rather a series of different perspectives on the events of the plot. Sometimes this takes the form of traditional epistolary narratives such as Harker's Journal, but Stoker's narrators also utilise contemporary technologies such as Dr Seward's phonograph recordings and Mina's typewriter. **Indeed, a contemporary review of the novel in *The Spectator* noted how the 'up-to-dateness of the book — the phonograph diaries, typewriters, and so on—hardly fits in with the mediæval methods which ultimately secure the victory for Count Dracula's foes.'**⁴ Typing is something Mina 'practises very hard' – a suggestion that her ambitions lie outside the domestic sphere. Likewise, in *Frankenstein*, the frame narrative of Walton's letters from the arctic give an apparent authenticity to Victor's incredible narrative. However, a central difference in *Dracula* is that the Count himself is never given a first-person narrative voice, whereas Shelley's creature is. By putting the creature's voice at the narrative centre of the novel the reader may begin to question just how reasonable Victor's hatred of this 'vile insect' is. **Victor is a man of emotional extremes – however his emotions are destructively egotistical. Victor claims in Justine's trial that the 'torments of the accused did not equal mine' and in his self-absorption when creating the creature Victor imagines 'A new species would bless me as his creator and source'. Victor's rationality leads to emotional impotence – after hearing the creature movingly remind Victor that 'no father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses' and that he is only 'malicious because...miserable' the reader feels great emotional sympathy for him, which Victor doesn't.**⁵ Indeed the creature is arguably not only more emotionally developed than his creator, but also more rational. He uses the Miltonic rhetoric he learns from *Paradise Lost* to eloquently argue for Victor's 'justice...clemency and affection'. **The count in *Dracula* is ironically both central and marginal in the narrative. Although he is the catalyst for almost every event in the novel, his physical appearances are infrequent and his motives remain enigmatic. The hints at an emotional complexity such as his claim that 'I, too, can love' are left undeveloped by Stoker. Plenty of other characters give their views of the count's 'child-brain' and 'blood-lust' but the Count never speaks for himself. This perhaps means he doesn't have quite the same emotional resonance for the reader as Shelley's creature.**⁶

In both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* apparently rational science is presented as a method by which men attempt to control the emotions and desires of women.⁷ Waldman's speech in praise of modern rational science presents scientists as the 'pursuers' and 'penetrators' of a female-personified nature. Both Mina and Lucy in *Dracula* are represented to a degree as Victorian 'New Women': Van Helsing refers to Mina's apparently 'man's brain' and Lucy (rather shockingly perhaps to Victorian readers) claims she wishes to be able to 'marry three men, or as many as want her'. **In the 1992 Francis Ford Coppola film version this sexualised aspect of Lucy is even more emphasised than in the novel, with her white costume and pale skin juxtaposed with her hissing scarlet mouth.**⁸ One could see the shocking central set piece of the novel – the 'saving' of Lucy by Arthur and his male assistants as symbolic of the 'rational' Victorian patriarchal establishment re-asserting control of female sexuality. This reading is emphasised by the sexualised language of how Lucy's body 'shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions' and the phallic symbolism of the stake put through Lucy's heart. *Frankenstein* contains an equally shocking description of the mutilation of a female body when Victor 'tore to pieces' the body of the female creature out of a (seemingly irrational) fear that a female creature would be 'ten thousand times more malignant' than the male. **Mary Shelley's radical family background and especially her proto-feminist mother make us question the frequent sexism represented in the novel. Anne Mellor sees this as Shelley critiquing the patriarchy and that 'what Victor truly fears in female sexuality'.**⁹

4. Use of contemporary reviews is an interesting way to offer critical comments simultaneously with context, since the review helps to show how reception of the text may have changed over time (AO3, AO5).

5. The answer offers a consistently detailed reading of the text to establish the relationship between emotion and reason (AO1).

6. A similar examination of the second text allows a thoughtful comparative point to be made (AO4).

7. The candidate's study of the presentation of men and women in these texts is a fruitful ground to develop ideas about emotion and reason (AO3, AO4).

8. Reference to a dramatisation is an interesting and valid way to establish a 'reading' of the text (AO5).

9. The candidate combines biographical context with a critical perspective on the text (AO3, AO5).



Perhaps one of the reasons Gothic writing has endured all the way from Anne Radcliffe to the *Twilight* series is because it appeals to emotional instincts in readers which social systems such as education, family and capitalism demands that we repress. The last century has demonstrated through such horrors as nuclear weapons and the social Darwinism of the Nazis that apparent 'rationalism' can unleash untold horror.¹⁰

Frankenstein's ambiguous ending which leaves the creature 'lost in darkness and distance' may reflect how the tremendous advances in science and technology have created a sense of dislocation from the kinds of emotional and physical connection which make us humans rather than monsters.

10. The conclusion makes effective use of broad literary and historical contexts (AO3).

Examiner commentary

This is a consistently detailed and concisely written response which offers a sustained discussion of reason and emotion in the chosen texts and in Gothic writing generally. The answer makes judicious selection of material from both texts to illustrate the argument and to enable detailed comparison to be made. Context is consistently integrated into the answer, demonstrating throughout a thoughtful and sophisticated grasp of the topic area. Alternative views of the texts are provided in a fresh and imaginative way by referencing not only a critic, but also a contemporary review (allowing for contextual insights to be offered too) and a filmed dramatisation. The conclusion moves out to make a broad judgement related to the topic area as whole; it usefully references one of the chosen texts, and would be improved by including the other as well to sustain the sense of comparison.



DYSTOPIA

QUESTION 5

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

Revelation is the word for a complex of thought revealing itself instantaneously with the enormous impact of absolute truth. Standing motionless with Becky, my mouth agape, head far back, staring up at that incredible sight in the night sky, I knew a thousand things it would take minutes to explain, and others I can never explain in a lifetime.

Quite simply, the great pods were leaving a fierce and inhospitable planet. I knew it utterly and a wave of exultation so violent it left me trembling swept through my body; because I knew Becky and I had played our part in what was now happening. We hadn't, and couldn't possibly have been – I saw it now – the only souls who had stumbled and blundered onto what had happened in Mill Valley. There'd been others, of course, individuals, and little groups, who had done what we had – who had simply refused to give up. Many had lost, but some of us who had not been caught and trapped without a chance had fought implacably, and a fragment of wartime speech moved through my mind: We shall fight them in the fields, and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender. True then for one people, it was true always for the whole human race, and now I felt that nothing in the whole vast universe could ever destroy us.

Did this incredible alien life form "think" this, too, or "know" it? Probably not, I thought, or anything our minds could conceive. But it had sensed it; it could tell with certainty that this planet, this little race, would never receive them, would never yield. And Becky and I, in refusing to surrender, but instead fighting their invasion to the end, giving up hope of escape in order to destroy even a few of them, had provided the final conclusive demonstration of that truth. And so now, to survive – their one purpose and function – the great pods lifted and rose, climbing through the faint mist, on and out toward the space they had come from, leaving a fiercely implacable planet behind, to move aimlessly on once again, forever, or... it didn't matter.

Even now – so soon – there are times, and they come more frequently, when I'm no longer certain in my mind of just what we did see, or of what really happened here. I think it's perfectly possible that we didn't actually see, or correctly interpret, everything that happened, or that we thought had happened. I don't know, I can't say; the human mind exaggerates and deceives itself. And I don't much care; we're together, Becky and I, for better or worse.

But ... showers of small frogs, tiny fish, and mysterious rains of pebbles sometimes fall from out of the skies. Here and there, with no possible explanation, men are burned to death inside their clothes. And once in a while, the orderly, immutable sequences of time itself are inexplicably shifted and altered. You read these occasional queer little stories, humorously written, tongue-in-cheek, most of the time; or you have vague distorted rumors of them. And this much I know. Some of them – some of them – are true.

Jack Finney, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1954)



Like many twentieth century dystopian texts, Finney's *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* clearly involves an experience of apocalyptic change, called here 'revelation', which immediately recalls the tremendous events in the last book of the Bible. The religious mood is also brought out when those who fought on the side of Finney's narrator are referred to not as 'people' but as 'souls'. It appears a group of alien colonists have come to earth, have been fiercely resisted by the planet's inhabitants, and have been forced to abandon their project and fly away.¹ When the passage opens the presumably male narrator and his companion Becky are watching the aliens depart, forming an 'incredible sight' in the night sky. **Similar 'invasions' to those described here occur in many dystopian narratives, chiefly H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*.**² As in Wells the 'pods' seem not to have been defeated by human ingenuity, but through what Finney calls the 'fierce and inhospitable' nature of planet earth. The suggestion may even be that the environment knows better than humankind how to protect itself, how to make provision to expel intruders, reminding the reader that Finney, like all writers of Science Fiction, is aware of Darwinian theories about the survival of the fittest. This means that his passage has strong Christian and religious elements; but also shows strong interest in scientific theory and the scientific imagination.

The first half of Finney's passage, as often in science fiction, focuses on possibly idyllic memories of the culture the 'pods' have broken in upon in 'Mill Valley'. His characters clearly have a solid memory of their past before the alien invaders came. They have combated the invaders not in millions but in 'little groups', representing the American belief in the value of small town life and the importance of on-the-ground democracy. Finney's rhetoric backs up his vision of the importance of 'individuals' in settling large-scale twentieth century conflict. He does this by adding to his own emotional writing the more solid rhythm of Winston Churchill's words on the possible German invasion of the United Kingdom of 1941: *'we shall fight them in the fields, and in the streets, we shall fight them in the hills; we shall never surrender.'* **It is clear the battle against the invaders has been, like the resistance of the Nazis, heroic, just and decisive.**⁴ **Finney's arguments tend to use longer, less decisive structures ('We hadn't, and couldn't possibly have been – I saw it now') than Churchill's, so it is Churchill's words that prevail, with their powerful rhetoric, continually repeating the same sentence structure ('we shall fight . . .') and using very simple words, mainly drawn from the Anglo Saxon register of the English language.**⁵

Finney's use of Churchill's words grounds the conflict he is describing here in the mid twentieth century struggle against Hitler's fascism, reminding us that many fantasies about invaders from outer space, like *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers*, drew their most significant inspiration from the highly destructive conflicts, mainly in Europe, from 1914. **Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a good example of this. Though on the surface a grim portrayal of a future dystopia, the book is also modelled on tendencies within twentieth century tyranny, not least Stalinist Russia at the time of the show trials in the late 1930s.**⁶ If one reads the Finney passage in a similar way, as a kind of allegory of contemporary history, the most obvious reference may be, as so often in science fiction, to the Cold War. The apparently 'fascist' (to judge from the Churchill quote) threat of the aliens in the Finney passage may really represent American fears of a Communist takeover in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Though the threat in this passage seems to come from outer space and return there, the aliens have, to judge from this passage, colonised – if only for a brief time – small-town America. **This may suggest the infiltration fears of the early 1950s goaded by Senator McCarthy, the so-called 'red-under-the-bed' threat that the United States and its way of life was vulnerable to Russian agents provocateurs posing as left-wing political activists.**⁷ This would not be an unreasonable reading, as many of the classic Science Fiction texts of this period portray America, or somewhere that resembles it, abandoned to an unwanted but powerfully organised totalitarian regime. **A good example is Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* where under cover of promoting consumerism and plain speech the regime has organised a systematic destruction of all written knowledge, and therefore all freedom and creativity of thinking.**⁸ Like Orwell and Bradbury, Jack Finney seems to be fighting the Cold War with literary weapons.

1. The candidate gives a clear sense of the whole situation presented in the passage (AO1).

2. This reference to a dystopian novel shows a good understanding of literary context (AO3).

3. The identification of religious and scientific elements in the passage shows a clear grasp of dystopian fiction in general (AO3).

4. The candidate effectively identifies a historical context for the passage by identifying the well-known quotation from Winston Churchill (AO3).

5. The Churchill quotation is used to draw attention to the style of the set passage by contrast (AO2).

6. The candidate uses a set text to bring in discussion of literary and historical contexts (AO3).

7. The answer expands on a further historical context for the passage (AO3).

8. A recommended text provides literary context (AO3).



The third paragraph of the Finney passage presents the threat of the invaders in slightly different terms. Here the 'pods' are seeking a special location where they are especially fitted to survive. The resisting forces, the 'little race' of planet earth, are portrayed as combatants in a group, no longer a gathering of heroic individuals but an organised military force, 'giving up hope of escape in order to destroy even a few of them.'⁹ In this paragraph Finney presents the struggle as less a moral or political conflict and more a biological one. We notice also that the call from political leaders to abandon individual creeds and band together to defeat a common enemy has often been used in American history, and notably in the two conflicts relevant here, World War 2 and the Cold War against the Russians.

The second half of the Finney passage moves away from considering the past danger posed by the pods, and to move on to think more and more about the literal meaning of what he has seen, or thinks he has seen. The prose seems to change in tone from celebrating a victory to questioning its meaning,¹⁰ perhaps as the specific danger posed by the invasion passes and is replaced by a more general anxiety as to the meaning of life in the twentieth century. The 'pods' are not just defeated enemies now, but mysterious nuisances moving 'through the faint mist' to fresh inscrutable adventures. **The prose starts to lead from one weighty question to another. It becomes more chopped up and more rhetorical, the uncertainty leading to the use of scare quotes, as in 'Did this incredible alien life form "think" this too, or "know it"?' Such a heaping up of unanswered and unanswerable questions is a common technique in dystopian fantasy,**¹¹ as in Wells's *The Time Machine*, where it is not clear where the time traveller has gone, uncertain whether he will ever come back and even a matter for debate whether he should have invented or used his time machine in the first place. 'I'm no longer certain,' writes Finney's narrator, 'of what we did see, or of what really happened here.' To further the effect of unanswered points the narrator introduces ellipsis marks, more than once, presumably to suggest what cannot be expressed, and he brings added emotion to his argument with forceful parentheses, such as 'Even now – so soon.' **The 'faint mist' that hides the retreating pods almost becomes a symbol of their mysterious purpose. As at the beginning of the passage, Finney makes much use at the end of qualifying adverbs and adjectives to suggest the inadequacy of language to come to terms with the mystery of the universe: 'the orderly, immutable sequences of time itself are inexplicably shifted and altered.'**¹² In his realist dystopia, *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad does something similar with quantities of adjectives to convey the mysterious darkness of the Congo.

Whatever may be the exact meaning of the big questions at the end of the Finney passage, they arguably make Finney's narrator less reliable, less authoritative. His lack of clarity about the meaning of the 'pod' adventure suggests he might be hazy about other things.¹³ And he doesn't expect his girlfriend, Becky, like so many fifties science fiction girls, to be more than a comforting presence in the background. This reminds me of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. There the female characters are also marginalised, to such an extent that the end of that book the academics can't make up what really happened to them. **It is one of the strengths (or weaknesses?) of dystopian fiction that it is hard for an author to establish a thoroughly reliable point of view.**¹⁴

To conclude, Finney's passage uses lots of emotive constructions and language, rather like a Tabloid paper. He wishes to feed the appetite for science fiction in the 1950s, but struggles to appeal directly to female readers. Contextually his piece gestures towards the threats and conflicts of the Cold War, though his final posture is to endorse the power and value of the human imagination, especially its ability to come to terms with mystery.¹⁵

9. The answer goes on to characterise the nature of the struggle which is described (AO2).

10. The candidate has a good overview and understanding of the way the passage develops in terms of argument and tone (AO2).

11. Here, there is a detailed analysis of the prose style of the passage (AO2).

12. The answer expands further on the prose style, and demonstrates the importance of trying to 'express what cannot be expressed' in dystopian fiction (AO2).

13. The answer focuses on the use of first person narrative, and touches on the effects of using an unreliable narrator (AO2).

14. AO2 discussion about point of view leads to a more general point about the topic as a whole (AO3).

15. The conclusion establishes an overview of the passage and its chief contexts (AO2, AO3, AO1).



Examiner commentary

This answer seems rather context-heavy in its early stages, but does ensure by the end that enough has been said about style and expression in the passage. The candidate shows an excellent awareness of the topic area, and uses his knowledge to aid his understanding of the set passage. He has registered that the novel was published in the 1950s and therefore is prepared to discuss the aftermath of World War II and the Cold War to contextualise the piece. References to other examples of dystopian fiction are also helpful to the discussion, and are never included for their own sake. The written style is fluent and well organised.



QUESTION 6(B)

“Writers of dystopian fiction often seek to satirise human failings.”

By comparing *The Handmaid’s Tale* with at least one other text prepared for this topic, discuss how far you agree with this view.

Both Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and Ray Bradbury in *Fahrenheit 451* (1954) are concerned with the concept of the utopian ideal or the desire to create a better world as described in Thomas More’s *Utopia*; More himself explained that the term ‘utopia’ should be understood to mean ‘good place’.¹ However, an ideal society cannot function properly until the human failings in its predecessor have been eliminated. Therefore, the concept of any utopia becomes a paradox in that it depends upon destruction. The societies in both texts are, apparently, attempts to build utopias, or ‘good places’, but dystopias – ‘bad places’ – have been created instead. Both texts suggest then that when there is an attempt to artificially shape or control elements of society, those who take control are inclined to be overwhelmed by self-interest and the desire to wield power over others. **This need to occupy a more powerful position in various ways in order to control ostensible human failings is one of the main human failings satirised in both novels.**²

Both dystopias arguably have some utopian aspects, in particular their promotion of happiness, their citizens’ obedience to the state and their oligarchic governments; however, their lack of respect for individual identity turns them sour. Both novels explore the possible effects of applying ideological schemes to modern countries and those who live in them, especially the negative aspects of such regimes and how they have to suppress their citizens in order to exercise control. **Each novel is presented from the point of view of one central character: in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, this character is the handmaid known as Offred, and in *Fahrenheit 451*, a ‘fireman’ called Guy Montag. Ironically, both Offred and Guy Montag have to deal with the suppression of their personal characteristics in order to behave as members of their societies.**³ Guy Montag is expected to live, as Fire Chief Beatty argues, ‘for pleasure, for titillation’. On the surface, he seems to enjoy the typical life of a citizen and homeowner with the added status of being a ‘fireman’, **but his true misery is encapsulated by Kingsley Amis’s comment that the novel is ‘the most skilfully drawn of all science fiction’s conformist hells’.**⁴ Similarly, Offred is supposed to be content with fulfilling her well-defined duties as a handmaid in Gilead. Despite the obvious privations of the handmaid’s role, Atwood’s Commander, who has a vested interest in the preservation of the regime, argues that the authorities have ‘given [the handmaids] more than they’ve taken away’. **Karen Stein identifies Atwood’s clear satirical purpose in the novel when she notes that ‘[The Commander’s] smug certainties are punctured by ironic narration’.**⁵ All of these authority figures have duties which do not diminish human failings, but deliberately add to them. **It is interesting to consider that they would claim to be eradicating human failings as a justification for oppression.**⁶ In Atwood’s novel, those with a distinguishable (arguably subversive) identity are dispatched to the ‘colonies’ in order to protect society as a whole. In *Fahrenheit 451*, members of society who behave oddly or seem unhappy are dealt with coldly and efficiently: Clarisse and her unconventional family are disappeared; Montag’s wife Mildred, after her overdose, has her blood replaced by a machine ‘like a black cobra’, and has apparently forgotten everything – the overdose and the unfeeling treatment – by the next morning.

1. The candidate places both texts in the context of literary history and the topic area (AO3).

2. Here, the main thrust of the argument is clearly stated with apt use of the terms of the question (AO1).

3. The candidate balances references to both novels, as she will do throughout the answer; this is an effective technique for comparison (AO4).

4. A comment from Kingsley Amis on *Fahrenheit 451* supports the candidate’s argument (AO5).

5. An insight is provided from Karen Stein, a critic of *The Handmaid’s Tale* (AO5).

6. Here, the candidate identifies the satirical purpose of both novels in relation to the question (AO1, AO4).



Another significant method of suppression in both novels is the denial of rights according to a citizen's gender; in this sense, both societies might be seen to regard being female as a human failing. **Atwood, whose novel might in some ways be viewed as a product of second wave feminism,**⁷ explores this question by rendering her protagonist one of the dominant 'national resources' (the growing problem of infertility in Gilead has made fertile women into a valuable resource simply because of their reproductive powers). The regime takes the gender question from Atwood's own society to, some might argue, its logical extreme. The regime suppresses the rights of women to fulfil their wider potential because it erases all possible positions of worth for them. Unlike Offred, Mildred Montag and her neighbours are permitted to work by the state, but have refused even to contemplate the traditional roles yearned for in *The Handmaid's Tale*; it is clear that the roles of wife and mother, which persist in *The Handmaid's Tale*, are under pressure in a society where the pursuit of mindless pleasures like driving fast and watching the 'walls' – a kind of elaborated television – are the only permissible goals in life. If gender inequality is considered a human failing, then both novels certainly explore it. **Even the clothes the characters wear are a feature of control. Handmaids have a different uniform to identify their position; each item of the uniform has a particular function. Offred's 'ankle-length skirt' is intended to avert male attention. Her 'white wings' create a façade of innocence and purity, disguising the sexualised nature of the handmaids' purpose. The issue of clothing, costumes, make-up, uniforms, all ways in which women label themselves, whether to enhance their sexuality or disguise it, is as pertinent today as in Atwood's and Bradbury's novels. Guy Montag's fireman's uniform also proclaims his importance in society but seems to oppress his thoughts too. His "black beetle-coloured helmet" implies that his mind is encased within a hard shell. The symbol of his uniform, "The Salamander", represents also the lizard which lives in fire and is unaffected by flames, becoming a metaphor for the firemen who are protected by their role.**⁸ Both texts, therefore, present as a human failing, the acceptance of the majority to abide by expectations of gender as set out by the state.

The protagonists of both novels do, encouragingly, fight against these human failings. **If, as in the words of Bradbury's Beatty "a book is a loaded gun", then both writers are pointing the gun at aspects of their own societies.**⁹ Through presenting a society whose sole purpose is to destroy books, **Bradbury satirically attacks the burning of books that took place in Nazi Germany, an event which had a huge influence on his writing: in his Afterword, he refers to 'Hitler torching books in Germany in 1934'. The handmaids are sent to the 'Red Centre' where they are re-educated and lied to about their history in the way that Stalin re-wrote text books and historical events in order to justify the rules of society in Communist Russia.**¹⁰ Education within both novels is therefore shown to be a force of deception, but in exposing these terrible means of control both writers are educating their readers and asking them to consider their own human failings when viewing the world around them. **The continuing relevance of *The Handmaid's Tale* in particular is underlined by Dan Geddes when he points out that 'Atwood's novel depicts a not too futuristic society of Gilead.'**¹¹

7. Here, the answer establishes a feminist context for *The Handmaid's Tale* (AO3).

8. Here, there is some detailed textual reference which is offered to compare ways in which both novels use physical appearance and self-presentation to make their points (AO4).

9. This is a stylish selection of quotation to support and shape the candidate's argument (AO1).

10. The answer refers to totalitarian states to supply historical and political context for these novels (AO3).

11. The candidate's discussion of the novels' satirical force is supported by a comment from a critic, Dan Geddes (AO5).



Ultimately, the written word is shown to have some power if it is presented as apparently so dangerous. **Ironically, *Fahrenheit 451* itself was censored presumably because of its potential to create discord in American high schools; similarly, *The Handmaid's Tale* was listed as number 37 on the '100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990–2000' by the American Library Association.**¹² In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Bible is referred to as 'an incendiary device'; in *Fahrenheit 451* it literally becomes one. A utopian ideal which prioritises freedom of expression is not allowed in either text and instead, language is used to suppress individuality and to enforce the dominance of the governing body, perhaps a satirical comment by both writers on the abuse of power within many governments today. **Language loses its ability to represent knowledge, and conveys only opinions and distortions: for example, the handmaids are offered a distortion of the Marxist slogan 'From each according to her ability, to each according to his needs'. In the original version, 'her' reads 'his'; in this distorted version, the misogynist society dictates that women are expected to be the givers and men the receivers in Gilead. To prevent such distortions in *Fahrenheit 451*, individuals memorise texts of proven literary value, often at great personal cost.**¹³

Representatives of both regimes in the texts are presented ultimately as hypocrites in whom we can have no faith – and hypocrisy might be seen as the ultimate human failing.¹⁴ The Commander claims that 'what's dangerous in the hands of the multitudes is safe enough for those whose motives are... beyond reproach'; he is claiming special privileges here entirely from self-interest, but representing himself as selfless and serving the national interest. Beatty, the fire chief in *Fahrenheit 451*, 'had wanted to die'; Montag realises: Beatty's tendency to quote from literature at all points and his capacity to understand Montag's misery suggest an internal conflict he was beginning to acknowledge. But Beatty chooses escape – albeit painful and horrific – rather than pursuing a life of quiet heroism like Faber and the reading community Montag joins at the end of the novel. **Both Atwood and Bradbury present worlds which are chilling because they are not so very distant from what we see around us; they can instruct us or, they can urge us to enjoy freedoms we have now.**¹⁵

Examiner commentary

This answer is very well balanced between the two chosen texts, tending to offer matching comments on the two novels throughout. The candidate ensures consistent focus on the question partly by using the key terms 'satire' and 'human failings'. She supplies various contexts for the novels which suggest she has a thorough knowledge of her topic area: these include the concepts of utopia and dystopia, and the contexts of feminism and twentieth century totalitarian states. She also includes some insights from critics and offers some detailed reference to the text, especially concerning dress codes, which is employed to enhance the comparison between the novels – a particular strength of this answer.

12. The topic of censorship is important in both novels and in this answer; the candidate offers an interesting insight into brushes with censorship experienced by both novelists in relation to these texts (AO3).

13. The answer focuses on the importance of writing in society in both novels (AO4).

14. The conclusion is once again well-balanced and clearly focused on the question (AO4, AO1).

15. The candidate relates the satirical energy of both texts to her own contemporary experience (AO1).



WOMEN IN LITERATURE

QUESTION 7

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

I rose next morning with a feeling of hopeful exhilaration, in spite of the disappointments already experienced; but I found the dressing of Mary Ann was no light matter, as her abundant hair was to be smeared with pomade, plaited in three long tails, and tied with bows of ribbon: a task my unaccustomed fingers found great difficulty in performing. She told me her nurse could do it in half the time, and, by keeping up a constant fidget of impatience, contrived to render me still longer. When all was done, we went into the schoolroom, where I met my other pupil, and chatted with the two till it was time to go down to breakfast. That meal being concluded, and a few civil words having been exchanged with Mrs. Bloomfield, we repaired to the schoolroom again, and commenced the business of the day. I found my pupils very backward, indeed; but Tom, though averse to every species of mental exertion, was not without abilities. Mary Ann could scarcely read a word, and was so careless and inattentive that I could hardly get on with her at all. However, by dint of great labour and patience, I managed to get something done in the course of the morning, and then accompanied my young charge out into the garden and adjacent grounds, for a little recreation before dinner. There we got along tolerably together, except that I found they had no notion of going with me: I must go with them, wherever they chose to lead me. I must run, walk, or stand, exactly as it suited their fancy. This, I thought, was reversing the order of things; and I found it doubly disagreeable, as on this as well as subsequent occasions, they seemed to prefer the dirtiest places and the most dismal occupations. But there was no remedy; either I must follow them, or keep entirely apart from them, and thus appear neglectful of my charge. To-day, they manifested a particular attachment to a well at the bottom of the lawn, where they persisted in dabbling with sticks and pebbles for above half an hour. I was in constant fear that their mother would see them from the window, and blame me for allowing them thus to draggle their clothes and wet their feet and hands, instead of taking exercise; but no arguments, commands, or entreaties could draw them away. If she did not see them, someone else did – a gentleman on horseback had entered the gate and was proceeding up the road; at the distance of a few paces from us he paused, and calling to the children in a waspish penetrating tone, bade them ‘keep out of that water.’ ‘Miss Grey,’ said he, ‘(I suppose it is Miss Grey), I am surprised that you should allow them to dirty their clothes in that manner! Don’t you see how Miss Bloomfield has soiled her frock? and that Master Bloomfield’s socks are quite wet? and both of them without gloves? Dear, dear! Let me request that in future you will keep them decent at least!’ so saying, he turned away, and continued his ride up to the house. This was Mr. Bloomfield. I was surprised that he should nominate his children Master and Miss Bloomfield; and still more so, that he should speak so uncivilly to me, their governess, and a perfect stranger to himself. Presently the bell rang to summon us in. I dined with the children at one, while he and his lady took their luncheon at the same table. His conduct there did not greatly raise him in my estimation. He was a man of ordinary stature – rather below than above – and rather thin than stout, apparently between thirty and forty years of age: he had a large mouth, pale, dingy complexion, milky blue eyes, and hair the colour of a hempen cord. There was a roast leg of mutton before him: he helped Mrs. Bloomfield, the children, and me, desiring me to cut up the children’s meat; then, after twisting about the mutton in various directions, and eyeing it from different points, he pronounced it not fit to be eaten, and called for the cold beef.

Anne Brontë, Agnes Grey (1847)



This is an extract from a nineteenth century novel which is written in the first person from a woman's point of view. This narrative method allows the writer to give us a clear sense of the narrator's inner life,¹ which would otherwise be difficult, seeing that Agnes Grey is an employee of the household and has to keep her responses under control, especially when she becomes annoyed or critical of the people around her. It is also noticeable that in the course of the passage she is never alone, but she has no one in whom she can confide; this means that her honest thoughts are only expressed to herself.

The passage opens with Agnes referring to her feelings of 'hopeful exhilaration, in spite of the disappointments already experienced'; **this suggests that life as a governess promises some rewards but is actually quite tough, and that Agnes must have a strong character to withstand the pressure of her 'disappointments'. This may remind the reader of another more famous fictional governess: Ann Brontë's sister, Charlotte, created the character Jane Eyre, who despite a series of misfortunes and trials ends the novel wealthy and happy, married at last to Rochester.**² Agnes Grey's experiences in this passage seem more mundane than Jane's (Jane Eyre is full of remarkable Gothic events), but she still seems to be presented with a lot of difficulties to overcome. **In common with many female characters in fiction from this period, Agnes seems to have great need of the qualities of endurance and patience; if she were a man, she could do something more active to challenge her circumstances.**³

There are two chief female figures in the passage: one is Agnes, and the other is Mary Ann, the little girl she cares for. Mary Ann is a very different kind of female figure from Agnes, partly because she is so young but also because she is born into a privileged family and apparently quite spoiled. The effort for Agnes of dressing Mary Ann is 'no light matter', and **the details of 'pomade', 'abundant hair' and 'bows of ribbon'**⁴ suggest the importance to more privileged females of being decorative in their daily lives. **Although Miss Grey's clothes are not described, one imagines that they would be plain and dark, and that she would not have any decoration about her person; this would make her similar in appearance to Jane Eyre, who is dressed very plainly and actually becomes very uncomfortable during her first engagement to Rochester, when he wants to dress her up in lavish clothes and jewellery.**⁵ The contrast between a lavish decorative appearance and a modest and plain one is clearly partly to do with class and wealth, but also with the different ways in which women can be presented or choose to present themselves: **femininity can be showy and by implication quite shallow, or more modest and serious, implying a higher moral character.**⁶

The third female figure in the passage is Mrs Bloomfield, the children's mother. Interestingly, although she is present in the house for the whole course of the time described, she has barely any impact on events. There are 'a few civil words' exchanged with her at breakfast, and she is also present at dinner, where her husband considers that, along with the children and the governess, she should make do with inferior food. Given her lack of personality and action in the passage, it is almost surprising that Agnes should be 'in constant fear that their mother should see them from the window' when the children are misbehaving in the garden; it would be a surprise if Mrs Bloomfield were suddenly to assert herself and reprimand the governess. **Her passive presence is a reminder that the mistress of a privileged household might well have quite a restricted life, with limited powers to seek entertainment and company.**⁷

1. The candidate gives a clear account of the nature of the passage and the narrative method employed (AO2).

2. Here, the candidate shows contextual awareness of the lives of some nineteenth century women, and also offers Jane Eyre as literary context for the passage (AO3).

3. The candidate has given thought to restrictions on the lives of women at this point in history (AO3).

4. The candidate picks out vocabulary relating to fashion from the passage (AO2).

5. Further context from Jane Eyre, incorporating some detail – but the candidate is careful to return to the passage without spending too much time on wider reading (AO3).

6. This is an interesting insight into one way in which women can be presented in fiction, showing a thoughtful awareness of the topic from the candidate (AO3).

7. The candidate shows some knowledge of social history, and relates it effectively to the passage (AO3).



It is interesting to read about Miss Grey's reactions to her 'charges': we might expect a stereotypical female figure to be nurturing and almost maternal in her attitude to her pupils.

Miss Grey, however, is quite dry and critical: she finds her pupils 'backward', and says in a short dismissive sentence that 'Mary Ann could scarcely read a word, and was so careless and inattentive that I could hardly get on with her at all.'⁸ The descriptions of Mary Ann are strikingly honest, and Agnes makes no attempt to excuse or explain the child's rudeness: 'She told me her nurse could do it in half the time.' The children's 'recreation before dinner' emphasises the difficulties Miss Grey has, because as a woman of a lower social class than the children, she finds it impossible to command their respect. Agnes is trapped in a problematic situation, because she must follow the children and watch them, but fears getting into trouble for her lack of control, since they are making themselves dirty and wet. **Her tone when she describes events remains controlled and rather ironic in its understatement: 'I found it doubly disagreeable ... as they seemed to prefer the dirtiest places and most dismal occupations'. The reader can discern feelings of panic in Miss Grey, however, through her listing the hopelessness of the 'arguments, commands and entreaties' which she uses on them in vain;**⁹ she has clearly tried everything short of bribery to get them to behave.

Agnes's fears of exciting the criticism of her employers are quickly realised. **In another contrast with *Jane Eyre*, a male figure enters on horseback: however, this is not a dramatic and Romantic entrance like Rochester's.**¹⁰ Mr Bloomfield is bad-tempered and critical of Agnes, and reprimands her for the children's misdeeds. **Ann Brontë chooses to introduce dialogue at this point in the passage, and there is some dramatic energy in Mr Bloomfield's exclamations and questions: 'I am surprised that you should allow them to dirty their clothes in that manner! Don't you see how Miss Bloomfield has soiled her frock?'**¹¹ Agnes notes with surprise that he addresses his children formally as 'Master and Miss Bloomfield': **perhaps this underlines that being close to children is a woman's work, and that Mr Bloomfield as a father has very little to do with his offspring. Agnes's surprise that he 'should speak so uncivilly to me, their governess, and a perfect stranger to himself' might be a little naïve; perhaps this is her first position as a governess. In the nineteenth century, an educated single woman of limited means had very little choice when it came to earning a living, and governesses were in many ways at the mercy of those who employed them.**¹²

The passage ends with the family dining together, in an encounter which does not improve Agnes's opinion of Mr Bloomfield: **in a short, dry sentence which gives a strong sense of irony and understatement, she points out that 'His conduct there did not greatly raise him in my estimation.'**¹³ The governess joins them at table, emphasising her status as being something between one of the family and one of the servants; this was not an appealing position, since governesses did not really belong to either group, and the life could therefore be very lonely. For any woman who did not have independent means, the most appealing 'career' was generally to marry well, but a governess would be in a difficult position when it came to meeting suitors. **As if to underline the lack of attractive male company, the end of the passage offers a detailed and unflattering portrait of Mr Bloomfield, who with his 'large mouth' and 'pale, dingy complexion' is clearly no romantic hero. In addition to his physical shortcomings he is rude and selfish, serving the family and Agnes with mutton but then calling for beef for himself on the grounds that the mutton is 'not fit to be eaten.'**¹⁴ This underlines that the man of the house is of higher status than everyone else, including his wife, and can insist on the best of everything for his own use, while economising on provisions for everyone else.

8. The candidate is sensitive to tone here, and picks out the feature of sentence length in her analysis of the description of Mary Ann (AO2).

9. This is a detailed and effective analysis of the passage, showing an appreciation of tone and an understanding of the effect of listing in the passage (AO2).

10. Again, *Jane Eyre* is used as literary context, providing a contrast to the set passage (AO3).

11. The candidate picks out a change of pace and method with the introduction of dialogue into the passage (AO2).

12. The candidate supplies social historical context, showing an awareness of how gender and class affected people's behaviour and opportunities at this time in history (AO3).

13. The tone and style of the passage are analysed here, with appropriate use of literary language (AO2, AO1).

14. The detailed description of Mr Bloomfield is analysed (AO2).



The description of Agnes's life is quite depressing and very convincing, given the ordinary everyday nature of the occurrences in the passage; it may well be based on experience, since some of the Brontë sisters did work as governesses. **Agnes seems like a familiar kind of nineteenth century heroine: she is clever and independent-minded, but her economic situation apparently makes her quite helpless. Like many other female characters in literature, at this stage she is presented as something of a victim, but perhaps this will change in the course of the novel.**¹⁵ It would seem likely that Agnes will attract some male attention as the story unfolds, but there is no expectation in the passage that this will come from her employer as it does in the case of Jane Eyre. Perhaps Agnes will ultimately rise above the limitations of her current situation in life, as Jane does, or **maybe she will remain a victim of circumstances like Tess in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, another nineteenth century novel.**¹⁶

15. The candidate offers an overview in her conclusion, showing that she can fit this novel into her wider reading of nineteenth century fiction (AO3).

16. The answer finishes with a reference to another nineteenth century novel, and touches on the tendency for female characters to be presented as victims in some literature (AO3).

Examiner commentary

This answer is well focused on the passage and the question, and shows a good general understanding of the roles and lives of women in the nineteenth century. The candidate identifies features of the writing including the use of dialogue and the tone of the narrator, and offers literary context in the form of references to other novels, particularly Jane Eyre. There is a risk here that a candidate might develop discussion of a novel known to them too far, and use it to fill up an answer with prepared material. In this answer, however, contextual discussion is always appropriate to the passage and relevant to the answer, and is never allowed to dominate. The answer is fluently expressed and well organised, and confident in its use of literary language.



QUESTION 8(A)

Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*

'Writing about women often portrays them as creatures of emotion rather than reason.'

By comparing *Sense and Sensibility* with at least one other text prescribed for this topic, discuss how far you have found this to be the case.

Both Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë explore the complex relationship between reason and emotion, **vigorously debated in the first half of the nineteenth century as Enlightenment attitudes were challenged by Romantics preferring imagination and personal feeling.**¹ Critic Ian Watt has even suggested Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* should be re-named 'common sense and sensitiveness'

Whilst Austen's complex survey of turn of the nineteenth century society seems to indicate that a woman's desires had better be restrained in the light of social conventions and pressures, Brontë's novel questions the value of social restraint on almost every page,² not least the celebrated feminist outburst with which Jane celebrates her escape from the exploitative and snobbish girl's school, Lowood ('Women feel just as men feel'). **Indeed Charlotte's celebrated critique of Austen's fiction attacks what she saw as its lack of passion and creative rebellion. 'She [Austen] ruffles her reader with nothing vehement, disturbs him with nothing profound.'**³ Whereas Austen's heroine, Elinor, must battle the meanness of her relatives and the cruelty of a foolish matriarch, Mrs Ferrars, by means of a series of silent and often passive contradictions, Jane uses her spirited and outspoken persona as her chief weapon, whether her opponent be her thoughtless Aunt Read, or her sophisticated and intelligent employer, Mr Rochester.

Both Jane and Elinor know the power and value of feeling, however, and the pain of keeping it under control.⁴ Elinor spends the whole novel passionately attached to Edward Ferrars, a man to whom she has limited access and who is not himself a particularly demonstrative lover, or a very expressive reader of the pre-Romantic poet, Cowper. **At times she seems to have to do his feeling for him: 'all his wishes centred in domestic comfort and the quiet of private life.'** She also, famously, has to restrain her natural thoughts whenever her highly strung sister, Marianne, the novel's most spectacularly passionate character, takes offence and flounces from a room: 'Upon Elinor the whole trick of telling lies when politeness required it, always fell.' Similarly Jane spends much of the novel shielding her feelings from a heartless and selfish world. At Gateshead Hall the maid complains she 'never saw a girl of her age with so much cover.' At Thornfield her cover is that of 'a Governess, disconnected, poor and plain.' Yet her passion, like that of the cooler Elinor, is never in doubt. When Jane sleeps on the heath at Whitcross she seems warmed through the freezing night by her own 'intolerable' feelings on leaving Rochester, 'powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of a furnace'; and when she seeks reasons for resisting St John Rivers she expresses them in strong imagery of repression: **marrying him would be 'forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital – this would be unendurable.'**⁵

1. This broad cultural context is helpful in the introduction to the essay (AO3).

2. The candidate establishes a strong base for comparison between the two texts (AO4).

3. This critical comment is especially helpful, coming from one of the two featured authors in relation to the other (AO5).

4. The candidate finds similarities as well as differences between the two texts (AO4).

5. Throughout this passage of the essay, the candidate develops comparison (AO4) in a consistently detailed fashion with impressive use of quotation to support his argument (AO1). This is a helpful demonstration of how close attention to the text is important to achieve high marks in this part of the exam, despite the fact that AO2 is not assessed.



With all this passion Jane Eyre's tastes are inevitably Romantic. The adventure in the Red Room is like a scene from a Gothic novel. She is devoted to Bewick's book of birds, and her own wild pictures are like illustrations for the Ancient Mariner: 'a drowned corpse glanced through the green water . . . a muster of northern lights reared their dim lances, close serried, along the horizon.' When she first meets Rochester by night she thinks him a 'gytrash', a 'lionlike creature with long hair and a huge head', frequenting lonely moon lit lanes. **Austen's novel, on the other hand, seems much less sympathetic to imaginative flights, indeed hardly touched by the Romantic spirit of her age.**⁶ The key imaginative figures in *Sense and Sensibility* are Willoughby and Marianne. The first of these is shown to be unreliable and self-seeking, the second painfully immature. Marianne, it could be said, is not just a fan of 'sensibility'; she is in love with it. When she goes back to Cleveland the narrator speaks of her state-of-mind as 'precious' even 'invaluable misery'. She manages her emotional trauma. Her rhetorical questions on saying goodbye to Norland connote this: 'Dear, dear Norland! when shall I cease to regret you?', as do her lamentations about the dead leaves there which so irritate her sister. The sleepless night which follows her first meeting with Willoughby is carefully prepared for, and we are told 'her sensibility was potent enough!' **There may even be something masochistic about Marianne's indulgence of emotion, as Kate Winslet's wanderings in the storm in Ang Lee's 1995 film indicate.**⁷

But though Austen critiques the book's flights of sensibility, she also shows how strong emotion may flow in the most rational people, including males. The money-grubbing of the Dashwoods and Ferrarses, for instance, often goes against their social and personal advantage. There is no benefit to them in taking the lively but treacherous Lucy Steele into their family, but they do, for the strongly emotional reason that Lady Middleton, Mrs John Dashwood and Mrs Ferrars all see her as rather like them. And when the latter decrees that her son Edward is to be disinherited for wishing to marry Lucy Steele and her other son Robert to be rewarded with the family fortune for actually marrying her, irrational behaviour can go no further. **In relishing this irony, Austen's narrator seems to suggest that the most repressed and bitter people, mostly women but men too, are often those most ready to follow their emotions to the limit.**⁸ Rude Mr Palmer and his talkative wife, indiscreet Mrs Jennings, thoughtless Nan Steele and self-indulgent Mrs Dashwood are all further examples of how, in this novel of apparent good sense, emotion – and not always well managed emotion – often rules. In *Jane Eyre*, perhaps less surprisingly, there is also a tendency for people to value emotion over reason. Bertha Mason, cruelly wronged and wronging, has been overcome by her emotions, and in her madness has no life beyond them. **Helen Burns lives in what a critic has called 'her own private chapel', avoiding contact wherever possible with the external world.**⁹ Mrs Reed believes herself eminently reasonable and respectable, but really operates from a mixture of indulgence and prejudice, and ruins her family as a result. Even that 'positive, hard character', St John Rivers, turns out to be passionate in self-sacrifice, with an 'austere patriot's passion for his fatherland' as he contemplates Romantic scenery of waterfall and mountain before he departs for India.

Austen, then, seems comfortable on the surface with the Enlightenment world of reason and decorum, while undercutting it, as critic Marilyn Butler has argued, with displays of powerful human emotion. Brontë is much less tolerant of it. **Before the Second World War this led mainly male critics of the novel, like Lord David Cecil, to prefer Austen's more disciplined method to Brontë's use of the irregularity of passion. To modern readers, used to an internalised and confessional style, Brontë's focus on Jane's warm inner life is likely to prove more attractive.**¹⁰ The world may not care for Jane, female, friendless and impoverished, but she 'cares for herself!' It is on that basis that emotion is proved to triumph over the rational judgment of the world: 'The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself.'

6. The candidate ensures that the texts are well balanced throughout the essay (AO4).

7. Reference to a dramatisation can be an excellent way of incorporating AO5 into an essay.

8. This stage of the candidate's argument shows thoughtful engagement with the Austen novel, where strong feelings can occur in unexpected places (AO1).

9. The essay supplies a helpful critical insight to support the argument; examiners will not expect candidates to name all of the critics they invoke (AO5).

10. The candidate is aware that views in the readership of literary texts are inclined to change over time (AO5, AO3).



To conclude, Austen provides a generally more conservative and Brontë a more radical attitude to female emotions, but both realise the role of imagination, and also prejudice, in making the most important decisions of our lives. Mary Wollstonecraft, in *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), argued that female progress would only come on the basis of clear thinking and rational education. Austen and Brontë suggest that managing female emotion will be important too. Both writers illustrate the unreasonable limitations of female experience in a mostly male dominated world.¹¹ Austen uses the law of entail to deprive the Dashwood girls of a roof over their heads and employs kindly Colonel Brandon as a patriarchal *deus ex machina* to get the girls out of their fix. In *Jane Eyre* the chafing under male constraint (Brocklehurst's tyrannical snobbery, for instance) is more overt. Everything is shown through Jane's discerning, passionate and unmistakably female sensibility, and the access to her emotions, 'pure gold, but with a steely point of agony', dominates the book, though with continuous reminders that strong feeling must be regulated by reference to self-discipline and good sense.¹²

11. The candidate demonstrates a confident command of important ideas and material in the topic area (AO3).

12. The candidate continues to balance his comments in relation to both texts (AO4).

Examiner commentary

This essay is well balanced and consistently detailed, keeping the primary texts and the question in view throughout. The candidate clearly knows the topic area, Women in Literature, very well; he may have specialised in nineteenth century texts. The selection of *Jane Eyre* to contrast with *Sense and Sensibility* has served him well, and his ability to offer detailed quotation from both texts has been immensely helpful in developing his argument. References to criticism and context are well managed, and are never offered for their own sake but always subordinated to the argument of the essay.



QUESTION 8(B)

Virginia Woolf: *Mrs Dalloway*

'Literature by and about women is often very strong in its depiction of the inner life.'

Discuss this aspect of writing by comparing *Mrs Dalloway* with at least one other text prescribed for this topic.

In both *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* the depiction of the inner life of characters is an important factor for consideration.

Woolf was particularly concerned to revolutionise the way in which the inner life of characters (sometimes male but often female) is presented in fictional texts. It is no coincidence that **Julia Briggs chose to give her 2006 biography of Woolf the title *An Inner Life*,**¹ arguing that Woolf's work is both intimate and democratic, consistently shifting from the thoughts of one character to those of another. *Jane Eyre* is also full of descriptions that reflect the thought process of its heroine, and the imagery it uses, such as her attempt to describe her emotional (and clearly sexual) response to Mr Rochester early in their relationship. She describes it as 'pure gold, with a steely point of agony.'

Brontë's first person narrative remains fixed to Jane's point of view, whereas Woolf is able to range widely and rapidly between viewpoints, as in the novel's virtuoso opening, where Woolf describes the responses of a whole crowd to an appearance by the Prime Minister, shopkeepers, nursing mothers, idle bachelors, Mrs Dalloway herself and Edgar J. Watkiss, the latter speaking in broad cockney. Brontë cannot diversify viewpoint in this way, but she can use an inward voice to show how the adult world looked to her ten year old self. Writing as a married woman in her twenties or thirties, Jane probably thinks of Mr Brocklehurst as a silly snob, but back in her childhood when his whims ruled her at Lowood School, he must have seemed both powerful and sinister. Thus when she first comes into contact with him at Gateshead, she describes him, with appropriate subjectivity, as a 'black pillar'²

1. The title of a critical work is cleverly brought in to advance the argument (AO5).

2. The candidate offers a sophisticated comparison of the narrative methods of the two novels as a way of contrasting the presentation of the inner life (AO1, AO4).



Brontë's novel fits into the pattern of self-revelatory fiction associated with the Romantic movement. All of Charlotte Brontë's writing depends on autobiographical sources such as her interaction with her sisters and her education at home and abroad. She is also fond of using a first person viewpoint (she does this in *Villette* as well as *Jane Eyre*), so that aspects of her writing are bound to seem strongly confessional.³ The scenes where Jane encounters the pacifistic Helen Burns at Lowood have even the ghostly sense for some readers of carrying on debates about religion and attitudes to authority that Charlotte may have had with her dead sister Maria, who forms the original of Helen.⁴

Many of the novel's key scenes are structured in this way, with good and evil angel, as it were, competing for supremacy in Jane's thoughts. **When she tears herself away from Rochester after his exposure as a bigamist, she asks herself who would care if she stayed with him: 'Who in the world cares for you? Or who will be injured by what you do?' There is a strong inward reply: 'I care for myself.' Some of the imagery generated by these inner debates is as potent as any in the book.⁵** She thinks of the urge to return to her lover as 'a barbed arrow-head in my breast; it tore me when I tried to extract it; it sickened me when remembrance thrust it further in.'

Brontë's writing reflects the confessional impulse Rousseau had offered the Romantics, operating with a fresh, distinctively female inflection. One critic has described her as 'a kind of female Byron' exploring the emotional as much as the dramatic implications of her chosen subjects. **Woolf's interests were less in writing about her own thoughts than those of her characters, exploring the diversity of thought and feeling to be found in an 'ordinary mind on an ordinary day' in the great city of London, which T.S. Eliot had already turned into a major Modernist city with his *The Waste Land*.⁶** Significant shifts in literary thinking (in turn a reflection of broader changes in political and social structures) had been taking place for a number of decades up to the point where Woolf came to write *Mrs Dalloway* in 1925. Woolf herself wrote (in her essay *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*) that "On or about December 1910, human character changed". The publication of Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1922, the most ambitious of all Modernist novels, had a profound effect on Woolf. It deals with twenty-four hours in the life of a Capital City (Dublin, as opposed to Woolf's London). The novel closes with an extensive interior monologue by that lively female Molly Bloom, and is comprised of shorter monologues by a variety of characters. Its influence on *Mrs Dalloway*, and on Woolf's presentation of her characters' inner life, is clear.

Like Joyce's, Woolf's novel uses typically Modernist techniques. Most famously, she employs her so-called 'tunneling' technique ("I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters" she stated in her *Diary*).⁷ These 'caves' are often filled with the memories of her characters, allowing them to float freely backwards and forwards in time, thus increasing the scope of the novel well beyond the twenty-four hours it ostensibly covers. It also means the events of the far past are juxtaposed with those of the present, leading to intriguing and paradoxical juxtaposition. When Clarissa feels especially lonely her friends become children in a childhood game who have gone off 'blackberrying in the sun'; when she feels disappointed with her present life she thinks of herself as both a child and a woman, presenting her life to her parents ('a whole life, a complete life') as she once presented 'bread to the ducks.' **Events are often presented in a non-chronological fashion (for example, the hallucinations of Septimus) or via 'flashbacks' (characters' memories of the First World War or of Bourton). Narrative techniques are constantly varied. The inner thoughts of Peter Walsh seem gendered: confident, determined, thinking mainly of the future, absorbing imperial space ('All India lay behind him') whereas Clarissa's voice is characteristically more quizzical, and possibly (reflecting the period) more feminine, with disappointed but very real liberal yearnings ('With all this luxury going on, what hope for a better state of things?') and a sense that much key knowledge has passed her by: 'to this day, ask her what the equator was, and she did not know.'⁸**

3. A literary context for the novel is established (AO3).

4. Here, a biographical context is introduced (AO3).

5. Discussion of imagery is an excellent method of developing the argument about depiction of the inner life (AO1).

6. The answer moves to the second text to develop comparison; again, an initial sense of literary context is offered (AO3, AO4).

7. The writer's own criticism is used to shape the argument (AO5).

8. The candidate balances the detailed discussion of Brontë with a similar approach to Woolf; this technique will be fine as long as the comparison is made explicit by bringing the texts together later in the essay (AO1, AO4).



If *Mrs Dalloway* is an echo chamber of sometimes competing voices (again, like *The Waste Land*), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is mainly preoccupied with the inner life of its eponymous character. In this sense it is indeed a true 'bildungsroman'. Unlike the leaden circles of Big Ben which confine the action of *Mrs Dalloway* to a single day and place, in *Jane Eyre* we are led – in conventional narrative mode – along Jane's chronological path from Gateshead to Lowood and on to Thornfield, Derbyshire and Ferndean. Thus where Woolf concentrates on making Clarissa seem less superficial and more sympathetic than she had in earlier stories featuring her, such as *The Voyage Out*, Brontë leads Jane on a ten year spiritual journey from a discontented and vulnerable poor relation, to a vigorous and able Puritan woman who is mistress of a large house and beloved husband.⁹

Jane's repeated meditations upon the soul ("I need not sell my soul to buy bliss. I have an inward treasure born within me") and about her conscience ("If all the world hated you ... while your own conscience approved of you ... you would not be without friends") ensure that her inner life remains as much the subject of the novel as any external factors being recounted. Indeed, it might be argued that the physical journey being made by Jane during the course of the novel is merely an allegorical manifestation of the inner process which she is undertaking. When the narrative voice utters those famous words "Reader, I married him" at the start of chapter 38, we become aware of that inner voice merging into the outer reality of the world of the novel, culminating in that strange and moving final paragraph that focuses not on Jane and Rochester at all but on the culmination of St John Rivers's spiritual journey. The last words of the novel are the last words of the Bible. Jane arrives at a state of heightened consciousness in the same way that Clarissa's inner voice does when death turns up as a kind of guest at her long-expected party. "A thing there was that mattered" says Mrs Dalloway.

Both novels are very strong in their depiction of a woman's inner life. Both novels benefit from the progressive social and political emancipation of women through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, enabling their authors to examine two unlikely, even disadvantaged characters, a poor governess and the shy wife of a would-be Cabinet Minister who often leaves her unattended in High Society, and discover in their inner lives a rich mine of thought and feeling.¹⁰

9. Here, both texts are interwoven effectively and the candidate can capitalise on the detail established in relation to each text earlier in the essay (AO4).

10. The topic of the essay is strongly related to the contexts of each novel and to the topic area as a whole (AO1, AO3, AO4).

Examiner commentary

This essay is a consistently detailed discussion of two contrasting novels. The candidate has taken the question about depiction of the inner life and focused on the writers' contrasting narrative methods to shape his answer. He has found it necessary to spend time on each novel separately before he can bring them together in detailed comparison; this proves to be a very successful way of approaching this task. Candidates must be careful, however, in using this method; if the texts are not ultimately discussed in combination, they will lose marks for AO4. Throughout this answer, the candidate demonstrates sophisticated understanding of literary methods and detailed knowledge of context. There are brief critical quotations alongside the candidate's own presentation of a range of views in his answer fulfilling AO5.



THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

QUESTION 9

Write a critical appreciation of the passage, relating your discussion to your reading concerning the Immigrant Experience.

When I woke of a morning, I was never greatly surprised to find in my bed a new family of immigrants, in their foreign baggy underwear.

They looked pale and exhausted. They smelled of Ellis Island¹ disinfectant, a stink that sickened me like castor oil.

Around the room was scattered all their wealth, all their striped calico seabags, and monumental bundles of featherbeds, pots, pans, fine peasant linen, embroidered towels, and queer coats as thick as blankets.

Every tenement home was a Plymouth Rock² like ours. The hospitality was taken for granted until the new family rented its own flat. The immigrants would sit around our supper table, and ask endless questions about America. They would tell the bad news of the old country (the news was always bad). They would worry the first morning as to how to find work. They would be instructed that you must not blow out the gas (most of them had never seen it before). They would walk up and down our East Side street, peering at policemen and saloons in amazement at America. They would make discoveries; they would chatter and be foolish.

After a few days they left us with thanks. But some stayed on and on, eating at our table. Don't think my mother liked this. She'd grumble about someone like Fyfka the Miser, grumble, curse, spit and mutter, but she'd never really ask him to move out. She didn't know how.

Imagine the kind of man this Fyfka the Miser was. We did not even know him when he came from Ellis Island. He said he was the friend of a cousin of a boyhood friend of my father's. He had our address and the name of this distant, mythical and totally unknown friend of the cousin of a friend in Roumania. Nothing more; and we didn't like him from the start; but for seven months he ate and slept at our home – for nothing.

Fyfka got a job in a pants factory a week after he arrived; good pay for an immigrant, eight dollars a week. He worked from six A.M. to seven at night. Every morning he bought two rolls for a penny. One roll and a glass of water was his breakfast. For lunch he ate the other roll, and a three-cent slice of herring.

Fyfka paid us no rent; he never changed his shirt or the clothes he had worn in the steerage; he went to no picnics, parks or theaters; he didn't smoke, or drink, or eat candy; he needed nothing. Thus out of eight dollars a week he managed to save some two hundred dollars in the months he sponged on us. He had heard of Rothschild³. He wanted to go into business in America. Poverty makes some people insane.

Michael Gold, *Jews without Money* (1930)

¹ Ellis Island: the USA's busiest immigrant inspection station from 1892 until 1954.

² Plymouth Rock: the site where the early English immigrants to America, the Pilgrim Fathers, landed in 1620.

³ Rothschild: rich family of emigrant Jewish financiers originating in Frankfurt.



This passage suggests that Jewish immigrants to the United States are heroic adventurers far from home, but with this aspect come negatives of their personalities suggesting that they are struggling, thus denoting their reliance on other Jews already in the States. The presentation of the Jews is clear but anonymous. Apart from Fyfka the Miser they have no names, tending to suggest that one immigrant can easily come to stand for the whole group,¹ thus making it easier to stereotype or even to patronise them. In Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the characterisation also works like this, with the central character coming to represent the typical Pakistani abroad post 9.11, and Erica the typical neurotic, under-confident American female.²

Fyfka is the only character in the passage who is dealt with at some length. This introduces a good deal of ethnic colour, an atmosphere of the 'distant, mythical and totally unknown.' Because he still smells of his steerage passage across the Atlantic he keeps the predicament of poverty fleeing its homeland strongly before the reader. **Quite possibly he left home as a result of Pogroms against the East European Jews (we are told 'the news [of the old country] was always bad').³ Fyfka also dominates the final three paragraphs of the passage, which so far has been rather fragmented and chaotic, the perspective constantly shifting between one immigrant group and another. Fyfka thus gives an impression of coherence (and humour) which the much more broken up overall predicament of the 'Jews without money' in the passage does not justify.⁴**

I believe that this passage may reflect Michael Gold's experience of his own immigrant family coming to America, suggesting a time possibly before the First World War, as his book was published in 1930. This means he is dealing with the very Jewish Emigrants who by coming to America escaped the Nazi Holocaust, and he is thus dealing with the beginnings of the Jewish community in the United States. This contrasts with Henry Roth's description of first generation Jewish life in New York at about this time in *Call it Sleep*, and also with Philip Roth's arguments in *Goodbye Columbus* that third generation immigrants should abandon memories of their European origins and assimilate pretty completely with the American consumer society of the 1950s.⁵ In Gold's passage the Jews are marked by having only just come from Ellis Island, the great immigrant inspection station in New York Harbour. The Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel are far in the future. They bring with them belongings that seem suited to backwoods peasant living rather than to a technologically advanced place like New York, **and the narrator's eye seems, in the third paragraph, to move across the bags, blankets and embroidery with a mixture of fascination and distaste.⁶ He is distressed that these people do not know what to do with gas for cooking and lighting, an invention that has been in regular use in America (and much of Europe) for about a hundred years.**

1. The answer starts by making general comments about the passage as a whole (AO1).

2. Here, a set text is used to provide literary context, the answer suggesting that both texts take a similar approach to the presentation of immigrants (AO3).

3. The candidate offers some historical context, making sure that it is closely keyed to the passage (AO3).

4. The candidate offers detailed insight into the way Fyfka is presented in the passage (AO2).

5. The candidate places the passage into historical and literary context in some detail. Supplying background in this way is an effective approach to the task, as long as the candidate keeps the passage in view and returns explicitly to it before too long (AO3).

6. The answer selects detail from the passage to provide insight into the narrator; by implication, he addresses the narrative method of the passage (AO2).



Gold describes the tenement home where he lives, and which takes in the Immigrants, as a sort of 'Plymouth Rock', alluding to the landing of the Early English immigrants to America in New England in 1620. The Jewish immigrants in the passage are also trying to escape religious oppression. **They flee from the widespread Anti-Semitism of Eastern Europe, much as the Pilgrim Fathers were trying to get away from what they saw as misunderstanding of their Puritan beliefs.**⁷ Gold thus suggests two things. In the first place he shows irony that control of America, and the power to dictate its lifestyle, is now in the hands of White Anglo Saxon Protestants who had a head start on these Jews of some three hundred years. In the second he is showing, like most writers who deal with the greatest of all immigrant countries, America, that a sense of new beginning in a new world is of great importance in developing a sense of belonging there, and that nothing helps you to belong like making a myth about it. **Thus, Gold suggests, has sprung up the rather ironic myth of Ellis Island, contrasting with the more heroic myth of Plymouth Rock leading on to celebrations of Thanksgiving.**⁸ Another myth developed in the passage is of Fyfka the Miser as a budding entrepreneur, and even a great Capitalist, like the Jewish financiers from the House of Rothschild. **The lively young narrator pours scorn on both Fyfka's ambition and his impracticality: 'Poverty makes some people insane.'**⁹ But the book is called *Jews Without Money*, presumably because other Jews do make money, and Fyfka, with his frugal, even parasitic habits, may well one day emulate the Rothschilds. He is also the passage's example of an immigrant who has already come to believe in the American Dream: that if you work hard in America the cast-off people of Europe can achieve almost anything there.

Although the focus of the passage is on the new Americans who have just crossed the sea, it is obvious that the narrator is the son of immigrants himself, so that he too is bound up with the immigrant experience. **It is clear his main response is to feel superior to the Jews who room temporarily in his tenement. He ridicules the strangeness of their clothes and belongings, and also finds ridiculous their naivety and lack of sophistication in a city where even young boys like him have seen plenty of policemen and saloons before.**¹⁰ The new people go out into the street to gawp at nothing. They chatter about obvious 'discoveries'. They are 'foolish' – and, quite probably, embarrassing to an aspiring streetwise kid who likes 'picnics' and 'candy' (they don't). The most sickening thing about them, their reek of Ellis Island disinfectant, reminds him of castor oil, almost the worst taste in a child's world. **The literature of immigration has many examples of children who come to despise their elders for their slowness in casting off old country ways. Karim Amir in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* considers himself an Englishman, and looks with contempt on his father's cultivation of an Anglicised Indian persona.**¹¹ In Gold's passage what is striking about the freshly arrived immigrants, apart from their odour and poverty, is their odd lack of self-consciousness. The boy scorns this, but they also have a kind of unexpected talent for admiring their new surroundings, suggesting that there is something child-like about them, fitting them for a new beginning.

The most striking thing about Gold's technique is the immediacy he gets from his short, chopped up paragraphs and direct sentences, often just a few words. It is a technique like that of a journalist.¹² He does not seem to be telling a story. He seems to be holding up a whole lifestyle for the reader's consideration. Almost every paragraph is self-contained and dominated by the strong reaction of the child: 'I was never greatly surprised to find in my bed a new family of immigrants'. Strong scents, and the 'monumental' bedclothes and 'foreign baggy underwear' predominate in his memories, but so does the dinner table with its anxious and ignorant talk. There is even a reference to ethnic Jewish food in the 'three-cent slice of herring'. Gold is providing a cool analysis of how 'foolish' the recently arrived look to the tenement holders of several years standing. But he is also offering a panorama of the Lower East Side, sometimes thought of as 'a whole Jewish mini state', of how a resourceful people 'on the move' jump ship and with some awkwardness (at first) embrace the future.

7. The answer sketches in historical background specific to the passage (AO3).

8. The candidate discusses the importance of myth-making in the literature of immigration (AO2/3).

9. There is an effective comment on the tone of the narrative voice (AO2).

10. The candidate characterises the narrator of the passage, picking up details from the passage to help (AO2).

11. The candidate uses his wider reading to provide literary context for the extract (AO3).

12. Here, the answer offers a shrewd comment on the journalistic style of the passage (AO2).



In conclusion, then, it would be unfair to claim that Gold's writing gives the sense of being both absorbed in and threatened by the experience of early twentieth century New York as presented in, for example, Henry Roth's Call it Sleep.¹³ Henry Roth is determined to show how Yiddish is both a common tongue among New York Jews but also a way of isolating them from the English-speaking culture. David, the boy in Roth's story, thinks in something like a Modernist writer's Stream of Consciousness, but when he and his friends speak, the results are a kind of 'maimed English': 'I'm gonna gid gum. In duh slot machine.' Gold does not make it clear in this passage whether the language his Jews speak is English or Yiddish, though it is probably the latter, and some of the people Gold describes would certainly have no English yet. But if the passage passes over the challenge of linguistic division and difficulty so many immigrants encounter, **Gold does present with great vitality the vigour and something of the absurdity of a shared beginning. He shows also that his Jews Without Money have already come a long way, but still have a long way to go.**¹⁴

13. The candidate supplies a conclusion by comparing the extract with an appropriate set text which also deals with Jewish immigrants in the USA (AO3).

14. The conclusion offers a judgement of the style and content of the set passage, and places it confidently in the context of the Literature of Immigration (AO2/3).

Examiner commentary

This is an assured and confident discussion of the passage. AO2 effects are indicated and evidently understood; AO3 is especially strong, both in terms of the historical understanding of the immigration of Jews to America and also the literary context of the topic area (a number of novels from the recommended list are registered, and even one which is not listed). The answer recognises the humorous tone of the extract, something which often proves difficult for candidates to manage under exam conditions. The candidate picks up not only ways in which the immigrants resemble each other and function as a group, but also ways in which they differ in areas like age and also the degree of their familiarity and confidence in the new world they have chosen.



QUESTION 10(A)

Henry Roth, *Call it Sleep*

'The literature of immigration often deals with the need to escape the past.'

Compare ways in which this theme is explored in *Call It Sleep* and at least one other text prescribed for this topic.'

Published in 1934, written by Jewish immigrant Henry Roth, *Call it Sleep* is 'an exact, unsparring portrait of the lives of poor Jewish immigrants in New York City in the early decades of the twentieth century' according to critic Richard E. Nicholls.¹ By comparing this novel to *Goodbye Columbus*, Philip Roth's debut collection of a novella and five short stories, published in 1959, one will be able to identify different attitudes to the past of the American Jews in Eastern Europe and their experience of an American Jewish culture as the century progressed.²

David, the hero of Henry Roth's novel is so young – about six when the book starts – he has little understanding of his Jewishness or how it separates him from the other cultures that surround him in Brownsville and later the lower East Side, mainly Irish-American and Italian-American. **Yet he is aware that the language his mother and father talk at home (Yiddish, translated by the author into English) is beautiful, even poetic. He is told his hands are 'those of a prince's'; he asks questions like, 'Mama, what are eternal years?'; and when his mother is accused of breaking a promise to his father, the latter says 'Even the fixed word wavers, eh.' This is sympathetic, yet in stark contrast to what Jewish critic Leslie Fiedler calls the 'maimed' English that the Jewish immigrants speak to one another, or to other Americans.**³ This is well-shown when a little girl introduces David to her private parts and thus teaches him the facts of life and reveals that he is (or will be) a father himself. What she says is: 'Who puts it in is de poppa. De poppa's god de petzel. Yaw de poppa.' These words are axiomatically phallic and foreshadow many events later in the novel, but at this stage David cannot hope to understand them. Nor can the gentile characters in the novel understand David. An Irish policeman tries to take David home when he gets lost but cannot understand the address David gives him. This sums up the contempt other New Yorker's feel for the Jews' inability to speak American English: 'Be-gob, he'll be having me talk like a Jew. Sure!'

1. The candidate helpfully characterises the set novel by quoting from a critic (AO5).

2. Both novels are featured in the introduction to the essay, which is the best way of starting a well-balanced comparison (AO4).

3. This focus on language is very helpful to the argument of the essay; since Yiddish represents the past for these characters (AO1).



This suggests that children like David, growing up with two languages, often taunted by Christian boys in the street, and not understanding American culture, will not be comfortable with the Jewish culture they bring with them across the Atlantic. **For these immigrants the past will not be consoling, but a source of mystery and confusion, much as his father's jealous suspicions that his mother has had sex with a Christian 'organist' in the old country grow during the course of the novel (partly as David is better able to understand them) and will not go away. David is impressed by his rabbi (but afraid of him too) and impressed by the scriptures, especially the story of Isaiah's coal, which burns and purifies. But though he is impressed, he is also confused about the Bible.**⁴ For example he comes to believe that he can do Isaiah's miracle for himself by putting a piece of zinc on a live tramcar rail and predictably electrocutes himself. He is also willing to believe the American urban myth of Santa Claus, and becomes convinced a Christian rosary will protect him from danger. As John J. Clayton has said this is a novel of 'misunderstood secrets'. It follows even the shared 'secrets' of David's Jewish cultural identity are misunderstood. When he produces the electric flash from the tramcar rail he is not really copying Isaiah. He has learned the trick from a gang of street urchins who hate him because he is a Jew.

The hesitant and often afraid early immigrants to America in Henry Roth's Modernist novel contrast strongly with the children of immigrants in Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus*, who have now been in the States for three or even four generations.⁵ Roth's book was published in the 1950s, so it is like other stories of consumerism and prosperity after the second world war, such as Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1961) (about German immigrants) and John Updike's *Rabbit Run* (1959) which has a Scandinavian hero. All these books deal with ways in which sharing prosperity and the American Dream has made all Americans more like one another, and less likely to think about the place their ancestors come from. Brenda, the heroine, looks like a fifties film star, a 'practical girl' with 'short-clipped auburn hair'. Her passion, like lots of America girls, is 'maintaining her beauty as it was' and she is 'afraid' of her Jewish nose, which she has had 'fixed'. **The only scene in Philip Roth's novella that offers a glimpse of earlier immigrant life as portrayed in *Call it Sleep* is when Brenda takes the narrator up to the storeroom to see the old family furniture and you think there will be stories about the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But even in this scene Philip Roth makes clear Brenda isn't interested in her family history.**⁶ She is looking for some money she hid under a sofa in the storeroom years ago. As always Brenda's needs are in the present time and she only cares about the past if it helps her to obtain them.

4. The answer develops a clear sense of what 'the past' amounts to for these characters (AO1). It has been worth establishing a strong understanding of the first text in the essay, but it is time to introduce the second text.

5. The second text now appears, and the candidate will need to develop some strong comparison between the two.

6. The candidate has established that *Goodbye Columbus* is written from a very different perspective, but can still find a scene which creates a point of contact between the two novels (AO1, AO3, AO4).



There are no pictures of Brenda's father, Mr Patimkin, in the house, suggesting that nothing matters about the shared Jewish past and everything matters about the individualist American future. Albert, the terrible father in *Call it Sleep* is much more like a cruel biblical patriarch, or even a vengeful God, than docile Mr Patimkin, whose main purpose in the novella seems to be to maintain a swimming pool for his children and pay College fees. Philip Roth's purpose, I think, is to encourage American Jews not to become fixated on memories of their time in European ghettos or American slums (those dark 'cellars' of sexual and physical fear described in *Call it Sleep*) but to embrace all the implications, positive as well as negative, of the things promised in the tv ads: 'gold dinnerware, sporting-goods trees, nectarines, garbage disposals.'⁷ This led to Jewish critics, who campaigned hard to have *Call it Sleep* recognised as a modern masterpiece, turning strongly against *Goodbye Columbus* soon after it was published.⁸ They argued that in rejecting the old culture with its memories of 'frosted windows on the Russian steppes', and in concentrating on what Philip Roth himself calls 'the avid and brilliant Americanization' of so many Jews of his own generation, the book sold out on all that it meant to be Jewish. **Certainly whenever Jewish issues emerge in *Goodbye Columbus* they are treated with some touches of satire, whereas Henry Roth in *Call it Sleep* always treats David's Jewish identity as a fact of life.**⁹ In Henry Roth the rabbi brings a feeling of authority to every scene in which he appears, David telling us his 'beard' shakes out 'sparks of satisfaction.' **In Philip Roth's 'Eli, the Fanatic' the darkly clad orthodox Jew, Tzoref, seems to bring with him not something to copy but a sort of black comedy – either daft or frightening, depending on your point of view.**¹⁰ He is trying to establish a school in a modern American suburb, but makes no effort to compromise with the modern world. Every detail must be kosher. He seems to want, and to be getting 'a hundred little kids with little yamalkahs chanting their Hebrew lessons on Coach House Road.' The secular, modernized Jewish-American characters in the story do not react well to this. They clearly associate this demon headmaster with an obscure effort to bring back the obscurity of their Jewish past. But one of them proves unable to resist him. At the end of the story the hero Leo Peck, who at the beginning of the story is a sophisticated American lawyer, has come to dress like Tzoref, talk like Tzoref and even think like Tzoref. There is a suggestion that in changing places with Tzoref so uncompromisingly this modern American Jew may have driven himself mad. **This suggests that where in *Call it Sleep* the Jewish past, focussed on the rabbi, is a source of stability, in *Goodbye Columbus* it can be a much less reliable prop.**¹¹

In conclusion it is easy to see that an awareness of the Jewish past and the sense of identity it gives controls almost every issue in the works of these two authors, though that sense of past works differently in the two books.¹² In Philip Roth's work it can be a source of confusion, providing modern Americans with what S.T. Coleridge famously called 'ancestral voices'¹³ that do not match the needs and ambitions of the new secular world. In Henry Roth's novel there is something heroic about the efforts of his people to try to forge identity from scratch in the New World and their Jewish identity gives them something to work with. Both writers incorporate the Jewish religion to incorporate moral boundaries for and expectations of the characters' human needs.

Examiner commentary

This answer provides a mature and thoughtful consideration of the topic. The choice of *Goodbye Columbus* as a comparative text works well for the candidate, since both novels deal with Jews living in America but are strongly contrasted by the dates at which they are set. The use of a short story as additional literary context is a good idea, and this approach to study could inform centres' teaching of any of the topic areas. The essay is a little slow to move on to the second text, but justifies the time it spends initially on *Call It Sleep* because this has helped to establish the initial position of the argument. The knowledge, fluency and detail displayed throughout make this a clear top band answer.

7. This paragraph makes it clear that the two novels are strongly contrasted; picking out the father figures in both is a good way to establish these differences (AO1, AO4).

8. This is interesting and helpful discussion of the development of critical attitudes over time (AO5, AO3).

9. The candidate's answer benefits from his strong sense of the religious and historical contexts of these works (AO3).

10. A short story provides valuable literary context (AO3).

11. The candidate brings the argument together by characterising the contrasting feelings about the past presented by these two writers (AO4).

12. The conclusion summarises the different ideas and feelings about the past which are presented in the two novels (AO1, AO4).

¹³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan', l. 30



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General qualifications

Telephone 01223 553998

Facsimile 01223 552627

Email general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk



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