

Commentary on candidate evidence

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for this course assessment component.

Candidate 1

The candidate was awarded **10 marks**.

Topic

An exploration of narcissism in *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt.

Task

The candidate has chosen to attempt an 'exploration of narcissism' of the narrator Richard Pape in the novel. While the choice of text is appropriate for this level of study, the choice of theme is less helpful as there are many other themes which would have provided a broader range of material for the candidate to work with, for example: superficiality, isolation, beauty, and illusion versus reality. Furthermore, the selection of the character of Richard as a focus could be seen as flawed as there are several other characters in the novel who would be better suited to such an approach – Bunny and Julian to name but two – who could be clearly said to be narcissistic, and this broadening of the focus may have been beneficial for the candidate.

Knowledge and understanding

The dissertation shows some **knowledge and understanding of key elements** of the early part of the novel, eg Richard's description of his childhood (on page 2 of the candidate response), the beauty of the college setting (page 3 of the response), Henry Winters [sic] saving Richard (page 3 of the response) and the character of Bunny (page 4 of the response). However, the main elements of the novel are not mentioned (such as the Bacchanalia and the first murder, or the relationship with the tutor, or the other characters in the group – and their obsession with beauty and death, or Henry's dramatic suicide).

There are also many **inaccuracies** (on page 1: Richard 'sounds proud'; 'Richard is a murderer with a victim complex'; on page 4: Bunny being stripped of 'the complexity that Tartt offers the other characters.' or Bunny being 'made into a villain by Richard' or that Richard only 'claims his wrong doings when it boosts his status or his ego').

The **approach to the task has many weaknesses in relevance** and there is only **limited textual evidence to support the demands of the task**, drawn from the first quarter of the novel only with all but two quotations taken from the first 60 pages of a 500-page novel.

Analysis

There is **some attempt to analyse a limited range of literary techniques**. The dissertation mentions descriptive language, first-person narrative, prologue, choice of words, unreliable narrator, structure and setting. However, the level of analysis is **weak**, and often inaccurate (for example on page 1 of the response, 'he seems to be reveling [sic] in the attention he is indirectly receiving from the murder, fueling [sic] his ego'; on page 2, 'this in itself contradicts the structure that Tartt has set us'; and on page 4, 'Richard really does not feel ...remorseful').

The analysis throughout can primarily be described as having a **weakness in depth and relevance**, and a pertinent example to illustrate this is the paragraph on setting on pages 2 and 3. On these pages the candidate initially states that 'Another aspect of the story that is impacted through Richard's narration is the setting' (page 2) and they then assert that there is 'sentence upon sentence of negative descriptions' of 'the area Richard grew up in' (page 2) and then offer up some explication on Hampden and a warehouse on page 3. There are no quotations to support their assertions about the settings and the single quotation that is used – 'despair' – points to Richard's feelings as he wanders through his hometown. Furthermore, the candidate then struggles to connect their assertions about setting to the stated focus of the dissertation – 'narcissism' – as they then conclude this section on setting by asserting that 'Tartt uses the character of Richard to convey narcissism' and that 'another key trait of this is the inability to accept responsibility [...and] at times of distress or despair externalises his angst through his environment' (page 3), but this statement is unsupported by the **limited textual evidence** provided and the candidate struggles to create a cohesive and supported point to address the task. This sort of **weakness in depth and relevance** of analysis is typical throughout the dissertation.

Evaluation

There is an **implied evaluative stance with respect to the text and the task, but it has some weakness in relevance**. Page 2 of the candidate's response sees an extended diagnosis of Richard as a narcissist, which the candidate asserts has been established in the prologue. The discussion of setting on pages 2 and 3 culminates in the evaluative statement that Richard is used to 'convey narcissism', which is not based on the preceding analysis. The comment on page 3 that 'Tartt drags out this chapter in an attempt to make the reader suffer like Richard does ...instills [sic] a sense of boredom and chore' is perhaps evaluative, but not relevant. Throughout, the dissertation attempts to draw the same erroneous conclusion irrespective of what has been discussed before, which is 'how well it serves Richard and his ego at that time in the story' (page 3 of the response).

Expression

There is **some weakness in accuracy or use of structure, style and language, which affects the strength of the argument**, but does not impede understanding.

Mark

This dissertation fully meets all the descriptors in the 10-6 range and is therefore awarded a mark of **10**.

Candidate 2

The candidate was awarded **15 marks**.

Topic

A comparative analysis of how narrative perspective, in two modern retellings of the Trojan War, *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller and *A Thousand Ships* by Natalie Haynes provide differing dominant views on war and its impact.

Task

The candidate has chosen two relatively recently published texts, and both make suitable subjects for study at this level. The candidate makes a reasonably clear statement of the particular area of focus. This is then expanded upon in the introductory paragraphs on pages 1 and 2 of their response where they refer to the narrative perspective of Patroclus in *The Song of Achilles* and that for *A Thousand Ships*, 'this dissertation will focus on the characters of Creusa and Briseis, as well as the collective stories from the novel as a whole.' The dissertation '...will explore how drastically differently each novel portrays the characters and how that changes the reader's experience of the war and its impact.' The choice of just two characters and their stories from *A Thousand Ships* could be viewed as a rather **limited selection**.

Knowledge and understanding

Allowing for the rather narrow focus of the candidate's chosen task, there is enough evidence in the dissertation of **appropriate knowledge and understanding of the key elements, central concerns and (some) significant details of the texts**. There is, in the main, a **relevant approach to the task**. The candidate gives a succinct summary of the background to the stories and characters (on pages 1 and 2 of their response) and then in the body of the dissertation shows understanding of the depictions of Achilles, Patroclus, Creusa and Briseis in the two novels and how they help to 'provide differing dominant views on war and its impact.' There are, however, **some limitations in the breadth of selection of textual evidence chosen to support the demands of the task**.

Analysis

The candidate offers a **relevant analysis of a range of literary techniques and/or features as appropriate to the task**. On pages 1 and 2 of their response the candidate defines the two texts as exemplifying models of classical and modern tragedy respectively. The 'chronological structure' of *The Song of Achilles*, which '...enforces the idea that your fate is inevitable' (page 2) is contrasted with the 'nonlinear structure used to depict the chaos of war' in *A Thousand Ships* (page 3). There is reference to the use of Calliope as a framing device (page 2) and the 'shifts to a different character as the chapters change'. The use of flashback in Creusa's story is mentioned on page 3 of their response and the effect of tone on the depiction of Briseis on page 4. There is analysis of characterisation and the portrayal of relationships throughout the dissertation and

the difference between single and multiple character narratives (on pages 6 and 7 of their response). The candidate makes an appropriate comment on the effects of Patroclus hiding 'behind Achilles' armour' and being 'able to be a stronger, more warrior-like version of himself' before 'falling into a trap of his own hubris' (page 6) prefacing this with a quotation from Oscar Wilde. There is, however, often **weakness in the depth of the analysis**. This can be seen, for example, in the candidate's comments on Creusa's description of Sinon on page 3 of their response.

Evaluation

There is a **discernible evaluative stance with respect to the texts and task throughout the dissertation and this is based on evidence presented within the dissertation**. The candidate comments on the relative merits of the different types of narrative viewpoints used and concludes that 'the two novels have contrasting depictions of war' with *A Thousand Ships* offering 'a more realistic interpretation' but *The Song of Achilles* being 'an idealised version of the war' (page 7 of their response).

Expression

While the candidate does make reasonably accurate use of appropriate/analytical terminology (narrative, cliché, perspective, tragedy, non-linear structure, flashback), there is **some weakness in the structure of this dissertation** which means it is not always clear to which text the analysis refers. There are also some awkwardly expressed ideas.

Mark

Holistic assessment of the dissertation indicates that the work just meets the standard described in the 18-15 range. It is therefore awarded the lowest mark from that range, 15.