

# Commentary on candidate evidence

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for the project-dissertation.

## Candidate 1

The candidate was awarded **12 marks**.

### Topic

Exploring the ways in which *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *Interview with the Vampire* by Anne Rice changed the representation of vampires in English Literature through theme, character, and plot.

### Task

The texts selected here are texts suitable for this level of study. This paring is one which has tended to be dealt with using primarily character and plot as the literary focus and this candidate sets out to do just that. However, the issue with the task is its intention to look at how these two novels 'changed the representation of vampires in English Literature'. This is a bold and broad focus, and even bolder when the primary focus is upon two novels only, albeit there are passing mentions of more contemporary novels which were all made more popular through TV and film adaptations, and a cursory mention of Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*. Such a focus would suggest that vampire writing needed to be understood historically, show initial representations and then the new representations highlighted. The candidate never makes clear how this will be dealt with, and leaves several questions to be answered: Is *Dracula* the more traditional representation of vampires? Is *Interview with the Vampire* the new 'representation' of vampires? Where does *Carmilla* play a role? Where do these texts sit alongside the mention of Shelley and Radcliffe in the opening paragraph on page 1? Where do they sit in the range of young adult contemporary novels referred to? These questions raise uncertainty, and the candidate does not really resolve them through the writing of this dissertation.

### Knowledge and understanding

The approach to the task this candidate seems to take is established on the first page where they attempt to create a historical context to place these novels within. There is mention of Shelley and Radcliffe, and a general assertion that *Dracula* 'was one of the first vampire books' with a nod to Le Fanu on page 2 with the acknowledgement that 'the description of female vampires comes from *Carmilla*'. However, this patchwork of references to other writing is never explored in any depth or in any useful way beyond these references, and this would suggest that the candidate's knowledge and understanding of the central concerns of the genre itself, especially with a task which states it will look at the 'changed representation of vampires in English Literature' has some insecurities.

The candidate correctly asserts that 'Bram Stoker did not invent vampires' and that he 'may have taken inspiration from Vlad the Impaler' (page 1) and moves on to assert that the 'sensuality of female vampires does not have the same effect' (page 2) on nineteenth-century readers and that 'views have changed since the release of both books' (page 2). Lucy is described on page 3 as being 'sexual and heavily embraced this' and that Dracula does not allow her 'to create any vampire children' (page 3). The candidate continues on page 5 by looking at ideas of homosexuality where there are 'hints at Dracula being queer', an assertion which the candidate finds difficult to substantiate convincingly. There is then a jump to look at Renfield and the discussion of his drinking the blood of living animals, and of Dracula using blood as a route 'to look younger' (page 5) and as an indicator of 'his powers of manipulation' (page 5) which links to similar ideas of manipulation 'in modern literature such as *The Vampire Diaries*' (page 5) which infers some idea of development in the literature but does not go far beyond inferential statements like this. The candidate finishes their work on *Dracula* by commenting on drinking blood from the neck of victims, and the associations of blood to other bodily fluids which seems to have been taken from a secondary source and is not developed in terms of being relevant to the core focus of the task. This work on *Dracula* can best be described as having some weakness in relevance.

Likewise, the candidate takes a similar approach to *Interview with the Vampire* where they assert that this novel 'put vampires in a new perspective for gothic literature as it was written from a vampire's perspective' (page 2) and that 'every character has major flaws and characteristics' (page 2) and that Louis feels guilt for 'possessing immortality' (page 2). The candidate moves on to look at Claudia who was 'a vampire stuck in a 5-year-old's body' (page 2) with the 'ultimate wish [...] to be a grown woman', and who had 'an inability to have children' but still 'took control of her sensuality' (page 4). They then move off at a tangent to look at Lestat's victims where he is seen to '[play] with their fears [...] before he makes them suffer physically' and this is seen to link to a 'theme of religion' (page 4) which shows insecurities in their knowledge and understanding of the novel as it pertains to the task. This approach to addressing the ideas in the novels continues with comments on page 7 on Louis and Lestat's 'flirty comments' and 'intimacy' and finally onto a concluding view that Louis 'feels he has no purpose' (page 7) and that Armand ultimately 'mentored Louis about his vampirism' (page 8). Overall, the candidate has a degree of understanding about some aspects of the novels, yet their selections show an insecurity in their knowledge and understanding of the novels, especially as they pertain to the task they have set themselves.

As outlined in the discussion of the task, the approach taken by the candidate is generally appropriate in that it carries some potential if we assume that they are trying to show that *Dracula* is a more traditional rendering of the vampire novel with *Interview with the Vampire* being the novel which shows the 'change in representation of vampires'. Yet the reader has to make many assumptions on behalf of the candidate such as assuming that Dracula's traditional approach to vampires as seen through 'diary entries, letters, newspaper articles and telegrams' (page 1) is in contrast with *Interview with the Vampire* which sees the world through the multiple perspectives of vampires; that in *Dracula* it is grown

sexualised women [Lucy and Mina] who are central, as contrasted by Claudia's subversive qualities as a child 'jealous of everyone as she could never experience being sexual' (page 3); and that there are homosexual undertones in both novels to some degree. Yet even with such generous assumptions, the dissertation itself ultimately shows some weaknesses in relevance throughout as it does not commit to dealing with an idea of change in 'representation of vampires' as defined by the task.

With *Interview with the Vampire*, the candidate uses some textual evidence to support the demands of the task but with *Dracula* the evidence used could be said to be limited in terms of supporting the demands of the task with only six quotations (two unreferenced).

## Analysis

There is some attempt to analyse literary techniques but with weakness in the depth/relevance of the analysis. The candidate outlines in their task that they will look at 'theme, character, and plot' but they also touch upon structure – the aforementioned 'diary entries, letters, newspaper articles and telegrams' (page 1) which is contrasted with *Interview with the Vampire* in that Rice's novel sees the world through the multiple perspectives (page 2) – and the 'symbolism of blood' (page 4). The candidate makes attempts at analysis such as their comments on *Dracula* on page 2 with "the ruby of their voluptuous lips" as indicating the 'sensuality of female vampires' (page 2); the irony of Claudia being 'in a child's body and is a vampire so cannot provide children' when she is quoted as saying "A coven of children? This is all I could provide..." (page 2); a comment on the 'use of "it's"' in *Dracula* which suggests 'that the characters did not view Lucy as human' (page 3); Dracula's queer tendencies when he says to the vampire brides "How dare you touch him any of you?" as being evidence of Dracula's being 'jealous of his three brides for wishing to be intimate with the man he so desires' (page 5). These comments all have some validity, yet they show a weakness in depth and there is no consistent relevance to the task.

The candidate also, at times, has an idiosyncratic approach to using secondary sources to substantiate their analytical assertions. The comments on the symbolism of blood on pages 4 and 5 are indicative of this approach as they state that the symbolism of blood 'can be viewed as a metaphor for blood-transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS as well as illnesses such as Leukemia and rabies' (pages 4-5) and then connect *Dracula* to 'dirty blood' and 'clean' blood which seems to be a confusing approach to dealing with blood in *Dracula*, a novel written in 1899.

## Evaluation

The candidate has an implied evaluative stance with respect to the texts and task. They make broad evaluative statements on the opening page about the fact that 'Gothic literature has been popular across the world for many centuries' and that *Dracula* 'plays between the world of real and supernatural [which] sets it apart from other novels written around that time period'. The candidate also attempts to engage the texts with the world today, but without much success. The candidate touches upon 'sexuality in women' in the world today on page 2 and

men having 'failed to treat women fairly for so long that women have been forced to fight to be equal' (page 3) which could have had a place in this dissertation, but the candidate fails to integrate these points well with the primary texts themselves. Other comments which also have potential, but which fail to fully engage with the line of argument, are – for example – on page 2 the comment on how the 'theme of sexuality is now embraced and encouraged in some cases whereas previously it was viewed as disgusting and disrespectful' and on page 4 where 'women are now not pressured into having children'. The candidate also attempts to engage these two novels with modern examples of vampire writing, films, and TV series with passing statements about them without really using them to support the main point of the task. For example, they discuss *Twilight* and *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* on page 3 in that they are novels 'told from the point of view of a female lead character' and then *The Vampire Diaries* on page 5 where manipulation is also prevalent in that novel as it is in *Dracula*, and the mention of Carlisle Cullen in *Twilight* is apposite in his similarity to Armand as a mentor in *Interview with the Vampire*, but that is where the engagement stops.

## Expression

The candidate shows some weakness in accuracy or use of structure, style and language, including appropriate critical/analytical terminology which affects the strength of the argument but does not impede understanding. In particular, the candidate struggles to structure a cogent line of argument, and their structure is unhelpfully fragmented and weak throughout. There are attempts throughout to be genuinely comparative, but once again, this does not help support their overall line of argument.

It is worth commenting that the candidate has an extensive bibliography, with some sources having some potential to support specific lines of argument. These sources are quoted in footnotes, but they are never fully integrated into supporting a line of argument which would help the candidate address the task. For example, the comment from Judith Bell's article on page 2 is apposite – "The overt eroticism of the female vampire is no longer frightening because sexuality in woman is now acceptable, even desirable, trait", but is never really developed into supporting the candidate's line of argument.

## Range

Holistically, this dissertation neither fully meets, or just meets the standard described in the 14-11 range, and is awarded a mark from the middle of the range.

## Candidate 2

The candidate was awarded **30 marks**.

### Topic

A comparative literary study examining the portrayal of social class conflict, the miscommunication this brings and how this is overcome in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

### Task

The candidate has chosen to write a dissertation on two complex and sophisticated novels which are appropriate for this level of study: Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Their chosen task is to examine three aspects of each novel: (i) 'the portrayal of social class', (ii) 'the miscommunication this brings', and (iii) 'how this is overcome'. The candidate has also stated that they will have a 'literary' focus which is expanded upon at the end of the first paragraph on page 1 of the dissertation, when they state that 'characterisation, irony and narrative voice' will be central to their approach. The candidate also states that they will have a comparative approach, and the candidate consistently offers a comparative approach throughout the whole dissertation.

### Knowledge and understanding

Throughout the dissertation, the candidate shows that they have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the texts as a whole which demonstrates sustained insight into the issues explored. The candidate states on page 1 that Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* 'is a lively, spirited girl' who 'prides herself on her "discernment" [...] but she is often mistaken in her conclusions about [Darcy and Wickham's] motivations.' They understand that Elizabeth's 'father's estate is bequeathed to the next male heir and the family's lack of connections diminish their prospects, ensuring one of the five daughters will have to marry well to raise their fortunes.' (page 2). There is also an understanding of the beginnings of the Elizabeth/Darcy relationship where 'Darcy wrestles with his attraction towards her and his contempt towards her social inferiority' whilst her 'dislike of Darcy heightens to disdain' as she feels 'supercilious about his elevated class position'. Yet in Wickham, she is 'mesmerised by [his] pleasing external qualities' (page 4) but in her 'naiveté [she is] unable to see Wickham as the corrupt directionless opportunist that he is.' (page 6). It is then observed that Elizabeth's 'appraisal of Darcy's letter and the truth of its material forces her to revise her attitudes and understanding' (page 7) and 'she realises she no longer desires his good opinion.' (page 8). The candidate then states that 'misunderstanding is averted and also eradicated when Darcy and Elizabeth take the time to communicate with each other' (page 9) as we then see that Darcy is then 'presented as an upper-class gentleman, balancing power and compassion, community involvement and dedication to family' and his 'attitude towards Elizabeth's relatives seems to have shifted from derision to goodwill' (page 9). Darcy then 'seeks to secure Lydia and Wickham's marriage' and 'protect the reputations of the family he once scorned' (page 11).

The same comprehensive knowledge and understanding is evident in the candidate's treatment of *North and South* as they outline the fact that at the start of the novel, Margaret Hale returns to 'her parents' country parsonage in the small Southern village of Helstone after spending the last ten years with the Shaws' (page 2). The candidate observes that 'Margaret will be challenged' for the 'snobbery she exhibits as a Southerner with her delicate sensibilities and educated background' (page 3) and that she will be 'subjected to class injustice in the North' (page 3). Margaret rejects a marriage proposal, favouring 'love and affection in matrimony, as opposed to financial advantage' (page 3). She views the 'manufacturing class with spite' (page 4) and although 'her social standing is compromised upon her father's occupation change [...] Margaret continues to possess an air of her own self-importance.' (page 5) The candidate continues to interrogate Margaret's 'inherent prejudice of the working class and manufacturing class' as she first meets the mill owner, John Thornton, and she seems to him 'to be an educated, cultured misfit in such a destitute environment' (page 5). But the candidate shows some insight into the novel when 'Margaret's appearance of pretension is contrasted with her genuine concern, unaffected by snobbery, for the Higgins family' (page 5) with her friendship with Bessy going towards 'soften[ing] Margaret's prejudices' (page 6). The relationship between Margaret and Thornton is one where their 'views about the world differ' and 'they lack the mutual understanding to communicate in an inoffensive way' (page 7). It is when the millworkers strike, when 'Thornton belittles his workers' that Margaret 'encourages Thornton to realise that personal relationships are the only bridge across the class divide' (page 8). Yet through this, 'Thornton's persistent compassion and charity towards her and her family shows the influence she has on shaping his view of the world' and eventually 'their conversations, slowly loosening the ties of misunderstanding, have borne fruit, and caused Thornton to change policy' (page 10) and ultimately, 'her view of Thornton [is] reformed due to his persistent compassion' yet 'misunderstanding continues to cloak their relationship' until Thornton 'makes room for ventures based on personal attachment' (page 12).

The tripartite nature of the task is dealt with logically, and there is a full and relevant exploration which demonstrates sustained consideration of the implications of the task where both novels are concerned: the class conflict is recognised, the miscommunication is outlined, and the issues are overcome.

The candidate uses extensive textual evidence which is clearly focussed on the demands of the task through broad but judicious selection of references. These texts are both substantial texts, yet the candidate has been judicious and extensive in their selection of quotation – there are over forty direct quotations evenly balanced across both novels – and they also integrate some relevant secondary reading to support their own line of argument.

## Analysis

The candidate makes a relevant analysis of a task-appropriate range of literary techniques which skilfully strengthen the line of argument. The candidate is – not surprisingly – focussed on the characterisation of Elizabeth and Margaret and their relationships with Darcy and Thornton respectively, but they also touch upon

motif, character foil, irony, narrative voice, and symbolism. The analysis is consistently delivered through the entire dissertation, with some examples as follows: on page 1, the comment on Austen's narrative voice as a voice where readers are 'likely to blindly follow [Elizabeth's] misconceptions about the characters', alongside the comment on page 4 that 'the ironic narrative voice' favours 'Elizabeth's perspective [...] making us think that her view of others is unbiased and unprejudiced allows us to ascertain, on a second reading, that we, like Elizabeth, were too easily led astray by Wickham's appearance of congeniality' are insightful points, as is the analysis of Darcy being the "'proudest, most disagreeable man'" and "'not handsome enough to tempt me'" as being indicative of Elizabeth's 'bad first impression [which] hardens into a firm dislike that causes her to create a preconceived notion of his character which she will later admonish herself for.' (page 2) Also, the interaction between Elizabeth and Darcy on page 3 – "'propensity to hate everyone [...] and yours, is wilfully to misunderstand them'" – is analysed as an 'astute assessment of each other's character contrasted in their inability to diagnose their own capacity for judging each other based on the appearance of class.' (page 3)

In *North and South*, further relevant analysis which strengthens the line of argument is made. Initially, the comment on page 2 on "'I don't like shoppy people'" is analysed as being indicative of Margaret's 'innate sense of superiority over her position – she only has respect for specific professions and their corresponding lifestyles' but on the other hand, comment is made on page 3 that she was "'untamed from the forest'" which shows she comes from 'humble circumstances' and she will have to 'harness these qualities if she wishes to plead on behalf of the injustice she faces'. The candidate then looks at the interaction between Margaret and Thornton, and in particular "their assumptions about each other" on page 5 where Margaret sees Thornton as "'not quite a gentleman'" and Thornton 'misinterprets her proud demeanour as "superciliousness"' all of which points to their assumptions about each other being 'based on their appearance of status and rank'. Furthermore, when the candidate looks at a further conflict between Margaret and Thornton over the 'mention of an imminent strike' on page 8, Margaret's view that 'God created men "mutually dependent", seems to proclaim an urgent appeal for compassion and mercy between workers and masters' whereas Thornton sees the workers as a "'pack of ungrateful hounds'" and it is here that Margaret 'encourages Thornton to realise that personal relationships are the only bridge across the class divide' and that her own development as a character 'allows her to perceive that a humanising approach is the only way to pacify the impasse.' (page 8) The candidate then looks at the resolution to the issues with Thornton facing his workers directly where he 'urges his workers to "kill me, if it is your brutal will"' (page 10) which is an important point in the novel as he realises that 'he should respect his workers enough to face them himself, rather than hiding behind an intermediary' and this change is also apparent with his 'interactions with Higgins' where Thornton perceives Higgins' 'compassionate streak' (page 10). As the analysis of *North and South* comes to a close, the candidate looks at the symbolism of the dried rose presented to Margaret on page 12 which 'symbolises Thornton's newfound ability to see Margaret, as well as the millworkers, as more than mere stereotypes.'

## Evaluation

The candidate has a committed, clear stance with respect to the texts and the task which is skilfully based on precise evidence presented within the dissertation. For example, on page 2 the candidate comments that Elizabeth Bennet 'will have to learn a valuable lesson in the virtue of humility, and to refrain from judging others too quickly based on the superficial disparity appearance of class brings'; on page 6 they state that 'The purpose Margaret finds in this human attachment begins to cohere her role as mediating figure between warring employers and employees'; on page 7, that when Elizabeth realises 'her judgement is erroneous, [she] rebuilds her character, loosening her prejudices of Darcy and spends more time investing in maturation of private judgement'; on page 8 the comment is made that Margaret's 'attitude is inconsistent with her own narrow-mindedness, and filtered, cynical view of Thornton and his views on despotism'; on page 9 where Elizabeth 'must reassess her perception of Darcy's character, and this modification is externalised in a gracious affability to her and the Gardiners' which is further evaluated on page 10 where the candidate states that 'Darcy's generosity elucidates that he is trying to make amends for how insufferably he insulted Elizabeth's connections; his prejudice against her relatives, because of their class position, blinded him to the nature of the Gardiners' amiability and prudence.' In the final paragraph of the dissertation, the ideas are pulled together skilfully when the candidate writes that characters in both novels 'need to undergo a shift in perspective in order to bridge the social class divide, a barrier strengthened by misunderstanding' where Darcy and Thornton initially 'fail to recognise the hypocrisy of their own actions' with 'misunderstanding cloak[ing] Elizabeth and Margaret's relationships with their love interests' yet ultimately, the 'reconciling power of human interaction can unite a world divided by class disparity and snobbery' and 'both couples can live in harmony with each other and their class subordinates or superiors, content in the knowledge that they are equals, regardless of class or background.' (page 13)

## Expression

The candidate makes skilful and considered use of structure and their writing follows an impressive line of argument which is consistent with their stated approach in their task. The candidate sets out to offer a comparative literary study and they do this in a consistent and insightful manner throughout. The candidate's style and language include appropriate critical/ analytical terminology, which is deployed to develop an argument with a sustained, precise focus on the task. As with many dissertations of a very high standard, this candidate is able to integrate knowledge and understanding with analysis and evaluation in a very sophisticated and articulate way. There are a few instances of slips of expression, but none which would detract from this very well-considered and thoughtful piece of critical discourse on two complex and sophisticated texts.

## Range

This dissertation fully meets the standard described in the 30-27 range and is therefore awarded the highest mark in that range. It should be noted that a dissertation does not need to be perfect to be awarded full marks.