

Commentary on candidate evidence

Assessors awarded the candidate evidence the following marks for each question of the Literary Study question paper.

Candidate 1

Question 2: Compare and contrast the means by which unsettling emotions are explored in three poems.

The candidate was awarded **15 marks**.

Texts: Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess', 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'.

Knowledge and understanding

In the introduction, this candidate proposes to examine 'the unsettling emotions of obsession, jealousy and hypocrisy ...through structure, repetition and imagery to allow the reader to gain an insight to the speaker's warped thoughts' [page 1]. This is a **relevant and thoughtful approach to the question**, and this is then demonstrated throughout the response. The response then goes on to offer us a genuinely comparative response which moves fluently between each poem, identifying commonalities and shared characteristics.

The candidate offers us a broad knowledge and understanding of the texts, and opens with 'My Last Duchess' where the candidate reveals that the Duke 'believes his Duchess should be an accessory to him rather than an equal' [page 1] as well as acknowledging the Duke's attempts to 'maintain his polite facade' [page 2]. The Duke's objectification of the Duchess is presented, and the candidate suggests the Duke's displeasure with his wife is rooted in his inability to 'control' [page 2] her.

Overwhelming jealousy is identified as the motivating factor in both 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'. In 'Porphyria's Lover' the narrator feels less important than Porphyria's 'social life' and that he is 'her last priority' [page 3]. The narrator in 'The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' is seen to be 'inherently

jealous' of Brother Lawrence [page 3] whilst simultaneously accusing him of languishing in sin and this hypocrisy is recognised by the candidate.

The obsessive qualities of each narrator are also articulated in the response. The candidate concludes that the Duke of Ferrara murders his wife 'to regain his power and dominance' [page 9] whilst in 'Porphyria's Lover' the narrator 'felt he could not have her to himself without murdering' [page 9] his lover. The candidate makes **use of textual evidence which is relevant to the demands of the question.**

Analysis

Throughout the response, the candidate offers us a **relevant analysis of the task, together with an appropriate range of literary techniques and/or features of language which supports the line of argument.** They analyse the impact of the genre, enjambement, motifs, dramatic irony, connotation, foreshadowing, rhyme scheme, repetition and narrative structure.

In their analysis of 'My Last Duchess', the candidate identifies the 'repetition of words such as "lessoned" or "tamed" which show what the Duke expected of the Duchess as a wife' [page 2] and they link this to his 'unsettling jealousy' [page 2]. They go on to analyse how 'imagery is used to create a sinister setting' [page 8], using the supporting evidence "'half flush that died along her throat'" [page 8] to imply the Duke has had her 'strangled' [page 8].

Their treatment of 'Porphyria's Lover' is more extensive. They state that the narrator 'puts Porphyria on a pedestal' [page 4], using his 'angelic description of her simply entering a room' [page 4] to demonstrate his obsession. They also refer to the description of the stormy weather and assert this 'unsettlingly foreshadows' [page 4] his decision to kill her. At this point the candidate offers an analysis of the poem's construction, linking its shaping to meaning, stating 'before she enters, the poem is ordered using caesura to give the impression of control, when Porphyria enters, enjambement creeps in, showing his lack of control over her' [pages 4-5]. On page 9 the candidate analyses the impact of repetition which reinforces 'how his jealousy and obsession has left him to need complete control of her' [page 8].

The candidate's analysis of 'The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' further **supports their line of argument**. However, whilst the candidate correctly identifies the dramatic irony in the narrator's projection of lust onto Brother Lawrence, citing the line 'black, lustrous, thick like horsehair', the analysis lacks the structural precision necessary to fully bridge the gap between the textual evidence and their argument. Consequently, the reader is left to infer the explicit connection between the narrator's hypocrisy and the cited imagery. Their analysis of "'Gr-r-r'" [page 7] emphasises the intensity of emotion felt by the narrator and his joy in Brother Lawrence's downfall 'presents him as the sinful monk' [page 8]. Holistically, the analysis of the three poems **supports the line of argument**.

Evaluation

This response offers a **discernible and relevant evaluative stance with respect to the texts and the question and based on evidence discussed within the response**. The candidate refers explicitly to the wording of the question throughout their response, referring to the 'unsettling jealousy of the Duke [page 2], the 'unsettling nature' [page 6] of 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'the unsettling emotion of jealousy' [page 6] found in the monastic narrator of 'The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'. The candidate does offer a more discerning evaluative stance however on each of the poems. They refer to the 'unhinged nature of the speaker' [page 5] in 'Porphyria's Lover' and then go on to explain how Browning manipulates the rhyme scheme of the poem to emphasise the illogicality of the speaker. On page 6, the candidate refers to the circular structure of 'My Last Duchess' and concludes this shaping decision 'confirms he is not affected by this situation which is foreboding to the reader as we discover he has plans to marry again leaving the question of what will happen to his next wife' [page 6] which shows their absolute grasp of the sinister nature of the Duke. On page 7, the candidate comments on 'The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' by observing the irony of the fact that 'whilst the speaker tries to catch Brother Lawrence sinning, he is the one sinning himself' as he 'takes pride in being morally corrupt.'

Technical accuracy

This response meets the **minimum competence for technical accuracy which includes few errors in the use of structure, style, language and/or literary terminology.**

Range

This response fully meets the standard described in the 15-13 band range and is awarded the mark at the top of the range.

Candidate 2

Question 28: Discuss the use of humour or wit to expose the tensions and/or hypocrisies in two plays.

The candidate was awarded **14 marks**.

Texts: *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett.

Knowledge and understanding

The candidate has chosen to examine two Beckett plays, *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*, to explore how humour exposes tension, displaying a **broad knowledge and understanding of the texts**. From the outset the candidate identifies the plays as emerging from the 'tragicomedy genre' [page 1] and surmises that they 'emphasise the absurdity in the meaningless lives' [page 1] of the characters. Whilst the candidate interweaves their handling of the texts there is a slight imbalance with *Endgame* receiving less attention overall.

The candidate uses the 'co-dependen[t]' [page 9] relationship between Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* to establish 'a certain amount of resentment for each other' [page 3] but that whilst 'these men are not supposed to be together' [page 3], they 'have stayed out of fear of being alone' [page 3]. The 'idea of having meaningless dialogue to help the time pass' [page 4] is developed and then connected to *Endgame* through the examination of the 'relationship of Hamm and Clov' [page 4]. Drawing on the use of dialogue the candidate presents that Hamm and Clov's 'existence is sustained by this cycle of talking, arguing and interacting' [page 4] without which 'neither of them would know what to do' [page 4]. Indeed, if Clov 'were to leave and become his own person ...he would be paralysed with his own freedom' [page 4].

The candidate then applies a similar treatment to *Waiting for Godot* 'where Lucky appears to be a slave under Pozzo's rule' [page 5] but 'that Lucky stays there to avoid freedom' [page 5] and that this makes Lucky 'lucky because he has Pozzo [to] tell him what to do' [page 5]. In *Endgame*, 'Hamm is physically dependant on Clov, Clov is emotionally dependant on Hamm' [page 7]. The humorous interactions between these characters are used to explore the absurdity of human existence by

the candidate and introduce the idea of action and inaction as tension in the plays which is **a relevant and thoughtful approach to the question**.

The response contains 18 quotations across the two plays that are **relevant to the demands of the question**. Humour as a mode to explore the ‘tragedy of miscommunication’ in *Waiting for Godot* as ‘Estragon’s foot hurts but Vladimir’s mind hurts and neither can understand each others pain’ [sic] [page 9] is coupled with, in *Endgame*, Hamm’s repeated request for “my painkiller” [page 6] illustrating that ‘Hamm needs Clov’ to be relieved from pain but that humour is created in this ‘ridiculous task[s]’ [page 6]. The candidate notes that Beckett deploys a ‘tone of silliness’ [page 2], ‘tone of irony’ [page 5], ‘sense of humour’ [page 6], ‘silly tone’ [page 7], and a ‘playful, unserious tone’ [page 10] to establish the tension between, and within, characters to ‘emphasise the meaninglessness of the world’ [page 11]. This is linked to the act of writing itself as the candidate tells us ‘if nothing truly matters then words have no meaning’ [page 3] and, later, that a symptom of this meaninglessness is ‘the tragedy of ...miscommunication’ [page 9] as Estragon’s and Vladimir are unable to understand what the other really means.

Analysis

The candidate offers **relevant analysis of a range of literary techniques and/or features of language which supports the line of argument**. The response deploys analysis of dialogue and characterisation to establish the ‘bizarre and meaningless’ [sic] [page 1] nature of existence: ‘conversation [is] a game rather than something of any importance that could possibly come to any kind of conclusion’ [page 2]. In *Waiting for Godot*, the use of insults such as “moron!” [page 2] and “imbecile” [page 2] is seen as part of a ‘ritualised cruelty they partake in to help the time pass’ [page 3] as a coping mechanism to ‘distract from their meaningless existence’ [sic] [page 3]. The dialogue ‘exposes the tension’ that ‘nothing in life truly matters and establishes that anything that happens, or doesn’t happen in the play will be stripped of any reason or meaning’ [sic] [page 3].

Meaningless tasks are explored through ‘imperative comands’ [sic] [page 5] in *Endgame* that expose a tension between ‘action versus inaction’ [page 7], illustrating ‘the relentless inaction that Beckett’s plays follow’ [page 9]. This is developed further

as, in *Waiting for Godot*, the men “wait” [page 9] to see if suicide would be a means of escape before the realisation that ‘one may die before the other and they will be left alone, even if it’s only for a split second’ [pages 9-10]. The candidate, often implicitly, discusses this dark humour and the tension that is exposed as the characters cannot face living, but cannot face dying either. The ‘disease of inaction’ [page 10] is as a direct result of the realisation of the ‘meaninglessness of life’ [page 10] and is identified as the primary source of angst set against the backdrop of dark humour in the plays. Overall, this approach **supports the line of argument** but, at times, is dependent on micro-analysis and assertion which is not as helpful as the comments highlight above.

Evaluation

This response offers **a discernible and relevant evaluative stance with respect to the texts and the question and based on the evidence discussed**. From the outset the candidate states that ‘Beckett uses humour in both plays to highlight absurdity in the meaningless lives his characters live’ [page 1]. On page 5 humour is noted to highlight ‘the thing that everyone says they truly want they actively avoid’ [page 5]. The candidate states that ‘inaction is more of a permanent state of being than a specific experience for someone in their circumstance’ [page 10] and ‘a life devoid of meaning is not only reserved for the misfortunate and rather a universal experience’ [pages 10-11] and that the plays seek to teach us that ‘it is easier to experience this cyclical paralysis in company’ [page 11]. The conclusion is limited to a single summary sentence, but this does not significantly detract from the overall quality of the response.

Technical accuracy

The response does meet the **minimum competence for technical accuracy which includes few errors in structure, style and language**.

Range

This response more than just meets the standard described in the 15-13 band range and has been awarded the mark from the middle of the range.

Candidate 3

Question 13: Discuss how unreliable narrators influence the reader's interpretation of two novels.

The candidate was awarded **20 marks**.

Texts: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Driver's Seat* by Muriel Spark.

Knowledge and understanding

In their introduction the candidate outlines their intended approach to the question, stating, 'Through opaque and erratic narration, both novels explore the theme of control – how it manifests, how it is undermined and how external factors shape it, leaving the reader to consider the universality of these social mechanisms' [page 1]. Having already asserted that Spark's 'distinctive narrative style' [page 1] is a 'key mechanism' [page 1] in influencing reader interpretation this approach promises an exploration of the 'disturbing mindsets' [page 1] of both Jean Brodie and Lise. They then go on to examine the impact of prolepsis, narrative stance and dual perspective in the context of control which allows them to present **a full and relevant exploration with sustained consideration of the implications of the question.**

Throughout the entirety of this response the candidate demonstrates a **comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the texts.** In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the prolepsis in the exposition is said to 'complicate the narrative, guiding us towards the tension between fate and agency' [page 2]. The candidate refers to the reductive characterisation of Mary (by Brodie) to suggest that the identity allotted her 'leads to her death' [page 3] but perhaps more importantly they drive us towards questioning why Brodie desires to control the lives of others, referring to this movement as a 'whydunnit' [page 3]. Their treatment of the impact of prolepsis in *The Driver's Seat* is no less accomplished and is said to establish the 'narrative as a preordained trajectory towards death' [page 4].

The candidate then moves on to narrative stance and explains how the use of the third person 'accentuates the unreliable narration' [page 4], using the betrayal of Brodie by Sandy to illustrate their point in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Their understanding of the impact of narrative technique in *The Driver's Seat* is even more

comprehensive, and the candidate writes that Spark ‘refuses to anchor the narrative in a single viewpoint to mirror the instability of human interactions’ [page 7].

Finally, they examine the resolution in each novel and how it impacts narrative unreliability. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the candidate recognises how the dual narratives of both Sandy and Brodie create a ‘doubleness’ which ‘accentuates the confusion of the moral landscape’ [page 9] as well as placing Sandy above Brodie in a ‘moral standpoint’ [page 9], concluding that, despite this, Spark’s commentary is ‘nuanced’ [page 10]. In *The Driver’s Seat* the candidate explains that ‘unreliable narration challenges us to look past stereotypes of control’ [page 10], using the details of the murder of Lise to exemplify their point about how ‘quickly agency can slip away’ [page 11].

Throughout the response the candidate makes **extensive use of textual evidence to support an argument which is clearly focused on the demands of the question.**

Analysis

Throughout this response, the candidate presents us with a **relevant analysis of a task-appropriate range of literary techniques and/or features of language which skilfully strengthens the line of argument** which includes narrative technique and structure, theme, hyperbolic and emotive language, sentence structure, imagery, word choice, motifs, and stereotypes.

The candidate’s analysis of techniques is **skilful**, and their frequent use of critical terminology is naturally assimilated into their evaluative and analytical discourse. They begin with an analysis of how prolepsis is used in the ‘exposition of both novels to complicate the narrative’ [page 2]. On page 2, beginning with *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, they write, ‘Within this introduction to Mary she is presented as being “lump-like and too stupid” the hyperbolic language suggesting that she is useless and deeply uneducated. The juxtaposition within this introduction is not incidental but Spark uses it to expose how identity can be exposed and internalised’. After a discussion of how this moment ‘follows her [Mary] through life’ [page 3] the candidate concludes that the ‘prolepsis reveals the fatalistic nature of control’ [page 3]. Moving on to *The Driver’s Seat*, the candidate suggests that the use of prolepsis allows

Spark to construct a 'narrative puzzle' [page 3]. However, they recognise that the narrative structure is shaped in such a way that Spark 'forces us to reconsider Lise's actions as part of a controlled performance' [page 12] having already told us the exact details of her murder. They also recognise the characterisation of Lise within the prolepsis as a 'mysterious and memorable persona' [page 12] as integral to Spark's design, also recognising that her 'need for another to enact her murder undermines the notion of control' [page 12] she craves. The candidate concludes that Spark uses prolepsis 'to deepen and embolden the hidden meaning behind the narrative' [page 13].

They then move to a discussion of how the third person narrative stance 'accentuates the unreliable narration' [page 4]. Analysing the betrayal of Jean Brodie by Sandy the candidate writes, 'the narrator mainly takes on the voice of Sandy' [page 4-5] who both 'admires and questions Miss Brodie' [page 5], but that 'a voice more like Mr Lowther's' [page 5] is used to demonstrate the 'damaging impact' [page 6]. The candidate recognises that this is a technique used by Spark to 'control[s] what we know through the instability of the narrative, commenting on the opacity of human interactions and the difficulty of moral judgement' [page 6]. In *The Driver's Seat*, the candidate then explores the effect of unreliable narration 'within the climax' [page 6]. They conclude 'we do not get either of their full accounts and do not know who is fully in control' [page 6]. They go on to fully support their analysis of unreliable narrator with appropriate textual evidence and detailed reference to text on pages 6 and 7. In the candidate's final section, they explore dual perspective and how this helps to establish 'the illusion of control and its social implications' [page 8]. They go on to explain this further, stating 'we wonder whether each protagonist has successfully achieved their own goal' [page 8]. The candidate recognises the irony in Brodie's unwillingness to recognise Sandy as the individual who betrayed her and they go on to consider the implications of the 'interjection of her voice in the simile "like an enigmatic Pope"' [page 9].

In *The Driver's Seat*, Richard's perspective allows the candidate to reflect on 'how quickly agency can slip away' [page 11] as well as the notion of victimhood [page 11], 'leaving us with the disturbing message that control is always mediated by others and is never absolute but often illusionary' [page 12]. At this point it is worth noting the

fluidity and logic with which the candidate moves between novels, ideas and paragraphs. They never lose sight of the task and their approach to it.

Evaluation

This candidate writes with sophistication and insight throughout. This candidate integrates their understanding, analysis and evaluation seamlessly and there is a consistent and **committed, clear evaluative stance with respect to the texts and the question which is skilfully based on precise evidence discussed within the response**. The candidate is highly appreciative of Spark's skill as a writer, referring to her as 'nuanced' [page 10] and 'clever' [page 12], and they have clearly thought deeply about the wider implications of her writing. When writing of the resolution in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the candidate concludes 'while authoritarian figures may loose [sic] control, their influence endures in subtle and troubling ways' [page 10]. The candidate concludes strongly by stating that Spark's narrative methods 'interrogate the human desire for control and the social structures that undermine it, revealing how both protagonists need to control their own lives and the lives of others through the narrative is not neutral but inherently dangerous' [sic] [page 13].

Technical accuracy

This response clearly **demonstrates minimum competence for technical accuracy**. They consistently return explicitly to the wording contained within the question, but they do so in a way that only serves to gently usher the reader through their response to the question. This imbues the discourse with a sense of control and balance.

Range

This response fully meets the standard described in the 20-19 band range and has been awarded the mark at the top of the range.