

# Commentary on candidate evidence

Assessors awarded the candidate evidence the following marks for the portfolio–writing component.

## Candidate 1

### Drama: ‘Tea with Old Friends’

The candidate was awarded **12 marks**.

This scene from a murder mystery depicts two elderly upper class female friends, Cecile Walton and Mildred Lanburry, who are meeting over tea and biscuits at a country estate in the years prior to World War One.

### Content

The candidate **demonstrates treatment of central thematic concerns, ideas, feelings, experiences which reveals thoughtfulness, insight and imagination throughout**. The candidate begins with the sense of a world where appearances and order are all important in their presentation of the ‘*elegance*’ [page 1] of the Edwardian garden setting with ‘*ornate flowerpots and groomed hedges*’ [page 1], where the host, Cecile Walton, ‘*adjusts a lace throw and small vase of flowers to her liking*’ [page 1] on the tea table. The candidate hints there is perhaps some threat to this carefully cultivated space: ‘*a white trellis almost overgrown with roses yet still retaining an air of impeccable neatness*’ [page 1].

The elderly and wealthy Cecile Walton is initially presented as the archetypical country house matriarch: ‘*(standing to greet her friend)* Mildred, dear! How fine you look this morning! So glad you could come’ [page 1]. Walton’s equally upper-class visitor, Mildred Lanburry, is presented as having the same concern with politeness and order: ‘Thank you for the invitation! You are well?’ [page 1]. This is reinforced when they discuss the relatively recent death of Lanburry’s husband where she ‘*withdraws a handkerchief from her handbag, [and] dabs it to her nose*’ [page 2] and ‘*then folds the handkerchief back into her bag*’ [page 2].

After tea is served the candidate elaborates on the suspicious circumstances regarding the death of Lanburry's husband. Lanburry states: 'The authorities told me he was poisoned! Poor old Henry. In his tea, can you imagine?' [page 2]. This combined with the swift transition to Lanburry's request for 'Two sugars, please, if you don't mind' [page 2], posits that behind their polite facade there is more to these two women than meets the eye. The candidate's use of italics lends a level of dramatic irony to their conversation: 'So, the police realised there was no way I could have done it, even if I had *wanted* to' [page 3], an impression which is further confirmed when Mrs Walton comments on the story with: 'Very nasty business. It is unfortunate things turned out that way. Would you like a biscuit, dear?' [page 3].

The next note of discord is introduced when Walton tells her friend of her marital problems: 'I am a troubled woman.' [page 3] The candidate successfully portrays Walton's distress, she '*stands angrily*' [page 4] and speaks with '*more bitterness still*' [page 4]. The success of this is further exemplified in Walton's response to Lanburry's mention of a gift of a 'tailored suit' [page 4] Walton recently purchased for her husband: '*(She abruptly stops pacing)* It was! *(A pause. Then sadly)* Have I not been a loyal wife?' [page 4].

The candidate then moves into the true motives for Lanburry's invite to the Walton household – making good use of subtle and ambiguous dialogue to do so – Walton asks of Lanburry: 'you remember it was exactly a year ago today that I offered my help with you and your Henry? [...] Well, I was wondering ...if ...perhaps ...you could assist me in a similar way?' [page 5]

Lanburry recovers from her initial hesitancy: '*tracing the rim of her teacup with her finger*' [page 5] to join Walton on a walk-through of her murderous plans '*(Mrs Walton gestures for Mrs Lanburry to stand, and the pair link arms. Mrs Walton leads her in the direction of the French doors).*' [page 6]

The piece ends with a moment of tension where it appears that Lanburry could be having second thoughts: 'I say ...it is a shame' [page 6]. However, it is swiftly obvious that Walton's subtle blackmail has been successful with Lanburry stating: 'It is a shame hunting is such a dangerous sport. Any mishaps that may befall during such an outing tend to be fatal' [page 6].

## Structure

The candidate opens with '*Pleasant classical music plays as the curtains rise*' [page 1] in their **consistent shaping** of their country house garden setting. This world of carefully ordered garden borders, maids, and tables set for tea **contributes to impact** in an environment where dignity must be preserved by fair means or foul.

The **sequencing** of this piece **consistently** adds to the **impact**. The candidate makes careful use of stage directions and dialogue to guide the audience through the stages of Walton's nuanced manipulation of her friend Lanburry: '[...] *Mrs Walton surveys her companion* [...] 'If you don't mind me asking, I wonder, how long has it been now since your husband left us?' [page 2]. And later where Walton questions 'And we are such good friends, are we not?' [page 4]. Or in Walton's command: 'do not forget to wear your nice lace gloves, dear, they go with everything. That is *extremely* important' [page 6].

The characterisation of both Lanburry and Walton is equally consistent. The candidate presents two upper class ladies who obey the genre conventions required of a murder mystery without descending into stereotype. Lanburry says of her husband's murder: 'Though of course, what could ever drive one to do such a thing?' [page 3] and Walton on her husband's infidelity: 'He is good at hunting; it is his chance to show off to ...to *her*.' [page 5].

The ending where Walton comments: 'Oh, indeed. In the same tragic way rat poison is *so often* mistaken for sugar. (*Sweetly*) More tea, dear?' [page 7] brings a satisfying end to a consistently shaped piece.

## Tone/mood

The candidate has **created a tone and mood which is generally sustained, revealing a distinctive authorial voice**. Throughout the piece, both protagonists are rendered effectively through the upper-class diction and mannerisms used to build the mood of the piece through their conversations and actions whilst having tea. The candidate then effectively engages with understated moments where Walton's motives are hinted at: '*(As if a memory has suddenly returned)* Oh! Pardon my abruptness, but have you heard about The Chesters? Newlywed, it was in this

week's advertisements.' [page 2]. They do the same when hinting at the tension in Walton's description of the length of her marriage, 'More [years] than I care to mention' [page 4].

The candidate also creates a sense of the supportive friendship between the two women in Lanburry's reassuring statement, 'I have no doubt of it.' [page 4] on Walton's efforts in her marriage. Or Lanburry's quiet rage, on her friend's behalf, when she asks, 'How long has this been going on, this tryst?' [page 5]. However, the candidate also includes elements of tension within this relationship: (*'Mrs Lanburry is slightly startled by the abruptness of the request but quickly disguises this.'*) [page 5] and '*Mrs Lanburry unlinks her arm from her friend's and walks a little on her own, deep in thought.*' [page 6] and there is also a clever circuitousness to the plans for the murder itself when Walton states that her maid 'Alice will be accompanying me to Scotland. She has family there, so when I have no need of her, she can visit them. It will be good for the girl.' [page 6], to which Lanburry pithily replies, 'How sweet.' [page 6], all of which subtly alters the **mood** of the piece at apt moments in the drama.

## Expression

This candidate demonstrates **confident use of style, technique and language**. The taking of tea provides a useful central motif for the candidate's depiction of a scene where appearance is at odds with reality – and the routines of such an event provide a veil for the tension inherent in the plot. Throughout the scene the candidate makes use of techniques such as dramatic pauses '*(There is a brief silence)*' [page 6] to enhance the piece, and the creation of pathos in their depiction of what could be stereotypical characters, such as in Walton's description of her dedication to her marriage, 'I have done so, diligently, have I not?' [page 4], has a **degree of originality**.

## Range

This piece of drama fully meets the descriptors of the 12-10 band range and is awarded the highest mark in that range.

## Candidate 2

### Poetry: 'Mibby'

The candidate was awarded **15 marks**.

In this arresting and candid Scots poem the persona reflects on a life of hardship and abuse and charts their progress through childhood and school before imagining a potentially affluent and settled future. The poet's wide lens considers themes of identity, family, education, community, anger, shame which demonstrates **sustained thoughtfulness, insight and imagination throughout**.

### Content

The poet opens with a demand (through the use of the second person) that we place ourselves in the shoes of the persona who has endured a childhood blighted by neglect and abuse. The persona has been 'dragged up' [page 1] and taken away from her parents who are addicts. The addiction impacts every aspect of the persona's life as she cannot see her father 'fur ees habit' [page 1] and that habit eventually takes his life. The persona has an enduring sense of shame as in her youth she feels 'ashamed ae yer hoose n couldny huv embdy in' [page 1] and this humiliation grows stronger later 'when the topic ae the drugs cims up n school, mibby evribdy turns roon ae look it ye' [page 1] suggesting the pressure she feels socially but the persona also has the brutal insight that 'it makes ye hink about the affects ae neglect oan the soul' [page 1]. This insightful voice punctures the 'daft explanation' for her parents' 'fuck ups' [page 1] and the death, addictions, and imprisonment of her 'boay cousins' [page 1] before going on to look at the wider impact of drug abuse. The whole community she lives in is in fact blighted by addiction and poverty and the persona vacillates between regarding them as 'poor souls' who 'drank lit fish cos they thoat they'd fun thur soul it the bottom ae the can' [page 2] and the community spirit that 'cid only be seen if ye wur wan ae thum' [page 2]. Later, in stanza 11, she considers if the 'poor souls ye once knew might be dead noo, probably' [page 3]. Her understanding of the real-life impact of addiction on a community is acutely on point and unsentimental. She is both compassionate and pragmatic without ever descending into mawkish self-pity.

The persona's mother recovers from her addiction and, in stanza 3, the mother offers support to 'ae the loast souls' [page 1] whilst the persona is 'fulla envy' [page 1] at the way the mother is 'gentle wae thum' [page 1] in a way that she presumably is not with the persona. The persona ruefully notes that she is the 'only daft daft enough tae envy any ae they poor souls' [page 1] demonstrating the unflinching determination to examine every aspect of her own character. The complex nature of the maternal relationship is one the poet returns to in stanza 7 where they offer us a vignette of the persona's childhood by describing 'sittin wi yer heed er the bath n yer maw hid the bone comb oot fishin oot the nits' [page 2] going on to confess that she caught the nits on purpose 'Cos mibby, ye jist liked the feelin ae yer mams hauns in yer hair'. This blistering insight into the bittersweet nature of the persona's relationship with her mother is one that leaves the reader with no doubt that this is a poet fully in control of the inner life and emotional depths of their creation.

The persona's laser-like focus on their inner life is never more impressive than at the end of the poem where she considers whether or not her childhood is something she would change. The repeated questions in stanza 22 ('Wid ye? Wid ye really?') suggest someone confronting their identity and their experience of the world and relentlessly probing it. As ever with this poet though, their blunt pragmatism seems to win through, and they conclude that this thought is nothing but a 'fleetin' wan' [page 4] because the security they crave when 'ye huv yer Rolls Royce. / N yer wains ur well fed./ [...] N ye've goat yer big fancy joab. / N ye've goat the money fir mare letterin oan yer da's heedstain.' [page 4] will 'mibby [mean] there'll be nae mare mibbies.' [page 4]

## Structure

The poem is written in free verse and makes effective use of repetition. The poet **skilfully shapes and contributes significantly to the impact of** the poem weaving stark memories of childhood with wider insights into the impact of poverty and addiction.

At the beginning of the poem the persona deals with the complexity of her grief at the death of the father and her sense that to him she 'wurny worth lovin' [page 1] in three brief, heartbreaking lines. At the end of the poem the persona's difficult relationship

with her mother is shown through the 'birthmark in the same place is yer mams' [page 4] that she now hides 'ahint makeup' [page 4].

In stanza 9, the persona 'got aulder, n startit dain yer ain hing' [page 2] and embarks on a romantic relationship but one in which she never fully understands her partner. This leads her to examine her feelings of self-doubt and vulnerability, which she sees as a legacy of her father, writing that the insecurity 'wis showin lit a cauld sare' [page 2]. The relationship cannot survive whether because of the boy's 'habit' or because the persona sees herself as a 'poor soul' [page 2] or because for the persona she 'couldny read um, jist lit ye couldny read yer auld da' [page 2]. This comparison between her romantic relationship and the one with her father demonstrates the far-reaching impact of the neglect she has suffered and links back to the beginning of the poem where the death of the father 'left you wae nuhin but hurt' [page 1].

For the persona there is at 'the big school' [page 3] a turning point in her experience of the world and it is through education that the persona has a 'ticket oot the scheme' [page 3] where she can finally begin to see herself as successful and tells us with fearless, clear-eyed determination that she is 'no gonny be a poor soul' [page 3]. From here the poet builds to a climax with the use of one-line stanzas making clear to us the 'serious stuff' [page 3] she is dealing with. The chilling comparison of having her 'bloods done it the doctors' [3] with the image of her father using her school tie when he is taking drugs is not just a neat juxtaposition between her past and her future but also a harrowing moment for the reader. The persona does not stop there with this merciless self-examination as she confesses that she sees both her parents in herself and 'the thoat eh becomin either wan ae thum terrorises ye' [page 4] and the feeling that she does not know who she is but 'jist who ye've been made tae be' [page 4]. The literal and metaphorical 'look it yerself' [page 4] in stanza 20 illustrates the changes in her physical appearance and the emotional development of the persona.

By the end of the poem the persona sees herself as the owner of a Rolls Royce with 'wains [who] ur well fed' [page 4]. The contrast of material possessions with the basics of survival is a poignant one, while the dream of her mother saying 'sorry ae yer face, no er sponsor' [page 4] and the 'money fir mair letterin oan yer da's heedstain' [page 4] reveals again the deep wound of the persona's childhood trauma

and complex relationship with her parents. This persona's sagacity regarding her material and emotional needs is both deeply affecting and structurally effective leaving the reader emotionally invested in her future.

## Tone/mood

The poet's use of Scots adds veracity and personality to what is a **clearly distinctive authorial voice** and this is **rigorously sustained revealing a committed and clearly distinctive authorial voice** throughout. The voice of the girl brings a perceptive awareness of the trauma and pain at the heart of the persona's experience. The use of the second person forces the reader to see through the eyes of the persona, and this too is sustained throughout.

The poet addresses themes of identity as the persona considers her use of Scots asking in stanza 8 whether the reader will need a 'glossary ae help ye unnerstaun this' [page 2] pointing out that she was given no such instructions and 'wis tae figure it oot fur masel' [page 2] before defiantly telling us that she doesn't want us to understand because 'ma experience is the only hing av goat aw ae masel' [page 2]. The maturity and perception of this poet is impressive and leaves the reader with a clear sense of the inner life of the persona. This reflection on voice and identity is one the poet returns to later in the poem and their use of standard English in stanza 10 is a clever way of highlighting the persona's sense that they have to 'hide what you had come from' [page 3] before raging that 'they cin ge away n stick thir correct pronunciation up thur arse' [page 3] leaving the reader with a picture of an uncompromisingly strong young woman struggling to balance the different facets of her character and life experience as she navigates between her past and present and her potential future.

## Expression

This poet makes a **skilful use of style, technique and language**, and the poem shows a **high degree of originality**. The use of repetition of 'N mibby ye...' at the beginning of most lines forces us to see the world through the persona's eyes and consider a life full of uncertainty, trauma, and possibility. There is a judicious use of rhetorical question, simile, dialect and the lightness of touch allows the persona to

engage with some bleakly horrifying experiences without ever becoming cloying or maudlin.

One of the key skills of the poet is in knowing what to hold back as much as what to write down and this judicious and restrained use of language emphasises the poet's control of their material and this is a key strength of this impressive poem.

## **Range**

This poem fully meets the standard described in the 15-13 band range and has been awarded the top mark in that range.