



National  
Qualifications  
2025

**X824/77/12**

**English  
Textual Analysis**

TUESDAY, 6 MAY  
2:30 PM – 4:00 PM

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**Total marks — 20**

Attempt **ONLY** Part A **OR** Part B **OR** Part C **OR** Part D.

**PART A — POETRY — 20 marks**

Attempt the question.

**PART B — PROSE FICTION — 20 marks**

Attempt the question.

**PART C — PROSE NON-FICTION — 20 marks**

Attempt the question.

**PART D — DRAMA — 20 marks**

Attempt the question.

Write your answers clearly in the answer booklet provided. In the answer booklet, you must clearly identify the question number you are attempting.

Use **blue** or **black** ink.

Before leaving the examination room you must give your answer booklet to the Invigilator; if you do not, you may lose all the marks for this paper.



\* X 8 2 4 7 7 1 2 \*

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS — 20 marks

Your answer should take the form of a CRITICAL ANALYSIS appropriately structured to meet the demands of your selected question.

Attempt ONLY Part A OR Part B OR Part C OR Part D.

PART A — POETRY

Read carefully *Returning* (1964) by Robert Lowell and then answer the question that follows it.

*Returning*

- Homecoming to the sheltered little resort,  
where the members of my gang  
are bald-headed, in business,  
and the dogs still know me by my smell . . .
- 5 It's rather a dead town  
after my twenty years' mirage.
- Long awash,  
breaking myself against the surf,  
touching bottom, rushed
- 10 by the green go-light  
of those nervous waters, I found  
my exhaustion, the light of the world.
- Nothing is deader than this small town main street,  
where the venerable elm sickens, and hardens
- 15 with tarred cement, where no leaf  
is born, or falls, or resists till winter.
- But I remember its former fertility,  
how everything came out clearly  
in the hour of credulity
- 20 and young summer, when this street  
was already somewhat overshadowed,  
and here at the altar of surrender,  
I met you,  
the death of thirst in my brief flesh.
- 25 That was the first growth,  
the heir of all my minutes,  
the victim of every ramification —  
more and more it grew green, and gave too much shelter.
- And now at my homecoming,  
30 the barked elms stand up like sticks along the street.  
I am a foot taller than when I left,  
and cannot see the dirt at my feet.

Yet sometimes I catch my vague mind  
circling with a glazed eye  
35 for a name without a face, or a face without a name,  
and at every step,  
I startle them. They start up,  
dog-eared, bald as baby birds.

### Question

Write a detailed critical analysis of some of the means by which the poet reflects on change and the passing of time.

In your response you should consider:

- form and structure
- word choice and imagery
- mood and atmosphere
- any other literary device you consider to be important.

[Turn over

OR

PART B — PROSE FICTION

Read carefully the extract from *The Lincoln Highway* (2021) by Amor Towles and then answer the question that follows it.

*In this opening chapter of the novel, Emmett has been released from a juvenile detention centre in the United States, and is being driven home.*

*The Lincoln Highway*

Emmett

5 June 12, 1954 — The drive from Salina to Morgen was three hours, and for much of it, Emmett hadn't said a word. For the first sixty miles or so, Warden Williams had made an effort at friendly conversation. He had told a few stories about his childhood back East and asked a few questions about Emmett's on the farm. But this was the last they'd be together, and Emmett didn't see much sense in going into all of that now. So when they crossed the border from Kansas into Nebraska and the warden turned on the radio, Emmett stared out the window at the prairie, keeping his thoughts to himself.

When they were five miles south of town, Emmett pointed through the windshield.

'You take that next right. It'll be the white house about four miles down the road.'

10 The warden slowed his car and took the turn. They drove past the McKusker place, then the Andersens' with its matching pair of large red barns. A few minutes later they could see Emmett's house standing beside a small grove of oak trees about thirty yards from the road.

When they got within a hundred feet of the driveway, the warden pulled to the side of the road.

15 'Emmett,' he said, with his hands on the wheel, 'before we drive in there's something I'd like to say. We haven't known each other long, but from my time with you I can tell that that boy's death weighs heavily on your conscience. No one imagines what happened that night reflects either the spirit of malice or an expression of your character. It was the ugly side of chance. But as a civilized society, we ask that even those who have had an unintended hand in the misfortune of others pay some retribution. So that by having the opportunity to pay a debt, they too can find  
20 some solace, some sense of atonement, and thus begin the process of renewal. Do you understand me, Emmett?'

'I do, sir.'

25 'I'm glad to hear it. I know you've got your brother to care for now and the immediate future may seem daunting; but you're a bright young man and you've got your whole life ahead of you. Having paid your debt in full, I just hope you'll make the most of your liberty.'

'That's what I intend to do, Warden.'

30 And in that moment, Emmett meant it. Because he agreed with most of what the warden said. He knew in the strongest of terms that his whole life was ahead of him and he knew that he needed to care for his brother. He knew too that he had been an agent of misfortune rather than its author. But he didn't agree that his debt had been paid in full. For no matter how much chance has played a role, when by your hands you have brought another man's time on earth to its end, to prove to the Almighty that you are worthy of his mercy, that shouldn't take any less than the rest of your life.

35 The warden put the car in gear and turned into the Watsons'. In the clearing by the front porch were two cars — a sedan and a pickup. The warden parked beside the pickup. When he and Emmett got out of the car, a tall man with a cowboy hat in his hand came out the front door and off the porch.

'Hey there, Emmett.'

'Hey, Mr. Ransom.'

40 The warden extended his hand to the rancher.

'I'm Warden Williams. It was nice of you to take the trouble to meet us.'

'It was no trouble, Warden.'

'I gather you've known Emmett a long time.'

'Since the day he was born.'

45 The warden put a hand on Emmett's shoulder.

'Then I don't need to explain to you what a fine young man he is. I was just telling him in the car that having paid his debt to society, he's got his whole life ahead of him.'

'He does at that,' agreed Mr. Ransom.

The three men stood without speaking.

50 'Well,' the warden said after a moment, 'I guess I should be heading back.'

Emmett and Mr. Ransom offered a final thanks to the warden, shook his hand, then watched as he climbed in his car and drove away. The warden was a quarter mile down the road when Emmett nodded toward the sedan.

'Mr. Obermeyer's?'

55 'He's waiting in the kitchen.'

'And Billy?'

'I told Sally to bring him over a little later, so you and Tom can get your business done.'

Emmett nodded.

'You ready to go in?' asked Mr. Ransom.

60 'The sooner the better,' said Emmett.

They found Tom Obermeyer seated at the small kitchen table. He was wearing a white shirt with short sleeves and a tie. If he was also wearing a suit coat, he must have left it in his car because it wasn't hanging on the back of the chair.

65 When Emmett and Mr. Ransom came through the door, they seemed to catch the banker off his guard, because he abruptly scraped back the chair, stood up, and stuck out his hand all in a single motion.

'Well, hey now, Emmett. It's good to see you.'

Emmett shook the banker's hand without a reply.

70 Taking a look around, Emmett noted that the floor was swept, the counter clear, the sink empty, the cabinets closed. The kitchen looked cleaner than at any point in Emmett's memory.

'Here,' Mr. Obermeyer said, gesturing to the table. 'Why don't we all sit down.'

75 Emmett took the chair opposite the banker. Mr. Ransom remained standing, leaning his shoulder against the doorframe. On the table was a brown folder thick with papers. It was sitting just out of the banker's reach, as if it had been left there by somebody else. Mr. Obermeyer cleared his throat.

'First of all, Emmett, let me say how sorry I am about your father. He was a fine man and too young to be taken by illness.'

'Thank you.'

80 'I gather when you came for the funeral that Walter Eberstadt had a chance to sit down with you and discuss your father's estate.'

'He did,' said Emmett.

The banker nodded with a look of sympathetic understanding.

85 'Then I suspect Walter explained that three years ago your father took out a new loan on top of the old mortgage. The point I'm getting to is that in the last few years the harvest wasn't what your father had hoped; and this year, what with your father's passing, there isn't going to be a harvest at all. So we had no choice but to call in the loan. It's an unpleasant bit of business, I know, Emmett, but I want you to understand that it was not an easy decision for the bank to make. When he began falling behind, we gave him some extra time. And when he got sick, we gave him some more. But sometimes a man's bad luck becomes too great to surmount, no matter  
90 how much time you give him.'

'Now that you are home,' continued the banker, 'it's probably best for everyone involved if we see this process through to its conclusion. As the executor of your father's estate, we'll need you to sign a few papers. And within a few weeks, I'm sorry to say, we'll need you to make arrangements for you and your brother to move out.'

95 'If you've got something that needs signing, let's sign it.'

Mr. Obermeyer took a few documents from the folder. He turned them around so that they were facing Emmett and peeled back pages, explaining the purpose of individual sections and subsections, translating the terminology, pointing to where the documents should be signed and where initialled.

100 'You got a pen?'

Mr. Obermeyer handed Emmett his pen. Emmett signed and initialled the papers without consideration, then slid them back across the table.

'That it?'

105 'There is one other thing,' said the banker, after returning the documents safely to their folder. 'The car in the barn. When we did the routine inventory of the house, we couldn't find the registration or the keys.'

'What do you need them for?'

'The second loan your father took out wasn't for specific pieces of agricultural machinery. It was

110 against any new piece of capital equipment purchased for the farm, and I'm afraid that extends to personal vehicles.'

'Not to that car it doesn't.'

'Now, Emmett . . .'

'It doesn't because that piece of capital equipment isn't my father's. It's mine.'

115 Mr. Obermeyer looked to Emmett with a mixture of scepticism and sympathy — two emotions that in Emmett's view had no business being on the same face at the same time. Emmett took his wallet from his pocket, withdrew the registration, and put it on the table.

The banker picked it up and reviewed it.

'I see that the car is in your name, Emmett, but I'm afraid that if it was purchased by your father on your behalf . . .'

120 'It was not.'

The banker looked to Mr. Ransom for support. Finding none, he turned back to Emmett.

125 'For two summers,' said Emmett, 'I worked for Mr. Schulte to earn the money to buy that car. I framed houses. Shingled roofs. Repaired porches. As a matter of fact, I even helped install those new cabinets in your kitchen. If you don't believe me, you're welcome to go ask Mr. Schulte. But either way, you're not touching that car.'

Mr. Obermeyer frowned. But when Emmett held out his hand for the registration, the banker returned it without protest. And when he left with his folder, he wasn't particularly surprised that neither Emmett nor Mr. Ransom bothered seeing him to the door.

130 When the banker was gone, Mr. Ransom went outside to wait for Sally and Billy, leaving Emmett to walk the house on his own.

135 Upstairs in Billy's room, the bed was made, the collections of bottle caps and bird feathers were neatly arranged on their shelves, and one of the windows had been opened to let in some air. A window must have been opened on the other side of the hall too because there was enough of a draught to stir the fighter planes hanging over Billy's bed: replicas of a Spitfire, a Warhawk, and a Thunderbolt.

Emmett smiled softly to see them.

140 He had built those planes when he was about Billy's age. Emmett had assembled the models on the kitchen table with all the precision of an engineer. He had painted the insignias and serial numbers on the fuselages with four tiny bottles of enamel paint and a fine-haired brush. When they were done, Emmett had lined them up on his bureau in a diagonal row just like they would have been on the deck of a carrier.

145 From the age of four, Billy had admired them. Sometimes when Emmett would come home from school, he would find Billy standing on a chair beside the bureau talking to himself in the language of a fighter pilot. So when Billy turned six, Emmett and his father hung the planes from the ceiling over Billy's bed as a birthday surprise.

Emmett continued down the hall to his father's room, where he found the same evidence of tidiness: the bed made, the photographs on the bureau dusted, the curtains tied back with a bow. Emmett approached one of the windows and looked out across his father's land. After being ploughed and planted for twenty years, the fields had been left untended for just one season and

150 you could already see the tireless advance of nature — the sagebrush and ragwort and ironweed establishing themselves among the prairie grasses. If left untended for another few years, you wouldn't be able to tell that anyone had ever farmed these acres at all.

Emmett shook his head.

*Bad luck . . .*

155 That's what Mr. Obermeyer had called it. A bad luck that was too great to surmount. And the banker was right, up to a point. When it came to bad luck, Emmett's father always had plenty to spare. But Emmett knew that wasn't the extent of the matter. For when it came to bad judgement, Charlie Watson had plenty of that to spare too.

160 Emmett's father had come to Nebraska from Boston in 1933 with his new wife and a dream of working the land. Over the next two decades, he had tried to grow wheat, corn, soy, even alfalfa, and had been thwarted at every turn. If the crop he chose to grow one year needed plenty of water, there were two years of drought. When he switched to a crop that needed plenty of sun, thunderclouds gathered in the west. Nature is merciless, you might counter. It's indifferent and unpredictable. But a farmer who changes the crop he's growing every two or three years? Even as  
165 a boy, Emmett knew that was a sign of a man who didn't know what he was doing.

So one evening when Emmett was fifteen and the school year nearly over, he had ridden his bike into town, knocked on Mr. Schulte's door, and asked for a job. Mr. Schulte was so bemused by Emmett's request that he sat him down at the dinner table and had him brought a slice of pie.  
170 Then he asked Emmett why on earth a boy who was raised on a farm would want to spend his summer pounding nails.

It wasn't because Emmett knew Mr. Schulte to be a friendly man, or because he lived in one of the nicest houses in town. Emmett went to Mr. Schulte because he figured that no matter what happened, a carpenter would always have work. No matter how well you build them, houses run down. Hinges loosen, floorboards wear, roof seams separate. All you had to do was stroll through  
175 the Watson house to witness the myriad ways in which time can take its toll on a homestead.

In the months of summer, there were nights marked by the roll of thunder or the whistle of an arid wind on which Emmett could hear his father stirring in the next room, unable to sleep — and not without reason. Because a farmer with a mortgage was like a man walking on the railing of a bridge with his arms outstretched and his eyes closed. It was a way of life in which the difference  
180 between abundance and ruin could be measured by a few inches of rain or a few nights of frost.

But a carpenter didn't lie awake at night worrying about the weather. He *welcomed* the extremes of nature. He welcomed the blizzards and downpours and tornadoes. He welcomed the onset of mould and the onslaughts of insects. These were the natural forces that slowly but inevitably undermined the integrity of a house, weakening its foundations, rotting its beams, and wilting its  
185 plaster.

Emmett didn't say all of this when Mr. Schulte asked his question. Putting his fork down, he simply replied:

'The way I figure it, Mr. Schulte, it was Job who had the oxen, and Noah who had the hammer.'

Mr. Schulte gave a laugh and hired Emmett on the spot.

### Question

Discuss the ways in which the opening of this novel is effective in establishing the circumstances and character of Emmett.

OR

## PART C — PROSE NON-FICTION

Read carefully the extract from *Super-Infinite* (2022) by Katherine Rundell and then answer the question that follows it.

*This extract is part of the introduction to a biography on the poet John Donne.*

### *Super-Infinite*

#### I

The power of John Donne's words nearly killed a man. It was the late spring of 1623, on the morning of Ascension Day, and Donne had finally secured for himself celebrity, fortune and a captive audience. He had been appointed the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral two years before: he was fifty-one, slim and amply bearded, and his preaching was famous across the whole of London.  
5 His congregation — merchants, aristocrats, actors in elaborate ruffs, the whole sweep of the city — came to his sermons carrying paper and ink, wrote down his finest passages and took them home to dissect and relish, pontificate and argue over. He often wept in the pulpit, in joy and in sorrow, and his audience would weep with him. His words, they said, could 'charm the soul'.

That morning he was not preaching in his own church, but fifteen minutes' easy walk across  
10 London at Lincoln's Inn, where a new chapel was being consecrated. Word went out: wherever he was, people came flocking, often in their thousands, to hear him speak. That morning, too many people flocked. 'There was a great concourse of noblemen and gentlemen', and in among 'the extreme press and thronging', as they pushed closer to hear his words, men in the crowd were shoved to the ground and trampled. 'Two or three were endangered, and taken up dead for the  
15 time.' There's no record of Donne halting his sermon; so it's likely that he kept going in his rich, authoritative voice as the bruised men were carried off and out of sight.

#### II

Just fifteen years before that, the same man finished a book and immediately put it away. He knew as he wrote it that it could be dangerous to him were it to be discovered. He was living in  
20 obscurity in Mitcham, in a cold house with thin walls and a noxious cellar that leaked 'raw vapours' to the rooms above, distracted by a handful of gamesome and clamouring children. It was a book written in illness and poverty, to be read by almost no one. The book was called *Biathanatos*.

#### III

A decade or so before, the same man, then about twenty-three years old, sat for a portrait. The  
25 painting was of a man who knew about fashion; he wore a hat big enough to sail a cat in, a big lace collar, an exquisite moustache. He positioned the pommel of his sword to be just visible, an accessory more than a weapon. Around the edge of the canvas was painted in Latin, 'O Lady, lighten our darkness'; a not-quite-blasphemous misquotation of Psalm 17, his prayer addressed not to God but to a lover. And his beauty deserved walk-on music, rock-and-roll lute: all  
30 architectural jawline and hooked eyebrows. Those eyebrows were the author of some of the most celebratory and most lavishly sexed poetry ever written in English, shared among an intimate and loyal group of hyper-educated friends.

Sometime religious outsider and social disaster, sometime celebrity preacher and establishment  
35 darling, John Donne was incapable of being just one thing. He reimagined and reinvented himself, over and over: he was a poet, lover, essayist, lawyer, pirate, recusant, preacher, satirist, politician, courtier, chaplain to the King, dean of the finest cathedral in London. It's traditional to imagine

two Donnes — Jack Donne, the youthful rake<sup>1</sup>, and Dr Donne, the older, wiser priest, a split Donne himself imagined in a letter to a friend — but he was infinitely more various and unpredictable than that.

40 Donne loved the *trans-* prefix: it's scattered everywhere across his writing — 'transpose', 'translate', 'transport', 'transubstantiate'. In this Latin preposition — 'across, to the other side of, over, beyond' — he saw both the chaos and potential of us. We are, he believed, creatures born transformable. He knew of transformation into misery: 'But O, self-traitor, I do bring/The spider love, which transubstantiates all/And can convert manna to gall' — but also the transformation achieved by beautiful women: 'Us she informed, but transubstantiates you'.

45 And then there was the transformation of himself: from failure and penury, to recognition within his lifetime as one of the finest minds of his age; one whose work, if allowed under your skin, can offer joy so violent it kicks the metal out of your knees, and sorrow large enough to eat you. Because amid all Donne's reinventions, there was a constant running through his life and work: he remained steadfast in his belief that we, humans, are at once a catastrophe and a miracle.

50 There are few writers of his time who faced greater horror. Donne's family history was one of blood and fire; a great-uncle was arrested in an anti-Catholic raid and executed: another was locked inside the Tower of London, where as a small schoolboy Donne visited him, venturing fearfully in among the men convicted to death. As a student, a young priest whom his brother had tried to shelter was captured, hanged, drawn and quartered. His brother was taken by the priest  
55 hunters at the same time, tortured and locked in a plague-ridden jail. At sea, Donne watched in horror and fascination as dozens of sailors burned to death. He married a young woman, Anne More, clandestine and hurried by love, and as a result found himself thrown in prison, spending dismayed ice-cold winter months first in a disease-ridden cell and then under house arrest. Once married, they were often poor, and at the mercy of richer friends and relations; he knew what it  
60 was to be jealous and thwarted and bitter. He was racked, over and over again, by life-threatening illnesses, with dozens of bouts of fever, aching throat, vomiting; at least three times it was believed he was dying. He lost, over the course of his life, six children: Francis at seven, Lucy at nineteen, Mary at three, an unnamed stillborn baby, Nicholas as an infant, another stillborn child. He lost Anne, at the age of thirty-three, her body destroyed by bearing twelve children. He  
65 thought often of sin, and miserable failure, and suicide. He believed us unique in our capacity to ruin ourselves: 'Nothing but man, of all envenomed things,/Doth work upon itself with inborn sting'. He was a man who walked so often in darkness that it became for him a daily commute.

But there are also few writers of his time who insisted so doggedly and determinedly on awe. His poetry is wildly delighted and captivated by the body — though broken, though doomed to decay  
70 — and by the ways in which thinking fast and hard were a sensual joy akin to sex. He kicked aside the Petrarchan traditions of idealised, sanitised desire: he joyfully brought the body to collide with the soul. He wrote: 'one might almost say her body thought.' In his sermons, he reckoned us a disaster, but the most spectacular disaster that has ever been. As he got older he grew richer, harsher, sterner and drier, yet he still asserted: 'it is too little to call Man a little world; except  
75 God, man is a diminutive to nothing. Man consists of more pieces, more parts, than the world doth, nay, than the world is.' He believed our minds could be forged into citadels against the world's chaos: he wrote in a verse letter, 'be thine own palace, or the world's thy jail.' Tap a human, he believed, and they ring with the sound of infinity.

Joy and squalor: both Donne's life and work tell that it is fundamentally impossible to have one  
80 without taking up the other. You could try, but you would be so coated in the unacknowledged fear of being forced to look, that what purchase could you get on the world? Donne saw, analysed, lived alongside, even saluted corruption and death. He was often hopeless, often despairing, and yet still he insisted at the very end: it is an astonishment to be alive, and it behoves you to be astonished.

<sup>1</sup> rake: a man of immoral habits

85 How much of Donne remains to us? Those who love Donne have no choice but to relish the challenge of piecing him together from a patchwork of what we do and do not know. He is there in his work, always; but there are moments in his life where we must work out from fragments and clues what it was that he was doing: there is a long gap in his childhood, another after university, more after his marriage, and in his later years he flickers in and out of sight. Time eats  
90 your paperwork, and it has eaten some of his. We have, for instance, not yet discovered any diaries, no books of household notes or accounts. There are no manuscript drafts of poems — we have only one English poem in his own handwriting — and so no evidence of him at work, building the verse from false starts and scratches. He burned all his friends' letters to him after they died; a letter was, for him, akin to an extension of the living person, and should not exist  
95 without its parent — so we have no gossip to-and-fros in the letter archive.

But what remains is a miracle; because a colossal amount of Donne's work has been rescued from time's hunger, remarkable in the period for its variety and sweep.

There are two long prose treatises on religious questions, one of which — an attack on the Jesuits called *Ignatius His Conclave* — is racy and explosive and delicious, and the other of which — an  
100 argument that Catholics must take the Oath of Allegiance to the King, called *Pseudo-Martyr* — is so dense it would be swifter to eat it than to read it. There are thirty-one pieces of half satirical, half serious prose writing called the Problems and Paradoxes: essays with stings in them, and the *Essays in Divinity*, which are hyper-learned disquisitions on various books of the Bible. There is *Biathanatos*, his treatise on suicide, an interrogation of sin and conscience. There are the  
105 *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, a collection of twenty-three meditations on humanity, written at breakneck speed during a near-fatal illness in the very teeth of what Donne believed was going to be his death. (Having published them within weeks of writing them, he went on to survive another eight years.) There are 160 sermons, dating from 1615 to 1631 — six of which were published during his lifetime, the rest collected by his son into three great luxurious folios  
110 after his death.

There are 230 letters, to his friends, patrons and employers, the majority of which were also collected and published posthumously by his son, John Donne junior. John junior had a bad habit, when editing the letters, of removing all dates and changing the names of the addressees to make his father's early acquaintance seem more high-flying and high-society, so dating and attributing  
115 them is an ongoing and gargantuan task. Anyone turning to the prose letters seeking disquisitions on politics or news of his love affairs would be disappointed; Donne lived under a state which both censored and spied on its citizens, and his letters are largely — though not solely — practicalities. Will you come for dinner? I am ill. Might you give me money? Can you find me work? (Or, more accurately, because a significant portion of the letters are outrageous pieces of flattery:  
120 you are so ravishingly exquisite, can you find me work?)

And there are the poems: about two hundred of them, totalling just over 9,100 lines. In among those lines are epithalamia — poems written to salute a marriage — and obsequies — poems written to mourn a death. There are satires, religious verse, and about forty verse letters, a tradition he loved; poems of anything from twelve to 130 lines, carrying news, musings on virtue  
125 and God, and declarations of how richly he treasured the friend to whom he is writing. The idea of writing letters in verse wasn't his own — Petrarch did it, and the tradition dates all the way back to Ovid, whose *Heroides* are imagined verse letters by the wronged heroines of Roman and Greek myths — but Donne seems to have used the form more than any other poet of his lifetime. There was something in the way a verse letter could elevate the details of the day-to-day and  
130 render it sharp-edged and memorable that he cherished. It appealed to the part of him that wanted his own brand of intense precision to suffuse everything he touched.

And then there is the work Donne is most famous for; the love poetry and erotic verse. To call anyone the 'best' of anything is a brittle kind of game — but if you wanted to play it, Donne is the greatest writer of desire in the English language. He wrote about sex in a way that nobody ever  
135 has, before or since: he wrote sex as the great insistence on life, the salute, the bodily semaphore

for the human living infinite. The word most used across his poetry, apart from ‘and’ and ‘the’, is ‘love’.

140 This body of surviving work is enough, taken together, to make the case that Donne was one of the finest writers in English: that he belongs up alongside Shakespeare, and that to let him slowly fall out of the common consciousness would be as foolish as discarding a kidney or a lung. The work cuts through time to us: but his life also cannot be ignored — because the imagination that burns through his poetry was the same which attempted to manoeuvre through the snake pit of the Renaissance court. This book, then, hopes to do both: both to tell the story of his life, and to point to the places in his work where his words are at their most singular: where his words can  
145 be, for a modern reader, galvanic. His work still has the power to be transformative. This is both a biography of Donne and an act of evangelism.

### Question

Analyse some of the ways in which the author conveys her admiration for John Donne.

OR

## PART D — DRAMA

Read carefully the extract from *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* (1914) by D. H. Lawrence and then answer the question that follows it.

*The play is set in the Holroyds' cottage in an English coal-mining village.*

### Characters in this extract:

**MRS HOLROYD:** wife of Charles Holroyd

**JACK HOLROYD:** son, 8 years old

**MINNIE HOLROYD:** daughter, 6 years old

**BLACKMORE:** an electrician at the coal-mine

### Other characters mentioned in this extract:

**CHARLES HOLROYD:** a coal-miner

### Act 1 Scene 1

*The kitchen of a miner's small cottage. On the left is the fireplace, with a deep, full red fire. At the back is a white-curtained window, and beside it the outer door of the room. On the right, two white wooden stairs intrude into the kitchen below the closed stair-foot door. On the left, another door.*

5 *The room is furnished with a chintz-backed sofa under the window, a glass-knobbed painted dresser on the right, and in the centre, toward the fire, a table with a red and blue check tablecloth. On one side of the hearth is a wooden rocking-chair, on the other an arm-chair of round staves. An unlighted copper-shaded lamp hangs from the raftered ceiling. It is dark twilight, with the room full of warm fireglow. A woman enters from the outer door. As she leaves the door open behind her, the colliery rail can be seen not far from the threshold, and, away back, the headstocks of a pit.*

10 *The woman is tall and voluptuously built. She carries a basket heaped full of washing, which she has just taken from the clotheslines outside. Setting down the basket heavily, she feels among the clothes. She lifts out a white heap of sheets and other linen, setting it on the table; then she takes a woollen shirt in her hand.*

15 **MRS HOLROYD** (*aloud, to herself*): You know they're not dry even now, though it's been as fine as it has. (*She spreads the shirt on the back of her rocking-chair, which she turns to the fire.*)

**VOICE** (*calling from outside*): Well, have you got them dry?

**MRS HOLROYD** *starts up, turns and flings her hand in the direction of the open door, where appears a man in blue overalls, swarfed<sup>1</sup> and greased. He carries a dinner-basket.*

20 **MRS HOLROYD**: You — you — I don't know what to call you! The idea of shouting at me like that — like the Evil One out of the darkness!

**BLACKMORE**: I ought to have remembered your tender nerves. Shall I come in?

**MRS HOLROYD**: No — not for your impudence. But you're late, aren't you?

**BLACKMORE**: It's only just gone six. We electricians, you know, we're the gentlemen on a mine: ours is gentlemen's work. But I'll bet Charles Holroyd was home before four.

25 **MRS HOLROYD** (*bitterly*): Ay, and gone again before five.

<sup>1</sup> swarfed: covered in grime

BLACKMORE: But mine's a lad's job, and I do nothing! — Where's he gone?

MRS HOLROYD (*contemptuously*): Dunno! He'd got a game on somewhere — toffed himself up to the nines, and skedaddled off as brisk as a turkey-cock. (*She smirks in front of the mirror hanging on the chimney-piece, in imitation of a man brushing his hair and moustache and admiring himself.*)

30 BLACKMORE: Though turkey-cocks aren't brisk as a rule. Children playing?

MRS HOLROYD (*recovering herself coldly*): Yes. And they ought to be in.

*She continues placing the flannel garments before the fire, on the fender and on chair-backs, till the stove is hedged in with a steaming fence; then she takes a sheet in a bundle from the table, and*

35 *goes up to BLACKMORE, who stands watching her.*

MRS HOLROYD: Here, take hold, and help me fold it.

BLACKMORE: I shall swarf it up.

MRS HOLROYD (*snatching back the sheet*): Oh, you're as tiresome as everybody else.

BLACKMORE (*putting down his basket and moving to door on right*): Well, I can soon wash my

40 hands.

MRS HOLROYD (*ceasing to flap and fold pillow-cases*): That roller-towel's ever so dirty. I'll get you another. (*She goes to a drawer in the dresser, and then back toward the scullery, from which comes the sound of water.*)

BLACKMORE: Why, bless my life, I'm a lot dirtier than the towel. I don't want another.

45 MRS HOLROYD (*going into the scullery*): Here you are.

BLACKMORE (*softly, now she is near him*): Why did you trouble now? Pride, you know, pride, nothing else.

MRS HOLROYD (*also playful*): It's nothing but decency.

BLACKMORE (*softly*): Pride, pride, pride!

50 *A child of eight suddenly appears in the doorway.*

JACK: Oo, how dark!

MRS HOLROYD (*hurrying agitated into the kitchen*): Why, where have you been — what have you been doing now?

JACK (*surprised*): Why — I've only been out to play.

55 MRS HOLROYD (*still sharply*): And where's Minnie?

*A little girl of six appears by the door.*

MINNIE: I'm here, mam, and what do you think — ?

MRS HOLROYD (*softening, as she recovers equanimity*): Well, and what should I think?

JACK: Oh, yes, mam — you know my father — ?

60 MRS HOLROYD (*ironically*): I should hope so.

MINNIE: We saw him dancing, mam, with a paper bonnet.

MRS HOLROYD: What — ?

JACK: There's some women at New Inn, what's come from Nottingham —

MINNIE: An' he's dancin' with the pink one.

65 JACK: Shut up, our Minnie. An' they've got paper bonnets on —

MINNIE: All colours, mam!

JACK (*getting angry*): Shut up, our Minnie! An' my dad's dancing with her.

- MINNIE: With the pink-bonnet one, mam.
- JACK: Up in the club-room over the bar.
- 70 MINNIE: An' she's a lot littler than him, mam.
- JACK (*piteously*): Shut up, our Minnie — An' you can see 'em go past the window, 'cause there isn't no curtains up, an' my father's got the pink bonnet one —
- MINNIE: An' there's a piano, mam —
- JACK: An' lots of folks outside watchin', lookin' at my dad! He can dance, can't he, mam?
- 75 MRS HOLROYD (*she has been lighting the lamp, and holds the lamp-glass*): And who else is there?
- MINNIE: Some more men — an' *all* the women with paper bonnets on.
- JACK: There's about ten, I should think, an' they say they came in a brake<sup>2</sup> from Nottingham.
- MRS HOLROYD, *trying to replace the lamp-glass over the flame, lets it drop on the floor with a smash*.
- 80 JACK: There, now — now we'll have to have a candle.
- BLACKMORE (*appearing in the scullery doorway with the towel*): What's that — the lamp-glass?
- JACK: I never knowed Mr Blackmore was here.
- BLACKMORE (*to MRS HOLROYD*): Have you got another?
- MRS HOLROYD: No. (*There is silence for a moment*) We can manage with a candle for to-night.
- 85 BLACKMORE (*stepping forward and blowing out the smoky flame*): I'll see if I can't get you one from the pit. I shan't be a minute.
- MRS HOLROYD: Don't — don't bother — I don't want you to.
- He, however, unscrews the burner and goes.*
- MINNIE: Did Mr Blackmore come for tea mam?
- 90 MRS HOLROYD: No; he's had no tea.
- JACK: I bet he's hungry. Can I have some bread?
- MRS HOLROYD (*she stands a lighted candle on the table*): Yes, and you can get your boots off to go to bed.
- JACK: It's not seven o'clock yet.
- 95 MRS HOLROYD: It doesn't matter.
- MINNIE: What do they wear paper bonnets for, mam?
- MRS HOLROYD: Because they're brazen hussies.
- JACK: I saw them having a glass of beer.
- MRS HOLROYD: A nice crew!
- 100 JACK: They say they are old pals of Mrs Meakins. You could hear her screaming o' laughin', an' my dad says: 'He-ah, missis — here — a dog's-nose for the Daches — hopin' it'll smell samthing' — What's a dog's-nose?
- MRS HOLROYD (*giving him a piece of bread and butter*): Don't ask me, child. How should I know?
- MINNIE: Would she eat it, mam?
- 105 MRS HOLROYD: Eat what?
- MINNIE: Her in the pink bonnet — eat the dog's nose?
- MRS HOLROYD: No, of course not. How should I know what a dog's nose is?

<sup>2</sup> brake: a horse-drawn carriage

JACK: I bet he'll never go to work to-morrow, mother — will he?

110 MRS HOLROYD: Goodness knows. I'm sick of it — disgracing me. There'll be the whole place cackling *this* now. They've no sooner finished about him getting taken up for fighting than they begin on this. But I'll put a stop to it some road or other. It's not going on, if I know it: it isn't.

*She stops, hearing footsteps, and BLACKMORE enters.*

BLACKMORE: Here we are then — got one all right.

MINNIE: Did they give it you, Mr Blackmore?

115 BLACKMORE: No, I took it.

*He screws on the burner and proceeds to light the lamp. He is a tall, slender, mobile man of twenty-seven, brown-haired, dressed in blue overalls. JACK HOLROYD is a big, dark, ruddy, lusty lad. MINNIE is also big, but fair.*

MINNIE: What do you wear blue trousers for, Mr Blackmore?

120 BLACKMORE: They're to keep my other trousers from getting greasy.

MINNIE: Why don't you wear pit-breeches, like dad's?

JACK: 'Cause he's a 'lectrician. Could you make me a little injun what would make electric light?

BLACKMORE: I will, some day.

JACK: When?

125 MINNIE: Why don't you come an' live here?

BLACKMORE (*looking swiftly at MRS HOLROYD*): Nay, you've got your own dad to live here.

MINNIE (*plaintively*): Well, you could come as well. Dad shouts when we've gone to bed, an' thumps the table. He wouldn't if you was here.

JACK: He dursn't —

130 MRS HOLROYD: Be quiet now, be quiet. Here, Mr Blackmore. (*She again gives him the sheet to fold.*)

BLACKMORE: Your hands *are* cold.

MRS HOLROYD: Are they? — I didn't know.

*Blackmore puts his hand on hers.*

135 MRS HOLROYD (*confusedly, looking aside*): You must want your tea.

BLACKMORE: I'm in no hurry.

MRS HOLROYD: Selvidge<sup>3</sup> to selvidge. You'll be quite a domestic man, if you go on.

BLACKMORE: Ay.

*They fold the two sheets.*

140 BLACKMORE: They are white, your sheets!

MRS HOLROYD: But look at the smuts on them — look! This vile hole! I'd never have come to live here, in all the thick of the pit-grime, and lonely, if it hadn't been for him, so that he shouldn't call in a public-house on his road home from work. And now he slinks past on the other side of the railway, and goes down to the New Inn instead of coming in for his dinner. I might as well have

145 stopped in Bestwood.

BLACKMORE: Though I rather like this little place, standing by itself.

MRS HOLROYD: Jack, can you go and take the stockings in for me? They're on the line just below the pigsty. The prop's near the apple-tree — mind it. Minnie, you take the peg-basket.

<sup>3</sup> selvidge: the edge produced on woven fabric

MINNIE: Will there be any rats, mam?

150 MRS HOLROYD: Rats — no. They'll be frightened when they hear you, if there are.  
*The children go out.*

BLACKMORE: Poor little beggars!

MRS HOLROYD: Do you know, this place is fairly alive with rats. They run up that dirty vine in front of the house — I'm always at him to cut it down — and you can hear them at night overhead like

155 a regiment of soldiers tramping. Really, you know, I *hate* them.

BLACKMORE: Well — a rat is a nasty thing!

MRS HOLROYD: But I s'll get used to them. I'd give anything to be out of this place.

BLACKMORE: It *is* rotten, when you're tied to a life you don't like. But I should miss it if you weren't here. When I'm coming down the line to the pit in the morning — it's nearly dark at seven

160 now — I watch the firelight in here. Sometimes I put my hand on the wall outside where the chimney runs up to feel it warm. There isn't much in Bestwood, is there?

MRS HOLROYD: There's less than nothing if you can't be like the rest of them — as common as they're made.

BLACKMORE: It's a fact — particularly for a woman — But this place is cosy — God love me, I'm

165 sick of lodgings.

MRS HOLROYD: You'll have to get married — I'm sure there are plenty of nice girls about.

BLACKMORE: Are there? I never see 'em. (*He laughs.*)

MRS HOLROYD: Oh, come, you can't say that.

BLACKMORE: I've not seen a single girl — an unmarried girl — that I should want for more than a

170 fortnight — not one.

MRS HOLROYD: Perhaps you're very particular.  
*She puts her two palms on the table and leans back. He draws near to her, dropping his head.*

BLACKMORE: Look here!  
*He has put his hand on the table near hers.*

175 MRS HOLROYD: Yes, I know you've got nice hands — but you needn't be vain of them.

BLACKMORE: No — it's not that — But don't they seem — (*he glances swiftly at her; she turns her head aside; he laughs nervously*) — they sort of go well with one another. (*He laughs again.*)

MRS HOLROYD: They *do*, rather —  
*They stand still, near one another, with bent heads, for a moment. Suddenly she starts up and*

180 *draws her hand away.*

BLACKMORE: Why — what is it?  
*She does not answer. The children come in — JACK with an armful of stockings, MINNIE with the basket of pegs.*

JACK: I believe it's freezing mother.

185 MINNIE: Mr Blackmore, could you shoot a rat an' hit it?

BLACKMORE (*laughing*): Shoot the lot of 'em, like a wink.

MRS HOLROYD: But you've had no tea. What an awful shame to keep you here!

BLACKMORE: Nay, I don't care. It never bothers me.

MRS HOLROYD: Then you're different from most men.

190 BLACKMORE: All men aren't alike, you know.

MRS HOLROYD: But do go and get some tea.

MINNIE (*plaintively*): Can't you stop, Mr Blackmore?

BLACKMORE: Why, Minnie?

MINNIE: So's we're not frightened. Yes, do. Will you?

195 BLACKMORE: Frightened of what?

MINNIE: 'Cause there's noises, an' rats — an' perhaps dad'll come home and shout.

BLACKMORE: But he'd shout more if I was here.

JACK: He doesn't when my uncle John's here. So you stop, an' perhaps he won't.

BLACKMORE: Don't you like him to shout when you're in bed?

200 *They do not answer, but look seriously at him.*

### Question

Make a detailed analysis of the dramatic techniques used in this extract to introduce the audience to the tensions within the Holroyd household.

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