

Refer to the following texts when answering Questions 1 to 4 in the 2019 English Literary Studies examination.

TEXT 1

Dr Susan Carland's 2017 Stella Prize* award night speech

She writes.

She writes, and she's righteous.

She's righteous because through her writing, not only does she hold up a mirror to reflect us back to us, she points us to look through a microscope and see all the minute pieces of ourselves and the people we know magnified, clarified. The parts of ourselves we had brushed over or rejected, through her writing, she enlarges them for our proper contemplation. They are beautiful and terrifying and ugly and significant. She writes and, suddenly, these pieces matter.

And she is righteous because, as well as offering a mirror and microscope to us — to people like us and people not like us and I'm not sure which is the more important audience — she is righteous because, she shows us a better version of ourselves. She shows us someone to aspire to be, in one way or another. The loving sisters in *An isolated incident*, the compelling therapist in *Between a wolf and a dog*, the brave mother in *The hate race*, the endlessly understanding daughter in *Poum and Alexandre*, the fearless chronicler of *Dying: a memoir*, the perceptive Jane in *The museum of modern love*.

Through her righteous writing, she uplifts. She is psychologist and priestess at once, both diagnosing and calling us to the higher versions of ourselves.

The versions that we can't always see or find in a society that ignores us, dismisses us, humiliates us, destroys us.

She writes.

She writes, and she riots.

She riots on the page against that society that, in so many ways, seems to hate us.

She riots — not with placards and marches and crowds, but with ink and paper. And that quiet riot sweeps us all along with her, takes so many more of us with her than if she'd taken to the streets. She riots with the written word. The traffic doesn't stop for these riots, but we do. Individual people, men and particularly women, boys and particularly girls, around the country, pause and read her words and we know that something is very wrong.

She riots by pointing out the outrageous way women are viewed — by men, media, on the street, at work, in the home. She writes and she riots and we burn.

She writes.

She writes and she rights wrongs. By her writing, she rights the wrongs of the missing female voice.

And perhaps the worst part of the missing female voice is that it is not really missing at all. Women have been speaking and writing for a long time. And yet too many book prize lists and school set-texts lists miss our voices. How are we there, and yet not there?

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Text 1 (continued)

Only 34% of the winners of the Booker Prize are women. And never has a woman of colour won.

She rights the wrong by refusing to acquiesce to that wilful ignoring. That ignoring that says women's voices aren't representative, aren't as creative, are too niche, too mumsy, too female.

She writes and declares 'you cannot ignore me'. Her book is a flare.

She writes and we all benefit. And yet all too often, we do not celebrate her — the Australian female author.

So tonight let's honour everything she — the Australian female author — is and does. She's righteous, she riots, she rights wrongs.

Most of all — she writes.

And we rejoice.

*The Stella Prize is an Australian annual literary award, worth \$50 000, that was established in 2013 for writing by Australian women in all genres.

Source: Carland, S 2017, 'Dr Susan Carland's 2017 Stella Prize award night speech', *Stella*, viewed 16 May 2019, www.thestellaprizewinner.com.au

Extract from *Write till you drop*

by Annie Dillard

The sensation of writing a book is the sensation of spinning, blinded by love and daring. It is the sensation of a stunt pilot's turning barrel rolls, or an inchworm's blind rearing from a stem in search of a route. At its worst, it feels like alligator wrestling, at the level of the sentence.

At its best, the sensation of writing is that of any unmerited grace. It is handed to you, but only if you look for it. You search, you break your fists, your back, your brain, and then — and only then — it is handed to you. From the corner of your eye you see motion. Something is moving through the air and headed your way. It is a parcel bound in ribbons and bows; it has two white wings. It flies directly at you; you can read your name on it. If it were a baseball, you would hit it out of the park. It is that one pitch in a thousand you see in slow motion; its wings beat slowly as a hawk's.

One line of a poem, the poet said — only one line, but thank God for that one line — drops from the ceiling. Thornton Wilder cited this unnamed writer of sonnets: one line of a sonnet falls from the ceiling, and you tap in the others around it with a jeweler's hammer. Nobody whispers it in your ear. It is like something you memorized once and forgot. Now it comes back and rips away your breath. You find and finger a phrase at a time; you lay it down as if with tongs, restraining your strength, and wait suspended and fierce until the next one finds you: yes, this; and yes, praise be, then this.

Einstein likened the generation of a new idea to a chicken's laying an egg: 'Kieks — auf einmal ist es da.' Cheep — and all at once there it is.* Of course, Einstein was not above playing to the crowd.

Push it. Examine all things intensely and relentlessly. Probe and search each object in a piece of art; do not leave it, do not course over it, as if it were understood, but instead follow it down until you see it in the mystery of its own specificity and strength. Giacometti's drawings and paintings show his bewilderment and persistence. If he had not acknowledged his bewilderment, he would not have persisted. A master of drawing, Rico Lebrun, discovered that 'the draftsman must aggress; only by persistent assault will the live image capitulate and give up its secret to an unrelenting line.' Who but an artist fierce to know — not fierce to seem to know — would suppose that a live image possessed a secret? The artist is willing to give all his or her strength and life to probing with blunt instruments those same secrets no one can describe any way but with the instruments' faint tracks.

Admire the world for never ending on you as you would admire an opponent, without taking your eyes off him, or walking away.

One of the few things I know about writing is this: spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place in the book, or for another book; give it, give it all, give it now. The impulse to save something good for a better place later is the signal to spend it now. Something more will arise for later, something better. These things fill from behind, from beneath, like well water. Similarly, the impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes.

After Michelangelo died, someone found in his studio a piece of paper on which he had written a note to his apprentice, in the handwriting of his old age: 'Draw, Antonio, draw, Antonio, draw and do not waste time.'

* This is a translation of the previous sentence.

Source: Excerpt from Dillard, A 1989, 'Write till you drop', *The New York Times Company*, viewed 16 May 2019, <http://archive.nytimes.com>

TEXT 3

Step away from the keyboard!

by P Rose

It's a bit rich. The entitled need to self-express. Blogging and posting the inanity of their lives, believing that to write and share and like reveals something other than their own shallow ubiquity. Send these keyboard narcissists to their rooms and back to the reading lamp, a good book, and time spent alone.

Of course, there should be celebration in the wonder of finding your authentic essence through self-expression. But to find your voice takes time and experience. To find your voice, you must first listen. To find your voice, you must first hear the voices of others.

It used to be that writers would read and reflect and refine and perhaps, one distant day after the nineteenth edit, find a voice worth sharing. Now, many who are barely aware of a world beyond algorithm-sourced advertisements share 'profound' insights into the workings of their life.

Self-indulgent types, often those with a million mindless followers and an inflated sense of importance, need to know that not everyone deserves to be published. Such false flattery is a lie.

See the emergence of the internet poets and their self-important proclamations. But what are they saying? Look at me. Listen to me. Celebrate me. How their pleading self-indulgence bores. Take this example of a self-serving selfie in verse, 'Roses r red / violets r blue / like my page / and I'll follow you' — ugh!

Much of this so-called writing is little better than graffiti and there's an excess of trite opinions to be found. More misguided egomaniacs, who think that their poorly conceived and clumsily crafted blog on the joys of a deconstructed cheese sandwich is going to enlighten anyone. An excess of the so-called credentialed types, who think that attending a lunchtime workshop about the art of romance writing or sci-fi plotting gives them a right to impose their words on others.

And what remains? There's a surfeit of vacuous material and less serious reading than ever before. There are more people desperately wanting attention and less listening with attention. There's the famous and the not-so-famous, convinced that they're expected to express their thoughts ad nauseam. And it's got to stop. As the author Toby Litt said, 'Bad writing is almost always a love poem addressed by the self to the self ... the person who will admire it first and most and last is the writer ...'*

They need to listen and learn and look inward. Life is challenging and the need for meaning-making isn't met by inflicting a clichéd story or a dribbling poem upon others. These keyboard fraudsters should abandon their laptops, rush to a library, and borrow Shakespeare's *Much ado about nothing*. Then find a quiet corner and learn from this highly instructive, timeless text.

You can take your empty democratisation of 'everyone's gifted' and recite it like a mantra, but it won't get you anywhere real. To get to the richest of places — your inner life — you have to turn off the need for incessant affirmation and find out what it means to read and reflect and then redefine how you see and think.

Close down your social media accounts. Think before publishing your life online. You'd do better to read the old copy of *Sense and sensibility* that is tragically gathering dust, ignored in your room. Don't waste everyone's time becoming yet another writer; do them a favour and become a discerning reader. A world of discovery awaits you. Whether it's Shakespeare, or Tolstoy, or Atwood, the profound insights of the greatest are needed as an antidote to the shameless, shallow self-promotion of our age.

You're not entitled to be heard. You must first listen, truly listen, and allow wisdom to settle within. Then, one day, you may find that you actually have something worth saying.

* Litt, T 2019, 'Sensibility', *tobylitt*, viewed 16 June 2019, www.tobylitt.wordpress.com