

Candidate 3

Texts used: D/F (Practice paper 2018)

Both in 'Bleak House' (Dickens) and 'A Change of Climate' (Mantel), depictions of children in states of poverty and destitution take centre stage. Yet, these children are viewed through the eyes of outsiders who appear better off and therefore have limited personal experience of poverty. In 'Bleak House', these outsiders react to the poverty in front of them with shock and horror whilst Anna in 'A Change of Climate' carries a sense of resignation towards the destitution she witnesses day in, day out.

Through the use of an outsider's perspective, both extracts explore the outsider's reaction to poverty, resulting in two very different ways of thinking about poverty. A tone of disbelief underlies the narrator and the "guardian[s]" discourse upon seeing the living conditions of the children. The guardian "whispered", "is it possible ... that this child worries for the rest?". The lexical choice of "whispered" connotes a sense of ashamedness and scandal surrounding such poverty as the other characters are so unused to seeing this immediate reaction of surprise is further highlighted by the succession of exclamations, "Look at this! For God's sake, look at this!" The use of the exclamation marks, as well as the repeated imperative verb "look" suggest how urgently and passionately the guardian feels about these children's living conditions in 'A Change of Climate', however, poverty is presented by Anna as simply a fact of life, however horrible it may be. The monotony of poverty for her is emphasised by the continued references to time made throughout the extract. The extract begins with, "Each morning by eight Anna was in the little school room" and her day is marked by her pupils "nodding and slumping at their benches" by "eleven each day", before finally, "by one o'clock school was over." The repetition of "each" in two of these references to time highlights the monotony of Anna's daily routine and illustrates the point that poverty is continuous, occurring "each day". Further demonstrating Anna's resignation to poverty is her attitude towards teaching the poor children. She "did not try to stop" the

girls knitting at the back of the classroom as “she had no doubt they needed whatever it was they were knitting”. The throw-away generalisation “whatever” implies a disinterest in the finer details of the children’s situation, sweeping it all under the same title of disadvantage. Her seemingly lacking the aspiration is further highlighted as “her aim was not high”, perhaps displaying a trait of realism over an idealistic approach perhaps implied in ‘Bleak House’ by the shock in the initial reactions of the characters.

Both extracts also play with the concept of childhood and its relationship with adulthood when faced with poverty. In ‘Bleak House’, Charlotte, affectionately nicknamed “Charley” has to work to support her siblings as the sole source of income. Dickens presents her as a child under the burdens of adulthood as he describes her as “a very little girl, childish in figure but shrewd and older-looking in the face”. The infantile connotations of “very little” and “childish” contrast immensely with the harshness of “shrewd” given its closed nasal sound, and the comparative “older-looking”. Her apron and bonnet are both described as “womanly”, as is her manner: “The little girl took it, in a womanly sort of manner belonging to the apron and the bonnet”. Here, the personification of the apron and the bonnet serves to detach the quality of womanliness from the “little girl”. As Dickens continues, “she might have been a child playing at washing and imitating a poor working woman”. The lexical choice of “playing” denotes the infantile and carefree days the child should be enjoying and the verb “imitating” again shows how out-of-place Charley is amongst the title of “woman”. Charley also plays mother to her siblings, with the baby described as “the burden that clung to her most affectionately”. This metaphor demonstrates the immense weight Charley is under as the verb “clung” indicates the steadfastness with which her responsibilities have attached themselves to her, however unwanted they may be. This is juxtaposed by the adverb “affectionately” which perhaps illustrates the appreciation and love felt by her siblings. The image of a baby clinging to something suggests a strong sense of neediness and desperation. In ‘A Change of Climate’ contrastingly the

children are more separate from the adults and allowed to be children. The setting of a schoolroom aids this as it provides a space for the children to be treated as such. Yet the image of the infantile "tots who could barely grip a pencil" creates a childlike atmosphere of innocence in the schoolroom. Yet the children's responsibilities at home are referenced with the boys having to spend "months on the battered schoolroom benches; then months on the trail." The repeated "months" again emphasises the monotony of the passing of time and the daily routines of the children. The description of the school benches as "battered" indicates the lack of provision and connotes cruelty as it is reminiscent of 'beating'.

In conclusion, the two texts present contrasting views on poverty, mainly differing in its perception by outsiders whilst the suffering of the children remains universally similar. The overall more personal reaction to poverty in 'Bleak House' is mirrored by its 1st person narration as it demonstrates the human reaction of horror and sympathy towards the children. Reflected by its more generalised and less-emotional reaction to poverty, the 3rd person narration in 'A Change of Climate' is more impersonal and gives an objective view of poverty yet towards the end of the extract delves into Anna's thoughts – "perhaps I fear them" – with the intrusive "I" indicating that poverty has in fact impacted her on an emotional level.