

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1: Explorations in creative reading and writing

SET A

Insert

The source that follows is:

Source A: 20th Century prose-fiction

The Duchess and the Jeweller by Virginia Woolf

An extract from a collection of short stories published in 1944.

Source A

Source A is taken from a short story by Virginia Woolf. Oliver Bacon was born into a poor family in a deprived area of London. After a career in petty crime, he is now the richest jeweller in England. The Duchess of Lambourne has come to sell him some jewellery.

As usual, Oliver Bacon strode through the shop without speaking, though the four men, the two old men, Marshall and Spencer, and the two young men, Hammond and Wicks, stood straight and looked at him, envying him. It was only with one finger of the amber-coloured glove, wagging, that he acknowledged their presence. And he went in
5 and shut the door of his private room behind him.

“So,” he half sighed, half snorted, “so——”

Then he touched a spring in the wall and slowly the panelling slid open, and behind it were the steel safes, five, no, six of them, all of burnished steel. He twisted a key; unlocked one; then another. Each was lined with a pad of deep crimson velvet; in each
10 lay jewels—bracelets, necklaces, rings, tiaras, ducal coronets; loose stones in glass shells; rubies, emeralds, pearls, diamonds. All safe, shining, cool, yet burning, eternally, with their own compressed light.

“Tears!” said Oliver, looking at the pearls.

“Heart’s blood!” he said, looking at the rubies.

15 “Gunpowder!” he continued, rattling the diamonds so that they flashed and blazed.

“Gunpowder enough to blow Mayfair—sky high, high, high!” He threw his head back and made a sound like a horse neighing as he said it.

The telephone buzzed obsequiously in a low muted voice on his table. He shut the safe.

20 “In ten minutes,” he said. “Not before.” And he sat down at his desk and looked at the heads of the Roman emperors that were graven on his sleeve links. And again he dismantled himself and became once more the little boy playing marbles in the alley where they sell stolen dogs on Sunday. He became that wily astute little boy, with lips like wet cherries. He dabbled his fingers in ropes of tripe; he dipped them in pans of
25 frying fish; he dodged in and out among the crowds. He was slim, lissome, with eyes like licked stones. And now—now—the hands of the clock ticked on, one two, three, four... The Duchess of Lambourne waited his pleasure; the Duchess of Lambourne, daughter of a hundred Earls. She would wait for ten minutes on a chair at the counter. She would wait his pleasure. She would wait till he was ready to see her. He watched
30 the clock in its shagreen case as the ten minutes passed. Then he heard soft slow footsteps approaching; a rustle in the corridor. The door opened. Mr. Hammond flattened himself against the wall.

“Her Grace!” he announced.

And he waited there, flattened against the wall.

35 And Oliver, rising, could hear the rustle of the dress of the Duchess as she came down the passage. Then she loomed up, filling the door, filling the room with the aroma, the prestige, the arrogance, the pomp, the pride of all the Dukes and Duchesses swollen in one wave. And as a wave breaks, she broke, as she sat down, spreading and

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- 40 splashing and falling over Oliver Bacon, the great jeweller, covering him with sparkling bright colours, green, rose, violet; and odours; and iridescences; and rays shooting from fingers, nodding from plumes, flashing from silk; for she was very large, very fat, tightly girt in pink taffeta, and past her prime. As a parasol with many flounces, as a peacock with many feathers, shuts its flounces, folds its feathers, so she subsided and shut herself as she sank down in the leather armchair.
- 45 “Good morning, Mr. Bacon,” said the Duchess. And she held out her hand which came through the slit of her white glove. And Oliver bent low as he shook it. And as their hands touched the link was forged between them once more. They were friends, yet enemies; he was master, she was mistress; each cheated the other, each needed the other, each feared the other, each felt this and knew this every time they touched
- 50 hands thus in the little back room with the white light outside, and the tree with its six leaves, and the sound of the street in the distance and behind them the safes.



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