

EAE 0422 A	Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat	Code Sujet	CLG 30
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Your main commentary should be focused on *quantification*. Other topics may also be addressed.

5 An easterly is the most disagreeable wind in Lyme Bay – Lyme Bay being that largest bite from the underside of England’s outstretched south-western leg – and a person of curiosity could at once have deduced several strong probabilities about the pair who began to walk down the quay at Lyme Regis, the small but ancient eponym of the inbite, one incisively sharp and blustery morning in the late March of 1867.

10 The Cobb has invited what familiarity breeds for at least seven hundred years, and the real Lymers will never see much more to it than a long claw of old grey wall that flexes itself against the sea. In fact, since it lies well apart from the main town, a tiny Piraeus to a microscopic Athens, they seem almost to turn their backs on it. Certainly it has cost them enough in repairs through the centuries to justify a certain resentment. But to a less taxpaying, or more discriminating, eye it is quite simply the most beautiful sea-rampart on the south coast of England. And not only because it is, as the guide-books say, redolent of seven hundred years of English history, because ships sailed to meet the Armada from it, because Monmouth landed beside it... but finally because it is a superb fragment of folk-art.

20 Primitive yet complex, elephantine but delicate; as full of subtle curves and volumes as a Henry Moore or a Michelangelo; and pure, clean, salt, a paragon of mass. I exaggerate? Perhaps, but I can be put to the test, for the Cobb has changed very little since the year of which I write; though the town of Lyme has, and the test is not fair if you look back towards land.

25 However, if you had turned northward and landward in 1867, as the man that day did, your prospect would have been harmonious. A picturesque congeries of some dozen or so houses and a small boatyard – in which, arklie on its stocks, sat the thorax of a lugger – huddled at where the Cobb runs back to land. Half a mile to the east lay, across sloping meadows, the thatched and slated roofs of Lyme itself; a town that had its heyday in the Middle Ages and had been declining ever since. To the west sombre grey cliffs,

35 known locally as Ware Cleeves, rose steeply from the shingled beach where Monmouth entered upon his idiocy. Above them and beyond, stepped massively inland, climbed further cliffs masked by dense woods. It is in this aspect that the Cobb seems most a last bulwark – against all that wild eroding coast to the west. There too I can be put to proof. No house lay visible then or, beyond a brief misery of beach-huts, lies today in that direction.

40 The local spy – and there was one – might thus have deduced that these two were strangers, people of some taste, and not to be denied their enjoyment of the Cobb by a mere harsh wind. On the other hand he might, focusing his telescope more closely, have suspected that a mutual solitude interested them rather more than maritime architecture; and he would most certainly have remarked that they were people of a very superior taste as regards their outward appearance.

50 The young lady was dressed in the height of fashion, for another wind was blowing in 1867; the beginning of a revolt against the crinoline and the large bonnet. The eye in the telescope might have glimpsed a magenta skirt of an almost daring narrowness – and shortness, since two white ankles could be seen beneath the rich green coat and above the black boots that delicately trod the revetment; and perched over the netted chignon, one of the impertinent little flat “pork-pie” hats with a delicate tuft of egret plumes at the side – a millinery style that the resident ladies of Lyme would not dare to wear for at least another year; while the taller man, impeccably in a light grey, with his top hat held in his free hand, had severely reduced his dundrearies, which the arbiters of the best England male fashion had declared a shade vulgar – that is, risible to the foreigner – a year or two previously.