

# English Literature

Advanced GCE A2 7828

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3828

## Report on the Units

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**June 2007**

**3828/7828/MS/R/07**

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## Chief Examiner's Report

### Summer 2007

### GCE English Literature

Examiners on every paper have found plenty of reasons to compliment candidates and their teachers:

- ... Candidates' ability to construct a fluent and convincing essay was often of a high order. It was amazing how much some candidates packed in to the time available although sometimes more economy and a sharper sense of the exact demands of the task would have been advantageous. But there were few who could not finish their answers nor, indeed, many who fell foul of rubrics in any way. (2707)
- It was good to see so many well organised answers this session, establishing an agenda and then developing the identified issues systematically (2708)
- Work this summer was on the whole soundly or well written and organised, thoughtfully argued, in response to what the five Assessment Objectives require, and above all else demonstrating not merely knowledge and understanding but also some genuine interest and frequently pleasure in what was being discussed. (2709/ 2711 coursework)
- This summer Examiners saw much outstanding work. There is no doubt that the standard of preparation for this paper improves every year, and with it both the confidence with which candidates articulate their views, and the range of material with which those views are supported. (2710)
- Most answers showed an enthusiastic engagement with the text, whatever the ability, and there was much sophisticated writing. It is now rare to see a script where the candidate has failed to divide time more or less equally between the two questions. (2712)
- This summer's paper reflected the work of candidates who are now largely confident with this specification. The very best work seen was exhilarating to read and beautifully constructed ("the best wrote with lapidary precision" wrote one examiner) whilst there were very few candidates who struggled with the requirements of the examination. (2713).

In relation to the four "areas for improvement" most frequently noted among the individual paper reports, some basic advice might be offered to candidates, to improve performance even further:

**Read the question carefully:** think about the implications of the key terms, explore the opportunities offered, and remember what the important elements of the task are:

- It was amazing how much some candidates packed in to the time available although sometimes more economy and a sharper sense of the exact demands of the task would have been advantageous. (2707)
- ... where candidates under-perform it is frequently because they do not target with sufficient precision the particular demands of the different parts of the exam ... One criticism made by some examiners in this session is that several candidates are not actually reading the questions closely enough. (2713)

Before you begin to write, **think about not only what you have to say, but also about how you are going to say it** (A level examiners assess both knowledge and ability to organise it relevantly and coherently in response to the question):

- It was good to see so many well organised answers this session, establishing an agenda and then developing the identified issues systematically; there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a linear approach (as long as it goes beyond noting points **arbitrarily and gets to the end of the poem/passage set**) but an answer organised around topics – eg on a prose passage: **narrative significance of the episode/ characterisation/ development of thematic concerns/ language and narrative method – actually seems easier for candidates to handle. (2708)**
- **There is nothing wrong with adopting a chronological approach to an answer if that suits the question. What is not likely to draw high marks is the kind of narrative approach where a question is used merely to go through the story of a novel without regard to a strict focus on the demands of the question (2712)**

**Consider in detail "effects of the writing" (AO3)** remembering that all of our papers except 2710 invite critical discussion of given passages or those selected by the candidate. The 2710 does note that "The standard of close quotation continues to be pleasing"): on other papers, however:

- Some candidates do not appear to be aware that they need to engage with the language used in the text. Weaker answers discuss the content or 'meaning' only. (2708)

**Be careful about how you use "other reader's views":** AO4 emphasises the primary importance of the candidate's own "independent opinions and judgements":

- ... a feature of some answers ... was quotation from a selection of named critics, not always done with discretion and relevance or in a way that promoted the candidates' own argument and judgement. It could be productive if the published opinions referred to were treated analytically and discussed, but not if they were simply regurgitated from potted notes and treated as holy writ. (2707)
- There seems to have been an instruction in some centres that critics **MUST** be quoted, often with the same quotations used by candidates from a given centre. Often there appears to be no real justification for the quotation and it is not part of the ongoing argument. More often than not, this wasn't useful and given that the exam is only 90 minutes for two essays, it probably means that textual details could be more fruitfully explored. (2708)
- ... a significant minority of answers still seem overwhelmed by other critical views, offering an anthology of other opinions but not developing the candidate's own. (2710)
- ... there must be a real *engagement* with such views – simply quoting them, or even using them as illustration or support, is not sufficient. Many Centres set a provocative or challenging task, so that candidates must inevitably take issue with at least one "alternative" view, but even where this is done there needs to be at least one other, whether real or possible. (2790/2711 Coursework)

**Write legibly** and check your work:

- At a nuts and bolts level, a number of examiners believe that handwriting has deteriorated over the years, and spelling is no better. (2707)
- One comment I have to make (if only as a catharsis) is that some candidates' handwriting was so completely appalling I almost gave up the will to live. (2708)

Finally, an interesting comment from an examiner - on particular texts, but raising a general issue for us all to think about: a reminder that exploring relations *between* texts studied, throughout the A level course, is an effective way of identifying their particular concerns and methods as well as accustoming candidates to the demands of A2:

*Report on the Units taken in June 2007*

- Candidates rarely note relations between the texts they have studied: eg I found it interesting that most of the candidates discussing Stevenson's poem about a funeral went on to write about [the death of Helen Burns in] *Jane Eyre* and none of them made any connection between the two versions of the idea of death as a liberation – 'Freeing Lizzie' and Helen Burns being freed.

*Report on the Units taken in June 2007*



**REPORT FOR PUBLICATION TO CENTRES BY PRINCIPAL EXAMINER MAY 2007  
AS ENGLISH LITERATURE  
2707 DRAMA: SHAKESPEARE  
Dr M.F. Rymer**

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

Although a wide range of performance was seen this session, examiners were impressed by the high quality of much of the work. One examiner summed up the opinions of many: "I was struck by the careful preparation that had taken place. There seemed to be consistent and effective attention to the assessment objectives and, although I thought the choice of criticism was not always helpful to a balanced response, a great deal was achieved."

The mention of 'criticism' emphasises a feature of some answers, which was quotation from a selection of named critics, not always done with discretion and relevance or in a way that promoted the candidates' own argument and judgement. It could be productive if the published opinions referred to were treated analytically and discussed, but not if they were simply regurgitated from potted notes and treated as holy writ. In some cases Bradley, Granville Barker and a galaxy of later pundits were quoted in essays at greater length than was Shakespeare himself. This was not what was required for AO4. On the other hand it was interesting to see the integration of some contemporary critical approaches into the way that candidates wrote and responded, including feminism, Marxism and angles from Freud or language studies.

The 'alternative views' issue is a topic about which we receive questions from teachers and the evidence of this session underlined the advice given, which is that retailing of particular critics or schools of criticism is not expected at AS level, as opposed to an awareness of a range of possible approaches to the play. The same is true of references to other works by Shakespeare apart from the essential context of the whole play being studied. Candidates who showed lively engagement of their own with the text, and who stated or implied, in a relevant discussion of the question asked, that there were alternative views, did excellently.

At a nuts and bolts level, a number of examiners believe that handwriting has deteriorated over the years, and spelling is no better. Some felt that there was too much narrative rather than analysis in answers and that deficiencies in skills of close reading led to better performances on Section B than on Section A. On the other hand, candidates' ability to construct a fluent and convincing essay was often of a high order. It was amazing how much some candidates packed in to the time available although sometimes more economy and a sharper sense of the exact demands of the task would have been advantageous. But there were few who could not finish their answers nor, indeed, many who fell foul of rubrics in any way.

**COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS**

***Henry IV (Part 2)***

This play attracted the fewest candidates but they produced some of the better answers.

**Question 1** was based on the passage from Act 4, Scene 2 in which Prince John negotiates with the rebels. Some answers were limited and rather general, without close attention to or understanding of the detail of the passage. Medieval forms of speech and hierarchy could be misinterpreted ("Prince John calls the Archbishop 'my lord' meaning that he is over-ruled by him"). Others surprisingly seemed unaware of the fact that Lancaster was acting with duplicity and tricking the rebels with his declarations, thus missing the tension underlying the formal dialogue and the ironic edge to the 'princely word'. Nevertheless the issue of the Prince's significance lent itself well to some comparisons with Hal and the relationship of the brothers with their father. The politics of the play, including the role of political dishonesty, were often related excellently to the rebels' assertions and situation in the passage.

In **Question 5(a)** candidates were asked to discuss the influence of the past on the present. It was the less popular of the options but done well by those who chose it. The tetralogy as a whole was frequently discussed especially in the case of Henry's usurpation of the throne and Hal's relationship with Falstaff in the past and present. There were thoughtful comments on the way that the past can or cannot be escaped ("are we dealing with tragic fate or a problem of management in a tactical situation?") Better answers considered the wording of the question, 'overwhelmed' being debated intelligently.

**Question 5(b)** was about Hal, an idealist or a callous politician. Some convincing responses were skilfully balanced, with attention to both sides of the question. Others struggled with the idea that he might be an idealist and one examiner was unsure whether candidates always knew the meaning of the word: many simply wrote about the character as calculating. The rejection of Falstaff was cited as evidence for both points of view and many argued that his future as King was promising, although these twenty-first century and post-Iraq students, if they referred to the French wars in *Henry V*, tended to see them as evidence of a continuation of his father's sins and troubles rather than a prospect of glory to come.

### As You Like It

This play was a relatively infrequent choice but enjoyed by many who studied it.

**Question 2** referred to the extract from Act 2, Scene 7 when Orlando brings Adam to the Duke and Amiens sings. It proved to be a productive passage. Some effective answers were alert to the fact that this scene immediately follows Jaques' 'All the world's a stage' speech and Duke Senior's 'venerable burden' was juxtaposed with the rather different attitude to old age in the 'lean and slippered pantaloons'. Better answers also resisted imposing a simplistic pastoral idyll on the song, acknowledging a darkness in the tone: the winter wind has 'tooth', the sky is 'bitter with 'bite' but not 'so unkind', 'so nigh'. Weaker answers made generalisations about language ("the use of alliteration in the song suggests that perhaps the lifestyle in the forest is not so easy"). Some noted that this is Adam's final appearance in the play and that death is present in seeming Arcadia.

The exploration of the power of women was the issue for **Question 6(a)**. Some less confident answers were concerned mainly with Rosalind's disguise and little else. Popular areas for discussion were her epilogue and her use of her disguise to educate Orlando and others in love. Some, usually stronger, answers were aware of the limits of women's power as seen in Audrey, Phebe, the way "Celia, having stood up to her father, subsides into a more conventional woman when she reaches Arden", and Rosalind's (arguably) final return to the fold. The power won by women in the play is, one essay suggested, fairly limited: "it is the power to attract men more easily". Another interesting argument was that "Shakespeare refutes the claims of Petrarchan literature for female dominance and instead frees his female protagonist from the constraints of convention, showing the virtues of equality between the sexes."

In **Question 6(b)** candidates were asked to consider the significance of Duke Frederick and Duke Senior. It was relatively rarely chosen and tended to become a 'court versus country' discussion – for some students seemingly the only concern of the play. More developed responses went into some detail comparing the two dukes with Oliver and Orlando, sometimes looking at how other kinds of relationship (master and servant, Duke and attendants) prove more reliable than close family ties. The contrast with the Rosalind/Celia relationship also provided a helpful approach. More attention to the question about the 'significance' of the characters could have widened and deepened the analysis.

## Antony and Cleopatra

**Question 3** presented candidates with the dramatic attack on the Messenger by Cleopatra in Act 2, Scene 5. This was an overwhelmingly popular choice of play and this question, answered by the majority of candidates, evoked many excellent responses in which candidates enjoyed analysing or describing the dramatic situation and were able to talk about what is happening on stage as well as in the language. Drawing the knife was recognised as a *coup de theatre*.

There were interesting psychological explanations of Cleopatra's conduct: for instance "one could argue that Cleopatra is controlled entirely by her id, so is unable to control her atavistic desires." Whatever the origin of her passion, most felt that it reflected real love for Antony while some saw it as a calculated piece of theatre. Cleopatra was agreed to be 'capricious, tempestuous and mercurial' and her changing moods in the scene were linked to the idea of her 'infinite variety'.

Language and tone were often well discussed. One essay looked at Cleopatra's 'flamboyant Asiatic speech'. Another argued that "the structure of the passage, with Cleopatra's quick retorts keeping on line with the iambic pentameter, suggests that she is fully in control of the situation." Most answers considered 'Melt Egypt into Nile', serpents and their links to other parts of the play but were often content just to identify rather than to discuss. The issue of historical context was not often successfully dealt with, with general assertions that "a Jacobean audience would have been horrified." There were, however, useful comments on what kind of behaviour might be expected from a queen. She needs Charmian's help, it was thought, to regain her dignity. The humorous aspects of the scene were widely recognised: one observer noted that "to 'hail' pearls is not the usual method of delivery". Some less successful answers, however, took everything more literally: for them Cleopatra seriously believes that gold will change the truth.

Politics as a central concern was the focus of **Question 7(a)**. Many candidates were able to provide historical material about the transition from the rule of Elizabeth to that of James. Often it was baldly set out but in more effective answers it was integrated with an account of the political issues of the play. Some took the question to be simply an invitation to discuss Rome and Egypt; in other cases a more subtle limitation was a conflation of the political and the military. Many responses were intelligently structured around the contrasts between Antony and Octavius and issues discussed included opportunism, political decisions and judgements, the control of one's image, the control – or suppression – of emotion, and the manipulation of relationships, with Octavia more than once being identified as 'a political porn'. A few essays looked at Pompey as a victim of the ruthless politics of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

In **Question 7(b)**, the choice of most candidates, they were asked to consider how far and in what ways Antony could be regarded as a tragic figure. Some ignored the stem of the question altogether, just focusing on contradictions in Antony's character. Others had a limited understanding of tragedy, seeing it as simply a question of whether Antony is heroic or whether we sympathise with him. Better answers showed an understanding of Aristotelian concepts and sometimes terminology, often quoting Bradley. Broad interpretations of 'tragic' were perfectly acceptable but perhaps predictably tended to become re-written Rome v. Egypt essays. Other students wrote down all they knew about Antony rather than addressing how the play presents him.

Usually effectively, much was made of Antony's former heroic characteristics as noted by Philo and Caesar. "He falls from a hero to a tragic hero" observed one writer. Generally it was felt that "tragedy arises from Antony's battle between love and honour, his downfall resulting from his inability to conform to one or the other." Some argued that indecision and weakness are not the stuff of tragedy and it is only occasionally – as in sending Enobarbus's treasure after him – that we see the greatness that was once there.

Furthermore the bungled manner of his death, its mythologizing by Cleopatra, Fate, or Caesar's ability were all enlisted as arguments against tragic stature. One particularly interesting view was that the real tragic figure is Cleopatra, unlike Antony who is defeated and divided from the beginning.

### **The Tempest**

This play was often chosen and tended to evoke the widest range of performance from sparkling and perceptive exploration to basic and unadventurous notes prepared on a few predictable topics.

**Question 4** was based on the passage from Act 5, Scene 1 in which Prospero's project gathers to a head. Discussion usually centred on the relationship between Prospero and Ariel. One examiner felt that "weaker answers were bogged down in sympathising with Ariel and condemning Prospero for his peremptory tone" but many could see the significance of Ariel, a spirit, having tender affections and recognised this as a catalyst for Prospero's renunciation of revenge. Some claimed that Prospero forgives the courtiers for his own advantage but did not always support this with evidence. Most would agree, however, that he attains wisdom, "a far more powerful tool than the magic he will shortly give up." There were some good examples of really close reading: thoughtful insights included "at the beginning of the passage Prospero's 'project' suggests that he does not see the prisoners as human beings but as objects rather like chess pieces".

**Question 8(a)** asked for a discussion of the significance of Stephan and Trinculo. This was done well by those who had a strong grasp of the detail of the play and who could go beyond mere character sketches: "they represent foolishness, eurocentrism, the negative effects of civilisation and courtly vanity". Close reference to the text was able to bring out the comic effects and to link the comic sub plot with events involving the principal characters, leading from pride and foolishness to other themes such as greed, lust and power. A weakness was the tendency to start with comments on their relationship with Caliban and to digress into a prepared essay on Caliban himself

Candidates answering **Question 8(b)** had to say how far and in what ways they saw family relationships as a central concern of *The Tempest*. There were more and usually more successful responses here. A wide range of characters and relationships was investigated. Many considered Prospero, Miranda, Ariel and Caliban as a "surrogate and sometimes dysfunctional family." The similarities between Antonio and Sebastian added to the family dimension. "The tempest itself is a metaphor for turbulent family relationships in the play." Less positively there was quite often confusion between Antonio and Alonso and a habit of quoting criticism when the play itself would have done the job better: a critic apparently says, for example, that "Caliban is responsive to beauty and harmonies that others are blind and deaf to". Sometimes on this play, as elsewhere, criticism is credited with such profound statements as "Prospero is the major source of power in *The Tempest*".

## 2708 Poetry and Prose Summer 2006 Principal Examiner's Report

### General comments from examiners:

- On the whole I was impressed by the quality of work – candidates produced work of a generally high and commendable standard. Most showed evidence of having worked extremely hard, others cleverly (some merely methodically) using the question as hook on which to hang their notes. There were some essays of brilliance – highly relevant, sophisticated and convincingly structured arguments, expressed in lucid and articulate prose, eschewing the linear approach. The analysis and evaluation of linguistic and poetic effect was, quite simply, a delight to read.
- Judicious selection of both characters and relevant passages was a key to success in answering (b)-type questions ... Candidates were much better this year about *identifying* the passage at the beginning of the answer – this is helpful to the candidate as well as the examiner, reminding them what they have to concentrate on. Occasionally no passage was chosen at all and a general discussion was written.
- AO5-related discussion is usually well handled now: there are still some answers unbalanced by historical or biographical information, but far more where contextual issues are helpfully acknowledged and integrated into discussion of the text itself.
- There was much encouragement in seeing that so many young people had found so much pleasure in reading these books.
- It was good to see so many well organised answers this session, establishing an agenda and then developing the identified issues systematically; there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a linear approach (as long as it goes beyond noting points arbitrarily and *gets to the end of the poem/passage set*) but an answer organised around topics – eg on a prose passage: narrative significance of the episode/ characterisation/ development of thematic concerns/ language and narrative method – actually seems easier for candidates to handle.

### On the other hand:

- Too many candidates simply ignored one of the Bullet Points. Candidates need to be reminded that these need to be dealt with if the question is to be answered successfully and the relevant Assessment Objectives addressed ... it was a tendency in some of the answers, at all levels of potential achievement, to evade Bullet Point 2, particularly in the case of (a) option answers: some detailed and probing analyses of the given passage involved little if any reference to the wider texts. Candidates should be encouraged to read each passage with a sense of its wider implications and resonances, rather than to plough through it line by line, tacking on a three line paragraph at the end drawing attention to other poems/passages with similar methods and concerns.
- Candidates rarely note relations between the texts they have studied: eg I found it interesting that most of the candidates discussing Stevenson's poem about a funeral went on to write about *Jane Eyre* and none of them made any connection between the two versions of the idea of death as a liberation – 'Freeing Lizzie' and Helen Burns being freed.
- There seems to have been an instruction in some centres that critics **MUST** be quoted, often with the same quotations used by candidates from a given centre. Often there appears to be no real justification for the quotation and it is not part of the ongoing argument. More often that not, this wasn't useful and given that the exam is only 90 minutes for two essays, it probably means that textual details could be more fruitfully explored.
- Some candidates do not appear to be aware that they need to engage with the language used in the text. Weaker answers discuss the content or 'meaning' only.

Finally, developing a point frequently made this session:

- One comment I have to make (if only as a catharsis) is that some candidates' handwriting was virtually illegible. Spending twenty minutes on one question, just to decipher the writing, seems ridiculous to me - and the fact that these were some of the most able students, developing often complicated ideas, seemed to make it even more imperative that they should be encouraged to write so that other people can read them.

## The Questions

### SECTION A

#### 1 Chaucer: The Franklin's Tale

Examiners saw a number of enthusiastic and well-informed answers on this text: to support discussion of the dynamics of the tale, candidates explored issues to do with the courtly love tradition (though some still present this as a social, rather than literary, set of conventions), relations between this tale and others in *The Canterbury Tales*, the Franklin's personality and concerns, some seeing beyond the Franklin to Chaucer's construction of him as a social aspirant paying a last tribute to an outmoded social hierarchy and ideology. It was good to see candidates aware of the power of rhyme and of other poetic features like word placement. However, candidates do need to be reminded that their discussion should focus on the writing of the set text, the *Tale* itself: while some answers – mostly but not exclusively on 1b - drew sensibly and fruitfully on the Franklin's portrait in *The General Prologue*, some spent too much time on this, and a few of these practically ignored the question's applicability to the *Tale*.

Some answers - again mostly but not exclusively on 1b – copied out substantial elements of the editors' notes in the recommended edition of the *Tale*, invariably without attribution: answers do, of course, receive credit for reference to other readers' views (AO4), but this depends on what the answer does with the views cited; substantial copying of this kind reduces the space for the candidate's own responses, on which the answer is assessed.

The passage set in 1a concerns Aurelius's response to Dorigen's challenge and his prayer to Apollo for help. Answers which attended closely to the writing explored a range of issues: the tone of the writing (in contrast to earlier description of the garden, darkening as the sun goes down); the presentation of Aurelius's state of mind - contrasting with his earlier description when he was "fresher ... and ... jollier ... that is the month of May" his condition now is self-pitying and "as melodramatic as Dorigen's when she protests about the 'rokkes'"; some argued that Aurelius, sexually obsessed, is "flouting" the rules of courtly love; many explored relations between Christian and pagan references - some felt that Aurelius's invocation to a *pagan* deity indicated the shallowness of his dedication, some that both he and Dorigen are hubristic in challenging or making demands on divine authority of either persuasion. The opportunity in Question 1b to discuss the significance of *gentillesse* in the *Tale* was taken up vigorously by many candidates, exploring both social (eg the aspiration of the Franklin himself) and moral aspects of the concept: testing the behaviour of Arveragus, Aurelius and the clerk against the expectation that upper class folk had a monopoly on *gentillesse*, there was much debate on which of these three displayed most emphatically the moral features of the code. Many answers noted that acts of *gentillesse* provoke others, as Aurelius responds to Arveragus's "grete gentillesse" by releasing Dorigen, and the clerk in turn does "a gentil dede" in forgoing his thousand pound fee. The most interesting answers noted that elements of the concept of *gentillesse* – patience, "trouthe", respect for persons, "franchise", personal integrity, generosity of spirit – are internally contradictory: by instructing Dorigen to keep her "trouthe" Arveragus chooses to compromise his conjugal responsibility and breaks his promise not to exercise "maistrye" over his wife ("no democratic discussion here ...").

## 2 Shakespeare: Complete Sonnets

An examiner notes "a greater confidence in handling questions on this text emerging": responses to the Sonnets are often pleasingly sensitive and well-informed, ranging extensively over the sequence for illustrative and comparative discussion. Increasingly, responses to Bullet Point 1 display knowledge of the history and concerns of the sonnet as a poetic sub-genre and awareness of the variety in Shakespeare's handling of the basic *3 quatrains + rhyming couplet* sonnet form. It's particularly absorbing to watch an answer exploring layers of implication of the imagery in selected sonnets, often noting that central images (eg the sun/ nature in general/ disease/ warfare/ contractual law) are deployed with different shades of meaning as discussion proceeds from one sonnet to another. However, on these poems in particular, weaker answers tend to offer linear paraphrase/explanation of the selected sonnet(s), with little/no attention to subtlety of effect or implication.

Most answers considered the soul/body relation addressed in Sonnet CXLVI as a theological/Metaphysical (some fruitful references to Donne and Marvell) issue, exploring the poem's extraordinary range of relational/transactional imagery ("rebel powers ... outward walls ... so short a lease ... fading mansion ... inheritors of this excess ... servant's loss ... buy terms divine ..."), with some ingenious readings of the final couplet. Other sonnets often considered in this relation were those testing ways of resisting the processes of decay and mortality (eg III, VI, XII, XV, XVIII, XIX, LXV). Some answers took "Poor soul" to refer to the figure to whom the poem is addressed, usually identified as the Dark Lady, in this reading stressing the distaste for cosmetic and moral dissimulation ("painting the outward walls") also evident in eg CXXVII, CXXX, CXXXI. Some answers noted that the interaction of both these readings is what gives this sonnet its particular power and density. The central issue identified in Question 2b – love as cause of comfort and/or despair – was vigorously explored by many candidates, showing at various levels of achievement critical sensitivity and width of reference. Candidates tended to see 'comfort' in the poet's love for the young man and 'despair' in his love for the Dark Lady, a tendency that led at times to some rather simplistic polarisation. In answers that concentrated on *despair* there were some powerful readings of poems that one might think would be difficult material for 17-18 year-olds (eg CXXIX, CXXXIII, CXXXIV ...). Undiluted *comfort* was more difficult to come across, since in the Sonnets most expressions of love come with a health warning: "Even 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day' reminds us of death and decay as well"; "Love always brings trouble with it – XCVII". Some answers concentrated usefully on Sonnet CXLIV, cited in the question: it is clear that most candidates' reading extends well beyond the sonnets we have identified as the group on which (a)-type questions will be set.

## 3 Byron: Selected Poems

This text is becoming more popular; "probably adopted," an examiner notes, "by avid enthusiasts". Some answers - though fewer now - are unbalanced by reference to biographical material, often described as "sensational" by candidates. Some answers distinguish between "public"/satirical poems, where Byron is said to adopt a pose or create a persona, and "private"/first person poems which are regarded as more "sincere"; others challenge this distinction, suggesting that there is always a "theatrical" element in Byron's work – as one candidate put it vividly, "He is always up to something ..." (eg 'Fare thee well' was sometimes read as expression of genuine grief and remorse, sometimes as designed to "send his wife on a guilt trip", sometimes with elements of both of these views).

On the passage of social satire in Canto XI of *Don Juan* set for Question 3a, discussion of Byron's own posture ("too sincere a poet"), his scornful tone and sardonic voice in satirising the society which had rejected him, was evident in the fullest answers. The various ways in which most elements contemporary London society is presented as in decline (only the Whigs exempt, since they are "Exactly where they were") were comprehensively noted: the nobility, the rich, the political classes, the dandies, emperor, king, fellow poets and writers. While some answers seemed not to see humour in the writing, most relished the comic touches of irony, bathos,

colloquial language (" ... Dished ... Diddled ...") and the often spectacular, virtuoso, rhyming patterns (anticipated/ dissipated/participated ... Franceses/dances is/phantasies ... Jupiter/stupider/Blue Peter). Answers noted the irony that Byron had been noble, young, rich and dissolute himself, and how this is acknowledged in the last couplet in the passage. Other parts of *Don Juan*, *Childe Harold* and 'Beppo' were cited to show correspondences and contrasts (eg 'Beppo' exemplifying a more jovial critical voice). Question 3b was more popular. Poems most frequently referred to were 'I watched thee', 'Fare thee well', 'She walks in beauty', and 'When we two parted', deployed to explore a range of possible kinds of "love" (unrequited, socially unauthorised, domestic, paternal, "love at first sight", aesthetic) presented in diverse poetic forms, and with various intentions/effects (passionate, "sincere", regretful, accusatory, self-pitying, "tongue in cheek"). Some answers explored other aspects of love: of nature (*Childe Harold*), of liberty ('Sonnet on Chillon'), and some thoughtful answers used "Yet though I cannot be beloved / Still let me love" ('January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1824 ...') as the fulcrum of well developed argument. The fullest answers were those most attentive to specific effects of language and poetic form.

#### 4 Browning: Selected Poems

Like Byron, a minority choice and also often studied with enthusiasm and discrimination. Examiners have been pleased to see candidates addressing the contemporary/personal poems rather more regularly, though many answers still stick to a narrow range of reference: 'My Last Duchess' and 'Porphyria's Lover' still appear far more frequently than any other poems, not always made relevant to the question attempted. Weaker answers described their chosen poems without analysing them, and especially did not discuss effects of the verse form.

In answers on Question 4a, the Bishop ordering his tomb was generally regarded unsympathetically by candidates in view of his apparently scandalous history and his obsession with outdoing Gandolf's tomb with its "Paltry onion stone"; many answers cited 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' as also illustrating clerical hypocrisy, materialism, illicit sensuality, personal vindictiveness; there were a number of well-ordered, fully supported answers following this line. Some answers, however, proposing 'Fra Lippo Lippi' and 'Bishop Blougram's Apology' as counterweights, explored tensions dramatised in the poem between, on the one hand, demands of the church for exemplary spiritual and behavioural integrity and, on the other hand, irresistible human needs of love, companionship, beauty, sensual pleasure, and a sense of personal status and esteem ("No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line ... "). In this reading, the movement of the verse in the Bishop's stream of consciousness suggests *both* cynical exploitation of position *and* genuinely felt conflicting commitments (" ... I shall lie through centuries, / And hear the blessed mutter of the mass ... As still he envied me, so fair she was"). To explore complex tensions between conflicting imperatives, some well developed answers also drew on 'The Last Ride Together' and 'Any Wife to Any Husband'. Poems of this kind also figured in many answers on Question 4b exploring the view that "in his poetry Browning is more interested in the difficulties of love than in its pleasures": most answers agreed with this proposal. 'My Last Duchess' and 'Porphyria's Lover' were often cited as presenting final solutions to love's transience and other "difficulties", and 'Andrea del Sarto' offered very fruitful material for discussion of the question. It was pleasing to see answers addressing poems such as 'Any Wife To Any Husband', 'Two In The Campagna' and 'Love Among The Ruins', more delicate, hesitant explorations of "Infinite passion, and the pain / Of finite hearts that yearn" and the fundamental question "How is it under our control / To love or not to love?". Most rewarding answers were those that were most responsive to specific effects of language and form in the various poems addressed: too often dramatic monologues were regarded as presentationally monolithic.



## 5 Eliot: Selected Poems

Examiners report some confident and enthusiastic responses, though some candidates seem to find it hard to write coherently on Eliot. Few answers now are unbalanced by biographical or contextual material (though his first wife is sometimes still blamed for a good deal of his psychological/emotional disposition and the Great War for everything else). Although most candidates seemed to be effectively conversant with *The Waste Land*, the poem's title was almost never presented in the correct form (most commonly, among other variants, "the 'Wasteland' ").

Question 5a, set on 'The Burial of the Dead', found some well-informed and thoughtful responses, alert to motifs (particularly water, with a range of symbolic values), allusions (Chaucer, Wagner, Bible ...), representation of spiritual and urban landscapes, various modes of isolation and breakdown. The fullest answers briefly traced the development of these concerns in *The Waste Land* (and elsewhere too) and explored how they are expressed by the language and form of the poem ("a fragmented world in fragmented language ..."), as Eliot challenges the reader to go with him into new poetic subjects – cities, politics, pubs. Question 5b, on difficulties in communication was more popular and often very well done indeed. Answers developed catalogues of various kinds of "difficulty" explored in a wide range of poems: between people ("Prufrock can't bring himself to talk at all, let alone ask his overwhelming question. Other people talk too much about nothing ... In 'Portrait of a Lady' one tries to talk, the other refuses to listen"), and particularly between men and women (the typist and the clerk "have nothing to say to each other"); between aspects of the self (Prufrock again, exemplifying modern dissociated sensibility); between classes (in 'The Fire Sermon' "the women seem to speak different languages"); between generations ("The boy reads but Gerontion doesn't listen, and he talks to himself ..."); between cultural/historical periods ("...the First World War interrupts history ..."). Again the fullest answers explored Eliot's poetic methods, suggesting that communication between poet/poem and reader is deliberately made problematic ("... you have to work really hard, and everyone in our class came up with a different meaning ..."). One candidate remembered Pound's injunction that a characteristic of modern poetry should be "high strenuousness".

## 6 Thomas: Selected Poems

Generally, examiners report, answers showed sympathetic understanding of the poet's characteristic concerns and methods, drawing fruitfully on biographical knowledge about Thomas's war experience, the Dymock group and his friendship with Robert Frost.

While some answers on 6a offered little more than linear paraphrase of 'The Glory', others were alert to Thomas's characteristically ambivalent presentation of natural beauty and energy: "Thomas loves nature," a candidate wrote, "but it also makes him deeply unhappy with himself, he sees himself as inadequate, with 'no wisdom or strength to match this beauty'". There was some fascinating discussion of "sublime vacancy", evidently valued in nature but scorned in "my own heart"; the "hope to find whatever it is I seek" (echoes of eg "the unseen moving goal" of 'The Other' and "what I desired I knew not" in 'Melancholy'); and his resignation to "be content with discontent" (cf "half in love with pain" in 'Liberty'). The process of remembering becoming reflection and revision also reminded some candidates of 'Old Man'. Many answers noted the frequency of enjambement, but few explored the effects of the device in the poem – the interaction between regular metrical rhythm and varied syntactical structures is what gives the poem its characteristic tone, conversational, confessional, but also rhythmic and orderly. The heavy use of rhetorical questions in the poem was seen as illustrating the writer's profound dissatisfaction with self, his constant sense of having had the experience, so to speak, but missed the meaning. In response to Question 6b, on the significance of the war in Thomas's work, some answers concentrated on discussion of 'The Sun Used to Shine', with some thoughtful analysis of the poem's cyclical movement, beginning with a celebration of friendship, displaced by "rumours of the war remote", in turn accorded universal symbolic value ("Hades

fields ... the Crusades / Or Caesar's battles") and fading "like memory's sand", yielding to a vision of another friendship "under the same moon". Some answers explored other poems that overtly relate to the experience of the war, most often 'As the Team's Head-Brass', 'This Is No Case Of Petty Right And Wrong' and 'Lights Out', but many candidates, remembering that all Thomas's poetry was written between December 1914 and January 1917 when he went to France, argued that all his poems are war poems, in the sense that the awareness of war amplified his love of the land, his response to the beauty of even insignificant objects ('Tall Nettles'), and his acknowledgement that experience, memory and understanding are temporary and conditional ("I cannot bite the day to the core").

## 7 Harrison: Selected Poems

This has become one of the most popular texts on the paper, provoking some energetic and engaged responses. While some answers tended to by-pass the poetry in favour of biographical information, political polemic or personal identification, most concentrated, more or less effectively, on discussion of the writing.

Setting 'Book Ends I, II' for Question 7a played into a strong hand for many candidates, who were well able to explore its relations, by correspondence and contrast, with other poems in *The School of Eloquence* sequence, notably 'A Good Read' and 'Breaking the Chain'; some answers also drew very effectively on 'Long Distance', and 'Marked with D', Harrison's threnody on his father's death. An effective discriminator was the care with which answers explored the effects of the central image, "You're like book ends, the pair of you": surprisingly many seemed simply to take the metaphor for granted, while for others it formed the platform for discussion of the poet's presentation of his relationship with his father, intimating both similarity/affection and separateness/resentment; there was thoughtful comment on the role of the mother as both presence and absence ("She not here to tell us we're alike") and her percipience in offering book ends as a model for the relation between the two men; some, noted that they are kept apart by books that Harrison has read ("Ibsen, Marx and Gide") and (remembering 'Bringing Up') the "mucky books" that he's written. Most answers noted Harrison's characteristic invocation of his parents' language as eloquent and perceptive, particularly in this poem ("I can't squeeze more love into their stone"). Many answers read 'Book Ends II' as a tenderly defensive response to his father's *cutting* grumbles: Harrison proves he is still "*the bright boy at description*" by composing "*a whole sonnet*" when he can "find the right words on my own". Question 7b invited discussion of Harrison as "a political poet": most popular poems chosen for discussion were 'National Trust', 'Working', 'Durham', 'Stately Home' and *v*. Almost every answer recognised that for Harrison "language is political" - giving voice to the voiceless in his poetry is a way of counteracting the process by which "the tongueless man gets his land took"; there was some interesting discussion of Harrison's voicing the working class in *v*. (noting the skinhead's resentment of what he's doing), but also some acknowledgement that the family poems are themselves political, in the sense of exploring social and cultural class conflict between representative figures. Discussions of 'Durham' explored the implications of "Bad weather and the public mess / drive us to private tenderness", in relation to the mantra "The personal is political"; and 'The Red Lights of Plenty' offered overt political comment on the United States (where Marx – for whose centenary the poem was written – said the development of capitalism, and its demise, would be played out).

## 8 Stevenson: Granny Scarecrow

There were very few takers for this text: answers varied quite sharply between those where a real interest in particular qualities of the poetry was evident, and those that seemed rather at a loss about what to do with it.

Almost all answers were on 8a, 'Freeing Lizzie'. While some appeared to find the poem quite problematic, many working their way rather stolidly through it line by line, there were some thoughtful responses to this poem, with a strong sense of its emotional structure and progress through the narrative of the day. Among the issues explored were: the sense of different kinds of community – village, family, linguistic ("Right words are being said in the right way"), national ("It's a very Welsh funeral," a candidate wrote); the characterisation of Lizzie and intimations of her life and relationships ("Plain ones can't be picky. They have to marry who comes ..."); the view of death as a process of transition ("Look, look, she's everywhere ... Lizzie's gone ahead to the Cadwgan ..."); continuity of life and communal experience ("It's going to be a treat of a tea ..."). There was some interesting discussion of the narrator's perspective and positioning as an interested, sympathetic observer. Question 8b, on the notion of entrapment, found very few answers, with some promising discussion of kinds of entrapment in eg: 'An Angel' ("trapped in the Angel's gaze"); 'False Flowers' (in an uncommunicative relationship); 'Going Back' (in her own memory); 'Arioso Dolente' (by family and "all the griefs of the world ...").

## SECTION B

### 9 Austen: Persuasion

This was one of the most popular texts on the paper. Candidates are generally confident now in discussion of narrative methods and effects as well as thematic concerns; alertness to irony is often a clear discriminator. Awareness of contextual factors is also now generally evident, recognising that in this novel, at any rate, Austen is addressing issues radically relevant to a society undergoing significant social and cultural transformations at a critical historical moment.

For example, answers on 9a, on the moment when the Crofts are about to occupy Kellynch Hall, and the senior members of the Elliott family propose to move to Bath, were usually alert to the symbolic value of a retired admiral (characterised by "open, trusting liberality") taking over tenancy of the estate from a vain, indolent aristocrat who cannot afford to keep it up, and to the comic effects of their comments on each other. Answers found much to say about characterisation: established qualities of Sir Walter, Elizabeth, Mary and Lady Russell are confirmed in the passage, as usual by measuring their behaviour in relation to Ann, whose position in her family (described as "dysfunctional" by many candidates) is further illustrated ("hardened to such affronts ... in a sort of desolate tranquillity"); the sinister figure of Mrs Clay is much discussed in the passage, ironically foreshadowing her future role in the novel. Answers identified a range of concerns developed throughout the text: the navy as a kind of alternative community of people and values; the significance of rank and status ("inequality of condition and rank") as measurement of personal value; the reminder that "assiduous and pleasing manners" can be dangerously misleading (here relating to Mrs Clay, later to Mr William Elliott). Some answers explored the language of the passage, noting the weighting here of key words and issues that recur throughout the novel: eg "good breeding ... Anne would not be allowed to be of any *use* (this word appears several times in the passage and follows Anne through the novel) ... agreeable manner ... respectability ...". Austen's practice of refracting narrative through Anne's perspective was often interestingly explored. This narrative method was also often addressed in the rather fewer answers on Question 9b, where "the role and significance of Anne Elliott" was the topic set. Marilyn Butler's distinction between Austen heroines who are always right and those who are usually wrong was quite often employed as platform for a discussion of Anne's role as an indirect commentator and "moral benchmark" throughout the novel. Her own developing confidence and independence was carefully charted, often by putting together episodes such as her stay at the Great House where, "having no voice" she plays virtually

unnoticed, her taking charge at Lyme ("no one so proper, so capable as Anne") and her conversation with Captain Harville in the White Hart when Anne fully finds her voice, to Captain Wentworth's astonishment and admiration ("his pen had fallen down ..."). A number of answers explored relations between characters as elements in a structure where the meaning of each is determined by its relation with others, eg Sir Walter in relation to Admiral Croft, Wentworth in relation to Mr William Elliott; and Anne is defined by her difference from everyone else. Some argued that she (like the novel itself) represents a balance between Augustan sense and Romantic sensibility, others that she represents one of these systems over against the other. Her role as a romantic heroine ("like Cinderella") was much appreciated by some candidates.

## **10 Brontë: Jane Eyre**

A popular text. A developing interest here is in the management of the narrative, eg the interaction between Jane as child/young adult and the older Jane, narrating and commenting on her experience. Both questions also gave candidates the opportunity to consider religion, gender and class as issues.

Many answers on the passage set for Question 9a, the episode of Helen Burns' death, regarded this as a key moment in Jane's development; the concept of mercy now and joy at the end helps her come to terms with Brocklehurst/Reed and sustains her in the face of Rivers' moral blackmail. The fullest answers noted how the passage is introduced, at a moment when Jane is powerfully aware of the beauty of the natural world, and when her "mind made its first earnest effort to comprehend what had been infused into it concerning heaven and hell"; most explored ways in which Helen contributes to Jane's "comprehension" by offering one model of religious belief and its relation to the world of human choice and conduct; most also recognised that Brocklehurst is to offer another, Rivers yet another. Relatively few, however, commented on the final word in the passage/chapter, carved on the marble tablet that (presumably) Jane has put in place, signalling her own renewal of life, as well as Helen's, in a different dimension of love. Some answers noted that Helen's death is the result of the abusive, exploitative regime at Lowood ("Semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection"). Answers explored the sensory precision of the descriptive writing and the emotional handling of dialogue. On Question 9b, "the conflict between love and duty", answers often pitched Rochester against Rivers as embodying the demands of love and duty experienced by Jane: most often placing Rochester's invitation to live as his mistress (when Jane tells herself "I must be ice and rock against him") against River's proposal to go to India with him, to which she virtually agrees ("I had now put love out of the question, and thought only of duty") until rescued by Rochester's telepathic summons back. There was some very thoughtful discussion in many answers of Brontë's handling of imagery to evoke powerful emotional response. The dyad love/duty was sometimes construed as passion/restraint: in this relation Bertha Mason was regarded as a warning of what Jane might become if she did not learn to restrain her own impulses. A few answers argued that Rochester maintains a duty of care – after a fashion – towards Bertha and less equivocally towards Adele; some others also cited River's repudiation of a loving relationship with Rosamund in favour of a different kind of duty.

## **11 Gaskell: Mary Barton**

Only a few candidates addressed this novel. Those who did seem to have found it an interesting AS-level text, amenable to both intrinsic and extrinsic study; where knowledge of context was combined with understanding of Gaskell's narrative project, there were some really interesting answers.

The passage set for 11a, as John Barton becomes involved in radical politics after his wife's and son's deaths, is one of the novel's most spectacular instances of narratorial intrusion, which a number of candidates explored enthusiastically. Having delivered a convincing analysis of employer/worker relations in the 1840s, illustrating precisely why the workers are aggrieved (in times of depression "Large houses are still occupied, while spinners' and weavers' cottages

stand empty, because the families that occupy them are obliged to live in rooms and cellars"), the narrator does an about-turn to assert that workers are wrong to believe that they "alone suffer from bad times", claiming "I know what is the truth in such matters" (though not explaining what "the truth" is) and blaming the workers' "child-like improvidence" and outside agitators ("there are never wanting those who ... find it in their interest to cherish such feelings in the working classes") for the development of trades' union and Chartist activity. As candidates pointed out, the analysis of social and economic conditions as unequal and exploitative that the narrator rejects is fully confirmed by the rest of the passage, during which Barton looks into shop windows "where all edible luxuries are displayed" while his son is dying of malnutrition, and Mary eventually finds "respectable" employment where she "was to work for two years without remuneration" – and by the rest of the novel in its "condition of England" mode. The passage effectively sets the scene, as answers pointed out, for the novel's development, grounding the future narrative securely in the characterisation of Barton, dangerously resentful, and his daughter, dangerously beautiful, on whom "her absent, her mysterious aunt Esther had an unacknowledged influence". Question 9b "on the role and significance of Mr Carson" attracted fewer responses. A few answers considered the young Harry Carson as part of the concern, noting his pursuit of Mary as a sexual expression of the exploitative relation between the classes, and the significance of his murder in both the political and the romantic elements of the novel. The passages often selected for discussion of the elder Mr Carson's significance were: Wilson's visit to the Carson household to ask for help for the Davenports; the scenes where John Barton and Mr Carson are presented as "brothers in the deep suffering of the heart" and Mr Carson's demand for vengeance yields to forgiveness; and the narrator's final reflection on Mr Carson's transfiguration - having "hung on the cross of agony", realising that "a perfect understanding, and complete confidence and love, might exist between masters and men", he is presented as responsible for "many of the improvements now in practice in the system of employment in Manchester". One or two candidates pointed out that Engels' *Condition of the Working Classes in England*, his study of "the system of employment in Manchester" and London, was written in the same year as *Mary Barton* was published, outlining a similar description the effects of the system, and a very different model of how it might be transformed.

## 12 Stoker: Dracula

This has become a very popular and successful text for AS study. Examiners have been impressed by the range of issues and contextual relations that candidates have explored in their answers. An examiner notes: "Contextual knowledge is still perhaps better applied in response to Dracula than any other prose text; it is evidently striking the right chords with candidates."

The passage set for Question 12a, Harker's account of his encounter in Dracula's castle with "three young women, ladies by their dress and manner", has been a popular reference point for answers in previous examination sessions, and was relished by most candidates this year. As a candidate pointed out, "This is where the story really begins", establishing the key concerns and motifs to be developed in the rest of the novel. Many answers pointed out that this is an episode where first person narrative is particularly effective, foregrounding the character and ambivalent responses of the narrator himself, modulating dramatically from "something about them made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear" (only momentarily coloured by the memory of Mina), through "wicked burning desire" to "languorous ecstasy". The inversion of gendered sexual expectations here was much discussed ("as a typical Victorian male, Harker is horrified and excited by women who take on sexual power and initiative"); noting an issue central to the concerns of the novel as a whole, many answers related the episode to anxieties about the emergence of "the New Woman", Victorian fear of female sexuality and the social consequences of women's empowerment. Effective links were established between this passage and the later presentations of Lucy and Mina as contrasting embodiments of gender possibilities. The representation of the three women was thoroughly explored: their aquiline similarity to Dracula, taken as a serious warning of intent; the eloquence of the colour imagery (red and white); the particularly precise sensory detail (eg "like the intolerable, tingling sweetness of water-glasses when played on by a cunning hand ... the churning sound of her

tongue ...the soft shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat ..."); the introduction of the key word "voluptuous" foreshadowing Lucy's presentation as sexual predator; the animal imagery that follows Dracula to London. The description of Dracula himself ("...demons of the pit ... flames of hell-fire ...") was taken to signal his portrayal as a kind of Anti-Christ in the novel's symbolic structure; one candidate noted that his riposte "Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past" authorises the "back-story of Coppola's film". As many candidates noted, this is an example of virtuoso writing in the Gothic mode. Relatively few addressed Question 12b, on "Stoker's characterisation of Van Helsing". Among some rather thin character sketches, often not grounded in specific passages, there were some substantial analyses of Van Helsing as the embodiment of "everything that Dracula is not". The lineaments of his character, as father-figure, team-leader, scientist, doctor, proto-priest and specialist in occult knowledge, were well illustrated in answers, some noting that he is both representative of the modern world and critical of its epistemological narrowness and complacency ("...there are things," he tells Seward, "that you know not, but that you shall know, and bless me for knowing, though they are not pleasant things"). The passages most frequently cited were the episode of Lucy's final transfusion, when all the elements of Van Helsing's characterisation were said to be evident, the penetration and decapitation of her vampire avatar, and the moment towards the end when he recounts the second appearance of the three vampire women: some candidates were interested that he takes over the narrative only briefly, while Dracula and Quincy P. Morris, the other "foreigners" in the novel, never do.

### 13 Conrad: Heart of Darkness

Middle range in popularity, this seems to be selected by enthusiasts, and has proved an excellent text for AS study. Candidates who think about how narrative point of view works in the novel and explore in detail effects of the language do well on Conrad, while general answers, without the support of close critical analysis of language and structure are less successful. In answers to both options contextual issues were fruitfully explored: as a candidate wrote, "Colonialism is bad for everybody – colonisers and colonised all suffer from the relationships"; Achebe's view of Conrad as a racist was often debated, and usually refuted. An examiner warns: "A lot of candidates appear to have been watching *Apocalypse Now*. This can be a helpful and stimulating teaching aid for this text, but Conrad and Coppola were too often confused and conflated this year."

The passage set for Question 13a offers rich possibilities for discussion of narrative method. Some answers simply ignored the first paragraph, most noted the brief return of the first narrator, but not all of these explored the effects of this interruption to Marlow's discourse, signalling a pause in the narrative while Marlow then takes stock of the issues involved in the experience that he is describing – and drawing attention to the strain this is causing him. Many answers identified "restraint" as the main issue in this passage: the agencies that restrain behaviour in the world of the listeners on the *Nellie* ("kind neighbours ... the butcher and the policeman"); circumstances in which certain kinds of restraint must be exercised ("We must help [women] to stay in that beautiful world of their own ..."); conditions in which those external restraints are removed ("you must fall back upon your own innate strength ..."); and consequences when all restraint is denied ("The thing was to know what he belonged to, what powers of darkness had claimed him for their own"). Answers often argued that Marlow's review here looks forward to developments in the rest of the novel, particularly powerfully in the references to the Intended. There was some interesting discussion of the effects of the writing, the dark/light imagery, the evocation of the wilderness, the echo in "claim of distant kinship", the constantly interrupted discourse, underlining Marlow's feeling that the whole narrative enterprise is unrealisable ("Absurd ... this is the worst of trying to tell ..."). In discussion of this passage and others selected in relation to Question 12b answers explored the dual emphasis of Conrad's/Marlow's presentation of Kurtz, signalled in the 12a passage by the material and the postscript of his report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs ("How ironic is that for a title?" a candidate asked). Kurtz's *Light of the World* painting was often analysed as evidence of an aspect of the character's presentation, the view of the accountant, the brick-

maker and the harlequin figure were also often cited, and the episode of Kurtz's death was probably the most popular of all. Marlow's profoundly ambivalent relationship/ involvement with Kurtz ("It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through"), and his struggle to come to terms with his own experiences on the river provoked some fascinating answers – as one candidate wrote, "Marlow is probably closer to being Kurtz than he realises".

#### 14 Forster: A Passage to India

The Indian context and Forster's relationship with India occasionally intruded too far in answers on this quite popular text, though in most the balance between contextual and critical discussion was effectively maintained. Some candidates had found Forster's study *Aspects of the Novel* helpful in considering his own authorial practice, particularly in relation to characterisation and handling of plot.

The conclusion of the novel, set in Question 13a, provided plenty of fruitful material for most answers. This final presentation of the two characters, restored temporarily to a comfortable, "playful" (as many answers called it), "knockabout" (as the narrator calls it) relationship was often referred back to other moments of companionship or dispute, to show how the figures "have developed and still remained the same". Developed answers also noted ways in which the passage re-activates memory of earlier events and issues ("the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace ...") and other characters (Adela and Mrs Moore). There was much well focused and detailed discussion of the novel's pervasive concern with the question "whether or not it was possible to be friends with an Englishman". Some answers tried to locate Forster's position in the debate about India's future, and where answers considered narrative point of view there was some perceptive discussion: some pointed out that the narrator is effectively a third party in the conversation, moving into and out of each respective consciousness, commenting on/explaining motive and disposition (eg "They trusted each other, although they were going to part, perhaps because they were going to part"). There was some thoughtful discussion also of the presentation and influence of nature/landscape – an occasion where discussion of effects of the "pathetic fallacy" was helpful and appropriate. Many candidates appreciated the enigmatic rhetoric of the final paragraph. Fewer candidates attempted Question 13b, where Forster's discussion in *Aspects of the Novel* of "flat" and "rounded" characters was quite often referred to: some thought Ronnie Heaslop one or the other, some argued he is both. For many he illustrated the effect of colonialism on the disposition and understanding of the colonial official, illustrated in the frequently cited episode where ("scratchy and dictatorial") he reprimands his mother for talking to Aziz. "He's on the way to becoming a Turton," a candidate wrote, while others (picking up "just official" from the question) were more generous in exploring his presentation as illustrating the problems and tensions of the official role. How far his function is satirical was also discussed: as he is obliged to follow the official line, some answers argued that it was the system being satirised rather than individual figures; others pointed out that he behaves rather well in the episode where Fielding is harangued at the club, making "the only appeal that could have saved the situation. Whatever Heaslop wished must be done".

#### 15 Barnes: History of the World in 10½ Chapters

This text was chosen by very few candidates. For most the main issue was to explore "connections" between the elements of the text.

"... everything's connected," says the narrator of the passage from 'The Survivor' set as Question 15a, making this, like politics, into a gender issue when she says later about men, "They just don't see the connections, do they?" – between, for example, cold war politics, nuclear war, the Middle East, the treatment of reindeer and cats, and arguments with Greg. Answers connected the passage and the story more widely with other stories in relation to eg: representations of partnerships, ('The Visitors and 'The Mountain'); concerns about animals (eg 'The Stowaway', 'The Wars of Religion'); various kinds of sea voyage and/or shipwreck (eg 'The Stowaway', 'The Visitors', 'Shipwreck', the third of 'Three Simple Stories'). Answers explored the

language for clues about the nature and condition of the narrator ("Greg was an ordinary bloke ... slapped me around a bit on pay-night"), in the context of the story's overall uncertainty about the relationship and world she has left behind and the nightmare, hallucinatory world she has entered. On 15b, the text's presentation of "the experience of love", most answers concentrated (often descriptively) on the meditation on the subject in 'Parenthesis', pointing out that apart from this excursion love gets a raw deal, presented as self-centred, exploitative, or "something to run away from". The fullest answers linked love, history and survival, Auden and Forster, and reflected on Barnes's/the narrator's conclusion that the only thing that will survive is love (not quite the actual message of Larkin's 'An Arundel Tomb'), that we must believe in love or we're lost, at the mercy of history and someone else's truth; some answers deftly considered the interweaving of these various elements in Barnes's prose.

## **16 Carver: Short Cuts**

Another minority text and enthusiast's choice: an examiner reports "Better and better work all the time, on this text". A candidate quoted Hemingway's saying that if the reader is to read between the lines the writer has to write between them: with this kind of approach, some interesting discussion can follow on the reader's role in creating meaning from the text. "Carver shows rather than tells what the characters are feeling," one candidate wrote.

The passage set in Question 16a, from Part II of 'Will You Please Be Quiet, Please', offered fruitful material for this kind of analysis. Answers pointed out that apart from one overt expression ("Oh, Betty, he thought ... ") Ralph's thoughts and feelings are projected on to (or reflected by) the sharply realised details of the sinister, potentially violent, discontinuous, chaotic, enigmatic urban world he moves through and into ("the neon-lighted clam shell with a man's legs sticking out" attracted a lot of discussion as an objective correlative for his relationship with Marian, even for marriage in general in Carver's work). "Without being told," a candidate wrote, "you know what he's feeling ...". On Question 16b various interpretations of the key term "mystery" were pursued: information unknown or withheld or partially revealed (eg 'So Much Water ...' / 'Will You Please Be Quiet, Please'); unexplained motivation (eg 'Tell the Women We're Going'); bewildering, unintended consequences (eg 'Jerry and Molly and Sam'); arbitrary accident (eg 'A Small, Good Thing'); enigmatic circumstances ('The Collector'- as the anonymous narrator says, "It all seems strange"). Many answers explored the idea that mystery is a feature of Carver's narrative methods: restricting information to a single, narrow, point of view as in 'They're Not Your Husband'); mystery is particularly evident in his stories' unresolved conclusions (eg what can happen next where "Things kept falling ..." and the Millers "braced themselves ..."). Some answers discussed whether the stories are epiphanic, in the sense that meanings are suddenly radically clarified, for character and/or reader; a candidate, describing Carver as "teasing" the reader, said some of the stories contained "almost-epiphanies". Others explored the uneasy, insecure, vulnerable condition of Carver's characters as an aspect of "blue-collar tragedy" or "low-rent tragedy", in the context of Reaganite social/economic policies hostile to the prospects of this stratum of the class structure in the United States.



**Principal Examiner's Report**

**Advanced Summer 2007**

**Prepared by David Johnson (175048), Principal Examiner**

**Unit 2710 Poetry and Drama (pre-1900)**

**General Comments**

This summer Examiners saw much outstanding work. There is no doubt that the standard of preparation for this paper improves every year, and with it both the confidence with which candidates articulate their views, and the confidence with which those views are supported.

The candidates' own views, in response to the proposition in the question, are of course at the centre of a good response. Nevertheless - as we commented three years ago when the paper was still quite new - a significant minority of candidates still seem overwhelmed by other critical views, offering an anthology of other opinions but not developing their own. The study of other critical views is a stimulus to developing the candidate's own understanding: care needs to be taken not to overwhelm personal contact with the text. Examiners reported seeing work from whole centres where candidates worked through a list of critical views with apparent detachment ('a feminist critic might say...a Marxist critic would say...') without ever quite reaching the most important view - their own. We would strongly discourage centres from adopting such a 'listing' approach in preparatory work, or from promoting essay-writing 'formulas' of any kind: such approaches deprive answers of freshness, and distract from the task in hand. The best answers use critics as a springboard to their own thoughts, integrating critical views into their own thought-out responses.

The standard of close quotation continues to be pleasing, perhaps not surprisingly better on verse than drama. Candidates unable to substantiate a view of a play by close reference to details of language will not do well on this paper: an answer on imprisonment in *Hamlet* supported by detailed reference to the language - beginning, perhaps, with 'Denmark's a prison...' will obviously do much better than a generalised and vague discussion. Nevertheless, the standard of detailed textual knowledge in drama answers remains very variable. On poetry, range continues to be an issue on Blake: far too many answers to both set questions considered a reference to two or three of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* to be adequate as support for an answer: as we have said previously, it is not. Candidates are expected to have some knowledge of poems and writings outside this range, and to refer to them.

Historical context is generally used better, with less history-essay preamble writing, though this year Blake was represented by many candidates as a strident social revolutionary. The problem with studying the work of critics and historians with a strong didactic agenda is that weaker answers can easily become a catalogue of unsupported assertions: such essays are often polemically passionate but very weakly rooted in text.

**Comments on Individual Questions**

**SECTION A: Poetry**

**1. Chaucer: The Merchant's Prologue and Tale**

There were many excellent answers to each of the options on Chaucer.

**1(a) The garden as paradise and prison.**

This question provoked many interesting responses. Some answers made excellent use of their knowledge of mediaeval garden symbolism, and focused on poetic

details, to show how the garden was both a literal and psychological prison, both for January and May, May as prisoner of Januarie's 'appetit', Januarie as prisoner of his own delusion or as 'prison-warder carefully making sure that he is the only one who has a key'. One candidate wrote that 'Life in the garden is like a custodial sentence' another that 'it is a place of sexual liberation as well as confinement.' Some stronger answers developed the idea of the psychological 'prison' that Januarie is trapped within. There were some interesting AO5 comments – pears being a medieval contraceptive, for example.

1(b) Deception and dishonesty.

This was slightly the more popular question. There were many excellent discussions about the self-deception of Januarie driving the *Tale* forward so that the arch deceivers May and Damian could take full advantage of the situation. Better answers captured the complexity of our responses to Januarie and the fluctuating responses we feel for May. Many commented intelligently on the 'back-story' of betrayal represented by Proserpine and Pluto. Some outstanding answers extended the idea of deceit onto the plane of language and looked at the contrasting registers between rhetorical poeticism of certain lines when juxtaposed with the brutalism of 'liftheth up her smock and in he throng', with the implication that the language itself operates deceptively and ironically. The repetition of 'fresshe May' leads us to expect deception. Some successful answers were very careful about the distinctions between dishonesty, deception and Januarie's self deception and often discussed how far the Merchant was also deceiving.

**2. Herbert: Selected Poems**

The little seen was impressive, with real attempts to understand a very different culture and period from our own, and as a result enjoy the poetry. The quality of this work was often outstanding, with meticulous and sensitive attention paid to the subtle complexity of Herbert's poetic methods.

**3. Milton: Paradise Lost Books 9 and 10**

3(a) Reconciliation and fall.

A wealth of opinion, knowledge of the books and a response to critical accounts was seen in essays, which often were proficient, or at very good achievement levels. Thoughtful debate of the question was evident with candidates agreeing with the proposition or totally reversing the viewpoint, arguing comprehensively for the alternative interpretation. There was also some confusion about the reconciliation. Most took it only to be the reconciliation between Adam and Eve, some drawing commonsense parallels with married couples in any age. Others focused more on their reconciliation with God. This sometimes led to a more theological discussion. Either way, it was a question which allowed candidates to range widely through the text and to discuss Milton's use of form and language in some depth. There was pleasingly wide understanding of the contemporary political impact on the writing of the poem. Many candidates had clearly been extremely enthusiastically taught and were consequently well rewarded for producing some well argued and crafted responses. Stronger answers often effectively linked fall and reconciliation to the Felix Culpa and the preference of active to 'cloistered' virtue in *Areopagitica*. The best saw the importance of reconciliation to God and to each other and the human virtues that emerge from admission of guilt and expressions of remorse. Some less secure answers seemed to be discussing God's purposes rather than Milton's, others were sidetracked into spending too much time on Satan rather than Adam and Eve, as the question suggested.

3(b) An exploration of loneliness.

This was not as popular as 3(a) but nonetheless there were some perceptive answers studying isolation in relation to Adam and Eve, while some of the most successful responses involved an investigation into how Satan was isolated and lonely - 'the sexual, moral and aesthetic jealousy he feels serves to torture him more.' There was wide coverage of such ideas as characters being isolated from each other, the effects of the Fall on Adam and Eve's relationship with God and a comparison of the loneliness felt by Adam and Eve pre and post lapsarian world. There were also some lively female psychological interpretations of pre and post lapsarian Eve. Some candidates argued along the lines that 'Milton personifies loneliness through Satan and the inhabitants of Hell so that the emphasis is left on the restored union of Adam and Eve'. Some were sidetracked by considering Milton's own perceived loneliness – too much biographical context can become very speculative

**4. Dryden: Selected Poems**

The very small number of centres studying Dryden had generally done so very well indeed. Genuine depth and detail were seen in AOii, AO3 and (particularly) AO5ii, skilfully used to support or demolish the propositions. The text was clearly known and used to support or challenge with confidence.

**5. Blake: Selected Poems**

Blake is an ambiguous poet, whose work uses paradox, dialectic and complex symbolism. Unfortunately, many candidates persist in seeing him as a very simple poet, representing him as a moralist and social reformer and taking all his statements at face value. On both Blake questions a fair number of candidates referred only to a handful of poems from Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience. Encouragingly, however, we are gradually seeing wider coverage of the Songs and some more adventurous references to other works.

5(a) Imagination versus the natural world.

Generally 'the world of the imagination' was better covered than 'the natural world'. Some, however, succeeded in clearly distinguishing or linking the two. For instance, 'the natural world is a powerful metaphor for the state of unity and harmony which is conducive to the exploration of the world of the imagination.' One candidate wrote of Blake's later work as 'both liberated and fantastical.' There was some outstanding AO3 particularly when referring to the nature of Blake's four-fold vision. 'In 'Little Boy Lost' the priest grabs the boy with 'zeal' which is taken from the word 'zealot' and means in a trance like state. Blake is conveying the realities of 'single vision' when an adult lacks imagination and cannot embrace the innocence of a question. The strict rhyme scheme highlights the trance like state and bondage the church places upon the human mind. Here Blake is clearly concerned with imagination and the restriction placed upon it by the church.' Though some answers fell into the trap offered by the false opposition of the title, many explored the way Blake uses natural imagery in metaphorical ways (the clod and the pebble, for example). The best answers were often from candidates who were aware of Blake's explicit identification of the imagination as a radical force. Such answers moved outside the Songs to discuss 'Auguries of Innocence' (infinity in a grain of sand, and so on) and 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'. There were useful comments on Blake's idea of 'four-fold vision'. However, most candidates in the middling mark range provided partly relevant commentaries on appropriate or not so appropriate poems. Abler candidates often engaged with the 'Romantic' contexts of the poems while less able ones dealt with the supposed political contexts. Less successful responses were often limited to a very small number poems, usually only from Innocence and

Experience. Some were so interested in the context (Swedenborg, the French revolution, slavery) that they made only limited reference to the text itself. Sometimes the advice to explore the language was completely ignored.

5(b) Evoking sympathy for the sufferings of others.

This was much the more popular question. Less successful answers tended to go through a few poems such as 'The Chimney Sweep', 'Holy Thursday' and 'London' and pause now and then to say 'this evokes sympathy.' There were, however, many more probing responses. Strong answers challenged the question and argued against the proposition that he was simply trying to evoke sympathy but instead was fuelled by a more focussed anger. One answer argued for a Brechtian effect, with Blake deliberately withholding pity – a refreshingly different approach. Another view was that though Blake often evokes sympathy for the sufferings of others, many of the poems, especially in Experience, 'suggest that the effect is self-imposed: people restrict themselves with "mind-forg'd manacles".' Some discussed Blake's exploration of 'sympathy for the victims of sexual and psychic repression as much as of poverty' and an alert response insisted that Blake arouses 'not sympathy but righteous indignation.' There was some adequate discussion of contextual issues such as the French Revolution and the social problems of England. Competent candidates were able to create a neat, balanced argument by listing examples of sympathy and suffering.

**6. Hopkins: Selected Poems**

6(a) Dominated by fear rather than joy.

This was much the more popular option. In the strongest answers, excellent use of text was tailored to tight, sophisticated arguments. AO3 was often detailed and subtle and biography was used intelligently, recognising different moods at different stages of his life. The opinions of established critics and biographers were considered and often challenged, the candidates preferring their own opinions. Many answers intertwined AO1/2/3/5ii to reach AO4, quoting critics, but often wrote personally too, identifying favourite poems. Some AO5ii was useful but the complications of inscape, instress etc. could be omitted in favour of an enthusiastic examination of the poems. Sometimes examples of 'fear' and 'joy' were simply listed. Fear was most commonly found in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' and the Terrible Sonnets. Fear of God, fear of disbelief and - as in 'Binsey Poplars' - fear of 'loss of haecitas' were discussed. (The specifically religious fears were sometimes illuminated, briefly and appositely, by biographical material.) Some – possibly a majority - found more joy than fear and especially joy in words: a 'celebratory use of language, a joy in dialect words, in cynghanedd.' Some, however, argued that 'Hopkins is constantly trying to find the right balance between his love of nature and creativity and the discipline and fear he feels to be part of religion.'

6(b) Senses versus intellect.

The few answers seen successfully drew the senses and the intellect together: for example 'arguably Hopkins's attention to the aesthetics of words is solely a vehicle for his ideas' including 'the fundamental essence, the "thisness", of each thing. The "dappled things" in "Pied Beauty" attempt to express the divine pattern in nature.' Another wrote that 'like a painting, Hopkins's poems connect with the reader on an emotional rather than an intellectual level.' 'Even though the literary references threaten to distance the reader from the poems, Hopkins uses them to inscape his own mentality.'

## SECTION B: Drama

### 7. Shakespeare: Hamlet

Hamlet produced very interested and interesting answers again this time. Each year brings its own topical issues: candidates this time were very aware of how much surveillance is going on at Elsinore. More Freudian criticism was seen. The quantity of quotation available to many was impressive. Some candidates wrote about the self-consciousness of the play, its soliloquies, for instance, making it apparently always aware of its audience. This could work well – particularly for Q7 (a), where even the audience became prisoners - but could also become altogether too theoretical.

#### 7(a) All the characters are prisoners.

Most candidates seemed not to have thought beforehand of the implications of the concept of imprisonment in the play but worked through a very plausible and highly successful interpretation of the question, which clearly illuminated their thinking. There was a wide interpretation of 'prisoners' whether literal or other senses of the word. There were many differing interpretations of imprisonment in the play – Denmark as a corrupt, captive state; the claustrophobia of the court; Hamlet seen as a prisoner of the ghost's impossible demands, revenge-hero expectations, or his own propensity to think too much. (On the other hand, some suggested, his real freedom - freedom of expression - is encountered in the soliloquies where he does that thinking.) Ophelia was seen as victim; Gertrude as victim of male domination. (Less secure answers often generalised crudely about women – apparently they were all prisoners in the Elizabethan period.) One answer saw Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as 'apparatchiks, slaves to the system'; and the Ghost was seen as imprisoned in Purgatory. Hamlet's preoccupation with acting and theatre emphasizes that 'all the characters are prisoners of the actors playing them, and they in turn of the script.' A number of mature responses considered the 'imprisoning' nature of tragedy as a form. This question provoked some very perceptive responses.

#### 7(b) Loyalty is the one redeeming virtue in the play.

'Loyalty' was a very fruitful source for discussion, and could be read in very different ways, offering the reader plenty of variety, even within individual centres. Some of the best candidates wrote of its double edged nature – an accepted virtue which might be the basis for the usually accepted evil of revenge. As with the first option, less able candidates were able to structure the answer simply by dealing with one character at a time. Some of the more persuasive pieces focused on Claudius' court as a centre of false loyalties. Claudius himself is a personification of disloyalty, 'ruthlessly efficient in his employment and his disposal of his subjects, as seen in his coercion of Laertes, his selfish reaction to Polonius' death, and his lack of effort to save his queen.' There were some interesting studies of Ophelia, torn between loyalties. Horatio was singled out as more loyal than any other character; 'loyalty is felt not only between Hamlet and Horatio but between the audience and Horatio.' 'Horatio's loyalty is the redeeming virtue of the play.' 'Horatio reminds us of human dignity – that love can remain despite evil and shows that relationships can be both complex and wonderful.'

### 8. Shakespeare: Measure for Measure

Most saw the complexities of the issues in the play and their only difficulty was writing about them all in an hour or so. As with 'Hamlet', a number had read criticism by actors, which they obviously found illuminating. Much writing was informed by experience of performance, which was often illuminating, and which added much to the commitment of candidates.

8(a) The main villain of the play is not Angelo, but the Duke.

This was a very successful question, in that candidates could agree, disagree or take up the prompt 'how far?' and discuss the culpability of both – and find plenty to write about and evidently plenty to interest them. The most successful answers were balanced, finding plenty to accuse Angelo of but also finding troublesome ambiguity in the Duke's actions and motives. One wrote 'While Angelo leaves [Isabella] a dreadful choice, the Duke leaves her no choice at all.' In fact most were more willing to excuse Angelo than the Duke. The variety of responses was welcomed and centres appear to have encouraged individual thought. There was some good recognition of the Problem and Morality Play elements which made candidates think more closely about roles and responsibilities inherent in the play. However, the main weakness was the lack of balance in many answers, most of whom took a distinctly anti-Duke stance. His lack of soliloquies, the lack of evidence as to how he sees himself, the fact that we see him in his roles as head of state and friar but rarely as an individual - all these were seen as contributing to the difficulty. Many answers seemed to comprise the 'case for the prosecution' should the Duke ever be put on trial. Too few answers seemed to understand why the Duke refuses to divulge to Isabella the fact that Claudio is alive or why he manipulates events in the final scene; one or two answers grasped that this has something to do with mercy. Conversely, many took an extremely pro-Angelo stance, finding all sorts of ways of apologising for his behaviour. Although Angelo may have claims on our sympathy, there was a tendency to avoid or to minimise, rather than discuss, the outrageousness of his treatment of Isabella. More balanced accounts saw elements of good man and villain in both men.

8(b) A play overshadowed by the idea of death.

This was attempted by very few. The best answer saw the main issues of the play – unmerciful justice, sexual repression, extremism – through the attitudes of the characters towards death – Isabella's unforgiving attitude to the death of Claudio, the Duke's terrifying enthusiasm to have Barnadine executed, Angelo's desire to die rather than experience mercy in the final scene. Some countered the proposition, pointing to the irrepressible evidence of life: even Mistress Overdone has a maternal side, even Elbow's wife is pregnant. Links between death and corruption were made as well as the threat of execution and its moral acceptability. While most generally agreed with the title proposition, they missed the opportunity to explore the concept of death through detailed textual AO3 analysis. One candidate countered the proposition by viewing Juliet as the key character, 'enskied', celebrating human love and fruitfulness. Even the Duke's proposal of marriage (despite the enigmatic silence) was seen by some as a positive ending, a triumph of love and good intentions over corruption and death.

## **9. Middleton: The Changeling**

9(a) DeFlores, at once hero and villain.

Many candidates wrote with real literary perception on De Flores' sinister ambiguity. 'There are heroic aspects to him - despite being ugly he woos a beautiful woman, perhaps presenting the most unlikely argument for personality over looks ever conceived.' Some were usefully aware of the tradition of the malcontent in Jacobean tragedy. 'His emergence carrying the finger of Alonso, an obvious phallic symbol, still joined to the finger which proclaimed his commitment under God, is perhaps the most iconic image of his sin.' Less confident answers gave a generalised outline of De Flores' actions.

9(b) The gradual unfolding of corruption and madness.

Perceptive answers were seen on the dramatic unfolding of corruption and madness within the play, referring both to the mad-house scenes and to the stifling corruption within the castle. Weaker essays quoted rarely and were narrative-dominated. Some answers were weakened because they discussed madness only in terms of Beatrice-Joanna, without reference to the madhouse scenes.

**10. Behn: The Rover**

10(a) Willmore as villain.

This was generally well answered. Willmore's actions and manner were carefully evaluated. The concept of simple villainy was profitably complicated by candidates' awareness of carnival - Willmore, said one, is 'a personification of carnival' and 'the social situation with its rakes, heroes and charming wits'. There were also some good studies of Behn's subversion of the male characters more generally - again moving away from simple character-sketching.

10(b) Women struggle for control.

This too was well answered. Quotation was ready and appropriate. Most writers focused on the status of women in the period and the different individual situations of Florinda, Hellena and Angellica Bianca. Several argued interestingly that Hellena is the real 'Rover'. Another fruitful approach was this: 'While the carnival setting allows the female characters to gain some control over their lives, it also makes them vulnerable and so demonstrates how difficult it really is to gain control'

**11. Gay: The Beggar's Opera**

The play was well known and both questions were tackled with depth and detail.

11(a) The appropriately cynical conclusion.

Cynicism at the conclusion and in the work more generally were well linked. Candidates found cynicism about the judicial system, Walpole's government and the fashionable opera. But 'the framing device ensures that the audience are fully aware that the characters are merely actors ... The audience has the freedom either to notice the cynical aspect or to treat it all as fantastical, and enjoy the songs.'

11(b) A satirical view of marriage.

Centres were well informed on the historic and theatrical context (AO2 and AO 5ii - Walpole, Italian opera, 18th century criminals and the ballad tradition.). Awareness of cynicism and parody were evident and lively insights and opinions about marriage and the family were confidently explored. This year, candidates made better references to the songs and the ballads, relating their content to the spoken dialogue

**12. Shaw: Mrs Warren's Profession**

Historical context was used rather better this year, though some alarming parodies of Shaw's social attitudes and the situation of women at the turn of the century still emerged. Responses were generally clearly focussed and well supported with textual evidence.

12(a) What Vivie and her mother have in common.

This was very popular. Most had no difficulty in finding examples of similarities and differences between the two women. The main difference was seen to be one of circumstance rather than character. Good use was made of Shaw's preface, of the contrasting costumes and the first appearances of Vivie and Mrs Warren, and of a range of characters. The danger was that candidates indulged in a pair of character studies rather than using the contrasts between the two protagonists to explore the

ideas of the play. While many fell into this trap, other candidates were more incisive in their willingness to explore the central ideas of the play, to offer psychological interpretation with insights such as the fact that their dislike of certain qualities in each other, was because they saw and disliked them in their selves and to explore the contradictions embodied in the figure of Vivie. Again, an ability to respond to complexity is a defining feature of an able candidate. Though better candidates also discussed Shaw's intentions as defined in the 'Preface', it was surprising how many of the middling or weaker candidates failed to mention Shaw's didactic intentions, as if these characters had suddenly appeared out of nowhere or were 'real'.

12(b) An attack on sexual hypocrisy.

This was also popular. Strong candidates explored the question in detail, looking closely at the portrayal of sexuality and gender in the play, and exploring its paradoxes and contradictions. They wrote knowledgeably about the 'well-made play' and Ibsen. Less secure answers tended to flatten out the oddness of the text, pretending that it is 'normal', while perceptive candidates engaged with that oddness and explored it insightfully.



**PRINCIPAL MODERATOR REPORT** **JUNE 2007**  
**ENGLISH LITERATURE AS and A2 COURSEWORK UNITS 2709 and 2711**

It is hard to make meaningful general comments when referring to such a large number of coursework essays from so many very different Centres and candidates, and based upon so many individually selected texts and tasks, and it will inevitably be the case that every piece of praise below will not be relevant to at least some Centres, and equally that every piece of criticism will not be relevant to many. One general comment, however, echoed by almost every Moderator this summer, must be to say how very pleasing and often very good indeed was the overall standard of work seen; of course there were exceptions to this, but as in previous years this Report will open with a few very typical remarks:

- once again, there was some very impressive work at the top of the mark range . . . more than a handful of candidates submitted folders for Unit 2709 that would not be out of place at undergraduate level;
- moderating work in Unit 2711 once again provided an opportunity to read some truly exciting and illuminating work;
- it was, as always, a genuine pleasure to read the work of candidates demonstrating an impressive grasp of and enthusiasm for their texts;
- moderating continues to be an enjoyable, interesting and enlightening experience;
- I continue to feel positive about the way that Coursework is able to generate some excellent critical writing at the highest level, yet at the same time can bring out the best in candidates whose responses are enthusiastic but less sophisticated and less incisive.

It is entirely evident that at the top of the mark-range of both 2709 and 2711 the ablest candidates are capable of writing critical essays of the highest calibre; it is also evident that apart from a very small handful of candidates who struggle to compose any really clear argument the great majority, at a variety of levels, manage to do themselves and their teachers proud. Work this summer was on the whole soundly or well written and organised, thoughtfully argued, in response to what the five Assessment Objectives require, and above all else demonstrating not merely knowledge and understanding but also some genuine interest and frequently pleasure in what was being discussed. Coursework has once more demonstrated its value in helping individual response and critical awareness – there was, for example, rather less evidence this year of reliance upon “taught” ideas or class notes, or of “borrowed” or simply copied ideas; there was on the contrary considerable evidence of real personal thinking and writing, which is what Coursework at its best should encourage.

There were niggles and irritations, of course – and it might be sensible to clear some of these first; none of them was entirely new, and it was disappointing for Moderators to find the same concerns appearing session after session, despite repeated reference to them in previous Reports.

The submission of marks and/or work to Moderators must be completed by **May 15<sup>th</sup>** – the date is the same every year, for all Coursework, and unless there is a particular and unforeseeable crisis within the Centre there really should be no need for either marks or work to be sent late; to do so inevitably puts unnecessary pressure upon the Moderator, and there can be little excuse for sending work several weeks, even a month, beyond the deadline. If there *is* a sudden problem within the Centre, contact must be made with OCR and the Moderator.

It is equally irritating for a Moderator to receive a mark-sheet that is unclear, or even occasionally with no apparent marks on it at all. There were, too, rather more complaints than usual from Moderators about arithmetical errors, or discrepancies between the mark-sheet and the mark on the candidates’ work. Too many cover-sheets lacked candidate numbers, again necessitating additional work for the Moderator, who must be sure that s/he is looking at the correct folder. Moderators are teachers too, and are well aware of the pressures that Centres face, but it really would be helpful if small administrative tasks could be correctly completed.

Some Centres continued to send work with no means of holding the sheets of paper together, seemingly unconcerned at the potential chaos if the packet were to be torn open in the post and candidates' work muddled; treasury tags or staples are very secure and quick to use.

Some Centres ignore the rule about word-length – sometimes apparently quite deliberately – and allow essays of significantly more than 3000 words to be submitted. The 3000-word limit is not an OCR quibble – it is a QCA ruling, designed to ensure that all candidates work within the same rules, and to allow a breach of this is surely a little bit like allowing some candidates to have extra time in an examination because they have more to say than they can manage in the 90 minutes or whatever time is allocated. The procedure for dealing with over-long work is clearly indicated on the cover-sheet and in the Specification booklet, and Moderators are instructed to return all such work for re-marking.

One comment this summer, however – made by more than one Moderator – was unexpected and worrying: a number of Centres noted in their annotations or summative comments that there were QWC errors or weaknesses in a candidate's work, but then gave the work full or very nearly full marks. As one Moderator put it, *"there were Centres who seemed to ignore poor management of AO1 when this was evident in basic errors, poor structure or unlinked argument, yet who still gave a high mark based upon raw content rather than upon the effectiveness of the candidate's presentation of an argument."* Of course the ideas and critical thoughts of an essay are paramount, but given the demands of AO1 (dominant in Unit 2711) and those of QWC it seems curious, and even perverse, for a Centre to comment but to take no "punitive" action when syntactical weaknesses occurred.

Enough of general quibbles, though these were relevant to a surprisingly large number of Centres. As noted at the start of this Report, the majority of Centres and of candidates prepared and submitted work of good quality. Centre assessment was undertaken very much in line with what the Assessment Objectives and the related Band Descriptions require, frequently with clear and helpful evidence of double marking or other forms of internal standardisation; this last will almost inevitably lead to more secure marking, and certainly to secure rank-ordering of essays. Marginal annotation was widely used, usually indicating where and how successfully a particular AO had been addressed; the best annotation was not detailed – an AO number with a tick, a double tick, or possibly a question mark alongside, was often sufficient to show an acknowledgement of where the candidate had addressed the requirement – but it was often supported by a summative comment on the essay and/or on the cover-sheet, making clear how and why a Band, then a mark, had been agreed upon. Essays with no annotation or comment were happily rare this summer, though as always this lack of evidence was not helpful.

Moderators commented on the apparently growing confidence this summer with which Centres, and therefore candidates, approached the demands of the AOs; there were still weaknesses in some areas, but overall there was a sense that the demands that these make of candidates have been much more fully absorbed, and that the need, for example, to make use of contextual material was far more fluently integrated rather than simply bolted on in order to tick a particular box. As one Moderator put it: *"this is what Coursework is really asking candidates to do – forget the AOs, and argue a passionate case about their text, looking closely at the sweep of the text and its detail, making illuminating connections, making apposite references to cultural movements or to periods of history, and developing their argument through a thoughtful consideration of what other people have said."* Despite the apparently cavalier attitude to the AOs implied here, in fact a candidate who does all this will invariably address precisely everything that each AO and each Band Description requires, and will at the same time demonstrate the excitement and pleasure that is so very evident in many essays.

**AO1**, and the associated **QWC**, have already been touched upon; this is dominant in Unit 2711, carrying more weight than any other single AO, and for a high mark markers must therefore expect – particularly at A2 level – a thoroughly accurate and well-sustained, cogent, argument.

An essay should not be considered for a Band Five mark unless these three elements are clearly of an excellent level; the ideas expressed must of course be supported and illustrated by frequent and apposite brief quotation and reference to the text, but these alone cannot be used to justify a top-band placing.

**AO2** was managed a little better this summer than in the past, especially in Unit 2709, where it is dominant, though it remained one of the least well handled aspects of AS work. Many Centres, for entirely understandable reasons, continue to set the same passage and the same task for candidates in their selected-passage piece in this Unit, but while this may sometimes help the less confident to respond thoughtfully and carefully, it may at the same time hinder the kind of lively and individual response that attracts the highest marks. Candidates who chose their own passage very often did so because they found particular interest and relevance in what they selected, and could therefore write about it with much greater freedom.

Relating the passage to the whole text is the first and most important part of AO2, and this is absolutely crucial; no matter how closely and critically the passage is explored (**AO3** was often very strong) if its relationship to the rest of the text is unexplored the essay *cannot and must not* achieve a high mark. It is not enough to add a final sentence or two at the end of the essay – the links must be constant and integrated. This is perhaps especially important, though certainly not uniquely so, when the selected passage is a poem; there must be frequent and illustrated references to a number of other poems in the collection being studied.

The relationship must, too, be more than just narrative- or character-based; candidates need to show how the selected passage is in specific ways illustrative of thematic ideas that pervade the whole text, and of how its particular stylistic characteristics reflect those of the text as a whole. The focus of this piece is of course the selected passage or poem, but this needs to be seen more as a springboard for consideration of wider issues than simply as an end in itself.

Genre and period concerns need to be considered too as part of AO2; there is clearly some overlap here with what AO5 requires, but for the highest marks it is crucial that consideration is given to not merely contextual *facts* of the period and genre concerned, but to ways in which these have influenced the writing of the passage/poem in question.

Candidates writing work in Unit 2711 are at some advantage with regard to AO2, in that they do not need to identify and explore just one passage (many do, and this is entirely legitimate, but it is not the most common approach); A2 essays need to demonstrate a fluent and easy ability to move about the text, drawing comparisons, contrasts and connections within it, while addressing and exploring the same concerns as those listed above for AS work.

As just noted, **AO3** was generally quite well handled, though more concentration does need to be given to the form and structure of the passage concerned (2709) or to those of the whole text (2711); too many candidates concentrate over-much on the writer's use of language, and on literary techniques such as alliteration, simile, onomatopoeia and so on, forgetting about wider stylistic effects. And rather too many Centres are happy to tick every quotation from the passage or text and indicate "AO3" in the margin, even where there is no critical comment on it at all; quotation *per se* may be an AO1 feature, but it is certainly not helpful for AO3.

A lot has been said in previous Reports about **AO4**, and there was some evidence this summer that Centres are becoming a little more confident about this. Too many still ticked and rewarded a candidate's personal opinion about a text; this is one element of what AO4 requires, but it is not central – what is needed is that such opinions are formed as an explicit result of considering other actual or possible views and interpretations. The Band Descriptions for both 2709 and 2711 make it absolutely clear that this is crucial for a mark in Band Two and above, and that for a Band Four or Five mark there must be a real *engagement* with such views – simply quoting them, or even using them as illustration or support, is not sufficient. Many Centres set a provocative or challenging task, so that candidates must inevitably take issue with at least one

“alternative” view, but even where this is done there needs to be at least one other, whether real or possible. Phrases such as “some critics have said . . .”, “it could be argued that . . . .”, “many people think that . . . .” are acceptable, of course, but not for high-band marks, where real alternative ideas do need to be grappled with. Where AO4 is managed well it can lead to some interesting and thoughtful writing; one Moderator was “*extremely impressed with the range of supporting supplementary reading that the majority of candidates had clearly undertaken; at its best this reading provided real opportunities for engaging with challenging ideas rather than just ticking a box.*” This surely is what AO4 is looking for.

**AO5** was handled with far greater ease and sophistication by most candidates this summer than has sometimes been the case, and the days of the potted biography or social history do seem to have passed. Candidates in both Units were much better able to integrate a range of appropriate and helpful contextual material quite confidently and seamlessly into their writing; the important word here of course is “appropriate” – historical, social, literary or biographical information is of little or no value in itself unless clearly and relevantly linked to what the essay is about.

Enough has been said in previous Reports about choice of texts and wording of tasks, and Centres still have the opportunity to seek advice on both of these areas through the Coursework Consultancy service, accessible by contacting OCR, or by attending one of the series of INSET courses in the autumn. In brief, though, much of the best work in both Units does continue to come from candidates who have had at least some say in the wording of their tasks, or in the choice of their selected passage, or even in the choice of text; where all candidates do exactly the same task – a common feature in 2709, and for entirely understandable reasons – there is a clear tendency towards sameness across all essays; this may sometimes help the less confident but will very probably hold back the individuality and independence of the most confident and able. It is perhaps worth noting the comment of many Moderators that where a candidate demonstrates genuine originality, whether in the choice of text or in the wording of the task, or of course in the approach taken during the work itself, then Centres will quite rightly be looking for higher marks. *The Great Gatsby*, *The Crucible*, Sylvia Plath’s poetry are of course entirely worthy of close and prolonged study, but do not invariably lead to the freshest responses; it was good this year to see Chaucer, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Austen, Lawrence, as well as some more recent texts – *Disgrace*, *Fingersmith*, *The Kite Runner*, *Saturday* (and much excellent work on *Atonement*). New drama and new poetry remain rare in Unit 2709, as does recreative work – though Moderators certainly reported some good examples of the latter. Teachers will, and must, work to their own interests and enthusiasms, and of course will necessarily be bound by their Centres’ budgets, but it has to be said that much of the very best writing this year, as every year, came from candidates striking out on different and enthusiastic routes; as one Moderator says, “*moderating once again gave me the opportunity to read some truly exciting and illuminating work*” – this is Coursework at its very best.

**General comments**

As ever, this report should be read in conjunction with previous 2712 reports, all of which are readily available from OCR. Some parts reiterate good advice which still is not heeded by all.

Most answers showed an enthusiastic engagement with the text whatever the ability, and there was much sophisticated writing. It is now rare to see a script where the candidate has failed to divide time more or less equally between the two questions. The following points to be read within these encouraging contexts.

As mentioned in the January report, it is a good idea to avoid irritating the examiner by failing to write the number and option of the questions tackled in the boxes provided on the front cover of the answer book, and at the commencement of the answer itself.

The demands of Sections A and B are different. Candidates sometimes ignore this to their cost, the most frequent error being to write Section B type essays for a Section A question, resulting in scant focus upon chosen passages and thus demonstrating little AO3. For instance, see comments below on *To The Lighthouse*. It is surprising, given the targeting of AO3 across the AS and A2 specification, that candidates are sometimes so desperate to show how much they have learned, or how fully developed their thematic interpretation of the novel, that they fail to target AO3 where the requirement is explicit.

**Section A**

The Unit is now in its twelfth session, yet one wonders whether some candidates have seen and studied a previous 2712 examination paper, and noted the importance of the rubric box at the head of Section A which clearly specifies two things: that 'each chosen passage should be no longer than two sides of text and must be clearly identified'. Failure clearly to identify the passages was an oversight by some candidates, but others completely neglected to fix on particular parts of their text. This not only meant that AO1 suffered, but so too did detailed AO2 and AO3. Section A answers should commence something like this:

My chosen passages from 'Cold Comfort Farm' are from Chapter 3, pages 37-39 (Penguin edition), beginning "A strange film passed over Adam's eyes..." and ending "The porridge boiled over."; and Chapter 7, pages 77-78, beginning "...The man's big body" to "...in a bright, interested voice."

A crisp start, clearly defining the passages, often led on to a crisp, relevant response.

**Section B**

There is a need to define terms at the outset of an answer if a candidate is not to risk getting tied up in knots (see comments below on the *Cold Comfort Farm* and *A Thousand Acres* Section B answers). Also, all the terms of the question must be addressed, preferably in the opening paragraph where the answer should set out its stall (see comments below on the *Atonement* answers).

There is nothing wrong with adopting a chronological approach to an answer if that suits the question. What is not likely to draw high marks is the kind of narrative approach where a question is used merely to go through the story of a novel without regard to a strict focus on the demands of the question (See comments below on the *Atonement* and *Rites of Passage* answers).

Some candidates did not address AO5ii contextual requirements, even implicitly. Others appeared to think that AO5ii means reference to other texts, and whilst that might illuminate (for instance with *Atonement* and *A Thousand Acres*), such references usually did little to improve answers.

### **Cold Comfort Farm**

This is a popular text, and there were some amusing answers which matched the wit of the original. In the Section A question on town and country values, answers were sometimes thin on AO3 and some did not take on the word 'values', writing general responses on the presentation of the similarities and differences of town and country. In the Section B question on relationships between the sexes, the terms 'realistic' and 'farfical' were rarely defined; but those answers which did so tended to produce good AO4. Weaker answers sometimes laboured examples of farce in relationships, more successful ones dealt with how the novel presents some realism through farce, showing awareness that the terms are not necessarily opposites. On the alternative question of whether the novel has a moral purpose or merely pokes fun, candidates often have trouble discussing humour, and weaker answers presented and described a list of examples. 'Moral purpose' was rarely defined, but some stronger answers linked it to an AO5-type exploration of such matters as the predicament of women in a rural society or the power of education to liberate.

### **Atonement**

This is another popular text which produced some confident answers. The Section A question on sense of place yielded varied responses, some of them excellent. The focus was often upon a combination of the Tallis house and grounds, Briony's hospital, and/or Robbie's wartime surroundings. Some defined 'sense of place' as referring to a character's sense of their place in the scheme of things, and this take on the question was accepted - although in general candidates who interpreted the question as referring to a physical or geographical place seemed to find it easier to advance detailed textual support for their ideas. The Section B question on heroes/villains/victims produced some strong answers, better candidates using the three terms to build a firm framework for their essays. Weaker responses tended to be narrative in approach, and sometimes forgot about one of the key terms in the question. Likewise with the alternative question on guilt and its consequences, weaker candidates sometimes ignored 'its consequences' and, again, produced mainly narrative responses. Those candidates who looked beyond the 'events' of the novel to its construction produced much better answers.

### **Rites of Passage**

This text was not quite as popular as in previous sessions, but there were many good answers on it. In the Section A question on 'being at sea' almost all answers took the phrase literally, although a handful of the better ones saw and used the possible metaphorical inference. The Section B question on Talbot was the more popular, but weaker responses tended to be narrative in approach. Few candidates considered the term 'how far', and those who did produced stronger answers. The alternative on 'crossing the line' drew some excellent answers, with candidates sometimes revelling in the various metaphorical possibilities.

### **Open Secrets**

There were too few responses on this text for meaningful comment here.

### **To the Lighthouse**

This is another popular text. The Section A question on two female characters produced a significant number of Section B rather than Section A type answers. Some wrote with relish on the two Section B questions, and there was much effective and well understood AO5. There were some particularly strong responses to the question on a sense of hope in the novel. The alternative on the novel as 'a kind of ghost story' drew one or two excellent responses, but there were a greater number of candidates who, although there was an attempt to define terms, were not able effectively to demonstrate a link between the proposition and their knowledge of the text.

### **A Thousand Acres**

The Section A question on Larry was, in general, appropriately answered, although some responses went little beyond character studies. There was a good range of answers on the Section B essay concerning the men as blameworthy, and a few excellent answers on the alternative about 'probing'; however, on the latter some failed to sort out their reading of the prompt quotation at the beginning of the essay, and therefore tended thereafter to tie themselves in knots over whether or not it fitted with their reading of the text.

### **Letter to Daniel**

There were too few responses to this text for valid comment here.

### **An Evil Cradling**

This text is becoming increasingly popular and candidates tend to write well on it. The Section A question on cruelty was generally well answered, but sometimes the meaning of 'cruelty' was stretched to the limit (e.g. Keenan's 'cruelty' to John in exposing him to risk through his defiance), and this kind of approach tended to produce weak answers. Occasionally there was little attempt to compare the chosen passages. Both the Section B questions on Keenan's presentation of himself and compassion/selfishness produced generally good answers, the former drawing especially thoughtful responses when the candidate kept 'present himself' in the foreground. A surprise was the occasional paucity of AO5ii evaluation on a text which abounded in opportunities for it.

Neil King  
Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2007





## Report for Publication to Centres (June 2007)

### 2713 – Comparative and Contextual Study

#### General Comments

This summer's paper reflected the work of candidates who are now largely confident with this specification. The very best work seen was exhilarating to read and beautifully constructed ("the best wrote with lapidary precision" wrote one examiner) whilst there were very few candidates who struggled with the requirements of the examination. There were few rubric infringements, although there was an increase in the number of candidates who wrote their Section A answers on the wrong topic, seeming to choose the first they saw rather than that which pertained to the topic area they had studied. Elsewhere, examiners recorded that most candidates balanced their time well, with relatively few manifestly running out of time on their second answer. In respect of topics studied, Satire was the least seen, whilst there was a slight increase in the study of Post-Colonial Literature; the other four were much more in evidence, albeit that Writing of the Romantic Era is much the smallest of the 'big 4', and The Gothic Tradition is now decidedly the major topic by volume.

Flaws and weaknesses in candidates' approach to the paper have been outlined in previous reports, and it is frustrating that, broadly, they remain the same this year as in previous sessions. That said, a majority of centres have now grasped the philosophy that underpins the paper securely, and understand the required balance in their approach. Nonetheless, it remains that where candidates under-perform it is frequently because they do not target with sufficient precision the particular demands of the different parts of the exam.

In Section A many candidates still skip over the primary requirement to 'write a critical appreciation of the passage' – despite the prompt on the question paper that is specifically there as a reminder. They tend to concentrate their efforts on the secondary requirement to relate their discussion to wider reading in the topic, such that AO2 and AO5ii comment and comparison weighs too heavily: candidates must always keep the extract in the foreground of their attention in this section. A second cause of below par attainment occurs when candidates approach passages determined to find what they expect or want to see, and assess the given passage according to the notional checklist of qualities or components ('tropes' is the favoured term) that they bring into the exam room with them. As one examiner put it, their "preoccupation was 'does this passage conform to the rules of the genre X?', rather than actually just looking closely at the qualities of the writing in front of them".

In Section B more limited answers tended to fall into two broad groups, namely those that failed to sustain AO2 and those whose knowledge was sketchy or thin – both of text and AO5 context – such that argument or, more accurately, assertion was scant. In the former case, it was not uncommon for candidates to write exhaustively and in great detail about the primary text but fail to compare it with at least one other text in any depth or with any complexity. This, statistically, was particularly a problem with *Frankenstein* and *Tender is the Night*. These are texts which many candidates wrote enthusiastically about but often as if they were 2710 texts. Consequently discussion of them was frequently in isolation, such that candidates too often did not leave sufficient time or space to develop an argument that *compared* texts, thus overlooking the primary target of the section. In short, 2713 is not about the set texts *per se*, it is about the topic, and many candidates unfortunately lose sight of this important distinction.

At the other extreme are those candidates who know their texts at the level of an overview only, resulting in answers that do not substantiate the ideas being put forward. Candidates who have learned their material thoroughly and are able to support their case with evidence tend to do well (subject to the caveat in the paragraph above). It is not necessary to have a large number of texts at one's disposal, but examiners report that many ostensibly able candidates did less well than they might have owing to the paucity of their underpinning textual support.

Whilst they may have been trying to make a valid case in response to a question, they often floundered on the rocks of thin assertion.

One criticism made by some examiners in this session is that several candidates are not actually reading the questions closely enough. Problems have arisen in two principal formats: actual misreadings of questions or, more often, partial or inadequate readings of questions, whereby only half a question is tackled with the 'tricky bit' overlooked or ignored. This is sometimes because candidates, in reductive terms, have got prepared material that they wish to write about and thus they feel a need to twist a question to what they know. This, obviously, is a self-limiting procedure.

## Comments on individual topic areas

### Satire

This topic was little studied this year, so broad comments here are made with caution since patterns of performance are not too discernible. Nonetheless, most candidates tackled the element common to all answers, the passage from Ray Bradbury's short story *The Pedestrian*, with confidence. Bradbury's nightmare scenario was effectively related to other dystopian visions such as *Brave New World* and *1984* with their emphasis on mass conformity and the sinister suppression of individuality. There was much reference to the police car as the embodiment of dehumanized authority and the harshly relentless interrogation, with several candidates making effective AO3 comment in this regard. Leonard Mead was uniformly regarded as the unwitting victim of forces beyond his control, and as a figure who represented the individual, with a number of candidates placing the passage within the context of 1950s America with the McCarthy communist witch-hunts and the insidious, creeping fear of non-conformity.

Question 7a, which asked candidates to consider whether satirists needed 'to be a detached observer of human affairs', drew a range of responses that compared Pope primarily with Swift. Candidates dwelt at length on the differences between Horatian satire – detached, urbane, wryly amused – and Juvenalian satire – bitterly personal, vitriolic even – and saw advantages in each, though many argued that the potency of satire dissipated when the target of an attack was not known as a figure of significance to the reader. Interestingly, some candidates felt that Swift was *too* undetached at times. Question 7b ('satirists seek to expose the decay of civilisation') was little attempted: one examiner noted that candidates struggled to define the concept of civilization, which clearly hampered their responses. This, in passing, raises the broader, important observation that defining terms in an answer is a valuable approach because it helps an examiner understand the scope of an answer and, crucially, shows that a candidate is focusing closely on the terms of the question at issue. Question 7c proved the most popular of the three and candidates seemed broadly confident in discussing wit and humour, for all that most did not distinguish between the two and regarded them as synonymous. Those candidates who had studied *England, England* found much to say about the range of humour to be found in the novel, from the surreal to the darkly threatening, but a majority of candidates wrote most about *The Rape of the Lock*, observing Pope's wit both in subject matter and in satirical form.

### The Gothic Tradition

The passage from *The Ash Tree* worked very well, and interpretations were varied. Whilst many candidates decided that 1904 meant that the text was 'modern' (or even 'contemporary', to some) it was common to read that it was firmly part of the late Victorian Gothic revival, whilst others viewed it as a parodic extract, with James satirising the excesses of Gothic stereotypes. Good answers analysed the fragmentary nature of the narrative, with its shifting tenses and their effect, as well as James's use of stock Gothic conventions such as the building of suspense, the fear of the unknown, the supernatural and, as virtually everyone observed it seems, weak,

emotional women! Some did note the weak emotional gardener also, just to even matters up. More seriously, many candidates noted a religious sub-text in the passage, not only in the biblical quotation (which few really got a handle on as a proleptic marker) and the figure of the Bishop of Kilmore, but also in the idea of the ash tree itself, and were able to discuss the AO5 implications of religious iconography in the Gothic tradition.

Of the two set texts, *Frankenstein* is significantly the most studied, and by far the most common comparator is *Dracula*, although the numbers writing on *The Dead School* are increasing. Questions 8a ('It is a convention of the Gothic that human beings should be portrayed as weak and powerless') and 8c ('Society creates its own monsters') were hugely popular and both were generally well answered. Candidates used Shelley's text to challenge the former question, seeing Victor as in some ways strong and powerful, driven by a (perverse) vision to impressive heights of achievement – creating life is, after all, God-like – only to fall to the depths from an excess of self absorption and pride. There was much reference to the weakness of women, exemplified mainly by Elizabeth and Justine, although many did argue the contrary about Elizabeth, saying she was not personally weak, but that she was powerless in the patriarchal society in which she lived. The Crew of Light in *Dracula* was posited by some as figures of strength. Many candidates discussed the monster also, naturally enough, but few considered the fundamental question of whether 'he' was a 'he' or an 'it', a central concern in a question that asks about the portrayal of human beings.

Question 8b was written about well by those who had studied *The Dead School*, and the descent into madness by Raphael and Malachy was well rehearsed, and candidates drew parallels between them with assurance. Some distinguished between internal and external loss of control, and interesting comparison was drawn in particular with *The Wasp Factory*, where several candidates noted that the issue was conversely about having too much control.

8c proved accessible to candidates of all abilities, and candidates almost uniformly saw Victor, the monster (obviously), and society itself as monsters and monstrous. Victor had little if any sympathy from the candidature: he was evidently a flawed father who abrogated his duty to his child (sic), and he was monstrous, too, for playing God when he shouldn't have. In contrast to such simplistic lines of argument, many wrote excellently about the metaphorical construct of the monster as an externalisation of societal fears in the context of Revolution. Where *The Dead School* was referred to, both Raphael and Malachy were deemed monsters, yet victims, owing to their warped and disturbed childhoods.

### Writing of the Romantic Era

Examiners saw a range of responses to the extract from *Adonais* and the best were, in the words of one examiner, "brilliant". Candidates who have studied this topic seem to have a particularly strong AO5 understanding that underpins their answers, and they were able to place Shelley's poetry in its context with confidence. Candidates of all ability were able to trace the imaginative, personal response to Keats's death, and discuss issues relating to nature, human suffering, death, and the immortality of art. The best answers went further, however, and explored the paradox of the living being in a state of death compared with the new life Keats is experiencing in death. Equally, several candidates drew parallels between these stanzas and intertextual echoes within them to Keats's own verse, notably the *Odes*. Regrettably, there were a few candidates who appeared to think this was a complete poem, despite the numbering of the stanzas and the gloss at the top of the question paper informing them that it was an extract, and as a consequence this hampered their answers.

Question 9a ('consider the significance of beauty in Romantic writing') was answered well by those that attempted it, although they were relatively few as a proportion. The text cited and explored most was *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and candidates discussed it confidently, with the tension between transitoriness and permanence in beauty and its essence as fact or platonic ideal being common areas of analysis. The most frequent comparison was made with

Wordsworth, and *Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey* in particular. However, more than one examiner observed that it was common for candidates to overdo their discussion of Keats at the expense of comparison: this restricted the attainment of some.

9b (on 'the importance of childhood in writing of the Romantic era') was little answered, but *We are Seven* and *Michael* were discussed sensibly, and most candidates compared with depictions of childhood in Blake. Weaker answers tended to list poems in which children are mentioned, but evocations of innocence were usefully explored elsewhere.

Question 9c, which asked candidates to consider the proposition that 'Romantic writing shows a sensitive alertness to human suffering', generated many good answers, albeit that the 'sensitive alertness' tag was overlooked or ignored by many candidates. *Ode to a Nightingale* and *Ode on Melancholy* were much to the fore in respect of Keats's examination and exploration of his own suffering, and candidates compared with Blake in the main, but also Wordsworth (*Peele Castle*) and Coleridge (*Rime of the Ancient Mariner*). For many, the creative imagination was an escape from suffering, and a number of stronger answers brought in a political dimension to their responses, drawing on Rousseau and the idea of human oppression.

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Prose

All examiners reported that candidates responded to the passage from *Native Son* with both enthusiasm and insight, with even the weakest finding a wide range of elements to discuss, even if at a basic level: racism, freedom, dreams and aspirations, technological and industrial advance and consumerism were common areas of consideration. It was pleasing to note, though, that a large majority of candidates found substantial AO3 opportunities for comment, not least in the change of narrative tone towards the end from the dryly laconic to the more harsh "hard laughter", as well as the powerful plane metaphor. A few candidates' historical grasp was significantly awry in believing that Gus and Bigger were slaves, but the vast majority qualified this intelligently by arguing that they were economic slaves (in comparison with the 'free' white landlords, white pilots and car drivers) or politically disempowered. Many saw an underlying passivity, even apathy, in Gus and Bigger's mien, one that they hid behind a mask of humour, although many noted the "pensive, brooding" element too.

Question 10a proved the most popular choice, not least because far more candidates write on *Tender is the Night* than *Postcards*. The issue of a 'dangerous fascination with the brilliant and the glamorous' proved accessible to all, even if those who had studied Proulx's text argued it in the alternative. The quality of answers often depended on the precision with which candidates dissected the question. Weaker answers tended to list examples of the brilliant and the glamorous, mostly comparing *Gatsby* and the Buchanans with the Divers' social round, but better responses tried to tackle the aspects of danger and fascination. There was critically astute and sensitive analysis of Fitzgerald's construction of Dick Diver as a character and of the social and emotional milieu he found so dangerously attractive – but there was scarcely a shred of sympathy for him. *Gatsby* fared somewhat better in this regard. Because candidates unquestioningly accepted Nick Carraway as a reliable narrator they took *Gatsby* very much at his (Carraway's) final estimate, namely a better man than those who put him down. Tom, Daisy and the hapless Wilson were all seen as pursuing dangerous paths and all paid a heavy price; Nick Carraway was patently 'fascinated' with all this. Many candidates observed that it is the brilliant and glamorous women – Nicole, Rosemary, Daisy - who survive and prosper.

10b ('Much 20<sup>th</sup> Century American prose addresses the need to come to terms with the iron necessities of life') was least answered, but candidates generally displayed a good knowledge of *Postcards* and many went beyond listing Loyal's many jobs. Stronger answers observed that there was scope to consider broader AO5 considerations of America as a capitalist country built on ideas of individualism and economic advance, and several could draw on influences such as the Depression and the Wall Street Crash permeating texts. Good answers considered aspects of economic imperative, which is how most read 'iron necessities', and managed to make

valuable comparisons with various works by Steinbeck and *The Color Purple*. Some candidates argued persuasively that even the rich are driven by a need and desire for money, although their reasons pertain to social goals more than basic survival.

Question 10c produced a variety of responses, and attainment often depended on how candidates construed the question. Weaker responses tended to list 'dark pasts', with Nicole's being the most cited and evaluated, together with Loyal's. Many candidates observed usefully that Loyal Blood's dark past remains with him, paradoxically, as an ongoing present throughout the book. Jay Gatsby was often referred to, with his bootlegging activities being parenthetically referred to in many cases, but less persuasive were those who claimed that his existence as Jay Gatz was dark for no other reason than, simply, that it was in the past. Few explored why, or if, or how, it may have been 'dark'.

### Post-1945 Drama

Examiners report unanimously that the passage from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was answered well in the main, except to the extent that several candidates from several centres adopted a technique of using the passage as a launch pad for finding parallels or similarities in other plays they had studied, at the expense of analysing the passage itself in its own right. Thus Brick's crutch was a reminder of Max's stick in *The Homecoming*, his sucking of ice was like Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and so on. Beyond that, there were many excellent analyses of Williams' characteristic theatrical concerns and methods and some effective references to other of his plays and those of Miller, Albee and Pinter (for all that a few weaker candidates tried to argue that this was kitchen sink drama, or theatre of the absurd). Candidates confidently discussed the expressionistic elements of the passage – shrill laughs, eerie green glows, plantation songs, crumbling yellow plaster faces – but did not always go on to discuss how these added to the effects of the drama. Thematically, truth and illusion were the core focuses for many answers, with many honing in on Brick's gnomic "Mendacity is a system that we live in". However, many others explored the contrast between Big Daddy's blunt self-assertion and Brick's, as one examiner put it, "eloquent obliquity"; the double meaning of the crutch, both as a symbol of control when fought over and, ironically, a signifier of disability; the implicit and explicit violence within the scene. Candidates who attempted to argue that these were poor working class characters because they didn't speak grammatically correct English did not really make a persuasive case, not least because they had not observed the fact of the 28,000 acre estate.

Question 11a (on love as "a deeply problematic emotion") was a popular choice. Martha and George's relationship was the most common relationship to be scrutinised, although many candidates tended to assert conclusions about it: they were 'obviously' in love really, or 'clearly' hated each other, but frequently such blunt claims would remain unsupported. Ultimately, though, few challenged the proposition in the question. George and Martha, Nick and Honey, Willy and Linda, Stanley and Stella, Blanche and Allen, Ruth and just about everyone were all found to have deeply problematical relationships, with degrees of similarity and dissimilarity between them. Candidates tended to warm to, and have sympathy for, those who displayed passion and raw emotion; there was less favour for the cool, the clinical and the callous.

Question 10b (which looked at how dramatists 'seek to shock audiences into seeing the world in a new way') was the least answered of the three, but usually answered well. The notion of 'shock' was well grasped, and candidates referred intelligently to qualities of language, staging (through the theatre of the absurd) and action (violence, for instance) as well as theme. Extremes of profanity and verbal abuse from Max and his sons and Martha and George and the explicit use of intimidating and provocative sexuality from Ruth and Martha formed the central thrust of several good answers.

The 10c option, on the dramatization of hope and hopelessness in Post-1945 Drama, proved popular and accessible also. Many candidates used material that ostensibly overlapped with 10a, but turned it fruitfully and appositely to the task. Several candidates explored the ambiguity of the family dynamic of *The Homecoming* and were often undecided as to whether Pinter's play ended positively or negatively (much as he would wish?) whilst a majority found hope in the ending of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* despite the turmoil of what has gone before. Blanche's dashed hopes of escaping her invidious situation were also discussed. Unsurprisingly, those who had studied American texts managed to include the American Dream in their answers, but in the case of Arthur Miller in particular this was often very well done. *Death of a Salesman* and *View from a Bridge* proved notably fruitful texts for candidates.

### **Post-Colonial Literature**

As with Satire, comments on this topic are made with caution owing to the relatively few answers seen by examiners. Despite this, reports are unanimous that candidates tackled the Benjamin Zephaniah poem with gusto. Responses were divided in their opinion: some argued that the person 'protests too much' about not having an identity crisis, so proving he has one, and is therefore in denial; by contrast, others argued powerfully that the narrative voice is a strong, empowered, politically astute voice that fully understands the cultural positioning of the liberal establishment, one that he is not going to conform to. He is not going to be an alienated, dislocated voice of frustration; in fact, quite the opposite, and many candidates warmed to the positive nature of the message.

*White Teeth* was much more in evidence than Walcott's poetry and as a result 10b and 10c were answered more than 10a. Few candidates picked up on the term 'challenge' in 10b and tended to write straightforwardly about how colonizing culture leads towards hybridity, although some candidates took the line that Smith just 'tells it like it is' and does not adopt a political stance at all. The idea that post-colonial literature is, perhaps, a retort to this notion was not really taken up. Equally, therefore, 'mixed cultural heritage' in 10c tended to become somewhat blurred with answers that took the stance outlined above, although candidates were clear in their view that mixed heritage *is* a strength and something to be celebrated. Whilst 10a (on the significance of memory in Post-Colonial literature) was least answered, responses here possibly had the greatest clarity and focus. Walcott's poetry was usefully compared with *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The God of Small Things*, with some candidates making excellent use of biographical material too.

**Advanced GCE English Literature 2707-2713  
June 2007 Assessment Series**

**Unit Threshold Marks**

<i>Unit</i>		<b>Maximum Mark</b>	<b>a</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>c</b>	<b>d</b>	<b>e</b>	<b>u</b>
<b>2707</b>	Raw	60	47	42	37	32	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
<b>2708</b>	Raw	60	48	42	37	32	27	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
<b>2709</b>	Raw	60	51	45	39	33	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
<b>2710</b>	Raw	60	48	42	36	31	26	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
<b>2711</b>	Raw	60	52	46	41	36	31	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
<b>2712</b>	Raw	60	50	44	39	34	29	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
<b>2713</b>	Raw	60	47	41	35	30	25	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

**Specification Aggregation Results**

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	<b>Maximum Mark</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>U</b>
<b>3828</b>	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
<b>7828</b>	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>Total Number of Candidates</b>
<b>3828</b>	29.64	53.95	75.72	89.50	96.47	100.00	7641
<b>7828</b>	40.17	67.51	86.06	95.85	99.43	100.00	7541

**7541 candidates aggregated this series**

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see;  
[http://www.ocr.org.uk/exam\\_system/understand\\_ums.html](http://www.ocr.org.uk/exam_system/understand_ums.html)

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

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