

# English Language & Literature

Advanced GCE A2 7829

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3829

## Report on the Units

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**January 2008**

**3829/7829/MS/R/08J**

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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# **Chief Examiner's Report - GCE English Language & Literature 3829/7829**

Candidates demonstrated a clear awareness of the expectations of each module, focusing in the main on Assessment Objectives in an informed and competent manner. There was evidence of strong textual knowledge and a familiarity with a variety of approaches to the analysis of diverse types of texts. At some levels a greater use of linguistic and literary terminology would assist certain candidates in developing closer details of material. There was, on the whole, efficient time management and adherence to the rubric of the papers. There was also evidence of some very careful preparation of candidates and a sense that candidates felt at home with the demands of the specification.

## **2714 Linking Language and Literature**

### **General Comments**

Candidates, on the whole, tackled the paper with a fair degree of confidence and used their time well. There was little rubric infringement. It was pleasing to note that there seemed to be growing confidence amongst candidates when it came to engaging with the transcription: as well as exploring values and attitudes with more consistency, their comments were aligned to a greater appreciation of how linguistic features help to shape specific effects. Some candidates still seem to feel the need to answer the second bullet point of the question in a generic fashion when, in fact, by developing a detailed focus on the first bullet point the differences between fictional and spontaneous speech can be subsumed into it. There was a clear sense of the comparative nature of the passages. Some of the candidates' quality of written communication could have perhaps been focused on a little more: occasionally, possible perceptive ideas became a bit lost because of unclear expression.

On the whole, though, candidates seem to be well prepared and aware of the nature and demands of this module.

### **Comments on Individual Questions**

Candidates seemed to engage with the comparative nature of the material effectively on the whole. Passage A produced some thoughtful and inspired comments. Those who focused on the attitudes and values of both characters tended to deal with the material in more depth. The role of the father was explored in depth by many and they noted how his register and dialect seemed to place him at a certain social level; that he seemed possibly envious of his son; others commented on how his language seemed a substitute for physical bullying, driven by his possible need for money to purchase alcohol. Huck's apparent reluctance to engage in a fierce argument persuaded some candidates that he was either passive in nature or cleverly withstanding his father's onslaught in a tactical and effective manner. Some commented on how his narrative voice did not always echo his speaking voice and that this technique possibly demonstrated the elevated social status he had acquired in comparison to his father's limited and backward looking viewpoint. Some answers tried to explore the passage in a manner which assumed it had the features of spontaneous speech: others noted that Twain was attempting to replicate features of everyday speech to create a more credible and realistic portrait of the world the novel inhabits. The role of the narrative voice, especially its references to paralinguistic features, drew some perceptive and sustained insights.

The transcription was explored to some effect. Answers at the top of the range drew incisive comparisons between A's methods of persuasion - her use of positive words which stressed the quality of the product and her use of the term 'girls', for example - and the nature of the father's approach in the first passage. They explored her more subtle but forceful approach, tracing how she moved from different forms of flattery to the more commanding imperative at the close. There were some effective comments on dominant speakers, agenda control and manipulation of language. The others speakers, in similar answers, were given equal attention and their hesitation and gradual change of mind were traced succinctly. Less secure answers tended to focus on paraphrase or drew on fairly basic qualities such as fillers and micro pauses to make their observations.

## 2715 Language in Literature: Poetry and Prose

### General Comments

A number of candidates performed outstandingly well on this paper, demonstrating that it is possible to excel in combining literary with linguistic approaches. These were, on the whole, candidates who answered the question which had been set, using the bullet-prompts for their intended purposes, which are to provide support and structure to an answer and to enable a sustained focus on relevant issues.

As ever, though, some candidates seemed determined to pursue their own agenda rather than answering the question as set. Such unevenly-focused answers often revealed substantial textual knowledge, which was appropriately rewarded, but failed to display the AO1/AO3i skills needed for higher reward.

The question-specific 'Notes on Task' in the published mark-scheme offer detailed examples of features of language which might profitably have been discussed in response to tasks and prompts.

Allocation of time between the two questions was hardly ever a problem. Where scripts showed an imbalance, it was generally due to a lack of textual knowledge rather than a failure of examination technique.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### Q1 CHAUCER: *The Nun's Priest's Tale*

"Dreams and reactions to them" should have been a straightforward question focus, but very few responses managed to concentrate proficiently and directly on this aspect of the *Tale*. Many answers drifted into more general (AO4) discussion of Chauntecleer's debate with Pertelote. There was some confusion as to who was speaking in any one particular line: many candidates attributed the warning (lines 6 and 7) to Chauntecleer, and the scornful riposte (lines 12-19) to Pertelote. This section of the text was rather poorly understood. As a result, candidates were not able to explore features of language which would allow a high-level response to the first bullet-prompt ("variations in diction and tone").

The second bullet-prompt ("different attitudes and reactions") elicited fairly general (AO4) discussion, which at least allowed candidates to move into comparison with another passage, often Pertelote's response to Chauntecleer's initial dream.

#### Q2 CHAUCER: *The Miller's Tale*

Candidates answering on this text were once again generally well-prepared for a question about the conventions of Courtly Love. Such an approach kept answers more or less on track, though the (AO3i) details of diction and tone tended to take second place to assertions of Absolon's (alleged) effeminacy. Some fruitful AO4 comparison was made with Nicholas's rather more vigorous 'romantic' behaviour,

**Q3 ROBERT FROST: *Selected Poems***

Candidates struggled to focus on Frost's narrative voice, missing the 'steer' in the first bullet-prompt towards "natural spoken language" in what Frost had to say and concentrating instead on the representation of accent/dialect in Baptiste's utterances.

It seemed the poem had been studied, in a largely thematic way, in relation to the idea of neighbourliness. This resulted in some distortion of the relationship between the two men in the poem and an over-simplification of Frost's train of thought. AO4 comparison was generally with *Mending Wall*, again largely in thematic terms rather than in exploration of the narrative voice.

**Q4 WENDY COPE: *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis***

This question had a focus ("underlying seriousness") which candidates had no difficulty in engaging with at some level. However, the complexities and nuances of Cope's language escaped most. Candidates were aware that the colloquialisms ("pushover ... fling ... cost a packet") were a cover for more serious emotions, but lacked the precision of AO1/AO3/AO5 skills to explore where such language might have come from or might be going to.

A few well-informed and confident candidates enjoyed themselves exploring the Freudian (phallic) significance of cigarettes in *Giving Up Smoking*. More often, though, answers were struggling to pin down whether reference to high culture (Beethoven and Shakespeare) was evidence of seriousness of the opposite. Candidates at this level find it hard to be content with the possibility that Cope is being both serious and flippant, and harder still to locate that ambiguity in the interaction of poetic form with variations in diction and register.

**Q5 EMILY BRONTE: *Wuthering Heights***

Candidates engaged readily with what is a central passage in the novel. Focus on "Catherine's ways of thinking" was less straightforward, though there was at least sound attention to imagery here and elsewhere. As usual, the relationships between Nelly, Catherine and Heathcliff were well understood. Many candidates revealed sound textual knowledge in the range of (AO4) comparative passages selected to answer this question as well as in their reading of the passage in its context.

**Q6 MARY SHELLEY: *Frankenstein***

Here the question-focus was "the Creature's ability to reason". Candidates were able to engage productively with his (expression of his) feelings, and noticed that (here at least) Victor too accepts him as "a creature of fine sensations". As in previous sessions, however, there was much discussion of Victor as an inadequate/neglectful parent, which only occasionally and indirectly came into focus with the question.

**Q7 RODDY DOYLE: *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha***

The usual *Report* lament about how candidates tend towards writing a 'default' answer about Paddy's maturation through the novel and the deterioration in his family circumstances will be absent for this session. Candidates generally did as they were asked, namely to focus on Paddy's response to language.

### *Report on the Units taken in January 2008*

Details of the passage were not always well understood, with candidates failing in particular to recognise the extent to which Paddy was quoting Mr Finnucane. However, Paddy's mixture of fear, anticipation and disappointment was grasped soundly.

AO4 comparative passages in this session were varied and often well chosen. The child/adult distinction was observed rather better in this dimension than in the (AO3i/AO5) discussion of the passage.

#### **Q8 IAN McEWAN: *The Child in Time***

Many answers made at least a sound job of exploring how McEwan presents the experience of being a child in the passage and elsewhere in the novel, a favourite (AO4) choice being Charles Darke and his tree-house. Candidates had more mixed success in discussion of sentence structure: they made competent observations on what they call McEwan's/Stephen's 'listing' technique (for example in the opening four lines of the passage) but otherwise were rather inaccurate in their comments, frequently mis-identifying compound and complex sentences.



## **2716 Styles of Writing**

Although there were not many candidates for this January's module, there was work from across the whole range. Candidates had made sensible choices about their assignments, and were thus able to demonstrate clearly that they had benefited from the study of both literary and non-literary texts. In literary terms, the monologue remains a popular choice. Centres should, however, be warned that to present an invented transcription as a non-literary piece is not appropriate because it in effect counts as a piece of creative writing set up to imitate real speech: it invokes discussion, for example of presentation of character through speech, which starts to look like a literary approach if candidates aren't very careful. Many candidates produce speeches about a cause and then draw attention to the spontaneous speech features in commentaries. That is different and entirely within the remit of the specification.

Centres commented usefully on the folders, usually with close reference to the Assessment Objectives, and this was helpful to moderators. As always, it is particularly useful when centres annotate the work itself as well as providing an overall summary: it helps us to see exactly where strengths and weaknesses are located. As a consequence of the close reference to the AOs, the vast majority of centres were extremely accurate in their assessments.

## 2717 Language in Literature: Drama

### General Comments

The standard of work overall compares very favourably indeed with most January sessions in the history of this Paper. Candidates had generally been very well prepared, particularly with respect to selecting relevant passages and engaging with relevant linguistic and dramatic features of presentation. Candidates tended to have a good understanding of their chosen texts and were able to direct relevant textual analysis toward the specific requirements of the questions. Candidates showed some confidence and assurance in constructing strong, coherent arguments that were anchored in thoughtful consideration of relevant textual detail. Written expression was, in the main, quite accurate and more than adequate to the task. Fewer answers demonstrated an exclusively literary appreciation of the texts, and candidates continue to show increasing sophistication in their use of linguistic terminology. There was ample evidence of candidates being sensitised to the particular demands and nuances of individual questions; weaker responses, on this occasion, tended to be characterised by an over-rehearsed treatment of chosen passages and some inflexibility in adapting pre-selected materials.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### 1 **SHAKESPEARE: *Antony and Cleopatra***

- (a) This question was frequently chosen, and was handled with confidence. There were many interesting lines of interpretation, which demonstrated an informed and critical understanding a useful range of passages. Many candidates were able to use the prompt quotation with discernment, linking close analysis of specific passages both to the protagonists' values and to the Roman and Egyptian contexts. Stronger answers were able to explore ways in which 'epicurean' values are variously interpreted, supplanted, endorsed and subjected to criticism on the play. There was also some sensitive elucidation of the 'transcendental' qualities of the protagonists' love. Weaker answers tended to offer very narrow lines of argument and straightforwardly narrative approaches.
- (b) Another fairly popular choice, this question was answered convincingly in the main. Candidates were most successful when they were able to sustain a relevant focus on the role/function and presentation of messengers, as well as the messages sent (more often than not by the play's protagonists). The best answers were able to illuminate the potential for manipulation, scapegoating, misunderstanding and deception, as well as examining linguistic protocols, terms of address, politeness strategies and status issues. Weaker answers tended to offer limited summaries/descriptions of actions/sequences of events, albeit linked to the play's most dramatic and pivotal moments.

#### 2 **SHAKESPEARE: *As You Like It***

- (a) Less popular, this question was, notwithstanding, answered very satisfactorily in the main. Whilst the majority of candidates argued in support of the prompt quotation, foregrounding the centrality of Arden, the court/forest antithesis and pastoral values, there were some very well-informed answers which approached the question with an incisive focus on the perceptions/perspectives of particular characters and their experiences of phases/stages/rhythms/changes. There was some fruitful consideration of mythologised representations of past and present experience and of the passing of time in ritualised action - masque, song and dance. The best of these anchored their discussions in careful and assured examination of relevant linguistic detail and particular dramatic effects. Weaker answers did not get beyond fairly superficial consideration the court/forest antithesis.

- (b) Chosen infrequently, this question was, nevertheless, answered reasonably well. Candidates tended to explore the play's central (Rosalind/Orlando) relationship, and this enabled them to find ready and relevant textual material with which to link the testing out of true affections, the wisdom of choices and the importance of play/role-play. Relatively few candidates, however, developed strong, coherent arguments emerging from close analysis of relevant linguistic detail. Greater assurance was exhibited in considering specific dramatic strategies/effects (the use of disguise, for instance). There were some accomplished comparisons with the Silvius/Phebe and Touchstone/Audrey relationships. Weaker candidates tended not to get rigorously to grips with the intellectual content/implications of the prompt quotation.

### 3 **SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest***

- (a) This was a very popular choice and candidates generally demonstrated a very secure grasp of both the demands of the question and the content/stylistic features of selected passages. Better answers demonstrated a good understanding of the centrality of the truth and illusion and the agency of Prospero and Ariel in particular. Many candidates wrote impressively about the 'veracity' of Prospero's early narrative and made useful comparisons with his closing monologues. The experiences of Ferdinand, Gonzalo, Caliban and 'the villains' were usefully considered. Weaker answers tended to gravitate to fairly vague and undeveloping discussions of Gonzalo's experience or of Prospero's use of magic.
- (b) A little less frequently chosen than 3(a), this question, popular nevertheless, prompted some interesting well-informed discussion of a good range of appropriate passages. The majority of candidates chose to anchor their responses in Prospero's perceptions and reconstructions of the past and this generally gave rise to secure lines of argument. Prospero's representations were sometimes very successfully contraposed with Caliban's version of events; helpful and logical links were made both with the play's 'live' action, the projected future, reconciliation and forgiveness. Weaker answers tended not to get far beyond fairly cursory summaries of Prospero's early narrative account.

### 4 **BECKETT: *Waiting for Godot***

- (a) *Waiting for Godot* regained much of its popularity this session, and this question was generally answered well. Candidates were able to exploit the semantic complexities of the prompt quotation and devised intelligent structures for their arguments. There were relatively few generalised whole-text responses or undigested accounts of existentialist philosophy. On the whole, candidates showed flexibility and dexterity in their discussions of a range of appropriate passages and these were usually grounded in the analysis of specific linguistic details and dramatic effects. Occasionally candidates simply presented what they considered to be relevant episodes, with the expectation that these might somehow 'speak for themselves' with respect to meeting the demands of the question: citing the 'let's hang ourselves...' routine was one such example.
- (b) This question was quite frequently chosen and was handled impressively. Weaker responses offered pre-prepared individual 'character' studies but the majority approached the relationship with independent thought and, at times, with some subtlety. Again there were relatively few generalised sketches and the better answers showed an impressive determination to engage with the language and action of challenging and potentially obscure/bizarre materials. The majority of candidates focused on both the 'fascinating' and 'disturbing' with some precision and incisiveness.

## 5 **FRIEL: *Translations***

- (a) This was quite a popular choice and was generally answered with knowledge and discernment. Most candidates tackled the question's proposition with careful attention to relevant textual materials and with reference to a range of characters and situations. Owen's central role provided many candidates with a core focus, as did the attitudes of Lancey, Manus and Hugh and the development of the relationship between Yolland and Maire. The anglicisation of Gaelic place names and use of Greek and Latin were also fruitfully considered. The best answers examined the play's central linguistic concerns as embodied in the complexities of specific relationships. The candidates who opted for this question generally answered it well.
- (b) This question was answered much less frequently and prompted responses of variable quality. The best were sophisticated explorations of a range of ambiguous or unresolved issues - personal, social, cultural, economic and political. The candidates who attempted this question tended to dwell on whether the play's ending is optimistic or pessimistic; and/or what happens to Yolland. Very few answers exhibited a clear understanding of the means by which Friel creates a sense of uncertainty or open-endedness: mythological analogues; creation of mood and atmosphere and use of symbolism, for example. There was little discussion of what might constitute open-endedness in linguistic terms. The weakest answers were simplistically assertive, without engaging with relevant textual evidence.

## 6 **WILLIAMS: *A Streetcar Named Desire***

- (a) This was quite a popular choice and there were good numbers of well-informed and carefully focused answers. Candidates undertook rewarding analyses of a wide range of relevant passages, often constructing substantial and well-supported answers. They were able to elicit much relevant detail from stage directions and use of stage properties, the behaviour, attitudes and values of a range of characters, sound and music and also the language varieties in evidence: slang, idiom, class dialects, for example. The best answers were convincing in the breadth and depth of their interpretations with regard both to 'squalid' and 'vitality'. Some helpful contrapositions with the moribund world of Belle Reve were also made.
- (b) Again quite a popular choice, this question was handled a little less well. The majority of answers focused on the language used by both Stanley and Blanche, judging Stanley's language to appeal to the feelings and Blanche's to the intellect. The best answers went beyond constructing simplified dualities and gave some consideration too, to the paralinguistic and expressionistic dimensions of language use. The most assured responses engaged candidates with selected passages at a personal level as actively participant readers/spectators. Weaker answers tended to be fairly superficial descriptions of (albeit sometimes pivotal) moments of high feeling/emotional crisis in the play.

## **2718 Issues in Language and Literature**

As usual, there were tiny numbers of candidates for the January session, so it is not possible to draw significant conclusions about standards or approaches.

For the most part, assignments chosen were suitable, and it was good to see candidates focusing in detail on small extracts from texts rather than trying to deal in generalities. Candidates who were able to offer comparison and contrast between passages throughout their essays tended to do better than those who simply deal with passages one by one and then try to pull it all together in the final stages. Sensibly, most candidates have abandoned the temptation to do a lot of contextualising of their passage and simply get on with the analysis. This is good practice: it leads to more focused pieces that are often shorter and the better for it. Centres still need to work on ensuring that spoken language is sufficiently considered by candidates.

The majority of the marking was helpful and clearly aligned to the Assessment Objectives. Moderators are always pleased to see teacher annotation on the work itself, as well as overall comments, because it helps them to locate where the various AOs have been found and rewarded.

Centres are reminded of the need to be on time with sending the mark sheets and responding to requests for samples. One or two centres had to be chased for Course Work authentication forms, and this, of course, slows down the process.

## 2719 Experience into Words

### General Comments

There was a limited number of entries for this paper. Candidates produced some sound and competent work on the whole. There was a clear sense of effective time management and little rubric infringement. Answers tended to remain a little distant from the material at times, relying on identification of features rather than exploring linguistic and literary aspects in depth. The first question elicited some reasonable comments and the second one some rather more generalised responses. A greater focus on using embedded quotations and attempting to comment on the qualities or moods they evoke might benefit some candidates. Choices of vocabulary and how different forms shape meaning were not always pursued with genuine vigour. This was also the case on the directed writing task where some candidates seemed to omit comments on the original passage and simply focused on their own re-creative piece.

### Comments on Individual Questions

1

There were some sound comments on the poem, especially by those who recognised it as a sonnet and could refer to the traditions of the genre and how the structure of the form might be used. Many sensed the isolation of the narrator and how natural imagery was employed to evoke her state of mind. One or two candidates seemed to become embroiled in debates about her apparent promiscuity and how this would have been frowned on at the time. Comments on specific aspects of the language seemed to rely, at times, on translating particular words or terms rather than developing sustained comments on the material. However, many answers dealt with this competently. The transcription was dealt with soundly, if a little cautiously. Answers at the top of the range focused on the speaker's references to danger and some of the choices of violent terms; they drew comparisons between the notions of passion in both extracts and the seeming isolation of the speakers. One or two noted the way in which the poem drew on the image of a tree to anchor her thoughts and the ways in which the second voice was more literally concerned with the preservation of trees. The transcription, though, was also approached by others in a more generalised manner; they looked for fairly mundane aspects such as fillers and repetition rather than exploring the speaker's choices of vocabulary and his register. Such an approach is rather limited in outlook and does not really help candidates to get beneath the surface of the material.

2

This question was answered soundly by some and disappointingly by others. Some candidates seemed to have had limited practice in dealing with the second part of this type of assignment, that is the commentary. Many candidates dealt with the first task - the directed writing - with enthusiasm and to some effect; there were some persuasive and articulate pieces, demonstrating an awareness of audience and an appropriate form of language and strategy. There was use of flattery and an awareness of aspirational needs. A few limited their marks by borrowing words and phrases too heavily from the original extract. However, many commentaries were basic or limited for a number of reasons: some forgot to mention the original extract and merely focused on their own directed writing; when some did attempt to comment on the original piece, they mentioned the use of punctuation and paragraphs but seemed to avoid commenting on choices of language or strategies employed. When some explored their own writing they also avoided commenting on register and lexis but limited their insights to comparing formal to informal tones and little beyond. There was a sense that a number of candidates seemed less aware of the demands of the commentary and that the question is marked holistically: that is, the commentary informs the marks awarded to the directed writing and vice-versa. Candidates should be advised that it is in their interests to gain as much practice as possible in approaching this type of question.

# Grade Thresholds

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## Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2714	Raw	60	49	43	38	33	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2715	Raw	60	47	41	35	29	24	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2716	Raw	60	49	43	38	33	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2717	Raw	60	49	43	38	33	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2718	Raw	60	51	45	39	33	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2719	Raw	60	44	39	34	30	26	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

## Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
3829	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7829	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

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

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3829	12.7	25.5	56.4	80.0	98.2	100	63
7829	25.0	40.0	75.0	95.0	100	100	21

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

[http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums\\_results.html](http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html)

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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