

English Literature

Advanced GCE A2 7828

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3828

Report on the Units

June 2008

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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

Although there will be re-sit opportunities for candidates in January and May next year, this has been the last full AS session for the current specification. Over the years, examiners have consistently congratulated candidates on the resourcefulness with which they have met the challenges of demanding questions, whether set on the written papers or negotiated for coursework assignments, in the context of the range of requirements defined by the Assessment Objectives. As a Principal Examiner reports: "examiners commented on how ably centres, now fully experienced, responded to the requirements of the examination in terms of recognising the assessment objectives and encouraging candidates to produce answers which were appropriately focused and articulated." [2707] Throughout the life of the AS phase of Curriculum 2000 examiners have been particularly impressed by the confidence with which candidates have generally responded to texts covering virtually every period in the British literary tradition (and texts from other cultures also) from Chaucer to the 21st century. The combination of rigorous AOs, demanding tasks and complex texts represents a serious challenge for students one year into their A Level course, and examiners appreciate the hard work, energy and enthusiasm of both candidates and their teachers in achieving the quality of work that we have seen developing in the last seven years. Echoing the experience of most colleagues, an examiner reports having read "some exceptional essays, which went far beyond the requirements of AS level" [2708], but we appreciate just as much the enjoyment and application evident in scripts across the full range of achievement.

Over the years examiners have reported improvement in all areas defined by the AOs. Perhaps the most striking progress has been in candidates' management of contextual material (AO5i) in their answers, the area that generated the greatest anxiety when Curriculum 2000 was introduced. In the early years, examiners often reported on answers overloaded with historical information unhelpful in a discussion of literary texts. More typical of recent years is this examiner's comment: "Impressively, most answers integrated contextual into textual discussion; there were very few 'add-on' contextual comments. The best answers were in this respect sophisticated and lucid, managing to remain grounded in the text and question while also establishing a broader reference of writer and era." [2708] The benefits of developing these skills at AS are clearly evident in A2 work where this year, according to a Principal Examiner, "the great majority were well able to integrate, and above all to use effectively and appropriately, contextual ideas and materials. Context was interpreted in many different ways – literary, social, historical, cultural – all of which could be made relevant and illuminating." [2711]

Candidates generally have also become more confident in engaging with "other writers' views" and alternative readings (AO4) while forming their own readings of texts ("Embedding references into argument was a skill evident in many scripts ..." [2708]), though there are still warnings of problems in this area, "with the tendency of less successful answers to lean on and reproduce secondhand material such as social-historical background or fragments condensed and learned from critical works" [2707]; "too many [candidates] still failed to address the need (and the Band Descriptions make it quite clear that it is a need) to engage with the actual or possible views of other critics" [2709].

Candidates and centres need to make sure that progress in these areas is not at the expense of detailed critical analysis, still the most important aspect of literary study in this specification. On the one hand some examiners have noted "the paucity of close attention and reaction to the effects of Shakespeare's language in Section A passages, even if, as was often the case, much was said instead about the context of the play as a whole" [2707], and that "Some answers were short on close textual analysis, especially on prose texts." [2708]. On the other hand, examiners also report that in this respect work is "consistently well done – candidates seemed confident with this – work at all levels showed an ability to tackle points of language, structure and form" [2709].

All in all, the view of most AS examiners may be summarised in this comment: "Most answers I saw showed a clear enjoyment of and engagement with the texts – enjoyable to mark!" [2708]

Meanwhile A2 continues, with a final full session next year and resit opportunities in January and June, 2010. Here good work has been recognised in several areas:

- this Summer's examination produced a large number of impressive responses from candidates. Examiners reported fewer 're-cycled' answers, 'more thinking on their feet', more exploration, and a wider range of reference within essays. [2710]
- once again, Unit 2711 produced some really outstanding work, from candidates who demonstrated an astonishing level of academic sophistication, maturity and confidence ... The overall standard of work in Unit 2711 was high, and it was a genuine pleasure to read candidates' work, and to share their personal engagement and sense of discovery with the texts studied.
- in general candidates seemed to be well prepared and to have enjoyed their texts. [2712]
- this summer's paper once again reflected the work of candidates who are, almost universally, confident with this specification. The best work, again, was exhilarating: the literary and emotional maturity displayed by so many teenagers remains impressive and a source of delight to examiners. [2713]

Also in the reports that follow there are familiar warnings and recommendations, well worth bearing in mind by teachers and candidates working on all Advanced Level papers.

- It is becoming clear that, while the confident expression of an informed opinion is at the heart of the dominant Assessment Objective (AO4) on this paper, a major discriminator of answer success will be the quality of evidence cited to support candidates' views. [2710]
- AO4 remained something of a problem area; some Centres, and some candidates, addressed it with real skill and confidence, while others appeared almost entirely unaware of what it really demands ... Candidates' ability to use critics well depends so much upon earlier development of their literary skills. If they have been helped to find their own voices in the early stages of the A Level programme they will be less likely to simply 'borrow' from other critics, but will use them as sounding boards against which to test their own judgements. Scrupulous use of secondary sources is generally a sign of both honesty and independence of thought. [2709/2711]
- Candidates from many centres showed a good grasp of literary context and theory, but some imported terms such as 'post-modern', 'stream of consciousness', and 'epiphany' with little relevance. [2712]
- ... a good number of candidates whose approach to the exam was limited by partial or inadequate readings of questions, whereby only half a question is tackled with the 'tricky bit' overlooked or ignored. [2713]

2707 Drama: Shakespeare

General comments

On this, the last large-scale session of the specification, examiners commented on how ably Centres, now fully experienced, responded to the requirements of the examination in terms of recognising the Assessment Objectives and encouraging candidates to produce answers which were appropriately focused and articulated. Rubric infringements were practically unknown and there was usually a strong sense of relevance in approaching the questions.

Examiners registered a wide range of accomplishment among the candidates but the average quality surpassed that of last January and there was a pleasing amount of work of outstanding skill, well informed, perceptively analytical and stylishly expressed. Candidates had found their study of Shakespeare rewarding, thought-provoking and worthy of complex discussion and argument. At a fundamental level, too, written communication was in general of a high order.

Perhaps the main negative factors were not to do with style, ignorance or inability but rather were connected with the tendency of less successful answers to lean on and reproduce secondhand material such as social-historical background or fragments, condensed and learned from critical works, which might have been of tangential importance to the point at issue. This was no substitute for detailed personal engagement and independent opinion.

In particular, examiners mentioned the paucity of close attention and response to the effects of Shakespeare's language in Section A passages, even if, as was often the case, much was said instead about the context of the play as a whole. When considering the Assessment Objectives examiners were looking for a balance of qualities in answers which did not allow AO5i to overwhelm AO3.

Comments on individual questions

Henry IV (Part 2)

This may have been the least often chosen play but many answers on it were perceptive, knowledgeable and well argued.

Q.1 was on a passage from Act 2, Scene 1 and asked about the contribution of the extract to the view of Falstaff in the play, with attention to the effects of language and suggestions about his particular characteristics. Most answers tended to take the view that here Falstaff's treatment of the Hostess is barely, if at all, funny. Relatively few were able to relate to the nature of the comic misunderstandings in the Hostess's speech (some used the word "Hostess" as if it were the character's given name).

But there was productive commentary on how this exchange marks a decisive shift away from the generally indulgent view of Falstaff encouraged in *Henry IV (Part 1)* and candidates were usually alert to how the Hostess's volubility renders her vulnerable to Falstaff's irresponsibly exploitative opportunism. A correction (ominous or rightful) was seen as being established in the gravitas and sobriety of the Lord Chief Justice. As in other Section A answers there was little on imagery and some tendency to labour peripheral issues woodenly and at length (such as punctuation – surprisingly few seem to realise that commas, dashes and exclamation marks are the work of editors, not Shakespeare). Nevertheless, examiners felt that in compensation there was much well developed sensitivity to the tone of the passage.

Q.5(a), on the relationships between the comic and serious elements of the play, attracted few responses and most examiners saw no examples. Those candidates who attempted it were mainly successful in moving beyond a mere list of comic and serious elements to a much more interesting consideration of the play's dramatic balance and to the interaction of plot and sub-plot and the re-echoing of themes and images. Several candidates clearly had a detailed understanding of *Henry IV (Part 1)* and used this to advantage when considering the second bullet point about the court and Eastcheap.

In Q.5(b) most of the answers, on King Henry, were successfully analytical. The temptation to recycle a prepared character sketch was resisted and the demands of the task were understood: to discuss the role and significance of the King, the presentation of character and the burdens of kingship. There was much well developed material on fatherhood, disease and frailty as presented through the dying Henry, and the "mock" deathbed scene was frequently discussed. Better essays skilfully wove in apt quotation while some observed that there are in fact *two* King Henrys in the play.

As You Like It

Like *Henry IV (Part 2)* this was a minority choice of text.

Q.2 was on the episode from Act 5, Scene 1 in which Touchstone deals with the unfortunate William. The task was to discuss its contribution to a view of Touchstone and his role in the play, with attention to effects of language and tone and to ideas about the relations between rustic characters and the court. Some candidates found it difficult to write convincingly about the subtleties of the character of Touchstone and indeed may have confused him with Jaques. Others did so confidently and widened the discussion to issues of court and country and the pastoral tradition, including some excellent observation on the language used and its tone.

Touchstone was seen as patronising and then more directly bullying while William was seen as modest, deferential and confused. Audrey was hardly mentioned: commentary on her visible stage presence might have enhanced some answers. Touchstone, it was argued, takes advantage as he himself is at a disadvantage in some court scenes. As one examiner said, "this was a very successful stimulus for many because the extract, perhaps a little unexpected, encouraged candidates to live on their wits rather than on prepared material".

Q.6(a) asked for a discussion of the role and significance of Orlando in *As You Like It* with reference to the presentation of the character and the notion of personal development in response to experience. It was the more popular of the alternatives on the text. Candidates enjoyed writing about this "underdog" character and many placed him effectively in the context of Rosalind's actions and behaviour as well as looking at the character's function and importance, and how far he fulfilled the requirements for heroic status, beyond a simple narrative account. The second bullet point, about experience, was less well handled apart from a minority of sophisticated discussions able to combine ideas of personality and philosophy. A few candidates unfortunately confused Orlando with Oliver.

In Q.6(b) candidates were asked how far they agreed that the ending of the play was unsatisfactory. They had to analyse the presentation of the ending and think about reconciliation and reformation. There was worthwhile knowledge and exploration of Shakespeare's comic conventions but very little was written on Rosalind's epilogue speech. Instead, answers tended to explore the moral justice and appropriateness of the various love-pairings and reformations. Most focused successfully on what were seen as the hurried comic formalities which, it was argued, neglected or deliberately flouted the psychological continuity of characters and relationships established up to that point. The general opinion, interestingly, was that the ending was indeed either marginally or totally unsatisfactory.

Antony and Cleopatra

This and *The Tempest* were studied by at least three-quarters of the candidates; the two plays were of equal popularity. Quality of response varied considerably but most candidates knew “their” play well in terms of themes, issues, dramatic effects and characterisation, and in general wrote with a high degree of understanding and responsiveness.

Q.3 was set on an extract from Act 1, Scene 3 in which Cleopatra rebukes Antony for his intention to leave Egypt. It asked about the view of Cleopatra’s attitude towards Antony, the language effects, and tensions in the relationship. Although the specific requirements of the question were not always observed, candidates as ever relished the opportunity to discuss Cleopatra’s manifold and lively characteristics. The most effective commentaries, too, explored the imagery, constantly shifting tone and extraordinarily revealing language with real sophistication despite some examiners’ feeling that this session’s widespread interest in (almost fixation with) sexual innuendo threatened to become, even on this play, out of proportion in the scale of a relatively short answer.

It was on this question, too, that some of the least well judged examples of the “tell all you know” approach were seen. There were long answers which really lost touch with the passage and offered a wide ranging character sketch of Cleopatra and her love for Antony, impressively well informed but not convincing the reader that the question was being treated as more than a peg on which to hang the pre-digested information.

Nevertheless, Cleopatra’s wiles used to prevent Antony’s departure were accurately picked out including feigned indifference, mockery, anger, and the pretended response to how Antony will receive the news of her death, although it was sometimes a pity to see how candidates were prone to reduce the impact and perception of their answers by inappropriate expression. Examples included “she will always be there for him” and “Cleopatra has a thing about Fulvia”. Examiners also observed that many candidates were remarkably harsh towards the character of Cleopatra “in an almost revisionist manner” and some did not understand that at this point in the plot Fulvia had already died.

The two Section B essay questions were tackled by equal numbers of candidates. Q.7(a) was about the role and significance of women other than Cleopatra in the play, looking at their presentation and the issue of women and power. Several examiners thought that the weaker responses – apart from the very few who unfortunately missed the “other than” and wrote a Cleopatra character sketch – revealed a lack of secure knowledge of the text. Such was the impact of the Egyptian Queen on some readers that they found it difficult to remember who the other women were, although it was often established that women could to some extent helpfully be considered as a group in relation to, or in contrast with, Cleopatra.

However, many of the most productive answers remembered all the other female characters and named them correctly although “Charmain” made her regular appearance as did “Isis” and “Iris”. There was occasional confusion of Fulvia and Octavia (or “Octavio”) and the latter naturally tended to dominate the answers, being linked to the issue of women’s powerlessness which was argued as a phenomenon equally of ancient Rome and Jacobean England despite the authority of Queen Elizabeth, a Tudor Cleopatra perhaps only in some ways. Helpful reference was occasionally made in these essays to feminist criticism.

Q.7(b) concerned the way characters approach their deaths in *Antony and Cleopatra* with reference to the way the play presents dying and death and its suggestions about the matter of suicide. It evoked some of the best answers on the paper. Enobarbus and Charmian were often considered as examples of Shakespeare’s balanced sophistication where this issue is concerned. Many also considered minor characters such as the protagonists’ servants and even Fulvia, but the basis of most discussions was the contrast between Antony’s botched suicide and Cleopatra’s assured, measured, affecting stage management. They seized the chance to

discuss a wide range of contextual issues, most frequently the celebrated Rome/Egypt dichotomy of values. The topic of suicide clearly fascinated many candidates and occasional reference was made to recent events in South Wales. A few examiners reported confusion about whether the lines in the question are spoken by Antony or Cleopatra.

The Tempest

Q.4 was set on a passage from Act 1, Scene 1 dramatising the shipwreck and asking about response to the early part of the play, language, imagery, tone, and the preparation for some of the play's main concerns. Candidates seemed to excel at and enjoy the opportunities afforded by the task and the obvious possibility of contextualising the scene in relation to a large number of ideas prominent later in the play. On the other hand only the better answers produced really successful analyses of the language. There was much confusion surrounding the meaning of individual words and phrases ("unstanched", "wide-chopp'd rascal", "furze") and regarding use of the terms poetry, prose and (blank) verse.

As often seems the case with *The Tempest* not all candidates were entirely clear about the roles of the various characters they were describing, especially Gonzalo, or about their cities of origin in Italy. Awareness of the dramatic impact of the scene was extensive and there was perhaps an over-richness of disquisitions on the history of staging conventions at the Globe, the Blackfriars, at court and in modern theatres. Another contextual matter extensively discussed was the issue of social class distinctions in the passage and in the play as a whole, which arguably could sometimes be over-simplified.

Q.8(a) and Q.8(b) were chosen by equal numbers of candidates. 8(a) asked not for a straightforward character sketch of Caliban but for a discussion of how far he is the figure for whom the audience feel most sympathy, referring to the methods used to present the character and the issue of the effects in the play of ill treatment. Stronger answers realised this and went beyond prepared notes, engaging with the issue of sympathy to an impressive degree and supporting their answers with appropriate quotation and detailed textual support. Some achieved interesting complexity of argument incorporating alternative or ambivalent views of the "monster" in relation to the people, economy, politics and society around him.

There was a notable element of personal response, some helpful references to the experience of particular stage portrayals and many offered productive allusions to historical and literary contexts such as the exploration of the New World and the writings of Montaigne. The postcolonialist approach obviously continues to affect candidates' opinions about Caliban.

Q.8(b), perhaps appropriately for the last major session of the unit, was about the role and significance of Prospero. It asked about his presentation and the view in the play of the effects of power. Many essays were formidably well informed, which was not an advantage if the material was used unselectively. Responses tended sometimes to be over-long and over-loaded, including a large number of quotations not analysed and not woven into the argument being shaped.

On the other hand hundreds of candidates wrote well balanced essays on this topic with intriguing angles on Prospero, for example that he *fears* his power and mistrusts himself in control of it, or that he might be Shakespeare's response to Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*. Most tackled the task with evident relish, from a reasoned and specific viewpoint, and their command of AO1 was demonstrated by the coherence of their discussion backed up by judiciously chosen quotations.

Report on the Units taken in June 2008

The idea of Prospero as Shakespeare was particularly prominent this session and also the undeniable fact that he is seen negatively by many candidates, at a time when politicians and authority figures in general seem to be mistrusted, "split" and under a tempestuous cloud.

2708 Poetry and Prose

General comments from examiners

- I read some exceptional essays, which went far beyond the requirements of AS level; on the other hand, I read a handful of scripts where the candidates clearly were unable to complete answers at A Level standard.
- Some answers were short on close textual analysis, especially on prose texts.
- A few scripts – though not so many this year - indicated poor time management.
- Answers that worked through the passage sequentially often ran into problems, particularly where the whole passage was not covered; conclusion often very important.
- Impressively, most answers integrated contextual into textual discussion; there were very few “add-on” contextual comments. The best answers were in this respect sophisticated and lucid, managing to remain grounded in the text and question while also establishing a broader reference of writer and era.
- The quality of written expression seems to have improved over recent years, with far fewer examples of ungrammatical or muddled writing.
- Embedding of references into argument was a skill evident in many scripts.
- Most answers I saw showed a clear enjoyment of and engagement with the texts – enjoyable to mark!

Comments on individual questions

Section A

1 Chaucer: *The Franklin's Tale*

On 1(a), answers which attended closely to effects of the writing found plenty to say about this passage, considering: implications of setting in “The colde, frosty seson of Decembre (period of Lord of Misrule and time for payment of debts, comparison with the springtime garden); reminder of heavenly (though not Godly) supervision of events in Tale; Aurelius’s wish to break the laws of nature to satisfy his desires; illusion as solution to problem; characterisation of the “subtil clerk”; sense throughout of greater sophistication in Franklin’s narrative than he admits to (“I ne kan no termes of astrologye”). Some answers were effectively structured by viewing the passage as a summary of the preceding action and serving a proleptic function as well. On 1(b) – the tale’s presentation of marriage – passages most frequently selected were the early account of Dorigen’s and Arveragus’s “maistrye”-free arrangement and the moment at the end when Arveragus instructs his wife to fulfil her contract with Aurelius, on the principle that “Trouthe is the hyste thing that man may kepe”. Relations between these two passages, and the relative importance of “maistrye” and “trouthe” in the tale, generated some interesting discussion; since the original arrangement caused so much trouble candidates wondered by what accommodation husband and wife contrived to live henceforth “in sovereign blisse”. Answers referred the model of marriage explored in the tale to medieval expectations of conjugal relations, and also to literary conventions of courtly love; many answers also cited contributions of other pilgrims’ tales to the “marriage debate”.

2 Shakespeare: *Complete Sonnets*

Answers on Sonnet 147 [2(a)] generally traced carefully aspects and effects of the development of disease image throughout poem, alert to effects of paradox and the sense of inner conflict between rational and emotional/physical imperatives. Answers usually developed fruitful reference to other sonnets considering eg: lady's physical/moral corruption as source of disease (cf 127, 130); extensive development of other images (court of law in 30); images of ageing; love as a 'plague' (137, 141); wounds of love (139); 'testy sick men' (140); possible reference to syphilis (144); comparison/contrast with mental/ emotional/ spiritual sickness in 129. Many of these sonnets were cited also in answers exploring the experience of being betrayed [2(b)]. Various forms of betrayal were identified: the Dark Lady's preference for another lover (143); sense of betrayal over Dark Lady's qualities (138); betrayal by time/age, though with children (7, 12), love (29, 30) or poetry (19) as redemptive agencies; jealousy of others; betrayal by his own feelings/ desires (35, 12). In many impressive answers thematic discussion and comparisons were supported by detailed and sensitive critical analysis.

3 Byron: *Selected Poems*

Answers on 3(a) almost invariably considered Byron's response to Lake Lemn in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto III as an expression of Romantic emphasis on nature as sanctuary from/ antidote to social discomfort/ torture/ ostracism; where supported by detailed analysis of effects of the writing and verse this approach produced some really impressive answers. Correspondences were explored with the early part of Canto III and *Don Juan* in relation to Byron's view of human society, and with the sense of personal unhappiness/ loneliness/ depression in 'Fare Thee Well' and 'I watched thee'. Some answers interestingly explored implications of details of the set passage, particularly "A link reluctant in a fleshly chain" and "Sounds sweet as if a sister's voice reproved". The fewer answers on 3(b) considered Byron's exploration of different kinds of exile: from England, with differing tones and emphases (*Don Juan*, *Childe Harold*, *Beppo*); from close relationships ('Fare Thee Well', 'Epistle to Augusta', 'I watched thee'); his sense of an ending of his exile in death ('January 22nd 1824. Messalonghi').

4 Browning: *Poems*

Not many candidates attempted 4(a), set on 'Up at a Villa, Down in the City'. Most of these answers offered a comparative catalogue of features of each environment in all seasons – weather, company, amenities, activities – sometimes supported by critical analysis of effects of the writing. Only the fullest and more sensitive answers noted the equivocal note of the final stanza or the occasional appreciation of beauty in the landscape glimpsed in accounts of villa life. Some answers invoked 'Love Among The Ruins' in terms of symbolic value of setting. In answers on 4(b) 'My Last Duchess' and 'Porphyria's Lover' were most often brought into play as instances of speakers whose self-presentation invites the reader's critical judgement of their condition and motivation. The speakers of 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' and 'The Bishop Orders his Tomb ...' were also frequently cited, as churchmen falling short of appropriately principled disposition; conversely, 'Andrea del Sarto' and 'Fra Lippo Lippi' were seen as characters whose presentation evokes sympathy rather than disapproval. In fuller answers these views were supported by detailed discussion of the poetic means by which impressions were conveyed.

5 Eliot: *Selected Poems*

5(a), set on the closing sections of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', produced some well-informed and critically sensitive discussion, alert to tonal modulation and elaborate effects of imagery. Prufrock's state of mind - psychological/ emotional condition, affected self-sufficiency/ timidity/ fastidiousness – was interestingly explored, often fully acknowledging the contribution of the verse form to overall effect, sometimes effectively related to modernist issues and postwar uncertainties. In too many answers Prufrock was taken to stand in unequivocally for Eliot himself, leading to often clumsy biographical readings of the poetry. On 5(b), inviting discussion of the view that "disillusion is at the heart of Eliot's poetry", *disillusion* was taken variously to mean depression, disappointment, distaste, revulsion, alienation, provoked by various features of modern society: lack of passion (typist and clerk); a sense of history in decline (eg 'Gerontion'); a lack of promise (eg the opening of 'The Burial of the Dead'); effects of industrialisation/ urbanisation (*The Waste Land*); sense of unfulfilment ('Portrait of a Lady').

6 Thomas: *Selected Poems*

On 6(a) there was some interesting exploration of the dense, enigmatic pictorial imagery of 'I Never Saw that Land Before', the most sensitive noting the poet's own reticence in attributing meaning, and his insistence that the experience (touching 'some goal') is beyond the capacity of language to communicate: in this respect, connections were suggested with 'Old Man', 'The Other' and 'Melancholy'. On 6(b) the fullest answers explored the ambivalences in Thomas's presentation of his relationship with nature, evident strikingly in 'The Glory' and 'The Brook', the poems most frequently selected by candidates here. Such answers noted persuasively both the exhilarated response to natural beauty and the associated sense of personal dissatisfaction and inadequacy; and traced evidence of this ambivalence, variously inflected, in a range of other poems. Less developed answers tended to present Thomas as more conventionally celebrating natural beauty, though there was some interesting discussion of ways in which nature is made symbolic in Thomas's poetry, with 'As the Team's Head-Brass' as a fruitful example.

7 Harrison: *Selected Poems*

There were some answers on 7(a) that did little beyond paraphrase the set poem, 'Breaking the Chain', often offering biographical information in place of critical comment. Fuller answers considered ways in which the poem explores relations between family members and generations (changes of expectation and experience/ senses of community/ belonging/ loss/ rejection), the best of these paying close attention to effects of the writing, particularly the elaborate implications of the two major images, chain and dividers. Poems most frequently and fruitfully cited as related were 'A Good Read' and 'Book Ends'. There were fewer answers on 7(b); these usually centred on 'National Trust', where Harrison's project to give a voice to the voiceless is most explicit, moving on variously to the debate in 'v.' between Harrison and his skinhead alter ego on the issue, the use of italicised colloquial discourse to represent his parents' voices in the *School of Eloquence* poems, and/or the wider agenda to give formal poetic expression to working class experience.

8 Stevenson: *Granny Scarecrow*

Among the relatively few answers on Stevenson, there were some thoughtful responses to the set poem 'The Wrekin' 8(a), exploring the effects of the range of images associated with the mountain (snail/ birth mound/ tumulus/ omphalos/ eye/ Golgotha/ "print on dirty canvas" ...) and the layers of significance (natural, historical, mythic, personal) developed in the course of the poem. On 8(b), "remembering the dead", the personal poems 'Clydie is Dead!' and 'Freeing Lizzie' were the most frequent starting-points in answers that occasionally moved on to the wider

issues explored in 'A Parable for Norman' and/or 'Invocation and Interruption'. On both options there were some impressive answers, alert to effects of language and form.

Section B

9 Austen: *Persuasion*

9(a), set on the novel's opening paragraphs, proved much the more popular option. Candidates relished the opportunity to explore ways in which Sir Walter Elliot ("conceited, silly father" and representative of a decaying aristocratic class) and his family are introduced, in answers often alert to both the personal and symbolic qualities with which they are invested. As well as characterisation and family relationships, issues identified included marriage and related prospects, gender relations and expectations, money/rank as measure of personal value, and Anne's status in the family and in the text ("only Anne"). On 9(b) the passage most frequently selected was Anne's discussion with Harville in the White Hart about men's and women's relative capacities for emotional depth and stamina. Anne was often taken as a case study, lucky in that her only option, marriage, eventually turned out fortunately. The experiences of Mrs Croft, Mrs Clay and Mrs Smith were investigated as in different ways modelling "roles and opportunities available to women in the world of the novel", as were the various representations of marriage. On both options, most answers explored, more or less analytically, effects of narrative method, indirect speech devices and various kinds of irony.

10 Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

On 10(a) most answers argued that Jane's outburst to Mrs Reed marks both a turning-point in the action and her own development ("the first victory I had gained") and an augury of later occasions when she responds to injustice with principled energy ("*Speak I must*"). Noting the contrast between Mrs Reed's and Bessie's attitudes, answers pointed out that here, for the first time, emotional consolation comes not from nature or books but from sympathetic companionship, also that this is a particularly interesting example of effects of Brontë's narrative method (eg older Jane/narrator describing/commenting on young Jane's thoughts and situation). On 10(b), answers explored "ways in which Brontë presents the relationship between Jane and Rochester" often by fruitful comparison between early passages (their first meeting; or early conversations where she tries apprehensively to read his nature) with later episodes (her rejection of his offer of extra-marital fidelity; or her return, independently wealthy, to a crippled and dependent Rochester). In some answers the useful comparison was between Jane's relationships with Rochester and Rivers. While some answers were uncritically descriptive, others were interested in the language and narrative methods evident in the selected passages. Some interesting answers explicitly raising feminist issues.

11 Gaskell: *Mary Barton*

Among the few answers to 11(a) were some thoughtful discussions of this climactic and didactic passage, where the wisdom of a worker who is more articulate than he recognises ("I can't rightly explain the meaning that is in me") helps persuade a master into a change of heart that leads him to bring about improvements in "the system of employment in Manchester". Most answers recognised the significance of the pattern of experience invoked here: having himself "hung on the cross of agony" Mr Carson instigates a process of reform that acknowledges "the Spirit of Christ as the regulating law" between the capitalist forces of production. On 11(b), answers explored a range of models of women's experience presented in the novel (Barton's wife/ Mrs Davenport/ Esther/ Carson's family), with particular attention to Mary's options (Jem Wilson/ Harry Carson) and the novel's resolution (escape to Canada), offered as the only

escape route for her and Jem (what Raymond Williams calls a “virtual resolution”). On both options, fuller answers considered the effects of narrative method, particularly the persistently intrusive and interpretive narrative voice.

12 Stoker: *Dracula*

On 12(a) candidates often noted that Van Helsing rarely takes over the narrative in the novel (and that *Dracula* never does). Here, as the narrative approaches its conclusion, Van Helsing’s role as father figure, surrogate priest and master of occult *arcana* is ironically subverted as Mina reminds him that this time he is the one who needs protection (“None safer in all the world from them than I am”), even as he feels the erotic power of the three vampire women whom Harker had found irresistible in the novel’s opening chapters. Most answers explored the characteristically gothic effects of the writing, particularly the description of setting. On 12(b) the most popular passages presenting *Dracula* in England were Mina’s observation of his first assault on Lucy, the twin accounts of his attack on Mina, and his encounter with the Crew of Light in his London house, where he outlines his agenda (“My revenge is just begun ...”). There were many enthusiastic and well-informed responses to these descriptions of *Dracula*, exploring the emphases on sexuality and infection in his targeting middle class women. Answers presented various other readings of the novel as registering a range of Victorian anxieties: upheavals in gender politics; reverse colonisation; hubris of scientific rationalism; modernity under threat from a world of ancient knowledge and power. The fullest answers were alert to the effects of the writing and narrative methods.

13 Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*

The richly evocative passage set for 13(a) produced some full, thoughtful and well-informed responses, particularly those which explored the effects of narrative method – here Marlow tentatively reporting to his (perhaps half-asleep) London listeners on half-heard and less-than-half-understood conversations between disreputable interlocutors about mysterious figures whose functions and motivations are at this moment unknown. Answers noted abundant, enigmatic references to ivory and to Kurtz, the reminders of colonialist inefficiency and back-biting, the warning that “the inner truth is hidden – luckily, luckily”, and the oppressiveness of the “patient wilderness ... an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention ...”. On 13(b) the European figures most frequently selected were Kurtz, the accountant and the “harlequin”. While some answers offered descriptive character studies, most were alert to methods of construction through Marlow’s mediation, and symbolic value in relation to the view presented of the colonialist enterprise (beneficent/ civilising and/or brutalising/ exploitative).

14 Forster: *A Passage to India*

Answers on 14(a) – set on the conclusion of the tea-party at Fielding’s college – explored generally effectively the characterisation of Aziz, Fielding, Adela, Mrs Moore, Ronny Heaslop and Godbole in terms of the novel’s presentation of relations between Indian and European communities. Most noted the “provocative” behaviour (differently motivated) of both Aziz and Ronny, and there was a good deal of interest in Godbole’s song, incomprehensible to the Europeans, delightful to the Indians. 14(b) invited discussion of the novel’s concern with “misunderstandings, exaggerated expectations, and disappointments”. The bridge party and the expedition to the Marabar caves were most frequently selected, each presenting plenty of relevant material and issues. On both options the best answers explored the effects of narrative method, particularly the mediating function of the third person narrative voice.

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

The passage from 'The Stowaway', set for 15(a), offered opportunities for candidates to consider the text's presentation of relations between human beings and animals ("floating cafeteria"). Answers explored the chapter's ironic relation with the biblical account of the flood, and the inflection here of the text's persistent concern with "survival of the fittest" as the model of historical process. There was some interesting discussion of the effects of narrative methods, and the tone/register of the narrative voice. 'The Stowaway' provided passages for answers to 15(b), on the theme of "survival of the fittest"; others came from 'The Visitors', 'Shipwreck' and 'The Wars of Religion', exploring the issue in different ways. In some answers the variety of voices and narrative styles, and patterns of repetition were thoughtfully addressed.

16 Carver: *Short Cuts*

The opening of 'So Much Water So Close to Home' [16(a)] prompted some enthusiastic and sensitive discussion of ways in which the writing here generates such a range of effects: portentous diction, indicators of tension in the narrator and the domestic relationship, the gradual delivery of information in matter of fact language, the ironic relation between reminders of normality ("decent men, family men ...") and a profoundly disturbing situation. This complexity of effects was seen as characteristic of Carver's work, exemplified by a wide range of reference to other stories. Many noted that Claire is the collection's only female first person narrator while her husband serves as the type of male character encountered constantly in *Short Cuts*. On 16(b) candidates responded to the proposal that Carver writes about "things that just happen to people and cause their lives to take a turn" by drawing on almost every story in the collection for exemplary passages. As in previous sessions, there was some impressive discussion of the subtleties of Carver's writing and his interest in individual psychology and the apparent accidental randomness of experience. There were some references to contextual issues such as Carver's own alcoholism and failed marriage and some answers also cited his views about the disillusionment experienced by men during the flowering of women's liberation, and economic difficulties for the American working class, in the 1960s and 70s.

2709 and 2711 Coursework Units

This summer saw the last major session for Unit 2709 (it will still be available for re-sits in January and May 2009), so much of what is said about the work submitted may be of limited direct relevance, though many comments will relate equally to the administrative requirements of the new AS Unit F662, and of course Unit 2711 has a full further year to run (with re-sits in January and May 2010) before the new A2 unit takes its place. This Report will, however, follow the normal pattern, and comment simply on impressions of how candidates and Centres managed their work, together with suggestions as to ways in which improvements can be made.

There will be a number of quite significant criticisms, both of the contents of work and of administrative procedures adopted by Centres, but it is important to open with a more generally positive statement, because there can be no doubting the fact that once again there was some quite excellent work in both units, as well as a large amount of very sound, carefully written and presented material; candidates and Centres alike must be thanked and indeed congratulated on another generally very successful and satisfying session: in the words of one moderator, *“Once again, Unit 2711 produced some really outstanding work from those candidates who demonstrated an astonishing level of academic sophistication, maturity and confidence”*; or from another, *“The overall standard of work in Unit 2711 was high, and it was a genuine pleasure to read candidates’ work, and to share their personal engagement and sense of discovery with the texts studied”* and *“Moderating this Unit again provided the opportunity to read some exciting and illuminating work”*. Clearly, especially at A2, work remained at a strikingly high standard.

Moderators’ comments on AS Unit 2709 were rather more subdued: *“Submissions for 2709 this year were of a good standard”*; *“On the whole a sound session”*; *“All went quite smoothly this session”*. And it was in this unit that most concerns appeared to arise; there are no doubt as many reasons for this as there are Centres, so no general conclusions can be adduced, though there are certainly some general critical comments that must be made.

Punctuality first: there were more issues this summer than ever before of work and/or marks coming late; as has been said repeatedly, the date for submission of work is the same every year, and will remain the same for the new Specification – May 15th is the last date by which moderators should receive work or marks from Centres. There will of course be some occasions when a Centre cannot meet this date for entirely unexpected and valid reasons, and provided OCR is advised of this before May 15th allowance can often be made; it should not be necessary, however, for moderators to have to chase work again and again, or to receive it up to two or even three weeks late. The same is the case when a sample is requested; this should be sent to the moderator within a few days, not a few weeks, nor again after further telephone calls and emails.

Over-long work was an unexpectedly frequent problem this year, and Centres may want to look carefully at the regulation regarding this in the new Specification. There can surely be no excuse for allowing candidates to submit folders that exceed 3000 words; over-length work can and must be managed at the drafting stage. Moderators should not have had to count words, or return work. As one moderator said, *“I cannot believe that Centres are unaware of the word limit at this stage – and some of the folders sent to me were in excess of 4500 words”*.

Plagiarism thankfully appeared to be a very small concern this summer, and it may be that Centres have become sharper-eyed and more adept at spotting work that is not apparently that of the candidate him/herself. There were some folders, however, that were clearly and provably copied from internet material; where a moderator finds such work, s/he has no choice – the work is sent straight to OCR, and the candidate will be penalised. No last-minute re-writing can be allowed.

Other administrative irritations continued: incomplete or illegible mark-sheets; missing mark-sheets; missing authentication forms; folders with no candidate numbers on them; marks that were different on the mark-sheets from those on the folders; and still those Centres (a surprisingly large number) who do not use staples or treasury tags to keep candidates' work together, simply sending large numbers of loose sheets of paper – a recipe surely for potential disaster!

Enough gripes: though some of these are arguably quite trivial, they were frequent enough to cause considerable inconvenience for moderators, and none of them was necessary. Interestingly, but puzzlingly, they almost invariably related to Unit 2709 rather than Unit 2711; there must be a reason for this, but this is not the place to speculate - enough simply to ask that Centres must, please, take more care.

Despite everything that has just been said, moderators spoke well and gratefully about the great care taken by most Centres, and about the efficiency and professionalism that was evident. Work was thoughtfully and helpfully annotated; summative comments were apt and usefully linked to the Assessment Objectives; marks allocated were explained and justified by these comments, and although there was still an over-riding tendency towards over-generosity the marks awarded were generally at least reasonably close to agreed standards. Most candidates, whatever the quality of their work, were obviously well and sensitively managed by their teaching staff.

Annotation has just been mentioned; this was in most cases, and in both units, clear and helpful, though there were still a few Centres where there were either no comments at all (always suggestive, however unfairly, that the moderator might be seeing a fair copy of an already corrected piece) or comments that were personal and bore no explicit relation to the AOs; it is certainly useful for moderation to see how markers have viewed their candidates' writing, but however lively and occasionally even entertaining these comments are it is far more valuable if they are directed to the ways in which the work does, or does not, fulfil what each AO requires.

Several moderators noted with surprise and disappointment that some Centres did not appear to notice spelling and syntactical errors, and that even where these were noted the inaccuracies seemed to be completely ignored when the mark was decided upon. AO1 does require clear and correct writing, and the QWC criteria must also be taken into account. A moderator really should not have to say that "*some Centres commented on technical inaccuracy and awkward sentence construction, yet still awarded full marks*"; another, even more firmly, noted "*one or two shocking examples of Centres appearing to ignore AO1 during internal moderation and marking, and presenting stolidly or even partially incoherently written folders in the higher bands*". This second comment applied to 2709; 2711 work was in general far more confidently and securely written.

AO2 remained a serious concern at 2709, though again was much better handled by 2711 candidates. AO2i is dominant in 2709, carrying more weight than any other single AO; this has been the case since the Specification began, but still there were many selected-passage pieces that failed to address its demands, and Centres' marks had to be adjusted because candidates failed partly or often entirely to relate the selected passage in any meaningful way to their text as a whole. This was almost uniformly the case where poetry was concerned, but not exclusively so; while there was some very good close critical reading of the passages, all too often there was no attempt at all to show how the styles and techniques identified and explored in this way could also be seen elsewhere in the whole anthology, collection, or indeed novel or play. This has for many years been a considerable weakness in many folders, and it was sad to see it still being so in this last major submission. A2 candidates showed a much greater ability to move around their texts, drawing appropriate links and connections between various parts as they did so. They were also rather more adept at noting and commenting upon relevant aspects of genre and period, though to be fair many AS candidates handled these aspects with some skill too.

As just suggested, AO3 was managed quite well, often very well, by candidates in both units; this was a notable strength at AS (in the words of one moderator, “*Consistently well done – candidates seemed confident with this – work at all levels showed an ability to tackle points of language, structure and form*”), and it was very good to read so much easy and fluent critical exploration in A2 pieces – in most instances integrated smoothly into the overall argument rather than bolted on or inserted somewhat clumsily as has sometimes been the case in past years. “Structure and form” were positively commented on by this moderator, but others did suggest that while language was very confidently handled, there was much less certainty about the ways in which texts, or even parts of texts, were structured.

AO4 remained something of a problem area; some Centres, and some candidates, addressed it with real skill and confidence, while others appeared almost entirely unaware of what it really demands. No candidate at all failed to present at least some sort of personal response, and this was often reached at least partly in response to a nudge or provocation in the task that was set; too many, however, still failed to address the need (and the Band Descriptions make it quite clear that it is a *need*) to engage with the actual or possible views of other critics. This point has been reiterated in many Reports and at all INSET meetings, and indeed in moderators’ reports to individual Centres, so it was especially disappointing to find that high marks were still being awarded in respect of AO4 when candidates had made no reference whatsoever to the possibility that other views might be possible, let alone taken hold of them, engaged with them, and used them as a means of reaching their own conclusions. Some moderators were quite – and correctly – outspoken about this: “*as noted last year, the ‘other possible interpretations’ aspect of AO4 was very variable; some Centres handled it quite adeptly, but others seemed to ignore the fact that ‘interpretations’ is plural*”; “*this is the most worrying AO, as too many middle-band candidates make no reference at all to any views other than their own*”; “*in many cases candidates merely quoted a critical view without discussing it*”. In fairness, others did say that “*there was also some very good engagement with other critical views and possible interpretations*” or “*the best candidates were not only able to provide their own interpretations, but also to consider the views of other critics and to analyse them*”. AO4 is certainly an aspect of the Specification that needs more thought and encouragement by Centres; one moderator’s comment takes a longer-term view of the situation, and makes some helpful and valuable points:

“Candidates’ ability to use critics well depends so much upon earlier development of their literary skills. If they have been helped to find their own voices in the early stages of the A Level programme they will be less likely to simply ‘borrow’ from other critics, but will use them as sounding boards against which to test their own judgements. Scrupulous acknowledgement of secondary sources is generally a sign of both honesty and independence of thought.”

This last sentence is a particularly interesting one, deserving of some consideration in a number of ways.

The final Assessment Objective, AO5, was generally handled with ease and confidence by most. Gone – almost – are the days when essays began with a piece of sometimes spurious historical or biographical information before moving on to the task in hand; such essays did still exist, but the great majority were well able to integrate, and above all to use effectively and appropriately, contextual ideas and materials. Context was interpreted in many different ways – literary, social, historical, cultural – all of which could be made relevant and illuminating. This last word is perhaps the most important: simply to say, for instance, that *The Great Gatsby* is set in “the Jazz Age”, or is a reflection of “The American Dream” is of little value – an essay which *uses* this idea, and relates it to the events, characters and themes of the novel is much more likely to achieve higher marks in relation to AO5, and more importantly is much more likely to show a genuine understanding and enjoyment of the writing than is a candidate who in the words of one moderator “*made dutiful references to the Jazz Age background which had been taken from the York or other Notes on the novel*”.

There have been many criticisms in this Report, but although they reflect some disappointing and sometimes worrying trends they are also intended to act as guides to Centres as to ways in which future submissions can be made even better than they were this summer. For despite the criticisms, there can be no doubt that coursework continues to reflect some excellent teaching, and to show some high-calibre critical understanding and writing among many candidates. Although it was said at the beginning there was some outstandingly good academic and scholarly work, it is important to stress that moderators also praised the efforts and the successes of the very many less confident but equally hard-working candidates, whose folders and essays gave a great deal of real pleasure: "When candidates have the opportunity to follow their own enthusiasms, real energy and directed scholarship is often the result. This is not, however, restricted to those at the top of the mark range; there are many candidates rightly placed in the lower bands who have nevertheless gained enormously from their engagement with the texts and tasks, and whose learning and enthusiasm are evident in their writing." Moderators do and must criticise where necessary, but they invariably find far more to praise and indeed to enjoy in what they are sent. Coursework is very much alive and well; Centres and candidates alike will find a great deal of challenge but also surely of pleasure in the new Specification.

2710 Poetry and Drama pre-1900

General comments

This Summer's examination produced a large number of impressive responses from candidates. Examiners reported fewer 'regurgitated' answers, 'more thinking on their feet', more exploration, and a wider range of reference within essays. As one examiner put it, the paper offers 'challenging books from the mainstream of classical English Literature, with no concessions to the age or possible inexperience of our candidates, and an examination that puts those books under the critical spotlight in a way that allows for full differentiation.' Our aim must be to provide a test that allows the competent to perform competently, the basic candidate to write a basic script, but one which also allows the stars to shine. Reports suggest that we seem largely to be achieving that aim.

It is becoming clear that, while the confident expression of an informed opinion is at the heart of the dominant Assessment Objective (AO4) on this paper, a major discriminator of answer success will be the quality of evidence cited to support candidates' views. This year, the quality of cited evidence on most of the poets, especially Chaucer, Milton and Hopkins, was very high. Generally answers on Blake were somewhat less satisfactory, with a limited range of poems all too often being offered to sustain a relatively limited argument.

In general the handling of AO5ii was more confident, especially on Chaucer and Milton. Answers on Blake, however, too often produced crude claims for Blake as a social revolutionary, rooted in vague and generalized assertions about corruption in the upper classes, slavery, industrialisation and chimney sweeping. Candidates would have been better advised to look more closely at a wider range of poems.

Critical support was largely appropriate and well used. A number of candidates attempting AO4 critical support relied on imagined anonymous critics; 'some critics say...', 'feminist critics would say ...', 'Marxist critics ...'. This is rarely a helpful stratagem. Some even adopted the quotation in the question and claimed many critics held that view.

Examiners this year reported a surprising number of scripts offering views in an inappropriately colloquial style: talking of 'Hamlet's crew', and Hamlet's 'Mum', 'Gerty', 'Ophelia is a smug time-server who has only herself to blame', Horatio as 'the last man standing', and Januarie 'getting it on' with May. Sometimes such language was accompanied by equally confident but inappropriate AO5ii evidence, such as 'Milton was a lifelong misogynist' and 'the Duke has every right to behave as he does because he is God's representative on earth'.

Comments on individual questions

Section A: Poetry

Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*

Both questions seem to have been empowering. Candidates were well-prepared, contextually alert, and in the majority of cases pleasingly aware of the layered irony that drives the tale. There were some incautious remarks at times such as 'all 14th Century marriages were loveless business deals' but in the main contextual knowledge was very pleasing.

1(a): 'A sordid tale of love and betrayal.'

Many candidates wrote about this with gusto, and there were some superb responses. Often answers dealt separately with the 'love' and 'betrayal' aspects, and quite often with the 'sordid'.

Most agreed that lust rather than love dominates the Tale, or that betrayal is more important than love. There was plenty of fluent referencing, and the Biblical (Rebekka, Song of Songs) and Classical allusions (Paris, Helen, Priapus, Pluto, Proserpina) were handled illuminatingly in the best answers. Betrayal and illicit sex were felt to be the stuff of *fabliau*; this and the parodic courtly love elements 'ensure that we don't take Damyan's love for May very seriously.' (On the other hand one writer suggested that the allusions to courtly love, mocking or not, 'raises the poem above the sordid *fabliau* level' – as do the mythological references and 'auctoritees'.) There was some agreement that May is 'the only character whose "sordid" nature can be partly excused,' either because she is the victim of a patriarchal society or because 'the love that Januarie feels is nothing more than sexual.' Some had trouble with the concept of 'love', suggesting that there is a kind of genuine and vulnerable need felt by Januarie for May at the end of the poem, but also claiming that Damyan 'loves' May because of the love sickness he displays, without nuancing this enough by referring to AO2 backgrounds. Many good answers considered the word 'betrayal' and worked it up to another level – 'the self-betrayal' of the Merchant who betrays his understanding by lapsing into cynicism. Some do not see any comedy in the Tale - 'she has no power and has to hide in the toilet to read her letters' - but another answer concluded 'the betrayal is not necessarily treated as sordid, but rather with a sense of humour'.

1(b) 'Throughout *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale* women have the upper hand.'

There were many very good answers on this too, many of which avoided a straightforward yes/no approach and instead explored it via the Merchant's Prologue (and indeed other contexts within the 'marriage group' and the tale of patient Griselda). They then moved on to Januarie's reductive approach to choosing a bride, the wedding night and May's table-turning in the garden. The dialogue between Pluto and Proserpina came in for close scrutiny, with some seeing Proserpina's gift of the gab as a failed and eventually inadequate compensation for the genuine facts of female subjugation in the fourteenth century; others saw it as an assertion of female freedom in their ability to outwit men; fewer realised it actually confirms the Merchant's jaundiced view of women. Plenty of candidates wanted to locate this question inside a feminist critique of the Tale, and this proved always an interesting and often a fruitful context. 'Abused, exploited May' might work for the first third of the Tale, but something much more interesting is needed as a total account. Too few seem to question *why* May marries Januarie in the first place, what her motives were and whether she had any alternative. Plenty wanted to talk about the status of women in the fourteenth century but very few supported their views with historical or literary reference. Does the representation of the female pilgrims on this journey to Canterbury – the Wife of Bath and Prioress especially – suggest a totally downtrodden weaker sex?

George Herbert: *Selected Poems*

The range of textual discussion on Herbert has broadened and the depth of the subsequent reading gratifyingly broadened, and candidates seem much more aware of the seventeenth century context.

2(a) 'Although Herbert sings of sin, his theme is love.'

Answers that could focus on both sin and love were tending to move into higher bands, looking at the relationship between the two. A pleasing number of answers were remarkably well-informed and knowledgeable on Herbert's Anglicanism and where the Reformation was up to by the 1640's. Not many candidates considered *sings*, which was potentially a fruitful stimulus. Some of the most convincing answers worked on the basis that 'Sin and love are both addressed in Herbert's central theme of the Redemption.' 'Herbert's poems often culminate in a rhyming couplet which affirms his love for God ... He seems to "sing of sin" because he is confident enough in his "love" for God to feel assurance that his sins will be forgiven.'

2(b) 'simplicity is Herbert's greatest strength.'

This was not as popular as 2(a), but produced some very good answers. Simplicity can be applied to both the subject matter and the style of Herbert's poetry. The better answers could see a link between the two, and the best ones could dispute the question: 'Herbert may appear superficially simple but the truth is very different' was a line attempted by some, or 'complex ideas in a simple form' was another sophisticated variant. These were excellent responses. There was good writing on the apparent complexity and final simplicity ('something understood') of 'Prayer', the rejection of 'curling with metaphors a plain intention' in 'Jordan' (II), and the more obvious simplicity of thought and language in 'The Church-Porch'.

John Milton: *Paradise Lost* Books 9 and 10

As one Examiner wrote, 'the quality of Milton answers continues to be a delight. For any who accuse A2 English Literature of dumbing down ... they only need to be pointed in the direction of Milton and *Paradise Lost*. English Literature doesn't come much more classical than this, the canon doesn't come much purer: but set two books of this seventeenth century Latinate epic for seventeen and eighteen year olds, and they run with it in an altogether exhilarating and heart-warming fashion. Classical English Literature, in other words, is alive and well.'

3(a) 'In *Paradise Lost* Books 9 and 10 Milton explores both the delights and dangers of independence.'

This question evoked an entire range of responses. Some acceptable, generally sound, answers could sketch Adam and Eve's desire for independence and its dangerous results quite effectively. Competent answers were tending to focus on 'both delights *and* dangers'. Proficient arguments were tending to move outwards from Adam and Eve and look at Satan, and how far *he* was motivated by a desire for independence. Some excellent answers could see the relevance of this question to the whole free will debate: whether Adam and Eve were more mature characters after the fall, whether they had any choice in falling or not, whether they had to have had flawed personalities to succumb to Satan's temptation, how *felix* was the *felix culpa*, and so on. Candidates often saw the 'dangers' leading the way – through the Fortunate Fall – to 'delights'. Others usefully related independence to larger debates about free will or considered Milton's 'Protestant interest in the importance of finding one's own independent relationship with God.' There was much to be said here, and many candidates rose to the challenge.

3(b) '*Paradise Lost* Books 9 and 10 are less about loss than about growth and gain.'

As ever, candidates showed a gratifying awareness of the poem outside Books Nine and Ten, and a good sense of context for the opening change of mood in Book Nine. There were some excellent analyses of the debate/ argument/ quarrel between Adam and Eve on the theme of her gardening alone, the weevil of original sin already entering the paradise of Eden. Satan's initial response to this paradisaic beauty, personified in his first glimpse of Eve, was often sensitively and persuasively handled. The overall sense of its fragility, that these good times are at their best precisely because about to end, was not missed. Others suggested that with the Fall comes mortality, but also human history, civilisation, culture and eventually... us. There were fewer pro-Satan stances this year, with many arguing strongly that if anyone loses, it is he. The dramatic consequences of the fall and the nature of Divine Judgement, especially its appropriateness, were treated well. Candidates clearly enjoyed Satan's punishment fitting the crime, the best of times of his triumphal return to Pandemonium giving way so tragically quickly to 'a monstrous serpent on his belly prone'. The ending of Book Ten, with its note of hope amidst the elegiac sadness, was discussed very maturely in many of the better scripts: neither the best of times nor the worst, but a new beginning after the end of both.

John Dryden: Selected Poems

There were too few answers on Dryden this year to make any general comment.

William Blake: Selected Poems

There are encouraging signs this year of an improvement in work on Blake: but very few answers considered material beyond *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. We have repeatedly urged candidates to read more widely, and encouraged a sense of irony and contradiction in their reading. Too many Blake answers are still grounded in dogmatism and over-simplification.

5(a) 'Blake's most effective poetry explores a world of suffering and loss'.

This elicited a great variety of responses. One perceptive writer said that Blake explores 'not only literal suffering and loss – slavery, prostitution and the industrial revolution – but the metaphorical and spiritual suffering of the mind through lack of creativity and "mind-forged manacles".' Loss of innocence in *Songs of Experience* was a popular topic, but many answers found 'darker' elements in *Songs of Innocence* also. ('Loss' could also be of the imagination or of Albion.) Children's suffering, and the use of a child's voice to expose it, were a common focus for discussion. The poems - with special emphasis given to 'London' and the 'Chimney Sweeper' and 'Holy Thursday' pieces – were said to privilege 'the marginalised: harlots, chimney-sweeps, charity children.' Some answers dealt interestingly with the 'most effective poetry' aspect of the question, using 'Infant Joy' and 'The Lamb' most often as examples of effective poems not about suffering. (A few allowed this approach to carry them too far from the main topic.) The least successful tended simply to list instances of suffering and loss, drawing usually on a very few poems. Much space was devoted to generalisations about Blake as 'keen social campaigner'; many answers referred to the social message of the poems but few discussed them as poetry. However, there was some close-reading, albeit sometimes with a social emphasis: for example one candidate explored the double meaning of 'forged' in 'London' – 'man restricts himself very powerfully, as if in steel, but also completely falsely: it does not need to happen'. Range of reference was, in some Centres, most remarkably extended this year: one examiner reported 'this year's answers were for me the most interesting since I started examining, largely because of the wider range of reference, so that we had 'Thel', 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', 'The Book of Urizen', even 'The Four Zoas', all knowledgeably mentioned.'

5(b) 'Blake's poetry gains its energy from its contradictions'.

This provoked interesting responses, with the best going beyond the dualisms and exploring the anti-dualistic nature of Blake's thought (he did call dualisms a 'cloven fiction' and it is the *marriage* of Heaven and Hell.) Answers could achieve a competent level that were limited to the pairings in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, but more creditable better work moved outwards to 'America' and 'Thel' and beyond. Some very impressive answers considered the energy not only of the ideas but of the form, and where the power of Blake's language comes from. Any analysis of Blake's energy as a writer could be rewarded here for its imaginativeness.

Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Poems

Hopkins continues to be discussed with passion and style by the small number of Centres who choose him.

6(a) 'Hopkins' poetry celebrates beauty whilst lamenting its passing.'

This was generally well answered, and well understood. A minority of answers argued for one or the other of 'celebrates' or 'lamenting'. Some candidates saw this question as an opportunity to

run a 'pros and cons' debate on the two 'sides', and then agree with one. As with Blake, the many who had plenty of quotations at their fingertips were able to tackle AO3 very effectively.

6(b) 'Much of Hopkins' poetry powerfully dramatises the experience of pain.'

Candidates saw that different kinds of pain might be addressed, and looked at evidence for this. Some very good answers successfully linked AO5ii biographical details with expression of pain. The danger of such biographical support was that at times it could overwhelm literary analysis. Some answers ignored 'powerfully dramatises' almost completely.

Section B: Drama

William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*

7(a): 'Horatio is crucial to the meaning and effects of the play *Hamlet*.'

A few answers spent too little time on Horatio and too much on other characters who might or might not be 'crucial'. More often, however, he was discussed discerningly. Most argued that he was a 'sounding-board' for Hamlet, a balance or contrast; 'when Horatio is present a profound sense of order is restored.' They noted that he stands apart, 'has virtually no contact with the other supporting characters,' is not part of the court. 'Similar to a Greek Chorus, he is never quite central to the action but always present and judging what happens.' There were pertinent contrasts between the thoughtful Horatio and the men of action Fortinbras and Laertes, and between loyal Horatio and the less reliable university men Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. His role as Hamlet's survivor was considered interestingly. Some argued that 'his summary to Fortinbras shows that he understands little of what has happened to Hamlet, leaving the only really close relationship as that between Hamlet and the audience.'

7(b): 'Hamlet avenges his mother, rather than his father.'

This was a popular choice. However, we had not anticipated the problems which all too many candidates had with the work 'avenge'. A number of answers confused 'avenge' with 'take vengeance on' – sometimes fluctuating between the two meanings – but often came to much the same relevant conclusions as their colleagues. A greater problem was a tendency to generalised speculation about Hamlet's and Gertrude's motives and psychology. Argument often digressed into lengthy consideration of Hamlet as revenger more generally, the Ghost's reliability or otherwise, or 'whether Gertrude is a victim or an accomplice.' The same topics found a suitably briefer place, of course, in many essays more clearly focused on the question.

Many of the strongest answers here focused clearly on the wording of the question, and understood the full implications of 'avenges his mother'. They focused on the end of the play, and argued clearly the implications of Hamlet's language and how it showed his feelings. They weighed carefully the implications of the question, drawing attention to the 'how far' part. They considered the Ghost's instructions, and how far Hamlet was able to follow them. They drew attention to the Ghost's intervention in the Closet scene, and often provided interesting background from the Revenge tradition, and from the historical implications of Henry VIII's divorce. Some very interesting points were made about the relationship between the Player Queen and Gertrude. Many answers invoked the Oedipus complex. Some took this rather too literally perhaps – Hamlet 'wants to kill Claudius for having done what he hasn't been able to do, kill his father and sleep with his mother'. Others found it a helpful concept in offering such broader views as 'His psyche has been shattered by the transformation of the madonna mother figure into a whore. Yet his relationship to her seems more vivid than his reverential attitude towards his father.' Another mature conclusion was that 'Whilst Hamlet's father's death may have initiated his obsessive interest in the spiritual and physical elements of death, his mother's

“betrayal” could be seen as the root of his greatest obsession – the contrast between “being” and “seeming” and the nature of acting.’

William Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*

This play continues to stimulate passionate and committed essays from students at all levels of attainment.

8(a): ‘The only truly sympathetic character in the play is Lucio.’

Many thoughtful and well-informed answers recognised that Lucio is an interesting character: first, so fully-drawn in his role; second, he appears right through the play; third, our attitudes to him change significantly in the course of the play; and lastly, he helps focus the key theme of Justice, particularly in Act V. Many answers strongly agreed that Lucio is ‘the only truly sympathetic character.’ He variously ‘lacks the other characters’ hypocrisy,’ is ‘in tune with his own sexuality,’ does what he can to save Claudio, speaks true when he allegedly slanders the Duke. He also, some answers stressed, wins sympathy for the laughter he brings to the play. Occasionally he received a more mixed reaction: ‘Lucio’s name means “light”. He operates as a bringer of light by exposing hypocrisy and flaws of others and the state. But light may also associate him with Lucifer in the way he manipulates, lies and slanders.’ Occasionally answers which considered other characters’ claims to sympathy carried their writers too far from Lucio. On both *Measure for Measure* questions many candidates believed, as in previous years, that Lucio is actually hanged. One or two who had seen lively productions spoke up for most of the lowlife characters as sympathetic, too.

8(b) ‘In *Measure for Measure* nobody receives justice.’

This central, mainstream question was on the whole answered extremely well. As with all such questions, saying what was understood by ‘justice’ always lent cogency and focus to the subsequent discussion, extrapolating from individual character judgements to the nature of *Justice* in the play as a whole. Many could see a significant justice-mercy dichotomy, and a fair few could see the ending as deliberately unsatisfactory, somehow related to this as a Problem Play, with nobody left satisfied, neither characters nor audience, in a strangely nihilistic conclusion. There was particularly good AO4 critical support here: many candidates had read widely in the critics, and were able not only to quote them appropriately but also in some cases to engage with them, and actually say where they disagreed with Boas or Wilson Knight, Rossiter or Maxwell. Less confident answers went through the characters in the form of a list, ticking or crossing as to whether they received justice. One problem was the inability in some answers to differentiate between *law* and *justice*, the latter containing within itself the crucial concept of *mercy*; so many answers argued that Claudius is receiving justice by being threatened with execution because he has broken the law against fornication, the penalty of which was death. Others were indignant at the fact that Barnadine is pardoned. Better answers, of course, explored the nature of mercy in the play, the legalism of Angelo compared with the kind of forgiveness – however warped - promulgated by the Duke. One or two candidates took a staunchly pro-Duke line, seeing him in a Wilson Knight way as a divine figure; a one-sided view, but refreshing after the ways others condemn him so easily. The question also allowed scrutiny of the final scene, and all the embedded silences, the most deafening of which is Isabella’s.

Thomas Middleton: *The Changeling*

This play attracts a growing number of really appreciative responses, many of them informed by a pleasing awareness of dramatic effect.

9(a): '*The Changeling* depends for its dramatic effect on a sense of enclosed spaces and constriction.'

As one Examiner wrote, 'what the question invites you to do is link the physical stagecraft of the play to its themes: imprisonment, restriction, confinement, crushing intimacy, claustrophobia, control, stifling sexuality...'. Such answers evoked the sense of claustrophobia - physical and psychological - and the best also explored how the madhouse sub-plot parallels and adds to that constrictive sense in the main plot. Some pleasing answers referred to the intricacies of the castle, which De Flores knows well, and were able to develop this idea of the space as a metaphor: Beatrice is in a labyrinth, which De Flores, a bull, knows only too well. The enclosed theatrical space was used in an interesting way, as an image of the conditions of the play, as were the restrictions of the madhouse.

9(b) 'Beatrice's disintegration both fascinates and repels.'

Beatrice was often felt to repel more than fascinate as she disintegrates: the audience is repelled by her actions because 'she is unaware of their consequences and is so self-deluded that she convinces herself she is acting morally'; Isabella's contrasting conduct makes Beatrice seem less sympathetic. Candidates were good at picking up early indications of what an unpleasant character she is. One candidate described her as 'the Iberian Lady Macbeth.' Confident answers engaged with feminist critics, and argued that audiences saw Beatrice's behaviour as her own fault, not of the 'patriarchal society'. Her language was analysed to show how motives emerged, and how the term *The Changeling* applied to her, other characters, and then the audience. There were some interesting comparisons between her and Isabella.

Aphra Behn: *The Rover*

10(a): 'Despite the poses adopted by the male characters in *The Rover*, the true predators in the play are the women.'

A candidate argued that 'The men are truly predators. The women adopt the prose of predators to defend themselves in a misogynistic society.' Most could see that this was a complex question: of course there are the two rape scenes, but there's also the gulling of Blunt and the emotional rape of Biancha. Who comes out top in the battle of the sexes here? The vast majority of responses to this question did not know the answer, which is exactly why they were so pleasing: the question produced engaged, informed and interesting debates.

10(b): 'Relationships are shown to be as much a matter of economics as of emotion.' How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of *The Rover*?

There were perceptive responses to this question: Angellica was said to be accustomed to 'treating each relationship as a business transaction' but Willmore 'left her business model in ruins' - 'her well-honed commercial attitude could not totally remove emotion from relationships.' Yet it is 'those characters who are able to suspend their emotions who are successful in their relationships. Hellena's committed and businesslike pursuit of Willmore ends in marriage.'

John Gay: *The Beggar's Opera*

11(a): 'Peachum is crucial to the dramatic effects of the play.'

In answers to this question, the issue of 'dramatic effects' was not always addressed. Less confident answers just described Peachum. A few answers focused on why other characters were crucial.

11(b): 'The *Beggar's Opera* is a highly moral play, in spite of its apparent glamorization of the criminal life.'

Answers varied widely in quality: however, there were some very good ones. Lots of answers failed to address 'in spite of its apparent glamorisation of the criminal life'. 'Satire' was repeatedly referred to, although in weaker answers not always fully understood. AO5ii material was generally blended appropriately. Textual reference for both these questions could often have been more precise.

George Bernard Shaw: *Mrs Warren's Profession*

This play has always attracted a range of committed, thoughtful responses. It continues to do so.

12(a): 'The play suggests that close relationships are always corrupting.'

Sound answers concentrated just on Vivie and her mother, and the extent to which they are 'close'. Fuller answers paid attention to the key word 'corrupting' and its precise meaning, and showed an awareness that other relationships also need analysing. The strongest answers challenged the whole thrust of the question: the relationship between daughter and mother was said to be corrupt precisely because it *wasn't* very close; the same was true of Frank and his father, or Crofts and Mrs Warren. Some answers could even generalise to the theme of prostitution as a whole, suggesting that the corruption of prostitution lies in its lack of closeness, its parody of a really close sexual relationship. This approach, allied to a close textual knowledge of the play, produced some outstanding responses. There was much good AO5 discussion on Fabians, Socialism, 'the New Woman' and the crisis of Capitalism. Equally, there were many staunch defenders of prostitution and our eponymous heroine. *It's a corrupt society which forces women into this way of life* was an angle encountered a number of times. Other answers saw Vivie's deliberate detachment from life and relationships as itself corrupt, a refusal to be close, a denial of intimacy.

12(b): 'Praed is the only interesting male character in the play.'

This provoked some good discussion of what it is to be 'interesting' – to be a goodly Praed or a stageworthy Crofts – but also much rather vague repetition of the word 'interesting'. As with the Lucio question, responses to this tended to become a series of comparisons, between Praed and other characters who were deemed to be more or less interesting. On this question where the word 'interesting' needed to be defined. Weaker answers used it naively; stronger answers attempted to explore our involvement in the play. No answer explored how (and why) Shaw constructed a play in which no character is particularly interesting – room for a discussion of Brecht's alienation effect here.... Several felt that Praed was uninteresting because, "conventionally unconventional", he does not share the contradictions of the other characters.'

2712 Prose post-1914 (Written Paper)

General comments

Overall standard: In general candidates seemed to be well prepared and to have enjoyed their texts. Some examiners reported that in their allocation the overall standard was very good, with only a handful of scripts in the lower ranges; others found fewer really excellent scripts than in previous years; and one that in his allocation results seemed to be bunched in Bands 2,3,4 with few at the top or bottom end. It was clear that some candidates from 'double-entered' centres felt that their coursework mark was adequate for their needs, and one or two were explicit about this in apologising for their mediocre performance.

Handwriting: There was some deplorable handwriting seen in this session. One examiner noted: "I struggled through one centre where script after script could not be deciphered; this was followed by a centre in which it was clear that the students had been taught the value of presentation." Candidates need to understand that what cannot be read, cannot be rewarded.

Quality of written communication: Comma splicing is now so prevalent that it was rare to find a script free from punctuation and syntax errors.

Technical terms: Candidates from many centres showed a good grasp of literary context and theory, but some imported terms such as 'post-modern', 'stream of consciousness', and epiphany with little relevance to the question addressed.

Intentionalist Fallacies: There are a notable number of candidates who insist that everything said by a fictional narrator must be intended to represent the viewpoint of the author. Perhaps they could be reminded what D H Lawrence once said: "Never trust the teller. Trust the tale."

Use of time: Most candidates now seem to be good at planning their time and writing two answers of apt length.

Section A: A persistent, if small, number of candidates still fail to identify passages; and some who do then fail to focus their responses upon their selected passages, writing a general Section B type answer. Sometimes AO3 analysis was present, but it was not always used relevantly in answer to the question asked. This may be because some candidates choose previously prepared passages about which they know they can comment on form, structure and/or language, and press these into the service of a question for which these passages are not appropriate. Sometimes there was still too much effort expended on AO5ii in Section A.

Section B: Some candidates still do not appreciate that more than description and/or listing in Section B is required. Sometimes candidates tackled only part of the question: for instance, 'How far, and in what ways...' means consider both of these, even if one carries more weight than the other in the candidate's view.

As ever, it would be a great help if candidates could put question numbers in the boxes provided on the front sheet of the answer book. Examiners waste time rectifying this omission.

Comments on individual questions

Cold Comfort Farm

This is a popular text. In general, the Section A question on Seth was well answered: candidates identified specific techniques used by Gibbons in her presentation of him, and accounted for the comic exaggeration so crucial to the effect he has in the novel. There was much enthusiastic featuring of porridge, mud-spattered thighs, panther's lounging grace and so forth. The Section B question on a 'clash between the ancient and the modern' was sometimes simplistically taken to mean 'town and country'. Few answers took on the idea of 'clash', many reading the word as meaning simply 'contrast'. Some settled for an account of the way the modern succeeds the ancient in the novel by means of Flora's agency. As elsewhere, the best answers made real efforts to consider the question fully, and on its own terms, while the less successful tended to produce well-informed lists of examples. Some of the best responses took issue with the statement, pointing out that Flora achieves some synthesis between ancient and modern and is herself Augustan in outlook. The alternative question on the creation of comedy out of 'nastiness' was less popular but generally well-handled by those who chose to tackle it. There was much commonsense discussion about the parodic intentions and effects of the novel, and on the importance of Flora's understated unflappability in ensuring that 'nastiness' is never for long taken seriously. Weaker answers tended to catalogue 'nasty but funny' things in the novel.

Atonement

This was by far the most popular text in this session. There were many very well-informed responses, but this sometimes meant that material was not used selectively and answers were flooded with pre-learnt or pre-annotated material. In the Section A question on 'the experience of childhood', AO2ii tended often to operate at the expense of AO3, although it is clear that there were times when McEwan's specific literary techniques were implicitly recognised as part of his overall narrative effects. Few answers considered fully the implications of the word 'experience' in the task, with many candidates either writing about McEwan's 'presentation of children' (ignoring the word 'experience'), or about characters who happened to be children, not relating their behaviour particularly to the experience of childhood. A common (and cogent) starting point was that childhood in the novel is characterised by a desire for adulthood, or at least for recognition and approval by adults. However, a misjudgement which sometimes followed on from such a promising start was to include personal opinions as to the nature of childhood as experienced by the candidates themselves. The better answers on the Section B question on betrayal considered subtle distinctions between different kinds of betrayal. 'Betrayal' of characters by their historical and/or cultural circumstances (class system, snobberies, the war and so forth) was sometimes well-integrated into the wider argument. Some highly effective writing dealt with the relationship between the reader and narrator and/or the narrator and her (semi?)-fictionalised versions of events. Less successful answers tended to stick 'within' the plot, thereby discussing the events themselves as if they were 'real'. The alternative question on the influence of women prompted answers ranging from the excellent to an unshaped listing of detached examples. Many of the better answers considered the nature and extent of Briony's 'influence' as the 'writer' of the novel. Others, sometimes very successfully, chose to take issue with the contention in the title alleging, for example, that there was no more controlling influence than Paul Marshall and his silence.

Rites of Passage

Although it was not as popular as in some sessions, there were some excellently astute and perceptive answers on this text, which seems to lend itself to mature thought and sophisticated response. The Section A question on Talbot was generally well-handled, producing clear, well-informed responses. There was again a slight tendency to let AO2ii predominate over AO3, but it

was rare for candidates completely to ignore the need for close analysis. The Section B question on different kinds of authority produced answers which ranged in quality from the successful (which gave due consideration to 'with what effects'), through the well-informed but unfocused, to a listing of different kinds of authority. The alternative question on a clash between good and evil produced some sensible considerations of how, while the characters may be presented as seeing a polarised morality, readers are encouraged to see things as much less easily defined.

Open Secrets

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

To the Lighthouse

It is clear that candidates answering on this text had been sensitively taught and effectively prepared for the examination, and in general they rose to the occasion by displaying mature and well-developed views. One examiner commented that 'it is clear teachers who choose Woolf are experts and enthusiasts'. In the Section A question on James Ramsay there was some perceptive discussion of the similarities as well as the differences between James and his father, and of the shifting viewpoint. Often candidates found more to say about James as a child than as he is presented in 'The Lighthouse', but the best were sharp in spotting plenty of material for comparison in that last section. A familiar weakness in Section A responses was the desire to display sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the whole text at the expense of really effective focus on the task set. On the Section B question concerning the effects of time, there were some impressive answers which used the H shape of the novel, the three main characters' search for different forms of permanence, and the imagery of waves. The alternative question describing the book as 'a novel of impressions rather than events' was less successfully dealt with, one or two candidates struggling with the idea of 'impressions'.

A Thousand Acres

A handful of centres answered on this text. In answer to the Section A question on two male characters there was some very effective AO2ii focus but, again, shortage of specific AO3 analysis was a weakness in some responses. In the Section B question on 'uses and abuses of personal power' there was much more about abuses than uses, which perhaps reflects the way in which the novel is likely to be read. The alternative about 'terrible things for which no-one is to blame' was answered by too few candidates for meaningful comment.

Letter to Daniel

There were only a few responses on this text, but there was in all questions a well-informed, sensitive understanding seen across a range of different kinds of despatch.

An Evil Cradling

There were some excellent answers on the Section A question concerning Keenan's determination not to be defeated, with strong AO3 emphasis on syntax, 'lexical field' (those who know it love this phrase), sound and imagery. There was some good engagement with the key words 'determination' and 'defeated', both of which were seen to have taken many forms. Less effective answers tended to be tempted away from focus on techniques into more general observations about Keenan's defiance of his captors.

Report on the Units taken in June 2008

The Section B question on human contact was generally well answered, and the alternative on 'the fury of life' drew some thoughtful comment on Keenan's relationship with the guards as well as his fellow hostages.

2713 Comparative and Contextual Study

General comments

This summer's paper once again reflected the work of candidates who are, almost universally, confident with this synoptic unit. The best work, again, was exhilarating: the literary and emotional maturity displayed by so many candidates remains impressive and a source of delight to examiners. At the other extreme there were very few candidates who struggled with the requirements of the examination. Rubric infringements were few, although this year a few candidates who had prepared for the 20th Century American Prose topic accidentally wrote on the Satire passage, written by Dorothy Parker.

All six topics were well in evidence this summer, marking a slight resurgence of Satire and Post-Colonial Literature as areas of study, although the 'Big Three' remain The Gothic Tradition, 20th Century American Prose and Post-1945 Drama. In broad terms, performance across the topic areas showed no discernible difference, although the greatest breadth of textual reference was often to be found in answers relating to Writing of the Romantic Era and Post-1945 Drama.

In Section A it remains a problem that many candidates still fail to observe that their primary requirement is to 'write a critical appreciation of the passage' – despite the prompt on the question paper that is specifically there as a reminder. This criticism is made in every report, yet the message is still too often disregarded. The second main historical weakness of approach in this section was much in evidence again, namely candidates' propensity to engage in 'trope spotting'. In other words, many students exhibit a desire to note known elements from their AO5ii checklist at the expense of simply responding alertly and openly to the literary qualities of the passage they encounter. As one examiner put it: "[they] write about what they think they ought to see." In particular, those writing about the Gothic seem susceptible to this approach, perhaps best exemplified by one candidate who wrote: "To achieve the status of Gothic tradition the literature must adhere to certain regulations". However, this reductive approach was to be found, to greater or lesser degree, in relation to all six topics.

With regard to Section B, last year's report on the June 2007 exam commented that many answers were limited by "partial or inadequate readings of questions, whereby only half a question is tackled with the 'tricky bit' overlooked or ignored". It is a source of regret, therefore, that this shortcoming was much in evidence again this year, notably in the 20th Century American Prose and Post-1945 Drama topics. In these cases the key words 'desperate' (10b) and 'inevitably' (10c) were as good as ignored by most candidates, and in the 11b question, which asked candidates to consider whether female figures in post-1945 drama are 'marginalized', the majority of candidates took this term to be a plain synonym for 'weak', though marginalization and weakness are clearly quite different concepts. Many candidates therefore damaged their chances of success because they were too quick in assuming what they believed a question's concerns to be.

Another feature of many candidates' work is misuse of the terms 'similar' and 'typical': examiners frequently read that 'Dick Diver is similar to Loyal Blood', or that 'Victor Frankenstein is a typical Gothic figure', for instance, but candidates often fail to substantiate such claims by arguing in what ways this may be so. Consequently, such claims, in whatever topic area, do not serve candidates' purposes particularly well. Answers do best where it is clear that a candidate is trying to think through the terms of the question on the day, there and then, rather than attempting to mould rehearsed material to an approximation of the terms of the question.

Many candidates achieved highly when writing about just two texts, although there was a feeling from a number of examiners that more candidates than usual concentrated excessively on their primary set text this session. Consequently, thorough, knowledgeable and sometimes

sophisticated discussions of, for instance, *Frankenstein*, *Tender is the Night* or *The Homecoming*, which would no doubt have done very well as 2710 responses, could not gain particularly high marks because the candidate failed to place that discussion within the context of the topic studied and/or to compare the text with others.

Ultimately, it is pleasing to note that the overall performance of the candidature continues to improve year on year, but it is perturbing, too, that the principal weaknesses observed by examiners over the years are still so frequently evident.

Comments on individual topic areas

Satire

The Dorothy Parker passage proved very fruitful for most candidates. Most answers identified the frivolous and “morally vacuous” (as one candidate put it) nature of the persona and the various devices such as repetition and exaggeration involved. The only significant recurring problem of interpretation was that of the ‘authorial fallacy’, whereby several candidates confused the diarist and Parker herself. That said, some observed that Parker may be sending herself up to a degree, given that she was part of the social whirl and world being satirised in the passage. The passage usually gave rise to some exposition of the state of economic affairs at the time – to be applauded since the topic has no overt cultural context – and the most frequent comparative text was Pope: many candidates made astute parallels between the diarist and Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*. Discussion of the banal nature of the diarist’s life was frequent; a few candidates also realised that the persona was rather more on the outer fringe of the high life she aspired to than she made out. Many candidates observed the light, witty Horatian tone at work, discriminating it from its darker, more severe Juvenalian counterpart.

In Section B the (a) and (c) essays (“Effective satire addresses universal themes from the starting point of small issues”; “Satire works best when it attacks human folly and weakness”) were both popular and answers on both centred almost always on *The Rape of the Lock*, which was usually well discussed and most often compared with *Gulliver’s Travels*. Quotations from Pope were frequent and apt, though unfortunately often offered in obviously incorrect wording which did not scan. The satirical targets of Pope and Swift were well-understood and discussed with often impressive historical contextual underpinning. With regard to (a), the most common line of argument was that satire primarily addressed the ‘folly and weakness’ (from the (c) question!) of humans, and since humans are universally and individually ‘small’, the question’s tenet basically held.

Few students who had studied *England, England* wrote on anything other than 7(b) (“Satire isn’t brave or wittily cutting-edge; it is rooted in a simple desire for the world not to change.”). Most wrote thoughtfully about the central project in the novel, whereby the Isle of Wight is transformed into Albion, a simulacrum of the England of the popular imagination, a false England that somehow becomes more real than the reality it purports to reflect. Candidates from one centre in particular knowledgeably and extensively cited Baudrillard in respect of this argument. Perhaps the most common argument was that Barnes’s central conceit was witty in the way that the text explored a core conservatism in people, one that dislikes change and hankers after a golden age that (probably) never was. A range of comparators was offered, and often Pope was given as an example of a voice of moral stability. Examiners report that little dystopian literature was discussed by candidates, perhaps surprising given that it centrally seeks to warn against the perils of certain shifts in society.

The Gothic Tradition

The passage from *Sir Bertrand: A Fragment* by Anna Laetitia Aikin worked well for most candidates, who realised that it was from the early years of the tradition and were able to relate it thoughtfully to *The Castle of Otranto* one way (similar) and *Frankenstein* the other (dissimilar). As noted above, many candidates were able to spot the various gothic tropes and effects, and a good number argued sensibly that the effects on the reader in the late eighteenth century would have been different from the present because of its relative novelty, in comparison with our more jaundiced (perhaps) recognition of often tired clichés. Opinion was divided about whether Sir Bertrand was a true hero for showing bravery in his remorseless ascent into the unknown in spite of his fear, or whether he was a weak man, not heroic, for the very fact that he showed fear (“his blood was chilled”).

The last few lines, when the scene changes tone and setting from darkness and threat to lightness and sensuousness, were not always considered, but when they were candidates often discussed them interestingly. Some argued that it was unclear whether Aikin had taken the reader through a transgressive boundary into a dreamlike realm; others discussed the scene as one of sexual transgression, noting its taboo qualities for its time. Less convincing answers argued that the passage was influenced by the French Revolution, whilst many others argued along the lines of one candidate who wrote that “1773 was pre-enlightenment therefore there was no scientific explanation” for what happened in the passage. Clearly, flawed AO5ii argument such as this is not helpful.

In Section B, most candidates had studied *Frankenstein*, and of those the majority answered question 8(a): “By comparing *Frankenstein* with at least one other Gothic text you have studied, explore the role and significance of the villain in Gothic writing.” *Dracula* was easily the biggest comparator. There was a good deal of intelligent discussion of how *Frankenstein* differed in scope and emphasis from many earlier gothic novels, with an almost universal line of argument that Shelley’s novel offered two villains (at least) in Victor himself and his creation, and that the concept of the villain was ambiguous, therefore. Some added a third, Walton, into the mix. Valuable discussions of the figure of the doppelganger were often introduced, sometimes linked to *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, whilst *Dracula*, *Ambrosio* (in *The Monk*) and *Manfred* (in *The Castle of Otranto*) were most often offered as straightforward villains, in so far as there is such a thing. From more modern texts, the eponymous *Woman in Black* and Frank from *The Wasp Factory* were seen as, simply, ambiguous villains! The few answers that referred to Raphael and Malachy from *The Dead School* as villains were rarely successful: not because a case could not be made; rather because a case simply was *not* made since the texts were cited at a very superficial level only. At the other end of the spectrum, some excellent responses discussed ways in which society itself was a ‘villain’, either as the source for idea of the monster as metaphor in *Frankenstein*, or as the corrupting cause of the decline in Raphael, and to a lesser extent Malachy, in *The Dead School*.

Questions 8(b) (“By comparing *The Dead School* with at least one other Gothic text you have studied, explore ways in which Gothic literature is ‘haunted by the past’”) and 8(c) (“Novelty and sensationalism are central elements of the Gothic tradition”) were minority interests this summer. With regard to the former, the haunting legacy of witnessing the deaths of their respective fathers, and the manner of those deaths, was securely articulated by most, and in respect of *Frankenstein* it was Victor’s failure to come to terms with the death of his mother that was most frequently cited as a correlative. Answers on 8(c) generally avoided the potential trap of doing no more than list examples of the novel and the sensational, with some astutely observing that early gothic was new and ‘sensational’ (in its effect on early readers) *ab initio* as a genre, showing good knowledge of its development from Walpole, through Shelley to the Victorian revival and up to the present day with its myriad current manifestations. Such answers, though infrequent, were rewarding for examiners to read.

Writing of the Romantic Era

It is most gratifying to see just how secure and assured so many candidates are when tackling this topic, with its requirement to explore the poetic form of the passage presented as well as its context: their success is a testament to some impressive teaching in a wide range of centres.

Peacock's poem, *Newark Abbey*, proved accessible to students of all abilities, with a good number of outstanding responses finding fruitful material to discuss that related to a range of Romantic concepts. Examiners reported discussions of transcendence, the effect of memory, the paradox of painful love, the Sublime, the constancy of nature, human mortality and so on. Whilst there was some careless reading – for instance, the “bridge sublime” (line 15) was for some a real ‘bricks and mortar’ bridge in the landscape around the Abbey – most answers grasped the nuances of the poem intelligently, thoughtfully considering ways in which past and present merge in the subjective individual experience. This issue was appropriately linked to Wordsworth's experience in *Tintern Abbey* on the one hand and to Keats's idea of negative capability on the other. Most discussed the poem's structure, observing its rhyme scheme, its iambic form (though this was often identified as pentameter rather than tetrameter) and its broken stanzaic form, although the effects of these features were not often considered. The best answers discussed the strong first person persona, noting how the romanticism of this poem is to be found less in the universal than in the personal reflections upon loss: ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’ as it were, and yet still felt *now*.

In Section B, Keats was the set poet most discussed this session, and of the three essay options, 9(a) (“An attempt to grasp what is far away, whether in time or place or spirit.”) was the favoured question. The wording deliberately invites a range of approaches, and candidates rose to the task intelligently. Keats's Odes were much cited, and many answers thoughtfully discussed the concept of negative capability as central to this question, deeming ‘far away’ to be that which is ill-defined, beyond reason or liminal: the love scene on the urn in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, together with the significance to the human soul of the nightingale's song, with its capacity to span time and link past and present, in *Ode to a Nightingale*, were frequently discussed. However, a wide variety of sources were drawn upon, and examiners reported intelligent discussion of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *Kubla Khan*, and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* too.

A second common approach to the question was to tackle it as one about memory. In that regard, a number of candidates used *Newark Abbey* in order to exemplify their argument. This was allowed – there is no basis upon which to disallow the use of a Section A passage – but it only proved of significant benefit where candidates developed what they had said in Section A, or found new things to say about it altogether.

Answers to 9(b) (“The poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions.” [Wordsworth: *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*] Consider the importance of ‘human passions’ in writing of the Romantic era) and 9(c) (Discuss the importance of the idea of the Sublime in writing of the Romantic era) were much less in evidence, although the quality of some responses on the latter question was astonishingly good. A number of candidates showed themselves to be steeped in understanding of the Sublime, and were able to discuss Edmund Burke and his influence on Romantic thought in depth and with acute insight. The Romantic response to the power and grandeur of nature, with its capacity to shock the perceiver and create a sense of transcendent awe and wonder, was widely discussed. Wordsworth's Lakeland experience was often considered, while some strong answers observed that the Sublime was in some senses an ‘early’ Romantic notion, even containing elements of the Gothic, and that in later Romantic writing it was perhaps less observable.

20th Century American Prose

The Upton Sinclair passage proved a very successful text this summer. At a relatively straightforward level, all candidates seemed able to discuss the context of the passage in AO5 terms, recognising its historical setting in a period of great industrial growth for America that was built, in part, on mass immigration. Appropriately, therefore, Jurgis and Ona were seen as figures in that tradition and, in almost all cases, were deemed to be in pursuit of the American Dream, with most candidates noting how the end of the passage reflected their spirit of hope and aspiration, not least in Jurgis's ambition to "go there and get a job". Better candidates, however, astutely discerned underlying ironies within the text, observing that the dispassionate third person narrator's eye rather coolly laid bare the grim reality of immigrant experience, one either not seen or ignored by the immigrants themselves.

There was much excellent AO3 evaluation of the passage, with many candidates thoughtfully analysing the imagery of decay and physical degradation on the rubbish tip and seeing its metaphorical implications for the moral, as many regarded it, state of American capitalism. Equally, the imagery of fire and smoke in the final paragraph was not a "dream of wonder" or a "vision of power" (as it is for Jurgis and Ona) for most candidates: it was plainly a vision of hell on earth. Other excellent answers observed how the "black and brown and grey and purple" sky of the sunset was an image of a damaged, bruised America, and many speculated intelligently that Sinclair was preparing readers for an inevitable tragedy that must befall Jurgis and Ona.

For all the strengths in responses to this passage, there were two frequent problems of interpretation that arose, one insignificant, the other less so. First, many students assumed Lithuania was in Africa, thought therefore that Jurgis and Ona must be black, and that in turn the passage had a wealth of potential to discuss black experience in 20th Century America. Examiners simply ignored this error of fact where it occurred – it did not in itself compromise any reading of the passage – but it did cause problems for the few who then went on to discuss at length their prepared AO5 material on black experience, sometimes digressing into comparison with *The Color Purple*, for instance. In such circumstances, if it was possible, examiners rewarded discussion that drew on the broad principles of oppression and exploitation that might be common to this passage and candidates' wider reading.

More worrying was the hugely common error of reading that was made by almost certainly over 90% of the candidature in the first five lines of the passage. Sinclair's text reads:

The streets through which Jurgis and Ona were walking resembled streets less than they did a miniature topographical map. The roadway was commonly several feet lower than the level of the houses, which were sometimes joined by high board walks; there were no pavements – there were mountains and valleys and rivers, gullies and ditches, and great hollows full of stinking green water.

Few candidates noted that there is an extended simile at work here, with Sinclair using exaggeration to describe the terrible state of the roads in the outskirts of Chicago at this time. Instead, it seems, candidates saw the words 'mountains and valleys and rivers' and launched into discussions of how significant landscape is to American prose writing, particularly in *Postcards*, and how the West is an iconic notion with its wide open spaces. Again, as noted above, candidates saw what they wanted and expected to see. Ultimately, the error was minor, because virtually all candidates quickly built a secure argument about how Sinclair was undermining any idealisation of landscape in this passage, which is true, and then moved on. The important point to note, though, is how un-critical and imprecise so many candidates' actual close reading was in this instance.

All three questions were tackled in good numbers this summer, with *Tender is the Night* slightly more popular than *Postcards*, although quite a few centres had prepared both texts with their students. A good range of texts for comparison was in evidence, with examiners citing in

particular *The Great Gatsby*, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Of Mice and Men* and *Cannery Row*, Walker's *The Color Purple*, Morrison's *Beloved*, Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. It is pleasing, though, that at least a couple of centres would have appear to have taught Richard Wright's *Native Son*: perhaps on the back of last summer's passage?

Question 10(a) ("Goodbye my father. Goodbye all my fathers." By comparing *Tender is the Night* with at least one other appropriate text you have studied, consider how far you agree with the view that 20th Century American prose explores a sense of being cut off from the past) elicited a range a responses, a number of them excellent and interesting for the fact that candidates approached their answers from perhaps unexpected angles. One very fruitful avenue for some was to discuss the structure of *Tender is the Night* itself, where (in the 1934 edition) the past, especially Dick Diver's, is necessarily cut off from the reader until it is revealed in flashback. Other answers discussed how Dick becomes cut off from his father's value system as the novel progresses, so picking up on the quotation's prompt, whilst others sensibly discussed how Nicole grows to be cut off from her abusive past, and how Rosemary Hoyt loses her 'past' innocence as she grows into experience through the novel's course. Many answers noted Dick's decline, or 'dive', from past heights to ultimate depths.

This proved a particularly successful question because many candidates, of a range of abilities, sought to tackle the specific aspect of being *cut off* from the past. A strong recurring line of argument pertaining to *Tender is the Night*, but also frequently to Loyal Blood in *Postcards* and the eponymous *Gatsby*, was that the past is always with you in the present and that, paradoxically, the past cannot be cut off from the present. Elsewhere, there was a pleasing understanding that the 'past' is not a single, finite notion, but that there are 'pasts', whether historic, individual or collective. Examiners enjoyed marking this question this summer.

Also successful was question 10(b) ("20th Century American prose is dominated by a desperate quest for the good life."), subject to the caveat in the introduction to this report about the unwillingness, or simple failure, of candidates to address the term 'desperate'. Many weaker answers addressed the expression 'good life' as a simple synonym for the American Dream, yet still managed to write successful answers within quite narrowly defined parameters. There were many responses that were much more sophisticated and discriminating, especially in relation to the core text, *Postcards*, arguing succinctly and persuasively that Loyal Blood's quest, if such it is, is to avoid or escape a bad life once he has caused Billy's death, noting the irony that his 'good life' exists at the start of the book on his own land, the farm. Others also thoughtfully pointed out the irony that it is Billy who ends up staying on the farm – dead! – whilst it is Loyal who is forced to quest, or journey, through the book, which was Billy's desired dream of a good life, by heading West. Candidates also argued that whenever the good life is attained or threatens to be attained in *Postcards*, such as Dub's acquisition of money through Real Estate trading or Jewell's acquisition of metaphorical freedom in learning to drive, it is dashed by fate or misfortune. As such, the American Dream is just that: a dream, an illusion. One candidate pointedly observed that *Postcards* is "the quest of desperates"! Fitzgerald's two novels were the primary comparators, and much implicitly strong discussion was seen with regard to *Gatsby*'s futile quest to win (back?) Daisy, although it was a weakness of many answers that discussion remained at the level of assertion.

Question 10(c) ("Innocence is inevitably corrupted") was least often answered, most responses related to *Tender is the Night*. Discussion went in two primary directions, evaluating either various characters' innocence – or otherwise – or considering whether America, and its concomitant 'Dream', is itself an 'innocent' that is corrupted. Again, as noted above, the tag 'inevitably' was addressed by few. Strong answers sought to discriminate between innocence and naivety, often finding Dick Diver to be more the latter than the former, and several arguing that Rosemary Hoyt was never an innocent – particularly given her mother! Nicole's abuse by her father was invariably cited as an example of corrupted innocence, but some then argued interestingly that she in turn corrupts the father figure that is Dick Diver. Opinion was divided

about whether she does this consciously or not. Elsewhere, *Loyal Blood* was mostly seen as a tragic innocent, as was *Gatsby* by many, despite his criminal associations.

Post-1945 Drama

The passage between the two characters, Norma and the Matron, proved successful and gave candidates plenty to write about, although some answers examined the italicised introductory note, regarding it as a stage direction in Whittington's text. In a few cases candidates thought that Whittington was perhaps being judgemental in using the expression "illegitimate baby". Such opinions did not hinder overall responses.

Most candidates responded thoughtfully and positively to the dynamic between the two characters, noting their disparity in age, experience and status. There was a range of opinion about the Matron figure, with some viewing her as a blunt, insensitive woman who is slave to a paradoxically un-Christian world view, whilst others found her a more subtle character, someone who is hidebound by her professional role, and whose humanity is obscured by the formality of her language. Equally, candidates were divided about whether the church was a support for Norma in her hour of need or an agency of oppressive social and moral control. Sympathy for Norma abounded. Many candidates observed that an audience's perspective in 2008 reflected a changed social outlook from that of 1964, and went on further to argue that presumably Whittington's purpose in writing the piece back in 1998 was to highlight what most saw as the social hypocrisy of the earlier period.

There was some strong AO3 analysis. Good answers observed a stichomythic quality to the dialogue, although it was noted that there was scope for actors and a director to work with pace and speed here to highlight tension, or Norma's naivety. Strong answers understood more of the Matron's attempt to steer the conversation, for example "A lifetime's companion" implying that the adoption arrangement was permanent, whereas some took her remarks more at face value, as of course does Norma. The coldness of the Matron (as most deemed it), however, with her concern not to upset "the other girls" and the vulnerable state of Norma were picked up by all, as was the Matron's assumption that "fitting in" was a question of eye colour rather than temperament. There were, quite properly, various interpretations of the tone and effect of the final tableau.

Both set plays were much in evidence this summer, and the principal comparators were *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Death of a Salesman* and *Look Back in Anger*, which seems to have had a surge this session (this may be due to the presence of a passage from that play in January this year). Question 11(a) (By comparing *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* with at least one other appropriate play, discuss the importance of the idea of 'the burden of guilt' in Post-1945 Drama) was answered effectively by many candidates. Albee's play offers many sources of guilt for candidates to get their teeth into, ranging from George's failure to be "the" History department and his "bergin" episode, through to Honey's self-induced abortions, Martha's actual (or would-be) infidelity with Nick and, most crucially, George and Martha's guilt – and profound sorrow – at not being able to have a real family. All these were intelligently addressed. Elsewhere, Blanche proved a major focus for discussion, both in respect of guilt over the loss of Belle Rêve and her being the cause of her husband's suicide, but interestingly several answers revealingly discussed Stanley's moral guilt for raping Blanche, about which he feels no guilt or remorse at all.

Question 11(b) on *The Homecoming*, asked candidates to consider whether "Female characters are marginalized in post-1945 drama" and was the most answered question on this topic this session. Ruth proved a source of much debate for candidates, with many arguing that she starts the play as an outsider, both literally and figuratively, and gradually comes to adopt the primary power position in the play, paradoxically by choosing to become a whore by the end. There was intelligent discussion of the misogynistic context of Max's household with his sons and the

crucial background presence of Jessie in the play, but candidates were undecided whether the ending is satisfactory: is Ruth really dominant (in the famous tableau with the men gathered round her as if she is a latter day Madonna), or is she purblind to the fact that in choosing prostitution, theoretically on her terms, she is still fulfilling male desires?

Elsewhere, many answers discussed Blanche Dubois as a victim of a patriarchal society; likewise, interestingly, her sister, Stella. Both, in different ways, were seen as weak or misguided. By contrast, Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was seen as paradoxically strong and weak, Honey is, for most, weak, whilst Linda Loman in *Death of a Salesman* is strong. Other answers cited other female characters from a range of plays. However, the thrust of the question was evaded or avoided by very many candidates: as explained in the introductory section, the issue of marginalization of women in Post-1945 drama is not the same as arguing that women are weak. This is a broader AO5ii concern. There were few answers that stepped back and discussed whether drama in this period structurally focuses on men (for example, by arguing that *Streetcar* is an interesting play in the context of this question because its focus is a female character whereas, say, Linda is marginalized in *Death of a Salesman*).

The last question, 11(c) (addressing "Anger, outrage and a sense of betrayal"), was least often answered on this topic and, was also the least well answered, primarily because those candidates who tackled it often simply listed various elements of plays they had studied that were, variously, examples of angry characters, outrageous events, or characters who were betrayed or were betrayers.

Post-Colonial Literature

There was a slight increase in the number of answers on Post-Colonial literature this session, and a slight pick up within that cohort answering on Derek Walcott. That said, it remains that, as last year, the numbers are such that broad assessments about responses, particularly for the three essay options, are made with caution.

The passage from *Dangerous Love* by Ben Okri was successfully tackled by what proved an enthusiastic and knowledgeable candidature. Candidates were quick to point out Omovo's situation as an outsider, both conceptually within this topic area, and literally as a figure within the narrative, being out of place in every possible sense. There was much cogent discussion of the differing self-images of the white and Nigerian customers in the restaurant, and astute analysis of the power games at work between the businessmen. The ironies of the differences in clothing and of eating pizza in Africa were well discussed in a number of responses. Some stronger answers intelligently discussed the point of the "pointless remark" made by the quieter Nigerian businessman about how, when he was once in London, he "saw a fat woman dragged across the road by a small dog", seeing in it his warning to the Europeans that the outside onlooker must be careful in reaching conclusions about social situations which they do not fully understand. This was sharp analysis.

Although examiners saw a relatively small number of answers on the poetry of Derek Walcott, there was still some impressive work in response to question 12(a) (Discuss ways in which the idea of exile is presented in Post-Colonial literature). Candidates often referred to the poems 'The Almond Trees' and 'Veranda' to illuminate Walcott's personal experiences; his account of returning to the island of his birth from living and working in America in 'Homecoming: Anse La Raye' was analysed for the reverberations of exile. The main text used to offer other forms of exile for comparison was Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

White Teeth was again the most popular set text and question 12(b) (...explore the presentation of family and family relationships in Post-Colonial literature) was significantly the most frequently answered task. A majority of candidates approached the task in a proficient, straightforward fashion, considering the major family groups in the novel, with most

discussions focusing on Samad's relationship with his sons and the irony of their respective upbringings leading to opposing cultural outcomes. The issue of hybridity within a multi-cultural context was also discussed in several answers. One text used as a comparison by more than one centre was Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, which proved valuable for this question and for 12(c) (Post-colonial writing is as much concerned with tensions within cultures as between cultures.) Discussion of this text focused on the notion that 'nation' is a higher level model of 'family', and Kip's relationship with England as the colonial 'father' was discussed by some. Again, with 12(c), Kip was the focus for much discussion, as his growing disillusionment with Britain and what it represents grows in the course of the novel. Andrea Levy's *Small Island* also appeared in answers to both questions 12(b) and 12(c), generally in comparison with *White Teeth*. There was an interesting crossover between questions (b) and (c) where candidates chose to consider tensions within a family's culture.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE English Literature 3828/7828
June 2008 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
2707	Raw	60	47	42	37	32	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2708	Raw	60	47	41	36	31	26	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2709	Raw	60	52	46	40	34	29	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2710	Raw	60	49	43	37	31	26	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2711	Raw	60	53	47	42	37	32	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2712	Raw	60	49	44	39	35	31	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2713	Raw	60	46	41	36	31	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
3828	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7828	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
3828	28.2	52.7	73.4	89.1	96.5	100.0	6820
7828	40.3	68.4	87.0	96.9	99.8	100.0	7778

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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