

English Literature

Advanced GCE A2 7828

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3828

Report on the Units

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Chief Examiner's Report

This is the last major session of the current AS specification, though of course there is a re-sit opportunity this summer.

For all the differences between the legacy and the new AS papers, the essential emphasis in study and assessment remains on the direct personal engagement between reader and text, supported - but not displaced - by awareness of relevant contextual factors and alternative ways of reading. I echo the hope that the AS legacy specification "has provided useful building materials for a newly reformulated examination" (2707 report), and offer our best wishes from the residual community of legacy AS to the emergent community of AS candidates, teachers and examiners as they move into new territory.

At both AS and A2 this session there has been, as usual, evidence of hard work, critical proficiency and enthusiasm, on the part of candidates and their teachers:

- Virtually all had at least a working knowledge of the texts, some recognition of the main themes and characters and an ability to frame a response roughly in line with the question asked ... nearly all candidates had clearly worked hard to develop understanding of their Shakespeare play ... [Candidates] wrote with commendable clarity and often showed a command of a useful literary-technical vocabulary. (2707)
- Overall, I was really very impressed by the performance of candidates this year: the paper provoked some very cogent, convincing and intellectually rigorous work. There was also evidence that many candidates actually enjoyed sitting it ... Most candidates now remember that a little context goes a long way, and the inclusion of "other readers' views" in constructing an argument is now generally well managed. (2708)
- The general level of detailed quotation continues to improve, with many candidates able to muster truly impressive detail to support their views. (2710)
- It is very often the case that candidates will rise to the challenge of a new text or a more unexpected task, and while there continued to be sound and often good work on favourite texts (*The Great Gatsby*, *Atonement*, *A Handful of Dust* were again among the most widely-used) there was some very lively and often scholarly work from candidates using less well-known novels, their responses perhaps being sharpened by the relative paucity of easily-accessible study guides. (2709/2711)
- In general candidates seemed to be well prepared and have a good idea of what is required of them. (2712)
- The general level of detailed quotation continues to improve, with many candidates able to muster truly impressive detail to support their views. (2710)
- a full range of ability was seen, and candidates in the main showed a secure grasp of the demands of the paper. As ever, the best work was breathtaking in its quality. (2713)

On the other hand, familiar areas for improvement also persist. These comments from individual papers effectively apply to work seen across the specification:

- It was disappointing, however, to come across those who lacked the confidence to put forward argument and responses of their own. Instead they reproduced memorised notes or model answers, often snippets from critics, popular revision guides or social-historical information inadequately digested ... A prevalent weakness was a tendency in Section A to neglect analysis of and response to the effects of Shakespeare's language in the set passage, in favour of more general ideas about the play as a whole (2707)
- Too many answers neglected the central requirement of this paper, to consider in detail the effects of the writing in the poems or passages set or selected for discussion. (2708)

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- a disappointing number of essays had quite significant QWC errors, most of which would have been spotted by more careful use by candidates of spellcheckers and a detailed final proof-reading (2709/11)
- there has been a growing tendency to sidestep personal critical comment (a crucial ingredient in a paper which has AO4 as its dominant objective) by the creation of imagined commentators – “a feminist critic might say...” “a Marxist critic would observe...” while avoiding a personal response to the question. (2710)
- Comma splicing (or worse) is now so prevalent that it was rare to find a script free from punctuation and syntax errors ... Sometimes candidates neglect to define terms, and this tends to make for a lack of clarity in the arguments advanced. (2712)

2707 Drama: Shakespeare

General Comments

Examiners reported a gratifying impression of overall improvement and progress since centres first entered candidates for this specification.

Early difficulties, such as how to manage the use of contexts of various kinds, how to incorporate aspects of literary theory or how to cope with a paper structured around specific Assessment Objectives, all of which originally caused qualms in some quarters, were resolved in due course and it is to be hoped that the experience of 2707 has provided useful building materials for a newly reformulated examination, even though the reduction in the number of modules makes it unrealistic to provide a separate Shakespeare paper.

As tends to be usual on this paper, compared with the summer the January 2009 session produced performances of an almost invariably satisfactory standard. There was not much high-flying work of superlative quality but correspondingly few answers were placed in the lowest mark band. It was a rare experience to come across candidates who were obviously completely unprepared or unable to meet the minimum requirements of the examination. Virtually all had at least a working knowledge of the texts, some recognition of the main themes and characters and an ability to frame a response roughly in line with the question asked. Similarly it was an indication of centres' familiarity with the structure of the paper that there were few rubric infringements although we did see a slightly larger than usual number of unfinished scripts.

Thus, nearly all candidates had clearly worked hard to develop understanding of their Shakespeare play. It was disappointing, however, to come across those who lacked the confidence to put forward argument and responses of their own. Instead they reproduced memorised notes or model answers, often snippets from critics, popular revision guides or social-historical information inadequately digested.

A prevalent weakness was a tendency in Section A to neglect analysis of and response to the effects of Shakespeare's language in the set passage, in favour of more general ideas about the play as a whole, for example character sketches of Hal, Rosalind, Antony or Ariel instead of comment on the details of the specified extract. Similarly in Section B the less successful responses were often those determined to use ideas learned beforehand about anticipated topics that were not discriminately adapted to the question actually set. Examples of this were assertions about the characters of Cleopatra and Antony in general on both the essay alternative topics and pre-packaged disquisitions on power and colonialism instead of more specifically on "enslavement" in *The Tempest*.

On the other hand, although over the years examiners have had reason to criticise both the legibility and the expression of answers, such complaints were significantly reduced on this occasion. The average candidate wrote with commendable clarity and often showed a command of a useful literary-technical vocabulary. It seemed that answers less often resorted to inappropriate colloquialism ("Cleopatra has a thing about Antony") or, what was noticed in the summer session, to the emotional vocabulary of teenage magazines and daytime television.

Most candidates answered on *Antony and Cleopatra* or *The Tempest*, with fewer writing on *As You Like It* and only a small minority on *Henry IV (Part 2)*.

Comments On Individual Questions

Henry IV (Part 2)

Question 1 was based on a passage from Act 2, Scene 2 in which Hal and Poins discuss the Prince's feelings towards his father. Candidates were asked to comment on Prince Hal's relationships in Eastcheap, the language, imagery and tone, and the issue of divided loyalties in the play. The general standard was satisfactory but not usually very effective in response to particularities of the extract. Instead there were essays surveying Hal's development in the play, his rejection of Falstaff at the end, and so forth. The more successful were able to dwell on, for instance, the matter of tone (just how Poins says "I would think thee a most princely hypocrite"), or the effect of Hal's confession in this context of his true feelings about his father. Some perceptive answers pointed out that the wit developed by the Page under the influence of Falstaff ("a had him from me Christian; and look if the fat villain have not transform'd him ape") could be paralleled with the influence of Falstaff upon Hal himself.

In Question 5(a) candidates were asked about the effects and significance of rebellion, its presentation and about personal and political grievances in the play. There were competent accounts, sometimes over-narrative in approach, of the Northern rebellion and of Hal's wild youth. What distinguished the better responses was a by no means universal willingness to comment on and analyse the complex links and contrasts between personal and political elements. As one candidate observed, "Shakespeare makes the historical power-struggle psychologically convincing in terms of individual characters".

Question 5(b) was about the role and significance of Shallow, Silence and other Gloucestershire characters, how they were presented, and the variety of English life in the play. This was the less popular alternative but straightforwardly answered with reference to the comic yokels recruited by Falstaff as well as to Shallow and Silence. Some essays wrote well in a *Chimes at Midnight* style about old age and memory, thus bringing in the past as well as the present of England.

As You Like It

Question 2 specified a passage from Act 4, Scene 1, an exchange between Rosalind and Orlando, and it asked about the candidate's view of their relationship, the language effects and the uses of humour. The extract gave a good opportunity to discuss language, with the better candidates linking humour to wordplay. Most were able to comment on Rosalind's wit and her dominant role in the conversation; in addition the irony of her disguise was widely appreciated. On the other hand only the more successful answers explored Rosalind's real feelings in any depth or the implications of the disguise on her ability to manipulate Orlando which some developed into issues of power and gender. Celia's criticism that "you have simply mis-us'd our sex in your love-prate" was widely ignored although one candidate did argue that "doublet and hose" should be seen as a metaphor for the male sex organs.

The role and significance of brothers in the play was the subject of Question 6(a), how they were presented and what was suggested about the issue of family conflict. Oliver and Orlando were usually dealt with in most detail with many making clear links to thematic concerns such as reconciliation and reformation. Candidates were not penalised if they discussed only one pair of brothers. Court and country also figured largely in responses, most usually illustrated through the Dukes Senior and Ferdinand. A few of the strongest answers drew comparisons with Rosalind and Celia while weaker ones were able to describe the sibling relationships but failed to analyse their significance. Similarly, the topic of family conflict was sometimes ignored.

There were very few answers to Question 6(b) in which candidates were asked to consider the interaction between characters as possibly the most enjoyable aspect of *As You Like It*, explaining how this interaction was shown and how the play suggests the variety of human personality. Answers tended to resort to rather random appreciative statements about

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characters, especially Rosalind, and some examiners felt that it was unusual for the word “interaction” to be fully understood and therefore it tended not to be well used to shape an answer.

Antony and Cleopatra

In Question 3 the passage set was from Act 1, Scene 4 in which Octavius and Lepidus discuss Antony. Candidates had to comment on their view of Antony, the language effects and the relationships within the triumvirate.

There was a wide range of performance here with some problems for weaker candidates, especially for those who did not read the question carefully and wrote exclusively about Caesar. There were several examples of mis-reading. One was the assumption that “you are too indulgent” at the start of the passage referred to Antony, not Lepidus, and another was that “stand the buffet” was linked to Egyptian over-indulgence in food. Similarly a number of candidates believed that “his composure must be rare indeed” was in praise of Antony, having missed the hypothesis in Caesar’s first speech. Caesar’s second speech about the fickleness of popular favour was assumed to be a continuation of his comments on Antony and thus Antony was thought to be compared to a “vagabond flag”. There was little discussion of the effect and significance of the report of the pirates’ advance. Some ignored the bullet point about the triumvirate altogether, although others made it the central point of their answer.

That being said, there were many well focused answers with thoughtful analyses of language and recognition of the shift in Caesar’s tone from disapproval of Antony to frustrated respect. More sophisticated responses also speculated about Caesar’s repressed envy of qualities and experiences beyond his reach.

Section B answers were divided equally between the alternatives.

Cleopatra as a great actress or a great queen, was the subject raised in Question 7(a), with a requirement to comment on her strengths and weaknesses and the ideas in the play about acting a part, paving the way for an AO4-oriented discussion by mentioning alternative views of the character. Most candidates could provide evidence of her tendency to act and some evaluation of her strengths and weaknesses as a queen. The more interesting essays discussed connections between ruling and acting a part, arguing, for example, that Caesar assumes a role just as does Cleopatra, his being suitably restrained as a Roman leader, hers fittingly extravagant for an Egyptian queen. Many answers were severely critical of Cleopatra, ready to condemn her threats to “unpeople Egypt” or her behaviour at the Battle of Actium. Once again the second bullet point was often addressed by implication if at all. Intriguingly, a number of candidates offered an unfamiliar but seemingly very apt quotation from the play, one script confidently locating it in Act 3, where Cleopatra is described as an “actress of formidable range”. Recourse to a concordance revealed that Shakespeare never uses the word “formidable”. The quotation is from York Notes.

For Question 7(b) candidates were referred to Dryden’s title *All For Love* and asked how far this would be appropriate for *Antony and Cleopatra*, considering the presentation of love and the suggestions of the play about obsession. There was a range of responses, some prepared material on love v. lust not fully tied in to the question, but most offered a reasonable discussion with varied examples of love including that of Enobarbus, Eros, Charmian and Iras. It was debated whether love was the play’s dominant theme, whether it was love and only love that caused the deaths of the protagonists, and in what ways their obsessions about the relationship could be distinguished. There was also some thoughtful defence of the commemorative function of Shakespeare’s actual title. Pleasingly there were alternatives offered such as the political aspects of the play.

The Tempest

The extract in Question 4 was from Act 3, Scene 3, where Ariel denounces the nobles, and it asked about the scene's contribution to a view of Ariel, about the language, imagery and tone, and about Ariel's relationship with Prospero. Many candidates were able to write about the passage's classical and biblical resonances, its natural and marine imagery, and to relate the magic and music to other parts of the play. Comparisons were drawn with the opening storm and the role performed by Ariel was related to a wider concern in the play with plotting and dissimulation.

Some good AO4 discussion focused on whether Ariel speaks sincerely, and autonomously assumes the harpy role zestfully for an ulterior motive, or is simply Prospero's mouthpiece. Unfortunately, however, there were many prepared answers on Prospero's relationship with Ariel, drifting into comparisons with Caliban which would have worked better in the Section B question on enslavement. Like all the Section A questions, this one tended to attract general essays rather than detailed analyses of the passage itself.

Question 8(a), much the more popular of the alternatives, was about enslavement, its presentation and significance, and the uses of power in the play. Again, the prepared answer on "power" was the enemy of many candidates and others did not proceed much beyond the basic outlines of Prospero's treatment of Ariel and Caliban, with a broad awareness of colonisation as an issue. In some cases "enslavement" was used quite loosely as synonymous with entrapment or subservience – so Prospero and Miranda are enslaved because stranded on the island and the courtiers by fealty to Alonso.

More discerningly, some wrote of Sebastian and Antonio as slaves to ambition and of Prospero as enslaved by his magic. Good answers went beyond broad references to colonisation (some seemed to think the British Empire was in full swing by 1611) and saw problems with specific uses of power in the play, for example Prospero's controlling and arguably self-interested manipulation of Miranda and Ferdinand and his harsh treatment of Alonso's party, highlighting how abuses of power can occur in pursuit of an apparently just cause.

Question 8(b), definitely a minority choice, required a discussion of the role, significance and presentation of Gonzalo and the play's suggestions about optimism and generosity. Those familiar with the character wrote appropriately and in detail about presentation although they were less secure on optimism and generosity. Nobility was well discussed, together with the attitude of other characters towards Gonzalo, his philosophy and his influence on Prospero at the end.

2708 Poetry and Prose

General comments

The entry this session was marked by familiar virtues and problems. Examiners found a good deal of work that was interesting and creditable: characteristically an examiner commented: “Overall, I was really very impressed by the performance of candidates this year: the paper provoked some very cogent, convincing and intellectually rigorous work. There was also evidence that many candidates actually enjoyed sitting it.” Most candidates now remember that a little context goes a long way, and the inclusion of “other readers’ views” in constructing an argument is now generally well managed.

However, some answers offered discussion that was rather general, with little focus on the terms of the question. While most candidates wrote with an awareness of the paper’s pattern of Assessment Objectives, failure to address Bullet Point 2, the contextual requirement, was quite common. Too many answers neglected the central requirement of this paper, to consider in detail the effects of the writing in the poems or passages set or selected for discussion. Answers to (b)-type questions in particular often lacked grounding in identified material, therefore offering general rather than focused comment.

The Questions

Section A

1 Chaucer: *The Franklin's Tale*

The passage set for 1a – Dorigen’s final encounter with Aurelius in the street when he releases her from her bond – was recognised by most candidates as a narrative crux raising issues central to the entire tale. Answers explored relations between various aspects of the concept of gentillesse – eg *trouthe*, *patience*, *franchise*, *chivalry* – though relatively few perceived these relations to be ironically inflected in the Tale: most answers presented Arveragus’s insistence, that his wife should keep her promise to love Aurelius “best of any man”, unequivocally as an act of *gentillesse*, while others pondered on the morality of this curious readiness to make himself a cuckold (as long as nobody knows about it) and noted that the interest here is how pressures between conflicting demands of various *trouthes*, given and received, are negotiated by the characters. Aurelius was generally praised for his *gentil* renunciation, acknowledging the example of Arveragus: the former rivals in love now rivals in *gentillesse*; the lower class figure taught by the knight how *gentil* folk should behave. Fullest answers located the passage contextually in relation to Arveragus’s and Dorigen’s initial conjugal agreement, her later contract with Aurelius, the philosopher’s releasing Aurelius from his bond and the Franklin’s final question as to which of the characters is “the mooste fre”. In responses to 1b there was some really interesting discussion of the Franklin’s/ Chaucer’s presentation of Dorigen. Some saw her as an object over which Aurelius and Arveragus are disputing possession; others as having to deal with complex situations for which her limited personal experience and familiar, narrow codes of behaviour provide no preparation: her complaint against God for creating the “grisly feendly rokkes blake” and her extended cadenza on classical precedents were seen in most answers as tiresomely melodramatic, in others as exploratory attempts to make sense of disorientating experiences. In some answers her personal narrative was seen as evidence that the Franklin did not understand the conventions of courtly love and the Breton *lai*; in others the narrative was seen as testing these theoretical conventions against actualities of social and personal relationship – the test begins in a Maytime garden ends in a public street.

2 Shakespeare: *Complete Sonnets*

Only a few candidates attempted 1a; many answers were aware of the possible topical allusions (eg recent lunar eclipse, death of Elizabeth, accession of James I), and most were able to relate the sonnet to others exploring similar “incertainties”: eg love, time, age, death. Some interesting discussion of imagery – “lease/ forfeit/ crown themselves assured/ olives of endless age/ Death to me subscribes” – in relation to other sonnets deploying similar patterns in similar or different ways. Some of these answers, on a difficult poem, were impressively resourceful. The much more popular question 1b, on Time as a concern in the sonnets, clearly played into a strong hand for many candidates, who produced often well-informed and thoughtful answers exploring ways in which the destructive effects of time are acknowledged and various means of resisting it are adumbrated: through breeding (eg sonnets 2, 7, 12), through the power of poetry (eg 19, 60, 63, 66) or the redemptive power of memory (eg 30). An examiner noted particularly that in response to 1b candidates produced more developed answers than elicited by (b)-type questions in previous sessions; Shakespeare’s management of the sonnet form and effects of language were often sensitively explored in these answers.

3 Byron: *Selected Poems*

Question 3a, on Byron’s presentation of Wellington in *Don Juan* Canto IX, was well handled by candidates who knew the context and were prepared to explore the effects of language. Many related Byron’s contempt for Wellington to his Romantic identification with Napoleon, responding to the irony/ sarcasm of the writing and the charges of complacency, greed, and poverty of achievement measured against the historical scale of “such opportunity”. Answers often noted the satirical, bathetic effect of the contrived rhymes (eg shabby : abbey : tabby / expenses : men’s is / Cincinnatus : potatoes), the cumulative effect of the verse form, and the personal bitterness of Byron’s indictment. In response to 3b, inviting consideration of Caroline Lamb’s description of Byron – “Mad, bad and dangerous to know” – in relation to Byron’s self-presentation in his poetry, elicited lively, personal and resourceful answers, some taking each term in order, some reviewing a range of poems with the quotation in mind. His political satire (*Don Juan*, *Childe Harold*), his relations with his half-sister (‘Epistle to Augusta’), his evocation of his conjugal (‘Fare Thee Well’) and adulterous experiences, his teasing, ambivalent views of England and the English (‘Beppo’), his revolutionary fervour (‘Messalonghi’), his relationship with the 15-year-old Loukas (‘I watched thee’), were in turn explored as aspects of Lamb’s notation, in some answers with lively critical responses to the writing and verse form.

4 Browning

There were only a few answers on the passage from ‘Andrea del Sarto’ set for 4a: these tended to be narrative/ descriptive in mode, though there were some sensitive accounts of the implied conjugal relationship and the sense of failure in artistic achievement; the best of these were grounded in attention to diction, musical effect and rhythm (“ ... come in, at last / Inside the melancholy little house / We built to be so gay in. God is just ...”). The quality of an answer on 4b, “the problem of communication between men and women” often depended on the appropriateness of the poem(s) selected for comment: ‘My Last Duchess’ and ‘Porphyria’s Lover’ were selected (usually together) even more frequently than usual, and candidates often struggled to make their discussion relevant to the terms of the question. On the other hand, ‘A Lovers’ Quarrel’, ‘Any Wife to Any Husband’ and ‘Two in the Campagna’, as well as ‘Andrea del Sarto’, provided plenty of fruitful material for this topic; in a handful of answers ‘A Woman’s Last Word’ was discussed particularly impressively. Some answers introduced biographical material more or less relevantly, the Browning marriage appearing variously to be unassailably contented or perpetually in turmoil. A resourceful reading of ‘My Last Duchess’ was that it was based on Elizabeth’s father.

5 Eliot: *Selected Poems*

On 5a, set on the second section of 'Portrait of a Lady', answers that concentrated, as required, on the relationship between the "Lady" and the narrator offered some thoughtful and engaged discussion of the effects of this tense dialogue, involving the spoken discourse of the Lady interacting with the unspoken thought responses of the narrator. It was particularly heartening to read developed critical analysis of the effects of complex imagery (eg the lilacs, the atmosphere of Juliet's tomb, the discordant violin); fruitful perception that a portrait is a staged representation and how both characters are self-consciously performing, for each other and also in a sense for the reader; also some interesting intimation of social comment in the suggestions of ritualised activity in the experience of both characters, and some fruitful comparison with the world and personality of Prufrock, though 'The Hollow Men' and 'Preludes' were also usefully invoked. Answers that suggested biographical reference were sometimes fruitful, sometimes distracted; and there was often some contextual misunderstanding: the poem was not written as a picture of post-war Britain - it's not actually set in Britain at all. On 5b – Eliot's making poetry out of "unexpected features of modern, urban life" – there were some very good answers on Eliot's appropriation of material on the face of it not ostensibly "poetic", drawing on 'Prufrock', 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', 'Preludes', and *The Waste Land*, notably 'The Fire Sermon': the ironic relation between the resonance and sonority of imagery and the sordid environment invoked was tellingly illustrated and explored. Some answers ignored or missed the point of "unexpected", writing more generally about Eliot's representation of city life and environment, or noting how "unexpected" it is that people don't communicate very well in Eliot's poems: "that is not what I meant, at all ..."

6 Thomas: *Selected Poems*

Not many answers at all on Thomas this session, mostly on 6b. Answers on 'Tears', set for 6a, invariably noted the juxtaposition of the bucolic English rural scene ("... twenty hounds streamed by me ...") and the military changing of the guard; the more developed answers considered relations between the two episodes, the "beauty" that they are felt to share, pointing towards the dualities of happiness and despair characteristic of Thomas's work. Other poems adduced were often those also selected in response to 6b, to explore "the significance of England in Thomas's poetry": 'The Glory' and 'The Brook' were the most frequently addressed as representative of Thomas's ambivalent responses to the English natural world; 'As the Team's Head-Brass' often discussed in relation to the war and its effects on English landscape and people; less often, 'This is No Case of Petty Right and Wrong' was addressed as expressing an apparently more problematic view of English nationalism.

7 Harrison: *Selected Poems*

Again a popular text this session. In response to 7a there were some disappointing answers on 'National Trust', sometimes completely misreading the poem's central narrative and the significance of its emphasis on language. On the other hand, a number of excellent, sensitive and well-informed answers were grounded in discussion of Harrison's core concern of class relations and his project to give a voice to the voiceless; fruitful correspondences were established with poems from *The School of Eloquence* collection and (particularly pleasing for examiners) we saw some very good work on v. 7b, on Harrison's exploration of relationships in his poetry played into a strong hand for many candidates, though there were a number of answers that did little more than describe 'Breaking the Chain' and 'Book Ends' almost entirely in term of Harrison's family; it was surprising again to find how few answers spent any time in exploring the effects of the central images in these poems. Some thoughtful answers concentrated on family relationships, some on class relations; the most interesting discussions ranged between class and personal dimensions, the fullest of these considering poems where both personal and political issues interact – eg 'Allotments', 'Durham' ("Bad weather and the public mess/ Drive us to private tenderness ..."), and v.

8 Stevenson: *Granny Scarecrow*

Hardly any answers. On 'Arioso Dolente', set for 8a, there was some excellent discussion, alert to the effects of language and verse form in extrapolating several time scales and life experiences from the images "cupped in a concave universe or lens". On 8b similar correspondences between poems were explored, between eg 'Innocence and Experience' and 'Going Back', together with 'Arioso Dolente'. The sharper answers discussed the dark undercurrents in Stevenson's work; others lingered on a sentimental reading of her depiction of family life.

Section B

9 Austen: *Persuasion*

Most candidates found plenty to say in response to both questions on this text, which were attempted in about equal numbers. The passage set for 9a was the occasion of Anne overhearing Wentworth praising Louisa for her "character of decision and firmness" and deploring "the evil of too yielding and indecisive a character". Most answers recognised the multi-layered significance of this episode: in setting up Louisa as Anne's rival; in indicating that Wentworth still has an interest in and feelings for Anne, initiating the narrative arc that leads to The White Hart and Wentworth's parallel eaves-dropping on Anne's conversation with Harville; in foregrounding the theme of persuasion and Lady Russell's supposed influence over Anne; in its ironic structural relation with the episode on the Cobb two chapters later, when Louisa's "strength of mind" causes such trouble for everyone and Anne's qualities are recognised ("... no one so proper, so capable as Anne ..."). There was some enterprising discussion of the dramatic effects of the situation, mediated through Anne's consciousness and coloured by her agitated responses, and thoughtful comment on the developed image of the nut, "blessed by original strength", more relevant to Anne than Louisa. There, however, a number of answers that found little to say about effects of the writing in the passage. 9b, on the significance of the navy in the novel, played into some very strong hands. Answers were often well-informed on historical context, and passage selections indicated alertness to the novel's method of establishing crucial contrasts: between, for instance, Sir Walter and Admiral Croft, Mr William Elliot and Mr Wentworth, Mrs Musgrove and Mrs Croft (perhaps a model, as some noted, for Anne's future life). Most candidates are now confidently analysing characters as symbolic embodiments of social institutions and/or moral values, realising that the action of the novel is pitched at a transitional moment not just between two phases in the Napoleonic war but also between two social orders, aristocratic and meritocratic. Austen's personal connection with and sympathy for the navy was often noted. On both questions, some candidates discussed characters' presentation in terms of Augustan/Romantic dichotomies: this strategy was sometimes illuminating, sometimes confused and confusing.

10 Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

Jane's departure from Thornfield was the passage set for 10a. Most answers explored various kinds of significance for this episode: inaugurating the next phase of Jane's journey towards self-realisation; foregrounding the novel's central concern with tensions between passion and duty, impulse and restraint, emotion and reason, fire and ice ("up rushed the blood to his face; forth flashed the fire from his eyes; erect he sprang"); dramatising the temperament of each character and relations between them (power shifts to Jane, but she still calls him "master"); structural parallels with other episodes (the Red Room, reminders of Jane's mother and Bertha Mason); effects of Brontë's narrative method (eg switching between dialogue and Jane's consciousness; highly melodramatic writing; symbolic value of the natural world). Examiners were surprised that so many answers dealt only with the first part of the passage, Jane's interaction with Rochester, missing opportunities offered by the virtuosity of the writing. The qualities of the passage were, however, often thoroughly explored in answers that chose this

episode in response to 10b, though the Red Room was the most popular 10b choice. Answers noted that here, as on other occasions, loneliness is actually a relief for Jane (on the window seat, or with her book, Jane can retreat into her imagination), and that echoes of this experience resonate throughout the novel (as in the 10a passage). Other lonely moments were explored, at Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield (eg during the stay of the Ingram party), Moor House, variously associated with distinctions of age, gender and/or class. Some adventurous answers discussed other characters' loneliness (Rochester, Adele, St John, Helen and Bertha) from a range of religious, social or moral perspectives.

11 Gaskell: *Mary Barton*

Very few answers on this text. The passage set for 11a came from one of the very few episodes in the novel set in the world of the wealthy Carson family; here the Carson daughters chat in a desultory way about their brother's romantic dispositions, until they are interrupted by the maid bringing the news of his death. Answers noted that: the discourse of these young women resembles that of the novel's narrative voice, rendered without the phonetic or punctuational indicators associated with the working families, signifying deviation from "normal" speech ("They talk like the reader," a candidate wrote wryly); the physical setting ("comfortable, elegant, well-lighted drawing-room") is sharply distinguished from the living conditions of the poor; and the girls' chat is about trivia rather than the life/death issues that occupy the workers. There were rather more answers on 11b, inviting discussion of ways in which Gaskell explores the gulf "twixt rich and poor" in the novel. Most of these considered the contrast in living conditions, particularly between descriptions of the Davenports' cellar and the Carson mansion; some considered the account of the meeting between owners and workers in Chapter 16; some the description, in the penultimate chapter, of Mr Carson's conversion and its effects. The most interesting of these considered ways in which the narrative voice intervenes to mediate, explain and/or criticise the actions described.

12 Stoker: *Dracula*

The description of the crew of light's violent rehabilitation of the undead Lucy Westenra from "blood-stained, voluptuous" vampirism to "unequalled sweetness and purity", set for 12a, was addressed in most of the answers on this text; many of these were thoughtful, well-informed, critically adept and individually responsive. The sexual implications of the writing were invariably foregrounded, noting the appropriateness of Arthur, as Lucy's fiancé, striking the blow that signifies the consummation and act of possession that marriage would have brought him. Answers also suggested that this moment brings together the community of brothers inaugurating their hunting of Dracula, confirms Van Helsing's role as leader, and indicates the triumph of superstition over science as a mode of understanding and dealing with the threat that Dracula represents. Some illuminating answers wove together feminist and "reverse colonisation" readings, arguing that women's bodies represent the central site of conflict, and that in this episode Arthur and his companions are symbolically "staking their claim" to the disputed territory. Answers on 12b, discussing the representation of Mina, ranged from straightforward "angel in the house" readings to critically developed analyses of Stoker's complex construction of this character: acknowledging her maternal, protective, willingly subordinate self-presentation (eg the end of Chapter 17, a popular choice of passage) and her facetious view of the "New Woman" ("... she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it, too!"); on the other hand also noting that her characterisation radically inflects the conventional gothic model of woman-as-victim, since Mina, like Van Helsing, can handle modern technology, is organisationally more capable than any of the men (she has arranged the various documents into the shape of the novel that we are reading), survives Dracula's horrifying assault, and provides the crucial telepathic link that enables his destruction. As a few candidates argued, Mina represents the real threat to the orthodoxy of men's taken for granted, monopolistic domination; one or two answers argued that her singularity is signalled strikingly by "the bundle of names" given to her son at the end, remembering the earnest Victorian convention of naming the eldest son after his father(s).

13 Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*

The passage set for 13a describes Marlow's first sight of the African coastline from the French steamer. Most answers, in varying degrees of development and sensitivity, explored the proleptic effects of the writing in the passage, introducing/anticipating themes and motifs characteristic of the text: the ominous evocation of the African coastline ("like thinking about an enigma ... aspect of monotonous grimness ... edge of a colossal jungle ... God-forsaken wilderness"); intimations of the nature of colonial activity ("some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister backcloth ... merry dance of death and trade"); ambivalent presentation of Africans ("faces like grotesque masks ... intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there"); the early establishment of dark/light imagery. The man-of-war's aggression, "incomprehensible, firing into a continent", the "pieces of decaying machinery", the "objectless blasting", and the description of the grove of death that follows shortly were thoroughly explored as symbolic outcomes of colonialism, and the casual news of European casualties ("Hanged himself ... The sun too much for him, or the country perhaps") perceived as premonitory of the experience of Kurtz and Marlow himself. Responses to 13b, discussing the presentation of female characters, concentrated largely on the "wild and gorgeous" African woman and Kurtz's Intended, with some discussion of the knitting women and Marlow's aunt. Some impressive answers considered the ambivalences in the presentation of both major figures, as emblematic of aspects of Africa and Europe and the relations between them, the fullest exploring views of colonial effects and ideology – some of these were extremely thoughtful and well-informed, among the best answers examiners have seen at AS. Other answers ignored the cultural specificity of these presentations, offering general discussion of Marlow's / Conrad's views on women.

14 Forster: *A Passage to India*

Not many answers on this text. Most answers were on the passage set for 14a, including the loan to Fielding of Aziz's collar-stud, perceived in many as a key symbolic moment in the development of relations between these two characters, and also between the communities they are taken to represent. There was some fruitful discussion of the function of the narrative voice here – a particularly clear instance of its mediating role between reader and the text, offering explanation of what each character intended in an exchange that was misunderstood by both of them. Answers on 14b, on the significance of prejudice in the novel, most often took the Bridge Party as the occasion when prejudices are most overt and disabling, among both communities; the trial scene was another frequent and fruitful choice. Again the most engaged answers explored the clarifying, explicating function of the narrative voice.

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

Very few answers on this text, almost all on 15b. Answers on 15a - the ironic re-telling of the story of Jonah and the whale, and the subsequent exploration of relations between various kinds of narrative – tended to be descriptive rather than analytical, but there were some interesting answers on 15b, on the view of "history" suggested by this text. Most of these addressed 'The Survivor' - considering various effects of this ironic version of the Ark story – discussion often taking direction from the meditation on history in the chapter 'Parenthesis'. The most interesting of these explored the notion of "fabulation", relating this to post-modernism as an aspect of all manner of forms of representation. It has been clear for the last years of this specification that this text has worked very well indeed for some candidates.

16 Carver: *Short Cuts*

Fewer answers on this text this session than we have become accustomed to. Most addressed 16a, set on the conclusion of the story 'They're Not Your Husband'. Many of these answers were thoroughly attentive to the resonances of the writing in this passage, noting the interaction between Earl's failure to get work and his obsession with Doreen's weight ("She becomes his job," as a candidate wrote), the awful effects on her health and his marginalized position in the family. Some answers on both options considered Carver's "minimalism" as a problem; others enthusiastically discussed the effects of "showing not telling". Answers on 16b – on what *Short Cuts* suggests about "American life" – were alert to contextual economic issues in Reaganite America, giving rise to the prevalence of "blue collar" or "low rent" tragedy characteristic of the world of Carver's stories: there was some interesting discussion of a contemporary "crisis of masculinity", leading to episodes of violence and/or alcoholism; the value of marriage as an institution was seen to be seriously challenged in many of the stories; and some impressive answers explored a more general sense of fragmentation/ alienation/ anomie/ dissociation evident in personal and social relationships. "The American dream has become a nightmare," a candidate wrote, tellingly.

2709 and 2711 Coursework Units

Because this was the last January session for AS Unit 2709, there was a very small entry, so this Report will concentrate primarily upon A2 Unit 2711, for which the entry was very similar in size to past January sessions. Most general comments will, however, apply to work submitted for both Units.

Moderators reported that most Centres had very clearly taken great care in assessing, marking and moderating their candidates' work; there was frequent evidence of double marking and/or close internal moderation, so that even where marks were not as close to agreed standards as they could have been it was obvious that they had been reached only after much professional and thoughtful consideration. In the words of one Moderator "*in every case that I saw the marking was thoughtful and professional, even where I disagreed with the final judgements*". Evidence of this care, in the form of marginal annotations and double summative comments, was of great help to Moderators.

An interesting but statistically small development was in the number of Centres using two texts, perhaps from those whose planning is looking forward to the demands of the new F662 and F664 Specifications; comparative work of this sort is certainly more demanding, but there was some interesting and well-focused work as a result. It is very often the case that candidates will rise to the challenge of a new text or a more unexpected task, and while there continued to be sound and often good work on favourite texts (*The Great Gatsby*, *Atonement*, *A Handful of Dust* were again among the most widely-used) there was some very lively and often scholarly work from candidates using less well-known novels, their responses perhaps being sharpened by the relative paucity of easily-accessible study guides.

Tasks set were often very helpful to candidates, especially perhaps those that immediately demanded an AO4-related response to a provocative critical proposition; most Centres submitting A2 coursework clearly encouraged individually set tasks, often apparently worded by candidates themselves. This is good practice, and should be encouraged, though Centres should perhaps make use of the OCR Coursework Consultancy Service to reassure themselves and their candidates that such tasks are not just acceptable but more importantly sufficiently challenging and helpfully phrased; details of the service can be found on the OCR website (www.ocr.org.uk).

A few general complaints must also be made:

- many Centres, for some reason more than usual this year, sent their work late, and often very late; as has been said repeatedly in these Reports, the dates are the same every January and May, and, unless there is an unforeseen and entirely unavoidable situation within a Centre, Moderators really must expect work to come on time, and without having to be chased, often more than once;
- cover-sheets were not always completed fully, and in one or two instances not at all; it is not helpful for a Moderator to have to try to work out which cover-sheet belongs to which candidate or to which essay;
- quite a large number of Centres still submitted loose work, with the attendant danger that essays could become confused or even lost; work must be stapled or treasury-tagged together; plastic wallets, however, are not at all helpful;
- a disappointing number of essays had quite significant QWC errors, most of which would have been spotted by more careful use by candidates of spellcheckers and a detailed final proof-reading; some summative comments noted such errors, but did not always appear to take account of them in awarding a mark.

Over-long work was a very infrequent concern this session, though one or two essays had to be returned for re-marking; the rule is clear – 3000 words is the maximum allowed, and Centres must not assess anything beyond this limit, and must note this in their summative comments. Plagiarism, or the inappropriate use of secondary critical material, was a very rare concern indeed, which was most pleasing.

AO1 is dominant in Unit 2711, and it was here that Moderators often found some over-generous marking. Work that is placed in higher Bands must be very tightly and cogently argued, and demonstrate a strong control of textual knowledge and material. Too often work was placed in Band Four or even Band Five that was loose in structure and argument; no matter how interesting or even exciting the ideas may be, work should not be over-marked if it is not strictly and logically focused and controlled.

AO2ii was generally well handled in the sense that most candidates demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of their chosen texts, in the best cases moving freely and fluently across them, and using quotation and comparative reference aptly and confidently. Period issues were also generally well handled, but genre rather less so, often not at all – again, for the highest marks, both aspects of AO2ii must be addressed.

AO3 was addressed well by many candidates, often helped by a task which required them to begin with a discussion of a short passage from the text before moving outwards from it. Some required a comparative exploration of two passages, but this led almost inevitably to work that was restricted to only these two parts of the text rather than seeing them as parts of a whole. The most confident candidates were able again to use frequent but brief quotations as an integral part of their argument, commenting positively and appropriately on the writers' use of language and imagery in these moments. One Moderator suggests that when preparing candidates, "*the best models for AO3 are good literary critical essays, where the critics demonstrate how to introduce brief extracts into their arguments, how to comment concisely on the language, imagery etc., and how to continue with their arguments*". Offering candidates examples of such professional criticism is a very helpful way of introducing good practice, for both AO3 and of course AO4.

AO4 continues to be something of a concern, in that while most candidates seemed aware of the need to introduce at least some secondary critical material, relatively few did much beyond use it purely illustratively, and very few positively *engaged* with it, as required by the higher Bands. Engagement does not necessarily mean disagreeing with a view, though this can be very fruitful, but it must mean considerably more than simply quoting it without any comment at all, or just a bland "and I entirely agree" tacked on to it. Some essays showed no attempt at all to go beyond purely personal response, but however good and interesting this may have been such essays were not properly addressing AO4.

AO5ii has in part been discussed above in relation to AO2ii, and most candidates were clearly aware of the need to set their work within a number of contexts, for example biographical, social, historical, cultural, literary. The most popular texts noted at the start of this Report lend themselves very readily to much of this kind of contextual discussion, and provided only that this was entirely relevant and only briefly and relevantly used it was often very well managed. Too much contextual material could become *unhelpful*, of course, leading candidates away from the critical and literary discussion that must be expected.

2710 Poetry and Drama Pre-1900

General Comments

A wide range of thoughtful responses was seen in this session, though Chaucer, Blake and Milton dominated the poetry section, and *Hamlet* the drama.

The general level of detailed quotation continues to improve, with many candidates able to muster truly impressive detail to support their views. Perhaps because a number of questions this year asked about the “balancing” of qualities in texts, some Examiners reported a tendency among some candidates to offer an “on the one hand....on the other hand..” style of answer which refuses to arrive at a conclusion. In such answers there has been a growing tendency to sidestep personal critical comment (a crucial ingredient in a paper which has AO4 as its dominant objective) by the creation of imagined commentators – “a feminist critic might say...” “a Marxist critic would observe...” while avoiding a personal response to the question. Answers can thus become a strange and inconclusive hypothetical juggling exercise, and are weakened as a result.

Responses to Individual Questions

Section A: Poetry

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

The first question was by far the more popular. Chaucer continues to be written about with vigour and commitment: but a number of candidates attempting (a) seemed surprisingly uncertain what “sordid” meant. Chaucer can still sometimes provoke surprisingly prudish writing from a young audience. However, fewer candidates this year saw Januarie as a paedophile, recognising instead May’s twenty-year-old knowingness.

1(a): ‘Sordid humour and nothing more.’

Most candidates were able to find examples of “sordid humour” – the wedding-night and the privy were particular favourites. Successful answers often identified the sordid moments, described what happened (with evidence), and put the situations into the context of *fabliaux*, the subversion of Courtly Love, the Merchant's personal misogyny and the contemporary misogynistic tradition. They then went on to discuss the overall ironic tone and humour, arguing that though there is much that is sordid about these matters, serious issues about marriage and the place of women are also raised. Such sophisticated answers saw the “sordid humour” as subverting courtly love and perhaps being aimed by the Merchant, in view of the status of Januarie and Damyan, at the Knight and the Squire. More limited answers, however, concentrated only on sordidness or on humour and had little to say in response to the “nothing more” element of the question.

1(b) ‘The intervention of Pluto and Proserpina is central to the poem’s meaning and effects.’

There were fewer answers here. Some inclined to narrative. More interesting accounts highlighted the parallels between Pluto and Proserpina and Januarie and May, or the wider opinion of marriage advanced by the Merchant. Answers argued that the nature of the gods' intervention “cements our impression of the characters as presented by the Merchant. Januarie will never accept reality no matter how many chances he is given. May and all women will always act disloyally”; and that women hold disproportionate power. But the teller's point of view, most were aware, may be flawed. A critic's remark on marriage in the poem as “legalised rape”

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was often cited; the rape is literal, one answer observed, “in the case of Proserpina and her myth.”

George Herbert: *Selected Poems*

After the very promising answers seen from a number of Centres in the summer, Examiners were disappointed to see too few answers on Herbert’s poetry to make a general comment in this session.

John Milton: *Paradise Lost Books 9 and 10*

Milton continues to attract vivid, committed and individual responses.

3(a) ‘In Milton’s presentation of Adam and Eve in Books 9 and 10, conflict between them is more interesting than harmony.’

Most candidates had a fairly clear notion of where to find conflict and harmony in the two Books - usually they focused on the relationship between Adam and Eve, though a few candidates were sidetracked into debates about which of the two deserves more blame. The least secure answers managed to identify the phases of debate, harmony, disharmony. The better ones quoted details from the separation debate, the post-Fall falling out and the reconciliation. The best did all that, but also discussed earlier books and the Edenic relationship, and then Eve's growing vanity and failure to see the danger she was putting herself in, and put that in the context of contemporary values - sin and gender power. These best answers kept the key term “interesting” at the forefront of discussion and explored the nature of our involvement in the poem. There was a good sense of how Milton subtly distances us from the landscape and emotions of prelapsarian Eden. Others commented on our responses as “fallen” readers. One perceptive commentator explored how “the perfect iambic pentameter and repetitions in the descriptions of Adam and Eve reflect the perfection, simple harmony and ritual repetitions of rural life”; and how difficult it is to maintain an interest in this harmonious state. They emerge from conflict, most agreed, “as wiser, more rounded characters,” coming to life after the Fall, as “human, with all the conflicting emotions and flaws that make up the human state,” and so more interesting to post-lapsarian readers who have always lived in this world of conflict. Conflict has produced the *felix culpa*, a more interesting concept than simple harmony.

3(b) ‘The settings are more than a mere backdrop to the action of Books 9 and 10 of Milton’s poem.’

This question was ably attempted by relatively few students, who broadened the definition of “settings” to include the full range of theological vistas in Books IX and X and saw the settings as providing a moral commentary on the action. Those who wrote about setting tended to do so with confidence, citing evidence in detail.

John Dryden: *Selected Poems*

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

William Blake: *Selected Poems*

Blake continues to be the most popular poet on the paper: while dogmatically written answers continue to claim him as a crude proto-Marxist critic of industrialisation, a growing number of candidates appears to be approaching him with a combination of sophistication and knowledge of textual detail. Those who are aware of Blake's fascination with oppositions and creative paradox often do well.

5(a) 'Blake's poetry balances anger with joy.'

Most essays were more successful in listing instances of anger and joy than in addressing the idea of a balance between them. The poems most often discussed included 'London', 'Infant Joy' and 'Infant Sorrow', 'Nurse's Song', 'The Echoing Green', 'The Tiger' and 'The Lamb', and 'The Garden of Love'. Occasionally 'A Poison Tree' was found useful for its combination of anger and joy. The two emotions were linked, sometimes productively, with Innocence and Experience. "Joy is the naïve voice of innocence, anger the bitter voice of experience." One answer persuasively discussed anger and joy as part of "Blake's larger belief in the unity of opposites, the 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell', the balance between the tiger and the lamb." Good answers showed understanding of the dialectical nature of Blake's reasoning and that the balancing of anger and joy itself generated poetry.

5(b) 'The energy of Blake's poetry comes from its visionary quality.'

This was less popular. "Visionary" was sometimes vaguely understood, occasionally being taken to mean simply "visual". While the definition could sometimes be very narrow ("the angel in the tree at Peckham") or so impossibly wide as to include almost every thought Blake ever had, some referred knowledgeably to "fourfold vision", and "energy" led to some very good illustration though this element of the question was often ignored. However, there were some perceptive and wide-ranging responses. Blake was seen either as a seer, a purveyor of visions, or as a "social visionary" in his opposition to all forms of repression. Often there were loose generalisations about "the church", which many writers seemed to think was Blake's only target. There were some interesting treatments of 'The Little Girl Lost' and 'Found': "Lyca achieves double vision when she sees the beasts of prey gambol and play, showing they have two sides to them. But her parents imagine her lost 'in desert wild,' showing their experienced single vision perception of nature." More widely "Blake draws on visions, dreams and fantasy to illustrate the creativity and emotional potential of human beings."

Gerard Manley Hopkins: *Selected Poems*

More popular this January, Hopkins continues to be discussed with style and passion.

6(a) 'In his nature poetry, Hopkins is concerned more with the invisible world than with the visible world.'

Some answers were very good indeed; others seemed to miss the tension in the question between "invisible" and "visible", arguing that Hopkins was concerned with the invisible world of faith but choosing supporting quotation that focused on the visible world of nature, as if the two were commensurate. There were, however, some adroit analyses of how Hopkins's language evokes his wonder in the natural world. A common and usually productive approach was to divide the poems into those more and those less concerned with the visible and invisible world. 'Spring', for instance, is mainly concerned with the visible and 'Carrion Comfort' with the invisible. Some candidates had difficulty finding other examples for the 'invisible' list. The very best answers saw that Hopkins is not more concerned with the one world or the other but with the way the two interact: "he sees the spiritual world as present in the natural – 'the azurous hung

hills are his world-wielding shoulder””. One essay considered the precision with which Hopkins implies the invisible in the visible: “stipple” in 'Pied Beauty', for example, “suggests the use of a paintbrush, and so the work of God.”

6(b) 'Hopkins's poetry shows suffering to be an essential part of faith.'

This was, in general, dealt with less satisfactorily. Biographical material was not always well integrated into the argument, and some candidates wrestled with the key word “essential” in the question. Some essays concentrated almost exclusively on 'The Wreck of the *Deutschland*' or 'Carrion Comfort'; others, naturally focusing on the 'Sonnets of Desolation', lacked the counterbalance to qualify their discussion by considering the place of joy at the natural world in Hopkins's work. Often examples of suffering substituted for analysis of how it may or may not be essential to faith.

Section B: DRAMA

William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*

7(a): 'Polonius is a loyal servant and a caring father.'

'Polonius is corrupt and manipulative.'

This question proved very fruitful. Abundant evidence was available for both statements. Some argued convincingly that both are true: ignorant of his master's crimes, “Polonius appears faithful, but corrupt by association” One answer commented that to be a “loyal servant” to Claudius, you *had* to be “corrupt and manipulative”. Given the “rotten” state of Denmark, said another essay, “he can be simultaneously a ‘loyal servant’ and ‘corrupt’ simply by conforming to his surroundings.” He was generally felt to be a fairly complex, contradictory character, if himself unaware of the complexities of others. Many felt that though he tried to be a caring father at the beginning, his duties as a loyal servant soon overrode his affection. He tries to be a manipulator, but has “problems even with manipulating words” – the need for “more matter with less art.” Hamlet's superior skill with words helps him to manipulate Polonius instead. Some alert candidates saw the contrasting views of Polonius as symptomatic of the problems within Denmark, so that the fact that Polonius is both loyal and corrupt shows how “rotten” things have become.

7(b): 'Hamlet is a victim of the Ghost's unreasonable demands'

One essay forcefully and interestingly presented the case that “as a result of the unreasonable demands Hamlet becomes a spy like Claudius and Polonius, a murderer like Claudius, a plotter (responsible for the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) and, in his ‘antic disposition,’ a deceiver.” Debate about the Ghost's trustworthiness contributed usefully to the discussion in some cases, but was sometimes pursued without much focus on the demands. It was often argued, frequently to good effect, that Hamlet is a victim not of the Ghost's demands so much as of his own nature or of Claudius. A few answers were hampered by the belief that “victim” can only mean “murder victim.” Others maintained that Hamlet, whatever the original demands, becomes more victimiser than victim, especially with reference to Ophelia. The most common problem in responses to this popular question was a tendency to narrative rather than analysis and a failure to examine whether the Ghost's demands are “unreasonable”. Some of those that did address the question fully agreed with the statement, arguing, for instance, that “the Ghost asks the Christian Hamlet to undertake a pagan revenge.” Attempts to argue that Hamlet is unequivocally Protestant and the Ghost Catholic were interesting but usually less cogent.

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William Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*

8(a): 'It is crucial to the effects and meaning of the play that the Duke's motivation remains a mystery.'

This was a popular question. There was often a gap between those answers which identified the mysteriousness of the Duke's motivation and those which also talked about this as "crucial to the effects and meaning of the play." Some argued that the uncertainty "shows the audience the difficulty of judging between appearance and reality." There were many rather general remarks of the 'this enables the audience to make up its own mind' variety. The idea of *Measure for Measure* as a "problem play" was often well used in the context of this uncertainty. Successful answers often identified all the incidents/situations where the Duke is involved and then argued about his motivations. Most accepted that his motives were ambiguous and that it was better that they should be for their effects on the audience. Only a few saw his actions as benign. Many are still thinking of him as manipulative and unacceptably authoritarian.

8(b) '*Measure for Measure* depicts a joyless society.'

There was an impressive variety of approaches to the idea of joylessness in the play. The main focus was on Isabella and Angelo: on their puritanism and, particularly in his case, self-torment. Some searching analyses examined such questions as "just how much control the law can have over an entire social group, and whether or not laws can restrain people from doing as they wish." There was much material suggesting the contrasting joyousness, under threat from these characters, available to the Vienna "underworld". However, other astute commentators saw the predatory, unreliable, semi-criminal nature of the lives of those in the sex trade and their customers. Most thought that joylessness prevails: even marriage, at the end of the play, is joyless, a punishment or second best. One candidate's carefully weighed answer ended with the reflection that there was not much joy for Isabella, expected to marry a Duke whom she could hardly trust. Less secure contributions simply explained who was unhappy and why.

Thomas Middleton: *The Changeling*

Interest in this play continues to grow.

9(a): '*The Changeling* challenges conventional ideas of service and loyalty.'

Those who attempted a) often wrote illuminatingly and knowledgeably about the play, with some fine explorations of the way the themes of "service" snakes through the play. As always, some candidates were impressive in their ability to muster a wide range of textual references to support their argument. "Loyalty" was often given a valuably wide definition, to include loyalty to servants as well as vice versa, so that it became a serious question of ethics. There was an interesting disparity between those who saw Beatrice as an immature girl looking for thrills, but basically innocent, and those who found her unforgivably immoral. Some used the sub-plot to add weight to their judgements.

9(b) '*The Changeling* is no more than a chaotic mixture of revenge, sex and absurdity.'

This was a popular question. Some excellent answers considered the play as a kind of revenge tragedy: candidates readily found examples of revenge and sex but less often of absurdity. Some argued for Beatrice as a victim of a patriarchal society rather than simply the creature of a chaotic world. At times answers linked the sub and main plots successfully, but the chance was missed to adduce the links as an example of non-chaotic structure. Some of the implausibilities in the plot were entertainingly analysed.

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Aphra Behn: *The Rover*

10(a): 'Violence and the threat of violence are never far below the surface of the language and the action.'

Very few answers to this question were seen.

10(b): 'Angellica Bianca's story shows that in the world of *The Rover* even a strong woman cannot control her fate.'

Much the preferred question: good examples of Angellica's initial power were cited; placed high on her balcony "she literally looks down on her adoring admirers." But her control is precarious, for she is dependent on men and it is made clear that she is seen as a commodity – a "purchase" or "prize." Hellena was seen as contrastingly able to control her own fate: "she consistently defies male authority figures who attempt to control her and force her to conform to a stereotypical image of women." Unlike Angellica, she succeeds in "directing" her relationship with Willmore.

John Gay: *The Beggar's Opera*

This text is being addressed with increasing sophistication and increasing understanding of genre and context.

11(a): 'A play about survival in a corrupt world.'

Examiners have feared that the study of this text is beginning to induce cynicism: "the way to survive in a corrupt society is by being corrupt yourself"; "Survival in this corrupt world requires, above all, the acquisition of money by any means"; you must "use your attributes to best advantage" regardless of notions of romantic love, sexual morality or financial probity. Some argued for Polly as an exception to such ruthlessness. Macheath's survival, it was felt, "emphasises the ignorance of society towards its own corruption. The Beggar reveals how his audience ... are unwilling to accept justice. They would rather be entertained." "Survival" brought some pertinent discussion of how often the characters seem to be quite careless of their own lives, and certainly of others'. There was some heartfelt discussion of the "commodification" of women. Most discussions were helped by a sophisticated understanding of genre and other contexts, with some useful references to *opera seria*, Brecht and Hogarth.

11(b): '*The Beggar's Opera* offers a sustained and radical critique of the lives of the rich.' Some thoughtful answers were seen on this question, often focussing on the play's deployment of Italian opera traditions. Most candidates interpreted the question as simply asking whether the play depicted the world of the rich unsympathetically. Some focussed surprisingly on Peachum as an example of "the rich". There was good illustration of Gay's satire and how it worked, which obliquely treated "sustained".

George Bernard Shaw: *Mrs Warren's Profession*

This play continues to attract committed responses.

12(a): '*Mrs Warren's Profession* presents a grimly commercial view of human life and society.'

Some excellent responses explored the ubiquity of exploitation within the play and the ways that money features within each of the relationships in the play – including Vivie's. Among better answers there was a strong sense of the radicalism of Shaw's critique. While most answers had relevant points to make about the "commercial" aspect of the question, "grimly" was more rarely

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taken up. Many answers concentrated a little too exclusively on Crofts. A few interesting essays looked at ways in which the entertaining elements of the play – melodrama, suspense, humour – are used to make the grimness of the social message palatable.

12(b): 'Mrs Warren's refusal to renounce her profession is the key issue in the play.'

Some answers on this question, tended to agree with the proposition, but also qualified it with an examination of the ending of the play which was also seen as integral to Shaw's intentions. Some candidates did not know the meaning of "renounce", taking it to mean "refer to" or "openly mention." While some candidates saw striking similarities (in terms of the need for independence and job satisfaction) between mother and daughter, most answers avoided discussing the moral and emotional implications of prostitution, apparently seeing it as no less abnormal than life as an actuary.

2712 Prose post-1914 (Written Paper)

General comments

Previous reports: As ever, this report should be read in conjunction with previous 2712 reports, all of which are available from OCR.

Overall standard: In general candidates seemed to be well prepared and have a good idea of what is required of them. One candidate answered two Section B questions, and thus only scored marks for the better of the two responses.

Quality of written communication: Comma splicing (or worse) is now so prevalent that it was rare to find a script free from punctuation and syntax errors. These things inevitably have an impact upon assessment under AO1, which overarches this paper.

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, or locate them precisely; and some who do then fail to focus their responses upon their selected passages, writing a general Section B type answer.

Section B: Sometimes candidates neglect to define terms, and this tends to make for a lack of clarity in the arguments advanced.

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

Atonement was by far the most popular text, with *Cold Comfort Farm* the only other with a significant number of responses.

Cold Comfort Farm

Candidates appeared to find accessible the Section A question on two female Starkadders. Strong answers – and there were a good many – often investigated the ways in which Gibbons, in her desire to entertain us, has given her characters distinctively exaggerated speaking (or shrieking!) voices, and how she uses repetition and physical detail to enhance the extreme effects of such figures. It was clear that candidates were very well informed about the literary targets of Gibbons' satire, but such material did not always operate to advantage, especially when it seemed to be offered as an alternative to close textual analysis. There were some well-informed responses to the Section B question on a menacing/violent undercurrent in the novel, and they often took the view that this aspect was exaggerated and meant to be found ludicrous. There was some tendency to offload learned material concerning literary targets (Mary Webb, D H Lawrence, et al); but such discussion, if carefully integrated, was fruitful. The alternative question on 'the habit of taking oneself too seriously' was equally popular, and elicited answers across the mark range. All agreed with the prompt quotation, and many effective responses demonstrated close acquaintance with the novel by considering a number of relatively minor figures. Again, there was some tendency to reproduce prepared material in unconvincing ways.

Atonement

This being the most popular text, it also drew the widest range of answers across the ability range. For their first extract in response to the Section A question on Briony candidates often chose the passage in which her “controlling demon” of obsessive orderliness is described, or sometimes the “nettle-slashing incident” (as it seems to have become known). Her services to the dying Luc Cornet often provided illuminating contrast, but more commonly selected was a second extract from the “London 1999” epilogue. Many of the best answers took on the meta-narrative complexity of Briony as the novelist, considering how McEwan subtly implies the older woman’s moral agenda in the style of her self-narration. Although well informed and often using what have become familiar passages, it was encouraging to read a diversity of responses, even from the same Centre. Most candidates had read and thought with great care, but had also been allowed to develop their own views. All this said, at the other end of the scale there were weak answers which offered little in the way of close textual analysis, opting instead for character studies.

Despite reading many answers to the Section B question on memory, examiners found that fresh ideas turned up (even in otherwise unpromising answers) and that candidates at all levels of ability often responded in relevant ways, the best being wonderfully sophisticated and well informed. However, some weaker answers did not go beyond identifying a list of memories rather than assessing “the importance of memory”. Answers to the alternative question concerning the novel being about loss of innocence sometimes gave the impression of being adapted from ideas prompted by a question in a recent session about the experience of childhood in the novel. This is fair enough provided that the adjustment to the terms and specific significance of the current question has been fully made. Some answers were impressive and showed evidence of thoughtful, intelligent reading, interpreting “innocence” in many ways within the same answer. Middling answers gave a range of examples of types of innocence (not always clearly defined or distinguished) and of loss of innocence. Comparatively few tackled the broader issue implicit in “a novel about the loss of innocence”. A very small minority of candidates quickly dismissed the idea of the novel being about the loss of innocence and spent the rest of the essay considering what else it could be said to be about: and in doing this they may have answered the “How far” part of the question, but they ignored “in what ways”. Sometimes more attention was paid to the novel’s literary antecedents (Northanger Abbey, Passage to India, The Go-Between, What Maisie Knew) than to the 1930s or wartime contexts. In some essays this worked well; in others it led to a display of literary ‘knowledge’ whose relevance to the question was at best indirect.

Rites of Passage

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

Open Secrets

There were no responses on this text in this session.

To the Lighthouse

The Section A question on Mr Ramsey was generally well answered, although weaker answers tended to produce little more than a character study, often supported by a certain amount of contextual material which was, by and large, difficult to reward in a Section A answer. The Section B question on the title of the novel often led to rather vague answers; because candidates too often failed to set clear parameters for their discussion by unpacking the question, their answers remaining unfocused and meandering. Others established with clarity the criteria by which they were judging the effectiveness of the novel’s title. The alternative question on the characters’ struggle against a sense of their own failure tended to be better answered, with candidates engaging productively with all elements of the question.

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A Thousand Acres

All the questions on this text were generally well answered. There was some good detail considered in the Section A question, although interpretation of “family tensions” was frequently not made explicit. In response to the Section B question on Ginny, the strongest candidates explored all elements of the question by considering not just the different ways in which Ginny might be deemed to be the novel’s “hero”, but also the implications of her role as its narrator. In the alternative question on Smiley’s presentation of characters who “suffer needlessly and learn nothing” most answers explored a range of instances and types of suffering depicted in the novel, and a reasonable number considered “needlessly”; but few engaged to any great extent with the second part of the proposition (that they “learn nothing”), those who did tending to produce full and cogent responses.

Letter to Daniel

There were no responses on this text in this session.

An Evil Cradling

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

2713 Comparative and Contextual Study

General Comments

The number of candidates entering for the synoptic unit in the January examination session remains very small. Nonetheless, a full range of ability was seen, and candidates in the main showed a secure grasp of the demands of the paper. As ever, the best work was breathtaking in its quality.

Again, as in previous sessions, not all topic areas were answered evenly; since very few candidates answered on Satire or Post-Colonial Literature, it is unfair to reach firm conclusions about the performance of candidates in those sections. By contrast, each of the other four topics was tackled by a respectable number of students, even if some individual questions were preferred over others.

In broad terms, the unseen passage (Section A) was tackled with confidence by most candidates who undertook the Romantic and 20th Century American Prose topics, showing a strong grasp of AO5ii appreciation and a willingness to cross-reference to their wider reading. The passage of poetry in the Gothic section proved problematic to some candidates (who appeared disconcerted by the very fact that it was poetry), whilst the post-1945 drama passage from *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* was rarely well answered. As always, for all topic areas, those candidates who answered on what they found in the extract provided, rather than on what they might wish to find, were invariably the more successful.

In relation to the Gothic passage, many candidates found some success through the tried and tested process of “trope spotting”, relating the passage to their broad AO5ii contextual understanding, but this was not the case with the drama extract: many candidates struggled to come to terms with the passage’s potential for AO3 exploration – wit, wordplay, humour, interaction of characters, and so on – and even fewer appreciated the passage in a context of meta-theatre or absurdist tradition, although some made valid cross references to Beckett and even Ionesco. At a basic level, many answers failed to progress beyond observing that death was a common topic in plays since 1945 (often implying it hadn’t been before!) and that this was because of either the trauma caused by World War II or, according to some, because of the Cold War being fought at the time the play was written. Simplistic commentary in terms such as these could not gain much credit.

Section B continues to be done well on the whole. Few candidates now make the mistake of writing about their first text and then about a second or third in isolation: the prime requirement to compare texts now seems to be understood clearly. Equally, few scripts had a disproportionate weighting towards a single text, with a second seemingly tagged-on as an afterthought. Where this happens, AO2 comparison is inevitably scant, and the candidate necessarily penalises himself or herself. Thankfully, such instances are rare.

Ultimately, in time honoured fashion, those students did well who had revised thoroughly, knew their texts in detail, argued (and did not assert) their case in response to the question asked (rather than the question they wanted it to be, or thought it was) and could relate their knowledge to broad contextual understanding thoughtfully. It was both pleasing and reassuring to see that many candidates did fulfil such stringent demands with excellence.

Comments on individual topic areas

Satire

One candidate only answered on this topic. Comment on performance for the topic area as a whole is therefore not possible.

The Gothic Tradition

This topic remains the most popular, and candidates across the ability range tackle it with confidence. As noted above, the poetry passage from *The Bastille, A Vision* proved difficult for some candidates in respect of close AO3 discussion, despite the promptings of the header notes. However, most candidates were quick to recognise traditional Gothic elements within Williams's text, commenting on the setting in the prison, and ways in which fear, horror and terror were evoked. It was not uncommon for candidates to attempt to discriminate between these concepts according to Ann Radcliffe's definitions. Elsewhere, candidates discussed the significance of dreams and visions in the Gothic, noting that they were an important element in psychological interpretations of the genre, with a good number of answers alluding to Freud's work – though not all were clear about the chronology of dates involved. However, answers which argued that this was quite a "modern" passage in a way, despite its early provenance within the Gothic tradition, were often quite successful. Surprisingly few students could place the extract within the context of the French Revolution, which began famously and iconically with the storming of the Bastille one year prior to this poem's publication.

There were many more answers on *Frankenstein* than on *The Dead School*, and *Dracula* was easily the most frequent comparative text: *Wuthering Heights*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Monk* and, from more modern times, *The Wasp Factory* were also much in evidence as texts for comparison. However, it is a pleasing aspect of this topic that the range of texts used is wide and, more importantly, that they are usually well understood.

Question 8a ("By comparing *Frankenstein* with at least one other Gothic text you have studied, explore the significance of the figure of the outsider in Gothic writing") was by far the most popular option. Unsurprisingly, the creature and Victor Frankenstein himself were virtually universally cited as the main outsiders in *Frankenstein*, with a good number distinguishing between them on the grounds that the former was excluded by society, whilst Victor chose to exclude himself from society's bounds and norms. Yet many candidates usefully expanded their answers to include Walton as an outsider, akin psychologically to Victor, whilst others argued from a feminist standpoint, noting the ways in which female characters are outsiders in the text, lacking power and influence. Quite frequently, in such cases, Shelley's family circumstances were discussed pertinently. The figure of *Dracula* was commonly offered as a comparator, as was *Wuthering Heights*' Heathcliff and the "modern" women in *Dracula*, who placed themselves beyond society's norms.

A few strong responses also argued thoughtfully that the genre itself, particularly in its earliest times, placed the readership in the role of the outsider, in that they (often "middle class women") chose to immerse themselves in a literary form outside the mainstream. From this, and in relation to the earlier avenues highlighted, many candidates argued thoughtfully and productively on the concept of transgression.

Also popular was Question 8c ("Without fear, there is no Gothic." Explore this claim...). Some answers at the lower end of the mark range did little more than give examples of fear-inducing elements of the texts they had studied, but more attempted to evaluate the implications of the question's contention. Candidates discussed interestingly the constituent elements of Gothic – what defines it – and very few ignored the question's central focus. Not surprisingly, fear was deemed integral to the Gothic by most, if not all, candidates, but answers were, for the most

part, much more nuanced than simple agreement. Many competent answers argued that Gothic comprises “fear plus something else”, with the “plus” being, for instance, the sublime, or death, or some other key Gothic trope. Subtler answers would often tease out the implications of fear: is it physical or psychological? What differentiates horror from terror? Whilst yet other approaches considered ways in which fear derives from the unknown, including whether such unknowns are external or internal to the individual psyche. Again, the question proved accessible to students of all abilities.

Relatively few students wrote about *The Dead School* as a central text (9b: “Harrowing up the soul with imaginary horrors, and making the flesh creep and the nerves thrill.’ By comparing ...”) but those that did were broadly well attuned to the notion that the Gothic is powerfully effective through its visceral qualities. Valid commentary pertaining to Raphael Bell’s nightmarish decline was much in evidence, as was discussion of the trauma of memory. Candidates who have studied this text are well grounded in the concept of modern Gothic, with its focus on psychological torment, and this January’s session proved no different.

Writing of the Romantic Era

The passage from Bloomfield’s *The Farmer’s Boy* proved accessible to most candidates, though several misread aspects of it in a number of ways. One common misconception was the interpretation of “industry”, whereby the term was deemed a corollary of “dark satanic mills” rather than a plain synonym for work or endeavour; a second was to fail to notice that the narrative persona was *not* inspired by the sublime and that “From meaner objects far [his] raptures flow”, namely humble pastoral. In each instance, such a misreading rarely undermined a whole response, but it was indicative of an approach that sought AO5ii context material at the expense of closely considered AO3 analysis. In the former case, it was not uncommon to read of the farmer’s boy, Giles, being exploited by a merciless farmer, rather than observing that he “serv’d from affection” “his generous Master.” In the latter instance, one frequently read of pathetic fallacy, Burke, the power of nature to inspire the imagination and so on, but few made the relatively straightforward point that Bloomfield is inverting the common Romantic sensibility here, or rejecting it even: “No Alpine wonders thunder through my verse”.

Candidates were on safer ground when they made fruitful comment on the poem’s links to themes of childhood and memory. Many saw parallels in the text to Wordsworthian ideals, with its depiction of an ordinary working man and boy at home in bountiful, fecund nature which, in turn, was Giles’s teacher: “Nature was his book”. Pleasingly, too, many candidates wrote confidently about the poem’s structure, discussing its metre and rhythm as well as its lexical grounding in Romantic language. Several candidates wrote skilfully about iambic pentameter and Bloomfield’s use of heroic couplets, which reflected both scholarliness and confidence.

All three questions on the Romantic topic were tackled in good numbers, although Wordsworth was perhaps more in evidence in this session than Keats. Question 9b (“By comparing *Lyrical Ballads* with at least one other text from the Romantic era, explore ways in which Romantic writers present those on the margins of society.”) was answered most frequently and proved a fruitful source for discussion. Proficient responses frequently focused on the old, the poor and the needy – ‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’, ‘The Idiot Boy’, ‘The Female Vagrant’ were often cited – and most candidates clearly understood from the context of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that Wordsworth and Coleridge were attempting to shift a whole paradigm of sensibility with regards to, say, ordinary people. Some good responses argued that the aim was to bring such figures in from the margins of society.

A different line of argument adopted by some, and no less valid, was that Romantics themselves were on the margins of society in a very real sense, and in so arguing they broached common ground with those who answered Question 9c (“By comparing the work of at least two writers of the Romantic era, discuss Romantic attitudes to poets and poetry”). Shelley’s contention that

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poets were the “unacknowledged legislators of mankind” was much to the fore and was usually well discussed, as was the Romantics’ belief in the primacy of imagination as a source of revealed truth. This question saw great breadth of reference with, in particular, a lot of valid engagement with Blake.

Question 9a (“By comparing Keats’s *Poems and Letters* with the work of at least one other writer of the Romantic era, consider the importance of dreams and visions in Romantic writing”) was least frequently answered of the three, but responses were often strong. The prompt in the question – “do I wake or sleep?” – allowed a way in for the less confident, and candidates discussed thoughtfully and cogently a range of perspectives on the task. Keats’s concept of “negative capability” was discussed by some, as was the dreamlike state of reverie in differing *Odes* – *Grecian Urn*, *Melancholy*, *Nightingale* and *Indolence* all figured. In a different vein, from within Keats’s work, *La Belle dame Sans Merci* and its dream vision was also brought into discussion by several. Comparison was often made with Blake, unsurprisingly, but the drug induced visions of Coleridge were also referred to frequently, both in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*.

As in previous exam sessions, it bears repeating that whilst ‘Writing of the Romantic Era’ is the least often answered of the four statistically substantial topics, it remains the topic with the highest overall quality of response by some margin.

20th Century American Prose

There is a certain grim irony in the fact that John Updike should die in the week when the opening of his novel *Rabbit at Rest* was offered to candidates for analysis: in the passage the main protagonist, Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom contemplates his mortality. The centrality of death, with the concomitant issue of the passing of time, was quickly recognised by candidates of all abilities, and discussion was full, vigorous and confident. Other “American” aspects of the passage that were discerned by a high proportion of candidates were those of travel (and journeying), and the iconic ubiquity of cars. Equally, modernity was often discussed, as was advertising - or rather its lack, on the approaches to the airport in this passage. Interestingly, while “The American Dream” has been often invoked in an over-simplified manner answers here often dissected the concept’s constituent elements in this passage, with stronger responses acutely noting Updike’s dark humour and cool irony.

It has become a commonplace in recent exams for candidates to argue that American authors like to undermine, or puncture, the illusion of comfortable, if superficial, American life. What was pleasing in this session was that, whilst many candidates found much to criticise in such fashion – the cold, impersonal airport terminal, the antiseptic muzak, the air of crypt-like futuristic menace – others also noted the complexity of Rabbit’s response to his situation. Yes, he is uneasy, and yes, his wife is a source of irritation, and yet he is “innocently proud” of her. Candidates were clearly thinking things out on the day and not simply bringing pre-determined material to the exam: that is good practice.

Of the three questions available in Section B, only two were tackled in any numbers. Question 10a (“20th Century American prose shows closeness and intimacy in human relationships to be tragically impossible.” By comparing *Tender is the Night* with at least one other appropriate text, consider this view.”) was easily the most popular question, although relatively few candidates thought with sufficient precision about its opportunities. Answers confidently discussed relationships in a wide range of texts, often showing them to be flawed and broken, or breaking, and credit was given in such circumstances. Dick Diver with Nicole and/or Rosemary, Nicole with her father, Loyal Blood with Billy, Gatsby with Daisy (and Tom with Daisy) were frequently offered as examples. Equally, some candidates offered counters to the contention, drawing attention to the Joad family in *The Grapes of Wrath*, or George and Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*, or even Nicole and Tommy Barban in *Tender is the Night* as examples of closeness or intimacy

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that could and did exist, even if it was tragically doomed. However, “closeness” and “intimacy” were virtually always dealt with as synonyms, and the issue of “tragically impossible” was rarely examined as an issue. In other words, what defines, or comprises, “tragedy” in this regard was almost always treated as a rather straightforward given: if a relationship ends or is thwarted, seems to be the view, it is a tragedy. Why, or how, this might be so was little argued – as was the issue of “impossibility”.

Question 10b (“By comparing *Postcards* with at least one other appropriate text, discuss the importance of family in the 20th Century American prose you have studied.”) was also tackled in good numbers. Many candidates detailed the various vicissitudes of the Blood family, with some attempting to dig a little deeper into the importance of “importance”. Many noted the ironic – tragic, even – belief in family that Loyal retained over the years of his self-imposed exile, unaware of the fragmentation that had occurred back home over that same period. Others, in respect of *Tender is the Night*, argued that family is a problematical and dubious issue on several counts, not least because of the shaky moral basis of many of the ties seen. The incestuous relationship of Nicole and her father was a factor considered in many essays, with many of those in turn noting the dark sub-text of its echoes in Dick’s relationship with the young starlet, Rosemary, the title of the film that made her name (“Daddy’s Girl”), and even a proleptic hint of danger in respect of Dick’s relationship with his own young daughter.

The Great Gatsby is the main text used for comparison in this topic and it proved a valuable source for discussion in this question, as it had for 10a. The nature of Tom and Daisy’s marriage came under scrutiny, as did that of the Wilsons, and a number of candidates thoughtfully considered the Gatz/Gatsby conundrum, noting that Gatsby’s father is still on the scene, as it were, at the end of the novel, suggesting a permanence of family ties little seen elsewhere in the text. Elsewhere, some candidates observed that strong family units, albeit beset by major problems, are often to be found in texts by women authors, notably citing Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Morrison’s *Beloved* as just two examples.

The third question (10c: “By comparing ... discuss the importance of setting and/or landscape in the 20th Century American prose you have read....”) was rarely attempted. Most answers did little more than outline the various settings of the books they had studied. Indeed, very few of those answering on *Tender is the Night* made much of the fact that most of the novel is set in Europe, although some answers commented thoughtfully on how the Divers were creating a sort of jazz age “America on Sea” in the south of France. Answers on *The Great Gatsby* often mentioned the difference between East and West Eggs, and how the Valley of Ashes was symbolically significant to the novel, but such discussion was quite rare. *Postcards* was little mentioned, but some candidates noted its structure as a form of *Bildungsroman* (even if the term was not used) in which a journey through America over time and geography is integral to its structure.

Drama Post-1945

As observed in the general introduction, the passage from Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* proved difficult for most candidates and the marking process took account of this. It was evident that many candidates were searching for recognisable themes commonly found in modern drama – perhaps those most easily found in the set texts such as the changing roles of women in society, the exercise of power in relationships, anger and violence and so on – and were thrown by having as a passage a dramatic scene which concerned itself with the nature of drama itself and the way illusion, the “art” of theatre, becomes a form of reality. In such a light, it was particularly surprising that few of those who had studied *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* did not pick up on that angle. Equally, it was disappointing that relatively few candidates took note of the prompt at the head of the passage to give them the steer that it was from a comedy.

There were some aspects of the passage that candidates responded to successfully, however. Most noted the irony of a “real” death on stage not being as realistic as an acted one (for all that the term “paradox” was rare), and most candidates tried to determine the nature of the power relationship on stage, observing fairly that Rosencrantz is quite passive and that the Player takes the lead for much of the action. Some candidates commented on Stoppard’s use of stage directions, making links to their importance in works by Miller and Williams in particular.

Question 11a (“‘In post-1945 drama characters struggle to find a sense of purpose.’ By comparing *Who’s Afraid...*”) was easily the least frequently answered of the three on offer, and it was perhaps ironic that candidates failed to make a connection between the question’s contention and the content of the Section A passage. Those that did answer it wrote proficiently for the most part, considering variously George’s position “in” the History department, Martha’s role as daughter of the University’s principal, their joint inability to be true parents and Honey’s unwillingness to fulfil the “dream” role of being a mother. Those who had studied *The Homecoming* tended to focus on the decline in Max’s position in the family, the eclipsing of Teddy as an influence, and the conundrum of quite who, or what, Ruth is in the play. *Death of a Salesman* was a frequent comparator, but most candidates who chose this question did so, it seems, because they had studied *Waiting for Godot*.

Question 11b (“‘Conflict between generations is a powerful force in much modern theatre.’ By comparing *The Homecoming* with...”) was both popular and productive. The intra-familial warfare of Max and his sons was well rehearsed, as was the duel between George and Nick in Albee’s play, although the Martha/Honey juxtaposition was seen by most as less a conflict than as a tragic irony. Similarly, the conflict between Biff and Willy in *Death of a Salesman* was much to the fore. However, some candidates treated the question rather loosely, and considered it simply from the broader perspective of conflict in general. This was particularly frustrating when the elements of a strong answer were ostensibly all present. For instance, several candidates writing on *A Streetcar Named Desire* focused on the clash of personalities between Blanche and Stanley, but failed to do so in terms of how they metaphorically represent an old, lost America and a brutal, modern one: thus, the historical/generational aspect of the question was overlooked.

Question 11c (“By comparing at least two plays written since 1945, discuss ways in which a sense of entrapment is an important feature of modern drama.”) proved popular and successful also. Both set texts allowed for thoughtful approaches, and candidates wrote confidently about how all four characters in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* are trapped in a mire of social expectations, and how the family unit in *The Homecoming* works somehow like a spider’s web, enmeshing all its constituents. Stronger answers – of which there were a good number – also picked up on the “sense of...” element of the question, and candidates frequently commented on Pinter’s wider oeuvre, noting his capacity to develop a dark, menacing sensibility that traps characters within it.

Post-Colonial Literature

As with Satire, it is not possible to comment on this topic’s performance, since there were so few candidates

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE English Literature 3828/7828
January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
2707	Raw	60	46	41	36	31	27	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2708	Raw	60	48	42	36	30	24	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	25	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	34	30	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2713	Raw	60	47	41	35	30	25	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	19.5	47.0	73.9	92.4	99.3	100.0	426
7828	27.0	68.0	94.3	99.2	100.0	100.0	127

127 candidates aggregated this series

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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