

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LITERATURE

H072

For first teaching in 2015

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Contents

Introduction	3
Paper 2 series overview	4
Section 1 overview	5
Question 1 (a)	5
Question 1 (b)	5
Question 2 (a)	6
Question 2 (b)	11
Question 3 (a)	12
Question 3 (b)	12
Question 4 (a)	12
Question 4 (b)	13
Question 5 (a)	13
Question 5 (b)	14
Question 6 (a)	14
Question 6 (b)	15
Section 2 overview	16
Question 7	17
Question 8	18
Question 9	19
Question 10	21
Question 11	21

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper 2 series overview

The Drama and Prose Post-1900 component invites candidates to explore a set drama text as well as connections between a set prose text and an unseen prose passage. The component is designed to give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate the full breadth of their ability to fulfil the requirements of the range of the English Literature assessment objectives.

Success in this component is characterised by work that shows detailed knowledge of the set texts often demonstrated by well selected textual detail (AO2) in support of clear and developed arguments (AO1). Writing is fluent and clear (AO1) and closely focused on the question, using relevant critical concepts and terminology. Understanding the influence of contexts (AO3) is shown through relevant references which are appropriate to the question posed and support the argument of the response. In Section 1 (Drama) successful responses demonstrate a strong sense of the set text as drama through detailed discussion of dramatic effects (AO2), or references to performances (AO5). There is a range of interpretations of the text in the light of the question (AO5) relevant to the question and the argument of the response. In Section 2 (Prose) the unseen extract is connected to the set text in a number of detailed and interesting ways which often illuminate the set text itself (AO4).

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • constructed a clear and organised argument based on a close reading of the question • showed detailed knowledge of the text through apt selection of quotations or textual references to support their argument • wrote clearly and with precision • used references to contexts to support and develop the argument • made full use of the extract in Section 2 to create links to the set text which helped to deepen analysis • blended critical readings into the argument to support and develop ideas • showed awareness of the play as a text for performance in Section 1 • showed confident use of critical concepts and vocabulary • engaged enthusiastically with the text and the question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paid too little attention to the specific demands of the question • paid too little attention to the methods the writer used to present themes in Section 2 • reproduced material from other questions they had perhaps used in practice or preparation without sufficient focus on the question set in this exam • paid too little attention to opportunities offered by the extract in Section 2 to explore illuminating links • spent too much time on considerations of context which were not germane to the question or the argument • lacked clarity in written expression and/or in the construction of the argument • demonstrated a general understanding of ideas connected with the text, rather than showing a detailed, relevant appreciation of the text itself.

Section 1 overview

The level of knowledge candidates showed about their set texts was comparable to previous series. It is not our impression that the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has impaired candidates' ability to enjoy and understand literary texts such as these. The range of texts has continued to narrow, however, so that only two of the texts (*The History Boys* and *A Streetcar named Desire*) were seen in any number, with the vast majority of candidates answering on *Streetcar*. An important feature of the design of this paper is its range of text choice, so centres might consider some of the other less familiar plays on the set text list, all of which have the ability to generate, for both students and teachers, fresh and unexpected insights.

Successful responses managed to include a wide range of references to the text as well as critical readings. Less successful responses allowed the argument to stall, as memorised critical quotations and contextual information were off-loaded, with little regard for relevance, into the answer.

Successful responses always demonstrated strong, clear lines of relevant argument, and used AO3 and AO5 to support and develop these lines. This sense of embedding references to contexts and different readings within the overall structure of a response was most impressive where it was sustained.

Question 1 (a)

1 Noel Coward: *Private Lives*

Either

- (a) 'The battle of the sexes fought out between equals.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of *Private Lives*?

[30]

Very few responses to this question were seen.

Question 1 (b)

- (b) 'For all his wit and invention, Elyot seems ultimately lost in this luxurious world.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the role of Elyot in *Private Lives*?

[30]

No responses to this question were seen.

Question 2 (a)

2 Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Either

(a) 'The play portrays women as inevitably dependent on men.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of *A Streetcar Named Desire*? [30]

As in previous sessions, this play was overwhelmingly the most popular text on this component, and the great majority of candidates who answered on it chose this question. It was very clear that candidates found the play engaging, and that they often felt deeply personal responses to its characters, relationships and circumstances.

The question invited candidates to explore the presentation of relationships in the play, in particular how they impact on the women. The most successful responses also paid close attention to the words 'inevitably' and 'dependent' in the question, while weaker responses tended often to deal quite generally with notions of gender, but without focusing on the more specific consideration that the question requires. Strong responses explored the different forms of dependency explored within the play (such as the sisters being dependent on each other); the nature of Stanley's dependency on Stella; Steve and Eunice; Mitch and Blanche's relationship as it develops; and even the dependency of the male characters on each other to support a type of self-serving machismo.

AO2 was often very successful, with consideration often given to details such as 'meat' and to colour imagery (e.g. white satin). Other examples included Blanche wanting 'magic', along with lamplight imagery and reference to her as a 'moth'. Most frequent of all was 'I have always depended on the kindness of strangers', although analysis of this memorable final moment varied a great deal in quality and question relevance.

In less successful responses, context (AO3) was too broad, particularly when referring to 'the Southern Belle' with little or no explication. Biographical references to Williams' life tended in weaker responses to be less persuasive than more objectively identified social, political and cultural frameworks. Stronger responses tended to dwell far less on such biographical details alone as a way of addressing this AO.

There were very frequent and often closely observed references to the 1951 Elia Kazan film, who was often himself more directly quoted. Candidates had clearly enjoyed watching and discussing this production. Less frequently, but just as productively, the Gillian Anderson 2014 National Theatre production had stimulated much interest among candidates. These enabled some good responses to the text as performed drama, along with other references to critical views and different perspectives that contribute to any mature consideration of this play. It has been heartening to see in so many responses evidence of varied and flexible teaching approaches.

'Plastic theatre', while often referred to productively, was often not clearly defined and, in weaker work, tended to fall away once mentioned, as if these candidates had little clear understanding of the term but deployed it, nonetheless.

Exemplar 1

Tennessee Williams, drawing on the views and values of 1940s America, presents the female characters in 'A Streetcar Named Desire' as ~~inevitably~~ inevitably dependent on men. For example, Stella is dependent on her husband, Stanley, to survive and Blanche is dependent. Blanche's redemption within society is dependent on a man paving her from her dark reputation. However, Williams also presents Stanley as dependent on women ~~for both sexual pleas~~ for his own satisfaction; sexual pleasure and social mobility.

Firstly, Williams portrays Stella as dependent on Stanley in order to survive, both physically and within the eyes of society. For example, in Scene 3, Stella describes Stanley as 'the only one who's going anywhere'. Stella's notion that 'Stanley is the only man in his circle that has potential to grow and ~~provides for~~ acts as a provider indicates that Stella views him as her provider and her caretaker. She leans on him even when he is wrong or 'rough...at his worst' because she knows alone she will not survive. Williams draws on the contemporary views ~~to~~ of 1940s America to mould Stella's ~~beliefs~~ belief that she cannot survive without a husband, as at that time life for an unmarried, single mother was not easy. It is for these reasons that Stella stays with Stanley even after he brutally rapes her sister. At the end of the play, Stella is seen to have 'accepted the child sobbingly'. The verb 'accepted' is representative of Stella's acceptance of Stanley's

wrongdoing and her understanding that she must stay in order to survive, or else she will be destitute and without a sister. It is for these reasons that T.M. ~~McGill~~ McGill states that ~~her acceptance~~ her refusal of Blanche's story of rape is a commitment to self preservation rather than love'. Stella commits herself to Stanley and is dependent on him but not out of love, it is due to her need to survive in the unforgiving American South.

Furthermore, Williams portrays Blanche as dependent on a man to provide her with redemption and save her from the destiny of a fallen woman. For example, she immediately clings to Mitch as she views him as an opportunity to be redeemed in society - their union would offset the rumors of her promiscuity. This is supported by the quote, 'she read with feigned difficulty'. Blanche, the fading Southern Belle, puts on an act of being a damsel in distress or a helpless woman to draw in men who wish to save like Mitch, willing to help her. The adjective 'feigned' illustrates her pretence and shows her calling out for a male saviour. Critic, Marie Lund, describes Blanche and Mitch as 'mutual prospective saviour, their relationship is practical rather than one of romance'. Mitch in this case acts as Blanche's saviour from the consequences and destiny of being a fallen woman in the American South. Furthermore, Williams furthers the idea that Blanche is dependent on

a man to save her by constantly making Blanche mention her 'old admirer', Shep Huntleigh. The unseen character acts as a means of escape for Blanche from her reality as a destitute, sordid woman and displays her to be dependent on ~~him~~ as a man as she constantly reminds herself of him - especially after Mitch's rejection. Thus, Williams shows Blanche to be dependent on a man to free her from her reputation as a promiscuous, ~~an~~ impure woman and make her a respectable, Southern housewife.

However, Williams displays this nature of ~~depend~~ -ency via Stanley also, as he depends on Stella for his own personal advancement and satisfaction. For example, in scene 3, after the chaos of the poker night, Stanley and Stella seemingly forgive each other. The quote, ~~to~~ 'they came together with animal noises' shows the highly sexual, almost primitive, and carnal nature of their marriage. Stanley is dependent on Stella to fulfill his sexual appetite. Large, sexual appetite. Williams ~~also~~ whilst also showing progressive romance, also presents traditional marriages, similar to that of his parents, in the play, ~~was~~ of portraying the wife as a mere object of sexual pleasure for her husband. Furthermore, Williams presents Stanley as dependent on Stella to ascend the social ladder. In the opening scene, Stanley is described

to be 'roughly dressed in blue denim work clothes'. The material, 'denim', is often associated with the working class and immigrants in America striving for the American Dream, such as the founder of Levi ~~and~~ Strauss, who popularised denim, and was a German-Jewish immigrant from Bavaria. This symbol of hardwork shows Stanley to be a honest, hardworking, working class man striving to better his life. His wife, Stella, ~~and their~~ acts as his opportunity to ascend the rigid social hierarchy as due to her aristocratic background.

This exemplar opens with a brisk clarification of the specific ways in which ideas of women as “dependent” are to be explored. We are also given a brief idea of counterarguments that the candidate intends to set out. Concise, dynamic opening paragraphs such as this often characterise more successful responses because the focus is, without undue elaboration, on the question, and there are clear suggestions as to how the candidate is going to address it.

As the response develops in the second and third paragraphs, it is worth noting how the candidate allows the text itself to add substance to the argument as it is being expressed. The frequent use of quotations (e.g. “...the only one who’s going anywhere...” or “accepted the child sobbingly”) serves to confirm the candidate’s close understanding of the text, rather than suggesting a less fully developed understanding - of the ideas to be found in it, rather than the text itself as producing those ideas. Such quotations do not have to be completely accurate to work effectively, although they must carry the ‘gist’ of the correct version and feel closely akin to its language. Most very successful responses seldom go for long without engaging the reader with examples from the text itself.

The candidate’s inclusion of different critical readings (AO5) is also characteristic of many successful responses. Note how critics’ views add authority to arguments that the candidate has already expressed for themselves – they do not substitute for the candidate’s views, but rather they confirm them and add further authority. This sense that critical views have been selected, most probably from a wide range familiar to the candidate (many of which will have been discarded once the demands of the question became known) suggests a confident and judicious mind at work.

It is also a feature of the best responses that they find neat, concise expression for precise and complicated impressions. In the third paragraph, for example, regarding Blanche’s relationship with Mitch, the candidate suggests that she hoped “their union would offset the rumours of her promiscuity” – an idea that might have taken a less successful candidate several sentences to express. The best responses are always substantial, but often no ‘longer’ than less successful work – very good responses often come across as much more efficient than work from less successful candidates, and therefore able to cover much more ground in the time available.

AO3 ('...understanding of the significance and influence of contexts...') is addressed both in quite general terms (e.g., in paragraph 2, "Williams draws on contemporary views of 1940s America to mould Stella's beliefs..."), and in much more specific details (e.g. in identifying Stanley's working class origins as evident in his wearing of denim - "often associated with the working class and immigrants in America striving...at that time"). In both cases and elsewhere, however, such references have a clear and defined purpose within the candidate's overall argument. They are not, as often happens in less successful responses, thrown indiscriminately into the response simply because they have been learnt and 'prepared' for the exam. As ever, it is not the number of such references that matters, but rather the contribution they make to the response as a whole.

Question 2 (b)

- (b) 'Stanley stands for a new, cosmopolitan, immigrant America, without snobbery and social distinction.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the role of Stanley in *A Streetcar Named Desire*? [30]

Far fewer candidates opted for this question than for Question 2a. The question clearly required some understanding of 'new, cosmopolitan, immigrant America' in the late 1940s (AO3), although the same is the case with the play itself, properly understood. In most responses, AO3 was confident and well-informed, with clear appreciation of specific issues to do with early twentieth-century immigration and the post-war, blue collar world that Stanley inhabits. Less successful responses contrasted 'Old' and 'New' America with little sense of what this meant in cultural terms. 'Snobbery' and 'social distinction' were also, for some candidates, hazily understood terms, while for others they provided specific prompts that helped to identify and define the accelerating obsolescence of Blanche's mental and emotional world.

AO5 was again a noted strength in many responses, with Marlon Brando's seminal 1951 performance frequently a focus.

AO2 often centred on descriptions of Stanley, both his own views of himself and those held about him by other characters, often focusing on animal imagery ('pig', 'hang back with the brutes', 'gaudy seed-bearer'), and on language to do with the materiality of wealth and class (e.g. the 'columns' of Belle Reve), and on royal imagery (Stanley as 'king', Blanche and Stella as 'a pair of queens'). Interesting further occasional AO2 details included commentary on the connotations of names – Kowalski (immigrant), Du Bois (Old South aristocracy).

Weaker responses tended to offer a potted description of Stanley's character, discussing him as if he were real and selecting examples that were not always obviously relevant to the specific demands of the question.

Question 3 (a)

3 Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming***Either**

- (a)**
- 'A play in which everyone competes with everyone else.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of *The Homecoming*?**[30]**

No responses to this text were seen.

Question 3 (b)

- (b)**
- 'Lenny has a gift for organising the lives of other people.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the role of Lenny in *The Homecoming*?**[30]**

No responses to this text were seen.

Question 4 (a)

4 Alan Bennett: *The History Boys***Either**

- (a)**
- 'The play proves all knowledge is precious whether or not it serves the slightest human use.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this comment on *The History Boys*?**[30]**

Responses tended to be structured around attitudes to learning and knowledge expressed by the three teachers, and how all three are depicted as contrasting in different ways the Thatcherite caricature of the Headmaster. Irwin was often seen as a foil to Hector, for whose views (although not his extra-mural behaviour) there seemed to be much sympathy among candidates. Mrs Lintott was often seen as a pragmatist, who cut through what she saw as the postured excesses of her colleagues, and thereby became the audience's representative in the play.

The best responses were alert to the limitations of discussing the play's characters as if they were real people, bringing awareness of Bennett's many widely shared views on the play's main themes to bear significantly on his characterisation of these key figures. Detailed understanding of the play also emerged in responses that discussed the pupils' attitudes and responses to their teachers. 'Human use' tended to be interpreted as satisfaction in adult life rather than as access to Oxbridge, so that consideration of the final exchanges of the play often brought responses to a conclusion, with Hector's parting words – "Pass it on, boys." – as a fitting final thought.

A number of responses were successful in taking, in part, a more personal line, reflecting on their own experiences from within the exam 'system', and, in one case, reflecting on how the cultural effects of the Covid-19 pandemic had altered their perspective on the value of education and knowledge. As with Question 4b, very few responses referred either to the National Theatre production or to the later film adaptation of the play. One response that did so emphasised that the film version helped to clarify how, in the first classroom scene, 'despite the comic tone, the audience is allowed to infer that Hector has given the boys their admirable fluency in French'.

Question 4 (b)

(b) 'A world where teachers sell themselves, not their subjects.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the roles of the teachers in *The History Boys*? **[30]**

Roughly as popular as Question 4a, this question again produced a good range of successful responses. While there was no doubt about nearly all candidates' well-developed understanding and appreciation of the play, some neglected to address the precise demands of the question.

Better responses came across as intrigued by the play's ambiguities, as Bennett seems to discourage superficial judgements on whether Hector and Irwin aim primarily to 'sell themselves' as a means to an end (exam passing and Oxbridge entry) or, egocentrically, as an end in itself – or whether their motives are at all easy to discern. Better responses tended in some way to acknowledge that the teachers are all 'complex, layered and flawed individuals'. The pithily expressed verdicts on their teachers by the boys themselves found their way into a number of successful answers.

Some more successful responses used the Thatcherite context of the play's setting to amplify the significance of 'sell themselves' as consonant with the spirit of the times (AO3), and some were justifiably influenced by altered attitudes to sexual impropriety in reaching their judgements on Hector's behaviour towards his pupils, although most answers tended to admire and enjoy him, for instance noting how 'Hector's teachings ride on the back of his personality'.

Question 5 (a)

5 Polly Stenham: *That Face*

Either

(a) 'A play about the dangers of too much responsibility in the teenage years.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of *That Face*? **[30]**

No responses to this text were seen.

Question 5 (b)

(b) 'Henry was born to be a victim.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the role of Henry in *That Face*? [30]

No responses to this text were seen.

Question 6 (a)

6 Jez Butterworth: *Jerusalem*

Either

(a) 'The play is a gathering point for all the undesirable elements in society.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of *Jerusalem*?

[30]

Not many candidates chose to answer this question, although it was a little more popular than Question 6b. Responses were generally very well-informed and unafraid to offer clear personal views that tended, if anything, towards cultural optimism - such as that "the play portrays a libertarian spirit that fixes Britain as a leading democracy".

Others felt that "the play offers a harsh exposition of the realities of modern Britain", but also, elsewhere, that "Butterworth's romanticism takes it too far, and subverts the realities of life into an idyllic Shakespearean legend".

Another candidate felt that Butterworth identifies the Kennet and Avon Council, personified in Fawcett and Parsons, as the play's most deeply 'undesirable element' (representative of "bureaucratized societal norms"), with Rooster as its antithesis. Given the limited performance history of this play, and the inaccessibility of recorded stage interpretations, it is unsurprising that candidates largely made do with critics' views for AO5.

Question 6 (b)

(b) 'Rooster turns himself into a living myth before our eyes.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the role of Rooster in *Jerusalem*?

[30]

While only a handful of candidates chose to answer this question, they produced generally excellent responses. This is a text that had clearly appealed to them as a vivid mix of comedy and deep seriousness, and certainly of immediate cultural interest. One candidate argued that although "...life in the woods is based, however ephemerally, on hedonistic indulgence, Butterworth still has Rooster elevate himself into mythological status – not just as an observer of this process like the Professor".

In another response, "Following his beating at the hands of Troy, Johnny immediately summons up the mythological powers of his bloodline to take him up and save him". And, the conclusion of this response, "Rooster does not die in vain at the end but is seen on the point of leaving the world proudly, as a living myth, banging the drum before ascending beyond the reach of those who cannot attain his level of spirituality." Only excellent teaching and a profound fascination with the play and its ideas could produce responses of this quality.

Section 2 overview

This section offers candidates a single question on their prose set text choice with an unseen extract chosen to provide opportunities to make connections with the set text. The most successful responses maintain a balance of focus between the extract and the set text. Some candidates choose to start by considering aspects of the extract, while others prefer to begin by focusing on the set text; however, most of the best responses quickly settle to a blended discussion in which details from the extract are used to enable the candidate to offer well-developed and relevant views on the set text. Some responses begin by offering sustained commentary on either the set text or the extract, and then, later in the response, establish points of comparison with the 'other' text. This can work well, although candidates should take care that such comparisons, when they arrive, are apt and substantial (AO4). In some weaker responses, little more than brief moments of comparison were produced. It should be remembered that simply signposting an intention to compare (e.g. "This compares to..." or "A comparison can be made...") or tagging on a superficial connection at the end of a section that discussed aspects of the set text at length, are approaches that do not in themselves fully satisfy the AO4 requirement for responses in this section to analyse connections between the two texts.

In the most successful responses, there is an exciting sense of new discovery by the candidate, now that the set text is considered in the light of the extract. Less successful responses tend to fall back on prepared material, and this can lead to strained comparisons as the extract is distorted in the candidate's mind to make it 'fit' a pre-conceived pattern of understanding, rather than read with well-informed but flexible attention.

Weaker responses tended to tag on a connection at the end of discussion of the set text, or made rapid, successive but essentially superficial links between the extract and the set text. Successful responses also took in the extract's contextual information, including its date of publication.

In approaching the unseen prose extract, candidates should always take note of the introductory remarks that are intended to help them. An example of this is seen in the comments on question 9 (below). The date of publication of the extract can also sometimes be contextually helpful, although this is not always necessarily the case.

It is again noted that centres' text choices have narrowed, although to a lesser extent than in Section 1. There are many possible reasons for this, but the two texts that were very rarely seen (*Mrs Dalloway* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*) are both very well worth consideration for study at this level.

Question 7

7 F Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*

Discuss ways in which Fitzgerald presents women in *The Great Gatsby*.

In your answer you should make connections and comparisons with the following passage, in which two flappers walk the New York streets. [30]

Certainly less popular than in previous series, most responses to this question reflected on the position of women in Jazz age, 'Roaring Twenties' America, and compared it with the experience of American women nearly two decades later, when Parker's short story was first published. In less successful responses, this contextual comparison took the form of broad generalisation, and tended to predominate over analysis of the two texts themselves. There were, however, many enthusiastic and well-developed responses that compared the presentation of Daisy, Myrtle and Jordan Baker with the playful freedom apparently enjoyed by Annabel and Midge in the extract. While Parker's two flappers were usually seen as more or less indistinguishable, Fitzgerald's were all found to be very distinct, with Myrtle sometimes described as most immediately comparable to them.

The most successful responses managed to focus on the methods used by Fitzgerald and Parker to convey their sense of character, starting with Fitzgerald's use of physical detail, dialogue and setting, and comparing these narrative aspects with Parker's details of confected femininity (e.g. "they darkened their lashes and lightened their hair" and "conspicuous and cheap and charming" and "fancifully strapped"). On the whole, candidates considered the extent to which Fitzgerald portrayed his three female characters as free to act independently with Jordan's rule-breaking and Myrtle's adultery as evidence that, despite her far greater wealth, Daisy was much more straightforwardly a victim of her circumstances. The behaviour of the "young men" on Fifth Avenue ("grouped lethargically" "audible admiration") was frequently compared to the brutality, carelessness and violence depicted by Fitzgerald in his novel.

Question 8

8 Angela Carter: *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*

Discuss Carter's presentation of male and female roles in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*.

In your answer you should select material from the whole text and make connections and comparisons with the following passage, from a story about a woman with special powers. [30]

This was by some way the most popular question in Section 2. Candidates seemed to enjoy the extract, as it provided them with abundant and easily identifiable material for approaching the question. Stronger answers picked up on the influence of men on women in Carter's stories, and on the various forms of female assertiveness in the collection. There was some misreading of the extract (for example, confusing the 'woman with special powers' and Sweyn's mother) but this was not usually too detrimental.

AO3 largely focused on variations of post-war feminism (sometimes referred to as 'Second Wave', but occasionally without further signs of understanding what that might mean). Fairytale tropes (e.g. commonly, in Little Red Riding Hood) were frequently identified as having been 'subverted' (another term that most, but not all, seemed to have understood) by both Carter and Housman. Good responses tended to display adaptable knowledge of the fairytale sources of the stories, often focusing on the figure of the mother in 'The Bloody Chamber' as worthy of comparison with Housman's female. The best responses often went a step further by discussing the mother's rescue of her daughter with reference to the ending of 'Bluebeard' and then explaining the change in relation to Carter's feminism.

Details commonly noted in the extract from Housman's *The Were-Wolf* and compared to examples in Carter's collection, included references to gender ambiguity ('half masculine, yet not unwomanly'), the symbolism of the axe, the description of the protagonist as a 'hunter' and 'a bold free huntress', and her dress ('white fur cap', 'ivory studded girdle').

It was noted that, when it came to detailed analysis of Carter's stories, less able candidates tended to confine themselves to either 'The Snow Child' or 'The Werewolf' (Carter's version), both of which, although richly relevant to this question, are very brief. Centres clearly do encourage candidates to select material from across several stories when discussing this collection but might further reinforce this advice.

While comparisons between Carter's stories are of obvious interest to anyone studying *The Bloody Chamber* collection, care should be taken by candidates to prioritise comparisons between Carter's stories and the extract, rather than allowing the focus to shift too far towards inter-textual connections within Carter's collection. Properly managed AO4 was almost invariably a hallmark of more successful work.

Question 9

9 George Orwell: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Discuss ways in which Orwell handles the settings of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

In your answer you should make connections and comparisons with the following passage, from a novel in which young people are tested to the limits to prove their ingenuity. [30]

Nearly all responses to this question, including many weaker ones, displayed at least a competent understanding of Orwell's novel in itself, along with an alertness to its biographical, historical and cultural contexts. More successful responses were able to find and analyse details in the extract that corresponded to, or contrasted with, ideas and narrative features in *1984*. In weaker responses, the question tended to be handled quite loosely, with what seemed like a catch-all approach to topics raised and written on during the course. This was most notable in relation to 'technology', which was sometimes tied to the question in quite awkward ways. More successful responses tended to explore 'settings' such as physical spaces (rooms and landscapes) and, carefully introduced, the political 'setting' of the world of the novel. Such responses often argued that, in both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the extract, physical 'settings' act as an extension of state oppression, with candidates thereby successfully negotiating between the informed wish to offer a response on totalitarian apparatus as a whole and the question's specific focus. Less successful responses tended to discuss in quite general ways the novel's preoccupation with the invasive brutality of totalitarianism, with the extract being interpreted in broadly similar terms.

Candidates seemed to enjoy the extract from *The Maze Runner*, with links often made with the 'wet spider', the 'underground chamber', the 'darkly tinged windows' and, more broadly, the 'glass' imagery. Comparisons were also often made between the sinister description of the 'Gladers' (as 'pale and thin', and as resembling 'ghosts'), and Orwell's portrayal of Winston Smith, both to begin with and also at times throughout the novel. This worked well so long as such physical details were seen as having been produced by the 'settings', but sometimes, in less successful responses, became a focus that disregarded the question. Successful readings of the extract often seemed to have made thoughtful use of the introductory sentence, specifically the phrase '...in which young people are tested to the limits to prove their ingenuity'. AO3 was often well-informed although sometimes mismanaged. As in 2022, successful responses often showed a well-informed appreciation of other writing by Orwell, suggesting for example that the rubble-strewn setting of Airstrip 1 derived to some extent from descriptions in *Homage to Catalonia*, and that the terror inflicted by institutionalised injustice could also be seen in Orwell's account of *A Hanging* (from *Burmese Days*). More often, and aptly well-informed in most instances, Orwell's experiences of the physical environment of the BBC and of post-Blitz London more generally were brought into responses to develop appreciation of the setting of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Discussion of settings within the context of the dystopian genre and its tropes often worked well, with references ranging from the work of H G Wells to that of Suzanne Collins. While some responses contained an excessive amount of contextual material, at the expense of meaningful discussion of the texts, most managed to avoid such imbalance.

AO2 analysis of the extract from Dashner's novel was often strong, especially of the morbidity of its imagery ('like enormous coffins') and its dark ambiguity ('the lighting made it impossible to see'). Much was made, in various ways, of similarities and differences between this setting and 'Room 101', although detailed recall of the rented room above Mr Charrington's shop also led to some impressive comparative analysis (AO4).

Detailed knowledge and mature understanding of the set text is, as always, a crucial prerequisite to success in questions such as this. Analysis of how Orwell uses language to shape meanings (AO2) was less clearly developed in mid-range responses, and often neglected altogether in the weakest. For example, textually supported observations about the low-key, often deadpan directness of Orwell's writing and his free and memorable use of slogans and neologisms often found their way into more successful responses.

Exemplar 2

unknown consequences. Orwell, it can be argued that Orwell draws upon Stalinist Russia, in which ~~information and the structure~~ the withholding of information and, fear of the Gulags and mysterious government organisations forced mass conformity to ~~to~~ Josef Stalin. Therefore, it is clear that Orwell ~~has~~ depicts ominous, ambiguous settings to ~~show~~ display the ability of regimes to capitalise of human fear and the fear of the unknown.

This exemplar, taken from the second half of a response to Question 9 in Section 2, demonstrates how to keep all elements of the question in play while remaining purposeful about the direction of the argument. While the candidate offers detailed commentary on how both writers create and sustain key effects, the paragraph never goes for long without setting them up alongside each other (AO4). The opening sentence sets the tone; "...both Orwell and Dashner create ominous, uncomfortable settings to display how totalitarian regimes maintain loyalty and submission..." – concise, direct agenda-setting for this part of the response.

The candidate then offers a textually detailed analysis of how the writer of the unseen extract – Dashner – achieves specific effects in his language. "The ambiguity of this location and the ominous description, build up a fear of the unknown in the reader, reflecting what the characters feel also", followed by astute dissection of how selected single words 'drawn down' from the two preceding quotations (e.g. "coffins"; "underground") might evoke such a reaction in the reader. While it is possible to question how the candidate knows "what the characters feel" on such brief, 'unseen' acquaintance, it is reasonable to allow for this kind of speculation, given the multifarious demands of this kind of question – especially bearing in mind the overall dynamism and control of the response.

Movement between the set text and the extract is deft and productive. The two are not being compared for the sake of doing so, but as a means of illuminating the candidate's analysis of the set text; primarily, the question asks about "

...ways in which Orwell handles the settings of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and invites candidates to use the unseen extract to help achieve this.

Towards the end of this paragraph, the candidate turns our attention towards the historical context against which Orwell was writing his novel. As is characteristic of successful responses to questions in Section 2, this is achieved without losing focus on the main argument being presented (in this case, that the calculated disorientation of the setting in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a key effect of the novel). The contextual information offered is specific (e.g. "...Stalinist Russia, in which the withholding of information and fear of the Gulags and mysterious government organisations forced mass conformity...") and relevant to the idea under discussion. In other words, it serves the argument, rather than stalling it.

What is striking about this response is not so much that it weaves into its fabric elements of key Assessment Objectives (2, 3 and 4), but that it does so seamlessly and with obvious elegance and fluency. This means that excellent AO1 is perhaps its most defining feature.

Question 10

10 Virginia Woolf: *Mrs Dalloway*

Discuss ways in which Woolf presents social events in *Mrs Dalloway*.

In your answer you should make connections and comparisons with the following passage where Miriam watches a double wedding: Sarah marries Bennett, and Harriet marries Gerald. [30]

No responses were seen to this question.

Question 11

11 Mohsin Hamid: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Discuss ways in which Mohsin Hamid explores ideas about 'fitting in' in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

In your answer you should make connections and comparisons with the following passage from a short story in which an American woman has settled down with a Pakistani man she met at a prestigious US university. [30]

A handful of responses were seen to this question, most of which demonstrated a secure and engaged understanding of the novel and cultural notions to do with conformity ('fitting in'). The extract from *A Spoiled Man* provided plenty of opportunity for connections and comparisons; interesting ones often built on the reverse situations experienced by the main characters - Changez as a Pakistani man in New York and Sonya as an American woman in Pakistan. Unsurprisingly, AO3 tended to focus on 9/11 and its aftermath in the 'War on Terror', and on associated attitudes and intolerance. The novel had clearly elicited strong feelings among the few candidates who had studied it.

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