

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LITERATURE

H072

For first teaching in 2015

H072/01 Summer 2023 series

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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.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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H072/01 and its context in the specification

H072/01 (Shakespeare and poetry pre-1900) is one of two examination components for OCR's AS Level in English Literature. The component comprises two Sections.

Section 1 requires the candidate to answer one question from a choice of six Shakespeare plays. Each question has an either/or choice and requires the candidate to discuss a specific topic, taking into account a prompt quotation.

Section 2 requires the candidate to answer one question from a choice of five pre-1900 poets. The question directs the candidate towards a specific poem (or an extract from a longer poem) which is the principal focus of the question. Each question comprises a single poem or extract with no choice offered. The candidate is required to analyse the poem/extract closely and to make links between the set poem and other poems by the given poet or, if it is an extract, to the rest of the poem.

Section 1 assesses the four assessment objectives AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO5. Section 2 assesses the four assessment objectives AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4.

Assessment for learning



Although some aspects of the paper (questions and assessment objectives) require candidates to write about linguistic techniques and/or dramatic effects, it is not always necessary for candidates to use highly complex technical terminology – sometimes drawn from linguistics or from the study of Classical languages – to ‘improve’ their responses. ‘Feature spotting’ alone is rarely helpful, and the use of technical terms for their own sake sometimes adds very little to a candidate’s overall response. Candidates should be encouraged to realise that they do not need to ‘tick off’ a long list of such terms in their responses, that linguistic effects can sometimes be described using more approachable means, and that any discussion of linguistic techniques is most effective when these are linked to the effect they have on the meaning and reception of a text. In the 2023 series some of the terms used (at times) without appropriate contextualisation included “syndetic listing” and “asyndetic listing”, “dental fricatives” and “plosive consonants”.

The fundamental principle of the marking is holistic: each response is given one mark out of 30. This reflects how the response has met the level criteria as a whole, as set out in the mark scheme.

In both sections, AO1 and AO2 are more heavily weighted. To do well on this paper, candidates need to have sufficiently close familiarity with their texts to:

- Structure an argument which is genuinely responsive to the question;
- Develop their argument through detailed textual reference and discussion of effects.

For Section 1, knowledge of productions and specific references to critical views and perspectives will help candidates to achieve with respect to AO5, but these ideas should complement (and not be a substitute for) close familiarity with the written text. Relevant discussion of dramatic effects or of actors’ delivery of lines within a particular production are also recognised as achievement with respect to AO5. Relevant discussion of Shakespeare’s construction of dramatic tension, or his use of stagecraft, are recognised as achievement with respect to AO2.

For Section 2, responsiveness to the question necessitates a focus on the given extract. Sound comprehension of (and some range across) the extract is necessary for mid-level achievement. Candidates must know the rest of the poem (or the other set poems) well enough to select cross-references and to make connections apposite to the question. However, it is expected that most of the discussion of effects will use quotations from the extract itself. A lack of adequate focus on the extract is regarded as a partial attempt at the question.

Section 2: Use of the extract

It is expected that between two-thirds and three-quarters of a Section 2 response will focus on, quote from, and analyse effects in the given extract.

Candidates should be mindful that AO3 is the least-weighted assessment objective in both sections. References to social, historical and biographical context are rewarded only where they genuinely contribute to the interpretations of the text being debated.

Paper 1 series overview

Examiners reported that it was a pleasure to mark so many impressive and thoughtful answers. It was good to note candidates continuing to regain traditional writing skills associated with examinations, and it was also clear that developments in the personal, imaginative and original qualities of candidates' responses has continued to increase markedly. Whereas some candidates still struggle to master the essential skills required for success in an examination (such as responding effectively to the question, managing time appropriately, and writing clearly and with accurate expression) many others were able to impress with their original and thoughtful responses to the questions set. It was encouraging to conclude that the core skills of English Literature have continued to be nurtured and refined and the AS qualification continues to serve a valuable purpose - positioned as it is between the GCSE and the full A Level.

The paper was very well received. No official complaints were made. Imaginative and creative responses to answering the paper were welcomed, particularly – of course – when such answers responded to the specific questions set and when they took into account the assessment objectives being covered. Reference was frequently made in responses to issues such as gender, race, social inequality, mental health, climate change, and contemporary events involving war, political leadership and corruption. The term “patriarchy” featured in a significant number of scripts in the 2023 series. An idiosyncratic approach to answering questions could serve candidates well, although centres would be well advised to remember that certain conventions do apply when expressing ideas about literary texts in an examination context.

Once again, a small number of causes for concern arose in aspects of the presentation of some answers. Use of time in the examination was also an issue for some candidates. Some examiners commented again this year that handwriting was becoming a significant problem in some scripts. It should be remembered that an assessment of this kind does invite a formally structured set of responses. The quality of typed work (on the other hand) continues to improve, and it was often good to infer that candidates had taken time to check their typed work. It would be sensible for centres to remind candidates to indicate which questions they have chosen to answer (by writing the numbers on their script). The use of rather obscure technical terms (for their own sake) continued to cause problems in some areas.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • made a sensible choice of question • answered the specific requirements of their chosen questions • remembered to respond to the relevant assessment objectives for each question type • wrote accurately and legibly – and wrote an appropriate amount • indicated on their script which questions they were answering • remembered the conventions of writing about literary texts in an examination context • noticed all the key words in their questions, allowing space for consideration of the text in light of each key word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • did not answer the questions chosen, or ‘twisted’ responses away from the question set in order to address a preferred topic • focused their response on the incorrect assessment objectives for that part of the paper • wrote very short or very long responses • wrote inaccurately or illegibly, or answered in note form • wrote generally rather than answering a specific question, and sometime did not indicate the numbers of the questions chosen on the script

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• wrote essays with clear, well-structured arguments• demonstrated detailed knowledge and understanding of their texts, particularly in their selection of quotations• selected and convincingly discussed effects of language, form and structure which genuinely developed their argument.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• responded partially to questions, sometimes deploying pre-prepared material of limited or tenuous relevance• wrote with little sense of direction or debate, sometimes without paragraphing• used few quotations, or few relevant quotations, perhaps as a result of insufficient textual knowledge• identified textual events or discussed character with little sense of authorial methods, sometimes drifting into narrative recount.

Section 1 overview

Hamlet was by some way the most popular text. *Measure for Measure* was also popular. There were far fewer responses to *The Tempest* and *Twelfth Night*. *Richard III* and *Coriolanus* were the least popular texts.

Candidates who did well in Section 1 generally did the following:	Candidates who did less well in Section 1 generally did the following:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • among a range of textual references, discussed in detail perhaps 2–3 moments of the play which were highly relevant to their selected question • quoted appropriately and pertinently from the play • selected quotations employing language which developed their argument and interpretation in response to the question • recognised that there were multiple key words in each question, and devoted time and space to the consideration of each key word • used the question to prompt a debate, considering more than one side of the given proposition • discussed the play in ways which were genuinely informed by different interpretations • referred selectively to aspects of historical context in order to enrich their interpretation of textual detail. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • referred to parts of the play which were not entirely relevant to their selected question • made little use of (or attempted to fabricate) relevant quotations • discussed characters' traits and actions without attempting analysis of language, structure or form • focused on one key word in the question at the expense of others, sometimes stretching this word and writing about a tenuously related theme rather than answering the question set • wrote as if only one interpretation of the play were possible, focusing on their approval or disapproval of characters' behaviour and generally presenting their opinions about characters as facts • used aspects of the play to make sweeping assertions about the treatment of (for example) women in the Elizabethan/Jacobean period.

Question 1 (a)

1 *Coriolanus*

Either

(a) 'Pride is the chief quality of the characters of the play.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this comment on the play *Coriolanus*? [30]

This was not a particularly favoured text choice for the current series, but – of the two questions available on this play – this choice was the more popular. Candidates were quick to comment on the fact that almost everyone in this play shows evidence of personal pride, as befits its combative and highly politicised atmosphere. Many answers suggested that this play, full of blood, battles and threatened violence, is steeped in shows of pride. Good answers needed to be more than just an annotated list of characters who are mastered by pride; they offered instead a unifying argument. Many candidates decided that the most significant example of pride is the play's overweening hero, and the lion's share of attention was often his.

Question 1 (b)

(b) 'Aufidius views Coriolanus with a strange blend of hatred and admiration.'

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

[30]

This was not an especially popular question. Many candidates suggested that Aufidius' career is defined by his relationship with Coriolanus, much of it spent in the hero's shadow. Candidate suggested that Aufidius' behaviour is not straightforward, even though some argued that it is – in the end - consistent. Some suggested that the character is a darkly watchful presence, biding time for victory and revenge. Others conveyed the idea that he is more involved than this, taking personal pleasure in watching the demise of his rival. Examiners were prepared to accept any convincing account of the character and his role.

Question 2 (a)

2 *Hamlet*

Either

(a) 'In this play all families are dysfunctional.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the play *Hamlet*?

[30]

This was – by far – the most popular option choice (for the most popular text) on the paper. Most answers focused on Denmark's royal family, where brother usurps and murders brother and the Queen swaps her allegiance between them. The shortcomings of family life were sometimes offered as explanation of any difficulties with the Prince's behaviour. Some candidates were interested in Freudian readings of Gertrude's intense relationship with her son. Candidates were often inclined to think in terms of the play's 'first family' and 'second family', so comparisons between King and Counsellor as patriarchs were sometimes drawn. Polonius tended to be presented by candidates as a heavy-handed, but not always judicious, father. Completists were keen to point out that the King of Norway seems to have lost control of his ambitious son Fortinbras. There were rare references to the homicidal families in the various versions of *The Mousetrap* (holding a mirror up to nature) especially 'Lucianus, Nephew to the King'. Some even referred to Priam, Hecuba and their various sons in the scene of the Fall of Troy introduced by the Player King. At its best, this material was presented as part of a wider argument, not just listed. The confined, obsessive nature of the court at Elsinore, not to mention its 'rotteness', were sometimes singled out as particular reasons for familial dysfunctionality.

Exemplar 1

Shakespeare's digression from the main plot, introduces the second dysfunctional family - namely the dynamic between Ophelia, Laertes and Polonius. Whilst Hamlet is largely victimised within his family, Ophelia forms his mirror image within hers. Eric Hemmara purports that the young girl 'suffers a series of patriarchal oppressions'; ~~Both~~ both her mother and father-dominating masculine figures seem to control Ophelia through their superior status. Laertes, ~~didactically~~ in a didactic fashion warns his sister not to leave her 'chaste treasure open to unmastered opportunity'.

~~The~~ The Laertes' ~~analogical~~ analogical metaphor, referencing Ophelia's chastity strips away her substance and depth ~~and~~ through its commodification ~~and~~ renders her to merely nothing but a sexual object. In a similar fashion, Polonius, labelled by Michael Pennington as a 'hard parent' seeks to tyrannically control ^{both} his daughters ^{and sons.} autonomy. His crude insults towards Ophelia, accusing her of being a 'green girl' ~~suggest~~ is evocative of the dysfunctionality which telegraphs the subplot. Whilst it is important that contextually, ~~perhaps~~ the archetypal woman in Jacobean era was ideally subservient

in Jacobean era was ideologically subversive and the prized possession of her family, Polonius' and Leartes' ~~the~~ aggregation of dictatorial control and overt misogyny encapsulate the enmeshment of their family dynamic.

This section from a Level 6 response to Question 2(a) demonstrates impressive focus on the question, as well as notable emphasis on the requirements of all four assessment objectives in this Section of the paper.

Question 2 (b)

(b) 'In some ways Horatio is the real hero of *Hamlet*.'

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

This was the less popular of the two *Hamlet* options but was still a dominant choice on the paper. Horatio was often presented as a figure of probity and loyalty in a play ravaged by duplicity and deceit. His constant attentiveness to Hamlet, and his sensitivity towards the Prince's needs, were sometimes contrasted with the venality of his two old school-friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are little more than henchmen. Horatio was sometimes shown to be a rock-solid ally during the elaborate business of the play-within-a-play, who mediates for us the offstage happenings while Hamlet is in England. Candidates presented the facts that Horatio is constantly at Hamlet's side during the overwrought graveyard scene and the trauma of Laertes' challenge, and acts as second during the fatal duel, having scrupulously counselled his master against it. Many candidates saw Horatio as an important structural principle, and a tribute to human nature, rather than as a genuine candidate for hero of the play. Any well-argued response was considered to be acceptable by examiners. Judicious answers required wide-ranging knowledge of the play.

Question 3 (a)

3 *Measure for Measure*

Either

- (a) '*Measure for Measure* shows it is hard to force people to act against their will.'

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

[30]

This question was a fairly popular choice. Many candidates were keen to show that, without resorting to excessive force, it is hard for a ruler to make his people go against their character and wishes, and that Vincentio (who keeps a safe distance from his Dukedom as the reforms are introduced) is trying to turn a relaxed public morality into a rigorous one. Lucio was sometimes presented as the play's great spokesperson for the biological origin of human passions, and the near impossibility of using the law to pin them down, and he seems almost impossible to correct or discipline. Candidates sometimes noted that the effect of empowering the corrupt Deputy, Angelo, is to make him behave very much as he has always subliminally wanted to act, becoming a homicidal 'devil' of deceit dressed up like a Puritan 'angel' of humility. At the end of the play answers sometimes reasserted the comic spirit of understanding, even appreciating human irregularity.

Question 3 (b)

- (b) 'It is not easy for a modern audience to sympathise with the choices Isabella makes.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the role of Isabella in *Measure for Measure*?

[30]

This question was also a fairly popular choice. Many candidates suggested that the Convent-bred Isabella is too much of a purist, wishing for greater restraints on her order, and setting her vow of chastity (even when negotiating with a manifestly corrupt official) above her brother's life. Her view of the world is shrewd rather than innocent and can offer incisive criticism of the human ego and lust for power. But candidates sometimes felt that even in these moments she is prone to a touch of priggishness. She does not seem to have taught herself to respect a world which has room in it for widespread sensual indulgence. Many candidates wondered why and how the bed-trick (a transparent fraud and a violation of the marriage-contract) is meant to square with her shiny worldview. She trusts Vincentio in his disguise as a priest without question, and as a result is cruelly and publicly mistreated by him in the play's denouement, before she receives an unexpected and (in the text at least) unanswered offer of marriage. Isabella was rarely presented by candidates as a fully sympathetic figure when judged by the standards of modern feminism.

Question 4 (a)

4 *Richard III*

Either

- (a) 'A symbolic triumph of Richmond's good over Richard's evil.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the play *Richard III*?

[30]

This play was not a popular choice during the current series. More successful responses often decided that this was not primarily a question about the character of Richard (still less of Richmond) but about the way the play is shaped, certainly from the moment Richard ascends the throne, into something like a moralised conflict between good and evil. Some candidates felt that even early in the play the moral territory is drawn out sharply in black and white. Richard draws attention to his own similarity to the devil in the old morality plays. Against his catalogue of audacious and quite unrepentant iniquity, the apparently saintly Richmond seems to win by force of destiny (some candidates suggested).

Question 4 (b)

- (b) 'Richard's victims are little more than fools.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the roles of those who suffer at Richard's hands in *Richard III*?

[30]

Very few answers to this question were seen – although it was probably the more popular choice of the two on this play. Candidates were generally quick to suggest that Richard's series of victims put up little resistance. The only characters to effectively oppose Richard are the young Duke of York and the quietly scheming Stanley. Answers tended to agree that some of Richard's opponents give in very easily (the Mayor) and even miraculously (the Lady Anne), but the 'mighty Dukes' are unmanageably powerful, and people tend to do what they say, no questions asked. After the play's pivot (the start of Act IV) Richard was seen to be much less influential. Some candidates suggested that throughout the play the chorus of women provides both notable opposition to Richard's wishes and witness to his crimes.

Question 5 (a)

5 *The Tempest*

Either

- (a) '*The Tempest* traces a difficult journey from storm to calm.'

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

[30]

This was a reasonably popular text choice. There was a fairly even spread of answer on *The Tempest* across the two question options. Many candidates suggested that the 'literal' Shakespearean tempest breaks over Lords and mariners in the first scene, and its impact is not finally resolved until the last moments of the play. Many answers suggested that in this play the sense of transition constitutes the whole action. The 'difficult' nature of the journey from 'storm' to 'calm' is signalled at the outset, where the apparent shipwreck, violently and directly dramatised, gives way to Miranda's realisation that it is her father who has created this. Some candidates chose to organise their essay in terms of the tempest motif; others viewed the progress from storm to calm more metaphorically; many suggested that even at the close of the play it isn't fully complete. Other essays considered the play's celebrated imagery of marine transformations: nymphs chasing wavelets, eyes turned into pearls, St Elmo's fire.

Question 5 (b)

- (b) 'Prospero is never more impressive than when he chooses to give up his power.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the role of Prospero in *The Tempest*?

[30]

Quite a few answers to this question were seen. Candidates presented very different views of Prospero's integrity: some saw him as a ruthless egoist, imposing his will on the universe; others saw him as a catalytic force, bringing virtue to human identity 'when no man was his own'. He could be seen as tetchy and overweening; he could be seen as unworldly, and generous to a fault. Candidates therefore offered different views as to how positively we are to view his renunciation of power at the end of the play. Some saw it as a recognition that his forgiveness is 'only partial', that it cannot reach all human needs (Antonio's, for instance). Others argued that he recognises his limitations as a human being and must join his fellows not as a Renaissance magus, but as a man among men and women, shorn of his 'art'. Some pointed out that he feels aged, that his hope is now with the young generation (Ferdinand and Miranda) and that 'every third thought will be his grave', so he has little choice but to downsize. Some even argued, like the Victorians, that he is an allegorical figure, depicting Shakespeare's career as an artist, and that his 'immemorial pageant', like Shakespeare's, is drawing to a close. Those who viewed the text as belonging to the fantasy genre noted that a rapprochement with reality is a characteristic of the form. Those who preferred the colonial reading of the play thought it a good thing Prospero has seen sense and given up his imperial ambitions. Any well-argued view was accepted.

Question 6 (a)

6 *Twelfth Night*

Either

- (a) 'A play about the search for identity.'

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

[30]

This was not a very popular text, but some answers to this question were seen. This was probably the more popular option of the two on the play. Many candidates suggested that everyone in *Twelfth Night* seems to be in search of themselves. The most sensible character, Viola, is prepared to bear the shocks of destiny and see what turns up. Orsino and Olivia are both determined to lock themselves down in citadels of idealism, and the play helps both to find themselves. Questions of cross-dressing and disguise highlight issues of identity, as many candidates pointed out. Candidates were likely to conclude that Malvolio's identity is indeed that of supercilious social climber, but that doesn't necessarily mean he deserves his punishment. Antonio's identity is grim, heroic and baffled. Maria and Fabian clearly know who they are, and what they need. Feste seems quite happy (at times) not to have too much sense of self. This was shown by candidates to be a very rich subject, taking in all aspects of the play.

Question 6 (b)

- (b) 'Feste, the Fool, is not only the wisest character in the play, but also the least forgiving.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the role of Feste in *Twelfth Night*?

[30]

This was the less popular of the two choices on *Twelfth Night*. Candidates sometimes thought that for all his insights into human life and human nature, Feste is not all that 'wise' when he goes to such lengths to punish a fellow employee who has casually insulted him. His harbouring of grudges also shows up strongly when he has Malvolio in his power, particularly in the darkroom scene, pursuing the practical joke when Sir Toby and Maria start to have their doubts. It was shown that he doesn't quite fit into either court but moves between them easily. Many candidates suggested that both of the question's terms apply to Feste at times. Candidates were able to decide whether he is vindictive, prophetic or just cynical. Often, they were swayed by productions they had seen, as the presentation of this character can vary enormously from staging to staging.

Section 2 overview

Christina Rossetti was by far the most popular poet in this section. *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale* was also popular, and there were a number of responses on *Paradise Lost* and a smaller number on Coleridge. Tennyson was the least popular choice, but some answers on *Maud* were seen in this series.

Candidates who did well in Section 2 generally did the following:	Candidates who did less well in Section 2 generally did the following:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devoted between two-thirds and three-quarters of their response to the extract • Referred to details outside the extract only when they were pertinent to their argument in response to the question • Structured their response around examples of language, imagery and verse form which were pertinent to, and which generated different lines of interpretation in response to, the question • Discussed effects in ways which built on their study of key themes and concerns in the set text as whole. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used only one or two quotations from the extract, focusing more of their response on other poems/other parts of the poem • Referred to other poems which were at best partially relevant to the question • Seemed to work their way indiscriminately through the extract, without constructing an argument in response to the question • Attempted to discuss effects of language features in ways that revealed partial comprehension of the text • Made entirely generalised references to metre and rhyme scheme, without making convincing connections between form and meaning • Deployed biographical knowledge of the poet without much relevance to analysis of the extract.

Question 7

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

Discuss ways in which Chaucer explores the extent of May's dishonesty in this extract from *The Merchant's Tale*.

In your answer explore the author's use of language, imagery and verse form, and consider ways in which you find the extract characteristic of *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*. **[30]**

This text was quite a popular choice for the series. Candidates suggested that the Merchant narrates the whole of this passage with plenty of irony and possibly a hint of prurience. The description of May as 'bright and sheene' is the only praise she gets from him, and her splendour is, in any case, all for watchful, lustful Damien (and the Merchant), since Januarie is blind and cannot see it. May's deception has already set up this scheme to cuckold Januarie in his precious garden, so carefully yet glibly described earlier in the poem. May pretends as a pregnant woman to have a craving for some pears, when actually it is for Damien, up in the pear-tree. She has played on Januarie's credulity so often before; she jokes about it. He bows down meekly, mounted by her like a groom before a horse. He would give her 'myn herte blood' if she asked for it. May's dishonesty culminates in a gross description of the sex-act from the Merchant. He apologises for it, but doesn't seem all that repentant, especially as he draws attention to May's act of copulation again a few lines later. The passage concludes with Januarie's hysterics when his sight is restored. Even then May doesn't have to work hard to deceive him. She claims her sex-show was a brilliant idea, to shock his eyes back to full sight. As for Januarie, his predicament is ridiculous, but his pain is real. Candidates found plenty to say in this passage about the interaction of narrative and dialogue; the way the Merchant telegraphs his contempt for both Januarie and May; and the cynical, rather than straightforwardly comic way Chaucer presents fabliau material.

Exemplar 2

Secondly, May's dishonesty is hidden by her deity-like personality, creating a veil to shadow the deceit. Firstly Chaucer uses a plethora of religious imagery to build the angelic impression of May. May expresses "for Goddes sake" and that her actions were "Godwoot". Chaucer's use of repetition of "God" in May's speech present her as seemingly religious and pure. This fits in with the virtuous impression of women within the trope of courtly love - worshipped and praised by gods themselves. However, elsewhere in the poem, Proserpina, a pagan figure, criticises Solomon, as a "lecherous and an idolatre", showcasing the irony of a pagan goddess disapproving of a biblical king. Linking this to May, the repetition of "God" also now presents May as artificial and superficial to readers, yet not to Januarie. May's dishonesty is also reinforced by her descriptions in the extract, describing her as

"so ~~is~~ bright and sheen" in combination with her epithet "fresshe". Chaucer evokes the imagery of purity and innocence, again ~~is~~ in line with the archetype of a woman in courtly love. Yet due to the satirical nature presented to audiences, the meaning of "bright and sheen" changes to blinding, as May's dishonesty ~~is~~ remains uncovered due to her "fresshe" facade. Finally this ~~not~~ angelic persona is flipped through the vulgar actions in the extract. May is seen as "dressed // in swich manere it may nat been expressed". The rhyming brings the reader's attention to the vulgularity of ~~her~~ May's actions - symbolising her constant ~~deceit~~ deceit - as beyond description, subverting the virtue of a courtly woman, presenting her deity-like personality as symbolic of her ~~is~~ innocent veneer, hiding her sexual urge, symbolic of her deceit.

This section from a Level 6 response to Question 7 demonstrates an impressive and appropriate approach to meeting AO2 ("ways in which meanings are shaped") in a response.

Question 8

8 John Milton: *Paradise Lost Books 9 & 10*

Discuss ways in which Milton suggests the beginning of misunderstanding between Adam and Eve in this extract from *Paradise Lost Book 9*.

In your answer explore the author's use of language, imagery and verse form, and consider ways in which you find this extract characteristic of *Paradise Lost Books 9 & 10*. **[30]**

This was a fairly popular text choice. Candidates described how Milton presents Eve as behaving like a lover whose devotion is undervalued: she is concerned that if Adam fears the temptations of the serpent, it must be because he fails to recognise her 'firmness', because, in some way, he considers her the weaker vessel. Milton shows her expressing her resentment plainly. She criticises thoughts which should not 'have found harbour in her husband's breast'; she deplores things she 'expected not to hear.' Although Adam's long rejoinder is 'mild' and reasonable, candidates sometimes found it disconcerting too. But Adam does express strong trust in Eve, in her innocence, good sense and 'virtue' (which he says beams from her like 'outward strength'). Yet he still thinks this robustness were better coming from both of the pair, not just one; or him, rather than her. He is quietly insistent about the power of their foe: how subtle and dangerous he must be 'who could seduce/Angels' and who is confident enough to glide about without retinue. Even though Milton deliberately understates this exchange, candidates tended to see it as more than a very eloquent version of a lovers' tiff. This exchange is a close prelude to the Fall, predicated by Eve's haughtiness or Adam's indulgence, or a mixture of both. Candidates sometimes presented thoughts about ways in which Milton shows how unfallen beings may harbour fallen thoughts. Many pointed out that Milton, clearly depending on traditional sources, clearly hints that Eve is the more guilty party in this extract, and some shaped their answers around the unfairness of this outdated view.

Question 9

9 Samuel Taylor Coleridge: *Selected Poems*

Discuss ways in which Coleridge shows the importance of reflections in solitude in 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement'.

In your answer explore the author's use of language, imagery and verse form, and consider ways in which you find the extract characteristic of Coleridge's work in your selection. **[30]**

This was not a very popular text choice. The value of 'abstruse musing' in solitude is a recurring theme in Coleridge's Conversation poems, and candidates who attempted this question connected this extract with the slightly disturbed idyll with Sara Coleridge in 'The Aeolian Harp', the enforced afternoon of recuperation in 'Lime-Tree Bower', the thoughts of a baby-sitter in 'Frost at Midnight', and the meditation in 'The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem' on the power and value of the nightingale in literature and life. Some pointed out that the Ancient Mariner too has long, painful yet creative opportunities for 'solitary musing' after the rest of his crew die. The one intrusion into Coleridge's solitude in the poem prescribed is the refugee from commercial Bristol, who seems to learn a lot from intruding on Coleridge's 'blessed spot'. Some candidates expressed awareness that Bristol was at this time a centre for the Atlantic Slave Trade. Sara then hears a sermon ('I said to my beloved...') on the blessedness of solitude and nature. Coleridge's recreation of his 'cot' by the Bristol Channel is self-consciously idyllic. Careful use of caesurae points the contributions of individual plants, and Coleridge includes a favourite Romantic image, the skylark, flickering in and out of sight at the limit of the naked eye. The second stanza, where Coleridge climbs a 'bare bleak' Quantock mountain, leads to a classic piece of fashionable 'Natural Theology', where an experience of God grows out of contemplation of a picturesque scene. Candidates pointed out that - as so often in Coleridge - much of the mystical energy depends on careful registration of details in the landscape and that the extract ends in a prayer of quiet thankfulness.

Question 10

10 Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Maud*

Discuss ways in which Tennyson describes the narrator's dreams and predictions in this extract from *Maud*.

In your answer explore the author's use of language, imagery and verse form, and consider ways in which you find the extract characteristic of *Maud*. **[30]**

This text was not popular, although some responses were seen in this series. The third section of *Maud* (originally joined to the second section) originally attracted much adverse criticism because it argues that many of the social evils the narrator has previously identified will be cured by the coming war in the Crimea, the first major European war since Napoleon. The poet described the persona at the start of this extract as 'sane but shattered' yet transformed by the 'pure and holy love of Maud'. In this extract Maud's ghost seems to emerge from the persona's dream like 'silent lightning' from a 'band' of stars, to show the way forward, pointing to Mars (the planet of war) as he glows in the constellation of Leo (possibly an image of martial Britain). Some candidates saw this dark military prophecy as an aspect of the persona's long history of madness, even though he tells us that fighting in the Crimean war will be a cure for his 'old hysterical mock-disease'. The vision of pastoral hillocks being torn up and cobwebs blown out of the mouth of cannons seems to violate so much of the poem's delicacy of natural detail. There are many other dreams and predictions in the poem (the fathers arranging marriage to Maud; the tirade against Mammon; the dark hallucination of suicide burial). Other parts of the poem are also written like this extract, in irregular hexameters. This metre is usually a sign that the narrator is over-excited but has plenty to say. The few candidates who attempted this question were able to make a number of useful points which drew on some of these aspects of the extract (and the poem as a whole).

Question 11

11 Christina Rossetti: *Selected Poems*

Discuss ways in which Rossetti celebrates the power of love in 'In the Round Tower at Jhansi, June 8 1857.'

In your answer explore the author's use of language, imagery and verse form, and consider ways in which you find the poem characteristic of Rossetti's work in your selection. **[30]**

This was by far the most popular text choice in this Section of the paper. This is an early Rossetti poem, and it is unusual in that it is a response to a recent public event: the murder of English women and children during what has traditionally been called the 'Indian Mutiny' of 1857. Candidates sometimes noted that after the first stanza's scene setting the focus is less on the situation, still less its wrongs, than the transforming power of love. Most candidates focused impressively on this topic throughout their answer. Candidates suggested that the wider conflict seems frozen by the vignette of the lovers, almost as if time and circumstance have stopped. The chivalrous English officer and his 'pale young wife' become immersed in a poetic love duet. In the third stanza the repeated phrase 'Close . . .' both conceals and reveals the pistol that will become the murder weapon. Candidates were quick to point out that Victorian readers would know at once that the woman sacrificing her life to her loving husband is avoiding 'a fate worse than death.' The clipped rhythm of the final stanza with its short last line concentrates on their heroism, on the banality ("Good bye."—"Good bye"), and the horror ('Young, strong and full of life') of what they are doing. The power of love, both earthly and heavenly, occurs throughout the selection of Rossetti poems, as in 'Twice' and 'Soeur Louise de la Miséricorde'. The notion of sacrificial love provided useful contrasts for many candidates. It lies at the heart of 'Goblin Market' and 'Remember', and both these poems were frequently mentioned in answers. Rossetti's note, attached to the poem, led some candidates to feel that the poem is less an account of an event than a rhetorical transformation of it. Rossetti discovered much later (c. 1875) that the Skenes, man and wife, were probably taken out and shot by the rebels. Some candidates felt that, despite its art, the poem is at bottom a contribution to contemporary British propaganda.

Exemplar 3

The image of the pistol in the 'Round Tower' has connotations of death; death is another characteristic theme of Rossetti's work. In 'Shut out', death is personified as a 'shadowless figure' with an ominous and ghost-like form. Similarly, in 'Song' ('When I am dead, my dearest,' the entire meaning of the poem is that of the speaker's death. Like some of the language in 'In the Round Tower at Jhansi' 'Song' is a cold and often blunt poem, in which the speaker tells their partner, or a family member to "sing no sad songs of me" and to "plant no roses at my head"; to forget the speaker and move on after their death. However this could also contrast with the 'Round Tower' as the speaker's outlook on death is monotone and dull in 'song'. On the other hand in 'In the Round Tower at Jhansi', both Skene and his wife (though having 'courage' and avoiding being 'loth') have a level of fear and, of course, sadness, as their death closes in on them. inevitable

This section from a Level 4 response to Question 11 demonstrates a competent approach in which linguistic analysis and comparative observations are handled in a rather straightforward manner.

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