

English Literature (Opening Minds)

General Certificate of Secondary Education **1901**

Examiners' Reports

June 2011

1901/R/11

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

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2441 Drama Post-1914

General Comments (including 2445)

Examiners were very impressed with the overall quality of the work in this eighth and final summer session and there was a strong feeling that standards have continued to improve throughout the life of this specification as a result of thorough, sensitive and imaginative teaching. Candidates seemed to be very well prepared in terms of their textual knowledge, their planning, their focus on the terms of the question and their use of quotation and textual reference to support their ideas. Much of the writing communicated real individuality, engagement and enjoyment, and words like “outstanding”, “remarkable” and even “breathtaking” appeared frequently in Examiner reports. *Journey's End* has remained by far the most popular post-1914 Drama text, closely followed by *Death of a Salesman*, and both plays have regularly stimulated so many astonishingly powerful, mature and sophisticated responses from our candidates that Examiners (and we hope teachers and students) are delighted that *Journey's End* and *A View From the Bridge* appear on the Modern Drama paper in the new OCR GCSE English Literature Specifications.

However some able candidates continue to underachieve – on the extract questions, in particular, because of one highly avoidable misapprehension: that a Higher Tier question which refers to “the ways” or “how” a dramatist is working requires specific attention to the technical features of writing (dashes, question marks, exclamation marks, italics, ellipsis, sentence length, lexical sets, sound effects, caesura...) rather than a thoughtful exploration of what is actually happening onstage. It is as if some candidates believe that dialogue, characterisation, onstage movement, developing relationships, evolving plot-lines, setting and staging are not to be considered as “ways” in which playwrights achieve their effects. Candidates sometimes appear too wary of “telling the story” and too intent on subjecting the written text to a minute linguistic analysis, often using terms and concepts which are far more appropriate to the study of poetry or language data, and making no real attempt to visualise what is happening onstage and then express how they feel about it. At its very worst this approach has led to lengthy consideration of the effects of rhyme, alliteration, sibilance and onomatopoeia in stage directions – in other words, the sound effects of something that will never be heard onstage.

This is the seventeenth report on 2441/2445 Drama Units and, throughout the process, the biggest reason for underachievement has remained the inability of candidates to move beyond an analysis of the words on the page and see these plays as scripts for performance. Many bright students are still referring to themselves as “readers” only and commencing their answers by selecting stage directions, or even worse, punctuation, as the key to a scene's dramatic impact. Many make the telling slip of referring to their play as a “novel” or a “poem” as if they are having difficulty changing genres or are unaware that plays, poems and novels require different approaches. The heart of every Examiner sinks when an answer commences: “Miller makes this a powerfully dramatic moment with his use of exclamation marks” or focuses almost exclusively on the wording of stage directions as if they have nothing to do with the onstage action and have an independent life on the page. On the other hand, Examiners' hearts soar when an opening paragraph establishes the context for the prescribed extract and answers questions like: what's led to this moment, what happens as a result of it, who's onstage, what do they know, what does the audience know about them...? Successful candidates have clearly been encouraged to see their text as a play script, to visualise the action, to keep all the onstage characters in mind and to consider the impact on a theatre audience, and the benefits of watching or being involved in a live performance and of classroom-based drama activities are strikingly evident in the best answers.

Indecision about question choice and the use of material from the printed extract to answer another question, unfinished answers, rubric infringements and multiple answers were all quite rare, as if Centres have ensured that their candidates are thoroughly familiar with the well-established format of the Drama Units. Although a few candidates plunged into the detail of the extracts without conveying a clear understanding of the dramatic context or drifted away from the moment prescribed by the empathic questions, it was felt that the candidates' knowledge of their set play was almost universally sound and that the majority of answers to extract-based questions, which are still the most popular option by far, displayed a good balance between scrutiny of the printed passage and wider perspectives. In some Centres, the extract question was the only one attempted and it seemed that candidates' choices had been circumscribed before they had entered the exam room. This seems a risky strategy and makes it all the more important that candidates are well versed in the arts of speedily placing the extract in its dramatic context, and of making connections to the play as a whole but concentrating largely on the dramatic details of the extract itself – the words and actions of the characters and the ways in which they interact with each other, not just punctuation and the ways in which the stage directions are written.

A huge amount of time was occasionally wasted in the production of an introductory paragraph which simply reworked the terms of the question without beginning to answer it or in providing unhelpful biographical details about the playwrights (particularly Sherriff's own wartime experiences) or detailing a meaty historical background for the text (exploring the concept of the American Dream, or Great War propaganda and recruitment or Shakespeare's theatre and audience at great length) as if addressing the social/historical/cultural contexts assessment objective which is not required for the Drama Units. The terms "dialogue" and "dialect" have come to be regarded as synonymous by some candidates, as have "empathy" and "sympathy"; "foreshadowing" has become a rather overused term, attached by some to any situation which might arouse tension or suspense; and for a substantial minority, the concept of "dramatic irony" has broadened to such an extent that it can be applied to any situation which may be mildly ironic or surprising.

It is a source of great regret to Examiners that, at a time when more candidates than ever are attempting empathic questions and writing with such assurance in the voice of characters apparently remote from their own experience, this option will not be available in the new specifications. There were fewer third-person or voiceless empathic answers and unhelpful "Dear Diary" approaches this time and some of the answers to the "middle" question were the best and most confidently argued that Examiners had seen, particularly on Stanhope's qualities as a commander (Question 11 on *Journey's End*) and on Emerson's qualities as a doctor (Question 8 on *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*).

Generalisation is always a difficult exercise, but after seventeen sessions assessing the Drama Units since May 2003, it is possible to continue to offer this summary of the features which tend to characterise successful and less successful answers.

Generally

Successful candidates:

- see the texts as scripts for performance and themselves as members of an audience
- see the stage directions as part of the dramatic action of the scene and visualise this onstage action and all the onstage characters
- pay explicit attention to the wording of the question and balance attention to each strand of the question
- construct purposeful opening paragraphs which focus specifically on a particular question about a particular play
- select and integrate brief quotations to support and amplify their ideas
- avoid formulaic approaches and trust their own direct personal response.

Less successful candidates:

- see the texts as pieces of writing only and themselves as readers
- see the stage directions merely as a pieces of tacked-on written communication and ignore the onstage action
- start with a pre-packaged introduction which is unhelpfully generalised, biographical or list-like and says nothing specific about the play or the question
- lose the focus of the question and import prepared material which has very little direct relevance, or misread the question entirely and write about the wrong character or wrong moment
- become bogged down in feature-logging and detached from the dramatic action
- work through a pre-digested agenda without fully engaging the question or the play, and without expressing a personal response.

Extract-based Questions

Successful candidates:

- devote at least two-thirds of answers to discussing, quoting from and commenting on the extract itself but still convey understanding of the whole-play context
- start by returning to their text to locate the extract in the context of the whole play
- establish the dramatic context for the characters and the audience (what do the characters know, what do we know, are there any differences...?) quickly and economically in the opening paragraph
- ground their whole-play reflections firmly in the detail of the extract
- pay close attention to the way the dramatic action evolves throughout the extract, concentrating on the words and actions of the characters.

Less successful candidates:

- produce generalised answers with little attention to the printed passage, or approach the extract as if it is an “unseen” exercise and give little sense of the rest of the play
- produce a sweeping opening paragraph with an all-purpose list of headings and largely ignore the question
- focus exclusively on stage directions, or punctuation, as if the dialogue, the interaction between characters, the dramatic situation...are unimportant
- rarely quote from the extract or copy out huge chunks unaccompanied by any attempt at commentary
- miss the reference to “this moment” in the question and as a result answer the question on the play as a whole with little reference to the printed extract.

Discursive Questions

Successful candidates:

- focus rigorously on (and sometimes challenge) the terms of the question and maintain relevance throughout
- range selectively across the text to find supporting detail for their arguments
- balance their attention to double-stranded questions on two characters/two moments/two elements
- show a sharp awareness of audience response
- quote shrewdly and economically
- reach a relevant conclusion.

Less successful candidates:

- become bogged down in one moment in the play so that the range of reference becomes too narrow

- rely only on the printed extract for the previous question for their ideas and quotations
- spend the bulk of their time on one strand of a two-stranded question
- lose the question entirely and unload pre-packaged and lengthy material about “the American Dream” in *Death of a Salesman* or about coping strategies or the effects of propaganda in *Journey's End*, or on another previously prepared topic with limited relevance to the question.

Empathic Questions

Successful candidates:

- anchor empathic questions securely to the prescribed moment to focus solely on what that character knows, thinks and feels at that point
- emphasise the character's dominant feelings and priorities at that point in the play
- select appropriate detail and integrate quotations of the character's actual words smoothly into the answer
- maintain a limited point-of-view so that knowledge and attitudes are credibly circumscribed
- sustain a voice that rings true in terms of language and tone
- know when to stop and therefore avoid repetition.

Less successful candidates:

- ascribe knowledge, feelings and attitudes to characters in empathic answers which are inappropriate to that character at that point in the play
- work through the character's experiences in a chronological and unselective way up to the prescribed point without asking “what's my main feeling at this precise moment?”
- lose the moment entirely and leap on the later moments in the play
- use inappropriate or anachronistic idioms
- over-simplify or stereotype both character and language
- write too much and therefore lose control of point-of-view and repeat themselves.

Comments on Individual Questions

Death of a Salesman

The climactic extract from the “Frank's Chop House” scene stimulated some wonderful answers to **Question 1**. Strong candidates managed the difficult transition between past and present with great assurance and were able to comment not just on the impact of Willy's infidelity on the young Biff but also the crushing significance of the guilty memory for Willy himself and on the increasingly fragility of his mind at this point. Many candidates shaped intelligent contrasts between the adult sons who have left their father “babbling in a toilet” and the kindness of strangers, in the form of Stanley, the waiter. Many explored the ominous ironies in Willy's dismissive attitude to money and there was a great deal of perceptive grappling with the significance of Willy's concern for his appearance and the symbolism of the “seeds”. The very best answers maintained a tight focus on what they found “moving” in the scene, often expressing heartfelt sympathy for both Willy and Biff, and admiration for the sensitivity and protectiveness of Stanley. Some made a very intelligent distinction between the nature of the Boston revelation for Biff and for an audience who have been made aware of the existence of *The Woman* and thereby primed for this moment throughout the play. There were some perceptive comments about the fact that Willy is “on his knees”, with one candidate pointing out that, at this moment, he has literally become a “low man”. This was a rich and packed passage and Examiners were pleased to see a wide variety of impressive ideas and highly convincing interpretation from candidates who had clearly been encouraged to trust their own personal responses and ground them in the dramatic detail of the text. Some candidates found it difficult to divide their time between the two phases of the extract and either concentrated on the

memory or the present-time situation; and others were baffled by the time-shift and wrote about Biff as he was the adult version throughout the scene. Some lost the focus on the extract and wrote rather too extensively about the effect of the Boston revelation on Biff's life, or about the dollar and the American Dream, or about seeds and the frontier spirit, or the effect of serial abandonment (his father, Ben, his sons...) on Willy, or about the suicide to come – all of which could have been neatly grounded in the detail of the extract but which tended to run away with some answers. There was some lively commentary on the ironic connection between Willy's act of betrayal with The Woman and the sons' departure with the "chippies", but some found this term hard to understand and one candidate insisted that the girls were chip shop workers.

Question 2 was the least popular Miller question but there were many strongly argued and well-supported cases, usually confirming Biff as the more likeable brother, on the basis of his honesty and more genuine love for his mother and for his father despite the painful knowledge of the infidelity which he keeps to himself. The best answers divided their time between the two brothers in both youth and adulthood, maintained the comparative focus and considered the way Miller contrasts their attitudes and behaviour in the "Chop House" scene and its aftermath and in "The Requiem", in particular. Happy's attitude to women and his philandering came in for some ferocious criticism, as did his denial of his father when he needed him most. Some answers suffered from concentrating almost exclusively on one brother or on the scenes from the past, and some, particularly at Foundation Tier, saw "likeable" in the rather narrow sense of popularity with the other characters in the play, particularly their father. One clear discriminator was the candidates' ability to see the brothers as constructed characters in order to focus on Miller's portrayal of them, rather than giving the impression of liking or disliking them as real people. Heartfelt sympathy for Happy as the younger, overlooked sibling was often expressed but not always made sharply relevant to the question.

There were many very convincing Charleys in response to **Question 3** which made shrewd use of the scenes in Charley's office and often managed to integrate ideas, feelings and expressions from other areas of the play, most notably the card game and The Requiem. The strongest answers conveyed Charley's alarm at Willy's desperation – both psychological and financial – and an understanding of the implications in his remark about being worth more dead than alive. Many candidates were able to integrate direct quotation successfully and also some comparative reflections as Charley considered his own life as opposed to Willy's and Bernard as opposed to Biff and Happy. Neighbourly concern, particularly for Linda, and some frustration about Willy's inability to face reality and accept the job offer, often dictated the tone of successful answers, whereas an excess of anger or *schadenfreude* undermined other answers. The humour, pragmatism, wisdom, warmth and unsentimental kindness in Charley's voice was often brilliantly captured, along with his idiom and even the rhythms of his speech, although some candidates accorded him such remarkable omniscience that he was intimately acquainted with all the goings-on in the Loman household including all the rows and Willy's suicide attempts. The adjoining walls might be paper-thin but this extensive knowledge appeared unconvincing.

The Caretaker

This play continues to attract a small but enthusiastic following and the vast majority of them attempted **Question 4** and the Buddha breaking scene involving Mick and Davies. The best answers conveyed a clear understanding of both characters and of the evolving power struggles, and there was much intelligent discussion of menace, status and Davies's betrayal of Aston. Although there is often a tendency in Pinter answers to slip into decontextualised analysis of linguistic features and conversational interaction, involving question-mark counting and unhelpful references to semantic fields, there was a great deal of successful analysis of the effect of the pauses, the crackling tension, Mick's menacing movement and the rapid shifts in his tone and register, the irony of his description of Davies forming something of a self-portrait, and the symbolism of the Buddha. Weaker answers tended to drift into generalised comment about Davies's changing loyalties and Mick's long speech was occasionally ignored in its entirety. **Questions 5** and **6** were so rarely answered that generalised comment is difficult, but the best

answers to **Question 5** maintained the focus on the relationship and its significance, especially for Aston, and avoided the trap of drifting into two separate character studies, whilst Pinter's manipulation of the language (and of vacuum cleaners) for comic effect and the absurdity of some of Davies's claims and Mick's pretensions received some effective scrutiny in **Question 6** answers.

Whose Life Is It Anyway?

Ken's refusal to take the prescribed Valium and his challenge to the authority of the hospital in the extract for **Question 7**, received a great deal of thoughtful attention from many candidates. The strongest answers placed Ken's conversation with Dr Scott in a very secure context, noting her willingness to listen and their developing intimacy, seeing the build-up to the forced injection and fully understanding Ken's desire to exercise more control over his life in the light of Dr Emerson's honest prognosis. Most candidates recognised that Ken convinces Dr Scott to relent about the Valium with some seeing this as the first sign of her dropping her "professional guard". The concept of Ken's "consciousness" and the importance of feeling "like a human being again" were often sensitively handled, though only the most confident candidates could identify the "glorious minutes" when Ken had felt like a human being. The humour was often picked out and explored, especially the irony of "sleep on it", and the subtleties of Ken's arguments traced in some detail to demonstrate his intelligence, the way he induces doubt in Dr Scott's mind and his ability to undertake and win the battles to come. The reference to "Sinai" in relation to "tablets" baffled a few candidates, Dr Scott was occasionally identified as a nurse or a man, and lengthy discussions of "professionalism" derailed some answers. "Conscious" and "conscience" were occasionally confused.

Many strong candidates demonstrated their ability to argue rather than simply assert, to balance competing judgements and to assemble evidence effectively in response to **Question 8** and Clark's portrayal of Dr Emerson. The strongest often showed an appreciation of the way Clark encourages us to share Ken's perspective on Dr Emerson, and used the testimony of other characters – Dr Scott, the Judge, Ken himself – to counterbalance the impact of the forced injection and the use of the Mental Health Act. Emerson's skills and knowledge as a medical practitioner were valued but his "people skills" were not. His good intentions and his dedication to preserving life often held sway over his authoritarianism in end-justifying-means conclusions.

The challenge of producing a voice as intelligent, witty and educated as Ken Harrison's at the climax of his quest for self-determination and the end of the play, was well and truly met by many candidates in response to **Question 9**. There was much effective reflection on the prescribed moment itself and Dr Emerson's offer to Ken to stay in hospital on his own terms and Ken's polite refusal of Dr Scott's proffered kiss. The best Kens exuded a calm certainty about the events he has set in motion and a quiet satisfaction at the Judge's decision. Sentimentality, bitter regret and morbid reflections on the days ahead came to dominate some less convincing answers, but the idea that Ken does not want to die but cannot face living in his present state was so powerfully conveyed in some answers that experienced Examiners were nearly reduced to tears.

Journey's End

Once again, **Question 10** was by far the most frequently answered of any question on the Drama units and many candidates identified the moment in this extract when Stanhope is finally driven to reveal his vulnerability to the young man who idolises him, as an emotional climax to the play. The strongest answers were sharply aware of the dramatic context, and successful candidates often wrote with great sensitivity about the effect of Osborne's death on both Stanhope and Raleigh, the reasons for Stanhope's anger at the start of the extract (and the way Hibbert has contributed to this in the previous scene), the reasons for Stanhope's frosty attitude to his childhood friend and Raleigh's naive misunderstanding of Stanhope's response to Osborne's death. Some candidates made the subtle distinction that Stanhope's admission of

weakness is a dramatic revelation for Raleigh but not for the audience for whom the earlier scenes between Stanhope and Osborne have already made his fragile state of mind and reliance on alcohol abundantly clear. Stanhope's isolation by Osborne's bed, the darkness of the dugout and the gunfire were often discussed with great sensitivity. Many candidates managed to engage with and explain the strength and range of emotion in the scene – anger, grief, embarrassment, shame, awkwardness, outrage, incomprehension, shock, regret – by working carefully through the dialogue and paying attention to the movements and feelings suggested in the stage directions. However, some candidates wrote almost exclusively about the stage directions with hardly a specific reference to the two characters onstage or to the dramatic situation, and without exploration of the feelings Stanhope and Raleigh are experiencing. High emotion, tension and suspense were suggested but the sources of the conflicts in the scene not explored in any detail and the death of Osborne not even mentioned. The belief that it is helpful to catalogue exclamation marks, sentence length, patterns of interruption, lists of three, the use of italics, dashes and pauses in the dialogue without responding to what is being said, or to identify poetic devices in the wording of stage directions, also hampered proper engagement with the power of the scene. Some candidates took “funny” to mean “humorous” rather than “odd” and there were some unfortunately literal interpretations of the stage directions as well – that “*his voice is nearly breaking*” demonstrates Raleigh's extreme youth and that Stanhope “*fights for breath*” because he is such a heavy smoker, for instance.

Question 11 on Stanhope's qualities as a commander stimulated a range of strong arguments. Examiners were very impressed by the variety of interpretation with the same moment sometimes used to demonstrate opposing views of leadership: for instance, Stanhope's touching devotion to the dying Raleigh used to demonstrate both the leader's concern for his men and also dereliction of duty at a time when the German attack is in full swing; or the brandishing of a revolver in Hibbert's face used to suggest both effective man-management and also intemperate bullying. The most successful answers tended to be those which paid explicit attention to the “How far” in the Higher Tier question and tried to shape a balanced case. There was widespread agreement about Stanhope's dedication, courage, sense of honour, duty and pride in his company, and many candidates drew very effectively on the testimony of other characters, particularly Osborne and also Raleigh in his contentious letter home. The way Sherriff contrasts Stanhope's attention to detail with Hardy's slovenliness also received thoughtful attention in the best answers. Some candidates got rather bogged down in the early stages of the play and particularly in the expository conversation between Osborne and Hardy and therefore had little time to assess Stanhope's leadership in action, but many explored his handling of Hibbert and the Sergeant-Major, in particular, to demonstrate his motivational powers and single-mindedness. Some candidates found his drinking, his smoking, his temper, his mood swings, his bullying of Raleigh, Hibbert and even Mason, and his willingness to lead his men to certain death (or shoot them) thoroughly reprehensible but there was a tendency to lose sight of the front-line war context and the chain of command in some of these hostile arguments. The extract for Question 10 was occasionally used as the prime source of material for Question 11 answers, but this problem was not widespread.

Many candidates managed to create a thoroughly convincing Hibbert in response to **Question 12**. The vast majority conveyed his feelings of dread effectively and many made sensible and selective use of references to the preceding scene with Stanhope. The best answers tended to base Hibbert's feelings and tone on what he says at the end of that scene where he thanks Stanhope for his honest admission of his own fears, for his discretion, decency and for his encouragement, and says that he'll “try” to “go on sticking it”. Some subtle responses had Hibbert realising that he had been to some extent duped by Stanhope and recognising that the neuralgia stratagem has failed, with all his old fears and trepidations resurfacing. Radical transformations into a gung-ho warrior, determined to bash the Bosche for Stanhope and for good old Blighty; indignant rants about Stanhope's bullying tactics, based on an absolute belief in the reality of the neuralgia; gushing tributes to his new best friend, Stanhope – these were less convincing. The very best answers made selective use of the scene with Stanhope and

often responded fully to his frank admission that he feels “exactly the same” as Hibbert, but also went on to portray the weakness and sleazy unpleasantness which Hibbert displays in the play’s later scenes with some references to “tarts”, joy-rides and post-cards. The desire to demonstrate wide textual knowledge occasionally led candidates away from the turmoil of the prescribed moment and to confer a calm and objective omniscience on Hibbert so that he could survey all the major events of the play, knew all about Stanhope’s relationship with Raleigh, the row over the letter and the details of the forthcoming raid. Some answers drifted a long way from the text into a rather fanciful elaboration on Hibbert’s former life, and invented a family, girlfriends and a distinguished school and rugby-playing history. Hibbert’s idiom was captured very successfully by many candidates but there was much uncertainty about the precise meanings of “prig” and “funk” and there was an occasional drift into the 21st Century: “I feel such a wuss...Stanhope should get off my back...how very dare he?”

2442 Poetry and Prose Post-1914

This is the last report on a June 2442 examination session. As Centres prepare themselves for the new dispensation, it has been encouraging to note that candidates had been well prepared for this almost final flourish of the old. As ever, there were some excellent responses to admire, and a general sense that candidates had done their best to achieve outcomes that did justice to their knowledge and understanding of the texts they had studied.

In general, candidates had been entered for the correct Tier. However, there are always candidates incorrectly entered at Higher Tier who do not reach an allowed E and thus receive a U grade.

Examiners reported that some candidates consider device-spotting central to the enjoyment of English Literature, and, especially, poetry. Identifying a device sometimes becomes the sole purpose of reading a poem. What the effects of that device are is all too often not considered.

Other issues raised by examiners included concern over the growing fondness for using “negative” and “positive” as if they were precise and exact adjectives. To say that Sassoon has a “negative” attitude to war but McCrae has a “positive” one, without amplification, really amounts very little. “Sympathy” now seems totally inadequate as a feeling for one’s fellow man; “empathy” appears to have won the linguistic day. Examiners have expressed the hope that the less gushing “sympathy” may soon make a come-back. The dry jargon of “lexical fields” and “lexis” is all too apparent, coming between the candidate and the expression of personal engagement with literature. It is to be hoped that the new specification will inspire candidates to rise to its challenge with a new and more incisive vocabulary.

Poetry

As ever there were some strong responses to the poetry section, not least where candidates focused closely on the question, showed good understanding, supported their ideas, considered the effects of language, and, in the case of Higher Tier candidates, remembered the requirement to compare. Weaker responses tended to paraphrase lines in the poems, explaining “what the poet is trying to say”, identifying literary devices, and writing out rhyme schemes, usually without any discussion of the effects of the devices and rhyme schemes. Many references to the rhythm of a poem offered no actual comment on the rhythm or its effect.

Some examiners were surprised by the number of poetry responses that, after a fairly perfunctory introductory paragraph, provided a second paragraph that offered no overview of the poems under discussion, offering instead a detailed discussion of rhyme schemes that had little or no bearing on the actual question they were answering. When responding to a question about what, for example, is moving about two poems, a candidate’s dispassionate discussion of a rhyme scheme is usually unhelpful, since it is difficult (though not impossible) to argue that a rhyme scheme is central in creating powerful emotion in a reader. Unstructured responses of this sort sometimes prevented candidates from engaging with the set question.

The best poetry responses engaged closely with the language used by the poets, and, when identifying literary devices, discussed the effects created by these devices. Less persuasive responses too often commented on quotations by stating that “this is something that everyone has experienced”, in the apparent belief that the unsupported appeal to common experience constitutes an incisive comment on language.

Weaker responses simply identified devices: the caesura, enjambment (variously spelled), anaphora, and tricolon were often enthusiastically hunted down, to very little effect. Enjambment usually “helped the poem to flow”. Some candidates identified end-stopped lines in prose

passages, attributing this to the writer's use of caesura (putting the full-stop into a sort of literary honours list).

Opening Lines

This was comfortably the most popular of the poetry texts, with the majority of candidates choosing to work on **Section H: The 1914-18 War**.

However, there were many responses to **How It Looks From Here**, with a number of candidates writing about the pairing of *Defying Gravity* and *Bedfellows* and the poets' portrayal of death in the two poems. There were many perceptive analyses of *Defying Gravity*, with good understanding of the central metaphor of gravity and its pull on both paper aeroplanes and men. The image of the yo-yo was clearly understood, with many responses commenting on the childish associations of both the yo-yo and the paper plane and how the description renders death less fearsome. There were good responses to the rugby imagery, and to the friend's breaking from the tackle and streaking to "a dimension as yet unimagined", which many took to be heaven. There was often clear understanding of death's liberating effect on the friend, though "the homage paid by the living to the giant yo-yo" was sometimes not understood. Good responses often focused closely on the language and on the enjambment of "aw-Kwardly", often with some insight into its effect. However, weaker responses struggled to make much sense of the poem. *Bedfellows* attracted an interesting variety of interpretations. Some candidates identified the speaker as the occupant of a bed in a hospital; others, as the occupant of a cheap boarding-house; others as a woman grieving over the loss of her lover (despite the unromantic connotations of the "greasy head" and "dreary innuendo"); others as a victim of murder. Examiners accepted whatever interpretations they were offered, provided that focus on the portrayal of death was clear, and relevant textual support was provided. Good responses looked at Paterson's language in some detail, for example at "dead" halo, the "tick in the wrist" and the use of half-rhymes. Good responses also often explored the contrast between McGough's suggestion that death can be seen as liberation, with Paterson's more fearful view of death. Best responses to *Bedfellows* did not seek to nail the poem down as a response to a simply defined situation, but savoured its mystery, its ambiguity, and its sense of ominous, repeated and imminent misery.

A number of candidates looked at the disturbing nature of the views expressed in *Mort aux Chats* and *Rat, O Rat ...*. Good responses reacted to the invitation of the question to what they found so disturbing, and there were powerful responses to the Porter, whose poem was seen as an attack, not on cats, but on Jews, women, and minorities in general. Here there was careful textual support, though comparatively few candidates noted the significance of the Rule of Dogs lasting a thousand years. Better answers also recognised the satirical tone of Porter's poem. Weaker responses took the poem at face value and were disturbed by Peter Porter's hatred of cats. Such responses also registered surprise at Logue's readiness to engage in conversation with a rat. Better responses explored what the rat might represent; for example, immigrant workers eyeing up jobs in the speaker's own back yard. However, many responded, quite successfully, to the poem as simply entertaining and amusing, an attempt to persuade an unwelcome rodent to depart. Examiners found interestingly different responses to the question. Some responses compared the speakers' views as similarly disturbing, whilst others concentrated on what they saw as Porter's darker, satirical intent with Logue's intent, simply to amuse.

There were comparatively few responses to the third question on poems suggesting more than one way of looking at things. However, there were successful responses, especially to *Judging Distances*, where clear contrasts were made between the military voice and the poetic voice of his auditor.

Responses to the war poetry were successful when candidates focused closely on the question and really responded to the language the poets use. Less successful responses were able to

show some understanding of the poems largely through paraphrase, for example explaining what the soldier in *The Target* has done and what he is feeling. However, the question invited involvement with the language, asking how Gurney movingly conveys sympathy for the soldier. "Movingly" can be addressed only by consideration of the choice of language and its effect, and not by simply summarising the story-line of the poem.

However, many candidates were able to show understanding at both tiers of the ways in which the poets contrast the past, present and future in *Spring in War-Time* and *Perhaps* -. They were usually able to consider, in greater or lesser depth, the use of nature in both poems, with Nesbit limiting herself to the one season, whilst Brittain includes all four. There were some perceptive comments on the structure of each poem, with careful consideration, for example, of Brittain's use of a short fourth line to end each stanza, conclusively denying any faint hope suggested by the early part of the stanza. Fewer candidates noted the short monosyllabic line with which Nesbit concludes her poem. Some candidates comparing the two poems found *Perhaps*-decidedly optimistic, often by seeming to ignore the last two lines of the poem.

Responses to the Question 5, thoughts and feelings about the dead, were often well focused, especially in *The Falling Leaves*, where the magnitude of the deaths was recognised and the cause, not age or pestilence, well understood. The metaphors of leaves and snowflakes were usually well understood and comment on them well developed.

The ways in which the poets movingly convey their sympathy for soldiers was often well answered by candidates who selected *The Target* and *The Deserter* for discussion. The soldier's guilt in the Gurney, his contemplation of his own death as a means of relieving his mother of her daily anxiety on his behalf, his wish to apologise to the soldier, were usually well understood. His loss of faith in a God who "takes no sort of heed" and offers no "word of guidance" was less well understood, with some candidates writing simply that the references to God shows that this is a religious poem. Less assured responses tended to focus only on the first two stanzas, showing some reluctance to venture further into the poem. *The Deserter* was generally well understood, with candidates focusing on the descriptions of the man's fear and on the poet's sympathetic tone. There were some misunderstandings. Some candidates thought that the poem demonstrates the poet's belief that deserters should be shot, since cowardice is contemptible; some thought that the man was shot by his fellow-soldiers in the act of deserting; others spent a disproportionate amount of time sympathising with the deserter's mother (an understandable reaction, but irrelevant to the question). *Lamentations* produced interesting responses from candidates who really understood the poem. The effect of the brother's death on the soldier was often carefully illustrated and the coldly contemptuous thought of the officer in the last line clearly understood. However, many candidates berated Sassoon's absence of sympathy with the grief-stricken soldier, citing the last line of the poem in evidence. Many also confused the sergeant with the "voice" of the poem, attributing the poem's last line to the sergeant. Many thought that the brother had been sent to the Western Front.

Poems 2: Larkin and Fanthorpe

At the time of writing this report, comparatively few responses to Larkin and Fanthorpe have been seen, these mostly to Question 7 on *Annus Mirabilis* and *Reports*. Some candidates rose well to the challenge to discuss what they found amusing about the poems, quite successfully in Larkin's case, but less so in Fanthorpe's. Few candidates writing on Fanthorpe went beyond discussion of the poem as a satire on the comments teachers write on school reports. Taking the comments literally too often led candidates to ignore the last two stanzas where "School is the world" is developed and the vital last line containing "*Rest in Peace*" delivers the deadly truth of the poem. The last two verses do not detract from the amusement to be gained from the poem, but the comedy is, perhaps, made blacker.

Touched with Fire

A number of candidates offered responses on this text, particularly to the first question on the depiction of action and strength in *Mushrooms* and *Digging*. At the Higher Tier, there were many interesting contrasts drawn between the strength (in numbers) of the mushrooms and their power as they heave, shoulder, nudge and shove on their way to inheriting the earth, and Heaney's description of his father's and grandfather's individual physical strength. Sometimes the mushrooms were seen as women assertively taking their place, or usurping the traditionally male place, in society; such responses often showed considerable engagement with the poem. Stray observations, such as Plath's marriage to Ted Hughes and her suicide, sometimes blurred discussion, leading to comments of the kind that *Mushrooms* shows "her unbalanced state of mind"; arguably because repressed aggressive thoughts are coming to the surface. However, this line of argument often led to interesting responses, especially when supported by careful and thoughtful attention to the poem's language. There were a number of good responses to *Digging*, recognising the poet's admiration of his father and grandfather and working in the poet's own activity and strength in handling his squat pen first described as a gun and latterly as a tool to dig with.

There were comparatively few responses to *Refugee Mother and Child*, *Our History*, *Mid-Term Break* and *Nursery Rhyme of Innocence and Experience*, the poems set for discussion in Questions 11 and 12. Most showed a sensitive understanding of the poems, and provided a reminder of how well this anthology inspires good writing about poetry from sixteen-year-olds. That they respond well to *Mid-Term Break* and *Digging* suggests that the Heaney selection in *Reflections* might inspire good responses in candidates choosing Heaney for the new examination.

Prose

Opening Worlds

This was again the most popular of the prose texts, with most candidates working on the text choosing to respond to the extracts from *Games at Twilight* and *The Gold-Legged Frog*. Weaker responses tended to paraphrase the two extracts, or quoted extensively from them adding on a rider to the effect that "This shows how unpleasant it is in a hot climate". Good answers really engaged with the language, especially the language of *Games at Twilight*. Here good responses made much of the repetition of "too hot. Too bright.", and also offered comment on the brevity of the second and third sentences. Many picked up the challenge posed by the climate for those who had to "face" it, and there were many perceptive comments on the comparison of the garden to "a tray of beaten brass", and the various metals Desai includes in her description. Candidates seemed to write less well on the extract from *The Gold-Legged Frog*; some examiners suspected candidates were themselves running out of energy, this extract usually being the last piece of analysis undertaken in the examination, when they had already been thinking and writing for well over an hour. Most included the personification of the sun and its determination to burn "every living thing ... to a crisp", often linking this to the "endless torture". Comparatively few candidates commented on the "dark pall" and its associations, and there was often little discussion of Srinawak's description of the way Nak's ears buzz and his eyes burn. Where this was noted, it was simply explained, without reference to onomatopoeia or alliteration, as symptoms of sunstroke. Although comparison is not examined in the prose section of the Unit, some candidates sought to make detailed comparisons between the two extracts, too often at the expense of close focus on the question.

There were many good responses to the invitation to write about the importance of money in *The Red Ball* and *The Pieces Of Silver*. Candidates noted its significance in Bolan's attempt to buy friendship, and his consequent beating, in *The Red Ball*; and how its absence in *The Pieces of Silver* leads first to Clement's humiliation, and, when he acquires it, to his triumph over Mr Chase. Weaker responses often failed to focus on money, but drifted to its near relative, poverty.

Others over-emphasised parts of the story with which they were very familiar as a result of questions set in previous years; for example, there was much close attention to the savagery of Bolan's beating, without linking it to money; and in the case of *The Pieces of Silver*, to the opening paragraphs of the story and the strictness of the school. As ever, the best answers were those which focused closely on the question, selected relevant material carefully and supported ideas with reference to the text and discussion of the language used.

Question 15, on the clash between the traditional and the modern in *Dead Men's Path*, *Snapshots of a Wedding* and *The Young Couple*, was often well answered. Candidates appeared to know the stories well, and found no difficulty in identifying Michael Obi, Neo, and Cathy as bearers of the banner of modernity against that of tradition raised against them. There was evidence of clear engagement with the stories, with dislike of Obi and sympathy for Cathy well to the fore. Interestingly, Neo attracted both sympathy and hostility from candidates. Importantly, the best responses supported their opinions with careful textual reference.

D H Lawrence: Ten Short Stories

There are too few responses seen for any valuable comment to be made.

Empire of the Sun

There were comparatively few responses to this text. Of those, most were to the extract-based question. This was well answered with candidates focusing closely on the extract to show that Jim was enjoying his "dislocations". Some speculated about Jim's frame of mind, detecting a form of hysteria, not least in Ballard's comparison of his state of mind with that of his fellow prisoners. Engagement with the text was evident.

Things Fall Apart

By far the most popular question answered by candidates on this text was the extract-based question. This asked for personal reaction, supported by textual detail, to the killing of Ikemefuna. Most candidates clearly felt strong sympathy for the attractive and unfortunate Ikemefuna, and shock at Okonkwo's cutting him down, despite Ezeudu's warning. The best responses at Higher Tier also looked closely at Achebe's writing here; the way he builds up to the moment of Ikemefuna's death, the boy's anticipation of his re-union with his mother and sister, and his dying appeal to "My father".

Candidates were usually able to trace Achebe's portrayal of Okonkwo's troubled relationship with Nwoye, emphasising Okonkwo's detestation of weakness, the beneficial effect Ikemefuna has on this relationship, and the fatal blow that the killing of Ikemefuna deals to the relationship. Nwoye's embracing of Christianity, as an important factor in the relationship, was usually well understood.

Few candidates responded to the invitation to discuss their feelings about the way things in Umuofia fall apart. Most took a reasonably balanced view, weighing the attractive culture and traditions of the Umuofians against the violence and cruelty that Achebe also illustrates. Approval or disapproval of the changes Achebe records in the novel was equally acceptable, provided that textual support for the candidate's view was offered.

The Old Man and the Sea

This again proved to be a popular text, with the extract-based question the most popular of the three. Candidates at both Tiers seemed to know the text well and were able to respond to what they found exciting about the extract. At Foundation Tier responses tended to paraphrase the extract and highlight what was considered exciting about it. At Higher Tier, there was often

considerable attention to Hemingway's writing; to sentence lengths, the descriptions of the sharks, and the verbs Hemingway uses to describe the old man's actions.

There were comparatively few responses to what was moving about the old man's struggle, but a number engaged with the old man's relationship with Manolin. Some responses did little more than draw attention to the old man's missing the boy while at sea. Others looked with considerable care at the opening and closing of the novel where Hemingway presents the relationship in most detail and were able to support the case that Hemingway makes the relationship very close indeed.

Nineteen Eighty-Four

There were some very good responses to this text from candidates who had clearly engaged closely with it and were excited both by the narrative and the political context. The extract-based question was the most popular of the three and candidates found much to write in response to it. "Foreshadowing" seems to have become a popular term in recent years, and candidates detected plenty of foreshadowing in the extract: the rat; the other side of the wall; the paperweight; "oranges and lemons"; the vapourisation of Julia's grandfather ... Interestingly there were detailed discussions of how defying the Party simply by being together with limbs wound around each other; the smell of coffee, the lipstick, the creation of a homely domestic world in Mr Charrington's room, made readers fearful about Winston and Julia's future.

Questions 29 and 30 attracted very few responses, but examiners reported that these answers were focused and showed understanding of the novel.

Modern Women's Short Stories

No responses to this text were seen.

Literary Non-Fiction

Pole to Pole

There were a number of responses to the extract-based question from candidates who had clearly studied the text, making apt reference to other parts of the book and showing some understanding of Palin's literary style. Palin's sympathy for the people was well illustrated, and the humour identified, if not always fully appreciated. The last sentence of the extract often passed without comment.

Fever Pitch

At the time of writing, no responses to this text have been seen.

2444 Pre-1914 Texts

General Comments

The final summer session for Unit 2444 saw a small but very pleasing entry; candidates demonstrated a good – often very good – knowledge and understanding of their three texts, and in most cases addressed the questions with confidence, supporting what they said with quite full and usually appropriate textual support. In the words of one examiner, “*a strong feature was close reference to the texts; many responses were deeply rooted in the texts demonstrating knowledge, understanding and enjoyment*”.

There were virtually no rubric errors in the scripts, and in almost every case all three answers were of similar length, suggesting that timing had not been a problem for most candidates. It was indeed not uncommon for the last answer – usually but not invariably on a prose text – to be the longest and best.

Comments on Individual Questions

Relatively few texts were used this session, so where a text is not mentioned it is simply because there were no answers to the questions on it.

Much Ado About Nothing

Question 1

This question was generally well done; most answers could place the extract briefly within its context, often comparing it with the parallel scene where Benedick is being similarly gulled, and most also demonstrated understanding of how the three characters in the extract showed new and revealing sides to their characters, sides not seen before in the play. Hero's quite brief speeches point to a rather sharper and more aware personality than is seen in her relations with either her father or Claudio; Ursula is seen as thoroughly enjoying what she and Hero are doing, and most strikingly of all Beatrice is portrayed as – surprisingly – having a much gentler and softer side to her than has been drawn before this moment. It is, as the questions in both Tiers say, an entertaining moment in the play, and candidates were well able to show this.

Question 2

There were no answers to this question.

Romeo and Juliet

Question 3

The contrast between Benvolio and Romeo is very clear and striking here: Romeo is lovesick, and Benvolio is down-to-earth, realistic and above all – as his name suggests – well-wishing. All answers were well able to define and draw this contrast, illustrating it aptly and confidently with quotations from the extract, and most also made some brief but relevant comments about how Romeo's penchant for falling passionately and instantly in love foreshadows what happens to him when he first meets Juliet. There were some interesting comments about the nature of the verse form that Shakespeare uses here, the careful and elegantly rhyming iambic pentameters reflecting the nobility and education of the two young men, with many noting the way in which line 2 is split between the two, suggestive of the closeness that exists between them.

Question 4

The Nurse's likely reactions – panic, hysteria, grief, guilt – were all captured by candidates here, often with quotations and half-quotations from what she says elsewhere in the play being well

integrated into the empathic speech created by many. It is not easy to create a convincing “voice”, especially perhaps when writing in the role of a character from so far back in time, but using such quotations, provided they are helpful and not too frequent, is one way of succeeding. Most answers focused very exactly on the moment prescribed by the question, with only a few straying too far beyond it into later events.

Opening Lines: War

Question 9

It is always rather surprising to examiners how many candidates assume that “the match” in line 2 of *Vitae Lampada* is a game of football – but for a side to have to score ten goals in only “an hour to play” is surely asking too much; candidates should really be aware that cricket is the game that is at the heart of the poem. Having said this, however, almost all were well able to see the contrast between the horror of the reality of battle (lines 9-13) and the idea of following your schoolboy-captain’s voice and the concept of fighting simply for honour, an idea strongly echoed in *The Volunteer*, where the clerk’s dreams of dying honourably for his country are brought to pass suddenly but – in the poem at least – gloriously. There was some good appreciation of both poems.

Question 10

All candidates who tackled this question wrote on Tennyson and Scott, perhaps surprisingly, since Kipling’s poem is so bitterly angry too. However, all answers clearly understood both poems, and wrote in appropriate detail about the anger that they convey; several appeared rather too determined to say all that they knew about *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, discussing Tennyson’s arguably ambivalent feelings about the six hundred soldiers rather than just his feelings of *anger*, but this did not seriously weaken most answers.

Opening Lines: Town and Country

Question 11

These are two quite long and very rich poems, so that examiners could not and did not expect huge amounts of detail from both, but the question does ask candidates to discuss the vivid pictures of nature presented in them, and there is surely more than plenty of material – especially in Keats’s poem – for this to be well and fully illustrated rather than just asserted. Most answers in fact went beyond simple narrative or paraphrase, with some appropriate quotations, and in many answers there was some reasonably close exploration of the language and images used by the two poets. Housman’s poem was not very well understood by many, though given the nature of the question this tended not to matter as much it might; however, candidates who assumed that line 4 means that there is a snowstorm were clearly misreading, and those who assumed that “his forest fleece” refers to some kind of coat or jacket were presumably unaware that the poem was written long before artificial fibres, and failed to appreciate the natural image that the poet is creating.

Question 12

The most popular pairing here was Blake and Hardy, with just a handful of answers using Hopkins. Higher Tier candidates were required to compare their two poems, though in fact most Foundation Tier answers did this as well, and often quite thoughtfully; the contrast between Blake’s unmitigated despair and anger and Hardy’s quiet but profoundly nostalgic sadness was often very well managed. The language in each poem was well explored by most candidates, especially the images of London that Blake creates, and there were some interestingly argued and often quite convincingly supported ideas about what Hardy is recalling in *Beeny Cliff* – in fact a poem in which he recalls his visits to this spot in Cornwall with his now-dead wife.

Austen: *Northanger Abbey*

Question 17

There was a good range of responses to this question, the best being very good indeed in terms of insight and substantiation; very few indeed failed to see that Austen is drawing attention here to Isabella's duplicitous nature, and could show this with at least some illustrative material from the passage; there is, as one examiner notes, "*so much evidence stacked up against Isabella*" that it was almost impossible not to respond at least sensibly. The best answers also made apt use of her mother's contributions to the scene.

Question 18

There were no answers to this question.

Dickens: *Hard Times*

Question 19

This is a particularly unattractive moment in the novel, in its portrayal of Mr Gradgrind and his seemingly total misunderstanding of his daughter's personality and wishes. Candidates often felt truly strongly about the unsavoury nature of his proposal – not just the fact that Mr Bounderby has not spoken directly to Louisa herself about his wish to marry her, but also the idea of marriage between two people of such different ages and characteristics. The conversation is remarkably cold and stilted, and many candidates noted the almost embarrassing awkwardness felt by Mr Gradgrind in lines 14 -16, and the dreadful silence in line 25. Louisa does at least know and perhaps understand the word "love", a concept apparently quite out of her father's ken.

Question 20

There were no answers to this question.

Eliot: *Silas Marner*

Question 23

This was the more popular of the two questions on the novel, and almost invariably managed well or very well; the contrast and lack of affection between Godfrey and the Squire was clearly apparent to all candidates, even if only in the usage of the word "Sir"; most candidates too noted that the Squire's describing Godfrey as "a shilly-shally fellow", while arguably entirely justified, is hardly the mark of a caring father, and his criticism of his deceased wife is another unpleasant aspect of his personality. Most candidates felt sympathy for Godfrey, especially at this point, and also when in line 29 he feels "very hot and uncomfortable", but surprisingly few seemed aware that one of the reasons for this – perhaps the main reason – is that he is already married, to Mollie.

Question 24

There were a few answers to this question, mostly selecting the moment when Eppie first appears to Silas, or when Godfrey and Nancy come to try to reclaim Eppie from him. These answers were sensibly argued and illustrated.

Poe: *Selected Tales*

Question 25

The few responses to this question showed some good appreciation of how Poe's language and indeed punctuation help to create excitement and suspense; there was ample textual support in most responses.

Question 26

There were no answers to this question.

2445 Drama Pre-1914

General Comments (see 2441 Section)

There was a much smaller entry for these papers than for 2441, and a tiny entry for Foundation Tier which makes generalised comment difficult. The two most popular texts were *Romeo and Juliet* (by far) and *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the two non-Shakespearian choices, Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* and Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* were so rarely attempted that secure conclusions about the general characteristics of candidate performance are difficult to reach. Candidates had been very well prepared and the vast majority demonstrated enjoyment and sound knowledge of their set text. There was a great deal of detailed, well organised and sharply perceptive work, but the remarks in the *General Comments* (2441) section of the report on the unnecessary use of historical detail continue to be relevant to the 2445 Shakespeare answers. Some highly able candidates also underachieved because of the misapprehension (described in detail in the *General Comments* section) that the identification of some technical features of the writing is of much more value and relevance than a genuine engagement with what is happening onstage.

Comments on Individual Questions

Much Ado About Nothing

Question 1 was easily the most popular *Much Ado About Nothing* option and the starting point for successful answers was a clear understanding of the dramatic context and that Leonato is conducting a dramatic gulling scene of his own. Strong candidates conveyed a confident grasp of Borachio's admission of guilt and exoneration of Margaret, of Leonato's dissembling and where it is leading and of Claudio and Don Pedro's remorse. Less confident candidates sometimes gave the impression that Hero is, in fact, dead or that Claudio is being lined up to marry cousin Beatrice or that Margaret has knowingly incriminated Hero. There were some subtle arguments about the audience's knowledge of the details of the unfolding plot, about the impact of the dramatic ironies and about the behaviour of Leonato whose faith in Hero had been notable for its absence when the original accusation was made. Many candidates wrestled interestingly with the portrayal of Claudio, with some prepared to take his repentance at face value and others appalled by his shallow and self-serving fickleness. There were some effectively integrated ideas about the scene in performance and some candidates felt confident enough to express their own views on how the scene should be dramatised, although some referred in detail to a particular production without making this clearly relevant to the question. The strongest candidates were able to probe the dialogue and comment in detail on the language, but some drifted into the decontextualised logging of linguistic features – plosives and sibilants attracting the most attention – without really demonstrating how these contributed to the power of the scene.

Questions 2 and 3 were attempted by a minority of candidates. There were some lively appreciations of the play's humour with the opening encounter between Beatrice and Benedick and the gulling scenes proving the most popular choices for **Question 2**. The single moment answers were generally the more focused and analytical and therefore more successful.

Question 3 was rarely attempted but enjoyment of the play was often clearly communicated through a convincingly lively voice well rooted in the moment and a hidden romantic interest subtly suggested. Nicely integrated quotation and judiciously selected vocabulary helped to convey a believable voice though some anachronistic expressions ("Benedick needs to change the record...") intruded on occasions.

Romeo and Juliet

Question 4 was by far the most popular question on this text and on both tiers of this paper. Once again, a full understanding of the dramatic context and a willingness to explore the layers of irony, especially in Juliet's speeches, characterised the most successful answers. Some candidates remained unsure as to Juliet's exact marital status or thought that she and Lady Capulet were hearing of Tybalt's death for the first time or even that Juliet was coming clean about her secret marriage to Romeo. Stronger candidates fully understood that the pillows are still warm after Romeo's recent departure and the consummation of their marriage, that the Capulets have already planned Juliet's marriage to Paris to lift her spirits after the death of Tybalt and that the extract sets up Juliet's violent disagreement with her father. The very best focused effectively on the dramatic ironies, explored the power and wit of Juliet's double meanings, registered her defiance and commented intelligently on the marked development of her character. Some candidates concentrated all their attention on the early sections of the extract and left no time for Lady Capulet's "joyful tidings" and the looming row with Lord Capulet, some assumed that Juliet's "*Aside*" would be heard by her mother, some identified double meaning in Juliet's speeches but found it hard to comment on their effect and some lost the focus on the extract by placing undue emphasis on the Romeo/Tybalt conflict or on Juliet's strained relationship with her parents. Decontextualised feature logging undermined some answers and the tendency to list sound effects and other features of versification, without accompanying comment on Juliet's complex feelings was quite widespread.

Friar Lawrence was the subject of much intelligent comment in answer to **Question 5** and strong answers engaged with the "How far" of the question and ranged selectively across the text. The vast majority felt that he was a good, loyal and supportive friend, with the best interests of Romeo and his community at heart, and only a very few felt secure enough to develop counter arguments, to consider possible character flaws and to suggest that his help was not entirely beneficial.

There were some convincingly confused, impassioned and regretful "Fortune's fools" produced in response to **Question 6**. Sensible candidates had clearly returned to Act Three, Scene One and re-read it carefully to immerse themselves in Romeo's state of mind and to make shrewd selections of appropriate quotation to integrate into their answer. The best answers focused on Romeo's feelings for Juliet, in particular, but also registered his grief for Mercutio, anger at Tybalt and bitterness about the chain of events. The subsequent scene in Friar Lawrence's cell was often used effectively to establish a convincing tone and the desperation of Romeo's response to the prospect of separation from Juliet.

2446 Poetry and Prose Pre-1914

In this final Summer session of the specification, it has been rewarding to see candidates, in both Tiers and from the whole range of ability, studying the great works of English Literature with a fresh and lively approach. There was particularly impressive work which made a really meaningful comparison between the styles of two poets and which responded to the humour of Eliot, Dickens, Wells and Austen. Candidates showed an implicit awareness of the social and historical contexts of their set texts and of authorial voice. Many responded to the analysis of language and form with sophistication and flair, though a tendency to observe and describe technical features rather than to comment on their effect still remains. This paper has always shown how much students can gain from immersing themselves in the dense world of the nineteenth century novel and how much they appreciate both the richness of the writing and characterisation as well as the complexity of moral viewpoint which these texts still offer. Both students and teachers deserve credit for studying these central texts in such a vivid and engaging way. Strong, well-expressed opinion enlivened many answers.

OCR: Opening Lines: War

In answer to **Question 1** the strongest responses focused on the aspects of each poet's style that vividly conveyed hatred of war. They also demonstrated understanding of Kipling's comparison between humans and the hyaenas and saw how this illuminated the poem as a whole. Many candidates showed a clearer understanding of *The Drum* than *The Hyaenas*, which unbalanced their responses.

Answers to **Question 2** were successful when candidates selected moments of action and drama and showed how the poet's writing creates tension, suspense and a sense of immediacy for the reader.

Responses to **Question 3** commented on the build up of tension in the Whitman poem and on the similar responses of the bereaved parents (presented very differently) in both poems. *Come up from the fields father...*, arguably the more complex poem, was generally handled more effectively than *Tommy's Dead*.

OCR: Opening Lines: Town and Country

Question 4 was answered very well when candidates engaged with the term "attractiveness". Such responses examined the imagery in detail showing how it suggests the appeal of country life. This was a more focused approach than an analysis of the "fake" qualities of Marlowe's Arcadian idyll or Yeats's "over-idealised" view of the Lake Isle, which would have been better suited to a different question. Many answers compared the poets' approaches and styles very effectively. A surprising number of candidates asserted that "noon" refers to midnight rather than midday.

Question 5 elicited some very diverse and interesting responses. The best answers looked closely at the imagery in the poems and did not overburden them with thematic or rather strained interpretations. *To Autumn* was sometimes approached as if it were more about Spring and Winter than Autumn itself – another example of candidates side-stepping the question set in order to write about "the circle/cycle of life".

Question 6 was handled well by candidates who understood that *Conveyancing* is a satirical poem mainly decrying London's systems of transportation, rather than approving of the "liveliness" of the city. Most candidates compared the difference in the content, tone, structure and style of the two poems with confidence. Candidates who gained high marks tended to engage with the language of the Wordsworth, in particular, in some detail.

Blake: *Songs Of Innocence and Experience*

Question 7

Most candidates could contrast the deep, dark desires of *The Sick Rose* with the maternal comfort and confidence of *The Little Black Boy*. The bright images of the one were contrasted with the “howling storm” of the other. The strongest responses wondered whether the heavenly image is that reassuring and appreciated the ambiguity of “crimson joy”, instead of leaping too quickly to conclusions about racism or sexuality and many wrote well about the difference between a vision of divine love (however far removed) and a secular sensual and destructive love.

Answers to **Question 8** focused sensibly on the visual element of the poems and the ways in which a darkening countryside may not be all it appears even in ‘Innocence’.

In answer to **Question 9** *Holy Thursday* and *The Chimney Sweeper* were the most popular choices, with candidates firmly focused on the question and hence on the writing. Many candidates made impressive comparisons with the equivalent “Song of Innocence”, but differed in the extent to which they explored the portrayal of the suffering of the children. They were very sure about who was to blame, but the best answers looked closely at how Blake shows the vulnerability of the children, and gives them a voice to express their unhappiness. Many captured the passion and anger of the speaking voice, as well as the irony of the hypocrisy of a sentimental response. The most successful answers on *Infant Sorrow* were alert to just how problematic and unsentimental Blake’s image of the newborn babe is.

Austen: *Northanger Abbey*

Question 13 produced some excellent answers. Candidates responded to the affectionate portrayal of both Catherine and Henry and the strongest work understood the humour that sprang both from Catherine’s “artlessness”, Henry’s gentle teasing and Catherine’s inability to understand the teasing. Knowledge that Catherine does not behave as a literary “heroine” should, informed such responses. Some candidates commented on how Catherine and Henry were implicitly compared with the Thorpes here. This was a valid approach but sometimes led candidates too far away from the passage itself.

Answers to **Question 14** gave a wide range of textual support for views on Austen’s presentation of General Tilney.

The best answers to **Question 15** wisely selected material from the whole of Catherine’s visit to Northanger Abbey rather than only concentrating on the journey there. They showed awareness of Austen’s parody of the Gothic Novel and her comic anti-climaxes, with telling references to the text.

Dickens: *Hard Times*

Question 16

The vivid first portrait of Mr Bounderby provided ample material. Sometimes the temptation was for candidates to spend too long outside the passage or on learned disquisitions about “apronymic” names instead of looking at how Bounderby is described and what he says here. Most candidates were in no doubt about what he represented, or why he is the villain of the piece, but the best answers related his inflated ego closely to his “great puffed head” and his repeated use of the first person in his tale of the “self-made man”. They also connected the “brassy speaking-trumpet of his voice” with his repetitive, egocentric and over-emphatic speech; an “inflammation” neatly contrasted with the “surpassing feebleness” of Mrs Gradgrind. Most were particular observant about the mechanical, manufactured aspects of his appearance and personality, showing excellent knowledge of the book as a whole.

Question 17

Candidates were successful in using the text to support their points on Mr Sleary. They analysed both the way he is described and the way he talks in order to explain what makes him memorable. There was appreciation both of his centrality to the plot, and the ways in which he represents the world of the circus folk and the tumbling alternative they represent to the grind of Coketown.

Hardy: *Far From the Madding Crowd*

Question 19

There were many excellent answers to this passage, especially when candidates concentrated clearly on the terms of the question and analysed the style. An engaged response to characterisation, context and the “foreshadowing” in the episode featured in strong answers. A few candidates had difficulty in identifying the moment in the novel. They either thought it occurred much later, before Fanny’s final journey to the workhouse or mistook Fanny for Bathsheba. This limited the reward the answer could achieve. As this is an open book examination, it is surprising that candidates did not attempt to find the passage.

Answers to **Question 20** were the most successful when candidates gave concrete evidence for Troy’s many shortcomings as a husband and evaluated the extent to which Bathsheba was foolish to marry him.

Question 21 was answered well when candidates responded to the dramatic reversal in the scene and to the intensity and irrationality of Boldwood’s feelings for Bathsheba. This approach was more successful than an unfocused narration.

Eliot: *Silas Marner*

Question 22 was often a delight to mark. Candidates thoroughly engaged with the humour produced by the contrast between the two sisters in terms of appearance, character and language. Priscilla’s bluntness and colloquial speech were fully appreciated and the strongest answers found intelligent things to say about the context of the passage. A common misconception was that Priscilla’s dress was yellow rather than the silver colour of the dress making her skin appear yellow. Some candidates mistakenly thought that Nancy’s intentions were malicious and that the quarrel was spiteful.

Question 23 elicited strong responses to Godfrey. Often these were very sympathetic, recognising his dysfunctional family as a disadvantage to him and his love for Nancy as a redeeming feature. The strongest answers were perhaps more in tune with Eliot’s presentation of his weakness and moral vacillation but also balanced their view of him with clarity and confidence.

In answer to **Question 24** candidates generally chose their moments well. The most popular choices were the theft of Silas’s money, Silas’s finding of Eppie and Godfrey’s discovery of Dunsey’s body. Those who analysed the causes of tension and drama, along with sound textual support and reference to language, achieved the highest reward.

Poe: *Selected Tales*

Question 25

The better answers put the passages into context and commented effectively on Poe’s style, rather than writing in a generalised way or digressing into speculations about Poe’s own character. The strongest answers contained well-selected detail from the passages and analysed the ways in which aspects of the style conveyed the fear of the narrators the most vividly. Many candidates assumed Poe was the narrator of the stories.

Question 27 elicited some lively answers on *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Tell Tale Heart*.

Wells: *The History of Mr. Polly*

Question 28 was answered well when candidates understood that Mr Polly decides to return to the Potwell Inn to face Uncle Jim. The best answers appreciated the humour of the thought process which leads him to that decision and showed appreciation of Wells's style. Knowledge of the build up to this passage and of Mr. Polly's behaviour elsewhere in the novel informed the strongest answers without dominating them.

Chopin: *Short Stories*

Question 33 proved to be the most popular choice on this text and answers featured *A Matter of Prejudice*, *Lilacs* and *A Respectable Woman*. Candidates made interesting and well-supported cases for their chosen stories and concentrated effectively on the terms of the question. Less successful answers tended to analyse one story more clearly and in greater detail than the other.

Most candidates made good division of their time between questions. There were relatively few rubric infringements and most candidates tackled both questions. The quality of written communication was generally high; paragraphing and organisation of argument was often impressive.

2443/7 Pre/Post-1914 Texts (Coursework)

General Comments

Centres are to be praised for the care and commitment made to candidates submitting coursework this year, when so much else has been going on to distract them. Everyone benefits when staff complete paperwork punctually and accurately and particularly when they take the trouble to annotate work and provide detailed comment indicating how marking was informed by the assessment objectives. Similarly evidence of internal standardisation is always re-assuring and the very exercise of moderation is useful staff development. There is always sympathy for centres working in isolation where often some sort of benchmarking is needed so that teachers can have a sense of comparative standards.

As has been the case for many years now, teachers have marked within the Board's tolerance and have used tasks that have been tried and tested. As this specification comes to an end it might be helpful to summarise some of the good practice that has characterised it.

Very often, when assessing a centre, a moderator can see the degree to which a teacher has provided a support structure for assignments. Where support has been too prescriptive, good students have often been constrained, but where it has allowed for individual expression and insight even candidates of medium ability have been able to demonstrate some of the more demanding criteria such as sensitivity and originality.

Well set tasks have always supported candidates, providing them with prompts and manoeuvring them to meeting the full range of assessment objectives, whereas less well thought-out ones often lead to narrative or responses that over-balance into just one assessment objective. For example analyses of Hardy's short stories that focus only on AO4 can result in a piece of socio-historical documentary. At the other extreme vague questions like, "Write a critical commentary on..." often don't give the sense of direction that candidates need.

Many centres tackle Shakespeare by examining one scene only. This can lead to fine analysis of language, stagecraft and style but teachers need to encourage students to refer to the play as a whole.

Most students have been able to remark upon the language of poetry and there has been a definite improvement in this area over the years. Good teaching has encouraged students to go further and link identification of stylistic devices with effect and meaning. There are still cases where students focus heavily on feature spotting and naming rhetorical devices but without indicating their effects and this does not help them to express their understanding or appreciation. Such responses are often technically clever but give a rather clinical reaction to the text. Those candidates who react with sophistication and confidence have been unafraid to ask themselves questions like, "How does this verse make me feel?" and then "What in the form or language has made me feel his way?"

One of the challenges of teaching 2443 and 2447 has always been the art of comparison. Very few candidates now write on two entirely separate texts but the skill of continuous cross-reference and judgement tends to elude all but the most talented student. Two weaknesses always emerge: the unbalanced answer focusing much more heavily on one of the poems; or, a relatively short final paragraph comparing the two. The latter approach is entirely acceptable but the final part drawing out the comparison between the poems needs to be more substantial.

Blake and Wordsworth on London and 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' and 'Dulce et Decorum Est' have always been firm favourites and work well for many students. However, seeing other poems being studied is always welcome.

A lingering problem candidates have with AO4 is the inclusion of undigested biographical detail which does not inform the study of the text. More of this has been reported, presumably a result of students doing their own internet research. Teaching how to use secondary sources, now so much is easily available, remains one of the challenges of the future.

As has always been the case fewer centres have opted for 2447 but it is refreshing occasionally to come across writers like Beckett or Pinter and to see the imaginative and perceptive responses these provoke.

This specification has been running since 2003 and it has been rewarding to see the developments in task-setting and responses over the years. Teachers and their students are to be congratulated for their hard work and dedication which has often produced impressive and stimulating responses and shown a real appreciation of English literature.

2448 Post-1914 Texts

There was only one entry for this unit in June 2011.

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