

# English Literature

Advanced GCE A2 H471

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H071

## OCR Report to Centres

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**January 2013**

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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## CONTENTS

Advanced GCE English Literature (H471)

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### OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
Overview	1
F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945	2
F662 Literature post-1900	5
F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800	7
F664 Texts in Time	11

## Overview

Principal Examiners and Moderators have again reported that centres and candidates demonstrated confidence in their work and a well-informed approach this January. Numbers were very low for F663, the A2 examined unit, since this session offered the final opportunity to sit the examination using the original set-text list, and the majority of takers were therefore re-sitting. Perhaps as a consequence, the number taking the A2 coursework early had increased. In the future only summer sessions will be offered, so in that sense this January session represented a kind of farewell.

Principal Moderators were pleased to report an improvement in relation to observation of the 3,000 word limit, and it is hoped that this improvement will be sustained into the summer session. Administrative errors in coursework submissions, such as the omission of required documents or inconsistency in the presentation of final marks, do cause significant disruption and delay to the moderation process; moderators were therefore grateful for the accuracy and care with which most centres present their coursework samples.

As already stated, F663 formed a very small part of operations this summer; in contrast, F661 once again had a sizeable entry and examiners saw work on all texts and very nearly all questions. Candidates often showed more confidence in dealing with the F661 poetry question than they had done in June 2012; answers on the novels also showed thorough preparation, but a significant number of candidates were inclined to pack their essays with learned material – especially in relation to critical approaches – that was sometimes of questionable relevance. More detail will follow in the F661 report.

Finally, centres are reminded that they have now had the last opportunity for candidates to sit F663 with the original set texts. Support materials are available on the website in relation to the new F663 texts as well as for the other three units.

## F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945

The new texts continued to settle in well in this session. Examiners were encouraged to see a wide range of response, suggesting that many candidates had engaged well with their chosen texts and were ready to offer thoughtful and individual views. The general standard of answers was good: most candidates knew the texts well, targeted the relevant AOs effectively and focused appropriately on the questions. Very few really poor answers were seen.

Examiners reported improved confidence in writing about poetry, although some candidates were still tempted to substitute wider contexts, especially the poet's biography, for detailed analysis of the set poem. AO2 analysis remained a challenge for many candidates, who sometimes resorted to rather mechanical or unlikely readings of poetic effects. Answers on the novels were often packed with AO3 and AO4 material, sometimes rather indiscriminately chosen. The best essays were marked out by their careful selection of material appropriate to the task, and by a sensitive awareness and appreciation of the literary qualities of their chosen text. Once again, many candidates chose to incorporate film and stage versions of texts into their discussions, especially in answers on *Frankenstein*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This worked well where the dramatisations were cited as 'other interpretations' in fulfilment of AO3; in a few weaker answers, however, candidates were drawn into prolonged discussion of a film version or even cited details from a film in the place of textual reference.

### **Section A**

#### **Robert Browning**

Often comment was biographical in emphasis. There were some good discussions of the contrasting attitudes and verbal parallels between 'Love in a Life' and 'Life in a Love'. The form of the poems was often discussed with detailed comment on the conversational tone, enhanced by the use of dashes and exclamation marks and the humorous persistence of 'such closets to search, such alcoves to importune'. One candidate linked this imagery to the Gothic style pursuit through hallways and shuttered rooms. Another writer wondered, if the woman always eludes the man, 'is it mere wishful thinking or insensitivity that he continues to pursue her'. Some of the more successful links with other poems concerned Browning's 'philosophy of imperfection', with reference for instance to 'Two in the Campagna'. One candidate made interesting use of 'Prospice', where 'the speaker is more interested in the prize at the end of the struggle, whereas the speaker in the set poems seems to relish the "hunt".'

#### **Emily Dickinson**

Examiners offered a wide range of comments on Dickinson answers this session. Some saw a preponderance of weaker answers where candidates seemed well-prepared to answer on death, but not on this set poem, and offered much fuller comment about 'I heard a Fly Buzz' or 'Because I could not stop for Death'. There was also a lot of very broad context about the prevalence of death in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and how this influenced Dickinson's work. Other examiners suggested that in contrast 'Dickinson elicited some of the most interesting analysis this session'. The main strength of good Dickinson answers was close and engaged analysis of language: for example, there was much discussion of 'awful leisure' as an oxymoron. Dashes were felt, variously, to suggest breaths, crying, the difficulty of articulating feeling; the final dash 'implies either that death is not the end or that the speaker cannot fully accept the situation'. 'A narrow time' was interpreted in terms of restricted breathing, 'the suffocating nature of grief', or the fact that 'The road to Hell is broad but the path to heaven narrow'.

#### **Edward Thomas**

Answers on 'The sun used to shine' were generally more assured than they were on 'Tears' in June 2012. Candidates seemed well informed about the poet's biography, with most identifying his companion in the poem as Robert Frost. War-time context was better controlled and often

effectively used in relation to such images as the 'sentry of dark betonies'. There was some convincing material on the way in which punctuation and rhythm evoke contemplative walking in the first part of the poem. One interesting response showed how 'Thoughts of war gradually come to dominate the poem, like rumours becoming truth'. 'As the Team's Head Brass', 'Old Man', 'Tears' and 'Gone, Gone Again' were the most generally cited links.

### **W B Yeats**

Though the wider context of the poets' lives featured in the other options too, it was perhaps most prevalent in this question, with, in some cases, Yeats' pursuit of Maud, along with Irish politics, taking up more of the candidates' time than analysis of the poetry. However, there were many excellent responses to this question in which the imagery was well handled, beginning with the first line to introduce discussion of Yeats' fear of aging – both his own and Maud's. The 'mysterious, always brimming lake' was often beautifully treated, especially making links with the images of 'Wild Swans...'. A number of essays on Yeats did not discuss form or structure at all. Some better candidates did discuss the way in which the form enhanced the manner in which memories were being presented as fragmentary and often rambling. 'Wild Swans...', 'Easter 1916', 'Among Schoolchildren', 'The Cat and the Moon', 'In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth...' and 'Sailing to Byzantium' were the most commonly used links.

## **Section B**

### **Frankenstein**

Answers to the (a) question on creators and creation could become very lengthy rehearsals of AO3 and AO4 material; better responses were well focused on both Frankenstein and the creature and often showed a sophisticated understanding of such relevant issues as nature versus nurture. One answer argued forcefully that 'Frankenstein attempts to upgrade himself from creation to creator, and thus the creature, too, elevates his position from an "abhorred" creation to the destroyer of his creator'. Several answers contrasted Frankenstein's unnatural attitude to nature with the conduct of his family: natural behaviour includes such self-sacrifice as his mother's in giving her life to save Elizabeth. Frankenstein was seen often as usurping the role of God or of women. Intelligent use was made of interpretation through production - especially the 2011 National Theatre version - and, in spite of a fair number of inaccuracies, of Mary Shelley's biography. There were a few good answers to the (b) option on setting, but sometimes textual knowledge here was uncertain, and candidates were inclined to lose focus on the question.

### **Jane Eyre**

This was a popular text, with most candidates responding to the (a) question on Rochester as both master and pupil of Jane. Weaker answers understood the question to be asking simply which of the two characters is dominant; these answers were usually focused almost entirely on gender politics and issues of social class. Better answers were effective in their sustained focus on the terms of the question, and discussed ways in which both characters might be understood to teach and to learn in this relationship: one answer suggested that she teaches him morality, he teaches her 'the worth of love over duty'. There was especially effective use of quotation in many answers. It is impressive that most candidates (working at nearly every level) can demonstrate detailed textual knowledge of this long and intricate work. Film and television versions of the novel were cited frequently and effectively. There were far fewer answers to the (b) question on 'sensational effects'; these were often successful, although there was some uncertainty about the meaning of 'sensational' in one or two cases.

### **The Turn of the Screw**

There was considerable engagement with the variety of possible readings of *The Turn of the Screw*, and perhaps a sense that candidates were enjoying, and going on thinking about, this text more than most. 'Do the children need protecting by the Governess from the ghosts, or do they need protecting from her and her sexually repressed mind?' asked one candidate. Most

readers agreed that certainty was impossible, not least because of the use of an unreliable narrator. Debate usually centred on the various sightings or apparent sightings of the ghosts, on the Governess's sheltered background and sexual desire and repression, and on the death of Miles. 'Some believe that she was successful in defeating evil. Despite Miles's death, "his heart, dispossessed, had stopped" seems to suggest that the evil within him has been banished. Perhaps the only way to destroy the evil was to kill Miles'. Many good answers made excellent use of the opening ('framing') sequence of the novel. All answers could offer a range of interpretations of the novella; the better ones also engaged with the rewarding qualities of its ambiguity. Far fewer candidates chose to write on the (b) option about settings; a few excellent responses with detailed textual support demonstrated the rewards of engaging with the imaginative qualities of this text.

### **The Picture of Dorian Gray**

This was another very popular text choice – and the (a) question was an attractive option for candidates right across the ability range. This is again a novel which seems to engage and delight candidates. Clearly there are plenty of strong views in existence about the issues raised by the text. Moral and spiritual corruption were considered on a range of levels and in a variety of contexts. Textual evidence and reference was often detailed and impressive. Evidence from Wilde's own life and contextual writings was often cited with success. Victorian attitudes to gender, religion and sexual morality were often mentioned rather loosely though. In the end, it was impressive to note that most candidates had reached a level of sophistication in their literary studies whereby they understood that critical responses can state more about the reader's moral vision than about that of the author or his protagonists. Very few candidates answered the (b) option on the presentation of time passing.

### **The Secret Agent**

This novel was perhaps the least often chosen, and answers were almost exclusively responses to the (a) option on Winnie as an anarchist. The average standard of answers was relatively high, demonstrating a thorough knowledge of the text and the ability to quote appropriately in support of answers. Even weaker answers tended to present full and detailed character sketches of Winnie; at the more sophisticated end of the spectrum, candidates were able to draw on a range of reference in the novel and explore the concepts of both anarchy and violence in relation to Winnie and also a wide range of other characters and events. Awareness of the novel's complex narrative techniques and time-shifts featured effectively in a number of strong answers. There were few, if any, responses to the (b) option.

### **Mrs Dalloway**

This text was generally well handled, and both questions attracted responses, although the (a) option on marriage was once again the more popular. Answers on marriage sometimes listed the relationships presented in the novel along with a generalised assessment of their success or otherwise. More successful candidates traced the development of the novel's most important relationships and both evaluated these individually and commented on the book's presentation of the institution of marriage. Alternatives to heterosexual marriage were often discussed with ardent enthusiasm, sometimes invoking experiences from Woolf's own biographical experiences and (in one case) the current political debate about the legalisation of gay marriage. Other 'catastrophes' (a key word in the question) in the novel were also considered by some candidates – although not always with appropriate relevance. There were a number of very successful and sophisticated responses to the (b) option on narrative technique; many candidates made reference to Woolf's 'tunnelling' method and there was perhaps some interference from the June 2012 question in this respect.

## F662 Literature post-1900

This final January series saw many high performing candidates presenting folders and centres continuing to offer fresh approaches to text selection and text combinations. Rubric infringements and inappropriate text selections were very rarely seen. There were a number of Centres offering re-creative work and the vast majority of these had candidates offering a spirited short pastiche alongside a lengthier commentary. A broad range of tasks was provided by many centres which assisted ownership of the project by candidates. Differentiated questions for both tasks were noted more widely - these allowed candidates of differing abilities to achieve their best opportunity of high mark-earning literary response. In addition, many centres had a very good sense of the assessment scale, placed their candidates well in relation to the assessment criteria and presented secure rank orders of candidates.

Less positively, there were some centres who submitted late and without the required paperwork (coversheets and CCS160s); some over-length submissions were submitted and returned to centres; the Task 1 Critical Pieces did not always come with the accompaniment of a selected passage. A small number of centres only addressed the chosen extract or poem rather than embedding their close critical scrutiny in an answer with awareness of the whole text or collection. There were also instances of generosity and, less commonly, severity that led to mark alterations for the centres concerned.

Centres in the main were very aware of the necessary assessment objectives under scrutiny on the two different pieces of coursework. Task 1 (15 marks) targeted AO1 and AO2 and Task 2 (25 marks) AO1, AO3 and AO4. The different focuses of these essays were very well observed and many of the tasks devised by centres were able to direct their candidates usefully to the dominant areas of assessment for each piece.

For Task 1, the best assignments guided candidates to matters of form, structure and language and asked them to assess how typical or representative the extract was in terms of the wider text. Some centres had tasks that were too thematic in focus which did not lead candidates naturally to evaluating matters of style.

For Task 2, centres often foregrounded the first part of AO3 by including the instruction to compare in their tasks and there was an increase in matters of context receiving mention in questions (AO4).

AO1 is relevant to both items in the folder. This series there was mostly excellent or at least very good understanding shown. Writing was generally fluent and accurate. Essays were often well-argued, although some weaker candidates drifted into narrative at times or did not proof-read sharply enough or had a less than robust structure to meet the demands of the higher marks. Critical terminology was at least competently used by most candidates, with many deploying telling meta-language in their discussions.

AO2 analysis was detailed, the critical response of some candidates perceptive and sensitive and their writing mature and elegant, although some candidates were less willing to consider form and structure to any great extent. In general, candidates have been doing this increasingly more in recent sessions with poetry and drama, though consideration of form is often an omission in discussion of prose. Awareness and discussion of stagecraft has improved significantly, though this is still an area for development.

Candidates were often confident about discussing the writers' lexis, imagery and symbolism, though even in some Band 5 responses this could be explanatory in nature, rather than analytical. The best responses were adept at critically analysing well-chosen detail. In some

responses, however, even in Band 5, very lengthy quotations (which were either integrated or not), were not unpicked, critically addressed and analysed, but were glossed over.

Some candidates chose the re-creative option and achieved the right concentration on the commentary over the pastiche. In some instances, the narrative voice was changed, though the conventions of a monologue were adhered to. The best commentaries effectively and regularly linked their discussion of literary methods and thematic concerns in the pastiche to a specific part of the stimulus text and indeed the whole text.

AO3 was well addressed; higher performing candidates managed conceptualised comparison and clearly engaged with other critics rather than just citing them, although bibliographies were not always included. Many candidates had worked hard to produce clear, integrated comparisons. It was encouraging to see that some candidates were comparing texts in a synthesised way. The more usual approach was to discuss the texts alternately with the argument and comparisons clearly foregrounded, often leading to mid-range achievement. In some responses, particularly lower down the mark range, however, the comparisons were implicit in the discussion of subject matter, or the threads were drawn together in a lengthy concluding paragraph. Comparisons sometimes lacked sharpness and direction, not because of lack of knowledge or understanding, but because candidates did not make good use of topic sentences and discourse markers; though this is an aspect that has improved.

Most candidates were aware of the need to explore different readings of the text, the second aspect of AO3, and incorporated some specified critical views or perspectives, sometimes evidenced by footnotes and some lengthy and scholarly bibliographies. Rarely, however, was argument advanced and refined by consistent and rigorous exploration; when candidates did so, the argument was more sophisticated and subtle. There is also a need for more range in terms of citations deployed: sometimes alternative views on one text had been found but not on the other. Personal interpretation, perceptive or not, is not a substitute for testing the argument in terms of credited alternative views, and formulations such as “Some critics “ can look naïve.

In terms of AO4, the best responses integrated seamlessly a range of contextual material which was used to inform and underpin their argument. Gone are the days when a paragraph devoted to comment on contexts was tacked on at the end of an essay to ensure coverage of AO4. Candidates from many Centres now introduce discussion of the texts by placing them in historical, social, literary or ideological contexts in the opening paragraph. Some Centres devise titles which ensure sustained contextualised discussion.

Annotation of coursework has improved – it is now more comprehensive and better targeted towards a qualitative assessment of achievement against the prescribed objectives. There were some occasions where marks had been incorrectly recorded and submitted or clarification sought because of discrepancies between the coversheets and MS1: these are very time-consuming to deal with and a little more care with administration would greatly ease the process.

It would be wrong to conclude on a critical note, though. The success of the candidates and teachers is that much interesting, engaging work, some mature beyond the candidates’ years, is produced - a testament to teachers’ commitment, enthusiasm and to some excellent teaching. There is also a real sense of literature explored and enjoyed, which is hugely gratifying for all concerned

## F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800

### General Comments

In this, the last January paper for F663, we saw answers on the paper's original group of set books for the last time. Because there will be no further examination of these texts, the paper was only applicable to first time or resitting candidates, and therefore the entry was very small. A number of questions were not chosen by any candidates.

The general standard of answers was good, and sometimes outstanding: very few weak or ill-prepared answers were seen. *Othello* continued to be the overwhelmingly popular Shakespeare play in Section A, and in Section B *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Dr Faustus* dominated the plays, with a smaller group of answers on *The School for Scandal*. Virtually no answers were seen on *The Rover*. Poetry choices were more evenly spread, only *The Rape of the Lock* being studied by relatively few.

### Responses to Individual Questions

#### Section A: Shakespeare

##### 1. *Henry IV Part 1*

###### (a) 'The play's strength lies in the breadth of its exploration of English society.'

Most of the very small group of answers to this question were impressively argued: such answers looked not only at the dominance of Falstaff in the play's effect, but also at the austerity of the world of the Court, and the bravura of Hotspur. The most successful demonstrated the ways in which the play's differing strands complemented each other, offering a sense of richness and vitality. There was much relevant and useful comment on the recent production of the play at Shakespeare's Globe.

###### (b) 'A play which constantly questions the balance between duty and pleasure.'

There were too few answers to this question to offer any general comment.

##### 2. *Twelfth Night*

###### (a) 'Viola awakens Illyria from its obsession with the past.'

There were too few answers to this question to offer any general comment.

###### (b) 'Despite its festive moments, sadness haunts the play.'

It was generally agreed that sadness was a factor in the play's effects. Successful answers looked at the strain of melancholy pervading the play. Most illustrated Orsino's moody romanticism and Olivia's mourning, and strong answers talked of Viola's conviction of her brother's death, and about the melancholy lyricism of Feste. Some also saw the pathos in Sir Andrew: 'I was admired once'. Some good answers incorporated discussion of the discomfort induced in audiences by the treatment of Malvolio, and discussed the sense that though the play may be a comedy, it is given greater resonance and power by its non-comic elements.

### **3. Othello**

#### **(a) 'A play about soldiers, far from home, managing an overseas empire.'**

This answer provoked some very interesting answers. Clearly, the military aspects of the play have been discussed carefully. Candidates discussed the degree to which Othello was, by virtue of his role as a General, accustomed to making snap judgements in conflicts on the basis of the best available evidence. In such a world, it was felt, making sudden decisions could be vital. Some speculated on masculine relationships and bonds in the military world, and cited the comments made about soldiers sleeping together, and overhearing each other's thoughts. Much was written about comradeship in arms: and about the ways in which Othello may have had reason to trust Iago's judgement in the past. Responding to the geographical prompt, some interesting answers pointed out that despite Othello's racial isolation, he is in Cyprus in his true professional context: it is Desdemona who is in fact isolated, far away from her normal social world. The question's fresh perspective generally provoked equally fresh and interesting responses.

#### **(b) 'The power of the play lies in its central paradox: that Othello is shown to be both a hero and a fool.'**

This was by far the most popular question on this January's paper. It attracted some quite outstanding answers. Most agreed that Othello showed some element of both qualities – the heroism being located most frequently in his dignity, his manifest military success, his dealings with the Senate and Brabantio in the First Act, and in Desdemona's moving statements when accused by her father. Foolishness was generally located in Othello's credulousness, in his mercurial mood-swings, and his gradual collapse into incoherence and violence. The most successful answers addressed the question on a detailed level (looking at language and at the effects of language) while also offering a balanced evaluation of the whole proposition: less successful answers tended to chronicle the events of the play, proposing that Othello is noble at the play's beginning, declines into jealousy, rage and incoherence, then, in the final scene, becomes noble again. While extended discussion of Iago's role in all this was relevant, some less focused answers became sidetracked into an essay on Iago – a pity, given that the question set asked candidates to consider the dramatic presentation of Othello. It has become clear that candidates are much better than they have been in the past at the handling of detailed analysis of text (AO2) and at incorporating relevant contextual factors (AO4) – some of the discussion of the situation of 'outsiders' in Venice and in English society of the time was both sophisticated and fresh.

### **4. The Winter's Tale**

#### **(a) 'The improbable and unexpected elements are crucial to the power of the play.'**

There were too few answers to this question to offer any general comment.

#### **(b) 'The female characters are the most significant in the play – they drive the plot, and bring about its resolution.'**

The relatively few answers to this question were in general very assured and discriminating: while agreeing with the proposition, some made very careful distinctions between the roles of active female characters, who are catalytic and guide the action, and others who tend to function mainly as symbols.

## Section B

### General

Pride and sin dominated Section B answers in this session: Questions 6, 7 and 8 accounted for nearly all answers seen. Candidates are becoming increasingly sophisticated in linking and comparing texts at the AO2 level of language and imagery, and some pairings - like the pairing of Donne's poems with *The Duchess of Malfi* - have provoked candidates to offer some surprising insights. Similarly, the popular pairing of *Dr Faustus* with *Paradise Lost Book One* provoked some very interesting perceptions.

### Responses to Individual Questions

#### 5 'Humour helps us to come to terms with human weakness.'

This question was answered by relatively few candidates.

##### *Sheridan and Pope*

This pairing offered a chance to discuss the ironic devices used by both writers, and the 'human weakness' underlying both works: while many of the answers identified the characters' failings in both texts, relatively few (but excellent) answers went to the heart of the question by probing the purpose of the works: were they for simple entertainment or moral correction? Some sophisticated answers discussed both authors as outsiders, and considered how that may have motivated and shaped their work.

#### 6 'Writers, readers and audiences delight in the spectacle of sinfulness.'

This question was not just an invitation to catalogue sins: disappointingly few answers to this popular question really engaged with the prompt, and looked at 'the spectacle of sinfulness' or audiences' expectations and reactions: those who did, did so very well.

##### *Chaucer and Webster or Marlowe*

Some enjoyable answers talked about the Pardoner's 'cocky conviction' that his audience was too stupid to understand his arrogance, or the pride he took in deceit: his relish in the language of preaching, and his obvious verbal enjoyment during his tale were particularly commented on. Many saw his discomfiture, and the crudity of his condemnation at the end, as spectacular. In comparison, candidates enjoyed discussing the tableau of the Deadly Sins in *Dr Faustus*, and the spectacular unpleasantness of Ferdinand and (at times) Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi*. It is a pity that the spectacularly dramatic conclusions to both these plays seem to escape candidates in studying them – the end of either play would seem an object lesson in 'the spectacle of sinfulness' but very few answers did them justice.

##### *Milton and Marlowe*

Some enterprising answers compared the aspirations of the two protagonists: while Satan's rationalisation of his situation was often seen as self-deceiving, few answers were able to summarise the exact nature of Satan's 'sinfulness'; it was generally found easier to explain and illustrate Faustus's transgressions. There was a pleasing sense that candidates saw the generic distinction between the texts: *Dr Faustus* was seen as a dramatic text working within theatrical conventions – discussions of morality plays and their 'sometimes crude and spectacular' effects were sometimes paralleled by quite sophisticated comments on the complex poetic and epic nature of Milton's project.

*Donne and Webster*

Characterising Donne as 'sinful' led to some surprisingly and disappointingly moralistic answers that fitted the 'libertine in youth – guilt-ridden priest in age' formula. A problem in less secure Donne answers has been the tendency to turn the poems into a sort of comic-strip 'life of John Donne', rather than seeing the poems as ironic, rhetorical and entertaining. So less confident answers sometimes constructed a narrative, involving John Donne and his wife, which paralleled that of the Duchess and Antonio. This was rarely very convincing.

**7 'Pride goes before a fall: the greater the pride, the harder the fall.'**

*Chaucer and Webster or Marlowe*

Some candidates had clearly very much enjoyed Chaucer's ironic portrait of his Pardoner, and had fun exploring his vanity and his tendency to let his rhetoric run away with him. Pleasingly, such answers this year paid very much more attention to the Rioters and the Tale than has been the case in the past: the fate of the rioters was often seen as central to the effect of the poem. In Webster, pride was often related to the arrogance of Ferdinand and the Cardinal, though a surprising number of answers berated the Duchess for daring to provoke a secret marriage. Comparisons of Chaucer with Marlowe produced the observation that the Pardoner was both brighter and more resilient than Faustus, both in having achievable aspirations, and in coping with failure.

*Milton and Marlowe*

Candidates often wrote about Satan with precision and surprising empathy: they were also very well aware of the critical debate about Milton's portrayal, and about Satan's motivation. His pride and desperation provoked a great deal more sympathy than was offered to Faustus, who was generally found pompous and unattractive, and who was generally condemned for 'falling short' of his initial aspirations.

**8 'Love is a kind of madness.'**

When done with subtlety, this question provoked some very interesting comparisons – but a number of less secure answers simply characterised any kind of extreme utterance as 'mad', and as a result simply catalogued what the texts said.

*Donne and Webster*

This was an intriguing pairing in response to this question. Many candidates had studied the atmosphere and detail of Donne's love poems in detail and much was made of geographical and cosmological imagery and of the use of conceits. The desire in Donne to enclose the world of his lovers, and the complex nature of his relationships expressed in his poems, led to some very subtle comparisons with the Duchess and Antonio's clandestine relationship and its consequences, and some excellent and detailed AO2 comparison of language was offered. However, in the less secure answers, the treatment of Donne's poems could all too easily become the sort of 'comic strip' caricature mentioned in (6) above.

**9 'In literature the use of time is always significant.'**

There were too few answers to this question to offer any comment.

**10 'Life goes on but literary texts must end.'**

There were too few answers to this question to offer any comment.

## F664 Texts in Time

This final January session was a very successful one and clearly indicated the maturity of the Unit and Centres' confidence in teaching and assessing it. Where at one time Centres often retained traditional approaches, with set groups of texts and limited questions, the majority in this session showed a willingness to experiment by broadening the canon, allowing candidates choice in their texts and negotiating individual task titles.

Such an open and enthusiastic embracing of the opportunities of Coursework provides clear evidence that it offers a unique learning opportunity to develop higher-order academic skills and understanding. Many candidates have benefited from this opportunity enormously this session, which Moderators noted with interest and pleasure.

### Administration

Although there were one or two Centres who were extremely late with their provision of marks or sample folders, administration was on the whole very smooth. Folders were presented well, the Centre Authentication Form was included in nearly every case and, perhaps helped by the use of the new coversheet, Centres had been very diligent in their approach to work which exceeded the word limit.

Most candidates acknowledged secondary sources with footnotes and bibliography; these are requirements of the specification and work should not be submitted without them, though it should be noted that only quotations and references from secondary sources are needed. There is no necessity for candidates to footnote quotations from their three core texts.

### Texts

Text choice showed a wide range, all the way from Chaucer, Shakespeare, Pope and Tennyson up to Derek Walcott, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, Tom Stoppard, William Boyd and John Kennedy Toole. Some works in translation featured, such as *A Doll's House*, *Madame Bovary*, *The Outsider* and *Mephisto*. Drama featured in few essays, which is a shame, as an essay featuring all three genres has a very good basis for literary comparison and presents opportunities for analysis of dramatic technique.

The poetry text often still needs a more careful approach. Some Centres and candidates submitted work on inappropriately brief poetry texts, covering either a single fairly long poem, or a very small group of poems. It should be remembered that candidates should show evidence of study of an amount of poetry equivalent to that which might be set for an examined unit.

### The Assessment Objectives

#### AO3

Assisted in most cases by questions which explicitly demanded comparison, most essays seen by Moderators handled comparison well; the most successful essays are adept at combining close comparison of all three texts with developing key parts of the argument with one or two of them. The length of the F664 essay allows this flexibility of approach.

Some essays featured detailed and sophisticated engagement with critical views, with some candidates having the confidence to argue effectively with the views of established critics, while others negotiated their own ground between differing critical opinions. It is this kind of engagement which should be rewarded by marks in Band 5; a number of Centres still tend to credit citations from critics alone, or a critical quotation used only to conclude the candidate's argument.

#### **AO4**

Contexts were appropriately handled in many essays, though less confident candidates tend to include pieces of historical or other contextual information without demonstrating successfully its influence on the text and its writing. There can also be an over reliance on biography, particularly with more confessional texts, so that candidates see the literature purely as case study or biographical revelation without consideration of its literary merits.

#### **AO1**

The most successful essays are almost invariably those where the question has directed the candidate towards argument. This encourages the development of a shaped essay, building towards a definite conclusion. There were this session, as there always are with Coursework, some examples of highly sophisticated, probing argument – as one Moderator said, ‘I was impressed and sometimes humbled by the quality of some of the work produced.’ Such work occurs when candidates have a clear literary understanding of the texts they are discussing; a detailed *knowledge* of the texts is not sufficient for high marks.

#### **AO2**

Nearly all candidates used appropriate quotations to support the points made in their essays. Of course the most successful work ensured that these quotations were not only effectively incorporated, but they were also consistently critically addressed and the analysis was a key part of the developing argument. Candidates who quote poetry correctly are very few, however, which suggests a lack of appreciation of form. Structure and form were less successfully discussed than diction and imagery. Even in poetry answers, many candidates said nothing or very little about poetic form and often referred only to the content of poems. In some cases the discussion even of Keats’ poems was focused on the characters rather than the poetic techniques. Form is an even greater issue in the prose texts, where it is seldom discussed; only a few candidates wrote effectively on narrative voice and narrative structure.

#### **Marking and Annotation**

Moderators saw much excellent practice from Centres this session, with thoughtful marginal comments related to the AOs, leading to balanced and considered summative comments. There were frequent signs of lively internal moderation. Occasionally the coversheet only bore a comment such as ‘Please see end of essay’; it must be remembered that a completed coversheet is part of the Specification requirements and forms both the final account of the Candidate’s attainment and the Moderator’s working document.

**OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)**  
**1 Hills Road**  
**Cambridge**  
**CB1 2EU**

**OCR Customer Contact Centre**

**Education and Learning**

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: [general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk](mailto:general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk)

**[www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk)**

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