



GCE

English Literature

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H072**

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

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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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H072/01 Shakespeare and poetry pre-1900

General Comments:

This is the first session of a new specification and candidates responded well to the demands of answering two questions in 90 minutes. One examiner commented that ‘candidates have, on the whole, done remarkably well within the shorter time limit’. Another Examiner commented that ‘there was some very impressive writing and clear evidence of engagement with and enjoyment of the texts’. Across the range of scripts there was clear evidence that the questions were accessible to candidates and that they responded by taking the opportunity to show what they knew and were able to do. There was considerable evidence that texts had been well prepared and many candidates constructed responses that included substantial detail, particularly considering the length of the examination. One Examiner commented that ‘there was evidence of comprehensive and sophisticated teaching throughout.’

A significant number of scripts would be improved by candidates increasing their familiarity with the texts. Close familiarity with the text is a pre-requisite for success in English literature examinations. As a general rule candidates should be encouraged to read the set text at least four times. The first, a reading for familiarisation before close study; the second, a detailed reading in preparation for, or as a part of, class study; the third, re-visiting the text when preparing and writing practice assignments; the fourth when revising approaching the examination. Although context is ‘light touch’ in this specification candidates should be aware of basic historical time-lines and periods which are the contexts of the texts studied. More than one Examiner commented that Shakespeare was identified in a number of scripts as a Victorian writer writing for a Victorian audience. Finally, in general terms, candidates should be encouraged to handwrite practice assignments and ensure their hand is clearly legible.

Section 1 answers on Shakespeare generally responded well to the format of the questions in which candidates were invited to respond to an AO5 style prompt. One examiner commented that ‘the best answers were characterised by cogency and coherence of expression, and a real confidence in the use of the text – some candidates have shown excellent detailed knowledge of these closed texts.’ The best answers kept closely to the question set and avoided the tendency, evident in some weaker scripts, to move away from the topic set. It is not acceptable to focus the answer on an agenda different to the slant of the question by suggesting, for example, that the play is not about ‘fatherhood’ but about ‘colonialism’ and then proceed to write about that. A significant performance indicator was the ability of candidates to use succinct, accurate quotation. Indeed one Examiner commented that ‘the pertinence of the textual reference seemed to be the main discriminator.’ A particular strength of the answers on this new specification, and this should be encouraged, is the excellent use made of productions to illustrate points and suggest alternative readings. One examiner commented that ‘candidates who discussed specific scenes and staging they have seen, linked explicitly to the question and the impact it created, were brilliant to read.’ Another commented that ‘performance interpretations were by far the most popular way of addressing AO5. One Examiner commented that this strength was less evident in response to ‘Twelfth Night’. On certain texts, including the two most popular, *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, critical material was assimilated and well used. However, the best use of such material was when candidates used it to raise a new angle which was then debated rather than just included it as ‘another view’.

Some candidates, however, seemed to be more familiar with a film than the text of the play. This was particularly evident in ‘Hamlet’ questions where the Branagh film was taken, for example, as evidence that Hamlet had slept with Ophelia. Familiarity with the text as set is a prerequisite. Weaker responses sometimes contained no quotation or close echo of the text, or merely put in a quotation which had been learnt (‘foul and most unnatural murder’) regardless of its relevance. The use of contextual material in the Shakespeare answers was of uneven quality. *The Tempest*

answers on Caliban often used contextual material deriving from post-colonial approaches well, whilst others focused too much on the colonial context at the expense of close attention to the text. Contextual material is most effective when precise, for example, Protestant views of the ghost in *Hamlet* or Hamlet's identity as an Early Modern/Renaissance questioner which could be directly linked to the question set. Responses would be improved by remembering that the approach to context is 'light touch' with specific, brief links made.

The best answers in Section 2 kept a central focus on the extract while, as one Examiner commented, making 'pithy references, effectively in parentheses, to other poems or other sections of the longer poem'. Candidates who were able to write accurately and confidently about the impact of poetic structure and phonology, whether it be the use of rhyme scheme, couplets, variation of the caesura, variations in the use of iambic pentameter, the effects of plosive letters or sibilance, stood out. The best answers contained consistently detailed close analysis. Many candidates showed considerable skill in the analysis of poetic practices while weaker scripts relied on paraphrase of content. Clearly some of the set texts for Section 1 are very long and contain significantly more material than the 15 poems set for each poet on the legacy F661. However, candidates should be made aware that the principal focus of the response should be a close analysis of the set text. The balance between the focus on the extract and connections to other poems/parts of the poem is broadly similar to that on F661 i.e. two thirds to three quarters on the extract, the remainder on connections. Connections should be relevant to the angle set on the extract, whether in comparison or in contrast. Very effective links were made, particularly in the responses to Chaucer and Milton, to the rest of the poem/Tale, but with some candidates this turned their responses into a more general response to the whole work rather than sustained attention to the extract. As with Section 1, context is a light touch; there were many excellent responses to Rossetti, but some included far too much material on her biography/social context/the position of women in Victorian society at the expense of the key demands of the task.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section 1

Question No.

1. *Coriolanus*

There were very few responses to this text; several Examiners reported seeing none at all. Only a couple of responses to a) were reported. Examiners commented responses to b) were often strong. Some candidates saw Coriolanus as a military figure unskilled in politics and ill-equipped for life beyond the battlefield, but others recognised a more human side in his dealings with his wife and mother. One Examiner reported on an interesting response which took the view 'that, although Coriolanus lives by the sword, our experience of him as a character is essentially through his words' and went on to offer a good analysis of how his language can be violent but is often rhetorical in structure. There was perceptive comment on Volumnia's formative influence.' In one particularly impressive response the candidate observed that 'Coriolanus is, in many ways, an embodiment of 'Romanitas', the Roman ideal. Much of this comes through war and the potency of his sword... Coriolanus is also an epitome of the Aristotelian virtue of megalopsychia, the virtue of 'independence'. He refuses on matters of principle to 'sway' with the ambitions of politicians.' Good use was made of the Ralph Fiennes' production/film.

2. *Hamlet*

This was the most popular text in Section 1; both questions produced some excellent responses. Good responses often focused on Hamlet's procrastination, frequently discussing his responses to the Ghost, drawing attention to Protestant scepticism, and the 'now I might do it pat scene'. Good answers explored Hamlet's 'Renaissance' questioning and philosophical doubt and what he was thinking *about*: his obsessions with death, corruption and his mother's 'incest' and sexuality, with Ernest Jones 'Oedipus Theory' being frequently cited and sometimes well handled. Good answers provided effective contrast by discussing Laertes, Claudius, Fortinbras and even Ophelia. One Examiner commented that in 'a few stimulating responses candidates considered Ophelia either as a character whose suicide shows she acts impetuously or as a character prohibited from acting and/or living entirely in her own thoughts'. One excellent response examined Hamlet's status as a Renaissance man in a feudal world stating 'thought is not getting in the way of action, but rather action is impossible with Hamlet's knowledge of both Christian and classical virtues'. Weaker responses tended to assert rather than cite textual support; this was a particular problem with unsupported assertions such as 'Hamlet is not willing to commit murder because his conscience is warning him that he will be sent to Hell if he commits murder.' Surprisingly, few responses took the question as an invitation to analyse closely one of the introspective soliloquies. Strong answers to question b) discussed Gertrude's words and actions rooting arguments firmly in the text. One candidate observed 'It is unclear in the play if Gertrude was involved, or even knew of, the murder of her first husband' and the point was made that 'she is alone and as a character marginalised and overlooked, so arouses sympathy'. Detailed analyses of the Ghost's view of Gertrude, Hamlet's response to her, especially in the closet scene, and her death, were all productive areas of the text explored. Weaker responses simply speculated on what Gertrude might have thought, why she married, what she knew, without textual support. The responses made excellent use of productions, with Branagh and Tennant both being popular.

3. *Measure for Measure*

Although less popular than *Hamlet*, candidates choosing this text clearly enjoyed the challenges it presented, recognising it as a 'problem play' and commenting, in both questions, on the ambiguity of the ending. There was a good range of engaged responses to 3a, often weighing the outcomes for the different characters carefully, with many candidates discussing Angelo, Lucio and Isabella. One candidate felt that the Duke's 'irresponsibility and lack of guilt' is at the heart of the injustice. One examiner commented that Lucio was much discussed 'and his punishment felt to be unjust – it seems not least because of the audience's affection for him'. Another examiner reported that context was used well here, both in terms of Vienna and England under James I. Typical responses to this question marshalled thoughtful arguments based on good understanding and support from the text. Examiners commented that good answers were comfortable relating the question to concepts of the 'problem play' and 'comedy' linking the oddity of the ending to Shakespeare's search for comic resolution in a play which had teetered on the edge of tragedy. Weaker responses typically focused on a narrow range of material, for example, just discussing the outcome for Angelo without adequate textual support. The b) question also produced good responses which took a range of views on Isabella. One examiner commented that this question produced 'some of the most interesting analysis in the whole paper. One response argued that when Isabella asserts the importance of her chastity, 'Isabella is at the zenith of orthodox Christian religiosity, and these principles can be seen throughout the remainder of the play and she discovers little.' Many answers saw Isabella as a victim of Angelo while good answers often considered her situation at the end of play in detail and with an open-minded evaluation: 'her final silence could be indicative of a silent rebellion, or alternatively it could show an unhappy compliance'. Another candidate saw Isabella on 'a journey towards empowerment.' Good answers to b) often explored virginity and its associated notion of purity through 17th century eyes. Examiners reported on weaker responses to this question slipping into a scant narrative of what Isabella does in the play.

4. *Richard III*

This was a text chosen by few. However, examiners report that the responses they saw were generally well done. In a) students tended to assume what a 'good' person was rather than unpack the concept, but power and powerlessness were well explored. Anne, the Princes and Richmond appeared frequently and one response offered some good analysis of Act 1 Scene 2 and how well Anne does defend herself verbally. There were rather more responses to b) and some of the stronger candidates grappled well with the nuances of the term 'intelligence' and that it means more than 'clever', embracing concepts such as sensitivity and emotional intelligence. Stronger responses also showed a good understanding of the interplay between Richard and the audience. Successful approaches looked at Richard's ability with language, his manipulative and deceptive powers, and most interestingly his political shrewdness in swaying the opinions of others. Weaker responses tended to assume that the statement was just true and there was a tendency to slip into narration rather than select key moments for analysis.

5 *The Tempest*

This was the second most popular text. Question a) was the less popular of the choices. One examiner reported that the 'responsibility and difficulty of fatherhood was often explored well, as well as the idea that Prospero is an imperfect father to all three of his wards'. Interesting ideas were expressed such as the response which linked fatherhood to the responsibility of the ruler, the father of the nation, while another response succinctly observed 'Fatherhood is a battle against change, in order to maintain absolute control'. Many successful answers offered good close reading of the dialogues between Miranda and Prospero and ranged further into the paternalistic relationships between Prospero, Ariel and Caliban, seen sometimes in a colonialist perspective.' One excellent response commented in detail on the role of the marriage masque in enchanting and educating Miranda and Ferdinand as Prospero's daughter and future son-in-law. Weaker responses to this question did not unpack the concept of 'fatherhood', often sticking close to a description of the relationship between Prospero and Miranda. Some weaker responses simply offered the assumption that Miranda is totally under male control, 'like all women of her time'. The b) question was very popular. Clearly candidates had been well prepared on Caliban and approached this question with relish. Strong responses analysed Caliban's shifts in language closely, and, whilst post-colonial perspectives were prevalent, many candidates felt there was genuinely much to be said on either side of the question. Good responses often argued that his savage side was a product of his treatment by Prospero, while acknowledging his natural tendencies to reproduce, understandably alarmed Prospero and the audience in his attempt to violate Miranda. Caliban's sense of beauty was frequently acknowledged and there was interesting debate about the sincerity of his seeking for grace at the end of play. One examiner reported that 'there was an impressive consideration of Montaigne and, occasionally, of psychoanalytic readings of Ariel and Caliban as aspects of Prospero'. Another examiner commented how candidates had made good use of the recent Globe (Allam) production. One Examiner observed that 'this was a text and question which enabled candidates to show excellence of argument and approach. In weaker scripts contextual knowledge on the state of colonialism/Empire was insecure.

6. *Twelfth Night*

There were some strong responses to this text. Some excellent answers to a) unpacked the key concepts of the question explicitly, by considering that the play presents many aspects of love including romantic love, familial love, heterosexual and homosexual erotic love and narcissism. Indeed, several Examiners commented upon the maturity with which homosexual dimensions in the play were discussed. Just as significantly, successful answers focused closely on the phrase 'changes everything' noting that the set task is not a general question about love. One response foregrounded this concept of change in the following way: 'Frank Kermode describes the world

in *Twelfth Night* as ‘topsy turvy’ which could be said to stem from the complications and changes caused by unconventional and unrequited love in the play.’ Most answers concentrated on how far Orsino and Olivia can be said to have changed as a result of love, one response observing that ‘both Orsino and Olivia were changed by Viola into more authentic and less performed selves’ and this was linked nicely to Shakespeare’s subversion of ‘Petrarchan’ modes. Some argued that Malvolio and Antonio remain unchanged by love – they remain isolated at the end as stressed in some productions. One strong response observed that ‘Sir Toby remains distinctly himself despite falling in love’. One analysis saw love to ‘shatter the frozen and static world of Illyria’. However, there were a significant number of weaker scripts which wrote generally about love and ignored the steer towards ‘change’ and a few were determined to turn this into an essay about disguise and deception, which could be linked but only if handled well. One Examiner commented that, unlike the other plays tackled, ‘examples from the text in performance were far rarer to hear.’ However, many were influenced by Branagh’s film interpretation. There were fewer responses to b) but Examiners observed that there was some good understanding of the ambiguities of Feste’s role in the play, which was explored well in the light of the three terms of the question. Strong responses presented some very good linguistic and structural analysis of Feste’s speech and many responses noted his role as an onlooker and his appearance in the background throughout the play. Stronger responses picked up on his melancholy, sensitivity, wisdom and possible kindness to extend and present alternative responses to those prompted by the title quotation. Weaker responses slipped into character study rather than evaluating the slant of the question and one examiner commented upon the lack of attention paid to Feste’s songs.

Section 2

Question no:

7. Chaucer: *The Merchant’s Prologue and Tale*

This was the second most popular text in this section. One Examiner commented that ‘this text produced some very good responses, with candidates showing knowledge of the wider text and understanding of the Tale’s context and how Chaucer both reproduced and subverted courtly love conventions’. Another Examiner commented that ‘candidates clearly relished and wrote well about the use of irony in the passage.’ Stronger candidates were able to comment precisely on the ironic effects within the passage in the portrayal of all the characters and were also able to comment on the proleptic irony as future events such as the cuckolding of January unfold. Many candidates commented well on the use of rhyming couplets, one observing that ‘important words are put together in order to emphasise them to the listener and even create an ironic effect, such as ‘might’ and night’. Candidates analysed cratylic names, also described as charactonyms, very effectively. Connections to the rest of the text were often well integrated into the response and there was a wide range of contextual knowledge shown: courtly love, fabliau, the senex amans, Medieval aphrodisiacs, classical myths and also to the patriarchal context. One response observed that ‘misogyny can be observed throughout the Tale but Chaucer’s proto-feminism can be seen in the way May’s sexuality is an act of defiance against patriarchy.’ Weaker responses gave too little attention to a detailed analysis of the extract and too much attention to writing generally about the Tale as a whole. In general the Middle English was well handled but there were a number of examples of misreading and misinterpretation. For instance,, Damyan’s taking to his bed was interpreted as a reference to January wanting to go to bed with May and the line, ‘That for the verray peyne he was ny wood’ was understood by several candidates to imply that Damyan had become like a tree.

8. Milton: *Paradise Lost Books 9 and 10*

There were some very sophisticated and scholarly responses to this text. Particularly strong was the analysis of the contrast between Satan's original transformation into a serpent when tempting Eve and the version of it in this extract. One response observed that 'Their transformation is from the spiritual forms of the fallen angels to the physical state of the serpents.' Many responses analysed in detail the sibilance of the hissing, and the syntax and use of enjambment in 'supplanted down he fell/A monstrous serpent on his belly prone' which 'reflects his fall leaving him on his 'belly''. One candidate observed that 'Milton places 'fell' twice emphatically at the end of the line, mirroring the depiction of the Fall of Adam and Eve. The potential spondee 'Heav'n-fall'n', the unstressed syllables elided, is highly illustrative of the fallen state.' Comments upon rhetorical effects of repetition and variation of the caesura were also strengths in some excellent responses, as was knowledge of the epic genre, shown, for example, through analysis of Milton's use of allusion. One candidate observed that 'Epic formulae are used in the very different types of disgusting snake that they turn into, namely the 'Scorpion and asp, and amphisbaena dire' which shows the immensity of their transformation and their fall from grace (peripeteia)'. Links to other parts of the poem were generally proficient, including going beyond Books 9 and 10 to an awareness of the aim of the text to justify the ways of God to men, the notion that Milton was seen by Blake to be 'of the devil's party' etc and this knowledge enabled candidates to orient themselves around the key details in a dense passage. Weaker scripts struggled with the form of the poem and frequently wrote more generally about Satan in the poem as a whole rather than analysing the extract closely.

9. Coleridge: *Selected Poems*

This was not a popular text but there were a few excellent responses. One strong answer noted that the 'natural elements become supernatural, creating a more eerie effect because of the established power of nature'. Another response observed that 'Coleridge's combining natural and supernatural elements can be seen in the tricolon of rhetorical questions: 'Is this the hill? Is this the kirk? Is this mine own countree?' suggesting his longing at seeing something of spiritual familiarity'. Good links were made to *Kubla Khan*, *Christabel* and conversation poems such as *Frost at Midnight* and one Examiner commented that some candidates seemed more comfortable with locating supernatural elements in other parts of the poem rather than in this extract. Many candidates did not get to grips with the way natural and supernatural elements were presented in the poem and did not pay sufficient attention to the language, imagery, ballad form in this extract. A potentially productive area which was rarely explored was a consideration of the Gothic elements in this extract and in the poem as a whole. One Examiner commented that 'it was interesting that although the passage was part of a longer narrative, candidates who actually mentioned the albatross etc were in the minority, but if they did this, their task was much easier, in tracking the consequences of harming nature and the sense here of how these consequences ultimately unfold'.

10. Tennyson: *Maud*

Although there were few responses to this text, some were excellent. Strong answers tracked the shifts of mood through the poem through choice of language, imagery and most impressively through shifts of meter and verse form. One candidate observed that Tennyson 'emphasises pathetic fallacy with the phrase 'the sunset burn'd' suggesting a growing passion in Maud and the speaker's relationship' while another commented that 'the rhyming of 'spark' and 'dark' is a subtle allusion to the intertwined nature of hope and darkness in the speaker's life'. Some good answers showed their understanding of how the speaker's changing moods relate to Tennyson's engagement with industrialisation, religious despair and war. Weaker responses identified the changes in mood but did not adequately support this with textual evidence and analysis and often failed to pick up on the political and social strand in the extract.

11. Rossetti: *Selected Poems*

This was by some distance the most popular text. One Examiner observed that ‘there was some very good close reading of the poem, with attention focusing especially on the door itself, the iron bars, the spirit and the wall. The garden and the sense of loss were profitably explored in terms of the Garden of Eden.’ Many Examiners commented upon the impressive range of interpretations including religious, feminist, and biographical and combinations of all three: Rossetti’s compassion for and engagement with fallen women, as a personal confession of her religious crises and as an angry riposte from a woman desperate for a voice in a man’s world. Good answers were not reductive but opened up the possibilities of the poem, sometimes unpacking the concept of loss and making comparisons to other poems exploring Rossetti’s different ideas about holding on, letting go and remembrance in general. Stronger responses analysed the rhyming pattern effectively, observing, for example, the relationship between ‘enclosed’ rhyme and the speaker’s situation. Stronger answers effectively combined sophisticated analysis with appropriate but *succinctly* referenced biographical and social context, such as the social position of women, Rossetti’s relationships, and isolation from nature as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Effective connections were made to poems such as ‘Up Hill’, ‘The Echo’, ‘Goblin Market’ and ‘Remember’. However, there were also a number of weaker scripts who indulged in personal responses not rooted in textual analysis and became side-tracked into context based responses rather than ones that had a dominant focus on the set text.

H072/02 Drama and prose post-1900

General Comments:

Overall, candidates had been well prepared and understood the demands of the exam. Section 1 was a task which will have felt relatively familiar to centres; Section 2 presented a fresh task, offering candidates the opportunity to explore unseen material. On the whole, students rose well to this challenge.

Candidates understood the new Assessment Objectives and the majority applied this understanding appropriately in their responses. Most also demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the set texts and of critical and contextual material. The most common weakness in answers was a tendency to write too much too quickly: one examiner reported that 'almost all candidates had more than enough time to complete the tasks assigned and this sometimes led to diffuseness of style, to rather list-like construction, to unnecessary proliferation of illustrative detail and to repetition'. Many candidates would have done better to produce shorter answers which were more succinct and clearly focused on the question.

The handling of context in particular needs care. Centres had clearly encouraged candidates to engage fully with contextual considerations and many answers demonstrated formidable breadth of reading. However, essays which foregrounded contextual considerations at the expense of offering a literary response proved unsuccessful. Context is part of the requirement of both sections but contextual knowledge should underpin and inform the candidate's response rather than lead it. Some candidates were particularly prone to over-use of authors' biographies, and historical context was often inaccurate and muddled (for example, a number of candidates suggested that there were still slaves in the Deep South in the 1940s). Candidates should ensure that contextual insights help to illuminate the text; in many cases, literary contexts – such as other works by writers studied or consideration of genre – proved more helpful than the more commonly supplied biographical and historical material.

There were, however, many excellent responses which showed what can be done with original thinking in response to questions posed; this approach always generated stronger discussion than answers which depended on well-rehearsed material which was not adjusted fully to the demands of the question. Examiners were especially impressed with those answers which engaged with and rose to the demands of the unseen material in Section 2, producing pleasing variety and freshness of response.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section 1 Drama

Most candidates handled this part of the exam effectively and seemed confident with their approach. Stronger answers thought of the plays, at least partly, in terms of performance and discussed dramatic effects.

Question No. 1(a) and 1(b) *Private Lives*

This text was studied successfully by a small number of candidates. Some sound exploration of Elyot and Amanda and their superficial façade was offered. Weaker answers sometimes restricted their contextual discussion to the issue of women's roles, offering a simplistic understanding that in an unspecified previous era, 'women had no voice'. Better responses often used the theatre as context, frequently referencing the original production of the play in which Elyot and Amanda were played by Noel Coward and Gertrude Lawrence; Coward's own remarks about his play also provided valuable AO5 insights.

Question No. 2(a) and 2(b) *A Streetcar Named Desire*

This text was the most popular choice of centres. AO3 was often problematic, partly because many thought the Civil War was a recent event and therefore had emotionally affected the characters, while a sizeable minority thought the play was set in the 1920s (also a favourite alternative placing of the Civil War). The 'Old South' was sometimes juxtaposed with an invented 'New North', and a few called the Southern States 'South America'. There was much use of biographical context. When dealing with the play's repressed (or concealed?) homosexuality this was often very good ('Stanley is what Tennessee Williams was afraid of, but what he really wanted to be'), but less so when dealing with the playwright's mother, sister, or the Williams family's mental health in general; very few of these references led to a deeper understanding of Blanche.

Many candidates chose to consider option (a), Williams' exploration of masculinity. Simple responses often focused on Stanley only, considering his animalism and primal connection to Stella and the threat he feels from Blanche. Such responses were sometimes characterised by relatively immature responses to sexuality and to context and this question was often hindered rather than helped by reference to biographical details of Williams himself and his family. More developed responses brought in Mitch, Allen Gray and Steve and used these characters, as well as Stanley, to offer insight into how the dramatic presentation of masculinity is shaped. Such candidates often reached an understanding that masculinity is not fixed or linear and is fluid for all the characters, including Stanley himself.

The (b) question on Blanche was by far the most popular question on the paper. Most students offered a consideration of Blanche in relation to the proposition about facing the truth rather than merely writing a general essay about her character. Many candidates highlighted the lies Blanche tells about her past, her prostitution, her age and her former lovers and could identify the dramatic presentation of the mask she constructs to deceive herself and others. One candidate argued that she needs darkness within the play to belie her own disappointing reality; further that her 'constitution and identity are so fragile that the naked light bulb and all it illuminates would be fatal to Blanche and her moth-like qualities'. The strongest responses engaged perceptively with Williams' dramatic presentation, usually making references to Blanche's style of dress, her bathing habits and the important role played by the paper lantern to illustrate their arguments concerning her character. There was some excellent AO5 use of references to productions, including the Elia Kazan film.

Question 3(a) and 3(b) *The Homecoming*

This was a less popular text but some successful responses were seen to both questions. Some candidates focused on Pinter's use of language and silence; some attempted to explore generic concerns such as the influence of the theatre of the absurd and the breakdown in communication that this may signal within the family. Nearly all answers were very attentive to textual detail and stage effect.

Question 4(a) and 4(b) *The History Boys*

The History Boys proved a very popular text. One examiner reported that he 'had thought students might be baffled by the play's 1950s provenance, its 1980s setting, and its West End appearance in 2005, but they should be congratulated on how well they handled these contextual complexities'. Given the complexities there was inevitably some awkwardness in the handling of context but examiners rewarded generalised understanding of changes within the education system without over-penalising factual errors about the introduction of league tables and related government strategy. The (a) option on the contrasting teaching styles of Hector and Irwin was the more popular. Weaker responses were inclined to offer a simplistic reading of Hector's teaching as knowledge for its own sake and Irwin's as teaching to the exam, thereby losing some of the subtleties of the different approaches both characters take.

Answers to the question on the marginalised role of women despite the powerful presence of Mrs. Lintott sometimes treated the female History teacher to further marginalisation in their

responses, instead dealing with Fiona as a priority. Many candidates were able to consider the significance of Dakin's language in his exploration of Fiona but fewer successfully tackled Lintott's significance as a dramatic device or, indeed, her core speeches. Some successfully commented on her structural role as she gathers the boys at the end to reflect on Hector and memorialise their learning. Hector's wife offered some candidates interesting material for more thoughtful insight, and better answers also included the impact of the rather closed masculine world of the play. Context was sometimes limited to rather weak generalisations about the place of women in society, including an observation from one candidate that 'in the 1980s it would be unusual to find a strong independent woman'.

Question 5(a) and 5(b) *That Face*

This was a less popular text although it was studied successfully by a small number of candidates.

Question 6(a) and 6(b) *Jerusalem*

The (a) option was the more favoured question for this text. Candidates offered a real variety of interpretations of belonging and strong candidates used this variety to offer very successful insights. Candidates considered Johnny's marginalisation, his belonging to the wood, to a past England and to his Romany heritage; Lee's desire to go was contrasted with Davey's similarly to stay; Phaedra and Johnny's belonging to childhood or adulthood made for interesting analysis; the youth of Flintock finding belonging within Johnny's encampment presented a useful focus. One strong answer identified that belonging is a difficult concept to negotiate when the underclass of society is marginalised. Good candidates responded well to the inter-textual nature of the play, the variety of contextual influences it offers and the range of interviews with Butterworth and Rylance that are available online; however, this richness of resources led some students to use a scattergun approach, throwing in plenty of information but not always coherently constructing an argument about belonging.

Answers to the (b) option were far fewer, and dealt with the text less confidently. Pea and Tanya provided the focus for weaker responses who saw women as little other than victims. Stronger responses considered the dramatic significance of both Dawn and Phaedra and were able to make more rounded interpretations.

Section 2 Prose

The unseen nature of this section offered real variety. Centres have taken differing approaches to preparing students for this task and more than one valid way of exploiting and linking the extract to the set text was noted by the examining team. The most successful candidates used the extract as a springboard for interpretation of the set text, finding that the unseen extract offered new ways of seeing the novel they had studied. Successful candidates also spent time digesting the contextual information offered on the extract and reading the passage itself closely for valuable AO2 detail. Weaker answers demonstrated less careful reading of the extract. These responses were often characterised by one or two 'token' links, usually made merely at surface level and often did not develop the assertions about the connections identified.

Question 7 *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby was the most popular prose text. Examiners saw many excellent responses here and the pairing of Fitzgerald and Dreiser brought out clearly class issues, twenties hedonism, and the ache of romantic exasperation shared by Gatsby and Clyde. Candidates were much more secure on historical issues (WW1, Prohibition) in *Gatsby* than in a number of other texts. Examiners found that Bella and Sondra were often transposed in candidates' understanding but did not penalise for this common mistake. Clyde's response to Sondra was well-documented, in particular his 'curiously stinging sense of what it was to want and not to have' which candidates were quick to apply to Gatsby; many also connected the 'electric',

'thrilling' qualities of Sondra to Daisy's character. Strong candidates drew quite sensitive portrayals of Daisy offering material from across the set text to illustrate the characterisation offered. Weak responses often demonstrated a slavish imperative to make links where these could not be justified. The dog in the extract was magnified to unfortunate and unhelpful levels of significance at times.

Question 8 *The Bloody Chamber*

Sophisticated arguments exploring the tension between the idealised worlds of fairy tale and reality or the interconnectedness of desire and fear that underpins many tales of this genre were very pleasing. These strong responses made effective use of the unseen extract by Orson Scott Card, finding a good deal of interest in the lead character's hesitancy when compared with the bluster of so many of Carter's heroes. Many felt the passage contained an intriguing blend of Gothic material (the setting) and fairy tale elements (often via *Sleeping Beauty*). The literary fairy tale had been well researched, with many aware of the contents and tone of Charles Perrault's work. Weaker answers appeared to lack confidence with this aspect of the set text, tending to write implicitly about fairy tale elements and foregrounding instead the gothic tropes and archetypes within the story collection. Whilst the manipulation of gothic genre across both set text and extract yielded much valuable material and the inter-relationship between these two genres is clear, students often found it difficult to construct a route from gothic to fairy tale and arguments were oblique and sometimes tortured as a result.

Comparisons to the extract variously explored the 'woman asleep', the skin 'stretched taut across her cheekbones' and the supernatural swirling of the leaves. The forest setting provided material for detailed consideration as did the young man's desire to 'see her, to touch her'. Remarkably few picked out the 'airplane' in the passage, which offered hints of the modern world. Most candidates recognised that, for Carter, the whole text means that they must handle a number of short stories (in practice usually three) to achieve coverage. 'The Erl-King', 'The Snow Child' and 'The Lady of the House of Love' were popular choices.

Question 9 *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Students were clearly well-prepared on the dystopian genre. Knowledge of the set text was often excellent and many candidates were able to offer strong responses with the unseen extract affording a number of clear routes into analysis of the set text. *Anthem's* name and bracelet were often related to *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* uniforms; the 'thoughts which are forbidden' to Thoughtcrime; the 'evil' work of writing to Winston's diary; the Ministry of Love to the Palace of Corrective Detention. Links which focused only on similarity tended to be less strong than those which contrasted Orwell's text more thoughtfully with the passage: the consideration of Winston, for example, with his personal name offering him identity beyond that which *Equality 7-2521* enjoys. There was a very natural journey from such comparisons to the contexts of Nazism and Stalinism which many candidates took but the generic dystopian context remained a solid foundation for good responses. The impact of totalitarian manipulation exercised many strong candidates, some of whom explored the individual's fear of difference. As with Williams, biographical details were often less illuminating than literary contexts.

Question 10 *Mrs Dalloway*

Woolf was a less popular text; however, those responses that were seen by examiners usually demonstrated very sensitive readings both of Clarissa and of Edith in the extract. Responses focused on Clarissa's reminiscences about her youth and experiences at Bourton and the contrast between her nostalgia for life with Sally Seton compared to Edith's recognition that in the past she had been 'braver, younger, more determined'. Septimus' inability to separate reality from the past memories he conjures so vividly was also considered and one strong candidate compared his powerlessness with Edith's sense of being out of control. Septimus could also be viewed as being controlled by the medical professions and only free within his nightmarish visions. One candidate observed that without her past, 'Clarissa' would be merely a wife, 'Mrs Richard Dalloway'. Only the best answers compared the narrative style of the two texts.

Question 11 *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

This text was relatively unpopular, but the responses seen were often securely engaged in issues of cultural identity and belonging. Strong candidates wrote successfully about Hamid's symbolism and were able to consider issues of belonging beyond culture and nation. The desire for personal belonging and Erica and Changez' mutual search for differing kinds of love also afforded interesting perspectives on the question. Jim provided a thought-provoking foil for Changez with his insistence on shared outsider status alongside his protégée. Contrast between the set text and extract often focused on Changez' solitary experience as opposed to the collective view expressed by Budhos' narrator.

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