

GCE

English Language & Literature

Advanced GCE **A2 H473**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H073**

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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F671 Speaking Voices

General Comments:

Centres and candidates have benefited from the specification being in its final year and therefore the scripts indicate that they are usually able to apply a judicious selection of the required combined linguistic-literary approaches. The majority of the candidates appeared to be those at the A2 stage who were retaking to boost their overall grade. Candidates that 'scan' the transcripts and locate heavily occurring features in the Transcription Key are prone to making instant 'conclusions' about the nature of the discourse that can hamper development of analysis. The material provided as passages A and B in Section A, or as 'cue-quotation' and supporting passage in Section B, gave ample opportunity for candidates to demonstrate what they had learned. In Section A, relevant references to 'elsewhere in the novel' needed to be supported with a quotation or a very detailed illustration to enable the candidates to engage with language, otherwise they could achieve little reward.

The best answers were those which applied knowledge of language and of literary forms in a discriminating way, with candidates realising for example that 'dominance' theories of spoken language would not be helpful in exploring a co-operative conversation such as that between Caitlin and Elizabeth in Q.1. Answers which depended on labelling words and phrases – "this premodified noun phrase" / "with this declarative utterance" / "Paddy uses this interrogative utterance" – were undermined when such labelling was inaccurate. Even an accurate display of knowledge about language will not earn many marks if it is not tied closely to the nature of the interaction and thematic concerns of the question paper.

Good answers adopt an approach which integrates linguistic and literary elements. They also take an integrated approach to coverage of the skills categorised by Assessment Objectives. For example, "*critical analysis of ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings*" (AO2 – the dominant AO in Section A) cannot helpfully be separated from "*application of relevant concepts and approaches from integrated linguistic and literary study*" and the accurate use of "*critical terminology, appropriate to the subject matter*" (AO1).

Similarly, AO3 is the dominant Assessment Objective in Section B. Its twin requirements – to "*use integrated approaches to explore relationships between texts*" and to "*analyse and evaluate the influence of the contextual factors on the production and reception of texts, as appropriate to the question*" – cannot be met without the application of AO1 and AO2 skills.

Centres have clearly been working to enable candidates to integrate useful comment on "*the influence of the contextual factors*" into their Section B answers, especially on *The Child in Time*. In addition, there was evidence that this session's candidates know what to avoid, and the majority had actively practised NOT doing the following:

- making repeated assertions that interaction or lexis is formal/informal without any textual support or exploration
- making imprecise use of terminology, e.g. syntax/lexis/register used interchangeably,
- with no clear reference to any relevant examples
- setting themselves the trap of confusion/conflation over accent/dialect/idiolect/sociolect

This is a technically demanding paper which requires a range of integrated linguistic-literary skills and a good knowledge of two set texts.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

In Section A, candidates had to select one question on one text: *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*, or *The Remains of the Day*, or *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*.

Question 1: *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*

A conversation between two women comparing their experiences of starting school was paired with the extract from the novel in which the narrator is preparing for her first day at school.

The most successful answers revealed:

- careful reading of how speech style is used to construct and reveal emotion and character
- accurate specific reference to features of language and interaction
- productive application of linguistic approaches to an analysis of Passage B
- apt references to relevant moments elsewhere in the novel, mainly concerning her mother's control and judgemental behaviour
- sensitive reading of the interaction between Caitlin and Elizabeth as interested and co-operative, with an appreciation of how features of spoken language such as non-fluency construct meaning.

Some answers took an approach which depended on cataloguing features of spoken language, and an attempt to 'prove' that Passage A was spontaneous. Such lines of argument did not take discussion very far. The laughter, pauses and overlaps in Q1 were sometimes mis-read as a mix of discomfort, uncertainty or other tensions between the speakers. Similarly, although knowledge of theories can shed light on some interactions, the evidence in the conversation between Bea and Karen was not that interruptions showed a power struggle or awkwardness, but rather that overlaps were supportive. This might usefully have been contrasted with the lack of real communication between Jeanette and her mother in Passage B, although astute readers would pick up on the evidence of shared understanding and the way Jeanette's narrative creates humour at her mother's expense, especially in her creation of Mr and Mrs Snail.

Question 2: *The Remains of the Day*

A transcript of a television programme from a series about finding houses in France for people from Britain was paired with Steven's memories of the first day of his motoring trip.

The common theme of the two passages was the importance of a view. Candidates wrote well about the reaction to the old man's insistence that he should follow up his recommendation to take advantage of the view, appreciating how his attitude stems from Stevens' role as butler. The popularity of television programmes dealing with property has made this an accessible genre and candidates were able to explore how Tim and Karen are guided by Matt to see the house as right for them. Successful answers revealed:

- careful reading and understanding of the dynamics of interaction between Stevens and the old man, referring to other times when Stevens feels uncomfortable (for example in bantering with Mr Faraday or talking to Miss Kenton) or makes judgements/assumptions which are flawed
- an appreciation that Stevens is determined not to be influenced into behaving impulsively and his shifting attitude to the old man
- analysis of the creation of humour at Stevens' expense
- well-developed discussion of how features of the television presenter's language are typical of the genre and the shifting attitude of Tim and Karen to the house and its view

Question 3: *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*

An interview in which Connie recalls aspects of her home and family was paired with Paddy recounting a conversation with his mother. Both passages contained reference to the names given to rooms and attitudes to these.

Candidates often related this moment in the novel to the development of Paddy's relationship with his father and other times where his mother is seen as a nurturing parent. They were more able this session to analyse accurately Doyle's methods in constructing Paddy's speaking and narrative voices.

Successful answers revealed:

- thoughtful understanding of the context of Passage A, and consideration of the ways in which Trevor encourages Connie to reveal her feelings about childhood
- careful reading of detail, such as those related to the grandparents' house and lack of contact with her father
- secure understanding of the interaction between Paddy and his mother and the way Paddy interprets the naming of the drawing room and his name being that of his father
- exploration of the details of the narrative commentary given by Doyle to Paddy here and elsewhere in the novel, for example with reference to other moments of parental conflict and Paddy's relationship with his father
- detailed and accurate attention to specific elements of language use, such as the way Trevor encourages Connie and Paddy's mother prevents any loss of his face

As with the other Section A questions, some candidates tended to assume the interviewer would dominate the interaction. It is always safer and more profitable to start with the evidence and build a reading of the passage.

The features of emphatic speech – the raised volume represented by CAPITALS and the stressed sound/syllable(s) represented by underlining were sometimes over-interpreted.

Section B

As in Section A, candidates had to select one question on one text: *A Handful of Dust* or *The Child in Time* or *Persuasion*. The selection of texts was generally more balanced in this session.

Question 4: *A Handful of Dust*

The task in this question was to explore the ways in which Waugh presents marriage and divorce in *A Handful of Dust*. The cue-quotation offered the conversation involving Tony and Jock at the Sixty-four Club with Babs and Milly about providing grounds for Tony and Brenda's divorce. Passage A was from a debate in the House of Commons in 1934 regarding divorce.

Successful answers revealed:

- clear engagement with the question-focus and ready reference to instances in the novel where Tony and Brenda's marriage is presented and her relationship with John Beaver
- careful reading of the cue-quotation, paying attention to how Waugh constructs meaning in direct speech by using a variety of utterance types
- understanding of Waugh's satirical style, and how he allows characters to reveal the reality of the "weekend away" in the dialogue
- some relevant comparisons with Passage A in terms of its views about marriage and divorce, most candidates seeing it as reflecting Tony and Brenda's relationship
- thoughtful use of the between-the-wars Bright-Young-People context

Better responses moved beyond simply relating marriage and divorce to Waugh's personal life and divorce and his presentation of Brenda and Tony and concentrated on how attitudes at the time were revealed through Passage A. There were a number of well-chosen references to other parts of the novel where problems in their marriage is revealed in Tony and Brenda's differing attitudes to country and city, Tony's love of Hetton and Brenda's response to the death of John Andrew.

Question 5: *The Child in Time*

This question invited examination of ways in which McEwan presents father-child relationships in *The Child in Time*.

The cue-quotation offered an extract from Chapter 1 when Stephen gets Kate ready for the trip to the supermarket.

Passage A was from a newspaper published in the same year as the novel in which the author considered the idea of the "New Man". Successful answers revealed:

- clear engagement with the question-focus, and accurate reference to some examples of father-child relationships, mainly focussing on that between Stephen and Kate but also with his own father
- relevant examples from the novel of McEwan's narrative methods, appreciating that the novel is often subtle and metaphorical/symbolic, but also making effective use of the *Childcare Handbook*
- analysis of genuinely significant details which reveal the poignant nature of Stephen's relationship with Kate
- some relevant attention to the range of ideas in Passage A, connecting the "New Man" to Stephen and the way that he too did not want to perpetuate the form of fatherhood he had experienced.

Question 6: *Persuasion*

This question invited examination of different views of social relationships and the cue-quotation was from Chapter 16 in which Anne is in Bath with her father, sister and Lady Russell; Passage A is from a book written by Reverend Richard Graves.

Successful answers revealed:

- clear engagement with the question-focus and understanding of the way Austen's views are reflected in those provided by Passage A
- well-chosen examples and quotations from elsewhere in the novel: the initially pleasing manners and behaviour of Mr Elliot contrasted with those of Admiral Croft and priorities of Sir Walter and Lady Russell and what they reveal
- judicious comment on Austen's narrative method, including how she uses "free indirect discourse"
- some detailed attention to the context and lexis of the cue-quotation

Many answers offered an outline of the social context, more or less related to ideas of what might constitute social relationships in Austen's time but often focussing on romantic relationships. There were some responses which were unrelated to the question and provided lengthy explanation of the history of the time. The concept of manners and correct behaviour was not always grasped in the context of *Persuasion*. The views expressed in Passage A caused some confusion, with some vocabulary being challenging.

F673 Dramatic Voices

General Comments

Candidates do not seem to be as well prepared for this year's examination as for 2015. A few observations:

- i. Many candidates offload biographical and contextual information without linking it to the question directly.
- ii. Many candidates are still unable to use critical terminology correctly – both linguistic terminology and literary terminology. Some candidates do not seem to know the difference between an adjective and an adverb and some candidates do not know the difference between a metaphor and a simile. There appears to be confusion as to the differences between a *lexical* field and a *semantic* field.
- iii. Some candidates have been provided with information regarding various critical theoretical readings of their texts, e.g. Marxist, Feminist, etc. Whilst this may seem relevant to the teachers delivering the course, in terms of how this information is applied by candidates, it is very similar to the biographical/contextual information. It would be preferable for candidates to be able to understand the context contemporaneous to the texts and be able to apply relevant information to the question rather than repeating snippets of what a Marxist or Feminist interpretation of the text might be.
- iv. Most candidates seem unaware that these plays were actually written to be performed. Understanding of the contextual factors around performance and production of these plays has been lacking. One or two very perceptive candidates are able to pick up on the significance of stage directions, props and even costumes, but most refer to these plays as 'books', without any awareness of the fact that the questions they are answering are all about dramatic presentation. This alone seems to be contributing to the fact that some candidates are not responding as well as they could be to the questions.
- v. Some candidates are unable to distinguish between the purpose of the Section A questions and the purpose of the Section B questions. Although the AOs are the same and the requirement to focus on dramatic presentation is the same, the weighting of the AOs is different and this should be something brought to the attention of centres.
- vi. The Section A questions should focus mainly on the two passages, although links to the wider plays would provide a more developed response. The Section A questions have a much larger weighting on comparison and contextual factors than the Section B questions, so in order for candidates to perform well they need to know the difference between what these two questions are looking for. The Section B questions encourage the wider reading of the selected play and there is the expectation that the answer will select examples from the whole play. This seems obvious, but doesn't seem to be reflected in how candidates have been prepared.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No. 1

Generally well answered – some candidates fall into trap of enumerating crimes/consequences rather than exploring dramatic presentation. Generally able to explore language – less secure on how the structure of the plays demonstrate the cycle of crime leading to punishment in *Volpone* and the audience expectations, or the lack of resolution in *GGGR* and how this impacts on the audience. Form of *Volpone* is generally identified and connected to beast fables, Commedia Dell'Arte, and city comedy. However, candidates struggle to identify and explore the form of *GGGR* – some feeling it is an absurdist play only or a black farce. Some candidates also completely miss the point of whether crimes or their consequences are acknowledged by the characters internally within the drama and the dramatic effects this creates, e.g. contrasting *Volpone's* response and behaviour with Levene's response and behaviour and how this impacts on the reception/production of both plays.

Question No. 2

Generally well answered – some candidates fall into trap of identifying episodes of improper behaviour, rather than exploring dramatic presentation. Generally able to explore language and some better candidates recognise the structure of opening *AYLI* with such a negative scene and how this leads to character changes and the development of 'proper' behaviour, particularly by Oliver, by the end of the play. Most identify *AYLI* as a romantic comedy, which is not strictly accurate, as it is satirising courtly love and is more of a pastoral comedy than romantic, although clearly romance forms part of the plot and relationships.

For *Arcadia*, many candidates struggle with the idea of the fact it is a tragi-comedy as they seem to forget the death of Thomasina and how this is foregrounded early on in the play. Many candidates also seemed unable to link this scene to further episodes of improper behaviour through the play – Septimus' manipulation of Chater; Bernard's behaviour and manipulation of Chloe under similar circumstances and the structural parallels Stoppard draws between what is deemed improper behaviour in 1809 and what is deemed to be improper behaviour in 1993.

Question No. 3

Most candidates did not answer this question very well. The question led them to *identify* bad news and few of them actually focused on the *impact* of the bad news. Most candidates could identify what the bad news was in *RT*, but very few could actually see that this was a device being used by the characters of Vindice and Hippolito within the play to seek revenge, by inciting Lussurioso to murder, and a dramatic device by Middleton to reflect the depths of Vindice's corruption and moral decline from the beginning to the end of the play.

Within *TLOI*, again candidates could *identify* the bad news delivered, but again few could see how James exploits this to his advantage in order to escape his torture and how this is used as a dramatic device by McDonagh to show the absurdity of Padraic's emotions in terms of the moral values he has towards human life vs feline life and how this reflects negatively on the 'cause' he represents.

Question No. 4

This question was generally well answered when it was applied to *GGGR* as most candidates could see that the competition between the salesmen ran the full length of the play and also encompassed a number of themes including greed and manipulation, as well as conveying contextual messages about 1980s American, the American Dream, the futility of the competition and the harsh realities of life at the time. Some more able candidates were also able to bring in discussion about the cyclical structure and settings of the play which reinforced the futility of the competition and how the resolution to the play is deliberately left open and what this signifies in terms of a never-ending cycle of the salesmen competing.

When it came to *Volpone*, most candidates could identify that the competition between the heir hunters again ran the full length of the play and were able to discuss the way in which this linked to the themes of the play and the motivations for this competition from Volpone and Mosca's point of view. However, very few were able to go beyond a description of the competition and the themes and explore the dramatic presentation of competition, which given it runs throughout the play is somewhat disappointing.

Question No. 5

This question was generally well answered and was probably answered equally as well for both texts. For *AYLI*, candidates were clearly able to identify the two main settings of the court and the forest, with more able candidate's also picking up on the significance of Oliver's house. In addition, many candidates were able to link these two settings to the feuds between both sets of brothers (Oliver/Orlando, Frederick/Senior) and to explore how the settings were able to represent the differences not just in personality between these individuals, but also what the settings represented in terms of themes; e.g. order and restriction of the court vs disorder but freedom of the forest. More able candidates were also able to discuss at length how characters altered their outlook, behaviour or both by transferring from one setting to another and how these settings were also used as a commentary on contemporaneous society by Shakespeare.

For *Arcadia*, candidates were able to identify the garden and the room where the main action takes place. Most candidates were able to make the connection between the garden and the changes taking place to it as a reflection of the move from Classicism to Romanticism. A number of candidates were also able to contrast the action taking place within the garden settings (including the gazebo) as being off stage, yet significant to the plot and the characters, in contrast to the conversations taking place within the room. Candidates were also able to show the connections between the settings as a device to link the two different timeframes together. More able candidates were able to closely identify elements of the setting, e.g. the table and how Stoppard uses this to connect the timeframes to each other and how articles on the table are used to foreshadow events within the play.

Question No. 6

The vast majority of candidates struggled with this question. The majority of candidates provided an account of which characters had distorted moral values and made some attempt to justify their conclusions, rather than focussing on the dramatic devices used to present distorted moral values. This has led to the vast majority of scripts marked for this question scoring quite poorly, particularly when compared to those answering Q4 and Q5, where even less able candidates were able to at least make some comment on language, even if they couldn't work through how structure and form were relevant. (*NB examiners were instructed at standardisation to make allowances when marking for this*). In the case of *RT*, Vindice's moral values were enumerated in detail and arguments made as to why they were distorted. In the case of *TLOI*, Padraic and occasionally Mairead were discussed in depth in terms of their characters and their morals.

F674 Connections Across Texts

General Comments:

The work received was, as always, varied and interesting. This was the penultimate outing for this particular unit, and therefore candidates and centres have very much settled into patterns that are, for the most part, clearly within the spirit of the component and the syllabus as a whole.

To the end, centres have been slightly resistant to the idea of getting their candidates to explain why their central text for Task 1 is not part of the central canon or expands the canon of 'literature', and this has meant that opportunities for discussion about the flexibility or permeability of genre models have not been fully exploited. For the most part, candidates choose a theme and then compare three texts, often to great effect. Centres that simply allow the spoken piece to be there for purposes of thematic exposition do the candidates some disservice. It is clear from the specification that the spoken language, whether scripted or spontaneous, should be discussed with reference to how speech is different to writing, with conventions that are parallel to those of written texts.

Task 2 assignments were sensible and have now moved very much towards the predictable, with monologues or newspaper features strongly represented. There were some interesting attempts at poetry and short stories. On the whole, candidates enjoy being given the opportunity to comment on what they have written and on its strengths and limitations, and this is an area that seems to improve year on year.

This unit has been running for some years now, and the centres that make submissions are fully aware of the requirements for success. Over the years, the marking by centres has become increasingly focused on the assessment objectives, and thus, in most cases much more accurate. There are still too many instances of marking that simply evokes an assessment objective without then adding an evaluative comment to suggest whereabouts within that AO the commendation falls. Summative comments were always useful and often very perceptive. This meant that, on the whole, moderators were able to simply confirm centre decisions. Where work was significantly moved, it was often because an element of the requirements (the speech imperative, in some cases) simply was never addressed.

Administration is, in general, very good, with centres submitting both marks and folders at the appropriate time.

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