

English Language & Literature

Advanced GCE A2 H473

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H073

Report on the Units

January 2009

H073/H473/MS/R/09J

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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 syllabus 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 (Written Examination)

General Comments

The first paper of the new specification was taken by a small but significant number of candidates, whose work suggested careful preparation but also demonstrated the height of the step up from GCSE to AS level.

It is always difficult for Centres and candidates to feel their way into the changed requirements of a new specification. Those who entered this first session are to be commended on their effort.

In each of Sections A and B there was a choice of three texts, with one question on each. All candidates chose to answer on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* in Section A; and the overwhelming majority of candidates chose question 4 (*The Great Gatsby*) in Section B. A very small number did *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Individual candidates often performed better on one question, and more often this was Section A. However, script evidence suggested that this was more a matter of time management and examination technique than an indication that they were finding Section B more difficult. Almost all candidates did Section A first – though there is no absolute requirement to do so.

Since Section A questions are passage-based, it may be easier for candidates to maintain a focus on relevant textual detail in this Section. It is hoped they would have made substantial annotation on the question paper while reading the passages: this would help them to support points with appropriate reference.

The Assessment Objective weightings for the Unit mean that AO2 is dominant in Section A, AO3 in Section B. However, there will always be significant overlap between the AOs, and a competent integrated linguistic/literary approach is likely to include aspects of AO1, AO2 and AO3 in virtually every relevant comment.

Although it is hard to predict likely patterns of future answers from a small initial sample, it is hoped that the following comments on responses in this session will provide helpful guidance to those entering in subsequent sessions. Reference should also be made to the published mark-scheme for an indication of appropriate response in terms of the Assessment Objectives.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

There were no answers to questions 1 and 3, but Centres studying *Surfacing* or *Hawksmoor* may well wish to use the questions and passages as examination practice.

Question 2: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

Christopher's account of being at the police station was paired with a transcription of a woman police officer talking about an item of jargon which puzzles trainees.

Candidates had clearly engaged with the character of Christopher, and had useful general comments to make about his 'voice' throughout the novel. Some of the discussion depended too much on assertions about what might be typical of someone with Asperger's Syndrome, and not enough on consideration of the linguistic features of his utterance. It was not surprising that,

after only one term's study, candidates were insecure in identifying and then discussing features of lexis, syntax and register. However, they need to start from what is in the text and build up to a view of what is typical of Christopher's voice rather than starting with assertions and hoping that the examples they quote or refer to will match.

The question-wording invites comparison of the construction and effects of the voices in the passages. Candidates have to get over the first hurdle, which is to realise (and remember!) that Christopher's voice is a fictional construct, whereas the spontaneous speech in Passage A is someone's natural utterance. So it was not helpful to write of the police-woman "using" (for example) fillers, repairs or micro-pauses: these might be features of her spoken language, but they construct her voice, rather than the other way round. Similarly, it is almost always unhelpful to identify "errors" in spoken language as if it were an inferior version of written Standard English.

These are things which candidates will become more adept at handling as they are exposed to more recorded or transcribed speech. Similarly, practice will allow them to become more comfortable (and more accurate) in employing (AO1) linguistic/literary terminology and the associated concepts. Amongst terms which caused problems this session were the following:

- formal / informal – register and levels of formality are a continuum; so, rather than asserting that an utterance or passage is formal or informal, it's much more helpful to identify and explore the features that determine the position on that continuum.
- lexical / semantic field – candidates regularly asserted that the speaker in Passage A was using a particular semantic field when what they meant was field-specific lexis. Issues of semantics (and morphology) will be of interest in some passages: no-one remarked, for example, on how the woman police officer moved from "talking in riddles" to "riddling on", an interesting instance of a shift in word-class from noun to verb.
- idiolect / sociolect / (occupational) dialect – candidates wanted to characterise features of the police-woman's utterance in terms of something-lect, but struggled to make distinctions between speech sounds (accent) and lexical features.

The mark-scheme offers some further examples of potentially fruitful avenues for exploration.

Section B

There were no answers to question 6, but Centres studying *A Room with a View* may well wish to use the question and passages as examination practice.

It may help Centres to think about the structure of the questions in this Section:

- a theme central to the chosen novel is identified
- a 'cue-quotation' from the novel is offered as an example of how this theme is presented in the novel
- (a) passage(s) is/are provided for comparison / contrast

The passage(s) should provide candidates with another possible way into the task, shedding further light on the theme identified by the question-wording. There is no intention to add further levels of demand to the question, rather to offer some ideas and material that help to set the chosen novel in its cultural context.

The Specification, amplified later by a Notice to Centres, has described the passage(s) as non-literary. There was some concern that the Dorothy Parker extract in question 4 was a poem and therefore, by definition, literary.

OCR assures Centres that they need not worry about the provenance of passages/extracts. The eight lines of 'Resumé' were offered to candidates as evidence of an attitude to life (and death) in 1925 America which was both sardonic and frivolous: it was not set as a piece of poetry

worthy of (or requiring) serious critical attention. The title of the collection from which it came (*Enough Rope*) was another hint to candidates that matters of life and death might be thought suitable for levity in the decade after the Great War – which itself is a cue for the second extract.

Question 4: *The Great Gatsby*

The cue-quotation involved Daisy asking: “What’ll we do with ourselves this afternoon? ... and the day after that and the next thirty years?”

This introduced a question about Fitzgerald’s presentation of aimless existence.

Candidates mostly took a long time to focus on the question. Many began by introducing (prepared) material of limited or generalised contextual relevance, outlining their knowledge about (but not always understanding of) the American Dream / the Jazz Age / the Depression / Prohibition / the Wall Street Crash.

Such an approach is unhelpful. These topics may relate to having an aim or purpose in life, but the question has already defined aimless existence as the focus, and this is what candidates should start with. Ideas from the passage(s), equally, might provide a handy opening to a well-structured essay answer.

For example, one very good candidate began by observing that Gatsby tells Nick how he “tried very hard to die” in the War, and contrasted that to Dorothy Parker’s conclusion (“You might as well live”). After such an opening, there was no looking back: this is an excellent example of how Section B questions can be made quite simple. Candidates who start by writing a page on the American dream are making things very hard for themselves.

Question 5: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

A handful of candidates attempted this question, about Rhys’s presentation of the experience of being a woman.

The cue-quotation was Christophine’s exhortation to Antoinette: “Get up, girl, and dress yourself. Woman must have spunks to live in this wicked world.”

Passage A was correspondingly serious: an extract from the *Statement of Purpose* written for the National Organization for Women when it was founded in 1966. The very obvious lexis of equality and partnership in this extract would have provided a direct contrast to Antoinette’s experience in the novel.

As with Fitzgerald, candidates were tempted to drift into biography of Jean Rhys, seeing the preoccupations of the text as reflections of the author’s life. No doubt they often are, but that is not a matter for this paper. There was less of a tendency to ‘off-load’ background material on Rhys than on Fitzgerald, but some inclination to write about other themes which the candidates had studied – race and identity, for example. These themes may or may not appear in future sessions, but what candidates must do is write about what the current question asks.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE (English Literature) (H073/H473)
January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
F671	Raw	60	45	40	35	30	25	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
H073	200	160	140	120	100	80	0
H473	400	320	280	240	200	160	0

0 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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