

English Literature

Advanced GCE A2 H471

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H071

OCR Report to Centres

January 2012

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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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Any enquiries about publications should be addressed to:

OCR Publications
PO Box 5050
Annesley
NOTTINGHAM
NG15 0DL

Telephone: 0870 770 6622
Facsimile: 01223 552610
E-mail: publications@ocr.org.uk

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Overview

This January showed once again that most centres and candidates have a good understanding of the specification and are approaching the range of tasks offered with confidence and expertise. Principals of all units were impressed by the very high quality of work at the top end of the range, and also by the thoroughness and capability of much of the work lower down the scale.

Coursework still presents some practical challenges to centres: moderators had to send back many folders for re-marking because they had exceeded the maximum 3,000 word count allowed for each unit. Centres are reminded that, if candidates submit a final draft which is over length, marking should stop at the 3,000 word point. There are also issues with work which has been plagiarised: problems of this kind should be dealt with in the centre, according to the OCR guidelines. Where moderators suspect plagiarism in sample folders, the work is referred to OCR's malpractice team. If such matters can be dealt with at centre level before work is dispatched, moderation can proceed more quickly and efficiently.

In the examined units, the Principal Examiners were pleased to note that there seemed to be an overall improvement in relation to detailed knowledge of primary texts, an issue which was highlighted in the reports for June 2011. A common weakness to both units in this session was a tendency in some candidates to rely on material generated in practice essays from past papers: sometimes, key terms from past questions dominated answers.

The F661 session represented the last opportunity for candidates to answer on the first group of set texts: **centres are reminded that the new texts are examined for the first time in June 2012**. The current F663 texts will similarly make a last appearance in January 2013, making way for new texts which appear for the first time in the June 2013 session.

F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945

General Comments

This was the last session on the first group of set texts, and therefore nearly all candidates were re-sitting the examination. This seemed to be reflected in the nature of the work seen by examiners: many candidates had worked very hard to make the most of this 'last chance' and produced answers of impressive detail and thoroughness; others seemed to be basing their answers on a more distant memory of the set texts, and handed in scripts with relatively few quotations and some gaps in recall (for example, there was a higher incidence in this session of Section A answers which did not refer to any additional poems).

As in previous sessions, the key to high marks was sustained focus on the question supported by detailed and sensitive use of illustration from the primary text. In Section A, the best responses prioritised close analysis of the set poem in relation to the question and also showed a confident grasp of the group of prescribed poems, apparently being able at will to dip in and find appropriate material for comparison and contrast. In Section B, the best answers examined the question thoroughly and explored all of its nuances; cogent arguments were supported by apt quotation from the set text and aided in their development by insights from other readers and an informed awareness of the novel's contexts.

Some candidates depended too much in the examination on practice essays from past papers: passages of questionable relevance were often recognisable as parts of answers to former questions. Similarly, some Section A answers gave too much attention to additional preferred poems and very little to the set poem.

Comments on Individual Questions

1 William Wordsworth: 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'

Most candidates seemed responsive to the poem and wrote especially well about the relation between the poet's attitudes to the city and to nature. Often town and country were seen as working together: it was suggested that Wordsworth experiences both in the same way, alone here as in 'Nutting' and responding to a city which is 'Open unto the fields, and to the sky'. But, most people stressed, the vision of the city seems more transient: a scene which is only there before the industrial day begins. 'It is ironic that Wordsworth wants people to appreciate this natural setting but it is when there is nobody around,' felt one commentator. There was some skilled technical work on the poem as sonnet, although a number of examiners reported a surprising lack of awareness of the poem's form. Candidates raised interesting issues of context to do with Romanticism, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Most focused effectively on the awe-inspiring aspects of the city, and comparisons were generally drawn with 'St. Paul's'.

2 Christina Rossetti: 'Good Friday'

Answers on this poem were relatively scarce, but often of high quality. Most engaged closely with the text. There was much interest in the speaker's perception of herself as a stone, seen by some as 'reverse personification'. Even the sun and the moon react, unlike the stone. More broadly, 'the sense of unworthiness and lack of feeling are influenced by the repression of Rossetti's life as a Victorian woman, expected to suppress her own desires'. Examiners reported that candidates' interrogation of the poem's theological issues sometimes became intense: for example, she pleads with Jesus to 'smite' her, showing the importance of suffering in her view of Christianity.

Some students were pleasingly detailed in their consideration of poetic method, with a particular focus on the effects of caesura and line lengths and perceptive study of verse form. The poem 'moves from an entrapped rhyme scheme of ABBA to a more lucid and flowing ABAB. This represents both the hope rising within the speaker and the liquid flowing from Christ'. There were successful comparisons with other devotional poems, especially 'Despised and Rejected' and 'Shut Out', and contrasts with 'A Birthday'.

3 **Wilfred Owen: 'The Sentry'**

As ever, this poet was by far the most popular Section A choice. Candidates found plenty of material in the poem for comment: in weaker answers, this material often appeared rushed and chaotic with no discernible structure; better responses were disciplined and purposeful in their arrangement. Some excellent responses focused on the experience of warfare as perceived by Owen, and celebrated the range of literary and linguistic devices used to portray the scene whilst making effective links with other poems. Competent responses tended to stray into the historical/political contexts at the expense of close analysis of language, imagery and verse form. Several noted the adversarial quality of nature itself. Poorly organised answers often failed to reach the end of the poem, missing opportunities to comment on its striking use of direct speech and the use of light imagery at its conclusion. Most were well supplied with contextual material to support their reading of the set poem; the best focused with precision on details of other poems such as 'Exposure' (endurance of conditions) and 'Dulce et Decorum Est' (the persistence of dreams).

4 **Robert Frost: 'Mending Wall'**

The enigmatic quality of this poem prompted a wide range of interpretations: as many candidates were convinced that walls are 'good' as were adamant that walls are 'bad'. Although most candidates could write about the poem with confidence, a significant minority launched into general discussion without taking time to consider the theme in the question, which was 'work'. Good answers generated or adapted relevant material with ease, considering the 'struggle between man and nature' almost as a definition of work, and investigating the humorous opposition of attitudes between Frost and his neighbour. Interesting responses offered a great variety of ideas emanating from the poem: for example, that people are defined by their work ("he is all pine, I am apple orchard"); and that, according to the Puritans, work gives purpose to a man's existence. A wide range of other comparative poems was cited: 'Out, Out – ' was a particularly interesting choice and was often handled very well; 'Gathering Leaves' gave scope to consider the value or the pointlessness of work. Wider contexts often included walls in general (the poem's "wall-like structure" was often mentioned) and Frost's own farming experience.

Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

Question 5(a) *'Pride and Prejudice shows the reader the results of poor parenting.'*
In the light of this comment, explore Austen's presentation of parents and their children in the novel.

The majority of answers to this question (even good ones) limited their discussion to Mr and Mrs Bennet, and most candidates agreed with the prompt quotation. There was some interesting writing about the Bennets as 'a dysfunctional family'. One candidate wondered whether we judge Mrs Bennet more harshly than her husband 'because we are reading from Elizabeth's point of view'. Most answers discussed a range of parent/child relationships and many argued successfully that some characters emerge unscathed or even strengthened from the experience of poor parenting. One very impressive answer explored the significance of the different parents as representatives of different social groups and attitudes and hence used the question to explore the didactic and contextual focus of Austen's satire. A few candidates considered briefly – and entertainingly – what kind of parents the novel's younger generation (the Bingleys, the Darcys, the Collinses) might make.

Question 5(b) *'The novel rushes to a happy ending.'*

How far and in what ways do you agree with this comment on the structure of Pride and Prejudice?

There were relatively few answers to this question. As ever, candidates seemed to be more attracted to questions about characters and themes than to those about language and structure; one examiner suggested that 'more could be done at this level on thinking about the novel as a construct or a structure'. Opinion seemed to be equally divided between the two possible points of view. The 'happy ending' element of the question gave students the opportunity to write about the features of comedy and the most able argued convincingly that the ending was neither rushed nor necessarily happy for all the couples. A few candidates engaged with the idea of a rushed ending following a long prologue, one suggesting that Austen is 'interested in how the couples get over the obstacles she puts between them rather than in the details of the relationships after they are formed'.

Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*

Question 6(a) *'Heathcliff's behaviour undermines both the moral and the economic basis of his society.'*

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of Heathcliff?

There were – as ever in responses on this text – plenty of strong opinions available about the novel and its main characters. Weaker answers tended to provide generalised character portrayals of Heathcliff; better ones engaged with the specific terms of the question and considered both the terms 'moral' and 'economic' in separate and enlightening detail. Many candidates offered a Marxist reading of the text, frequently citing Terry Eagleton in support; but this was only one way of fulfilling the requirement to recognise different readings. The best AO3 content generally consisted of vigorous debate with the question's quotation: for example, one candidate suggested that 'Heathcliff does not really undermine the economic basis of his society, he beats it at its own game by becoming a rich and respected property owner'. One writer noted perceptively that 'he uses the economic basis of society to elevate his social standing and at the same time uses this as an excuse to abuse its moral basis'.

Question 6(b) *'The events of the second part of Wuthering Heights offer intriguing comparisons and contrasts with those of the first.'*

In the light of this comment, discuss the relationship between the two parts of the novel.

Comparatively few candidates tackled this question. Weaker answers seemed less than sure about the novel's plot and complicated structure, and sometimes let themselves down in sketchy responses; better answers explored sophisticated concepts such as unreliable narration; only the very best dealt successfully with the specific requirement to discuss the relationship between the novel's two parts. One examiner reported that 'some responses to the second question just became a plot summary of similar things that happened in both parts of the novel; but there was some interesting AO2 analysis where candidates had an excellent working knowledge of the text'. Some candidates offered a broader critical context, one suggesting that Brontë is 'perhaps attempting to inject conventional Victorian sentiment back into the novel by providing a less radical second half, in which the second generation corrects the indiscretions of the first'.

Thomas Hardy: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Question 7(a) *'Tess's great flaw is her tendency to endure rather than oppose her fate.'*

How far and in what ways do you agree with this comment on the heroine of Tess of the D'Urbervilles?

A popular text – and this was the more popular option. As ever, the deciding factor was the ability to answer the question rather than just list general character traits apparent in Tess. Some answers fell into narrating Tess's experiences, and some spent more time on whether she is a heroine than on whether she opposes or endures her fate. Others engaged with the question more fully: for example, 'Her family and Angel's idealisation of her work alongside fate to bring her downfall, and Tess does try to oppose it, but fails'. She was often seen as a victim more of patriarchy than of fate: 'Her beauty, which is not the "trump card" her mother thinks, makes her a vulnerable target for predatory males from the flirtatious men at the Marlott dance to the sybaritic Alec'. Candidates have strong feelings about this heroine, of course, and most were keen to offer protection to her reputation.

Question 7(b) *Hardy has been described as 'an intensely visual novelist'. In the light of this comment, explore the significance of visual description in Tess of the D'Urbervilles.*

Some very good answers were seen. Better candidates often took the chance to let their answer to this question display both their impressive textual recall and their sophisticated approach to the novel. Landscape was often used well, open Blackmoor suggesting Tess's young innocence opposed to the 'ageless, impassive Stonehenge' which encircles her. Some weaker answers merely listed a series of described instances in the novel (generally locations, possibly indicating interference from a question in an earlier session). Colour symbolism featured in nearly every answer.

Edith Wharton: *The Age of Innocence*

Questions 8(a) & 8(b)

Examiners saw very little on this novel; there was some excellent work among the small number of answers.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*

Question 9(a) *'The novel's title is deeply ironic – there is nothing "Great" about Gatsby.'*
How far and in what ways do you agree?

Most answers set up a balance between why Gatsby may be regarded as "Great" and why he shouldn't. Others explored deeper ironies by arguing that in Nick's special dual vision he is *both* great and pathetic: for example, 'The title *The Great Gatsby* could be taken in many ways; the most common being that Gatsby is a great man with a noble goal. The ironic interpretation would suggest that Gatsby is a somewhat pathetic or despicable character; both could be reasoned to be true...' Many examiners reported that candidates responded freshly and thoughtfully to this question; most seemed to use their knowledge of text, contexts and criticism to arrive at a view which was strongly held and clearly their own. Many accounts weighed how far the greatness is down to Nick's flawed perception ('Nick is "carried away", much like his name'); contrasted Gatsby's qualities favourably with those of the other characters (especially Tom and Daisy); or argued that what is to be valued in him is the greatness of his dream and the determination with which he pursues it.

Question 9(b) *'A brave new world grown old and tarnished.'*
Discuss the settings of The Great Gatsby in the light of this comment.

There were significantly fewer answers to this question. Weaker answers tended to list settings and discuss them; in such answers, there was (as in previous sessions) a surprising amount of confusion about the geography of the novel. At all levels, the Valley of Ashes often provided a focal point for the essay, and links with T.S. Eliot and 'The Waste Land' were often exploited. The American Dream and the critic Trilling more often than not made an appearance in answers to this question. Only better answers made the most of the question's quotation in relation to the novel's settings; many candidates privileged either the quotation or the question.

Evelyn Waugh: *A Handful of Dust*

Question 10(a) '*A Handful of Dust is a novel without hope.*'
How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?

Examiners saw relatively little work on this text. One reported that 'the best responses were those getting down to close language analysis, like the animal imagery used to illustrate the heartless/savage nature of some of the characters'. Answers often cited the alternative ending written for publication in America as a way of investigating the degree of hope/despair at the end of the novel. Increasingly, candidates have depended on biographical context to support discussion of this novel, and some were inclined to make simplistic links between Waugh and Tony Last.

Question 10(b) '*The novel sets out to ridicule fashionable society, not to improve it.*'
How far and in what ways do you agree with this comment on the satire of A Handful of Dust?

One examiner suggested that 'candidates were quite clear that Waugh was seeking to ridicule and not improve'; another that 'very few candidates had much to say about satire in the novel'. Some answers offered telling social context; again, Waugh's biography was brought in to account for what was generally felt to be a bleak world view. One examiner was disappointed that candidates seemed to struggle to recognize or appreciate Waugh's humour.

F662 Literature post-1900

General Comments

This fourth January session for Literature Post 1900 produced much excellent work and careful assessment. There was evidence that centres continue to experiment with their text selections, ownership of the course by candidates and approaches to Task 1. Some comments from moderators on the quality of the submissions indicate the success and sense of enterprise in evidence this session: for example, one moderator reported that “there was a general confidence about the entry. I thought that most of the centres I looked at this time knew what they doing and were taking greater advantage of the opportunities of adopting different approaches to the F662 coursework, showing in many cases more assured moderation and wiser text and task choices. Task setting also had generally acquired a sharper focus and more centres were encouraging candidates to follow individual interests, usually in one of the tasks rather than both”. Another noticed that “there was more re-creative work than has often been the case, and my impression over the past couple of years is that this is on the increase”. Moderators generally were pleased to note more evaluation of contextual influences in candidates’ responses to texts.

Texts

Many new texts were seen this session, particularly by teachers seeking to fulfil the post 1990 text requirement, and also the growing practice of allowing students some guided free choice and the opportunity for independent study. Some of the titles and authors noted this session were *The School of Eloquence* by Tony Harrison, *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver, *The Redeemer* by Jo Nesbo, *The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox* by Maggie O Farrell, *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, *Woods etc* by Alice Oswald, *Ursula, Under* by Ingrid Hill, and *Ordinary Thunderstorms* by William Boyd. Unusual but worthwhile studies of poetry were offered in work on James Harpur, Derek Mahon and Carol Rumens. This session saw fewer uses of non-fiction, cultural commentaries, works of literary criticism as main texts, short stories and texts in translation. These are permitted by the specification, and no doubt we will see more of these choices in the June session.

Task 1

For Task 1, the Critical Piece or Close Passage Study continues to be the favoured choice of centres; however, this session saw about 40% of submissions using the re-creative alternative. Past reports have dwelt on the need to relate the chosen passage (briefly) to the text as a whole, and to focus primarily on AO2; moderators saw welcome improvements in these areas. In particular, there has been a marked improvement in the way poetry is handled. However, there are still some problems arising from the Critical Piece: some of the passages selected for analysis are overlong; poems and indeed passages from novels are sometimes being treated comparatively for much of the essay; some of the tasks set are more appropriate to a whole-text study; and some candidates are wasting words on the citation of critics and the inclusion of substantial amounts of contextual material. In the case of the last two problems, while such material can be classed as AO1 (knowledge), it needs to be remembered that analysis of form, structure and language (AO2) is the main requirement of this task and that AO3 (alternative views) and AO4 (context) are not assessed.

Re-creative writing was frequently attempted this session, often with considerable success. Almost all candidates appropriately provided a short pastiche and a much longer commentary, giving themselves ample opportunity to meet the Assessment Objectives. Candidates should also include and refer to a specific part of their stimulus text which in some way forms the basis or inspiration for their pastiche; where supplied this session, this extract was usually about twice

the length of the candidate's own piece. Most re-creations take the form of an insert that could be placed seamlessly in the original text, but some candidates have managed prologues and epilogues, and a small number have produced genre alternatives suggested by the original stimulus text. Normally, however, alterations to genre are to be avoided as, if not strongly suggested by the base text, they constitute textual transformations, a different type of imitative writing. Using the original text as a 'springboard' – taking a theme from the original text and running with it – is also inadvisable since resulting work is usually too far away from the stimulus to receive credit. Further improvements to re-creative writing will occur when candidates organise their commentaries so they have an angle or overview to enable the AO1 requirement for an overarching argument stipulated in Band 5 of the mark scheme. For further advice on this and other matters connected with coursework, centres are advised to approach the Coursework Consultancy via the OCR website.

Task 2

For Task 2, candidates ideally should have their own title or at least to make a wise choice from a sizeable list provided by the centre. Such an approach promotes ownership of the topic, including the necessary research required to do this extended essay justice. Occasionally all candidates across a centre have the same task, including the same quotations, the same critics and the same contextual flavours. Frames of this kind are not in the spirit of the specification and also are difficult to mark/moderate, with rank orders having to rely on literacy and fluency issues as the points assembled are so similar. However, the vast majority of centres offer their candidates variety and challenge in terms of the assignments on which they are allowed to write, a good number building in some element of candidate text selection. To enable the latter to occur, some centres teach a number of texts at speed and then allow candidates to make their own couplings from a manageable list; others teach one text in depth (say *The Handmaid's Tale*) and then give a list of similar or related texts (such as *1984* or other examples of dystopian fiction); some teach a cross-genre approach to Linked Texts (for example, *Engleby* by Sebastian Faulks and poems from *The Whitsun Weddings* by Philip Larkin) for which candidates negotiate their own choice of title, thereby opening the piece up to productive personal interests.

In Linked Texts essays, candidates need to marshal an argument and maintain an overview of two texts in a robust comparative structure. Many centres have also realised the role which can be played by contextual factors in organising points across the essay. However, while comparison has progressed as a writing skill, the second element of AO3, the need to use critics/theory and engage with alternative views, needs further work in many cases. In good essays, critical insights are introduced and explored as part of the debate, not limited to a token mention. In some less effective essays, only one text receives critical enquiry and the other is left without such analysis; in weaker responses there is no critical background reading/research at all. Ideally, initial text choice should take into account the availability of secondary material.

Assessment Objectives

AO1 applies to both folder items and is worth a quarter of the marks for the whole folder. However, very often it is taken for granted and assessed with insufficient rigour. As Literature Post 1900 is a coursework unit, proof-reading needs to be very rigorous to eradicate surface errors and stylistic infelicities. Candidates should also pay attention to structural matters, being vigilant about repetitive or similarly constructed sentence starts, ensuring that well managed discourse markers direct the argument, and avoiding unwieldy paragraphing – or its opposite, undernourished points with limited development. Teachers should also look at the sophistication of vocabulary and construction: clarity of expression should always be a goal, but there should be sparkling or persuasive clarity for Band 5 marks.

AO2 is now better attended to in Task 1 pieces than was the case at the start of the specification, although a number of responses each session remain overly thematic. Analysis of form, structure and language should constitute two thirds of the answer's focus, as this

Assessment Objective is worth 10 of the 40 marks available for coursework and is only assessed in Task 1. Many candidates and centres are adept at analysing language, but less assured with form and structure. For really high marks, such as 14 or 15, it should be expected of candidates to be able to evaluate all three key terms in their chosen passage. Poetry and drama analyses sometimes allow candidates to achieve highly in discussion of form, but more insight is often needed in relation to form in prose: for example, awareness of different types of novel or different narrative strategies. As far as structure is concerned, candidates often offer observations about whole texts during close readings of passages; they should aim rather to comment on the structure of the extract they are dealing with.

AO3 drives Linked Texts pieces, in that many teachers and candidates see these as extended comparative essays. Comparison is indeed essential to understanding AO3, but it is not the whole story. Strong comparative pieces will exhibit sustained and themed comparison rather than a simple alternation of texts or discussion of one text with the occasional side reference to the other. However, to achieve highly with AO3 as a whole, besides the robust comparison, candidates need to find alternative views on both texts with which they engage – either to show agreement with the position or to take issue. These views can come from reviews or critical studies, from theoretical standpoints, or from versions of texts which show a director's or another writer's interpretation of the original material. It should be helpful to centres to think of 5 marks available for comparison and 5 for the use of alternative readings.

AO4 involves contexts – either of reception or production, and ideally both. As 10 marks are available on the Linked Texts essay for this Assessment Objective, candidates ideally will provide a range of contextual factors for consideration and evaluate their impact. Context can be interpreted in a broad way: social, historical, cultural, economic, political, geographical, media, genre, language, biographical, literary and so on.

Administration

Administration, provision of appropriate documentation and communication with the moderator were handled very well. Meeting deadlines and processing requests for samples are handled as a matter of course by the vast majority of centres.

However, some pointers to improve practice are offered:

- (i) Cover-sheets should be fully and accurately completed, and should include the summative comment rather than a directive to 'See end of essay'. It is helpful if centres identify on the cover-sheet the post 1990 text. A new cover-sheet is available on the OCR website.
- (ii) Folder totals that are different from the sum of the marks on the two separate items need explaining. These will be seen as addition errors unless a reason for the difference is given in the summative comment box. Of course, marks can be adjusted as a result of internal moderation, but this needs to be documented so it is not perceived as a mistake.
- (iii) Essays with no or minimal teacher marking visible create moderator concern. Essays should be annotated for Assessment Objective achievement, ideally in the margin and at the end of the essay. Statements about the type of achievement rather than just numbers (for example, how well the AO is being met) are the most useful type of comment.
- (iv) Moderators sometimes find insufficient evidence of what precisely was studied for Task One. Textual extracts for both types of Task One piece should be provided as required by the specification and indicated on the cover-sheet.
- (v) Overlong folders should be dealt with in centres. Candidates should honour the 3000 word limit and edit as necessary. If that is not possible, then the centre should rule off at 3000 words and only mark to that line.

- (vi) Centres are reminded of the JCQ policies and procedures for suspected malpractice: Malpractice in a coursework component or a controlled assessment component of a specification discovered prior to the candidate signing the declaration of authentication need not be reported to awarding bodies, but must be dealt with in accordance with the centre's internal procedures. Centres should not normally give credit for any work submitted which is not the candidate's own work, but if any assistance has been given, a note must be made of this on the cover sheet of the candidate's work or other appropriate place. Where suspected malpractice is identified by a centre, the head of centre must submit the fullest details of the case at the earliest opportunity to OCR.

F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800

General Comments

We were pleased by the range and enthusiasm of response in this January's entry. Clearly some centres have digested reports on the unit from previous sessions, as many candidates seemed more prepared this January session to look in detail at language. Attention to register in exchanges between characters, and awareness of the ways in which language creates dramatic atmosphere and tension were often very good.

Responses to Individual Questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Because Othello has been studied by a majority of Centres, the Othello questions were the most heavily represented: of those, (a) on the balance of responsibility for Othello's downfall between Iago's cunning and Othello's weakness was overwhelmingly the most popular.

1 *Henry IV Part 1*

(a) 'Throughout Henry IV Part 1 heroism is portrayed as a kind of foolishness.'

There were some lucid and thoughtful answers on heroism, with Hal's seen as pragmatic and calculated, while Hotspur and Falstaff were seen by many candidates as establishing extremes. Falstaff's jokes and his behaviour on the battlefield were well used by some candidates in the discussion on heroism.

'As the play unfolds the King learns, slowly and painfully, that he has precisely the son he needs.'

As some candidates pointed out, the learning continues in part two - but the question drew engaged responses. Some answers ignored 'the son he needs', while others failed to see the prompting in 'painfully'. Some interesting answers saw the similarities of the King and his son in their Machiavellian attitudes and in their capacity to deceive. The Prince's soliloquy was well used as evidence of Hal's true nature, which his father does not see: 'Henry sees only his behaviour, not his motivation'. A significant number of answers were heavily critical of Falstaff, seeing him as a father who had failed in his duty.

2. *Twelfth Night*

(a) 'Sir Toby is more important to the play than he may at first seem.'

There were some very shrewd and well supported answers to this question, considering not only his character, but his dramatic impact on audiences over time. Attention was paid to his impact on language, structure and dramatic effects. He was seen to be catalytic in the play, a Saturnalian figure in both comedic and some darker senses, and his status was a topic of speculation. Candidates often saw him as a figure of fun who, like the play more generally, has a darker side. This is revealed mainly when his treatment of Malvolio 'goes too far'. Many answers saw him as ambiguous, and not without pathos. The very best answers based their evaluations on precise and detailed evidence from the text.

(b) ‘The play disrupts ideas of class, status and gender.’

A popular question, which took ideas of Twelfth Night disruption, and of sexual and social role-swapping, as the basis for some deft analysis. Some very perceptive answers saw that Feste and Sir Toby had particularly important parts to play in the ‘disruption’, and discussion of Malvolio was often very sophisticated. There was some interesting reflection on the complications of gender roles arising from the fact that Viola was played by a boy playing a girl disguised as a boy.

3. *Othello*

(a) ‘Iago does not destroy Othello: he provokes Othello to destroy himself.’

Many candidates managed to balance discussion of the relative parts played by Iago and Othello in Othello’s downfall; a minority, however, having apparently worked on past questions, failed to see the focus of this question and simply concentrated on Iago. Many agreed with the quotation – Iago is a brilliant, lucky and opportunistic destroyer with an uniquely vulnerable (if magnificent) victim. Some candidates looked at ways in which a soldier’s ‘masculine’ or military bond between Othello and Iago provided Iago with a unique opportunity for destruction.

(b) ‘The contrast between public and private settings is central to the dramatic effects of the play’

Confident answers often tackled both character and setting, and really took issue with genre, structure, staging, themes of deception, illusion and reality and their dramatic effects. Less substantial responses dealt with the effects of the characters being in two geographical environments, Venice and Cyprus, but dealt effectively with the nature of status, and the domestic versus the military world with some appropriate links to language and changes in the protagonist’s perspective and behaviour. Astute responses looked at the ways in which Iago exploits private and public comments, public and private aspects of his relationships in his dealings with Roderigo, Cassio, Othello and Emilia, and the ways in which he uses darkness both metaphorically (in his comments both about himself and others) and literally, as when the cover of night allows him to expose Othello to Brabantio. Some referred to his private relationship with the audience through soliloquy. Some saw the ways in which public and private scenes mirrored and lent emphasis to the play’s increasing tension and outcome: a very public bedroom scene in which Othello makes public redress and confession, where what should have been a private crime becomes a public display.

4. *The Winter’s Tale*

(a) ‘As guides and guardians, Paulina and Camillo are both crucial to the dramatic effects of the play.’

Candidates saw both Camillo and Paulina as ‘truth-tellers’. Paulina appealed to candidates, who wrote well about her courage, and some noted that she got away with her involvement in the plot *because* she was a woman, rather than in spite of it. Camillo was usually treated rather more briefly, but candidates who knew the text well talked about his dual role, working for two kings, but always regarding Leontes as his true master. Some answers saw a contrast in their loyalties, Camillo changing master but Paulina staying with Leontes. Surprisingly few answers mentioned their marriage, most of those few happily accepting it as a sort of fairy-tale ending.

(b) 'A play whose structure is an elaborate pattern of light and dark - each intensifying the other.'

Most candidates found abundant evidence not only of light and dark but of the 'elaborate pattern' of the two. Many saw this as embedded in the very genre of tragicomedy, and wrote interestingly about the death of Antigonus, which was seen as merging tragedy and comedy with a bitter-sweet, devastating yet amusing event, and the function of Time. Many felt that the darkness is not banished at the end of the play, with Hermione failing to speak to Leontes. Most respondents had a good eye for the detail of the 'elaborate pattern': often there was a good sense of dramatic structure and effects – the way an intimate scene between Hermione and Mamillius immediately precedes her accusation by Leontes, for instance.

Section B

This January a much wider range of questions was chosen by candidates than was the case last year: and a more inventive use was made of questions. This is encouraging.

5 'Words can entice us, can compel us, can ensnare us.'

Straightforward approaches to both sets of texts offered accounts focused on the nature of seduction and or persuasion in the texts, when and where they occurred. This in itself was self-limiting: such candidates did not always consider the nature of the language used or the personal and the public effects of the ensnaring or enticing words. A few very successful answers seemed to respond strongly to the vibrant resonance of language in Marlowe, Donne, Pope and Sheridan. These few often offered a secure literary critical analysis of the texts on which they were answering. There seems to be a need for more work on focused, detailed analysis of selected passages from texts.

6 'We admire defiance or disobedience - especially in the face of the inevitable.'

Marlowe and Milton. Candidates explored how both Satan and Faustus defy God and disobey his laws and the expectations [in the case of Faustus] of a theocentric society. It was important to see how the debate over the existence of Hell and its rejection by Faustus ties in with his hubris and marks him for the audience as a man facing eventual damnation. Mention was made of Marlowe's atheism, but it was not fully seen as a rarity in Marlowe's audience. Candidates offered good examples of defiance and disobedience, but admiration was rare. Satan was the exception – his courage and resilience helped and one small group seemed to think he was the hero and God the villain, so defiance was praiseworthy. Too many answers ignored the whole idea of 'the inevitable'. Often the point was made that modern audiences, not subject to the same 'religious strictures', were more likely to admire these defiant heroes than were Marlowe's and Milton's contemporaries. But some candidates did not fully understand the religious context, thinking that one or other of the authors was a Catholic, that repentance is a purely Catholic doctrine, or that anyone could find Satan purely and simply admirable.

Chaucer and Marlowe. Most writers found Faustus' defiance more attractive than the Pardoner's. Many answers compared Faustus and the Pardoner directly. Here, as in other combinations on this question, AO4 was often inaccurate – for example 'Faustus and the Pardoner are both disobedient to the Catholic church'. Surprising numbers found the characters purely admirable or purely to be condemned.

Webster and Donne. Admiration tended to be confined to either Webster himself or Donne's defiance on a personal level. Most answers concentrated on the Duchess, with a little about Ferdinand and all too few commented on Bosola. 'For God's sake hold your tongue...' often became the prop for this question, and was followed by chunks of background. Some were able to note that Donne, though later obedient to God, remained defiant - almost disobedient – in the nature of the language employed.

7 ‘There is a fine line between heroism and foolishness.’

Chaucer and Marlowe. Most essays managed to keep heroism and foolishness both in mind. Faustus, rising from base stock to 'Doctor's name', was felt to have more heroic potential than the unattractive Pardoner. On the other hand, there are similarities between Faustus and the Revellers: he declines from his early heroic ambitions, and they are distracted by gold from the justifiable aim of avenging their friend. Some answers saw Faustus as purely heroic, a Renaissance man, an academic achiever, but tended to ignore how he actually behaves for much of the play.

Milton and Marlowe. Some writers did not grasp the way in which Satan is presented by Milton, arguing for instance that the reference to 'the tyranny of Heaven' automatically makes God a tyrant. But there were some perceptive responses, observing that Faustus and Satan are both heroic and foolish because they try to achieve the unachievable.

Pope and Sheridan. Here there was good understanding of genre, especially satire, and of eighteenth-century society.

8 ‘Because we know we must die, we live all the more intensely.’

Marlowe and Donne. Some answers gave a good sense of how Donne's poetry is expressive of strong feeling. Some useful AO4 biographical context on Donne and his courtship of Ann More was offered, but only the best answers conveyed a sense of the intensity of his language.

Chaucer and Marlowe. It was astutely observed by some candidates that though Faustus, the Pardoner and the rioters could be seen as living life to the full, none of them actually achieve any sense of this fullness, squandering their lives and the opportunities granted to them on impossible tasks like slaying death, abandoning their initial goals to indulge in transitory earthly pleasures.

Donne and Marlowe. Candidates often found Donne more difficult to relate to the question than Marlowe. Donne himself was seen as a character in the poems, living life to the full. Details and comparisons linking Donne and Malfi proved somewhat less secure. Focus on the Duchess formed the main part of the arguments, with some brief references to Ferdinand. Donne was reasonably well linked (as a supporting role rather than a comparison or by contrast) with focus on his seductive poems, usually by general reference with some detail from 'The Flea' and one or two others. Some did try to compare his Divine poems by suggesting that he turned his back on living life intensely.

9 ‘Laughter is always dangerous.’

Donne and Behn. In *The Rover* potential rape scenes are presented comically, but there is real danger; in 'The Perfume' the obstacles faced by the lovers seem funny but there is a real danger of discovery. Answers contained some individual parallels like this, but mostly struggled to make much of the 'dangerous' element of the question.

Pope and Sheridan. Sometimes biographical contrast was used to introduce discussion of humour – Sheridan's humour was seen as less savage than Pope's because he was part of London society, whereas Pope was represented as living his life outside the normal social currents as his religion and his disability excluded him from normal life. On the whole candidates had more to say about 'The Rape of the Lock' than *The School for Scandal*.

10 'Love is the most selfish of emotions.'

Donne and Webster. There was a heavy emphasis on the Duchess and the nature of her love (with its elements of both deception and self-deception) which were linked effectively with Donne's poems of seduction and love. The selfish element was linked to destructive consequences – especially the Duchess and Ferdinand's love (though again, some candidates were tempted to compare the latter characters with Donne himself and his love for his wife). Strong responses were able to link the Holy Sonnets and ways in which some of these reflected love of God which could appear 'selfish' both in nature and language, in their attempt to obtain salvation and avoid eternal damnation. Few answers, surprisingly, discussed Julia, the Cardinal or Bosola – though some did comment briefly on loyalty or the love of power. Love of power was noted as a link, by some, with the persona in Donne's poems.

Donne and Marlowe. Some successful pieces contrasted Faustus' selfish love of knowledge and 'Donne's less selfish quest for knowledge of what he loves'.

Donne and Behn. The selfishness in both cases was seen as men's treatment of women as objects.

Pope and Sheridan. Love in satire, one candidate argued, is bound to be selfish. Lady Teazle uses marriage as a means of access to London society, just as 'love is almost a fashionable pastime' for Belinda. Pope was seen as more extreme in his exposure of 'love and marriage as covers for inveterate narcissism'. He has no equivalent for the virtuous Maria – even Clarissa's motives seem suspect. In both texts women are objects for selfish male desire, whether sexual or financial.

Donne and Sheridan. Many discussed the representation of love without focusing too much on the 'selfish' element. Only very few mentioned the love of God as an important feature in later Donne. Most concentrated on sexual love only in Donne, with some appropriate use of critical terms.

F664 Texts in Time

January 2012

There was a comparatively small number of candidates entering this session, dominated by candidates retaking the Unit, and it was clear that the vast majority of Centres were confident in their handling of the A2 coursework. Most candidates, whatever their ability level, know how to balance the requirements of an interwoven comparison of three texts (although some still deal with them essentially in sections, with links of varying deftness). In some Centres, AO3 integration and interweaving of texts was really excellent, and contextual consideration is increasingly allowed to arise naturally from the literary discussion. Work was almost uniformly well presented and addressed the Assessment Objectives appropriately. Many more Centres are now embracing the opportunities of coursework and are encouraging their candidates to exercise choice and pursue their own interests, either by selecting one or more texts themselves or by crafting their own title, with guidance from teachers.

Administration

One disappointing aspect was the number of folders which Moderators were obliged to return to Centres for remarking. The word limit is 3000 words and the instructions on the rear of the cover sheet are unambiguous: 'no folder must be submitted which exceeds this length' is printed in bold type. This has also been explicitly mentioned in all Principal Moderator Reports since June 2010. Over-length work will be returned, a process which necessarily causes delays in the moderation process and potential upset for teachers and candidates.

It is also expected that every F664 essay will acknowledge secondary sources with footnotes and bibliography. These are completed appropriately by most candidates, but again Centres should note that these are requirements of the specification and work should not be submitted without them.

Texts

While the canon is alive and strong in most essays, it was refreshing to see the mould being broken in a number of Centres, and names such as Sheers, Dunn, Ferlinghetti, Stockett, Frayn, Kwesi-Johnson, Senghor, Xingjian and Sackler appearing in candidates' choices. This is a clear sign of a wholehearted embracing of coursework, extending the range of candidates' literary experience. Work in translation showed equal enterprise with Maupassant's *A Parisian Affair and Other Stories*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Ovid's *Elegies* and *The Iliad*.

In some Centres, the poetry text needs a little more thought, as it tends to be the 'poor relation' in many essays. This is accentuated when essays have a character or biographical focus. It should be remembered that poetry is one of the compulsory genres in the Unit, so it is very important that candidates take great care with their choice of poetry text and show their awareness of its poetic qualities in their discussion.

The Assessment Objectives

AO3

As stated in the opening comments, candidates have become much more adept at comparing texts in an integrated way, balancing detailed discussion of points on a single text with sections of close, interwoven comparison. Such an approach is easier for candidates if they have a task which clearly asks them to 'compare' or 'compare and contrast', rather than a looser injunction to 'explore' or 'discuss'. The strongest essays compare and contrast with a purpose – the insights gained from the comparison help candidates towards the conclusion of their argument. Comparison for comparison's sake is much less effective.

Critical awareness is also improving, with most candidates citing books, as well as websites, as their sources for other readings, and a decreased reliance on Wikipedia and Sparknotes. The ability to explore, rather than simply refer to, other readings is a significant indicator of a candidate's merit. Sometimes, weaker candidates are over-rewarded for simply quoting a critic's comment or a web source to make a point, failing to engage with the quoted view. Moderators saw a variety of alternative readings offered, including film versions, newspaper reviews and theatre trips as well as recognised literary critical sources.

AO4

Much of the worked sampled considered the significance and influence of context illuminatingly; there were, however, some simplistic assumptions made which more careful research would have avoided. At times, candidates' understanding of the degree to which the influence of these contexts was present in their texts was questionable – especially the social and historical influences. Surprisingly, it is the 20th century that is least well handled, particularly after the First World War. More successful answers integrated contextual matters in the argument; less successful work tended to address AO4 in a separate, often introductory, section which was not made sufficiently relevant.

AO1

As mentioned under AO3 above, candidates write most successfully when arguing a case, which helps them to structure the response and use the other AOs to inform the argument. Knowledge of texts was usually strong this session, but literary understanding less so; responses almost entirely based on character and plot were often placed too highly within the bands. The number of lapses in grammatical accuracy and paragraphing was surprising in carefully drafted coursework and in some cases it seemed to have been overlooked by markers.

AO2

All candidates used quotations appropriately to illustrate key parts of their discussion. In some cases these were critically addressed, but while candidates offered some detailed analysis of language and imagery, especially in the poetry texts, there was uneven coverage of structure and form. Poetic form in particular should be considered, as it is form which makes this genre particularly distinct. Many candidates discussed the content of poetry, and sometimes its language, but there was very little real exploration of the effects of poetic form. Considering poetry only as autobiographical extensions of the author limited poetry discussion further. In novels, the effects of retrospective narration and changes in narrative perspective, where used, were discussed by some but not all. It would be good to see more drama chosen for F664, as this often elicits a greater awareness of genre, with candidates writing well when they recognise the performance potential of a text written for stage or screen performance.

Marking and Annotation

Moderators saw a lot of good practice from Centres this session, with evaluative marginal comments related to the AOs leading to thoughtful, detailed and balanced summative comments. While there were of course exceptions, this kind of care tends to lead to marks which are close to the national standard. There were often signs of thorough internal moderation. In one or two cases, such internal moderation had led to marks being raised, without the justification being made clear; it was usually the case that the original marks were the more accurate.

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

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