

English Literature

Advanced GCE A2 H471

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H071

Examiners' Reports

January 2011

HX71/R/11J

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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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Chief Examiner Report

This January saw an increase in numbers for all units compared with previous January sessions. In general, Principal Examiners and Moderators felt that centres were more confident about the demands of the specification, although some candidates seemed under-prepared to face the demands of the examined units.

F661 saw the largest entry, and examiners received work covering the complete range of achievement. Centres and candidates seemed to have a good understanding of the Assessment Objectives, and examiners praised the range of material studied to cover criticism and context. In the best answers, candidates showed an impressive range and depth of knowledge: the examples chosen for their answers were aptly chosen and always helped to advance the argument of the essay. Weaker answers introduced material with less understanding and discrimination, and at times with a 'box-ticking' mentality. In both examined units, there has been an increased interest in study of the writers' biographies, for example Frost, Fitzgerald and Waugh in F661, and Donne in particular in F663. Candidates need to handle this material with care to avoid making simplistic links between literature and life; this issue is discussed in more detail in the reports on the examined units. In F663, the range of texts and questions covered was narrower than last year, and examiners often felt that candidates had not prepared all of their set texts in sufficient detail. Thorough knowledge of the primary text is decisive in relation to AO2 performance, and proved to be the most important discriminator in both examined units.

Principal Moderators reported an increased confidence in the work of centres and candidates, and suggested that choices of text and task are now generally appropriate and increasingly diverse. Moderators are starting to see a greater variety of text and task within individual centres, and have reported that work from such centres is often characterised by a stronger sense of individual research and scholarship. Candidates are handling the demands of the Assessment Objectives in a range of ways, some of which are detailed in the reports which follow; moderators have been pleased to see candidates engaging more thoroughly with criticism and contextual material. The coursework consultancy service offers advice on choices and approaches to both units; all centres are recommended to make use of this service, which many centres have found to be prompt and helpful.

F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945

General Comments

In this session, it was notable that candidates are becoming increasingly familiar with the demands of the unit. There seems to be a more even balance now between the 'technical' requirements of the AOs on the one hand and a fresh, personal response to literature on the other. One examiner noted that 'The general standard of discussion and textual knowledge was creditable and it was rare to find a candidate who was not a realistic prospect for the exam'. Overall, standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar continue to be strong generally, and nearly all answers tend to cover a sensible length.

Answers on poetry were most successful where candidates privileged close analysis of the set poem, interspersed with occasional telling and developed links to other poems. Most candidates in this session remembered to focus on the question, and generally reminded the examiner of their good intentions by occasional reference to its terms. The weakest answers were those which depended on paraphrase and were descriptive writing – rather than analysis – dominated. Very few candidates forgot to reference additional poems in their answers, but a significant number did little more than name-check those poems; the question asks that candidates 'consider how this poem relates to others that you have studied', so it follows that some explication is required. Most candidates included some successful discussion of language; many attempted to deal with verse form, but often less convincingly (use of terminology such as 'blank verse' was often uncertain, and candidates sometimes offered views such as 'the poem has no rhythm', when presumably they meant 'no regular rhythm').

Successful answers in Section B were chiefly characterised by thorough knowledge of the set text and an ability to make close reference to it, often in the form of quotation. Technical comment is (understandably) more prevalent in answers on poetry, but candidates are well-advised to consider methods available to the novelist, and to remember that an analytical answer will always earn more marks than a descriptive one (the weakest answers in this section are those which lapse into a re-telling of the story). AO3 (different readings) can be fulfilled in a variety of ways, including through the candidate's own argument; by reference to critics; through discussion of contrasting critical approaches, such as Marxist or feminist; by explaining insights gained from watching dramatisations of set novels. AO4 (context) can likewise take different forms (for example social, historical, literary, biographical etc). Examiners have noticed that increasing numbers of candidates are learning 'snippets' of AO3 and AO4 and introducing these into answers indiscriminately, with something of a 'box-ticking' mentality. In good answers, critical and contextual material has been thoroughly understood and absorbed, and is cited where it is apt and supportive of the argument.

Comments on individual questions

1 Wordsworth: 'Anecdote for Fathers'

Answers on Wordsworth were often characterised by an impressive array of contextual information: candidates offered ideas as to the model for the child in the poem, and discussed Romantic views about childhood and education, often citing Rousseau. Weaker answers struggled to relate this learned material to a reading of the poem, but some examiners were pleased to find essays where contextual information gave appropriate support to a direct response to the text: one wrote that he 'enjoyed reading pleasingly fresh responses to the poem, which tended to see the child as "indicative of Romantic ideals" and the father as someone who "symbolises the Enlightenment", spontaneous feeling juxtaposed with the father's "need to know and define".' 'Nutting' and 'There was a boy' were the most popular choices of additional poem; examiners also reported excellent use

of poetry from outside the selection, such as 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' and 'Resolution and Independence'.

2 Rossetti: 'Maude Clare'

Rossetti was the least popular choice in Section A. Candidates often engaged with the poem quite strongly, but were sometimes drawn into a re-telling of the story without offering comment on the poem's form. As tends to be the case with Rossetti, candidates were inclined to relate her depiction of love relationships to what some described as her own 'love-life', sometimes with rather a patronising tone. The quasi-medieval world of the poem engaged the interest of quite a few candidates, some of whom could relate this setting to the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Many were well able to understand the use and effect of symbolism in the poem, and there was good discussion of the imagery of 'fading leaves' and 'budding lilies', and of the 'counter-intuitive' effect of the last stanza. Perhaps surprisingly, some candidates read the conclusion of the poem as having an optimistic tone.

3 Owen: 'Insensibility'

This was (again) by far the most popular choice in Section A. The best answers were alert to irony as central to the poem's effects and meanings; these usually focused initially on the idea of a self-imposed denial of feeling as the only means of survival in the trenches. Many candidates picked up echoes of the Beatitudes, and some developed this discussion very effectively: one thoughtful answer suggested that Jesus' words were counter-intuitive/turning expectations upside down (eg 'Blessed are the poor in spirit') and Owen too adopts just such a technique ('*Happy* are those who lose imagination'). Weaker answers were inclined to restrict themselves to a line-by-line discussion of the poem, often failing to reach the end of the poem or else struggling to find a reading of its conclusion; there was also some misunderstanding of the meaning of the very word 'Insensibility'. Some comments on verse-form seemed a little strained; for example: 'There is a lot of enjambement, which suggests the war is never-ending'. More sensitive readings contributed comments like 'In the last stanza Owen reveals the truth of his feelings, almost as if he too has muted them through the rest of the poem ... We are made to see that what we thought was advice was in fact wry observation'. Another writer pointed out that 'Although the poem itself is about lack of emotion, it provokes such feelings from the reader as empathy, compassion, pity and sorrow'.

4 Frost: 'Out, Out –'

This was a fairly popular choice, and candidates seem to relish the clear narrative element of the poem in contrast to some of Frost's arguably more mystical and obscure statements. Many made the link between the title and *Macbeth*; often, this link was misunderstood or undeveloped, but one examiner noted work from a candidate who 'understood the soliloquy's concern with the "transience of life" and how that fitted perfectly with the poem's subject matter'. Another answer touchingly offered the paraphrase 'he should have died hereafter'. There was some interesting exploration of the idea that the boy was complicit in his own death. The reactions of the dead boy's family members were seen to vary from devastated and pathetic to heartless and pragmatic; appropriate justification was usually provided. Most candidates scored well on the AO2 element of this question: the use of sensory imagery and onomatopoeia was generally detected in the poem's opening lines. Some of the best answers offered a clever analysis of what one candidate called 'the utter randomness of things'.

Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

Question 5(a) *'There are always reasons for loving in Pride and Prejudice, and Elizabeth loves for the best reasons.'*

In the light of this comment, discuss ways in which Austen presents love in Pride and Prejudice.

This text was again a very popular choice, and the majority of candidates chose this question. It was often well-answered, although consideration of the reasons for loving tended to be limited; a significant minority of answers discussed marriage rather than love. One firmly-argued answer concluded that 'Austen obviously wants to say marriage all depends on love but she must also show us the harsh reality that it depends on money'. Many candidates referred to the views of Mrs Bennet, Mr Collins, Charlotte Lucas and Lady Catherine on the economic or social benefits of marriage (with or without love) but were surprisingly less confident when trying to analyse the stages of Elizabeth and Darcy's romance and the extent to which they too were influenced by economic and social as well as personal factors. Good answers often compared Elizabeth's instant attraction to Wickham with the reluctant development of her admiration and love for Darcy and went on to explore the reasons for it. Many candidates clearly relished the opportunity to write about love in this novel, and many presented the view that the work is a celebration of this 'affirming human quality'.

Question 5(b) *'There is a Heroine, there is a Hero, and there is an Obstacle. The Obstacle is money.'*

In the light of this comment, discuss ways in which Austen shapes the narrative of Pride and Prejudice.

This was not a popular question, but candidates who could identify the original prompt quotation as coming from Martin Amis did tend to jump at the opportunities the question offered. Excellent answers were distinguished by a capacity to deal with all the terms of the question (and quotation). The shape of the narrative was rarely the specific focus of an answer – although the phrase did prompt candidates to introduce discussion of narrative techniques such as free indirect discourse. The nature of heroism was almost universally ignored.

Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*

Question 6(a) *Catherine says, 'Nelly, I am Heathcliff.'*

In the light of this statement, discuss Brontë's presentation of the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff.

This was a very popular question, and by far the more popular of the two options on *Wuthering Heights*. As ever, candidates write on this novel with a passion, intensity and drive; however, some candidates who jumped at this question as 'a gift' failed to address its concerns specifically. Better candidates structured perceptive and fluent responses. Favourite and familiar episodes and quotations tended to dominate answers – but they were none the worse for this. They talked mainly about 'the relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff as a struggle between the power of social class and the meaning of true love'. There was some solid work on contrasts between Cathy's feelings for Edgar and for Heathcliff, quoting the 'foliage' and 'rocks' opposition, and some interesting discussion of the idea of Heathcliff as Cathy's id and Edgar as her super ego. The identification between the lovers and the landscape was well used. One candidate felt that 'The pathetic fallacy is not a fallacy at all: the lovers' passion is actually a part of nature and can affect it'.

Question 6(b) *'The power of the novel derives from the way time shifts between present and past and back again.'*

In the light of this comment, explore the narrative structure of Wuthering Heights.

There were very few answers to this question. It seems (as again so often evidenced in answers this session) that only very skilled candidates handle the complex narrative structure of this novel effectively. Film and television adaptations of this novel were frequently cited in answers to the two Question 6 options.

Hardy: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Question 7(a) *'Throughout the novel Hardy identifies Tess with the beauty and vulnerability of the natural world.'*

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

Only the very best answers to 7(a) explored the natural world fully (and examined both beauty and vulnerability as well). Certain incidents (often those near the start of the novel) seem to grab the attention of candidates more than others and this often held back answers in the middle of the mark range. Better answers explored ways in which Hardy's writing draws on nature to evoke Tess's character (peony mouth/roses/colour red) and situation (Talbothays v Flintcomb Ash). Excellent recall of the novel allowed the best candidates to produce some excellent AO2 analysis: 'Hardy describes how "the iron fender grinned". This suggests that whilst Hardy uses the natural world to highlight her vulnerability and beauty, he uses manmade materials to convey the harsh, immovable institutions of society that are stacked against her. That the fender is "iron" shows how cold and hard it is suggesting that it is emotionally unfeeling and hard to change – much like Victorian society.'

Question 7(b) *'Tess's life is presented as a journey, even a pilgrimage.'*

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

The few answers on b) usually integrated the various stages of Tess's physical journey successfully with her emotional development. Some felt, however, that progress was thwarted continually by men, with the altar stone and noose the unfulfilling destination of her 'pilgrimage'. One candidate felt that a pilgrimage needs a direction and that, despite Tess's journeys and attempts to move on, the past is always pulling her back. Some argued that Tess's pilgrimage was pagan rather than Christian, beginning with the ritual dance and ending at the major pagan shrine with ritual sacrifice.

Edith Wharton: *The Age of Innocence*

Questions 8(a) & 8(b) Too little work was seen on this novel to justify a general comment.

F.Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*

Question 9(a) *Nick Carraway says, 'They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together.'*

In the light of Nick's comment, explore the roles and significance of Tom and Daisy in the novel.

This option choice was the more popular of the two. Sometimes analysis appeared in the form of generalised material; better answers were more securely focused on the terms of the question. At the weaker end of the range, answers tended to present separate character sketches of Tom and Daisy. Better answers explored the symbolic value of the two characters as representative of inherited wealth (as opposed to earned wealth, particularly illegally earned) and certain aspects of 1920s culture (materialism, money as power, violence, self-centred insularity, taken-for-granted adulterous inclinations); the picture of them "conspiring together" was seen to represent the wealthy closing ranks against the *nouveaux riches*. They were frequently presented as 'survivors', preying on weaker people and symbolising a collective (destructive) attitude to life which challenged a more enlightened vision of humanity and the

aspirations of the American Dream. Many answers speculated about the provenance of Nick's judgement of Tom and Daisy, wondering how selective his presentation of them is, and how biased his view.

Question 9(b) *'Nick never satirises West Egg society's conspicuous consumption without letting us know that he admires it too.'*

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of The Great Gatsby?

This was the less popular option, but a good number of answers (across the mark range) were seen. Candidates experienced no difficulty with the phrase 'conspicuous consumption'; instead, they made the most of recent parallels in our own society and subsequent unfortunate economic effects ('the banking crisis'). An invitation in the question to explore Nick's role as narrator (and an unreliable filter at that) was rarely taken up – although better answers did relish the opportunity to expand in this way. There was some interesting discussion of moments when admiration seems to be an unconscious element of Nick's response, particularly in the virtuoso writing of the account of the first party he goes to.

Evelyn Waugh: *A Handful of Dust*

Question 10(a) *'Waugh exposes Tony's code of honour and chivalry as a hollow sham.'*

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

This question was considerably less popular than the (b) option. Some weaker candidates seemed to struggle a little with 'chivalry' and 'sham' but even they tended to present decent character portrayals of Tony: a figure who seems to invite pity and derision in equal measure. Very good knowledge of the book (and an impressive ability to quote accurately) was often displayed, and many answers discussed the means by which Waugh is able to 'expose' honour and chivalry as a hollow sham – many used the two endings to prove their point. One answer argued that 'Tony's code is not a sham, more a fault in his character. His belief in the old ways ties him into the past'; and 'his unflinching trust in others simply means he is used by people like Brenda and Dr Messinger'. For most writers Tony's faults were minor 'compared to the empty parasitic presence of Mr Beaver and the greedy capitalist nature of Mrs Beaver'.

Question 10(b) *'Painful and hilarious in equal measure.'*

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of A Handful of Dust?

This option was by far the more popular, and candidates were well prepared to look at both 'painful' and 'hilarious' aspects of the novel. There were many competent answers which listed examples under each of these categories; better responses saw humour and tragedy combined in key scenes such as the death of John Andrew, which featured in most answers. As with all of the novels, detailed recall was a feature of excellent answers such as this one: 'The absurd names of the London set ('Polly Cockpurse', 'Mrs Rattery', 'Mrs Pecksniff', 'Mrs Beaver') appear purely hilarious on the surface, yet all are alluding to an animalistic society'. 'Painful' aspects of the novel were often linked to 'The Waste Land' (usually 'The Wasteland'); 'situational irony' was also enjoyed as contributing to comedy, for example Tony and Mrs Rattery's animal snap. Answers to both questions made increasing use of Waugh's biography in discussion; some became too enthusiastic in their pursuit of links between literature and life, offering rather simplistic discussion.

F662 Literature post-1900

This was the third January session for Literature Post 1900 and a very rewarding experience. Centres negotiated their way through the module with increasing confidence and very pleasing outcomes; and, for the most part, Centres showed security in their text selection and course creation as well as their application of the marking criteria.

Here are two of the end of session comments from moderators on the quality of the submissions and their pleasure in their job of checking samples of work:

“Texts were almost uniformly apt and of sufficient academic and literary demand; this may be the result of so many more Centres now using the consultancy service, but whatever the reason it was good to see.”

“There was a wide variety of texts this session and many interesting and thoughtful essays. Candidates generally had an excellent understanding of their chosen texts and arguments were well-structured.”

Confidence, high standards, appropriateness and range are features of candidates' work repeatedly highlighted by moderators. Centres have clearly worked long and hard to achieve successful outcomes in the vast majority of cases. Inevitably there were a few rubric infringements and some unbalanced interpretations of guidelines and ill-advised tasks, but these were not frequent occurrences.

High standards have been seen in the increase in academic formatting of essays, for example in the inclusion by many centres of meticulous bibliographies and indices and accompanying notes. Most Centres have used this approach to increase scholarship and research on the part of their candidates; footnote systems, however, need to be kept for genuine elucidations and citations, not exploited as a repository for sections of argument which will not fit in to the permitted word count.

Re-creative work is increasingly common as a choice for Task One: some centres specialise in the approach, others offer it as an alternative to close passage study. One moderator commented: “Re-creative pieces were astonishingly good – hard to tell from the original on occasion. And what an interesting opportunity candidates had, to emulate the form, style and themes of great craftspeople – certainly a valuable skill to have in life. I loved the work of the Centre who had to re-create *Waiting for Godot* – even the lowest mark achieved demonstrated very good engagement with the ways in which we relate, or fail to.”

How, then, can it improve still further?

- 1 Centres need to be clear in their own minds what re-creative writing is. There is a clue in the term itself. It recreates the world of the text – that is, the emotional, psychological, stylistic world. It is closest to imitative writing (although that might lead to mere pastiche), might figure as adaptive writing, but is some way removed from text transformation and not at all like original writing. If in doubt, the coursework consultancy service can help.
- 2 Centres aiming at 1000 words for this Task One option should be very strict with their candidates: 300 words for the text, 700 words for the commentary; or, if allowing 1200 words, then 400 should be for text and 800 for commentary.
- 3 Commentaries need to focus on stylistic choices made to achieve an authentic recreation; this has two strands – what is achieved in the text produced and how those elements fit in with the style and concerns of the original text as a whole. Ideally the latter should have a localised focus (how the re-creative writing works at a particular point alongside the area of the original text that inspired this new composition) and a global focus (how the text

produced could be seen as part of the overall pattern and achievement of the base text). Close contextualisation/response to immediate details in terms of a stimulus poem or a specific chapter or scene and how the text produced is characteristic of the text and writer in more broad terms need to be covered.

- 4 AO2 is dominant for this item so the concentration of the writing should be on matters of form, structure and language rather than of character, plot and theme. These can be mentioned and credited, but count as knowledge of the text (AO1), which is not as heavily weighted for this piece.
- 5 A task needs to be set with a clear outcome and critical focus, rather than a vague title being allowed. Centres may find a bullet point system useful, although this is not essential.

The alternative to re-creative work in Task One is a close passage study, which has much to recommend it and is extremely well done by some centres. However, some centres use a generalised single task (for example, 'write a critical appreciation'), which does not give candidates the opportunity to match disparate points to an overarching argument, nor their own interests in a text to a question that they could own. Centres with strong practice often provided a variety of assignments and passages for consideration and had framed tasks to allow for coherent well-structured argument. Centres are reminded that in the mark scheme one of the strands of AO1 achieved at Band 5 level is the provision of "argument", whereas lower in the assessment scale this aspect is present in the form of "arguments" (separate points and apperceptions which do not quite gel or are not organised into a shaped whole). This means that top marks can only be achieved in Task One by work which sustains a central argument throughout the assignment.

Knowledge and response are often very evident in close passage study answers for Task One. However, although AO2 is the dominant focus, a number of centres allow content or thematic material to dominate. The emphasis should be on the writer's craft rather than the ideas covered in the extract. Essays should be led by comments on form, structure and language; and for really high marks all three of these should be present in the answer.

While some centres are adept at taking a focus passage or poem and linking it briefly to the concerns of the text studied as a whole, a recurring weakness with the Critical Piece option was the failure of many centres to study a passage or representative text in the context of the wider text from which it was taken. More often than not, this breach took the form of an analysis of a single poem without reference to the collection from which it derived, although extracts from plays and novels were also inadequately contextualised at times. Put pragmatically: if centres are seeking high marks, links need to be made to the wider text, as the specification clearly demands the study of three whole texts (one in Task One and two more in Task Two). Meeting this reading requirement should be a key feature of questions/instructions for this item. The coursework consultancy service will give advice on how centres might develop early ideas for close passage study and extend the range and scope of tasks.

Task Two, the Linked Texts piece, is an area of major change in AS coursework. On the whole, candidates this session showed a confident ability to move between their texts, with only a very few simply writing what were in effect two separate but occasionally linked essays on their individual texts. Many moved fluently and coherently within paragraphs and even within sentences, demonstrating an impressive level of skill in dealing with AO3 (comparison).

Not all moderators reported that the linking of texts had been well done, however: one pointed out that "lack of skills of comparison was the central problem for some centres: most pieces, except the best scripts, preferred to give 'in tandem' comparisons, which really begged the question."

There are, of course, differing approaches to the comparative task in Task Two answers and these often line up with the different abilities of the entry cohort. At the upper end of the mark range, candidates maintain a consistently integrated comparison of the two texts. Other candidates, a little less ambitiously, firmly establish the ground with the first text before opening up the comparison by dealing with the second text clearly in the light of the first. Both of these structures can be very successful. However, to be avoided are essays which restrict comparison to their first and final paragraphs, with two separate discussions of the texts in between. Essays regularly switching text in each paragraph, but not drawing out comparison save for an occasional 'on the other hand', also do not score as well as they could.

The latter aspect of AO3, the use of alternative readings, however, also needs consideration, so these are not perfunctory but well-integrated and so that both texts studied are considered in the light of other readers. At a low level, other readings might be supplied by York Notes Advanced, by websites and/or by reviews; at a higher level, secondary critical texts and literary theory might prove the way forward. Books and websites consulted should be referenced in a bibliography. However, to obtain a good mark, what is being sought is not some weighty tome or abstruse theory or long list of texts at the end of the essay, but *engagement* with a critical view. Many centres did not really observe this strand at all; however, the vast majority tried to meet it by citing a critic or quoting a view. It must be stressed that mere citation rather than consideration of the opinion expressed or analysis of the stance taken is unlikely to score well, either. Candidates should aim to tease out the validity of an opinion or position on a text rather than hoping this assessment objective is met by implication.

AO1 is worth 5 marks and tight essay structure, accurate expression and sharp terminology in a sustained argument are what are required here. QWC and appropriate scholarly format (footnotes and bibliography) can also be included as a consideration under AO1.

For AO4 any type of context is acceptable provided it is made to count and evaluated; with 10 marks available for this assessment objective, range and/or depth of comment should be offered. Some centres take context as read, even if very little explicit contextual material has been offered. The impact of contextual factors as they affect the texts and task under discussion is what is required for high marks. Some essays offload context in a 'bolt-on' way, as gobbets of biographical or social/historical background, before the business of setting up a thesis begins; such 'tacked-on' context – while present – is disconnected from the thrust of the essay and, although gaining token credit under AO4, affects the AO1 achievement of the essay. Something else that should be guarded against is sociological or cultural argument that distracts the candidate from literary study. However, this session, a good number of candidates successfully established literary contexts (genre concerns, mention of other writers within the same field, reference to other works by the same writer), and the emergence of letters and correspondence as a way of providing contextual insight is an interesting development that a small number of centres have championed. As ever, if there are aspects of practice that centres wish to extend, the coursework consultancy service provides reassurance.

The coursework consultancy service is, of course, free of charge and a number of centres have availed themselves of this opportunity already; indeed, some centres sent along e-mail evidence to this effect or added comments to top sheets to show they had considered options for their candidates. It is hoped more centres will try out ideas or seek clarification in this way.

This session there were a few problems with the interpretation of the specification; these were dealt with sympathetically, and it is hoped INSET, the consultancy service, centre reports and principal moderator reports such as this all help centres to a better understanding of requirements. To clarify, three post-1900 texts need to have been taught and need to be written upon. These texts should have been fully read and the tasks constructed by the centre should allow candidates to show whole text knowledge both in Task One and Task Two. The same text as in Task One can occur in Task Two, but will most probably be used here as literary context (AO4) rather than as a text to satisfy the three texts reading requirement. Critical works can count as one of the Linked Texts pieces, but the text needs to be treated as an equal partner in the discussion not as a reading of the other text (AO3) or the context for discussion (AO4); this will probably involve looking at details of construction or organisation of the critical text rather than just its thematic content.

Centres are also asked to consider improving administration of coursework in cases where there have been shortcomings. For example:

- 1 Difficulties in sending work and accompanying documentation by the deadline. Moderators now use an email request system operated via OCR Interchange, and centres need to be alert to requests received in this way.
- 2 Top sheets sketchily filled in, with missing details of text, task and candidate as the most commonly observed errors. This information might seem onerous to fill in, but it is very useful to moderators and slows down the process when not available. It would be helpful if centres indicated on the top sheet which of the texts is the post 1990 one.
- 3 Folder totals that are different from the sum of the marks on the two separate items. 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.
- 4 Essays with no or minimal teacher marking visible. Essays should be annotated for assessment objective achievement – ideally in the margin and at the end of the essay. We are looking for statements about the type of achievement rather than just numbers, for example “sophisticated comparison (AO3)” or “evaluation of writer’s life (AO4)”.
- 5 Insufficient evidence of what was precisely studied for Task One. Extracts for both types of Task One piece should be provided as required by the specification and indicated on the cover-sheet.
- 6 Candidates being withdrawn, but OCR not being informed necessitating a paper chase that could have been avoided.

Despite these reminders and moderating team niggles, it must be stressed that this has been a very successful session and AS coursework presents itself at its best as something fresh and invigorating. Let the very good practice continue!

F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800

General Comments

There was a substantial increase in entries this session compared with last January, most of which were from candidates approaching A2 assessment for the first time. Perhaps for this reason, many candidates seemed only partially ready for the substantial challenges of this paper; it should be recognised that there is a significant step up in standard from AS to A2. Though some responses were impressive, informed and insightful, examiners reported that many answers showed insufficient detailed textual knowledge, together with a rawness of approach which suggested lack of practice and a degree of immaturity.

Section A: Shakespeare

An overwhelming majority of candidates answered on *Othello* – a bias even more pronounced than in the previous two sessions. Candidates often addressed Shakespeare questions broadly: many of them did not read the wording of questions with care, or know the plays well enough to quote confidently to support their arguments, instead offering broad summaries. Many candidates neglected close reading of the text (AO2), which is an important part of Section A.

Provided candidates had a grasp of the core text, reference to theatre and film productions was often beneficial. In the best answers candidates made real use of them as 'different readings', some actually citing, for example, the Oliver Parker *Othello* as a perverse reading of some scenes; conversely, less confident candidates fell into the trap of treating a film or a particular production in the theatre as the definitive text, thereby betraying a weak grasp of the original play.

Responses to Individual Questions

1 *Henry IV Part 1*

(a) 'Falstaff's vitality is crucially important to the play's effects.'

Of the relatively few answers on this text, a majority chose to write on Falstaff. The question's focus – his vitality – was missed by many, who chose to read the question simply as 'Falstaff is crucial...' and then to give a summary of his part in the play. Good, focused answers saw that it was indeed Falstaff's vitality which was the key to his importance – as representative of perennial sides of 'fallen' man, and yet also exemplifying central human qualities which were set against the world of the Court and the Crown. Candidates who had seen the recent Shakespeare's Globe sequence of plays often used reference to them very well.

(b) 'The business of state is counterbalanced by significant moments of intimacy and affection.'

Less popular, but very productive for alert candidates, this question invited a focus on two aspects of the play, and an evaluation of the balance between the two. Perceptive answers saw the warmth of the Boar's Head group, and the affection of the rebels in their marriages; they looked at the stiffness and telling linguistic evidence of Hal's scenes with his father, especially towards the play's end. Most answers focused on Hal and Falstaff, and on the details of their interchange, especially in 'role play'. The best answers showed why such scenes were 'significant'.

2 *Twelfth Night*

(a) '[Feste] embodies a sense of ironic detachment and loneliness.'

The less popular of the two options, this was often done very well by candidates who responded to the term 'ironic', seeing Feste's songs and his repartee as proceeding from a 'dark irony' which some articulated with eloquence and insight. 'Loneliness' was a trigger for those who saw Feste's unique status in the play, moving between families and situations but never entirely being part of any of them. His detached but crucial role in the play as a whole (especially in conclusion) was discussed by some candidates with subtlety and insight. Some very well prepared candidates were able to discuss Fools in other plays to contextualise Feste.

(b) 'The play's dramatic impact springs from deception and disguise.'

While most candidates agreed that the play was full of deception and disguise, many could get no further than Viola's adopted identity, which the less secure simply chronicled. Better answers saw the implications of the gender change, the fluidity and misrule caused by Viola's attempts to perform her chosen role, and even more productively, the ambiguity of a boy playing a girl playing a boy. The deception played on Malvolio was not mentioned by a surprising number of candidates – nor Feste's clerical role. A few very interesting answers really took on 'dramatic impact' and talked about the misrule and licence associated with 'twelfth night', and the play's transformative effects.

3 *Othello*

(a) 'Despite his apparent good nature, Cassio plays a significant part in Othello's downfall.'

The second, prompting part of this question read 'By exploring the presentation of Cassio in Othello, evaluate this view.' A substantial minority of candidates lost sight of the prompt, and having decided that Cassio did not play a significant part in Othello's downfall, offered an apparently prepared essay on Iago instead – sometimes even supplying a past question that they would have preferred. Focused answers talked about Cassio's promotion; about his intelligence (few seemed to know why being an 'arithmetician' could have been crucial in a world of artillery warfare); about his social status and 'courtesy' in speech; and his weaknesses – not just his poor head for alcohol, but also a certain fretful insecurity which the best could express by close attention to the text. Few answers looked critically at his treatment of Bianca, and his relationship with her, or his sexual smugness (with Bianca, with Emilia, and to an extent, Desdemona). The best answers saw Cassio as likeable but, like his General, flawed – and therefore easy meat for Iago.

(b) 'The play constantly questions ideas of heroism and nobility.'

This question offered a wide range of opportunities to look at the many and varied ways in which nobility and heroism are represented and challenged in the play. Most answers began with the paradoxes of the opening scenes, where a violently critical and sneering description of Othello by Iago is followed by Othello's dignified entry, his defence of himself before his accuser, and his commission to Cyprus. Many candidates lacked the detailed textual knowledge and sensitivity to tone to talk about these scenes – many knew that 'put up your bright swords...' exemplified something noble, but had no means of expressing an understanding of the lines' effects. Good answers needed to trace Othello's gradual slide into degradation, and his attempt to rally at the end (one excellent answer picked out as crucial the air of shocked astonishment among the Venetians on witnessing Othello strike Desdemona.) The change in Othello's language served as a useful indicator for some candidates of how heroic or otherwise he appears to be: 'When he adopts Iago's language,

he becomes what society would expect him to be – savage, out of control and bestial'. There was some good writing on the women in particular: Desdemona was seen as truly noble, Emilia as showing true heroism at the end of the play.

4 *The Winter's Tale*

(a) 'The ending of the play may appear magical, but it is made possible only by the persistence of everyday qualities such as patience and steadfastness'

Handled well by the few candidates who chose it, this question prompted a thoughtful look at the roles of Paulina and Camillo, together with a consideration of how much the play owes to 'masque' conventions and theatrical artifice in its conclusion, and how much to a somewhat deeper, almost musical sense of 'rightness'.

(b) 'The bitter and artificial world of the court needs the natural, pastoral world for its renewal.'

This question invited a comparison of the worlds of the court and the country, and – though chosen by few – elicited some very acute and well judged responses. Candidates agreed that there was a contrast, but questioned the terms of the proposition, offering a view that the pastoral world, though different, was in many ways no less artificial. Some apt reading in the Pastoral in Jacobean drama supported some mature comments.

Section B

This January a somewhat restricted range of texts was offered for section B. Marlowe and Webster very much predominated amongst the playwrights, and Chaucer, Webster and Donne among the poets. For that reason, combinations of those texts will be the ones most mentioned below. Very few centres studied *The Rover*, and Sheridan and Pope were almost invariably studied together.

Similarly, a surprisingly restricted range of questions was attempted: the most popular was overwhelmingly the first in the selection.

Relatively few candidates seemed to run out of time: however, there was a very much 'rawer' sense emerging from arguments than had been observed in the summer. As was observed in the summer report, good answers tended to establish some idea of the field of enquiry at the beginning of the essay, and then kept both texts in play throughout. This January, perhaps a third of essays were 'split', offering half an answer on one text, half on another, thereby weakening the crucial AO3 element of comparison. Another disappointing phenomenon was the essay 'by implication', where alternate paragraphs were on each text, but argumentative links were missing.

This January saw the emergence of a reading of John Donne which worried examiners. It is clearly desirable, when teaching Donne (often against The Duchess of Malfi) to build up a sense of chronological context: but examiners repeatedly saw references to Donne which took the poems simply as 'episodes' or 'scenes' from a 'timeline' style biography, and took the speaker in each to be 'John Donne', initially an inveterate womaniser, a lecher, then a married man, then an anxious Dean of the Church facing death. Such an approach can be reductive, and meant that in such essays 'Donne' equated to 'Bosola' or 'the Duchess' as a sort of fictional character. Candidates who adopted this approach rarely detected irony, nuance or tone: the poems became merely narrative documents.

Finally, and perhaps most surprisingly, a majority of candidates who wrote on *The Pardoner's Tale* failed to talk about the *Tale* in any detail, but confined themselves to the *Prologue* –which is not, as teachers should be aware, the set text, but can offer contextual insights into the way the tale is told. In particular, candidates who wrote on the question about appetite and its destructiveness often missed opportunities provided by the *Tale* in favour of focusing on the *Prologue*.

5 'Appetite – whether for power, knowledge, sex or money – is a destructive force.'

The great majority of answers were on this question. A wide range of appetites was analysed: for power, love, sex, God, money, attention.

Chaucer and Webster: A distinction was drawn between the violent destruction of the Pardoner's rioters or Webster's main characters and the lesser scale or metaphorical 'destruction' of others. For example the way the Pardoner is treated by the Host was seen as the equivalent of 'the more obvious destruction waiting on the appetites of Ferdinand and the Cardinal'. Appetite 'leads to the destruction of the rioters, Julia and the Aragonian brethren. But even more "normal" characters have their appetites: Delio for Julia, the Duchess for a normal life'.

Donne and Marlowe. Candidates tended rather to limit their approach by seeing Donne (often) and Marlowe (sometimes) in a purely biographical context. Most succeeded, however, in finding useful examples of appetite in both texts and debated how far they were destructive. Appetite was often felt to have positive associations in Donne's love poems (and, for those who considered the appetite for God or salvation, in his religious pieces) whereas its effect in Faustus was seen as destructive.

Donne and Behn. A few were seen. 'Blunt's appetite leads, comically, to loss of money and possessions; 'Twicknam Garden' presents the lover's more serious 'emotional destruction'.

Milton and Marlowe. Some very good answers were seen. 'Both Faustus' appetite for worldly pleasures and Satan's appetite for rule are destructive forces as they drive the characters to take illogical steps which lead to eternal damnation'.

6 'Love is a restless emotion, driving growth and change.'

Donne and Marlowe. Some useful contrasts and parallels were identified. Faustus' self-love and vanity – as opposed to love – were set against Donne's speaker's love, secular or divine. In Faustus sexual love is often presented negatively, as in Helen as succuba, or made fun of as in Robin's fantasies about 'stark naked' dancing maidens; in Donne, by contrast, there is reverence for sexual love and his speaker 'even invites God to "ravish" him in order to increase his spiritual love'. One thing they do share, it was pointed out, is love of argument. There were some interesting discussions of how women have little say in the poems, while the Duchess is central in her story, and in wooing the male character; but that love is only one of several themes in the play, while it is central in the poems. Some wrote knowledgeably of the love of God here; others concentrated only on the secular poems.

7 'Life is a game of chance in which skilful players risk everything.'

This was often well done when focused on Marlowe and Milton. Candidates showed some understanding of the risks in moral/theological terms. The best candidates saw the importance of considering pre-destination and free-will as affecting the risk/chance factors.

8 'Temptation arises from a willingness to be tempted.'

Donne and Marlowe. 'Faustus falls into temptation out of fear of physical pain where Donne tries to fight temptation out of pain and fear for his soul'. Most answers ignored the 'willingness' part of the quotation. The temptation aspect was well done in most cases and put into a moral context but the 'willingness to be tempted' part was only dealt with by the sharpest candidates. The few Pope/Sheridan essays dealt well with this. Pope particularly lent himself to detailed discussion, but work on Sheridan was less assured in handling and less well aligned with the question.

This answer also worked well with Dr Faustus and either *Paradise Lost* or the Pardoner. Many completely ignored the idea of 'willingness', concentrating instead on 'results'. A number happily equated the 'result' of the Pardoner's humiliation with Faustus being dragged off to hell. Others saw that the Pardoner's actions affect others, while Faustus sends only himself to perdition. Candidates who referred to the Tale found it particularly helpful here.

9 'Happiness – a state to which all aspire, but which few will ever reach.'

A question most often applied to Marlowe/Milton [though occasionally Webster/Milton] and was largely effective when applied to Faustus but less so when focused on Satan. Many candidates did not have a very accurate idea of how the 17th century viewed God.

10 'Irony exposes the gap between the way things appear and the way they are.'

Tackled by very few, but in those few cases, generally well.

F664 Texts in Time

This session demonstrated how well and how quickly this unit has matured since the first entries at the same time last year. It was much more apparent than in the January 2010 session that Centres were largely comfortable with the demands, opportunities and assessment of the A2 coursework.

Administration

In the overwhelming majority of cases, administration was very good, with well-packaged parcels of immaculate folders arriving on time with all relevant paperwork, bearing signs of careful internal moderation and assessment.

It is worth making a number of observations to help Centres in the future, however.

- The dates for the submission of marks are fixed and the same every year. Marks entered late cause severe delays to the moderation process and could potentially delay the awarding of marks to the candidates concerned.
- A4 manilla envelopes containing more than one coursework folder tend to disintegrate in the post, rendering that coursework rather vulnerable.
- Individual candidates' work should not be sent as separate sheets. Each essay should be attached to the cover sheet with a staple, or, preferably, a treasury tag. Paperclips should not be used, as they either disappear or attach themselves to the wrong work.
- The summative comment should appear on the coversheet, which is a requirement of the specification. This is because the coversheet forms the final documentation of the candidate's attainment.
- The Centre Authentication Form (CCS160) should always be included with the folders. It is not necessary to send individual candidates' authentication forms.

Word Counts

A number of Centres used the new downloadable interactive coversheet, which includes specific boxes for the total word count and the word count net of title, quotations, footnotes and bibliography. In other Centres, candidates appended these word counts to the end of their essays. Until the new coversheets become standard, either approach is acceptable. It should be stressed, however, that the 3000 word limit, excluding title, quotations, footnotes and bibliography, is absolute and fixed. There is no 'tolerance' as some seemed to think, just as there is no 'tolerance' about the timing of a written examination. Footnotes are to be used for the acknowledgement of secondary sources; they should not be used to develop points of argument. If a candidate does so, these must be included in the word count. Candidates who are allowed to submit overlength work should expect to have this work returned to the Centre. Any falsification of a word count is likely to be treated as malpractice.

Text Choices

Entries this session were dominated by traditional choices of text, though there was a marked and pleasing increase in the number of candidates who had been given the opportunity to exercise some choice in their texts. This led to greater variety and a greater sense of individual research and scholarship. Some interesting choices of poet were evident, such as Walcott, Lowell and Ferlinghetti, while recent works such as *The Road*, *Revolutionary Road* and *Angels in America* were also used. The filmed versions of these were often referred to as alternative readings in order to address AO3. There was a pleasing amount of drama in evidence, though in this session few candidates really discussed these texts as drama, thus missing some of the potential of their choice.

There were again examples of candidates submitting work on single short stories or single poems. These are rarely substantial enough to qualify as A level texts of equivalent weight to those set for an examined unit. Insufficient text weight can lead to adjustment to marks if it has not already been part of the Centre's considerations for assessment.

Task Titles

As well as a greater range of candidates' own text choices, there was also clear evidence that more Centres are encouraging candidates to pursue their own questions and thus embrace the opportunities of coursework more fully. Sometimes, though, candidates would have benefited from greater guidance on the wording of their questions. When framing tasks, it is best practice to ensure that the wording directs candidates clearly towards the Assessment Objectives, so that by following the title, they will at least begin to address the AOs by default. It is therefore wise to make explicit the comparative nature of the task, by using the imperatives 'Compare' or 'Compare and contrast'. 'Discuss' or 'Explore' titles give less guidance and are markedly less successful.

It is also important that candidates focus on 'ways', 'treatment' or 'presentation', thus ensuring that they write a literary essay and that they are comparing the *writing* of three texts, rather than the ideas, content or characters of three texts. Such wording should also move them away from close adherence to plot and character, which is the downfall of many weaker essays.

Sometimes the context is dictated clearly by the choice of texts, but if this too, as well as some critical view, can also be highlighted in the question for the candidate to evaluate, so much the better.

The Assessment Objectives

Though some aspects of the Assessment Objectives have been referred to above, it is worth commenting in more detail about how the AOs were addressed by candidates in this session, beginning with the dominant AOs.

- **AO3**
This was approached in several ways, with better candidates keeping all three texts in play throughout the response, but nearly every candidate attempted to compare throughout their essays, even if they dealt with one text at a time. The second strand of AO3, reference to alternative readings, was often well handled, with many candidates making apt references to critics and the most confident candidates engaging with or challenging their opinions. The range of engagement with other readings, however, was marked. The best candidates' approach was truly scholarly with the majority of sources being printed works of criticism that had been carefully read and assimilated. Less impressive practice usually comprised a reliance on a few websites such as Sparknotes and Wikipedia. Those using more modern texts, *The Road*, for example, successfully used newspaper reviews found online, as well as considering the 'reading' of the film.
- **AO4**
The use of contextual knowledge was somewhat uneven. Whilst most candidates attempted to make some reference to the contexts in which texts were written, this was often not well understood, especially in the responses of weaker candidates. Sometimes, judgements about historical periods were simplistic or sweeping, whether about 19th century attitudes to science and religion or the development of 20th century feminism. Interestingly, it was often the more modern 20th century contexts that were least well understood. Biographical information was seldom used productively. There was, however, a significant number of candidates who blended contextual understanding fluently into their discussion in order to inform their argument.

- **AO1**
Most candidates gave more or less equal weighting to the three texts and poetry was less of a poor relation than in previous sessions, although there were still examples where poetry seemed to be addressed more superficially, with rather tenuous links to the other texts. Fewer candidates dealt with the texts consecutively; most made some attempt to interweave discussion of them in their arguments. Many did this with some sophistication. Writing was usually good, often excellent, with fluent, well-structured, clearly focused arguments.
- **AO2**
There was some perceptive and detailed exploration of form, structure and language, although a number of candidates could have given more attention to genre. Poetry was occasionally analysed for content alone, with no real appreciation of style, and opportunities were often missed with drama. A strong address to AO2 was often the hallmark of a good essay, as the argument was clearly focused on the writing.

The overall impression gained by Moderators this session was that the unit is developing very well. As stated earlier, more centres are giving candidates the opportunity to follow individual interests, resulting in lively and original responses. There was a real sense of commitment and purpose, not just in Band 5 essays, but throughout the range. Candidates engaged with the texts on a personal level and gave serious thought to their topics. The work was often very well presented, showing meticulous attention to detail and pride in achievement. Moderators found it a pleasure to read work written with such care and enthusiasm and to see that it had been given the praise and recognition it deserved.

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

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