

Examiners' report

AS LEVEL

ENGLISH LITERATURE

**OCR Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE
in English Literature**

H072

For first teaching in 2015

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Paper 2 series overview

Examiners noted the strongly personal engagement seen in many responses, and how well-informed candidates were regarding a wide range of 'contexts'. It was clear that candidates were often understanding their chosen texts in the light of current events and live media issues - for example, conflict in the Middle East, issues around Trump's second presidency, the influence of social media and the dangers of AI. This is as it should be, although candidates are again reminded that the assessment of this paper is holistic and positive, and that very formulaic responses that target Assessment Objectives at the expense of overall cogency and question relevance are not generally destined for very high marks.

As previously, examiners noted that many of the techniques and technical vocabulary currently in vogue in the teaching of English and English Literature at GCSE are being replicated at AS Level. This can be very helpful, for example in approaching the requirement to demonstrate skills of close analysis (AO2) which is a feature of the assessment of both sections of this exam. However, such analysis should serve the effectiveness of the response as a whole, rather than amounting to 'feature spotting' for its own sake. If used gratuitously or inaccurately, such terminology can cramp a response, or even mask meanings by introducing unnecessary convolution. The best responses always conveyed genuine erudition with controlled, syntactically disciplined clarity of expression. It is worth reflecting on key AO1 qualities identified in the mark scheme as required for the higher Levels: Level 5, 'good level of coherence and accuracy'; Level 6, 'consistently fluent and accurate'.

Over-generalised use of some contextual terms (e.g. 'the patriarchy'; 'the American Dream') was noted as a feature in some less successful responses. If used sweepingly and without nuance, as if to cover all characters in a text despite their presentation as culturally and psychologically diverse, such claims carry little weight.

Nearly all candidates take care to make sure that their work is easily legible, and this is valued by examiners. A very small minority do present responses that are difficult to read and centres should advise candidates against rushing as they write, and perhaps encourage some candidates to research the use of different kinds of pen.

Very long responses often do not produce greater clarity of argument than responses which, while still being substantial, are also selective and well-controlled. Similarly, although perhaps more obviously, very short or fragmentary responses tend to lack the detail and thoroughness expected of high level responses. Where candidates had planned their responses, they tended to keep a tighter focus on the question, and thereby to save time and achieve greater clarity. However, to judge by some of the responses that followed them, highly elaborate plans were sometimes less helpful.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- wrote accurately and legibly - wrote an appropriate amount for each question - maintained a focus on the terms of the question - remembered to address the relevant Assessment Objectives - analysed linguistic features and dramatic techniques/effects in the service of their overall argument (rather than as techniques to be spotted simply for the sake of addressing AO2) - included critical views and performance interpretations in the service of their overall argument (rather than simply for the sake of addressing AO5) - were prepared to offer imaginative and personal ideas, rather than just sticking to pre-prepared material - blended aspects of 'contexts' (AO3) into responses, rather than including such information without regard to the question.	- wrote very short responses - wrote generalised responses, rather than trying to adapt their knowledge and understanding to the specific focus and demands of the question - made little effort to integrate AO specific material into a question-focused argument - used complex linguistic and literary terms without fully understanding them, and/or without considering their relevance - repeated the exact words of the question often within the response, as if doing this would in itself establish question relevance - listed quotations from critics and/or performance interpretations as 'bolted on' extras, rather than integrating them into the overall argument - listed biographical 'facts' about writers without integrating them into the overall argument.

Assessment for learning



- It is worth re-iterating that examiners look to mark this unit positively and holistically.
- The requirement to address Assessment Objectives is most effectively met when AO specific material is used to support the overall argument which a candidate seeking to develop in response to a question, rather than 'bolted on' in order to display depth of 'knowledge'. In many really successful responses, such material is very often used sparingly, in a way that enhances the overall clarity and impact of the response as a whole.
- In analysing the effect/s of a writer's choice of language or dramatic techniques (AO2), candidates are reminded that the use of complex terminology does not in itself produce perceptive work. A close and sensitive consideration of a writer's effects should be linked to the overall argument being developed; appropriate and accurately use linguistic terminology often has a part to play in such analysis – but its display should never become the candidate's objective.
- Candidates are reminded that answers do not need to be excessively long in answering the questions in this unit. Some of the very best responses are far shorter than others where a candidate has taken little time to think, read their comparison extract carefully (in Section 2), and commit time to the consideration and planning of responses.
- It is not possible to achieve high levels of success in this unit without clear thinking, no matter how well prepared a candidate may be.

Section 1 overview

The majority of candidates answered on *A Streetcar Named Desire*, split very evenly between the two available options, 2 (a) and 2 (b). While it was very clear that most knew the play well, a substantial minority would have done better to have written a bit less, 'displayed' less 'knowledge' about the play, and instead taken time to shape their responses more carefully in the light of the question selected.

Details from the 1951 Elia Kazan/Marlon Brando and the 2014 Gillian Anderson Young Vic/NT Live productions were brought into many responses, the more successful inclusions being specific in the selection of performance detail to help in the development of key ideas.

References to 'Plastic Theatre' and 'Southern Belle' worked well when clarified in a way that was relevant to the argument being presented and exemplified from the play. Without some such clarification, however, their inclusion added little of substance; they are not self-explanatory terms.

Some AO2 analysis felt as if it was 'bolted on' or as if included as a token gesture. At its best, such close analysis should be placed so that it helps to develop a thought or argument, rather than simply because candidates know that some such commentary is needed somewhere in the response. Occasionally, when every quotation has a 'tag' of quick (but, so far as the question is concerned, pointless) close analysis added on, it can become a distraction from the main business of any response – what does the candidate actually think?

In many responses, biographical contexts to the play were outlined (for example, the psychiatric illness of Williams' sister Rose and her subsequent lobotomy, or Williams' homosexuality). These succeeded when they were accurately reported and (crucially) tailored to the question, although there were plenty of responses that did not adapt what candidates knew about William's life in this way.

With this text especially, it is important to consider not just what Williams meant to communicate, but how he sought to do so by means of the dramatic impact on audiences of his play in performance. What audiences see and (beyond the dialogue) hear is highly significant, and successful responses always demonstrate an awareness of this.

In many of the most successful responses, quite minor characters had their (question-relevant) moment in the spotlight. Eunice and the Mexican flower vendor were two examples of this.

It was interesting that some candidates adduced Andrew Tate as a figure of comparable impact in their own media-driven world to Stanley in the play's rugged post-War environment.

Question 1 (a)

1 Noel Coward: *Private Lives*

Either

(a) 'The play shows what fun it can be to dominate other people.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of *Private Lives*?

[30]

No responses seen to this question.

Question 1 (b)

(b) 'Victor is a bully with a bad temper, while Sybil is foolish and immature.'

In the light of this comment, discuss the roles of Victor and Sybil in *Private Lives*.

[30]

No responses seen to this question.

Question 2 (a)

2 Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Either

(a) Williams argued his play was about the 'merciless harshness of America's success-orientated society.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

[30]

While the prompting quotations are nearly always confected in order to help set questions up, this one was a direct quotation from Tennessee Williams himself (that his play was about the 'merciless harshness of America's success-orientated society'), which made it relatively uncontroversial as a point of view. If the playwright thought this about his play, then it would seem perverse to suggest that it was not part of what he was aiming to portray. Better responses, of course, sought to use the quotation as a springboard to their consideration of the play's qualities, rather than providing a fairly inert list of ways in which Williams' statement might be said to be true.

Williams' words provided an easy way into AO3, and many candidates began their responses by developing contextual material about the shifting culture of the immediate post-War South as a secure foundation for their response.

Many successful responses considered how Williams presents Blanche and Stella as responding very differently to such fundamental and radical cultural change, with Stella's more pragmatic accommodation of her husband's brutality appearing to offer a more viable, if horribly compromised, way forward than Blanche's opposing insistence on 'magic'. Both sisters are, it was often argued, effectively doomed by the prevailing circumstances that have swept away the old South and its ways – to an undignified passive surrender to their brutalities in the case of Stella, and to annihilation by their amoral momentum in the case of Blanche.

Stanley was widely seen as an embodiment of the 'merciless' world to which Williams was referring, and it is Blanche's refusal to accommodate him – and therefore the values he asserts – that was often seen as leading to her destruction. Mitch was also seen by many as a potentially similar victim to Blanche, but one who allows himself to be influenced towards a decisive rejection of Blanche and the anachronistic fantasy she was often said by candidates to represent. We watch, some argued, as Mitch undergoes a process of social realignment that saves him from a fate similar to Blanche's, but which may have cancelled his capacity for humane relationships.

An interesting line taken on Blanche was that she is made to suffer because, in contrast to Stella, she wishes to dominate, rather than allowing herself to be dominated by her circumstances.

Question 2 (b)

(b) 'Stella seems both tougher and gentler than her sister Blanche.'

In the light of this comment, discuss the roles of Stella and Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
[30]

The most successful responses invariably engaged fully with the statement prompt – that 'Stella is both tougher and gentler than her sister Blanche', paying particular attention to the words 'tougher' and 'gentler', rather than producing more generalised character comparison responses. Quite often, less successful candidates (who still knew the play very well, in many cases) produced responses that considered which of the sisters was weaker or stronger than the other; not necessarily qualities identical to toughness and gentleness in this play.

A few responses wrote about only one of the women rather than offering a comparison of both.

A good number of successful responses resisted the temptation to produce clear, unambiguous and settled conclusions. There were plenty of ways identified in which both Stella and Blanche could be seen as both 'tough' and 'gentle', and some of their actions and words were identified as simultaneously both. 'Toughness' and 'gentleness' are not, many argued, mutually exclusive opposites in this play.

Many responses suggested that Blanche has already demonstrated her 'toughness' before the play begins, in having striven to resist the collapse of Belle Reve and all it represents. This viewpoint was best presented by candidates who clarified that Blanche's Laurel ordeals were, as she so emotively reports them, part of the play's exposition and 'backstory' rather than features of its main action.

Many responses argued that the sisters are most clearly contrasted in their reactions to Stanley, and that Blanche tries, more consistently than Stella, to be 'tough' in her own way when provoked by his coarseness and brutality. Stella is, many argued, too gentle in accommodating Stanley's brutality earlier in the play as a response to the compulsive animal sexuality of their relationship and to the security he offers her in such an unstable world; but, as the play ends, she was said by many to be tough in opting to align herself with Stanley for the sake of her baby.

Some argued, in effect, that Blanche cannot help herself in wanting to maintain a self-justifying sense of cultural superiority over both Stanley and Mitch, and that Stella's frequent gentleness towards her demonstrates her (Stella's) awareness of this helplessness.

A minor note; while the notion of 'gentility' could certainly be considered where Blanche and Stella are concerned, few candidates who used the word did so in a way that was accurate to its precise meaning. 'Gentleness' is the noun that derives from the adjective 'gentle' as it was clearly understood in the great majority of responses; 'gentility' is not synonymous with 'gentleness'.

One response offered the view that any 'gentleness' we may discern in Blanche is just another ploy to prop up her sense of self-worth in an environment which she finds deeply hostile, and into which she does wish to be assimilated. Even her gentler side is, as she acknowledges, a "Barnum and Bailey" enactment intended to allow her to hide her true self away from the harshness of a patriarchal nightmare.

Exemplar 1

2	b	In 'A Streetcar Named Desire', Williams portrays Stella as more regret resilient and 'tougher' than Blanche because of her ability to adapt to her new surroundings. Though that both Blanche and Stella come from an aristocratic, Old South, Southern Belle background, Stella is able to adapt much more easily to the New South than her sister. However, the Williams also suggests that Blanche is 'tougher' than Stella because of the sheer trauma that she has had to deal with, such as the loss of Belle Reve and the suicide of her husband. However, both the sisters are shown to be equally 'gentle', in line with idea post-war ideals of gender roles. Williams suggests that Stella may be tougher than Blanche due to her better ability to adapt to her new surroundings, suggesting her 'instinct for survival and indeed her resilience. Both the sisters came from an aristocratic Southern Belle background, with their fortune likely built on slavery. However, after the American Civil War (which ended in the victory of the North) the Old South began to decline in status and importance as slavery was it prohibited. Williams' own mother was a Southern Belle, and suffered this decline. While Blanche finds the economic pragmatism pragmatism of New South difficult to accept, Stella is much more welcomi welcoming of the change. She talks of how there were "things to adjust myself to later on" and happily lives in their small home. Blanche, however, is shocked at Stella's own living conditions, labelling them "horrible" and
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		likening them to a literary work by Edgar Allan Poe. Blanche is further shocked that Stella has no maid and questions "Why didn't you tell me?" "Why, that you had to live in these ... conditions?" The juxtaposition of the two characters along with Blanche's haughty tone emphasises the contrast between them. Indeed, Blanche seems "incongruous to this setting" [Elysian Fields], dressed in a white bodice when around her is an atmosphere of decay. In the 2014 Old Vic Gillian Anderson production, Blanche is shown to be pulling a luxury suitcase when she arrives at Stella's home, emphasising her "incongruous" nature, the adjective used by Williams. It is for these reasons as well that critics argue that Stella shows "a commitment to self-preservation."
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Exemplar 1 illustrates the way in which many of the best candidates open their responses with a brisk, dynamic clarity that gives no sense of anything being held back. Within two tightly packed paragraphs, it is quickly clear that the candidate knows the play in close textual detail, understands its historical and cultural background, and is able to integrate critical and performance details into a response that has a firm grip on the terms of the question. Clear personal opinions have already been stated, and the ground established for their further investigation. While some moderately technical vocabulary has been employed ('juxtaposition'; 'adjective') the candidate has not sought to demonstrate analytical sophistication for its own sake but has prioritised clarity of expression throughout.

Question 3 (a)

3 Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming*

Either

(a) 'The purpose of dialogue in this play is to get something from another person.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of *The Homecoming*?

[30]

No responses seen to this question.

Question 3 (b)

- (b) 'Ruth contributes something this all-male household so urgently needs.'

In the light of this comment, discuss the role of Ruth in *The Homecoming*.

[30]

No responses seen to this question.

Question 4 (a)

4 Alan Bennett: *The History Boys*

Either

- (a) 'A play that explores frustration as much as success.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this comment on *The History Boys*?

[30]

Very few responses were seen to this question.

Question 4 (b)

- (b) 'Irwin's personal insecurities come through in his cynical teaching methods.'

In the light of this comment, discuss the role of Irwin in *The History Boys*.

[30]

Very few responses were seen to this question.

Question 5 (a)

5 Polly Stenham: *That Face*

Either

- (a) 'In this play the problems of a dysfunctional family reflect those of wider society.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of *That Face*?

[30]

No responses seen to this question.

Question 5 (b)

(b) 'Martha treats Henry like a plaything, not a son.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the roles of Martha and Henry in *That Face*? [30]

No responses seen to this question.

Question 6 (a)

6 Jez Butterworth: *Jerusalem*

Either

(a) 'Jerusalem is not paradise but a rubbish dump.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the setting of *Jerusalem*? [30]

Almost everyone who wrote about *Jerusalem* chose this question. While there were some less successful responses that displayed little beyond an outline understanding of the play, there were several of very high quality indeed. Most candidates, initially at least, discussed ways in which the play presents us with a 'rubbish dump' – both literally (e.g. Johnny's caravan and its physical environs; the cheaply imitative travesty of Flintock Fair as it is reported) and more figuratively (e.g. the cynicism expressed by some of Butterworth's characters). Some chose to continue in this vein, arguing that Johnny's radical individualism is an affront to civilised values, that he is an unreliable father, and that the lure of his 'Greenworld' threatens harm to the vulnerable individuals who fall for it. Some such responses were certainly successful because they maintained their focus on the text and the question, whereas a few lost their way by degenerating into generalised personal views on regrettable attitudes and behaviour seen as typifying contemporary English society. Candidates may deplore such behaviour, but it is important to stay focused on the play.

Very few responses argued that the play depicts a 'paradise', but many saw the play as being about loss and forgotten togetherness. The figure of The Professor was brought into several of the best responses as having a dramatic significance well beyond the confusion and whimsy he may at first appear to offer. Phaedra was another figure recognised by some as carrying a mystical significance that was hard to pin down, but which influenced the balance and ambiguity of the play as a whole. Some responses argued very successfully that the play offers us a glimpse, as Blake did, of a radical opposition to institutionalisation and authoritarian social structures. Butterworth's purpose in writing the play was seen by some as to challenge the rigid constructs of societal propriety that the bureaucratic paralysis embodied in Parsons and Fawcett have largely succeeded in imposing.

Many candidates cited the 2008 financial crash as a key context, and followed this up by also considering how the political and cultural contexts had changed when the play was later revived (in 2018 and 2021). The Jimmy Savile case was one such intervening development, cited by some candidates as perhaps having altered audience responses to the play.

Question 6 (b)

(b) 'Dawn and Wesley can't tear themselves free from the respectable world.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the roles of Dawn and Wesley in *Jerusalem*?

[30]

Very few responses were seen to this question.

Section 2 overview

As ever, the best Section 2 responses were those in which candidates were able to set aside at least some of what they 'knew' about their set text so as to shape a more effective response to the question itself. It is very seldom that candidates in this exam do not know enough to be able to put together effective responses – the difference between those who achieve high levels of success and those who score more modestly is often to do with having the confidence to think independently, to consider the given extract carefully, and to discriminate between what is useful and what is not relevant.

In this section, there is the challenge of unseen material, although candidates should look through past papers to reassure themselves that these extracts are chosen with great care to provide opportunity rather than difficulty. It is always worth a few minutes of exam time to settle in with the extract itself, allowing it to percolate in its own time. It is unhelpful for candidates to take the view that that time spent reading and thinking is time being wasted.

Question 7

7 F Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*

Discuss ways in which Fitzgerald presents wealth and luxury in *The Great Gatsby*.

In your answer you should make connections and comparisons with the unseen passage below, in which a relationship is tentatively re-started. [30]

Nearly all responses demonstrated a detailed understanding of Fitzgerald's novel, and were able to relate it to key contexts such as Prohibition/bootlegging, the post-Great War economic boom, the culture clash between 'Old' and 'New' money. Some less successful responses relied on terms such as 'The American Dream' and the 'Roaring Twenties' more or less as if they were self-explanatory, limiting their effectiveness as supporting evidence for ideas and arguments being put forward.

For many, the extract provided a stimulating and ironic contrast to the novel – not in the display of excessive wealth (analysed as common to both texts), but in its apparent justification. Gregg's acknowledgement of how much the house is all costing was seen as something of a contrast to Gatsby's attitude. Gregg's aim (to 'insure...a happy wife and family') was central to many responses as a contrast to Gatsby's obsessive but miscalculated project to win back Daisy.

The fate of characters from less elevated backgrounds was another source of comparison, although comparisons between the figure of Forbes (in the extract) and Myrtle and George Wilson (in *The Great Gatsby*) felt a little over-stretched in some responses.

Plenty of references to 'pyramids of pulpless halves' and to 'the green light' on the end of Daisy's dock figured in responses at all levels of achievement, with the more successful managing to blend interpretation of such symbolism into their overall argument, and the less successful recognising the quotations as significant, but unable to present a convincing and question-relevant exploration.

Exemplar 2

While ~~the text~~ "The Great Gatsby" portrays those with excessive wealth or those engaging in conspicuous consumption as morally superficial and shallow, we do not see this to the same extent in 'The Love Nest', where Gregg's motives seem to be at least somewhat more noble. Nick describes the morally undisciplined behaviour of those at Gatsby's parties -

He mentions how the first time he went, he thought he was one of the few "who had actually been invited" - furthermore he compares the ~~partygoers~~ partygoers' behaviour to that associated with an "amusement park". Many of the guests make little attempt to get to know their host or meet him - instead, they spread countless lies and rumours about his background, suggesting he "killed a man once" or that he was a "German spy during the war." ~~The text~~ Even those with wealth are presented ~~as~~ as bored and unfulfilled, such as Daisy. Nick talks of the "basic insincerity" of her speech - ~~for example~~, additionally, the use of repeated questions and hyperbole when Daisy says: "What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon... and the day after that, and the next thirty years?" also helps to highlight the extent of her unfulfilment. In this way, Fitzgerald ~~criticises~~ criticises the moral ~~superficiality~~ superficiality that was so pervasive in the 20s. Rather than heading west in search of stability and fulfilment of the American Dream as settlers had traditionally done, both texts show the tide turning east, as people flocked to big ~~metropolises~~ cities like New York in search of material wealth. By contrast, in the extract, Gregg does not seem to be motivated by ~~the~~ morally superficial concerns such as the ~~same~~ ~~same~~ partygoers in Gatsby,

		but rather, he seems to have the interests of his family at heart. He mentions how his home is "a good investment if it tends to make your family proud and satisfied" and it "insures" him of "a happy wife and family." Indeed The exclamation of "What more can a man ask as well as
		relatively humble home with which Gregg speaks highlights how, in contrast to Gatsby, his wealth is there to make his family happy, not just for the arbitrary accumulation of wealth.

In this exemplar note how the candidate has identified precisely how *The Great Gatsby* reflects a cultural shift in American attitudes to personal aspiration. The phrase 'The American Dream' is used, but in a way that shows that the candidate has a developed understanding of its implications. It is also worth looking here at how points of comparison between Fitzgerald's novel and the unseen extract are carefully nuanced where necessary. Phrases like '...not to the same extent...' and '...at least somewhat...' show a fineness of judgement being applied to comparisons, whereas some less successful responses to this question (and others in the section) observed comparisons only in terms of absolute similarity or contrast. The abundant inclusion of direct quotations both from the novel and also from the unseen extract is also impressive in this paragraph.

Question 8

8 Angela Carter: *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*

Discuss ways in which Carter transforms folk-tales in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*.

In your answer you should select material from the whole text and make connections and comparisons with the unseen passage below.

[30]

This was by far the most popular Section 2 option, with responses from roughly two thirds of candidates. One way in which this question differed from the other options in Section 2 was in its implicit involvement of other texts ('folk tales') in the comparison it required between Carter's stories and the given extract. This did not add further complexity to the question, however, but instead offered the opportunity to discuss and compare how both Carter and Walker had 'transformed' stereotypes noted in previous versions of Gothic and folk narratives.

Among other contexts mentioned, 'second wave feminism' featured in nearly all responses, although less successfully where this reference was not clarified. A simple summary of cultural significance (e.g. '...which focused on female freedom, whether psychological, social or sexual...') not only establishes that the candidate understands their own reference, but can provide a helpful link to the wider analysis being developed in responses. Such clarification certainly averts the sense of such a term being used as a kind of inert slogan.

Awake to the information that accompanied the extract, some candidates were impressively able to compare the feminist context of Carter's collection with that of Walker's text, published some seventeen years later. There were even two candidates who suggested, not at all implausibly, that Carter's collection could easily have informed Walker's adaptation of (in this case) *Red Riding Hood*.

A variety of Gothic and fairy tale tropes were identified in the extract by most candidates, such as the 'thick forest', the sense of threat, the zoomorphic caricaturing of human attitudes, the mannered and emotive formality of dialogue. Rich comparisons with a wide variety of Carter's stories followed from such confident observation, with *The Bloody Chamber*, *The Courtship of Mr Lyon*, *The Erl King*, *The Company of Wolves*, *The Werewolf* and *The Snow Child* all proving very popular. Many candidates were impressively able to quote often and accurately from their chosen stories, demonstrating the strong textual knowledge and understanding so essential to high quality work.

There are ten stories in Carter's collection – too many for them all to find their way meaningfully into candidate responses that must also offer comparison with an unseen extract as a key Assessment Objective. In choosing their material, however, candidates should aim to make sure that they comment on a variety of Carter's stories, and that analysis of the two very brief stories (*The Snow Child* and *The Werewolf*) does not completely crowd out other material.

Some candidates, more than in previous years, included details of Carter's family life, upbringing and academic career as 'context' in their responses. As ever with AO3, such material needs to be tailored to the requirements of the question if it is to add value and avoid coming across as knowledge display without further purpose, as was sometimes the case this year.

Some highly successful responses constructed paragraphs that began by identifying a feature of the given unseen extract as a stimulus for discussing relevant and linked aspects of the set text. In this way, the AO4 requirement was not only met, but became the structural principle for the response as a whole, with discussion of identified differences or even contrasts between the extract and the set text operating just as well as an exploration of their similarities.

A great many responses to this question were either good or excellent, a testament to the skills, passion and commitment of candidates, but also of their teachers. It is clear that cross-generational enthusiasm for this collection has only intensified over time.

Question 9

9 George Orwell: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Discuss ways in which Orwell presents the concept of freedom in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

In your answer you should make connections and comparisons with the unseen passage below, an extract from a novel where the leading character finally escapes to Canada from a cruel regime in the United States. [30]

Responses to this question were almost invariably well informed and often came across as intensely personal. Nazi propagandism and the sinister forces of Stalinist repression in the USSR were cited as significant contextual factors that Orwell was reflecting in his novel, although many other influences were also identified, and there were also plenty of references to other texts written by Orwell. Other more contemporary factors included the ubiquitous CCTV surveillance now seen as routine in our cities, and the pervasive significance of personal data as it is traded and farmed by institutions and nation states. Smart-speaker technology such as Amazon's 'Alexa' was identified by some candidates as precisely replicating the 'telescreen' capacity both to transmit and to observe simultaneously, thereby possessing the potential to be used in order to exert control or influence.

The accompanying extract provided candidates with something of a contrast, in that the unnamed subject seems to be on the brink of successfully escaping to Canada and therefore to freedom, something that Winston and Julia do not experience at the end of Orwell's novel. The landscape described by Hilary Jordan was widely compared to the Golden Country in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with both being identified as providing a sense of the exhilaration that freedom can bring. Some argued that Winston's appreciation of nature, seen especially in the glimpses Orwell affords him (and us) of the Golden Country, is not an expression of true or complete freedom; rather, it was sometimes subtly argued, the mere ability to admire such beauty imitates a sense of freedom that is as near as Orwell ever allows Winston to come to it.

The tense exhilaration set out in the final sentences of the extract were compared by some to how Orwell describes Winston and Julia's short-lived intimacy in the room above Mr Charrington's shop.

As ever, the best responses were those who were able to set aside some of what they 'knew' about Orwell's novel so as to shape a more effective response to the question itself. It is very seldom that candidates in this exam do not know enough to be able to put together effective responses – the difference between those who achieve high levels of success and those who score more modestly is often to do with having the confidence to think independently and to discriminate between what is useful to an argument and what is not.

Question 10

10 Virginia Woolf: *Mrs Dalloway*

Discuss ways in which Woolf explores the impact of shell-shock in *Mrs Dalloway*.

In your answer you should make connections and comparisons with the unseen passage below where Dr Rivers, a psychiatrist, is using hypnosis to treat Prior, a survivor of the trenches. [30]

No responses were seen to this question.

Question 11

11 Mohsin Hamid: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Discuss ways in which Mohsin Hamid explores ideas about cultural difference in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

In your answer you should make connections and comparisons with the unseen passage below set in 1982 in which the narrator reflects on ways in which he and others of a Pakistani background have responded to life in America. [30]

This question attracted a handful of responses, nearly all of them well informed and perceptive. There was a strong sense of personal engagement with Hamid's novel, reflected in remarks about its depiction of cultural identity in a world dominated by American values, assumptions and prejudices. Much was made contextually about the shift in attitudes towards Changez following 9/11, and about the unease and hostility that edge their way into the narrative, leading up to the sinister possibilities of the ending. The significance of clothing in both the novel and the extract was a successful focus of analysis in several responses.

Many points of correspondence with the extract were discussed, including the superficiality of western/American popular culture and attitudes, and the pressure exerted by world events (e.g. the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre) on younger, semi-westernised individuals, families and communities.

Recent events in the Middle East and the current political culture in the USA were brought into responses, making it clear that candidates felt the novel (and extract) to be of immediate and urgent relevance.

As ever, candidates took different approaches to the comparison element in the question, with most opting to alternate between the novel and the extract but some, just as successfully, preferring to discuss the novel at some length before then working in comparisons with the extract.

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