

GCE

English Literature

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H072**

OCR Report to Centres June 2017

About this Examiner Report to Centres

This report on the 2017 Summer assessments aims to highlight:

- areas where students were more successful
- main areas where students may need additional support and some reflection
- points of advice for future examinations

It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

The report also includes:

- An invitation to get involved in Cambridge Assessment's research into **how current reforms are affecting schools and colleges**
- Links to important documents such as **grade boundaries**
- A reminder of our **post-results services** including Enquiries About Results
- **Further support that you can expect from OCR**, such as our Active Results service and CPD programme
- A link to our handy Teacher Guide on **Supporting the move to linear assessment** to support you with the ongoing transition

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The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes and all responses will be anonymous.

To take part, please click on this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/KP96LWB>

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Supporting the move to linear assessment

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H072/01 Shakespeare and poetry pre-1900

General Comments:

This is the second session of this specification and candidates responded well to the demands of answering two questions in 90 minutes, dividing their time sensibly and responding to some of the advice given in last year's report. This was particularly apparent, for example, in the use of productions on the Shakespeare section and the balance between analysis of the extract and connections to the rest of the text and/or other poems in the poetry section. Examiners made a number of very positive comments relating to the overall performance of the candidates. One examiner commented that 'across the range there was significant evidence that the questions were accessible to candidates and they took the opportunity to show what they were able to do', while another commented that 'generally speaking most questions were responded to in the manner requested.' In a more elevated tone, an examiner observed that 'there were times when the responses were wonderful and uplifted the heart and soul....' There was much evidence of very good teaching with candidates constructing responses that showed detailed and nuanced understanding of both text and context. More candidates seemed to be planning although one examiner commented that in Section 2 many responses fell into 'a stream of consciousness approach lacking structure and direction'. One examiner noted that there were 'fewer generalisations about context than last year, although 'women had no power' and 'men didn't care about women' still cropped up'. One examiner observed that 'this paper, for those who enjoy English literature, provides candidates with an insight into the mind and world of Shakespeare as well as pre-twentieth century poetry, preparing them well for both A level and for reading literature at university.'

It continues to be the case that, as observed in last year's report, candidates who performed well invariably had close familiarity with the texts, whereas weaker scripts were clearly impeded by cursory knowledge of the play and/or the poem or extract. A surprising number of candidates fell into narrating the plot in Section 1 without much quoting at all and in Section 2 a number of candidates did not engage sufficiently in an analysis of the set extract. There is more work still to be done on preparing students for the requirements of the paper including work on picking apart questions and identifying what is being asked and how to exploit the potential of the task. In terms of contextual knowledge, there were fewer, but still several, instances of Shakespeare being identified as a Victorian writer. Some candidates showed an impressive knowledge of the historical background to 'Richard III' (the 'Hollow Crown'?) but there was still evidence of a basic lack of relevant historical context in the weaker scripts. Candidates and centres should be urged to continue to offer opportunities to handwrite responses. More than one examiner commented that handwriting is getting worse and there did seem to be a curious outbreak of 'in which' and 'of which' being used as a substitute for the plain 'which' in sentences like 'Duke Vincentio's role is as an onlooker of the state, of which is heavily rife with corruption in which Vincentio fails to resolve.'

In Section 1 top level responses demonstrated a thorough understanding of the plays within their context. A characteristic of such responses was the use of embedded quotations to support arguments which were then analysed succinctly and their effect commented upon. One examiner commented that 'the best responses drew on quotations from across the play to provide thoughtful and incisive arguments.' As reported above, contextual understanding was invariably mentioned and often to some good effect but on occasion it became intrusive and a substitute for textually based lines of commentary. Context is 'light touch' on this specification. Many examiners commented on the excellent use of productions. One examiner commented that 'the concise reference to Shakespeare productions seen was a skilful and effective aspect of many, perhaps, most scripts'. This is an excellent practice to be encouraged although in weaker scripts there was a danger that some candidates analysed the film at the expense of analysis of the primary text of the play. It was also noticeable that there was a wide range of

critical responses cited often to good effect to support or develop AO5 viewpoints: the historic (Dryden, Johnson, Coleridge, Hazlitt), the classic (Bradley, Wilson Knight, Spurgeon, Leavis) and the more modern (Dollimore, Belsey, Showalter). Such citations are often more precise and useful than general references to critical schools, such as ‘post-colonial’ critics or ‘feminist’ critics, although, this does depend on how well and precisely they are used.

The ‘deflected response’ still occurred and candidates should be specifically warned against this. The question will always invite the candidate to consider ‘how far and in what ways do you agree’ and this is a prompt to evaluate the proposition and not to dismiss it and write about something else. For example, it is unacceptable to say ‘I don’t agree that ‘The Tempest’ is about the need for second chances, it is about colonialism’ and then go on to write about that. It is acceptable, though certainly not required, to make a glancing reference to other themes in the play, but the argument should be a discussion of the merits and demerits of the proposition. So, for example, with the ‘Tempest’ question, a candidate might observe the second chances in the play offered by Prospero to Antonio, Alonso, himself etc. but contest that a second chance is, arguably, not offered to Caliban or that Antonio seems to spurn it and has no ‘need’ for it. Candidates should also be warned against answering last year’s question. Several responses to 2a on ‘Hamlet’ attempted to turn it into a question on ‘inaction’, whilst others shoehorned in barely relevant material on Caliban and colonialism into 5a. A most common feature of weaker scripts was the tendency to re-tell sections of the play. Centres should continue to guard against narrative responses; descriptive and narrative comment is a level 2 criterion. One examiner commented that ‘for many candidates there was a complete lack of textual support for their arguments and good ideas lapsed into narrative comment.’

In Section 2, as one might expect, the level of analysis was sharper than in Section 1. One examiner commented that ‘level 6 responses showed a genuine engagement with the poem and demonstrated consistent AO2 application. The significance of contextual factors were recognised and used to enhance arguments’. Another examiner observed that ‘maturer essays were often distinguished by an excellent grasp of the possibilities of verse form.’ Many candidates have grasped the principle and appropriate balance of A04 (two thirds to three quarters of the response on the extract, the rest on connections) with evidence of extensive and insightful cross reference, especially on Rossetti but notably, too, on Milton and Chaucer. However, some candidates did not respond to all the information in the question, for example, noting that the Chaucer question invited a response to the presentation of the garden *and* the change of fortune. Whilst others, and this was particularly true of the Rossetti question (see below), did not get to grips with the steer of the question which was, for example, to discuss the presentation of Laura’s transformation (see below). Weaker responses did not strike an appropriate balance between the extract and connections. One examiner commented that ‘some candidates paid scant attention to the extract.’ Some presented a general response to the rest of poet’s work or the context (a particular problem with Rossetti – again see below) and failed to analyse adequately the extract in front of them. One examiner commented that ‘at the lowest levels, it was clear that some candidates had very little understanding of the extract or poem almost as if it was an ‘unseen’ text’. An examiner commented that ‘perhaps the greatest discriminator for this section of the paper was between those who had clearly spent time working through the extract and those who paid little attention to it.’ General overviews are no substitute for AO2 analysis.

Section 1 – Shakespeare

Comments on Individual Questions:

1. *Coriolanus*

There were even fewer responses to this text than last year, with only a handful of examiners seeing any at all. However, comments on those seen were positive. Question 1a invited candidates to discuss the presentation of Rome in the play (as city, republic, or even as a set of values) in the light of its perception as a place of the negative qualities of ‘anger and self-interest’. The few responses that were seen presented a good overview of the anger generated by a militaristic Rome and some successful responses discussed this in terms of a range of cultural and political factors. Answers to 1b invariably showed a secure knowledge of the play. Volumnia was well understood. One examiner reported on ‘some excellent commentary on how she was able to project her influence and its limitations.’ Good responses discussed Coriolanus’s autonomy but also considered its attendant failure which led to the tragic ending. There was a high level of at least competence and much excellence in responses to this text with one examiner commenting that responses were ‘confident and focused.’ One examiner commented on the appropriate use of oedipal perspectives in answering 1b whilst another observed that ‘references to the Ralph Fiennes’ production were good and frequent.’

2. *Hamlet*

2a was the most popular question on the most popular Shakespeare text. One examiner commented that it was ‘accessible to candidates across ability ranges.’ Another commented that ‘revenge was considered from historical, religious and literary perspectives’ and many strong responses integrated context with the text excellently, arguing for revenge as, at best, only partially worthwhile. Other strong responses concluded that the play presented revenge as mainly worthless, a conclusion supported by analysis of its effect upon Hamlet, Polonius, Ophelia and the tragic conclusion. There were many excellent arguments which related revenge to codes of honour, contrasting, for example, the demands of family honour as opposed to Christian codes. Bacon’s ‘revenge is a kind of wild justice’ was much quoted usually to good effect. Although it was possible to write a very strong response by just considering Hamlet, most of the strong responses discussed Laertes and Fortinbras as foils to the Prince. Good responses arguing for the value of revenge often saw it as a purging of corruption. However, one candidate challenged the view that Fortinbras restored order and cleansed in a vengeful act the corruption of Denmark by citing Bogdanov’s 1980s presentation of Fortinbras arriving on stage as a territorial opportunist with an AK47. One candidate observed how the dumb show holds up a mirror to the corruption of Denmark necessitating revenge while another observed astutely that ‘Revenge seems not to be a solution but a symptom of the corruption in Denmark.’ Weaker responses used the topic as an opportunity to discuss revenge as a concept removed from the text or to deflect the question on to another, perhaps prepared, topic, such as the position of Gertrude. One examiner commented that there were many ‘shades of last year’s question’, not always directed to the topic in hand, which may have been written as some form of a mock exam.

Examiners reported that 2b was also popular and accessible. Many successful responses placed Polonius in the context of what one candidate described as the ‘surveillance society prevalent in Denmark’. Telling comparisons were drawn with the court of Elizabeth and even specific figures such as Lord Burghley. The respect conferred on Polonius by Claudius was often seen as a signifier of his political skills. Many good responses considered his political skills in the domestic sphere debating whether his manipulation of Ophelia, advice to Laertes and his subsequent tracking of him were wise and politically clever or merely examples of his folly. One candidate referenced how in the Greg Doran production ‘Polonius is seen mouthing the words of Laertes, suggesting he believes his children are incapable of doing things for themselves’. Some

responses noted how Polonius's political and espionage skills back-fired. Others saw his foolishness and verbosity as a tactic with one candidate observing that 'Polonius is aware of his actions but puts on a facade of being a tedious fool'. One candidate observed that 'the derogatory description of his corpse is a sign of the worthlessness of the courtier'. Competent responses were able to comment upon the way his prolixity and loquaciousness is mocked by Hamlet but yet he does display some political skills. Weaker scripts could not see beyond the 'tedious folly' nor reflect upon the role Polonius plays in 'Hamlet'. There were examples of candidates re-directing the question to one about the abuse of Ophelia and one examiner commented on how this elicited 'some angry feminist responses.'

3. Measure for Measure

A less popular play this year. Most examiners reported that they had seen no responses to 3a which required the candidates to focus on the play of the 'low life' or underworld in terms of its overall role in the function of the comedy, possibly as a foil to Angelo's puritanism. The question also invited the candidates to consider the significance in the play of certain characters, such as Lucio. One examiner did note that responses to this question were very competent, but more in providing an overview than in detailing individual instances with close textual knowledge. One very good response did discuss the function of the underworld in the way it provided insight into the seedy, immoral, sexually promiscuous underbelly of Vienna. Lucio was seen as a key character who subverted conventional sexual morals. 3b was an accessible question. One examiner observed that 'this was a successful question and produced many good, well-argued answers with interwoven quotation and very sound, sometimes very good, use of context'. Some responses focused on the character of the Duke but many responses were able to go beyond this to discuss his role as ruler and his function at the end of the play in providing a problematic but necessary comic ending. There was much good discussion of the Duke's leaving Angelo in charge: his 'wisdom' in realising he would not be able to re-impose morality, his 'testing' of Angelo, but also his 'feckless irresponsibility'. Relevant contextual material was in abundance with one examiner commenting on the appropriate reference to Jacobean morality, James I, Vienna's reputation and religious debate. There was good use of critics (Wilson Knight, Leavis, Northrop Frye, Jan Kott, Boas, 'feminist theorists') and good use was made of recent productions including a Globe production. Most responses achieved a balanced view though weaker responses were unable, for example, to grasp the Duke's reasons for leaving or becoming a friar.

4. Richard III

Not a popular text but more responses than last year. 4a was the more popular of the questions with good responses unpacking the concept of loyalty – to God, interestingly to oneself, to one's family, to England. One candidate countered the proposition in the title by arguing that Richmond's loyalty to 'the cause of saving England from Richard is eventually realised.' Candidates appear to have studied the characters well and were able to integrate well selected quotations with a contextual understanding of the Tudor ascendancy and the Tudor myth. The tragic consequences of loyalty were well explored with responses identifying those whose loyalty was naïve and those in whom it was more commendable. Weaker responses allowed context to get in the way of considering the text, did not pay attention to the 'does nobody any good' dimension and struggled to find counter arguments. In the use of productions, Cumberbatch has risen to rival Olivier. There were few responses to 4b. Candidates were better at discussing Clarence and Hastings's similar fates than their differences. One examiner noted that two candidates recognised that 'fate' was an Elizabethan and a tragic concept. One candidate noted detailed similarities in the role of foreshadowing, dreams and inevitability while observing that 'Clarence evokes pity, Hastings does not' and quoted Peter Smith on Hastings's 'colossal complacency.'

5. *The Tempest*

This was a popular text. 5a was marginally the more popular question and several examiners reported that there were many excellent responses to it. Stronger responses considered the 'human need' dimension to the question, suggesting, for example, that this need did not appear to be present in Antonio and debating whether the 'human need' for second chances applies to Caliban and the spirit Ariel. Good answers discussed Gonzalo's rescue of Prospero and Miranda, Caliban's destiny at the end, Prospero's second chance to be Duke of Milan and the second chances offered to the 'men of sin' as Prospero moves from vengeance to mercy. One candidate, perhaps mischievously, suggested that Miranda has a second chance 'to exchange one dominant male for another'. There was much interesting discussion of Antonio's silence in the final scene as he appears to be unrepentant in receipt of Prospero's forgiveness. One candidate suggested that the 'play is not about the human need for second chances so much as the necessity for forgiveness'. Although Caliban was discussed well in terms of the question, some responses re-directed their response too closely to last year's question and engaged in a lengthy debate about colonialism. As commented upon by one examiner, 5b prompted 'some fantastic responses'. Another commented upon 'delightful responses.' Many candidates seized upon the scope for psychoanalytical, postcolonial and Marxist readings, which were very productive when understood and handled with care. Many responses offered a nuanced reading of the relationship between Prospero and Ariel contrasting, for example, Prospero's terms of endearment with his pejorative terms of address. One candidate observed that 'Ariel is an important figure, not just an agent of Prospero's will.' Many aspects of his dramatic function were successfully analysed: his music, the way he symbolises air, fire, the imagination, his role as an extension of Prospero's psyche and as an instrument of redemptive instruction. Many responses observed his crucial function in prompting Prospero's conscience and commitment to mercy in Act 5. There were many excellent citations of productions, none more so than the many references to the recent RSC/Intel production which had clearly inspired and moved many candidates with its dramatic spectacle. The image of Ariel tangled in the roots of the tree, and the evocation of his alluring music accompanied by what one candidate described as 'mystical and beautiful creatures' to draw Ferdinand ashore clearly made a great impact. However, one examiner noted the wide variation in command of textual detail with some responses being 'too narrative based.'

6. *Twelfth Night*

A popular text this year, with 6a being the more popular of the two questions. 6a prompted a wide range of responses in terms of quality. Good responses focused not only on Malvolio (with one examiner commenting on 'fine critiques of Malvolio's performance') but also considered the 'narcissism' of Orsino, the self-love of Sir Toby, and Olivia made an appearance in many answers as an example of self-indulgent mourning and vanity. One candidate observed that despite the punishment of Malvolio the play was more concerned with 'mocking self-love than warning of its dangers.' Indeed, one examiner commented that many otherwise good responses did not give adequate attention to the 'dangers' dimension of the question. However, one candidate did discuss thoroughly the extent to which Malvolio, Orsino and Olivia were punished. Surprisingly, little was made of how Viola might act as a counterpoint to the presentation of self-love; one candidate briefly referred to the dangers of selfless love, identifying Antonio as a character who puts his life in danger for Sebastian's sake. Last year it was observed that few productions were referenced in the 'Twelfth Night' responses but this year good use was made of the Trevor Nunn production, the Globe 2012 production and the 2017 NT production. However, some candidates did not move beyond Malvolio in their answer; this may be a shadow of the sample question of Malvolio which many candidates may have answered as a practice. 6b was well answered. Viola's disguise was seen to give her the freedom of a man, but restricted her in terms of expressing her love for Orsino. However, some answers could not get beyond the idea of the disguise as a prison rather than a potential liberation. One examiner commented that 'language was well explored, including the double meanings and word play in her conversations with Orsino and Olivia which provided rich material for analysis'. In terms of context, the concept

of the patriarchal society was frequently cited though some rather sweeping comments were made about the ‘powerlessness’ of women in Elizabethan society and what might shock a contemporary audience. One excellent response suggested that, in disguise, ‘Viola became a dynamic force to disrupt and reconfigure the stasis of Illyria.’

Section 2 – Poetry pre-1900

7. Chaucer: *The Merchant’s Prologue and Tale*

This was the second most popular poetry text and many examiners commented on a number of excellent and some outstanding responses. Excellent responses were characterised by the quality of detailed comments on the language of the extract: the rhyme and onomatopoeia of ‘wicket’ and ‘clicket’ linking with Chaucer’s bawdy symbolism, the pervasive use of irony, with the ironic use ‘of noble’ and ‘fresshe’ being frequently picked out, and the literal and metaphorical blindness of January. Some responses equated May’s body with the garden as both are centres for January’s pleasure and only he (apparently) has access. One response observed that ‘the Merchant portrays Januarie’s garden as an environment which invites deception’. The wider context was noted in the allusions to the Garden of Eden, the Romance of the Rose (though one candidate described this as a ‘pornographic novel’), mythological characters, the ‘senex amans’ and fabliau tradition. The position of women in medieval society was frequently referenced but the best responses avoided targeting the text with over-simplified accusations of misogyny, with one candidate arguing strongly that Chaucer could be seen as a proto-feminist. Many candidates were alert to the comedy. The two parts of the question tested some candidates with a number ignoring the second part of the question completely. However, many responses not only considered the apostrophe to Fortune and the comparison to a scorpion but also linked this to the whole extract and its foreshadowing of future activities in the garden. Some excellent connections were made to the rest of the text with many candidates, for example, linking the description of the garden ‘walled with stoon’ with the description of May on her wedding night ‘as stille as stoon’. Many candidates coped very well with the linguistic challenges of the Middle English, although a few analysed the irony of January being described as ‘wise’, misreading the medieval spelling of ‘ways’. Weaker candidates and those who were reading less attentively assumed the apostrophe and the reference to the scorpion was an invocation of Damyan or even May.

8. Milton: *Paradise Lost Books 9 and 10*

This was the third most popular text with examiners commenting on a series of strong responses. One examiner commented that most responses were in the top two levels and another that responses were ‘often approached in a sophisticated manner.’ Most impressive was the level of AO2 detail and the way most candidates achieved a balance in discussing the portrayal of each character. Many candidates explored Satan’s complicated response to Eve successfully, the extract being mainly from his perspective. The phrase ‘stupidly good’ was often picked out and analysed as a good example of Satan’s mixed feelings and some responses paid close attention to language and verse form with discussion of the device of the epic simile in the context of some excellent understanding of Milton’s literary style. Some responses presented an excellent discussion of Milton’s theology relating to the text. Eve’s portrayal was discussed in terms of her beauty and vulnerability and how, ironically, Satan is tempted by her. References were made to the possible misogyny present in the theological and social background of the poem but this was often handled in nuanced way. One candidate referenced Milton’s ‘Doctrina de Christiana’ in a discussion of Eve: ‘man is not of the woman, but woman of the man.’ Excellent connections were made to, for example, Adam’s interactions with Eve and the temptation of Eve in the garden. One examiner noted responses ‘sometimes intercalating quotations with real flair.’ Some responses did present some basic misunderstandings. The misreading of ‘Emborder’d on each bank, the hand of Eve’ (misunderstanding that ‘hand’ here means ‘handiwork’) led many candidates to discuss the importance of the Eve’s ‘hand’

elsewhere in the poem and several candidates observed that Eve, rather than the ‘spot’, was ‘delicious’.

9. Coleridge: *Selected Poems*

Although quite a rare choice this question did attract some good responses and one examiner commented that ‘some were very impressive indeed’. A focus on the individual words and phrases Coleridge used and attention to the tone of the extract invariably lifted the quality of responses. An examiner commented that one particularly strong response ‘commented on the effect on the difference between what is ‘seen’ and what is ‘felt’ in the poem, with feeling taking precedence’. This was linked to an effective analysis of Coleridge’s Romantic view of feeling. Another candidate wrote well about the structure of Coleridge’s conversation poems as a form of meditation. There were some very rich links made to other poems with the ‘Aeolian Harp’ and ‘This Lime Tree Bower’ being particularly productive. However, there were many weak responses to this text. Some candidates had difficulty framing ‘dejected’, although it is in the title of the poem. Others fell back on repeating that Coleridge was ‘dejected’ without analysis of the reason why. Faced with an extract which some candidates clearly found challenging, some responses wrote about other poems with one examiner commenting that one response ‘discussed Lime Tree Bower/Kubla Khan/Ancient Mariner/Aeolian Harp but quoted only once from the set extract on Dejection’. Context was an issue in some scripts. An examiner commented that less secure scripts ‘were too liberal in applying biographical context to the interpretation of the passage’ and several wrote extensively on the poem being addressed to Sara Fricker whereas it is addressed to Sara Hutchinson and expresses a frustrated love – in another version the poem is entitled ‘Letter to Sara Hutchinson’.

10. Tennyson: *Maud*

Although not a popular choice, examiners commented upon some very good responses. One examiner observed that ‘the passage gave much scope for the analysis of language effects.’ Strong responses linked the extract to other parts of ‘Maud’ and commented on the power of individual phrasing, the rhetorical flourishes, hyperbole and emphatic participles to good effect. Metre, rhythm and rhyme were dealt with well in this extract. One candidate wrote ‘there is an unsettled mood when observing the people around him which comes across in the discordant rhythm and rhyme of the extract’ while another observed ‘he is unable to separate his obsession with morbidity with his other obsession with Maud.’ Candidates found plenty to say about madness making some good contextual links to Tennyson’s family, fear of insanity and changing attitudes to mental illness. Stronger responses moved beyond the immediacy of the presentation of the mental state to discuss parts of the extract which expressed impassioned comments on, for example, the ‘church’ and linked the mood of the poem to reflections on industrialisation, religious despair and war. Weaker responses had more difficulty in placing the extract in the context of the whole poem. Whilst stronger responses weighed up the merits of the monodrama form for exploring mental states, weaker responses did not differentiate between Tennyson and the persona and presented too much contextual information rather than focusing on the extract.

11. Rossetti: *Selected Poems*

This was far and away the most popular choice of text and produced responses of varying quality, right across the range. Much depended on whether or not the candidates focused on the question of ‘transformation’ and understood the transformation presented in this extract. At the top end there were some brilliantly succinct insights. One response debated the meaning of the transformation in terms of ‘empowerment, release from addiction, redemption and a discovery of a new innocence’, while another wrote ‘Laura’s transformation is presented in many ways: as a salvation, as a bonding between sisters and as destruction.’ However, as one examiner commented, ‘all candidates engaged with the extract but many didn’t understand where the extract fitted into the wider poem and focused on Laura’s transformation to a fallen woman’.

rather than the description of her redemption and rebirth away from this position.’ This failure to reflect upon the extract’s position at the climax of the poem and as Laura’s crisis did lead to what one examiner described as ‘a surfeit of goblins’ and a focus on their initial effect upon Laura. As one examiner commented ‘few candidates seemed to be aware that Laura has two transformations in the poem – the first following her yielding to the temptation of the Goblin fruits and the second redemptive one in the extract.’ Stronger responses picked up on the sound and rhythmic qualities of the extract and how these reflected an ‘unravelling’ in Laura with links to the onomatopoeia, sibilance and alliteration associated with goblin men earlier in the poem. There were excellent responses that analysed the nuances and ambiguities of language, and some linked the extract to the Gothic genre. Stronger responses made useful and relevant links to context: Rossetti’s precise religious beliefs, her work with ‘fallen women’, her relationship to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and some excellent links were made, not only to the rest of ‘Goblin market’ (which, if done well would satisfy AO4 requirements) but also to ‘Birthday’, ‘Shut Out’, ‘Maude Clare’, ‘Soeur Louise’, ‘Twice’ and ‘In the Round Tower at Jhansi’. However, weaker responses moved far away from the extract to write mainly about the rest of Goblin Market or other poems. One examiner commented that ‘it was the text which seemed to suffer most from candidates avoiding the extract’. Another commented of a tendency in some scripts for candidates to write a ‘psycho-sexual critique of the poem instead of actually responding to the focus of the extract’. In strong responses feminist analyses were used with discretion and to illuminate the text, but one examiner commented that sometimes such perspectives were ‘crowbarred’ into the essay distracting from rather than adding to the argument.

H072/02 Drama and prose post-1900

General Comments:

Candidates were, once again, well-prepared by centres for the tasks and there was evidence of lucid, original and mature responses to the texts. It is clear that the challenge presented by the two tasks in this component encourages students to stretch to their potential and the responses that candidates produced provided evidence of really supportive and engaging ways of teaching the range of texts on offer.

Examiners have noted that there is a tendency to answer the question the candidate wants to answer rather than the one set - this is especially true where candidates seem to have rigorously prepared for mock exams using practice/sample assessment materials. Candidates should be encouraged to prepare more broadly and develop confidence in focusing on the question prompts more directly, using the question to frame a way of thinking about the text which they can then respond to. Stronger planning in exam conditions would yield results that demonstrate a better AO1 focus on the task and candidates should be encouraged to develop agility in how they engage with a wide range of possible questions about their text.

More than one examiner noted a growing tendency to offer individual words in quotation marks where those words were not direct quotation e.g. 'Irwin becomes a "journalist".' Candidates should be clear about what does and does not constitute material which can be credited for AO2.

Section 1 – Drama

Many candidates are being given the opportunity to experience their text in performance either in the theatre or on screen and this method of teaching is to be applauded. Whilst seeing a text in performance is not a requisite for successful textual study, it is apparent that those candidates who can engage thoughtfully with the dramatic aspects of their text tend to communicate most successfully about the work that they have studied. They also tend to offer a way of thinking about the text which opens up the range of AO5 possibilities to them.

There are some candidates who do not see their text as a performance script at all and this will inevitably limit candidates' responses to questions which foreground dramatic elements and which ask candidates to respond to the 'role' of a set of characters.

Question 1(a) and 1(b) *Private Lives*

This text was studied successfully by a small number of candidates.

Question 1(a) invited candidates to weigh up the lightness of the topics against possible hints of darkness. Many saw the significance of the physical and verbal violence. Question 1(b) generated considerations of the difficulties of love and its challenges, hidden by flippancy and 'safe topics of conversation'. One candidate suggested that love will prevail and 'find a way to come out'; others proposed that Amanda and Elyot think and act alike even when separate.

Question 2(a) and 2(b) *A Streetcar Named Desire*

This text was, again, the most popular choice with question 2(a) on desire being by far the most popular question choice.

Many examiners have noted that candidates are struggling to come to terms with the complex historical background that the text presents them with. Misunderstandings and trite or too simplistic readings of historical context (AO3) often misshape and misdirect the interpretations

that are therefore being drawn of the text (AO5). The unusualness of New Orleans as a Southern cultural centre is usually grasped, but it is much harder to feed in material on the ‘traditional Southern attitudes’ which Blanche partly reflects and partly manipulates. Many candidates need a mental timeline reminding them that the Civil War ended in 1865 and the play belongs to the early post-war years. Southerners like Blanche have thus had eighty years to brood on their defeat and mythologise plantation life. Many candidates write as if the Civil War has only just ended, and some seem to think the South is still under a kind of Yankee occupation. The phrase ‘ante-bellum’ for pre-1865, commonly used in the US, has not always been understood and is sometimes converted to ‘post-bellum’, where the issue of which of three or more major wars might be intended quickly comes up. In using the term, candidates should be clear that they are referencing a period before the American Civil War. There is a much clearer sense of American recovery after the depression and of commercialisation at the time of the play.

Biographical context is also often less rather than more helpful to candidates. Undeveloped or brief references to Williams' mother and sister did not always offer insight to the text itself. There is a useful parallel to be drawn between the sister's breakdown and Blanche's hospitalisation at the end of the play but Williams' other works such as *The Glass Menagerie*, for example, or the daringly autobiographical *Suddenly Last Summer* are more apposite texts for an exploration of Williams' sister's predicament. Candidates are generally much more comfortable discussing Williams' homosexuality and wider contexts of gay rights in American society at the time. Ultimately though, links to biographical material, other than offering interesting landmarks or places of interest to point out along the way, do not tend to generate useful interpretations of the text in hand because they stop at the point of simple linkage.

Question 2(a) A Streetcar Named Desire

Sophisticated responses to this question looked at different forms of desire, not just sexual desire. Some candidates answered on ‘strength’ as such, rather than strength of desire and this was definitely one of those questions where candidates often shaped a premise that they wished to engage with rather than dealing with the given proposition. Candidates sometimes decided to reject the thesis of the question entirely and offer instead their ideas on what the play is really about. In effect, they wrote an essay on the question they wanted to answer rather than the one that was provided. The best idea is to deal with the proposition through argument and weave in and develop alternative readings, rather than jettisoning the proposition outright at the start.

The more successful answers tended to consider a range of characters. Where only one or two characters were addressed, such as just Blanche and Stanley or even just Blanche, this necessarily limited the argument that could be made in response to the question.

Good answers reflected on how the play got its title, and the steamy, cosmopolitan atmosphere of New Orleans, where desires are hard to suppress; weaker answers tended to interpret ‘desires’ too widely or vaguely. The best responses made use of stage directions, sound effects, music and film camerawork to stress the expressionist nature of the way desire is presented in ‘plastic theatre’.

Question 2(b) A Streetcar Named Desire

Examiners saw some really good answers on this question, comparing Mitch and Stella to Blanche and Stanley, but really getting to grips with Stella and Mitch's function in the play. One excellent response wrote: “they are the only two characters not presented as grotesques of particular social groups with Stella's role as at times often narrator-esque mediator and Mitch's dual function as a ‘macho’ and ‘superior’ gentleman.” Candidates were often able to compare Mitch and Stella through the lens of a particular facet of victimhood, (i.e., abuse by Stanley; gentle temperaments etc.). For weaker candidates, tethering the response to Stella and Mitch was sometimes a bit tricky – what often emerged was a simplistic structure going through each character in turn.

Question 3(a) and 3(b) *The Homecoming*

This text prompted some strong responses across both questions.

Question 3(a) *The Homecoming*

This question generated very interesting AO3 engagement with considerations of masculinity in post-war Britain. Many answers linked 'desire' with impotence, as if the traditional, aggressive desires of masculinity were increasingly being blocked by liberal ideals, especially with regard to women. The sexual revolution, class issues, pornography and pimping, the Kray twins and the East End they lorded, were all handled with restraint and authority, and candidates were also very well informed about the nature of Pinter's theatre and its portrayal of power relations.

Most took a focus on Max and Lenny separately and explored their power struggle or relationship. Others focused on male desires such as control, acceptance, knowledge, violence and sex – often seeing Max, Lenny, Joey, Sam and Teddy as somehow aligned with a different aspect of desire. Some saw Ruth as a man in a woman's disguise and Billington's view of the play as feminist was much discussed.

Whilst many, therefore, developed extremely mature responses to the text, few candidates really engaged with the 'powerful' prompt.

Question 3(b) *The Homecoming*

Candidates very frequently agreed that Max was indeed 'never really in control'. Many candidates were able to bring in all the other characters and the question, again, enabled robust response to context and quotation of many of the most entertaining lines in the play.

One candidate argued that 'Max's preponderance for reading yesterday's paper is a sign of his overall redundancy.' Max was also seen as ambivalent – old, helpless, faded, though some see his control over the young boys as violent and abusive. Others see his threats as humorous, not seriously attempting to exert anything. Candidates often used the struggle between Max and Lenny as their focal point, but many also brought in the Max/Ruth relationship leading to discussions on sexuality, gender, feminism and the whole basis of 'kitchen sink drama which Pinter is so evidently sending up'.

Question 4(a) *The History Boys*

Successful responses here brought in a wide range of the play's cast. Candidates were able to contrast the roles of Irwin and Hector in relation to knowledge and often offered Lintott as a balance to their opposing principles. There was really useful discussion about how the boys and teachers mutually teach each other and many were able to conclude that it is only Posner who ultimately follows Hector's lead. Rudge offered fruitful discussion demonstrating, as he does, an alternative measure of success which he achieves through sport and chance and embodying a knowledge which teachers such as Hector and Irwin lack. Indeed, many proposed that the boys are less naive than their teachers in many ways.

Weaker candidates only really seemed ready to offer a comparison between the teaching styles of Irwin, Hector and Lintott. Some candidates went through the boys one at a time and didn't really find enough to say.

Question 4(b) *The History Boys*

The question proposed an interesting angle on a slippery character. Almost all candidates discussed Irwin's lie about getting into Oxford and many were interested in whether Irwin lies to himself about his sexuality. Irwin's role to make boys 'polished' and stand out by default means that truth, to Irwin, is not the issue. His attitudes to essays – 'gobbets' such as Christ's foreskin and the holocaust - demonstrate his attitude to what historical truth really is. Interesting engagement was offered in response to his position as the play's framework and in Irwin as 'an essential element in the conflict which drives the play'.

Weaker students drifted from a focus on Irwin in relation to the question to bring in a consideration of other teachers on equal terms. Candidates really do need to practise ensuring that their discussion remains rooted in the proposition of the task in order to satisfy the AO1 requirement. Both questions on this text seemed to highlight weaknesses in less confident candidates' knowledge of anything other than Hector. Candidates cannot get by with only partial knowledge of the set text.

Question 5(a) and 5(b) *That Face*

As was the case last year, this was a less popular text although both questions generated really fruitful discussion. Interesting connections were made to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and to Blanche from *A Streetcar Named Desire* in relation to Martha and many candidates know their text extremely well.

Question 6(a) *Jerusalem*

Jerusalem is a text which generates lively debate from candidates of all abilities and alert, often politically engaged, work. Question 6(a) invited arguments over whether Byron does in fact change at all or, as one candidate proposed 'is it our perceptions of him [that change] as more is revealed through his interaction with the different groups that arrive in King Johnny's caravan court?'. Byron's various roles were explored to excellent effect by many who offered a wide range of interpretations: Byron as representative of an old way of the English pastoral world or as a version or representative of Arthur/George/war heroes/rebels/Robin Hood/giant friend/'modern Jesus'. Most candidates commented on Byron's more suspect characteristics – the drug-taking/selling, the womanising, his actual relationships with Phaedra and Markey and many questioned, too, his real history versus the legend he, (and his band of merry men), creates. It is fair to say candidates are a little more shy of his more mythical qualities (i.e. the Byron blood, whatever is in the depths of his eyes that terrifies Dawn, the call to the Giant at the end).

Weaker candidates often reduced this discussion to a compendium of Byron moments, of which there are many. Few candidates across the ability range really tackled the 'slippery' prompt or engaged with whether this quality is the 'most interesting' thing about him.

Question 6(b) *Jerusalem*

This option privileged intelligent juxtaposition of nostalgia with cultural pride and the wide-ranging proposition in the question invited many candidates to demonstrate exquisite engagement. Strong candidates were able to make much of the English iconography of the play starting with the faded St George flag, Phaedra singing 'Jerusalem' and the pervasive background of the green and pleasant land, giving way to 'dark satanic mills'. Jingoistic patriotism, nostalgia and belief that 'things were better before' were intelligently explored and candidates are supremely well-prepared and well-informed in their consideration of wide-ranging contextual influences such as the Morris men and green worlds which were viewed as key to maintaining the tone of nostalgia. Byron's home with its antiques scattered about, taps into this world 'but crucially such relics are broken and no longer of any use'.

Byron's role in the protection and/or destruction of a world is variously seen as ogre/troll but also Green Man and Eco protector, 'not just trying to hold back time, but also industrial progress'. Many referenced the anti-climax of Flintock Fair's shabby offerings and astute candidates could explore Markey's disappointment as he symbolises the next generation to come.

This really was an enormously successful question with mature and thoughtful answers constructed from a wealth of material. The strength of AO3 seen here even stretched to a sophisticated sense of reception history that audiences in 2009 can't really look at the play in the same way as the 2017 post-Brexit audience.

Section 2 – Prose

Candidates often produce more thoughtful material on Section 2 because this section presents them with unseen material to engage with which can prompt surprising responses. Within the confines of the time allowed, the majority of candidates make sound connections between the unseen and their set text, comparing different attitudes or presentations or uses of language. At the top end of the mark range some candidates can actually find the exploration of the unseen extract illuminates and re-calibrates their understanding of the studied text. Those candidates who really mine the passage for material to shape a response to the question tend to do significantly better than those who lead the argument through pre-conceived notions of the set text.

However, this series did generate concerns about the approach some candidates are taking to the unseen passage. If little consideration is offered of the passage and connections are cursory and not fully exploited, then candidates are seriously reducing their focus on both AO1, concerning relevancy, and AO4, establishing links. Candidates, therefore, who only pay lip-service to the passage or who try to squeeze rather too much out of one or two quotations from the passage without presenting a solid understanding of the whole of the extract are disadvantaging themselves by trying to write a discursive essay rather than conducting a comparison/contrast exercise. This became a real discriminator in marking: candidates who take time to think carefully about the passage and who read it carefully in advance of putting pen to paper, make the passage integral to the structure of the answer and do better as a result.

Question 7 *The Great Gatsby*

Many candidates noticed how close the extract is to the novel in terms of place and date and the idea of the dark side of luxury was accessible to all candidates who wrote variously about waste, luxury being a substitute for happiness, emptiness, the decadence of party-going, destruction and crime. Candidates were able to make links readily across the texts, some even suggesting the same drinking set might show up at parties in both. Better answers not only juxtaposed debauched commodities in the two texts but picked up the hints of romance and nostalgia in Wharton's final lines, juxtaposing these with the American Dream and Gatsby's immortal longings. The corruption of the natural world was considered by more than one candidate: 'Daisy herself is associated with nature through the imagery of her name, suggesting that her sensibilities are from another era. However, her romance with Gatsby appears to be based on the consumerist and superficial self, rather than with the natural form.'

Many referenced the questioning tone of the passage: 'What was it all for, and what was left when it was over?' and this line was a useful link to Gatsby's death and 'his hopeless attempt to recreate the past by money alone'. There was a lot more potential in the passage, however, which was less often tapped: 'trampled' and 'forced' flowers; the grandeur of the house compared to Gatsby's; Nona's disgust related to some of Nick's reflections; her idyllic childhood memory linked to Gatsby's devotion to the unspoiled past.

Question 8 *The Bloody Chamber*

The Bierce passage offered perceptive candidates rich material for cross-reference to *The Bloody Chamber*. However, this is one of the texts that suffered from candidates wanting to unload pre-packed readings of the stories without starting from the premise of the question and the content of the passage first. Weaker responses, therefore, find candidates struggling to attach what they want to say about the set text to the unseen through awkward, and oftentimes tenuous, links. Comments were not always tailored to the beast theme and the predominance of readings of the Carter text as a feminist or a Gothic text first, before studying it as a work of literature in its own right, can disable candidates' ability to make AO1 achievement. Lack of focus on the passage also meant that some did not notice that the opening section is a dream.

Better answers made much of the ‘dream within a dream’ atmosphere of the passage, and the otherness and yet strange familiarity of the panther’s eyes, often with links in to Erl-King. Arguments tended to debate the assumption that humans were somehow better or more privileged than beasts, and that beasts are not always dangerous. The best answers used three to four short stories; the least successful confined themselves to one, with a disappointing pattern that some students relied solely on ‘The Snow Child’, a trend which proved enormously limiting.

Question 9 *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

The Forster passage seemed to engage most candidates. The best responses picked up on intriguing details such as ‘the age of litter’ and ‘the Book of the Machine’. Many pointed out that the Machine in Forster seems more enabling and supportive than Big Brother, but still has its sinister aspects and the menacing aspect of technology was a common theme. Real interest in the idea of control was demonstrated and strong links could be drawn between the comparative lack of sophistication of technology in the novel to the more sophisticated and womb-like feel of the machine-world in Forster. Excellent use was made of surveillance and conformity in both set text and passage.

Almost everyone made use of the moment where Vashti looks round ‘as if someone might be watching her’ and many also noted that reverence for Big Brother/the Machine has assumed the characteristics of a primitive religion.

As for last year, the early twentieth century totalitarian analogues of the novel were well-identified and well-used. Overall, context seems to be well understood and well applied for this text.

Question 10 *Mrs Dalloway*

A small number of entries for this text were seen this year. Candidates responded strongly to the powerful emotions in the unseen extract and there were some really thoughtful answers which discussed Woolf’s narrative technique alongside the fragmentary society of post World War 1 England. Septimus usually provided most of the framing from the set text and his experience was invariably successfully contrasted to that of the veteran in the passage.

Question 11 *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The passage offered candidates really engaging routes into the comparison. Strong answers responded to the feeling of loss and alienation that can accompany the desire to belong. Various types of assimilation were addressed but tended to focus on external elements such as contrasts between clothes/flesh; food/consumption and the pace of life in London/Lahore/New York. Ideologies were less fulsomely contrasted but many commented on attitudes to religion. One candidate suggested that ‘Wanting to belong means accepting things which your religion forbids, even though they are enjoyable things – this causes the confusion in the individual’s mind.’

Weaker responses often just documented Changez’s changing relationship with America and gave the sense more of a parallel study rather than one where the texts are truly linked and contrasted.

The range of AO3 context for this question was impressive, especially regarding the impact of 9/11 on American culture, and the subsequent War on Terror.

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