

Report on the Units

June 2008

1901/MS/R/08

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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2441 Drama Post - 1914

General Comments (including 2445)

There was widespread agreement amongst examiners that the overall performance of candidates in this session was stronger than on any previous occasion. The majority of candidates displayed a secure grasp of textual detail and had clearly been stimulated by sensitive and supportive teaching to engage with the characters, situations, ideas and emotions in their set text in a personal and thoughtful way. Many teachers had managed the difficult balance of showing candidates what to look for without telling them what to see, so that examiners were often amazed at the confidence, variety and originality of the insights emerging from a single Centre, and remarks such as “dazzling”, “exciting”, “amazing” and “stunning” appeared regularly in examiners’ reports. One senior examiner felt that his own understanding and enjoyment of the set texts had been considerably enhanced by the reading of this summer’s scripts.

The proportion of candidates entered for the Foundation Tier papers continued to shrink (from 25% of 2441 candidates in May 2005 to less than 12% this session) and although a minority of underachieving Higher Tier candidates would have benefitted from the bullet-pointed support of many Foundation Tier questions, Centres had clearly made careful and appropriate tiering decisions. *Journey’s End* remains the most popular post-1914 Drama text, closely followed by *Death of a Salesman* and *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*, while *The Caretaker* continues to attract a minority of enthusiasts. *Romeo and Juliet* remains by far the most popular pre-1914 choice, followed by *Much Ado About Nothing*, with the non-Shakespearian options, Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People* and Wilde’s *An Ideal Husband*, occupying a tiny but gradually increasing share of the market.

The pattern of question choice once again varied significantly from Centre to Centre, particularly in relation to the empathic question which still appears to polarise opinion amongst teachers to the extent that candidates are either advised to embrace it or avoid it at all costs. There are particular difficulties associated with each type of question and the problems of scrutinising the detail of the extract while conveying an understanding of the whole-play context for the first question on each text, or of anchoring discursive answers to the exact wording of the second question and selecting a range of supporting detail have been frequently emphasised in previous reports. While it is certainly true that the third and empathic question also has inherent difficulties, particularly in finding the “voice” and restricting it to a particular moment in the play, it would be a shame if a lingering perception that the empathic question is too “risky” or too “soft” an option were to close off such a stimulating, involving and imaginative approach to the teaching (and examining) of drama texts. An unscientific survey of performance in several Centres during this session confirmed that when the empathic question has been regularly attempted and the approach clearly embedded in the teaching of the text, the marks awarded to empathic answers generally match and often exceed the average performance of the Centre.

The tendency to devote far too long to the production of a huge plan appeared far less marked this time, although clear evidence of some initial brainstorming/listing/selecting certainly characterised successful answers. Many candidates had been thoroughly and effectively coached in the art of constructing an exam answer but some of the scaffolding lists and lengthy mnemonics, often fully explained in an initial plan, were so elaborate that they assumed lives of their own and obscured the nature of the question being tackled almost entirely. The simple idea of “taking the PEE” (point, example, explanation) in its different manifestations, seems to be an effective prop for many candidates to place at the heart of their answers, but a learned agenda for extract-based questions such as “context, plot, setting, character, theme, lighting, stage directions, dialogue, language...”, often encourages candidates to reserve a paragraph

for each heading irrespective of the focus of the question and leads them away from the dramatic detail of a specific moment, into sweeping and repetitive comment. Examiners' hearts tend to sink when opening paragraphs contain topic lists or sweeping statements like "Sherriff uses dialogue and stage directions..." and say nothing specific about the play or the question.

A similarly formulaic approach which hampered the achievement of quite able candidates, at times, seemed to be based on the mistaken assumption that strong answers have to display specialised knowledge about language. Previous reports have often commented on the damaging tendency to log features like dashes, ellipses and exclamation marks and ascribe astonishingly dramatic powers to them, without engaging what is actually being said or responding to the onstage action - as if the candidates see the plays as written texts only. Opening comments like "Miller's main weapon in making this scene dramatic is his use of punctuation" or "Linda begins to use lots of exclamation marks", do not suggest close involvement with the drama of a particular moment in the play. In a similar vein, some candidates became so bogged down in the identification of features like stichomythia or polysyndeton or a variety of lexical fields, or became so fascinated by patterns of sound like alliteration, or repeated plosives or even rhyme, that this linguistic classification became an end in itself and the primary focus on the dramatic action of the play was obscured. Decontextualised feature-logging has blighted approaches to poetry for some time but lengthy classification, largely for its own sake, of phonological, graphological, lexical and grammatical features, is even less appropriate in a 45 minute answer on a drama text.

Writing about the humorous features in a particular scene (in *The Caretaker* or *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* or *Much Ado About Nothing*, for example) proved particularly difficult for some candidates. A few avoided humour entirely even when answering questions which explicitly focused on it (such as Question 4 on *The Caretaker* and Question 7 on *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*); a few picked out potentially humorous moments or lines but added no accompanying comment; and a few picked out these humorous moments, labelled them as "wordplay" or "sexual innuendo" and moved swiftly on. The most successful candidates, however, tried to explore the sources of the humour in specific examples. Examiners understand how difficult it can be to show an appreciation of humour, especially for young people in the formal and serious context of an exam room, and so are keen to reward any attempt to explain the effect of a particular joke, to unpick a double meaning or a comic implication or an ironic reversal, when the question requires it. The strongest answers to Question 7 on *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* not only engaged both strands of the question ("humorous" and "moving") but often linked and synthesised them by demonstrating that many of Ken's witty remarks are double-edged and emphasise his sense of his own impotence.

Generalising about the work of 30,000 candidates is always a difficult exercise but several clear trends have emerged.

Successful candidates:

- see the texts as scripts for performance and themselves as members of an audience;
- see the stage directions as part of the dramatic action of the scene and visualise this onstage action;
- pay explicit attention to the wording of the question and balance attention to each strand of the question;
- devote at least two-thirds of answers to extract-based questions to discussing, quoting from and commenting on the extract itself but still convey understanding of the whole-play context;
- anchor empathic questions securely to the prescribed moment to focus solely on what that character knows, thinks and feels at that point;
- construct purposeful opening paragraphs which focus specifically on a particular question about a particular play;

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- range selectively across the text to find supporting detail for discursive answers;
- avoid formulaic approaches and trust their own direct personal response.

Less successful candidates:

- see the texts as pieces of writing only and themselves as readers;
- see the stage directions merely as a pieces of tacked-on written communication and ignore the onstage action;
- lose the focus of the question and import prepared material which has very little direct relevance, or misread the question entirely and write about the wrong character, for instance;
- produce generalised answers to extract-based questions with little attention to the printed passage, or approach the extract as if it is an “unseen” exercise and give little sense of the rest of the play;
- ascribe knowledge, feelings and attitudes to characters in empathic answers which are inappropriate to that character at that point in the play, or work through the character’s experiences in a chronological and unselective way up to the prescribed point without asking “what’s my main feeling at this precise moment?”;
- produce a sweeping opening paragraph with an all-purpose list of headings and largely ignore the question;
- become bogged down in one moment in the play in answering discursive questions, so that the range of reference becomes too narrow;
- work through a pre-digested agenda without fully engaging the question or the play, and without expressing a personal response.

Specific examples of clear under-achievement could often be attributed to the following causes:

- writing about the Raleigh-Stanhope relationship rather than the Raleigh-Osborne relationship (Question 11, 2441);
- missing the reference to “this moment” in an extract-based question and as a result answering the question on the play as a whole with little reference to the printed extract;
- indeterminate question selection, often missing out the question number on the front-page grid and in the margin or basing a discursive answer wholly on the passage printed for the extract-based question, as if the candidate is unsure about the paper layout or which question to settle on;
- losing the question and unloading pre-packaged and lengthy material about “the American Dream” (often allowing the term to speak for itself with no explanation) in *Death of a Salesman* answers, about the morality of euthanasia in *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*, about Sherriff’s war experiences, about “avoidance behaviours” or about Trotter (in answer to Question 10 on *Journey’s End*, 2441), about the reactions of Elizabethan audiences to the Shakespeare texts or of 1920s audiences to *Journey’s End*;
- missing out one strand of the question so that the Mrs Boyle scene was used for Question 8 (*Whose Life Is It Anyway?*) but not the Dr Travers scene, for instance;
- the copying out of notes from the critical introductions to set texts (particularly *Death of a Salesman*);
- answers to more than one question or on more than one text.

Comments on Individual Questions

Death of a Salesman

Question 1 was by far the most popular of the Miller tasks and examiners reported reading many answers which were breathtaking in their range and insight. The best conveyed a secure grasp of the context with some even pointing out the irony that Linda is launching a passionate defence of her husband immediately after the scene which has conclusively confirmed his infidelity. In fact, there was a great deal of intelligent commentary on the dramatic effect of Linda's anger and the way she finds her voice and dominates this scene, with some candidates suggesting fascinating ideas about the way this contrasts with Miller's portrayal of her and of other women elsewhere in the play as "maids, whores and voiceless or non-existent wives..." (as one candidate memorably put it). It was refreshing to see so many candidates attempting to visualise the dramatic action of this extract and writing explicitly about the significance of features like Happy's initial gesturing, Linda's ominous advance and violent rejection of the flowers, Biff's search for his father, his kneeling, his throwing of the flowers into the wastebasket...rather than retreating into generalised comment about the importance of stage directions. There were many fascinating links established between the flowers and the web of lies and illusions created by the Loman men although some candidates became a little bogged down in fanciful symbolic readings. At Higher Tier, the majority of candidates wrote confidently about Happy's dishonesty and Linda's fury and the most confident managed to explore the complexities of Biff's feelings about himself and his father and to establish a clear contrast with between Biff and Happy. Some candidates argued convincingly that the extract has a particular impact as the audience might expect this to be the moment where Biff reveals the Boston secret. The second bullet on the Foundation Tier question nudged many candidates to establish that contrast more fully than Higher Tier candidates. There was a tendency to ignore the scene in Act One where Linda tells her sons about the rubber pipe and confronts them with their responsibilities, and to suggest that her anger in the printed extract is completely unexpected and unprecedented, and less successful answers often implied criticism of Linda for her unreasonable behaviour. A misunderstanding of Biff's final speech led some candidates to assert that he is angry with his father rather than himself and thinks Willy is the "scum of the earth". Some saw "pal" (like "kid" in previous sessions) as a term of abuse and a substantial number wasted valuable time on the dramatic power of dashes and exclamation marks as if they have a life of their own which is entirely independent of the words spoken by the characters.

Although **Question 2** was a minority choice, there were some fine answers which ranged widely and selectively across the play. The most confident candidates engaged the "how far" of the question very directly and shaped a genuinely argumentative response to the multiple layers of Willy's character. Sympathy for Willy was widespread and so unconditional in some cases that candidates appeared to have read the question as "How" rather than "How far", as if assuming that Miller's intention was to portray Willy as an entirely sympathetic character. Some of these entirely sympathetic responses explained and excused his infidelity, his irascibility and his inculcation of flawed values in his sons and even argued that Biff lets him down by flunking math and failing in the business world. Some outstanding candidates explored the idea of "sympathy" very closely and made astonishingly subtle distinctions between "sympathy" and "pity".

There were many convincing Willy Lomans created in response to the empathic **Question 3**, and the feelings, contradictions, speech rhythms and vocabulary were so successfully captured that it felt like Arthur Miller had written an extra soliloquy. Strong candidates were able to weave appropriate textual references into Willy's thoughts, such as Linda's need for good news, the crumbling domestic appliances, Frank's Chop House, Bernard's tennis rackets and two sons...and some particularly subtle answers had the memories of Boston beginning to bubble up in the wake of Bernard's questioning. Some even had Willy addressing remarks to Ben in an entirely convincing way. The best answers pinpointed the moment exactly and reflected on the specific details of the conversations with Bernard and Charley, on the loss of his job and his

feelings about Howard and on the prospect of Biff's meeting with Bill Oliver and the restaurant meal to come. Candidates generally were very strong on Willy's bewilderment and delusion but occasionally lost the moment and conveyed their own confusion (rather than Willy's) about the order of events.

The Caretaker

A small number of Pinter enthusiasts tackled *The Caretaker* in this session and of these the vast majority answered the extract-based **Question 4**. Strong answers conveyed a sharp awareness of context and of the positioning of the two characters throughout the scene, established the moment as Mick's first verbal assault on Davies after he has physically attacked him at the end of Act One, and often made the interesting point that Mick's first appearance in the play places the audience in the same mystified situation as Davies. There were many confident explorations of Mick's intimidation of Davies and of the disturbing elements in the extract, and there was a great deal of intelligent comment on Mick's menacing questions, repetitions, pauses, rapid shifts in tone and disconcertingly unpredictable leaps from topic to topic. The best candidates often made successful links between the menace and the comedy, and saw the incongruity of Mick's occasionally genteel politeness, his random family anecdotes, his ludicrous likening of Davies to his athletic "uncle's brother"...in the context of Mick's exercise of power and dominance. Close attention to the variety of Mick's language was a central feature of successful answers although quite a few candidates shied away from Mick's long speech or simply dismissed it as "rambling" or "random". There was some drift into linguistic feature logging (of "polysyndeton", "ellipsis", "lexical fields" and the mechanics of spoken language) which became divorced from the two characters and the dramatic context. The "disturbing" strand was handled much more fully than the "amusing" strand of the question in most answers, and ideas about the sinister nature of the interrogation, the effect of the dripping sound (often convincingly associated with torture or dungeons or time moving slowly...), the subtle undermining of Davies' sense of identity...were often very fully developed.

Question 5 was answered by a very small number of candidates but there was evidence of strong understanding of and sympathy for the character of Aston. Strong answers ranged confidently throughout the play and made productive and argumentative use of Aston's long and revelatory speech. Some successful answers made a clear distinction between his understandable unwillingness to communicate and the feelings suggested by the kindness and generosity he displays towards Davies. Less successful answers ignored the focus on "feelings" in the question and produced broad character sketches.

A tiny number of candidates opted for **Question 6** but most of these managed to convey Mick's suspicion of Davies, his concern for his brother and the liveliness of his voice. One candidate produced an astonishingly accurate pastiche of Mick's voice including an effective use of pauses.

Whose Life Is It Anyway?

Question 7 was the most popular option on this very popular text. The most confident candidates not only engaged both strands of the question ("humorous" and "moving") but showed a sharp awareness of the connections between them although only the very best managed to pursue Ken's jokes about Mr Hill acting as his surrogate with Dr Scott and link these to his sense of his own impotence and his desire to seek his own death ("I can't do the things I want to do"). Many candidates wrote very sensitively about the growing intimacy between Ken and Dr Scott with fewer trying to over-romanticise the relationship than in previous sessions, and the moving finality of Ken's feeling that his life "is over" was often strongly grasped. A number of candidates, particularly at Foundation Tier, found the nature of the "fight" and the distinction between Ken enjoying the fight and actually wanting to win and thereby securing his own death,

difficult to grasp. Candidates were generally much more comfortable in exploring the “moving” elements of the extract and although there was some specific and exploratory comment on Ken’s humorous remarks about Mr Hill or on his description of Nurse Sadler as his “substitute mum, with her porcelain pap”, there was a tendency to assert the presence of humour or to simply label it as “sexual innuendo” or even less helpfully and appropriately as “black” humour, and to move on without attempting to explain. Occasionally, remarks like “You look lovely” or “You called me Ken” were cited unconvincingly as examples of humour as if candidates were trying hard to answer the whole question but finding the amusing features very elusive indeed. Some candidates, especially at Foundation Tier, were uncertain about Dr Scott’s attitude to Ken and his “fight” as if they had forgotten the conversation with Mr Hill which precedes the extract or missed her assurance that she has not tried to convince Mr Hill that Dr Emerson is right or the fact that she wishes Ken “good luck” at the end of the extract. Some candidates were confused about the hospital hierarchy and thought that, despite her title, Dr Scott is one of the nurses. There was a tendency amongst a few Foundation Tier candidates to tackle the bullets in relation to the whole play and to lose the stem question and its focus on the printed extract.

Question 8 linked two moments in the play in which encounters with two different medical professionals have similarly disastrous effects on Ken, and although the majority of candidates wrote with great authority about the dramatic confrontation with Mrs Boyle, the second meeting with Dr Travers received far less attention and was occasionally ignored altogether. There was widespread understanding of Ken’s attitude to “professionalism” and to the ironically counter-productive effects of these two visits, and many candidates wrote movingly about the way Ken resolves his relationships with his fiancée and his parents, as reported to Dr Travers. Some candidates confined themselves to explaining why the two meetings are “upsetting” for Ken as if they had interpreted the question rather narrowly, and their personal response to the broader dramatic effect on an audience remained rather undeveloped as a result.

Many candidates embraced the challenge of adopting the mature, educated, serious and professional voice of Dr Emerson in response to the empathic **Question 9** and, although some found the formality of his register difficult to sustain, his feelings and attitudes were widely understood. Self-belief, determination, authority, a passion for preserving life and an absolute confidence based on years of medical experience were the qualities which characterised successful answers, and the very best made the implications of Emerson’s conversation with Dr Scott and particularly his remark about a “post-mortem” absolutely clear. Some candidates produced less convincing answers because they were so keen to demonstrate both sides of the debate that they portrayed an even-handed Emerson troubled by Dr Scott’s arguments and tortured by self-doubt. Emersons who retained a faith in a miracle cure were also unconvincing.

Journey’s End

Question 10 proved to be the most frequently answered question on the paper, although the question choices on *Journey’s End* - which is by some distance the most popular text - were more evenly spread across the three options than for any other text. The low-key and understated nature of the conversation between Stanhope and Osborne and the absence of obviously dramatic conflict onstage made this a challenging passage for some candidates, but the vast majority managed to respond to some of the moving elements in the portrayal of Stanhope’s troubled state of mind and of Osborne’s sensitive handling of him. Strong candidates not only understood Stanhope’s envy of Trotter and the significance of the conversation about imagination, but also explored the exact nature of Stanhope’s insecurities and appreciated how the revelation of these insecurities affects audience sympathy. Osborne’s protective subject-changing and reassuring support for his friend and commanding officer also prompted a great deal of sensitive response and there were many moving commentaries on Stanhope’s tortured final speech. As always with extract-based questions, an awareness of the immediate context was a key feature of successful answers and many candidates noted that the exact time of the “big attack” has just been confirmed and that along with the countdown provided by Trotter’s

chart, this underpins the morbid nature of Stanhope's reflections. Less developed answers tended to dismiss parts of the conversation as merely "trivial" or "meaningless" or "coping strategies" or all three, but there were many fascinating responses to the "worms" discussion which not only engaged the humour but also suggested possible symbolic interpretations (that the worms represent death and decay, or the soldiers themselves, trapped in the mud and directionless...). Some candidates were diverted from the passage and the question by the desire to unload essays on Trotter or "class" or "displacement activities/ coping strategies" or "comradeship", whereas others allowed the shape of the passage to dictate the shape of their answer by working unselectively through it and ignoring the question. Stanhope's casual remark about defacing Trotter's chart was taken very seriously by several candidates who insisted that he is hostile to Trotter and dislikes him intensely. The description of Trotter as "common" by several candidates suggested that they had adopted the condescending attitudes that his brother officers occasionally display and there was some fairly widespread misunderstanding of the significance of "rank" and of the differences between the "dug-out", the "trenches" and the "front line", and between the "big attack" and the "raid". Osborne's important but subsidiary role in the conversation was occasionally ignored but the exchange about "potty" people who "keep it to themselves" provoked the fascinating thought in one or two candidates that Osborne's conversational deflections and "avoidance behaviour" are not simply designed to protect and reassure Stanhope but also to preserve his own veneer of stability.

Question 11 was the most popular discursive question on the paper and many candidates ranged confidently and selectively across the text to establish the memorable impact of the relationship between Raleigh and Osborne. Their initial meeting and Osborne's kindly induction of the new recruit, Osborne's attempts to shield Raleigh from the realities of war and from the changes in Stanhope, the highly charged moments which they share before the raid and Raleigh's reactions to Osborne's death all provided a focus for successfully developed comment. In addition the strongest candidates were able to see the relationship in the context of the whole play and convey understanding of the way Sherriff contrasts Osborne's approach to Raleigh with Stanhope's or the way he secures audience sympathy for Osborne to heighten the impact of his death or the way he emphasises the cruelty of combat by constructing such a touching and close relationship and then almost immediately destroys it. One excellent candidate argued that the relationship is particularly memorable "because when Osborne and Raleigh meet, the two lives of Stanhope, home and war, come together." Some candidates became rather bogged down in the early scenes and it was unfortunate that a number of candidates in their haste misread the question and wrote exclusively about the relationship between Stanhope and Raleigh (or occasionally Osborne and Stanhope, sometimes confined exclusively to the extract), thereby losing valuable marks.

Answers to **Question 12** once again demonstrated the success of empathic approaches in promoting close engagement with the text. Several grizzled examiners reported that many of the Raleighs portrayed in the responses to this popular question were not only imbued with the detail and spirit of the play and of the character, but were genuinely moving to read. The strongest answers seized the exact moment prescribed by the question and understood that in the wake of the anguished revelation at the end of their climactic exchange, Raleigh has begun to understand the strain Stanhope is under, the impact of Osborne's death on him and his need "to forget". Successful answers therefore tended to strike a note of anguished regret and portrayed a Raleigh who is not only traumatised by the loss of Osborne and his experience of the reality of warfare, but who is also embarrassed by his own naivety in avoiding the meal and in making assumptions about the man he idolises. In some answers, the precise moment became obscured by a chronological approach to Raleigh's experiences beginning with his arrival in the dug-out, working through the censored letter incident and arriving unselectively at this confrontation with Stanhope. Some answers were self-righteously indignant to the point of belligerence about Stanhope's behaviour and still highly critical of the "celebratory" meal as if the revelatory conversation with Stanhope had not taken place. Some overemphasised the extent and rapidity of the young man's disillusion and adopted a cynicism about the futility of war and the attitudes of the Generals which was closer to Sassoon than Raleigh. Some bright and well-

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informed candidates in their determination to demonstrate the extent of their textual knowledge strayed beyond the limitations of Raleigh's point-of-view and included, for instance, perfect recall of what has been said at the meal which he chooses to avoid. Raleigh's language was often beautifully captured and direct quotation successfully integrated but there were some expressions which were jarringly anachronistic ("what am I like...I was so up for the raid...he's lost the plot...I need time to sort my head out...he was always there for me...Madge and Dennis are still an item...").

2442 Poetry and Prose Post - 1914

It is impossible to make definitive comment on the work of so many candidates at both Foundation and Higher Tier and on thirteen texts, but it is hoped that the Report will be of help to Centres in indicating why their candidates were successful (or less than successful) in this examination and in preparing them for future encounters with this Unit.

In general, Centres entered their candidates at the appropriate level, but a number of examiners reported that some appeared to have misjudged the level of difficulty facing some candidates. It bears repeating that candidates inappropriately entered at Higher Tier risk being unclassified if their work falls below the threshold of mid-E, whereas, if entered at Foundation Tier, such work would, of course, be graded. It is saddening to report that some Centres recorded a distressing number of unclassified grades.

Examiners also commented on the length of some responses at both Foundation and Higher Tier. Obviously there is no particular virtue in writing at great and inordinate length, and often considerable virtue in succinctness, but it is difficult to produce a well-developed, adequately-illustrated response to questions in no more than one or one and a half sides of paper. Planning a response is also a virtue, yet this too can be over-done, with candidates providing plans rivalling the response itself in length.

Better candidates were able to focus on the key words of a question, such as “moving”, “dramatic”, and “significant” whereas weaker ones were often heavily reliant on narrative or paraphrase with the occasional comment or explanation. As one Team Leader wrote, “One very much got the impression that candidates were writing most of what they knew and understood, hoping to hit a few lucky targets by carpet-bombing”.

In Scheme A, Written Communication is assessed only on this Unit. Candidates who communicate ideas clearly and accurately at either Tier boost their chances of reaching a good grade, whereas those who communicate poorly and inaccurately disadvantage themselves.

Many examiners commented in their reports on the narrowing of the range of texts studied by candidates. Some examiners reported that they saw responses only to *Opening Worlds* and *Opening Lines*. To some extent this will be reflected in this overall Report on the Unit since it difficult to provide general comment on texts and questions that were taken up by so few candidates. For example, at the time of compiling this Report, the Principal Examiner has seen nothing on *Poems 2* or the *Modern Women’s Short Stories* anthology.

Examiners reported that, in general, but not universally, responses to poetry were rather better than in previous years. There seemed to be less device-spotting, less hunting down of the elusive polysyndeton, the reclusive asyndeton and the unsociable anaphora, and a readiness to discuss what the poems were about. However, examiners commented unfavourably on the increasing use of such jargon as “lexis”, “semantic fields”, “indirect free discourse” without illuminating the texts under discussion in any way. Weaker responses often spent time labouring through rhyme schemes (*The Hero’s* “first verse rhymes aabbcc”) without indicating what, if any, the effect of this might be. Fairly basic responses aimed only for explanation of what the poet was saying or “trying to say” (obviously with such little success that paraphrase was necessary). The best responses engaged with the language, looking in detail at the effects the poets produced on the response of the reader, whether to Letts’s amazement or revulsion that “Just that”, turning and running, should justify the firing of an English bullet in the heart (with an exclamation mark following the repetition of the line).

By far the most popular poetry text was *Opening Lines*, and the war poetry in particular. Responses to *Section G: How It Looks From Here* were often disappointing. Many responses to

Question 1, inviting discussion/comparison of *Mort aux Chats* and *Rat, O Rat ...*, interpreted both poems literally, at worst arguing that Porter harboured a totally irrational phobia about cats and that Logue must be mad as he converses with a rat and leaves it a note which sadly it cannot read as Logue has thoughtlessly placed it out of eyeshot. Most were able to show that both poems portrayed animals in unusual ways, watching television in the case of cats, or being handsome in the case of the sadly unlovely rat. Some asserted that *Rat, O Rat* was a prayer to a deity (*Rat, O Rat* and *O God ...*), perhaps pushed in that direction by the reference in line 16 to “ten good Christians”, but could not pursue the interpretation very far, finding, for example, difficulty in explaining the deity’s fondness for potatoes. Better responses identified the “voice” in the Porter as a dog’s and discussed in some detail the poem’s satirical reproduction of a dictator’s rant. The poem was considered to be an attack against women, refugees, asylum-seekers, Jews, and such discussions were often well supported, not least by candidates who focused on “The Rule/of Dogs shall last a thousand years”. Better responses avoided consigning Logue to the care of a government-funded programme in the community to support persons who held conversations with rats, focusing instead on the poem’s humorous approach to ridding one’s house, or country, of an unwanted visitor, whether animal or, possibly human. Better responses noted the ironic escalation of the owner’s bids to remove the unwanted visitor: the note, the cursed ownership of the “large and hungry dog” and the final bathetic suggestion that the praise of a larger congregation might be the bait that persuaded the “handsome” yet unwelcome rat to vacate the premises.

There were comparatively few responses to the invitation to explore/compare the idea of appearance versus reality in Plath’s *Mirror* and Dunn’s *I Am a Cameraman*. There were, however, some very closely argued responses to the question, the best of which considered the language of the poems and not simply the content, discussing, for example, Plath’s image of the “terrible fish”.

There were a number of responses to the invitation to explore the ways in which the poets bring to life the beauties of nature in two of the poems, *Judging Distances*, *In Your Mind*, and *Oh Grateful Colours*, *Bright Looks!*. Most were able to distinguish between the two voices in the Reed poem, but, having made the distinction and appreciating the satire of the military voice, did not always fully explore the resonance of such words as “vestments”. Some responses to the Duffy simply proceeded linearly through the poem, without focusing on the lines in which the beauties of nature are central, like those describing a moon peeling itself into the sea. Most were able to respond to Smith’s delight in colours, whether of natural or fabricated objects, though some misread the last lines, offering a paraphrase to show that “the landscape of the dead” is colourless, omitting line 16 that suggests perhaps this is “a false tale”. A number of examiners noted that candidates’ vocabulary is on occasion less than exact. The opening lines of Smith’s poem were often described as simplistic, rather than simple, as if the meanings of these two terms were identical. And “sympathy” and “sympathise” have been banished by “empathy” and “empathise” for their cold inadequacy in our touchy/feely age.

As was perhaps to be expected, *Section H: The 1914-18 War (ii)* attracted very many candidates.

Surprisingly, very many candidates referred to Winifred M Letts as “he”, no doubt misled by the third syllable of her first name. It was less clear why some candidates thought that Agnes Herbertson was also male, unless the first two syllables of the surname led them gender-astay, nor why Sassoon was considered, by a few, to be female. Such responses tended to make much of how great an understanding of trench warfare such poets could have, in the light of their gender. There was plenty of material here to enable candidates to discuss the portrayal of the soldier’s fear, and better responses feasted on the chance to discuss the “frightened child” and “hare” references. These were also able to recognise Letts’s refusal to condemn the deserter on the grounds that the God-given instinct is “to live and not to die” and also focus on the effects of the personification of “Fear” that both “dogged” and “gripped” him. Responses often recognised the repetition of the words “And so he turned and ran away” but made no comment on the two

words “Just that” that say much about the poet’s assessment of the enormity of what the deserter did. Similarly candidates often noted the repetition of the line “An English bullet in his heart.” but only the most perceptive commented on the outrage or horror conveyed by the poet’s use of an exclamation mark in line 25. Some candidates seemed not to understand that the deserter was executed by a firing squad and guessingly made suggestions about “Blindfolded”, believing that the word suggested his confusion about whether or not to desert. Some claimed that people were “blindfolded” because the weather was bad, so killing the deserter through “friendly fire”. Responses to *The Hero* followed the pattern of previous years, including earlier responses to Sassoon’s *Lamentations*, in believing that Sassoon was so hard-hearted as to believe that a man convulsed with grief because his brother had gone west, was damning about an officer who panicked in the trench. Candidates sometimes thought that “Jack” had, like the Deserter, been shot for deserting, although the poem states only “he’d tried to get sent home”, before being blown to small bits. Surprisingly few candidates commented on the name “Wicked Corner”. The poet’s detachment and irony were perceived only by better candidates who recognised Sassoon’s condemnation of the Brother Officer’s opinion of the unfortunate “Jack”. A number of candidates ignored the thrust of the question and compared the lies told to mothers in both poems, usually condemning the military. It is perhaps worth reminding Centres here that questions may not require candidates to consider the entirety of one or both of the poems. Responses which focused in detail on the mothers in *The Deserter* and *The Hero* were largely irrelevant as the question, of course, focused on the fear of the soldiers and not on the mothers’ reactions.

Question 5 asking about the relationships between fathers and sons in *The Parable of the Old Man and the Young* and *The Seed-Merchant’s Son* was well answered by candidates who discussed Abraham and his relations with Isaac in terms of the twisting of the Biblical story and of his responsibility as a father to both his son Isaac and an entire generation of young men, the “seed” on which the future relies. These also engaged with the last lines of the *Seed-Merchant’s Son*, offering evidence that the Seed-Merchant was thanking God for the enjoyment of his son’s sadly brief life or that the seed represented some kind of future growth.

Question 6 invited candidates to discuss the “particularly striking words and phrases” the poets use to convey their thoughts and feelings about death in war. Too many simply paraphrased two poems and paid almost no attention to the words and phrases of the poems. There were, however, some powerful responses to the offensive in Owen’s *Spring Offensive*, with close attention given to lines 27-46. Some noted how the buttercups that had blossomed with gold the men’s slow boots coming up the valley were horrifically succeeded by the sudden cups set “In thousands for their blood” and responded sensitively and sympathetically to such language as “the surf of bullets” and “the hot blast and fury of hell’s upsurge”. “Some say God caught them even before they fell” also provoked sensitive response by some, whilst some others dismissed the line as simply evincing sentimental and irrational deism. *The Target* was quite a popular choice here, with able candidates focusing both on the guilt felt by the voice and what they found striking about the language Gurney uses. Weaker responses paraphrased the poem without highlighting the language in any way.

There were a number of responses to *Touched with Fire* and these were often very sound indeed. Candidates found *Piano and Drums* and *Our History* very accessible and often showed close engagement with the poets’ comparison of the past and present in the two poems with careful focus on the imagery the poets use. The vibrant language of the poems was often carefully assessed, and the sadness and sense of loss in both poems (with a compensating sense of some gain in the Okara) sensitively explored. The three key words of Question 11 (“power”, “violence” and “disturbing”) were usually addressed to a greater or lesser degree. Candidates often interpreted *Hawk Roosting* as an allegory of a dictator, and this interpretation, when followed through, fitted the question well. However, whilst the best answers focused on the poem’s language, others simply explained what the hawk was saying. Few attempted to comment on “through the bones of the living” and “my manners ...” was mostly paraphrased, though one candidate noted that “If his manners are tearing off heads, one shudders to think

what he does when he is being ill-mannered". There were comparatively few responses to Question 12. However, the poem most usually selected for comparison was *Mid-Term Break*, often set beside Causley's *Nursery Rhyme of Innocence and Experience*. These poems were quite successfully tackled with candidates being able to discuss Heaney's detachment and lack of emotion, though a number, having trawled through the poem, ignored the powerful and moving last line. Some responses showed good understanding of *Nursery Rhyme*, made interesting cross-references to Blake and made Satanic connections. *Digging* was not so successfully addressed, some candidates not realising that the voice in the poem is an adult's recalling his childhood impressions of his father and grandfather at work and is not itself the voice of a child.

Prose

Comfortably the most popular prose text was the OCR Anthology *Opening Worlds* and the most popular question was on the extracts from *The Pieces of Silver* and *The Young Couple*. As stated in previous reports on Post-1914 Poetry and Prose, Assessment Objective 3 is addressed only in responses to poetry, and not in responses to prose texts. From this text, the Lawrence Short Stories and the Susan Hill *Modern Women's Short Stories* we are required to set passages from two stories, but questions never use the word "compare". It was again clear from reading many of this summer's scripts that some candidates believe that comparison is the task they have been set. Accordingly, there were detailed discussions of how one interior expressed poverty, the other wealth; how one mother was thin, the other large; one father gangling, the other large; the one insubstantial meal of the day contrasted with Naraian's father's fondness for his food ... Such detailed comparisons distracted candidates from focusing on how the writers "memorably describe houses and the people who live in them". Comparisons which provided no more than structure to the response were useful, but the best candidates here considered the two extracts quite discretely and focused on features that made the extracts memorable. Poems and prose passages are printed on the examination paper so that the language used in either genre can be discussed, analysed and responded to. There was plenty to discuss in the Sealy. Many picked up the reference to a "coop of a room", linking it to chickens being cooped up and to Mrs Dovecot scraping, pecking and foraging for her food "like a scratching hen"; others also remarked on the appropriateness of the family name to dwellers in a coop. Good answers focused on the seagulls (birds, again) "soaring up" and metaphorically away from the "wretched coop" whilst Dave and his family remained cooped up. There was evidence of careless reading of the extract; many candidates remarked that Dave Dovecot "piled" his spoon rather "plied" it. A number wrote that Maud had bones like an eagle's (not noting the comparison of "want" with the eagle). On occasion unawareness of language undid candidates; one commented on the embarrassment that the family must have suffered at having to paper their walls with pornographic materials (the evidence being "the once gay pictures of the magazine pages"); a number were unaware of the meaning of "grizzled", believing Dave to be bearlike. Good responses detailed the oppressive atmosphere of the Indian interior, its effect on Cathy, the way Cathy and Naraian are treated as possessions by the father, and Cathy's existence as a trophy daughter-in-law. Insecure responses suggested that the house was owned by Naraian and Cathy, the latter of whom was ungrateful for the luxurious lap in which she found herself. On occasion, candidates offered unsupported biographical information/speculation of the kind that Sealy was born in Barbados and is probably describing the house he grew up in as a boy; or that Jhabvala, being born in Germany and moving after her marriage to India, must, as Cathy, be actually re-telling her own experiences. Such speculation absorbed time that would have been better spent on language discussion and evaluation.

The vivid portrayal of relationships between husbands and wives in *The Train from Rhodesia* and *The Tall Woman and Her Short Husband* was a less popular choice. There were often good responses to the Feng Ji-cai story, with emphasis being put on the attraction of opposites, the ability to ignore the pettinesses of others, and the survival of love. As ever, good textual knowledge and detailed reference to and support from the text characterized good answers. The relationship in the Gordimer story was handled less well, often depending on recounting the husband's haggling for the lion, his satisfaction with his bargain and her initial reaction. Comparatively few candidates responded to the last three paragraphs of the story and the writer's language, such as "sick. A weariness, a tastelessness, the discovery of a void ...". Attention to the language here characterised very good answers.

Question 15 asked about the portrayal of unkindness in any two of *Two Kinds*, *Leela's Friend*, and *The Tall Woman and Her Short Husband*. The best responses focused on the unkindness portrayed and how this portrayal was vivid, using textual detail in support. Weaker ones tended to recount much, or all, of the story, often substituting "unfair" for "unkind", leaving the examiner to infer which parts of it the candidate considered to illustrate unkindness. Priorities were sometimes a little surprising: a number of candidates referred to the grandfather's comparison in *The Tall Woman and Her Short Husband* of those characters to a tall thin empty wine bottle and a squat tin of pork, but did not consider the struggle meeting, the beating up of the husband, his imprisonment, or the subsequent change in his appearance. Some examiners felt that such focusing on comparatively minor details in the early part of a story occurs because candidates work through the story linearly rather than take an overview and select the most apt material from the story, wherever it happens to occur. There were also concerns with relevance, not least over the distractions offered by the role of the tailor's wife, certainly a leader in the unkindness offered to the husband and wife, to candidates who narrated what she did, her acquisition of the flat, her irrelevant questions at the meeting, whether she would have remarried in the event of the tailor's death, what her motives might be, all at the expense of close focus on the question. There was often a similar pattern in discussions of *Leela's Friend*, where some candidates made much of Mr Sivasanker's unkindness in subjecting Sidda "to a scrutiny" and little of the accusation of theft, the tarnishing of his reputation, his imprisonment and his being left, though innocent, for a further night in jail. A number of candidates wrote about "unfairness" or "prejudice" not quite focusing on the central thrust of the question. The distracting character here was Leela's mother who was, perhaps rightly, deemed inferior to Sidda as a carer of Leela. However, dwelling upon her giving Leela a slap and being unable to conjure up vivid bedtime stories led away from the treatment of Sidda to consideration of the qualities of a good mother as perceived in these socially-conscious times. There were some sensitive responses to unkindness in *Two Kinds*, with plenty of recognition that the mother's unkindness was unintentional and arose from her belief that Jing-mei could be anything she (or her mother) "wanted to be in America". A number of candidates illustrated Jing-mei's own deliberate unkindness in uttering the equivalent of "Alakazam" that briefly transformed her mother into something "thin, brittle, lifeless". On occasion, responses attacking Jing-mei made no reference to these particularly unkind words.

The *Ten Short Stories* of D H Lawrence seem to decline in popularity year by year. However, there were some responses to the extract-based question. As ever, the best answers focused on the language of the extracts analysing and discussing the violence offered to John Thomas and Rex's canine rage. Less successful responses paraphrased the extracts or recounted events leading up to the extracts.

Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* continues to attract a number of Centres, though, as with Lawrence, its following seems to decrease session by session. There were some sensitive responses to the extract, noting how Jim was now able to see life in Lunghua camp through the eyes of others, most notably Mrs Vincent, although his naïve reflection that one day the prisoners might all one day happily return to Lunghua suggests that his developing maturity is not yet fully fledged. Jim's relationship with Mr Maxted was generally understood. Responses ranged from simple narration

of stages in that relationship to careful analyses of the way it changes, concluding with Mr Macted's preventing Jim from joining the march from the stadium, thereby saving his life. Candidates continue to write with some engagement and enjoyment on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, a text studied at a significant number of Centres. As usual, the focus of the extract-based question was the extract itself, although some weaker responses simply used the extract as a spring-board to discuss Okonkwo's feelings for and his relationships with members of his family throughout the novel. Better responses tried to define what his feelings actually are and what motivates him to beat Nwoye so violently that he drives him to the missionaries. Family and tribal loyalty seem central to Okonkwo's beliefs, and good responses made a lot of the importance of not abandoning the gods of one's father. The best responses discussed the language of the extract and the way in which it conveys Okonkwo's powerful feelings. There were some sensitive responses to Question 23 on how Achebe makes Ikemefuna's short life particularly moving, with personal response often evident. These often included thoughtful discussion on the termination of his short life, offering the opportunity for response to or analysis of the language Achebe chooses to portray his death. There were comparatively few responses to Question 24, making general comment unhelpful.

The extract on which Question 25, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, was based was, of course, extremely short but offered plenty of material for discussion and analysis. Inevitably, weaker responses either paraphrased the extract or summarised the novel to reveal what had led up to these concluding six paragraphs. However, many candidates were able to focus on why they found the ending moving, considering such aspects of the extract as the success, or failure, of the old man; the ignorance of the tourists; the confusion over the marlin, the object of Santiago's admiration and respect, and the sharks, the destroyers; the marlin as no more than a piece of detritus; the care shown by Manolin; the dream about the lions Some quite sophisticated responses considered the theory of the circle of life, the ending reflecting the opening of the novel. On occasion there might have been more detailed consideration of the language of the extract ("empty beer cans and dead barracudas ... heavy steady sea ... garbage... handsome, beautifully formed"...) but most found material on which to comment here. Question 26 produced some interesting evaluations of the old man's assessment of the cause for his defeat. There were some very closely argued essays discussing going out too far (yes or no and why), how he might be considered to fail and how he did not fail, with detailed support from the text. Good answers engaged with the writing, recognising the importance of the reference to Hemingway persuading a reader to espouse a view. Responses to Question 27 were variable. Examiners accept the moment or moments chosen by the candidate but are looking to reward analysis of or response to the writing and how it makes the moment/s exciting and dramatic. Weaker responses narrated a part of the novel, often at considerable length, without bringing out what made it exciting or dramatic, whilst others, at Higher Tier, sometimes wrote about two moments when they had already done a very good job on the first, perhaps thinking that quantity would attract higher marks.

Responses to the extract-based questions on Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* sometimes proceeded on the assumption that the response was to a first-time reading of the passage and worked on the assumption that whatever suspense the extract generated was unsatisfied by an overall knowledge of the novel. Too often Julia's declaration of love was not mentioned ("the reader is left to speculate about what Winston is going to read") and her nervousness, conveyed in Orwell's references to her colour and her eyes, was similarly ignored. Where the focus was firmly on the extract and its language, responses reached the higher bands. The question on how Orwell makes the relationship between Winston and O'Brien so disturbing was often well answered, with candidates selecting particular moments from the text to support what they found particularly disturbing about it; for example, the meeting at O'Brien's flat when Winston is apparently enrolled into the Brotherhood, or Winston's continuing admiration for O'Brien even at some of the most horrific moments of his interrogation and torture in the Ministry of Love. Less successful responses mainly summarised Winston's meetings with O'Brien without focusing on the question's requirement of personal engagement and response and the key word "disturbing". In response to Question 30 candidates often showed a remarkable grasp of details in the novel

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that illustrated the cruelty inflicted on individuals, such as Winston and Julia, or on the population in general whose daily life is made miserable by avoidable shortage of essentials that makes life uncomfortable and equally avoidable “steamers” that make life dangerous.

Literary non-fiction

There were too few responses to either *Pole to Pole* or *Fever Pitch* for much useful comment to be made. However, there were some responses to the Palin extract-based question. The best focused on how Palin’s language made the accounts moving, not least by exploring his descriptions of the youthful soldiers and the poor children in the extract from *Day 77*. These also commented sensitively on the moving conclusion to the extract from *Day 77*. Less successful responses paraphrased the extracts without considering the language Palin uses or how that makes his accounts moving.

2443 Pre–1914 Texts (Coursework)

2447 Post–1914 Texts (Coursework)

Most centres are now highly skilled at supporting their students at all levels through coursework to achieve their best. Detailed teacher annotations, use of the reverse of the Coursework Cover Sheet are all ways in which the most proficient centres give feedback to their candidates and assist the moderator in confirming the teacher assessments. Often notes on the folders show a thorough standardisation has taken place and from one school came a table setting out the comments and standards of each teacher. All these practices are indicators of centres where teachers are highly professional, value their students and display integrity as assessors.

Conversely there are always those centres where cover sheets are not properly filled in, careless clerical errors are made, deficiencies not properly indicated or calculated, tasks not described and teacher annotation is missing. It is worth pointing out that evidence of marking is a prerequisite of the specification. It often becomes the business of the moderator in such circumstances to rescue the candidate.

Certain sectors of the press would have it that coursework is riddled with plagiarism from the internet. Oh for the days of Coles or York Notes, when weaker candidates could quote verbatim long passages that they did not understand and that were irrelevant to the question! That tends, though, to be the nature of most copying from internet sites that moderators see and it is sad when candidates get into trouble for including lots of trite background material that would not have earned them any marks anyway. This often seems to be the result of research projects into the background of texts and authors that are unmediated by the teacher. It would be better not to set such assignments or to limit them to classroom presentations. They rarely enrich a coursework task unless a student has been taught to discriminate, paraphrase, apply and express insights in his or her own words. These instances are still relatively rare and it is disappointing when teachers have failed to spot them, when for moderators with a bit of sense, and some googling, identifying such practice is relatively straightforward. Teaching students to use secondary sources constructively is becoming increasingly important with the opportunities occasioned by massive access to information.

Good candidates can assimilate and use this background material effectively to inform their reading of a text, thus meeting Assessment Objective 4 (AO4). There were responses where a little reading about Darwin and the Victorian crisis of faith greatly enhanced study of H.G.Wells or 'Jekyll and Hyde'. As long as it was tempered by a focus on the text, an understanding of the Jews in England provided meat for worthwhile discussion of 'The Merchant of Venice'. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' was shown to respond well to a reading where a knowledge of social and cultural factors was appropriately applied. On the negative side many centres seem unable, despite constant reminders in these reports, to extricate themselves from long irrelevant descriptions of witchcraft, Holinshed and the Crimean War.

Equally some centres remain fixated on tasks that year after year fail to enable candidates to meet the criteria. Centres must test the three chosen tasks against the four assessment objectives on p.12 of the Specification and against how those Assessment Objectives are translated into marking criteria at the various grade levels. Exemplar material or OCR training might help here. Here teachers might ask themselves whether their candidates will be able to pertinently include evaluation of dramatic and stylistic effectiveness in a debate as to who is responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet – a perennially disappointing task! It is a matter of matching tasks to particular students' abilities. Some can include discussion of drama and language in Romeo's letters to his father or the Dunsinane Gazette, but they have to be very wily

to do so. Equally, if these students are unable to aim for the higher grades these tasks might provide a structure for them to demonstrate knowledge of the plot and character. Tasks that focus candidates on one scene of a play or story can fail for the opposite reasons. They may well involve detailed analysis of certain speeches or dramatic effects but fail to show an understanding of the whole text. Titles should prompt this, as in “How do the first two scenes shape our opinion of Othello?” It is appropriate at this level to provide tasks that focus on narrow material, such as a particular character or scene, but again the wording can encourage a response that meets broad assessment criteria. Two successful tasks were: “How is Caliban presented through language in ‘The Tempest’?” and “To what extent is Theseus presented as a good ruler in ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’?” One candidate gave it away rather by writing “In the bit that I’ve read...”

Choices of text remain fairly established now, generally with those that have worked well. In prose the Gothic style texts offer opportunities for candidates at all levels to explore AO4, show an understanding of genre and analyse how language is used to create tension and horror. One centre used ‘Jude the Obscure’ successful, though it would not be suitable for all entrants. Plays like ‘the Tempest’ and Shakespeare’s great tragedies enable ambitious students to fulfil their potential though many are able to do little more than scrape the surface.

In poetry it is certainly possible to highlight good practice. This largely occurs where only two or three poems are studied and there is constant comparison and cross referencing to meet AO3. Some tasks invite studies of themes such as heroism or the position of women and some invite a narrative approach. The danger of these is in forgetting that the texts are poems and need examination of the specific features of the genre, particularly AO1 and AO2. Centres should also be reminded that 2443 deals with pre-1914 texts; although the skills of comparison may be demonstrated with ‘Light Brigade’ and ‘Dulce’, it is important that there is an equal balance between the texts so that candidates can demonstrate all the qualities required in relation to AOs1, 2 and 4.

The use of writing frames or ‘scaffolding’ clearly has a place in the tutoring of students to write formal discussion, analysis and evaluation. However it penalises candidates when heavily directed work appears for assessment. It makes it difficult to discriminate amongst those who have produced homogenous work and inhibits the demonstration of imagination, originality, sensitivity and personal insight. Where teachers (for whatever noble reasons) have over-directed the content of essays they are trespassing into a shadowy area that ultimately darkens into malpractice. The JCQ ‘Instructions for Conducting Coursework’ categorises such practice as “unacceptable assistance” and names “provision of outlines, paragraphs or section headings or writing frames.” A few colleagues may need to review their practice in the light of this, because centres are likely to be reported or at best scaled down where this is happening.

Any negative comments in this report all arise in contrast to the overwhelming good practice from committed and tireless teachers and highly motivated and engaged students. For a huge majority of centres moderation was straightforward because folders were properly presented, assessment accurate and standardisation thorough. Again this year the coursework component enabled candidates to extend themselves and teachers to demonstrate their professionalism to a wider audience.

2444 Pre-1914 Texts

General Comments

Examiners were generally impressed by the sound, and often quite detailed, knowledge and understanding shown by candidates, most of whom had clearly been well prepared for this examination. Answers in all three sections of the question paper showed a general awareness that more was needed than simple rehearsal of the plot, or paraphrase of the poems, and that quotation was essential, and for higher marks at least some discussion of how these quotations created particular effects. Once again, this was especially evident in the poetry section, where close reading and discussion were attempted by almost all candidates, often very sharply and appropriately.

Unexpectedly, perhaps, the drama section – almost invariably Shakespeare – was the least well managed this session, with poetry and prose being tackled more confidently and personally; candidates need to be encouraged even more than usual to respond personally, rather than allowing themselves simply to repeat what they have been taught: however thorough this is – and in many cases it was very evident that some excellent and very careful teaching had indeed been undertaken – personal and individual response will often lead to fresher and better answers, provided, of course, that the ideas are firmly and sensibly rooted in what the text/passage actually says.

Prose once more led to the widest variety of answers, with use made of every text, and unusually perhaps no single text appeared either more popular than others, or led to better responses. Candidates showed very good understanding of their prose choices, and of how they should respond to the writing.

Comments on Individual Questions

Much Ado About Nothing

There were relatively few answers on this play, and of those **Q1** was by far the more popular. Candidates found plenty to say about the relationship between Beatrice and Benedick both here and earlier in the play (setting the context of the passage-based questions is helpful, provided that it *is* simply setting and not the main thrust of the answer), and were well able to demonstrate the humour as well as the potentially warm and affectionate nature of their growing sense of love. The dramatic nature of Beatrice's command was of course noted by all, and how it leads to a sudden shifting of mood on stage, and in the potential love between the two characters.

Romeo and Juliet

The two questions here were equally popular. Interestingly and disappointingly neither led to outstandingly good answers, although there were plenty that were both thorough and thoughtful.

Q3 was not always placed correctly, and many candidates thought that Juliet was talking to herself, not to Romeo below her balcony. Most saw something at least of her uncertainty – of Romeo's professed love and of her own possibly unseemly haste – but too many strayed too far beyond the extract and discussed the feud, her planned marriage to Paris, and her parents' anger at her love for Romeo (which of course they do not know about). Setting the speech in context is sensible, but the main focus of all passage-based questions must be the passage itself and its language.

Q4 led to some full and thoughtful answers, especially where focus was properly upon just one or two defined moments; high marks could not be given to answers that simply rehearsed a perhaps prepared character study of the Nurse, or discussed how and where generally she was made memorable. Credit was reserved for those answers that explored in some detail the selected moment(s) and the language used in the play to create and/or develop her character and her relationship with Juliet, or indeed other characters – many used the scene with Mercutio and others in the Verona square to emphasise her bawdy but likeable nature, though the most popular were the first scene with Juliet and Lady Capulet (*not, please, “Juliet’s mum”*), and her return to Juliet after meeting Romeo.

An Ideal Husband

There were a few responses to **Q5**, though not to **Q6**. The passage was well understood, and in general was soundly discussed, with plenty of detailed reference to what is said and done; there was clear enjoyment of the two contrasting and conflicting characters, and a real appreciation of the dramatic quality of the exchanges.

An Enemy of the People

There were no answers on this text.

Opening Lines: War

The two questions here were equally popular, and often very well handled, though **Q9** did present some difficulties to some candidates, many of whom appeared to have little or occasionally no understanding of the Collins. Asquith’s poem was more confidently handled, and although a lot of misreadings occurred most answers were able to see at least something of the sad irony of the clerk’s “content/With that high hour”. Relatively few took proper notice of the question’s requirement to explore what was made *moving* – too many simply paraphrased the poem, often well and thoughtfully but not always relevantly. **Q10** was rather better done, with most answers seeing plenty of evidence that the three poems all express horror and grief at war’s wastefulness; again there were a few that simply paraphrased – this was more evident on Tennyson – and some appeared to have little clear understanding of either Whitman or Dobell, but in general there was some sensible, sensitive and often close reading of the language of the chosen two poems. Candidates do need to be warned, however, that making general and personal points about war itself, even if loosely related to the poems, will not gain any reward – *the poems* must be the focus.

Opening Lines: Town and Country

As with *War*, answers were split roughly equally, though **Q11** was marginally more popular, and candidates here seemed very much at ease with both poems – considerably more so than in *War*, in fact. There were perhaps inevitably some ecologically-correct responses to Hopkins, and a few that raged against spreading (sub)urbanisation and industrialisation, but most focused upon what he is actually saying in the poem, and how he views the loss of the row of poplars. The idea that the poem is shaped like a poplar tree was curiously common, but so too was an awareness of the various ways in which Hopkins uses unusual methods and rhythms to make his ideas felt – and “felt” is a word that was used by several. Poetic techniques are so important in this poem that they must be mentioned and illustrated, and thankfully there were almost none that merely identified them – they were discussed, and their effects explored. Yeats’s poem was perhaps even more sensitively appreciated, with some strong personal and sensitive

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understanding of how he expresses his deep wish to escape the city and live in the peace and calm of Innisfree.

It is a point relevant to all questions, of course, but it seemed peculiarly prevalent here: candidates should be strongly advised to refer to writers by their surnames, or even their full names, but emphatically not their first names: it is critically at least awkward to read of William or Gerard – curiously, however, Shakespeare is never William, nor is Austen plain Jane!

Q12 was rather less successful; candidates appeared in many cases to have expected to write simply about these poems as *nature* poetry, and to be asked to explore weather and the seasons took many by surprise. It is important in teaching to stress that while a question will never be a “trick” or truly off-target one, it may not always be exactly what is anticipated or indeed hoped-for; it must, however, be addressed as asked – simple paraphrase, or an answer to the question that would have been liked, will not achieve high marks. So *Beeny Cliff* is certainly about Hardy’s first wife, but that is not what is asked here, and unless explicitly related to the weather, and the March weather in particular, anything else could not be considered relevant. Housman and Meynell were not always well understood, and their respective seasons were surprisingly often incorrect: Housman is surely writing about autumn rather than midwinter (the snow is metaphorical) and Meynell is most certainly not about spring.

Blake: Songs of Innocence and Experience

There were no answers on this text.

Hardy: Selected Poems

There were no answers on this text.

Austen: Northanger Abbey

Q17 was by far the more popular of the two questions here, and often done very well indeed; Catherine’s absurd expectations that like the Abbey itself General Tilney must be up to no good in his late-night readings and wanderings were well appreciated by candidates, relating these to earlier indications that her reading of gothic novels had over-influenced her young mind. A few suggested, quite astutely, that although wrong in her immediate suspicions, Catherine’s doubts about the General were perhaps a foreshadowing of his later ill-treatment of her. **Q18** was done by only a few candidates, some of whom resorted to simple character study rather than to the *snobbery* of the chosen character.

Dickens: Hard Times

Q19 was by far the more popular question, and often done very well; candidates were mostly well able to see how they could have an ambiguous response to Tom Gradgrind, especially as this passage develops. There was some good and close reading of Dickens’s writing, and helpfully relevant reference to events earlier and later in the novel, though most focused well and tightly upon what was printed here.

Hardy: Far From the Madding Crowd

There were some sensitive responses to both questions, with Mr Boldwood gaining considerably more sympathy in **Q22** than examiners had expected (as one said, was this possibly thanks to Peter Finch's portrayal in the film?); his folly and obsessiveness were seen as weaknesses to be pitied rather than criticised, and even his killing of Troy at the Christmas party was sometimes a moment for sadness rather than shock or anger. One examiner noted that "most candidates showed a good or exceptionally good knowledge of his development through the novel". There was plenty of warm understanding too of how the passage in **Q21** explores this difficult and even tender moment in the relationship between Bathsheba and Gabriel; most answers focused on the extract, with appropriate contextualisation but never over-much narrative.

Eliot: Silas Marner

As one examiner says "some of the best answers in the whole examination were to **Q23**"; this is a particularly touching but never sentimental moment in the novel, and candidates clearly felt this too, with some very sensitive understanding of how Eliot portrays Silas's uncertain but desperate longing for love through the child Eppie. His responses towards Dolly's warm but perhaps slightly domineering offers of help were well handled, and his sudden doubt at the end of the passage, when Dolly mentions christening, was again very delicately noted by most candidates. Rather fewer warm feelings were evident in responses to Godfrey in **Q24**, though surprisingly many felt sorry for him, rather than feeling simply angry at him, when he asks Silas to return Eppie to him and Nancy; most candidates were well able to see how it was possible to hold two opinions towards Godfrey, though sympathy certainly won the day in almost every case – Godfrey's bullying father, his selfish brother, his addicted wife: all added fuel.

Poe: Selected Tales

There were some excellent responses to the two passages in **Q25**, though many candidates misplaced (b), believing it to come early rather than late in the tale – this was not a cause for immediate "penalty", but it did lead to some slightly odd answers; unlike (a), which certainly does foreshadow the horror that is to come later in the story, passage (b) helps in fact to clarify some of the previous mystery and horror. There was plenty of exploration and discussion of the writing in both passages, however, and some quite insightful critical understanding of how Poe creates horror and suspense.

Wells: The History of Mr Polly

Despite its very dated nature, and its often old-fashioned humour, this novel proves consistently popular in this Unit. Writing about comedy is of course very hard, as this is often so very personal – more than one candidate made the point in both questions that while the novel may have been funny once it no longer is, owing to our much greater sophistication in the 21st century! – but most answers to both questions managed quite well to express at least something of the humour that surely still reigns in the picture in **Q27** of the downtrodden and formerly fairly impotent Mr Polly defeating the large drunken lout that is Uncle Jim, and then trying to convince the little girl that it was not nearly the other way round. Most answers to **Q28** related Mr Polly's attempted suicide and fire, though a few wrote about his wedding to Miriam, his meetings with Christabel, and even his father's funeral as humorous moments; the chosen moment was never a criterion in examiners' minds, but what candidates made of it most certainly was. The focus had to be upon ways in which it was "particularly amusing", rather than whether or not a candidate could remember what happened.

Chopin: Short Stories

Chopin's stories are not necessarily the easiest text in the Prose section, but they almost invariably lead to some very good answers; candidates respond warmly and sensitively to her writing and to her characters, and in almost all cases know the stories well. This year was no exception, and both questions produced some very good and thoughtful answers, especially **Q30**, where the settings of all three stories were well understood, and their significance to plot and character very sensitively appreciated. *The Storm* and *Beyond the Bayou* were the more popular, with some detailed description of settings, and how these reflected events. **Q29** was less widely answered, and marginally less successfully too – answers tended more towards explanation than to exploration.

2445 Drama Pre - 1914

General Comments (see 2441 Section)

There was a much smaller entry for these papers than for 2441, and a very small entry for Foundation Tier which makes generalised comment difficult. The two most popular texts were *Romeo and Juliet* (by far) and *Much Ado About Nothing*, and although *An Enemy of the People* has established a foothold as one of the two non-Shakespearian choices, Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* is so rarely attempted that comment here is all but impossible. The remarks in the *General Comments* (2441) section of the report on the narrowing of question choices are particularly relevant to 2445 once again and many Examiners lamented the rarity of empathic answers, in particular.

Comments on Individual Questions

Much Ado About Nothing

Question 1 was easily the most popular *Much Ado About Nothing* option on both tiers and genuine enjoyment of the play was often apparent. The strongest answers not only scrutinised the dialogue and in particular the rapid exchange of wit between Beatrice and Benedick, but also saw the scene as an exposition and commented perceptively on the way Shakespeare introduces the themes, character traits and relationships that will prove so important later in the play. The friction between Beatrice and Benedick and the sense of their shared past, the rapid development of Claudio's interest in Hero, the significance of "noting", the initially cordial relationship between Leonato and Don Pedro, the brooding presence of Don John, the total silence of Hero... all proved fertile areas for discussion, but only the most confident candidates were able to comment in detail on the richness of the language and the sources of the humour.

Some candidates lost the focus on what is "memorable" in answer to **Question 2** and often produced very detailed but rather generalised character studies. There was much effective comment on the perceived change in Leonato and vehement condemnation of his treatment of Hero at the wedding. Lengthy discussion of historical contexts and "patriarchal" societies distracted some candidates from the core of the question and the impact of the character on an audience.

Question 3 was rarely attempted but a believable concern with power, wealth and status emerged in successful answers. Some had Don Pedro brooding convincingly about marriage and isolation, some expressed his appreciation of Beatrice's qualities and some conveyed a residual disappointment at her earlier rejection of him.

Romeo and Juliet

Question 4 was by far the most popular question on this text and on both tiers of this paper. Many candidates managed the balance between close attention to the printed extract and an evaluation of its overall impact in the play very shrewdly. A few worked through the passage with so little sense of context that Romeo's marriage to Juliet and the resulting ironies in the extract were completely overlooked; others saw the fight as a turning point and devoted their answer to examining the tragic consequences and the concept of "fate" without engaging the tensions and drama of the extract. Some made good use of references to the Luhrmann or Zeffirelli films while making it clear that these were versions of the text and not the text itself. Successful candidates not only visualised the dramatic action and responded to the impact of

the fight, but also conveyed their enjoyment of Mercutio's punning and of the highly-charged nature of the dialogue throughout.

A substantial number of candidates were unsure about the exact meaning of "admirable" in **Question 5** with some interpreting it very narrowly to mean "physically attractive". Strong candidates tended to make particularly good use of Juliet's soliloquies to demonstrate her courage, independence and developing maturity. Many adopted a surprisingly censorious line and found little if anything to admire about her behaviour or character.

Liveliness of voice and simple-minded anxiety about covering up and preserving her position in the Capulet household characterised the Nurses in successful answers to empathic **Question 6**.

An Ideal Husband

There were too few answers on this text to make any valid generalisations about performance.

An Enemy of the People

Candidates who tackled **Question 10** were generally more comfortable examining the significance of the moment in the context of the whole play than in responding to the dramatic detail of the extract itself. Sound overviews were therefore more prevalent than detailed, sustained explorations. Nevertheless the strongest candidates were able to chart the way the tension builds throughout the extract, to visualise the dramatic action and to comment on the impact of the Mayor's concealment and of the accumulating dramatic ironies, as well as wrestling with the broader moral issues which emerge clearly at this point.

Question 11 was a minority choice. Successful answers were well anchored to the final Act and offered comprehensive reasons for both optimism and pessimism before reaching a firm conclusion. Less successful answers lost the focus on the end of the play and produced a sprawling summary of the trials of the Stockmann family throughout the play. **Question 12** was answered so rarely that it is difficult to make any helpful comment.

2446 Poetry and Prose Pre - 1914

This year's examination produced work that demonstrated sound knowledge of the set texts and evidence of systematic teaching was widespread. Many answers were stunning in their maturity, sensitivity and range of reference.

The best poetry answers showed real engagement with the feelings expressed in the poems and a strong ability to respond to language rather than giving an empty display of technical knowledge. Answers beginning with an account of the rhyme scheme make an examiner's heart sink. As one examiner opined: "Poetry is not a science to be approached in an objective, detached way". Candidates should be encouraged first and foremost to look at words and the expression of feelings. Whereas most candidates showed excellent grasp of the content and themes of the poems, there were also some interpretations that indicated serious misreading of the text or a lack of essential background knowledge. Many candidates this year, however, showed a real flair for effective comparison and an ability to write sensitive, detailed analysis. At Foundation Tier, candidates need to move beyond merely outlining the content of the poems in order to move up the mark range.

Centres have clearly worked hard on the prose texts and candidates wrote some lively and responsive answers. At times the passage-based answers tended to suffer from candidates not being confident of the context. One of the requirements of this type of question is that the candidates use their knowledge of the rest of the text to inform their answer and this was particularly necessary this year to fully respond to the passages, as outlined below. Candidates also need to examine the passage closely but it is not necessary to turn this into a purely linguistic exercise- "Gradgrind uses a lot of polysyndeton,"- devoid of any context or knowledge of plot and character. Strong candidates can often integrate technical terminology effortlessly into their essays but many will list disparate words and claim they are in a "semantic field" or loosely refer to "free indirect discourse" for any style of narrative.

Foundation Tier candidates would be well advised to use the bullets where available to help them select material, as these are often ignored to the detriment of the answer. Strong candidates at this tier showed themselves able to write competent well-substantiated answers.

Most candidates made good division of their time between questions, although some Prose responses showed signs of rush. There were relatively few rubric infringements and most candidates tackled both questions. There were, however, some scripts that showed very limited response to the second poem or second story, where appropriate. On balance, however, it is impressive to see how much good criticism students are able to produce in ninety minutes. The quality of written communication was generally high: paragraphing and organisation of argument was often impressive. If there were anything to be avoided in future sessions it would be candidates' adherence to formulaic essay plans, rewriting of a mock exam essay and introductions that state the obvious or re-write the question. A willingness to actively engage with the question set and to have one's own views and feelings about the set texts reap the best rewards.

OCR: Opening Lines: War

Although these poems concern wars that are in the very dim and distant past for the candidates, many had clearly responded to them in relation to current events and in some cases with the light of personal experience. The best answers to Question 1 really engaged the contrasts between and within the poems, saw that Tennyson was not glorifying war in itself but the bravery of "the six hundred" and explored the seductive power of the recruiting drum in Scott's poem.

Candidates related form to meaning, such as the structured contrasts and oppositions in the Scott and avoided over-simplification and a “Tennyson is pro-war: Scott is anti war,” response. There was some subtle thematic linking about soldiers being misled into battle and a perception of the different attitude to blind obedience from the two poets. Less successful answers did not seem aware that there had been a blunder from the high command in *The Charge of the Light Brigade* or that the battle was not won by the British. The role of the drum as an instrument of recruitment was sometimes misunderstood and there was some generalised comment about soldiers giving their lives to protect their country, which does not sit that easily with the Crimean War. In answer to Question 2, there remain a few candidates who have no idea what happened to Sennacherib’s army but the best really engaged Byron’s brilliant leaf images and looked at the imagery of sudden death on the battlefield compared to the previous glamour of the Assyrian “wolf”. The horror of the hyaenas actions was delineated by strong answers, also characterised by an understanding that Kipling was criticising humanity’s indifference to the war dead and not the “free of shame” hyaenas. In answer to Question 3 the ironies in the Southey and the desolation in the Dobell were pretty well grasped by most candidates though weaker responses do not see the ironies in what Old Kaspar is saying or appreciate Dobell’s symbolic description of his “dead” land, thinking that Tommy and his comrades are buried there.

OCR: Opening Lines: Town and Country

Question 4 produced some perceptive work that shaped genuinely comparative explorations of both poems, caught the power of the wind against the transience of human life in the Housman and the godlike power and lonely omniscience of the eagle. There was close attention to language in *The Eagle*, the brevity of which, no doubt encouraged candidates to look at every word. Many candidates, however, either struggled with the meaning of *On Wenlock Edge*.. or seemed determined to over complicate it. A straightforward look at how the power of the wind is portrayed by imagery, personification, alliteration and the use of active verbs would have sufficed to create a good answer. There were, however, many misreadings of the “snow the leaves” image with candidates writing about the power of snowstorms. Very few engaged the “tree of life/tree of man” image and many wrote convoluted comparisons between the wind and the Roman Empire, often ignoring the actual words of the poem. Question 5 was generally answered very well. There was much genuinely comparative writing noting the ironies in Yeats’s desperation to escape the city to his rural retreat as opposed to Wordsworth’s admiration of London. The very best were able to explore the effect of Wordsworth’s use of personification, the sonnet form and listing, without merely identifying these features and to suggest the significance and effect of Yeats’s tranquil images, sounds and colours rather than just pointing them out. There was a genuine response to Yeats’s enthusiasm for going “back to nature” this year as well as recognition that both poems, to varying extents, present idealised viewpoints. Some candidates are still insisting on turning Wordsworth’s poem into an essay on pollution. The 1802 map of London does not show many factories near Westminster Bridge and it does seem perverse to write about what is *not* in the poem rather than what is. Successful answers to Question 6 on *Beeny Cliff* and *The Way through the Woods* wrote convincingly about the permanence of nature and the mutability of human life in both poems. Less convincing answers overcomplicated *The Way Through the Woods* in a similar manner to *On Wenlock Edge*... mentioned above, with candidates failing to state obvious points such as the road becoming overgrown and recaptured by nature and humans as a ghostly presence.

Blake: Songs Of Innocence and Experience

Candidates produced some enthusiastic work on Blake, showing detailed knowledge of both the poems and of Blake’s notions of innocence and experience. This occasionally got in the way of candidates responding to the actual question set, but enhanced the scripts of candidates who had made the poems their own. Effective answers to Question 7 concentrated on the “threatening images” of the question and examined the possibilities of Blake’s symbolism in a

genuinely exploratory way. Many candidates saw how ideas of secretiveness and disguise permeate both poems and responded sensitively to the threat posed by “invisible worm” and the “howling storm” and to the various possibilities of “dark secret love”. The corruption of “Experience” was seen as inevitable and unavoidable. Less successful answers wanted to compare the *Nurse’s Song in Innocence* to the *Experience* poem in this question, rather than concentrate on the question set and tended to detach the images from the context of the poem, for example “green to me means freshness, nature, rebirth, youth, vigour, growth...” when that was not the case. The sharp contrasts between *Night* and *London* provided ample material in Question 8 and candidates explored the ideas of safety, peace and guardianship in *Night* as opposed to the misery, restriction and oppression in *London* to strong effect. The comparative work here was generally very strong indeed.

Hardy: Selected Poems

Answers to Question 10 tended to write about *A Broken Appointment* more effectively than *Neutral Tones* where much of the pain derives from the imagery. Some candidates effectively analysed the structure and rhyme scheme of the poems but were far less impressive on looking at how the poems “movingly” convey lost love. This was one of the occasions where candidates really needed to be encouraged to respond to the feelings in the poems and not merely treat them as a kind of linguistic comprehension. There were very few answers to Questions 11 and 12.

Austen: Northanger Abbey

The best answers to Question 13 really examined how Austen’s irony leads us to disapprove of Isabella here, captured the flavour of the dialogue and started from the premise that the reader is encouraged to see a lot more than Catherine. Strong candidates wrote with an informed sense of context: that this is early in the relationship and Isabella is dominant over the less experienced and naïve Catherine. They noted that Catherine’s enthusiasm for Gothic novels, encouraged by Isabella here, will rebound on her later and that Isabella’s hints about her relationship with James Morland show the reader why she is so keen to befriend Catherine. Isabella’s hypocrisy about Miss Andrews was cited as one of the methods by which Austen shows we are not to trust her. Candidates with a less secure grasp of irony and context gave face-value readings of the passage. They asserted that the girls had a strong friendship, shared interests and confidences which is valid as far as it goes, but suggested a very limited grasp of “this point in the novel”, as cited in the question. There was much surprising disapproval of the empty headed chat about clothes and boys. Have teenage girls ever talked about anything else? The best answers to Question 14 were prepared to explore compatibility and the changes in Catherine without just drifting into a character study. Answers to Question 15 tended to be stronger on providing a broad context to show the shock, the dramatic reversal and the speed of the expulsion, whereas some of the best also examined the effect of the writing during Eleanor’s embarrassed news-breaking and Catherine’s misery on her journey home.

Dickens: Hard Times

Question 16 produced engaged writing which managed to convey an outraged anger at Gradgrind’s “factual” upbringing of his children as well as developed sensitive commentaries on the effect of key images such as Louisa’s fire and Tom’s mechanical behaviour. The best saw the seeds being sown for future misery and linked this with Tom’s exploitation of Louisa, the miserable marriage to the loathed Bounderby and the showdown scene where Louisa finally reproaches her father and the scales fall from his eyes. Some candidates experienced problems with the way Dickens adopts Gradgrind’s point-of-view in order to satirise it, for example saying things like “Gradgrind describes Louisa as ‘metallurgical’...the children as ‘delinquents’” or that “Dickens calls the children ‘rabble’”. Tom received little attention in many answers. Many

thought the “vagabonds” were the children, not the circus folk. The choices for Question 17 ranged very widely though Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit received some very satisfying criticism, as did Tom but often with a sense that he is a victim too. Some answers remained rather detached from the details of the just deserts and therefore drifted into character study. Question 18 proved less popular but there were some very fine answers, balancing attention to personal stories, especially Stephen Blackpool's, with the Coketown imagery.

Hardy: Far From the Madding Crowd

There are many gripping features of this climactic extract and the strongest answers appreciated the crucial nature of the context as well as the drama of the events. The reader has known for some time about Troy's return and we are gripped by the irony of the timing just after Boldwood has forced a promise out of Bathsheba. Suspense is built by Bathsheba's early recognition of Troy and Boldwood's failure to recognise him at first. Then both the dialogue and Hardy's description of Bathsheba and Boldwood's reactions grip us. Weaker responses paid scant attention to the context or ignored the dialogue or the description of Bathsheba, though few missed the drama of the actual shooting. It was possible to tackle Question 20 by looking at the goodness of Gabriel or the shortcomings versus sterling qualities of Bathsheba. Most wrote plot-based essays on why Gabriel was 'good enough' for Bathsheba and the man she could rely on. This could be effective but missed the emphasis on Bathsheba in the question and therefore a chance to explore how she is shown to change and develop in the course of the novel. One response to this question interestingly went on to consider whether the change to Bathsheba was also to some extent a loss.

Question 21 produced some good responses. Candidates wrote movingly of the pathos of Fanny's situation and made an excellent selection of the dramatic moments when she intervened in the narrative, one or two pointing out that her most memorable interventions come after her death, when Troy kisses her corpse and in the chapter where her grave is ruined by the rain from the “gurgyle”. They suggested that she haunts Troy and determines his fate. Most responses struggled to select effectively and concentrated on the barracks and churchyard encounters, but the close reading of how Hardy dramatises the social distance between them was impressive.

Eliot: Silas Marner

Question 22 was popular but answers suffered badly and surprisingly from insecure knowledge of context. Godfrey and Nancy's relationship is a major element of the novel yet many answers made no reference to Godfrey's wife and daughter and consequently seemed to be unaware of the reasons behind the off/on nature of his courtship of Nancy and that he is taking a (characteristically impetuous) huge risk in courting her here. Understanding of Nancy's behaviour was a key discriminator. The best answers saw that her “coldness” and self-control was owing to Godfrey's capriciousness in the past. Less successful responses misread this as the reserve expected of Victorian ladies. There were many miscomprehensions of the wording of the passage. It was surprising that many candidates chose this question when they were clearly unfamiliar with the extract. The best answers to Question 23 looked closely at the intensity of the conflict in key scenes such as Dunsey and Godfrey's row about Fowler's rent money and the subsequent confrontation between Godfrey and his father on the same topic. They also saw that the Red House lacked the civilising influence of a woman and that the Squire was a heavy handed and inconsistent parent. Strong answers to Question 24 likewise examined key scenes (for example Silas's response to the theft of the gold, Eppie's golden hair) closely, looked at their language and commented on the role of the gold in altering Silas's life and as Eliot's symbol of the shallowness of materialism. Weaker answers to both these questions tended to drift into narrative.

Poe: Selected Tales

Candidates need to be reminded that there is no compulsion to compare two stories. Many do; some do it well, but others waste time thinking this out when it is not a requirement of the specification. Question 25 was very popular. These short and very dramatic endings provided plenty of opportunity to explain how Poe's use of language creates horror. Good answers appreciated the use of narrative voice and explored the relative reliability and madness of the two narrators. Several noticed that the narrator of *The Black Cat* remains largely indifferent to the body of his wife in his obsession with "the hideous beast". However, there were also many weaker answers, which failed to put these passages into context, or were unable to appreciate how they work as endings because they had limited knowledge of how the stories begin. Many answers also suffered from examining one passage in much less detail than the other. The best candidates economically linked these endings back to how the stories started and looked closely at the demonic imagery in *The Black Cat* and at the characterization, creation of tension and ironies in *The Cask of Amontillado*. Two common misconceptions about this story were that Fortunato was burned to death when Montresor threw the torch into the aperture and/or that he was poisoned by the sherry.

Confessions were also the theme of Question 26. This was far less popular than Q25, but demonstrated similar strengths and weaknesses. Again, one story was often dealt with more cursorily than the other. This may have been pressure of time, but there were indications that weaker answers showed less confidence about *The Imp of the Perverse*, though many showed a strong grasp of the "imp" and its effects on the narrator. Strong candidates certainly appreciated what was dramatic, and good answers showed how Poe keeps the reader engaged by both style and characterisation. Question 27 allowed candidates to show their knowledge of Roderick Usher, often commenting on the memorable connection between him and his house or the macabre relationship between him and his sister Madeline. They tended to be, however, far more sketchy about Auguste Dupin or William Legrand. Candidates could describe their memorable detecting and code breaking characteristics with some confidence but were less successful at giving hard evidence from the stories.

There is a tendency in weaker answers about Poe to quote at length and then append a sweeping comment that "this is gothic" without fuller explanation, development or analysis. Dashes and exclamation marks still receive rapt attention and are seen as intrinsically interesting, with candidates often ignoring the life and death situations the characters are in.

Wells: The History of Mr. Polly

There were too few answers on this text this year to make a comment on performance.

Chopin: Short Stories

In answer to Question 31 most candidates found something to say about how Chopin reveals Madame Carambeau's character, responding to the writer's listing of her prejudices and the descriptions of her "eyes blue and cold" and her house with its "row of iron spikes", which convey the kind of person she is. In general candidates were far less confident on *Lilacs*. Many thought the nuns were speaking instead of Adrienne's servants and failed to spot Adrienne's impetuous and passionate response to the smell of lilacs, so central to the story. Many answers were less successful than they might have been because of the imbalance in the response to the two passages.

Question 32 was better answered, especially when candidates looked at the stylistic techniques Chopin uses to create a sense of fear, turmoil and anxiety rather than solely outlining these elements in the plot of *Her Letters* and *Beyond the Bayou*. In response to Question 33, most

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candidates responded to the passionate relationship between Calixta and Alcée and grasped the symbolism of the storm. Candidates were far more censorious of their adulterous relationship than Chopin appears to be and thought the ending “and everyone was happy” was ironic. A fair point but Clarisse seems in no hurry to have Alcée return to her. Weaker answers to this question drifted into narrative, failed to consider the writing and forgot that both characters are married to other people. It was not uncommon for candidates to write much more about one story than the other.

To answer well on these stories candidates need to have both a secure grasp of the plot and to be able to make some supported comment on the style of writing. There was a strong appreciation of the social and historical background both in terms of race and the position of women at the time, although the French/American/Acadian nature of New Orleans sometimes proves elusive.

2448 Post- 1914 Texts

The entry was over six hundred this year, a little up on the previous summer. The main texts studied were *Whose Life is it Anyway?*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Opening Lines*, *Opening Worlds*, and *Pole to Pole*. One large centre took the unusual but wholly legitimate step of choosing poetry, prose and literary non-fiction as their three genres.

The determination of teachers that their students should attend to matters of language emerged in two particularly striking ways in these scripts. The first was the use of the phrase 'linguistic techniques' in the preamble: for example 'The authors... make their endings moving by their uses of linguistic techniques', and '...the poets movingly present connections between the world of war and nature using linguistic techniques such as alliteration'. It is not mere carping to note the bathetic nature of the latter, and to suggest that deployment of the phrase in most cases did not enhance the quality of the response. The second was the answering by means of a number of 'point, evidence, explanation' headed paragraphs, a formula which again did not do much to develop fluency of response to the question asked.

Question 1 was the more popular on the Clark play. Some related the episodes with the fiancée and Ken's parents as though they happen as part of the scene, and not as being referred to by Ken. Few, surprisingly, picked up on why Dr Travers and his comments are so unacceptable to Ken. The minority who attempted Question 2 usually had a good grasp of why Ken is so hostile to Mrs Boyle.

Both *Death of a Salesman* questions were generally answered well. Better answers on the extract question focused effectively on 'dramatic', with detail from the scene. Weaker answers here said it 'makes you want to read on', which is not only vague but also unconvincing as a response to drama. Most Question 4 answers were reasoned and supported.

In general, preparation of the poetry compared favourably with the other two texts. Even the briefest answers to Question 9 were able to note the different styles of the two poems. The better answers were those that not only dealt with the detail of both, but were able to explain how the poets achieved their effects (for example the sarcasm in *Rat...* with an explanation of the humour). No answers to Question 10 were seen. Even some of the weakest answers to Question 11 were able to relate both poems to the question, and many answers made commendable attempts to discuss language effects. In some answers the desire to list points of comparison worked against the overall achievement. Good answers analysed structure and suggested effects; weaker answers made descriptive comments ('the first poem is written in five stanzas', 'the second poem is a sonnet') without offering any comment on effect or purpose. Question 12 was often confidently answered. Some misread the question and mentioned 'connections' simply between the two poems. Weaker answers were narrow in their range of reference; many answers could manage only one quotation from each of the two poems chosen.

Better answers to Question 17 showed a response to the detail of the extracts, informed by an overview of the stories of which these are the endings. A surprising number of candidates had not apparently discussed the possible significance of the last sentence of the *Two Kinds* passage. On Question 18 the phrase 'shape your feelings' was interpreted by some as meaning that the character had somehow to change during the story – fine for Anna, but not for the others. That said, commendable knowledge and understanding of the various stories was shown, and candidates had no trouble with discussing character flaws and strengths, with appropriate detail. It is worth mentioning again that comparison of stories or passages from stories is not required. Occasionally comparison was helpful and revealing in *Opening Worlds* answers, but more often than not the comparison was bland and unhelpful, or forced and overstated. A number of candidates asserted, for example, that both Chase and Anna are arrogant and dictatorial.

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Pole to Pole had clearly been enjoyed by candidates, but many found it difficult in either question to get beyond assertions of humour and to begin to discuss how and why Palin's writing is amusing. Weaker answers to Question 31 maintained that Palin includes a great deal of vivid/amazing/precise detail, and then gave just one often over-long quotation. Stronger answers to both questions responded personally and considered a range of perspectives.

A few Foundation Tier candidates answered too many or too few questions, or attempted questions on texts they did not seem to have studied. The best answers at this tier expressed clear and genuine personal response to the literature.

Grade Thresholds

General Certificate of Secondary Education
English Literature (1901)
June 2008 Assessment Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a*	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	u
2441/1	Raw	21				19	15	12	9	6	0
	UMS	27				24	20	16	12	8	0
2441/2	Raw	30	27	25	22	19	16	14			0
	UMS	40	36	32	28	24	20	18			0
2442/1	Raw	46				33	27	22	17	12	0
	UMS	69				60	50	40	30	20	0
2442/2	Raw	66	49	44	38	33	27	24			0
	UMS	100	90	80	70	60	50	45			0
2443	Raw	45	42	37	32	27	22	17	12	7	0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24	18	12	0
2444/1	Raw	42				33	27	21	15	9	0
	UMS	41				36	30	24	18	12	0
2444/2	Raw	60	51	45	39	33	26	22			0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	27			0
2445/1	Raw	21				19	16	13	10	7	0
	UMS	27				24	20	16	12	8	0
2445/2	Raw	30	27	25	22	19	16	14			0
	UMS	40	36	32	28	24	20	18			0
2446/1	Raw	46				37	30	23	17	11	0
	UMS	69				60	50	40	30	20	0
2446/2	Raw	66	56	50	44	38	32	29			0
	UMS	100	90	80	70	60	50	45			0
2447	Raw	45	42	37	32	27	22	17	12	7	0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24	18	12	0
2448/1	Raw	42				33	27	21	15	9	0
	UMS	41				36	30	24	18	12	0
2448/2	Raw	60	46	42	37	33	28	25			0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	27			0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
1901	200	180	160	140	120	100	80	60	40	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	Total No. of Cands
1901	8.3	24.6	49.7	73.4	87.6	94.0	97.6	99.3	100.0	38761

38761 candidates were entered for aggregation this series.

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see;
www.ocr.org.uk/OCR/WebSite/docroot/understand/ums.jsp

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

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