Qualification Accredited

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LITERATURE

H472
For first teaching in 2015

H472/01 Summer 2018 series
Version 1

Contents

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper H472/01 series overview

> ### *Key point call out*
>
> H472/01, Drama and Poetry pre-1900, is one of the three components which make up OCR's A Level in English Literature. The examination requires candidates to write about a Shakespeare play from a set list of six texts firstly commenting on a 'context' passage and secondly responding to an essay question. In the second half of the examination candidates choose one of six generic questions and write an essay comparing two texts, one drama and one poetry, from a selection of ten works – in all – written before 1900. This is a closed text examination.

Candidates are likely to perform well on the paper if they keep in mind the dominant assessment objective for each part: AO2 [linguistic analysis] in Section 1(a); AO5 [different interpretations] equally weighted along with AO1 in Section 1(b); AO3 [the significance and influence of contexts] in Section 2. They will also succeed if they bear in mind the importance of coherent, accurate expression (AO1 – which applies in all three parts of the paper).

Following the first examination of this component in 2017 this seemed – once again – to be a successful series for this comparatively new qualification. Examiners have been impressed by the performance of many candidates and (by implication) by the direction given to candidates by teachers and lecturers at their centres. In particular, it was impressive to note how candidates and centres have refined their approach to the examination in 2018. Overall improvement to some aspects of performance was noted in some instances and it was gratifying to see that the study of English Literature for this qualification continues to engage and stimulate candidates.

On the whole there was a notable improvement in the technique of candidates approaching the component this year. Many candidates appeared to have taken to heart the advice, as one examiner described it, to "Think more; write less!" In the first series of this reformed specification (2017) it was often found that candidates were using the 'extra' time available in the examination (compared to the previous specification) to produce extremely lengthy scripts rather than using that extra time to read and plan – and then craft careful, checked answers. Improvement in this area was substantial this year – even though it was sometimes still common to find scripts of twenty pages or more.

> ### *Key point call out*
>
> Candidates should be reminded that *answering the question set* is an important determining factor for the success of an answer and one of the key aspects borne in mind by an examiner when judging the quality of a script. It was noted at times during this series that some candidates took the opportunity to 'twist' a question away from its desired focus towards a topic which the candidate had been hoping to consider during the examination. This was not always a satisfactory approach. It is also worth reminding the increasing number of candidates who submit their answers in word processed format that they should take care with the presentation of their work and – with the requirements of AO1 in mind – eliminate errors of expression wherever possible (especially when these are 'typos' or the result of carelessness).

Once again in this series, it has often been a real pleasure to read a succession of interesting, engaged responses to the texts and questions on offer in the component. It is reassuring to note that candidates (at all levels) continue to approach literature with curiosity and originality; the personal responses they provide to these texts suggests that the works continue to find new generations of readers who interpret them from new and rewarding perspectives. Contemporary trends and preoccupations pervaded many scripts this year. At times these were not always discussed with appropriate literary subtlety and terms such as "toxic" (for relationships), "overthinking" (to describe Hamlet), "backstory", "relat(e)able", and "reveal" (as a noun) do need to be employed with care. The mental health of literary characters (and

indeed authors and readers) was a frequent and telling preoccupation in scripts – as were (sadly) the effects of both institutionalised sexism and sexual abuse. Many candidates were keen to discuss, often with impressive effect, contexts in which either "binary" or "non-binary" gender roles were considered or where "heteronormative" values dominated.

Section 1 overview

Key point call out
Some very impressive responses were seen to both Part (a) and Part (b) questions. It is worth reminding centres that there will always be some sort of link or connection between the content of the set passage in Part (a) and the Part (b) essay question on the same Shakespeare play. A very small number of candidates caused a rubric infringement by answering on a different Shakespeare play for the context and essay parts of the question. It should also be remembered that any part of each set play can be chosen as the basis for a Part (a) question and as candidates are not able to make a choice of passage in the examination, they therefore need to be familiar with the entire play. The examining process always ensures that candidates are not penalised for approaching a text in a particular way (indeed an individual approach is encouraged).

There continues to be considerable confusion among some candidates about use of the terms 'poetry', 'prose', 'verse' and 'blank verse'. Often these are presented as entirely interchangeable terms and candidates unable to distinguish between such key elements could place themselves at a disadvantage. As in the last series (although with some improvements) a considerable number of candidates chose to comment in an unhelpful way on punctuation marks in context passages (particularly exclamation marks or "explanation marks") which might in fact have been features of textual editing. The terms "semantic field" and "lexical field" were sometime employed by candidates without clear explanation or rationale.

An impressive range of critical views and of stage/film interpretations was cited by candidates in the Part (b) essays. It was also reassuring to see that some very successful candidates were able to explore a variety of interpretations simply by judicious expression of phrases such as "An alternative interpretation of this scene might suggest…"

Question 1(a)

Answer **one** question, **both parts (a) and (b)**, from this section. You should spend about 1 hour and 15 minutes on this section.

1   *Coriolanus*

Answer **both** parts **(a)** and **(b)**.

(a) Discuss the following passage from Act 1 Scene 3, exploring Shakespeare's use of language and its dramatic effects.

[15]

This text proved to be slightly more popular that it was in the 2017 series but it was still something of a minority choice. Some candidates chose to comment on the comparatively 'domestic' nature of the passage and on its concentration on the play's female realm. Volumnia's dominating and opinionated presence prompted some interesting discussion and analysis. Although not physically present in the passage, discussion frequently turned to the play's eponymous hero and to the way his mother both uses language to elevate her son to mythical status and also seeks to control his wife.

Question 1(b)

And

(b) 'The female characters are always positioned outside the main events of the play.'

Using your knowledge of the play as a whole, show how far you agree with this view of women in *Coriolanus*.

Remember to support your answer with reference to different interpretations.

[15]

Many candidates welcomed the opportunity to approach this issue from a feminist perspective. Theoretical stances and critical voices were sometime quoted to support this approach. Candidates appeared to be more-or-less evenly split when judging the appropriateness of the prompt quotation in the question. Links between the topic of this question and the passage in Part (a) were clearly strong and many candidates chose to use material from the printed passage to support their arguments. It is hoped that more candidates will choose to answer on *Coriolanus* during the lifetime of the specification.

Question 2(a)

2   *Hamlet*

Answer **both** parts **(a)** and **(b)**.

(a) Discuss the following passage from Act 4 Scene 4, exploring Shakespeare's use of language and its dramatic effects.

[15]

This text was the clear favourite choice among the set Shakespeare plays. In fact *Hamlet* has now become, overwhelmingly, the most popular text in Section 1. In this passage - which is very much one of "two halves" - it would have been entirely possible for a candidate to perform with great success by commenting on either Hamlet's interactions with the Captain and Rosencrantz on the one hand or on his soliloquy alone on the other. Some candidates did comment profitably on the contrast provided by these two elements in the passage. Others chose to comment on the way in which the passage – taken as a whole – encapsulates so many of the contrasts which lie at the heart of Hamlet's nature (often prompting quotation of the "antic disposition" phrase). Many candidates engaged well with Hamlet's soliloquy and this sometimes it led to discussion (often relevant) of the title character's other great speeches, especially "To be or not to be…".

Question 2(b)

And

(b) '*Hamlet* is a play about indecision.'

Using your knowledge of the play as a whole, show how far you agree with this view of the play *Hamlet*.

Remember to support your answer with reference to different interpretations.

[15]

Clearly many candidates had been prepared to write about this topic and there was a clear sense of enthusiasm emerging in many responses. Only answers which addressed the specific terms of the question (rather than drawing on related but non-specific material) succeeded fully. The range of critical discussion, partly of professional critics and theoreticians but mainly of theatrical and film performances, was greatly impressive. Many candidates clearly engage fully with this text in performance and a spate of recent *Hamlet* productions seems to have inspired and provoked candidates. Some candidates were keen to present the view that *Hamlet* is not a play about indecision: this could be a successful approach when being used as a means other than simply enabling a candidate to write about a completely unrelated topic at length. Many candidates did indeed use their knowledge of the play as a whole in successful answers which frequently cited Hamlet's soliloquies (again – often – "To be or not to be") and the missed opportunity to kill Claudius in Act III, scene iii.

Question 3(a)

3   Measure for Measure

Answer **both** parts **(a)** and **(b)**.

(a) Discuss the following passage from Act 4 Scene 3, exploring Shakespeare's use of language and its dramatic effects.

[15]

This was a fairly popular text choice in this series. The passage enabled candidates to comment on a wide variety of linguistic and dramatic techniques apparent in the passage (reflecting the wide world of Shakespeare's Vienna) and to explore the various ironies of the play's subject matter and methods. Less successful candidates tended to show particular confusion about terminology relating to verse and prose in this question.

Question 3(b)

And

(b) 'Shakespeare never forgets the funny side to life in Vienna.'

Using your knowledge of the play as a whole, show how far you agree with this view of *Measure for Measure*.

Remember to support your answer with reference to different interpretations.

[15]

Candidates used the prompt quotation in the passage as a means of discussing a wide variety of comic techniques and episodes in the play. This often also led – perhaps inevitably and sometimes with relevance – to consideration of *Measure for Measure* as a 'problem play'. Some candidates made profitable use of the alternative possibilities of 'funny' in the question (ie. both humorous and odd). Frequent critical consideration of the play in performance tended to focus particularly on Simon McBurney's 2004 Complicite production at the National Theatre.

Question 4(a)

4   Richard III

Answer **both** parts **(a)** and **(b)**.

(a) Discuss the following passage from Act 1 Scene 4, exploring Shakespeare's use of language and its dramatic effects.

[15]

This play was not a popular option and it is very much hoped that more responses to *Richard III* will be seen in future series. This passage elicited a small number of generally effective responses which tended to focus on use of blank verse (even by the Murderers), on the contrasting natures of 1 Murderer and 2 Murderer, and on the poignancy of Clarence's struggles to keep pace with the political world around him.

Question 4(b)

And

(b) 'Evil ambition inspires all the major events of the play.'

Using your knowledge of the play as a whole, show how far you agree with this view of the play *Richard III*.

Remember to support your answer with reference to different interpretations.

[15]

'Evil' and 'ambition' (either separately or together) prompted the few candidates who attempted this question to write profitably about the play's titular anti-hero and sometimes beyond to other characters and events – sometimes considering filmed and staged productions of the work. There was rarely significant disagreement with the prompt quotation.

Question 5(a)

5   The Tempest

Answer **both** parts **(a)** and **(b)**.

(a) Discuss the following passage from Act 5 Scene 1, exploring Shakespeare's use of language and its dramatic effects.

[15]

This was a very popular question. *The Tempest* was the second most popular text choice on this Section of the paper this series. Candidates appeared to enjoy the opportunity to write about this significant moment in the drama – often referring to it as a 'pivotal' moment which leads to the conclusion of the action. Successful candidates chose to comment on the range of reference in the passage – from consideration of Gonzalo and the other Lords, to the tense and shifting relationship between Prospero and Ariel, to the rich vein of imagery surrounding magic, power and nature. Clearly candidates continue to be fascinated by different aspects of the ambiguous relationship between Ariel and Prospero. Many candidates discussed aspects of the use of blank verse in the passage, and shared lines between the speaking characters were sometimes considered to hold special significance. Prospero's final speech naturally elicited a wide range of comment and the irony of his decision to give up his magic at the end of a long utterance in which he lists its qualities was noted by many.

Question 5(b)

And

(b) 'Prospero is right to give up his magic.'

Using your knowledge of the play as a whole, show how far you agree with this view of *The Tempest*.

Remember to support your answer with reference to different interpretations.

[15]

This question certainly prompted a variety of interpretations from candidates and it was good to see many answers presenting a range of personal opinions, as well as quoting from professional critics and referencing a number of celebrated performances of the play – with the recent 'high tech' RSC production still apparently very much in vogue. Overall opinion tended to fall on the side of Prospero correctly giving up his magic and this often prompted broader considerations of interpretations of the play which celebrate the best aspects of shared humanity. Links with the content of the Part (a) passage are clearly strong here and many candidates used these to useful effect as well as showing knowledge of the play as a whole. Weaker answers tended to offer a generalised character description of Prospero (a figure who clearly continues to divide audiences).

Question 6(a)

6   Twelfth Night

Answer **both** parts **(a)** and **(b)**.

(a) Discuss the following passage from Act 4 Scene 2, exploring Shakespeare's use of language and its dramatic effects.

[15]

This was a fairly popular text choice. The structure and comedic elements of the passage offered candidates a considerable amount to comment on. Both the structure of individual speeches and the broader linguistic interactions between characters were discussed by many candidates. The range of puns and allusions also offered high ability candidates a great deal to focus on – as did the element of religious parody. Candidates chose to comment on the way in which this culminating subplot reflects so much of the action and language of other strands of the play. Moral judgements about Malvolio also became part of many answers; a number of candidates took pity on him.

Question 6(b)

And

(b) 'Appearances in the play often hide a very different reality.'

Using your knowledge of the play as a whole, show how far you agree with this view of *Twelfth Night*.

Remember to support your answer with reference to different interpretations.

[15]

Once again, the concerns of this question arose directly from the passage in Part (a). Again it was candidates who followed the direction to use "knowledge of the play as a whole" who were in a position to perform most successfully. This was – perhaps – not an unexpected question but it was impressive to see how widely the topic was interpreted and how different candidates looked at the appearance/reality theme in the broader play from a number of different angles. The nature of the question allowed candidates to write about several different plot strands if they chose to. Interpretations offered tended to rely on professional criticism rather than staged or filmed productions (although mention was made of these) and to consider broader, but useful, theoretical approaches embracing feminism, Marxism and queer theory. The current preoccupation with gender and its apparent fluidity was certainly put to good use by many candidates.

Section 2 overview

> ### *Key point call out*
>
> Examiners marking this component were keen to comment on how effectively many candidates used the question choices available in this Section to great effect. There were fewer 'false starts' to this Section of the paper than in the previous series. It was also felt that the range of questions available to candidates provided them with every opportunity to write effectively about any possible chosen combination of texts (including the predominately lyric poetry selections). It was good to see *Maud* emerging as a much more popular choice than it had been in the first series of the examination. Other popular texts were *The Duchess of Malfi, A Doll's House, An Ideal Husband*, Chaucer, Milton and Rossetti. Many candidates demonstrated great skill in handling comparative discussion although many candidates chose to address their texts using the words "contrastly" and "comparingly" [sic].

Answer **one** question from this section. You should spend about 1 hour and 15 minutes on this section.

In your answer, you should refer to one drama text and one poetry text from the following lists:

Drama	Poetry
Christopher Marlowe: *Edward II* John Webster: *The Duchess of Malfi* Oliver Goldsmith: *She Stoops to Conquer* Henrik Ibsen: *A Doll's House* Oscar Wilde: *An Ideal Husband*	Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale* John Milton: *Paradise Lost, Books 9 & 10* Samuel Taylor Coleridge: *Selected Poems* Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Maud* Christina Rossetti: *Selected Poems*

Question 7

7 *'Love brings difficulties as well as pleasures.'*

In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers explore love relationships. In your answer, compare one drama text and one poetry text from the above lists.

[30]

This was a very popular question (probably the most frequently answered option in Section 2 of this year's examination) and prompted responses on every text and on a large number of different pairings. Candidates seemed keen to explore this topic in their respective texts and a large number of impressive, successful answers were seen. Some responses suffered from being too wide-ranging or for failing to offer an adequate degree of comparative discussion. The resounding sentiment from most candidates was that love does indeed bring as many negative as positive effects – and answers tended to focus on these difficulties. Some candidates explored and questioned whether the relationships presented in their chosen texts (for example, *Edward II* and *Maud*) were in fact loving at all. Love was considered in a wide range of contexts – from familial affection (*Goblin Market*) and lust (*The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*) to marriage (*A Doll's House*) and same-sex partnership (*Edward II*). At the most sophisticated level some candidates questioned the very nature of love and explored different traditions of the emotion in different cultural settings.

Question 8

Or

8   *'We live in a world of constant change.'*

In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers explore change. In your answer, compare one drama text and one poetry text from the above lists.

[30]

This was a question of some popularity: it was answered by a substantial number of candidates and was applied to a large number of textual combinations. Most candidates tended to agree with the prompt quotation and demonstrated how change applies in a number of literary contexts. Change was generally considered to bring negative implications for human protagonists but the potential positive impact was also considered for some texts. Consideration of social change by candidates often meant that they were able to address the dominant assessment objective (about contexts) effectively. The changing place of women in society (as applied to Nora in *A Doll's House* or May in *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*, for example) was often a fruitful matter for candidates to pursue.

Question 9

Or

9   *'Foolish acts and their consequences are an important part of literature.'*

In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers explore human folly and its effects. In your answer, compare one drama text and one poetry text from the above lists.

[30]

This was not an especially popular question but some good answers were seen. Candidates were able to identify foolish acts in a number of the set texts and some interesting points of comparison were sometimes provided. We were frequently reminded that folly can have serious as well as comic consequences. The momentary foolish lapse in the set books from *Paradise Lost* has implications for the whole of humanity, of course. Holy rashness is also a feature of Rossetti's *Goblin Market*. The term 'foolish acts' can take on darker tones when applied to *Maud*. Aspects of the literary and cultural history of folly were considered by some candidates – leading to discussion of points ranging from Erasmus, to Shakespeare's fools, to the satirical tradition. Some candidates were keen to point out that folly could be seen to be perceived in the eye of the beholder and can be very much a matter of interpretation (for example, Nora's questionable decision to leave home and family at the end of *A Doll's House*).

Question 10

Or

10   *'Literature is very good at exploring intense emotion.'*

In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers explore intense feelings and emotions. In your answer, compare one drama text and one poetry text from the above lists.

[30]

This was not a popular question but a number of successful answers were seen. Examiners felt that the question worked particularly well with the entire selection of texts. The question seemed to be especially attractive to those candidates who wished to write about lyric poetry (by Coleridge or Rossetti, for example) but the range of intense emotions explored encompassed themes and characters presented in a variety of texts. The way in which intense emotion is expressed was a profitable route for discussion – from the grandiosity of Webster's characters or of Milton's narrative technique, to the rather more constrained or refined (yet no less condensed) delivery apparent in the Goldsmith and Wilde texts. Intense emotion was sometimes judged by candidates to be a method of healthy, controlled release; to others it was a dangerous explosion of unbridled feeling (for example, in *Maud*).

Question 11

Or

11   *'We always need to be prepared for disappointment in life.'*

In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers explore disappointment. In your answer, compare one drama text and one poetry text from the above lists.

[30]

This was a fairly popular question choice. The premise in the prompt quotation is certainly a pessimistic one but most candidates seemed to be in agreement with it and they were able to apply it comparatively to the texts of their choice at a number of different levels in the response range. Candidates presented states of disappointment in a number of inventive ways – exploring the experience of individual characters (from Januarie to the narrator in *Maud)* as well as to wider situations (such as the conclusion of *An Ideal Husband*). 'Disappointment in life' frequently merged with 'disappointment in love' in some answers but this approach could pay off if handled with care. Even God was frequently described as disappointed in his response to the behaviour of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*. Contextual information about philosophical issues surrounding states of disappointment was used effectively in some cases.

Question 12

Or

12 *'Literature proves that human beings are intent on deceiving one another.'*

In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers explore deceit and delusion. In your answer, compare one drama text and one poetry text from the above lists.

[30]

This was a popular question – although it was notable that many candidates appeared to have difficulty spelling "deceiving" and "deceit" correctly. Elements of deceit were described and compared in all the set text choices. Some candidates offered interesting discussion of the effects on the structure and direction of the texts under consideration when influenced by the thematic effects of or character motivations for deceit. The deception at the heart of *She Stoops to Conquer*, for example, is very much the impetus for the comic elements of that play. Deceit also provided the motive for exploration of relevant contextual material (such as aspects of Wilde's personal life in connection with his play *An Ideal Husband*). Satan in *Paradise Lost* was frequently presented as the master of the art of deceit and some candidates made the point that all the major characters in *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale* engage in deceitful behaviour at some point.

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