

H472/01 Drama and poetry pre- 1900

General Comments:

This seems to have been a successful first series for this new paper. While elements of the paper have clear precedent in the former OCR F663 unit, other aspects are entirely new, and it is greatly to the credit of Centres and candidates that – on the whole – they have absorbed the requirements of the paper (its structure and approach to assessment) and managed its requirements with some success – and all in a comparatively brief space of time.

One notable feature of the new paper is its length. Two hours and thirty minutes is a substantial period of time for candidates to be focusing and writing. Many candidates have risen to this challenge impressively. Several assessors have noted how unusually lengthy many scripts have been with the suggestion being made that - in fact - some candidates are possibly writing too much. Candidates might like to consider using some of the 'extra' time available to think ahead and to plan answers appropriately, and then leave some time to check responses. Individual answers of seven or eight pages can be too long: there is no need for a candidate to write down everything he/she knows about a set text; rather the time should be used to focus specifically on the terms of the question and on the relevant application of the assessment objectives. Complete scripts of twenty or more pages were not uncommon in this series. Although planning is clearly a useful exercise, it was again noted by some assessors that some plans were simply too long to be of practical benefit in an examination context.

The new structure of this paper did present difficulties for some candidates: many approached the three answers required on equal terms. This meant that – rather than spending an equal amount of time on Sections 1 and 2 – some candidates considered the paper to have three equal parts. Candidates should be reminded that only fifteen marks are available for each of part (a) and part (b) of section 1 - and Section 2 of the paper carries a full 30 marks. Once again this would seem to be an issue of timing, planning and pragmatism when it comes to approaching the paper in the examination room. More candidates than usual were answering the paper 'backwards' (ie. doing Section 2 first before attempting Section 1) – which is a perfectly acceptable way to approach the paper.

It should be remembered that the application of the Assessment Objectives in the three parts of the paper is quite different. In effect, part (a) of Section 1 requires candidates to focus on linguistic and dramatic devices in the set passage; in part (b) of Section 1 there is a focus on interpretation; and in Section 2 context is dominant. As well as addressing the specific terms of the question in each case, candidates do need to ensure that they are focusing their answers on the requirements of the relevant Assessment Objectives each time. Whereas the answer to part (b) in Section 1 does require some sort of structured development, assessors are open to a more ruminative and discursive approach from candidates in part (a) of Section 1 and in Section 2.

As ever with OCR's A-Level in English Literature (legacy or revised) it has been very good to note during this series how well prepared – on the whole – candidates have been for this component. Most importantly, many candidates' engagement with literature continues to be perceptive, fresh and impassioned – and clearly this is a credit to candidates, to their Centres, and to the subject itself.

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Comments on Individual Questions:

Section 1 – Shakespeare

General notes –

There was a tendency for some candidates to write very detailed comments about the features of punctuation printed in the excerpts [Section (a)] and Centres should be reminded that this is sometimes a feature of editing and therefore precise observations about, for example, “Shakespeare’s use of the exclamation mark” should be used with care.

Part (a) of this Section does simply ask that candidates ‘Discuss’ the passage and they should feel free to approach that task in any way suitable to the question and the Assessment Objectives. This is an opportunity for candidates (and not always one taken up by them) and a new feature of the ‘revised’ specification.

Many candidates used stage and film productions of the plays to great effect as part of their consideration of interpretations in part (b).

There is a clear connection between the events, themes and ideas in the context part (a) and the essay part (b) in this Section. Candidates may choose to explore and exploit this link if they wish.

1 – *Coriolanus*

Unfortunately this was not a popular text and very few answers were seen. A handful of responses focused on dynamics of power, family and gender in part (a). Pride proved to be a popular choice in part (b) with some candidates choosing to employ classical terminology of ‘hubris’, ‘nemesis’, etc. in their answers. It is hoped that this play will become more popular as the life of the paper extends.

2 – *Hamlet*

This was probably the most popular Section 1 text choice. Candidates had a great deal to say about the context passage (a) which seemed to give them the chance to consider a wide variety of linguistic and dramatic aspects. Some candidates were keen to point out that the passage does not feature one of Hamlet’s ‘great soliloquies’ (with some disappointment) and it is perhaps worth issuing a reminder at this stage that part (a) Shakespeare passages can be taken from any stage in the set plays. The subtleties apparent in the way Horatio and Hamlet address each other (including their tendency to complete each other’s lines) were considered by some candidates. Signs of Hamlet’s “antic disposition” were also mentioned. References to kingship, fatherhood and death were also exploited. The “funeral bak’d-meats” provided an impetus for candidates wishing to explain the play’s leanings towards the macabre. The part (b) essay about death was perhaps an unexpected topic for some candidates – and there was, perhaps, a clear sense of some candidates (profitably) thinking on their feet about the subject. Others chose to debate the term ‘disturbing fascination’ at the centre of their response. Many candidates were able to list a very large number of characters and incidents relating to death in the play – from the very opening of the play to its conclusion (via Ophelia and “To be or not to be” – amongst other episodes – along the way). Some assessors were surprised that there was very little mention of the gravediggers and Yorick in this part.

3 – *Measure for Measure*

This play was another very popular choice. Candidates had a great deal to say about the relationship and dynamic presented between Isabella and Angelo in this scene (sometimes making comparison with the second, parallel, meeting scene). Legal terminology, shared lines, rhetorical tricks, and the sense of a battle of wills formed the focus for many of the comments made. The place of Lucio (“like Shakespeare himself” according to one candidate) in the scene provided a useful discriminator in some answers. The link between this passage and the essay

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question (b) about justice and mercy was a clear one for many candidates. Many had – perhaps – been expecting such an essay question, but it was those candidates who were able to address the prompt quotation in full (with its reference to a difficult relationship) who were often able to be most successful. From the focused dialogue of Isabella and Angelo in the context passage, candidates were often able to expand consideration of the key terms in the question to consider the wider social implications of Shakespeare's Vienna.

4 – *Richard III*

This was not a popular text and very few answers were seen. Of the very few responses available, most seemed to pick up on the Richard/Buckingham theme in the part (b) essay when addressing linguistic and dramatic matters in the part (a) context. It is hoped that this play will become more popular as the life of the paper extends.

5 – *The Tempest*

Quite a few responses to this play were seen – although it was perhaps not quite the very popular choice expected. In the context part (a) – perhaps with an eye to the part (b) essay – there tended to be a focus on the character of Caliban. Candidates seem to be fascinated by this character and what they clearly (often) believe to be his 'mistreatment' to the extent that post-colonial theories about his place in the island society are often presented. Attitudes to Prospero in part (a) seem to be as varied as ever with some candidates finding evidence of benevolence in his language while others are keen to highlight his tyranny. The cursing by both Prospero and Caliban was highlighted by many candidates – as was the parallel nature of much of the language of the teacher/master on the one hand and the pupil/slave on the other. Many candidates seemed to agree with both sides of the prompt quotation about Caliban in part (b). Less effective answers tended to offer a generalised character sketch of the creature whereas more perceptive answers synthesised these aspects of his character in a more subtle response.

6 – *Twelfth Night*

This text was a fairly popular choice. Many candidates had a great deal to say about the prose style of the context passage and this was often contrasted with other structures elsewhere in the play. Candidates were often impressive in the way they recognised the complexity of the language being used by these 'below-stairs' characters – sometimes coarse and laden with 'double entendres'; sometimes thoughtful and allusive. The pathos of Sir Andrew was frequently highlighted – as was the degree of vitriol aimed at Malvolio by the others. Deliberate deception proved to be a popular topic in part (b): weaker answers sometimes merely provided a list of such events in the play whereas more sophisticated responses often attempted to create a thesis about how the various deceptive acts in the play combined to provide a particular view of human nature.

Section 2 – Drama and Poetry pre-1900

General notes –

In some cases it was clear that – when there was disappointment that an 'expected' or 'prepared' topic had not been addressed directly as one of the questions set – some candidates attempted to turn the question picked towards that preferred topic (which sometimes meant that the question chosen was not appropriately addressed).

The most popular texts in this Section were *The Duchess of Malfi*, *A Doll's House* (and *An Ideal Husband* – to some extent), Chaucer, Milton and Rossetti. Very little was seen of Marlowe, Goldsmith, Coleridge or Tennyson. The most popular combinations of texts for comparison were: Webster with Chaucer and Ibsen with Rossetti.

Context is by far the dominant Assessment Objective in this Section of the paper and some candidates seemed to find it difficult to write in a sustained way about their chosen texts from

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this perspective. Better answers integrated contextual material into the response rather than simply ‘bolting on’ a long, unrelated exposition in this area.

The comparative element in this Section was handled in a variety of ways by different candidates. Weaker answers tended to write about one text first – and then address the second text in an unrelated way. This could be a reasonably successful way of approaching the question but more sophisticated answers nearly always kept both texts ‘in play’ throughout the length of the answer.

7 – This was quite a popular question. Many candidates found that the question applied very effectively to their chosen combination of texts and the general conclusion was that people are indeed both vain and selfish. The question was often used by candidates as a vehicle for exploring a feminist reading of their set texts (when – arguably – there was no specific question on the paper facilitating this approach) particularly by considering the selfish behaviour of men towards women. Selfishness was occasionally seen as desirable (for example in the Duchess’s intention to live in the way she wishes) but – more often - was portrayed as sinful and vain (with Chaucer’s characters often being cited in this context). Contextual material drawn from the Christian tradition was often cited for this question.

8 – This was a fairly popular question – but not excessively so. There was clear scope to discuss truth and secrecy in most of the listed texts. Contrasts, changes and revelations tended to be the focus of answers addressing this question. Texts in which a turning point in behaviour or attitude was presented (Ibsen, Wilde, Milton, Coleridge) tended to offer most scope for discussion and some candidates handled this very well indeed. Again – religious contextual material often featured in answers.

9 – This was not a very popular question but some candidates did handle it very well. A number of strong candidates seized the opportunity to define ‘The Outsider’ in a suitable way which also matched their own requirements in addressing the question. Outsiders were perceived in all sorts of literary contexts in relation to the set texts – whether rulers who struggled with their roles (the Duchess; Edward II) or visitors (in Goldsmith or in Coleridge’s poetry) or those who found it difficult to fit in with the norms of their society (Nora in Ibsen’s play; Milton’s first couple; Tennyson’s suffering narrator).

10 – This answer was rarely attempted even though it did offer a topic suitable for both narrative and lyric writing in equal measure. The few candidates who did address this question chose to consider the key term ‘reflection’ in a number of different ways: characters were perceived to be reflecting on their own thoughts or reflecting upon the actions of others or even (in one lively response) acting as a mirror to reflect the behaviour of others back onto them. Favoured chosen texts for this question included *Edward II* and Rossetti.

11 – This was a very popular question. Freedom was perceived by many candidates to be one of the central qualities to be recognised, celebrated and indeed encouraged by literary texts. The appeal (and danger) of freedom was perceived to be a topic in all the texts listed and answers covering every text – although not in every combination – were seen at some point in the series. Characters in the texts were frequently portrayed as trying to free themselves from an oppressive situation (and this was often presented contextually from a feminist or Marxist perspective). Characters were sometimes seen to fail in their bid for freedom and – at times – freedom was presented as failing to offer all it had promised.

12 – This was another very popular question. Most candidates seemed to agree that loss and suffering are universal states in the human condition and that most people try to escape from their effects although in many cases this is not possible. Some candidates treated loss and suffering as two separate – but related – states while other saw them as being synonymous. A litany of suffering and loss was cited in all the listed texts and better answers tended to identify both the reasons for the loss/suffering and the effects caused by it. Webster and Milton tended to be the most popular texts in this context.