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Work Out

English Literature

'A' Level

S.H. Burton

M
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Examination Boards for Advanced level

Syllabuses and past examination papers can be obtained from:

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Stag Hill House
Guildford
Surrey GU2 5XJ

University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES)

Syndicate Buildings
Hills Road
Cambridge CB1 2EU

Joint Matriculation Board (JMB)

78 Park Road
Altrincham
Cheshire WA14 5QQ

University of London School Examinations Board (L)

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245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX

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Examinations Office
Beechill House
Beechill Road
Belfast BT8 4RS

Introduction

How to Use This Book

By studying the work outs you will ensure that you do not face any unexpected or unpractised kinds of questions when you take your 'A' level English Literature examination. All the questions in this book have been taken from (or exactly modelled on) papers set by the various boards; and the kinds of knowledge and skills tested in the examination are illustrated and practised.

The great variety of set books specified by the different boards is reflected in the choice of study and practice material provided. The literary periods covered range from Chaucer's to the present day, and all the major literary forms ('genres') are amply represented. Thus, even if a particular question on which examination practice is based refers to an author or work not included in your syllabus, the advice given and the methods demonstrated are as relevant to your needs as when a question refers directly to one of your own authors or set books.

For example, by studying the critical commentary on the passage from *The Prelude – Books 1–3*, worked out in Chapter 3, you will learn how to answer examination questions of that kind. That particular passage was written by Wordsworth, but the *methods* of studying the passage and of writing the commentary can be applied with equal success to a passage taken from the work of any other poet.

Similarly, in the same chapter, the commentary worked out on the extract from *Much Ado About Nothing* shows you how to write a critical commentary on a scene from a particular play, but the demonstrated *way of doing it* will produce a good answer, whatever the source of the passage set for comment. An extract from another of Shakespeare's plays (comedy, tragedy, history, or 'romance'), or from the work of any other dramatist, requires the same approach and methods.

Again, the critical commentary on a passage from *Middlemarch* shows you not only how to tackle an examination question of that kind on that particular book, but also how to deal with such a question set on any novel.

Or, to turn to a different kind of question, the essay answer worked out on *Hard Times* (in Chapter 4) shows you how to write an essay of good 'A' level quality. The immediate subject matter for demonstration purposes is a particular novel, but the training given will help you to write an equally successful essay whether the subject is *Hard Times*, or *Great Expectations*, or *Joseph Andrews*, or *The Mill on the Floss*, or *The Heart of the Matter* – or any other novel by any other novelist.

Nor is the value of that training confined to the writing of essays on novels. The methods of question analysis and answer writing applied to the *Hard Times* essay will produce an equally successful result when the essay subject is a play, a poem, a poet, a biography – or whatever the set book may be. The other essays worked out in Chapter 4 provide proof of that. They are concerned with set books of different genres, but they are based on the same essay writing techniques.

I have selected just a few examples here to illustrate the importance of closely studying all the work outs. Each gives practical help, whether or not you are

making a special study of the particular author or work to which it refers. (If the subject is unfamiliar, you will find in the *Background* sections the information you need to appreciate the text details used in the answer.) As you become familiar with the methods demonstrated, and begin to apply them to your own practice work, you will tackle the different kinds of examination questions with growing confidence and skill.

The sections headed *What You Need to Know about the Passage* (in Chapters 2 and 3) have a special importance. They provide standards by which you can measure the adequacy of your own reading and thinking. Do not be content with your study of your set books until its results are comparable – in knowledge, understanding and appreciation – to the contents of those sections. You will then be able to answer any questions that the examiners are likely to set.

You will not always agree with the judgements I make and the conclusions I reach in the answers. That does not matter, provided that you understand the basis on which those judgements are formed and the stages by which those conclusions are reached. I have supplied text evidence to support my opinions, and arguments to justify my conclusions. Whenever, by using the same methods, you improve my answers with sounder opinions and better-grounded conclusions, you are taking big steps towards ensuring a good examination result for yourself.

I wrote my answers in the way that comes naturally to me after years of reading and writing. I wanted to express myself in language that reflected my own interest in literature. I hope I have succeeded. If I have, it is because I wrote what I thought and felt about the questions in my own way. To do that, I had to draw on resources of vocabulary and language structures that may, as yet, not be fully available to you. I make no apologies for that. Apologies would be due if I had patronised you by writing ‘down’.

I wrote as well as I could, and it may be that my writing on these questions will help you to increase the range of your own expression. But do not think that you are intended to imitate my way of writing. Extend your vocabulary and your command of language structures by thoughtful practice, but try always to write answers in *your own way* – in language that reflects *your* interests and opinions. Use my work for its approach and methods, not as a copybook.

Finally, a few words about Chapters 5 and 6. Do not regard them as superfluous if your syllabus does not include compulsory unseen critical appreciation or questions on comprehension or varieties of English. The contents of those two chapters have a bearing on all the rest of your work. The study of literature is the study of language used in special ways. The aspects of language use discussed and demonstrated in Chapters 5 and 6 are relevant to all the other matters tested in the examination – especially the writing of critical commentaries and of literary essays.

Revision

The book provides back-up for your course studies. The time and mental effort rightly put into studying set texts, authors, periods and background books sometimes leaves candidates feeling that they can’t see the wood for the trees. Immersed in details, they lose sight of the aims and values inherent in ‘A’ level studies in English Literature.

That is why the whole of Chapter 1 and the preliminary sections of Chapters 2–6 remind you of fundamental matters, such as the nature of this examination (both as a whole and in its individual papers), the qualities tested, what the examiners are looking for, and what you need to know.

So, although the work-out sections provide the most obviously practical help, I do hope that you will not fail to read and re-read Chapter 1 and the preliminary sections of the others. They contain strictly practical advice of many kinds (on selecting your background reading; and on learning, and learning how to use, the technical terms of literature and criticism – to give just two examples). But their main purpose is to help you to direct your growing knowledge of set books and of literature generally to best advantage as you pursue your studies. By using these sections as companions to your syllabus work, you will revise and consolidate as you go along.

Revision is not just a matter of consolidating factual knowledge; it is also – and just as importantly – a matter of reinforcing techniques, re-examining standards, and re-assessing approaches and attitudes. This book shows you how to go about it.

The Examination

The techniques needed for success are explained as each kind of paper and the sorts of questions appearing in each are dealt with in successive chapters. Particular attention is given in each chapter to four issues: timing, planning, common mistakes and good English.

Under examination conditions, you are writing against the clock. Not an ideal situation, perhaps – but inescapable. Use the advice given in this book on how to divide up your time, and how to write within the time limits, according to the sort of paper you are taking and the kind of question you are answering. Practise – and do not start practising on the day or in the week before the examination. Start as soon as you start your course of study.

Every chapter – and every work out in every chapter – contains advice on, and practical demonstrations of, the way to plan answers of all kinds. That advice is one of the most important features of this book, covering in detail a vital process to which far too little attention is paid.

You will, of course, need copies of recent papers set by your examining board (you will find the address on page vii or page viii) to enable you to practise timing and planning answers.

Another feature of this book is the attention paid to common mistakes made in answering various kinds of questions. Lists of these appear in each chapter. They are based on the study of examination scripts and the reports of examiners. Detailed advice is given on how to avoid each mistake, and the work outs provide practical demonstrations of how to use the advice.

Finally, the examiners' insistence on answers written in good English and with orderly presentation is closely studied in relation to each kind of answer, and the advice given in the earlier sections of the chapters is applied in the work outs.

I have had to assume, of course, that you are prepared to make the effort needed to acquire the considerable amount of knowledge expected of an 'A' level candidate. That can be done only by students who read a lot, and think about what they read. I wrote the book to show you how to make good use in the examination of the knowledge your own hard work has brought. That, I believe I have done.

I like to think that I have also suggested some ways of looking at literature that will increase your enjoyment.

Good luck!

S. H. B.