

**GCE**

**English Literature**

Advanced GCE **A2 H471**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H071**

**OCR Report to Centres June 2014**

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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 specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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## CONTENTS

Advanced GCE English Literature (H471)

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### OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945	1
F662 Literature post-1900	5
F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800	7
F664 Texts in Time	13

## F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945

### General Comments:

Performance by candidates on the paper this session was once again extremely good. Much of the work was substantial and very well researched; answers seem to be getting longer, and (possibly not unconnected) examiners are starting to report more problems with handwriting. Examiners were impressed by answers of substance which addressed fully all the AOs; still better were those which made a judicious selection of material and exhibited genuine engagement and personal response to the text alongside knowledge and technique.

In Section A on poetry, most candidates were ready to write an analysis of the set poem related to the question and to make links to at least two other poems in their answers. As always, the most impressive answers offered a sustained account of the set poem with plenty of AO2 detail and made links to other poems which shed light on the answer as a whole. Weaker answers wavered more in focus and technique, and were also inclined to make basic errors in the discussion of poetry: for example, wrongly identifying a range of different poetic metres as 'free verse' or 'iambic pentameter'; quoting verse as prose; and (increasingly) ending quotations at the end of a line of poetry whether or not this suited the meaning of the quotation.

Section B answers on the novels were especially confident, and it was pleasing to see that in many cases there was an increasing engagement with AO2 in this part of the exam. There was a good spread across the texts, although examiners saw less work on Woolf and (especially) Conrad than the other novelists. Grasp of context was often excellent, but in weaker answers usually flawed. To supply context, some candidates depended on very broad or erroneous statements about the place of women in society (for example, that in Victorian times the status of women was 'lower than animals').

### Comments on Individual Questions:

#### Section A

##### Robert Browning

Browning was the least popular Section A choice; however, many examiners were impressed with the quality of the work they saw on 'The Lost Leader'. Candidates generally identified the 'Leader' as William Wordsworth; some were confused about chronology and understood Wordsworth and Browning to be close contemporaries (Milton, Burns and Shelley were sometimes included in this confusion too). Most pleasing was the general tendency to write pertinently about metre: many candidates suggested that there was a military energy about the metre, sometimes referring to a snare drum to make their point. Links were generally made to other poems which feature feelings of anger, such as 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'. The best answers gave careful attention to the accommodations of the second stanza, where Wordsworth finishes 'Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne!'

##### Emily Dickinson

Most answers on 'Because I could not stop for Death –' identified the journey which takes place as a journey to death, or to the afterlife. Candidates characterised Death as a gentleman caller, and generally commented on the surprisingly calm and attractive tone of a poem about dying; there were frequent links made to 'I heard a Fly buzz – when I died' and 'The last Night that She lived', often finding a contrast in tone between these and the set poem. Some excellent answers saw line 13 of the poem ('Or rather – He passed Us –') as a turning point, and used this as the

basis to discuss the surprises and challenges of the poem's time scheme. Weaker answers sometimes ran out of steam before the end of the poem, avoiding comment on the image of the 'House' in stanza 5 and the statement about 'Eternity' in the poem's last line; candidates should be aware that, if the poem selected for comment is relatively short, it is wise to give as full an account of it as possible.

### **Edward Thomas**

Candidates generally wrote at least competently on the presentation of happiness in 'The Glory', but there was perhaps a greater tendency here than elsewhere in Section A for answers to avoid the question. Candidates were often keen to discuss Thomas's marriage, his friendship with Robert Frost and his deliberations about joining up; the theme of 'happiness' was sometimes less attractive as a subject. Better answers were drawn to the poem's tentativeness ('What I can have meant by happiness') and its paradoxical statements ('must I be content with discontent..?'); some especially thoughtful candidates debated the notion that discontent is to Thomas what wings are to a lark or a swallow, a necessary condition of his existence, and perhaps his art. Most answers took on the conclusion of the poem – 'I cannot bite the day to the core' – with an interesting variety of interpretations.

### **W B Yeats**

Examiners reported seeing some of the best work on poetry in response to Yeats's attempt to make sense of human experience in 'Man and the Echo'. Many candidates offered full and accurate contextual information about 'that play', 'that woman' and the house which 'lay wrecked'; there was also pertinent material included in many answers about the Oracle at Delphi. AO2 discussion often focused on the dialogue form of the poem and the effects of Echo's contributions; there was also effective analysis of metre and imagery, with particular attention paid in many answers to the 'stricken rabbit'. Weaker answers to this question were inclined to focus on other poems at the expense of the set poem; a significant minority also suggested that the poem is written in iambic pentameter.

## **Section B**

### ***Frankenstein***

The (a) question on *Frankenstein* – that the novel suggests that human knowledge should always be pushed beyond its current limits – was easily the more popular of the two choices. Many candidates had clearly given this matter a lot of thought, and some answers were inclined to cite recent scientific advances – for example, the cloning of Dolly the sheep – in their answers. This made for lively and interesting debate, and was successful as long as the literary content of the answer remained the primary area of interest. Candidates offered a range of conclusions, but many came down in favour of balance; answers were inclined to recognise the value of discovery and education, usually considering Walton, Frankenstein and the Creature in discussion, but also to characterise the novel as a cautionary tale in which Promethean overreaching is severely punished. The (b) option on questions raised by the ending was not often attempted. Success here tended to depend on recall of the late stages of the novel; some weaker answers ignored the ending altogether, instead offering a general essay about questions raised by the novel.

### ***Jane Eyre***

The (a) option on Jane's uncertain status as governess was a very popular choice. Many answers characterised effectively the anomalous position of the governess, and some suggested that Jane as a result of her status enjoys a position as 'outsider' which helps to make her an effective narrator. Weaker answers, however, were inclined to fasten on the term 'status' and answer a more general question, often on Jane's position as a woman; this less precise

reading of the question obviously resulted in lower marks. The (b) option, on the inevitability of the marriage at the end of the novel, was less popular but often well done. Candidates often argued that the marriage is an inevitable conclusion to the novel, not least because of the power of the relationship between Rochester and Jane; most acknowledged a feminist view which might be disappointed by Jane's capitulation to the system in the end. It was pleasing to see more discussion this session of St John Rivers, who has often been neglected in answers on this novel.

### ***The Turn of the Screw***

The (a) option on the text, suggesting that all of the female characters turn out to be victims, was the more popular of the two. Most candidates considered the Governess, Flora, Mrs Grose and Miss Jessel in their answers. Better responses were close to the text, and examined the behaviour of characters and their relationships with each other: for example, Miss Jessel was considered to be a possible aggressor where Flora was concerned, but also a possible victim of Quint. Weaker answers were inclined to describe all of the female characters as victims of the patriarchy, and relied at times on quite vague assertions about the relative social positions of Victorian men and women to create an argument for the victimhood of women. Many answers demonstrated the ambiguity surrounding the Governess – is she a victim or a villain? There were far fewer answers to the (b) option on suspense, and quite a number of these fell back on the familiar account of a range of critical approaches to this text, the suspense lying in the reader's inability to choose between them. Better answers, while alive to the critical debate, were prepared to consider the novella as a Gothic tale with all the familiar elements of eerie settings and twists and turns in the plot. The metaphor of the 'turn of the screw' was often picked up in these answers

### ***The Picture of Dorian Gray***

This was a popular text and the (a) option, on the dangers of a story with a moral, was by far the more popular question. Most candidates introduced into their answers material from Wilde's preface to the novel, in particular his comment that 'There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book'. Candidates often seemed to relish Wilde's taste for paradox, pointing out that, despite Wilde's claims, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is on the face of it a morality tale; some also underlined the irony that the book presented its own moral dangers to Wilde when it was used against him in court. Most answers discussed the hypothetical moral vision of the 'yellow book' which Lord Henry gives to Dorian in the course of the novel; most also referred to different presentations of morality in the novel, including the opium dens of the East End and the hypocrisy of the upper classes. There were far fewer responses to the (b) option on Wilde's descriptions of sensory experiences; examiners did however report receiving some outstanding work on this subject, with candidates often focusing on the opening of the novel in the garden and the descriptions of the East End from later in the novel.

### ***The Secret Agent***

*The Secret Agent* was by a long distance the least popular choice of Section B texts, and answers were almost exclusively responses to the (a) option on Stevie as both victim and visionary. These answers were often very positive about Stevie, especially admiring his moral outlook; some candidates, however, pointed out that he is treated with relentless irony in the narrative and utterly destroyed in the end, which gave them doubts about his status as a visionary. Many of these answers were excellent in quality. Few examiners saw any work at all on the (b) option about the time scheme of the novel.

***Mrs Dalloway***

Answers on Virginia Woolf were also often impressive, and seemed to be fairly evenly divided between the two options. Those on the (a) option about the frightening instability of human life often concentrated on Septimus and also brought in contextual references to Virginia Woolf's own mental health problems and eventual suicide to support their answers. There were some thoughtful accounts of Clarissa's vulnerability, despite her apparent privilege and security. Answers on the (b) option about presentation of time in the novel were often well informed about Modernist writing and able to show the qualities Woolf introduces to the novel by abandoning a straightforward linear narrative. Examiners were frequently impressed with the depth and sophistication of writing on Woolf's narrative method.

## F662 Literature post-1900

Centres were very knowledgeable of the demands of the unit. The Critical Pieces often targeted a number of sections of the text and combined close passage study with intra-textual knowledge. The Re-creative Work usually had worthwhile pastiches and longer commentaries enabling candidates to show their analytical as well as creative skills. The Linked Texts Pieces were often strongly comparative and many achieved an equal discussion between the two texts under discussion.

The tasks set by centres in most cases were appropriate for the unit and met the needs of candidates in terms of allowing them to access the assessment scale at points consistent with their ability. Many centres now provide directed tasks with a precise focus rather than vaguer directives such as “write a critical appreciation”. There were some instances of inappropriate text choice affecting the suitability of tasks: some texts outside the scope of the unit for instance Victorian novels or the poetry of Andrew Marvell or Christina Rossetti or three post 1900 texts which did not include one that was from 1990 or beyond or two film texts. There were also some submissions of writing that was not imitative of the concerns and style of the original text for the Re-creative Option: text transformation and creative/original writing. The aspect of task-setting that could lead to the largest improvement in practice would be more movement towards individual tasks for each candidate or at least a greater range of tasks so there is less of a sense of set areas of study for a text and less of a perception of a prescribed or even prepared answer.

Many centres have a good knowledge of the assessment scale and can apply it with discrimination and some sensitivity. Other centres have a tendency towards generosity using the top of bands rather than the range of marks within a band or bunching candidates together which need separating into a ranked order.

There is a good understanding of assessment objectives held by centres and the weighting of the assessment objectives for particular items is also securely known. Instances of answers dominated by critical observations (AO3) or contextual material (AO4) for Task 1, for instance, are rarer. Sometimes centres do not recognise sufficiently the importance of accuracy and fluency of expression for AO1 in awarding marks. Centres understand the dominance of AO2 for Task 1 and direct candidates to matters of style more than ideas to allow them to succeed, but the stylistic focus could include more analysis of form and structure not just language awareness. Comparison (AO3) is usually well handled on Task 2 although too often by alternating texts in subsequent paragraphs rather than achieving a more thematic or conceptualised linking. The inclusion of alternative views (the second strand of AO3) is increasing and there has been some development towards achieving a balance of critical observations on both texts studied and in terms of the candidates engaging with the critical statements rather than just inserting them. The use and evaluation of contextual material is an area of considerable competence for centres, although there is often more confidence shown including contextual information than analysing its significance in relation to tasks.

Centres are good at annotating items both in the margins around the work and appraising strengths and weaknesses at the end. Sometimes the summative comment on the top sheet is left blank, which is an improvement some centres could move towards. Caution needs to be exercised in using words such as good and competent as these are features of the mark scheme and can lead a consideration of an answer inappropriately if not used in the same way as in the assessment scale.



Another area where care should be taken is the recording of marks. Sometimes there are discrepancies between what was arrived at the end of an item and on the top sheet. This disparity should not occur without an explanation for the movement upwards or down; otherwise it actions a clerical error check. Clerical error notifications are also sent out when there is a difference between the total on the coursework folder and what has been submitted to data capture by MS1. There seemed to be more of these in evidence this year.

Much good practice again impressed moderators – the widening range of texts and of tasks was particularly pleasing. Recent texts such as *The Help* and *Jerusalem* and *Clybourne Park* and *South Downs* were seen in more than a few centres; and a collection such as *Birthday Letters* continues to rise in popularity. A number of Centres were interested in revitalising *The Experience of War* with new text choices such as televised poetry by Tony Harrison.

## F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800

### General Comments:

The paper generated a wide range of responses, ranging from the pre-rehearsed and formulaic to the intellectually inspiring. The best answers were fluent, interesting and well-informed, wrestling closely with the question. Weaker answers fell into familiar traps – treating the question in a descriptive or narrative way, for example, or regurgitating practice essays rather than answering the question as set, or offering simplified or generalised interpretations of characters and contexts.

Critical views (AO3) were often used well – we have moved away from the ‘critic as cake decoration’ approach to a much more flexible, cogent treatment of critics where they are often used to enrich and drive forward an argument. Feminist criticism was again much in evidence this year and was used to good effect when it enhanced a sense of the complexity of a text, but less so when it was used to endorse simplified responses not fully based on evidence. Critics such as Coppelia Kahn, Harold Bloom, Emma Smith and Jonathan Dollimore were well used in certain centres to add intellectual vigour to their candidates’ essays. Some candidates displayed an impressive ability to orchestrate a range of critical perspectives to produce an alert and sensitive reading of the text.

There is still some evidence that AO weightings are not fully assimilated, so that contexts (AO4) can be cited too insistently in Section A or neglected in Section B. Context can be something of a blunt instrument; very broad or generalised assertions about contexts are often the hallmark of weaker candidates who may claim variously that Ford lived in a society of misogynists, Prospero was a sadistic coloniser, or that the age of Chaucer should not have been so patriarchal. Under the pressure of timed exam conditions, it is understandable that candidates sometimes revert to such shorthand assertions, but more successful candidates do tend to have at their fingertips a more nuanced sense of context and a greater sense of the significance of specific details.

This said, the great strength of the exam is that it is not prescriptive and allows candidates to express their intellectual personalities and inclinations, so that differently-minded but equally able candidates will approach the same question in markedly individual ways, one pursuing a more historicist angle, another based around difference performance histories of a play, a third weaving together critical views to build an argument. All can be equally successful. What matters above all is for detail to be deployed effectively in the service of an effective argument and for the candidate to do justice to the complexity of the texts studied.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

#### 1a ‘Though he is called “king of shadows”, Oberon brings order and renewal to the play.’

*A Midsummer-Night’s Dream* was much the least popular choice of play. The more popular of the two questions on this play, this produced a number of suggestive readings. Many successful answers challenged the proposition, arguing that the dispute between Oberon and Titania and his failure to control Puck create the disorder, despite his compassion for Helena and the successful resolution of the lovers’ quarrel. Oberon is full of awkward corners, some likeable and some decidedly unattractive traits. Some ignored the ‘king of shadows’ element, but when it was discussed, it proved fruitful and enabled darker themes within the play to be explored: although harmony seems to be achieved, Titania has been cruelly humiliated and does not regain the changeling boy. Parallels between Oberon and Theseus were often drawn, and able candidates explored the ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ play-within-a-play, seeing it as a comic ‘translation’ of the tragic dangers that lurk within the rest of the play. Some answers commented on the visually striking ways in which Oberon has been presented in recent performances. On the whole, conclusions seemed to suggest that Oberon thinks that he brings order, but that he doesn’t,

because no-one could! Weaker answers sometimes drifted away from Oberon and focussed completely on Puck as an agent of disorder.

**1b 'Learning to see more clearly is central to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.'**

Many candidates seemed well prepared for this question, with lots of apposite and telling quotation. Some really good answers explored many aspects, including Titania's love for Bottom and all the references to eyesight in the forest; weaker answers were sometimes more narrative in approach. Few picked up on Theseus' Lunatic, lover, poet speech which is all about creative seeing. Amongst the stronger answers, one candidate wrote engagingly on seeing and the imagination in relation to Shakespeare's stagecraft, citing the difficulty of presenting a character such as Cobweb, who is 'small enough to duel with a bee'.

**2a 'Cleopatra is always performing a role. That is her strength; that is her weakness.'**

Many very fine answers here showed an impressive command of the text, supporting Cleopatra's contradictions through much apposite quotation. Some really interesting answers included the following ideas: that Cleopatra remains elusive even to herself; that it is impossible to tell whether she is really in love with Antony because she can't prevent herself play-acting; that the admixture of childish vanity and feminine magnificence arises because she has always been surrounded by sycophancy; and that 'performing a role' leaves her unable to cope with the unpredictable. Many candidates answered the question by evaluating the sincerity of her love for Antony, concluding that, beneath the layers of self-dramatisation, there is a genuine love for him, citing the verbal echoes between the two of them to demonstrate the inextricable nature of their love. Contextual knowledge of Roman history was usefully applied in discussing the limitations of her political position in the Mediterranean before her flight with Antony at Actium. Her ambivalent feelings for Antony were analysed well and were usually seen to be finally resolved into love *after* his death; her clever political positioning of Caesar and the brave words of her final speech impressed candidates. The best answers kept the 'strength' versus 'weakness' aspect of the question in mind, citing how Cleopatra outwits Caesar, or analysing the theatricality of her final speech where she 'transcends earthly genders, giving her an eternal power and strength'. One candidate explored the imagery of alchemy that is woven through the text and compared the description of her barge in North's Plutarch's with Enobarbus's rendering of the same scene, concluding, 'her performance has the alchemical power not only to portray herself as a demi-goddess but also to transform prosaic words into lyrical and poetical eloquence'. Another candidate remarked on the way the play begins and ends with 'air' imagery, from the 'bellows and fan' image that opens the play to her self-proclaimed apotheosis into 'fire and air'. The play similarly oscillates between the bathetic and the hyperbolic.

**2b 'Politics in *Antony and Cleopatra* is more about personalities than about issues.'**

This was less popular than 2(a) but often chosen by articulate and well-informed candidates. Many wrote well about the inseparable nature of the personal and political in a play where Cleopatra's 'manipulation of Antony' has political consequences and Caesar's coldness defines both himself and 'Romanitas'. One perceptive point was that in the galley scene 'Shakespeare uses alcohol as a device to show how personality affects politics'. Another good answer looked at the effect of Shakespeare's changes to Plutarch's account: 'the distortion of time, the addition of characters such as Enobarbus, the use of dichotomies between eastern and western settings, all make the play more personal and more character-driven'. The more successful answers explored how inextricably politics and rivalry are entwined in the play, one candidate showing that, while Roman characters such as Caesar tend to see themselves as supremely rational, they are as prone to petty grudges, emotionalism and personality conflicts as the Egyptian characters who at least have the virtue of being honest about the fact. The question elicited some sophisticated responses - some less secure answers either provided too much historical context or compared the "personalities" of the three main characters without relating this to the question.

### **3a 'Cordelia brings to the play heroism, compassion and judgement.'**

*King Lear* was much the most popular choice of play in this section of the paper: many candidates wrote on 3a and very many on 3b. Plenty of excellent material on Cordelia was seen. The best candidates considered all three qualities independently and formed clear judgements about Cordelia, often arriving at the conclusion that she did not necessarily show these qualities fully or consistently. Some were able to work at a more complex level by saying the three were not necessarily compatible: she may be compassionate and heroic, but her judgement in abandoning her father to her sister in Act One was lamentable. Or she exercised good judgement in steering clear of the Love Test, but was hardly acting compassionately. Such investigations fared better than those who were producing a 'prepared' essay on Cordelia. Many questioned Cordelia's 'judgement' in her self-presentation in the 'love trial' scene, but few disagreed radically with 'heroism' or 'compassion'. A key discriminator was often the view taken of the reunion of Lear and Cordelia and her response to her father: some candidates were clearly unfamiliar with this scene while others were able to analyse it closely. Much good use was made of critical views and recent productions, as well as historical analysis of previous productions. - the majority of candidates referred helpfully and in detail to aspects of the current National Theatre production, which must have been very widely seen. The nihilism of the play was explored by some, while others were careful to find examples of compassion and humanity, with Christ-like Cordelia being cited as a countervailing truth. One candidate analysed the important role of Cornwall's unnamed servant who, provoked beyond endurance by the horror of what his master is doing, stands up to him and is mortally wounded in the process.

### **3b 'King Lear is a study of brutality, not only of human beings, but also of the natural world.'**

A very popular question, this produced some outstanding responses. Some saw the brutality as an expression of the nihilism that they felt underpinned the text; others saw it as a necessary prelude to the hope evinced by the accession of a new order, represented by Edgar and Albany. Most essays considered Lear's rejection of Cordelia and the blinding of Gloucester as examples of brutality. (There was perceptive identification of such other examples as the 'brutal honesty' of the Fool or the 'brutal black humour' of Regan: 'let him smell his way to Dover'.) Though some did not tackle the 'natural' aspect of the question, many wrote interestingly about the cruelty of the natural world in the storm or the references to 'tigers' and 'monsters of the deep'. Most responses included some analysis of the symbolic significance of the storm and its necessary brutality, although not all interpreted the "natural world" in this way. Some saw it as the "natural" social order, with much discussion of the Great Chain of Being. Others also, or alternatively probed 'nature' through Edmund's allegiance to her. A common argument was that the brutality does not point in the direction of nihilism but forces characters to know themselves and human nature better. The best answers often sought to explore the relationship between brutality in the natural world and human brutality, often seeing these as mutually inextricable in the play. Many argued that the brutality of the natural world was of less significance than the brutality inherent in humans and many answers linked the study with larger contextual ideas about the decline of feudal values and the growth of individualism.

### **4a 'Prospero, who means to teach, ends up learning more than anyone.'**

This was by far the more popular question on *The Tempest*. Examiners found a tendency among some candidates to deliver the 'prepared' Prospero essay, rather than addressing the interesting but specific issue in the prompt quotation. Many answers were informed by contemporary, post-colonial readings of Prospero, some perhaps to the extent of seeing him only as an occupying tyrant who learns little. However the question provoked some interesting analysis, suggesting, for example, that the most important lesson Prospero learns is that he can't really 'teach' by trying to control. Most candidates focused on this 'teaching' and 'learning' aspect of the title, and dealt with the characters that Prospero aimed to teach – usually Miranda, Ariel and Caliban. Stronger answers sometimes extended the discussion to the shipwrecked

noblemen. Some astute answers focused on Ariel's lessons to Prospero, and a few commented on how Prospero had learnt from Caliban – and how his response to Caliban's plot showed that he had learnt about power and control since being evicted from Milan. Prospero learns that 'the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance': some argued that he learns it only through the example of Miranda or, more usually, Ariel, often citing Ariel's line, "Mine would, sir, were I human" as a key learning point for Prospero. Most candidates concluded that Prospero's abjuration of his magic and apparent reconciliation at the end of the play showed that he had learnt a great deal. Nevertheless, a number of readings radically opposed this, and claimed Prospero as a manipulative politician, selling his daughter into a realpolitik marriage to re-establish his power. Most candidates mentioned the epilogue and Prospero as a representation of Shakespeare, but there was surprisingly little complex discussion about the impact of this idea on the rest of the play.

#### **4b 'The play's spectacular action asserts the power and value of theatre.'**

'Spectacular' was a key word in the title – candidates who were able to find focus on the effects (including particularly the visual effects) of the play tended to do well here. The key discriminator in this question seemed to be the candidate's interpretation of spectacle. While some less successful essays concentrated not on the 'power' of theatre but on power in general, the best answers looked at the masque, the harpy scene, the shipwreck etc. and examined how these visually impressive scenes reinforced some of the play's most prominent themes, and how the play draws attention to its own theatricality. Some of the very best answers were able to take on the question and argue that the power and value of theatre in the play are not only – not always? – at the spectacular moments, but sometimes at the quietest and most intimate, such as Caliban's hymn to the beauty of the island, when we suddenly realise our understanding of character, story and action may be entirely wrong. Magical moments in the theatre, and clearly a number of candidates had come under that magical spell themselves.

#### **5 'Court, city or country: a writer's choice of setting is always significant.'**

This question was rarely attempted, and yet it attracted some very interesting answers. Some Blake candidates looked at the use of the city as a setting and its associations with poverty and deprivation. They compared Blake most often with Webster or Sheridan, exploring the corrupt Catholic associations of Rome or the 'elegance' of Bath. "Setting" can be geographical, and there was some sensitive and appreciative discussion of Marvell's gardens and Blake's London. But it can also be *historical* setting, and there was a surprising amount of very good, accurate, historical work on The World of Sheridan or Chaucer's England. This year there was also a gratifying amount of precise and referenced historical background to the world of the 1380's. Sometimes the setting is a strange historical-mythical place – Ford's Parma, the Wife's Arthurian Britain, Jonson's Venice or Sheridan's Bath – and some of the best answers enjoyed discussing where the fact left off and the fiction began. "Court" can be ambiguous in itself, of course: aristocratic, noble courts (the Wife's Tale or Webster or Ford) or legal courts (trial scene in Volpone, Vittoria's arraignment), the Royal Court in the Wife's Tale quickly turning into a legal one as the Knight is put on trial.

#### **6 'Great literary characters are always putting on a show.'**

This was a very popular question. Volpone is acting a part all the time, and then doubly so as the Mountebank; Satan is acting a part in the temptation scene, as is Giovanni, lying to Annabella about the Friar's verdict; Jack Absolute is pretending to be Ensign Beverley, the Wife is pretending to be dead. Wall-to-wall disguise and impersonation in these texts, and many candidates enjoyed putting them alongside each other. They're putting on a show not only to the other characters but to us, the readers. But we also put on a show to ourselves, we go in for massive self-deception. No fool like an old fool? (Alison? Mrs Malaprop?) How much self-knowledge does Satan possess? To seduce is often to put on a show, as Marvell's lover does with his elegant conceits, or as Jack Absolute does wooing Lydia. One writer, comparing Lydia

and the Wife, noted that 'Lydia creates arguments with Jack so that she can truly be the star of her own sentimental show'.

### **7 'Literature rarely shows power being used well.'**

This was much the most popular single question on the paper. This question seemed to enable committed writing across the entire range of candidates. Everyone could point out some examples of "power" in their texts, and most could make some useful comparative judgements between their two texts. More confident candidates could also pick up on "using it well", and ask what exactly that intriguing phrase meant. The very best could create their own over-arching thesis, and many opted for the "Men use it badly, women use it well" argument, sustaining it with verve and enthusiasm. Power was interpreted in many ways: as sexual power over others (in *'Tis Pity, Volpone, Wife of Bath, Paradise Lost*, Blake - with much focus on *The Sick Rose*; Blake was very often seen in opposition to any of the drama texts, as an advocate of unrestraint.) Power could be ecclesiastical power (this was a frequent approach; using Blake, partnered with *'Tis Pity* or *The White Devil* in particular). Milton was used (not often with real AO4 accuracy or authority) and, (often intriguingly, and almost always well understood) Marvell. Many different kinds of power were explored, including the church, the state, money, status and gender.

### **8 'Experience all too often leads to disillusionment.'**

This question attracted few answers, mostly on Milton and Webster and Blake with either Webster or Sheridan. Several confused 'disillusion' and 'delusion' and a number wrote only about experience. A number offered general essays about characters who had bad experiences or unwelcome consequences. Blake & Chaucer were popular poetry choices as they actually featured the word "experience" and were often paired with Sheridan and Webster or Ford. *The Wife*, as representative of experience ('experience...') was quite popular among the poets, although Blake was more so, with some excellent work comparing 'Innocence' with 'Experience'. Among a few less confident candidates, the inviting comparability within the one text did, to some extent, make for looser comparisons between the Blake and whichever drama text had been chosen; it was as if such candidates felt that there was a complete essay to be written, including comparison, within the Blake selection, and that the drama text was an additional consideration, rather than essential to the answer.

### **9 'Literature shows us that sexual desire must be restrained.'**

This was the second most popular B question. Some answers compared Giovanni, Annabella and the dire consequences for almost all involved in their play with Eve and Adam after partaking of the fruit. Others analysed Vittoria, seeing her as the noble victim of the desire of others; relatively few noted her role in planting the idea of murder in Bracciano's mind. Some candidates showed enough command of the texts to be able to make detailed links between the imagery; for example, Satan's 'neck of burnished gold' with Vittoria's warning to Francisco: 'I discern poison under your gilded pills'. The same candidate went on to compare Vittoria's self-description as 'this mine of diamonds' with Milton's depiction of Eve as 'fairest unsupported flower' to show that the sexuality of each has been corrupted in different ways. One very effective answer examined 'The Rivals' by exploring the consequences of elopement and loss of reputation, which even sensible Julia chooses to risk, while Sir Anthony offers a backhanded compliment to his son as a 'sly dog'. Chaucer and especially the tale of the knight, who seems unpunished for committing rape, were often used for this question. Alisoun was seen by many as ambivalent - a 'carnal monster' by some, a more sympathetic figure by others.

**10 'Good writing must, above all, help us to view the world afresh.'**

Though this was not often attempted, there were some refreshing and mature responses, covering societal expectations, religious and moral questions and some enthusiastic personal analysis of the power of literature. Some responses explored the didactic elements within the texts, but a few proved themselves to be budding Russian Formalists, seeing the texts in relation to the concept of defamiliarisation (though the word itself was not used). Another candidate discussed 'Volpone', arguing that because it was a comedy the audience delighted in the deceitfulness of Volpone, which made them complicit in his sinfulness. Thus the text helped us view ourselves afresh. The same candidate explored how responses to texts change through time, so they are always being 'seen afresh'. Today's audiences laugh less *at* Alisoun but *with her* at the society of which she was a part.

## F664 Texts in Time

In the course of moderating this now well-established unit, assessors again saw the impressive level of scholarly enterprise which it can elicit. Many candidates had clearly gained much from being given some academic freedom and had engaged with reading, research and analysis which had stimulated them and, in turn, stimulated teachers and Moderators. While these qualities manifest themselves very clearly at the top of the mark range, they are also recognisable in the ways candidates of more modest abilities rise to the challenge and grapple with texts and issues in a developed way which they would be unable to do in an examination. Such skills of independent enquiry are, of course, invaluable.

### Administration

Most Centres have finely honed practices for the coursework, submitting their sample to the Moderator in good time with the appropriate paperwork. The text range matches the specification, tasks prompt candidates in suitable ways and the candidates provide full bibliographies and acknowledge their secondary sources with footnotes. Marking is detailed, with evaluative marginal comments and full, balanced summative comments on the coversheets acknowledge both the strengths and the weaknesses of the work. There are clear signs of internal moderation, matching the achievement of different teaching sets. That is the ideal and is exemplified by the vast majority of Centres.

There was, though, a significant number of Centres whose practice caused difficulties and in some cases caused considerable delays to the moderating process. Sending a sample consisting of loose, unattached sheets is not wise and paperclips are not much improvement. Each essay should be firmly attached to the coversheet, preferably with a treasury tag. Samples should be sent in firm, quality envelopes or packets – several Moderators received envelopes coming apart at the edges and some had required the intervention of the Post Office to repackage contents which were at risk.

Bibliographies should include full details of all sources, including the studied editions of the three core texts. This would help avoid confusion with poetry, which, as the Guidelines state, should be a single published collection of verse. Footnotes should acknowledge secondary sources only; they should not provide extra information or develop points of argument – if they do, they must be included in the word count.

The coversheet must be complete. It is the final record of the candidate's attainment, but several omitted candidate numbers, word counts, texts, titles, summative comments and even marks. The summative comment should be an objective assessment of the qualities shown in the essay to guide the moderator. Sweeping comments such as 'Exceeds the criteria in every respect' are not helpful.

### Texts and Tasks

Moderators saw a very wide range of texts and tasks being considered, a sign of the opportunities afforded by this unit. Women in literature were again popular, as were texts from Romantic, American and dystopian literature. Some candidates showed a keen awareness of contemporary political concerns, while some choices ranged deliberately over very wide time periods – the routes through 'Texts in Time' are various. Candidates in one Centre, for example, combined very canonical texts such as Chaucer, Larkin and *Howard's End* with 21<sup>st</sup> century works such as David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* to produce some inspired and varied responses.



There continues to be a marked difference between Centres where candidates have been given genuine choice in terms of texts and tasks and those where candidates follow a common scheme of work. Some Centres still teach a single set of texts to one dominant task, usually to the detriment of the candidates who tend to produce relatively uniform responses, often using the same references and the same critical opinions. Often, the overriding critical viewpoint behind the teaching remains unchallenged, limiting the candidates' opportunity to engage in interesting discussion of the issues involved. Candidates who have chosen their own direction tend to demonstrate genuine excitement and a real sense of discovery, with the emergence of an individual voice. Offering choice is not only educationally far more valuable, it also produces better results.

Offering entirely free choice does have its dangers, however, as some candidates chose texts which were not challenging enough to offer them real opportunities of literary exploration. Candidates need to choose in consultation with teachers, who can also make enquiries with the Consultancy Service. Choice often works most successfully within a common teaching framework, where all candidates in a set are writing on various works of American or dystopian literature, for example. This means that there is common ground for teaching and candidates can learn from each other's reading and research.

Poetry had again caused problems this year, after recently receding as a concern. It tends to be less well handled than prose or drama. Many candidates deal with content only and often treat poetry as simple autobiography, which limits the appreciation of the work of Sylvia Plath and Philip Larkin in particular. Very often links are made from the prose text to individual lines or phrases from poems, taken out of context, so candidates do not ever deal with a full poem, exploring its meaning and development. There also remain Centres who believe that candidates' poetry text can be a single poem. Both editions of the Coursework Guidelines and all Principal Moderator's Reports have made it quite clear that the poetry text should be equivalent to that which might be set for an examined unit. Candidates are expected to show detailed understanding of four or five poems, depending on length, in the essay, with passing reference to others where they fit the developing argument. Even longer poems such as 'Christabel' and 'Goblin Market' need reference to further poems, but some candidates were writing only on poems like 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. The same general rule applies, of course, to short stories, where candidates should refer to two or three stories in detail. Moderators are instructed to deduct marks for insufficient text coverage.

### **Malpractice**

This report has never before had a section on malpractice. Most coursework is punctiliously organised and administered, but this year there was a significant number of concerns which had to be escalated to the malpractice team.

The requirements for the specification are absolutely clear, but a number of candidates offered essays which omitted one of the compulsory genres, usually poetry, and a larger number, including entire Centres, who submitted work on texts which appear on the set text list for the examined units.

Plagiarism is a constant concern with coursework and it threatens the viability and integrity of such a valuable model of learning and assessment. Moderators are therefore highly skilled in detecting it and this session an unusually high number of examples were found, ranging from a couple of carefully adapted sentences to nearly two pages of direct copying. In a couple of cases, Centres drew attention to such malpractice themselves, which should never happen. Where malpractice is suspected, the work should not be submitted for moderation; the signatures on the Centre Authentication Form indicate that teachers in the Centre are satisfied that the work is the candidates' own.

The rules for the length of essays are also explicit. They appear not only in the specification and Coursework Guidelines, but on the reverse of the coversheet itself. They make it clear that work in excess of 3000 words should not be submitted. It is incumbent upon Centres to ensure that candidates clearly understand this. There are also instructions on how to proceed if a candidate does overstep the limit. It wastes an enormous amount of time when Moderators are compelled to return work to Centres for remarking when these instructions have not been carried out.

## **The Assessment Objectives**

### **AO3**

There was some notably accomplished, highly conceptualized and lucidly synthesized comparative analysis in the best work, incorporating aspects of presentation, style and structure, as well as concerns, characterisation and ideas. The art of comparison is an area of the unit which has improved steadily with each session, with candidates throughout the mark range carefully interweaving their discussion of texts and drawing out the significance of the similarities and differences they find.

Essays where separate paragraphs are loosely linked by openings such as “Similarly...”, ‘In contrast...’ or ‘This links to ...’ without further development demonstrate significant weaknesses in comparison. Successful essays develop much more cogent comparison at a number of levels, such as concerns, characterisation, structure and language. This kind of purposeful comparison creates a more satisfactory structure to the entire argument and demonstrates a higher level of understanding of the texts. Practising these skills in this unit is also highly beneficial for candidates’ success with F663.

Successful essays showed evidence of substantial detailed research relating to the views of particular critics and to the critical reception of texts, with top band candidates actively debating and challenging different viewpoints. Less successful candidates simply cited critical opinions rather than engaging with them, using them in a purely illustrative way. Frequently a quoted phrase or sentence only was in focus, rather than the whole argument behind that sentence, leading to rather thin consideration of critical views.

Candidates are entitled to range as widely as may be appropriate for critical views, but engagement with specific, academic views tends to be most successful. Assertion of what ‘a feminist critic might say’ is less persuasive and the views quoted from sites like goodreads, gradesaver and sparknotes seldom offered the quality or depth of insight to encourage active engagement.

### **AO4**

Contexts were appropriately handled in most of the work seen by Moderators, with some examples of genuinely illuminating writing showing detailed and thoughtful appreciation of the interaction between texts and their contexts. Historical, social, political, scientific, cultural, psychological, religious and mythological perspectives were all used extensively and usually to good effect. Occasionally, however, the approach was formulaic rather than illuminating, with observations on context slotted into the discussion without due consideration of their significance and influence.

At times candidates paid disproportionate attention to discussion of biography and other contexts so that relatively limited attention was paid to textual reference and literary analysis. It must be remembered that it is the significance of the contexts’ effects on the literary texts which is the focus of the unit, rather than texts being used to illustrate and explore the contexts.

Candidates who chose to focus on specific aspects of contexts in order to tease out particular issues or interpretations in the course of the argument tended to be most successful, rather than those who used context, often historical, just at the opening of the essay or at the introduction of each text.

## **AO1**

Again, the overall quality of writing and argument was very good, including some exceptionally accomplished, sophisticated and articulate essays which demonstrated confident, detailed understanding of the three texts. The strongest work structured a clear directed argument as it wove between the texts, incorporating critical interpretations and the influence of contexts, supported throughout by close reference and analysis.

Less successful work concentrated on character and theme, often conveyed through narrative summary. Such work often showed knowledge of the texts, often in detail, but was less successful in demonstrating literary understanding of them as artistic constructs, which is the aim of AO1.

Quality of writing and structure was quite frequently a concern this year. The work of a number of candidates contained quite basic errors of punctuation and expression, typographical slips, while the argument was sometimes obscured by very long, undirected paragraphs. Some of these flaws might have been eliminated with more careful, systematic proof reading and editing. Such errors often appeared in Band 5 work, sometimes awarded 40 marks. Markers sometimes seem to overlook that the clarity of written expression is a key part of the assessment of AO1.

## **AO2**

There was a substantial amount of penetrating, detailed analytical work on language and structure, with many candidates demonstrating well developed skills of close analysis. Analysis is at the heart of any literary essay, so while AO1/AO2 carries fewer marks than AO3/AO4, it is still central to an essay's success. That is why tasks which clearly direct candidates towards a comparison of 'presentation' or 'ways' are more successful than those which do not.

Since at least two genres, poetry and prose, are compulsory in this unit, the difference between poetic and prose communication ought to be a starting point. That is why candidates are limiting their potential success if they treat poetry lightly, discuss only its ideas and do not consider poetic form. In many discussions, a reader without prior knowledge would have no idea that the text under discussion was poetry as often it was also quoted as prose. The best work fully acknowledged the poetry, considering whole poems through discussion of their language, form and structure and often considering their specific place within the whole text.

The most successful writing on drama also fully grasped the nature of the genre, with careful consideration of stage directions, lighting, the use of props, costume and setting. This approach is much more satisfactory than dealing only with characters and events and approaching a play in the same way as a novel. Novels too should be considered in terms of parts, chapters, narrative positions, paragraph and sentence structure, language and idiom.

## **Marking and Annotation**

Most Centres carried out marking very carefully, providing full and evaluative marginal annotations and succinct summative comments that were extremely useful to the Moderator. Their marks were carefully considered and generally in line with national standards.

Such marking is best practice and is much more valuable than merely ticks and 'AO2' in the margin. Just as candidates should not see the AOs as separate hoops through which to jump, markers should consider how each AO contributes to the development of the essay.

There were also examples of assiduous, professional internal moderation which was sharply focused on the Bands and Assessment Objectives, reflecting discussion within the Centre. In a few cases, internal moderation had led to marks being raised without clear justification; usually the original marks were more appropriate and led to the Moderator having to recommend lower marks. As stated last year, markers should remember that the top mark in each band, especially Band 5, is only to be awarded to work that fully meets all the criteria for that Band. This allows for greater discrimination within the band to arrive at a 'best-fit' mark for all candidates.

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