

# English Literature

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H071

## Report on the Units

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**June 2009**

**HX71/MS/R/09**

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

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## Chief Examiner's Report

The first major session of this new specification has confirmed the impression given in January that, through attending INSET and through careful reading and preparation, teachers have grasped and communicated the altered requirements at English Literature AS Level very promptly and effectively.

In the examination, candidates were in general more secure in terms of knowledge of the text, and the haziness observed in January - especially concerning the later stages of the longer novels - had largely disappeared. The use of critical reading, as in January, was often assured and effective, and perhaps at its best where it had helped candidates to develop an awareness of literary technique; for example, in their treatment of narrative method in Section B of the examination. There were still some reductive and poorly-informed references to broad schools of criticism, including Marxism, psycho-analysis and (especially) feminism. There seemed often to be limited knowledge and study underpinning so-called 'feminist' critical views, which often amounted to a candidate's notion of how a woman might view an aspect of the text, usually a character or a relationship: for example, one candidate writing on *The Great Gatsby* said that 'feminist critics would despise Daisy'. However, there was often thoughtful use of critical quotations, and some convincing work on - for example - Marxist readings of *Wuthering Heights*. Examiners noted once more that able candidates took advantage of the increase in time available in the AS examination, finding that they could develop and illustrate their arguments fully in the time allowed. Some answers in this session, however, were over-long, using the liberal time allowance to repeat, add and extend unhelpfully: especially in Section A, candidates were sometimes tempted to add more contextual information, additional poems and critical views without illuminating their account of the set poem. Examiners are keen to reward answers which are well-crafted and concisely written rather than unnecessarily compendious.

This session saw the first significant submission of AS coursework, and the Principal Moderator's report gives a good sense of the exciting variety of texts and tasks seen by moderators. Many centres and candidates seem to have approached the coursework in a spirit of adventure and enthusiasm, and the references in the Principal Moderator's report to texts studied in this session should provide further inspiration to centres which are tweaking or re-designing their coursework units. There are still some teething troubles in a few centres, involving slight misunderstandings of the coursework requirements, and a careful reading of the report will help all centres to avoid these sorts of difficulties in future sessions. In particular, centres must ensure that three texts are studied in full and explored thoroughly in the two tasks, one text in Task One for close passage study or recreative response (both of which should show awareness of the text as a whole as well as of the chosen extract), and two other texts in Task Two for comparison/contrast. Where centres are in any doubt about the design of their coursework unit, they should make use of advice from the coursework consultancy service which is, of course, still in operation in connection with both AS and A2 coursework units.

## F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945

### General Comments

Overall performance was impressive. Candidates (and centres) seem to have made the adjustment to the new specification with ease and in nearly every case there was a sense that candidates were comfortable with the rubric and requirements of the paper. There was a strong sense of enthusiasm for literary study in general and these texts in particular which was pleasing to note. In general candidates showed secure textual knowledge and not only an ability to discuss, analyse and argue but also a response to literary effects and an imaginative engagement with the ideas and themes presented to them. The best work was outstandingly good for AS Level: one examiner noted that it is 'too easy to overlook the brilliance and sophistication with which some candidates rise to the challenge of the questions'. The main drawbacks in weaker answers were a tendency to narrate, summarise or paraphrase rather than analysing and arguing critically, thoughtfully or appreciatively, and also an over-reliance on second-hand ideas from critics and notes which could sometimes divert students from the details of the poems or novel into mere generalisation. Those who could briefly and aptly quote from the set books themselves to make analytical points had a great advantage.

### Section A

Answers to the poetry questions usually made good use of the text supplied in the examination, and the most successful selected a good number of appropriate quotations and analysed them effectively to show how structure, form and language shape meaning. There is, however, a tendency for many candidates to go through the poem in a linear fashion, which can lead to a number of weaknesses in answers, including repetition, sliding into paraphrase rather than analysis, and even giving up before reaching the last lines of the poem (often a very fruitful source of material for analysis). Marks are available for good use of analytical methods, and candidates would be well advised to ensure that their answers are thoughtfully planned and offer an overview of the poem as well as detailed exploration of the text. As in January, there were still some answers which rather neglected the set poem, giving the impression that the writer was hoping for a different selection on the examination paper. Such answers often amounted to general poetry essays with only minimal reference to the set poem, which inevitably limited the mark they could achieve. Almost all candidates showed awareness that they should refer to additional poems, and good answers did this in a way which illuminated the reading of the set poem; others supplied what felt like prepared material, and seemed to be ticking a box rather than using their knowledge to shed light on their answer overall.

### Comments on individual questions

#### 1 Wordsworth: 'Old Man Travelling'

Though Wordsworth was something of a minority choice on the paper, this question was often well done by candidates who chose him. Good answers perceived interesting ambivalences in the poem: for example, "led by nature" may mean influenced by the natural world; alternatively it may be his own "nature" that leads him to "peace so perfect", beyond, or with no more need of, external influence. Many answers discussed the effects of the poem as if the revelation in the final lines were known to the reader from the beginning: these missed the dramatic value of the news about his son, which effectively sends the reader back into the poem with a radically amended view of the disposition of the old man, which had seemed to emphasise his inward concentration rather than any connection with the world outside. A few noted the structural similarity of 'St Paul's', where the perspective changes dramatically in the last six lines, again changing the whole effect of the poem when it is read a second time, in the light of what is

known to be coming. What was often particularly effective was sensitive attention to rhythm and verse effects such as the plodding motion of “in his face, his step,/ His gait” which many - including the following candidate - picked up: ‘Wordsworth’s verse enacts not only the events but also the whole impression they create on the observer and the reader’.

## 2 Rossetti: ‘Twice’

Again, Rossetti was a less popular choice of poet, but answers on ‘Twice’ were often successful and, more than those on other poems, seemed to move naturally into an examination of the poem’s structure. Most recognised the two-part arrangement of the poem as an examination first of human, then of divine love, and made some reference to the poem’s repeating patterns: relatively few candidates noticed the significance of the change in tense between the first part of the poem (‘I took my heart in my hand...’) and the second (‘I take my heart ...’). There was an interesting range of comments on the contrast picked out in the question, where brackets appear around the declaration of love for a man - ‘(O my love ...)’ - , which then disappear from the declaration of love for God - ‘O my God’. This change in punctuation was generally held to affect the tone of the poem, helping to differentiate the speaker’s approach to a human lover (variously found to be defensive, secretive or overwhelmed by a dominating masculine presence) and then to God (open, unrestrained, self-confident). Many answers speculated on a possible autobiographical aspect of this poem, making references to Rossetti’s disappointments in love. Comparisons with other poems were often thoughtful and precise, making good use of quotation: areas for discussion included Rossetti’s nature imagery which was shown to develop feelings of fragility (‘the falling leaf’) and death, here and in ‘A Better Resurrection’. One candidate noted that ‘The sap of Spring in the one poem is matched by the better love of God in the other’.

## 3 Owen: ‘Disabled’

As in January, Wilfred Owen was the most popular choice of poet in Section A, and examiners saw a wide range of answers on ‘Disabled’. Weaker answers tended to work through the poem in order privileging narrative concerns over poetic effects, almost as if this were prose rather than poetry. Better answers saw the poem as a whole, and were able to show how Owen contrasts the soldier’s past with his present as a way of showing how much has been lost. Most made comment on how war has aged the soldier before his time (‘his back will never brace’), and noted the irony of comparing his post-war condition, and the blood spurting from his thigh, with the ‘blood-smear’ of the football match. Many successfully used the ‘lie’ of his ‘nineteen years’ as a way to talk about the context of war propaganda, white feathers and Jessie Pope. The bitterness of the way in which ‘crowds cheer Goal’ more than ‘cheered him home’ was well covered, as was the ‘solemn man’ who ‘*Thanked*’ him’ with concern for his soul, as if, most speculated, he was being prepared for his death. Material on the form of the poem often lacked confidence, with candidates wrongly suggesting that it is written in ‘free verse’, or that it makes use of pararhyme (often giving ‘dark’ and ‘park’ as an example); these candidates had clearly learned material about poetic techniques without properly understanding it. Though references to other poems were dominated by ‘Dulce Et Decorum Est ...’, many answers showed an impressively thorough knowledge of the prescribed selection; it was noted, however, that descriptive accounts of other works sometimes swamped attention to ‘Disabled’ itself.

## 4 Frost: ‘After Apple-Picking’

Frost was studied by a significant number of candidates, and again there was a wide range of response. A number of candidates lost sight very quickly of the question, which focuses on making familiar things seem strange, and offered instead a generalised practical criticism of the poem. Others struggled even with surface meaning, and often moved quickly into discussing

alternative poems with which they felt more comfortable. Many saw the poem as entirely metaphorical, and there was an intriguing variety of interpretations focused on familiar subjects such as apples, hard work and sleep: areas for discussion included sex, the fall of man, the desire for heaven and the desire for - or the fear of - death. The best answers ensured a clear reading of the surface meaning of the poem, explaining that on the simplest level familiar things are made to seem strange because the speaker is looking at them through a sheet of ice which distorts his vision, and then offered some metaphorical possibilities in a sophisticated, appropriately tentative manner, allowing that the poem might retain the possibility of a range of readings. 'Birches' and 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' were most often used in contextual discussion, and it was often in this area that some of the best answers showed their sophistication; for example, 'Just like the speaker in 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening', Frost refuses to give into this state of chaos and unfamiliarity but instead acts against it by creating form in words in his poetry'.

## Section B

In January examiners often found that Section B was a little weaker than Section A, and felt that this usually could be explained by lack of time for candidates to become thoroughly familiar with the set novel. In this summer session, most candidates seemed to be better acquainted with the set text, and many could quote appropriately and with confidence not only from the set novel but also from additional reading, whether critical or comparative. There was still a minority of candidates who were not fully acquainted with the text, and this emerged most clearly in answers on *Wuthering Heights*, where some offered little or nothing on Volume II of the novel (the story of the second generation characters).

Centres and candidates seem to have settled very effectively into study of criticism and context surrounding the set novels, understanding that that this study is in support of the novel, and should not be allowed to dominate answers. There were some helpful references to the recommended support texts for Section B, but more often centres and candidates had researched and found criticism relating directly to the set text, which was often used to enable the fulfilment of Assessment Objective 3 ('informed by the interpretations of other readers'). AO3 was often satisfied equally well by candidates who were prepared to challenge the terms of the question and show their awareness that there could be more than one way of seeing the text. Some have started to offer filmed versions of the novel as 'the interpretations of other readers': this was at times an imaginative and successful approach, but candidates should be prepared to identify the film to which they refer (if only by the date of release), rather than simply referring to 'the movie'. The practice of referring to broad schools of criticism with labels such as 'Marxist' or 'feminist' seemed to be less common in this session than in January, and where it appeared was often handled better: for example, one examiner saw some convincing work citing a Marxist view of *Wuthering Heights*. However, there is still some reductive and poorly informed work in this area, especially relating to feminist criticism: some candidates seem to see this route as an easy option for fulfilling AO3, but should be aware that they need to be properly informed about different schools of criticism to be able to write either credibly or creditably about them.

## Comments on individual questions

### Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

Question 5(a) '*When she came to that part of the letter in which her family were mentioned, in terms of such mortifying yet merited reproach, her sense of shame was severe.*'

*How far and in what ways does Austen's presentation of Elizabeth's family suggest they deserve such strong criticism?*

The success of answers to this question depended partly on whether candidates registered the importance of 'Austen's presentation'. Almost all answers could manage a well organised

survey of family members and offer a series of judgements as to whether Elizabeth's shame was justified, but only better answers considered Austen's methods in presenting their behaviour (through their actions, dialogue, comments from the narrative voice, views offered by other characters etc). Likewise, weaker answers stuck to a list-like presentation which judged family members as either respectable and decent (Elizabeth, Jane, often Mr Bennet) or deserving of criticism (Mary, Kitty, Lydia, sometimes Mr Bennet, Mr Collins and - especially - Mrs Bennet). Better answers also sought to consider the family as a whole, and some showed awareness of the context of the letter which is mentioned in the quotation in the question; the very best were marked by a consideration of the extent to which Austen's characterisation of Elizabeth's family is either 'light and bright' or alternatively conceals 'a fierce moral anger'.

Question 5(b) '*We learn most about the characters in **Pride and Prejudice** when they meet on social occasions.*'

*In the light of this comment, discuss Austen's presentation of social gatherings in the novel.*

This question was the more popular of the two on *Pride and Prejudice*, and on the whole was better done. It was encouraging that the question was interpreted liberally and comment was not confined to the two balls: there were some excellent and perceptive comments, for example, on confrontations between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Austen's presentation of meetings with Mr Collins was also clearly enjoyed and appreciated, and there were useful references to social conventions, issues of rank, the influence of money and property and gender relations at the time of the novel. Many challenged the question successfully by arguing that social gatherings are used to set up misconceptions about characters, due to their formal and restrained nature, while the reader learns most about character from intimate conversations, letters and free-indirect speech. This approach had the added advantage of privileging Austen's methods in discussion, and meant that the quality of literary comment was often higher than in response to the (a) option.

### **Brontë: *Wuthering Heights***

Question 6(a) '*Heathcliff is more hero than villain.*'

*How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of Brontë's presentation of Heathcliff in **Wuthering Heights**?*

*Wuthering Heights* was a popular choice of text, and the (a) option was favoured by most candidates. There were cogent arguments and no unanimity about the question, which meant that many responses were able effectively to consider the differing views of other readers, either by quoting critics or by debating alternative reactions to aspects of the plot and the character. Some good answers noted that Heathcliff is presented in a way that makes different readings available; only a few mentioned the importance of the use of multiple narrators and how this adds to the variety of views presented in the novel. Much depended on how far candidates were able to focus on the terms of the question and avoid surrendering entirely to a different one (usually about how far Heathcliff deserves the reader's sympathy because of his childhood, his subjection by the Earnshaw family and his thwarted passions). In good answers, notions of heroism were often well explored with a mature awareness of Byronic or Romantic heroes and sometimes a link to Gothic influences. One view well argued was that 'there is arguably no hero and indeed no heroism in the novel, only a self-contained world of real human nature.' Some good writing also arose from comparisons between Heathcliff and Edgar Linton.

Question 6(b) '*An unexpectedly happy ending for such a disturbing story.*'

*How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of **Wuthering Heights**?*

This question was generally addressed with both textual detail and an intelligent overview of the pattern and structure of the novel. Sadly there were a few candidates who seemed ignorant of the second volume and neglected to mention the younger Cathy or Hareton; these candidates were mostly devoted to the triangular relationship between Cathy I, Heathcliff and Edgar Linton. AO3 was often particularly well addressed, with candidates anatomising the question with some rigour: most agreed that the story has its disturbing qualities, and could usually offer liberal

illustration in support of their views; there was less agreement about the happiness of the ending, and candidates offered some thoughtful and interesting analysis in this area. A number of centres made use of Lord David Cecil's 'storm and calm' criticism of the novel in their attempts to relate its 'disturbing' and 'happy' elements.

### **Hardy: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles***

Question 7(a) *'Once victim, always victim - that's the law.'*

*In the light of this remark, explore ways in which Hardy presents Tess's experiences in **Tess of the D'Urbervilles**.*

Tess was immensely popular, especially question (a). Candidates knew a lot about Tess as a tragic victim (with particularly poignant writing about the death of Prince) and the distinction between them was how far they were able to shape and control the mass of material quoted or referred to; the weakest responses turned into little more than a catalogue of Tess's sufferings. The more successful essays frequently took time to discuss different aspects of 'law': the judicial system, the law of God, laws of inheritance and property, social convention, and the inexorable laws of nature and fate. One candidate suggested that 'In Hardy's deterministic eyes this was never destined to end happily'. Surprisingly, perhaps, sympathy for the character of Tess was not always unqualified and she was criticised for her naivety and her willingness to subject herself to the power of men.

Question 7(b) *'Although **Tess of the D'Urbervilles** is often considered pessimistic, it contains much unexpected comedy.'*

*In the light of this comment, consider the significance of comedy in the novel as a whole.*

The few answers to the (b) question on comedy mostly referred to Tess's father in the opening of the novel, the girls in the dairy, and the way in which Hardy invites the reader to be amused by his depiction of Alec as the stereotypical villain. There was one particular response which was excellent in looking in some detail at the way subtle humour is present in undertone throughout a great deal of the book, in the way that Hardy-as-narrator offers comment – the somewhat mocking way Angel's playing of the harp is described, for example, or the choice of language used in describing Alec's conversion. Most examiners reported that they had seen no answers to this question, however.

### **Wharton: *The Age of Innocence***

Question 8(a) *'Ultimately a study in failure and frustration.'*

*How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of **The Age of Innocence**?*

Most examiners saw no work on Wharton, and the text was certainly the least popular: however, one examiner expressed disappointment at the low take-up since there were 'some fine answers' amongst the few he had seen, and suggested that 'it seems to be a text that brings out the best in bright candidates'. Most answered the (a) question on 'failure and frustration', and seemed to have a good knowledge of the text. Less successful answers rarely went beyond a listing of examples, rather than offering a critical argument, but better ones often chose to focus especially on the ending, and to consider how far Newland Archer's final avoidance of a meeting with Ellen Olenska represented failure and frustration, and how much a fitting and dignified conclusion to this intense and abortive relationship. May Welland was often cited as an example of a character who pursued what she wanted and got it, and was therefore afflicted with neither failure nor frustration.

Question 8(b) *Newland Archer says, 'Women ought to be free - as free as we are.'*

*How far and in what ways does your reading of **The Age of Innocence** suggest that the male characters are 'freer' than the female characters?*

This question attracted some splendid responses: almost all candidates seemed to pick up Newland Archer's unintended irony, and answers considered in detail the relative freedom of

male and female characters in old New York. There was thoughtful textual support offered, often showing real appreciation of Wharton's craft: some candidates noted Newland's relative freedom in occupying an entire floor of the family home, whereas his mother and sister were cramped into smaller quarters. Most found irony in Newland's stated view, judging that his interest in May is very controlling; some found a degree of poignancy in his self-deluded notion of his own freedom, in view of the fact that social forces prevent the fulfilment of his romance with Ellen. Knowledge of social context was important in these answers, and candidates generally showed themselves to be well-informed in this area.

### **Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby***

Question 9(a) *'In the novel, everything comes down to money.'*

*How far and in what ways do you think money is the central issue in **The Great Gatsby**?*

As in January, *The Great Gatsby* was the most popular prose text on the paper, so most examiners saw a lot of answers on this novel. Textual knowledge was often very good, and most candidates could supply ample illustration to back up their arguments: there were frequent references to conspicuous consumption, often at Gatsby's parties, and contrasting passages focusing on the poverty represented by the Valley of Ashes. Views differed widely about the importance of money: some answers concluded very quickly (often in the introduction) that money is the be-all and end-all for all of the characters, and that Gatsby's obsession with Daisy is only another expression of the desire for wealth - after all, 'her voice was full of money'; others made more of their AO3 opportunities by challenging the question's statement, and suggesting that Gatsby's 'romantic readiness' points the way to possibilities which are more than just financial. One candidate wrote that 'Daisy represents for Gatsby the green light at the end of her dock. She blossoms for Gatsby like America flowered for the (Dutch) sailors. The money is only a means to a poetic end.'

Question 9(b) *Nick Carraway says, 'Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply.' In the light of this comment, discuss ways in which Fitzgerald presents female characters in **The Great Gatsby**.*

This question was a little less popular than (a), but still attracted a good number of answers. The question is reproduced in full above to help demonstrate the most significant shortcoming in answers: many candidates wrote on the presentation of female characters without taking into account the quotation at the head of the question. It may be that candidates were not sufficiently clear about the import of the expression 'in the light of this comment', or otherwise it may be that they had prepared answers on the presentation of women in the novel and had not been sufficiently alert in the examination to adapt their material absolutely to the terms of the question. Such answers made little reference to dishonesty, and therefore limited the mark they could achieve. Even in better answers, few analysed fully what one attentive candidate referred to as 'Nick's patronising comment': does Nick's view represent the general view, or is he especially dismissive - or tolerant - of women, or of dishonesty? Are the women less honest than the men, or just less worthy of blame? All answers seemed to present quite a critical view of the female characters, but some were more inclined to offer supportive sympathy, sometimes by referring to what they saw as Fitzgerald's own 'sexist' views. Though most candidates acknowledged the importance of the first person narrative, very few appreciated how radical its importance is: Nick's early carelessness about dishonesty in women has undergone significant alteration by the end of the novel, but few candidates seemed to be alive to this change.

### **Waugh: *A Handful of Dust***

Question 10(a) *'Confused and apparently unable to love, Brenda is as much a victim as her husband Tony.'*

*How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of **A Handful of Dust**?*

One examiner suggested that 'this novel was the least popular book yet generated by far the best answers'. The (a) choice, about Brenda's possible victimhood, suggested that candidates had an informed understanding not only of the question but also of Waugh's biography: many related his treatment of Brenda to his marital difficulties with his first wife. Even weaker answers were usually competent, generally offering a straightforward reading of the novel that came down heavily on the side of sympathy for Tony rather than for his wife. His suffering was (unsurprisingly) judged to be greater than hers, especially when it comes to the ending of the novel. Some candidates, however, offered a more sympathetic view, and suggested that Brenda's opportunities and experiences are unfairly limited by her social milieu. Contextual discussion often referred to T S Eliot: for example, one candidate likened Brenda 'to the typist in *The Waste Land*, as they are both creatures of the modern world who lead empty relationships.'

Question 10(b) '*A comic novel with tragic undertones.*'

*How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of **A Handful of Dust**?*

This question on the balance in the novel between comedy and tragedy was excellently answered; the candidates were well aware of the implications of the question and argued a clear case. There were arguments for the reversal of the statement which drew relevantly on the text to justify this reversal: some clearly saw Tony's tragedy as being the more important theme. A number of thoughtful answers showed how some episodes of the novel offer comedy and tragedy simultaneously: for example Mrs. Beaver's reactions to the fire, Brenda's reaction to John Andrew's death and the circumstances of Tony's death. A few sophisticated responses explored the wider literary connotations of the terms 'comic' and 'tragic' as they relate to the novel. Context was generally very well handled: amongst other material, there were impressive social/historical insights; a relevant awareness of Waugh's biography; and, again, some pertinent and imaginative use of T S Eliot's *The Waste Land*: one candidate wrote that 'the reader is left with a very pessimistic view on the tragic failure of civilisation - one that is without morals or spirituality or, as Eliot put it, "a heap of broken images"'.

## F662 Literature post-1900

### General Comments

A new specification for English Literature and new coursework guidelines involve change and, more importantly, the matter of how to deal with it. Threat? Opportunity? Challenge? Source of wariness? Something to welcome? Something to fear?

While understandably a little apprehensive, the vast majority of centres seized the opportunity this session to refresh approaches, revitalise text selections and rework tasks. There was a real sense of teachers doing something different – in part because they had to, but also because they saw new possibilities and realised now was the time to make changes rather than have change visited upon them. Certainly more centres than ever engaged with the recreative alternative in Task One, which showed that the English 21 creativity debate had been inspiring and influential. The comparative discussion necessary for Linked Texts allowed for interesting text combinations and fascinating explorations into complementary literature, intertextuality and striking contrasts in the treatment of themes and ideas.

The Task Two Linked Texts piece, as a folder item, may not have arrived perfectly formed, but we have every confidence that centres will make improvements and ‘tweak’ their practice. For the first year, the primary demand of comparison and many of the demands of recreative writing were in the main squarely met, and in some cases most impressively delivered. These are two elements of Literature Post 1900 that are transforming the study of English Literature and show centres taking the subject in new and exciting directions.

These areas will receive more space later in the report; before then it is relevant to spend more time considering the range of texts seen and how it has opened up the field of literary study.

### Choice of texts

In terms of novels studied, many centres are heading towards Margaret Atwood (*The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*) and Ian McEwan (*Enduring Love* and *Atonement*) and E.M. Forster (*A Passage to India*, *A Room with a View*) and Kazuo Ishiguro (*Remains of the Day*, *Never Let Me Go*). In terms of single texts, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *The Go-Between*, *The Color Purple*, *Beloved*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Rebecca*, *1984*, *Brave New World*, *The Bell Jar*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, *Wise Children*, *The Woman in Black*, *Regeneration*, *Birdsong*, *American Psycho*, *The Life of Pi*, *Scoop*, *The God of Small Things*, *The Member of the Wedding*, *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, *Catch 22*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *Reading in the Dark*, *Slaughterhouse 5*, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* remain popular. Newer prose texts of choice are *The Kite Runner*, *Spies*, *Time’s Arrow*, *Small Island*, *Notes On A Scandal*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *The Road*, *The Night Watch*, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, *Engleby*, *Charlotte Gray*, *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, *Disgrace*, *The Lovely Bones*, and *Vernon God Little*. Texts such as *Angels and Saints*, *Friendly Fire*, *Notes From An Exhibition*, *The Space Between Us*, *The Long Winter*, *Towards the End of the Morning*, *The Restraint of Beasts*, *No Country for Old Men*, and *Snow Crash* further emphasised the movement away from texts that might be perceived as the new canon; we hope centres continue to experiment, either with Booker shortlists or popular texts or by dusting off texts and writers that may seem out of fashion (- what is the status of DH Lawrence these days?).

Short stories were not much favoured, although *The Bloody Chamber*, *Dubliners*, *Short Cuts* and *Close Range* were in evidence.

## Report on the Units taken in June 2009

Drama was well represented by the work of Pinter, Stoppard, Williams and Miller. *Translations*, *Playhouse Creatures*, *Top Girls*, *Journey's End*, *Oleanna*, *Closer*, *Equus*, *True West*, *Waiting for Godot* and *Our Country's Good* might be the only plays written by their respective playwrights given how frequently these choices turned up. Some centres picked up suggestions in the INSET advice by running very successfully with *The Cut* and *How Many Miles to Basra?* Others went for their own choices: *The Pain and the Itch*, *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* and *My Boy Jack*. It is interesting to see who isn't getting much coverage – the likes of Ayckbourn, Rattigan and Coward; all dramatists whose work one is likely to see at a local theatre. This observation leads on to another point: a good DVD might be a centre's preferred mode of reception. This fact may account for the widespread adoption of Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* this session, easily the favourite drama text with centres.

By far the most popular text with centres this session, however, was *The World's Wife* by Carol Ann Duffy. Her *Mean Time* was also frequently used and *Rapture* and *The Other Country* a few times. Other poets seen were T.S. Eliot, W.B Yeats, Thomas Hardy (please be careful with dates here; not all his work is post 1900), Philip Larkin, Seamus Heaney (usually represented by *Death of a Naturalist* or *Selected Poems*: what about his later stuff?), Ted Hughes (many centres going with *Birthday Letters*), Sylvia Plath, Dylan Thomas, Simon Armitage (but not in terms of a published collection of his work), Siegfried Sassoon. Centres were less experimental in the area of poetry, however: Owen Sheers, Benjamin Zephaniah and Anne Sexton were the more unusual choices.

Many centres had clearly used the OCR Coursework Guidance and commonly studied areas were Growing Up, After the Great War, Love, Things Fall Apart and Dystopia. Other centres have taken up the baton for themselves. The children's fiction suggestions provided - Philip Pullman and Geoffrey Household - were dismissed for the likes of *How I Live Now*, *The Hobbit*, *Goodnight Mr Tom*, various *Harry Potters*, *Noughts and Crosses*, *Junk*, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, *Stone Cold*, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, *Stardust*, *Twilight* and an assortment of Terry Pratchetts. This raises the question: are these texts of the required literary weight and appropriate merit? Possibly not in their own right, but, if the tasks set are sufficiently taxing, they could be made to be part of a demanding unit; it depends what centres make of the opportunity and how they challenge their students. An interesting set of texts coalesced around the theme of mental health: novels by Kesey and Plath as one might expect, but the plays *The Hothouse* and *blue/orange* and non-fiction such as *Girl Interrupted* also figured.

Non-fiction indeed was not widely read, but *Dispatches*, *The Peregrine*, *The Lost Boy*, *The Bookseller of Kabul* and *Midnight in the Garden of Evil* were observed.

Similarly, film and TV scripts did not prove popular, surprisingly, although *Apocalypse Now*, *Talking Heads* (interestingly *Talking Heads 2* was more popular than Bennett's first set of dramatic monologues for television this time) and *My Beautiful Launderette* all were used to good effect.

Foreign literature, available to the specification once more, was perhaps predictably represented by the likes of *All Quiet On the Western Front*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The House of Bernada Alba*.

Works of cultural commentary were very thin on the ground.

Overall, then, the selection of texts gave some encouraging evidence of experimentation and of centres challenging the boundaries, but it is early days for the unit: there is more to come and certainly texts that do not fit into the three main literary genres could be better represented - and might well appeal to certain candidates.

A fuller list of texts studied in this session is provided as an appendix to this report.

### Task One - Close Passage Study

The more widely chosen option for Task One was the close passage study, which was not always approached as ambitiously as might have been hoped. Although a small number of centres provided a variety of assignments and passages for consideration and had framed tasks to allow for coherent well-structured argument, rather too many used a generalised single task, which did not give candidates the opportunity to match disparate points to an overarching argument, nor their own interests in a text to a question that they could own. A number of candidates addressed a task such as “write a critical appreciation”, which directed them to simply analyse form, structure and language – either implicitly (as in this wording) or explicitly (by adding “which focuses on matters of style and organisation” or something similar) – rather than to look at such concerns and do something with them such as evaluate a writer’s success or test a proposition or come at the text from a particular angle. Centres are reminded that in the mark scheme that one of the strands of AO1 achieved at Band 5 level is the provision of “argument” [*sic*], whereas lower in the assessment scale this aspect is present in the form of “arguments”: separate points and apperceptions which do not quite gel or are not organised into a shaped whole - a key discriminator between Bands 4 and 5!

Another recurring weakness with the Critical Piece option was a failure to study a passage or representative text *in the context of the wider text* from which it was taken. More often than not, this breach took the form of an analysis of a single poem without reference to the collection from which it derived, although extracts from plays and novels were sometimes narrowly viewed with candidates almost predicting other events and developments rather than having an informed overview or getting bogged down reading too much into a passage and thereby not seeing the wood for the trees. Put pragmatically, links need to be made to the wider text - intratextuality needs to be observed - if candidates are seeking high marks; the specification demands the study of three whole texts (two in Task Two and one in Task One). Meeting this reading requirement should be a key feature of questions/instructions for this item and centres that need help in this area should contact the coursework consultancy service, which will give advice on how early ideas for close passage study might be developed and the range and scope of tasks extended.

### Task One - Re-creative

It was pleasing to see a large number of recreative responses, often imaginative and very lively. When handled confidently, many of these were highly successful and the additional text produced demonstrated a strong understanding of an author’s vocabulary and style. Moderators had mixed experiences of accompanying commentaries, however:

“[Some] students were able to explain clearly in the commentary how their recreation reflected the aims and style of the original text. The better commentaries quoted from both their own recreation and the original text in order to make clear links and analyses of the author’s style and purposes in the original text, and the candidates’ understanding of these.”

“[In other cases] the accompanying commentary was not successful. In some cases, it was very short and seemed to be an afterthought, while many candidates demonstrated a keen critical awareness of their own writing, rather than that of the original text. Very few commentaries that I saw went back to the original text in any detail to demonstrate what the candidate had been attempting to imitate.”

These comments raise a number of issues, which will be addressed, but first it must be stressed that recreative work is now a very popular option and a potentially very strong part of a candidate’s folder submission. This constitutes a substantial and very swift sea change in teaching and practice. Obviously INSET and teaching materials have played their part here, but the enthusiasm of teachers and the engagement of students with creative approaches to literature deserve acknowledgement. This is positive development, which - like the spirit of adventure towards text selection - we hope will flourish.

How, then, can Recreative Writing improve still further?

- 1) Candidates need to be clear in their own minds what recreative writing is. There is a clue in the term itself. It recreates the world of the text – that is, the emotional, psychological, stylistic world. It is closest to imitative writing (although that might lead to mere pastiche), might figure as adaptive writing, but is some way removed from text transformation and not at all like original writing.
- 2) Centres aiming at 1000 words for this Task One option should be very strict with their candidates: 300 words for the text, 700 words for the commentary; or, if allowing 1200 words, then 400 should be for text and 800 for commentary.
- 3) Commentaries need to focus on stylistic choices made to achieve an authentic recreation; this has two strands – what is achieved in the text produced and how those elements fit in with the style and concerns of the original text as a whole. Ideally the latter should have a localised focus (how the recreative writing works at a particular point alongside the area of the original text that inspired this new composition) and a global focus (how the text produced could be seen as part of the overall pattern and achievement of the base text). Close contextualisation/response to immediate details in terms of a stimulus poem or a specific chapter or scene and how the text produced is characteristic of the text and writer in more broad terms need to be covered.
- 4) AO2 is dominant for this item so the concentration of the writing should be on matters of form, structure and language rather than of character, plot and theme. These can be mentioned and credited, but count as knowledge of the text (AO1), which is not as heavily weighted for this piece.
- 5) A candidate needs a task with a clear outcome and critical focus, rather than being allowed a more open-ended title. Centres may find a bullet point system useful, although this is not essential.

### **Task Two - Linked Texts**

The other area of major change in AS coursework is Task Two, the Linked Texts piece. Sustained comparative writing at this level is a new challenge for 17 year olds and one that has been firmly met both by the students themselves and their teachers. On the whole, candidates this session showed a confident ability to move between their texts, with very few writing in effect two separate but occasionally linked essays on their individual texts. Many moved fluently and coherently within paragraphs and even within sentences, demonstrating a real skill of a sort rarely seen in the past at A2, let alone AS. This constitutes a major achievement for the specification and for the centres and candidates who follow it.

Not all moderators reported that the linking of texts had been well done, however, and the following comment gives warning that there is still work to be done in this area:

“There were differing approaches to the comparative task in Task Two answers. At the upper end of the mark range, some candidates maintained a consistently integrated comparison of the two texts, while others firmly established the ground with the first text before opening up the comparison by dealing with the second text clearly in the light of the first. Both of these structures were successful. Far less successful were those essays which restricted the comparison to the first and final paragraphs, with two separate discussions of the texts in between. Other essays regularly switched text in each paragraph, but did not draw out the comparison, save for the occasional ‘on the other hand’. The real issue here was, it seemed, candidates’ and centres’ failure to realise the dominance of AOs 3 and 4, with candidates being highly rewarded for work with only passing gestures at context and often no real engagement at all with other readings.”

It is, indeed, the assessment objectives here that should inform the teaching and the candidates at the time of composition.

AO1 is worth 5 marks: Tight essay structure, accurate expression, sharp terminology in an ongoing and slanted argument are required here. Quality of Written Communication and appropriate scholarly format (footnotes and bibliography) can also be included as a consideration.

AO3 has two strands – comparison (or contrast) and alternative readings. Approaches to comparison have been supplied at INSET and thoughts on the hierarchy of potential skills are hinted at above. The latter aspect of this assessment objective, however, also needs consideration. At a low level, ‘other readings’ might be supplied by York Notes Advanced, websites and/or reviews; at a higher level secondary critical texts and literary theory might prove the way forward. Books and websites consulted should be referenced in a bibliography. However, to obtain a good mark, what is being sought is not reference to some weighty tome or abstruse theory, or long list of texts at the end of the essay, but clear *engagement* with a critical view. Many candidates did not really observe this strand at all; however, the vast majority tried to meet it by citing a critic or quoting a view. It must be stressed that mere citation, rather than consideration of the opinion expressed or analysis of the stance taken, is unlikely to score well, either. Centres should push their candidates towards teasing out the validity of an opinion or position on a text, rather than hoping this assessment objective will be met by implication. One moderator had this to say: “Centres may need to bear in mind that there is always an evaluative element to the consideration of alternative interpretations and it is not an invitation for speculation. It surprises me that more centres are not promoting frameworks as a springboard for an argument (feminist, Marxist, new historicist, archetypal, cultural materialist, post-colonial, etc) as a means of linking the texts in Task Two. Some candidates can flounder when told to ensure that critical readings are embedded into an argument and a way round this is to photocopy a couple of critical extracts to evaluate in class discussion alongside the text itself.” Good advice indeed!

AO4 offers a very healthy approach to context – in effect, any type of context is acceptable *provided that* it is made to count and evaluated. In these last two respects, candidates certainly need to recognise that 10 marks are available for this assessment objective. Too many seem to have assumed that a liberal definition of context means its presence will be taken as read even if very little explicit contextual material exists. This is not the case: the impact of contextual factors on the texts and task under discussion is being tested and needs to be included. At the other extreme, some candidates offload context in a most unhelpful way as a wodge of biographical or social historical background before the business of setting up a thesis begins; such ‘tag-on’ context is inevitably disconnected from the thrust of the essay and, although gaining token credit under AO4, affects the AO1 achievement of the essay. Something else that should be guarded against is sociological or cultural arguments that distract the candidate from literary study. However, a good number of candidates had success giving literary contexts (genre concerns, mention of other writers within the same field, reference to other works by the same writer), and the emergence of letters and correspondence as a way of providing contextual insight is an interesting development that a small number of centres have championed.

### **Presentation and Administration**

This session, a few centres had problems with interpretation of the specification; these were dealt with sympathetically. However, it is expected that for future sessions, all centres will have a clear understanding of the requirements, assisted by the provision of INSET, the consultancy service, centre reports and reports such as this.

The coursework consultancy service is, of course, free of charge and a number of centres have availed themselves of this opportunity already; indeed, some centres sent along email evidence to this effect or added comments to top sheets to show they had considered options for their candidates. It is hoped more centres will try out ideas or seek clarification in this way, although

some pieces of guidance which relate to the points raised above crop up with marked regularity: that centres should provide a range of tasks to facilitate differentiation in the responses and marking and to aid candidate ownership of the text studied; that one poem may be studied for Task One but that there should be a sense of a wider body of poems and specific mention of three or four other poems; that for Task Two: Linked Texts, the expectation is that fifteen to twenty poems be studied and that candidates might mention as many as eight in an answer, closely analysing at least three; that tasks should give candidates something to argue; that bullet points can be very useful in task setting to draw attention to the task's AO requirements.

Some candidates in this session submitted only two texts and had the same text in Task Two as in Task One; some had studied three texts but demonstrated knowledge of only two; and some seemed to perceive coursework as a mirror of F661, with an untested although often cited (on the coversheet) critical work as the third text. To clarify: **three texts need to have been taught and need to be written upon**. These texts should have been fully read and the tasks constructed by the centre should allow candidates to show whole text knowledge both in Task One and Task Two. The same text can occur in Task Two as in Task One, but will most probably count as literary context (AO4) rather than a text satisfying the three texts reading requirement. Critical works can count as one of the Linked Texts pieces, but the text needs to be treated as an equal partner in the discussion not as a reading of the other text (AO3) or the context for discussion (AO4); this will probably involve looking at details of construction or organisation of the critical text rather than just its thematic content.

Aspects of centre administration still in need of improvement – though frequently mentioned in reports on previous specifications – include:

- sending work and accompanying documentation by the deadline. This year an email request system operated via OCR Interchange and some centres seemed slow to access this or even to be unaware of the new procedure waiting to be reminded verbally and claiming they had received no call for folders.
- top sheets sketchily filled in, with missing text, task and candidate details as the most commonly observed errors. This information is very useful to moderators and lack of it slows down the process. It would be good if centres indicated on the top sheet which of the texts is post 1990.
- folder totals that are different from the sum of the marks on the two separate items. These will be seen as addition errors unless a reason for the difference is given in the summative comment box. Of course, marks can be adjusted as a result of internal moderation, but this needs to be documented so it is not perceived as a mistake.
- annotation of essays for assessment objective achievement – ideally in the margin and at the end of the essay. Moderators look for statements about the type of achievement rather than just numbers: eg “sophisticated comparison (AO3)” or “evaluation of writer’s life (AO4)”
- provision of extracts for both types of Task One piece - as required by the specification and indicated on the cover-sheet.

Despite these reminders, it must be stressed that this has been a very successful session and, as this Report has been at pains to point out, AS coursework presents itself at its best as something fresh and invigorating. To say this is not merely an attempt to make a new thing a great thing, but to reflect a feeling shared by many moderators:

“Moderating work on this unit has been a fascinating and almost entirely enjoyable experience.”

“My overall feeling is that centres generally engaged well with the new specification and I encountered very few problems with interpretation or implementation.”

*Report on the Units taken in June 2009*

“It was clear from the folders that most candidates had worked diligently, and been enabled to produce the best work of which they were individually capable. I found the process went well – I really enjoyed it!”

“this AS unit . . . opens the gate to reading numerous traditional and later texts, for significant depth of study and innovative approaches across all tasks. The scope and breadth available to teachers here is impressive and refreshing.”

Although this report has had to mention areas for improvement and reproof for the very small number of centres who ignored advice, instruction, common sense and deadlines, there is no doubt that F662 is a big move forward for coursework and that we are at the beginning of a unit that will reinvent the way texts are taught and studied. We look forward to the next session.

**Appendix of Texts Referenced (alphabetically by title)**

1984	George Orwell
All Quiet On the Western Front	Erich Maria Remarque
American Psycho	Bret Easton Ellis
Angels and Saints	Dale Chihuly
Apocalypse Now (Heart of Darkness)	Joseph Conrad
Atonement	Ian McEwan
The Bell Jar	Sylvia Plath
Beloved	Toni Morrison
Birdsong	Sebastian Faulks
The Bloody Chamber	Angela Carter
The Bookseller of Kabul	Åsne Seierstad
The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas	John Boyne
Blue/Orange	Joe Penhall
Brave New World	Aldous Huxley
Catch 22	Joseph Heller
The Catcher in the Rye	J. D. Salinger
Charlotte Gray	Sebastian Faulks
Close Range	Annie Proulx
Closer	Patrick Marber
The Color Purple	Alice Walker
The Cut	Mark Ravenhill
Disgrace	J. M. Coetzee
Dispatches	Michael Herr
Dubliners	James Joyce
Enduring Love	Ian McEwan
Engleby	Sebastian Faulks
Equus	Peter Shaffer
The French Lieutenant's Woman	John Fowles
Friendly Fire	Patrick Gale
Girl Interrupted	Susanna Kaysen
Girl with a Pearl Earring	Tracy Chevalier
The Go-Between	L.P. Hartley
The God of Small Things	Arundhati Roy
Goodnight Mr Tom	Michelle Magorian
The Grapes of Wrath	John Steinbeck
The Handmaid's Tale	Margaret Atwood
Harry Potters	J. K. Rowling
The History Boys	Alan Bennett
The Hobbit	J. R. R. Tolkien
The Hothouse	Harold Pinter
The House of Bernada Alba	Federico Garcia Lorca
How I Live Now	Meg Rosoff
How Many Miles to Basra?	Colin Teevan
Journey's End	R. C. Sherriff
Junk	Melvin Burgess
The Kite Runner	Khaled Hosseini
The Life of Pi	Yann Martel
The Long Winter	Laura Ingalls Wilder
The Lost Boy	Dave Pelzer
The Lovely Bones	Alice Sebold
Mean Time	Carol Ann Duffy
The Member of the Wedding	Carson McCullers
Midnight in the Garden of Evil	John Berendt

*Report on the Units taken in June 2009*

My Beautiful Laundrette	Hanif Kureishi
My Boy Jack.	David Haig
My Name Is Rachel Corrie	Rachel Corrie
Never Let Me Go	Kazuo Ishiguro
The Night Watch	Sergei Lukyanenko
No Country for Old Men	Cormac McCarthy
Notes From An Exhibition	Patrick Gale
Notes On A Scandal	Zoë Heller
Noughts and Crosses	Malorie Blackman
Oleanna	David Mamet
One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest	Ken Kesey
One Hundred Years of Solitude	Gabriel García Márquez
Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit	Jeanette Winterson
Oryx and Crake	Margaret Atwood
Our Country's Good	Thomas Keneally
The Pain and the Itch	Bruce Norris
A Passage to India	E.M. Forster
The Peregrine	John Alec Baker
Playhouse Creatures	Albie Sachs
The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie	Muriel Spark
A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man	Stephen Hero
Reading in the Dark	Seamus Deane
Rebecca	Daphne Du Maurier
Regeneration	Pat Barker
Remains of the Day	Kazuo Ishiguro
The Restraint of Beasts	Magnus Mills
The Road	Cormac McCarthy
A Room with a View	E.M. Forster
The Space Between Us	Craig Armstrong
Scoop	Evelyn Waugh
A Series of Unfortunate Events	Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler)
Short Cuts	Raymond Carver
Slaughterhouse 5	Kurt Vonnegut
Small Island	Andrea Levy
Snow Crash	Neal Stephenson
Spies	Michael Frayn
Stardust	Neil Gaiman
Stone Cold	Robert Swindells
Talking Heads	Alan Bennett
Top Girls	Caryl Churchill
A Thousand Splendid Suns	Khaled Hosseini
Time's Arrow	Martin Amis
Towards the End of the Morning	Michael Frayn
Translations	Brian Friel
True West	Sam Shepard
Twilight	Stephenie Meyer
Vernon God Little	DBC Pierre
Waiting for Godot	Samuel Beckett
We Need to Talk About Kevin	Lionel Shriver
Wide Sargasso Sea	Jean Rhys
Wise Children	Angela Carter
The Woman in Black	Susan Hill
The World's Wife	Carol Ann Duffy

# Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE English Literature (H071 H471)  
June 2009 Examination Series

## Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
F661	Raw	60	50	43	37	31	25	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
F662	Raw	40	33	28	24	20	16	0
	UMS	80	64	56	48	40	32	0

## Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
H071	200	160	140	120	100	80	0

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

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
H071	22.9	44.3	67.9	86.0	95.8	100.0	7078

## 7078 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

[http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums\\_results.html](http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html)

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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