

English Literature

Advanced GCE **A2 H471**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H071**

Examiners' Reports

June 2011

HX71/R/11

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Chief Examiner Report

This June once more saw an increase in entries for all components, and Principal Moderators and Examiners were unanimous in their view that the quality of responses from candidates continues to improve. As ever, there has been some deeply impressive work at the top end, showing a thoroughness of knowledge and research but also, in the very best work, imagination and a lightness of touch. Examiners have also noticed improvements lower down the ability range, however, with an increased confidence of approach and an improved technique; very few examination candidates are now falling into the trap of providing narrative responses, for example.

There are areas for improvement identified in the reports on each unit which follow, of course. In both coursework units, moderators have noticed an increase of submissions which are over length, and have therefore been sent back to centres for re-marking up to the 3,000 word limit. Centres and candidates are strongly advised to ensure that this limit is observed; the new coursework cover sheets have spaces for candidates to declare a word count both with and without quotation, which should help to focus attention on this important requirement.

In the examined units, there has been an imbalance in some work between knowledge *of* the text and knowledge *about* the text. Examiners have suggested that some candidates are too concerned with fulfilling Assessment Objectives, and have become inclined to offload learned material especially in relation to criticism and context, sometimes at the expense of a detailed response to the primary text. Candidates are advised to ensure a thorough understanding of the criticism and context which they learn, but to remember that knowledge and understanding of the primary text should be their priority.

Finally, centres are reminded that January 2012 will be the last opportunity for candidates to sit F661 with the original set texts; those studying the new list will need to wait for June before they have an opportunity for examination. Centres may need to revise their coursework choices in the light of changes to the set text list; as ever, the Coursework Consultancy is available to advise.

F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945

General Comments

This is the last summer session on the first group of set texts (the very last session will be January 2012), and, perhaps as a result of familiarity with the material, most centres and candidates handled the paper with confidence. One examiner reported that 'nearly all candidates demonstrated real engagement with the set texts and presented impressive skills of essay construction. In particular, nearly all candidates are now adept at addressing linguistic matters in the poetry questions (AO2) and critical issues in the questions on the novel (AO3)'. Examiners still noticed some weaknesses similar to those in previous sessions (too much historical/biographical context in Section A; a tendency towards narrative answers in Section B), but these are becoming less common; more candidates than ever seem to have a well-grooved examination technique, and there is very little evidence that requirements for the paper have been misunderstood.

In some cases, however, the 'well-grooved technique' can lead to answers which are rather formulaic, and over-reliant on a desire to 'tick all the boxes'. Teachers and candidates should be aware that examiners judge the overall quality of an answer first, before fine-tuning the mark according to performance against the Assessment Objectives. Therefore, a candidate who prioritises Assessment Objectives over the requirement to produce a thoughtful and imaginative answer to the question may be disappointed in his/her final mark. Many answers this session featured a range of contextual or critical points which did little to advance the argument or illuminate the answer, and had sometimes been apparently misunderstood by the candidate. The best work, in contrast, showed an impressive knowledge of the primary text, and an ability to refer briefly and cogently to telling and relevant contextual information or other interpretations of the text in the service of answering the question.

Comments on Individual Questions

1 William Wordsworth: 'The Tables Turned'

There was some perceptive work on 'The Tables Turned', one candidate remarking that, for Wordsworth, 'nature is not only something that is there in life, but is something one can live one's life by'. Most answers made comparative points about 'Expostulation and Reply', but candidates who chose other poems for comparative analysis were able to achieve their effects just as successfully. Contextual information (for example about Hazlitt and Romanticism) was often well-used, especially where it led candidates back into the poem under discussion. Many answers presented personal responses to the 'books vs. nature' debate considered in the set poem. Some linguistic analysis was imprecise; as ever, terms such as 'blank verse' tended to be employed without sufficient clarity of understanding. Several answers noted the irony of writing a poem against books, but many saw this as no contradiction where books stand for learned tomes, pure reason, unimaginative education or the Enlightenment. One candidate wrote that 'Wordsworth believed that education corrupts humans ... effectively disconnecting them from Nature, which is why he so admired rustic figures like Simon Lee and the illogical son in 'Anecdote for Fathers'.

2 Christina Rossetti: 'Echo'

Most candidates engaged well with the question on the presentation of longing in 'Echo', and often seemed personally touched by the poem; one examiner reported that she had seen some 'startlingly sensitive responses'. Many answers dealt extensively with sound and phonological elements, arguing strongly for the effectiveness of elongated vowel sounds, sibilants and plosives within the context of a poem titled 'Echo'. Likewise, better candidates explored formal features at some length – anaphora, repetition, line length and 'echoed' language were common features of strong answers. Biographical detail was successfully incorporated into good responses: ideas relating to 'soul sleep', pre-Raphaelite art and religious belief were dealt with succinctly and appropriately. 'A Better Resurrection' and 'Shut Out' were alluded to in most responses. Some candidates chose to interpret the poem as an expression of 'longing' for lost youth or a miscarried child – these were generally less successful responses. Many candidates dealt maturely and confidently with the poem's sexual imagery and ideas, especially within the context of Victorian repression, and read the poem as a lament for a lost/dead lover.

3 Wilfred Owen: 'Apologia pro Poemate Meo'

Answers were seen right across the mark range. Clearly this is a poet who continues to inspire and astound candidates: their own views about war and its injustices are rarely far from the surface of answers. There was quite a lot of misunderstanding about the meaning of the title of the poem. Some candidates chose to write comparatively about 'Dulce et Decorum Est' 'because it is also a Latin poem'. Biographical material continued to play an important role in many answers; as in previous sessions this tended to be generalised and was sometimes incorrect. The best answers made reference to linguistic techniques employed in the poem with considerable sophistication. There was some surprising confusion between pararhyme and full rhyme, too many claiming that this poem employed pararhyme to create a feeling of camaraderie and protection. However, most candidates answered well on this question and suggested that 'Apologia pro Poemate Meo' emphasises some positive aspects of comradeship, thus offering a more 'optimistic' perspective than Owen's other poems. One excellent answer concluded that 'Owen depicts comradeship as a tangible and unwavering faith, perhaps a concept which replaced his (earlier) beliefs'.

4 Robert Frost: 'A Leaf Treader'

Frost was a popular option this session. Candidates approached 'A Leaf Treader' with confidence and generally with a clear sense of their own personal response to the work. The more discerning moved beyond the mere passing of seasons in relation to his own aging and life in general and began exploring the ways in which Frost identified the meaning of time for others: human frailty, human strength and the ways in which characters can imprint themselves on time through settings or objects.

Effective comparisons were made with many other poems by Frost (often including works not on the set list); 'After Apple-Picking' was probably the most popular choice. Most candidates had something to say about the context of the poem and the life of the poet, but this was usually kept in proportion. Tiredness with life and the draw of death were often discussed, especially with reference to 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'. For the best and for lesser candidates, this was a fruitful poem for discussion, and many enjoyed tracing its verbal effects: for example, one candidate wrote that 'The witty rewording of 'man to man' as 'leaf to leaf' links the narrator with nature, in their common thirst for breaking free'; another writer saw 'leaf to leaf' as playing on 'heart to heart'.

Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

Question 5(a)

*Charlotte Lucas says 'Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance.'
In the light of her remark, discuss Austen's presentation of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice*.*

Pride and Prejudice was as popular as ever, and this question was by far the more popular of the two. Good answers examined a range of contrasting unions within the novel: most answers looked at Elizabeth and Darcy, the Bennets, Lydia and Wickham, and Charlotte and Collins. There was also some thoughtful discussion of the Gardiners and Lady Catherine in better answers. Following the general pattern with questions like this, weaker answers tended to list the marriages in the novel in linear fashion and comment on them with competence. Better answers looked at marriage more generally and synthesised a sophisticated answer which focused specifically on the element of chance, the best answers usually shaping their arguments around the use of the word 'entirely' in the quotation in the question. Charlotte Lucas herself often stood at the centre of answers. The question offered many opportunities to consider contextual (social) factors, and many candidates were clearly confident in writing about gender roles and class in the Regency period. There was some good use of secondary material, with frequent references to critical comments from Martin Amis and David Lodge, amongst others.

Question 5(b)

*'In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen's satire is always tinged with cruelty.'
How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?*

There were very few answers to this question. One examiner reported that 'some candidates tended to veer away from 'satire' in its strictest sense – there was relevant, appropriate discussion of humour, wit and irony, but only the best answers offered a full understanding of the term 'satire' as well as its functions'. Answers to both questions made references to dramatisations of the novel, especially screen versions; this was helpful where the features or interpretations referenced were made relevant to the argument of the answer.

Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*

Question 5(b)

*The most significant family relationships in *Wuthering Heights* are those between fathers and their children.*

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?

As ever, answers on *Wuthering Heights* tended to present passionate and individual views about the novel with strong feelings being offered about the characters and their situations. Candidates were well prepared to answer on a range of relationships. One examiner found that 'candidates tended to reshape the question by outlining a series of paternal or quasi-paternal relationships and saying they were important but going on to other relationships – particularly that between Heathcliff and Cathy – which they considered were more important. This could seem contrived but many candidates managed to balance and integrate the argument very well. There was plenty of feminist discussion and an interesting focus on the influence of the lack of maternal relationships in the novel. Fathers and children tended to be the focus less than families (or even relationships) in general; sometimes this prevented answers from reaching their full potential. Some answers explored less expected family relationships (or "surrogate relationships") and some candidates used Freudian theories of child/parent relationships to good effect.

Question 6(b)

'The most significant contrast in the novel is that between the two houses, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?

This was a popular question which seemed to encourage candidates to bring in a range of themes, different critical theories and methods. Attention to the word *most* and to the ways in which a contrast can be *significant* were often discriminators between good work and that which was only competent. One examiner saw 'some lovely work on the contrast between Victorian certainties and Brontë's ambiguity, as well as the more expected contrast between the Romantic and the Gothic. One candidate wrote about the conflict between the political and the imaginative in the novel. Another excellent answer suggested that "the contrast between the narrative voices can be read as a further contrast of Heights and Grange, and reflects the intricate construction of the nested narrative"'. Lord David Cecil and Charlotte Brontë were frequently presented as critical voices, the former usually in references to a contrast between 'storm' and 'calm'.

Thomas Hardy: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Question 7(a)

'Throughout the novel Hardy presents romantic love as a source of delusion, pain and even ruin.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of Tess of the D'Urbervilles?

Tess was a moderately popular choice this session (although perhaps less so than in recent sessions). Answers tended to be divided equally between the two options. Most candidates took the negative view of love in the novel, and many presented a (moderately successful) chronological list of painful events. Once again, better answers presented a more complete thesis which drew effectively on the novel's events and concerns and made reference to a range of critical views. The ideas that "love will triumph" and "love conquers all" were expressed by more than one candidate. All candidates engaged with the ideas of 'pain' and 'ruin' in the question, but only the best tackled 'delusion' as well. One candidate offered a very thoughtful conclusion, showing a rare precision and quality of reflection: 'In conclusion, *romanticised love* and not *romantic love* could be perceived to be the root cause of Angel's deluded perception of Tess and therefore his refusal to accept her as a real woman'.

Question 7(b)

'Hardy's creative use of coincidence is central to the novel's effects.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of Tess of the D'Urbervilles?

A substantial number of candidates chose this question. Some explored coincidence – with considerable sophistication – as a central feature of the novel (and, indeed, 'western literature') and went on to explore the ways in which this aspect affects plot, characterisation and use of language. As ever with the 'How far and in what ways' type of question, some candidates chose to ignore the exact wording of the question and therefore penalised themselves by providing a more generalised answer. A handful of candidates did latch on to the word 'creative' and used it as a starting point from which to consider Hardy's innovative qualities as a writer. Better responses distinguished effectively between 'coincidence' and 'fate', and found fruitful examples from the novel of 'creative use of coincidence'; for some weaker responses, almost any feature of the novel – for example, Tess's being born female – could be pressed into service as a 'coincidence'.

Edith Wharton: *The Age of Innocence*

Question 8(a)

'Newland Archer is presented as hopelessly entrapped by the culture into which he is born.'

How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?

As ever, this novel was significantly less popular than the others in Section B, although where studied there was often a welcome freshness and enthusiasm in candidates' work. Most answers were in response to (a) and the best explored Newland's self-awareness and decision-making. May's involvement and responses were discussed with insight and perception and linked to her being a product of the same society which entrapped Newland. Some (weaker) answers limited themselves to discussing ways in which Newland is a victim and offered little in the way of alternative readings of the text; the strongest were characterised by impressive AO2 content, for example discussion of the novel's recurring imagery of struggling for breath.

Question 8(b)

'The characters in the novel do not – or cannot – say what they mean.'

*In the light of this comment, explore ways in which Wharton presents communication between characters in *The Age of Innocence*.*

Fewer candidates chose this question, but those who did often produced answers of real sensitivity and impressive textual recall. Candidates were able to use quotations tellingly and well and there were some sensitive discussions of personal dilemmas and the ways in which Wharton allows the reader insights into them. Some answers referred to the 'hieroglyphic world' of the novel and showed how symbolic communication can be very powerful, for example through the gift of a particular variety of flower, or through the giving and declining of invitations.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*

Question 9(a)

'All the major characters are victims of the society in which the novel is set.'

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

This text was – once again – by far the most popular choice on the paper. This doesn't mean though that the novel is failing to elicit numerous fresh and original responses: *Gatsby* continues to be a novel which engages and inspires candidates working at all levels. This first question was the more popular of the two. Most candidates agreed with the statement presented in the prompt quotation and focused in their answers on George and Myrtle. Nearly every answer used interesting and relevant contextual material to inform the response. Some complex theories about the influence of social factors on personality and behaviour were presented or constructed. Many characters offered strong feelings about social justice and related issues of class and wealth. Some candidates arrived a little too easily at agreement with the statement in the question and had some difficulty in supporting an assertion that, say, Tom Buchanan is a victim; most, however, distinguished between characters effectively, and developed some discrimination in their answers: for example, one wrote 'On the other hand, it can be argued that some of the characters are themselves at fault, victims of their own hubris'.

Question 9(b)

'The narrator should never mix himself up in the narrative.'

*In the light of this comment, explore the role of the narrator in *The Great Gatsby*.*

This question was less frequently answered than the (a) option. A small number of candidates identified the prompt quotation as coming from Henry James, and that writer's 'house of fiction' concept also appeared in some answers. Weaker candidates were inclined to press into service a general-purpose 'unreliable narrator' essay; whilst this approach enjoyed some success, better answers considered carefully the extent to which Nick 'mixes himself up in the narrative'; the most sophisticated answers displayed real engagement with the levels of complexity inherent in the novel's narrative structure. There were some spirited defences of Nick, for example: 'I strongly disagree with this [lead quotation in question] as Fitzgerald clearly presents Nick as having a critical imagination, not a sentimental one.' Examiners reported that both questions allowed candidates to show detailed engagement with the novel; some rose to a mature consideration of Fitzgerald's art, for example: 'Nick's narration celebrates both the greatness of Gatsby, and the self-discovering process of writing itself'.

Evelyn Waugh: *A Handful of Dust*

Question 10(a)

'In A Handful of Dust, Waugh portrays marriage as a source of betrayal rather than fulfilment.'
How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?

This novel remains one of the less popular choices on the paper, with answers divided fairly equally between the two questions. Answers to the (a) question concentrated on the flawed marriage of Tony and Brenda Last, usually referencing his obsession with Hetton and her adultery with John Beaver as significant issues. Most offered discussion of Waugh's first marriage as context, and reflected on how his own experiences may have influenced his sceptical views. Better answers widened their discussion of the Lasts' relationship to include Brenda's later marriage to Jock and the satirical presentation of Tony's 'adultery' in Brighton. The best responses offered comment on the divorce culture of the society Waugh portrays; one candidate concluded that 'Betrayal is not an issue or even a concept in a morally bankrupt society'.

Question 10(b)

'The beauty of Mr Waugh's method is its complete heartlessness.'

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

There were some interesting views on Waugh's method in response to question 10(b), where more successful candidates concentrated on the narrative method and 'beauty' of Waugh's prose: 'The beauty of Waugh's style is that he constantly and consistently compels us and repels us with an unrelentingly cruel series of events'. Slightly less successful candidates depended on citing Waugh as heartless himself. However, most arguments were well-supported and validated by biographical, contextual support. One particularly strong candidate wrote in an introduction: 'If by "heartlessness" the question refers to Waugh's completely detached narrative throughout *A Handful of Dust*, then this statement is utterly correct [...] In portraying callousness, neglect of religion and betrayal of love, Waugh remains voiceless but uses irony and characterisation to show his opinion.' Weaker responses tended to list examples of the heartlessness of characters rather than focusing on Waugh's method.

F662 Literature post-1900

Literature Post 1900 saw its third full Summer session this June, which was met with confidence and sure assessment by many centres and produced very pleasing outcomes. Centres continued to refine approaches, reorganise and refresh text selections, and review tasks so that teaching and preparation for the unit impressed as strong and successful. As one moderator said, "Good work was in abundance and the range and combination of textual material was fabulous – new texts for old genres; weird and wonderful connections."

The quality of the work, the variety of text choices and the imagination of centres and candidates deserve special mention at the start of this report; and the teachers who have conceived such fruitful schemes from the specification guidelines, inspired their students and worked conscientiously in terms of preparing, exploring and assessing are to be congratulated for their interesting and, in some cases, exciting submissions.

As ever, a major key to success is close attention to, indeed targeting of, the assessment objectives and understanding how they relate to the marking grid.

Assessment Objective 1

AO1, which applies to both folder items, should be understood holistically as the relevance of the textual knowledge, organisation of the essay, the terminology used, the effectiveness of the writing style and the technical accuracy of what is written. Appropriate scholarly format (footnotes and bibliography), particularly useful for Task 2, can also be included as a consideration here. At the top of the range, moderators see mature and sophisticated prose styles; lower down many centres have pushed their candidates to communicate directly, responding to a question and keeping the writing clear and focused. Both types of achievement are good practice. Given they have time and drafting opportunities, candidates are expected to write to the best of their ability; weaknesses in argument or expression should therefore be reflected in a candidate's final mark.

Assessment Objective 2

AO2 is tested only on Task 1 and at its lowest level requires comment on form, structure and language, but *analysis* of these features, plus exploration of effect, for higher marks. It is largely well addressed, although some candidates concentrate too much on themes, relationships and characters and not enough on crafting and compositional choices.

Assessment Objective 3

AO3 is tested in the Linked Texts piece and has two strands: comparison and alternative views. The former is a strong feature of most submissions with fewer candidates each session writing two mini-essays or an essay of two halves with a rather obvious midpoint join. Comparison in alternating paragraphs often is used by candidates, with some success, although this can lead to a see-saw reading experience as first one text is considered, then the second, then the first again and so on. The most impressive type of comparison is where both texts are integrated in themed paragraphs or a conceptualised discussion.

The second aspect of AO3 involves reference to alternative readings of the texts which may take many forms including critical views, theoretical approaches, reviews and adaptations. AO3 discussion has certainly improved over the three years of this module, although candidates could work harder to incorporate such material seamlessly into their argument and to engage with, rather than just readily accept, the point or angle of the quotation or stance employed. Nevertheless, centres have clearly realised half of the marks available for AO3 must be

achieved by considering alternative views of the texts under discussion and have made considerable advances in guiding and challenging their students, thereby incorporating a wide range of critical approaches.

Assessment Objective 4

AO4 is weighted equally with AO3 in Task 2, and it is the assessment objective more centres could direct their candidates to address more thoroughly. Sometimes the comparative dearth of response seems linked to the choice of text selected by the centre: *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The History Boys* and *Atonement* are three examples where clearly very profitable and enterprising discussions have taken place, but these have often not registered in terms of contextual impacts. Sometimes a context (perhaps religion, or America) is named in the task, but essays go on to provide paragraphs of information concerning the named context rather than discussing its impact on the texts. Contexts, of course, can be interpreted in various ways – social, historical, geographical, literary, biographical, media, language, political, philosophical, artistic/aesthetic and so on – and can be concerned with the production or reception of the texts studied. For full reward in the top mark band there needs to be some range in the coverage of contexts, and also some depth, perhaps in terms of the level of detail covered in discussion of the relationship between text and context or in evaluating the importance of a particular contextual factor.

Task 1

For Task 1, most centres prepare their candidates for the Critical Piece which requires a close passage study (that passage being supplied with candidates' work) in relation to the wider text. This latter point about critical reading of a section of text in relation to the wider work needs to be reiterated. A number of centres still allow their students to write on one poem alone, when the emphasis should be on a focus poem demonstrating or running counter to an aspect (thematic or stylistic) of a whole collection. As the task involves close reading (and indeed two thirds of the marks should come from AO2 address), it is sufficient to cite another three poems as further illustration of the detailed point being made in relation to the focus poem, thereby giving some sense of the poet's wider achievement in a particular body of work. Some centres ignore the necessity to consider poems from a specific anthology or collection, for instance in a task comparing poems by different authors on Marilyn Monroe, which raises the problem of whether a recognised whole text has been studied; such approaches are not acceptable for Task 1. Of course, not all centres use poetry for Task 1; but wider reference to the text is still required whether a novel, a play, a short story or a piece of non-fiction has been studied. This need not take the form of quotation, but could be covered by referring to other scenes, chapters, stories or essays depending on what has been studied.

Re-creative work is also common as an outcome for Task 1, perhaps not as frequently attempted this time as in the two previous years; some centres make this their specialism, others offer it as an alternative to close passage study. There are some excellent inserts/additions being produced and for some students the opportunity to provide some creative work (short though it necessarily must be) is clearly inspiring. The commentaries are also improving and instances of short weight in accompanying evaluations are thankfully in decline. In terms of word count guidance, centres aiming at 1000 words for this Task 1 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.

Some centres, however, have too freely interpreted this alternative to the Critical Piece. Centres need to be clear in their own minds what re-creative 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 or "springboard" writing. Centres in any doubt concerning the nature of re-creative work, or any

other aspect of this unit, are advised to apply to the coursework consultancy for individual advice.

The 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 re-creative 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.

All the time it must be kept in mind that AO2 is dominant for this item so the concentration of the writing should be on matters of form, structure and language rather than on 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.

Task 2

The Linked Texts piece involves sustained comparative writing on two texts, a challenge for 17 year olds and also preparation for F664 where three texts need to be combined in an organised discussion. Many candidates this session showed a ready ability to move between their texts and some the capacity to focus their discussion so that both texts could oscillate around points in the argument. Centres are encouraged to guide their students towards this more synthesised approach to comparison in future.

Alternative readings, the second aspect of AO3, also need consideration. At a low level, other views might be supplied by study guides, websites and/or reviews; at a higher level secondary critical texts and literary theory might prove the way forward. However, there is no hierarchy here; it is all a question of how the view is used. Many students use quotations from elsewhere to back up a point; but engaging with and debating a quotation claim often has more value. Pleasingly there was an increase in the use of secondary critical material this session from what was observed in the first two years of the module; and candidates are encouraged to interrogate what they find has been written on, and around, their studied texts in future sessions.

For AO4 any type of context is acceptable provided it is made to count and evaluated; as stated above, this is a substantially weighted AO and needs to be developed fully. In this session there were far fewer candidates who offloaded context as a biographical or historical paragraph before the address to the task got under way; and so it is hoped that the undeveloped use of background and reliance on the centrality of the question focus (topics such as growing up or dystopia) to provide a range of points that might be taken as an ideological context are areas that teachers will continue to concentrate on improving.

Literature Post 1900 presents an improving picture, then, and further advances in the work and strategies for appreciating literature are anticipated. It is, therefore, unfortunate that this session saw the increase in a number of concerns which affect the quality of the moderation.

A sizeable number of centres submitted late work, some indeed very late; the deadline for mark collection is a fixed date and the dispatch of work happens then or shortly thereafter following a request for a sample via the OCR Interchange so it is expected that centres deliver marks and work promptly.

There were also more instances this June of over-length essays and clerical errors. The former should be sorted out with students ahead of the deadline or taken account of in the marking and explained with some sentences in the summative comment; moderators try to confirm the marks

of centres, but this is problematic if candidates have been allowed to produce over-length folders alongside ones that honour the word count. Essays which exceed requirements should be discouraged, or penalised in the centre's marking by only assessing to the permitted 3000 words.

Clerical errors consume time and also jeopardise candidate achievement. Centres must exercise vigilance in the totalling and recording of marks to avoid delays if the errors are picked up or incorrect grades if they are not.

However, despite the need for reminders on a small number of points, there is no doubt that the teaching for F662 and the work produced mark a huge success for coursework and show that teachers and candidates are enjoying a rich and rewarding experience of literature. More centres are using the Coursework Consultancy Service and that practice will surely grow helping teachers and students to develop better tasks. Further improvements and refinements are likely if centres continue to experiment within the scheme and to seek advice. It is hoped that the pointers for progress in this report will facilitate such change; but the last word must be thank you for an engaging and enterprising session.

F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800

General Comments

Examiners felt that the paper worked very well, stretching the most able while enabling weaker candidates to demonstrate their ability effectively. The quality of responses continues to improve. In its second year the paper seems to have bedded in properly, with most candidates aware of which AOs are targeted in the two sections of the exam. Although *Othello* was by far the most popular text in Section A, it was pleasing to see more centres answering on *Twelfth Night* and *The Winter's Tale*, almost always to good effect.

There was evidence that centres are using the Examiner's Report to inform their teaching of the candidates, so, this year fewer candidates ignored 'The Tale' itself and wrote only about 'The Pardoner's Prologue'; fewer candidates took a simplistic view of Donne's poetry as being entirely autobiographical; and the choice of question in Section A usually allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and literary intelligence to good effect.

It was clear that AO2 is an ongoing area of (relative) weakness, with weaker candidates simply not able to access the textual details of the poems or plays with enough precision or dexterity. In a significant minority of responses, AO1 issues weakened the ability of candidates to express their ideas with clarity or precision. However, there was a good level of consideration of performances of the plays, which supported AO3, and a good deal of personal insight from actors and directors cited. In fact performance on both stage and screen seems to have been thoroughly explored in most centres.

Responses to Individual Questions

Section A: Shakespeare

1. *Henry IV Part 1*

- (a) 'A bitter man, fashioning a thankless role for a reluctant son.'

Some candidates were good at addressing each element of the title quotation. Most recognised it as either accurate or a useful lead for debate. Many emphasised that we question the king from the beginning as a usurper (there was much pertinent reference to *Richard II*). Kingship is presented 'as playing a role, not as a birthright', a point drawn attention to by Henry's telling Hal about his ability to dress 'myself in ... humility', by the play-acting in the Boar's Head, and by the counterfeit kings at Shrewsbury. The King's belief in divine right is also 'undermined by his proclaimed preference for Hotspur over his own son'. Some argued, more favourably to Henry, that it is easy to underestimate the difficulties he faces: 'to maintain peaceful kingship is nigh-on impossible' when you are up against 'a character [like Hotspur] whose idea of a motivational speech is "die all, die merrily"'. Answers often dealt well with Hal's transformation into, or revelation as, an ideal or suitable king. There was some useful reference, in this context, to *Henry IV Part Two* and *Henry V*.

- (b) 'The world of the Tavern is more dramatically significant than the world of the court.'

Among the most cogently directed answers here were those which argued that the two worlds overlap. The play-acting at the tavern, for instance, 'raises contentious issues' about kingship. A number of essays, however, explored Falstaff's role rather than the world of the tavern specifically. Clearly the one is relevant to the other, but it was rare for tavern characters other than Falstaff to be mentioned.

2. *Twelfth Night*

- (a) 'Orsino is a romantic fantasist who urgently needs to be awakened to reality.'

This attracted a good variety of responses. Is Orsino's apparent awakening to reality undermined, wondered one writer, by his reference to his 'mistress and his fancy's queen'? Another questioned the possibility of such awakening when 'the whole setting of the play is surreal'. A simpler but no less pertinent conclusion was that 'There is hope for Orsino; after all, why does Viola love him if he is completely closed off from reality?' The question produced some very precise answers with some very detailed analysis of language and dramatic structure. However it was notable that some responses were rather 'thin', apparently running out of things to say; they did not seem to know the text of the play in sufficient detail.

- (b) 'The real fascination of the play lies in the undercurrents of danger and darkness beneath its comic surface.'

Candidates wrote very well about the dark side of *Twelfth Night*, possibly reflecting that 'genre mixing' has become the key concept in Shakespeare studies at the moment. The shading was located most often in the maltreatment of Malvolio and the possible exclusion of Antonio at the end of the play – areas both usefully supported by discussion of stage or film interpretations. The apparent failure of Sir Toby and his confederates 'to change or to learn anything new by the end' sounds a note of warning 'of the dangers of living a life of revels and "cakes and ale"'. Some answers looked also at the vein of melancholy evident in Orsino's love-longing, Viola/Cesario's account of her 'sister', and Feste's songs, especially 'O Mistress Mine' and the final song, which one candidate described as 'a lyrically pessimistic finale to an otherwise jubilant ending'.

3. *Othello*

- (a) 'The relationship between Iago and Roderigo offers an ironic parallel to the main action of *Othello*.'

There were relatively few answers here. Many had difficulty applying the idea of an 'ironic' parallel except in the broadest terms; they tended to write more simply, sometimes in more narrative mode, about the characters of Iago and Roderigo. A few were seriously distracted from the question because they became involved in debating Iago's motives. An insightful essay pointed out that Iago takes from Roderigo 'almost all he owns and also gets what he wants from Othello – Cassio's cashiering'; Iago's 'callous expenditure of Roderigo's life foreshadows the way he deals with Othello and, through him, Desdemona'. Some candidates did not know well enough the scenes in which Roderigo appears.

- (b) 'The women in *Othello* are articulate, but frustratingly unable to save themselves from the cruelty of men.'

There were many interesting responses to this question. Generally there was a good understanding of the context in a 'patriarchal' society. Some of the most perceptive argued that the play presents less the cruelty of men than a wider social problem: 'many in the audience would have thought that Othello's killing of Desdemona would be justified if she had really cuckolded him'. One thoughtful remark was that there is a tension 'between the obedient seventeenth-century archetype of "a maiden never bold" and the rebellious and strikingly modern "fair warrior"'. Some, however, seemed to think that this was less a play in which women are oppressed than one which 'oppresses women' and which would therefore be 'disapproved of by feminists'.

A few candidates ran into difficulties because they did not understand the word 'articulate'. (Most of these, however, managed to write fairly relevantly because they took it to mean, roughly, 'strong'.) Perhaps relatedly, there was a widespread tendency to assert articulacy rather than demonstrate it from the text. But many found good examples of the boldness of Desdemona's speech before the Senate, 'Her repeated and confident advocacy of Cassio in III.iii', and Emilia's heroic final defiance. 'Cyprus,' however, 'is a man's world' and here 'Othello's ability to justify his action and Desdemona's inability to do the same cause her death'.

A number of very successful answers took on the terms of the question, arguing that it was because of (not 'despite') their articulacy that the women fell victim to their men – Desdemona's persistence in arguing Cassio's cause, or Emilia's eventual, magnificent articulation of her husband's misdeeds lead to their physical destruction at the hands of their husbands.

Many essays mentioned Bianca as another abused or objectified woman; in weaker answers, statements about her tended to be rather general and speculative.

4. *The Winter's Tale*

- (a) 'In *The Winter's Tale*, the younger characters offer solutions to the problems created by the old.'

Many writers found this question congenial. One perceptive account showed how the younger generation transforms even the language of Leontes' court: he 'corrupts the innocence of the word 'play' ('go play, boy, play: thy mother plays'). Perdita directly redeems this – her use of 'play' ('No, like a bank for love to lie and play on') also has sexual connotations 'but they are free and innocent'. More broadly Florizel and Perdita 'act like a catharsis in Sicilia' or, someone else noted, 'as a reminder both of past wrongs and future hope'. Better responses introduced a good deal on the darker history of Prince Mamillius, including his ghost story.

- (b) 'Despite the play's happy ending, Leontes' court never fully emerges from the darkness.'

A number of candidates focused rather too heavily on Leontes, producing character-based essays that explored his role earlier on in the play, and ignoring the titular focus on the ending. However, there were also some sophisticated responses that took into account both characterisation and theme, considering the whole play as well as analysing the denouement in detail. One finely balanced essay observed: 'That Hermione does not address Leontes directly [in the final scene] perhaps indicates that some wrongs cannot be forgiven or forgotten, regardless of time passed, but this does not change the fact that Leontes himself has achieved inner transformation.' Candidates seem to relish the

opportunity to write about *The Winter's Tale* as a generic mixture of tragedy and comedy, and several lines of exploration were followed, with a sensitive balance between light and dark shown in better answers. Some answers were particularly good on Shakespeare's transformation of his source, Greene's *Pandosto* – the softening of Leontes' fate compared with Greene is particularly relevant to this question.

Section B

General

Again the best candidates handled Section B very well indeed. The careful dovetailing of original and thoughtful comparisons was often most impressive. AO2 illustration was frequently very good indeed and, even though not a dominant focus for this section of the paper, candidates used close analysis of the text with great success to develop detailed comparison in their answers. Higher Band responses gave close consideration to the subtleties of the quotations and allowed them to drive a well focused response. Less successful responses failed to allow the quotation to give structure to the essay, seizing instead on the straightforward rubric of the question.

AO3 (alternative views) and AO4 material was sometimes offered in isolation from the candidate's argument, especially in weaker answers. Some candidates demonstrated an impressive mastery of relevant theological, social and historical information, and were able to shape their knowledge to the demands of the question and the qualities of their chosen texts – but this is no mean feat, and understandably some weaker responses still featured 'bolted-on' paragraphs of context or criticism.

Responses to Individual Questions

5. 'Evil characters are lonely characters – and their isolation fascinates us.'

This was not one of the most popular choices but when chosen produced some wonderfully original responses. Marlowe and Milton, and Chaucer and Marlowe were the usual pairings for this question. However, most responses failed to engage with the need to discuss with the audience's 'fascination'.

Chaucer and Marlowe

Candidates looked successfully at ways in which Faustus is lonely and saw him as a warning in the morality play tradition. Many argued against the supposition that he was evil, using some very astute AO3/AO4 combinations to argue that a renaissance audience would commend Faustus for pushing boundaries (it was in this way the most successful responses dealt with the audience's 'fascination'). Not so many candidates had the same sympathy for the Pardoner – though they often felt both his misdeeds and his relative alienation reflected systemic corruption in the Medieval Church (AO4). In most answers using this combination 'The Pardoner's Tale' was interestingly compared with Faustus regarding the nature of sin and its ability to isolate.

Marlowe and Milton

This question was a very popular choice for this particular combination. Again AO4 was strong regarding the audience's reaction and the perception of Satan and Faustus as tragic heroes and not thoroughly evil characters. It was an astute answer that picked up on Mephistopheles' comment about wanting company in misery and extended that to Satan's rallying of his companions in hell. Satan's vastness and baleful beauty were often used to distinguish him from his peers – though he isn't alone very much, his is the keenest misery. Faustus's solitude,

and its dangers, were often seen as the occupational hazard of the 'thrusting' Renaissance man in a residually Medieval 'Morality Play' universe.

Webster and Chaucer

Not a frequent combination, but one excellent answer looked closely at how and why the Cardinal, Ferdinand and the Pardoner could be considered evil, and why they are lonely, and examined the way the revellers in the tale start off in camaraderie and then become isolated.

6. 'Desire dazzles and destroys people like moths in a candle flame.'

This was by far the most popular question on the paper for all combinations of texts.

Dr Marlowe and Donne.

The speakers of Donne's poems, or sometimes Donne himself, were seen usually as having less destructive desires than Faustus. Faustus was seen as a dangerous 'creative rebel', Donne as more of a commentator on human aspirations and failings, both in love and religion. Good comparisons included one involving the hope for 'a sort of immortality' for the lovers in 'The Canonization': 'unlike with Dr Faustus, this does not indicate any dangerous and destructive desire for God-like powers but merely suggests the innocent hope that the love they feel will live on due to its celebration in verse'.

Donne and Webster

On the whole candidates tended to focus a bit too much on outcome, not enough on process. There was little sense of how desire might 'dazzle' or even ennoble, much more on first and last things, especially eternal 'consequences'. Thus the Duchess 'literally faces death as a result of her desires, while Donne fears what will happen after death if he dies without repenting his sinful desires'. Ferdinand's apparent incestuous passion was often contrasted with the sort of love expressed in Donne: Ferdinand descends, through his desire, into lycanthropia, while Donne's lovers are 'elevated by their love'. Profitable AO4 was often in relatively short supply on this combination. As often with Donne, candidates introduced substantial amounts of biographical material; with Webster only the better candidates were able to view the play as skewed by an anti-Catholic bias or to pick up the disadvantages experienced by the Duchess as a woman in renaissance society. Donne's mercurial qualities as a writer and constantly shifting literary personae seem to make it difficult for some candidates to settle down with him for more than a poem or two; even more difficult to compare his poems with the work of others.

Webster and Pope

An unusual but unexpectedly fruitful pairing for this question. Successful responses took into consideration the difference in genre, something that might profitably be highlighted more often. Occasionally, as often at this level, candidates treated Pope too seriously and seemed to miss the point of his satire.

Pope and Sheridan

Quite a few candidates chose to apply the question to Pope and Sheridan, and although some did well, others struggled to bring out the full implications of the question focus – 'dazzles and "destroys" – in texts which are primarily satirical rather than tragic.

Marlowe and Milton

These writers produced some excellent responses, and represented possibly the most common single combination of texts this year. Exploring the lure of greatness and the eventual fall stimulated most students to produce strong work. A popular move was to argue that Faustus's desires are quintessentially human, his ruin the result of pardonable overreaching; whereas Satan is a professional, for whom damnation is only part of the territory. Some responses though failed properly to identify Satan as a character who is evil, or suffers, or regrets, or indeed, notices any ill effects of his damnation at all. A few even chose to compare him to Faustus by saying that the latter suffered for his desires, while Satan was ultimately left free and 'happy' in hell to fulfil them. A few essays compared the authors' 'own desire to break the mould' – Milton trying to outdo Homer and Virgil, Marlowe 'not marching now in fields of Thrasimene'.

7. 'Women are the subtler sex: more varied in their attractions, more ingenious in their stratagems.'

Pope and Sheridan

These eighteenth century texts, especially Pope, tended to invite displays of subtlety from candidates, with *Clarissa* and *Belinda* both functioning 'heroically' as fashionable exploiters of the male world, and *Lady Teazle*, who gains both her desires and her freedom, similarly victorious in *The School for Scandal*.

Pope and Behn

Often very energetic writing. Candidates seem very comfortable with Behn's play and (to a lesser extent) its contexts, and delighted in celebrating the energy of *Belinda* and *Hellena* and bittersweet *Angelica*, who seems to visit her individual Cave of Spleen. As always a minority failed to place the action of *The Rover* accurately in the Interregnum.

Sheridan and Behn

Another popular and vibrant combination, with very telling parallels offered between *Hellena* and *Lady Teazle*, and contrasts between the exploitativeness of overt *Willmore* and that of covert *Joseph Surface*.

Webster and Pope

On the whole this unexpected pairing was very successful, focusing on various relationships between *Julia* and *The Duchess* and *Belinda* and *Clarissa*. There was a good deal of contextual information applied, and the 'secretive' charisma of Webster's *Duchess* (and her poetry) also invoked recognition of the 'subtlety' of her portrait.

Donne and Webster

Not always a particularly successful combination for the focus of this question, as candidates found it much harder to pin down the subtlety of Donne's women than Webster's, and some of his best-known girls (those in 'On his Mistress' and 'The Flea') are not behaving very subtly. However, one or two candidates produced truly outstanding responses which identified the various 'stratagems' of the women in the play and explored the 'subtle' ways in which the poetry of Donne produced 'a voice' of resistance or acquiescence to the charms of the speaker within his poems.

8. 'Masks, poses, facades, deceptions – all are weapons in the battle of life.'

This was a fairly popular question, and produced a wide variety of original responses which looked at self-deception and the deception of others. However it was a rare response which fully addressed the phrase 'weapons in the battle of life', though Pope responses tended to address this very well. There were also answers on Milton and Webster, albeit more contrived. The military analogy was not addressed in very many scripts.

Marlowe and Chaucer

A few candidates answered very successfully using this combination. They discussed the satirical nature of the Pardoner's presentation, his deceit and holy facade, and went on to consider the revelation of his true nature. This they considered in the light of whether or not Faustus may be seen as a tragic hero, his fatal flaws viewed as not only pride but delusion.

Milton and Marlowe

This combination produced some extremely articulate responses with very good AO4 arguments. These answers were often supported by reference to Satan's heroic speech, noting the slippery and false nature of his rhetoric, and picking up the key quotations: "semblance of worth, not substance", and "vaunting aloud, though racked with deep despair". Many candidates offered insightful arguments on Faustus' self – deception, and one, whilst noting the Reformation AO4 potential in the 'disguise' of Mephistopheles in Friar's habit, extended this to comment on appearance versus reality, and used it to extend an argument on Faustus disguising/avoiding the true 'ugliness' of his necromancy.

Sheridan and Pope

This was a very common and rewarding pairing of texts. Inevitably candidates seemed to offer strong AO4, but without allowing their insights into Queen Anne politics or the nature of the Georgian theatre to deflect from their central concern: the text. Pope was shown to be writing about the creative value of deception and the delusions of scale, while Sheridan's play was viewed in terms of its self-concealing structure with the screen as almost the leading symbol. As one candidate put it, in *The School for Scandal* and *The Rape of the Lock* 'Pope focuses more on physical deception and disguise, Sheridan on verbal deception and disguising one's character and reputation'.

9 'In literature, the main purpose of setting is to intensify the presentation of character.'

Some answers offered good explorations on the epic nature of *Paradise Lost* and its 'gigantick loftiness' of scale as expressed through its language, usually compared with explorations of Marlowe's efforts to bring Hell to the Elizabethan stage. This was not a very popular question. Those who attempted it sometimes wrote exclusively about setting and forgot that the question also asks about characterization.

10 'We are both fascinated and repelled by the obsessions of others.'

This was another popular choice. A great many candidates wrote very intelligently on obsession and its effects. Higher band answers handled 'fascinated and repelled' with a great deal of insightful AO4, but answers lower in the bands tended also to address the fascination of those obsessed rather than the reader/audience reaction.

Chaucer and Marlowe

Faustus has a number of obsessions, one with necromancy, one with pushing back the frontiers of human knowledge, another (arguably) with his own self worth. All of these compete intriguingly with the Pardoner's more limited and self-knowing preoccupations. There was some good AO4 argument about renaissance aspiration contrasting with a medieval norm of 'knowing one's place'. There was also some good AO4 exploration of the readers' and the pilgrims' revulsion to the Pardoner.

Milton and Marlowe

Again there was some good writing on Faustus' obsessions (see above) and this led into insightful comparisons with similar (but sometimes more self-conscious) deluded attitudes in Satan. Responses again covered audience reaction to these characters with insightful AO4 arguments, with a preponderance of candidates who explored the Civil War run-up to *Paradise Lost* convinced that Satan was a portrait of the 'obsessive' Oliver Cromwell, and Milton engaged in a retrospective exploration of his former boss's exercise of power.

Donne and Webster

Answers here were generally more confident on *The Duchess of Malfi*, offering close studies of the development of Ferdinand's manic obsession. They found the attitude of the personae of the love poems hard to register as obsessive. They fared better if they were able to discuss his Holy Sonnets or 'Good Friday', perhaps introducing the background of the religious dilemma of Satire III. These candidates were then able to explore Donne's latent obsession with death.

F664 Texts in Time

Report to Centres

It is quite clear that this coursework unit has settled very comfortably, with Centres and candidates approaching it with confidence and producing some excellent work. As one moderator put it, 'rarely has assessing final examinations been so enjoyable'. On the one hand, this enjoyment lies in reading essays which quite are quite dazzling in their scope, insight and fluency, but it also lies in reading the work of candidates of more modest ability who have studied texts in which they have a real interest and who have gained much from the responsibility of pursuing their own researches and their own arguments.

Administration

In most cases, Centres were very well organised and submitted their samples on time, accompanied by the relevant paperwork. Some Centres with smaller numbers of candidates took the initiative to send all the work to the moderator before the sample request was received. This is fine for candidate numbers up to 20 and allows moderators to progress with the work as soon as the sample is generated.

There are a few points which would help the moderation process:

- The Centre Authentication Form (CCS160) should always be included with the folders.
- Coursework is of high value, so it should be packaged securely. Ordinary A4 envelopes rarely withstand the rigours of the postal service.
- The most effective method to bind each candidate's work is treasury tags. Paperclips detach far too easily and plastic wallets are awkward. Highly unsatisfactory is the practice of sending candidates' work unattached in any way, but as a loose pile of 40-50 sheets of paper.
- For security, each paginated sheet should be headed with the Centre number, Candidate name and Candidate number.

Word Limit

The coversheet for F664 clearly states that 'the maximum length of A2 coursework is 3000 words' and adds that 'no folder must be submitted which exceeds this length'. The 3000 word limit excludes the title, footnotes, bibliography and any quotations within the essay. Beyond that, there is no tolerance, as some Centres claimed. To allow some candidates to exceed the word limit would be the equivalent of allowing some candidates to exceed the allotted time in a written examination. One of the disappointing aspects of this session was the high number of folders which moderators were obliged to return to Centres for remarking because candidates had been allowed to exceed the word limit. The overwhelming majority of candidates work successfully within the word limit and it would be unjust to allow others to exceed it.

The new coversheet, downloadable from the OCR website, has clear boxes for the word count with and without quotations. Centres should use this to avoid any ambiguity.

Text Choices

While many Centres used canonical texts in traditional groupings, moderators noticed that overall, there was evidence of greater adventurousness in texts choice this session. Traditional groupings can work very well, of course, and many Centres are still following routes charted under the legacy synoptic unit, but the freedom of choice in F664 has encouraged some Centres and candidates to experiment. There was work, for example, on 9/11 related texts and on texts by Peter Ackroyd, Iain Sinclair, Sathnam Sanghera, Yasmin Hai and Bernadine Evaristo. Among the poets considered were Langston Hughes, Grace Nicholls, Sujata Bhatt, Tony Harrison and Charlotte Mew. There were some interesting combinations, such as *Birthday Letters* with *Ariel*, and thoughtful groupings of more established texts, such as ME Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Dickens' *Hard Times* and Browning's *Men and Women* or a mix of both in Chaucer's *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale* with Byron's *Don Juan* and Carol Shields' *Larry's Party*.

On the other hand, Candidates wrote essays on texts which did not always offer them opportunities to explore literature at a very sophisticated level. Often these were texts normally studied or anthologised at GCSE. While these texts may have been chosen in some instances to suit the interests and aptitudes of particular candidates, they sometimes limited their level of achievement.

Although many Centres are realising the opportunities of coursework and are allowing more freedom of choice, many are still using the same three texts for all candidates. The coursework unit seems to be taught in these Centres in much the same way as an examined unit, whereas it is designed to encourage individual research. Work where there has been independent research and genuine personal engagement is much livelier and gives candidates at all levels the opportunity to make their own discoveries and produce an original and satisfying piece. Centres new to choice might consider starting with two set texts and offering a choice of a third.

It is appropriate to remind Centres that texts chosen for study in coursework should equate approximately in substance to those which might be set on an examined unit. It is not, therefore, appropriate to write on a single poem as a poetry text (individual poems by Poe and Blake still crop up), nor on a single short story ('The Bloody Chamber', 'The Yellow Wallpaper'.) It is expected that candidates will study a selection of poetry or a short stories and refer to 4-5 poems or 3-4 stories in some detail in the essay, with reference to a number of others as appropriate.

Task Titles

As well as opening up text choice, many more Centres are now giving candidates a choice of titles, or, even better, encouraging candidates to negotiate their own titles. This allows an individual line of enquiry, a real sense of ownership for the candidate and is likely to produce much more original work. Moderators saw many examples of well framed, challenging and intriguing questions which were personalised and clearly engaged the candidates.

Where a common task is set, responses tend to follow the same pattern, using the same examples and making similar points. As well as missing the real purpose of coursework, this approach can stifle the creativity of some very able candidates and work to the disadvantage of those in the lower bands, who often try to make points without fully understanding the concepts or terminology.

It is clear that a well-focused title which is specific and explicit facilitates good work. The most successful tasks are worded in a way which directs candidates towards the Assessment Objectives, focusing on a comparison of how ideas or concepts are treated in the texts. Giving a clear direction towards argument or evaluation is also helpful, as the most successful essays construct a case and draw conclusions from the comparison of the texts.

The Assessment Objectives

Though some aspects of the Assessment Objectives have been referred to above, it is worth commenting in more detail about how the AOs were addressed by candidates in this session, beginning with the dominant AOs.

- **AO3**

The essentially comparative nature of the F664 task provides much of its challenge and it has been interesting to see how candidates have improved their approach to this element, many demonstrating real academic rigour. Most candidates adopted a sense of ongoing comparison, which is a high level skill. There were some candidates who dealt with the three texts entirely sequentially with only a 'however' or 'on the other hand' to link the sections, but these were rare. There is a much stronger understanding of the ways of comparing, which can allow for sections of essays devoted to developing key points on individual texts when matched with close specific comparison, often dealing with the three texts simultaneously. The strongest essays often combined comparison of the way the texts treated the broader concepts combined with fine, detailed comparison of diction, imagery or form.

Another area which has improved markedly since the beginning of this specification is candidates' use of alternative readings. Almost all candidates attempted to refer to other readings. They frequently developed different possible approaches to texts in some detail and depth. There was also substantial incorporation of research relating to the views of named critics and to the critical reception of texts, with the best writing actively debating and sometimes challenging different viewpoints. Such writing was clearly more successful than those essays which used critical views only to support the candidates' own points with limited exploration and engagement.

Candidates should be encouraged to use a wide critical field, beyond the frequently cited Wikipedia, Sparknotes and other websites. More successful candidates explored the judgements of named critics and were able to use them well. Strong essays often used critical theories and applied them to more than one text, although this was rare.

Candidates, by and large, coped well with the demands of this strand of AO3 when writing about contemporary texts without an established critical field, using internet reviews and newspaper archives, while others had used websites with judicious selectivity. Film versions of texts were also successfully used as different readings.

- **AO4**

Despite the influence and significance of contexts being part of the dominant Assessment Objectives, moderators saw a number of essays which paid very little attention to this area at all. More often, candidates showed awareness of those contexts, and sometimes wrote about them quite extensively, but did not sufficiently show understanding of the influence and significance to the texts under consideration. This is the important area; knowledge of the biography of the author or the historical period themselves are of much less value.

On the other hand, much of the work seen by moderators showed an assured understanding of the significance of contexts, particularly when it grouped the texts. This was often clearly seen in work on Romanticism, Modernism, Post Colonial Literature, Irish Writing and Gothic Literature, for example. While biographical material is often less well used as context, some candidates used relevant and interesting biographical information relating to Coleridge, TS Eliot, Tennessee Williams, Waugh, Ngugi and a number of other writers.

Choosing texts with some form of common context certainly helps candidates with this AO, whether that be a historical period, a genre or a style. In such cases, context becomes a useful tool to link the three texts comparatively. In such cases, candidates are not encumbered by the need to describe and scrutinise three drastically separate contexts and this enables them to strike a good balance between the demands of the four AOs.

Many submissions addressed context at the start of the essay. This could be a logical and engaging way of introducing the essay as it provided a thoughtful and convincing context for the comparison and analysis that followed. Such essays succeeded by making contextual detail integral to the study. However, in other cases the approach did not work so well, particularly when candidates started their essays with lengthy descriptions of the texts' historical and biographical and other contexts with little indication of their significance. Sometimes such essays could be initially mistaken for history essays, lacking any focus or even references to the texts in the first few paragraphs.

Historical contexts sometimes would benefit from a more subtle understanding, as candidates often made sweeping generalisations, assuming that everyone in a particular period thought exactly the same way. This was apparent in discussion of historical periods and even more glaring when the subject was more recent, such as Thatcherism.

- AO1

Much of the writing was fluent and on the whole moderators were impressed with how frequently they encountered work which featured genuinely sophisticated and eloquent phrasing, often with deft and appropriate use of key critical terminology. The best essays were well-paced, cohesive and persuasive, scholarly pieces of work which were illuminating in their insights. The strongest candidates used their opening paragraphs to unpick the question, firmly establish a line of argument, and fully embed the texts within their contexts and thereby showed an awareness of three of the four Assessment Objectives right away. Such writing moved easily from text to text in tightly controlled paragraphs.

Less confident candidates often lacked clear signposts to link paragraphs on the different texts. Topic sentences and discourse markers, which show that the argument is being developed, are important in developing a coherent argument.

Virtually every moderator this session commented on the number of candidates who had been rewarded very highly for this AO when their essays demonstrated significant writing weaknesses. There were several instances of full marks for AO1/2 being awarded to essays with multiple punctuation and typographical errors and lapses of expression. Sometimes even the names of authors, titles of poems, and texts were inaccurate. As coursework is crafted over time, with opportunities to draft, edit and proof-read, a very high level of fluency and accuracy of written expression is expected for high marks.

- AO2

This Assessment Objective is the key to the literary focus of the essay, so it is advantageous if the task highlights 'presentation', 'treatment', 'portrayal' or similar. The most confident candidates embraced all aspects of analysis and seamlessly interwove stylistic remarks with argument, maintaining a forensic momentum which was often delightful. There was often sharp and informed attention to diction, imagery and narrative voice. Aspects of form and structure, however, including punctuation, versification, sentence and paragraph construction, were less fully considered.

Marker's annotations often rewarded simple quotation for AO2 – using quotations is only one, and arguably the easiest, aspect of this Assessment Objective. The ability to analyse and explore the effects of language, form or structure is required for marks in the upper bands.

Annotation and Summative Comments

Most Centres are rigorous and diligent in their marking, recognising that the teacher is a full partner in the assessment process. In these cases, the assessment of the folders had been rigorously conducted by the teachers in the Centres; the annotations and comments were observant, accurate and helpful. Such marking referred closely to the Assessment Objectives to justify the marks awarded and there was often pleasing evidence of internal moderation.

It is far easier to support a Centre's marking where comments clearly justified the mark awarded, balancing the strengths and weaknesses. It is therefore important that Centres take full advantage of the opportunity to represent their view of the candidates' work formally on the cover sheet. There were some examples of rather vague comments which showed little differentiation between candidates. In the same way, it is helpful if marginal annotations are evaluative and less helpful if merely AO1, AO2 is acknowledged.

Conclusion

As ever, moderators were privileged to read some outstanding work this session, and to acknowledge the careful preparation, teaching and marking done by teachers to assist their candidates. It is hoped that pointers in this report will provide guidance and spread good practice.

Many Centres have benefited from advice given by the Coursework Consultancy Service. Any Centre with questions about coursework may freely use this service, the details of which are available on the OCR website.

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