

# **English Literature**

Advanced GCE A2 H471

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H071

## **Report on the Units**

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**June 2010**

**HX71/R/10**

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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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Advanced Subsidiary GCE English Literature – H071

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## **Chief Examiner Report**

This summer saw the first major session of the new specification, with a full entry for all four components. Centres and candidates are to be congratulated on their hard work in interpreting the changed requirements and coming to terms with the new Assessment Objectives, and in reading and writing with enthusiasm and insight. Moderators and examiners from each of the four units reported enjoying the evident energy and quality of many of the responses we received.

The work of candidates for F661 continued to improve; although the same issues have emerged this session (getting the right balance between the set poem and additional poems in Section A; avoiding narrative-based answers in Section B), there is evidence that centres are working on these areas in response to advice in reports and training. The importance of having a close knowledge of **all** the prescribed poems for the chosen poet was made especially clear in this session: for the first time in the life of the specification, a number of candidates noted on their papers that 'We have never studied this poem'. Candidates approaching the set poem as more-or-less an unseen exercise are at an obvious disadvantage.

The teething troubles experienced last summer by a number of centres in relation to course design for the F662 coursework unit have now largely cleared up, and moderators enjoyed looking at the increasing variety and ambition of submissions. Two areas were identified as needing further work. The second strand of AO3, dealing with the interpretations of other readers, was often handled rather briefly and superficially: candidates should document and discuss other views, rather than giving them a brief mention. Discussion of context (AO4) was sometimes bolted on rather than integrated fully into the argument in Task 2. More suggestions for improving these areas are given in the F662 report which follows.

The first full entry for F663, the A2 examined unit, was a testament to the enormous hard work which has gone on in centres. Though many teachers have seemed apprehensive about comparative work in Section B, examiners were impressed by the levels of knowledge and skill they encountered in candidates' work, and reported an excitement and unpredictability in Section B answers which suggested that candidates were approaching the task with confidence and enthusiasm. Work on Shakespeare was often impressive too, but the Principal Examiner has pointed out that the very best answers were characterised by close textual reference allied to analytical comment: some candidates clearly knew what they wanted to say, but were unable to come up with precise illustrative detail.

Similarly in F664 submissions, the quality of work at the top end of the range was very impressive: the Principal Moderator's report supplies a range of superlatives reported by his team. Moderators were often particularly admiring of work from centres where candidates had been given some freedom in terms of choice of text and task. As with F662, there was a feeling that some centres need to work more on the second strand of AO3, 'other interpretations', and more advice concerning this AO follows in the F664 report. Centres are reminded that, for both coursework units, advice is available from the OCR Coursework Consultancy, which is surprisingly used only by a small minority of centres. Queries are usually dealt with very quickly by senior moderators, and the service is, of course, free.

Finally, it may be helpful to give centres an early reminder of the approaching change of set texts for F661. The last session with the current set of texts will be January 2012, so AS candidates starting the course this September will have a final opportunity to re-sit the examination in the fourth term of their course.

*Report on the Units taken in June 2010*

The change of texts will also affect coursework choices: from the summer session of 2012, centres will no longer be able to use texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Jane Eyre*, which are among the new F661 texts, although they will be able to use texts, such as *Wuthering Heights*, which are coming off the set text list. A full list of all set texts and relevant dates is available in the Specification.

## F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945

### General Comments

Examiners found that this summer's question paper worked effectively to allow candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. One reported that 'most candidates were able to write well on their chosen texts; some wrote with exceptional clarity and critical judgement'; another found 'a strong sense that nearly all candidates are prepared for the exam with great care by teachers who have presented the set texts with enthusiasm but who have also conveyed the specific demands of the exam (and its AOs, etc.) to their students'.

Despite a generally positive response to candidates' work, examiners inevitably found areas for improvement, including the presentation of answers. All candidates should use a pen that produces clear, readable script, and should try to ensure that their handwriting is legible. Where a candidate presents a typed script the format should be double-spaced and in at least a 12 point font. Single spacing in a small font makes an answer extremely difficult to read and annotate.

Some examiners expressed reservations this session about the handling of AO4 throughout the paper and of AO3 in Section B. Almost all candidates could supply information in these areas, but a significant number betrayed an imperfect grasp of material they had studied through errors in understanding and presentation: for example, many in answers on Fitzgerald and Waugh referred to *The Wasteland* [sic] by T.S.Eliot, and others suggested that Keats had criticised the poetry of Wilfred Owen. Examiners are tolerant of inevitable slips resulting from time pressure in an examination; however, candidates are encouraged to absorb and assimilate thoroughly their contextual and critical studies of set writers and texts, and to ensure that references to such material demonstrate thorough understanding and are relevant to the issues raised by the question.

### Section A

Most answers now display a sensible balance between discussion of the set poem and references to additional poems, although there are still a very few candidates who limit their answer to the set poem only, and a much greater number who treat the set poem briefly before launching into a much fuller discussion of other poems, or who use moments in the set poem as triggers for contextual discussion without offering any analysis of the original. Candidates must be prepared to answer on any of the poems on the prescribed list; it was clear this year that quite a number of candidates were not in detail familiar with the poem set, especially in the case of Wilfred Owen's 'Miners'. Answers should address both content/meaning/experience communicated by the poem **and** form/structure/effects of language; in many answers this relationship was unbalanced.

### Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 "O mercy!" to myself I cried,  
"If Lucy should be dead!"

**Discuss ways in which Wordsworth presents intense emotion in 'Strange fits of passion I have known'.**

Most answers noted the increasingly tense relationship in the poem between the progress of the speaker's approach to the cottage and the gradual, then sudden, descent of the moon. Some thoughtful answers saw this relationship as a version of the Romantic concern with the effects of

natural phenomena on human consciousness (often citing the boat-stealing episode in *The Prelude* as analogous). Reference to the *Lyrical Ballads* Preface led to fruitful discussion of diction (“language really used by men”), simplicity of form (“natural language so naturally connected with metre”), the poem’s reflective mode (“emotion recollected in tranquillity”) and to the resourceful suggestion that the two final lines represent within the poem an instance of “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. Poems cited most frequently and helpfully in comparison/contrast were ‘Nutting’, ‘The Fountain’, ‘The Tables Turned’, ‘There was a Boy’, the Westminster Bridge sonnet, ‘Old Man Travelling’ and ‘St Paul’s’: these last two were seen as similar in the dramatic effect of the turn in the final lines of each (“makes you read the poem again in a different way”). Sometimes, genuine instances were seen of the contemporary appeal of Wordsworth’s verse: “we too have felt the tension of anticipating the worst and hoping it would not happen”.

**2 ‘From bough to bough the song-birds crossed,  
From flower to flower the moths and bees...’**

**Discuss Rossetti’s presentation of nature in ‘Shut Out’.**

While some answers took the garden in the set poem to be a literal, physical garden from which the speaker is ‘Shut Out’, most explored its symbolic value as representing an experience or state of being from which the speaker is excluded. Most frequently the Garden of Eden was cited, representing in turn a condition of innocence lost by the speaker; other readings suggested loss of the love of God, or childhood (as a condition irrecoverably left behind). Some offered ecological readings (“nature unspoiled by man”); some suggested the garden represented human love, offering biographical details of Rossetti’s romantic relationships. Various poems were cited for comparison, according to the answer’s reading of ‘Shut Out’ as materially, spiritually or sentimentally inclined: ‘A Birthday’, ‘Up-Hill’, ‘Remember’, ‘Twice’, ‘A Better Resurrection’, ‘Winter: My Secret’. A few noted that, in ‘Shut Out’ particularly, the version of “nature” often evoked in Rossetti is a *garden*, worlds away from Romantic landscapes or the moors of *Wuthering Heights*. There was a good deal of sensitive comment on Rossetti’s imagery and formal organisation in the set poem.

**3 ‘A sigh of the coal,  
Grown wistful of a former earth  
It might recall.’**

**Discuss ways in which Owen presents memory in ‘Miners’.**

Many answers noted that ‘Miners’ “is not like other Owen poems” and some seemed bewildered by the differences. Some answers ignored the title and regarded this as unequivocally a poem about soldiers; others missed the suggested parallels with the experience of war and mentioned only miners in their discussion. Answers that kept the question in focus identified layers of memory and forgetting: the memory of its own evolution attributed to the coal; memory of the underground colliery disaster at Halmer End; Owen’s own memories of “dark pits/ Of war” and the carnage of the trenches. Many candidates were able to quote from Owen’s letter about the poem (“I get mixed up with the war at the end”), and knew that mining was a method of trench warfare (some of these referred fruitfully to Faulks’s *Birdsong*). Answers followed a direct trail of memory to poems such as ‘Disabled’ and ‘Mental Cases’ (“Memory fingers in their hair as murders...”) or found correspondences of imagery in ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ (“guttering, choking, drowning ... white eyes writhing in his face”) or memory as unrepressible, for example in ‘The Sentry’ (“I try not to remember these things now”). Some noted the poem’s function as memorial: “This poem, which has stood the test of time, has allowed the memory of both the miners and the soldiers to live on”. There were many thoughtful analytical explorations of imagery, diction (“Peace *lies* indeed”), structural development of ideas and poetic form: a candidate described the effect of alternating longer/shorter lines as a “hesitant, forward and back rhythm”; the uncomfortable, ironic effects of half-rhyme (simmer/summer, cauldron/children, amber/ember, groaned/crooned) were also well considered.

**4 'What comes over a man, is it soul or mind -  
That to no limits and bounds he can stay confined?'**

**Discuss ways in which Frost considers 'limits and bounds' in 'There are Roughly Zones'.**

With 'There Are Roughly Zones' as a stimulus, candidates were able to explore relations between poems in the selection as virtually forming a debate about the force and value of "limits and bounds". With variations, many answers argued that, while the set poem insists that "There are roughly zones whose laws must be obeyed", 'Mending Wall' challenges the value of arbitrary man-made bounds ("There where it is we do not need a wall..."), and in 'Two Look at Two' it is the security of the intermediary boundary that makes possible the exchange in which "Two look at two, whichever side you spoke from". Other poems seen as contributing helpfully to the debate were 'Stopping by woods...', 'The Road Not Taken', 'Birches', 'Out, Out-', 'The Leaf-Treader'; 'Neither Out Far nor In Deep' was often seen as testimony to human refusal to be "confined" by "limits and bounds". There was some thoughtful discussion of the poem's formal features, the interactions of metrical form and sentence structure ("the very verse form pulls at its own boundaries; the poem itself 'does not love a wall'"), the play between end-stopped and run-on lines, the discreet ordering influence of the rhyming patterns, the relation between conversational style and unexpected rhetorical effect ("'wrong and right' are the wrong way round," a candidate wrote, "to make the reader think"). Answers were alive to ambivalence ("The persona knows he has gone against nature but still feels 'betrayed' by it"); and some offered a political reading, describing man's ambition "to extend the reach/ Clear to the Arctic" as "imperialist" and even "militarist". Altogether, most candidates seemed well prepared to discuss the effects and meaning of this poem in the context of Frost's characteristic methods and concerns.

**Section B**

Most answers on the novel demonstrated at least a competent grasp of the text, although many could have been improved by more detailed reference to language and narrative method. Candidates should avoid narrative-based answers: these are rarely sufficiently critical/analytical and consequently difficult to reward. Discussion of characters in a novel should consider their function (how do they contribute to the development of the narrative?) and significance (what symbolic value do they have in relation to the novel's thematic concerns?) within the text. A small number of candidates are apparently trying to satisfy both strands of AO3 in Section B by introducing additional primary texts (often, but not always, by the same writer) to provide connections and comparisons. Centres are reminded that, although additional texts may be used as a valuable part of contextual study, there is no requirement to write comparatively in Section B, and making comparison a central part of the answer will inevitably disadvantage candidates by creating a distraction from answering the question.

**Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice***

**5(a) 'Till this moment, I never knew myself.'**

**In the light of Elizabeth Bennet's remark, discuss the importance in *Pride and Prejudice* of self-discovery.**

Most answers distinguished between characters capable of "self-discovery" and understanding (Elizabeth and Darcy definitely, Charlotte Lucas to an extent, Jane potentially, intermittently Mr Bennet, and perhaps for a moment Lydia) and the others (notably Mrs Bennet, Mr Collins and Lady Catherine) who, represented as oblivious/indifferent to the effects their behaviour has on others, never achieve the condition. With Elizabeth and Darcy, "self-discovery" was seen as



either cause or effect of the recognition of love; many answers explored the novel's title in terms of the characters' qualities and the developing relationship between them. Answers which explored the dynamics of specific episodes/ exchanges/ confrontations were more convincing than those which invested in more general accounts of the narrative. Some interesting answers considered relations between economic and personal issues: recognising, for instance, the maturity/ good sense/ pragmatism of Charlotte Lucas in balancing desire and need; noting also the impact of seeing Pemberley on Elizabeth's progress towards self-discovery and social awareness.

**5(b) 'Although the manners of the society depicted in *Pride and Prejudice* are highly formal, we still learn plenty about the characters' emotional lives.'**

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

This question allowed candidates to consider contextual factors in relation to Austen's presentation of Regency "society"; sometimes this account unbalanced the answer. Most, however, addressed the elements of the question directly and thoughtfully, comparing public and private elements of the novel. Most answers agreed that "characters' emotional lives" are made accessible through private means: dialogue (Elizabeth and Jane in one way, Mr Collins in another); reflection (mostly Elizabeth); letters (Mr Darcy particularly revealing more than he understands himself). Austen's narrative interventions, direct, ironically oblique or through "indirect discourse", were often explored as forms of disclosure about characters' inner lives. Examiners noted that candidates are less inclined to refer to critics in responses on Austen, which is not a problem as long as AO3 is addressed in other ways. There is a general increase in successful references to dramatisations of novels to provide 'other readers' interpretations'; in some answers on *Pride and Prejudice*, however, there is occasionally a sense that candidates are depending too much on small screen versions (at least one answer credited Austen with 'the scene where Darcy emerges from the lake').

**Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights***

**6(a) 'This novel contains shocking picture of the worst forms of humanity' (Victorian review).**

**How far and in what ways have you been shocked by the characters of *Wuthering Heights*?**

An impressive range of Victorian and later critical responses supplemented the quotation in the question. Answers usually discussed the characters in turn, assessing the degree of shock delivered by their behaviour. Heathcliff usually came out as most shocking – brutal and vengeful – but also "gets the sympathy vote" because of his rough treatment as a youngster. Cathy was sometimes seen as most shocking by marrying Linton, betraying Heathcliff and herself by choosing status over love. Many candidates argued that the contemporary reader would be more shocked than we are today, particularly by Cathy's unfeminine impulses. Some very interesting answers assessed *Wuthering Heights* as a gothic novel, pointing out that the most shocking effects (such as Heathcliff digging up Catherine's body) are entirely consonant with gothic conventions, which were designed to shock anyway: so, interestingly, what is shocking and unacceptable in a realist text (people don't behave like that) is *acceptably* shocking if it's read as a gothic text. Some went further to suggest that the particular energy of the novel derives from tension between its realist and its gothic elements.

**6(b) 'Despite its many domestic scenes, the novel's true centre lies in the natural world.'**

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

Most answers considered relations between *Wuthering Heights*, Thrushcross Grange and the moor, many overtly adopting David Cecil's characterisation of children of the calm or children of the storm. Some thought the "domestic", or social issues (class/ culture/ marriage/ inheritance) dramatised in Cathy's choice between Heathcliff and Linton were at the heart of the novel; others that the impulses/ antipathies represented by the moor were the dominant factors; some argued that the tension between the two is what the novel is about. One candidate argued that the "true centre" in terms of aspiration and significance is not in the "domestic" or the "natural" world but in the "supernatural world" inhabited by Cathy's spirit at the beginning and by the two of them at the end – the only space where their love can be realised. Many candidates focused primarily on Heathcliff: his name alone provided fruitful discussion for some in the 'nature' context.

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

**7(a) 'The society depicted in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is notable for its hypocrisy and cruelty.'**

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

Usually answers described Tess's relationships with individuals - Alec, Angel and her family - arguing more or less directly that these revealed/ enacted wider economic/ social/ class/ gender relations; the quality of the answer was often determined by the explicitness with which the personal was read as symbolic of the social. Angel was seen as representing both developing liberal views of cultural and social issues and traditional patriarchal gender expectations, so his repudiation of Tess interestingly was described as doubly hypocritical; on the other hand, at least "you know where you are with Alec – he even looks like a villain". Answers usually discriminated between "hypocrisy and cruelty". There was some useful discussion of hypocrisy in the church (sometimes, however, narration of the baptism of Sorrow took the place of analysis); and thoughtful material relating to Flintcomb Ash as representing new ways of working the land, contrasted with the bucolic ways of Talbothays, where relations between people and nature, as well as between people, are allowed to be benevolent.

**7(b) 'Tess is too passive to be a tragic heroine.'**

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

Some answers offered a clear model of tragedy, usually based on Aristotle; often the Aristotelian invocation was vague, but in some answers close and systematic, identifying *hamartia* (in the sense of fatal flaw, Tess's beauty/ vulnerability/ passiveness), *hubris* (her family's aspiring beyond their station), and considering *catharsis* as a way of thinking about reader response. In these discussions the nature of "Justice" done and the status of "the President of the Immortals" were interesting issues; some noted the irony that Tess's "tragedy" is initiated by presumption to a high estate, not a fall from one. Other answers assessed how far Tess is represented as passive in the stages of her experience, or how far she may be regarded as responsible (some surprisingly hard-line positions here: she should have known better than to let Alec take liberties, and she should have asked Angel if he'd found her note...). Most answers argued that Fate is the main determiner; some considered Hardy's role as designer of her fate, considering effects of imagery (often the colour red) and proleptic warnings from other characters ("'Tis because we be on a blighted star, and not a sound one, isn't it, Tess?") and the narrator (who "calls her 'Poor Tess' lots of times").

**Edith Wharton: *The Age of Innocence***

**8(a) ‘Marriage was not the safe anchorage [Newland] had been taught to think, but a voyage on uncharted seas.’**

**In the light of this comment, explore the presentation of marriage in *The Age of Innocence*.**

Work on this text remains scarce (most examiners had nothing to report), but is often high in quality. Most candidates were well aware of the view of marriage generally supported by the text and expressed cogently in Newland Archer’s forebodings about his own, often quoting at some length: “... he saw his marriage becoming what most of the other marriages about him were: a dull association of material and social interests held together by ignorance on one side and hypocrisy on the other”. The relationships between Lawrence Lefferts and Julius Beaufort and their wives were often cited as embodying this model of marriage; candidates were alert to the irony that Beaufort is ostracised because of his financial corruption not his adultery, which is tolerated because it is ostensibly kept secret, even though all New York knows about it. Answers discussed Newland’s approach to, and experience of, marriage with May, as an instance of how the institution works in this society (“association of material and social interests”), and also in contrast with the kind of relationship invoked by his acquaintance with Ellen Olenska and the world she comes to represent for him: “You gave me my first glimpse of a real life, and at the same moment you asked me to go on with a sham one.” One examiner reported a number of weaker answers which “treated three marriages, say, as separate mini-essays”, and paid limited attention to the quotation on the question.

**8(b) ‘Throughout *The Age of Innocence*, we are conscious of a great city in the making.’**

**Explore Wharton’s presentation of New York in the light of this comment.**

Answers to this question were rare, and most of them dealt with “New York” as a particular community rather than as a city in a material, economic or political sense, exploring the conventions and relationships engendered in this “hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs”; many noted the appropriateness of the novel’s opening scene set in a theatre, where members of the audience are watching each other rather than action on the stage. Answers were alert to the narrative voice’s ironic, astringent criticism of aspects of this world, but many also to the sense of nostalgia in the presentation at the end of the novel as Newland reviews the new world of telephones and electric lighting. Some speculated interestingly about the reader’s response in 1920 to Wharton’s version of “New York” in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby***

**9(a) “‘Can’t repeat the past?’” he cried incredulously. “Why of course you can!”**

**In the light of Gatsby’s comment, explore the importance of the past in *The Great Gatsby*.**

Most answers concentrated on the past and present times of Jay Gatsby, particularly the relation between memories of his earlier lives and events in the summer of 1922, as related by Nick Carraway. Answers pointed out that the past that he wants to repeat is selective in excluding his early James Gatz period, and that the pattern of his past relationship with Daisy is actually, ironically, repeated to the point where she abandons him again in favour of Tom Buchanan. Some answers explored the significance for Nick of his own past: there was some thoughtful discussion of his memory of returning home at Christmas from school in the East, as a member of a community “unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour” (a

candidate called this passage “the sentimental centre of the novel”); another wrote “Nick has nowhere to go now except into memories, the only space left unspoilt”. A few answers, responding to the novel’s closing paragraphs, explored relations between the world of the novel (especially characterised, answers suggested, by the guest list that begins Chapter 4) and the promise of the “new world” apprehended by the Dutch sailors. “This,” answers suggested, “is what has happened to the American Dream”; some, particularly resourceful, argued that “the dream itself was already corrupt”.

**9(b) ‘The symbolism of *The Great Gatsby* suggests that hopes turn to dust and ashes.’**

**How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the novel?**

The main discriminator between answers was the degree of attention candidates paid to the terms of the question. Too many (often in very long answers) simply catalogued the “hopes” that “turn to dust and ashes”. Those prepared to hunt the symbols found plenty to interpret and relate to each other: the green light; Gatsby’s house, his cars, his smile and his domestic technology; his suits and (particularly) his shirts; the valley of ashes; the eyes of Dr TJ Eckleburg; Myrtle’s death (“her left breast swinging loose”, her blood mingling with the dust); colour patterns (green/ white/ yellow; sun/ moon/ artificial light (“The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun...”)); characters’ names; ways of seeing. Some answers proposed Gatsby himself as the major symbol, often citing Lionel Trilling’s “Gatsby is America”: James Gatz’s re-invention of himself; his rapid accumulation of wealth through crime (“the only way of achieving success in the twenties”); his repudiation of the class system; his “romantic readiness”; his commitment to a vision of the future; his role as a kind of reverse-pioneer, coming from the west to make his way in the east. All these features of his representation by Nick, in various combinations, were seen as aspects of America which “began as a dream,” a candidate wrote, “and became a nightmare”. This question generated a wide range of responses, some of them detailed, exploratory and resourceful.

**Evelyn Waugh: *A Handful of Dust***

**10a ‘A more moral book has rarely come my way’ (1930s review).**

**How far and in what ways do you find *A Handful of Dust* to be a moral book?**

This question attracted some good exploratory answers, often arguing that it takes a moral consciousness to detect immorality. Answers were often presented as a survey of characters, and weaker answers were inclined to dismiss the idea that the novel might be “a moral book” on the basis that it contained immoral characters; there was also a view (often reductively presented) that the novel constitutes an act of revenge by Waugh against his first wife, Evelyn Gardner. Many argued that Tony is the only character with a sense of importance in something other than himself; even though Hetton is uncomfortable and nondescript, his love for it sets him apart from the London community, trivial, self-serving, back-biting, mercenary, obsessed with fashion, cowardly, all features represented by individual figures. Mrs Beaver was the figure regarded as the most immoral; Brenda was sometimes seen as an innocent abroad, whose availability brings out the worst in the London scene, but usually criticised for her ‘callous behaviour’ at the death of John Andrew. Some answers were interested in Thérèse de Vitre, whom Tony meets and kisses on the transatlantic voyage: her rapid withdrawal from “the flowering of this romance” when she finds that Tony is married was seen as deriving from a moral/ religious commitment evident nowhere else in the novel. Wide-ranging references to Eliot, Dickens and Waugh’s own London society were incorporated smoothly; some candidates also used their knowledge of some of his other novels, such as *Decline and Fall* or *Brideshead Revisited*, to illuminate their answers.

**10(b) Neither comfortable nor luxurious: places to despair in.'**

**How far and in what ways do you agree with this comment on the setting of *A Handful of Dust*?**

Answers to this question offered a more or less systematic survey of settings, their meanings and effects. The quality of the answer depended on the range of discussion (many treated London as one setting, missing many possible lines of discussion), development of argument and use of detail in support. Hetton's relation to the past (unusual in the novel) was well explored, though many answers did not detect the ironies of its association with the Arthurian cycle; social attitudes to the past are more generally represented by Mrs Beaver's urge to cover everything up. Good answers discussed the irony of Tony perpetually reading Dickens in a setting that most answers argued was "a different kind of jungle", Mr Todd evincing many of the same characteristics as the London crew. It was pleasing to read work from candidates who had enjoyed Waugh's descriptions of discomfort ('he adapted himself to the rugged topography of the mattress') and pretension ('a wireless set fitted in a case of Regency lacquer'), and could relate these details to a blackly humorous vision.

## F662 Literature post-1900

In the second summer series for this AS coursework unit, moderators were impressed with the standard of work submitted, and saw plenty of evidence that centres are coming to grips with the demands of this unit. Centres seemed to be much more confident than last year, and much clearer about what is required. This is not to say that all four Assessment Objectives were uniformly well addressed, but almost all submissions suggested at least a basic grasp of requirements.

It was good to see centres taking advantage of the breadth of options offered in the tasks, with an intriguing rise in the proportion of re-creative work for Task 1. While some centres stuck to tried and tested text choices and approaches – often with considerable flair – others were more experimental, allowing candidates a wider choice of tasks across the cohort. This approach also yielded some very impressive work, showing candidates engaging with literature in a satisfying way.

A greater range of texts was in evidence, suggesting that centres are feeling confident about trying exploratory work and seeing the possibilities of the unit with greater vision. Whilst there was still a residual loyalty to the old or new favourites – Carol Ann Duffy, *The History Boys*, *Atonement* - these were by no means the outright favourites any more. Popular texts included perennial favourites such as *1984*, *A Clockwork Orange* and Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads* monologues, but some unusual and interesting choices were also seen – Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Joe Penhall's play *Blue/Orange* and Stephen King's *Salem's Lot*, to name but a few.

Many centres linked their texts thematically, which seems to be an increasingly popular approach. Frequent themes included war (*Regeneration* / Siegfried Sassoon / *Journey's End*), Bildungsroman (*Catcher in the Rye* / *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* / *Vernon God Little*) and dystopia (*Brave New World* / *Never Let Me Go* / *Oryx and Crake*). The combination of *The Kite Runner* and *The Bookseller of Kabul* continued to be popular, reflecting a topical interest regarding the conflicts in the Middle East.

### Task 1 – Recreative Writing

This option is growing in popularity. There were many sensitive recreative responses, with some good commentaries attached; centres seem much more confident generally about what is required here. Most candidates anchored their work very firmly in a specific poem or a clearly identified (and often photocopied) moment in their chosen novel or play, and made an attempt to link to the whole text. Most got the balance right and submitted substantial commentaries which were usually critical in focus.

Candidates have variously attempted to use Nadsat (*A Clockwork Orange*); reproduced Raymond Chandler's distinctive style in *The Big Sleep*; and written another scene or part of a scene in rhymed couplets (Tony Harrison's *Fram*). Poetry pastiches of Zephaniah were evocative of his rhythms and metre, not just subjects, attitudes and lexical fields. Some inserts into *Death of a Salesman* evoking Willy's dreams/nightmares or following the requiem with Linda's thoughts were also very effective. At one centre, candidates offered especially perceptive pieces based on *Waiting for Godot*.

## **Task 1 – Critical Analysis**

Most Task 1 passages/poems were of sensible length, although some centres based the critical analysis on two or even three poems, so that the tight critical focus that AO2 requires was somewhat dissipated. Most candidates related what they said to their chosen text as a whole – this was an aspect of coursework that was much improved since last summer. Moderators reported that centres are still trying to achieve a balance in this area: some candidates did spend rather more time than was sensible on this wider-text aspect, occasionally to the point where the response was in all but name a whole-text piece.

On the whole, the use of critical terminology for close analysis was much in evidence and dramatic, narrative and poetical methods were critically explored.

More centres this season presented a mixture of recreative and critical analyses – a good sign of enterprising approaches and confidence in the unit.

## **Task 1 Assessment Objectives**

### **Assessment Objective 1 (also applicable to Task 2)**

This Assessment Objective is tested in both of the folder items and takes the form of textual knowledge and understanding as well as terminology, the organising of an argument and clarity of expression.

Fewer responses this June were seriously unstructured or carelessly written, and centres did seem more confident in marking down spelling and syntactical sloppiness. However, some centres still seem to be unaware of the requirements of this AO and do not seem to take the quality of writing into consideration when deciding on the mark to be awarded. One moderator commented, “I was surprised by how many folders nominally on a mark of 40 had two essays with basic lapses in the use of written English and/or [which] lacked an evident structure or were woodenly linear and/or used an inappropriate register or even lacked paragraphs.”

Nonetheless, moderators did report that generally centres were addressing this AO effectively across both Tasks, and there was increased evidence of more thorough proof-reading of work.

### **Assessment Objective 2**

The only other Objective targeted in Task 1, AO2 is weighted twice as heavily as AO1. This year, a stronger performance in relation to AO2 suggests that there is a more assured understanding of its requirements and its importance.

However, some centres did not set helpful questions to encourage candidates to focus on AO2, and as a result, some able candidates lost marks because they did not offer a full treatment of this AO. It should be remembered that more focused task setting steers candidates towards addressing the Assessment Objectives; the centres that used the OCR Coursework Consultancy Service often did well here, taking advantage of advice given by senior moderators regarding task titles.

Some centres apparently felt that all AOs should be addressed in Task 1, with the result that critical comments and contextual material used up valuable words without contributing to the candidate's marks. In such cases, the AOs assessed in Task 2 (AO3 and AO4) were clearly being addressed in Task 1 at the expense of close analysis (AO1 and AO2), and this should be avoided in future. Again, the OCR Coursework Consultancy Service can be of help here.

## Task 2 – Linked Texts

Task 2 saw some very good linking – candidates almost invariably sustained comparison and/or contrast throughout their work, and fewer than last year wrote two almost discrete mini-essays. Generally, texts and questions were uniform within centres, but when candidates were allowed to select these for themselves the results were sometimes stunning, reflecting a more personal, imaginative and engaged approach.

Some very interesting pairings were on offer – *Regeneration* and *Journey's End* produced very good opportunities to meet comparative criteria, and indeed this was often the case when forms and eras were intermingled. *The History Boys* was still very popular, either with *Atonement* or *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, and there was something of an increase in the popularity of drama texts. Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams were much in evidence, and it was interesting to see choices like *Equus*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and *Oh What a Lovely War!*.

## Task 2 Assessment Objectives

**AO1 – see Task 1 above**

### Assessment Objective 3

There is an increased grasp evident of the two 'strands' of this AO, but the first – comparison – continues to be rather better addressed than the second – interpretations of other readers.

The first strand of AO3 was very well managed indeed. The degree to which the comparative analysis was fluid or balanced between the texts was much greater this year. At the lower end of the range, however, some candidates inevitably found it challenging to sustain well-ordered, comparative responses, and usually confined themselves to pointing out straightforward links.

While most candidates were able to engage in fruitful comparative discussion of the relationships between texts, the second strand of AO3 was not always fully developed: critical material must be properly integrated and interrogated to deserve high reward, and centres must take full account of both AO3 strands when arriving at a final mark.

Some work still relies on undocumented opinions and assertions to fulfil AO3ii: moderators reported the use of weak generalisations like "some critics say . . .", "it could be argued that . . .", "a feminist/Marxist would think . . .". Whilst moderators recognise that it can be difficult to source criticism on very recent publications, centres and candidates are encouraged to ensure that, as far as possible, they offer specific, documented views

On the positive side, different readings about the topic as well as about the texts are on the rise – though candidates need to ensure that discussion about the topic does not become a distraction. There was also more attention to footnotes and bibliographies – a very good academic approach is emerging now, though how these are used productively to present embedded different readings is often a discriminating factor. Less evident this year was the awkwardly bolted-on paragraph with critical views, and moderators did see some quite fluent integration and discussion of actual critics and what they said.

On the whole, this year has seen a definite and pronounced improvement in centres' grasp of both parts of AO3, but more work is needed on the second, 'interpretations' strand. This was a common factor reported by nearly all moderators.



#### **Assessment Objective 4**

While this session saw an improvement in the use of AO4, further improvements could still be made in the proper integration of contextual material into the argument as a whole. There are still centres where candidates get AO4 out of the way in the opening paragraph or two and others where the wording of the task encourages them to impart large quantities of historical or biographical information, not all of it strictly necessary.

Moderators found that contextual ideas and material varied hugely, with some candidates using far too much, to the detriment of any real sense of literary criticism. Most candidates managed to include at least some that was relevant and sensibly used, but as ever there was much biographical/social/cultural material that was introduced purely as background information, without any real or explored sense of how it impacted on the writing and/or reading of the texts.

Nonetheless, many centres had plainly grasped the requirements of AO4 well. Responses were often led by a strong awareness of ways in which contextual issues could be cross-referenced between the texts. Good sense of an era and period was evident at some centres. Class, cultural, educational, historical, linguistic, literary, moral, philosophical, political, psychological, social - all surfaced as contextual issues. Some centres used context as the steer in the task 2 title, which can work very productively.

Generally, there was more assurance in handling AO4 this time with particular success in the area of literary contexts, such as dystopias, crime, gothic, science fiction; other writer(s) in the same genre; or other works by the same writer.

#### **Centre Administration**

Submission deadlines were adhered to much more effectively this session, saving moderators considerable effort in chasing for samples.

In most instances, the assessment of the folders had been rigorously conducted by Centres and the annotations and comments were very helpful. There were some centres, though, at which the final mark awarded did not match the standard recognised in teacher comments throughout the folder. The summative comment should bear close relation to the mark finally awarded after internal moderation.

In some cases, teachers seemed reluctant to put much annotation on candidates' work, and some avoided referring to the AOs in their summative comments – it should be borne in mind that such annotation is extremely helpful to moderators in understanding how centres have reached conclusions about individual candidates' marks and thereby have created a valid rank-order for all their candidates. Moderators see only a sample of work, from which they must extrapolate a judgement about the centre's assessment overall

Clerical errors in the submission of marks were still rather too common, and centres should be aware that resolving them causes delay to the moderation process. In some cases, the usual administrative problems of unbound candidate work and missing Centre Authentication Forms were still being encountered.

Overall, this June showed a continuing improvement in the standard of work and of centre marking on this unit, and centres are to be commended on this. Previously common problems are occurring less and less frequently, though some cropped up often enough to merit mentions:

It is extremely helpful to moderators for candidates to include a word count. Ideally, two should be included, one including quotations and one excluding quotations, as some work which may seem overlength at first glance actually is not so when quotations are excluded.

## *Report on the Units taken in June 2010*

While the increasing inclusion of relevant footnotes is commendable, it should be stressed that excessive footnotes should not be used to advance the main argument of the work in order to circumvent the 3000 word limit.

It is helpful to indicate on the Coursework Cover Sheet which of the texts fulfils the post-1990 requirement.

Centres should remember that there is a blanket prohibition on using any set texts for the examined units in either coursework unit. This applies regardless of whether the centre has studied the particular set text for the examined units. The Chief Examiner, at the beginning of this Report, offers a reminder of forthcoming changes to set texts on Unit F661, which will in turn affect the availability of texts for coursework.

All of this is, of course, offered in the spirit of advice rather than criticism. This has been a very positive session for this unit, and moderators have found the work a pleasure to read and assess. One moderator commented, “the energy and imagination with which candidates at this level are now comparing texts is breathtaking”, while another remarked, “I regularly pinched myself and remembered that this was not degree work or final year A level, but AS work – and they say standards are dropping?”.

## F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800

### General Comments

This summer saw the first full entry for this paper, and the promise of the very encouraging January entry was amply fulfilled. Though Centres almost overwhelmingly studied *Othello* in Section A, in Section B a wide range of text pairings was chosen, and all questions were addressed by candidates.

Encouragingly in a year when the A\* grade makes its first appearance, a significant number of answers were outstanding for their perceptiveness, their coherence, and their ability to use the comparative discussion of texts as the catalyst for mature insights. It was especially pleasing, at the end of two years of preparatory training meetings for the specification, to see how many Centres had worked carefully to highlight the varying focuses of the two sections of the paper: candidates seemed aware of which assessment objectives they were required to prioritise in the two sections of the paper, and rarely neglected the key Assessment Objectives – AOs 2 and 3 in Section A, AOs 3 and 4 in Section B.

Two thirds of this paper involves the study of dramatic texts. Examiners regard the use of the experience of performance (live, or on film or video) as vital: but, by offering access to directors' and actors' interpretations, it also satisfies the requirement to show an awareness of differing ways in which the plays may be understood. Actors' own views on character and pace, in many cases gleaned from websites, are valuable as critical sources: such views are in many ways as useful as more established (and often time-worn) critical stances. Some use of very recent criticism has been encouraging, illustrating the vitality of contemporary critical debate. Examiners were surprised, however, to see so few connections being made between the drama text for part B and the chosen Shakespeare texts (knowledge of the *Duchess of Malfi*, for example might well be helpful in the study both of *Othello* and *Twelfth Night*, and vice versa).

Teachers are to be congratulated once again on rising to meet the challenge of change: if adaptability, receptiveness and open mindedness are signs of a healthy academic world, then the experience of reading answers this year has been very encouraging.

### Section A: Shakespeare

It has become clear that despite the gap between GCSE and A2, work on Shakespeare has not suffered. The standard of writing on the plays was in the main high, with most candidates showing excellent knowledge of the Shakespeare, textually and contextually.

The best work was distinguished by effective use of quotation (AO2) and clear engagement with critical opinion (AO3). Candidates should be able to quote the text with reasonable accuracy, allowing for examination conditions, but will only receive the highest marks if their quotations are appropriately integrated and analysed. Similarly, critical opinion should be used to further the argument of the essay, not just cited.

The prompting quotations which form a crucial part of questions are designed to help candidates to shape their arguments (AO1). Despite this, some candidates did not answer the questions with sufficient focus: this was particularly the case with 3a (on Iago) and 2b (on love in *Twelfth Night*). Some chose to ignore the initial prompt in the question (for example, 'complicit', 'desperate', 'all consuming'): in limiting themselves to the more general prompt which followed, there was loss of precision and focus in the argument.

As has already been said, most centres seem to have prepared their candidates with an awareness of the differing AOs for each part of the paper. However a significant proportion of answers on Shakespeare paid disproportionate attention to context (AO4), to the detriment of the more important concerns of language (AO2) and critical response (AO3).

## **Responses to Individual Questions**

### ***Henry IV Part 1***

#### **1(a) 'Hotspur's role in the play is necessarily a tragic one.'**

There was a satisfying variety of definitions of the tragic and views of Hotspur's relation to it. For some 'Hotspur is made tragic by the fact that he strives for an empty concept' while for others his death is not tragic because he dies for his beliefs and is therefore 'a martyr, rather than a tragic figure'. Several writers suggested that modern notions of honour, more in line with Falstaff's than with Hotspur's, make his death seem 'pitiable rather than fully tragic'. A more complex view was that the audience warms to Hotspur, his poetic language and his intemperate outbursts, but, as a tragic hero should, he has flaws; 'his lack of thought and his instinctive bravery show how easily men who seek honour can be manipulated by those who possess more calculating ambitions, such as Worcester'.

#### **1(b) 'Henry IV Part 1 explores growth and loss, both personal and political.'**

Essays concentrated mainly on Hal. His growth involves losses, seen especially in his changing relationship with Falstaff, foreshadowing his eventual rejection in Part Two. 'We want Hal to grow personally but dislike his cold political growth'. There was some perceptive commentary on the way Hal's language suggests his growth, with colloquial prose banter giving way to poised verse soliloquy. The King, one essay suggested, is 'unable to change politically' because he is trapped by the past: his deposition of the anointed monarch and his debts to those who made it possible.

### ***Twelfth Night***

#### **2(a) By exploring the dramatic presentation of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* evaluate the view that 'although comic at first glance, he is essentially a pitiable figure'.**

This was a popular option. Many candidates discussed how attitudes to the 'notoriously abused' steward change as the play moves on. Historical context is important in determining whether a Shakespearean audience would have relished or rejected the gulling of a puritan, leading to some good discussion of Puritanism in Shakespeare's time, and to different attitudes to the insane in the sixteenth and twenty-first centuries. Humour and pathos were thoughtfully examined in many answers.

#### **2(b) 'A primary concern of the play is the contrasting attitudes of men and women to love.'**

Many of the best candidates saw Viola as pivotal in this debate, and took different kinds of 'love' into consideration. Answers ranged widely through the contexts of Elizabethan stereotypes of the lover, and developed through analysis of the restlessness of Orsino. The best answers were clearly focused on analysis of the way love is presented in the speeches: contexts cited ranged from Plato's Symposium to the meeting between Christ and Mary Magdalene after the Resurrection, and were applied in a very interesting and illuminating way. The most successful answers really got to grips with the language of the play, comparing Viola's attitudes with those

of Orsino as conveyed in the way they speak. There was some very perceptive investigation of self-love – Olivia and Orsino, as well as Malvolio – and occasional sympathy for Sir Andrew. An impressive knowledge of court life was shown, with reference to *The Courtier* (Castiglioni) and Galen. Several saw the darkening aspects of love and noted that *Twelfth Night* is the last of the comedies and that the shadows of the tragedies are closing in.

## **Othello**

### **3(a) 'Iago demands the audience's complicity: we cannot help being fascinated by him.'**

Many candidates knew the play well, especially Iago's soliloquies and the scene where he first sparks doubt in Othello's mind. Some of these, however, used their essay simply to demonstrate their fascination with the character and so lost the opportunity to focus on 'the audience's complicity': this proved to be an important discriminator for this question.

The most accomplished answers, having taken in the meaning of 'complicity', allowed it to shape some excellent responses. Such answers often focused on the word "demand", wondering if Iago has clear intentions for the audience or whether he just enjoys the natural allure of the villain. These candidates also considered the difference between the contemporary and modern day audience. It was observed that the audience are privy to Iago's plans and yet powerless to do anything except watch the tragedy unfold - so as Iago's confidants we are, arguably, equally culpable. Only the very best saw in this the horror of helplessness and tied this to 'pity and fear' and catharsis. It was useful for candidates to explore the meaning of "fascination" and whether this means that we are impressed, intrigued or appalled by Iago.

Most of the best answers engaged with (rather than just referred to) different readings. These may have been taken from a known critical authority, seen as aspects of performance, or emerged from classroom discussion. Such answers were prepared to disagree creatively with an established view (e.g. 'I feel that Coleridge is only partly right here, because...') in order to clarify their own thought processes. Many candidates were also aware that different productions provide different interpretations, thereby strongly affecting the degree of audience complicity. On stage, 'Iago is clearly another human being acting out these terrible deeds, and we are easily fascinated by how the actor moves, speaks, acts', whereas in film or radio versions 'we do not have the same physical connection'. One powerful piece suggested that although Iago demands complicity we are distanced by his 'extreme views, irrational hatred, and similarities to a Vice figure from a morality play'. (Several noted that Elizabethans talked about going to *hear* a play – no wonder Iago's words count for so much.) Some candidates extended the idea of complicity beyond the audience to appreciate the compliance of Emilia and Roderigo and other characters in unwittingly assisting Iago with his plans.

### **3(b) 'Othello is a play about the desperate need for certainty.'**

Some very perceptive candidates identified how the theme of uncertainty pervades the play from the opening scene. Many interesting answers were produced by this question – perhaps because few candidates had thought of the play in quite these terms before, but were stimulated by the patterns of thought which it opened up for them in the exam for the first time. Some of the more successful approaches took issue with the proposition, arguing, for example, that the play charts the destruction of different kinds of 'certainty' (some desirable, some less so), with, at root, Iago's own radical self-ignorance as the motive cause.

At best there was a wide exploration of different kinds of uncertainty (including Iago's). Good answers explored different characters' uncertainties, often psychoanalytically, with some good contextual reference to racism, religion, sex and the army at different periods of history. While less secure answers focused only on Othello and his uncertainty about Desdemona's

unfaithfulness, the strongest answers went beyond Othello's need for certainty to consider insecurities in other characters. More able candidates expanded the term "certainty" to consider self assurance, appearance/reality, honesty/duplicity, security/stability, suspicion/proof, war/festivity/civil order, darkness/light, reputation and class/race. The term was applied to Brabantio, Desdemona, Cassio, Bianca, Roderigo and Iago.

A number of perceptive essays concluded that ironically Iago, who plays on characters' insecurities, was the only constant throughout the play - although we remain uncertain as to his motivation even at the end.

This question presented an excellent opportunity to consider the decline in Othello's language with some really close analysis. A handful of candidates also considered whether the term "desperate" was appropriate - most of them concluding that as the play progresses the quest for certainty does become more desperate or frantic. It was also argued that the audience becomes desperate to know the outcome of Iago's plan.

### ***The Winter's Tale***

#### **4(a) 'Hermione is far more important for what she represents than for anything she says or does.'**

Many candidates found this question sympathetic. Hermione's symbolic importance, usually as a figure of regeneration, was much discussed. Many writers, however, disagreed productively with the statement in the question, arguing that her words and deeds are actually more important than what she stands for. We see her 'more as a real person than as merely a moral figure'. What she says and the 'gentle but confident' way she says it is important. Paulina persistently reminds Leontes not of Hermione's representative status, argued one answer, but of 'her grace and actions'. Another approach was to see her as objectified by Leontes – he ignores her words and sees her only as a stereotypically inconstant woman. This resulted in some interesting work but sometimes moved rather far from the question into general studies of women in the play.

#### **4(b) 'A play dominated by the problems of beginnings and endings.'**

This question produced some very interesting explorations of pattern and structure, with candidates able to range across the play to exemplify parallels. These answers did not become mechanical, however: there were some very sensitive responses to the dilemmas faced by the characters. Though some answers became mired in plot summary, most found this question a useful route into the themes and the mixed genres of the play. Many successful answers contrasted Sicilian winter and death with Bohemian spring and rebirth. One intelligent view was that although we can see the whole play as moving from the death and loss of the first three acts to the growth of the last two, there is in fact 'a complex network of beginnings and endings throughout'. (Positive examples include the beginning of Camillo's relationship with Polixenes, and Paulina's constancy; negative examples include Polixenes' Leontes-like wrath in Act IV and the apparent lack of communication between Leontes and Hermione at the end.) Some answers looked at the problem, for the playwright, of achieving a final resolution: how 'Shakespeare cleverly diverts the audience's attention from the tragic "endings" (the deaths of Mamillius and Antigonus) in the first half with a joyous, comedic celebration of life in the rebirth of Hermione'.

## Section B

The best candidates handled Section B very well indeed, manipulating and comparing their texts with intelligence and real insight. Such candidates rose to the challenge of the closed text examination, remembering detailed quotations and detailed language observations and using them skilfully and appropriately. Good candidates understood the subtleties of the focus of the questions and used the quotation to help them structure their answers; less secure answers ignored the quotation and merely followed the straightforward rubric of the question, losing some sharpness of focus.

AO4 seemed to be the area with which some candidates struggled. It was often ignored completely, or it was 'cobbled' into a response and had no real relevance to the focus of the question. Where AO4 was addressed fully it informed or furthered well-crafted arguments. Mini history essays (on the Renaissance, the Reformation, Puritanism and the late Mediaeval Church) were often inaccurate, almost always irrelevant, and in many cases absurdly generalised. Theology proved especially taxing for some candidates: one examiner noted that 'knowledge of religious contexts ... was surprisingly poor. This applied mainly to work on Donne, Marlowe, Webster and, more rarely, Milton.'

To achieve successful AO3 comparison it is helpful to incorporate a high degree of 'interweaving' of the two texts. Good answers often established some kind of agenda in the first paragraph and ranged between the two texts so that both were kept in play throughout the answer. Alternative paragraphs, or pairs of paragraphs, can work well, but to spend a page or several pages on one text without cross reference is not a good idea. The literary-critical aspect of AO3 was usually well addressed: even in the weaker responses critical opinion was often used in support of arguments.

One area of concern was poor balance and coverage in comparative essays where Donne's poetry was one of the texts. Donne was often studied beside *The Duchess of Malfi*, and this was a very productive combination, but a significant minority of answers either did not look at enough poems (we would expect close attention to at least three poems) – or look at language in sufficient detail. Some essays involving Donne relied too heavily on an often romanticised biographical narrative, and spent too little time looking at the poems themselves. Work on Donne has particular rewards, but also offers challenges different in kind from the other (narrative) poems. Examiners also reported that disappointingly few candidates working on Donne had looked at the later, religious poems, despite the opportunities offered by the set questions: those who did look at these poems generally did very well.

Examiners reported seeing answers of breathtaking originality and insight in section B: there seems clear evidence that it stimulates remarkable levels of creativity from candidates. This stimulus often seems to provoke higher levels of performance from candidates than section A. Part of the art of success in Section B is to think hard about question choice. Examiners were delighted to see that a wide range of questions proved to be accessible for most text combinations: from an entry of say, 20 candidates studying the same texts, it was not unusual to see as many as five alternative question choices.

## Responses to Individual Questions

### 5 'There is a tension between the attractiveness of wrongdoing and fear of its consequences.'

This proved to be a very popular question, especially linking Faustus with Pope / Milton/ Chaucer / Donne to explore vanity, blasphemy, deceit and lust.

*Chaucer and Marlowe*

Candidates looked successfully at ways in which Faustus prevents himself from seeing the consequences of his actions and repenting, and ways in which the Pardoner avoids the moral of his own Tale. 'Helen seduces Faustus, but she also "sucks forth his soul"'. 'The Pardoner may have been enticed to take over the god-like role of the Host, but his silencing at the end emphatically expels him from that heaven'. A surprising number of candidates overlooked the Tale, concentrating their attention entirely upon the Pardoner:

*Chaucer and Webster*

Interesting comparisons were developed between Bosola and the Pardoner – they show similar cynicism, but Bosola develops beyond this. Really good answers used the genre of satire as a useful context for comparison, so that good grounds for comparison were established. Some responses recognised the black humour in the depiction of the Pardoner. Many candidates surprisingly asserted that the Duchess had done wrong in re-marrying, which seems to go against the whole emotional drive of the play. Particularly well handled was the shameless Pardoner's lack of fear for any divine consequence but suffering an appropriate come-uppance via the Host's rebuke. There was a tendency in all answers on The Pardoner to concentrate on the teller and make little reference to the tale of the rioters, but the Pardoner served the questions very well.

*Pope and Sheridan*

Many felt that Pope's attitude to wrongdoing is more ambivalent than Sheridan's – Belinda is admired as much as mocked, Clarissa's strictures fall on deaf ears. The difference was seen often in contextual terms: Pope's desire not to offend Arabella Fermor or Lord Petre, Sheridan's to entertain an audience with the scandalmongers.

*Chaucer and Sheridan*

An unusual combination which suggested some interesting comparisons – the Pardoner and Joseph Surface were both seen as performers. The texts were ably compared as satires.

**6 'For women, sex is a means to an end, for men, it is an end in itself.'**

*Donne and Webster*

Really good answers developed from close analysis of Donne, and comparing the attitudes expressed in his language with those of Webster. Donne's biography was sometimes substituted for his poems more than it was used to illustrate them, and it was perhaps too easily assumed that both authors shared their characters' or speakers' attitudes to sex. One interesting view, however, was that the proposition ignores the fact that "for each person sex is elementally different": casual sex in many of Donne's poems, and the affair between Julia and the Cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi*, contrast with the loving relationship of the Duchess and Antonio and with the 'spiritual union' of lovers in 'The Extasie' or 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning'.

*Sheridan and Pope*

Some very lively and contextually informed answers were alert to the contrasting satirical focus of the two texts, and developed ingenious discussions about the ways in which women's sexuality and women's reputations are represented as a commodity, to be nurtured, preserved and be the object of bids and stratagems. Examiners were impressed by the sophistication of the arguments offered.

**7 'It is the processes of argument and persuasion which most strongly engage us.'**

Though the processes of argument and persuasion were central to several of the texts, disappointingly few candidates seemed to be equipped with the analytical skills to do justice to this question. However, when candidates knew the texts well enough, and in particular had any



armoury of technical understanding of rhetoric, answers were lively and focused debates on the more subtle aspects of the ways in which argument and persuasion operated at different levels of society and the guises in which they appeared.

*Donne and Behn* worked well for most candidates, especially when looking at a range of poems. *Chaucer and Sheridan* produced more successful analysis on the Pardoner but worked less well with Sheridan, again suggesting that some candidates latched on to the question before they had completely thought the combination through in terms of the question's focus. *Pope and Sheridan* was generally very successfully done, with a keen sense of argument and persuasion operating both within the texts and at the level of the texts' overall satirical or moral focus. There was some fine awareness of irony.

## **8 'The struggle with God is absolute, all-consuming and passionate.'**

This was a very popular question, and many candidates were able to focus on the passion of the struggle. AO4 tended to be handled very well, or very badly. Some candidates took so much space setting out context that they left little space for focus on the texts. Weaker answers struggled with the main divisions of Christianity into Protestant and Catholic, and Renaissance and Reformation were sometimes confused.

*Faustus and Pardoner*: many candidates were unaware that mockery of the Pope would have been greeted with delight by a Protestant audience. No candidate who wrote on Faustus questioned the moral presented by the Chorus as being the 'answer' to the play. While context on *The Pardoner's Tale* was invariably sound, on this question detailed discussion of simony tended to squeeze out any exploration of personal encounters with God.

*Donne and Webster*: some candidates were aware of religious background, but did not develop it: it felt like an addition to the essay. God was seen rather as a setter of rules, and any rule breaking was seen as 'blasphemous', therefore 'The Flea' was treated as a blasphemous poem. The best answers understood that God and religion were often not the same thing, and this helped them comment on the Duchess's death. Relationship with God became redefined as relationship with religion, so many of Donne's more obviously relevant poems were ignored, as well as the moving death of the Duchess.

## **9 'It is their weaknesses which make heroic characters interesting.'**

Candidates really needed to have some idea of the technical meaning of the term 'heroic' to make sense of this question. Some candidates offered a clear working definition, for example with reference to Aristotle, but usually 'heroic' was understood simply to mean 'the main character'. This was a question where, by ignoring the introductory statement, candidates who knew the texts well sometimes produced pedestrian accounts. However, the weaknesses of Faustus, The Duchess and her brothers, Satan and The Pardoner (despite their possible blindness to their weaknesses), Donne (for women) and most notably Belinda (vain, splenetic) were well noted. There was interesting writing on Bosola as a potentially heroic character. This was one of the more popular questions.

*Pope and Sheridan*. Weaknesses were seen as making characters three-dimensional: the perfections of Sheridan's Maria and the moralising of Pope's Clarissa make them uninteresting compared with the other characters. Maria might have seemed more heroic in her own period, but 'modern readers prefer flawed heroines like Bridget Jones or Belinda'.

## 10 'Pride is inseparable from foolishness.'

This was probably the most popular question overall and produced a wide range of performance. Less secure candidates focused on the way the characters were 'proud'. Top band candidates were able to link foolishness with pride, and vice versa, and the ways in which these were *presented* by the writers – this often led to some insightful AO4 comment. The strongest candidates used their knowledge of the Renaissance and of the Civil War to excellent effect, showing how the writers were influenced by their historical contexts. One or two candidates veered a little too far away from the literary into the historical; but overall this was a successfully answered question. Despite the good historical AO4 very few placed pride and folly in a theological context.

### *Chaucer and Marlowe.*

The usual argument was that 'Faustus is often too proud to see how foolish he has been and the Pardoner is too proud to see that the pilgrims will not buy his relics'. One of the more telling comparisons concerned their pride in their own rhetoric: 'when the Pardoner preaches his voice rings out "as gooth a belle" and Faustus used to make the schools "ring with *sic probo*".' Some interesting answers compared the 'rytoures' with the comic characters in *Faustus*. Most candidates condemned Faustus for foolishness, although some acknowledged the power of his desire, and possible 'Renaissance' attitudes towards it – a point where context could have been really useful. It was interesting that in this secular age candidates were only too happy to see Faustus go to hell; many thought that the Chorus was right, and was the authentic voice.

### *Milton and Marlowe.*

Answers found clear connections between Satan's pride and Faustus'. 'Pride causes Faustus to replace love of God with love of himself and Satan to deceive others into believing that he can defeat the Almighty'. 'Satan's pride had cast him out of heaven and Faustus' 'waxen wings did mount above his reach'. Given the triviality of what Faustus gains from his bargain, many writers felt that 'foolishness' was a description better suited to him.

### *Pope and Sheridan.*

Comparisons were mainly between Lady Teazle and Belinda: 'Lady Teazle is as proud of her new reputation as a woman of fashion as Belinda is of her beauty'. There was some apt awareness of genre difference – while Pope can show Belinda's pride and foolishness through subtle mock-epic effects, Sheridan exposes Lady Teazle's and Joseph Surface's through broader visual comedy including the screen scene. (Here as on other questions production details were used to good effect, for example 'Lady Teazle was made ridiculous because her pride in understanding fashion manifested itself in lurid, bright dresses and ornamental hats'.) One interesting comment was that 'Maria shows proper pride in refusing to join in gossip but her fellow foil character, Clarissa, is foolish to pride herself on a virtue – independence – she does not have' since she passes the Baron the scissors.

## **F664 Texts in Time**

Though a small number of centres had submitted F664 coursework in January, this was the first full entry of this unit. It was apparent from consultancy enquiries and from training events that many centres were approaching this first main session with some apprehension, a little uncertain about their teaching, their candidates' approach and their assessments. As the small January submission had already indicated, however, the vast majority of centres had got it all about right. Candidates had been stimulated and stretched, had written well at different levels, while their work had been assessed successfully using the published marking criteria. Over 80% of centres had marks which conformed very closely to the national standard. For a new specification, that is remarkably successful, and testament to the care and diligence of teachers.

Unlike January, this session provided marks over a very wide range and it was good to see that teachers were prepared to use the whole range of marks available with discrimination. It is as important for centres to judge when candidates work shows a 'limited attempt to develop comparative discussion' as when they demonstrate 'excellent and consistently detailed comparative analysis'.

One of the features of coursework is the opportunity it can give to provoke interesting, thoughtful work throughout the mark range and according to candidate ability. As we have come to expect over the years, work at the top end was often remarkable in its poise, knowledge, analytical acumen and scholarly investigation. Moderators expressed themselves as 'impressed', 'privileged' and 'delighted' to read 'fascinating' and 'rewarding' work. Such comments, however, were not restricted to the top range – it was equally rewarding to see candidates of more modest ability pursuing arguments and finding insights in the comparisons between their texts. It has to be said that such insights occurred much more frequently when candidates were pursuing their own interests and ideas rather than following the same direction as their peers.

### **Task Titles**

A very large number of centres chose a text range and more particularly, task titles, from the Coursework Guidance booklet. This was a sensible way of playing safe, as the titles to be found there are good, well shaped tasks, but when a whole cohort of students from a centre studies the same texts and answers the same question, some of the opportunities of coursework have been missed and the possibility of individual work largely overlooked. Moderators saw a large number of examples of this; in some cases, even, with each candidate citing an identical bibliography and with essays similarly structured, often using the same points of reference. While the assessments of such work were usually sound, the sameness made them much less interesting reading because there had been much less interest in the writing. This kind of coursework is counter-productive in encouraging students to develop as independent thinkers and writers and tends to have the effect of depressing the marks.

For a number of reasons, then, it seems inadvisable to set the same task for each candidate. The unit is designed to elicit coursework borne out of research – the emphasis placed on other readings and the contexts of the literary works makes that clear. The prime learning opportunity for each candidate is to craft their reading and research into a balanced comparative essay. There were many centres, and candidates, who had embraced this model wholeheartedly. In such centres, each candidate had negotiated a title which was appropriate not just for the assessment objectives, but also for their own interests and abilities. This tailor-made approach produced, at each mark level, the most enterprising, spirited and original work, with candidates clearly benefiting from the ownership of the material and from following their own avenues of study. The learning acquired by these candidates will go well beyond the assessment on one English Literature unit.

A well chosen task title is usually the starting point for successful coursework and the correlative is also true. The best essays seen by moderators sprang from clearly directed arguments, where candidates had a case to make. They also tended to be stimulated by an explicit injunction to 'compare' – as this is the prime purpose of the essay, candidates who failed to compare their texts scored low marks. 'Explore', 'Discuss' and 'Consider' imperatives were far less successful, as were titles which did not directly ask for a literary focus. Titles without a question should not appear – a title such as 'Hope and Disillusion in America' offers a candidate no direction at all.

### **Text Choices**

Centres which offered a range of tasks usually had a more open policy on text choice, too. In some cohorts, candidates seem to have been given complete licence to choose texts – again, some negotiation is required so that teachers can check the suitability of the choices. Others had been given a free reign within a genre, such as gothic, post-colonial, American or satiric writing, while others had offered candidates a preselected pool of texts. This kind of range again encourages candidates to follow individual lines of argument and leads to more successful coursework. Centres nervous about moving from three taught texts are encouraged to move at least to two taught with a free choice for the third text as a staging post to more ambitious coursework.

Particular texts chosen also merit discussion. Many centres were ambitious and adventurous, ensuring that moderators saw a very wide range under discussion, from every recess of gothic literature to contemporary Indian poetry. Shakespeare and Chaucer appeared, as well as contemporary writers such as Ian McEwan, Cormac McCarthy, Owen Sheers and Margaret Atwood. One of the delights of moderating coursework is that it gives moderators a fascinating reading list for the following summer. There were few non-fiction choices, though critical work did appear. It is worth a reminder that when such a text is chosen, it must take an equal comparative role in the discussion with the other two texts.

Drama appeared infrequently, but when candidates wrote on drama, they tended to do so with a more developed sense of genre than those who were restricted to prose and poetry. There was often a real appreciation of how these texts worked as theatre and the potential for different performances to act as different interpretations.

A number of centres clearly broke regulations by choosing a text which appears on the set text list for one of the examined units. This is explicitly forbidden in the specification regulations and applies also to other poems by set poets.

### **Poetry**

At both AS and A2, the coursework is a balancing unit with the examined units, so text choices need to be of approximately equal substance. This is most frequently an issue with poetry, where the choice must be a published text, with an amount of poetry set for study which equates to that for an examined unit. Candidates are expected to show knowledge of a range of poetry in their essay, with some detailed discussion of 3 - 4 poems, depending on length. A similar guideline also applies to selections of short stories. Several centres offered work from their candidates with only a single poem listed as a 'text'. Even when that poem is a long one, such as 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', it is best seen within some context of the writer's wider work, but where that poem is not long (Poe's 'The Raven' cropped up a number of times), it is unacceptable as a 'text'. To submit work on two individual short stories and a single poem as the three texts was clearly flouting the letter and spirit of coursework and disadvantaging the candidates.

Candidates found poetry more difficult to integrate into their arguments and often it seemed to be relegated to a 'third text' status, in some essays meriting no more than a paragraph. Where discussion is largely thematic, or is limited to consideration of plot and character, it can be very difficult to make poetry fit the argument. This meant that those candidates who had recognisably literary tasks, directing them to a comparison of *how* ideas were explored, rather than the ideas themselves, were much more successful in constructing balanced arguments and keeping the poetry in focus.

## **Administration**

In most cases, the administration of the unit by centres was excellent, with all the correct folders delivered in good time accompanied by the Centre Authentication Form. Often there were also helpful notes about setting, course procedures etc. In the cases where further folders were requested, these were dispatched promptly and efficiently.

Centres do need to parcel up the coursework securely – several centres submitted all their candidates' work as loose sheets with individual pages unidentifiable, creating a serious potential problem if the package were to be damaged in transit. A staple or a treasury tag is a helpful addition and offers some security to candidates' work. A header or footer with candidate/centre number and pagination would also be a welcome practice.

It is very important that the cover sheet is properly filled in, with the correct candidate number, the texts studied, task title, breakdown of marks and summative comment. The most successful summative comments are those which clearly weigh the strengths and weaknesses of the work and measure these against the marking criteria to produce a clear balanced judgement. These should be assessment comments, explaining how the mark has been decided – the audience here is the moderator, not the candidate. Such comments make it much easier for the moderator to understand how and why marks have been awarded and thereby to support the centre's judgement of all its candidates, not just those in the moderation sample.

A bibliography and footnotes, to acknowledge secondary sources, are a requirement of the unit. Each critical and contextual reference in the essay should be footnoted, and the footnotes should correlate with the bibliography. This is a part of the valuable 'academic research' learning of the unit. Footnotes should not be used for the addition of material supplementary to the argument or to develop further points; if such material is worthwhile, it should be incorporated into the essay. Footnotes are excluded from the word limit only where they reference citations.

The word limit of 3000 words, excluding title, quotations, footnotes and bibliography, is a strict limit and must be adhered to. Once the exclusions have been taken into account, it offers plentiful scope for developed discussion, as has been shown by countless candidates. Ideally, candidates should state word counts both including and excluding quotations, etc, at the end of the essay.

## **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 With practice coming through GCSE and AS levels, many candidates handle integrated comparison very well at A2. The best answers are able to maintain comparisons between all three texts and use those comparisons and contrasts to drive the argument. Often it is the different treatment of ideas in different genres which provides the most illuminating

insights. The three texts must be kept in balance for the higher marks, each text drawn into the discussion at key moments to direct the argument.

The second bullet point of AO3 was often overlooked by centres. The evaluation of critical reading is part of the dominant assessment objective, so must be considered an essential part of the task. Candidates are expected to consider aspects of the critical debate around their texts and the highest marks are reserved for those who actively engage with different opinions, explore them, evaluate and challenge them. Sweeping generic comments, such as that 'feminists think that...' are much less successful. It is acknowledged that critical work on contemporary writers is harder to find, and that in these cases candidates might sometimes have to rely on hypothetical readings, but even these should be explored fully.

AO4 Almost without exception, candidates were very well informed about appropriate contexts. In most cases, large chunks of context roughly fitted into the essay were absent, though there were a number of examples of long contextual introductions, which delayed discussion of the actual texts unnecessarily. The key to context in the unit is to consider its 'significance and influence' on the texts. A number of centres accepted the presence of contextual knowledge in itself as fulfilling the requirements, whereas the criteria are more specifically directed.

AO1 Most candidates demonstrated an understanding of the texts and tasks under consideration. It is important that centres recognise that this understanding is of the nature of the text as a literary work. Sometimes recall of plot and character was accepted as 'understanding', which led to inflated marks.

The other aspects of AO1 are about writing and, in coursework, higher standards are demanded than for the examined units, as consideration of the time and facilities that candidates have had are included in the assessment. This includes the opportunity to redraft and reshape, to refine and to use word-processing technology. It was disappointing to see poorly expressed work awarded very high marks, despite errors in punctuation, spelling (including author names and text titles) and grammar. That said, much of the work was poised and fluent, clearly directing sophisticated and complex arguments. It is this kind of work which deserves 15/15.

AO2 Address to this AO is much more successful when the task is focused on the writers' treatment, presentation, expression etc. This makes the discussion of the writing and its effects a fundamental part of the argument – it has coherence and direction. Where that is not the case, patches of analysis can occur which do not contribute to the argument, often focusing on the alliteration of a couple of words or the assonance of a single line, without consideration of how it fits within the rest of the passage or text. Too often the poetry was reserved for AO2, with the language, structure and form of prose disregarded. The exception to this is drama, as mentioned earlier, which tends to produce thoughtful responses to dialogue, proxemics and stagecraft.

As stated at the outset, this was a highly successful first full session, to complement the success of the January submission. The majority of centres did a very good job and some candidates produced superb work. There are a good number of centres whose approaches to this unit, and to the work they help their candidates produce, are exemplary. There are a very few centres who struggled with the unit. The notes and guidance in this report are intended to help those centres, and to make the good practice of other centres even better. All centres are encouraged to make use of the OCR Coursework Consultancy service to check text choices, task titles and any other issues about which they may be uncertain.

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