

GCE

English Literature

Advanced GCE **A2 H471**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H071**

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945

General Comments:

This session for F661 has been offered to candidates re-sitting the examination, and therefore the nature of the cohort differed from earlier sessions; examiners generally reported that they saw less work of the highest quality, presumably because stronger candidates were often already happy with their marks, but also less very weak work. All candidates seemed to be very familiar with the requirements of the exam, but there were some who seemed to be working from a fairly distant memory of the texts and therefore could not supply the kind of textual detail which is necessary to get into the higher bands.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A

Robert Browning

Answers on 'Prospice' were generally competent or better. Most offered the biographical context that the poem was written following the death of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and identified her as the 'soul of my soul' at the poem's conclusion. Candidates were quick to discuss the use of adverse weather conditions at the poem's opening, but only the better ones touched on the use of heroic and archaic language and the poem's distinctive and unusual metre. 'The Grammarian's Funeral' and 'The Bishop Orders his Tomb' were popular comparators.

Emily Dickinson

The best answers on 'It was not Death, for I stood up' managed to balance their interpretations of this enigmatic poem with explicit focus on language and knowledge of the poet. One excellent candidate started from the premise that the poem attempts to 'express the inexpressible' and worked from there; weaker answers preferred to jump straight to a perceived subtext, usually that the poem deals with the theme of death. This interpretation is not wrong, of course, but candidates who chose this route did better if they were prepared to discuss the problem of a poem about death disclaiming the theme in its first line. 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain' and 'I heard a Fly buzz – when I died' were the most popular comparators.

Edward Thomas

Answers on 'No one so much as you' were quick to point out the poem is unusual in the selection for focusing on a relationship, and often compared it successfully with others which highlight solitude; comparisons were also often made to 'The sun used to shine'. Most answers spent time discussing the likely subject of the poem, and generally suggested that it was either the poet's mother or his wife. There is some disagreement about this amongst commentators, so examiners were prepared to accept a range of suggestions; since AO4 in this part of the exam primarily consists of references to other poems, it was unwise for candidates to spend too long on the issue of identification. Some answers struggled with the poem even at word level, finding difficulties with understanding words such as 'clay' and 'pine', but most were able to demonstrate a competent grasp of meaning. Few, however, found much to say about the poem's characteristically short line-length, and some even suggested it was written in iambic pentameter.

W B Yeats

The best answers on Yeats were those which understood that the 'The Stolen Child' was written early in Yeats' poetic career and coloured by his interest in Irish mythology. There were some subtle readings picking up on the changes in the final refrain and in the perspective of the last stanza, and commenting thoughtfully on whether the world of fantasy was best found in the Irish landscape or in the idealised domestic scenes at the poem's conclusion. Weaker answers tended to assume an allegorical interpretation without offering a justification for this (for example, suggesting that the faeries represent English soldiers), and quite commonly stated that Yeats' source for the world's suffering could be found in the events of World War One and the Irish Civil War, although the poem was published in 1889. Candidates should remember that they are not required to provide historical context in this part of the exam, but that where they do they should be careful about its accuracy.

Section B

Frankenstein

Almost all answers seen were to the (a) option, 'Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked'. Candidates were well prepared to answer on this theme, and the best responses showed how Frankenstein's failure to nurture his Creature leads to further disaster in the novel. As in other sessions, many candidates showed an impressive command of primary and secondary texts and quoted liberally to support their arguments. This is the text where candidates were most often tempted to write too much, offering masses of information which was not always shaped into a well-structured answer. The other main flaw in answers was a determination to offer a prepared response to an earlier question, usually one about the female characters in the novel.

Jane Eyre

Almost all candidates chose the (a) option on characters being motivated more by conscience than love. Most structured their answers clearly around a series of characters; some limited the effectiveness of their answers by spending most of the essay on Jane's childhood. It was interesting that a significant number struggled with the term 'conscience', and wrote instead on whether characters were led by their heart or their head, or (especially in relation to Jane) their desire to discover their own identity. Better responses discussed Jane's strongly moral sense, especially her instant flight from Thornfield when she finds that Rochester is already married; Rochester's own self-indulgence and self-justification in his bigamous plans; and St John's powerful but cold self-discipline in following his vocation.

The Turn of the Screw

Most candidates chose the (a) question on the dangers of innocence and generally offered a well-informed debate about the Governess and the children, usually focused on the ambiguities of the tale and the doubts about innocence which exist in each case. Answers to the (b) option on the framing narrative were usually more ambitious and sometimes displayed an impressive level of recall of the early part of the novella, and an ability to follow its implications throughout the rest of the story.

The Picture of Dorian Gray

Almost all answers on this text were to the (a) option concerning Dorian's selfishness and his possible heroic characteristics. Most came down very firmly against him, and were often inclined to spend much of the answer discussing the Sybil Vane episode as evidence of Dorian's anti-heroic qualities. Some defended him by identifying Lord Henry as the devilish origin of his decline. One of the best answers referred to Wilde's Preface, suggesting that it would be wrong to judge Dorian by the usual traditional moral standards and that it is possible to see him as a kind of hero of aestheticism.

The Secret Agent

Once again, almost all candidates answered on the (a) option about revolutionary politics. Most offered a survey of the anarchists, often including a very entertaining collection of quotations to characterise their ridiculous qualities; usually the 'genuine threat' was thought to be found in the figure of the Professor, and the best responses were able to quote from the novel's conclusion, where he passes on 'unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men'.

Mrs Dalloway

There were relatively few candidates for this text, almost all of whom chose the (a) option on the novel's contrast between youth and maturity. Answers focused mostly on the contrast between Bourton and the novel's present, dominated by discussion of Peter Walsh, Sally Seton and Clarissa. Some answers introduced Elizabeth as a representative of youth in time present; attempts to introduce Septimus into the discussion were usually less successful.

F662 Literature post-1900

General Comments:

Tasks set for F662 were largely appropriate and a few Centres had availed themselves of the Coursework Consultancy Service, although they were not as ready to supply evidence of this as in previous sessions. However, there were a very small number of centres that had provided unsuitable reading for their candidates: texts earlier than 1900, no post 1990 text, poems that did not seem part of a named collection, home-made anthologies.

For Task 1, it was observed that Centres who offered a Critical Piece were focussed in the main on form, structure and language to meet the demands of AO2 which was dominant for this item. Centres were generally more confident directing their candidates to aspects of language rather than comments on form and structure, however. There were still some Centres that set up tasks with a thematic rather than stylistic address and that did not show enough intra-textual reference even though the majority of the answer should be passage-based. The latter point was most often observed in the work of Centres studying poetry, where candidates concentrated solely on a focus poem rather than broadening out to a collection and thereby satisfying the reading requirement.

Centres offering Re-creative Work had often clearly directed candidates to a pastiche length shorter than the accompanying commentary, which was good practice. The work was very suitable for the Unit, imitating the stimulus passage/section by intelligently recreating the world and style of the base text, with no examples of original creative pieces and text transformations observed, inappropriate styles of writing seen in previous sessions. Some Centres responded to the whole text rather than a specific point in/example of the text under study, when, strictly, to ensure parity with Close Passage Study responses, they should be based on/around an identified section of text. Commentaries ideally should have dealt with the extracts under consideration and the re-creations, but Centres found the balance of emphasis difficult to manage; this was not penalised.

For the Linked Texts piece, tasks were in the vast majority of cases appropriately comparative and a number had a contextual loading which foregrounded the importance of AO4 in the balance of marks. Even at this late stage in the specification, some Centres were dealing with comparison by alternating paragraphs which produces a see-saw effect and, given the 10 marks available for AO4, more attention could have been addressed to breadth and depth of contextual influences and impacts. There were some centres offering light coverage of poetry and short story collections, which affected the AO1 achievement (knowledge of the text). The second aspect of AO3, the requirement for alternative readings, was often present but less frequently evaluated or interrogated.

Many teachers seemed well acquainted with the assessment Bands and the majority submitted marks within the acceptable mark variation. However, there were instances of leniency, indeed significantly more totals showing generosity than severity. It was disappointing that a small number of Centres were far adrift from the standard of the Unit and that some Centres seemed to push marks close to tolerance as an apparent strategy. Of course, the aim of moderation is to confirm marks if at all possible and, with that in mind, the largest cause for concern were those centres with comments indicating particular stages of the assessment scheme but marks from another area of the grid entirely. Given that much of the entry seemed to derive from re-sit candidates, the numbers of singletons and rogue outliers was greater than in previous sessions, but it is, of course, more difficult to locate individuals rather than create a rank order of candidates.

Annotation of folders has improved through the life of the Specification, which is a very pleasing development. Many Centres target the assessment objectives sensibly and evaluate candidates' strengths and weaknesses in respect of different assessment foci in order to justify the marks offered. A number of Centres do not take sufficient notice of candidates' written expression and accuracy and should bear in mind that AO1 relates to both tasks. Similarly, for Task 2, the use of alternative views and contextual material is sometimes a matter of off-loading than engaging with and assessing the impact of. There are still a minority of Centres that do not provide much of an insight into the marks awarded or that have "see end of essay" directives in the summative comment box on cover sheets, which denies them the opportunity to comment on the folder as a whole.

Most Centres were secure in their recording of marks, but there were still too many instances of clerical errors with disparities between what was written on folders and what had been submitted to data capture. Clerical errors are a time-consuming irritant to the moderation process which probably could be avoided with due diligence at an earlier stage. There were also instances of late submitted work and a high number of candidates who did not ultimately produce (new) work.

As ever, the best work sparkled with its academic style, advanced terminology, cogent argument and astute awareness of the assessment objectives, although, given this session was largely a last chance for many candidates, many of the really strong candidates had already achieved their standard in previous sessions and moved on. The candidature had risen well to the demands of close passage study (and imitative writing) and comparative contextual writing. There was less experimentation with texts this session but some relatively recent new ones such as *God of Carnage* came through in some Centres' submissions.

F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800

General comments

The overall standard of the candidates' responses was very high with most candidates understanding the different requirements of section A and B. Candidates showed an understanding of AO2 in section A by quoting from the text and analysing language effectively and referring to staging by looking at different stage and film versions. Candidates were either familiar with the critical debates or offered their own variant readings to address AO3. In section B most candidates understood the need to compare throughout their essay and many able candidates offered interesting and illuminating links between texts, AO3. Context, AO4, was used effectively and relevantly and examiners reported seeing less of the kind of biographical or potted history paragraphs as introductions, which do not link to the candidate's argument and therefore do not add to their achievement. Most candidates allocated an equal amount of time to each question, showing they understood that they are equally weighted, but a few able students ran out of time on the second question they attempted. Examiners noted that on the whole candidates who planned before committing to paper tended to have a clearer structure which often leads to the award of higher marks, especially in section B where the topic areas produce more spontaneous thinking and planning leads to more thoughtful links and comparisons being made effectively in response to the questions set.

Section A

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Question 1 (a): Responses to this question were successful in evaluating the dramatic role of the Mechanicals, referring, for example, to stage productions both recent versions, like The BBC Russell T Davis production, and those that they can only have come across in research, like Peter Brook's version. Some interesting responses saw the role of the Mechanicals in terms of class hierarchies and discussed the way the differing levels of education in the play made for compelling social commentary. Others saw the play within the play as being important in terms of metatheatricality and some saw that it parodied the play's action effectively. Most felt that Bottom was a hugely important character and saw his transformation as revealing that love and reason keep little company. The most successful responses considered varied readings and blended these into their argument. Some interesting responses made cross-comparisons to either mythology or other Shakespeare plays including *Romeo and Juliet*. Less successful candidates used quotations by way of mere illustration, rather than analysing them in detail and referring to their effects and to the impact created on the audience.

Question 1 (b): Many answers chose to consider the female characters in three groups: Hippolyta (in her dealings with Theseus), Titania (as dealt with by Oberon) and the two young Athenian friends Helena and Hermia. Weaker answers tended to find a broadly similar pattern of patriarchal bullying in all three relationships, whereas better answers saw quite distinct aspects, perhaps even contrasting, of the experiences depicted by Shakespeare. Stronger candidates focussed on the subtleties and the sub-plot such as the fairies, the Mechanicals and the wedding, rather than just the main and perhaps obvious characters, such as Hermia and Helena. Generalisations such as 'In Elizabethan times, women were viewed as inferior to men' were of some value to answers, but much less than more specific aspects of Elizabethan attitudes to gender. References were made to a great many productions, such as the caged Hippolyta in the San Francisco Actors' Workshop production in 1966. Russell T Davis's representation of Hippolyta restrained by a muzzle and a straightjacket was frequently mentioned. It was notable that many candidates who chose this question also chose question 6 suggesting candidates have much to say about the way writers present women.

Antony and Cleopatra

Question 2 (a): Weaker candidates struggled to define the public and private arena. Stronger candidates focussed on the varied settings of Alexandria, Egypt and Rome and intertwined these public settings with the emotions experienced by characters. Antony and Cleopatra's emotions were the most often discussed. Candidates often argued that Cleopatra could never be private or anything other than Egypt as theatricality was part of her role. They argued she is never alone on stage so her emotions are always seen in a public arena. Candidates felt that Antony's declarations of love are made publicly but some felt he received the news of Fulvia's death in a more private way. Caesar and Octavia's relationship was seen as a very public one but her private coming to Caesar being criticised by him as the behaviour of a 'market maid' was seen as evidence for the way public figures can have no private emotions. To support arguments, stronger candidates considered a range of key critics such as Samuel Johnson, Kermode, Bloom and AC Bradley but equally some excellent responses did not cite critics but looked at a range of views that they themselves put forward.

Question 2(b): Responses to this question were successful in tracking the presentation of Enobarbus throughout the play and relating this to Plutarch's version of events. The key word 'heart' was interpreted in different and relevant ways. They asked was Enobarbus the heart in terms of centre or in terms of emotional heart? Many saw an irony in this apparent cynic showing heart in his attitude to Cleopatra in the barge speech or in his obvious admiration for her. They saw a warmth in the way he was able to fit in to Egyptian society and in his relationship with Antony and his defence of Antony to other characters. Stronger responses focused on his soliloquies as guiding audience reflections on the main characters and events, making balanced, choric sense and compensating authoritatively for imbalance in the presentation of events by others. Many answers emphasised the cruelty of his death, and suggested that it is Enobarbus's death which is the true locus of the tragedy, despite the remainder of the play still to come at that point. Weaker responses only focused on a key scene or section rather than tracking the character through his entire trajectory.

King Lear

Question 3(a): Responses to this question were strong in the way that they incorporated considerations of stagecraft and included, for example, analysis of the Sam Mendes or Almeida productions. Key words relating to the tragic process such as anagnorisis or catharsis also helped support structural analysis in many of the better responses. As many modern productions often imply a backstory of abuse or cruelty from Lear to justify or explain Goneril and Regan's behaviour, candidates often referred to these ideas. This was helpful if candidates could look to the text to support these readings, for example the evidence that he has always overlooked the sisters in favour of Cordelia, or his irrational outbursts. Some very good candidates used these productions to argue that it is a very modern preoccupation to look for motivation for evil in a way that perhaps a Jacobean audience would not. Candidates gave the sisters' motives as sibling rivalry for Cordelia and then each other, a drive for power, Goneril was seen as feeling displaced, as the laws of primogeniture were being ignored by Lear. Sexual drive was seen in Goneril. 'Ah the differences betwixt man and man.' One perceptive candidate felt the sisters did not know themselves. 'Ask me not what I know'. Less successful responses included undeveloped and rather 'narrative' material on Regan or Goneril, or wrote about the sisters' actions, words and degeneration into evil, but failed to tackle the issues of the identifiability of the sisters' motivation. More successful answers often critiqued Goneril and Regan separately, finding different motives for both. Referring to stage directions and productions some argued that Regan was more extreme in the context of her actions towards Gloucester and Kent. Most candidates argued that while we may have some initial sympathy, their increasing brutality means this is quite quickly lost. As one candidate put it; 'While they may be maltreated by Lear and a patriarchal society, their cruelty and brutality throughout the play remains unjustified by any necessity.'

Question 3 (b): Candidates who tackled this question successfully included a clear focus on the term 'justice' from the outset and defined its presence through the text, leading up to the play's final scenes. Many candidates looked at different kinds of justice; poetic, Christian, divine, social, natural, pagan and even personal fulfilment. In their analysis some considered the concept of the wheel of fortune and how blinding was contextually a punishment for adultery. With regards to critical views (AO3) key critics referred to were Kott, Bradley, Tate, Tolstoy and Johnson. The best answers saw that the play does hint at a justice to come in the early scenes, where Cordelia is saved by France in spite of Lear's anger and Kent although rejected by Lear continues to serve him. But, as one candidate argued: 'The temporary and fleeting glimpses of justice only serve to heighten the more profound injustice we feel.' Candidates tended to argue there was ultimate justice for some; Edgar and Albany and all the evil characters but not for others; Gloucester, Cordelia and Lear. The fate of Edmund proved problematic for some candidates who felt they wanted to see his rebellion against his father as being just, because of the way he was treated as an illegitimate son, but a perceptive candidate argued it is difficult to reconcile 'society's injustice to bastards with Edmund's injustice to others'. Many candidates did pick out the two contradictory references to justice; 'The gods are just' and 'As flies to wanton boys..', some arguing the second reference cancelled out the first, others that this inherent contradiction was a key element of the play's effect.

The Tempest

Question 4 (a): Weaker candidates tended to drift into character study but most candidates referred to the irony in Ariel's comments on forgiveness; 'Mine would sir, were I human' and discussed this moment as Prospero's epiphany, following which Prospero decides to relinquish his victims and ultimately his power. One candidate saw, 'the irony that a spirit can in fact promote human characteristics within people devoid of humanity.' Candidates looked at his humanising influence on Prospero but also on the 'three men of sin', the lovers Miranda and Ferdinand and his role in defusing the plots against Alonso and Prospero. Some even argued that his actions changed the generic course of the play from revenge tragedy to romance comedy. More successful responses again referred to aspects of language or staging reviewing, for example, word types such as the use of superlatives within Ariel's speech and alluding to Trevor Nunn's production. Equally successful were candidates who did not merely write about Ariel but related the character to Caliban and discussed how far we see Caliban as human or beast. One interesting viewpoint was how Ariel is the first to acknowledge Caliban's latent humanity and therefore to draw the audience's attention to his amounting to far more than Prospero seems prepared to admit.

Question 4 (b): With regards to comic elements in the play, most successful candidates explored the levels of humour and the impact on the audience making a distinction between modern and contemporary audiences. Analysis consisted of several key critics including Greenblatt and Bloom, for example. Again many productions were referred to including the Jeremy Herrin's production. The adjective 'coarse' was, in weaker answers, either ignored (in a broad discussion about the play's humour) or cited without further comment. In better responses, 'coarse' led courageous candidates towards a discussion of the significance of Stephano and Trinculo and their drunken dealings with Caliban, and to an investigation of the significance of various comic and dramatic ironies as they operate in the play. One candidate wrote astutely; 'Shakespeare presents the comic characters as idiotic in an attempt to show us that usurpation is idiotic.' Some candidates drew a distinction between different kinds of comedy and argued although there was slapstick in the scenes with Stephano and Trinculo it was not coarse or crude and that there was more gentle comedy in Miranda and Ferdinand's scenes. Some candidates had seen productions where the scene with Antonio and Sebastian plotting had been played in a comic way.

Section B

Weaker students often used context as the sole base of comparison and this prevented both analysis and valuable links from taking place, often offering facts and details relating to the authors' lives, particularly in the case of Blake, overriding reference to textual analysis. The best use of context was either when it informed a textual reading - for example; 'According to critic Richard Dix, Blake's poems can be referred to as...a culture of traditional dissenting Christianity.' - or when it was used in a way that clearly linked to the terms of the question - so for example contemporary attitudes to gender in Q6. In the best work there was much apt reference to the way an understanding of context shapes and informs our responses. Many candidates chose to answer section B first suggesting a confidence with their pairings. The writing was varied and often original as the candidates seem to find a freedom in section B as they are comparing the texts in ways which seem new to them. Most candidates understood the need to compare throughout their responses and very precise and unusual links were made.

Question 5 Candidates looked at the way endings in literature are always to a certain extent contrived. The endings of the plays were considered in terms of their genre and ways of resolving the issues raised by the text. The deaths at the end of the tragedies and the punishments of Volpone and Mosca were seen as generic and therefore artificial but purposeful. In contrast the comic resolution of 'The Rivals' was seen as artificial but satisfying and expected. The narrative, longer poems' conclusions were also seen as generic and the ending to the Wife of Bath's story was seen as artificial and a wish fulfilment on her part. The ending to Paradise Lost Book 9 was seen as fitting Milton's moral didactic purpose. The endings of some of Blake's and Marvell's individual poems were discussed in some unusual and interesting ways with comments on structure and form illuminating the arguments. One candidate argued that 'texts make us aware that endings may be artificial but paradoxically this is what makes them effective, life is not so clear cut.'

Question 6 Some weaker candidates ignored the question of male understanding and just discussed the way women were presented but on the whole candidates dealt with this question well. They considered how far the writers presented their readers with biased views of female characters and most felt that the male writers did give interesting views of female behaviour. The presentation of the Wife of Bath was considered to be as a comic grotesque or as a sympathetic portrayal of a woman defiant in a male world. Most candidates felt that the Knight escaped justice and that in literature evil men do not have to face the consequences that erring women do but some felt that this was the writers presenting the injustices of patriarchal society. Others felt that Chaucer had empowered women in this tale as power resided with the Queen in Arthur's court and the Loathly Lady. Milton's Eve was seen as both culpable but in a way more interesting and moral than his Adam. Candidates looked at the women in Blake's poetry; the Nurse, Lyca, the references to the 'marriage hearse' and 'harlot's curse' in 'London' and his mother figures and argued he gave both sympathetic and critical portrayals of women. Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' was seen as both witty and engaged with women or was criticised as misogynistic. The women characters in the plays were also seen as both idealised like Celia in 'Volpone' and Isabella in 'The White Devil' or more complex like Vittoria who is presented as no less corrupt than the male dominated society she lives in. On the whole most candidates felt that male writers understood women to a degree but as one put it; 'male authors show women as too limited by their sexual desires, the actions of men, or the broader male gaze ever to be seen as equal to their male counterparts.'

Question 7 The arrogance of Milton's presentation of Satan and Eve was much discussed as was Chaucer's Wife of Bath and Jonson's Volpone and Mosca. Satan was seen as arrogant in his challenge to God's authority, Eve in the way she doesn't listen to Adam. The Wife of Bath was seen as arrogant in her challenge to biblical and documented authority. The arrogance of Ford's Giovanni in rejecting received social mores was seen as shocking and part of the play's effect. The presentation of Mrs Malaprop's arrogance was seen as comic as was Jonson's presentation of Lady Would Be and Sir Politic Would be. Arrogance was seen in the voice of

some of Marvell's poems and Blake was seen to criticise the arrogance of social institutions like the church. Candidates sometimes suggested the writers did not present arrogance as a monstrous fault but as part of the charm of some characters, for example Milton's Satan. Some looked at the way other faults were presented as more repellent, for example the many instances of cruelty and inhumanity in Blake's poems.

Question 8 Candidates were asked to look at the way appetites and desires were presented in the plays and the poems. Greed, lust and desire for power were seen as evidence of dangerous desires in the texts. Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath* and her Knight were seen as getting what they wanted without having to face the consequences. Others felt that the Knight had learned that he had to consider others' desires above his own. Vittoria and Annabella were seen as prevented by their gender from fulfilling their desires. Marvell's poems about love and seduction were usefully explored, as were Blake's poems about human greed and selfishness. 'The Poison Tree', 'The Sick Rose', 'The Clod and The Pebble' and 'To Tizrah' were seen as showing the failure and danger of selfish love. Milton's Eve and Satan were compared with his Adam, who was seen as not feeling the same destructive impulses. The way desire was presented as destructive in Ford's play gave much for candidates to discuss, as did the desires of the lovers in 'The White Devil', which lead to murder in Webster's play.

Question 9 Candidates enjoyed writing about the villains and were prompted by the question to consider how far the villainy was part of the attraction for a reader or audience. The best candidates saw a distinction between wrong doing and villainy leading to concise arguments. The phrase 'at the same time' was problematic for the weaker candidates but the best saw the subtleties in their writers' presentations of behaviour. For example, on *The Wife of Bath* one candidate wrote; 'We feel a sense of disgust towards the 'auctoritee' the wife mocks and its antifeminist stance and yet it simultaneously acts as a vehicle of admiration in her use of it against the establishment that undermines her'. Milton's Satan was much discussed as were the lovers in *The White Devil*. Vittoria's court scene provoked admiration because of her clever witty defiance, yet her implication in murder was seen as shocking. Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* could be seen as a wrongdoer in the eyes of society but candidates felt that modern readers enjoyed her lively earthy humour and rebellion against authority. Responses to this question often included helpful comments on different contemporary attitudes to morality, helping the candidates address AO4.

Question 10 This was a rich area for discussion as seduction is a key concern for both the poets and dramatists. Candidates discussed the flattery of Milton's Satan, where he compares Eve to a goddess. This was seen as effective, but Volpone's attempts to flatter Celia were seen as a failure, suggesting seduction is not always successfully achieved through flattery. Candidates felt Ford suggested that Giovanni's seduction was achieved through force of will rather than flattery. Candidates looked at the flattery in Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' and the references to seduction in Blake's poems. Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* was seen as a clever seducer but her technique was seen as far from flattery. One astute candidate argued that Milton's Satan and Ford's Giovanni used 'self seduction to commit sin'.

F664 Texts in Time

June 2016

The last full session of F664, 'Texts in Time', produced much excellent work as has become usual and provided the final opportunity for A Level candidates to write an extended essay of an individual nature. The Unit has offered the chance for candidates to discover an independent voice and to engage in a piece of advanced literary research. As ever, it is fitting to recognise the tremendous effort that goes into the preparation and production of coursework, both by candidates and teachers. Attention often focuses on the outstanding quality of work at the top end of the range, but the Unit, and coursework itself, should also be celebrated for its inclusivity. Teachers, often faced with a range of abilities and levels of motivation and commitment, deserve praise for tailoring the Unit to the needs of their own students by ensuring that study is both challenging and engaging. It is easy to be impressed by submissions from high-achieving centres; congratulations should also be given to those who successfully prepare students for the Unit in more diverse and often challenging circumstances.

Administration

With such a mature Unit, administration by most Centres was excellent, with texts studied, work set, marked, internally moderated and dispatched with well-oiled efficiency. An ideal coursework submission is marked with careful and evaluative marginal comments, complemented by a complete cover sheet, where the summative comment highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of the work, and in so doing, justifies the mark awarded. Evidence of internal moderation was apparent in most Centres, often demonstrating considerable debate about the merits of particular essays. It is important that the rank order of candidates in the whole cohort is considered, rather than just in separate teaching sets. There were occasions when internal moderation had increased candidates' marks without offering a rationale and it was usually the case that the original marks were the more accurate. Some candidates need clear advice on how to present footnotes and bibliographies in order to acknowledge their sources. In coursework, footnotes should only be used to indicate sources, not to develop points of argument or provide extra information. Oxford referencing is preferred, but any clear and consistent style is acceptable. Bibliographies should start with the three core texts.

Texts and Tasks

Again Moderators saw a very wide range of texts, both contemporary and classic, some extending national and cultural boundaries, while some candidates moved beyond the canon as coursework encourages. Sometimes these were teachers' choices but most often they were the individual choices of candidates who had been given the freedom to explore and discover individual interests. Such essays often presented penetrating and persuasive literary and philosophical argument, with a palpable sense of intellectual excitement and personal commitment to the project. This calibre of research and writing is most likely to occur when candidates are given such opportunities. In Centres which used the same three texts for the whole submission, there was a tendency to over-teach the material, which often produced essays of limited originality. The responses were often formulaic, frequently using the same references, critical readings and contextual information. Differentiation then focused on the degree to which candidates were able to articulate taught ideas and content.

Though the quality of writing on poetry has improved over the years, it still causes difficulty for some candidates. Often small quotations from poems are taken out of their contexts, with little developed discussion of poems as whole pieces. Many candidates dutifully refer to four poems, but show little grasp of how these relate to one another, or any sense of the collection as a whole. The poetry collection should be seen as a 'text' in the same way as the novel. The character-led approach to poetry is also unhelpful, leading to candidates comparing Sylvia Plath with Tess of the d'Urbervilles, for example.

Question setting has improved over the years, and the most successful are those which focus explicitly on the necessity of comparing the writing of the texts and direct that comparison towards the construction of an argument.

The Assessment Objectives

AO3

The comparative focus of the coursework was often a strength when prompted by well-phrased tasks. Many candidates actively sustained comparative discussion throughout their essays. There was some exceptional work in this area, which was accomplished and lucidly synthesised, incorporating aspects of presentation, style and structure, as well as concerns, characterisation and ideas. This kind of top level work blends the approach to the AOs and moves fluidly between the different texts while allowing space for the development of key ideas in each. In other, less successful work, texts were approached discretely, on a text-by-paragraph basis, with the occasional general link or use of phrases like 'Similarly...'; 'This can be linked to...'; 'This is also seen in...' without actually developing comparison or insight.

It was clear, and supported by authentic bibliographies, that significant numbers of candidates had researched the critical reception of their texts to an extensive degree, on the internet and in terms of wider reading, and expressed their views and opinions confidently and persuasively. The best candidates demonstrated sophisticated powers of critical discrimination and evaluation, actively debating and challenging different viewpoints, and making assured use of different theoretical perspectives. Such work engaged with the substance of the argument, rather than just a quoted 'soundbite'. This engagement with different readings is necessary for higher level work; less confident candidates often tend to refer to critical views without exploration of their implications, or use them for summary purposes or to conclude their own argument. While not always available for contemporary literature, academic readings create most opportunities for candidates, while reviews from quality sources, such as newspapers or academic websites, can be successful. References to Shmoop, goodreads, GradeSaver and SparkNotes, however, seldom lead to developed discussion.

AO4

The handling of contexts was strong in much of the work moderated, with some really illuminating writing on the interaction between contexts and texts in the best essays. There were relatively few instances of digression and irrelevance, and it was particularly noticeable that where candidates cited biographical contexts – the area most likely to tempt digression – most did so economically and succinctly. There were also some examples of contextual aspects being compared across writers. Literary, historical, social, political, philosophical, psychological, scientific, cultural, and religious perspectives were all used extensively to good effect. Very occasionally the contextual approach was heavy-handed and led candidates to use the literature to illustrate context, rather than showing how the context influenced the literature.

AO1

At the top of the range, candidates wrote extremely well, making sophisticated, cogent arguments and balancing their discussion of their primary texts throughout. Such candidates were able to refer widely and aptly to other literary texts and critical viewpoints in a synthesised way, embedding contextual reference throughout. The quality of writing often hinges on the ability to blend the different AOs. A fluent approach often led to exceptionally accomplished, sophisticated and articulate writing.

However, there were problems with candidates' editing and proof-reading of their work, with many examples of poor accuracy, ungrammatical sentence structure, weak punctuation, inappropriate register and errors in vocabulary. Many candidates sought to show that they were discussing the texts together by writing very long undirected paragraphs which obscured argument. Some of these faults were very apparent in work given Band 5 marks and were not acknowledged in the marginal annotations or summative comments.

Candidates should also note that knowledge of the texts is not the same as a literary understanding of them. It is understanding which is important here, a consideration of how writers express ideas, shape their texts and how readers derive meaning. AO1 and AO2 are therefore very closely related. Work which concentrates on character and theme, therefore, tends to be less successful, as it tends to rely on narrative commentary, concentrating on the 'what', rather than the 'how' of the works under consideration.

AO2

Well selected, apposite quotation is central to literary writing, especially where it leads to careful, analytical consideration of a writer's choices and the effects created for a reader. Many candidates showed real subtlety in their analysis and the best compared the differing techniques of their writers, and the varied effects created, with real sophistication. In some cases, candidates were not able to integrate quotations effectively into their writing and many showed an insensitivity to poetry by quoting it as prose, rendering it impossible to discuss form and structure with any effectiveness. Candidates were often able to discuss language and imagery effectively, though this was most successful when it directly contributed to the developing argument. Form and structure were less successfully managed and in some cases, even where candidates wrote with confidence about narrative methods, perspective and style in novels, they struggled to apply the same analytical thought to the structure and form of poetry. Drama too needs to be considered from the point of view of genre. Too many discussions focused on plot and character without reference to dramatic structure, dialogue, stage directions, performance and proxemics.

Marking and Annotation

In the overwhelming majority of cases, marking is carried out with great care and professionalism, as teachers try to ensure the best for their candidates but keep a judicious eye on the marking criteria and the standards. This leads to very close engagement with the essays, detailed and evaluative comments in the margins, related to the AOs. These annotations are then reconsidered and inform the balanced view in the summative comment, highlighting the strengths while acknowledging any weaknesses. Such a diligent approach tends to lead to final marks which are close to national standards.

It should be remembered that the summative comment on the cover sheet, which is a specification requirement, is a formal assessment summary addressed to the Moderator and awarding body; it is not a personal congratulation to the candidate.

As Principal Moderator, on behalf of the team of Moderators, I would like to thank Centres for the care they have taken with F664 over the life of the Unit.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

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Facsimile: 01223 552553

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