

# English Literature

Advanced GCE A2 H471

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H071

## OCR Report to Centres

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**June 2013**

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA) is a leading UK awarding body, providing a wide range of qualifications to meet the needs of candidates of all ages and abilities. OCR qualifications include AS/A Levels, Diplomas, GCSEs, Cambridge Nationals, Cambridge Technicals, Functional Skills, Key Skills, Entry Level qualifications, NVQs and vocational qualifications in areas such as IT, business, languages, teaching/training, administration and secretarial skills.

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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.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

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Advanced GCE English Literature (H471)

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### OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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## Overview

Performance in all units this summer continued to attract praise from moderators and examiners, who have been impressed by the quality of discussion and the detailed knowledge of many of the candidates. All four Principals have noted in their reports that the best work is characterised by the thorough integration of AO3 and AO4 material, so that candidates' knowledge about the texts is thoroughly absorbed into their answers, rather than laid out in a kind of freestanding demonstration.

In January, this report congratulated centres on an improvement in relation to observation of the 3,000 word limit for coursework submissions, and expressed a hope that the improvement would be sustained. Unfortunately, to quote from the F664 report, this summer session has in fact seen 'very many essays submitted which were in breach of the word limit regulations'. Many centres still seem surprised when over-length work is returned for re-marking: centres are asked to ensure that they monitor word counts and follow instructions as to how to proceed if the regulations are broken (these are available in a number of places, including on the coursework cover sheet itself).

In the examined units, the change to new set texts is now completed; indeed, the 'new' texts are now in their third session on F661. The change of texts on F663 has proceeded very smoothly for the most part, and examiners have been pleased with the quality of work; many centres have made excellent use of support materials provided on the OCR website in relation to both units, and have also evidently developed impressive programmes of study themselves. Use of performance-related material to enhance AO3 discussion continues to improve in both examined units, and in coursework as well.

## F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945

Performance by candidates on the paper this session seemed to be exceptionally good. Examiners were impressed by many excellent scripts and it was rare to see really weak work. Many answers this series presented clear evidence of planning, effective structuring, good use of time, and balance across the two answers. One examiner reported that 'from the evidence I have seen, it would seem that standards continue to rise and my personal belief is that there has been a vast improvement in candidates' knowledge and skills compared with performance (say) ten years ago'.

It seems that the current selection of texts has really grabbed the attention and enthusiasm of candidates and their teachers. The spread across texts continues to be very good: relatively few candidates write on Browning in Section A, and even fewer on Conrad in Section B, but all other texts have a substantial number of takers. Many answers contain fresh ideas providing clear evidence of candidates' engagement with (in particular) original critical responses. Greater focus than in some past sessions on AO2 in Section A was also apparent.

### Section A

#### Robert Browning

Examiners saw relatively few responses to this question on 'A Toccata of Galuppi's'. One reported that 'students were generally very well prepared to select the most salient features of the poem and discuss quite specifically Browning's methods of evocation. Candidates who were less well-prepared had problems with the poem's chronology and narrative perspective'. Some candidates struggled to understand who was speaking and had difficulty in gauging the tone of the poem. Others focused profitably on sexual imagery and on the poem itself as resembling a toccata or similarly showing off the artist's skill. One close reading concluded that 'a sense of doubt ensues when the speaker poses rhetorical questions such as "Were you happy?", making the reader question if Venice was indeed so happy as the language associations with lovers and sex suggested'. There were some good links to the use of the past in other poems, especially 'Love Among the Ruins'.

#### Emily Dickinson

In answers on 'One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted', there was some tendency to paraphrase rather than to comment; one examiner described this approach as offering a 'translation' of the poem, and candidates should be advised that taking this approach in a sustained way will limit the marks they can achieve. Examiners also found weaker answers 'padded out' with speculative biographical material about the poet's own mental health and reclusive life. Generally, however, there was good understanding of the way in which Dickinson takes conventional Gothic references such as a ghost, an assassin and an abbey and suggests a much more terrifying internal image. Other popular areas for discussion included the use of dashes as a marker of uncertainty and the division between body and mind at the end of the poem. At the top end, solid, detailed contextual knowledge really helped to develop sophisticated readings of the poem, and there were some notably impressive interpretations of the encounter with the self as a struggle with Puritan religious identity. The mention of the 'Revolver' in the final stanza did inspire candidates to look to 'My Life has stood' but often the link made was not very fruitful. More successful links were made with 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain' and 'I heard a Fly buzz – when I died'.

#### Edward Thomas

The subtle shifts in tone of 'March' created a challenge for candidates: weaker answers tended to shift their ground too, with a kind of commentary offering a 'now he's more hopeful ... now he's less hopeful' effect. Better answers were more inclined to give an overview, as from the candidate who suggested that repetition of the fact that spring will come again becomes 'a sort

of mantra: he is trying to convince himself that spring will return, in order to inspire hope in himself'. There was some excellent writing on the song of the thrushes as a metaphor for poetry, and contexts including Thomas's late turn to poetry were often interestingly explored; most candidates said something about the form and structure of the poem, often linking this with Thomas's earlier prose work. Less successful answers were often dominated by material about Thomas's depressive tendencies or his uncertainty at this time about joining the army. Links were most commonly made to 'The Glory' and 'But these things also'. The best answers were sensitive to tone, and remarkably sophisticated for this age-group.

### **W B Yeats**

Yeats was the most popular choice this session, and many candidates responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to write about the various contexts of 'The Second Coming', especially Irish politics, Revelation, and Yeats's idea of 'gyres'. Weaker candidates were often confused about historical contexts and sometimes determined to characterise the poem as dealing with Yeats's disappointment in love for Maud Gonne. Better candidates wrote perceptively on language and form, and in particular the way in which 'the loose form shows the lack of structure in the world'. One answer noted that 'The caesura in "Things fall apart ..." illustrates the point made, as it breaks apart the centre of the line'. Other comments on language included 'The repetition of "Surely" invokes Yeats's role as preacher or visionary'. Links to other poems were often effective, and showed in the best cases striking ability to view the selection as a whole: 'In 'September 1913' and 'Easter 1916' the change Yeats explores is significant, but it is specific to Ireland. In "The Second Coming" he refers to "the world" and "everywhere"; the change that occurs will eclipse "all things".'

### **Section B**

#### ***Frankenstein***

Weaker answers to the (a) question – that in *Frankenstein*, a man arrogantly takes on the responsibility of giving birth, and the female characters pay for his arrogance – were inclined to narrate much of the novel in the attempt to answer this question. Others, however, were stimulated to debate, agreeing, for example, that women suffer tremendously, but going on to argue that male characters suffer no less - above all, some felt, the creature. One examiner reported that 'many candidates jumped at the chance to present a feminist reading of the text', and had clearly thought about *Frankenstein* as a feminist novel: one suggested that 'Shelley should have presented the women in her novel with a bit more fight and intelligence if she was making a feminist point'. The (b) question on Doubles and doubling was less popular, but produced some excellent answers which were often rather more alive to the literary and imaginative qualities of the novel. Many candidates suggested that the popular confusion by which the creature is known as Frankenstein reflects the truth that 'the effects of the doubling are so profound that society cannot distinguish between the two'. Both are solitary - 'Frankenstein's isolation has led to the isolation of the creature'; both destroy each other's loved one; they literally change places as narrator. Other comments included 'Shelley presents Frankenstein showing signs of a "monstrous personality" and the "monster" showing signs of humanity'. Some answers made pertinent use of the recent National Theatre production in which actors alternated as Frankenstein and the creature.

#### ***Jane Eyre***

This is increasingly a popular text, and almost all candidates responded to the (a) question on 'hunger, rebellion and rage'. Sometimes they strayed into narrative, but usually came back. A general view was that 'Jane learns to repress her rage, rebellion and hunger in many ways, while her alter ego Bertha Mason releases them'. Hunger was interpreted variously as actual, spiritual, for love or for liberty. While many answers restricted discussion to these qualities in the character of Jane Eyre, others widened their discussion to include additional characters or even created a strong argument based on the novel's own 'rebellion' in the face of Victorian convention. Some candidates made skilful use of contemporary reviews of *Jane Eyre* to emphasise how the novel surprised and shocked readers in ways that might be unexpected by

the 21st Century student of the text. There were far fewer answers to the (b) option on *Jane Eyre* as ‘one of the great mystery stories’; these usually included good discussion of Gothic elements and setting, but sometimes dismissed the ‘mystery story’ suggestion quite early in their answers in favour of preferred readings.

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

The (a) option on the text as a political fable in which the servants, Quint and Miss Jessel, take their revenge on their social superiors, saw relatively few responses. No examiner reported on a candidate picking up the use of the term ‘fable’ in the question, but they did see lively debate on the nature and effect of the ‘revenge’, and plenty of purchase on social and political readings of the novella. One examiner reported that ‘when this question was done well it was done very well, as it encouraged candidates to think beyond the critical industry on the novel’. There is a tendency at times for answers on *The Turn of the Screw* to fall into a series of rehearsed accounts of a range of critical approaches, so the freshness and engagement of good answers was especially welcomed. Answers to the (b) option on the ending of the story just adding to its mystery were more numerous, and also more prone to falling into the listing of different critical approaches and focusing on James’s ambiguity often without registering its literary effects. An important discriminator for examiners marking this question was the extent to which candidates focused on the ending of the novella. There were, of course, excellent answers which offered detailed arguments supported by an impressive number of apt quotations. Televised and theatrical versions were also drawn in to good effect. Some of the best answers considered the ending in terms of the framing device and lack of resolution at the end.

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

This was a popular text and the (a) option, on Lord Henry Wotton as both tempter and victim of Dorian, was the more popular question. One examiner reported that ‘the best responses used the challenge of the ‘victim’ idea to offer a more subtle reading of Lord Henry’s relationship with Dorian, but there were also some very strong responses that blankly rejected any notion of victimhood and with sufficient detailed attention to the text were able fully to illustrate their argument’. Some candidates used literary contexts such as *Faustus* or *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, or the cultural context of aestheticism, very well to develop their response. There was in general good attention to language and imagery in this question, particularly from candidates who were able to analyse the initial meeting between Lord Henry and Dorian. There was some impressive close reading to support answers to this question, including one candidate who traced the development of the word ‘influence’ through the text. Responses to the (b) option on Wilde’s elegant style doing nothing to hide the unpleasantness of the society he describes sometimes struggled to sustain discussion of style and focused more attention on unpleasantness, frequently using biographical and social/historical material to substantiate their arguments. Better answers, such as the following, kept both elements in view: ‘The beauty and innocence of Sibyl accentuates the tragedy of Dorian’s rejection of her, leaving her “like a trampled flower”. Again this simile is elegant and delicate yet it portrays brutal destruction and the inferiority of the lower class.’

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

*The Secret Agent* was by a long distance the least popular choice of Section B texts, and answers were almost exclusively responses to the (a) option on there being ‘neither love nor heroism’ in the novel. Not all candidates separated these terms, but one examiner noted that this approach was generally more successful where it occurred. Answers tended to identify Winnie and Stevie, and also their mother, as exceptions to the question prompt. More ambitious responses, like the following, moved on to an overview and considered the tone of the novel: ‘The narrator’s omniscience allows him to use wit and irony to create a detachment between the readers and the characters [...] which does not allow for any act of love or heroism from Verloc to withstand the narrator’s cynicism.’ Few examiners saw any work at all on the (b) option, the London settings of the novel, but those who did without exception were fulsome in their praise. To give one example: ‘I had one essay on this question and it was of first class undergraduate quality, linking in the intellectual context of 1890s London (entropy, criminality and the

underclass...), *Heart of Darkness*, and quoting/analysing language and imagery with a detail and thoroughness that was awe-inspiring’.

### ***Mrs Dalloway***

Examiners were likewise impressed with work on Virginia Woolf, and praised highly answers to the more popular (a) option on the triviality of Clarissa’s concerns. One reported seeing ‘some fantastic and nuanced work on this question, with contextual links made to social class and gender in Britain in early twentieth century’. Comments on narrative method are to be encouraged in all Section B answers, but seemed mostly likely to appear in those on *Mrs Dalloway*. Another examiner noted that ‘the modernist qualities of the text offer strong candidates a rich opportunity for exhibiting sophisticated appreciation of literature. I was impressed by the eloquence of many of these responses as well as their subtle attention to the characterisation of Clarissa, her links with Septimus, and the place of all of this in the post-war context.’ Some weaker answers were more-or-less restricted to a character study of Clarissa, but many arrived at a profound and perhaps unexpected sympathy with the title character, discussing the ‘inner dialogue of Clarissa which opens to us the true misery of her life and its lost opportunities’. There were very few responses to the (b) option on the disjointedness of *Mrs Dalloway*, but there were some who rose ably to the challenge of discussing the novel’s structure. One examiner was particularly impressed with the mature conclusion of a candidate that ‘this after all seems to be Woolf’s intention: to show us that these odd happenings are in fact all part of our collective consciousness, that a Clarissa and a Septimus share the same experiences within the day of the novel’.

## F662 Literature post-1900

This session once again saw many accomplished candidates presenting excellent folders and the majority of centres showing good knowledge of the specification and OCR's assessment procedures. Approaches to text selection and text combinations continued to develop with many moderators reporting new titles and avenues of exploration within their allocations. There were a number of Centres offering re-creative work and the majority of these reassuringly presented pastiches accompanied by commentaries at least twice the length of the imitations of the original texts. Poetry, prose and drama were equally represented in re-creative tasks. A broad range of tasks was provided by many centres either to satisfy differentiation within a group of students with differing abilities or to promote student ownership of the task undertaken. Rubric infringements and inappropriate text selections were very much in the minority.

There were a number of instances where marks had been incorrectly recorded and submitted or challenges had to be made because of discrepancies between the coversheets and MS1: these are very time-consuming to deal with and a little more care with administration would greatly ease the process. Centres should be aware that their moderation cannot be completed until these issues are dealt with at centre level, which effectively means the moderation is interrupted and then resumed after a passage of time: it is desirable that moderation occurs in one sustained piece of concentrated focus. Over-length folders which seemed to be more frequent this session also slow the moderation process: if folders are presented that are over 3000 words, the centre needs to indicate how the total mark has been adjusted to reflect this infringement. Failure to do this can lead to the folder being returned to centre; folders that are detected as over-length and have not been declared are also returned. In these cases, moderators expect centres to adjust marks downwards. The easiest way, of course, for the over-length issue to be tackled is to ensure candidates do not exceed the word limit, which is one of the centre's tasks during the advice and preparation period of coursework.

Centres are also asked to be more vigilant in terms of checking for cases of plagiarism. These can only be checked and referred by moderators and then the matter is with the Malpractice Division. It is desirable for all concerned that copying of any kind is picked up in and dealt with by the centre.

The Critical Pieces were not always presented accompanied by a selected passage and a small number of centres still found moving beyond their extract to an awareness of the whole text or collection difficult.

Centres by now are well informed of the assessment objectives under scrutiny on the two different pieces of coursework which, of course, drive the allocation of marks. Task 1 carries 15 marks and targets AO1 and AO2; it may take the form of the close reading of a passage or a recreated section of text with a commentary – both approaches demand analysis of form, structure and language to meet the requirements of this item. Task 2 is worth 25 marks and tests AO1, AO3 and AO4. Essays are expected to be comparative and well researched with a strong overarching argument. The different emphases of these essays were often very well observed and many of the tasks helped candidates find the appropriate focus.

For Task 1, the best assignments focused on matters of form, structure and language and required candidates to evaluate how typical or representative the extract was in terms of the wider text. Often there was a question which allowed candidates to construct an "argument", as indicated in the Band 5 criteria (this proved more helpful to candidates than a general instruction such as "Write a critical appreciation"). Some centres with overly thematic tasks led their candidates to show knowledge rather than unpack matters of style. There are 10 marks available out of the 15 for analysing linguistic choices, text organisation and genre concerns.

For Task 2 centres often focused on the first part of AO3, comparison, by having a “compare” instruction in their tasks and there were more contextual factors (AO4) appearing as the focus of questions this session. It was rarer to see “alternative views”, the second strand of AO3, foregrounded in tasks although often a critical quotation was embedded in a task.

AO1 is applicable to both items in the folder. This session there was some excellent and much very good textual understanding in evidence. Some responses stayed at the competent level because points were just offloaded with no real sense of a structured argument. Essays were usually well-composed and accurately written, although some weaker scripts were far too reliant on a narrative approach at times or candidates failed to proof-read rigorously or the structure of the essay lacked cogency to meet the demands of the higher marks. Critical terminology was at least competently used by most candidates, with many showing precision in their use of meta-language.

Candidates often found address to detail in the critical response the easiest way to earn marks for AO2. Actually teasing away at how the language works rather than explaining terms allowed candidates to consider effects perceptively and much mature and elegant writing with such sensitivity was encountered. However, candidates remained less willing to tackle form and structure to the same extent. Poetry and drama perhaps lend themselves more to such discussion, and moderators saw some increase in formal and structural comments across these two genres though consideration of form was often a weakness of prose analysis. Inclusion of points about stagecraft increased significantly and at times there was illuminating discussion in this area, but there is still room for further development: candidates might, for instance, explain stage directions less and consider the effect of a playwright stipulating action or a particular design feature as well as controlling the dialogue. Candidates were most at their ease in the areas of word selection, imagery and symbolism, though even in some Band 5 responses such comment sometimes took the form of explication rather than analysis. The best responses were confident in sustained analysis of well-chosen detail, either many points about the same detail or a synthesised paragraph combining points about a number of details. In some answers, however, even in Band 5, very lengthy quotations were just glossed over, when better practice would be focusing on the most pertinent and comment-worthy features of the writer’s craft.

A small number of responses made too much of contextual factors and/or the observations of critics, which – while showing textual knowledge (AO1) – are not strictly required for the Critical Piece.

Some candidates took advantage of the re-creative option and managed to attend more to the commentary than the pastiche, which is the desirable balance of effort. The best commentaries frequently and successfully linked their discussion of literary methods and thematic concerns in the pastiche to a specific part of the stimulus text and indeed the whole text. It should be remembered that the re-creative piece should be based on a submitted extract from the text studied in the same way as close reading responses. A small number of re-creations were actually text transformations, changing genre without a clear rationale or introducing original material that was more to do with the candidate’s interests than the studied writer’s.

On Task 2, Linked Texts, AO3 was well addressed by most candidates; high scoring candidates managed conceptualised comparison, often in the form of thematic paragraphs, and clearly engaged with the citations of critics rather than just presenting them, although bibliographies were not always a feature even of high performing candidates. Many candidates had worked sensibly and industriously to produce clear, integrated comparisons across a range of points. Comparing texts in a synthesised way is the easiest way to achieve the full 5 marks available for comparison. The more frequently seen approach, which is less rigorous, was to discuss the texts alternately with the argument and comparisons clearly foregrounded, although this can lead to mid-range achievement if not monitored because of the see-sawing between points and over-explained structure creating a laboured reading experience. In some responses, particularly lower down the mark range, however, the comparisons consisted of juxtaposed points relying on

implicit comparison, or the elements of predominantly separately discussed texts were drawn together in a concluding paragraph. Comparisons sometimes lacked impact.

Most candidates used different readings of the text, the second aspect of AO3, and incorporated some specified critical views or perspectives, sometimes evidenced by footnotes and some lengthy and scholarly bibliographies. Less frequently did candidates advance and refine their arguments by consistent and rigorous exploration of the views quoted; when they did so, the inclusion of the cited material made sense and strengthened the argument. More range in the type of quotations deployed should be a goal: views on one text but not on the other created an imbalance in the way AO3 and the texts studied were treated in some submissions. Personal interpretation should be present, but not viewed as a substitute for wrestling with alternative views of texts to test propositions and advance the argument. Generalised reference to “some critics” has limited impact, as does recounting a classroom debate, but such approaches may be appropriate for some candidates.

In meeting the demands of AO4, the best responses were able to use a range of contextual material to inform and underpin their argument. While there are much fewer cases of tagged-on context at the ends of essays, candidates from many centres introduce discussion of the texts by placing them in historical, social, literary or ideological contexts in the opening paragraph – the success of this approach depends on whether this material is zeroing in on a particular area or whether the texts are just being introduced in an expansive, descriptive fashion. Some centres devised titles which ensured sustained contextualised discussion, which is one way to ensure relevance. Evaluating the importance and impact of contexts is worth 10 marks and the main area for improvement is that both texts be interrogated for relevant contextual approaches. The choice of text for study here is crucial and sometimes texts are chosen for other reasons than their readiness for contextual exploration. Centres should be aware that genre considerations and an interest in the language of the texts can be included as AO4 material providing the points made have a whole text focus.

Many centres were confident in their application of the assessment scale and their submitted totals went through moderation without adjustment. Much useful annotation of coursework is provided by many centres. Instances of leniency and others of severity led to adjustments being made and a sense of pushing the limits in some cases was observed; this often occurred around published threshold figures. Centres are advised to mark to criteria rather than herd folders towards key borderlines, especially as borderlines can change.

## F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800

### General Comments

This summer's examination produced splendid work: the vast majority of scripts were very well-matched with the particular task chosen, with examination technique sound, preparation impressive, and division of attention and performance between Section A and Section B usually equal.

There has also been continued improvement in the use of performance based materials in essays on drama texts. Strong focus on plays in the theatre has led not only to much more efficient writing about how dramatic effects are generated and developed, and how different 'directorial' decisions themselves constitute acts of criticism, but also to plays being seen in the context of long and often complex theatrical histories. There were, for instance, many perceptive answers where the modern audience's response to a particular production was juxtaposed with the likely response of an early modern audience to the same scene.

With respect to AO3, almost all candidates understood the need to consider different interpretations of their set texts. Some examiners complained that the same critical phrases recurred from text to text and therefore became over-familiar. This is not, of course, a problem in itself but it does suggest that filleted collections of critical materials are being distributed to candidates, rather than allowing them to discover quotable phrases for themselves. Weaker candidates still tend to enlist critics who confirm the perfectly obvious, for example 'Critic X argues that the Wife of Bath is confident and outspoken.'

In Section B, many examiners felt the selection, organisation and management of materials was as good as in Section A, or even slightly better. The selection of texts this year made it almost essential for candidates to compare works from different historical periods and this proved no handicap; indeed responses in lower attainment bands often found it easier to juxtapose Chaucer's fourteenth century England with Sheridan's Enlightenment playground than they did to compare Milton's and Ford's contrasting projections of the seventeenth century. Responses at every level either quickly signalled or implied the relevant historical context for their chosen text. However, there is still a tendency for candidates to compare texts purely in terms of ideas rather than exploring the possibilities offered by their differences in form and genre.

Contextual material (AO4) was often used expertly. Biographical materials, in particular, were used better than before, for example literary deductions drawn from the little that is known of Chaucer as courtier and businessman, and (especially) the lively and sensational details of Sheridan's early life, and of how his first play came to be written. The only difficulty was when comparisons were drawn between what goes on in *King Lear* and, to a lesser extent, *The Tempest*, and the contemporary Court. The parallels often seemed forced or inexact. New Historicist approaches have been fashionable for some thirty years now, but the combination of detailed scholarship and historical precision they call for may be asking a lot of A2 students. It was, for instance, common for responses to suggest that Lear's tripartite division of his kingdom resembles the unification of Great Britain in 1603, though few candidates seemed aware that dividing and expanding kingdoms are actually rather different things. James I's 'decadent' court was often compared with Lear's wild knights without much sense that there might be historical distance between the contemporaneous Whitehall and the play's mythologised dark age setting. Candidates seemed to be confused about stage censorship and how it operated, whether writing about seventeenth or eighteenth century texts.

Over recent years the amount of copy generated under examination conditions on this component has been increasing, and some of the best candidates, for whom bulk is part of effect, and who have formidable range and variety of things to say, are clearly benefiting by

writing more. However good and very good candidates sometimes allow their answers to develop in too leisurely a fashion, as if filling space were an end in itself; others seem to privilege writing over proper organisation and preparation of material, so that answers reach a natural conclusion and then stumble over some of the same ground again until the allotted time expires. As a short answer containing similar content to a longer one tends to attract a higher mark, candidates might consider employing more rigorous editorial skills.

## Responses to Individual Questions

### Section A: Shakespeare

In previous years answers on *Othello* swamped those on the other prescribed Shakespeare texts. This year, though *Lear* and *The Tempest* predominated, the split has been much more even. One area of general confusion is about early (ie pre Civil War) performances of Shakespeare's plays. Candidates seem unaware how few of these are documented, and how exceptional are contemporary eye-witness accounts. We received many loose generalisations suggesting, for example, that 'the first audiences would not stand for Shakespeare's original ending of *King Lear*.'

#### 1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

**(a) 'A Midsummer Night's Dream explores both the irrationality of love and its potential for "great constancy".' By exploring the presentation of love in the play, evaluate this view.**

The best responses offered an overview of Shakespeare's handling of mortal love - often that the interchangeability of the human lovers, and the pointless complexity of their desires, illustrate its arbitrary nature. So many couples, and so much of the play, were relevant to the proposition that it was rare to see two answers follow a similar pattern. Some responses struggled to get the term 'constancy' into focus, though others substituted it brusquely and convincingly for 'inconstancy' which seemed better to reflect the preferred darker approach to this text. There was very little attempt to respond to the word 'potential', though good answers often brought constancy into focus as a 'potential' which human lives should strive to develop. Most saw Theseus and Hippolyta (sometimes thought of not as newly-weds but as rather elderly) as an anchor of constant love, and the other characters eventually achieving something similar through events in the wood. Bottom's interlude with Titania was a favourite example of irrationality, though Theseus great speech about the creative irrationality of lunatics, lovers and poets in 5:1 was rarely quoted. Contemporary audiences were assumed to be shocked by any challenge to 'patriarchal' social values, to the extent of agreeing with Egeus and condemning Hermia, despite the way Shakespeare sets out the story. References to *Romeo and Juliet*, clearly written by Shakespeare at the same time, informed discussion of the Pyramus and Thisby interlude and often of the uncompromising romantic nature of Lysander and Hermia's view of love, though no-one referred to Mercutio's Queen Mab speech. There was less support from, and reference to performance or DVD materials than expected, though Max Reinhardt's 1935 Hollywood production often produced imaginative results.

**(b) 'The roles of Theseus and Hippolyta in A Midsummer Night's Dream provide a framework of authority and experience.' By exploring the dramatic effects of the play, evaluate this view.**

This question was attempted by few candidates. Some examiners felt the key terms, 'authority' and 'experience', were less strongly registered than those in other questions, and that the possibilities of 'framework' as structural principle were missed. Weak responses had little recall of Act 5, focussing almost exclusively on the events of the opening scene, thus missing (among other things) the meta-theatrical possibilities of Theseus' commentary on the Mechanicals' play.

## 2. *Antony and Cleopatra*

**(a) ‘The play gains much of its impact from the evocation of the contrasting worlds of Rome and Egypt.’ By exploring Shakespeare’s use of contrasting settings in *Antony and Cleopatra*, evaluate this view.**

Though the main lines of an argument were always clear, candidates found it harder to structure this response than many others; in particular, a good deal was done by juxtaposing evocations of the two settings rather than exploring ways in which they are morally, politically or hedonistically interlocked, and how this fundamentally ambivalent play might or might not represent the triumph of one over the other. Better candidates showed fresher thinking, destabilising these familiar oppositions by suggesting that the Rome world is actually more ‘Egyptian’ (in its emotionalism, its grudges and petty rivalries) than it likes to think. There was often little sense, however, of a developing argument, and some conclusions might have been more focused or decisive (or have privileged creative indecisiveness between the two ‘worlds’ better). The oscillating dramatic structure of the play was well used by some, tight verbal recall of Shakespeare’s dialogue and its contrasting idioms reinforcing a sense of moral or geographical distance. Weaker responses often found it very hard to distinguish effects in productions they had seen, often dependent on lighting, blocking or costume, from the role played by Shakespeare’s dialogue, with which they ought to have been concerned. These answers often seemed trapped in the early scenes of the play, from which almost all their illustration was drawn.

**(b) By exploring the dramatic presentation of Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*, evaluate the view that ‘it is hard for an audience to know Antony – because he does not know himself.’**

Weaker responses tended to pour out all they knew about the character of Antony, thus the precise terms of the question were sometimes lost. Stronger essays usually locked into the dissolution imagery, announced in the first scene, explored Antony’s valiant but forlorn attempts to reconstruct himself, and his prevailing mood that good or even great things are falling inexorably away. It was notable that many candidates found this question a useful way of approaching the play, and were thinking freshly in the examination. Sometimes a sense of Antony’s mystery/instability was followed through the course of his relationship with Cleopatra, but only occasionally was the focus allowed to drift from Antony to his Queen. Simple but robust responses tended to define Antony not by what he says about himself, but compiled a dossier of how other characters view him, Octavius, Enobarbus, the soothsayer and various ‘sad captains’. It was a surprise that Enobarbus, probably the most useful of these commentators, was not employed more frequently and fully. Only the best candidates brought Plutarch into their discussion, often suggesting that Shakespeare was both in thrall to and in competition with the source’s moralistic view of Antony. Other, equally impressive responses introduced Greenblatt’s concept of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.

## 3. *King Lear*

The two *Lear* questions were by far the most popular choices on the paper, with more takers for (b) than (a).

**(a) ‘Gloucester is no less a tragic figure than his king.’ By considering the role and dramatic presentation of Gloucester in *King Lear*, evaluate this view.**

The question of Gloucester and Lear as tragic figures triggered a fascinating diversity of views, many well-argued. Almost all responses had a reasonably effective working definition of tragedy, often traced fairly explicitly to Aristotle, and with a collection of semi-technical terms in Greek in support, e.g. *anagnorisis*, *hamartia*, *hubris*, less frequently *catharsis*. While these were

managed with some rigour, they can give a sense that Jacobean tragedy is more alert to neoclassical tragic theory than it really is. Some candidates saw hubris and the tragic flaw as being central, and Lear's fault as more self-inflicted than Gloucester's - others disagreed, seeing the need for the audience to 'pity' a character as essential to that character acquiring a tragic identity. Central to many essays was the horrific image of Gloucester's blinding, with many candidates comparing different film or theatre versions of this moment – again, to good AO3 effect. This led to comparisons between Lear's primarily mental suffering as opposed to Gloucester's physical maiming. Plenty of candidates analysed the role of Gloucester and the subplot as a structural device used by Shakespeare to magnify or consolidate for the audience the terror and horror of the play. Conclusions drawn by candidates were never predictable: there was a feeling that they were being encouraged to think about a familiar text from an unfamiliar angle, and most rose to the challenge impressively.

**(b) 'By considering the dramatic effects of *King Lear*, evaluate the view that 'despite the appalling suffering, the world of the play is not without hope.'**

Critical understanding of the issues raised by this question was of a very high order, though a few failed to pay detailed attention to the wording of the question, often writing about questions of justice in *King Lear*, rather than the absence of hope. Some became mired in the 'love test' and the implications of the opening sequence generally, whereas better answers focused on 'suffering' in the play's middle reaches and majored in the ending. Readings of the play ranged from the Christianly redemptive to the nihilistic, often juxtaposed as 'traditional' and post-modern responses to the play respectively. Stronger candidates registered the power of Cordelia's death, with Christian interpretations of her as a Christ-figure seeming to find her death at times oddly consoling, almost comforting, in that the Christian paradigm is seen to be manifesting itself. Others stressed the reticence of seventeenth and eighteenth century theatregoers to comprehend the death of Cordelia at all, finding in the gradual determination of directors and theatregoers to come to terms with it a sense of creativity in the critical evolution of the play. Even comparatively weak answers were knowledgeable about Nahum Tate's 1681 adaptation. Most responses gathered considerable power by refusing to engage fully with the bleakness of the final scene until their peroration, a number of knowledgeable candidates then focusing on the intriguing difference between Q and F texts in the final sequence of the play. Critics referred to with some frequency included Dr Johnson, A.C. Bradley, Jan Kott, Leo Tolstoy and (less anticipatedly) A.W. Schlegel. Peter Brook's 1971 film remains the iconic classroom version of the play, with surprisingly few references to Kozintsev.

#### **4. *The Tempest***

**(a) 'By the end of *The Tempest*, magic and wonder have given way to a human resolution.' Evaluate this view by exploring the dramatic effects of the play.**

Candidates approached the role of Prospero without the taint of asperity he invariably attracted ten or twenty years ago (possibly following the fashion of more gentle recent Prosperos on stage and screen, including Helen Mirren's). This also may have made candidates more confident about exploring the play's 'human resolution' and something like happy ending, the hero having exorcised the dark magical forces within him. It may also have contributed to a common view of the central character as a playwright-figure, trying to find an exit from the created world of theatrical illusion and magical artifice. Oddly, almost no-one wrote about the challenge of the Epilogue, in which the artist-God, whoever and whatever he is taken to be, expresses a very mortal need for 'human resolution'. Though work on this question was often both exciting and imaginative, some weaker responses seemed to miss 'human resolution' altogether, never coming to terms with the play as a study of the relationship between art ('magic') and life. One of the most obvious trajectories for an answer, Prospero's journey from vindictiveness to forgiveness and reconciliation, was almost never followed. There was some excellent work on the play's use as part the celebration of the nuptials of Princess Elizabeth to Frederick of

Bohemia, James I's court and its tastes tending to be handled better here than in work on *Lear*. Some candidates showed an extraordinary detailed knowledge of Jacobean Court Masques.

**(b) 'Undoubtedly brutal, yet oddly sensitive.' By considering the role and dramatic presentation of Caliban in *The Tempest*, evaluate this view.**

Abler candidates offered a range of readings of Caliban, often using post-colonialist perspectives to good effect, one even slyly pointing out that that the very use of 'oddly sensitive' in the question 'showed the bias of the coloniser on the part of the setter'...Ouch! Most candidates were appropriately aware that issues of slavery and colonisation, though they shed light on *The Tempest*, really belonged to later historical periods. Productions of the play, often distant, nineteenth century ones, were referred to, showing how Caliban has been imaged in different ways. Weaker candidates took the terms 'brutal' and 'sensitive' at face value; abler candidates explored Caliban from a range of perspectives, as Rousseauistic noble savage, as an example of a Hobbesian 'state of nature' figure, as one of the newly discovered indigenous peoples of South America. It was intriguing how many candidates were prepared to use Caliban's 'hinterland' as an excuse for his attempted rape. A few candidates found it hard to remember the key passages in which Caliban analyses his dreams and speaks of the natural history of the island, and sometimes these found it hard to demonstrate his 'sensitivity'. Better answers involved close attention to Caliban's language – the precise nature of the beauty of the 'these isles are full of noises' speech, his exuberant rhythms when drunk, the violence of his fantasies of cutting Prospero's 'weasand'. Though Montaigne's essay 'Of Cannibales' was mentioned a lot, almost nobody seemed to know that Gonzalo quotes from it in the play (2:1). It is, indeed, the only undisputed source of *The Tempest*.

## Section B

### General

**Drama: John Ford, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore; Ben Jonson, *Volpone*; John Webster, *The White Devil*; Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals*.**

**Poetry: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*; John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book Nine; Andrew Marvell, *Selected Poems*; William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*.**

Again the best candidates handled Section B very well indeed, often gaining higher marks than in Section A, partly because the need to dovetail two texts with a well-managed argument seems to have concentrated the mind, partly because candidates at all levels of attainment introduced their AO4 materials confidently, integrated them properly into the discussion, and rarely explored them for their own sake. The use of AO4 in Section B seemed much more functional than in the Shakespeare answers, and one useful opening gambit was to juxtapose character and context at once, as in this example: 'while the Wife is outspoken about sex, Sheridan's characters could not be, because an eighteenth-century audience would have been distrustful of the sexual promiscuity of the Restoration period and had been sensitised by the formal and demure nature of Georgian comedy.' Occasionally weaker candidates wrote about one aspect of the proposition rather than the detailed statement, especially when Q5 became a general essay on love, or when little or no attention was paid to the 'fragility' of innocence in Q 9, but in general attentiveness to all the implications of the question was striking, and the motor of the neatly shaped arguments that followed. As last year, there was a substantial amount of comment on the plays in performance (especially *'Tis Pity*), matching the attention given to performance in the Shakespeare questions. This continues to provide an excellent source of (AO3) dramatic interpretation and informed some very intelligent arguments. Areas of interest frequently explored in Section B included the Church and Theology, literature itself and the role of reading, and, notably, given the all-male authorship of these texts, the role and status of women. Nearly

half the answers were fuelled by interest in ‘times when patriarchal society ruled.’ While the best gender-based readings were ingenious and welcome, their prevalence did sometimes seem to marginalise significant areas of interest in the texts (Flammineo’s status as protagonist, for instance, or Marvell reduced to Juliana in the Mower Poems and the Coy Mistress). Weaker candidates, in particular, might be encouraged to develop a more nuanced view of the position of women in previous times: an interest in gender as social determinant in English Literature may seem superficially easier to manage with intellectual rigour at this level than one in, say, class, but can result in equally problematic misrepresentation. To put this in perspective, though, attention paid to women’s voices produced some of the keenest and subtlest writing in the exam. One candidate explained that Adam’s world, the world of all of us, is ‘a projection of Eve’s culpability after the Fall, which rendered all women equally culpable and thus deserving to be exploited.’

The favoured texts in Section B were *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale* and *The White Devil*, with *‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore* and *The Rivals* following closely.

### Responses to Individual Questions

**‘To embrace love is to embrace danger.’ In the light of this view, discuss writers’ treatment of love.**

This was fairly popular, but relatively few answers developed all the implications of the prompt quote. Middle ranking candidates sometimes made obtuse points about ‘danger’, which suggested they lacked confidence in their material (the ‘dangers’ of circulating libraries). The weakest responses tended to omit ‘embrace danger’ altogether. The most frequent choice of texts for this task were Ford, Webster, Chaucer and Milton, with Alysoun ‘living dangerously’ in love in ways other characters were unable to match.

**6 ‘Forbidden pleasures are the best.’ In the light of this view, discuss ways in which writers portray the pursuit and the consequences of pleasure.**

This was popular and all texts featured on this task. The development of what was meant by ‘forbidden pleasures’ was wide-ranging and candidates were able to illustrate the responses suitably. The majority opted for forbidden pleasures as those inherently life-affirming but not sanctioned by a repressive society, but livelier answers (often featuring Milton) tended to flow from a recognition that such ‘pleasures’ might also be radically or damagingly transgressive. This question also produced a number of “forced” answers, however, where pleasures the characters indulge in pretty openly were held accountable to rather unlikely bans.

**7 ‘Literature explores the conflict between order and chaos.’ In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers present order and chaos. In your answer, compare one drama with one poetry text from the above lists.**

This question was notably less popular than others though by no means poorly answered. It attracted an unexpectedly wide range of texts, though Milton was most popular, often with Chaucer.

**8 ‘Power is inevitably a source of corruption.’ In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers explore power and corruption.**

This was extremely popular and generated well-developed, detailed arguments, with all texts in service, and all used resourcefully. Responses unanimously agreed with the proposition, whether the corruptive power in question flowed from patriarchy, overwhelmingly seen as the

most damaging form of government, the *ancien regime*, the Church or (surprisingly, but not infrequently), scholars and teachers. This gave some responses a rather gloomy quality, but did not affect the quality of argument.

**9 ‘The fascination of innocence lies in its fragility.’ In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers present innocence.**

Ford, paired with either Milton or Blake, featured on most of these essays, which were not as common as answers to other questions. Whether Annabella, or anybody in *‘Tis Pity*, can meaningfully be considered ‘innocent’ exercised some candidates fruitfully; almost all had difficulty fitting the extraordinary assumptions and formal surprises of Blake’s *Songs* into the more ordered Renaissance worlds of the other texts, but attempts to do so were often fascinating. The main problem with weaker responses to this question was that candidates found the ‘fragility’ of innocence a difficult concept to keep in focus. Some found it hard to focus on ‘innocence’ as a concept pertaining to individuals, substituting instead an interest in classes of persons likely to be victimised, such as women, slaves or chimney-sweepers.

**10 ‘Verbal wit is women’s strongest weapon.’ In the light of this view, discuss ways in which writers portray women’s use of language.**

Many weaker candidates succumbed to working through the text rather than analysing the key language choices made by the author. This was often a problem when writing on Milton, where detailed recall of heightened language and often intricate argument was needed. Better responses took advantage of the opportunity to quote and analyse the actual words of the texts, with detailed investigations of the Trial scene in *The White Devil* and Alysoun’s commentaries on her omnivorous reading doing well here. Chaucer or Milton were usually paired with Webster and Sheridan, though many also found a good deal to say about the fairly restricted verbal palette of Celia in *Volpone*, to the surprise and satisfaction of examiners. Better answers dealt with both sides of the premise and these often introduced complex or compound viewpoints rather than remain preoccupied with a generalised feminist stance, such as demonstrating the complex and contrasting ways in which Eve and Vittoria ‘both use rhetoric as a means of counteracting their supposed inferiority.’ Almost all the stronger candidates opened up the term ‘wit’ to mean ‘articulacy’ or ‘intelligence’ as well as ‘clever verbal exchange.’

**Some comments on the texts.**

Chaucer was probably the single most popular text this year. The *Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale* lent itself to pairings with every play. Often her ‘verbal wit’ was commended as a means of feminist self-assertion in a misogynistic world; other candidates saw Chaucer having it both ways, wryly confirming anti-feminist stereotypes (garrulous wives, lusty widows, loose women) while allowing the poem to masquerade as example of feminist discourse. Almost every answer in higher attainment bands made an effort to link Prologue with Tale, usually by tracing Alysoun’s ‘autobiographical’ preoccupations in her Tale, but sometimes by exploring ‘romance’ elements, which could be fitted to other texts, for example the fascination with sentimental fiction in *The Rivals*.

*Paradise Lost Book Nine* was a popular choice, again lending itself to a range of pairings and questions. The focus tended to be on Satan and Eve, with Satan as a corrupting force, often linked with Flamineo in *The White Devil*, and Eve as someone struggling to assert her needs. The really striking feature was not candidates’ interest in the delicacy of Milton’s textual surface nor the theology that underpins his vision (though the best wrote well on those) but his views on women and divorce, which were handled with detail and conviction, and which invariably contributed to the progress of the argument. Blake’s view of Satan from *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* remains very popular.

Few candidates wrote on **Marvell**. Answers tended to be relatively weak, struggling to make tight comparisons with the other text and almost exclusively confined to the metaphysical lyrics, especially 'Coy Mistress', 'The Gallery', 'The Definition of Love' and the Mower poems. There was little interest in poems about the Civil War, the great extended topographical poem, 'Upon Appleton House' or the Restoration Satire 'Last Instructions to a Painter', all of which provide strong political and sociological context, useful on this paper.

**Blake** Good answers found troubling undercurrents in the 'innocence' poems, often at their best when one poem was allowed to generate debate with another, the resulting dialectic then being offered up to views drawn from the dramatic text. There were some good discussions of 'London', some of which tried to untangle the complexity of the image of the 'marriage hearse', as well as predictable interest in chimney-sweeps, though the essentially domestic nature of this labour was missed, candidates often feeling (anachronistically) it had something to do with the industrial revolution. Blake's status as an untravelled London-based writer, living before the full impact of industrialisation (even in the north and midlands) was felt, makes reflections of industrialisation drawn from his poetry insecure at best. The stronger scripts concentrated on Blake's political and religious contexts and concerns, and his tendency to look through settings and issues in an apocalyptic or paradoxical way rather than write directly about them. There was very little interest in the most significant influence on Blake (and his times), the French Revolution. As with Marvell, weaker answers tried to make do with just one or two poems.

**'Tis Pity She's A Whore** was a very popular choice, often paired with Chaucer or Milton. Candidates wrote well about the incestuous love between Annabella and Giovanni, aware of both the glamour and the forbidden nature of the subject, though some saw Giovanni as a Renaissance free-thinker, pushing at the boundaries of what can be tolerated. Much discussion took place about Annabella, some seeing her as a victim, others as choosing her fate, if unwisely, then personally. Plenty of candidates examined the religious figures in the play as examples of integrity (Friar) and corruption (Cardinal), but otherwise Annabella and Giovanni predominated, with very little interest in the other sexual intrigues that form the main sequences of the play, except the grim death of Putana and the tragicomic demise of Bergetto. The sense of the text's theatrical life was, however, very strong, with Cheek by Jowl's 2010 production referred to on nearly every script.

**Volpone** The moral ambiguity of Volpone was explored effectively, with some candidates offering a penetrating psychological analysis of his attraction to what is out of reach, bringing psychological depth to a play usually embraced as sophisticatedly mechanical. Useful contexts were provided on Venice, Catholicism, courtesans, mountebanks and Jonson's own life, many examiners commenting that AO4 was handled more securely on this text than any other in Section B. The scene most frequently discussed, by a distance, was Volpone's attempted seduction of Celia.

**The White Devil** was again popular, with Webster's unstable but compelling presentation of Vittoria often seen as an example of Jacobean feminist self-assertion, but sometimes of glamorous, not always savoury victimhood. The scenes that provoked most interest were the yew-tree dream (always interpreted ambiguously) and the 'Arraignment,' which led to close analysis of Vittoria's forensic skill and the ironic digs at patriarchy in her choice of language. Flamineo was generally seen as a less important figure than his sister, some responses omitting him altogether. He was used in more adventurous answers to show how a man of talent and some moral feeling can be soured by the endemic corruption of a Renaissance Court. Webster's play was frequently and fruitfully paired with Chaucer and Milton.

**The Rivals** was very popular, with insights into eighteenth century culture and society at an unexpectedly high level. Sentimental comedy (and novels), both of which require fairly sophisticated inter-textual insights at this level, were generally very well handled indeed, often with help from Lydia's library, many titles from which candidates had diligently followed up. The servants, Lucy and Fag, were made to work hard on most answers, with consequent insight into

the apparently rigid stratification of Georgian society and its concomitant ironies. Mrs Malaprop featured prominently as an example of women's 'verbal wit' misfiring, with all kinds of explanations, some psychological, some not, for what is really going on behind her verbal slips. The best candidates wrote insightfully about the ambivalence and cultural importance of Julia and Faulkland. After *Volpone* and the Chaucerian contexts, which A2 students generally handle well, no AO4 issues were embraced more confidently than those pertaining to Sheridan's play.

## F664 Texts in Time

It is always one of the features of this unit that Moderators read many examples of scholarly, ambitious and rigorous work. There were again many very impressive essays from some extremely well-administered centres that amply exemplify the value of coursework and provide a powerful justification for its continuation. Some Centres have established an impressive culture of literary research among their candidates, at all levels of the mark scheme. This bears positive testament to the capacity of 'Texts in Time' to stimulate candidates in the second year of their A level course, and to develop valuable transferable skills of sustained research and composition which will be important in both higher education and employment.

### Administration

The majority of Centres were meticulously organised, quickly submitting the correct sample of essays, carefully annotated and marked with completed cover sheets. In these cases, the essays were of the correct length, with text choices that fulfilled the specification requirements and well-honed tasks to direct the candidates' writing. The candidates themselves properly acknowledged secondary sources with footnotes and bibliography.

However, delay and frustration was caused by more Centres than ever before submitting work that either needed clarification or to be returned for remarking. There were a number of disparities between recorded marks and the marks on the cover sheets, a number of cover sheets with no candidate number or an incorrect one and many that provided no word count, despite boxes being provided for this on the cover sheet itself. Of greater concern, and causing greater delay, were the very many essays submitted which were in breach of the word limit regulations. The 3000 word limit is very clear in the specification and the coursework guidelines; it has been reiterated in every Principal Moderator's report. The last reminder, and instructions as to how to proceed if the regulations are broken, is printed on the coursework cover sheet itself. There is, therefore, little excuse for Centres failing to explain this regulation very clearly to their candidates and to mark work accordingly.

As the provision of footnotes, to acknowledge secondary sources, and a bibliography are specification requirements, it is good practice to give candidates clear instructions in the conventions so that they can present these appropriately. Footnoting references to the three core texts is not necessary and it should be noted that footnotes should not be used to extend points of argument or to provide extra information – if they do so, they must be included in the word count.

It was satisfying to see many Centres improving their practice by responding to advice offered in their previous Moderator's Reports, though there were occasions where it seemed that the previous session's report had not been read and acknowledged. It is therefore perhaps appropriate to remind Centres that a detailed Moderator's Report is available for every submission and can be downloaded from Interchange once results are released.

### Texts and Tasks

One of the delights of moderating the unit is reading work on such a wide range of texts. There is work on the traditional canon, including Chaucer, Shakespeare, Pope, Tennyson, Dickens, Brontë, and Fitzgerald, and the emerging canon with writers such as Armitage, Atwood, Churchill, Carver, Miller, Ishiguro and Carter. There are also Centres and candidates who stretch the boundaries or choose contemporary texts by writers such as David Dabydeen, Daljit Nagra, Philip Roth, Cormac McCarthy, Chimamanda Adichie, Christopher Okigbo, David Mitchell and Sarah Kane. The greatest range came from those Centres where candidates had been offered some choice of texts and were able to follow their individual interests. Such work tended to be

fresh, with the interest and engagement of personal enquiry, argued with vigour. Candidates who are given the opportunity to grasp the full advantages of coursework in this way, directing their own learning with guidance, tend to perform much more successfully than cohorts who are often disadvantaged by pursuing the same three taught texts. Here work has a homogeneity, often featuring the same textual, critical and contextual references, exacerbated when candidates write on the same or very similar task.

Adequate coverage of poetry and short stories remains a concern in some Centres. It should be remembered that candidates should show evidence of study of text equivalent to that which might be set for an examined unit; this means a full collection of poetry or short stories. In the work of some candidates, poetry is not well handled, present as an afterthought, with isolated, decontextualised lines spliced into the discussion through some thematic link. It is often used illustratively rather than analytically. It is often the case that the choice of topic is usually driven by the prose text(s), with the result that the poetry text is uncomfortably shoehorned into the argument. In some cases the approach to the poetry text is very similar to that taken to the novels and plays – with the poet as a character to describe and discuss. This is particularly the case with poets like Sylvia Plath, where there is a very marked assumption that the verse is an absolute and indisputable reflection of the life of the poet. This precludes the discussion of poetic personae and other poetic features, encouraging a narrative biographical approach.

Quite a lot of drama featured in essays this session and this worked extremely well when candidates considered the differences in genre and were alert to the particular features of writing for the stage, discussing dialogue, proxemics, setting and the audience experience. Discussion of both drama and prose texts was less successful when candidates restricted their discussion to what characters say and do. For this reason it is very important for tasks to lay the emphasis clearly on the literary nature of the task to ensure that candidates are directed to compare the writing of the texts, by using words and phrases such as ‘presentation’, ‘treatment’ and ‘ways in which’. Candidates are very much advantaged by a well-phrased task, which gives clear direction and guidance in its wording. Advice on such matters can always be sought from the Coursework Consultancy Service, which many Centres use to very good effect.

## **The Assessment Objectives**

### **AO3**

Most candidates are adept at maintaining comparison through their essays. Moderators saw some essays which dealt with the texts largely separately, but these were in the minority. At times, discourse indicators such as ‘Similarly...’, ‘In contrast...’ or ‘On the other hand...’ were used to imply comparison, but, without development, they were not effective in producing sustained comparison. The strongest essays combine comparison of broader ideas and concerns with direct comparison of small linguistic details, often linking all three texts together. Such essays are also able to develop central ideas on individual texts, compare pairs and compare all three under consideration at different points in the argument. The comparison is also much better directed if candidates compare how writers use features of the different genre to treat the topic of the essay, rather than if they compare characters or a loose ‘theme’.

The approach to critical readings varied widely, with some candidates clearly being given a few chosen critical paragraphs to incorporate, while other candidates benefited from substantial individual research. The work of the latter, was, of course, more successful, as candidates had considered the development of an argument, rather than a paragraph ‘soundbite’, which meant they were able to engage with the argument and explore its implications in much more detail. This is also why quick copy-and-pasted references from the internet seldom led to developed exploration of different readings. A thorough consideration of appropriate academic websites and careful reading of published essays invariably leads to more successful address to this aspect of AO3. Some essays also incorporated a sophisticated consideration of literary theory in relation to the texts, with some excellent, penetrating insights resulting from this. Marxist,

feminist and psychoanalytical approaches were all utilised to good effect, with some candidates demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the work of Freud, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan, amongst others. There were, though, also those candidates who referred to such figures with superficial understanding; as ever the key to this aspect of AO3 is in the quality of the exploration.

#### **AO4**

The handling of contexts was a strength in most of the work moderated, with some really illuminating writing on the interaction between contexts and texts, and relatively few instances of digression and irrelevance. Candidates frequently incorporated a detailed appreciation and understanding of contextual issues into their arguments in a fluent way. Where candidates used biographical context, it was noticeable that in the great majority of cases they used references concisely, picking out the details that specifically illuminated aspects of the texts. Political, scientific, cultural, psychological, religious and mythological perspectives were all used extensively to good effect. Some candidates also displayed an excellent appreciation of theoretical issues, philosophy and intellectual history, lending considerable force to the quality of their arguments. The appreciation and understanding of literary movements, periods and genre were well developed. At times, historical and social contexts led to rather sweeping assumptions rather than considered knowledge and understanding.

Many essays began with a first paragraph which explained the context(s), which can be an effective way of opening the argument. It is less successful, however, if no further reference is made to context, which happened in a number of cases. The most effective way of demonstrating understanding of the significance and influence of context is by referring to specific aspects where they illustrate or modify particular points in the developing argument.

#### **AO1**

As ever, Moderators saw many examples of finely-honed, scholarly arguments, sophisticated in their range, understanding, referencing and structure. Coursework creates opportunities for candidates to excel, pursuing individual academic arguments. However, it also provides opportunities for candidates of more modest abilities to craft carefully, to refine their technique, to draft and redraft and put together a substantial essay showing considered comparison in a way which would be impossible in the timed pressure of the examination room.

The ability to draft and use word processing technology should also eliminate basic errors of grammar and spelling. While the quality of written expression has certainly improved over the life of the specification, Moderators still see examples of work given high Band 5 marks for AO1/2 where the argument is unclear because of poor sentence construction or paragraphing and which contain lapses in written accuracy. In many cases these deficiencies had been ignored in Centres' marking, though the quality of expression of the argument is a key aspect of AO1. It is also the case that some Centres credit *knowledge* of the texts rather than *understanding* – this refers to a literary understanding of texts and a grasp of them as literary constructs, which is why AO1 is so closely linked with AO2.

#### **AO2**

An argument comparing the writing of texts should lead naturally to successful address of AO2 and certainly Moderators saw work of exceptional quality, with candidates seamlessly incorporating penetrating, detailed and succinct consideration of language, form and structure within the overall development of their argument. Many candidates are confident in offering comments on diction and imagery, which is most successful when it directly contributes to the argument and is contextualised within the discussion. Form and structure are discussed with much less frequency and much less success, though there were some examples of good consideration of drama in this session. Candidates should be encouraged to consider narrative

perspective and voice in novels, as well as construction through chapters, paragraphs and sentences. While there were many candidates who discussed poetry in ways which showed excellent understanding of language, imagery and form, there were also many examples of candidates offering comment on decontextualised words and images, so that their contribution to the meaning of the overall poem was absent. Even in the discussion of poetry, where features of structure and form are often the most obvious, they were often ignored by candidates, most clearly exemplified when quotations were rendered as prose. As poetry and prose are the compulsory genres for this unit, it would be sensible for Centres to focus on teaching ways of incorporating analysis of each, including structure and form, into arguments.

### **Marking and Annotation**

Most Centres carry out their marking and internal moderation with assiduous care, making careful and judicious assessments which are clearly explained in the summative comments and moderation notes. Marginal comments are most successful when they are evaluative and the best summative comments clearly balance the strengths and weaknesses of the responses in arriving at a judgement. These tend to make it much easier for the Moderator to support the Centre's judgment. While commentary at the end of an essay is useful in showing the markers' debate in deciding upon a particular mark, the cover sheet must be used to summarise the rationale for the final mark. Markers should remember that the top mark in each band is only to be awarded to work that fully meets all the criteria for that Band – this allows for greater discrimination within the band to arrive at a 'best-fit' mark.

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