

GCE



**Chief Examiner's and
Principal Moderator's Report
English Literature**

Summer Series 2019



Foreword

This booklet outlines the performance of candidates in all aspects of this specification for the Summer 2019 series.

CCEA hopes that the Chief Examiner's and/or Principal Moderator's report(s) will be viewed as a helpful and constructive medium to further support teachers and the learning process.

This booklet forms part of the suite of support materials for the specification. Further materials are available from the specification's microsite on our website at www.ccea.org.uk.

Contents

Assessment Unit AS 1	Section A: The Study of Poetry 1900-Present	4
	Section B: The Study of Drama 1900-Present	6
Assessment Unit AS 2	The Study of Prose Pre 1900	8
Assessment Unit A2 1	Shakespearean Genres	11
Assessment Unit A2 2	Section A: The Study of Poetry Pre 1900	14
	Section B: Unseen Poetry	17
Assessment Unit A2 3	Internal Assessment	18
Contact Details		20

GCE ENGLISH LITERATURE

Chief Examiner's Report

Overview

It is always worth noting that candidates must be aware of the specific Assessment Objectives for each unit/section if they are to engage successfully with the questions set. There was evidence that some candidates seemed to be uncertain about the nature of the task which they had been set.

AO5 (Argument/Interpretation) is the driving Assessment Objective in several units/sections: AS Unit 1 Section B; AS Unit 2; A2 Unit 1; and it also has a prominent place in A2 Unit 2 Section B.

In previous reports I had commented on the confused nature of 'argument' that had been produced and it is encouraging to acknowledge an improvement in this regard. At times the indicators of argument were gestural or unconvincing, but their use suggests that candidates were aware of such strategies of discourse as sequencing, development and qualification, and were trying to implement them. The importance of planning an argument has been emphasised before, and should be again, particularly for the A2 Unit 1, where the task has drawn a fairly generous time allowance. A second feature of the building of argument which drew comment from Assistant Examiners this series was the damaging inflexibility with which stimulus statements were handled, particularly when they were being negated or modified.

AO2 (Methods) is the driving Assessment Objective for AS Unit 1 Section A and A2 Unit 2, but also appearing in a subsidiary role in several other units. Assistant Examiners this series expressed concern about the quality and development of the linkage between the identified method and the key term or question focus, regretting the prevalence of assertion, or 'tagging' of the key term. They also noted a lazy use of the term 'imagery' which was often used indiscriminately for any and every use of language, without further investigation or analysis being deemed necessary.

I am pleased to report that AO3 (Context) appears to be taking its rightful place as a helpful and enriching, but subsidiary element in responses and we are seeing fewer unwieldy, context-heavy offerings. The text is to be central in all questions and responses.

AO4 (Connections across literary texts) is also deserving of comment. In AS Unit 1 Section A, this takes the form of an explicit instruction to compare and contrast, with the assurance that comparative operations which are meaningful, significant and relevant will be rewarded. The compare and contrast exercise does not appear in A2 Unit 2, nor can it because of the Chaucer option and the presence in the Anthology of several lengthier poems. At A2 level, the connections are made through the key term and are assessed through their relevance to it. A few candidates responding to the Donne option, for example, compared and contrasted the two poems. They were, of course, not penalised for doing so but teachers should ensure that their candidates are aware that this is not a required element.

AO1 is obviously in play for all units at AS and A2 level. The key aspects of this Assessment Objective have been laboured in previous reports but a significant rise in the illegibility of responses was noted by the Examining Team. The negative impact that this can have is obvious as examiners can only reward what they can read. Centres are asked to encourage candidates to write legibly so that their efforts are not in vain.

Assessment Unit AS 1

Section A: The Study of Poetry 1900-Present

Overview

This series presented the third opportunity for assessment of this component and it was pleasing to see that most candidates were well-prepared to respond to the question on the poets they had studied. Among this series' candidature, those who were successful responded analytically to the poetic methods used in the chosen pair of poems, made meaningful linkages between the noted method and the question's key terms and skilfully integrated relevant contextual information. As in previous years, less successful candidates struggled with the prescribed pairs of poems, both in conceptualising meaningful linkages between methods and the question's key terms and, in the very weakest cases, with basic understanding of the poems.

Examiners considered this question paper to have been "accessible to candidates of differing abilities" and to have allowed "all candidates to respond in a way that demonstrated their level of understanding". Candidates were deemed able to engage with the questions set and the Examining Team reported that the language of the examination was clear and precise with the question's key terms being both succinct and unambiguously presented.

The tendency to devalue the experience of poetry was still evident in the responses of those candidates who reduce this examination to a banal exercise in methods-spotting. To reiterate my thoughts from previous years, I would urge teachers to focus on their candidates becoming accomplished in understanding and utilising a focused selection of critical terms with the aim of producing quality linkages between the identified method and the key term in question. The pursuit of ever more esoteric terminology in the belief that candidates are being additionally equipped has, time and again, proved to be erroneous.

I would like to re-state, once again, the importance of candidates including accurate use of quotation. This section of the examination is 'open book' after all. It is expected at this level that candidates demonstrate technical proficiency in their exemplification - too often a lack of adeptness in comprehending the noted method's effect is confirmed by an incompetently quoted example. Thus, exemplification of a simile must include the comparatives linked by "like" or "as", a metaphor must evidence the association being made, enjambment must demonstrate the run-on line with a forward slash or follow the line layout of the text, and a caesura must be exemplified by quoting before and after the caesural mark. This is not mere pedantry: without proper exemplification the examiner cannot be sure that the candidate understands the method being referenced. Additionally, many candidates also labour under the misapprehension that meaningful and evidential exemplification can be provided by single-word quotation. Often points of potential consequence self-destructed because of glaring overstatement of effect when the evidence provided was minimal.

This year, the misunderstanding of what constitutes "imagery" was marked. Many candidates seemed unaware of the distinction between "imagery" and "image" and it was often the case that "imagery" was meaninglessly employed as a catch-all term when the candidate was not certain of the actual method in play. To be valid, imagery must evidence a supra-literal effect and the candidate must be able to explain how that effect influences meaning and how it is relevant to the question's key terms.

Q1 Once again, this proved the most popular pairing of poets and the key term of "death" posed few problems for the candidates. In many cases high-quality teaching was in evidence, with candidates demonstrating good knowledge of the poems and an ability to locate a wide range of methods and provide meaningful analysis. That said, as always, there was a significant minority who synonymised the key term to fit a prepared template with "grieving", "loss", "unexpected death" all in evidence. As always, in diluting the accuracy of the original key term, opportunities for success are inevitably eroded.

Misunderstanding was evident in both poems from many candidates. The suggestion of the saw as personified in “snarled and rattled” was prevalent and, even when zoomorphism was correctly identified, a significant number of candidates negated their point by suggesting that Frost’s “use of zoomorphism personifies the saw”. A more thorough grasp of the terminology would have benefitted a significant number of candidates. Similarly, many candidates were not aware of the difference between “reference” and “allusion” to Macbeth in the title of “Out, Out” and, in such cases, impact was inescapably thinned.

There were also some misunderstandings as to the chronology of “The Summer of Lost Rachel”. Many candidates did not seem to understand that Rachel is dead when the poem begins and thus early references to “foreshadowing” were difficult to convincingly exemplify. Also, there seemed to be a widespread belief that the nine stanzas in the poem are indicative of the nine years of Rachel’s life – Rachel, however, was seven when she was struck by the van.

Biographical material was clearly understood in this question but was often off-loaded at the expense of the specific references one would expect from the named poems. Candidates offered examples such as Frost being “used to death” because he had experienced the deaths and mental illnesses of many of his family, and the suggestion that Heaney, having previously experienced the death of his brother Christopher in a road accident, had a familiarity with the associated feelings; such examples served to dilute the potential impact of more relevant contexts such as the facts concerning Rachel’s accident and the specific details of Fitzgerald’s death as read about by Frost.

- Q2** The key term of “nature” was straightforward for candidates and many produced excellent responses. At the pinnacle were candidates whose points demonstrated clear understanding of the contrasting presentations of nature within the texts supported with skilfully selected methods linked to the key terms. Less successful answers often displayed tendencies to list constellations of methods at the expense of analysis and/or fell into the trap of applying contextual knowledge indiscriminately, which often resulted in the interpretation of the poems through the lens of the poet’s marriage, thus stifling meaningful analysis.

While the indiscriminate dispensing of contextual information may be understandable with the easy availability of often tendentious or even prurient contextual material linked to Plath and Hughes, and, perhaps too, the view of confessional poetry as only biographical, it is becoming clear that many candidates replace textual analysis with the off-loading of undiscerning biography. It must, once again, be stated that the driving Assessment Objective for this section of AS Unit 1 is AO2 (Methods) and to ignore this directive will always be to the candidate’s detriment.

- Q3** This choice of poets proved to be a popular one and it was pleasing to note that the majority of candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the prescribed poems. Many were able to meaningfully apply the key term to their analysis and produce well-written and often enlightening responses. As always, however, there were those candidates who attempted to contort previously written essays to fit the given question. The most recurrent distortion was the contraction of the key term of “religious places” – specific in this question to Assisi and the church Larkin visited – to the generic term “religion”.

Contextual material was generally handled well with candidates demonstrating awareness of the potential impact of Larkin’s agnosticism and Jennings’ Catholicism on the texts.

- Q4** For the first time this pairing of poets was represented, albeit thinly. The candidates responded nicely to the poems, but needed to focus their energies more on poetic methods. I hope that this option will be developed in more centres.

Assessment Unit AS 1

Section B: The Study of Drama 1900-Present

Overview

In keeping with the previous two series, the play by Williams remained the most popular option, followed by the plays by Friel and Miller. There were a few responses on Beckett and Bolt's plays. No responses were seen on Stewart's play.

AO5 is the driving Assessment Objective for this section of AS Unit 1, and the examiner's principal task is to weigh up the ability of the candidate to offer relevant arguments in response to the key terms of the question. The consideration of AO2 and AO3 is subsidiary to this. This series, candidates mostly managed to develop relevant arguments and engaged with the key terms (to a greater or lesser extent). The handling of the key terms can prove testing for some candidates, as sometimes a little manipulation leads to greater clarity of expression and argument; yet this must be done with due care and understanding – this was noticeable in the 3(b) option in particular. "Nothing in common" cannot always be satisfactorily reversed to "not nothing in common" and failing attempts to manipulate the stimulus statement disadvantaged many responses. Regrettably, this must be put down to inadequate language skills.

Regarding AO2, the request to place a greater focus on dramatic methods, rather than exclusively language methods appears to have been heeded by centres as it was clear that many teachers had guided candidates soundly in analysing drama. However, there are still some responses which contain references to linguistic techniques which cannot be considered to be of value – for example, comments about sibilance in a stage direction or comments about parts of speech such as 'violent verbs'. Examiners are instructed not to be beguiled by AO2 in cases like these where the method identified is simply not meaningful.

In the handling of dramatic methods another prevalent weakness, much commented upon by Assistant Examiners, was the use of general terms (or candidates using terms in a general way) without explaining what particular aspect of these they are trying to present. By means of illustration: candidates referred to "use of language" leaving examiners to question, what aspect of language was under scrutiny; candidates referred to "dialogue" but plays are built on dialogue, so the specific feature needs to be identified; candidates referred to "stage directions" but neglected to indicate what is being directed – voice? action? gesture? sound effect? Another general term used by candidates was "character interaction" but again, without specifying who was interacting with whom, or where, or indeed why. Such attempts in answers reveal little understanding of dramatic methods, are considered as general assertions, and as such are not credited. Some of these terms appear in the mark scheme as headings – they are not intended to be interpreted as methods in their own right. It is acknowledged that generalisation has its place when commenting on a dramatist's techniques but clearly able candidates would be better advised to move from this lazy style of generalisation to the analysis of the specifics of linguistic and dramatic technique. We recommend this as a path to improved performance.

As indicated previously, we enjoy seeing contextual material (AO3) being used meaningfully and relevantly: in this section of AS Unit 1, it can be used purposefully in order to support an argument. A 'stand-alone' paragraph containing only AO3 biography, for example, might not succeed in doing this. Relevant references to biography which are woven into an argument could be very rewarding.

- Q1 (a)** The measure of success to this question tended to depend on whether the candidate determined the nature of “change” as being merely external, rather than internal. Some candidates argued that Hugh was completely resistant to change as he continued to drink, wear shabby clothes, etc. More successful candidates unpacked the given prompt and wrote a balanced essay considering whether Hugh was “completely” resistant to change, or not.
- (b)** Better responses contained carefully balanced arguments, considering the metaphorical use of characters such as Sarah and the unseen Donnelly twins. They considered Lancey’s initial attitude and later threats, the staging of the dilapidated hedge school, Manus’s physical disability and the wider sense of community and loss.
- Q2 (a) & (b)** The number of responses for *Waiting for Godot* is small, perhaps because of the challenges that the play presents. Both questions seemed satisfactory to the candidature, however, the humour of the play is not understood.
- Q3 (a)** This question was considered to be very enabling by the Examining Team. Better candidates managed to consider a variety of forms of desire from a range of characters and explored specific scenes in which desire is seen as both destructive (e.g. Scenes 3, 9, 10) and restorative or creative (Stella and the baby). The key term “always” was intended to be interrogated. A few candidates dealt only with one part of the contestable statement (usually “desire”) over the other.
- (b)** The handling of the key terms led to difficulty for some candidates, with contradictions quickly apparent as they would claim that Blanche and Stella have “nothing in common”, leading to the appraisal that they have some things in common. Weaker responses lapsed into very general character studies in places. Some candidates dropped the key terms and wrote about ‘differences and similarities’. Some answers focused on one character’s traits, then asserted that as the other character did not share these traits, then they had nothing in common. Many responses discussed Stella’s decision in Scene 11 and her final tableau convincingly.
- Q4 (a)** This question was handled well by the majority of candidates who showed a clear focus on the task. Some candidates discussed Hale being responsible for bad things that happened in the play and this sometimes meant that the key terms were lost in the response.
- (b)** Candidates seemed to manage the key terms well, most including the word “always” at some point in their response. It was also noted that relevant context was used in the majority of responses.
- Q5 (a) & (b)** No responses seen this series.
- Q6 (a) & (b)** This play is undoubtedly a minority option but as with previous series, provoked engaged responses. Both questions proved popular. In Question 6(b), a few candidates diluted their argument by considering whether More was “a good man” in certain parts of their response, rather than “a good family man”.

Assessment Unit AS 2 The Study of Prose Pre 1900

Overview

Examiners considered the questions in this examination paper to have been appropriate, both in allowing the candidature to exhibit textual understanding and in discriminating between candidates' abilities. It was felt that candidates were able to engage with the questions set and there was agreement concerning the accessibility of the language used across all questions.

Many of the responses showed candidates' clear engagement with, and enthusiasm for, the novel which they had studied. Whilst the majority of candidates displayed competent – often excellent – knowledge of the texts they had studied, some responses showed an inability to adapt this knowledge to fit the precise key terms of the question. Many examiners formed the impression that candidates often embarked on their responses following little, if any, reflection on what the question was actually asking them to consider.

The driving Assessment Objective for this unit is AO5: the mark band into which responses are placed is determined by the quality of argument/interpretation. Most candidates are aware that they must use the explicit key terms of the stimulus statement, however, those candidates who adhered rigidly to the key terms in a mechanical manner often produced responses which were contradictory and inconsistent. Candidates should be advised to read the stimulus statement very carefully, identifying those key terms which should not be substituted for other terms and, most importantly, identifying key term(s) which make the stimulus statement contestable in order to enhance the development of a nuanced argument. Some candidates failed to explicitly write out the key terms, instead repeating the phrase 'the stimulus statement' in their response, whilst others simply 'tagged on' the key terms at the end of paragraphs, preceded by the phrase 'This shows...'. Such responses did not score highly.

Whilst it was evident that most candidates had studied their set text with a focus on AO2 (Methods), candidates should be advised to avoid identification and discussion of 'micro' methods such as pronouns, verbs, adjectives, alliteration, onomatopoeia and sibilance. Instead, focus should be on the overarching narrative methods such as form, structure, motifs, symbolism and imagery. (However, it was noted that the last of these was often used so loosely as to render the term meaningless.) Those candidates who accurately identified relevant narrative methods, linking them to the key terms of the stimulus statement, enhanced their argument and were richly rewarded.

In relation to AO3 (Context), it should be noted that candidates who produce clear, relevant lines of argument can achieve top of Band 5 with no acknowledgement of context – the Examining Team noted a few responses which were like this. The most successful candidates were able to integrate relevant contextual information throughout their responses, clearly linking it to the key terms, to illuminate their argument.

Examiners expressed an on-going concern with candidates' poor standard of expression (AO1): many responses showed considerable weaknesses in spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting. Some candidates produced over-lengthy responses, for example, writing eight pages of narration/description and repeating often irrelevant ideas with very little to credit; good responses consisting of four pages of concise and relevant argument can score highly.

- Q1 (a)** This was a popular text, with responses to the (a) question being the more popular of the two offered. Successful candidates set up a definition of the key term “rebel” and constructed an argument based on, for example, Hester’s refusal to name Pearl’s father, her repelling of the beadle and her modification of the scarlet letter, whilst acknowledging her acceptance of her punishment as an act of compliance to the expectations of the Puritan society. Less successful candidates conveyed a lack of understanding regarding the meaning of “rebel”, producing limited responses which dealt inaccurately with Hester’s relationship with Dimmesdale as an act of conscious rebellion. There were some unsuccessful, irrelevant responses which attempted to argue that Pearl is a rebel.
- (b)** A number of candidates responded to this question with varying degrees of success: the most successful candidates dealt with the key terms in their entirety, producing convincing responses which explored a range of characters (for example, Hester, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth) and also looked at societal forgiveness (or lack of forgiveness), supporting their points with relevant contextual material on the necessarily unforgiving nature of Puritan society. Less impressive responses tended to be contradictory and inconsistent: arguing from one point of view, and then, without acknowledging what they were doing, from the opposite point of view; some candidates wrote inaccurately and irrelevantly about Pearl as a character who does/does not show forgiveness.
- Q2 (a)** This question was not a good choice for those candidates who had a limited understanding of the female characters as they tended to ignore Safie and Caroline, who demonstrate initiative and resourcefulness which resist the imputation of powerlessness. There were, however, some successful responses which showed a very good understanding of the powerlessness of Elizabeth and Justine. A number of candidates supported their points with relevant discussion of narrative methods such as Shelley’s use of epistolary and embedded narratives which privilege the male voice and marginalise the female voice. The most successful candidates integrated relevant contextual information on Mary Wollstonecraft’s writings on the role of women in nineteenth-century society into their arguments.
- (b)** This was a very popular choice with the candidature. Many candidates showed an excellent understanding of the character of the Monster and were able to provide astutely observed evidence from the text to support their arguments regarding sympathy; many of these responses took a good account of the key term “impossible” and demonstrated skill in using appropriate alternatives such as ‘possible’, ‘easy’ and ‘difficult’ in order to seamlessly propel the stance adopted at various stages of the essay. There were many responses which integrated relevant context on Rousseau and Locke and included relevant methods such as Shelley’s use of multiple narrators, allusions to ‘Paradise Lost’ and use of contrast between the Monster and Victor. Less successful responses ignored the deliberately provocative key term “impossible” and, surprisingly, failed to reference the Monster’s heinous crimes. Some candidates digressed, unsuccessfully, into a discussion of sympathy regarding other characters.
- Q3 (a)** The Examining Team noted a number of very good responses to this question on Godfrey Cass: many candidates recognised his character development and successfully argued that Godfrey tried to atone for his previous immoral acts of deception and evasion of his moral responsibility to Molly Farren. There was, however, some misunderstanding evident regarding the meaning of “immoral” with some candidates arguing that Godfrey marrying ‘beneath his class’ was immoral.

- (b) There were a number of excellent responses to this question which enthusiastically engaged with Eliot's presentation of community life in Lantern Yard and Raveloe. A few unsuccessful responses lost focus on the key term "community life" and wrote about characters' actions being positive/negative. It was reported for both this question and the (a) question that there was a lack of narrative methods and context in many centres' responses. Disappointingly, this led to a number of candidates who had written excellent arguments being capped at the top of Band 4 (for no Methods/Context) or Band 5 (for limited Methods/Context). Candidates should be advised to incorporate a discussion of relevant methods such as Eliot's use of omniscient authorial voice, proleptic narration, contrast, thematic metaphors/similes and setting.
- Q4 (a)** The Examining Team noted many engaging, focused and nuanced responses to this question. Many candidates showed an excellent understanding of the marriages between Catherine and Linton, Isabella and Heathcliff and Cathy and Hareton, (acknowledging that, at least in prospect, this marriage may be a happy one). Some candidates also looked at the marriage of Hindley and Frances, but many misinterpreted this marriage as a negative one due to Hindley's reaction to Frances' death. Some candidates produced contradictory responses because of their inability to manipulate the key term "always".
- (b) Some candidates demonstrated very good knowledge of the character of Isabella and were able to provide evidence from the text which showed a clear understanding of her misfortunes, and argued that she is partly, but not entirely, responsible for them. Contextual information on the position of women in the nineteenth-century was often used to support the argument. There were, however, a number of limited responses which substituted the key term "responsible" with 'blame', and which failed to take into consideration Isabella's position at Thrushcross Grange and her state of mind. Others did not identify what Isabella's misfortunes are.
- Q5 (a)** Austen's Emma was chosen by a number of centres with considerable success. Examiners noted many very good, often excellent, responses to this question. Most successful were those candidates who set up a working definition of the key term "gentleman", linking it to nineteenth-century English society. Responses explored a range of male characters such as Frank Churchill, Mr Knightley, Mr Elton and Mr Woodhouse and examined if their behaviours could be considered gentlemanly, or not, before reaching a conclusion about Mr Knightley being the only perfect gentleman in the novel.
- (b) This was a popular question which showed candidates' engagement with, and enthusiasm for, the character of Emma, with many responses acknowledging the development in her character. Many successful responses took a good account of the key term "difficult" and its antonym 'easy'. Some nuanced arguments successfully incorporated relevant context. It was noted for both this question and the (a) question that there was a lack of narrative methods in many centres' responses. Disappointingly, this led to a number of candidates who had written excellent arguments being capped at the top of Band 4 (for not including any Methods) or Band 5 (for including only limited Methods). Candidates should be advised to incorporate a discussion of relevant methods such as Austen's use of set-pieces, irony, free indirect style and character contrast.
- Q6 (a)** For those few candidates who chose this question, there were varying degrees of success. Some candidates simply dismissed the idea of Van Helsing as a failure, writing instead about his success in ultimately defeating Count Dracula, whilst others acknowledged his failure to save Lucy. There was some valid discussion of other characters' views of Van Helsing.

- (b)** This question proved to be unsuccessful for many candidates for a number of reasons: the key term “tells us little” was often ignored, with candidates simply describing a feature of late-nineteenth-century English society and linking it (often unsuccessfully) to the novel; many candidates wrote about how Stoker plays on the fears of late-nineteenth-century society (a past paper question); many responses lost focus on “English” society and instead wrote about Transylvania; very often contextual information was ‘off-loaded’ and was not fully understood.

Assessment Unit A2 1 Shakespearean Genres

Overview

All questions in this unit were considered suitable by the team of Assistant Examiners for candidates of all abilities. As was the case in 2018, *Othello* and *King Lear* featured very heavily, with *The Winter’s Tale* featuring as the third most popular text.

The weaknesses appearing in many responses are those that were pointed out last series. These may be indicated here briefly as they are discussed in more detail in last year’s report.

Some candidates found it difficult to structure an answer which struck an effective balance between the extract and the wider text. The extract should receive close critical attention, and unfortunately this was not always the case in the responses seen. Examiners will allow strengths in one area to compensate for shortcomings in another, but this has its limits. Regrettably, some candidates did not achieve as they might have because they neglected the demands of the task as set forth in the rubric.

There also seemed to be, as previously, a high proportion of very lengthy responses, but with much irrelevance. Candidates would be well-advised to spend some time reading and thinking about the extract and planning their answers so that their essays can be more focused and succinct.

As far as AO2 (Methods) is concerned, there was still a tendency for candidates to focus on ‘micro’ methods (e.g., alliteration, assonance, etc.), rather than the more meaningful and significant dramatic techniques at work in these plays. Linguistic methods have their place, but they must be meaningful and not merely fortuitous collocations of vowels and consonants. Candidates still find it very difficult to relate features of form and structure to the question, and this, as several questions on the examination paper showed, can be incapacitating.

Most candidates were able to bring the driving Assessment Objective, AO5 (Argument/ Interpretation), into play to at least a certain extent, and examiners reported that they were able to reward this. High-quality responses offered arguments in which the stimulus statement was considered and qualified in a flexible way.

- Q1** The question allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the play in relation to key aspects of the nature of Shakespearean tragedy. The idea of the fatal flaw is a central concept in the study of tragedy. Successful responses set up a definition of *Othello*’s sense of honour which was then explored in relation to the extract and the wider text, often balancing this discussion with a range of other possible fatal flaws (such as jealousy or gullibility). The extract itself offered multiple opportunities to examine *Othello*’s sense of honour (for example, his honour as a husband, his sense that he can no longer respect himself as a soldier) and also suggested, through the presence of Iago as commentator and interlocutor an obvious alternative argument.

Many candidates were clearly interested and aware of how prickly people in the seventeenth century could be about “honour” and offered illuminating contextual information. Others were interested in debates around issues of race and ethnicity, but care needs to be taken that these ideas are not ‘shoe-horned’ into essays without being clearly linked to the key terms.

A small number of candidates mis-read the question as relating to Othello’s sense of humour. Teachers and candidates should be reassured that the questions will not feature such unusual or obscure readings of the texts. At the same time, candidates should be reminded of the importance of taking time to read the question carefully. It might also be wondered what such a misreading says about the understanding of the genre of Shakespearean tragedy.

Finally, candidates should be reminded of the importance of spending time to read the extract carefully. A careful reading of the extract should provide candidates with multiple arguments that can be incorporated into the essay.

- Q2** The best answers explored the nature of Lear’s “crimes”, and then moved on to consider if the “punishment” was fitting or excessive. Higher level responses dealt with all of the key terms, whilst less effective responses only looked at one (usually the punishment, which seemed to suggest an insecure understanding of Lear’s transgression). Even so, a certain amount of credit was available for these limited responses.

The extract offered a useful launch-pad for argument regarding punishment, and opportunities for backing that up with reference to dramatic methods and contextual information about the genre of Shakespearean Tragedy. Reservations about the level of understanding remain. Lear’s words: “I am a man/More sinned against than sinning” were almost universally cited as evidence of his anagnorisis. The Fool’s rhymed prophecy of confusion was not discussed in responses.

The main problem in relation to this question was a neglect of the key term “crime”. Less effective responses focused largely on the punishment and then simply asserted that this was far in excess of what Lear deserved. Other candidates pursued the argument that Lear had not really made any serious mistakes or errors of judgement at all. This line of argument indicated a limited understanding of both text and genre.

Many centres are still clearly allocating a significant amount of time to teaching a range of critical viewpoints, which candidates then try to integrate into their responses. Whilst this approach may well appeal to candidates (perhaps on the basis that it provides them with a ready-made ‘tool kit’ with which to approach the examination questions), it almost always had a detrimental effect on the quality of the response as it led to a shoe-horning of ideas into the essay which were not relevant to the question. My advice would be for teachers to be sparing and selective when surveying critical opinions, and to keep in mind their candidates’ powers of absorption. If critical opinions are to be offered, they should be brief, pointed and relevant. Candidates can access the top mark bands without any recourse to named authorities.

- Q3** This proved to be a very accessible question, with an extract which worked well in stimulating arguments about paternal responsibility. This option, more than the other plays available for study, tends to draw vigorous and opinionated declarations from candidates. Whereas last year I noted some unexpected and interesting contextual support, these voices seem to have gone silent and many responses would have been improved by a sounder knowledge of the nature of Shakespearean Comedy. Responses without context are rarities in this unit, but they did appear for this option.

Q4 Responses to this question quite often underachieved by neglecting the extract. Overall, candidates overlooked the possibilities the extract contained for argument about whether Orlando deserves Rosalind's love, and analysis of Shakespeare's dramatic methods. It was on to the wider text all too quickly, where most candidates seemed more comfortable. Candidates and teachers should be aware of the dual nature of the task in this unit: while a more general approach is acceptable when handling the wider text, close analysis is demanded when discussing the extract. The rubric of this and every question in the unit contains the reminder that: "Equal marks are available for your treatment of the given extract and other relevant parts of the text."

Understanding of the literary context of Shakespearean Comedy was much more secure in this question than it was in Question 3, and in many cases was used to support relevant arguments focusing on love, disguise, obstacles and marriage.

Q5 There were only a few responses to Measure for Measure. The question seemed to work well for the candidates, providing opportunities for argument and alternative interpretations; the extract was rich and the character of Angelo is sure to have drawn interested discussion in class. Perhaps a sharper understanding of the features attributed to the Problem Plays might be achievable.

Q6 The best responses in this option looked at Leontes' actions in the first three acts and then at his experiences after this. This approach allowed candidates to arrive at a judgement about whether or not Leontes' received the punishment he deserved. It has to be said, however, that most candidates struggled to produce a discussion that analysed the linkage between Leontes' actions and the subsequent events in the plot.

Less effective responses focused simply on Leontes' actions/mistakes, and then asserted that he was not punished enough. Responses of this type were at best simplistic character studies, and at worst merely descriptive.

Assessment Unit A2 2

Section A: The Study of Poetry Pre 1900

Overview

The questions in this unit were considered suitable for candidates of all abilities. All question options across the various texts were accessed, with the exceptions of Questions 4 (b) and Questions 6 (a) and (b).

The driving Assessment Objective for Section A is AO2 (Methods). Candidates were given credit when they were able to identify a particular literary method, illustrate it, analyse it to show understanding of operation and effect, and then relate it to the key term of the question. General identification of language using an adjective (for example, ‘aggressive language’, ‘gentle language’) lacked the specific focus on poetic methods required in this unit and therefore could not be credited. Similarly ‘image’ was used loosely at times to describe impression or general picture, and the general term ‘imagery’ was used with even vaguer understanding and as a way of avoiding grappling with figures of speech. Candidates would find it to their advantage to focus more specifically on particular literary techniques. In relation to tone, there were fewer instances general labelling, and an increasing ability to demonstrate how a particular tone is conveyed. Much of the comment on form and structure, as in previous series, was merely descriptive. Such comment, if it is to prove useful to candidates, must be made relevant to the key terms of the question. If there is nothing meaningful to say about form and structure, it would be more time-efficient to say nothing.

In this section, candidates should also demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which poetry is written and received by drawing on appropriate information from outside the poems (AO3). All of the questions include a specific contextual area, and it is important that candidates limit themselves to the context of the stipulated type. Little credit can be given for contextual information that has been introduced merely for its own sake. Good responses used contextual information sparingly and judiciously, and several good candidates seized the opportunity to enhance excellent analyses with an individual stamp, based on their own research.

The rubric of most of the questions requires that candidates should write about the printed poem “and one other appropriately selected poem”. It is pleasing to report that fewer inappropriate poems were chosen this year though teachers should be aware of the need to protect weaker candidates, as far as possible from indiscretion. Examiners are flexible in their approach and are ready to credit the consideration of a poem that has been argued into relevance, but this accommodation can only be carried so far. It is always a shame to see candidates with good knowledge and understanding underperforming in this section because of a poorly considered choice of second poem.

Section A also requires candidates to explore connections within and between poems (AO4). What is not required here however is the type of formal comparison and contrast produced at AS level. Candidates fulfil the AO4 element of this section by focusing on the key terms of the question when discussing two poems, or when considering an extract and wider text in the light of these key terms. Those candidates who alternated in their treatment of two short poems may have been labouring under a misapprehension, or applying a strategy which, even at GCSE level, was limiting. Remember too that connections may be within as well as between poems.

AO5 is not under assessment in this section. Some candidates appeared to believe that it was, and wasted valuable examination time and effort trying to agree or disagree with the key terms.

- Q1 (a)** This was overwhelmingly the more popular of the two questions. Treatment of the extract usually hit the obvious targets but no more, and a lot of good material was left unharvested. What is clear, however, is the sheer enjoyment with which this text is studied. There were some misguided, but few flat or dull responses. Understanding of the contextual area, however, was often limited: the Church was not the only force influencing sexual morality at the time.
- (b)** This question had a disappointingly small appeal. The contextual area was an obvious one (and could hardly have been avoided during the course of study) and the story of extraordinary adventures provided a fairly straightforward focus. Teachers and candidates should be aware that there is more to this text than the character of Dame Alisoun.

- Q2 (a)** Both the (a) and (b) questions were well represented in this popular option. One examiner, however reported a suspicion that a few centres appeared to be selecting from the Anthology only the 'love' poems or only the 'religious' poems and so effectively halving the course content. This could be most damaging to candidates' performance and prospects. The inadequacies of exemplification in responses were frequently pointed out.

There was evidence that some candidates had a narrow (or inaccurate) knowledge of the sonnet form, as suggested by their referring to "A Hymn to God the Father" (a reasonable second poem) as a sonnet. It seemed too that candidates responding to this poet option more than any other, are being trained in micro-analysis. A lot of responses were characterised by a tendency to offer smaller methods with obscure terms replacing straightforward analysis, but rarely with an understanding of the poems in their totality. The enjoyment mentioned in the Chaucer option was rarely seen in the Donne responses. The key term was "spiritual salvation" and some second poems proved challenging if they were to be argued into relevance.

- (b)** The theme of "lovers parting" produced fewer but fresher responses. (The 'picture' was often referred to as a photograph – but no great harm was done when this was the case.) Some sound analysis appeared on the description of the effects of travel, but the ventriloquism of the last seven lines of the poem was too challenging for many. The usual second poem, and a very good choice, was "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning". This is quite a long poem and some did not get past the compass conceit, which was well developed by some interested candidates. Although a rather more generalised and selective handling of methods in the second poem is acceptable, the rubric does state that equal marks are available for each poem.

The contextual area, again, for many stopped short at the conceit (usually undefined), and while some were able to reassemble some of the bullet points from previous mark schemes, few responses were enriched by a meaningful contextual contribution.

- Q3 (a)** Some responses in this option were disadvantaged by the selection of a second poem which gave only limited scope for relevant analysis. The comment made in the 2018 Report bears repeating: candidates should be encouraged not to think about the poems solely in terms of 'pairs'. Rather, they should be flexible in their approach and be ready to select whichever poem is most appropriate to the key terms of the question. Some of the poems in this option are deceptively simple, and that very simplicity seemed to baffle some candidates.

The poem offered was "The Little Vagabond" and the question focus was how Blake writes about the Church. Some candidates had a rather diffuse sense of the daring unconventionality of thought of this poem, but struggled to express it.

- (b)** With “Holy Thursday” (Songs of Innocence), candidates seemed rather more confident, and there was a closer focus on the key terms. Some candidates seemed to feel that they had run out of material, and bulked their answers out with lengthy discussions of contextual information, for which only limited credit can be given as the driving Assessment Objective in this section is AO2 (Methods).
- Q4 (a)** Keats is a less popular option but there was a range of responses to this question. The theme is central to Keats’s poetry but some candidates found it difficult to identify relevant material from their self-selected poem (or perhaps did not know the second poem well enough). However, there were a few truly excellent responses, where it was evident that careful thought had been given to what was achievable with the second poem.
- (b)** No responses to this question were reported.
- Q5 (a)** The two question options were of fairly equal popularity. Some of the best (and some of the longest) responses were to the poetry of Dickinson. Success, however, rarely came from the longer responses. Dickinson is a step too far for some, and it was sad to see responses clinging hopefully to dashes and capital letters, unable to move on.
- This question gave opportunities to the candidate who wished to write about Dickinson’s nature poetry and most found a congenial second poem in “How the old Mountains drip with Sunset”. The Examining Team were complimentary about the successful use of contextual information on nineteenth-century views on nature.
- (b)** Many responses to “One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted – ” were a little tentative. The best candidates engaged with the poem and with the key terms with astonishing maturity and insight.
- Q6 (a) & (b)** After a small but encouraging take-up last year, Barrett Browning has seemingly been abandoned.

Assessment Unit A2 2 Section B: Unseen Poetry

Overview

The unseen poem was “Auto Wreck” by Karl Shapiro.

Centres had been informed of a change in the format of the question to be asked in this section. As the change brought the task closer to a wording familiar from GCSE, candidates seemed to experience little or no disconcertion.

The poem proved suitable for the ability range, and almost no candidate was at a loss. It engaged all, and inspired the best. Most gained some purchase on the earlier details of the incident and there was constructive interest in the significance of the figurative language used of the ambulance. Other poetic features such as the repeated use of a noun with a contrasting adjective were noticed and commented on, but interpretation sometimes proved difficult. There was literalism in the treatment of the latter stages of the poem, though a few wonderful interpretations of “wound/That opens to our richest horror” will remain in the memory. The final section was addressed, even when there may not have been full understanding, with commendable determination.

One notable feature of responses was their irregularity, even unpredictability. One candidate, who otherwise seemed to have little to say, suddenly delivered the insight that the title referred to the wreck of the self – an idea which more eloquent candidates expressed as “existential dread”. This unpredictability is one reason that so many Assistant Examiners reported satisfaction in their marking of this section of the unit.

The task is allocated the response time of an hour, which gives candidates time to formulate or tease out their ideas. The Examining Team accept that illumination may not come initially and completely, but may have to be won through false starts, inconsistencies, repetitions and re-wordings. They will apply reasonable standards here, understanding that the assurance that comes with familiarity with a text is not present. Nevertheless, the time allocation is generous enough to allow reflection and planning, and many responses would have benefitted from spending time on these aspects.

Principal Moderator's Report

Assessment Unit A2 3

Internal Assessment

The second year of the revised specification saw centres build on the approaches to internal assessment adopted at the inception of the course. As such, a number of teaching strategies were evident as centres continued to refine, develop and embed the practice of the first year. Work was often characterised by high levels of candidate engagement.

Clearly, the models used within centres echoed those discussed at the launch events and the Agreement Trials. Most common was the use of a shortlist of possible texts, leading to a range of options for candidates to select from. In a small minority of centres, such a choice was extremely limited, with all candidates writing about the same two texts. Obviously, the opportunities for candidates to explore their own interests are considerably reduced by this model and the independence that is required at the higher end of achievement is necessarily more challenging to display. In a more general sense, the wider reading that this part of the course seeks to foster is not being strongly encouraged by such an approach. It thus continues to be a recommendation that such centres widen pedagogical approaches; the coursework from centres where choices were more open led to work that was fresher, engaged and genuinely independent.

Title setting remains a critical element of internal assessment, and it was clear that many teachers and candidates had carefully crafted and negotiated titles which in turn allowed candidates to explore their own interests while also being aware of the Assessment Objective requirements. It was often found that a general title which lacked strong direction led to work which lacked engagement and focus. Several centres took advantage of submitting work to the Portfolio Clinic, and this seemed to have aided the internal assessment process.

Centre marking was generally accurate, with clear use of the Mark Grid evident (Appendix 4 in the Specification). The 'best fit' approach required here was usually supported by marginalia and summative comments. As always, moderation of coursework was greatly aided by such commentary, as it allowed moderators to gain detailed insight into the rationale for the final mark awarded by the teacher.

The marking of a number of centres was considered lenient. This might be partly explained by the fact that the requirements for the legacy specification's internal assessment were considerably different, and adjusting to the new demands is an on-going process in some centres. Attendance at Agreement Trials is particularly recommended, as is careful scrutiny of the support materials offered by CCEA. On many occasions, marks fell outside of the acceptable tolerance range because of an inaccurate application of the Assessment Criteria in Bands 5 and 6. It may be worth noting the headline descriptors of the other levels of achievement: Band 3 is "competent" and Band 4 is "good".

There were very few rubric violations reported this year, with the stipulation that at least one of the novels must have been published in the twenty-first century well observed. The essay length requirement was also carefully followed. Only a very small number of candidates failed to include a bibliography.

Many examples of innovative textual pairing and title setting were evident. Most pleasingly, it was highly encouraging to observe how the freedom afforded to candidates by internal assessment in some centres had led to many individual and personal choices. Such work often revealed genuine independence, and was notable, too, as often being highly enthusiastic and very engaged.

Some instances of plagiarism were identified. Credit cannot be given for such malpractice, and centres are reminded to make candidates aware of what constitutes plagiarism and to be vigilant in detecting its presence in the final responses. The acknowledged use of secondary opinion remains good practice and can be rewarded if meaningfully used.

In summary, this unit has led to some very impressive outcomes. As centres continue to embed and develop good practice in their approaches, it is hoped that work will grow further in variety and individuality.

Contact details

The following information provides contact details for key staff members:

- **Specification Support Officer: Joan Jennings**
(telephone: (028) 9026 1200, extension: 2552, email: jjennings@ccea.org.uk)
- **Officer with Subject Responsibility: Olivia McNeill**
(telephone: (028) 9026 1200, extension: 2200, email: omcneill@ccea.org.uk)

