



General Certificate of Education

English Literature

Specification A

LTA1A Victorian Literature

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: www.aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2010 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

General

Although LTA1A remains the smallest of the Specification A English Literature AS options, the number of discerning centres choosing to study Victorian Literature in June 2010 rose by 2.7% on the previous summer. It seems likely that this upward trend will continue in the coming years: feedback from centres suggests that some who chose non-AQA specifications two years ago, when the new A-Levels were introduced, now intend to return to Specification A – while some of those who remained with the Specification are currently considering the advantages of offering a fresh option at AS.

This year's LTA1A paper worked very well. One examiner reported that Question 1 "enabled all candidates to respond to the extract and apply their wider reading experiences in a variety of ways" while "the questions on the poetry were consistent with the previous exam papers and encouraged candidates to debate and respond on a personal level". Another commented that "the Thackeray passage gave ample opportunity for students to demonstrate skills and knowledge" and was impressed by the ways that "both sections stretched and challenged the most able candidates: several full marks responses were truly humbling." Similarly, examiners were able to appreciate the ways in which "some candidates deftly applied contextual material by careful crafting - if not downright craftiness!" and the skill with which widely read candidates consistently "created focused and inspired links to the extract."

On the whole, examiners were pleased with the ways in which Wider Reading references were used more extensively in this year's responses to Question 1. Most centres now have a secure understanding of the ways in which this first section of the paper tests the Assessment Objectives and their candidates had been prepared accordingly. Nevertheless, some candidates do need to remember that Wider Reading must be connected to the extract. Examiners frequently expressed their concerns regarding the few candidates in their allocations who simply wrote about a set of Wider Reading references that only linked to each other, making no attempt to connect this material to the extract featured in the question paper. Similarly, some examiners were worried that less confident candidates had taken the four key areas of Victorian literature identified in the support materials and reduced them to a minimalist checklist of features they were determined to include, whatever the subject matter of the passage. Examiners found evidence of this unprofitably reductionist approach in the tendency of some candidates to lift single words out of the context of Thackeray's article (such as "faith" and "limbo") and develop them into lengthy, digressive discussions of Wider Reading texts that really had nothing to do with Thackeray's subject matter or style. Consequently, these candidates often missed a lot of what was in the passage and produced answers of extensive irrelevance. This approach should be avoided: the purpose of the key areas for study is to assist centres in their development of a wide course of appropriate reading, not to provide a shortcut to a good grade. Indeed, as Thackeray might have it: there *is* no short cut. As stated in previous editions of this report, the most successful Section A candidates are those whose centres have enabled them to read a wide variety of Victorian texts, both in full and in extract, and encouraged them to think for themselves. "Box-ticking approaches" (as one examiner rightly decried them) are not in the spirit of this Specification: they do not lead to success at AS and they deny candidates the opportunity to develop the skills which will become crucial at A2.

Candidates should also bear in mind that their Wider Reading references should be specific, as well as relevant: quotations from the Wider Reading texts and analysis of their form, structure and language take candidates into those higher Bands of the mark scheme which are denied to candidates whose references are generalized or merely narrative. Similarly, all candidates need to remember that references to all three literary genres are required in their answers to

Question 1: omitting a single genre will limit the mark that can be awarded and failing to refer to refer to two, or even all three, genres is potentially catastrophic. Careful planning should help candidates to avoid these serious errors but examiners saw far too little evidence of this in the scripts of less successful candidates. Concerns were also expressed, once again, about the use of inappropriately colloquial expression in some answers and the difficulties caused by thoughtlessly illegible handwriting: these are serious issues which some centres and candidates need to address as a matter of urgency.

Examiners noted an unusual pattern in the responses to this summer's poetry questions: for two of the set poets, the questions which focus on specific poems proved distinctly unpopular. It seems most likely that this shift towards the broader, opinion-based questions was due primarily to the accessibility of those questions, rather than a result of the inaccessibility of the focal poems offered in the alternatives. On the whole, candidates wrote well about the poetry they had studied, although there were some persistent problems. Once again a few candidates overloaded their answers with biographical information; others simply agreed with the given view and declined the opportunity to debate; some treated the poetry as prose and made no reference to the verse itself: candidates are strongly advised to avoid these approaches as they seriously limit the possibility of being awarded a higher Band mark for Section B.

To consider the achievement of candidates question by question:

Section A: Contextual Linking

Question 01

This year's LTA1A examiners found that the extract from Thackeray provided an effective starting point for Question 1, enabling candidates to analyse the writer's stylistic effects, to explore the issues he presents, to make relevant connections to the Victorian context and to consider its typicality in relation to their Wider Reading. One examiner reported that "all candidates could at least respond to the extract at surface level, with the most able adopting a conceptual approach and using the text to demonstrate excellent links in sophisticated and mature ways." A wide range of epithets were applied to Thackeray's stance in the *Cornhill Magazine* article: alienated, amazed, aroused, astounded, bemused, confused, disconnected, excited, fascinated, outraged, shocked and unsettled were among the most frequent terms used by candidates to sum up the writer's attitude to the rapid industrial progress of the Victorian era. Of course, evidence for each of these feelings can be found in the passage, but the more perceptive candidates realized that the attitude Thackeray presents is not a simple one: successful candidates read closely and explored the complexity of his views, recognizing an ambivalence and an ambiguity which were seldom noticed by those who remained at the surface of the extract. This became a useful discriminator for examiners when assessing the quality of the responses to Question 1. In the same way, closer readers could see the subtle humour in Thackeray's writing, realizing that his tone is deliberately whimsical; less successful candidates took a more literal approach to Thackeray's language, imposing a virulently angry, anti-industrial interpretation on the text for which they could not always find convincing evidence.

Most candidates were able to appreciate the way in which Thackeray sees the coming of the railways as a historical climacteric, dividing "that praerailroad world" from the age of steam locomotives and great iron ships. The language used to establish this division was often explored perceptively: candidates commented on Thackeray's contrasting use of the first and second persons, as well as on his classification of "the old world" as merely a "period" while "the new time" – far more impressively – is labelled an "era" and an "age". Thackeray's use of the word "gulph" received much attention (doubtless from candidates who remembered their

Ferlinghetti from GCSE), as did his literal and symbolic representation of railway embankments as signifiers of physical, cultural and temporal division.

Close readers explored the ways in which Thackeray's shifting sentence structures reflect the passage's mood: the earlier long sentences make it difficult to keep up, while the reader is overwhelmed by the use of lists and the absence of paragraphs; later the short sentences emphasise the finality of what has happened. Some of Thackeray's other stylistic quirks also caught the attention of candidates, particularly the inverted commas around "Brunel". Astute candidates pointed out that this must be deliberate (other names are not placed in inverted commas) and speculated on Thackeray's possibly satirical intentions. Does he see "Brunel" as a brand name, a slightly mocking buzzword for the technology on which he muses?

The personal responses of some candidates suggested that Thackeray is not so remote from their own experiences as might be expected, despite the gap of 150 years. Some candidates were affronted by Thackeray's patronising appellation "You young folks..." but others found echoes of his tone in the protagonist's attitude to her university-educated daughter in Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession* and in Lady Caroline Pontefract's "In my young days..." in Wilde's *A Woman of no Importance*. While some saw Thackeray as a smug promoter of the generation gap, others were struck by the (perhaps typically Victorian) exclusive maleness of his world view: there are certainly no specific references to women at all in the passage. Some engaged candidates shared Thackeray's concerns about the direction in which technology might take us, finding resonances of the GM crops debate in his troubled conclusion: as one sympathetic candidate put it, "Once the damage is done, there is no going back." For others, Thackeray's challenging and provocative final thoughts on the nature of time were more akin to a novel by Peter Ackroyd or an episode of *Doctor Who*.

For some candidates, Thackeray became a Pooterish commentator on contemporary events that he does not fully understand, his rhetorical questions showing his incredulity. For others, he was a Housman figure: some felt that Thackeray's sentimental and affectionate view of the horse-crowded Regency turnpikes is echoed in "The happy highways where I went / And cannot come again" from 'A Shropshire Lad'. Thackeray's presentation of this outmoded means of transport received much interesting comment: the coachman is reduced to an anonymous "Sir Somebody" because he is no longer important and his actual name has been forgotten; the "half-crown" tip might have been taken "affably" but by the end of the century, in one translation, Nora Helmer tips nineteen shillings! (Perhaps this is an example of Thackeray's anticipated "new manners".) More perceptive candidates noticed the way in which Thackeray dismisses the last two millennia by condensing their history into a list of 23 words; those at the surface of the text merely assumed that the Romans and the Normans were part of the pre-Victorian world with which Thackeray had been familiar. His reference to "Ancient Britons painted blue" furnished many candidates with an opportunity to cite Dickens' comparison of Coketown's appearance with "the painted face of a savage". This provided a fruitful contrast in the novelists' attitudes: while Dickens equates industry with savagery, Thackeray's savages have been banished by the march of progress.

Thackeray's claim that "We are of the time of chivalry. We are of the age of steam." also occasioned many comparisons with Dickens. A significant number of candidates noticed the way in which it is echoed in the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities* (published nine years later): "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." For many astute candidates, these two short sentences summed up Thackeray's position of being caught in the middle, straddling the two eras of which he writes. Many candidates used this as an opportunity to establish links to the poetry of Tennyson, where they found a similar duality. 'Morte d'Arthur' provided plentiful examples of both chivalry and the fear of change: Sir Bedivere's lament that "the true old times are dead / When...every chance brought out a noble knight" was put to good use in these

answers. In 'Ulysses' candidates found a narrator eager and willing to embrace change, while 'Locksley Hall' supplied widely read candidates with useful images of both railways ("the ringing grooves of change") and the "flying-machine" anecdotally introduced in Thackeray's article ("the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue"). Chivalry was found in plenty of other interesting places too, from Gladstone's ideal of the Victorian gentleman to Torvald Helmer's misplaced protectiveness: "I have broad wings to shield you from harm." The potential ambiguities of the phrase "the age of steam" were also explored in an original manner: is it a symbol of progress or is it, as when Jenny Agutter waits on Oakworth station at the end of *The Railway Children*, something which prevents clear vision and creates an uncertainty in which things are "unknown" and can be "only surmised"? Many felt that Thackeray's string of questions ("To what new continent are we wending? To what new laws, new manners, new politics, vast new expanses of liberties...?") reflects this uncertainty, while others used this list of new things as a way into their Wider reading and their contextual knowledge. Among the "new laws" discussed relevantly were the Women's Property Act and the Public Health Acts. For many candidates, Nora Helmer and Mrs Arbuthnot were the embodiment of Thackeray's "new politics" and "new liberties", while there was much discussion of whether "Towards what new continent are we wending?" is meant as an image of the vastness of Victorian technological change or as a reference to the power of the British Empire. For those who opted for the latter alternative, the phrase provided a useful opportunity to connect the extract with their Wider Reading in colonial literature.

Some of the Wider Reading links which featured in these answers referred directly to Thackeray's principal subject matter: the coming of the railways. The literary offshoots of Wordsworth's one-man campaign against railway incursions into Cumbria, his letter to the Inspector General of Railways and his sonnet 'On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway', were widely cited, as was his earlier pro-technology sonnet, 'Steamboats, Viaducts and Railways'. Robert Louis Stevenson's 'From a Railway Carriage' and Thomas Hardy's 'The Levelled Churchyard' were also popular choices. No less relevant were the relatively obscure 'I like to see it lap the miles' by Emily Dickinson and Rowland Egerton-Warburton's 'Past and Present' - which closely parallels Thackeray with its narrator's comparison between his childhood coach rides to boarding school and his son's journeys there by train. Many candidates made effective use of the railway references in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, especially the way in which Jack Worthing was named after the destination on a railway ticket, when discovered in a handbag at Waterloo station. Gwendolyn Fairfax's claim that "I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train." was also quoted with much enthusiasm. The prose extract from the LTA1A sample paper was used sensibly by some candidates: Ruskin's views on the Midland Railway's Peak District extension ("now, every fool in Buxton can be at Bakewell in half-an-hour, and every fool in Bakewell at Buxton") provided a relevant link to Thackeray's concerns. Nevertheless, candidates should use these extracts from previous papers with caution: if the practice is overdone, it can be construed as an absence of genuine Wider Reading – this certainly seemed to be so in the case of the candidate whose only Wider Reading references came from previous examination papers. Plenty of candidates were also familiar with Ruskin's much more enthusiastic response to railways in the essay collection *Cestus of Aglaia*. This passage was deconstructed in the February 2010 edition of *The English Review* and examiners were gratified to find this evidence that the more engaged candidates really are reading widely in order to prepare themselves for the LTA1A examination.

The caveats concerning the excessive use of previous examination paper extracts also apply to the use of poems from the set texts. Using a set poem as a Wider Reading link is not a breach of the rubric; indeed, some poems by Hardy (such as and 'The Darkling Thrush', 'Channel Firing' and 'The Convergence of the Twain') provide powerful echoes of Thackeray's apprehensions about the future and the directions technology will take. Examiners did express

some concern, however, at the fact that some candidates then used these same poems in their answers to Question 6. This could be interpreted as an indication of a very limited knowledge of Victorian poetry and might well have an impact on the marks awarded: future candidates are strongly advised to avoid this narrow approach.

Beyond the set texts, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'The Cry of the Children' was the most frequently cited poem in this June's responses to Question 1: it provided a useful contrast to Thackeray, showing the human cost of Victorian industrial progress, and enabled candidates to explore the writer's techniques – an essential feature of successful Wider Reading links. Similarly, both 'Binsey Poplars' by Gerard Manley Hopkins and John Clare's 'The Lament of Swordy Well' provided effective contrasts to Thackeray with their presentations of the environmental damage caused by the nineteenth century's agrarian and industrial revolutions.

In addition to the prose texts already mentioned, Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was a useful point of reference for many candidates – particularly Chapter XXX, in which Tess and Angel bring the milk cans to be loaded on to the London train. At this point in the novel, Hardy seems to share Thackeray's view of the railway's futuristic other-worldliness: "No object could have looked more foreign to the gleaming cranks and wheels than this unsophisticated girl." Some perceptive candidates linked Thackeray's idea of a world in which everything is shifting and nothing is certain to the works of Lewis Carroll. Others made effective connections between Thackeray and nineteenth century Utopian fiction: *The Cone* by H.G. Wells, *News from Nowhere* by William Morris and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* were all explored in some detail by well-informed candidates. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was sometimes linked to Thackeray's underlying fears of technology unbound, while Stoker's *Dracula* provided some surprisingly relevant contrasts: imprisoned in Dracula's castle, Jonathan Harker begins to realize that, although he lives "in the midst of our scientific, matter-of-fact nineteenth century", a modern world of shorthand and telegrams, "the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere 'modernity' cannot kill."

A refreshing feature of the drama links in the responses to this June's Question 1 was the constructive use made of plays in translation. In addition to that established favourite, *A Doll's House*, Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* was a popular choice which worked particularly well in connection with Thackeray's *Cornhill* article. For a number of candidates, the destruction of Madame Ranevsky's cherry orchard to make way for an estate of commuter villas is exactly what Thackeray has in mind when he expresses his fears that progress will "shut off the old world". Others established perceptive links to the thoughts of Trofimov in Act II of the play: "The human race progresses, perfecting its powers. Everything that is unattainable now will some day be near at hand and comprehensible." For these candidates, studying nineteenth century literature in translation had been a relevant and enriching experience: centres would do well to consider the advantages which the wider literary perspectives of texts in translation can confer on their candidates. Of course, that international perspective can also be found in the British drama of the time too: Hester Worsley's American view of a society that has become "shallow, selfish, foolish" in the 43 years between Thackeray's article and Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* also provided a relevant drama link. This play has proved to be a useful standby for the candidates who are fortunate enough to have studied it: those who know it in sufficient detail find that Wilde has something provocative to say about most aspects of Victorian life at some point or other within its four acts, providing a wealth of potential material for use in responses to Question 1.

Many examiners noted that the work of less successful candidates was often characterized by immaturities of expression. The vague, unhelpful terms "positive" and "negative" appeared frequently, despite the caveats expressed in previous editions of this report; the somewhat contradictory colloquialism "The writer talks about..." was much in evidence, as was the even

worse “The poem says...”; imagery was explained through the banal claim that “you get a picture in your mind” and, once again, some candidates assumed an inappropriate first-name familiarity with the author. However, while examiners experienced mild surprise when candidates referred to Thackeray as “William”, it was really nothing in comparison with their bewilderment at those who called the novelist “Makepeace”. As mentioned above, the absence of any planning was often an early indication that the examiner was about to encounter a structurally flawed response with little cohesion. Similarly, confusion about the numbers of the years which constitute the nineteenth century suggested an insecure grasp of the Victorian context: The Festival of Britain took place in 1951, not The Great Exhibition.

Successful candidates:

- explored and analysed the ways in which Thackeray presents his thoughts and feelings about change and industrial progress in the Victorian era
- established a range of relevant links between the extract and their Wider Reading
- referred to all three literary genres when writing about their Wider Reading, analysing the effects created by the writers’ choices of form, structure and language.

Less successful candidates:

- responded to Thackeray’s article in a simple manner, remaining at the surface of the text and failing to engage with the writer’s ambivalent attitudes
- referred only to the plots of their Wider Reading texts or missed out whole genres
- wrote about their Wider Reading in a general, all-purpose manner without making specific connections to Thackeray.

Section B: Poetry

Examiners were once again impressed by the ways in which many candidates responded to their set poetry texts: the most successful were closely engaged and wrote about the poems in a sensitive, balanced way. Less successful answers were often characterized by either a superficial approach, featuring explanation rather than analysis and paying little attention to the poet’s technique, or by simple agreement with the question’s given view, rather than the development of a balanced debate. As mentioned above, some answers seldom met the Assessment Objectives tested in Section B because they were overstuffed with irrelevant background information: it is vital that candidates keep the text at the forefront of their poetry answers and make every effort to construct an informed debate rather than a biographical narrative.

Selected Poems of John Clare

John Clare remains a stout favourite among the centres offering the Victorian Literature option, although he is still a considerable way behind the most popular of the set poets, Thomas Hardy. As with Hardy, there is a tendency for the less confident candidates studying Clare to fall back on biographical information in their answers. While it is true that brief contextual references can illuminate a candidate’s reading of the poetry, it becomes a matter of concern for the examiner when the biography begins to dominate the response and crowds out the verse. Like all this Specification’s Victorian poets, Clare lived a dramatically eventful life (centres studying Clare may wish to consider using *The Quickenning Maze*, Adam Foulds’ recent novel about the poet’s Epping Forest asylum experiences, as a coursework text to accompany this set poetry selection) but it is important that candidates develop the detachment necessary to separate the poems from the man. One examiner commented on the ways in which that too many candidates in his allocation spent so long attempting to establish a cause-and-effect linkage between the life and the work that their reading of the poetry became constrained and reductive. Inevitably, these candidates cannot be awarded marks in the higher Bands of the markscheme.

Those who maintain their primary focus on Clare's poetic techniques, however, and who use their answer to construct a relevant discussion of the given critical opinion invariably do well.

Question 02

This was by far the more popular Clare question but, while it was by no means a trick question, it did seem to become a trap for unwary candidates – especially those apparently ignorant of the Assessment Objectives and those who did not read the question paper with sufficient care. Too many candidates saw this question as an invitation to unload vast chunks of Clare's biography: they equated isolation with incarceration and told the story of Clare's asylum experiences at great length. Unfortunately, this approach could not be rewarded as knowledge of context (Assessment Objective 4) is not assessed in the poetry questions. Indeed some candidates lost sight of the fact that this was a poetry question in an English Literature examination altogether, omitting to make any reference to Clare's writing whatsoever. Slightly more successful were those candidates who equated isolation with loneliness, but these too were missing the point somewhat. Perhaps because of the tendency of today's youth to brand solitary individuals as inadequate, friendless "Larrys", many candidates struggled to grapple with the idea that Clare's isolation might be self-imposed and not unwelcome. More careful candidates engaged with the term "growing" and used Clare's presentation of shifting social relationships, and their ultimate absence, as a basis for the debate. The selection's last two sections provided most of the poems which candidates used to support the idea of Clare's isolation: the most popular choices were 'I Am' (where, though forlorn and friendless – "My friends forsake me like a memory lost" – Clare craves an even more intense isolation – "I long for scenes, where man hath never trod"), 'Sighing for Retirement' ("O take me from the busy crowd, / I cannot bear the noise!") and 'The Flitting' (where "I sit me in my corner chair" seems to be another deliberately isolating act). Some perceptive candidates found examples of isolated figures elsewhere in Clare's poetry: "once-beguiled Kate" in 'St Martin's Eve', for example, who is "condemned to live without a mate" due to her past indiscretions. On the other hand, many candidates used this poem's presentation of "a group...met together on pleasure bent" to argue that isolation is not always a dominant element in Clare's poetry. Similar counter-arguments were based on poems such as 'December' (with its "merry crew" of neighbours and rustics) and even 'The Ants' (anthropomorphised as a caring, integrated community that "flocks round to help their fellow men"). Some close reading candidates argued subtly that, even when he is isolated, Clare does not use the language of loneliness: in 'The Wren', for instance, although dwelling in a hut while tending sheep, he is accompanied by the "crowds of happy memories" which the bird's song brings.

Successful candidates:

- focused on Clare's poetic techniques
- engaged with the idea of "Clare's growing personal isolation"
- used poems in which isolation is not a key element to develop a balanced debate.

Less successful candidates:

- wrote long contextual accounts of Clare's isolation
- simply agreed that isolation is an important theme
- showed little awareness the ways Clare uses language to create effects.

Question 03

This was by far the less popular Clare question: perhaps because candidates viewed 'The Parish' as a difficult poem or, more likely, because writing about Clare's personal isolation seemed a more inviting prospect. It was evident that, among those few who did opt for this question, a significant number had an insecure knowledge of the focal poem. As one examiner

reported, “Some who tackled ‘The Parish’ had clearly not read past the first few lines and rapidly sank themselves with inept general comments.” Some at least managed a straightforward account of the poem (or, to be more precise, the extract: the whole poem is not included in Thornton’s selection) but it was a minority of candidates who were able to engage with the idea that ‘The Parish’ might be used as an introduction. These few well-informed candidates linked the focal poem’s presentation of life in a rural community with poems such as ‘Sport in the Meadows’ and ‘St Martin’s Eve’. Some candidates commented on the savage satirical tone adopted by Clare in this poem (which was not published in the poet’s lifetime, being thought far too seditious by his publishers) and found echoes of his role as a social commentator in poems such as ‘The Moors’ and ‘The Lament of Swordy Well’. These successful candidates found effective counter-arguments in their consideration of those aspects of Clare’s writing which are not introduced in ‘The Parish’, notably love poetry, detailed descriptions of nature and autobiography.

Successful candidates:

- explored ‘The Parish’ in a well-informed manner
- developed a range of relevant links to other poems
- produced a balanced argument in response to the idea of “an appropriate introduction”.

Less successful candidates:

- produced superficial accounts of ‘The Parish’
- struggled to understand Clare’s satirical approach
- made general comments rather than establishing specific links to other poems.

Selected Poems of The Brontës

Although the Brontës remain the minority choice among the LTA1A set poets, their poetry is usually well taught by the small number of centres studying Pamela Norris’ selection. In this summer’s examination, the Brontës were the only were set text for which the responses were fairly evenly divided between the two questions – and the questions themselves provided a clear, effective division among the candidates who attempted them. Examiners were pleased with the standard of many Brontë answers: the poetry was explored and analysed; the debates were balanced and developed; biographical information was used only when absolutely necessary. On the other hand a few less successful candidates, as with the other poetry texts, placed the poets’ lives at the forefront of their answers which left little time or space for any relevant comments they might have to make about poetic techniques. (Indeed, some examiners read about a doomed affair with Mrs Robinson so often that they began to wonder whether *The Graduate* had replaced the Brontës as the set text and whether “Jesus loves you more than you will know” and “Heaven holds a place for those who pray” might actually be lines by Anne Brontë rather than Simon & Garfunkel.) However, those answers which did manage to maintain a focus on the text featured a wide range of poems from across the whole selection: it was gratifying to see that Branwell Brontë is no longer this set text’s neglected poet – centres seem to have realised that, although slight, his oeuvre does offer a variety which enables candidates to develop interesting alternatives and counter-arguments.

Question 04

Most candidates who attempted this question had a secure grasp of the Brontës’ poetry and were able to select appropriate poems to illustrate the importance of love as a theme in their work. Romantic love was often the starting point for these answers: Charlotte Brontë’s apparently autobiographical presentation of unrequited love, ‘He saw my heart’s woe’, was a popular and effective choice, as was Branwell Brontë’s ‘Augusta’. The imagery and symbolism in both of these poems (the sea, the moon, towers and idols of stone) provided candidates with

plenty of effects to explore and analyse. Emily Brontë's poem 'Love is like the wild rose briar', with its comparison of love and friendship, was often used by those candidates who chose to evaluate the given view by exploring the different kinds of love to be found in this selection. For many of these candidates, the sisterly love found in Charlotte's poems on the deaths of Emily and Anne (and in 'Retrospection') was the most important alternative; others explored the ways Anne's love of home and love of God are presented in her poetry. The majority of candidates attempting this question were able to construct a balanced debate: in the Brontës' treatment of other themes such as death, nature and the imagination, they found plenty of material to develop their counter-arguments.

Successful candidates:

- displayed a secure knowledge of the ways in which the Brontës present love
- explored the Brontës' poetic techniques with engagement
- evaluated the given view and developed well-informed counter-arguments.

Less successful candidates:

- wrote simple accounts of the poetry
- simply agreed with the given view
- wrote more about the Brontës' lives than about their verse.

Question 05

Most candidates who chose to attempt this question at least had a basic grasp of Anne Brontë's 'Last Lines' and were able to offer some comment on the ways in which the poem's obvious finality provides an appropriate conclusion to the selection. One candidate eloquently summed up the poem as "seventeen stanzas of heartfelt desperation"; other well-informed readers argued its appropriateness as a conclusion on the grounds that it is, in fact, a collaboration: unfinished on Anne Brontë's death, the poem was completed by Charlotte Brontë in her role as editor and curator of her sisters' works. Anne's other more religious poems provided popular links in these answers: the ways in which her hopes and fears are presented in poems such as 'If This Be All' and 'Oh, they have robbed me of my hope' were frequently explored, while 'The Penitent' and 'A Prayer' provided further examples of the ways in which her ideas about service and the spirit are presented. Some candidates developed valid counter-arguments based on the aspects of the Brontës' poetry which are absent from 'Last Lines'; others used the biographical facts as the starting point for their debate: as Charlotte Brontë was the last of the Brontë children to die, surely one of her poems should conclude the selection? Interestingly, 'On the Death of Anne Brontë' was the most popular alternative suggested by the candidates who adopted this line of argument.

Successful candidates:

- explored 'Last Lines' with assurance
- established a range of links to other poems in the selection
- developed counter-arguments and suggested alternatives in response to the idea of "an appropriate conclusion".

Less successful candidates:

- wrote straightforward accounts of 'Last Lines'
- established some basic connections to other Anne Brontë poems
- simply agreed with the given view, rather than debating it.

Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy is still by far the most popular set poet on the LTA1A paper. Many candidates understand that the poetry needs to be the main focus of the debates they produce in response to the Hardy questions, but too many still overload their answers with biographical material. As stated elsewhere, the inclusion of brief contextual information concerning a poem can help to shape a relevant response. Whole paragraphs, or even pages, exclusively devoted to Hardy's life, however, can not be rewarded: Assessment Objective 4 is not assessed in these questions so candidates must give their full attention to the text itself. Examiners were also concerned, once again, about the narrow range of poetry which featured in some answers. This selection includes a wide variety of Hardy's verse, yet some candidates appear to be familiar with barely half a dozen poems: poems which they were determined to include in their responses, no matter how irrelevant or inappropriate these poems might be to the actual questions set. Successful candidates often showed a willingness to move beyond the Emma poems, even beyond the key poems, showing the examiner that they were familiar with the whole of Norman Page's selection – which is what the Specification requires. A worrying number of candidates wrote well about the language and content of the poems but made no references whatever to Hardy's poetic techniques: this approach should be avoided as it will inevitably have a limiting impact on the candidate's final mark. While mere feature spotting ("Hardy uses two similes, a metaphor and a bit of alliteration in this poem.") does not gain marks in AS English Literature, candidates are expected to comment on the writer's techniques and the poetic effects he creates. The best candidates explore the ways in which these techniques relate to the poetry's meaning; candidates who treat the verse as if it is prose that just happens to be set out in a different way are bound to be less successful.

Question 06

This was by far the more popular Hardy question and examiners felt that it worked very well, enabling candidates to adopt a range of approaches to the poetry. Although the *Poems of 1912-13* often produced sensitive and relevant responses, some examiners were disappointed that the Emma poems dominated the Question 6 answers in their allocation of scripts and regretted the fact that so many candidates seemed unaware that there is much more to Hardy's poetry than the story of his marriage. Others were more fortunate and found candidates who focused on different aspects of Hardy's own past: his childhood in 'The Roman Road' (which also considers the historic past), his parents' courtship in 'A Church Romance' and his ancestors in 'Old Furniture', for instance. Perceptive candidates sometimes based their debate on an evaluation of the keyword "obsessed" but less successful candidates often simply agreed with the view and did not bother to develop any sort of counter-argument: an approach which kept them in Band 2 of the mark scheme. Those who did produce a balanced debate often cited Hardy's poems about current affairs, such as 'Drummer Hodge', 'Channel Firing' (where, closer readers noted, he mixes the past and the present) and 'The Convergence of the Twain' as evidence of his concern with the present rather than the past. Worryingly, however, some candidates tried to use these poems as further evidence of Hardy's obsession with the past – apparently unaware that the Boer War, the approach of the First World War and the sinking of the *Titanic* were contemporary events for Hardy. Many well-informed candidates based their counter-arguments on the poems in which Hardy imagines the future: '1967' was the most popular choice here, while 'Afterwards' was also used to good effect. Unfortunately, a few candidates were unwilling to address the question that actually appeared on the examination paper, but it did seem to be in the same ballpark as the answer on 'Time' which they had prepared in advance so they rewrote that instead. Side-stepping the question in this manner is not recommended: it can only produce general responses at best. The most successful candidates were fully engaged with Hardy's use of language and poetic form: for example, some perceptively argued that even when he is writing about the present Hardy tends to use the

language of the past: the archaisms of ‘In Time of ‘The Breaking of Nations’” provided effective evidence of this technique.

Successful candidates:

- explored the effects created by Hardy’s use of form, structure and language
- evaluated the idea of the poet’s obsession with the past
- produced effective counter-arguments based on a wide range of Hardy’s poetry.

Less successful candidates:

- struggled to engage with Hardy’s poetic effects or ignored them altogether
- simply agreed with the given view
- wrote general responses with little attention to the keywords.

Question 07

This was not a popular question. This may have been because candidates were intimidated by the slightly unfamiliar wording (the formulation “most successful poem” has not been used before on LTA1A, although it did appear on this paper’s predecessor, LTA3) but it is more likely that most candidates were unable to resist the allure of Question 6. It was certainly a very successful question, differentiating effectively between those candidates who used it as a springboard for a successful exploration of Hardy’s poetry and those who, simply agreeing with the view, provided an account of ‘A Trampwoman’s Tragedy’ but made no attempt to compare it with any other poems in the selection. Confident candidates produced impressive responses, identifying the elements in the poem which would have appealed to a Victorian audience (its ballad form, its melodrama, its echoes of folksong, its mixture of realism and the supernatural) and making interesting connections to other poems in which Hardy employs similar techniques (‘A Sunday Morning Tragedy’ was the most common point of comparison). Less successful candidates struggled with this question, seeming to think that they merely had to go through the poem and agree that, yes, it is very successful – apparently ignorant of the question’s dominant Assessment Objective (AO3) which requires detailed comparison and sustained debate.

Successful candidates:

- explored ‘A Trampwoman’s Tragedy’ with confidence
- developed relevant links to a range of other poems
- produced an informed debate in response to the idea of “the most successful poem”.

Less successful candidates:

- wrote only a simple account of ‘A Trampwoman’s Tragedy’
- made no attempt to establish links to other poems
- merely agreed with the given view and made no attempt at discussion.

Centres are thanked for preparing so thoroughly their candidates to work with the new numbering system and the new style answer book. The majority of candidates responded well to the changes to the June 2010 exams, but where difficulties were experienced, centres are asked to draw candidates’ attention to the comprehensive range of guidance material that is available on this subject in order that they are confident about what is required of them in future examinations. Support available on this issue includes Guides for teachers and students, and specimen question papers and mark schemes showing the changes in action. All documents published in support of the changes to exams can be accessed via notices published on all qualification homepages, all subject notice boards, and on the parent and student area of the web.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.