



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

English Literature A

LTA1B

(Specification 2740)

**Unit 1: Texts in Context
World War One Literature**

Report on the Examination

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Texts in Context: World War One Literature

The entry was similar in size to the two previous summer series and again examiners saw the full range of marks and approaches. Centres will find the Summer 2011 LTA1B mark scheme a very useful document to use alongside this report, as it contains not only the assessment grids and an indicative content section for each question, suggesting possible approaches which successful candidates might adopt in their responses. The latter has been kept deliberately brief and open, however, allowing for a variety of candidate approaches. Given the size of the poetry anthologies for this option, it is not appropriate to list poems that might be used by candidates. Examiners are encouraged to allow candidates to make their own choices of links and connections. In addition to these documents, centres will also find it useful to refer to subsequent reports going back to January 2009.

Centres should remember that although Assessment Objective 4 is tested in Section A but not in Section B, it is still a crucial factor in the teaching of all aspects of a well designed course in this option because it is so bound up with one historical event. Key historical and biographical facts are fundamental to a proper understanding of changing attitudes and contexts within World War One. Candidates find the whole course more engaging and satisfying if they can understand the importance of central events in World War One and the circumstances in which it was fought. It is also a good idea to consider how and why attitudes to World War One have changed and developed so as to shape how we view the war and read its literature today in 2011.

To look at the achievement of candidates question by question:

Question 1

Centres will now be very familiar with some slight alterations to the format of this question since the specimen paper was published over three years ago. The wording of the generic question was adjusted slightly: examiners on the predecessor LTA6 paper (in many ways the model for this question and this option) expressed their concern that candidates sometimes became bogged down while trying to address the idea of 'typicality', so candidates on the new specification are directed simply to compare the extract with relevant aspects of their wider reading. Of course, in answering this question, candidates will still be considering what is typical of the Literature of World War One, but they will be doing so through the more direct means of exploring the similarities and differences between the extract and the most relevant parts of their wider reading.

The best way to prepare candidates for Question 1 is by providing them with non-fiction extracts from the Literature of World War One as part of their wider reading. Although centres have already identified three wider reading texts (one from each literary genre) and submitted details of these to their coursework advisors, it is vital that candidates' wider reading extends beyond this minimum required by the QCDA regulations governing every A-Level English Literature specification. This point is emphasised on page 7 of the Specification: "These three texts may be supplemented with a collection of relevant extracts and shorter pieces of writing." Candidates whose wider reading only stretches as far as their centre's three nominated texts may well find themselves at a disadvantage in the examination if their opportunities to establish relevant links to the extract are limited by the narrowness of their reading. Candidates are, of course, able to refer to their prose and drama coursework texts too, as well as to their set poetry examination text; indeed, as these texts are liable to be very well-known to them, they are likely to be able to refer to these in some depth and detail. To maximise their candidates' chances of success in answering Question 1, centres are advised to develop a programme of wider reading, such as the one in the AQA-endorsed Nelson Thorne's publication, *AQA English Literature A: Literature of*

World War One (ISBN 978-0748782949). Of course, centres are not obliged to use this supporting textbook, but they may find it useful as a model when constructing their own programme of wider reading. Centres are reminded that there is further guidance on how to prepare candidates for Question 1 in the 'Contextual Linking' advice which was issued in the summer of 2008.

It is also worth remembering that the extracts used in Question 1 will relate to at least one of the six key areas identified to help centres focus their studies in the rich area of the Literature of World War One. These areas are:

- The realities of war
- 'Man's inhumanity to man'
- Patriotism
- Politics
- Physical/mental/spiritual consequences
- The role of women and the Home Front

The wording of the question will usually include some of the key words or phrases from these topics, offering further guidance to candidates as they consider which of their wider reading texts will be of most relevance to the extract. Centres should use these topics when planning their course of wider reading; they may also refer to the wider reading list on pages 18 – 20 of the Specification, although the list is not exhaustive: the best centres will introduce their candidates to material from beyond this list. Centres should ensure that candidates' wider reading covers all three literary genres in equal measure: candidates are required to refer to **at least one example of their wider reading in each genre when answering Question 1** and omitting a genre is bound to have a limiting effect on the mark awarded. It is not advisable to use a very narrow range of centre-chosen texts and extracts (or, indeed, **readings** of those texts and extracts). It is not helpful for candidates if all those entered by a centre restrict themselves to exactly the same texts and extracts and exactly the same points and interpretations. Instead candidates should be encouraged to develop their own repertoire of wider reading and *readings* so that (a) their responses are individual and (b) they can choose the most meaningful links relevant to the given extract.

In attempting Question 1, candidates are advised to split their time evenly between the two parts of the question. It is perfectly acceptable for candidates to focus on the extract for thirty minutes, then spend the next thirty minutes writing about their relevant wider reading; however, more confident and sophisticated candidates may be able to produce integrated responses in which the extract and the wider reading comparisons are interwoven throughout the answer. Contrasts will also be an important part of successful responses, but their inclusion should be coherent: arbitrary, bolted-on texts with no obvious connection to the extract will not help candidates reach the higher bands of the mark scheme. However, this is most likely to occur in the responses of candidates whose entire wider reading, it would seem, has been limited to three texts: it should not be a problem for those candidates who are able to draw on a truly wide experience of the Literature of World War One.

The Extract

The extract from Rowland Feilding's *War Letters to a Wife* provided an accessible and engaging basis for contextual linking. There were plenty of thoughts and feelings to explore, considerable scope for scrutinising the ways in which Feilding expresses himself and there were numerous possibilities when it came to linking in wider reading. These factors characterise a well chosen extract for this question and examiners report on this question as one that manifestly 'worked'. It is important to remember that the first part of the question directs candidates to look closely at thoughts and feelings. This means looking at the extract in its own right and resisting the temptation to use the extract simply as a way in to wider

reading. Many candidates successfully used abstract nouns to describe and then analyse thoughts and feelings. The most successful saw a range of thoughts and feelings: shock at the Tommy's workload and punishing routine; awe at their ability to survive without complaining; mounting anger at their lack of comfort and consolation; scorn for the everyday complaints of the Home Front; exasperation at those not conscripted to fight; and so on. A list approach is not recommended, but it is important to engage with and be specific about thoughts and feelings and the ways in which they are expressed.

Yet again with the chosen extract, the most successful responses came from those candidates who carefully considered tone and mood. Centres should concentrate candidates' attention on these aspects so as to help them to engage effectively with thoughts and feelings. Again, there is a tendency to try and impose a pro- or anti-war viewpoint on the extract, and indeed other wider reading texts referenced. This over-simplification perhaps stems from a desire to make comparison straightforward, but the approach is deeply flawed and closes down rather than opens up possibilities for analytical exploration

Context

Given the AO weighting on context centres should remind themselves what this might mean. A contextual approach should be informed by historical knowledge without extensive offloading of facts and figures. Contextual observations arise from consideration of the extract and the wider reading texts chosen, rather than arbitrarily imposed on the question. The most useful observations tend to focus on time, gender and genre. In this extract, time was a potential interesting issue. The letter was clearly written during the war and there was intelligent speculation, given the reference to conscription, about when it was first written; and then how it came to be published in 1929 and what this may signify. As a letter, the primary audience was Feilding's wife but the secondary audience on publication as a memoir in 1929 is much wider. Many candidates commented on the significance of Feilding's rank; ranked below Brigadier and Colonel but significantly senior to the lowest ranks that are his subjects. One examiner wrote: "Those answers which achieved full marks were often able to consider the position of the Irish troops in relation to those 'fellow-countrymen' he speaks of so disparagingly, making contextual points fluently as part of their exploration of his growing anger".

Main features explored and used to make links and connections

Fielding's use of the letter form helped candidates to bring in other letters they knew such as: the correspondence between Owen and his mother, Susan; Raleigh's letter from *Journey's End*; and the correspondence of Vera Brittain and her circle. The fact that the letter is used as part of a memoir led to some valid links within that genre too.

Candidates warmed to the whole idea of a responsible and compassionate commanding officer whose concern for his men is expressed in anger and exasperation at some of those on the Home Front and their attitudes. Feilding's compassion was often set against Sassoon's 'The General', the Colonel (along with the Brigadier!) in *Journey's End* and the officers in *Oh! What a Lovely War*. In fact, a whole range of fictional and non-fictional commanding officers were cited for contrast. To compare, effective use was made of 'In Memoriam'. Compassionate camaraderie was explored using 'Two Fusiliers' and 'The Sentry'.

Candidates also relished the fact that Feilding details the nature of trench conditions. Many picked upon the features of the weather and saw parallels with poems such as 'Exposure' and 'Winter Warfare'. The extreme conditions described led to links with various 'nightmare scenarios' from the trenches: the various depictions of traumatic experiences from *Journey's End*, *Regeneration*, *A Long, Long Way*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the writings of Paul

Nash, 'The Sentry', 'Dulce et Decorum Est', 'Suicide in the Trenches', 'The Rear Guard', et al. Particularly effective and varied use was made of 'Breakfast'.

Many were quick to make links with other voices of protest, such as Sassoon in his 'Declaration', Kingsley in *The First Casualty* and Bertrand Russell in his autobiography. The best candidates evaluated the differences in tone and context as well as the similarities, and this goes for all comparisons made in both sections of the paper.

References to the Home Front led to a rich diversity of linked texts. Many compared Feilding's anger at the ignorant in general and the profiteers in particular with: Sassoon poems such as 'Blighters' and 'Glory of Women'; Jessie Pope and her poetry; Weir's visit to his parents from *Birdsong*; Willie Dunne's visits home in *A Long, Long Way*; Prior's attitudes to non-combatants in *Regeneration*; similar scenarios and attitudes in *All Quiet on the Western Front*; *The Accrington Pals*; *Black 'ell*, etc.

Feilding's reference to stoical humour at the end of the extract led to links with the gentle humour around food in *Journey's End* and, inevitably, *Blackadder Goes Forth*.

The most successful candidates take genre differences into account when making links and connection. One examiner reported: "Students at the top end are now very comfortable in considering differences in genre so the comparisons made with drama texts in Band 4 answers offered insightful ideas about why, for example, *Journey's End* would portray life at the Front so differently due to the constraints of the stage."

Form, structure and language

Meaning, of course, is primary and indicated by 'thoughts and feelings' in the first stem of the question. AO2 or FSL or 'the ways', as in 'the ways writers construct meaning' is secondary but still a crucial part of the analytical process. Confident and convincing comment on AO2 is an essential feature of writing in Bands 3 and 4. The most successful students understand that it must be linked to meaning to have any real validity. Therefore, feature spotting fails to put technique in the context of meaning and hence is unhelpful and arbitrary.

When it came to looking at AO2 aspects of the extract, the most successful candidates related aspects of form, structure and language to meaning. Aspects of FSL that were made good use of included:

- initial use of first person declaratives to convey key message
- first person plural 'we' to identify with the men and then the third person 'they' to encourage the reader to see Feilding as the soldiers' advocate, identifying them as the real victims
- pointed references to time and quantities: "eight days", "four nights", "every night", etc. to suggest extreme hardship and prolonged suffering without relief
- repetition of words, phrases and grammatical structures to echo the repetitive nature of the soldiers' plight
- use of short, stark statements such as "The temperature is icy" to emphasise each element of their suffering and the most painful factors
- language of logical argument, e.g. 'therefore', to put forward a reasoned case
- change to direct address at the beginning of paragraph 3
- triplet listing to emphasise the harsh conditions, e.g. "Freezing, or snowing, or drenching rain"
- direct speech to give real voices to the victims and demonstrate their stoicism
- punctuation such as exclamations, questions and dashes to suggest passionate, rhetorical argument

- use of emotive vocabulary such as “sick”, “ashamed”, “murderous” as Feilding’s case gathers force
- features of the final paragraph such as the use of “curious”, the fact that soldiers have ceased to be ‘they’ and are now represented as the generic singular “poor Tommy”, the use of suspension marks at the very end.

Some difficulties and misunderstandings

There were three recurrent issues:

1. Feilding’s reference to “a tablespoon of rum to console them...once in three days” led to some unconvincing links to Stanhope as an alcoholic in *Journey’s End*. Such a small amount of rum does not make Feilding’s men into alcoholic Stanhopes. The alcohol link needed evaluating and putting into proportion!
2. When Feilding declares that “It makes me feel sick” he probably does not mean in the physical sense and candidates needed to be clear about what they thought this statement revealed.
3. “The beast who makes capital out of the war” is clearly a reference to the greed of war profiteers, rather than a reference to the military hierarchy or politicians.

On a more general note, one examiner also pointed out that “many students still struggled with the demands of analysing a non-fiction text and this is something that many centres need to address.”

In subsequent examinations successful candidates will:

- explore the ways the writer’s thoughts and feelings about aspects of World War One are presented in the extract
- develop their own thoughtful and considered readings of the extract
- establish a range of substantial and meaningful links between the extract and their own wider reading
- develop a repertoire of wider reading texts in addition to coursework texts that are known and understood in detail
- refer to all three literary genres when writing about their wider reading, commenting on the writers’ choices of form, structure and language, as well as subject matter.

One examiner offered this further advice to centres:

- Students need to consider **genre** in Q1. They must prepare by analysing a range of non-fiction pieces in relation to their wider reading so that they can point out the differences in the ways in which choice of genre will shape the writing.
- It is most likely that looking for **differences from** as opposed to **similarities to** wider reading will lead to genuine exploration of how writers work. While it is right to point out thematic links, it is essential to be able to show how differently authors treat these themes.
- Listing literary devices is not analysis. Pointing out that other authors use the same devices is not analysis and can lead to some strained, unconvincing links.
- Beware of lazy assertions about context (*All women at the Home front were ignorant; all politicians were corrupt; all generals were incompetent.*) Beware of unloading context only loosely linked to the given passage.

Questions 2 -7

The expectations of AS candidates in this section are three-fold. Candidates should: select and then analyse appropriate poems in detail; closely explore the key words of the question; and co-ordinate a balanced response to the debate. A blend of these priorities ensures success, but the debate remains primary.

In this series, Gardner followed by Stallworthy proved to be the most popular choices, but a significant number of centres did Reilly. There were many engaged and enthusiastic answers with most prepared to address poetic effects created by writers' choices of form, structure and language. As one examiner repeated, "The vast majority of candidates had been taught well on how to address the debate and it was **rarely** ignored totally". Where problems occurred, they tended to be to do with:

- **Balancing the debate**

This key skill is a crucial discriminator when answering the poetry section. To balance the debate candidates need to identify the argument or given view as distinct from possible counter-arguments and then look substantially at both sides. Some able candidates who demonstrated high Band 3/Band 4 descriptors in other ways were prevented from fulfilling their potential by not balancing the debate. Candidates should remember to spend time identifying what they see as the debate inherent in the question before proceeding to the planning stage. 'Balancing the debate' means seeing beyond the given view; it may or may not involve a polarised debate. If they can see another way of looking at the poems, then they are balancing the debate. It may be that they spend more time on the given view or the counter argument, but they should at least spend a substantial amount of time and thought on both sides. Some confident candidates begin with the counter-argument which immediately implies that the debate will be balanced. Those candidates who do not mention a counter-argument until the very end tend not to be as successful in addressing and balancing the all important debate

- **Selecting appropriate material**

There was a good deal of engaged and intelligent analysis that was not clearly relevant to the question or to the candidate's line of argument. Care should be taken to select appropriate poems and to select from those poems only the most relevant aspects, rather than offloading all they know about a particular poem or poems. One of the answers to this issue is planning; time spent planning is crucial. Many candidates begin writing too soon (and the same can be said of responses to Section A). Once candidates are writing, they should make frequent reference to the key words of the question and the central debate so as to ensure that the answer remains on track. Some candidates perhaps try to cover too many poems for their own good. They should remember that there are two perfectly acceptable choices: ranging more widely, or choosing to concentrate on two or three poems in more detail. If they choose the former they must be careful to cover depth and closeness of reading. If they choose the latter, then 'two or three' means just that; covering two poems is fine and can still enable candidates to gain the highest marks.

- **Exploring poetic effects created by writers' choices of form, structure and language.**

This remains a difficult area for many candidates. Exploring aspects of form, in particular, such as rhyme, metre and stanza form can lead candidates into empty feature-spotting with little relevance and/or asserted and unconvincing links to meaning. Such features, it is claimed, are chosen by writers to "make them stand out" (?) or to create vague effects such as "flow" and "pace". For examiners the key questions when faced with these assertions are "How?" and "Why?" Candidates should also ask these questions themselves and use them to shape their responses when it comes to AO2.

The odd numbered questions naming a poem need just as much attention to the debate, to choice of material and poems and to planning. One examiner from last summer offered the following comment which applies to this examination: “Students must avoid merely ‘going through’ a given poem or a list of chosen poems without linking them to each other within the framework of a clearly developing argument. This seems to have been more evident in the answers to the second question on each poetry text”.

Question 2

This question was the most popular in this section. Loss was clearly an attractively broad concept for candidates. Words and phrases such as ‘Above all’ and ‘preoccupied’ provided the basis for debate in addition to the standard formula: ‘To what extent...’ These terms were made use of by those who addressed the debate closely. Some less focused responses tended to just go through some poems highlighting aspect of loss in the commentary.

Question 3

A relatively small proportion of candidates who tackled this question did so confidently and thoroughly. A successful answer focused on the whole poem rather than sections of it and tackled Rosenberg’s ambiguous and sinister imagery with confidence. Beyond the poem itself candidates needed to examine the idea of appropriateness to the ‘Death’s Kingdom’ section of the anthology. One examiner pointed out that “this year there has been a wider appreciation and willingness to discuss the form of anthologies without resorting to generalisations.” However, some read the question simply as an invitation to discuss the theme of death and this approach alone gave discussions an unhelpfully narrow focus.

Question 4

This was handled well by the majority of candidates who attempted it. Candidates found the focus on anger helpful in framing a debate. The inclusion of ‘completely’ also helped those alert to the need to debate closely. One examiner wrote: “This offered a chance to have a proper debate and good answers really ‘rolled their sleeves up’, balancing gentle, elegiac and lyrical poems in the collection with hard-hitting ones such as those by Helen Hamilton.”

Question 5

This was an understandably popular question. The instruction to consider this poem as one of ‘central importance’ allowed candidates to evaluate this poem as atypical of the anthology. The given view usually involved looking at the infamy of the poem and its viewpoint, and some found interesting poems of comparison. The counter-argument allowed candidates to look at poems they considered more typical of the anthology and its themes. An examiner noted that “taught responses sometimes predominated and ‘importance’ encouraged generalisation rather than exploration.”

Question 6

Given the way this question was worded, it was possible for candidates to look either at Daryush or Cannan or both. The phrase ‘significantly different’ enabled candidates to construct a balanced debate. Candidates had considerable scope to select poems by men as typical of male views in the argument or given view part of their answer; the subject matter and tone, as well as the form, structure and language of ‘Rouen’ also provided a secure basis for the argument. Possibilities for the counter-argument included considering Cannan’s view as a VAD close to the front line and, perhaps most of all, Daryush’s awareness of the limitations of women’s Home Front perspective. This question exposed those who did not know the gender of some poets; several thought Ezra Pound was a woman. Some less successful answers simply discussed the presentation of women in poems such as ‘Glory of Women’ and even ‘Dulce Et Decorum Est’. One examiner wrote: “The best answers here recognised that gender did not necessarily define perspective and argued convincingly that both female poets in the selection could be found to share views with male poets, frequently

using Sassoon to both support and challenge this contention. Some students had clearly never read the poems so ignored them and wrote only on the male poets.”

Question 7

This was an attractive question given the central importance of this poem and its distinctive voice and atypical features. Clearly the debate hinged on the phrase ‘at odds’ and the question enabled most candidates to construct a balanced debate. Arguing the given view was straightforward enough because of the context of aerial combat and, particularly, the detachment tone and stance of the narrator. Many relished the opportunity to explore interpretations of his attitude to his countrymen and his revelations about what motivates him. Due attention was paid to “a lonely impulse of delight” here. It was impressive to read some persuasive counter-arguments that established convincing links to a range of poems. One examiner praised “subtle work about tone.” Another noted that some did “struggle to decide what exactly the attitudes presented are so the debate was scuppered from the start.” They went on to praise “great answers, however, which found this detachment in Sorley and Brooke, for example, and went on to juxtapose the ‘clouds above’ with the filth and brutality shown in Owen or Rosenberg.”

In future, successful candidates will:

- create a balanced debate in response to the critical opinion given in the question
- select appropriate poems to support their argument and counter-argument
- explore the poetic effects created by the writer’s choices of form, structure and language in detail
- remember that the debate is just as important in the odd numbered questions.

Note:

Centres are reminded that June 2012 will be the last examination for ‘Up the Line to Death’ ed. Gardner. This text will be replaced by *The War Poems of Wilfred Owen* edited by Jon Stallworthy (978 0701161262 Chatto and Windus). There will be a final resit opportunity for ‘Up the Line to Death’ in January 2013.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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