



**General Certificate of Education**

**English Literature**

*Specification B*

**LITB3      Texts and Genres**

**Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination – June series*

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## Introduction

Summer 2010 completes the first two years of specification LITB, and so for the first time there are full reports on all four units, with each unit being taken by a large number of candidates.

It is important that as many teachers as possible read these reports, ideally as a complete set of four: even though an individual teacher may not have taught a specific unit, it is well worth knowing and understanding that for candidates the four units are connected in many ways.

This specification, when it was designed, had a number of overarching principles, based on a coherent set of views as to how English Literature can be taught and assessed. Like all specifications it draws on different ways of reading and how that reading can be assessed. As you read through these reports as a whole, a number of messages will be repeated; one, for example, is that we do not reward bolted on historical context; another is that we aim in nearly all tasks to encourage candidates to debate meanings.

As there are principles that run throughout the specification, then inevitably there are links across the units. For example: a close study of narrative in LITB 1 will help students with texts in all other units; looking at tragedy as a genre in LITB2 has a direct link with genres in LITB3, but can be relevant in the other two units also. The theories looked at in the critical material of LITB4 can be applied to LITB3. The ways texts are connected in LITB1 is similar to the process of LITB3. The issues around categorising texts in LITB3 can help with direct comparison in LITB4.

So, we hope that you find these reports illuminating, and urge you to read them as a whole so that the common messages, which are ultimately the most important ones, are made clear.

## General

Examiners were very gratified to note the large number of entries for this specification this summer and felt that, overall, it has been a successful experience for many candidates. Clearly the paper is accessible to candidates of all abilities and, while stretching and challenging the most able, it also allowed those of more modest ability to demonstrate their skills. Hence, the full range of marks was awarded by examiners. There were, indeed, many impressive answers where the fact that this is a closed book examination did not prevent candidates from engaging in close textual analysis. Many answers were fluent, cogent and a pleasure to read. There is, however, some valuable advice to feed back to centres and candidates as a result of our experiences this summer.

There can be no doubt that the gothic was by far the more popular genre on the paper but candidates were able to perform equally well on either genre and seemed to enjoy many of the texts they had studied. Choices of texts covered the full range but inevitably, Shakespeare's works proved very popular, as did *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* and *The Bloody Chamber*. Centres should note, however, that candidates must discuss at least three of the actual eighteen set texts in Section B. There were some answers where candidates discussed texts which were not set on the paper. LITB4 offers the candidates opportunities for independent study, not LITB3. Examiners did feel that candidates had been very well-prepared for their chosen topics and usually had a good understanding of genre.

There were some examples of scripts where rubric infringements occurred. Occasionally candidates did not address the requirement to write about at least one text which had been written between 1300 and 1800 but the more frequent infringement was to write about only

TWO texts in Section B instead of at least THREE. Sometimes candidates simply ran out of time and did not refer at all to the third text or did so merely in passing. It did seem, however, that there were some errors in the perception of what constitutes a “text”. This was particularly evident with regards to the texts in the poetry anthology. There are two set “texts” within the anthology – *Elements of the Pastoral 1300-1800* and *Pastoral Poetry after 1945*. Candidates may study both sections in which case, they will have studied two texts. Writing about one or more poems *from the same section* only counts as one text. If candidates write about three different poems, they have not covered three texts. Equally all the stories in *The Bloody Chamber* count as one text. Two different stories do not qualify as two different texts in a candidate’s answer. Centres choosing to study Chaucer should note that the text includes the Pardoner’s Tale, not just the Prologue.

The most significant piece of advice that examiners would like to offer candidates is to answer the question. Question focus is the key to successful answers. Where candidates did not score as highly as they potentially could have done, it was often because they did not answer the question set. Question 2, for example was on Macbeth, not Lady Macbeth so long paragraphs about her were rarely helpful. It is never advisable to distort the question to fit a desired topic or a practice essay which has been done during the course of study. There were cases where candidates would have derived benefit from writing less but with a more precise focus.

Candidates are also advised to read the questions carefully and consider the precise terms in which the question is worded. Sometimes not all parts of the question were answered or some of the wording was not specifically addressed. For example, in question 20, many answers successfully addressed “nightmarish terrors” but overlooked the idea of “the orderly surface of the civilised mind” and in question 22, candidates were asked to consider “rural life” and not just “rural characters”. Quite often more successful answers showed a thoughtful approach to the possible implications of questions. Still with reference to question 20, many answers were limited to consideration of how the terms applied to characters within the texts, whereas some particularly interesting answers discussed the gothic as an expression of these issues as an aspect of human psychology. Benefit could also have been gained in some cases by an accurate definition of terms. Not all responses to question 9, for example, gave a clear definition of “fairytales”, or, indeed, addressed that part of the question and it was noticeable that many candidates had a very limited understanding of “religion” in question 19 or seemed to see it as synonymous with the supernatural.

With regards to Section B, candidates are advised to choose the question carefully as it was sometimes felt that the best choice had not been made. It is important to consider which texts have been studied when choosing the question in this section as some texts may offer more to write about in response to certain questions than others. Some texts are simply a “better fit” for some questions.

Examiners would also like to point out certain issues in response to the assessment objectives. An aspect of AO1 is the consideration of the quality of written communication. Candidates should aim to structure their arguments as clearly and concisely as possible. Quality is more important than quantity. The best structure does not always follow the chronology of the text and candidates should be aware of this. Many weaker answers tended towards assertiveness and generalisation. Better answers used supportive textual analysis to prove their arguments. Use of supportive analysis also means that answers show clear responses to AO2. However, it should be remembered that discussion of form and structure, voice, perspective, use of setting etc. are equally important aspects of AO2, as well as diction and imagery.

Answers were generally interesting to read where candidates engaged in debate and discussion of alternative readings which is an aspect of AO3. Such essays are always more successful

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than those which merely illustrate and there is little credit to be gained from simply recounting the plot. Some clear evidence of links with other units on the specification is emerging in many answers, particularly links with the literary theory from LITB4 and narrative methods from LITB1. However, an excess of literary theory can sometimes make interpretation rather inflexible, such as the application of feminist theory in question 8. Better answers are more open-minded.

Finally, there are several points to be made in connection with AO4, the use of context. In successful answers context is integrated and useful to the discussion in response to the question. “Bolted- on” context is never constructive, nor should context drive the answer – the question should do that. The initial paragraph in an answer should actually address the question. Examiners do not wish to read a generalised potted history of the gothic or pastoral before the answer actually begins. Little reward is given to such introductions so they are generally a waste of time.

As stated previously, candidates’ generic knowledge will come out in their answers if they focus on the question. There were some fruitful considerations of differing reception contexts in some answers but it is important to stress that over-simplified generalisations about historical reception contexts should be avoided. There were some naïve assumptions about *all* women in Elizabethan England, for example, and probably worst of all was the reference to that vaguest of all historical periods, “back then” ( which can be any time from 1300 to 1979) and reference to which should be avoided at all costs!

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.

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