



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

English Literature B

LITB3

(Specification 2745)

Unit 3: Texts and Genres

Report on the Examination

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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As ever, there was a high level of enthusiasm for and engagement with the texts, both gothic and pastoral, while the best scripts showed a conceptualised understanding of literary issues.

In general terms, the most frequent weakness was a failure to read, digest and therefore, answer the actual question. Instead there was a tendency to follow a line of argument that was intermittently relevant, but that really encompassed the aspects of the text or texts that the candidate wanted to discuss or had written previous, practice essays on.

There were only a few examples of rubric infringements this January, the most common being a failure to write on three texts in Section B. This was sometimes simply due to mistiming, but there were occasions when candidates seemed to think two different stories from *The Bloody Chamber* or two different poems from the same selection comprised two different texts. Candidates should be careful about this issue. The other rubric infringement which occurred was answering question 10 when the post-1945 pastoral poetry had been studied. No marks could be awarded for this error as the answer contained no material relevant to the question.

Centres should also note that, where a collection of poems or short stories is set as the “text”, candidates are expected to have studied all poems or stories in the collection. It was evident this January that, on some occasions, candidates had only studied one poem because it was hoped that reference to one poem would be sufficient in the section B answer. For example the only poem referred to in every answer on the Pastoral Poetry 1300-1800 from one particular centre, was the extract from “Paradise Lost”. Generally speaking candidates were severely disadvantaged by this as it was not particularly easy to apply that poem to any of the questions.

Where candidates have studied poetry selections as a text, they should also think carefully about the poems they choose to write about in answer to the question. Apt choice of poems in these instances was often the key to good, relevant answers. There were a number of answers this January which failed to score highly on question 12 on Blake because candidates had chosen to write about “London”. As the question was on Blake’s presentation of the natural world, it was rarely possible to award any marks for the writing on this particular poem.

As always, candidates are strongly advised to read the question carefully and ensure they respond to all of its different parts. Failure to do so will result in part answers. Some questions this January required candidates to think of several different issues; question 1, for example, on “The Pardoner’s Tale”. In response to question 20 many candidates simply listed shocking things in gothic writing. Better answers considered why they were shocking and the best answers did not, as many did, overlook the word “always” in the question. Candidates also benefit from thinking very carefully about the terms of the questions and defining them when necessary. Question 9, for example, on *The Bloody Chamber*, a very popular text, was not a question on violence but on “violent instincts”. The best answers to this question recognized this distinction and responded to it. Similarly in response to question 19, many candidates seemed to think that nearly anything could be classed as an “emotion”, including, for example, ambition. Such imprecision was not a feature of the best answers. With reference to question 24, many answers would have been improved if candidates had actually defined what they understood by “civilised” and “uncivilised”. Answers often lost direction and conviction from the failure to do this as it was often unclear what candidates understood by these terms and hence what they were arguing.

With regards to AO1, the best answers were well-structured and fluently written. Technical terminology was integrated into the answers and used as a tool. Many candidates again demonstrated an impressive knowledge of the texts in a closed book examination and were

rewarded for the apt use of quotation and textual reference. There did, however, seem to be an increasing tendency towards misquotation. Whilst it is possible to overlook an occasional error, persistent misquotation where candidates have simply not bothered to learn the material does not count in the candidate's favour. There were some clear examples of poor imitations of Shakespearian language and blank verse which claimed to be quotations but were actually inept substitutes.

While the examination is obviously not purely a memory test, knowledge of the texts is the basic tool with which candidates should work to construct good answers. Examiners were particularly impressed by the knowledge of *Dr Faustus* which answers on that text often displayed. However, the contrary was often the case with regards to question 5 on *Paradise Lost* where many candidates seemed to think that Pandemonium and Hell were exactly synonymous and made no distinctions between them. Candidates should also note that not every question on this text is going to be about Satan.

Good answers were inevitably supported by appropriate AO2 analysis. It is pleasing to note some of the skills learnt on LITB1 featuring here with some interesting references, for example, to voice and perspective.

The best scripts this January showed an intelligent integration of AO3 where debate was central to the answer. However, there were still examples of scripts where critical interpretation was artificially imposed on the answer, particularly Marxist and Freudian views. The opinions of named critics were sometimes still cited without comment or evaluation, words which appear in the marking descriptors for the higher bands.

It was pleasing to note that, as far as AO4 was concerned, there was far less bolted-on context than in June 2010, but there was still a tendency to add historical detail of doubtful relevance. Examiners were pleased to note references to performance contexts when plays were being discussed, but there were examples of scripts where it was uncertain whether candidates had actually read the play. References were made, for example, in question 2, to Lady Macbeth committing suicide by throwing herself off the castle battlements and examiners wondered whether candidates had watched the Polanski film as opposed to studying the play.

On a final note, examiners enjoyed reading some good quality work this January in spite of the points noted above. Such work is doubly pleasant if the script is clear and legible!

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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