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# ENGLISH LITERATURE A

Paper 2 Love through the ages: prose  
Report on the Examination

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7711/2  
June 2018

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## General

This report should be read in conjunction with the report on 7711/1 and the mark schemes for both components. It was evident from the marking of Component 2 that the historicist philosophy of the specification, using the shared context of love through the ages, continues to be positively embraced for providing clarity and coherence. Importantly, this specification encourages confident, independent readers who are able to ‘make meaning’, through both close textual analysis and a wider understanding of the contexts that inform their literary study, to produce work with a clear, authentic voice.

Holistic marking enables responses to be assessed as organic whole texts in themselves. Assessment objectives are not tracked in the marking or reported on separately in summative comments. This enables the genuine interrelatedness of assessment objectives to be respected. The advice to students is to concentrate on answering the question set and let the assessment objectives look after themselves.

The question paper of 7711/2 enabled the full range of the candidature. The unseen passage in Section A proved both accessible and discriminating. Less able students were able to access much of the content and, in the vast majority of cases, could demonstrate some skills and understanding. The most able students were stretched by some of the passage’s subtler elements.

There were fewer overt references to wider reading than in previous series. Such references have tended to lead to digression and to cast little light on the question, or the texts, under discussion. Discussing typicality is becoming recognised as a more effective way of demonstrating relevant literary connections.

## Section A: Unseen prose

The unseen extract (from *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* by Richard Flanagan) engaged the interest of the vast majority of students. Most found the introductory material helpful, and some used it to help advance plausible ideas about the military backdrop to the story and the main character, who is a military doctor. The best of such answers not only used this context, but also anchored their observations in textual detail.

Strong answers:

- commented on figurative language with precision;
- explored how a range of features worked together to create effects and shape meaning;
- commented on structural elements of the passage, such as the symmetry between Dorrigo noticing Amy’s eyes at the start and Amy commenting on Dorrigo’s towards the end;
- explored the complexities of the characterisation and commented on the reciprocal nature of the attraction between the two characters;
- commented on the narrative point of view, exploring how it was third person, but appreciated how it privileges the perspective of Dorrigo;
- explored the effects of the author adopting this viewpoint and how it creates effects and shapes the reader’s response to characters and events.

Less able answers:

- speculated on the meaning and effects of figurative language in fanciful ways, typically reading too much into the opening simile about Amy’s eyes which ‘burnt like the blue in a

- gas flame', or into the image of the red flower that Amy wore in her hair (which was sometimes viewed unconvincingly as poppy-like symbol of remembrance);
- picked words, phrases or images out in isolation from the sentences and paragraphs from which they came, partially or wholly misreading in the process;
  - viewed the characters in broad terms, sometimes over-using the terms 'disturbed' or 'challenged' from the question without much understanding, and overlooking the subtleties of the passage;
  - considered the use of point of view incorrectly, or bluntly argued that the use of third person made the narrator's stance necessarily distant;
  - used context digressively or unconvincingly, for example, when too much was read into Flanagan's use of language drawn from warfare, such as 'retreated', claiming, with insufficient evidence, that each character represented a side in the Second World War.

## Section B

Both questions elicited a variety of responses, and the vast majority responded to their comparative set texts in ways that were relevant to the question posed. Less able responses to Question 3 (which began with the quotation 'In literature love always leads to happiness') sometimes made unconvincing claims in order to agree with this statement. These included the assertion that *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, through the relationship between Tess and Angel, shows love always leading to happiness. Some less able responses to Question 2 (which began with the quotation 'Literature shows us that love never lasts') sometimes stretched the terms of reference unhelpfully to focus on forms of love beyond romantic love, such as love between siblings.

The best answers considered the terms of the question, including those of the quoted statement, closely and tailored their responses to those terms, often grappling with key words and taking a clear stance on the viewpoint in the question. Such answers gave the impression of having been born of comprehensive and thoughtful planning. They usually began with confident introductions that indicated a viewpoint or an approach clearly. Less able responses sometimes seemed to be comprised of examples that, while being related to the question, were not part of an ongoing argument. Some of these less able responses seemed to try to reuse material that had been prepared before the exam, rather than to respond to the question directly.

Most students compared the texts well. Many strong answers sustained comparison throughout, interweaving comparisons and contrasts deftly, and some, having set up a comparative argument in a strong introduction focused on one text at a time, but never lost sight of the other text or the comparative nature of the task. Only a small minority of answers read like separate essays bound lightly together by a few token comparative sentences.

Strong answers:

- considered authorial methods in ways that enhanced their response to the question and often commented on more subtle elements, such as point of view, setting, narrative or genre skilfully;
- made enriching use of context – such answers often used contextual material sparingly and always kept sight of the text and the question;
- selected material impressively, choosing pertinent moments from novels and quoting expertly;
- showed impressive knowledge of whole texts, with apt material being chosen from several parts of the novels;

- developed connections in illuminating ways, comparing authorial methods as well as elements of plot and characterisation;
- argued with conviction, often showing confidence in their willingness to argue a case wholeheartedly and substantiating that argument with apt evidence.

Less able answers:

- labelled features without commenting on meaning or effects;
- used critical terminology without understanding;
- focused on characters and plot events with little or no sense of authorial methods;
- used context in generalised or irrelevant ways;
- used context in a digressive manner;
- made use of material that appeared to have been pre-learnt, rather than had been selected as appropriate for the question;
- seemed to feel obliged to offer both an argument and a counterargument, rather than to argue with genuine conviction.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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