3. Use the 2011 Marking Guidelines to award a mark to the sample response. Justify your choice by identifying relevant features of the response:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Marks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Argues skilfully the ways in which a comparative study accentuates the distinctive contexts of the prescribed texts</td>
<td>17–20</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates skilfully an understanding of the relationship between texts and contexts using well-selected and detailed textual references</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Composes a perceptive response using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Argues effectively the ways in which a comparative study accentuates the distinctive contexts of the prescribed texts</td>
<td>13–16</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates effectively an understanding of the relationship between texts and contexts using detailed textual references</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Composes an effective response using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Argues soundly the ways in which a comparative study accentuates the distinctive contexts of the prescribed texts</td>
<td>9–12</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates an understanding of some aspects of the relationship between texts and contexts using relevant textual references</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Composes a sound response using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Explains some aspects of the links between the prescribed texts</td>
<td>5–8</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates a limited understanding of the relationship between texts and contexts</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Composes a limited response</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Describes aspects of the texts using elementary knowledge</td>
<td>1–4</td>
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<tr>
<td>• May attempt to describe aspects of texts and contexts</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Attempts to compose a response to the question</td>
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2010 Paper 2 Section I Module A – Elective 2: Texts in Time

Analyse how The Great Gatsby and Browning’s poetry imaginatively portray individuals who challenge the established values of their time.

Sample response: Poetry and prose fiction

**Prescribed texts:**

- Sonnets from the Portuguese: Sonnets I, XIII, XIV, XXI, XXII, XXVIII, XXXII, XLIII, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1850
- The Great Gatsby, F Scott Fitzgerald, 1925

Love may be regarded as a universal emotion that transcends time. When we look closely at Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Songs from the Portuguese* and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, we realise that love is not a singular but a varied, multifaceted emotion which changes to capture the mood of its context and the individuals who declare it. In many ways it is a construct of its times, reflecting but also often challenging contemporary values in its depiction. It is, however, in the imaginative portrayal of individuals in both the texts that we really see the challenge that love conveys to the morals of an age.
Immediately refers to the question and elaborates on how the texts respond to the question, while addressing context.

Interestingly, the two composers being examined were also in their own ways challenging their age. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s own life centred on the intense and often unstable relationship he had with his wife Zelda, as they pursued a life of pleasure. In contrast, his novel, *The Great Gatsby*, offers a harsh critique of a hedonistic society where love is marginalised. The Victorian poet, Barrett Browning, wrote at a very different time, characterised by great conservatism and social constraints. Love and death were often featured in the texts of the period, the sentimental urges of the age sometimes verging towards melodrama. Trite verses and saccharine expressions of adoration were appreciated by the Victorian audience. It was therefore surprising that the Victorian public took so readily to Barrett Browning’s strong and often very physical intimations of love, but the secret of their success lies in their association with her own romance: the poems were a declaration of love from a woman who challenged the bonds of family, conducting a secret epistolary romance and eventually leaving her father’s house to elope with the poet, Robert Browning. The challenge against conventions that she embodied can be seen in the poems’ rejection of conventional courtly love for a stronger forceful love, initiated by a woman.

The sonnets each stand alone, but they need to be read as a suite of poems and in a set order as they move through different aspects of love using contrasting images. The persona, who is clearly closely connected to Barrett Browning, intensely declares her love, which would have shocked many of her audience. The first poem, “I thought once how Theocritus had sung”, begins the suite with a return to the classical origins of love poetry, alluding to the famous love poet Theocritus who, in the role of muse, takes Browning’s memory to intense “mortal” moments of love. The paradox of love emerges in her memories of “sweet years” that also yield “sadness” and “melancholy”. There is a violence in the way she remembers a mystic shape that “drew me backward by the hair” and the voice that is heard is “in mastery”. Love becomes an enslavement, a burial of the self that is equated with death in the persona’s confused mind. Love and death were often linked in the Victorian mind, but the love professed by this persona crosses the moral boundaries of established Victorian values in its exaggeration.

Grief and love are also inextricably connected in Poem XIII, where she presents the traditional role of a woman who is in “silence” but requests acknowledgement of her “woman-love to thy belief”. She continues to orchestrate the love relationship in Poem XIV, stating what she should be loved for. However, in this poem she rejects the conventions of love that were part of the Petrarchan love sonnet form. All those features that were so admired in a woman in love poetry – “her smile – her look – her way / Of speaking gently” – may change and so the persona is urging that she be loved “for love’s sake”.

The person who is declaring this love offers a challenge, not only to the person being addressed but also to her readers, to see how powerful love can be. Barrett Browning takes the very controlled form of the sonnet, where every line follows a circumscribed rhythm and breath, and shows how her love can live within the world of rules while also breaking these rules. A constant is the rejection of traditional imagery in her verses. She does not display the passive femininity of courtly love but takes the...
initiative. Barrett Browning voices the violence of her emotions and takes the lead, instructing her lover in how to love, over a series of poems that unfold her feelings in different moods and adopt different attitudes. One feature that dominates throughout is the eternal nature of her love and the close relationship of love to death in offering an intensity of feelings.

In F. Scott Fitzgerald’s story of love in the Jazz Age we see many of the same discourses of love that operate in Barrett Browning’s poetry, but the context seems very remote from the austere period of the Victorians. Love in its purest sense stood out in the Jazz Age because of the despair of post-World War I (the war to end all wars) when there was a loss of innocence. World War I had shown that life and its rules were fragile. The world was entering into a new age of cynicism, where conventional morality was under threat as people, losing their religious faith, were frightened by their mortality and pursued hedonistic pleasures as a compensation.

Setting, characters and a brief overview of the plot

Set in New York, among high society people, in a world of celebrities and self-made men who embody capitalist desires, the novel traces a romance that seems out of place. F. Scott Fitzgerald was very much a part of this world and his disillusionments with his life and his own marriage surface in the novel. The narrator of the story, Nick, becomes go-between for his neighbour, Gatsby, a man who reveals very little about his past and creates a sense of enigma.

There is no room for the authentic in this world of fabrication, but in the love that Gatsby bears for Daisy there is a genuineness that is in sharp contrast and challenges the pursuit of carnal pleasures that we see in Daisy’s husband, Tom, and in the party-goers who fill Gatsby’s house. Like Barrett Browning, Gatsby harbours an intensity of feeling that transcends time and allows him to remain faithful over five years. His whole life is dedicated to producing a world that is worthy of Daisy. And yet, Daisy is materialistic, commenting on the quality of Gatsby’s shirts, and she is changeable, loving not only Gatsby but her husband Tom.

Love is an illusion

Nick, the observer, writes from the perspective of time passing and in his narration he realises that Gatsby’s love is an illusion. Nick asks if “there must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams … because of the colossal vitality of his illusions”. Nevertheless, Nick’s descriptions of his cousin when she meets Gatsby again are often phrased according to traditional Petrarchan sentiments, focusing on her voice as a “husky, rhythmic whisper” and blossoming “like a flower” when Gatsby kisses her. The voice that “the ear follows up and down” is the reader’s first introduction to Daisy, who is also paradoxically “sad and lovely with … bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth”, the perfect heroine for a love story. It is, however, in the description of her voice, sustained throughout the novel, that Fitzgerald raises doubts about the motives of her love. Gatsby describes Daisy’s voice as “full of money”, wealth dominates his memories of her home when they first met and Daisy is associated throughout with the yellow of gold and the green of US paper bills.

Love is violent

Nick presents Gatsby’s love as forceful and disruptive, creating a “constant turbulent riot” in his heart. Gatsby goes through stages of love,
passing “visibly through two states and entering upon a third … consumed with wonder at her presence … at an inconceivable pitch of intensity” and then “running down like a clock”. Gatsby’s love is violent in its impact and permeates his every act. And yet, Gatsby dictates the way his love should proceed, wanting “nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: I never loved you.”

Like Gatsby, the persona in Barrett Browning’s poems gives directions to her lover, insisting on how she should be loved, often in the imperative mood: “Say … that thou dost love me”, but also often in a different tone or using different conventions. The insistence of Poem XIV is replaced by the petulant tone of Poem XXI, in the echoing repetition of the entreaty: “Say thou dost love me, love me, love me –” capturing the sound of the cuckoo. The daring nature of her hyperbolic requests is implied when the persona rhetorically asks:

Who can fear
Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll,
Too many flowers, though each shall crown the year?

Celestial images of stars and heavens and images of flora that are conventions of love poetry become a metaphor for an excess of desire that, it is implied, could be something to fear. Nevertheless, Barrett Browning’s conviction is ever-present, as she reveals her love. The physical intensity of her experience of love “when our two souls stand erect and strong, / Face to face, silent”, invites her to a spiritual realm which she rejects, wanting to “stay / Rather on earth, Beloved”. There is self-doubt in some poems, as she sees herself as a “worn viol” which can “spoil his song”, but this also hints at an active relationship. The strong physicality of her description in these lines and her defiance of the spiritual, preferring to stay on earth, suggest a carnality that was confronting to conservative, staid and Christian Victorian sensibilities.

Her most popular poem, XLIII, is a declaration of love that has resounded with audiences since its publication. Barrett Browning lists the extravagance of her love in hyperbolic terms – “to the depth and breadth and height / My soul can reach” – repeating the phrase “I love thee” until there is no uncertainty about her feelings. This is a love that has no barriers, not even death, which she respectfully refers to God’s will (“and if God choose / I shall but love thee better after death”).

The connection of Death and Love may not be as strong in the modern age, but it emerges in The Great Gatsby. Despite the selfishness of the Jazz Age, some characters show selflessness in their complete abandonment to love. Gatsby’s love for Daisy is contrasted with Tom’s relationship with Myrtle and Nick’s relationship with Jordan. The latter couple lack the emotional impact of the other two sets of lovers, who are also distinguished by the names of the two women, Daisy and Myrtle, hinting at the convention of floral metaphors in love poetry and also the Victorian predilection to use flowers as names. There is, in this subtle allusion, the suggestion of a more poetic love and intensity of emotions, as seen in Myrtle’s tragic run towards the car she thinks is Tom’s, causing her death. Nick, in contrast, feels some warmth for Jordan but cannot commit to a relationship with her. Instead, he watches others as they
connect and disconnect, betraying each other in the name of love. Like Myrtle, Gatsby faces death because of his love and both characters illustrate the sentiments of Barrett Browning’s poems that love and death are closely linked. Through the depth of their feelings, Myrtle and Gatsby challenge the shallowness of the era.

Summing up with reference to the question

Each age has its values and each age has those who defy the status quo and offer something challenging. The persona of Barrett Browning’s poems and Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel show that absolute love, in which the body and soul are sublimated, can present a challenge to prevailing values in its paradoxical complexity of passionate purity.

Follow up

Look up the Notes from the Marking Centre and the Marking Guidelines for the 2010 Examination (on the Board of Studies website). Use these guidelines to identify what was valued and to assess the sample 2010 responses.

Module B: Critical Study of Texts

From the Syllabus

**Reception** refers to how a text is received by an audience (what they think it means)

**Context** see page 13

**Textual integrity** means that judgements and interpretations can be supported by the ideas, language and structural features of the text

This module requires students to explore and evaluate a specific text and its reception in a range of contexts. It develops students’ understanding of questions of textual integrity.

Each elective in this module requires close study of a single text to be chosen from a list of prescribed texts.

Students explore the ideas expressed in the text through analysing its construction, content and language. They examine how particular features of the text contribute to textual integrity. They research others’ perspectives of the text and test these against their own understanding and interpretations of the text. Students discuss and evaluate the ways in which the set work has been read, received and valued in historical and other contexts. They extrapolate from this study of a particular text to explore questions of textual integrity and significance.

*(English Stage 6 Syllabus, p. 48)*

From the Prescriptions document

**Informed** means knowing how a range of interpretations can be supported by the text itself

**Perspectives of others** tells us that there is always more than one valid reading of a text

This module requires students to engage with and develop an informed personal understanding of their prescribed text. Through critical analysis and evaluation of its language, content and construction, students will develop an appreciation of the textual integrity of their prescribed text. They refine their own understanding and interpretations of the prescribed text and critically consider these in the light of the perspectives of others. Students explore how context influences their own and others’ responses to the text and how the text has been received and valued.