AQA GCSE ENG Lang Paper 1 Section A Reading: Extract from Bring up the Bodies

**1 Falcons**

2 *Wiltshire, September 1535*

3 His children are falling from the sky. He watches from horseback, acres of England stretching behind him; they

4 drop, gilt-winged, each with a blood-filled gaze. Grace Cromwell hovers in thin air. She is silent when she takes her 5 prey, silent as she glides to his fist. But the sounds she makes then, the rustle of feathers and the creak, the sigh

6 and riffle of pinion, the small cluck-cluck from her throat, these are sounds of recognition, intimate, daughterly,

7 almost disapproving. Her breast is gore-streaked and flesh clings to her claws.

8 Later, Henry will say, ‘Your girls flew well today.’ The hawk Anne Cromwell bounces on the glove of Rafe Sadler,

9 who rides by the king in easy conversation. They are tired; the sun is declining, and they ride back to Wolf Hall

10 with the reins slack on the necks of their mounts. Tomorrow his wife and two sisters will go out. These dead

11 women, their bones long sunk in London clay, are now transmigrated. Weightless, they glide on the upper

12 currents of the air. They pity no one. They answer to no one. Their lives are simple. When they look down they

13 see nothing but their prey, and the borrowed plumes of the hunters: they see a flittering, flinching universe, a

14 universe filled with their dinner.

15 All summer has been like this, a riot of dismemberment, fur and feather flying; the beating off and the whipping

16 in of hounds, the coddling of tired horses, the nursing, by the gentlemen, of contusions, sprains and blisters. And

17 for a few days at least, the sun has shone on Henry. Sometime before noon, clouds scudded in from the west and

18 rain fell in big scented drops; but the sun re-emerged with a scorching heat, and now the sky is so clear you can

19 see into Heaven and spy on what the saints are doing.

20 Though the day is over, Henry seems disinclined to go indoors. He stands looking about him, inhaling horse

21 sweat, a broad, brick-red streak of sunburn across his forehead. Early in the day he lost his hat, so by custom all

22 the hunting party were obliged to take off theirs. The king refused all offers of substitutes. As dusk steals over the

23 woods and fields, servants will be out looking for the stir of the black plume against darkening grass, or the glint

24 of his hunter’s badge, a gold St Hubert with sapphire eyes. Already you can feel the autumn. You know there will

25 not be many more days like these; so let us stand, the horseboys of Wolf Hall swarming around us, Wiltshire and

26 the western counties stretching into a haze of blue; let us stand, the king’s hand on his shoulder, Henry’s face

27 earnest as he talks his way back through the landscape of the day, the green copses and rushing streams, the

28 alders by the water’s edge, the early haze that lifted by nine; the brief shower, the small wind that died and

29 settled; the stillness, the afternoon heat.

30 ‘Sir, how are you not burned?‘ Rafe Sadler demands. A redhead like the king, he has turned a mottled, freckled

31 pink, and even his eyes look sore. He, Thomas Cromwell, shrugs; he hangs an arm around Rafe’s shoulders as

32 they drift indoors. He went through the whole of Italy – the battlefield as well as the shaded arena of the

33 counting house – without losing his London pallor. His ruffian childhood, the days on the river, the days in the

34 fields: they left him as white as God made him. ‘Cromwell has the skin of a lily,’ the king pronounces. ‘The only

35 particular in which he resembles that or any other blossom.’ Teasing him, they amble towards supper.