

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

---

Paper 9695/03  
Poetry and Prose

## Principal Examiner's Report November 2007

Examiners in this session found a very wide range of responses to questions. As always, at the upper end of the range, candidates' writing was assured and sophisticated, demonstrating detailed and thoughtful knowledge of texts and writers' techniques. At the lower end, however, there were candidates who seemed ill-prepared for the examination, with sketchy knowledge of texts and uncertainty about the demands of literary study.

Textual knowledge is the basis for all discussion; a thorough knowledge of the set texts is therefore essential for any answer. Knowledge itself is not enough for success in the examination, however; candidates need to be able to select from their knowledge precisely in order to develop an argument in response to the question on the examination paper. All questions are ultimately about the writers' craft, their presentation of characters and situations, their handling of ideas. The meaning of a poem, or what characters say and do in a novel or play, are the beginning of an answer, not its entirety.

In the same way, contextual and biographical material has no value in itself. Where it is used carefully and relevantly by a candidate to develop an interpretation or response to a text or question, then it can be very valuable.

### Question Specific Comments

#### 1. John Keats: *Selected Poems*

- (a) While some candidates tried to answer this question about Keats' presentation of love with reference to the Odes, most successful answers referred to 'Lamia', 'The Eve of St Agnes' and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', though other poems were successfully used too. As with previous years, the use of biographical material was problematic, as many candidates showed a far better knowledge of the vicissitudes of Keats' life than they did of Keats' poetry. However, some candidates were able to make reference to Keats' life very productively to show his position on love, tracing his concerns through well-chosen poems. Most candidates were able to illustrate Keats' presentation of love and its association with sorrow and pain in these poems while offering some evaluation. Some very strong answers featured a careful comparison between poems, suggesting, for example, that not all presentation of love in the poems 'leaves the heart high-sorrowful', using the union of the lovers on 'The Eve of St Agnes' to provide a contrast with misery and heartbreak.
- (b) 'Ode on Melancholy' was a poem that discriminated between candidates, as some who attempted this question struggled to give a clear account of their understanding of the poem's meaning. Others dealt with the poem chronologically, commenting on the imagery, dealing with the mood of the poem and linking it to elements in other poems. The most successful answers focused on this ode as an expression of inner struggle in Keats' mind between optimism and pessimism. Some showed a perceptive awareness of the central crux that joy and melancholy are inseparable or, as one candidate expressed it, 'like two sides of the same coin'. This led to a sophisticated response not only to this ode, but to Keats' poetry overall.

## 2. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) Candidates used a very wide range of poems to answer this question, though 'The Man With Night Sweats', 'Night Sweat', 'Rain' and the extract from 'Long Distance' were perhaps the most popular. The strongest answers noticed the imperative 'Compare' in the question and drew interesting links between the chosen poems. In many of the answers, contextual knowledge was used appropriately, as candidates showed how their understanding had been developed by use of background material. Strong answers also focused on the 'ways' of the question, looking at the poets' language, imagery and poetic structure.
- (b) 'Hunting Snake' proved a popular poem, attracting many answers. Nearly all candidates were able to show some understanding of the ambivalent nature of the narrator's responses (fear, awe, admiration) and how the Wright's choice of words and use of form conveyed those responses. More confident candidates saw more in the final lines than just relief that the encounter was over, suggesting that a priceless, almost indescribable moment had been shared. There was some very good knowledge of the poetic techniques evident in the poem, such as caesura, enjambment and variation of metre and rhyme. Some candidates showed awareness of Judith Wright's background as a naturalist and this gave their answers an added edge, some seeing the poem as a plea for respect for the natural world; others found significant links to the aboriginal question in the writer's native Australia.

## 3. Stevie Smith: *Selected Poems*

- (a) and (b) Too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.

## 4. Achebe: *Anthills of the Savannah*

- (a) The more successful answers to this question were able to demonstrate good knowledge of the three main characters but also show how their different perspectives of events, and of each other, made for a varied and interesting narrative. Some were quite perceptive in seeing what each represented – Beatrice as the voice of women, Ikem as the voice of the people, Chris as the increasingly questioning voice of the disillusioned. Some candidates gave an indication of the different styles of the character narratives, though few referred to the omniscient fourth narrator. Less confident answers offered little more than general character studies, often including incidental characters as 'narrators'.
- (b) The passage, taken from the novel's dénouement, offered ample opportunities to candidates, with the significance of the naming ceremony and the fact that most of the extract was dialogue. More successful answers focused on several aspects of significance, for example the role of women in the ceremony, the breaking with tradition, the ceremony as a symbol of new beginnings and new hope, the variety of participants present at the ceremony and what this signified for the future. References were also made to the perpetuation of Ikem's memory and the occasional elements of humour, which lighten the mood at the end of the novel. Very alert candidates demonstrated the social mix in the ways the ideas of the characters are expressed in different voices using formal English or pidgin and gave prominence to Beatrice's growing role as leader, who converses easily in both.

## 5. George Eliot: *The Mill on the Floss*

- (a) In a number of cases, answers here were narrative based, candidates struggling to progress beyond a summary of events in the novel to show that Tom and Maggie have both had a hard life. However, more thoughtful answers showed a careful weighing up of evidence in the novel and personal engagement with the question. Such answers acknowledged Tom's sense of duty but also demonstrated Eliot's presentation of Maggie's passionate and instinctive nature and the constraints placed on her by society. Some very good answers made reference to Eliot's narrative interventions, demonstrating how the omniscient narration directs the reader's sympathies towards Maggie.

- (b) This was a very popular question, attracting a wide range of answers. More confident answers focused clearly on the passage, focusing on Stephen and Lucy's relationship through the humour of their presentation created by Eliot's descriptions and dialogue. Candidates' responses varied: some found an attractive early romance between two attractive young people, while others discovered a shallow, society relationship without real feeling or substance, despite the flirtation. A number of candidates confused Lucy's King Charles spaniel with Stephen, which had unfortunate results for their reading of the passage.

6. Katherine Mansfield: *The Garden Party and Other Stories*

- (a) Many candidates answered this question, and it was often very well done. It provoked interesting discussion of the stories – while *The Woman at the Store* and *Frau Brechenmacher* were the most popular, followed by *Millie* and *The Little Governess*, some candidates also gave subtle individual readings of stories such as *Her First Ball* and *Prelude*. While the violence, physical or sexual, is quite apparent in a number of these stories, and was discussed often with care and close reference, the most successful candidates were those who paid attention to the words 'underneath the surface' and showed how violence is hinted at in imagery or setting, or gradually revealed through narrative structure.
- (b) Quite a number of answers on the passage from *Bliss* suggested that the candidates were unaware of the rest of the story, which severely hampered the understanding of the passage itself. Those candidates aware of the story were able to contextualise the passage and relate it directly to Bertha's later discovery of the affair between her husband and Miss Fulton. Many answers concentrated on the relationship between Bertha and Miss Fulton, ignoring the question's instruction to comment on Mansfield's presentation of the women – too many answers ignored Mug and Face. Successful answers illustrated Mansfield's satirical portrayal of the women, none of whom emerge from the passage with much credit. Most candidates concentrated on the section about the pear tree, which was discussed through a number of interpretations, often symbolic, frequently sexual. The most alert candidates were able to point out that Bertha's own interpretation of her epiphanic moment is mistaken, undercutting her perception with irony.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

---

Paper 9695/04

Drama

## General comments

As always, it is fascinating for Examiners to see how candidates interpret the questions set. Throughout the ability range it was clear that candidates had gained much from their study of these texts. The best candidates were acutely aware of the theatrical nature of the texts and were willing to engage with the dramatic qualities of what they had studied. Lower down the range, candidates often took a simpler approach, preferring to deal with either theme or character. It is clear that Centres have done much to address problems of candidates filling in too much background, author-centred detail, and have done great work too in discouraging candidates from plot summary.

The most popular texts were *Julius Caesar* and *Twelfth Night*, with *A View from the Bridge* coming in a close third.

It is clear that Centres are getting more comfortable with (b) type questions, and that candidates are being carefully tutored to focus on detail and to ensure that they do not stray too far away from the specifics of the question. However, in a number of instances, candidates could have done more to ensure that they covered the whole passage (Feste's song often got little mention in 2b, for example) including *where relevant* the stage directions. Few candidates now set to and contextualize the extract, a common fault in previous years.

There were few instances of rubric infringement. Candidates are better briefed now about how to use their time wisely, balancing the two answers. There were still, however, a number of instances of candidates writing such elaborate essay plans that their time for actually responding to questions was limited.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1: Athol Fugard *The Township Plays***

- (a) There were a small number of answers on this question. Candidates plainly knew their texts well and were able to talk about the main themes and characters of *The Coat*. However, the question asked for slightly more than that, and there were very few answers that started to tussle with ideas of self-referential experimental theatre or the dramatic presentation of individual experience as a metaphor for a larger situation.
- (b) Most candidates who attempted this question were able to focus well on dramatic technique. They were able to see how the passage is a turning point for the characters involved and how there is a dramatic coming together of clearly contrasted views.

### **Question 2: William Shakespeare *Twelfth Night***

- (a) There were many excellent answers on this question. However, a number of candidates could have improved their performance quite simply by making more precise reference to what actually happens in the dying moments of the play. Few candidates, for example, made mention of Feste's song. For many, the question was an opportunity to think through the unresolved issues of the play, but as there are so many of them, some candidates simply fell into listing relationships. Very few were willing to engage with the thematic raggedness of the ending, where the values endorsed are singularly at odds with those plainly governing the rest of the play.

- (b) This passage proved popular. A number of candidates did not, however, give enough weight to the words 'presentation' and 'romantic' in the question. It is clear that the passage presents a series of different models of romantic love, each of which is interrogated by the others. More could have been made of excesses of language: oddly the Duke's language was often seen as over the top, whereas Viola's passion with all its picturesque exaggerations ('let concealment, like a worm l'th bud,/ Feed on her damask cheek') was accepted as apt appraisal of a state of mind.

**Question 3: William Shakespeare *Julius Caesar***

- (a) A number of candidates gave way to the temptation to provide narrative summary, often by dwelling on the first half of the play in order to demonstrate Caesar's dominance there. More competent answers were able to widen out discussions and see how a preoccupation with Caesar makes him live on through both Brutus' and Antony's speeches and their subsequent behaviour. The best answers were able to focus on particular moments in the second half of the play.
- (b) The question about Antony's political skills proved popular. Most candidates were able to show the manipulative nature of Antony, his cunning, and his ambiguous mix of love for Caesar and personal ambition. Candidates who talked about Antony's ability to get onto the same level as the crowd though his language, his delaying actions and his sheer sense of the dramatic possibilities of presenting the crowd with Caesar's body, got straight to the centre of the passage.

**Question 4: William Shakespeare *The Comedy of Errors***

- (a) There were a tiny number of answers on this question. Candidates were able to make effective comment on comedy (though they did tend to see it in terms of whether scenes were funny or not). Only the best were able to place the lightness of events in most of the play against the play's preoccupations with money, madness and identity.
- (b) Most candidates were able to relate the passage to its context in the play. For some, close examination of the detail allowed an opportunity for reflection on attitudes towards marriage in the play. Many candidates made sensible points about the character difference between the two sisters. There were one or two very close readings of Adriana's speech that made much of her rhetoric ('that never words... that never object... that never touch...') in order to make points about her heart-felt sense of neglect at this point in the play.

**Question 5: Charlotte Keatley *My Mother Said I Never Should***

- (a) Candidates were able to make good use of the contrast between the 'waste ground' scenes and the more realistic, linear sections of the play. A number of candidates felt that the question provided them with an opportunity to summarize the action of the play, not at all what the question required.
- (b) Although candidates were able to give a sound account of both of the scenes printed, few realized that they could apply principles of comparison and contrast between the two moments in order to make relevant points. On the whole, candidates were good at suggesting how Keatley links the different generations through her dramatic techniques. There were some interesting discussions of the importance of objects to the play as a whole, often with close reference to the passage. More could have been made of the stage directions.

**Question 6: Arthur Miller *A View from the Bridge***

- (a) There were many interesting responses here, with most candidates clearly conscious of how Alfieri plays a number of different roles from chorus, to moral centre and filter, to bridge between Italian and American values. The best answers were able to see that many of the audience's reactions towards the action are tempered and shaped by our response to Alfieri. Weaker answers tended to describe Alfieri's role simply as choric without giving much close reference to particular instances. There were one or two very fine responses on Alfieri's use of language, particularly at the end of the play.

- (b) Better candidates here were willing to engage with stage directions as a means of seeing how the scene develops. This proved helpful when trying to characterise an audience's reaction to Eddie. There was much to be made of the rather ambiguous flirtation between Eddie and Catherine which at times turns barbed. Many candidates seemed to forget that the question also asked about Beatrice; those who remembered were able to make very useful contrasts, in part by talking about her absence.

**Question 7: Richard Sheridan *The Rivals***

- (a) There were a very small number of responses to this question. Candidates were generally confident about the characters and what they did in the play, but were rather more tested by being asked to make a comparison between them. There was a slight tendency for candidates to idealise Jack as a romantic lover. Often answers provided an overview with little close reference to text.
- (b) Most candidates were able to respond in broad terms to the presentation of Sir Anthony and Mrs Malaprop. Useful comments were made about language and about how this scene contributes to a wider theme of 'the generation gap.' More could have been made of the sheer ludicrousness of both of these caricature characters and their absurd views at this point.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

---

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Paper 9695/05</b> <b>Shakespeare and other Pre Twentieth Century Texts</b></p>
--

## General comments

The overall standard this session was highly satisfactory with nearly all of the candidates achieving a sound performance. There were some candidates who were awarded full marks and only a very few who did not reach the minimum acceptable standard for this paper. It is disappointing to report that once again there were a few candidates who infringed the rubric, by offering two answers from the same section of the paper. Previous Principal Examiner reports have mentioned candidates who appeared to time their performance poorly and left insufficient time for the proper completion of the second essay. This can be a damaging mistake and even though sometimes it was a case of getting carried away with enthusiasm for the first essay it severely restricts the overall performance. Centres are once again reminded of the need to ensure that all candidates are clear on the precise demands of the paper and understand the need to divide the time available equally between the two essays.

The standard of the candidates' written English was once again commendable. Some candidates, of course, do have difficulties with expressing themselves and often the weaker marks are a result of this rather than an obvious lack of knowledge of the texts. This was particularly noticeable when candidates less confident in English tackled the Chaucer text. On a more mundane level, Centres are asked to remind all candidates to ensure that their answers are securely but not too tightly tied together and that pages are numbered and in the right order. Candidates should also indicate which question and option they are answering.

There are some specific points arising from this session. Some candidates offer unbalanced scripts where it seems that one text is much better understood and in some cases remembered even, than the other text. In some cases as indicated above this can be simple over enthusiasm for the favourite text, but there are occasions when it seems that the candidates are simply not very well prepared to tackle the second text. This is very damaging and Centres are reminded that the two answers are of equal weight in the mark scheme and that excellent knowledge of one text is not enough for candidates to achieve a good mark overall.

It was also noticeable in this session that more candidates than usual were not sufficiently confident in their grasp of the basics of their chosen texts. To give one example, from the Charles Dickens passage, there were a number of answers which were unable to specify what Rosa Dartle's relationship with Steerforth actually was and she was variously described as his wife, his sister and his servant. Such gaps in the candidate's knowledge are inevitably very limiting. On this syllabus it is vital that the candidates have a detailed and accurate knowledge of the text itself.

A further point needs to be mentioned from this session and that is the importance of reading the question very carefully. Candidates do need to consider closely the precise wording of the question and decide what the nature of the task is. This will in turn give them a clear direction to their response and enable them to select appropriate evidence and textual support for the arguments or opinions offered in the essay. Too often candidates seem to seize on the general drift of the question and launch into their response without adequate forethought or taking the time to plan their response in sufficient detail. Without a few moments of careful reflection there is grave danger of, at worst, not answering the question at all but lapsing into generalisations and repetition.

## **Comments on specific questions**

### *Section A*

#### **Question 1**

##### *King Lear*

- (a) This was on balance the less effectively answered of the two options on this text but there was nevertheless some very good work on it and with very little seriously weak work. The better answers focused on the parallel cases of Lear and Gloucester, charting in detail their painful progress from moral blindness to more profound understanding of themselves and their world. There was close discussion of Lear's self-sufficient arrogance and presumption and his redemption by suffering. In general his experiences of the storm and growing awareness of his and others' mortality tended to be skated over in favour of his reconciliation with Cordelia and its tragic outcome. The same was true in the case of Gloucester, with detailed treatment of his early follies and misjudgements but rather less of the redemptive process itself. Some responses however ignored Gloucester completely, which given his parallel situation to Lear, was a limitation. Many candidates ignored the two quotations or treated them unequally. This meant that the 'infirmity of his age' was often dealt with in great detail, candidates cataloguing a range of problems from insanity to poverty, often with telling reference to the text. However some weaker candidates were unable to avoid the trap of telling the stories of Lear and Gloucester, often it seemed because of a lack of planning or considering the detail of the question.
- (b) This was widely and well answered by the majority of candidates. Shakespeare's dramatic construction of the conflict between Lear and Kent was explored in depth and detail, effectively bringing out the strengths and weaknesses of both characters. Understandably there was much emphasis on Kent's loyalty to his king and willingness to suffer in the (doomed) quest to save him from the worst excesses of his self-deceiving follies. The better answers examined the shifting nuances of Kent's language, bringing out his own tendency to intemperate excess, focusing the limitations of his powerful honesty. Most referred to his return in disguise to lend his support to the suffering Lear, but treatment of this middle phase of the play was markedly less detailed. Some very good responses drew attention to the curious ambiguity of Kent's concluding decision to take no part in the regeneration of a damaged world and his reference to the call of his master. Again there were few if any seriously inadequate answers here, though some weaker candidates retold the whole of the 'love test' sequence which had preceded this extract. Many candidates did seem confused by Kent's status, variously described as a 'peasant farmer' and as a servant. Centres need to ensure candidates do have a firm grasp of the historical context if candidates are to interpret texts in an informed way.

#### **Question 2**

##### **Measure for Measure**

- (a) There were some very good answers to this question, exploring in well focused detail the complex presentation of sexual desire in the play. There was much comment on the comic/sinister figure of Lucio, serial fornicator and 'Mr Big of the sex industry' in Vienna. The flourishing condition of the latter was taken as evidence that, at the most basic level, sexual desire was an instinct so powerful that the attempt to curb it by law was a project doomed from the start. There was also close discussion of Claudio's plight and of the sexually ambiguous figure of the Duke. Primary focus tended to be on Angelo and Isabella, both seen as examples of sexual repression and the psychological mayhem it can cause. Isabella's obsession with the nunnery was seen as an attempt to escape the implications of her sexuality, with some perceptive analysis of her language, pervaded (as it is) by sexual tension and even, some candidates claimed, subconscious sexual appetency. Answers in the stolid/just competent range touched on some of these issues but tended to treat them in a more simplistic and polarised way. Often the distinguishing feature was whether the candidate had thought about the implications of the word 'presentation' in the question and shaped the material accordingly.



- (b) Much of the foregoing material turned up quite legitimately in answers to the (b) option, which were also of a generally good standard. In the conflict between Isabella and her brother neither was seen to come off clean. Isabella though was very often roundly condemned for her attitudes, with some telling comparisons made with Angelo and even Lucio. Key evidence was her willingness later to make use of Marianna to do that which she herself thought a damnable sin – not as one candidate put it ‘the attitude one expects from a Christian about to become a nun’. In the competition between fear of death and fear of a fate worse than death, both were guilty of questionable debating tactics and both took a solipsist view of the world and their place in it. The best responses offered telling exploration of the language, particularly Claudio’s premonitions of a world beyond the grave, and went on to examine the broader issues invoked in the (a) option. Again the more limited work used at least some of this material but with a less accomplished sense of its complexity and far reaching implications, particularly by those who accepted Isabella at face value as the spotless virgin heroine wantonly harassed by an unworthy brother, who may have started out as an ‘honour bright’ public schoolboy but quickly degenerated into an arrant coward. It is difficult for candidates to find the ‘moral’ ground in the shifting sands of Shakespeare’s play, but modern attitudes to virginity and the immortality of the soul do need to be tempered with some understanding of what these concepts might have suggested to a contemporaneous audience as well.

### *Section B*

### **Question 3**

#### **Persuasion**

- (a) This was another very popular and generally well answered question. The best work interrogated the concept of ‘persuasion’ in perceptive depth and detail. The principal focus was on Anne and the act of persuasion that led to her break with Wentworth eight years prior to the novel’s opening. The temptation here is to oversimplify a many layered issue and indeed the less accomplished answers did just that. The better avoided this pitfall, giving full value to the well-intentioned and caring aspects of Lady Russell’s intervention and contrasting it with the stiff-necked arrogance of Sir Walter, whose role in Anne’s decision was minor. It was something of a disappointment, however, that only the very best answers brought out the extent to which it was Anne’s concern for Wentworth himself and her fear of proving herself a burden rather than blessing to him, that persuaded her to reject his proposal. Most attempted a balanced view of the benefits and evils of persuasion in this case, in general taking the sanguine line. Other aspects of persuasion touched on included Sir Walter’s decision to retrench in Bath and to accept naval officers in Kellynch Hall; Wentworth’s ‘glossy nut’ lecture leading to Louisa’s near fatal confusion of ‘firmness of mind’ with mere impetuosity and obstinacy; Anne’s being the less deceived about William Elliot and his motives, and Lady Russell’s eventual acceptance that, as far as Anne’s future happiness was concerned, Wentworth was ‘a good thing’. There were also interesting explorations of self-persuasion (Wentworth’s conviction that he was ‘over’ Anne, for example) and persuasion in the sense of ‘thinking that something is true’ such as Sir Walter’s view of the importance to the rest of the world of the Eliot name and status.
- (b) There were plenty of answers to this question and, as with (a), the overall standard was pleasingly high. Most saw the passage as a narrative crux, the point at which Anne emerges as a strong and decisive character, pro-active (as we all say nowadays) rather than passive and receptive. Most referred back to the cause of Louisa’s accident, her failure to distinguish firmness of mind from mere waywardness, a mistake that had the effect of highlighting, particularly of course for the good captain, Anne’s mature virtues. There was also much discussion of the basic decency and selfless generosity of naval people, contrasted with the cold self-centredness of Anne’s own family. Even the genuine if ineffective concern of the Musgroves compared favourably to the coldness of the Eliots it was felt. The best work drew attention to the force of ‘exerting himself’, emphasising Wentworth’s struggle to shake off the inertia induced by his horror-struck impotence in the face of Louisa’s disaster. More limited answers tended to miss this telling moment, choosing to see him as always decisively in command of himself and others. The ineffectuality of Henrietta and the silliness of Mary were touched on, though the latter emerges subsequent to this passage. There was sharp focus, needless to say, on Wentworth’s praise of Anne and the nature of her reaction, indicating the moment at which she begins to have serious hope that his old feelings for her are not in fact quite dead. There was so much material here that discrimination of answers was generally based on the subtlety and lucidity with which it was handled and the perception with which Austen’s language and style was explored.

## Question 4

### Wuthering Heights

- (a) There was a plethora of material here too, at least on the 'violence and cruelty' issue, and candidates deployed it with relish. Some very good answers began with the gothic invocation of the house itself and the macabre outcome of Lockwood's initial visit as a launching pad for a discussion of the many manifestations of violence and cruelty in the novel as a whole. These were often too numerous to be explored in the necessary detail by the candidates however and 'purposeful selectivity' in the choice of material might well have improved the effectiveness of some responses. Many candidates insisted perhaps quite rightly on the pathological cruelty of Heathcliff himself and refused to make excuses for his mounting catalogue of crimes as the fiction grinds on. There were those however who saw Heathcliff as a working class hero, turning on the rich and privileged their own traditional weapons of dominance and oppression which he had suffered from in the early part of his life in the Heights. Where the answers were perhaps a shade disappointing was in their lack of a credible counter argument. Some drew attention to the redeeming qualities of the Catherine/Hareton relationship and to Bronte's treatment of nature and the seasons as the positive forces in the book, along with Nellie's good sense and, for the main part, kindness to the afflicted families. Treatment of these issues tended to be much rarer however. Cathy was seen by a minority of candidates as at least as cruel as Heathcliff, in her psychological games and selfishness but generally the Heathcliff/Cathy relationship was seen as a positive if inevitably doomed and destructive force in the novel.
- (b) Some of the foregoing material turned up in answers here, since the focus is very much on Heathcliff and his appalling cruelty to his young wife, unsympathetic though many found her. At best she was seen as naïve and stupid, at worst as a typical spoilt little rich girl lusting after 'a bit of rough'. The persisting coldness between brother and sister was seen as indicating the lack of common humanity in the Lintons beneath their surface of polite refinement. However, the strength of the most successful answers lay in their readiness to engage the issue of 'narrative techniques', with some probing analyses of the multiple narration methods and effects, the role of Nelly Dean in mediating the story and the part played by letters in filling in the blanks. Weaker candidates, though recognising the change in narrator from Nellie to Isabella, were unable to explore the effect of this and the importance of who was saying what about whom to the construction of Bronte's text.

## Question 5

### The Knight's Tale

- (a) This question turned out to be quite testing for some candidates, who variously interpreted 'the Knight himself' as Theseus, the teller of the tale, Palamon and/or Arcite and Chaucer himself. The overall standard of the response was often determined by this decision and the evidence which the candidates were able to muster to support their views. There were some very effective answers, exploring the concerns, methods and effects of the story and attempting to relate its conventions and values to those of its teller. However, many struggled with the notion of a teller who was distinct from Chaucer, restricting themselves to a list of some of the more obvious aspects of the tale, its symmetry, parallelism, concern with the formalities of courtly love, honour, battle regulations among others. Weaker candidates were often unable to do more than to give a more or less accurate summary of the main events of the tale.
- (b) The situation was much the same here. There were a few proficient answers, exploring the concerns of the tale and its characteristic methods and effects as they are encapsulated in the given passage. But most offered little beyond a paraphrase of the passage, with detailed reference to the activities of the gods and the outcome of the struggle between Palamon and Arcite.

## Question 6

### David Copperfield

- (a) Candidates seemed to find this text highly congenial and there were some very good answers to both options. In (a) candidates anatomised the David/Agnes relationship in exhaustive detail, from its inception to the vision of domestic bliss that concludes the novel. There was sensitive and perceptive awareness of the nuances of feeling involved, at least on David's side, and close analysis of his refusal to recognise the truth of his own emotions for so long. Perceptive candidates remarked on the way recognising Agnes's love for David was a crucial factor in our judgement of for example Heep and Betsy Trotwood. There was much comment on the bildungsroman aspect of the novel and the crucial role of Agnes in teaching David the values of a 'disciplined' heart. She herself was generally seen as an 'uninteresting' figure in purely fictional terms, since she remains constant throughout, unsusceptible to artistic change and development. There was so much relevant material here that discrimination of answers was frequently a matter of the focused lucidity with which it was organised and the cogency of the arguments in which it was articulated.
- (b) There were some equally good answers here, with close interrogation of the given passage as the basis for a probing exploration of Dickens's construction of Rosa Dartle and her complex role in the novel. The better work examined the language of the passage, relating it to Dickens's characteristic uses of language in the text as a whole. There was, for example, some subtle comment on how Dickens at once heightens the character of Rosa and at the same time makes clear her fatal flaws as an example of the female principle, especially in contrast to Agnes and, in certain important respects, Dora. If they represent the Victorian ideal of womanhood (flawed in Dora's case, perfect in Agnes') Rosa represents the dangers of womanhood when it's not circumscribed by a due sense of womanly submission, loyalty and usefulness. More limited answers focused the obvious aspects of the passage, the violent and dangerously untrammelled passions, while showing restricted awareness of the literary and contextual significances of what was offered. Seriously weak work on this question was often a result of simply not knowing the text well enough to place the passage or recognise the characters. Apart from the errors mentioned in the general comments above a few candidates were under the impression that Steerforth's body was in the room and that David had carried it there.

## Question 7

### The Alchemist

This was very much a minority choice in this session. Candidates who tackled (a) were often well aware of the range and scope of Jonson's 'foolish' targets but often lacked the detail knowledge of the text to support their opinions. Option (b) answers were rare but candidates did notice the increase in pace and how the conmen's webs of deceit were starting to unravel at this point. However Jonson's Elizabethan slang and panoply of rogues remain testing for all but the best prepared candidates.

## Question 8

### Andrew Marvell: Selected Poems

- (a) Candidates probed the proposition, finding it on balance inadequate to a full appreciation of the poet's work. The best work argued that a dramatic fusion of ideas and emotion is the characteristic aspect of the poetry, ranging over the text in a sharply focused way to support its case. There were some detailed references to the Dialogue poems, The Definition of Love, To His Coy Mistress, The Coronet, Little T.C., The Nymph Complaining, On a Drop of Dew, among others, establishing that in Marvell's poetic universe ideas and emotions are essentially a function of each other. Weaker answers offered potted summaries of some of the poems, the success of which approach depended largely on the understanding shown by the candidate and the ability to shape the material to the task given.

- (b) There were sophisticated exegeses of the given poem to match those on 'Bermudas' in the summer. Full weight was given to the fine shades of meaning in the poem, its delicate nuances and teasing paradoxes, leading to wider textual reference supporting the view that the poet's attitude to female beauty and allure was deeply ambivalent and richly suggestive. Weaker candidates tended to paraphrase the poem and it is important on this text perhaps more than any other that candidates have spent time in preparing and exploring the language and poetic methods in detail if they are to be adequate in their responses, especially in the option (b) questions.

## Question 9

### Gulliver's Travels

- (a) This was a popular choice but seemed, perversely, sometimes to have been chosen by Centres whose candidates were least able to cope with its peculiar demands. There were also some very well prepared candidates who had an excellent knowledge of the detail of the text and were able to shape this into a relevant and cogent argument. More successful answers attempted to argue that the satire, in its most fundamental aspects, transcends period, even arguing that it is as relevant today as it ever was. However, in weaker responses supporting textual detail was at times rather scant and undeveloped. More limited work tried to make a case for the text as a persuasive travel book but found the argument heavy going, though those who saw the text as in part the children's tale it is sometimes presented as often fared better.
- (b) Some tended to sanitise the passage, arguing that the women were indulging a fondness for foreign travel not shared by their busy husbands and that, once abroad, they exercised their charitable instincts on the hapless and impoverished locals. Better answers focused on the detail of the task and could see, beneath the naïve narration, the shadow of Swift's misogyny, coated in a confection of humour here as elsewhere in the book, but nonetheless bitter and unpalatable to swallow.

## Question 10

### Tennyson: Selected Poems

This was the least popular text on the paper. Candidates who did tackle option (a) had a rich variety of material to explore and were able to tease out a view of Tennyson's emotional landscape from the conscious poetic poses he adopts. 'In Memoriam' was often well used but other poems were less securely referred to. Option (b) was rare indeed and nearly all candidates struggled with the persona as well as the tone and context in trying to respond to the extract.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

---

Paper 9695/06

Twentieth Century Texts

## General comments

All the questions were searching and fair, with the overall level of difficulty being comparable with previous years. Most of the questions addressed such broad themes, so central to the texts that most candidates were able to generate a relevant response. Candidates should be reminded however, that when a quotation is included in the question, it is important that they examine its implications – not just its context – and use it to shape their argument. As usual, those candidates who were able to perceive the subtle implications of the questions and explore the issues in a way that showed how writers manipulate the reader's response did well. Examiners were impressed by the degree to which good candidates balanced an ability to generate an interesting, personalised and coherent argument, with a detailed commentary on specific references and brief, well-chosen quotations. This allowed them to demonstrate a literary appreciation of the effects of the writers' choices in terms of point of view, structure, language and sentence structure. Although Les Murray is becoming more popular and is done well in the big Centres, Examiners are disappointed at the reluctance of candidates to take up the poetry options and are concerned that of those that do, so many are reluctant to comment on how the poetic techniques contribute to meaning and effect. A very small number of weak candidates still opt to do a set poem with little evidence of having studied the text. There has however been a significant improvement in the analysis of dramatic effect.

The range of candidates was similar to last year. Most candidates managed to organise their time effectively and there were very few who only managed one question or produced a noticeably thinner second answer. One candidate however did write two answers on the same text. The best candidates showed evidence of real planning and produced much more tightly focused answers as a result. Candidates should be warned however that they will not be rewarded for lengthy introductions rehearsing general literary, philosophical or biographical material, or conclusions which merely summarise the essay. There were very few candidates who could not express themselves sufficiently clearly.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1 EDWARD ALBEE: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?***

Both questions gave candidates the opportunity to show extensive knowledge and good understanding with (b) proving to be more popular than (a).

- (a) The best candidates effectively argued the significance of the relationship between George and Nick with particular reference to the quotation by looking at particular exchanges between them. Through these they raised issues of the generational conflict, the values represented by the opposition of the humanities and science and the American Dream. In comparing the characters they discussed Albee's presentation of them, with many commenting on how Albee gives George superior wit and authority while exposing Nick's limitations. Competent responses presented detailed but unchallenging character portraits and made some attempt at explaining the wider significance but sometimes made heavy weather of ideas like the theme of "illusion v. reality". Weaker candidates relied upon prepared, rather limited and sometimes unbalanced descriptions of George and Nick, or talked about the ideas in a generalised way with little reference to actual scenes.
- (b) Most candidates were able to make a relevant response and explain the dramatic effect on the audience of Martha's revelation and Nick's role in it. They obviously enjoyed Martha's merciless exposure of Nick's inadequacies. Good answers not only responded to Martha's moving tribute to George, comparing what she had previously said about him, to what she says about Nick but also explored her self-loathing. The best candidates focused consistently on the exchange, pointing out moments of barbed sarcasm, irony "that's how it is in a civilised society", proleptic irony "some

stupid, liquor-ridden night ..I will go too far” innuendo, and evidence of cruel mental games-playing, always connecting with George. By looking at Albee’s choice of vocabulary, the effect of the sentence structure in both of Martha’s longer speeches, particularly the cumulative rhetorical effect of the patterning in Martha’s description of her treatment of George and the aggression generated by her questions in the final section, good candidates were able to engage with the pace, emotional temperature and dramatic effect of the extract. Such successful responses also seamlessly integrated relevant references to the wider issues of the play such as the American Dream and Albee’s presentation of marriage. Competent answers seized upon particular issues like Martha’s “would be infidelities”, the Games, why Martha could not forgive George for loving her, or her scathing criticism of Nick’s blindness in the microphone/microscope image and wrote intelligently, drawing in relevant material from the wider text. Weaker answers spent too long on Martha’s view of Nick, neglecting her long speech about George and seemed to think that George was a broken man or they wrote more generally on the themes of illusion v reality, the American Dream and the evils of alcohol.

### **Question 2 SAMUEL BECHETT: *Endgame***

This is becoming an increasingly popular text with slightly more candidates opting for the essay question than the extract, though both questions produced a full range of responses from the impressive to the barely adequate.

- (a) Candidates seemed to enjoy the possible responses inherent in the question and even where some Centres appeared not to have heard of chess, there were intelligent and useful explorations of the waiting game and death. There was some impressive understanding of wider textual issues such as The Theatre of the Absurd and Existentialism which the best candidates were able to integrate into relevant discussion of the text, though many were unable to see the comedy. Good answers did not just mention the received ideas about the cyclical nature, the routines and the chess motif but knew the characterisation of Hamm, Clov, Nell and Nag well enough to examine the responses of each to the Endgame concept, showing how it affected their behaviour towards each other. They were able to illustrate this by detailed references to specific moments and analysis of particular stage business or exchanges. There were interesting discussions about the significance of the appearance of the boy towards the end. Weaker answers tended to give received notions of the absurdist theatre with varying degrees of understanding and without showing much personal response to the text.
- (b) The opening scene offered huge scope for discussion and so while many candidates were able to offer a relevant response, those who could generate an overview of the methods and concerns and support ideas by detailed analysis of the passage tended to do much better than those opting for a running commentary approach. These candidates tended to spend too long on the set and stage directions, neglecting the speeches. Good answers had a genuine understanding of the genre, and were able to analyse the symbolism of the set, Clov’s routines, and the language in some detail commenting on the issues raised by “it’s finished”, “the impossible heap”, “Me to play”, time, “Zero” and the characterisation of Clov and Hamm. They looked at the dependency between the two and evidence of tension linking this scene with its peculiar mixture of bad-temper, pathos and humour, to the wider text in ways which brought out an appreciation of the structure and dramatic effect. Competent answers had some intelligent ideas but had problems balancing generalised background material, themes and a detailed attention to the extract. The weakest answers were often so absorbed in the “absurdity” that they could not get beyond the “monotony” and “lack of communication” and asserted that the audience would be merely bored and bewildered by the meaninglessness of the experience.

### **Question 3 CARYL CHURCHILL: *Top Girls***

This is becoming an increasingly popular choice of text with option b) proving the more popular. Candidates often showed much evidence of knowledge and engagement with both themes and characters but often struggled to determine the dramatist’s attitudes. They knew it was feminist and related it to the Thatcher era, but only the most able were able to explore the ambiguity in the representation of women and feminism.

- (a) This question was either done very well or very badly with many candidates misunderstanding the meaning of “time scheme”. Some focused exclusively on the idea of characters coming from different times in the first act while some thought it was about characters coming in “on time” or cutting across each other in the dialogue or the play lasting a certain time and giving a summary of the plot. Good answers analysed the sequence of scenes identifying the questions raised by the first act about the historical and universal aspects of a woman’s lot - the strengths of some of the historic/fictional characters, the limitations imposed on them by men and Gret’s sense of collective strength and then explored the extent to which these were answered in the subsequent scenes. With reference to particular exchanges they were able to show the partial nature of liberation when society and the work place is still dominated by male principles and attitudes. They were also able to discuss how the argument between Marlene and Joyce raised the issue of individualism and collective conscience, exposed Marlene’s inadequacies and discussed the significance of Angie’s final comment of “Frightening” . In focusing on the final act they were able to discuss the dramatic effect of the time shift and the light this shed on previous scenes.
- (b) The best candidates managed to produce answers which balanced the concerns of the passage and the themes of the whole play using references to other characters and exchanges to support and broaden the discussion.. They addressed the issue of gender and social /political context of the play by exploring the ambiguity in the presentation of women and feminism . They looked at the ways in which – for all her apparent brisk professionalism, Win was undermining Louise’s confidence in her abilities and prospective areas of employment; while at the same time bringing out Louise’s own prejudices. There was some intuitive if rather tentative probing of the dramatic effects of the extract with not enough attention paid to the structure of the dialogue, the variations in pace or tone between the characters in the short exchanges – eg the intimacy of “Now just between ourselves” with the aggressive probing of “But why are you now...” and the longer speeches from Louise. Competent answers were able to discuss some of the ideas, and show how Louise was being discriminated against and make some intelligent comments about Win’s judgement and approach. Weaker answers gave brief character sketches, summarising the passages, or gave very generalised, personal ruminations on the position of women, the life/work balance and often spent too long on the significance of alcohol.

#### Question 4 LES MURRAY: *Selected Poems*

This is not a popular text but it is encouraging to see slightly more take up of Les Murray. Option (b) proved more popular, but both questions prompting a range of answers, with some candidates offering a sensitive appreciation of Murray’s style.

- (a) It was good to see some candidates taking issue with the proposition in the essay question, discussing Murray’s celebration of the extraordinary in poems where ordinary, bored lives are suddenly touched by remarkable experiences, though many opted for poems like *Louvre* and *The Shower* to assert agreement to the question but offered little explicit or sustained appreciation of the poetic techniques and effects.
- (b) There were some constructive attempts to explain the poem with more developed responses including a discussion of Murray’s use of travel, landscape, chance encounters, reminiscent tone and characteristic poetic style. The best candidates commented on the effect of the inclusion of the reader, and the speculations about the community you are invited to make from the poet’s observations “a light going out in a window here has meaning.” They attempted to comment on a variety of stylistic features: the effect of the long sentence with its almost casual use of alliteration in the first stanza; the effect of particular words the use of personification in describing the creek or houses, the alliteration and paradox of the “dim dazzling” blades. However while many candidates commented on the effect of a particular word here and there, there was a reluctance to explore the implications and nuances of Murray’s use of significant detail and vocabulary e.g. “perhaps” “shyness” “calendared kitchens” “agog” and the “dead match”. Many candidates are adept at selecting appropriate quotations to support their discussion of theme, or point of view but they should be encouraged to follow through with a comment on how the choice of language in the quotation contributes to the meaning or effect. Competent candidates attempted a running commentary of the poem to bring out its meaning, sometimes noting poetic techniques but often not able to express their contribution to the effect. Weaker candidates sometimes struggled with received ideas about Murray’s preoccupations with man’s effect on nature or the political/ economic issues of urban development and rural deprivation and gave a very sketchy treatment of the poem.

### Question 5 R.K.NARAYAN: *The Guide*

This was a very popular text with (b) proving to be the preferred option.

- (a) The best scripts ably combined detailed textual knowledge with a well developed argument pertinently addressed to the quotation. The ability to offer shrewd, independent evaluation invited by the phrases “*How far*” and “*in what ways*” distinguished the most accomplished responses. Good candidates understood that they had to look beyond the Swami role to the extent to which Raju was playing other roles expected of him and from which he could not escape either by circumstances or because of his own character. Very good candidates understood that the essence of this question was the contrast between what Ryan understood of his own character and actions and the reality to which the reader is given access through the interwoven narrative points of view. Competent answers explored the notion of “roles” extensively but had less interesting ideas on “*escape*” and though they might mention the dual narrative, rarely addressed the ambiguity and humour. Weaker candidates either focused on the swami section, or gave a narrative account of Raju’s journey from sinner to saint without any reference to the key words of the question.
- (b) Most candidates focused on the relationship and the consequences for both Raju and his mother in terms of plot with better candidates able not only to put the mother into her cultural context but also to show how this contributed to Narayan’s exploration of the theme of social change and the conflict between tradition and modern values. Some of the best responses adopted an adventurous, holistic approach to the passage often beginning with the middle or end and offering brief, but pertinent wider textual allusions while focusing on the effects of the writing in the passage to look at nuances in character presentation and authorial intention. Weaker candidates either wrote a general essay about the relationship or focused on Raju’s fear of his mother and paraphrased the passage. There were a lot of unproductive censorious comments on Raju’s behaviour. Some candidates provided a useful framework of comments on narrative method but did not illustrate with reference to the extract. Those who did notice significant phrases e.g. “she hissed a whisper.....She is a real snake woman...”, tended to focus on the significance of the “snake” in Christian and Hindu religions and neglected to discuss the effects of the actual words. Few commented on the sensuousness of the descriptions of Rosie or the comic effect of the sentence structure and choice of language in the listed anecdotes about “husbands”. It was surprising how little awareness there was of the effects created by Raju’s own voice in the majority of responses to this question. Some noted Raju’s ability to manipulate his mother but were satisfied with having made a point about character; few were prepared to question whether Rosie was “completely devoted “ to his mother or to consider the implications of Raju stating his mother’s motives were “naively clear. She was still supposed to be ignorant of Rosie’s affairs but she talked pointedly.” This reluctance to comment on the “*effects of the writing*” compromises the ability of intelligent, well-prepared, articulate candidates to gain the highest band. At all levels however, candidates showed obvious enjoyment and engagement with the text and often an impressive command of textual detail.

### QUESTION 6 JEAN RHYS: *The Wide Sargasso Sea*

This was another popular choice. Many candidates were anxious to show off their extensive knowledge of the text and needed to consider the focus of the questions more carefully.

- (a) The best scripts noted the differences between Rochester and Antoinette’s association , perception and reaction to the natural world and so effectively handled the importance of the word “*significant*” in the question. They were informed by an awareness of literary technique and explored issues such as the combination of comfort and menace that Antoinette finds in her natural surroundings and the function of the symbolism in terms of structure, characterisation and effect. “When Antoinette dreams of a huge dark forest we are afraid of her fate when she goes to Grande Bois.” Few were able to address the context and significance of the quotation directly. Competent responses often tended to consist of discrete comments on Rochester’s and Antoinette’s responses and a series of relevant symbols, showing a detailed knowledge of the text but less ability to generate a coherent exploration of the theme. Other scripts offered generalised narration of examples from the natural world and there seemed to be some dependence upon prepared answers.



- (b) This was the more popular option. More straightforward responses tended to focus on the opposites that occupy Antoinette's thoughts: sunshine and death, brightness and dark, Heaven and Hell, and related these to her earlier experience in the novel and less frequently to subsequent events. Many saw Mr Mason's visits and his hinted plan as part of a pattern in which Annette and Antoinette's lives are destroyed by men's actions. Some of the more sophisticated character studies of Antoinette explored the ideas of "refuge", "death" and "happiness" picking up on the contrast between freedom and safety in the passage, detecting in Antoinette the conflicting impulses of conformity (the use of "we" in the earlier part of the passage, taking comfort in communal routine) and her independence as shown by her leading an intense inner life, working out her own response to the religious doctrine. Very good answers depended on a candidate's willingness to look in detail at "the effects of the writing" and there was some nice sensitivity to shifts in tone and pace through some analysis of the sentences structure: "But what about happiness.....happiness, well." Or the significance of the broken sentence in which Mason avoids disclosing his plan. Even though many candidates seemed unfamiliar with the liturgical references "now and at the hour of our death", "perpetual light", some of them tried to explore the effect of the repetition in communicating Antoinette's state of mind in the passage – and throwing light on her suicide. Weaker candidates found it difficult to come to grips with the demands of the question and the extract, used narrative summary to explain how Antoinette came to be in the convent and saw Mr Mason as a kindly step-father.

#### QUESTION 7 DEREK WALCOTT: *Selected Poetry*

Both questions produced some impressive answers, with weaker candidates opting for (b).

- (a) Candidates wrote competently on an "islander haunted by the colonial past" but were less able to explore the "ambivalent feelings about the island's present". Most managed to give an account of appropriate poems such as *Ruins of a Great House* and *The Almond Trees* to illustrate Walcott's feelings towards the islands' history but while some could explain in general terms Walcott's concerns with the impact of development and tourism, they were short of detailed references to poems like *Ebb*, *The Virgins* and *Parades Parades*. Some avoided the issue by talking about Walcott's feelings towards his own present, which, with a reference back to the question "How far?" could have been productive. The best candidates generated a coherent argument based on close readings of the poems. They were able to comment on how the choice of images communicated Walcott's feelings, they understood the issue of ambivalence and there was some successful analysis of his methods and effects particularly when candidates were writing about *The Almond Trees*. Competent candidates wrote in more general terms, clear on the ideas but often referring more briefly to a wider range of poems.
- (b) This was the more popular option and the majority of candidates rose to the challenge of offering a personal response to the poem, the more successful candidates being those who understood what was entailed in writing a "critical appreciation". Even those who were presenting an intuitive response to the poem, tentatively exploring the nuances of meaning and feeling, engaged sensitively with the expression and were able to explore and comment on the impact of specific details. The more assured candidates noted the significance in the use of pronouns; the dehumanisation of the industrial images; the crucial connection between London and the West Indies through the language and imagery, and the references to Empire and "heart of our history, original sin". They debated with themselves the possible implications of the tolling bell, the flight of the birds in the last stanza and a few made perceptive comments on the structure, the rhyme scheme and effects of the sentence structure. Less assured candidates gave partial accounts of the poem, some limiting their focus to the description of London, with some limited commentary on the choice of particular words when teasing out the meaning.

## QUESTION 8 VIRGINIA WOOLF: *Mrs Dalloway*

This is an increasingly popular choice of text, often producing substantial and worthwhile responses. Many candidates showed an impressive command of significant detail and a mature, academic essay writing technique.

- (a) This option was often chosen by strong candidates who offered well organised, varied discussion which retained a constant focus on the distinctions in the question. Specifically they were able to synthesise critical evaluation “How far?” with strong literary appreciation of style and authorial intention “in what ways?” and sustain a critical perspective which allowed them to address the appropriateness of the comment. Candidates were often more concerned to show the presence of the material world and produced detailed references to inform a discussion on themes such as class, gender and society. The best of these showed how the responses of Clarissa and Septimus to the material world and society were crucial to an understanding of their inner lives and took some pleasure in examining how the narrative method provided significant triggers for revelations and the style captured Septimus’s inner terrors and Clarissa struggle to find her own sense of inner peace from her connection with others. Competent answers showed evidence of both sides of the question, sometimes offering quite detailed character portraits while less assured answers struggled with the complexity of the question and gave generalised account of character and method which sometimes had implicit relevance.
- (b) The most able candidates offered excellent , accomplished analysis of the effects of the writing with sustained focus upon the relationship between Sally Seton and Mrs Dalloway. Not only were they able to show what Sally represented to Clarissa but some were also able in varying degrees to examine the presentation of her memories: the language, the accumulation of detail, the symbolism, sentence structures, use of parenthesis, the effect of the direct speech in the interior monologue which combine to suggest Clarissa’s capacity for passionate feeling. Competent candidates understood that Sally represented a modern independent woman and concentrated on demonstrating the contrast with Clarissa by referring to the wider text though few could examine Clarissa’s later reaction to Sally at the party. Weaker candidates depended on fragmented narration or were overly concerned with discussing lesbianism.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

---

Paper 9695/07

Comment and Appreciation

## General comments

This was a very pleasing session; candidates generally seemed considerably more confident and more critically aware than has sometimes been the case in previous years. All three questions - but particularly the drama and the poetry - led to some very thoughtful writing, personally engaged but at the same time critically astute and controlled, and there were very few candidates indeed who appeared entirely unable to respond in some appropriate and sensitive manner to at least parts of each question. It has often been the case in past years that some answers have been very "mechanical", identifying and/or listing poetic or dramatic techniques but not exploring how these have helped to create particular effects or reader-responses; such answers were considerably fewer this session, which made for much more enjoyable reading for the examiners, but more importantly suggested that Centres and their candidates have become increasingly aware of how criticism and appreciation of unseen writing needs to be approached.

Many candidates clearly planned what they were going to say before they began to write, though many also appeared to launch straight into their answer without any thinking or preparation at all; occasionally this could lead to some unexpected and sudden insights, but far more often the result was an answer that wandered without any apparent plan or focus. There is no need for examiners to see a plan, but candidates would be well advised to spend a few minutes reading and carefully considering the extract/poem before setting pen to paper; they have, after all, a full hour to write each answer.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

**Question 1** and **Question 2** together was by far the most common pairing, and it was very evident indeed that this relatively short piece of drama was greatly enjoyed and appreciated by virtually every candidate who tackled it. Many took it entirely seriously, missing the often quite gentle but also quite significant humour, but provided that the arguments proposed were clearly and thoughtfully presented and illustrated this was never a "fault", and many such serious responses gained top-band marks.

Betty was rightly seen as the central character, and most candidates found her to be drawn by Churchill as at best irritating and at worst truly annoying; there was some sympathy for her in that she is so isolated, bored, and clearly disliked by Joshua, but most seemed to feel that at least some of her misery is self-induced, and many candidates clearly and actively disliked her - she was described variously as "lazy, conventional (is this necessarily a fault?), play-acting, attention-seeking, neurotic, humourless, hypochondriac". Her child-like adoration of Clive was seen by some as sweet and romantic, but by many more as rather cloying and sickly, and there was considerable feeling that Joshua is right in what he says about her laziness. On the other hand, of course, she is shown to be genuinely fond of her husband, and obviously worried by his absence from home, though her apparent tendency to hysteria and fainting was regarded by many candidates as further evidence of her immature and attention-seeking nature. Many saw her as racist, but more discerning answers pointed out that if she was prejudiced then this was largely because of her status and upbringing rather than a real dislike of black Africans; the most discerning suggested that it was perfectly understandable to dislike Joshua as he is portrayed in the extract!

Clive was generally viewed with some sympathy, not just because of having to tolerate a somewhat feeble wife, but because of the calm and controlled manner in which he handles both her and Joshua. His stiff-upper-lip attitude ("We are not in this country to enjoy ourselves") and his obvious love of his Queen and his professional responsibility ("It makes me proud. Elsewhere in the empire the sun is rising") were seen by some candidates as part of the humour already mentioned - Churchill is perhaps mocking the colonial pride that Clive demonstrates. His relationship with Joshua was regarded by most as quite interesting, and in many ways as a much healthier one than he has with his own wife, though his wink behind Betty's back was often - and rightly, perhaps - viewed as a less than generous action. There is, too, surely some further gentle humour in the fact that "He has saved my life. I have saved his life"; this is more the stuff of a rip-roaring old-style colonial tale than a convincing piece of "fact". Again, however, no candidate was in any way penalised for taking it seriously, as there is no evidence in the extract that it is not serious.

Joshua proved an elusive character, as Churchill seems to have made him; is he telling the truth, or is Betty's version the correct one? We cannot tell from the extract, but it does seem probable that the latter is the case, particularly given his (mock?) apology, Clive's surely ironic "I'm very shocked . . . very shocked"), and then his surreptitious wink. He is clearly a man with a sense of fun, like Clive, and perhaps, also like Clive, he enjoys teasing Betty. There is, however, a slightly more sinister undercurrent running through the second half of the passage which many candidates did notice and discuss.

Although drama, there is little apparent action, which made it all the more surprising that some candidates failed entirely to comment on the last ten lines or so, where there is some clear dramatic movement. The wink is highly important, of course - but not all answers referred to it - but so too are the positioning and action implied in Clive and Betty's waving to Harry Bagley as well as in their words to each other. And what can Betty mean in her final words?

## Question 2

This was the most popular question of the three, and the poem gave rise to a large number of very sensitive and thoughtful answers; perhaps because of its highly personal nature, and because most candidates have mothers for whom they feel similarly deep affection, much of the writing was quite emotional, but almost never at the expense of some perceptive and often highly controlled critical discussion as well.

There was one frequent misreading, which did mean that a significant number of candidates found themselves in difficulties, and were sometimes unable to extricate themselves from these. Line 7 says "But even were you here . . .", with the apparent implication that the speaker's mother has died; however, the rest of the poem, and especially line 10, surely makes it unarguably clear that the mother is alive - though certainly in at least a metaphorical sense absent, either because of serious ill health or perhaps because of some form of senile dementia. Whatever the cause of this "absence", there can be no doubt that she is alive, and that she is now necessarily being comforted by her daughter; the roles are reversed, as so many candidates pointed out, and the neat and very moving irony of the poem is that the speaker finds the comfort that she so urgently calls for, not by creeping into her mother's arms as she used to do, but by doing exactly the reverse - the comforter is comforted in turn, and both people in the poem receive comfort in the final lines.

The misreading, then, should not have happened; where it did, however, candidates were not necessarily "penalised", provided that what they wrote about the remainder of the poem was consistent with their particular interpretation, and provided that it was clearly and appropriately supported by quotation and reference.

This is not the place to write a critical commentary on the poem itself, but it is worth noting - as did very many candidates - that its structure and its rhyme-scheme are helpful in creating its meaning and its emotion. It is a tightly controlled piece, with a regular rhythm and rhyme pattern; where it breaks, in lines 13 and 14, it is surely in order to reflect a sudden change of mood in the speaker ("I lose the weight of years") and to echo her personal realisation of what is happening to her. The closing couplet is, like that of stanza 1, moving and powerful in its simplicity and its completeness. The poem is most certainly not blank verse, or free verse, as some candidates asserted, nor can it any way really be described as a nursery song or lullaby, though one can perhaps understand the thinking behind these last two misconceptions.

As noted earlier, few candidates wasted time simply listing the poetic devices used, though there were still a few who spent a great deal of time defining several - assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia for example, and then concluding such a survey with the words "there are no examples of these in the poem". Quite apart from the fact that this was not necessarily true, it is surely an entirely pointless exercise to explore what is *not* in the poem.

### Question 3

As noted above, relatively few candidates tackled these two passages, but there were some very good and thoughtful responses to them, and none that was entirely non-critical in approach. A good number, it is true, did rely overmuch on paraphrase and/or listing of effects, and some of the comparisons were very obvious and critically unhelpful; a few spent many unnecessary lines explaining how the different kinds of townscape described by Dickens and Hill, and the different kinds of transport referred to, proved that the two passages were written many years apart - the dates at the end of each passage in the examination paper should have been enough to show this. Unexpectedly, because this in past years has been what has happened in poetry questions rather than in prose ones, there were many answers that simply identified similes and metaphors (not always correctly), alliteration, assonance, repetition and other devices, without any real sense of why the writers used them. Some candidates noted simply that passage (a) has four paragraphs and passage (b) has twelve, as if this alone was a critical point. What does matter, of course, is what Dickens and Hill *do* with their very different paragraphs; some made good comments on this, especially Hill's use of very short, even one-word, paragraphs, and there were some interesting thoughts about how Dickens's longer and slower style reflects both the less urgent life-style of the 1850s and at the same time the fact that he wants to demonstrate how his fog permeates every possible aspect of London life. Hill does this by using all five senses between lines 5 and 12, at the same time drawing the reader into his description by his repeated use of the pronoun "you". A few also noted the similarity in the two closing paragraphs - Dickens's repetition of superlatives, and Hill's repetition of "confusion" - for different purposes and with different effects, but still with another kind of link between the two.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

---

Paper 9695/08

Coursework

## General comments

As is often the case in the November session, this year's entry was relatively small, but the work submitted was of a very pleasing standard indeed; Centres showed a real confidence in what they asked candidates to do, and marking was almost invariably closely in line with agreed standards for the syllabus. Candidates demonstrated a good – often very good – knowledge of their texts, and wrote with fluency and control, and more importantly with some considerable critical skill. It was a real pleasure to read some very confident and sophisticated responses to a range of interesting and not always “easy” texts; the poetry of T S Eliot, for example, is most certainly not straightforward, and that of Emily Dickinson, John Ashbery and Eileen Duggan presents a real intellectual challenge for any critic of any age. The novels chosen – and unusually there was no drama at all this session – included Atwood's “Cat's Eye”, Conrad's “Heart of Darkness” and William Satchell's novel about New Zealand, “The Greenstone Door”.

Writing on poetry can often be very superficial and “factual”, relying over-much or even entirely upon either simple paraphrase, or upon a listing of poetic techniques, or even upon straightforward personal responses with no critical discussion or support, so it was particularly pleasing to read essays this year which made sure that they really were properly critical in approach, looking closely at the poets' styles and techniques, not just for their own sake but in the light of what they were saying and how they were saying it. Poetry can become a relatively weak and under-appreciated relative of prose and drama, but the opposite was almost the case this year, where there were some excellent essays on poetry, but some on the novels which tended more towards character study and/or narrative rather than tightly critical.

As noted above, the marks awarded by Centres were very close indeed to agreed standards, and it was clear that the published Marking Criteria had been borne in mind when assessing the work. In some Centres, however, there was very little annotation – and in some instances none at all – to indicate to the Moderator or indeed to the candidate how the marks had been reached. Marginal annotation, especially when related to the requirements of the **Marking** Criteria, is always very helpful, and there should most certainly be a summative comment on each essay and on the folder as a whole, to show clearly to the Moderator the strengths and perhaps weaknesses that have led to the final mark. This is especially important in those occasional cases where – quite legitimately – the agreed final mark is not the same as a simple arithmetical addition of the two separate essay marks.

A few folders exceeded the word limit, and no apparent note had been taken of this by the Centres concerned. No work should be submitted that is over 3000 words in total; candidates must be asked to edit their work before submitting it for marking, and if still necessary to edit and reduce it before it is finally marked. As with a timed examination, it is essential that all candidates, from all Centres, work to exactly the same rules and within the same boundaries.

Overall, then, this was a very good session, producing work of a high standard generally, and proving once more the enormous value of work that has been planned, prepared, discussed and drafted over a lengthy period of time – and perhaps too offering evidence of the real pleasure that most candidates appeared to obtain from what they had read and written. There was very clearly some excellent teaching behind most of the work, and almost certainly some very satisfied candidates – congratulations are well deserved.