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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

General comments on 9695/03, 04, 05 and 06

Examiners offer the following advice to candidates:

In the introduction a good answer will:

- identify key phrases from the question for explanation or discussion
- show that the candidate has an overview of the text which can be articulated briefly and used as a context for the question; the candidate needs to show how the aspect specified in the question contributes to an understanding of the text.

The main body of the answer will exhibit a clear line of argument, addressing the question with relevant illustrations and passages of close analysis. Phrases will signpost the reader to aspects of the analysis which should include comment on:

- the treatment of the theme: not merely a statement of what the theme is but identifying the writer's approach (e.g. comic, ironic, argumentative, satiric, reflective, dramatic)
- narrative method and point of view, organisation and development of a scene or structure of the text
- functions of the characters – how they contribute to the effects and meanings of the text
- methods of characterisation: a discussion not simply of what characters are like but how their qualities are constructed by their own words and actions, other characters' comments, the omniscient narrator
- choice of language and structure and effects they generate in ways that reinforce meaning.

Good answers will make a point, illustrate it by quotation then comment on the effects of the language in the quotation: e.g. "The use of the word or phrase x is interesting, effective, significant or typical here because" thus maximising the value of references and quotations by commenting on some aspect of technique while also making a point about setting, character or theme.

When answering **(b)**-type passage-based questions candidates should show an understanding of what is meant by "critical appreciation", "methods" and "dramatic effect", by focusing on the detail of the passage, explaining what is significant about the passage in terms of plot, treatment of the theme, revelation of character etc. by showing how the writer's choices of language and structure generate meaning and effects.

Most often candidates work through the passage line by line, stanza by stanza, paragraph by paragraph; this approach can be effective but also may create problems: it encourages a reliance on paraphrase and can lead to repetition; often candidates using this approach do not reach the end of the passage which is often crucial to effects and meaning.

In dealing with dramatic texts there is often little sense of performance, of what the scene might be like in the theatre. Good answers analyse the scene in terms of what it contributes to the overall effect by considering, e.g.: how character is revealed through specific words and stage directions; how comedy works or tension is built up and how all these elements together with mood and tone are generated by the choice of language and action. References beyond the passage are used to show how characteristic of the text (or not) these aspects are, and how the passage relates to the text as a whole. Candidates can then address the terms of the question and show "How far and in what ways" a passage is characteristic in a logical, detailed way.

In dealing with poetry there is a tendency, even among competent candidates, to deal with the themes/concerns and pay scant attention to poetic technique. Comments are often confined to identifying one example of a particular feature – simile, alliteration, etc. – and noting the mechanics of the rhyme scheme without considering the effects achieved by these devices. It is rare to find candidates examining the sensuous effects of the language, how the sound and rhythm of the spoken verse is managed to vary pace and tone, to foreground particularly significant words or mimic the movement of what is being described.

Good answers place the poem within the context of the writer’s development of particular concerns, showing what is characteristic of a poet’s work in terms of treatment of a theme and technique and use this in an introduction to set an agenda for their essay.

In dealing with the poem’s concerns, good answers present an overview of the idea from its starting point, often a specific, concrete situation, developing to a more philosophical, personal or generalised reflection at the end. They note the “turn”, the key moment of recognition or realisation which leads to the conclusion, and register specific evidence for comments on point of view, and where appropriate distinguish the view of the *persona* in the poem.

Most of the essay should be devoted to showing how the writer’s decisions in terms of form, management of rhyme and rhythm, choice of register, lexis and sound qualities of words, figurative and rhetorical devices generate effects and feelings which communicate meaning.

All answers should show evidence of personal engagement with the texts through detailed analysis.

Paper 9695/03

Poetry and Prose

General comments

The examination in this session prompted a wide range of answers from candidates, many showing confidence and a real engagement with their set texts. Examiners enjoyed reading some very stimulating answers to the questions and, by and large, candidates throughout the mark range were able to show a thorough knowledge of the texts they had studied. In some cases they were able to put this knowledge into a wider cultural and historical perspective, leading to very sophisticated responses.

With the departure of William Blake from the syllabus, many Centres chose to study the replacement poet, John Keats, while *A Grain of Wheat* remains an enormously popular text. Only the poetry of Stevie Smith was neglected.

The more confident candidates are able to shape and develop their answers to the open **(a)** questions, and the most successful are those who can focus their points with close reference and quotation. Such candidates avoid the retelling of narrative, constructing their answers around specific points of argument which are in turn related to specific parts of the text. A number of candidates write weaker answers because they lack close reference and quotation to support the points they make. It is very difficult to write successfully about a writer’s techniques without quotation, and some of the poetry essays in particular were significantly hampered by a lack of quotation. The most successful answers to the passage **(b)** questions look very closely at the printed material and are able to comment in considerable detail on the writers’ choices of language, imagery and form and their effects.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**John Keats: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Though a popular choice, Keats seems to have caused problems for a number of candidates. Though those candidates who answered this question were aware of what narrative poetry is, many answers were inappropriate. Some elected to write about suitable poems, such as *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *The Eve of St Agnes*, *Hyperion* and *Lamia*, but merely recounted the story without addressing the question. Others tried, usually unsuccessfully, to construct a case for *Ode to a Nightingale* or *Ode on a Grecian Urn* as narrative poems. This meant that those candidates who tackled the question with confidence shone out, and there were candidates who wrote with skill and sensitivity on Keats' use of setting and his creation of atmosphere, of his characterisation and use of dialogue, on his management of actions and events within the poems. In such answers, candidates usually concluded that the skills of the poet and the skills of the story-teller were very closely interwoven in these poems.
- (b) There were, equally, some very successful and well-informed answers on this poem, including those who were able to place it within Keats' development as a poet. Such answers traced the references to Shakespeare and *King Lear* and connected them to Keats himself, noting the 'cockney poet's' own desire for immortality. On the other hand, there is little to be gained by beginning such an essay with a substantial biography of Keats, as a number of candidates did. There were some misreadings of the poem, notably those who connected *King Lear* with 'the golden-tongued romance', and others who thought the poem voiced Keats' complaint about being obliged to read Shakespeare again. Such answers suggested that the candidates may not have prepared the poem, and perhaps had not prepared the longer narrative verse either and thus felt unable to answer (a). The attraction of the set selection is its variety, and candidates should be encouraged to be prepared to answer on the whole range of Keats' poetry contained in it.

Question 2Ed. Hydes: *Touched with Fire (Sections A and B)*

- (a) *The Wild Swans at Coole*, *The Pond*, *Porpoises*, *Tall Nettles* and *Thistles* were all popular choices of poems by candidates answering this question. While many candidates were able to give at least reasonable accounts of the poems, only the most confident went beyond that to look more precisely at what the question was asking. Those candidates who linked their points about the language and form of the poems directly to the responses of the poets, and compared those responses, did very well.
- (b) The question on *Piano and Drums* was probably the most frequently answered question on the entire paper. It stimulated an enormous number of responses, many of which were very good – thoughtful, observant and sensitive. Some candidates wrote about the two forms of music only, but most placed the two instruments within a cultural context and noted the two influences pulling the narrator of the poem in different directions. While there was some polemic writing about colonialism, the most successful candidates based their answer on details from the poem, noting the singular and plural in the title, for example, the connections and differences between 'spears poised' and 'daggerpoint', the energetic verbs in the drums section. Candidates noted the warmth and nostalgia in the writing about the drums, and some dismissed the piano, but other more sensitive readers noted the 'coaxing diminuendo' and the 'new horizons'; the narrator is 'lost' and 'wandering', but the final 'mystic rhythm' is of the drums and concerto combined. The last stanza is crucial, and it is therefore not surprising that many of the excellent answers to this question began with that stanza, rather than taking a linear approach to the poem.

Question 3

Stevie Smith: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were very few answers on Stevie Smith, but those who answered this question chose appropriate poems. *Not Waving But Drowning*, *Egocentric*, *Deeply Morbid* all appeared, alongside a number of others. While candidates were able to illustrate the 'frustrations, anxieties and despairs' of life in the poems, they tended to be less successful in showing how their presentation in the poems is 'fresh' and 'unexpected'.
- (b) The pattern was similar with this question. Candidates chose additional poems usefully to discuss alongside *God and the Devil*, and made comments on Smith's view of humanity. Few, though, explored how Smith communicates that view.

Question 4

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

- (a) The stumbling block for some candidates with this question was the tendency to write a narrative summary of Margaret's time in Milton Northern. Others, more successful, cited the influences in Milton which affect Margaret's development: Thornton, the Higginses, the riot and her parents, for example. The best answers clearly focused on the question, which was on 'the ways' Gaskell shows 'Margaret learning'. Such answers referred to Gaskell's description of the physical impact Milton makes on Margaret, on the sympathetic conversations with Bessy Higgins and the more earnest ones with her father, on the robust arguments between Margaret and Thornton and on the presentation of her own self doubts. Such answers were able to range through the novel, citing episodes from London, Milton and Helstone to focus the points of argument, and thus avoided any lapse into narrative summary.
- (b) The passage was a popular option, offering plenty of material to candidates. Successful answers focused closely on the language employed by Gaskell, noting the 'deep lead-coloured cloud', the descriptions of streets and buildings, the verbs of motion and activity and Margaret's mental comparisons between the northerners and the crowds in London. Reference was made to the dialogue, comparing Margaret's rather terse contributions to conversation with her father's longer, informative sentences, suggesting a difference between their responses before they 'looked at each other in dismay' at the end of the extract. Candidates who summarised the content of the passage, without such close attention, missed opportunities and were less successful.

Question 5

Katherine Mansfield: *Short Stories*

- (a) This was the less popular of the two options on Mansfield, and while the candidates who attempted it usually chose appropriate stories to discuss, many of the answers tended towards narrative and did not explore the significance of the location in the kind of detail required by the question. *The Woman at the Store*, *Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding*, *The Garden Party* and *At the Bay* were frequently chosen stories, offering different types of locations and different effects upon the stories and the characters who inhabit them.
- (b) Many of the answers on the extract from *Her First Ball* were enthusiastic and sensitive. Candidates noted the bird imagery and the interweaving of description, dialogue and thought which contributes to Mansfield's dreamlike presentation of Leila's experience at the ball. Some answers compared this fantasy presentation of dancing with the description of the grim dancing lessons with the 'cold piano' and 'Miss Eccles poking the girls' feet' and connected this harsher reality with the fat man and the development of his character later in the story.

Question 6

Ngugi: *A Grain of Wheat*

- (a) This question provoked some very interesting answers, some candidates acknowledging that they found the narrative structure challenging at first reading, but came to appreciate the perspectives on the tale and history which it provides. Many candidates recognised the importance of the past in determining the present and the future as a reason why Ngugi employs the dislocated chronology in the novel. A number of candidates wrote only about the importance of the past, however, without acknowledging the structure of the novel. Others noted the interweaving of past and present, often indicated in the narrative by such references as 'Then, as now...' and 'Without warning he was back in Nyeri...' Some linked these timeshifts with the different perspectives of the novel and noted the effects on the reader. Such effects suggested were the creation of puzzles and suspense, and the modification of the readers' sympathies as they read.
- (b) The most successful answers to this question noted how closely the personal and political were interrelated; some answers listed the sections they considered personal and those they considered political, which was a much more limiting approach to the question. Confident candidates noted that the personal was first indicated by the passage being Mumbi's first person narration, and showed how wider political actions caused individual suffering, highlighted by the fact that the rebel leader at the centre of the political actions was her brother. Other candidates compared the political events with personal concerns of human relationships and love within the passage, noting Karanja's attraction to Mumbi, while others considered how characters balanced their personal concerns and their political awareness, contrasting Kihika and Mumbi's detained husband with Karanja's choice to join the homeguards. The irony of Mumbi narrating her story to Kihika's betrayer was also often noted. There were many different and interesting approaches to the question; the most successful candidates argued their position using close references to the passage on the question paper.

<p>Paper 9695/04</p> <p>Drama</p>

General comments

The Examiners saw work across the whole range. At the top end there was much personal engagement with text, a real feeling that candidates had worked hard to respond to the plays on many levels. With virtually all candidates there was a sense of the enjoyment they have gained from studying the texts.

Having said that, there are one or two things that may be of help to Centres in preparing candidates for future sessions. Firstly, candidates should be aware that background detail about a writer's life, or fulsome praise for the writer's achievement ('This, one of the most widely admired tragedies by Shakespeare, the most important playwright the world has ever seen' etc.) is not required, nor does it gain marks. Secondly candidates should be very wary of giving way to the temptation to re-tell the story of the play. Examiners are very familiar with the texts, and therefore the placing of a scene in context is unlikely to be highly rewarded. The same applies to essays that involve a chronological, scene-by-scene approach to the question. With that approach, candidates often simply run out of time.

In both (a) and (b) questions candidates do well to remind themselves frequently what the question is they think they are answering. All too often candidates write generally about the text rather than with a precise focus on the requirements of the question. Writing about the 'dramatic effectiveness of the scene...' is not the same as 'comment on the scene'. Candidates must be wary of re-writing the question to suit what they know and want to talk about. Examiners often point out that by the time some candidates have turned over the first page, it could be anyone's guess as to the question. Candidates can be trained to offer topic sentences in each paragraph, and these often help bring the writing back on track.

In (b) questions there is a tendency for candidates to drift outside the particular passage too readily. Of course reference can be made to other moments in the play, but the main focus must be on the particulars of the passage printed on the paper. All too often candidates are unwilling to deal with the detail of the passage by exploring language use, dramatic situation, character as developed at this particular moment.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

Caryl Churchill: *Serious Money*

- (a) There were a small number of answers to this question. Candidates knew the background to the play – Thatcherism and the ‘Big Bang’ in London – and were able to link it to the behaviour of the characters. Others were able to discuss generational differences and the various types of greed presented, such as ambition or cynical calculation.
- (b) Once again, there were few responses to this question. However, candidates did manage to make interesting comments on the different priorities of Zac (American, only interested in money, not land) and Jake (English and interested in property as a means of making money). More could have been made of Churchill’s strikingly original style of dramatic presentation and its importance as a means of distancing the audience from the ‘values’ presented. One or two commented on the ludicrous, fantastical world occupied by those who say, with no sense of irony or ridiculousness, that they could own ‘a cube of sea’ and a ‘section of God.’

Question 2

William Shakespeare: *The Comedy of Errors*

- (a) Most candidates were able to give a fair account of the values and traditions of Ephesus, with the city cited effectively as a place driven by a combination of materialism, draconian laws and superstition. Some very good answers pointed out that many of the values are embodied and presented through generic/representative figures such as the merchant and the Duke.
- (b) Most candidates were able to identify Adriana’s ambiguous and conflicting feelings towards her husband. However, there was a tendency to either paraphrase the passage or fail to engage with its detail. It would have been worth pointing out that there is significant meaning being created through the rhyme scheme; moreover, it is clear that at many moments in the scene Adriana is in fact addressing herself rather than the other characters.

Question 3

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a) This question was widely answered. Unfortunately, many candidates simply lapsed into listing dramatic moments in the play, thus seeing the question as predominantly about plot: this often led to discussions about the presentation of violence in the play, which was not germane to the question. The best answers were more selective, choosing a few moments of dramatic intensity from before the murder, a few from after in order to argue a case. Few paid attention to the word ‘tragedy’ in the question, which was there to suggest that the focus of the play might be Macbeth’s downfall, not the murder of Duncan. Many candidates were able to draw attention to how patterns and images set up in the first part of the play are then exploited later for intensely dramatic purposes. Good candidates were aware that dramatic intensity often comes from Shakespeare probing the workings of the Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s minds.
- (b) The ‘Sleepwalking’ scene from the play proved popular with many candidates. A key to success was an ability to demonstrate how closely each of Lady Macbeth’s remarks is an unwitting and unwilling echo of previous events as well as an admission of guilt. In order to make this point, many candidates felt obliged to make lengthy reference to events elsewhere in the play, often by summarising the plot. It is worth reminding candidates that Examiners have read the play and are not, therefore, very interested in having its story re-told. There is not time, nor is it relevant. Better candidates were also able to discuss the importance of the doctor and the waiting woman as representatives of the ordinary world and its values. The best candidates were able to make something of the scene being written in prose and use that as a way into talking about Lady-Macbeth’s incoherent, self-incriminating babblings.

Question 4Richard Sheridan: *The Rivals*

- (a) Candidates responded well to the different love relationships in the play, commenting on the differences between the Absolute/Lydia and Faulkland/Julia partnerships as a means of presenting different views of romantic love. Good answers tended to discuss the significance of social conventions in the various courtships as well as seeing that though different characters had different (mostly hidden) motives for love, the values that seem to apply to them all are those of money, rank and exploitation of others.
- (b) There were not many answers on this question, and those that there were often simply listed Mrs Malaprop's linguistic mistakes. This was a shame as there were issues of dramatic situation that were worthy of comment: few, for example, took the opportunity of commenting on Absolute's revelling insistence on reading the letter aloud or on his conspiratorial nudge to Mrs Malaprop ('So we will, Ma'am') as he allows her unwittingly to help develop his plot.

Question 5J M Synge: *The Playboy of the Western World*

- (a) There were some very reasonable answers to this question that moved rapidly beyond simply recounting Pegeen's actions and saw instead that Synge uses her to symbolise Irish nationalism, Irish values and the search for cultural identity. Many candidates noted that Pegeen brings about the 'transformation' of Christy, but the word seemed borrowed from somewhere else (study notes?). Having raised the issue, few were able to address the more difficult issue of transformation from what... to what. A number of candidates saw the question simply as a means of unloading a character study, despite the terms of the question.
- (b) Some candidates struggled with this extract. They were right to dwell on the possessiveness of Pegeen towards Christy and on Widow Quinn's determination to get in on the action. Better candidates commented on the peculiar morals and ironic contradictions inherent in a situation where the village peasantry see little problem with a 'murderer' keeping company with a single girl and where there is hearty approval of the murderer in the community as a whole. Other wider issues such as the characters' desire for novelty and religious hypocrisy were raised but not often effectively dealt with from the detail of the passage.

Question 6Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a) This was one of the most popular questions on the paper. Most candidates offered a balanced view, with other victims suggested too. In many essays there was discussion of the whole family as victim of economic circumstances, but this did tend to lead towards irrelevant discussion of 1930s America and rehearsals of ill-digested information about the 'American Dream'. Candidates should bear in mind that discussion of this kind is only useful when it emerges from a discussion of particular aspects of the text.

It was disappointing to see that whilst many candidates remarked upon Tom as the narrator of the play they then failed to follow through this insight when evaluating the degree to which he is a victim. It is clear that there is a double perspective on Tom presented by the dramatic action, and that all he says is not necessarily to be accepted at face value. Many candidates, for example, simply accepted Tom's evaluation of his own poetic capabilities without question. Only the very best candidates were able to see that Tom may be self-victimising.

- (b) Although this was widely answered, many candidates simply felt that they were being asked to paraphrase the text. Good answers analysed the effect of the screen device and looked closely at both Amanda's presentation of herself and (perhaps more importantly) the ways in which Williams gives us a different perspective on her self-deceit. Most candidates did not make this distinction. Candidates who paid particular attention to Amanda's nervously affected speech were able to make useful, textual points, as were those who pointed out that Jim's presence is more for Amanda's benefit than Laura's. A few candidates drew careful attention to the difference between Amanda's language and (ironically) the tersely pragmatic language of Tom, who is notionally the poet in the family.

Paper 9695/05

Shakespeare and other Pre Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

The overall standard this session was pleasingly sound, with nearly all of the candidates achieving a sound performance, including a number who were awarded full marks, and very few who did not reach the minimum acceptable standard for this paper. There were still one or two candidates who infringed the rubric, by offering two answers from the same section of the paper. There were also slightly more candidates this session who appeared to time their performance poorly and leave insufficient time for the proper completion of the second essay. Centres are reminded of the need to ensure that all candidates are clear on the precise demands of the paper and that both essays carry equal weight on the mark scheme.

This was the first year that only two Shakespeare texts were on the syllabus, inevitably leading to a very large proportion of the entry tackling *Antony and Cleopatra*. Nearly as popular this session was *Emma*. Examiners were pleased to report that some responses were seen on all the texts on the paper.

For the most part Examiners were once again impressed by the fluency and accuracy of the candidates in their written English, as well as the enthusiasm and interest in the books studied which so many of the candidates reveal, making the examining experience 'a worthwhile and humbling experience' as one put it.

There are two specific points, which need to be emphasised this session. The **(a)** option for each text is an essay, prompted often by a leading statement or quotation. Examiners reported that in this session a number of candidates were quoting extensive portions of critical comment from secondary sources, often with little connection to the precise demands of the task set by the question and often instead of relevant quotations from the text in question. Little reward can be given for such a strategy and candidates are reminded of the need for relevant and pointed quotation from the text to support their particular views or arguments, as well as brief, apposite support from critics.

The second point arising from this session is how candidates tackle the **(b)** options on each text, which are always passage based. These will involve some sort of critical appreciation of the given passage, linking it to a particular aspect of the text or to the text more generally. Examiners are concerned that a number of candidates do not seem to understand the demands of this type of question. Many spend far too much time, often as much as half of the essay, in giving a background summary of the whole text, rather than a brief and pointed contextualisation of the passage in question. Some candidates also do not seem to grasp what a critical appreciation entails:

The passage given posses a fast paced tone that uses many figures of speech in the language to create the imagery of the atmosphere

This was part of a response on *Antony and Cleopatra* and reveals the sort of problems, which are disappointingly common in responses to the passage question. Candidates do need to be able to discuss language, tone, imagery and form with some confidence and to discuss the effect of them, if they are to tackle these questions successfully. They will also need some confidence in expressing themselves with a critical vocabulary. The weaknesses identified in tackling a 'critical appreciation' are particularly apparent when candidates respond to a prose passage, where too often the response is entirely concerned with content and character and too rarely is there an appreciation of the style, the language and the narrative structures which shape and define the content of and the characters in the work. As one Examiner explained:

Too few candidates seem aware of the fact that the literary works are 'constructs' by an author who makes specific choices to create a specific effect and that this is true whether the work is a poem, a novel or a play.

Wise words which candidates would do well to remember. Notwithstanding this however Examiners were still pleased and impressed by some of the detailed and informed answers on the passages, often showing a real understanding of the construction and creation of a literary work in its genre and in its time.

One final point to mention is that a small number of Centres are encouraging the candidates to begin their answers, whether option **(a)** or **(b)**, with a detailed biography of the author and then a general summary of the whole text in question. Only after writing as much as two sides on these will the candidate turn to the specific demands of the task. This strategy is not recommended and too often leads the candidate to run out of time before being able to complete writing down all of their personal ideas and thoughts to the task set.

Comments on specific questions**Section A****Question 1**

William Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

- (a) This was a popular choice and there was a wide range of responses and strategies to the proposition. Most successful were those responses which considered Antony's situation rather than attempt a scene by scene summary, particularly where the 'How Far' part of the question was remembered. Some candidates agreed with the proposition – Antony was seen as the link between the disparate parts of the play and his quandaries and internal conflicts were much of the play's interest. Others though thought that Cleopatra was much more engaging and entertaining; she determined much of what Antony did and that without her Antony was rather dull. More detailed answers often considered the counter claims of Octavius and Enobarbus as well. The most successful often argued that the play's structure ensured that there were many perspectives offered by the text on the leading couple, highlighting the contrasting cultures of Egypt and Rome. Readings of the play that did not see them as equal were simply distorting the focus of the tragic story of two world figures.
- (b) There were many very good answers to this question, though some candidates fell into the traps already mentioned of either giving too much background or not focusing on the language sufficiently. Those who did had a rich seam to mine. Many candidates referred to Cleopatra's sense of theatre and drama, whilst acknowledging her sensitivity and the gentle rather peaceful imagery employed. Her use of the word 'Husband' and the almost maternal moments with the asp occasioned a great deal of comment, some seeing it as her last, great role play and others as the moment when the 'gypsy's lust' was transfigured into love. Most agreed it was the dramatic and moral climax of the play, some speculating on the effect of the earlier death of Antony. There were candidates who ignored the 'and her women' part of the question, whilst others ignored Cleopatra to concentrate on them. Neither strategy was successful, though candidates did occasionally remember the soothsayer scene and his predications for the women. Most though did notice the genuine affection and love which Cleopatra had engendered in her women, as well as in Antony.

Question 2

William Shakespeare: *Much Ado About Nothing*

- (a) This was the more popular of the two questions on this text. Candidates did show a wide knowledge of the text and the various kinds of comedy within it. There was also good use of supporting examples, though candidates were most often at a loss to explain how Beatrice and Benedick were comic:

The battle of wits between Beatrice and Benedick is comedic because it shows truly that they are trying to conceal their feelings, thus their intermittent clash of personalities and war of words.

This was not untypical of the attempts to explain, which might have been better done with precise and pointed references to the text. Most candidates were able to explore the 'darker' elements. It was accepted that conflict is an important part of comedy but the weaknesses in Claudio's character – 'How could she marry him in the end?' as one candidate put it – the roles of Don John and for some Don Pedro, as well as the seriousness of Benedick's challenge to Claudio suggested a text sliding towards becoming a problem play for a number of candidates. There were those candidates, perhaps less sure of the conventions and their own readings, who were determined to see everything as comic, even Claudio's cruel denunciation of Hero at her wedding. These were inevitably less successful. The best answers were balanced, aware of the doubts about a society where justice and truth prevail only by accidental discovery, but still appreciative enough of the moments of dramatic irony, the verbal sparring of so many of the characters and the antics of the Messina Bill to accept the play as a comedy.

- (b) Candidates were alive to the seriousness of this scene, though some were confused by the multiplicity of the tones. Those who ignored Don Pedro's final words often struggled to see the structural importance of the passage and the unravelling of the plot. Nearly all were united in condemnation of Claudio's callous insensitivity – 'old man's daughter' was much commented on. Audience reaction was considered but there was confusion about Don Pedro's long speech and what he was in fact trying to do. Candidates who were able to identify from precise exploration of the language and tone the various and shifting moods and reactions of the characters in the passage and comment on how this might strike the audience invariably did well.

Section B**Question 3**Jane Austen: *Emma*

- (a) This was a very popular choice and often well done, with many fluent and detailed answers noted. Mr Knightley's role and characterisation were well explored by nearly all candidates who chose this option. Examiners were pleased to report that a very detailed knowledge of the text was revealed by many candidates. The Box Hill episode for example was a popular choice selected to show what it revealed about how Austen intended the reader to see Knightley. There was shrewd differentiation between Knightley's rivals, Elton and Frank Churchill most notably. Few could see any faults in Knightley, though some did explore his attitudes to Frank Churchill as perhaps motivated by a rather unbecoming jealousy of Frank's relationship with Emma. Most though saw him as the perfect gentleman, with some female candidates lamenting that such gentlemanly behaviour and attitudes were only too rare now. Most answers inevitably considered his role vis a vis Emma in great detail, seeing him variously as her mentor, guide and moral guardian. A few answers remembered his kindness to Mr Woodhouse as well and his quitting of Donwell at the end was seen as an act of great self-sacrifice. There was some confusion between John and George Knightley however and this did limit the success of some answers.
- (b) This was a minority choice. Some responses were limited by failing to give a precise context and by confusions as to who in fact had given the piano and who had warned Emma of Knightley's possible attraction to Jane. Many answers though did explore how Austen revealed the Emma's self-deceptions, her devious and manipulative tendencies and her vanity. Those who looked in detail at how Austen controlled the narrative voice in the passage and were able to focus on specific phrases – 'Emma had no longer an alarm for Henry' was particularly fertile ground – did very well. Weaker candidates tended to paraphrase, the accuracy of which determined the success of the response. Those who were aware of why Frank might be acting as he does in the passage inevitably doing better than those who saw him as genuine in his advances and compliments to Emma. A few candidates noticed Austen's skill in showing us Emma and Knightley together as friends and yet both reacting with a tinge of jealousy to partly recognised rivals in the love for the as yet only vaguely realised future partner.

Question 4Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Knight's Tale*

- (a) This remains a popular minority choice. Candidates responded with thoughtful detail to this task, Theseus and Ypolita, the wailing women, the lack of relationship between the young knights and Emily, and the role of the Amazon sisters as persuaders and shapers of the tale were all remarked to some extent by most candidates. References to courtly love and the chivalric code were seen as interrelated aspects of an elaborate game of love. There were some lively and well-argued feminist responses, abhorring the fact that the women were there to be fought over or with and had no choice in their ultimate destiny. On the other hand, as with Emma and Knightley above, there were those candidates who regretted the passing of an age when women were ladies, to be treated with such courtesy and loved with such selfless devotion. Examiners noted some confusion with the conventions which Chaucer is using, though some candidates adopted a 21st Century approach to the role of women and were simply unsympathetic to the conventions. A few candidates remembered the divinities and made telling reference to the links between the human men and women and the gods and goddesses who controlled the human destiny.
- (b) Many saw this as an effective introduction to the tale and its principal concerns, particularly Theseus's attempts to impose order on human life, which was seen as chaotic and subject to chance. The social hierarchy, the function of the teller, the effect of the two time zones, classical and medieval, were all well explored at times. Many candidates were impressed by Theseus's 'wysdom and chivalrye' and saw him pivotal here and in the Tale generally. A few were able to link this to a consideration of the knight himself and Chaucer's use of different narrative voices. These candidates did very well indeed.

Question 5

Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*

- (a) This was the first time this text was offered and was consequently a minority choice. Most candidates accepted unreservedly the proposition. Children had a terrible time of it and there were few if any redeeming examples in the text. Few candidates were able to point to some of the counter-arguments – the role of Nelly for example – and there was a tendency to pile example on example of the dreadful things that, adults, particularly Heathcliff did to children in their care. Candidates who were able to discriminate the examples and explore how Brontë might differentiate the way characters behaved towards each other often did very well.
- (b) Nearly all responses were able to explore the passion, the violence and self-centred love on display in this passage. Better answers looked in detail at the violence of the language used, the role of Nellie as narrator and the effect of this scene in the context of the wider text. The gothic extravagances of the style were noted by a few who saw this deathbed conflict as the inevitable result of the characters' previous relationship. Even weaker responses could sometimes recognise this moment as the start of Heathcliff's reign as the diabolical villain.

Question 6

Christina Rossetti: *Selected Poems*

There were only a few responses to this text. Those who tackled (a) were able to give many examples of how reliant Rossetti is on natural imagery to make her points, though hardly any were able to discriminate between her variety of uses for nature and natural imagery. The (b) option was rarely tackled and sometimes appeared to be treated as an unseen, with candidates unable to link the poem to any other Rossetti work. Those who could link the poem to the selection did often make effective comparisons between the concerns of the poem and other concerns which Rossetti revealed elsewhere in the selection.

Question 7

John Donne: *Selected Poems* (from *The Metaphysical Poets ed. Gardner*)

This was minority choice. Those who tackled (a) invariably accepted the proposition and were at least able to tell the story of some of the poems as proof of the ordinariness of so much of Donne's work. The (b) option was rarely seen but telling links between the poem and the rest of the selection, often pointing out the difference between this poem and the religious, 'serious' poems elsewhere in the selection.

Question 8

George Eliot: *Middlemarch*

Nearly all who offered this text chose (a). Candidates had an impressive knowledge of the text and were able to gather evidence to support and refute the proposition. Dorothea and Casaubon were often seen as the failures in the marital stakes, with a perhaps surprising number of candidates showing as much sympathy for Casaubon's disappointments as they did for Dorothea. The Garths were often the more positive example chosen to refute the proposition, though cases were made for Mary and Fred and the Bulstrodes. Weaker candidates tended to list the examples and then to tell the story of the chosen marital examples but those who opted for a different structure, concentrating on how Eliot discriminates between the various social classes and ages she puts before us, often did well. Option (b) was not so well tackled, candidates too often seeming confused by the context and the precise importance of this passage to the text as a whole.

Question 9

Alexander Pope: *Rape of the Lock*

- (a) This was once again a popular choice and Examiners were impressed by how readily so many candidates entered the rather esoteric world which Pope creates. Most candidates were aware of the mock-heroic purposes of Pope's use of the supernatural and were able to link it to the epic tradition effectively. Some candidates saw the supernatural as one of a number of techniques, which could be reductive or humorous, and nearly all could connect it to the basic satirical methods of the poem generally.
- (b) There were a number of assured and confident responses to the passage, showing a detailed grasp of how important the opening was to Pope's satirical and mock-heroic intentions. Some candidates did simply list the various techniques on display, but where supported by precise references this could be quite successful. Fewer were able to explore the language in detail, which was a pity, for those that did were often very successful.

Question 10

Ben Jonson: *The Alchemist*

This was a minority choice. Candidates who tackled (a) did show a competent awareness of Jonson's dramatic methods and the sense of constant movement and comings and goings, which the play can have. This was occasionally linked to a consideration of Jonson's satirical intentions, though at times, particularly in the option (b) answers, Jonson's created world was simply baffling and candidates failed to grasp his moral and didactic stance. Sadly it was clear that few candidates had ever seen the play in performance, which alone would give them a true perspective on this entertaining and rewarding text.

Paper 9695/06

Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

There was a good level of enjoyment and personal engagement with the texts/tasks in the majority of cases; even the weaker candidates usually attempted to remain on task, often demonstrating a reasonably good standard of knowledge and understanding.

There was still a strong tendency to write unnecessary preambles and over-long answers which generally results in the use of tangential material and a loss of a clear and progressive line of argument; candidates should be encouraged to develop skills of presenting more tightly and cogently structured arguments in their responses.

There was less evidence of the tendency to import irrelevant and unhelpful material on e.g. The Theatre of the Absurd in Stoppard and Pinter plays; though still good deal of inaccurate information about the aridity of British life after the 2nd World War.

Candidates are also moving away from mainly descriptive/narrative based responses to a more analytical approach.

It was encouraging to note that in some cases candidates are beginning to consider how language shapes meaning. Centres should encourage their candidates to discuss and comment on effects of the writing in their answers to (b)-type questions. Awareness of the effects of narrative perspective in the prose texts should also be developed.

Comments on specific questions

Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Question 1

Some answers on (a) did little more than rehearse the narrative of the play. Fuller answers considered how the shape of the play's experience was signalled in the acts' titles. The 'Fun and Games' of Act 1 played by Martha and George not to entertain but also control, dominate, insult, humiliate and inflict pain on each other and their guests in ways which resonate throughout the play. 'Walpurgisnacht' reflects the chaos and destruction developing to a climax during the night, and 'The Exorcism' of the son's death was seen as crucial in saving George's and Martha's shattered marriage. On (b) most candidates were able to consider the dynamics of power relations in the passage and whole text: Martha initially dominant to undermine, ridicule, humiliate and torture George by stressing her father's role/influence, with Nick and Honey as audience. The dramatic effects of George's reassertion of his authority, symbolised by the fake gun, and the final moments of tenderness/compatibility ("C'mon....give me a kiss") were discussed in most answers.

Elizabeth Jennings: *Poems*

Question 2

Few Centres studied this text, and very few candidates were comfortable with the poetry. Answers on (a) tended to work through the poem paraphrasing each stanza in turn, usually neglecting the particular demands of the question and the effects of the writing. On (b) answers tended to offer brief characterisations of a handful of poems, with little concern for relations between them or for the effects of the poetry. On both options, a small minority of candidates wrote interestingly and sympathetically on Jennings's work.

R. K. Narayan: *The Guide*

Question 3

A popular text, usually well understood and enthusiastically discussed. Good answers explored the effects of the novel's structural devices: the duality of narrative perspective (Present/Past shifts, First/Third Person narrations, flashbacks, jump-outs) reflecting, some suggested, the duality of human nature in general and the two parallel stories of Raju's life in particular. The structure was seen to allow readers to understand the process of his transformation from earlier life as a scamp, sinner, selfish person to his emergence as a spiritual, selfless, saintly guru, though some pointed out that he is neither fully a sinner nor completely a saint. Candidates felt strongly that such a structure, though complex, rather than detracting from the unity of the novel generates sympathy, intrigue, anticipation, interest and suspense for the reader. Awareness of ironic relations between the narrative sections was less evident. On (b) various readings of the passage emerged: a "new" Raju emerges who has been transformed by the jail experience with a different outlook on life, a turning point in his journey, his status as a teacher, guide, leader in the prison seen as preparation for his role as a swami later, commanding the same adulation and respect from the villagers as from the prisoners. However, some candidates argued that he is still the "old" Raju in the passage: performer, manipulator, attention-seeker, self-centred people-pleaser as he adapts to the new environment and adopts new survival strategies; this was seen to parallel his role as a reluctant, "fake" swami who lies about his spirituality. An interesting third reading was that in prison, protected from the western influences personified in Rosie which lead him away from traditional values and relationships, he is able to re-order his life and nature. Best answers noted the irony of the situation, comic undertones and dramatic ironies in what Raju says ("model prisoner ... benevolent supervisor ... if you observed the rules ... I felt choked with tears" and so on: what might the other prisoners have thought of his behaviour?).

Harold Pinter: *The Caretaker*

Question 4

In answers on **(a)** there were some fruitful observations on the notion of care in the play: the ambiguity and ironic significance of the title (Davies never really takes up the role); each character's role as a caretaker of his own concerns in the context of their personal insecurities and isolation; how the title is ironic because of *lack* of care between characters and in society at large, as intimated by references in the play. Answers on **(b)**, by far the more popular option, explored the passage as a turning point in the direction and movement of the play. Most candidates were able to discuss the characters of Davies and Aston revealed/developed here through their actions and language: Davies as delusional, manipulative, callous, cruel, ungrateful, aggressive, violent, insensitive, whose betrayal of Aston is unforgivable in contrast to the restraint, dignity and composure of Aston, who quietly reasserts his authority at the end. Better answers focused on the irony of the whole situation and of what Davies says, understatement ("I don't think we're hitting it off"), humour, brutality of language, all foreshadowing the reversals of relationships that follow. Wider concerns of isolation, communication, identity, survival, insecurity were also addressed.

Jean Rhys: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Question 5

In answers on **(a)** generally the relationship between the two countries was seen as hostile, strained, tense, negative and incompatible as a result of mutual lack of understanding, communication and trust. Differences in history (colonisation, slavery, Emancipation Act), socio-cultural aspects (black, white, Creole identities), environments (Caribbean warm, vibrant, colourful, sensual, flamboyant, enchanting, as opposed to cold, dull, artificial, uninviting, "cardboard" England): all these relationships were described as symbolically enacted/represented by the characters of Rochester, Mason, Annette, Antoinette, Aunt Clara, Daniel Boyd, and brought to a focus in the central relationship between Antoinette and her husband. Some considered hints of some acceptance, hope, reconciliation in the novel, but these were not seen as not permanent. Answers on **(b)** considered the presentation of Rochester's complex and paradoxical consciousness: feelings of anger, revenge, contempt, and selfishness and possessiveness but also suggestions of compassion, love and tenderness ("I can be gentle too"). In some answers there was sympathy for Rochester as he is given a voice to suggest his victimisation, entrapment, self-pity and a bitter sense of betrayal ("she thirsts for anyone – not for me...") however unjustified. There was also fruitful discussion of the effects of nature imagery (hurricanes, bamboos, royal palms, trees, wind, sun) all foreshadowing Antoinette's ultimate punishment at his hands. The fragmented, disjointed structures were seen to reflect Rochester's inner conflict/near madness. On this passage the line-by-line approach was particularly unhelpful – especially when the discussion stopped short of the end of the extract.

Tom Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

Question 6

On **(a)** most candidates agreed that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are "strangers in a world that seems to be made by someone else...." but some took issue with the use of the word "frightened". The characters' lack of self-determination, self-reliance, self-identity, direction, purpose, control, choice, memory were seen to position them as puppets/pawns in Stoppard's absurd and strange world, controlled by outside forces and fate. Some answers acknowledged that these characters are manipulated not only by Stoppard in his play but also by the action of *Hamlet*, determined by yet another controlling agency. The relatively few answers on **(b)** generally lacked focus on the dramatic effects of the passage (e.g. the sudden but timely entry of the Danish court); many simply described the behaviour of the two characters or outlined aspects of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Derek Walcott: *Selected Poems*

Question 7

There were some excellent answers on **(a)**, exploring a range of poems to illustrate the various impulses in Walcott's uses of nature in his poetry: as a pure and beautiful force, particularly in his poems about the sea; as a metaphor for his own feelings (e.g. 'To a painter in England'); as symbolic of historical process (e.g. 'The Almond Trees'); as a symbol of decay and destruction (e.g. 'The Swamp'). Some very impressive answers were able to quote substantially and fruitfully, and discriminated sensitively between the effects and meanings of the poems cited. However, there were also answers that briefly characterised a random collection of poems, with little concern for relations between them or for poetic effects. **(b)** was the more popular choice. The best answers considered the political context and the bitterness of tone in the set poem to express his anger, disillusionment, frustration and criticism at the lack of progress and change in the post-Independence "New World" of the West Indies; decline of creative imagination and inspiration was noted in the images of the fountain, wind, and wave. These answers were alert to the bitterly ironic tone (in the title, brazen joy, uniforms of the country and so on); and the role of the poet in the conclusion was discussed, with some perceptive comment recognising that Walcott has said more than "nothing" in writing the poem. Some answers also covered aspects of language, use of free verse and rhetorical questions. There were strong signs of personal engagement in many of these answers. Other answers offered a checklist of poetic devices, loosely applied to the set poem.

Evelyn Waugh: *Decline and Fall*

Question 8

On **(a)** many argued that Paul is a bit of both, innocent and stupid, in the novel as he is victimised and scapegoated by others and often fails to perceive the realities of his circumstances or to say things in his defence. Others argued that he is perhaps more naïve, "static" not "dynamic", a shadow, but the only one who behaves morally and rationally in the book. There was some interesting discussion of his function as a passive recipient of other people's stories – a resourceful acknowledgement of his presence as a kind of negative capability in the text. Answers on **(b)** tended to work through the passage, often in a perfunctory manner. Where candidates were aware of ironic effects the writing was thoughtful, but it has to be said that most were not.

Paper 9695/07

Comment and Appreciation

General comments

There was some interesting and thoughtful writing in many of the scripts seen this session, but also a good deal that was very superficial and mechanical in its response to the printed passages and poems. While many candidates are obviously clear about how they should go about a piece of critical appreciation, and who show an understanding of how each writer produces his or her effects, there are still many who rely upon either a simple paraphrase of what they are given, or upon a series of dry and disconnected lists of literary devices and techniques, without in any way trying to relate these to what is actually there. Some candidates – rather more than usual this session it seemed, also tried to load too many 'hidden' meanings into what are in fact relatively straightforward and simple pieces of writing.

Many candidates do not appear to have had a wholly confident grasp of some of the passages this session, though they were certainly not in any way harder than usual. The two poems seemed particularly to create problems, even the very simple and straightforward 'Faintheart in a Railway Train', where too many answers wanted Hardy to be writing about something far more weighty and philosophical than just a chance but missed encounter with an attractive woman. Even Steinbeck's straightforward though certainly very detailed description of a drought was made by many candidates into something much more abstract than it actually is; simple and immediate understanding is what is required initially.

After a straightforward understanding is established, then Examiners will of course expect candidates to demonstrate an awareness of at least some of the ways in which each writer creates the particular effects that his/her writing is conveying. Technical terminology is obviously helpful, if only as a shorthand means of drawing attention to something, but it cannot replace a genuine and personal response based upon a secure understanding of how the writing is actually working. There is no point, and no value, in simply listing devices, even if they are illustrated – it is the *effects* that they create that matter, not just that they are there. Even less helpful is a negative comment, such as ‘there is no alliteration (or onomatopoeia, or assonance, or whatever it might be) in this passage’, especially of course if there *are* in fact such things in the writing; to draw attention to something that is not there can never be a helpful way of critically exploring what a writer *has* created. A particular danger, too, seems to occur with poetry, where the expressions ‘free verse’ and ‘blank verse’ are bandied about with sometimes no apparent awareness of what they actually mean – the two poems this session are written in neither form, though many candidates said firmly that they were.

Examiners will also of course look for evidence of a real and warm personal response to the writing, provided that it is securely backed up by close and critical reference to what is there, and provided that the response is based upon this, rather than upon general and unsupported or unargued assertions. Simply saying that something is wonderful, or moving, or ineffective, or whatever the adjective might be, is of itself pointless – it must be supported.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This question was the most widely tackled, though too often without real confidence or critical grasp; the great majority of answers relied more upon paraphrase and description of what happens in each paragraph than upon any attempt to explore the words that Steinbeck uses and the effects that these create. Some candidates appeared to be disconcerted by the fact that there was no clear plot or narrative to the passage, and made much of this negative point, rather than trying to get to grips with what actually is there, which is some remarkably rich and striking description of a developing drought.

Few candidates had any apparent problem understanding the basic situation described by Steinbeck, though one or two answers did appear to believe that drought implied heavy rainfall. The majority of answers, though, simply worked their way rather laboriously through each of the eight paragraphs (incidentally, they are not *stanzas*, as many candidates said), often doing little more than outlining what each says, while occasionally saying what literary devices they could find. More confident answers, however, chose to look in more detail at some of the methods that Steinbeck uses throughout the passage: his use of colour, for example, and the different effects that he creates as the red and grey turn progressively paler and pinker – suggestive, perhaps, of ill health and sickness – and the repeated use of red to describe and emphasise the extreme heat and danger of the sun. There certainly are plenty of literary devices, and again more confident candidates were able to select these and to explore some of their impact on the reader: for example, alliteration in line 13 (‘the sharp sun struck’), repetition in lines 17-18 (‘...the sky more pale; and every day the earth paled’), onomatopoeia in line 37 (‘the corn threshed the wind and made a dry, rushing sound’), personification in line 42 (‘the wind ... dug cunningly’). The point that must be stressed, though, is that merely finding and identifying these is not enough – what matters is what *use* the writer has made of them, and how and why they create interest or response in a reader.

Several candidates clearly felt that there should be more than just description, however good, and that the passage must mean something deeper than it does; there were some interesting thoughts here, the most convincing perhaps being that Steinbeck is using natural disaster to reflect how humanity reacts in the face of great difficulty – an interesting approach, but given that he does also talk about humans in the passage it is not likely that the whole is simply allegorical. The date of publication (1939) led to some unusual responses, relating to the Great Depression in the USA, and more imaginatively to the Second World War, even to the point of identifying specific images and events – the fact that the USA was not involved in this war in 1939 did not worry these candidates. As was suggested above, there is no need to assume that a piece of writing needs to mean anything more than it actually says.

As was said earlier, finding devices that are not there, is not a good tactic: for example, lines 20-22 do not contain similes – they are literally true. Nor is it helpful to say, as at least one candidate did, ‘the passage is fully punctuated’, or even that ‘there is no rhyming pattern or scheme’.

Question 2

Candidates had little problem in seeing that these two poems were linked thematically, and most conveyed at least some grasp of their very different moods – Hardy’s fairly light but nonetheless heartfelt regret at a missed opportunity, compared with the much more poignant and lingering sadness felt by King. The use of a journey was noted in both poems, with a surprising number of candidates wanting to see this as symbolic of a journey through life – possibly justifiable in King’s case, but surely not in Hardy’s; his brief and unemotional glimpses of the passing countryside are just indicative of how long and dull the speaker’s rail journey was until he suddenly spotted the ‘radiant stranger’, when for a brief moment time stopped. Some comments were interestingly made about how the church, the sea, and so on seemed to pass the train, rather than vice versa – another suggestion about the speaker’s sense of passive boredom. Many noticed the change of length, rhythm and tone in line 5 of the first stanza, and of these most noted that it was because the speaker’s boredom was suddenly and unexpectedly interrupted – for once, perhaps, the punctuation mark at the end of the line *is* significant and helpful to the meaning. Some candidates, too, noticed the way in which the rhythm is broken, and the syntax convoluted, in line 7, reflecting the speaker’s confusion and dithering, until it is too late, and the train moves him on.

King’s poem proved rather harder to grasp – not surprisingly, as it is a much more delicate and intricately-written piece, and its ideas are more abstract than Hardy’s. A very small number – just one or two – noticed that it is a villanelle, though most commented on the repeated use of lines 1 and 3, echoing the continuing uncertainty felt by the speaker in her search for peace and rest in a world that is passing by too fast, even though constantly striking, whether for its beauty or for its momentary hints of darker things. The term ‘villanelle’ is in itself unimportant, but the repetition and the circular nature of the poem’s ideas are central to its effects, and only a few candidates really managed to capture this; most who wrote on it clearly felt something of its intangibility and poignancy, but too many focused so much upon finding mechanical matters (alliteration, personification and so on) that they lost touch with what King is saying, or even feeling.

Tackling a comparative question is not easy, though it was pleasing how many candidates managed to keep hold of both poems throughout, moving between the two with some ease and fluency. It is of course quite legitimate to write about each poem quite separately, then to draw some comparisons and contrasts at the end, and many did this, but given that there are so many similarities between Hardy’s poem and King’s it was good that so many answers took hold of both poems together.

As in **Question 1**, too many points were made about technique alone; the rhyme patterns, for example, took up a quite unnecessary amount of space and time, quite unhelpfully in most cases, where candidates simply drew attention to these in detail (and surprisingly often getting them quite wrong). The most confident, as noted above, spoke well of the regularity of Hardy’s stanza 1, reflecting the boredom and monotony of the journey, followed by the sudden break and complexity at the change of stanza. And some candidates spoke with confidence about the cyclic nature of King’s refrain-like lines 1 and 3, suggestive of the continuing sense that whatever we see and do, ‘it does not last’. Her poem is perhaps deeply sad, certainly more so than Hardy’s, a sadness captured and controlled by the remarkably tight verse form she uses.

Question 3

This was the second most popular question, but surprisingly poorly managed by many candidates, who found it hard to articulate what they clearly *felt*. The two extracts are of course quite long, but that did not seem to cause much difficulty, and it is certainly true that A has some archaic, but surely never truly incomprehensible, vocabulary; what seemed to cause the greatest difficulty was in establishing what was different in the two approaches, and which was more effective. This difficulty is perhaps quite well summed up in the obviously puzzled words of one candidate, who wrote that ‘extract A is more in the form of prose ...; B is more of a drama than prose’.

Most answers were well aware that A was written by Charles Dickens, though a surprising number seemed to believe that B also was, and that therefore some of the language and style was inevitably less immediately easy to understand, though rather more stress was laid upon the apparent difficulties this caused that can really have been the case. Many, for example, said that they did not fully understand A until they had read B, which was so much easier to follow, because so much plainer and more explicit; a fair point, perhaps, but not many such candidates went beyond this to explore what advantages there might have been in some of the puzzles of A; for example, the fact that we have no idea initially who the man is, or why he is so alarming, or so dishevelled, or so aggressive to Pip, and the fact that we do not know his name, are surely some of the most alarming things about the situation (to be fair, a number of answers did make this point, adding that B lost some of the fear simply because once we know a person’s name we are bound to be less alarmed by him). Magwitch, though, is a name carrying sinister ‘witchlike’ overtones, making, in the eyes of many candidates, B a more alarming passage. The fact too that A is actually spoken by Pip can only increase our terror of the man, whereas in B we see both characters objectively and therefore both more and less sympathetically – again a point made by some candidates.

Some candidates saw A as more effective and frightening, for the reasons suggested above, but many more found B better, though rarely for any literary or dramatic reasons; indeed, those who focused properly upon the ways in which the two passages were written almost invariably said that A was more striking. B was favoured by most simply because it was easier to read – this may well be the case, but this is not sufficiently critical or perceptive a reason for an examination in literary comment and appreciation! A few candidates made mention of the specifically theatrical nature of B – apart from the obviously different way the text is presented – and noted the impact that lighting could make (line 3), or that action and movement could help an audience to react to character (line 54, for example); incidentally, very few answers used the word ‘audience’ here, though many used it in relation to the passages in **Questions 1 and 2**, a curious point.

Paper 9695/08

Coursework

General comments

There was some most interesting and successful Coursework this session; it is clear that Centres submitting work are confident about what is required by the syllabus, and that candidates themselves are equally assured in what they submit. There were no major problems at all in administration or in the contents of folders, and there was some fascinating, detailed and often quite sophisticated critical exploration of texts. The Moderator’s work was very straightforward this session, and indeed almost invariably genuinely pleasurable.

In general, the texts selected remained within the expected and conventional literary canon – no criticism at all is implied in saying this – and the essay titles set by Centres were such as to elicit exactly the sort of responses that the published Grade Criteria look for. It is of course a requirement that Centres send proposed texts and tasks in advance of beginning work, so one would naturally hope that there would be no concerns in this area; this is not invariably the case, but this session the texts and tasks were without exception entirely acceptable, and often very well worded indeed. A list of texts used is appended at the end of this report, together with a few of the more successful tasks, to give new Centres in particular some ideas as to what might be a useful approach to adopt when teaching and then setting their own essay titles. What these tasks have in common is a requirement for candidates to go well beyond showing simple knowledge of their texts, and to discuss at least some of the ways in which their writers have used language, form and structure – or in the case of drama some theatrical techniques – to create their particular effects.

Centres’ marking was by and large very much in line with agreed standards, and while a few adjustments were recommended (upwards as well as downwards, it is important to stress) most assessment was very thoughtful and accurate. It is of course crucial that Centres do use the Grade Criteria when coming to a decision, and it is particularly helpful if reference to these can be used in summative comments, either at the end of each essay or on the attached form, or indeed both. Such comments this session were usually helpful to the Moderator, though Centres who wrote no more than a few words were not necessarily helping their own candidates by not drawing attention to what was good, or indeed less good, in their writing. In the same way, essays with no annotation at all were particularly unhelpful, unlike those where teaching staff were at pains to indicate to the Moderator and indeed the candidate where things had gone well, or less well. An entirely untouched essay does, too, raise the uncomfortable thought that it could possibly be a ‘fair copy’ of an already marked piece of work. All work should be annotated and should be the first piece that has been handed in for assessment, and not a redraft.

Length was once or twice a minor concern; the syllabus states clearly that folders should consist of ‘a minimum of 2000 and a maximum of 3000 words’. This was rarely a problem, but it must be stressed that over-long folders are not acceptable, and in fact very rarely do candidates any favours; quite apart from the fact that concise and focused writing is an essential target to aim for, and over-verbosity is often self-defeating, it is clearly unfair to the majority of candidates who stay carefully within the limit if some are allowed to stray beyond it – it is almost as if selected candidates were to be allowed extra time in a timed examination paper.

Administrative matters were carried out with exemplary correctness by Centres this session – no problems here at all, at least as far as the Moderator was concerned. All in all, as was said at the start, a very good and successful set of submissions, for which all those involved must be warmly thanked and congratulated.

Texts used this summer, with some helpful and successful tasks

Prose

<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> – Atwood	Explore how Atwood shows the Gileadean regime to be full of hypocrisy.
<i>Lord of the Flies</i> – Golding	Discuss some of the symbols that Golding uses in this novel.
<i>Frankenstein</i> – Shelley	
<i>The Bridge of San Luis Rey</i> – Wilder	
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i> – Austen	
<i>Jane Eyre</i> – Brontë	Discuss the way Brontë uses Gothic elements in the novel.
<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i> – Hardy	
<i>Wuthering Heights</i> – Brontë	
<i>The Wine of Astonishment</i> – Lovelace	
<i>Brighton Rock</i> – Greene	
<i>Dracula</i> – Stoker	

Poetry

Selected Poems – T S Eliot	Explore ways in which Eliot conveys a sense of bleakness in his poetry.
Selected Poems – Raine	
Selected Poems – Frost	Explore how Frost uses images of forests, trees, woods, logs and leaves in his poetry.

Drama

<i>Pygmalion</i> – Shaw	
<i>Hamlet</i> – Shakespeare	
<i>Twelfth Night</i> – Shakespeare	Discuss ways in which the play can be called a 'dark comedy'.
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> – Shakespeare	
<i>The Crucible</i> – Miller	Explore how Miller creates and sustains tension in the play.
<i>Waiting for Godot</i> – Beckett	'A play in which nothing happens – twice.' How far would you agree that the play has no merits as a piece of drama?