

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/03
Poetry and Prose

As usual, there were some individual, sophisticated answers this session. Candidates produced some precise, thoughtful and thought-provoking work, demonstrating detailed knowledge, mature understanding and appreciation of literary effects, expressed with cogency. It is very satisfying when questions on the paper stimulate such responses. Overall, candidates showed good knowledge – there were very few answers where the candidates did not seem to have carefully read or revised the texts. In some cases, though, this knowledge was restricted to plot, character and events, rather than writers' techniques, language or structure. This was sometimes evident even in response to the passage-based (b) questions, which focus on language use and style. On the other hand, it was sometimes evident that candidates were approaching these questions as 'unseen' material, particularly on poetry, as their lack of knowledge of terms and references in the extracts suggested a lack of study. Other candidates were able to blend skilfully a detailed analysis of the extract with an informed knowledge of wider concerns.

In a number of answers, Examiners saw a return of the first paragraph being dominated by a biography of the author, irrespective of the question. Such material earns no marks unless it is made directly relevant to the argument.

Question Specific Comments

1. Sujata Bhatt: *Point No Point*
 - (a) There were not many answers to this question, but good answers demonstrated a sensitive awareness of Bhatt's background and common concerns. The very best blended close textual analysis with insightful discussion of different cultural influences. However, some candidates included too much general discussion of biographical detail at the expense of the poetry and the question. 'Brunizem', '3 November 1984', 'Walking Across Brooklyn Bridge' and 'Skinnydipping in History' were particularly successfully used.
 - (b) Many more candidates chose to answer on 'The Doors Are Always Open' and responded to the noise, activity, colour and smell described in the poem. There were some very personal responses to the portrayal of the goat giving birth and the decapitated rooster, and many commented on the cycle of life and the belief that as one life ends another begins. The interdependency between humans and animals, and their similarities, were noted (the hens are mourning the death of the rooster), as was the openness of the society described. The best answers focused on the vibrancy of language and image and the frankness of the child's perspective.
2. *Songs of Ourselves*
 - (a) While the extracts from 'Long Distance' and 'Modern Love' were the most popular choices by candidates answering this question, others used 'The Spirit is too Blunt an Instrument' and 'The Man with Night Sweats' with success. In some cases, answers were restricted to narrative and paraphrase, but there were examples of sensitive appreciation of subject matter and the ways the poets explored the ideas.
 - (b) Examiners saw more responses to this question than to any other single question on the paper and responses varied enormously. A number of candidates were frankly mystified by the poem and did not appear to have seen it before, while at the other end of the scale there was some detailed, scholarly analysis of Hopkins' many linguistic and rhythmic effects, placed into the contexts of the poem and his religious beliefs. Many candidates were able to employ critical vocabulary effectively, using terms such as alliteration, assonance, simile and metaphor, while others went further with curial sonnets, sprung rhythm, inscape and instress. However, just as effective was the discussion of candidates who did not know the precise critical terms, but nevertheless wrote

about the effects of Hopkins' linguistic and rhythmic play and their own responses to it. There was some bright and enthusiastic appreciation of the shape and form of the poem, its development, imagery and language.

3. William Wordsworth: *Selected Poetry*

- (a) This question is central to Wordsworth's poetry, which made it surprising that comparatively few candidates answered it with confidence. Many seemed not to have read the question carefully and saw it as a question on children, rather than childhood experiences. Many discussed 'Lucy Gray', for example, without forming a clear response to the question. Better answers selected episodes from 'Tintern Abbey' and 'The Prelude' together with poems such as 'Nutting' and successfully showed how childhood experiences in the poetry are often of the natural world, and that Wordsworth suggests that these experiences help form the moral nature of the maturing individual. Few candidates, though, placed the question's initial quotation and few discussed the 'Ode' itself in their answer.
- (b) This was a popular question, though in many of the answers, Examiners were not convinced that the candidates knew the identity of Milton, or of his significance. One candidate wrote that he was a prominent figure in World War II. This, and a determination to show that the poem is characteristic of Wordsworth's nature poetry, hampered many of the answers. Some candidates were able to write about disillusionment and the French Revolution as it related to England, and some wrote well about the position Milton holds in English poetry. There are a number of techniques which 'London 1802' has in common with other poems, and some of these were correctly identified, but candidates who had the confidence to say that in many ways the poem is *uncharacteristic* of the rest of the poetry in the selection tended to write stronger answers. The question asked '*how far* you find it characteristic' – too many candidates just tried to illustrate that it was.

4. Achebe: *Anthills of the Savannah*

- (a) Many answers here showed a detailed knowledge of the novel and the most successful selected precisely from this knowledge to construct an argument in response to the question. Candidates who took this approach were able to illustrate the question's premise, with some variation as to whether the candidates felt that the balance weighed more heavily on the imperialists' or Africans' side. There was careful illustration of power and corruption and a continued political enslavement to the West, and many candidates noted Ikem's lecture. Strong answers suggested that Achebe seems to be arguing in the novel that the legacy of imperialism has to end – Sam, Ikem and Chris, products of Lord Lugard College and all that that implies, are dead by the end of the novel and Beatrice, with a truly Kangan heart, is the pointer to a possibly better future.
- (b) This was a popular question and stimulated many strong answers. The best looked closely at Achebe's language of description and at the dialogue, carefully noting the portrayal of the Attorney-General as a sycophant and of Sam as a leader who cunningly manipulates him. Such answers noted the physical positions of the men and the imagery used to describe them, with Achebe's finely judged ironic tone. Some candidates made links to the further presentation of politics and power in the novel as a whole, and some focused also on Chris, the subject of discussion in the extract. These connections were useful in developing a context for the answer.

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

- (a) This question gave candidates an opportunity to use their knowledge of the whole text, which meant that there was some reliance on narrative summary in weaker answers. A common discriminator was whether candidates discussed Brontë's characterisation and presentation of Jane, or whether they discussed Jane as a real person. However, there were some perceptive responses which selected particular episodes for comment and linked Jane's control of her destiny to her need to find a balance between the conflicting demands of passion and reason. Some strong answers drew on some contextual knowledge, exploring how Jane's socio-economic status affected her power and how her inheritance – and Rochester's blindness and subsequent relative powerlessness – gave her increased status. Others additionally provided a more critical understanding of the role of external factors (luck, chance, timing, gothic elements) which help to bring Jane closer to her destiny.

- (b) There were some straightforward accounts of this extract which amounted to little more than paraphrase and missed the irony of the narration. More successful answers were closely focused on the writing and noted that the reader's view is governed by Jane's narration. Such responses saw the mocking humour of the passage as well as the condemnation of Brocklehurst and many focused on the reaction of Miss Temple, importantly included, as one candidate noted, 'so we do not only see the event through the prejudiced eyes of a child.' Some answers moved beyond the passage to consider the portrayal of an inflexible and dogmatic religion and to question Victorian values, while others showed their awareness that Mr Brocklehurst's wife and daughters do not live by the same precepts as he pronounces in this passage.
6. Katherine Mansfield: *The Garden Party and Other Stories*
- (a) There were fewer answers on Mansfield this session than Examiners have become accustomed to, but again the short stories stimulated much good writing. There were some general and quite narrative responses to this question, but candidates who focused on the wording were successful. Some carefully balanced an individual character with one in a relationship, and some were able to discriminate between different types of loneliness and isolation. Frau Brechenmacher was a popular choice, as was the woman at the store and Bertha from *Bliss*. The women in *At the Bay* and *Prelude* were considered, and the husband in *A Married Man's Story* was carefully discussed. The strongest answers drew a conclusion about Mansfield's view of the individuals' place within society and the success of relationships, while there were also a number of feminist readings.
- (b) The discriminator here was how carefully candidates read the question, as there were a number of answers which summarised the action of the excerpt but offered little more. More successful responses looked carefully at Mansfield's portrayal of Millie's attitude, as the question asked. These noted the way Mansfield marks Millie's shifts and changes in response to the boy's actions and words, and the resulting impression the reader gains of her loneliness and desperation, and the implied unhappiness with her own childlessness. Some of these answers developed very interestingly by including reference to Millie's change of heart at the end of the story.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/04

Drama

General Comments

Examiners saw a full range of work, covering all of the texts, though the Shakespeare, the Miller and the Wilde were the most popular. Work ranged from the absolutely superb (full of detail, originality and so on) to the other end where candidates knew the bare outlines of the plot and some limited things about the characters. Even here candidates often demonstrated enthusiasm for what they had read and were able to show that they had benefited from following the course. An issue that caused some concern was that some candidates had no notion of the texts as plays to be seen rather than just read. The give-away signs are uses of words like 'reader' or 'book' or references to the reading process; occasionally, too, candidates refer to matters of punctuation as though these could be represented on stage. Centres are reminded that candidates should interest themselves in matters of drama and that questions may legitimately be asked about 'dramatic significance.' At its most obvious, this means that in (b) questions it is always worth giving attention to any stage directions that are printed as part of the passage.

As always, it is worth pointing out that background 'contexts' for writers (dates of birth etc. or discussions of Wilde's sexuality) and unfocused enthusing ("Shakespeare is one of the world's greatest writers and *Twelfth Night* is one of his greatest comedies') do not gain many marks. All too often, candidates need to be encouraged to get on from the very beginning with points that can be derived from the particular text that they have been studying. Candidates should be discouraged from writing a 'one size fits all' introductory paragraph, particularly if they are writing about two Shakespeare plays because often they simply repeat the same material with no reference to the question, and thus compound the problem.

There were a few instances of rubric error, and Centres are reminded that they should ensure that candidates are clear about the examination requirements.

Specific Questions

1 ATHOL FUGARD: *The Township Plays*

- (a) Although this question was invariably responded to thoroughly, there were some candidates who were able to take the word 'inhumanity' and see how that term leads to a complex view of exactly how deeply the system is embedded, because it does not simply involve giving examples of whites being nasty to blacks. Some candidates were able to talk well about particular manifestations of the system such as the passbooks or the system of justice.
- (b) In general, candidates could identify the contrast between 'real life' and ambition, but it often proved more difficult to use the passage's detail in order demonstrate the *methods* that Fugard uses. In many cases, more could have been said about the attitudes of the speakers and how their speech reflects the contrast.

2 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Twelfth Night*

- (a) This was a popular choice, but there was often quite a lot of reliance on narrative summary. Better answers discussed the terms 'deception' and 'disguise' in a more figurative sense, often taking in self-deception too. A number of candidates described Viola as having disguised herself as her brother early on in the play, which is plainly not true. In most cases, more could have been made of the question's injunction to discuss 'dramatic significance'; many discussions of Malvolio's role and actions could certainly have been better had more attention been paid to this term.

- (b) Again, this was a popular question. Candidates often handled the idea of the relationship displayed here suitably. However, to gain a higher mark, it was necessary to give considerable interest to the richness of the language in the passage, particularly in terms of passion and irony. Many good answers engaged fully with Olivia's hints about her feelings for Viola, and there were also good expositions of Viola's hints about her true status ('...you think right: I am not what I am'). Weaker candidates kept to well-rehearsed discussions of the love triangles; others were able to consider the similarities between the situations of the two women and thus the causes of empathy that arise.

3 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Caesar*

- (a) Although the women in the play are very much minor characters, candidates were quick to point out how they add an important new light on Caesar and Brutus by showing them in their private rather than public capacity. Good candidates were able to go on from there to examine how their wives interrogate these characters' values. On the whole, Portia, rightly, tended to get more attention than Calphurnia in better answers because there is rather more to say about how she reacts to Brutus' mood swings and to his conduct after the death of Caesar.
- (b) Weaker candidates tended to offer a sequential commentary on the exchange, whereas stronger ones showed real, strategic insight into the ebb and flow of the tactics that Cassius uses. Many candidates spent too long on putting the passage into context in the play. Better candidates were able to look closely at Cassius' veiled hints ("Let be who it is") and at his subtle hints at Casca's loyalty to Rome. They were less clear about how Casca willingly opens up opportunities that Cassius then exploits. Many candidates engaged well with imagery of captivity or of cowardice, or with the subtle swing from first person to the inclusive 'we' of the penultimate line which so effectively locks Casca emotionally into the plot

4 TOM STOPPARD: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

- (a) At a simple level, candidates were able to give an account of the Players' interventions in the play, often seeing clearly that they offer amusement and entertainment to both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and to the wider audience. At a deeper level, answers recognised the symbolism of 'playing' a part and saw that Stoppard is establishing a link between 'real' selves and the masks that we put on. There were some very good answers about the ways that the Players embody much of the discussion about death that runs through the play, and in particular the way that they contribute to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's increasing sense of insecurity and uncertainty. Many candidates were obviously very comfortably aware of the links between this play and *Hamlet*, and both here and in (b) there were occasional moments of comparison and contrast in answers that really focused an issue or scene in Stoppard's play.
- (b) Candidates were quick to see how the coin-tossing idea contributes to the discussion of destiny, chance and control that is established here. There was much interesting discussion of which of the two characters is dominant in this early stage, with candidates seeing evidence to argue the case either way. Most candidates could have made more of the stage directions as giving an audience a series of clues: they occupied about a third of the passage, so plainly were not merely there to be ignored.

5 ARTHUR MILLER: *A View from the Bridge*

- (a) At the lower end, candidates often seemed to think of this as a character based question on Marco. A question like this, for all its seeming simplicity, is asking rather more, particularly about how Marco contributes to the dramatic action (the chair lifting scene, for example) or to themes such as loyalty and betrayal. Some candidates were able to write well about him by comparing and contrasting him with either Eddie or Rodolpho. At times candidates seemed keen to write a more general essay about the tensions between the Italian code and American law, and this often meant that Marco was dumped after the introductory paragraph. It is always important to focus on the actual question asked.
- (b) A number of candidates at the lower end of the mark scheme took the question to be an invitation for a discussion of the play as a whole without really looking closely at the passage given. It was not. Better candidates were able to take the detail from this incident in order to discuss the relationship between the three characters and the way in which this incident sets up and foreshadows what is to come. There were many general essays on Eddie's ambiguous attitude

towards the law and towards his community's values. Virtually all candidates were able to make something of the Vinnie Bolzano story.

6 OSCAR WILDE: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

- (a)** As always, many candidates found it quite hard to come to terms with the cultural milieu from which this play emerges. It was straightforward to see how there is a difference between the country and the city, but rather less easy to get hold of how Wilde exploits this for purposes of satire and humour. Many candidates were, however, able to see that the apparent contrast between country and city is in fact used by characters to further their own selfish ends.
- (b)** This question was handled with confidence by most candidates that tackled it. However, it was often seen as a general question, and there was not enough focus on the detail of the passage. The best answers focused clearly on the exaggeration that pervades the piece, with every little detail from muffins to name changing evoked as means of showing how these characters are made to treat courtship as a game to be played with style rather than sincerity. There were a number of weaker answers that dealt with the passage but made little reference to the issue of courtship that had been announced in the question.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/05

Shakespeare and other Pre Twentieth Century Texts

General Comments

The overall standard was satisfactory with most candidates achieving at least a sound level of performance. It was pleasing to see a number of candidates achieving full marks and only a small minority failed to reach the acceptable minimum standard for this paper. There were very few rubric infringements in this session, though it is always disappointing when any candidates damage their results with an avoidable mistake. It is also gratifying to report that only a very few candidates failed to manage the time in the examination successfully, with the vast majority offering two reasonably balanced answers on a text from each section of the paper. Where there were apparent time problems, these were often as a result of unchecked enthusiasm for the 'favourite' text. This is a particular danger for candidates when the set task is an issue on which they have a lot to say or about which they feel strongly. Centres are asked to remind candidates that the two essays are of equal importance and they should divide the time allowed equally between the two tasks.

The standard of written English for most candidates was commendably high. Very few candidates were unable to express themselves clearly and fluently. Inevitably there were varying levels of understanding but only a handful of candidates seemed to be hampered by expressive difficulties rather than a lack of knowledge of the texts. Centres should remind candidates of the need for clear presentation and good English, as required by the rubric. It is also helpful to have a clear indication of the questions attempted on the front of the answer booklet.

As in previous examination sessions it is necessary to report on the number of candidates who offer unbalanced scripts, in which one text is apparently prepared in far more detail than the other one. This is reflected in the candidate's performance in the examination when the two essays written can be as much as fifteen marks apart when assessed. Centres are once again reminded that the two sections of the paper are of equal weight and that even an excellent performance on one text will not ensure a good result if the second text is only partly prepared. A minority of candidates also appear to tackle an option (b) question as though it were an 'unseen' passage, perhaps because the questions on their prepared text were unappealing. However the demands of the option (b) question often require a knowledge of the wider text or some form of contextualisation before they can be fully answered. For example in this session the passage question on Marvell was an extract from a longer poem and it was difficult to address the task without a knowledge of the whole poem and indeed the wider Marvell selection. However it was clear that a few candidates were attempting to answer 'unseen'. Centres should advise candidates it is never a good idea, however tempting it may be in the heat of the exam, to write on a text the candidate has never seen rather than answering an apparently 'difficult' question on a text the candidate has fully prepared.

It is also worth repeating that a detailed knowledge of the text is a basic requirement of this paper. Whilst supporting material such as critical commentaries, film versions and other recorded adaptations are useful teaching aids, it is the engagement with the text itself and a commitment to understanding the methods and concerns of the writer which best prepare the candidates for the examination. Even at a basic level of performance, for example, candidates who were attempting the passage questions on Hardy or Dickens were struggling to explore the significance of the given passage if they were unaware of such contextual points as that Henchard was no longer Mayor of Casterbridge when the firmity woman reveals his past or that little David was travelling with Barkis because he was in disgrace for biting Mr Murdstone and was off to Salem House School. It is one of the many pleasures of examining to come across candidates who are fully engaged with their texts, can comfortably move around them with accuracy and fluency and exhibit genuine enjoyment of the experiences that these major authors offer them. Many candidates in this session were in that position and it is to be hoped in future sessions all candidates will be.

A further point has once again arisen in this session and that is the importance of reading the question very carefully. Candidates must consider closely the precise wording of the question and decide what the task before them is. In this way candidates will have a clear direction to their response and this will enable them

to select appropriate evidence and textual support for the arguments or opinions offered in the essay. In some cases 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. For example in the current session some candidates tackling the option (a) question on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* seized on the word 'sympathetically' and applied it to Prospero's treatment of the other characters in the play, rather than as the question required to the way Prospero himself is presented by Shakespeare. This example shows that without a few moments of careful reflection there is grave danger of at worst not answering the question at all and at best lapsing into generalisations and selecting material which is only partly relevant to the task in hand. It is a rare script that would not be improved by a few moments of detailed reflection on the precise terms of the question.

Specific Texts

Section A Shakespeare

King Lear

This was the most popular text on the paper with more or less equal distribution between the two options. The overall standard of response was high with candidates showing very good textual knowledge and some evidence of having thought about the issues in the play. The essay option was focused on the subplot of Gloucester and his sons and was generally very well done, with nearly all candidates showing knowledge of the subplot 'story' and how it interacts with the main plot. There was understanding shown of the parallels between Gloucester and Lear and to a lesser extent Edgar and Cordelia. Candidates though had varying views of the extent of Edmund's villainy (or justified self interest) and Edgar's innocence (or naivety). More sophisticated answers saw the thematic and metaphorical connections, often around ideas of 'seeing/blindness' and 'madness/foolly'. Other answers concentrated more on the play's structure and how Shakespeare organized the plot of the play, with some pondering that Gloucester dies offstage to leave the way clear for Lear's own onstage tragic end. One particularly divisive point was the way Edgar (disguised as Poor Tom) treats his blind father, with judgements ranging from 'cruel and vicious' with all that would mean for England when he came to power, to 'sensitive and loving' with its consequent suggestions for his royal future. Each approach to the task was potentially very good, but only if the candidate was able to select the relevant material to support the argument. Option (b) was equally popular but answers were occasionally marred by not having a clear context for it, with Albany's knowledge of Goneril's relationship with Edmund at this point in the play a particular crux. Nearly all candidates could point to the worsening marital relationship and the changes in Albany himself, though relatively few remembered his role in the closing scenes. The most successful answers explored his language and imagery in depth, showing how it reveals not only his own moral goodness but, by her replies to his wise words, the depth of Goneril's depravity.

The Tempest

This was less popular and the majority who offered this text chose option (b). The responses to the Prospero question were disappointing. Nearly all candidates knew some of the details of his story and his characterisation but few were able to consider in sufficient detail his 'presentation'. Those that did had a wealth of material from which to choose and often success was determined by the quality of the selection of material and how it was shaped to the task in hand. Most responses came to the conclusion that his presentation was ambivalent, in so far as whilst an audience might be sympathetic to his situation as a usurped Duke, his treatment of Caliban, Ariel, Miranda and the shipwrecked court of Alonso was at times so reprehensible, at least for some candidates that it overshadowed all his better points. The passage question was popular and there were some sensitive answers, showing awareness of the situation of Ferdinand and how much of his upbringing he was 'sacrificing' in this hard labour. Surprisingly a number of answers failed to spot Prospero's unseen presence or evaluate fully the effect of his 'Poor worm' speech, with a few candidates thinking it was a disparaging comment showing his contempt for his daughter, and by implication, Ferdinand. Other candidates thought this was evidence of him 'forcing' the couple into a relationship and ultimately marriage for his own despicable revenge. There were as well a significant number of detailed and careful appreciations of this touching scene and candidates who were alive to the nuances of language and imagery had fertile ground for detailed analysis of Shakespeare's methods and concerns.

Section B

Persuasion

This was a popular choice, though Option (a) was quite rare. Few candidates seemed to have a sufficiently detailed knowledge of Austen's ironic approach to characterisation to be able to give a wholly satisfactory response to that part of the task. Most answers focused on humour and on Sir Walter and Elizabeth, with only a few remembering the lighter, but equally humorous presentations of, for example Admiral and Mrs Croft. More limited responses were able to explore some of the plot and a few of the characters without convincingly linking the selected material to the specific task. Option (b) however was very popular and often very well done. Nearly all candidates had interesting points to make about the progress of this central relationship, noting Lady Russell's previous influence over Anne and how in this passage we see the change in the relationship and thereby Anne herself. A pleasing number of candidates were able to explore Austen's narrative structure here, assessing where the narrative was focused and the shifting angles of narration to telling effect. The cleverness of Lady Russell's approach to 'persuasion' was often noted, with suitable reference to the previous history of her persuading Anne. Many candidates were also able to make apposite points about the language and the subtlety with which Austen shapes meaning and reader response, the oblique reference to Wentworth –'save one' – for example being a commonly used example of this.

The Nun's Priest's Prologue and Tale

This was a minority choice in this session with only a few candidates offering the option (a) essay. Nearly all responses agreed with all parts of the quoted view of Chaucer and the success of the essay was determined by how well the candidates could support their opinion and by how much they focused on 'Chaucer's presentation' as the driver for the answer. Option (b) was more popular with answers ranging from a simple paraphrase of variable accuracy to a few detailed explorations of Chaucer's style and methods, including in a few rare cases an understanding of the narrator here and what the closing lines of the extract (and the poem) suggest.

David Copperfield

This was also a minority choice but there were some very good answers on both questions. The Heeps were well known to nearly all candidates and how Uriah in particular floats in and out of David's own life. Many answers simply agreed with the stated view of their villainy and were able to give many specific examples of it. Other answers though saw some redeeming features in their loyalty to each other and in Uriah's determination to get on and overcome all obstacles. Those who concentrated on the 'role and significance' were able to find fruitful material in terms of the plot and the thematic structure – Uriah for some candidates being a parallel to David himself and by dint of their lack of fathers inevitably linking Uriah with David and Steerforth. Option (b) was often very well handled by candidates able to see how Dickens's methods were revealed here – the language, the narrative structure and the humour all attracting relevant comment. The innocence of young David was often commented on though reactions to Barkis varied from accepting his ignorant shyness to seeing him as almost a Machiavel in his manipulation of the uncorrupted David.

The Mayor of Casterbridge

This was the most popular of the **Section B** texts with slightly more candidates tackling the passage question. It was clear that many candidates had thought about fate and coincidence in the novel since many detailed and carefully constructed answers were seen. Some limited themselves to considering Henchard only, with plenty of material to choose from, but others saw a wider impact, even to the extent of seeing the novel as a whole as Hardy's attempt to show us how insignificant we are in a possibly malign universe. A few candidates thought Hardy's reliance on coincidence was a weakness, offering examples from the text and from other critics to support this view, suggesting our belief in his characters was undermined by the way their lives were buffeted by mere chance encounters – the unfortunate timing of Newson's reappearance and Henchard's opening of Susan's letter being two commonly used examples. More limited answers were able to offer examples of coincidence and, less securely, fate, without always understanding the significance. These essays were often a series of similar examples rather than an attempt to develop a balanced argument. Option (b) was very popular and often very well done. Nearly all candidates were aware of the significance of the furmity woman's revelation, though the contextual awareness was variable. Knowing that Henchard had recently 'forced' Lucetta into agreeing to marry him and that his star was already shining less brightly because of Farfrae were important factors in justly weighing this passage. Some candidates did focus on the language and tone, pointing out the shifting narrative focus and movement from humour to seriousness for example.

Marvell Selection

Although a minority choice this was often very well tackled. Option (a) produced some excellent answers, looking in detail at Marvell's characteristic metaphysical approach to his topic, but offering sensitive and thoughtful evaluations of the poems and how so much of his 'real' feelings are suggested by a mere word or phrase. Candidates who adopted a comparative approach, ranging amongst the poems for similar or contrasting examples, often did well. More basic answers often showed a good knowledge of the text and were able to make and support some simple but relevant ideas. Option (b) was more variable in standard, with some candidates approaching this extract as an 'unseen', as mentioned earlier. Those who knew the poem and the selection well, however, were in the majority and there were some detailed and thoughtful responses to the language and imagery of this extract.

The Rape of the Lock

This was, on its return, a popular choice and there some excellent answers on both options, suggesting real engagement with Pope's satirical methods and a genuine, if surprising, enjoyment of the poem and its subject. Most candidates tackling option (a) agreed with the contention offered, seeing Belinda as an object of ridicule and at the same time of affection. Those who focused on the portrayal rather than the character inevitably did better, but many candidates were able to show some analytical skills in deconstructing the effect of Pope's choice of language and in a few cases of his chosen poetic methods. Option (b) rewarded those candidates who had fully engaged with the text and were able to explore the various references to classical literature and Pope's contemporary society and London in detail. Many answers showed awareness of and at times understanding of the effects of the heroic couplets and how Pope manipulates them to achieve his satirical ends.

Tennyson Selected Poems

This was the least popular text on the paper and very few candidates offered either option. Candidates generally did not agree with the view offered – Tennyson was always relevant to a sensitive reader, with many using the *In memoriam* poems as evidence of this. Tennyson's interest in religion was a difficulty for some modern readers as was his use of historical and mythological allusions and characters. However the consensus was that when dealing with emotions he was a reliable if slightly old fashioned guide. Option (b) was rare and few answers had a convincing grasp of Tennyson's methods here or even a knowledge of the poem as a whole.

The Duchess of Malfi

This was less popular in this session than in previous ones. The majority opted for the essay on Bosola and this was often well answered. His ambivalent presentation was reflected in the range of judgements candidates offered about him. He was variously a calculating, evil murderer or a misunderstood, much put upon potential hero. The best answers were able to develop balanced and thoughtful accounts, drawing on the text for support with fluency and accuracy. Option (b) was well known to candidates and many were able to comment sensibly on its significance in terms of plot and what it revealed about the Duchess and to a lesser extent Antonio. Only a few candidates remembered this was a play and commented on its dramatic effects, but those that did often did very well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/06

Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

Examiners felt that there were very few candidates for whom this examination was not a purposeful exercise. The overall difficulty of the paper seemed comparable with previous years. Some texts are perhaps perceived as being more demanding than others, but candidates choosing Eliot and Woolf often did very well. The lack of interest in Murray is disappointing. The questions were accessible and helpful to weaker as well as stronger candidates, producing a range of performance across all the bands. Some candidates achieved full marks through sustained engagement with the texts and the questions, developing fresh, personal responses based on a close, sensitive reading of the texts and supported by an impressive command of aptly chosen quotations and detailed references. To maximise the marks, candidates should try to give each question equal time; candidates producing unbalanced scripts, with one long and one short answer did less well. There was some over-developed background material on Pinter, Churchill, Narayan and Eliot. Candidates should be advised that while it can be useful to briefly mention social and literary contexts in relation to the treatment of a theme or the style, they should use the introduction to focus on the question and consider its implications. Candidates generally need to be encouraged to display more detailed literary analysis, particularly in the (b) questions where they are expected to engage primarily with the extracts and discuss how the language constructs meaning and manipulates audience response. There has been a significant improvement in the way candidates show an awareness of dramatic effects, but even good candidates appear to have more difficulty analysing poetic effect. Sometimes candidates seeking security and support are drawn to the (b) questions but then lack the skills to analyse the extracts and so neglect the main focus of the questions. Candidates who prefer to engage on the level of plot, character and theme would be better advised to opt for the (a) questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 MARGARET ATWOOD: *Cat's Eye*

This was a popular choice of text with most candidates showing good recall of the novel, some apt detailed references and sensitive, personal response.

- (a) This was the favourite of the two questions, with the quotation giving a useful pointer to the narrative structure. However weaker candidates tended to narrate the history of Elaine's friendships rather than to see them as sifted through Atwood's particular first person narrative. Candidates should perhaps be warned not simply to describe an aspect of the novel as an unfolding story. Stronger candidates explored the longer-term effects of Elaine's experiences, making interesting comparisons between her friendships with girls and Stephen, showing insight into the demands for conformity and Elaine's later treatment of Cordelia at High School and her attitude on return to Montreal for the retrospective.
- (b) This was a rich and interesting passage but lack of close reference meant there was often scant appreciation of its literary qualities. Only a few commented on the structure, how the reflection at the end tied back to the opening description, the use of visual detail, lists, choice of language and variety of sentence structure. Some candidates focused on Atwood's use of time and the juxtaposition of past and present in the novel. This was an appropriate way of developing a response though it tended towards consideration of theme rather than of the quality of the descriptive writing. The most fruitful contextual references related to Elaine's relationship with her mother while those who explored the symbolism made much of the pressure cooker as representing Elaine's emotional state and the wrapped up silver objects turning black in the cellar representing her repressed memories. Some weaker candidates saw the passage as essentially confirming the thriftiness of the household or attempted to give a character description, asserting Elaine's lack of self-esteem. Others attempted to apply half-digested ideas about post-colonialism

to the passage, paraphrased the passage or used the end of the passage as a launch pad for an essay on Elaine's experience of being bullied.

Question 2 R.K. NARAYAN: *The English Teacher*

This was also a popular choice of text. Both options were accessible and enabled many candidates to approach central themes and vital shifts in Krishna's sensibility, though perhaps some candidates spent too long on autobiographical material.

- (a) Few disagreed with the central proposition and could appreciate that children and ideas about childhood influenced Krishna in important ways. Most tended to focus on the impact of Leela before and after Susila's death and the ideas of the nursery school headmaster. More subtle points included the idea that Krishna's love of Susila is in part a response to her childlike, uncomplicated appreciation of novel experiences and clarity of thought and that Krishna himself, as a result of his experiences, ends up in a more childlike state himself. Weaker candidates tended to catalogue the appearances of children in the novel. Candidates should be warned that while it is legitimate to question whether the portrayal of childhood is central to the novel, they are expected to address the issue in some detail and evaluate its significance rather than simply refute the idea and produce pre-learned material.
- (b) This was a good passage for identifying the crucial changes in Krishna's life and his new freedom from the constraining routine of the college. Unfortunately weaker candidates tended to summarise the whole novel to explain how he had arrived at this point, or paraphrased the passage. Better candidates were able to see that Krishna was attempting to channel a whole complex of very personal emotions and frustrations into a formal letter on education and a number of candidates explored the post-colonial context well, but missed the opportunity for displaying a literary response to the extract. Candidates noted Krishna's attitudes, but were reluctant to explore the effect of the narrative method, the figurative language and the sentence structure. Only a few seemed to appreciate the irony of "the dead mutton of literary analysis".

Question 3 LES MURRAY: from *Selected Poems*

The majority of the candidates offering this text opted for the extract.

- (a) This was a very straightforward, open question on a significant theme and it was disappointing that candidates who chose this found it difficult to support general assertions about the poet's concerns with detailed reference to more than one poem.
- (b) Most candidates seemed to be approaching the extract as an unseen and struggled to extract meaning. The better candidates used the question and attempted to explore the effects of some of the figurative language "to create mood and tone" with some success. Others noted potentially rich phrases e.g. "Metaphors slump irritably together in / the muggy weeks" but appreciation was often limited to a comment on the meaning and essays were often a succession of separate bullet points rather than a structured response.

Question 4 CARYL CHURCHILL: *Top Girls*

This was a very popular text and generally well prepared. Candidates were usually able to move selectively around the play and display some apt textual support and appropriate personal response. Most showed an understanding of the dramatic effects resulting from the structure and some made good use of ideas about Thatcherism and feminism, though weaker candidates who had not assimilated their notes well, tended to drift away from the focus of the questions.

- (a) Most candidates could give an account of Marlene's independence, some relating it to a desire to avoid her mother's situation and explaining the light cast on Marlene's approach to life by the historical/fictional candidates. Better candidates explored how our view of Marlene develops during the play, pointed out her dependence on Joyce for looking after Angie and considered the cases for and against her independence being commendable. Most were able to define some ambivalence in their response to the character but in some weaker answers it was not clear whether the candidates understood the meaning of "commendably".

- (b) Most candidates were able to relate the passage to its immediate context and to the wider presentation of Angie in the play as a whole. There was some thoughtful writing about the difficulties in the relationship between Angie and Joyce, Angie's friendship with Kit and parallels between Angie and Marlene, Angie and Dull Gret. Angie's situation was often recognised to be the result of Marlene's choices and some candidates saw Angie's uncertain future as bringing into question the Thatcherite emphasis on individual, material success. Weaker candidates paid scant attention to the extract, moving quickly to a general account of the character, or relied on paraphrase. Stronger candidates looked more closely at the dialogue in the extract, considering tone, the significance of the dress and the dramatic impact of the brick.

Question 5 HAROLD PINTER: *The Homecoming*

The Homecoming was again a popular choice, provoking some lively and well-supported responses. Candidates at all levels of ability engaged fully with the text and questions.

- (a) This was a central question for which many candidates had prepared, but it was good to see the best of them carefully considering the words "struggle" and "dramatise". They debated the extent to which Ruth achieves power without the need to "struggle" for it, and explored how the daily struggle among the characters, creates a sense of who they are and is dramatised in the ways they abuse, ignore and demean each other. They referred to specific scenes in some detail, exploring the impact of specific conversations, conveying a real response to the staging, props like the glass of water, the walking stick and the final tableau.
- (b) This too prompted some interesting responses. Most candidates were able to make apt contextual links and could recognise a difference in tone between the passage and the rest of the play, though only in better responses did this recognition lead to discussion of the resulting dramatic effects. A few took Max's monologue at face value though the majority were aware of the irony and unreliability and of the deflating effect of Ruth's question about the butchers. Max's detailed description of the clothes he bought Jessie was related to other feminine aspects of his behaviour and there was appropriate discussion of gender stereotypes, the way Ruth is related to the men's memories of Jessie and some relish for the possible interpretation of child abuse. It was good to see that candidates explored the dramatic effects of the passage by close reference to Max's language, contrasting the conventional politeness of the opening with the savagery of the end, the use of cliché, the implications of Jessie being a woman with "a heart of gold and a mind" and the different effects of Max's requests for confirmation, particularly in addressing Sam. There were a few intelligent discussions of comedy and absurdity.

Question 6 T.S.ELIOT: *Prufrock and Other Observations, The Waste Land and The Hollow Men*

Both questions tended to prompt full, knowledgeable answers with some impressive detailed references, though comments on poetic technique were often generalised and assertive. Both questions were equally popular though candidates tended to do better on **Question (a)**. Some wrote so lengthily on this text that the second question was compromised.

- (a) This was an accessible question which enabled good candidates to write convincingly about a range of poems. They tended to make valid assertions on the theme and illustrate with appropriate quotations showing an implicit appreciation of the poetic method e.g. "In *Prufrock*, Eliot presents concerns in a way that trivialises them : *Do I dare disturb the universe?.....Do I dare to eat a peach?*" The better candidates discussed connections and distinctions amongst the poems in terms of the question, commenting on point of view and the sardonic, witty style. Simpler responses ran through several poems identifying instances of futility and insignificance, often spending too long describing the historical and social context.
- (b) Candidates varied very much in the prior knowledge that they brought to the passage. Some had a general awareness of Eliot's methods and concerns but seemed to approach the passage almost as an unseen. On the other hand there were candidates with detailed knowledge of the allusions in the passage, but who offered little personal response to it as poetry. The best were able to combine knowledge with perceptive personal response. They were able to place the extract in its immediate context as the opening of a section of the poem that does offer some answers to the barrenness of the wasteland experiences and say what the thunder said. They were also able to improvise quite effective responses on its poetic effects, commenting on the simplicity of the diction, the sentence structure, use of repetition and allusions. The weakest could not get beyond a paraphrase.

Question 7 WOLE SOYINKA: *Death and the King's Horseman*

This is a very accessible text and deserves to be studied more widely as it offers an interesting presentation of culture, colonialism and human strengths and weaknesses. It understandably proved popular with Nigerian Centres and was quite well done, with candidates answering the (a) question more successfully than the extract.

- (a) The culture within which Elesin is granted power is richly contextualised within the play and most candidates appreciated the enormity within that culture of Elesin's failure. The more nuanced responses recognised that Soyinka creates ambiguity by showing Elesin as humanly fallible rather than corrupt, prompting the audience to reflect sympathetically on his state of mind rather than to straightforwardly condemn him. The best candidates referred in detail to specific scenes, commenting with some insight on the conflict between the cultures and within individuals though more was said about characters and themes than dramatic presentation.
- (b) The extract was less well done, with few candidates appreciating its knock-about humour and mimicry. There was widespread recognition of the market women's role in upholding customs and values but less awareness of the girls' self-assurance and understanding of colonial attitudes and expressions. Very few candidates analysed the language and dramatic effects very closely, with weaker candidates tending to describe individual women characters as they appeared elsewhere in the text.

Question 8 VIRGINIA WOOLF: *Mrs Dalloway*

Both questions on this text really discriminated between the candidates with a personal engagement and understanding of the text and those who, though well prepared in terms of background information, found it difficult to select and apply their knowledge. There were some very good answers on both questions, but the approach of weaker candidates was too generalised.

- (a) While Septimus's plight and treatment were at the core of most answers, there was also some thoughtful writing relating the aftermath of the war more widely to ideas about patriotism, a mood of disenchantment, exhaustion, a preoccupation with death, recovery and new beginnings in terms of social mobility and education. There was some useful discussion on Miss Kilman's perception of herself in comparison to the opportunities available to Elizabeth. Some candidates delivered a lot of prepared historical background or tended to produce a description of Septimus and his wife, their background, difficulties and the circumstances of Septimus's death, with the weakest candidates relying on generalised narrative summary.
- (b) The extract was occasionally really well done with good responses focusing on Woolf's narrative technique, tracking not only the changing points of view but also the effect achieved by the transitions and juxtapositions. The comedy of Hugh's self-regarding behaviour was frequently noted, as was the irony of Lady Bruton's remarks about Clarissa, while the best candidates made some attempt to analyse the satire of class and excess in the description of the food. Weaker candidates struggled to relate the extract to the rest of the text and offered some unsupported general statements about "tunnelling" and "stream of consciousness". These often revealed some misunderstanding and occasionally resulted in garbled responses.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/07

Comment and Appreciation

General comments

There was a good deal of interesting work this summer, showing clear evidence of the careful and thoughtful preparation for this Paper that had been undertaken by many candidates; while there was certainly some less than proficient critical writing, there was no doubt that rather more candidates than usual understood the crucial need to go well beyond simple paraphrase or narrative, and to explore the effects that a writer's words have upon his or her readers. In doing this, there must of course be considerable use of suitable critical terminology, not just for its own sake, or simply to show the Examiners that candidates know such words and – usually – what they mean, but far more importantly to act as a kind of shorthand way of explaining the effects that the writers are creating. There is no point in simply listing all and every possibly technical term just for the sake of doing so – even in a few instances simply to say that some techniques are *not* used – but where they help an argument develop without a lengthier explanation than they can and should be introduced; this was evident in a good number of answers this summer.

Paraphrase and narrative have been mentioned, and where an answer does not go beyond simply “telling the story” it cannot achieve more than a very few marks. At A-Level it must absolutely be assumed that candidates will understand the passages and poems that are set for discussion; they are very carefully chosen in order to be sufficiently demanding for advanced study, while at the same time not so obscure or difficult that candidates can have no real hope of managing to appreciate them. If candidates only show that they can paraphrase then they are not in any sense demonstrating the skills that this Paper is testing, and that candidates at this level are expected to have acquired.

The great majority of candidates wrote on **Questions 1 and 2**, presumably because they were shorter and therefore appeared to be more straightforward; this was not really the case, however, as both the short story and the short poem are very delicate and sophisticated pieces, needing some sensitive and responsive handling. Most candidates certainly understood in broad terms what happens, or what is said, in the two pieces, though there was surprisingly often some uncertainty about both, but relatively few answers managed to tackle everything that could or should be said about either, almost always because too much time was spent on the kind of unnecessary and critically unhelpful rehearsal of their *contents* that has been mentioned above. It is true that Jean Rhys's story can be interpreted in at least two largely convincing ways, but too many spent too much time trying to decide what actually happens, and what is meant by the closing sentence, and thus not enough time really exploring the language and images that she uses while preparing the reader for the shock that comes right at the end. Similarly but more seriously too many candidates wanted to argue a case for Anne Bradstreet's husband being dead, or said that it was really a letter rather than a poem, or simply talked about love poetry in general, and wasted time on such largely irrelevant points rather than critically exploring what she actually says, and how she says it, in just twelve short lines.

It is of course not easy to manage an unseen passage or poem in less than an hour, to read and re-read it, to think and at least mentally prepare some ideas about it and then to write accurately and thoughtfully; Examiners recognise and understand this difficulty, and will always make allowances for hasty writing, awkwardly planned responses and changes of mind, but the best and most confident responses will almost invariably come from candidates who have clearly spent a few valuable minutes simply thinking before putting pen to paper. Some of the images and ideas early in Jean Rhys's story, for example, become much richer and more subtle when you have read and at least attempted to understand the conclusion; it is far better to do this than to try to jump straight into an answer before having absorbed as much as possible beforehand.

A number of candidates adopted a somewhat mechanistic approach to their answers, in effect writing a sequence of short, often very short, essays, each on a particular and identified sub-topic – Theme, Mood, Diction, Poetic Devices and so on. Such a simply structured approach is not usually very successful, in that it tends to encourage a superficial and in a way “factual” response to a text, rather than the fully argued and personally-felt critical discussion that Examiners look for.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was by far the most popular question, and many candidates wrote some very interesting and thoughtful answers; it is not a straightforward piece of writing, despite its simple language and uncomplicated narrative, and while some were clearly puzzled and occasionally entirely bewildered by the closing sentence there were many more who offered sensitive and often critically perceptive interpretations and sensitive personal responses to it.

The most common theory was that the girl/woman in the story is in fact dead, although until apparently not noticed by the two children she is unaware of this fact; candidates offering this idea used several moments to justify and support it, in particular the fact that the young boy mentions briefly to his sister how cold it has suddenly become, a phenomenon often linked in common belief to the appearance of a ghost. The opening paragraph, with its descriptions of the stepping stones leading across the river, was often seen as an image of a number of stages in the woman's life, leading in the end to her transition, by death, across the river – once or twice seen as the River Styx in ancient mythology – to life 'on the other side'. The fact that no mention is actually made in the story to her physically crossing the river was sometimes adduced as proof that she is in fact a purely spiritual being, even though there is in reality no actual reference to this anywhere in the story.

A substantial number, though rather fewer, decided that Jean Rhys is writing about the woman's first and shocked realisation that her skin colour is different from that of the two children, and that this is why they reject her attempted friendship; until this fearful moment she had never been aware of any such difference. Evidence for this idea was seen in the reference in the fifth paragraph to the fact that the children are European, that their house has recently been painted a symbolic white, and that the boy's silent and cold rejection is simply echoing what they have been told about black people, and how they should shun them and not respond in any way. The allegedly cold weather is quite simply an excuse.

A third quite common interpretation was that this is simply but rather vaguely a story about Appearance and Reality – that the narrator, in returning to her childhood home, expected things to be the same and was therefore shocked to find that the reality is that life does not stay still, and that nothing remains as it once was. The final sentence of the story was rather hard to include in this thesis, but it was nonetheless argued quite well by some candidates.

Other candidates admitted to uncertainty about the ending, even to the point of either ignoring it entirely, or occasionally just saying that "she" had come to a sudden but unexplained and undeveloped awareness that you cannot re-visit the past. Such answers were not often very convincing, however, and found considerable difficulties in explaining much of the imagery that Rhys uses – particularly perhaps the word "glassy" in lines 10 and 11, a word interpreted by many candidates as suggestive of the fragility of the woman's state of ignorance, which, for whatever reason, was about to be shattered like a piece of glass or a mirror. Others saw the word as suggestive that the narrator could no longer see as clearly as she used to, and was also perhaps separated from her new experience by a glass ceiling, or even that she was looking at herself in some kind of metaphorical mirror. It is not an easy word to understand here, but it was explored intelligently and thoughtfully by many.

It is a very short short story – and the introduction does make it clear that it is not simply an extract – but it has a lot of resonances and possibilities. The most successful answers moved significantly away from simple paraphrase and narrative, and tried hard to explore and justify at least some of the words and phrases that Rhys uses. There were some excellent and critically sensitive responses.

On a lighter note: candidates must be careful how they use the dates given for a writer's life; these can often – as in **Question 2** for example – be very helpful in establishing a context for the passage or poem, but they must be used sensibly. The comment made by one candidate, that Jean Rhys took too long, 89 years in fact, to write this story, was not the most alert or critically sensible use of the dates!

Question 2

The great majority of candidates wrote on this poem, too, perhaps assuming – wrongly – that because it is so short, and because the extract in **Question 3** is longer, that it would be easy to discuss. Its language is certainly simple and unsophisticated, its rhymes and rhythm are both very basic and unadorned, and its structure could hardly be more straightforward, but having said all that it is in fact a poem of very considerable sophistication and delicacy. Many candidates saw both qualities, and many too wrote about it with some sharply sensitive critical awareness, but too many rather unhelpfully discussed it terms of what Bradstreet does *not* say or write about, rather than what she does. It is very unwise, and certainly very unhelpful in examination terms, to suggest ways in which in the candidate's view a writer should have written, or to offer alternative words and phrases in place of what is actually there in a poem, rather than to discuss why, and more importantly with what effects, the writer's actual words and phrases are used.

It is perhaps helpful to say straight away that this is not a sonnet, as too many candidates assumed; there are only twelve lines instead of a sonnet's fourteen, and the simple couplet rhyme-scheme is not a sonnet form; those few – very few – who noted that it perhaps appeared initially to be a sonnet, or looked like a sonnet, were sharper, but too much time was wasted in saying this. It is simply a twelve-line poem with simple rhyme and consistent iambic pentameter rhythm – yes, lines eleven and twelve do have an additional syllable, but they both end with a weak feminine rhyme, and more significantly perhaps, as some candidates noted, the slight extra length of each line can arguably reflect the idea of lasting and eternal love, even after death.

The rhyming couplet pattern was seen by many candidates to echo the simple but centrally significant unity of husband and wife that the poem is celebrating; the repetition in lines 1-3, echoed by a different sort of repetition in lines 9-12, act as points of emphasis certainly, but the double repetition was seen by many also to act as another way of establishing the absolute certainty of the love being portrayed by Bradstreet. The poem has in effect three four-line sections, each adopting a slightly different view of the love, and again, by their self-contained nature, echoing the sense of oneness and completeness that the poem is celebrating. Several candidates also noted that the word and idea "ever" acts as a kind of frame, coming as it does at the very beginning and the very ending of the poem.

Many candidates were determined, often too determined, to find examples of poetic techniques, and wanted more metaphors than there are; in fact the poem is almost metaphor-free, the only one really being in line 7, which oddly was very rarely fully appreciated – often because of an uncertainty about the word "quench"; although later in the poem her love does have religious overtones, what Bradstreet is saying here, surely, is that she has such a strong physical desire and thirst for her husband that even rivers would be unable to satisfy it. Her hypothetical rejection of material riches in lines 5 and 6 are not metaphorical – they are statement of literal truth; her love *is* of greater value to her than any financial wealth that she might possibly possess.

Many candidates criticised the poem as being "corny", and full of clichés, ignoring for the most part that the poem might not have been seen in this way when first written more than 350 years ago. Even where they were aware of its date, some candidates said that even if it was not too seriously cliché-ridden then it certainly is now, which therefore makes it a poor poem, a slightly illogical and unconvincing argument. Many commented on the use of what are now archaic words, again in some cases criticising Bradstreet for using these, even though they were not archaic in the mid-17th century; others felt that such words – thee, ye, thy, ought, manifold – were used because they were Biblical, or Shakespearean, and as such carried some additional authority and seriousness. Again, however, the fact that such words were commonplace in 17th century writing was often simply ignored.

Too many candidates, despite the poem's brevity, did not in fact move far beyond straightforward paraphrase, simply outlining, with various levels of confidence and certainty, what the poem says, without making any comment at all about its structure. In many cases, in fact, there was little apparent awareness that it was a poem at all; where this happened, answers could not achieve more than a low or at best mediocre mark, given that it is so short and has so many simple but important and effective poetic features. It is emphatically not, as a surprising number of candidates said, a love letter – it is a poem; it is not even a love letter in the form of a poem – it is simply a poem. And why so relatively many should have assumed that the poet's husband is dead is something of a mystery; there is nothing in the poem itself, surely, which can seriously suggest this?

Question 3

It was a shame that so few candidates attempted this question: the extract is certainly lengthy, and this presumably persuaded some candidates to go for the shorter options; however, those who did respond to it managed to explore it with often considerable ease and perception, noting its gothic or ghost-story characteristics in some detail, at the same time responding to the moments of quiet and self-deprecating humour that the narrator uses. The opening, as almost all answers noted, is traditional and conventional in its use of a late-night time, a large and supposedly empty old house, a comrade and an attendant who have just left the narrator (there is no evidence at all that his comrade has died, as one or two asserted), a warm and securely fire-lit room, and streets that “were as silent as a graveyard”. The curiously determined steps that the narrator hears are again very characteristic of some kinds of ghost tale, and this element was well discussed by many. The fear that the narrator describes in the third paragraph is spoken of in terms that could equally well be seen as humorous, especially perhaps in the sentence in line 28 beginning “There is, I think, something most disagreeably disenchanting . . .” – the word “disenchanting”, and its alliterative echo in the following adjective, are surely intended in a lighter manner? The appearance in the fifth paragraph of the “black monster” is both alarming and comic, especially when it turns out to be – possibly – only the narrator’s own tea-service that he has seen. However, the closing short paragraph returns to serious horror again, with the introduction of the thunder-storm and the “comfortless pattering of the rain”. Traditional ghost-story elements are back again, with an ominous turn at the point where the extract frustratingly but enticingly finishes.

The character of the narrator was well explored by many; he was frequently seen as a man who likes routine and stability, as a man of intelligence and intellect, as one who is able to look quite coolly at his own feelings and fears, and when appropriate to laugh at his own folly, but also as one who when frightened acts with sudden almost instinctive violence – possibly, as many answers suggested, because of his military background, as evidenced by the word “garrison”. His conversational tone and language were often noted, too, as a means by which Le Fanu engages us with the narrator’s personality, and encourages us to feel with and for him, but then entertainingly and amusingly to let us down by the very fact that what he appears to see may in fact be simply imagined or at best exaggerated. As one sophisticated response put it, “the interfusion of ludicrous imaginings with a conventional background creates a comic jostling, a tantalising union of the definite and the vague”.

As noted above, many commented on the traditional Gothic elements that pervade the tale, with some candidates praising Le Fanu for his creation of such an atmospheric and alarming scenario, but with others dismissing these elements as simply hackneyed and over-worked, so losing their impact. The story is certainly frightening at times, but for an A Level candidate the words “scary”, “spooky, or the phrase “a bit creepy” are not really critically adequate, and Examiners did look for something a little more sophisticated, even if the idea is valid.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/08

Coursework

Like last year, this was a very good session indeed, with some excellent work on a very wide range of texts, demonstrating yet again how successful candidates can be when offered the opportunity to write essays on texts and tasks that they have been able to plan, draft and refine before submitting for marking. There was evidence in almost every Centre of good independent and personal response, often because it seemed that candidates had been offered a choice of tasks, or even in some cases a choice of texts, and were thus able to pursue their own particular interests and critical ideas. This is not of course to say that teachers should not decide what texts to teach and what tasks to set – they will know better than anybody the particular strengths and skills of their own candidates – but there is no doubt that the best work will often, if not always, come from candidates who have not been over-taught as a group, and whose work is therefore likely to be different from that of others, and likely too to show a special, individual interest and enjoyment.

Some of the texts and tasks used this year are printed below, not in any sense to act as a suggested book-list, but simply to demonstrate the varied and different kinds of reading that candidates undertook. Some of the writers are of course traditional (Shakespeare, Brontë, Christina Rossetti), some have become more modern classics (Plath, Tennessee Williams, Huxley, Larkin, Bennett) and some are more nearly contemporary (McEwan and Russell). It truly does not matter in a sense what texts are used, provided of course that they are of sufficient demand for Advanced Level study, that they do not appear on any of the examined syllabus lists, and that they have been approved by CIE before work on them begins. What is perhaps more important is the nature and wording of the tasks that are set, so that the demand given to each candidate is most appropriate for their individual abilities and critical skills. Again, these should be seen and approved, or occasionally amended, by CIE.

This component requires candidates to show knowledge and understanding of the whole of a text while at the same time demonstrating the ability to explore a writer's techniques and language in the kind of close and analytical way in a maximum of 3000 words. There are many ways of doing this, but one helpful suggestion may be to encourage candidates to spend part of their essay in focusing critically upon just one or two relatively brief passages from their novel or play, or upon two or three poems, so that they can show their critical skills on these, and then in doing so demonstrate how and why, or to what extent, they are reflective or characteristic, of the themes, ideas, styles of the rest of the text or poetry collection. A high mark cannot of course be awarded to an essay which focuses *only* upon one or two passages or poems, and candidates must make it perfectly clear that they do know the whole text or collection well and thoroughly, by making brief but pointed reference and quotation from the wider text. But in the same way a high mark cannot be awarded to an essay which makes only broad and general comments, without ever looking closely at how the writing works. A compromise and balance must be found, and one of the most pleasing aspects of this year's work was how well and how often candidates managed to achieve such a balance between close and broad writing, even when working on large and complex novels – *Wuthering Heights*, for example, or in one Centre Sterne's huge novel *Tristram Shandy*.

Teachers' annotations are invariably helpful to a Moderator in seeing how and why a particular mark has been reached, and another very pleasing aspect of this year's work was how full and detailed these comments were. The most useful were directed to the Moderator rather than to the candidates themselves, though this can also be valuable, but what was most encouraging was how exact and appropriately critical almost all comments were; there were very few indeed that were unnecessarily or unjustly fulsome in their praise, and even fewer that were unhelpfully negative. Marking was almost invariably close to agreed standards for this syllabus, and while a few adjustments were recommended to the marks awarded – upwards as well as downwards, it is important to stress – most Centres demonstrated a realistic and confident interpretation of what the Marking Criteria demand.

This has been said in several earlier Reports, but it must be re-iterated: the word limit is 3000 words, no more. When candidates allow themselves to exceed this, it is *essential* that Centres ask them to reduce the length before the work is marked; to go beyond 3000 words is not only a breach of the syllabus regulations, it is also unfair to other candidates who have followed the rule.

This was, then, a very good year; reading candidates' work is always enjoyable and often illuminating, but this summer it has been unusually pleasurable. Centres, teachers and most of all their candidates have produced some first-class work; even where work has been less sophisticated and less critically perceptive it has never been in any sense poor, and there is clear evidence that all candidates have learned and appreciated a great deal. All concerned should be justly proud.

Some texts and tasks that were successfully used by Centres this session; it is not suggested that they should be copied by other Centres, but the ideas they bring to mind may be of interest and help:

Prose: Brave New World (Huxley)

- *Discuss the role and significance of John the Savage in the novel.*
- *"The character of John the Savage forces the reader to question the values and philosophy of Huxley's World State." How far do you agree with this comment?*

Wuthering Heights (Brontë)

- *In the light of events in the novel, do you consider that Brontë portrays Heathcliff as 'a fiend from hell' or a victim of social prejudice?*
- *How far do you agree that in Heathcliff Brontë has created a truly tragic hero?*

A Room With A View (Forster)

- *How does Forster present Englishness in the novel?*
- *Explore the importance of deception in the novel.*

Other novelists whose works were discussed included Stead (*Talking About O'Dwyer*), McEwan (*Atonement*).

Poetry: Poems of Sylvia Plath

- *Many of Plath's poems give a strong impression of energy. Discuss some of the ways in which she creates this effect.*
- *"There is so much emphasis on death and despair in Plath's poetry that her celebration of life is often overlooked." How far do you agree with this view?*
- *Explore some of the ways in which Plath uses colour in her poetry.*
- *Explore Plath's portrayal of motherhood in her poems.*

Poems of Larkin

- *How, and how effectively in your view, does Larkin portray change in his poetry?*
- *Pessimist or realist? Consider your own response to Larkin as you read his poems.*

Poems of Christina Rossetti

- *An exploration of Rossetti's longing for self-fulfilment.*
- *Discuss how Rossetti explores the idea of renunciation in her poetry.*

Drama: Educating Rita (Russell)

- *Discuss how Russell presents different views of education in the play.*

The Glass Menagerie (Williams)

- *Explore the uses and effects of some of the unconventional dramatic techniques that Williams uses in the play.*
- *How, and with what effects, does Williams use symbolism in the play?*
- *Discuss Williams' portrayal of Amanda/Laura/Tom in the play (candidates were asked to select just one of these three characters)*

Waiting for Godot (Beckett)

- *Explore the importance of memory in the play.*
- *In your view, is the play about hope or despair?*

Other playwrights whose works were discussed included Bennett (*The History Boys*), Priestley (*An Inspector Calls*).