

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	1
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH	2
GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level	2
Paper 9695/03 Poetry and Prose	2
Paper 9695/04 Drama	4
Paper 9695/05 Shakespeare and other Pre Twentieth Century Texts	7
Paper 9695/06 Twentieth Century Texts	10
Paper 9695/07 Comment and Appreciation	14
Paper 9695/08 Coursework	17

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

<p>Paper 9695/03 Poetry and Prose</p>

General comments

Examiners noted an increased confidence in the way candidates approached the paper in this session. The great majority of candidates seemed well-prepared and have a good knowledge of their set texts. There were certainly examples where this was not the case, and some candidates struggled to demonstrate their knowledge, but by and large essays marshalled knowledge effectively. At the top end of the mark range, many candidates produced work of the highest standard. Their ability to write detailed, controlled, articulate answers in the time available was impressive.

Answers were again dominated by *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and *A Grain of Wheat*, though each text had been studied widely with the exception of Stevie Smith's *Selected Poems*.

As noted in the June report, it is clear that Centres are preparing candidates in the specific techniques for the questions with increasing success. Answers to the open (a) questions are effective when they are well shaped, constructing a clear argument, and supported by appropriate quotation and reference. The most confident answers to the passage (b) questions focus in considerable detail on the text printed on the examination paper, commenting on the effectiveness of the author's choices of form, language and imagery.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) With so many candidates choosing to answer this question, it provided Examiners with a very wide range of responses. While there were examples of what appeared to be pre-prepared essays, with little reference to the question, most candidates were able to choose appropriate poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* to illustrate their answers on Blake's concern with social injustice. Less successful candidates, however, tended to summarise the content of their chosen poems, explaining, for example, the difficulties of chimney sweeping, without paying much attention to Blake's presentation of the social concern in his poetry. Although some of these answers were well focused on social injustice and the social background to Blake's concerns, these issues took centre stage to the neglect of closer analysis. More successful answers demonstrated an awareness of the contextual issues, but focused on Blake's form, imagery and language in his poetry.
- (b) This was another popular choice. Candidates frequently noted that the opening of the set poem is reminiscent of the *Innocence* poems before it alters its tone and becomes much more characteristic of *Experience*. The best answers, through careful textual analysis, noted the way the language alters to signal these changes. Many candidates were able to demonstrate good knowledge of the whole text by referring in detail to other poems in support of their argument. At the lower end of the mark range, candidates struggled to progress beyond a paraphrase of the poem.

Question 2

Touched with Fire: ed. Hydes

- (a) This question elicited answers which referred to a wide range of poems, including *Ozymandias*, *The Wild Swans at Coole*, *Cold in the Earth*, *Rising Five*, *Tall Nettles* and *Thistles*. While in some cases the choice of poems was surprising, candidates were usually able to construct a justification of their selection. It was disappointing to see that candidates did not tackle highly relevant material in some of the longer poems in the selection, namely *Mariana* and *Tintern Abbey*. However, in most cases, candidates constructed valid arguments in comparing the treatment of the passing of time. Differentiation was achieved by the level of detail and awareness of poetic technique which candidates demonstrated.
- (b) Many candidates responded with enthusiasm to Heaney's poem, and there were few examples of dogged paraphrase. Many responded well to the prompt word 'language' in the question, commenting quite closely and pertinently on diction, and in doing so, were able to mark the development of the narrator's perspective through the poem. While very many candidates wrote well on the question, few candidates responded to the ambiguities in the poem. Most divided into two camps: those who thought Dan Taggart a cruel and domineering animal murderer and those who agreed that on "well-run farms" pests do "need to be kept down." A few candidates noted that the shift to polysyllabic diction in the final stanza creates unresolved ambiguities.

Question 3

Stevie Smith: *Selected Poems*

- (a)(b) There were too few answers on this text to make a useful general comment.

Question 4

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

- (a) There were some strong and well-informed answers on Mrs Thornton and Fanny, usually based on a good knowledge of the novel. Less confident candidates offered a study of the two women, describing their characters and relating some incidents in the novel which involve them. More confident candidates saw both women as pivotal in some way, presenting a contrast with each other and with other characters in the novel. Thus Fanny was often usefully compared with Edith and contrasted with Margaret, while Mrs Thornton was compared with Aunt Shaw and Mrs Thornton. The relationships between Mrs Hale and Frederick and Mrs Thornton and John were at the centre of some very interesting answers. Some very good answers were rooted in the text but also showed an awareness of social expectations for women at the time and the way Gaskell challenges them through the character of Margaret.
- (b) A number of candidates noted the words 'the condition of working people' in the question and concentrated their answers on working conditions seen in the novel. Better candidates noted the question's focus on the way these are presented, and in doing so were able to comment not only on the difficulty of a working life, whether in the north or the south, but also on Higgins' northern dialect presenting his plight in colloquial terms, compared with Margaret's more formal speech outlining the difficulties of the south. Many candidates noted this episode as a pivotal one in the novel, where Margaret is forced to reevaluate her own view of the south.

Question 5

Doris Lessing: *Martha Quest*

- (a) This was the final appearance of this text on the paper, but it still attracted a healthy number of answers, which were, for the most part, well informed and appreciative of the novel. Some of the answers on the Cohen brothers were quite simple, noting their lending of books to Martha and their early presentation to her of a challenge to the prevalent racism. More confident answers went much further, noting Joss Cohen's role in particular, provoking Martha into intellectual thought and into higher aspirations, goading her into grasping her independence and leaving home, and helping her get a job in the city. Such answers then noted how Martha's development demonstrates her inability to live up to Joss's and her own expectations. Thus the influence of the Cohen brothers forms a background to the whole second half of the novel, even when the characters themselves are not present in the narrative.

- (b) While some weaker answers did not progress far beyond a paraphrase of the episode, many candidates seemed actively to enjoy comparing Lessing's presentation of the members of the Left Book Club and Martha's response to them, appreciating the humour of the extract. The author's technique of moving in and out of Martha's perceptions was frequently noted, allowing, for example, the reader to compare Martha's "But they are old" with the narrative voice's "They were, in fact, between thirty and forty". Martha's own self-consciousness was usually noted, while several candidates also considered wider issues. Some commented, for example, that the episode shows how Martha focuses on matters of appearance and fashion under the influence of Donovan, and abandons the social and political issues which led her to the Club under the influence of Joss. Others noted her fierce comments on babies, motherhood and married domesticity and compared these with her marriage to Douglas at the end of the novel.

Question 6

Ngugi: *A Grain of Wheat*

- (a) This was by far the most popular text on the paper, and this the most popular question. It was rare to find a candidate who struggled with it, as a reasonable knowledge of plot and character would form the beginnings of an answer. At the lower end of the mark range, candidates were able to show examples of courage and betrayal in the actions of various characters. Better answers were able to show how, with nearly all the characters, these issues are interrelated, making easy judgements of characters very difficult. Many answers naturally focused on Mugo, but Mumbi, Kihika, Gikonyo, Karanja and Thompson often featured in wide-ranging answers.
- (b) At one end of the scale, some candidates seemed puzzled by this extract and were not clear that Thompson was reading his own notes. In these cases, even paraphrase became confused. On the other hand, there were many detailed and thoughtful answers which noted the colonial attitudes represented by the language in the notebook entries and compared the statements there with events described elsewhere in the novel. Such answers, for example, linked Thompson's note on African 'violence and savagery' with his own actions at Rira camp. Thompson's decline from idealism to disillusionment was frequently noted, and candidates often connected the form of the extract with comments on the narrative structure of the novel.

Paper 9695/04

Drama

General comments

The paper allowed candidates from across the whole ability range to show their understanding. As in past sessions, Examiners expressed the view that they would like to see candidates paying more attention to the idea that plays take on life through performance. Thus, though many candidates will not have had an opportunity to see a play they are studying, teachers should nonetheless ask them to think more explicitly about the texts as having 'dramatic' possibilities.

At the top end, there were answers of real quality, with candidates showing a warm appreciation and understanding of the texts and with some penetrating responses to the questions. Answers here were characterised by a willingness to explore text in detail, using detail as a means of discussing wider issues. Lower down, candidates were usually able to demonstrate both knowledge and understanding, but were often content to paraphrase or talk in generalisations. In future sessions, it would be good to see candidates paying closer attention to matters of language, showing awareness of word choice, register and tone as a means of establishing character and theme.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

Caryl Churchill: *Serious Money*

- (a) Given the contemporary nature of this text, it was surprising that candidates were unwilling to place the play in the context of its times. Candidates tended to write about the theme of greed without rising to the idea that there may be staging devices or character oppositions in the play which demonstrate the limitations of the viewpoint.
- (b) The candidates who attempted the passage question were able to see how themes are being established, though it would have been good to see answers that made more telling use of specific examples to make their points. There was little enthusiasm for dealing with the colloquial urgency of the characters' speech ('Meanwhile/Zackerman rings and.../He goes, he goes') and its intense competitiveness, with speakers elbowing each other out of the way. Self-absorption infuses the whole of the exchange between these three.

Question 2

William Shakespeare: *Comedy of Errors*

- (a) A number of responses to this question produced straightforward accounts of the role of both Antipholuses. This was not really what was required. Those candidates who attended to the phrase 'dramatic effects' were able to make more of the question because they could see that the whole issue of confusion in the plot is made more pointed because of the rather straight-laced character of Antipholus of Ephesus, who suddenly finds his assumptions about his status and standing in society thrown into confusion. Focus on one or two specific episodes would have helped most candidates.
- (b) The few answers on this question tended to offer paraphrase rather than analysis. Closer reference to the text would have enabled candidates to capture the surreal quality of the scene whilst at the same time capturing something of the very human emotions experienced by Adriana here. Clear exposition of the precise nature of the situation would have benefited a range of candidates, who plainly did not see how Antipholus of Syracuse sees himself as on a promise, whilst Adriana is trying to come to terms with a husband whose feelings for her seem to have been transformed during the course of a single morning.

Question 3

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a) This proved a popular question. The majority of candidates grasped the idea of Banquo as a contrast to Macbeth, someone who, faced with the same choices, chose to do good not evil. Many answers developed the idea of contrast by starting to see Banquo as Macbeth's conscience, a reading often backed up through discussion about whether Banquo's ghost is really present at the banquet scene. A small number of candidates were unable to do much more than summarise his role in the plot of the play without any reference to thematic issues.
- (b) The passage proved fertile for discussion, though there were too many answers that simply offered paraphrase. Another common fault was that candidates saw the question as their invitation to unload their views on the role of Lady Macbeth (faithful wife, fourth witch) in the play as a whole. It is always worth pointing out to candidates that the central thrust of passage based answers must be the passage itself, and that Examiners are looking for a detailed understanding of the detail. Having said that, good candidates wove quotation from the passage into their prose, focusing on particular moments (such as Lady Macbeth's crisp 'Only look up clear...' in response to Macbeth's wavering). It would have been good to see more candidates drawing more of a contrast between the way that Lady Macbeth speaks when on her own and her sudden change on the appearance of her husband. Early on in the scene, candidates could have made much of Lady Macbeth's vivid language. Many candidates argued that Lady Macbeth is already evil. It would have been more accurate (and more interesting) to note that she has to wind herself up to evil during the course of this particular scene.

Question 4

J.M.Synge: *The Playboy of the Western World*

- (a) There were a few responses on dream and reality in the play. In general, candidates understood the plot and had a view about character, but most were not able to see how Christy's glamorous past serves as an escapist fantasy for many of the characters in the play. One or two answers focused on Christy himself and made some capital out of the difference between his view of himself and the Christy that the audience actually sees.
- (b) Candidates tackling this question often simply offered paraphrase. However, those who went deeper were able to describe Christy's tactics such as exaggeration and spinning out a tale, whilst at the same time seeing how a strong irony underpins the whole.

Question 5

Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a) This question was widely done. Disappointingly, a number of candidates did not think hard enough about the actual phrasing of the question and ended up writing about disillusionment rather than the more tricky issue of self-delusion. Weaker candidates tended to resort to character sketches, but there were other candidates who were able to broaden out discussion and talk, for example, about the disparity between dream and reality, and about the invidious role of nostalgia for Amanda. Clearly, answers that simply discussed the self-delusions of the characters were not really responding fully to the word 'dramatise' in the question. There were some fine answers which looked at props, scenery and music as a dramatic counterpoint to the self-indulgence of the characters and these, of course, scored very highly indeed.
- (b) Widely answered, this question gave an opportunity for candidates to show sensitivity to both the particulars of this scene and the wider issues. Many readings simply took Jim to be the 'Knight in Shining Armour,' though it's very plain from the text that he too has failed to live up to his expectations of himself. The long speech about Laura's inferiority complex says a lot about what is on Jim's mind, and not all of it is simply about consoling her. Thus his right to point out the error of her ways is, itself, criticised by Williams. If anything, Jim comes across as a self-obsessed armchair psychologist, too full of the validity of his half-baked opinions, and all too quick to jump in and find fault with others ('You know what I judge to be the trouble with you ...'). A greater awareness of the tone of the passage might have helped. The fact that Jim unconsciously glances at himself in the mirror at the end of the scene does not mean that he is happy with what he sees. Although the scene is a turning point in the play, many candidates saw it as being much more positive than it really is. There was a slight tendency for some candidates to unload pre-conceived ideas or character studies, rather than focusing on the particulars of the passage.

Question 6

William Wycherley: *The Country Wife*

- (a) The few candidates who answered this question usually had a sound sense of Horner's character and his importance as the person who forces this society to show its limitations. However, only a small number of candidates were able to explore the issue of 'dramatisation' with conviction.
- (b) Candidates showed themselves able to contextualise this passage, describe the situation and comment on the characters, but few were able to make close use of detail in order to illuminate the comedy of the scene. A number of candidates simply offered a paraphrase, with little critical comment.

Paper 9695/05

Shakespeare and other Pre Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

Examiners reported that the general standard of performance in this session was commendable, with few failing to reach an adequate level of performance and a reasonable proportion of candidates with marks in the top two bands. There were a very few rubric infringements, invariably candidates who offered two answers on the same text. Nearly all candidates had managed the allocated time well, though a small minority of weaker candidates apparently ran out of time before they had completed the second essay. It is as important as ever to remind Centres that answering the right number of questions and spending an equal amount of time on each answer are an important factor in the candidates' final result.

Examiners have reported that some candidates are starting their answers with a biographical sketch of the author, sometimes taking up the first side of the answer. This is not a recommended practice and inevitably limits the time the candidate has for answering the question. Other Examiners have noted that some answers on the passage questions are still not giving sufficient attention to the language and tone of the passage. The temptation to give too much background information must be avoided, if the candidate is to have sufficient time to explore the passage in the depth required at this level. A precise and accurate placing of the passage is important, but too often a general narrative summary or broad character sketch is offered, which has limited value in a detailed critical appreciation. Once again though, it is pleasing to report that some candidates produce marvellous, insightful critical appreciations. In this session this was particularly noticed in the answers on 'Othello' and John Donne's 'The Flea'.

In the essay options there were many fluent, well-organised and knowledgeable answers on all the texts available. Examiners though have noticed that candidates in some Centres have a tendency to refer to other texts in their answers. In this session, most notably, Desdemona was sometimes compared to Lady Macbeth, Othello to Hamlet and Emma to Jane Eyre. This might be helpful in making a specific point, but often the candidate spent several paragraphs summarising the non-examined text to the detriment of the overall essay. Such wider references need to be used with caution and sparingly.

It is an essential element of working at this level that candidates quote directly from the text to support the point they are making and generally Examiners are pleased with the range and suitability of quotations offered. However, there is a need to ensure that candidates accurately attribute the quotations and that the context of the quotation is properly understood. This point is considered in more detail in the specific comments on 'Othello'.

Nearly all candidates showed at least a sound knowledge of the texts and the basics of plot and character. Most were able to shape this knowledge to the task in hand, though once again weaker candidates inclined inevitably to telling the story, especially if they offered a response on one of the novels. All Examiners reported at least some candidates who seemed to lose direction in their answer, possibly as a result of not being entirely sure of where they were heading to start with. Candidates who are careful to select material aimed at the specifics of the task invariably do well and often show a clear focus on the wording of the question.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

William Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

This was a popular choice in this session, with a more or less even split between the two options.

- (a) Candidates who used the basic dichotomy of Rome and Egypt as a starting point for their answer did well. Many opposites were offered: east/west and pleasure/duty were the most frequent, but candidates who linked those ideas to the central point of the question – the conflict of personal and political satisfaction – were often most successful. Answers focused on Antony, but again, the best answers were from candidates who saw that Octavius and even Cleopatra might be fruitfully considered.

- (b) Candidates were too often unsure of the precise context for this passage. Those who were could confidently relate it to the wider text. Many candidates noted Antony's generosity of spirit and were able to explore the nuances of his personal angst here, but an alarming number of answers ignored the final part of the passage and were silent on Cleopatra and her followers.

Question 2

William Shakespeare: *Othello*

This was the most popular text on the paper and again there was a fairly even split between the options.

- (a) The best answers on this question went beyond seeing 'race' as colour only and saw it as one of a complex of factors, most notably 'cultural alienation'. Candidates noted that 'colour' was often an issue for characters, rather than Othello himself and had interesting points to make about the Duke's overlooking Othello's race because he needs him. Some candidates tackled the idea of 'tragedy', referring to Aristotle's definition and crucially linking it to Othello himself. The best answers, of course, gave due weight to the role of Iago and supported their points with a variety of telling quotations. One issue here is the correct attribution of the quotations. Examiners were told that the Duke, Cassio and even Emilia called Othello 'thicklips' and 'black Ram'. More damningly perhaps, candidates sometimes assumed that Othello heard these phrases directly. Such looseness in supporting ideas raised suggests candidates are not always as familiar with the text as they might be.
- (b) Answers were often predictably polarised – Iago: the unrelenting villain and Cassio: the self-reproachful, virtuous male. Candidates who explored the language carefully were able to challenge this view of Cassio and see the layers of irony in the validity of Iago's advice, apart from the deceitfulness of the advisor. Some did see Cassio as 'an unmanly whinger', who had got what he deserved. Few saw any redeeming features in Iago, but some did admire his manipulation and his nerve. The context was well placed by nearly all candidates, though in some cases too long an exposition was given, which limited the time to be spent on the passage itself. Iago's goading use of 'lieutenant' was often remarked on, but only a very few spotted how his questions enabled him to establish that Roderigo was still a useful tool.

Question 3

William Shakespeare: *Much Ado About Nothing*

A number of Centres offered this text, which had evidently been studied with some enjoyment.

- (a) This was the most popular option. There was a tendency to list the 'eavesdropping' parts of the play and disregard the prompt of 'significant moments'. Weaker candidates thus drifted into unselective narrative. Candidates who were able to link the eavesdropping to the play's equivocal morality invariably did well.
- (b) It was disappointing to note that many candidates did not have a good grasp of the comedy in this extract. Attempted paraphrases of Dogberry's idiosyncrasies suggested too many candidates did not understand the basic meaning. Shakespeare's control of the tone in the extract, the mingling of the comic and the serious, for example, was simply ignored by most candidates. On the positive side though nearly all were able to explain why the revelations here were structurally important to the 'ending'.

Section B

Question 4

Jane Austen: *Emma*

This was once again the most popular text in **Section B** and Examiners were pleased at the knowledge of the text which so many candidates could call upon. Less pleasing were the failed attempts to give Austen an historical context, which too often referred to her as 'a Victorian novelist', or 'a contemporary of Dickens' or 'an Elizabethan writer'. This led to some loose arguments in the (a) option on the topic of social and class distinctions.

- (a) This was a popular choice and most candidates had a good deal of material to draw upon. Candidates did attempt to explain the 'hierarchical social structure', though as outlined above, some of these were unsuccessful. Weaker candidates treated 'social and class distinctions' together, but more discerning candidates were able to make telling reference to parts of the text where 'class' or 'social' was the key factor. Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax were properly the focus of a number of answers, and perceptive candidates saw how Emma's gradual understanding of these distinctions was integral to the structure of the novel. There was a tendency to generalise – the Martins were 'working class' and Emma was an 'aristocrat' – but there were many answers which revealed an interest in and enthusiasm for the text.
- (b) This was not so popular and, though candidates were able to respond to the content of the passage, few were able to explore Austen's dialogue in detail. Those who did were able to see in the nuances of Frank's words, for example, hints of what was to come, and candidates who could wrestle with the layers of irony here – the various attitudes to the flirtation of Emma and Frank most obviously – often did very well. Emma understandably came in for a good deal of criticism but many candidates recognised this as the turning point in her story.

Question 5

Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Knight's Tale*

This was once again a minority choice, the passage option proving to be the most popular.

- (a) Candidates were able to discuss the role of Theseus in some detail, but few were able to deal with the concept of the 'chaos of human existence' with any certainty. Best answers did explore the love rivalry and the effect of the gods and how these two elements undermine Theseus' best attempts.
- (b) There were many answers, which offered sensible comments on the two knights and their respective positions at this point, noticing their changing relationship and its final dramatic outcome. Candidates also had interesting points to make on Chaucer's style, particularly the narrative voice, in this passage and at times connected the comments to the wider text.

Question 6

Daniel Defoe: *Moll Flanders*

Only a few candidates offered this text and it is difficult to draw broad conclusions. Most had a sound knowledge of the text, though the comments were almost always confined to Moll herself. In (a) answers there was often an awareness of the moral ambivalence of the text. Distinctions were drawn between Moll's sexual career and her criminal career. In (b) there was a sound grasp of the importance of Moll's drift into 'thievery' but few candidates were able to explore Defoe's 'journalistic style' and use of telling details with any conviction.

Question 7

Christina Rossetti: *Selected Poems*

This was another minority choice but Examiners were pleased to note the work on this text was often good and a number of top band answers were seen. There was often an intelligent understanding of Rossetti's poems, her search for love, her sense of failure and longing and her deep faith. Candidates were able to explore the (a) question from a solid knowledge of the selection, giving them ample scope to display their enthusiasm. The (b) option was understandably not so popular, but the same delight in Rossetti's gentle but thought provoking poetry was often seen.

Question 8

John Donne: *Selected Poems*

This was still a popular choice, but a diminishing one.

- (a) Most candidates were able to treat the two elements in the question with some confidence, though too often perhaps they were seen as contradictory elements. Examiners were pleased by the range of reference which candidates had at their disposal and which was often used to good effect. The best answers were often those which saw Donne's poetry as a 'fusion of mind and passion' both in his love poems and in his religious poems.

- (b) There were some excellent, detailed critical appreciations of this poem. Candidates were often able to explore the language and the tone to telling effect and at the top level support the commentary with good, pithy reference to the wider selection. Those who misjudged the tone were less successful, taking Donne to task for 'his cruelty to an innocent lady'.

Question 9

George Eliot: *Middlemarch*

Very few candidates offered this text and the answers were variable. Few seemed to be able to grapple with 'failed idealism' convincingly, but a commendable knowledge of the text was revealed by those who offered either option.

Question 10

Ben Jonson: *The Alchemist*

Another minority text, though this was popular with those who had studied it. Candidates did write enthusiastically about it and on the (b) option were alive to the energetic and dramatic comedy of the extract.

Question 11

Alexander Pope: *The Rape of the Lock*

This was once again a popular choice and Examiners were pleased with the quality of the work done and the evident knowledge of the text and Pope that candidates had at their command.

- (a) Candidates who challenged the proposition did better than those who accepted it and tried to 'wrestle' the evidence to prove it. Many reached the conclusion that it was to some extent about love, but not overall a 'love poem'. As one candidate put it, Pope presented 'innumerable facets of the emotion, but in a distorted light'. Some tried to argue from the perspective of an alleged love affair between the Baron and Belinda but this was not a convincing strategy. Most candidates were able to point to the satire as the main thrust of the text and support their view with good textual pointing.
- (b) Candidates had a sound knowledge of the passage, but few were able to explain how it did or did not make a satisfactory ending. The better responses explored the misogynistic tone and the echoes of the earlier cantos and related the passage by these points to the wider text. It is fair to say that hardly a candidate had any sympathy for the characters in the poem and most assumed Pope had none either.

Paper 9695/06

Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

Overall, the standard of work was satisfactory, with some very perceptive and well-informed answers. Most candidates knew their texts well and found plenty of material to write about in response to the questions and the texts. There were few purely narrative answers, although there were some unfocused responses offering material tangential to the question. Quality of written expression was in most cases clear and accurate.

A weaker second answer was a very common feature in scripts from some Centres. Sometimes this was due to poor time management in the examination. More often, answers showed less secure knowledge and understanding of the second text, with more superficial comment, sketchier textual reference, and tendency to paraphrase, descriptive writing and repetition.

Discussion of poetry continues to prove difficult for many candidates, who display very limited capacity to deploy critical terminology appropriately in considering stylistic features.

Responses to passage-based questions were often impressive in discussing thematic concerns, although there was a strong tendency to write general essays on texts using the set passage as a springboard, and still widespread reluctance to discuss methods/techniques and effects of writing; to achieve the higher marks, the answer must represent a balance between critical analysis/appreciation of the set passage and discussion of its relation to the text as a whole.

Candidates in a high proportion of Centres answered on both *The Caretaker* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. In most Centres candidates had prepared material on the Theatre of the Absurd and/or existentialism, which was sometimes repeated in both answers: this kind of material is valuable if it leads to fruitful comment on the text, but in many answers it was offered in the first paragraph and was subsequently ignored; conversely, some answers were diverted into general contextual issues with little attention to text or question. There was some hair-raising general comment about British culture in the post-war period (when e.g. “people lost faith in everything, communication broke down and there was nothing to live for ...”), and very little acknowledgement that these plays offer radically different experiences for audiences and readers. On the other hand, some answers were confident and assured with a real sense of genre and of personal engagement and enjoyment, especially in relation to productions seen (particularly evident and helpful in answers on *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*)

Centres may care to consider the value of selecting texts of different genres for the candidates to work on at this stage of their literary education.

Many candidates wasted time writing out the questions and changing ink colours for quotations. A few even provided an unnecessary word count for their answers.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Jean Rhys: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) This was the more popular option. Most candidates considered at least some of the layers of significance of the Coulibri estate in Antoinette’s history and consciousness: e.g. a place of happiness (e.g. childhood immersion in nature/Garden of Eden); but also of oppression, danger, hate, volatile racial tension (Emancipation Act) and of rejection, loneliness, isolation, insecurity (experiences of mother/daughter and the relationship between them), rejection (Tia throwing the stone), magic and mystery (Christophine/Obeah), all foreshadowing future events. Better answers considered the significance of the setting in the novel’s structure: flashbacks/echoes throughout the novel and structural symmetry/parallel with the fire at Thornfield Hall.
- (b) Here there were some weak descriptive/paraphrased answers, which worked stolidly through the passage, virtually line by line. Others, however, noted the significance of narrative point of view (Antoinette silenced here) and the evidence of Rochester’s alienation, resentment, isolation in the passage, and commented on his and Antoinette’s different modes of behaviour and consciousness: Antoinette a free and generous spirit, comfortable in this world and her community; Rochester insecure, resentful, suspicious and critical (“watched her critically ... alien eyes ... debased French patois”). The fullest answers also explored issues of identity (“Creole of pure English descent”) and analysed more subtle details such as the shut windows and the open door, the perception of Antoinette’s eyes as unblinking, her hesitant speech, the ominous reference to Amelie’s “delighted malice, so intelligent, above all so intimate” – and related these convincingly to later developments in the relationship and the novel’s narrative.

Question 2

Kazuo Ishiguro: *An Artist of the Floating World*

- (a) Generally, straightforward answers identified Mori-san as the true artist of the floating world by virtue of his project to capture its transient beauty, to represent lifestyle before the war and to nurture his pupils’ talents in a particular direction. Some also discussed his role in the development of Ono’s career, his self-realisation and his eventual downfall, and explored parallels/contrasts between their artistic practices and philosophies and their relations with their students/apprentices. Reference to other masters was limited.

- (b) Answers here explored a wide range of issues in the passage: e.g. the effects of first person narrative and the unreliability of this narrator; fallibility of memory and uncertainty of judgement; changing/transient perceptions and perspectives; significance of Migi-Hidari as a cultural symbol and structural device (cp the Bridge of Hesitation); symbolic value of light/lanterns; damage caused by war on lives and social infrastructure; reality of old (Ono's nostalgia) and new (Ichiro's "new ways") Japan. Answers that noted the warning in "I try to recall that evening ..." (line 4) explored the tentative qualities of the writing and its investment in images of sensory nostalgia.

Question 3

Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

On both options there were some answers that lacked critical substance and evidence of any detailed acquaintance with the poems.

- (a) On fuller scripts, this provoked two kinds of answer. Some candidates cited poems like 'The Young Ones', 'Man in a Park', 'Men fishing in the Arno', 'My Grandmother', 'Father to Son' and/or 'The Diamond Cutter' in order to agree with the terms of the question, that Jennings is "a detached and critical observer". Others argued that she is always a keen observer but not necessarily critical or detached: she is "attached" or "engaged" in many of her compositions when celebrating life, beauty, Nature/God's creation, or reflecting on personal experiences of love, pain, fear, suffering, religious doubts: e.g. in 'Game of Chess', 'Remembering Fireworks', 'Stargazers and Others', 'Song for a Birth or a Death' and 'Sequence in Hospital'. Answers tended to summarise the argument of each poem cited, usually neglecting the poetic effects of the language and form by which the argument is articulated.
- (b) These answers were often descriptive accounts of marriage, love, or the end of passion depicted in the poem. Some did note the ironic symbolism of the title, passage of time, lack of communication and family bonds as concerns but there was very little discussion of effects of writing even though some stylistic features were acknowledged. 'My Grandmother', 'Father to Son', and 'Family Affairs' were commonly used as evidence of Jennings' characteristic concern with the aetiology of family and other close relationships.

Question 4

Harold Pinter: *The Caretaker*

- (a) Some candidates took 'setting' to signify the wider context of post-war London, and discussed the implied nature of society and relationships beyond the walls of the room that contains/confines the action of the play. Some addressed "setting" briefly (in one case noting a typical male negligence over housework!) then moved into more general essays on the characters and their problems/relationships, perhaps because of limited recall of relevant details. Aspects discussed in more consistently focused answers included: the room's emblematic significance (as microcosm of society, shelter from the outside world, territory to be fought over, trap or prison); its symbolic function (e.g. as reflecting Aston's mental state, Mick's ironically hyperbolic aspirations, or more widely a disordered, disintegrating society "made up of bits and pieces no longer of any use"); and the symbolic value of individual objects (particularly the statue of Buddha and the bucket audibly catching drips of water at dramatic moments). Some candidates validly considered costume and lighting as part of the play's setting. Some thoughtful answers showed how the meanings of the set and props emerge as they are used to dramatise the characters' interactions.
- (b) Candidates found in the passage a wealth of material for comment: e.g. the passage's language, its irony, volatile tone and comic effects; what it tells us about Mick and about his relationship with Aston and its implications for Davies. Some candidates compared Mick's treatment of Davies with the latter's subsequent attitude towards Aston, some detected a critique of marketing and commercial language, and some questioned the reliability of Mick's self-presentation. For less confident candidates the passage provided an occasion for sketches of the three characters, comments about young people's lack of respect for the elderly, or social indifference to the plight of the poor or the lower classes. A few thought that Mick was seriously treating Davies as a prospective buyer.

Question 5

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

- (a) This was a very popular option and generally well done. Most candidates discussed similarities/differences between the two marriages and focused on the issues of illusion/reality, failed emptiness of the American Dream (George and Martha sharing first names with the first President and his wife). Some considered the play as an allegory and explored the significance of playing games and marriage dramatised as a power struggle. Many answers suggested that Nick/Honey are a younger version of George/Martha. Some suggested that George and Martha at the end arrive at renewed understanding and closeness, rooted in the acceptance of reality, whereas Nick and Honey's relationship remains unstable; others argued that Nick and Honey have benefited from observing the events of the evening – that Nick seems to learn humility and Honey now wants a baby.
- (b) Most candidates found something in the passage to respond to, reflecting on the dynamics of the two marriages and exploring the significance of games: played to control, to dominate and humiliate (George finally as the ringmaster), to disguise reality and sustain illusions ("True or false? Hunh?"), eventually to survive. Some answers considered the psychological and ironic implications of other games in the play with the final game as essential to the survival of George/Martha's marriage.

Question 6

Tom Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

- (a) Comedy, suspense, comic effects (visual and verbal) and the various games were the most frequently discussed topics. However, many candidates seemed to have a fairly patchy knowledge of the play, and tended to fall back on summarising scenes/action in broad terms with rudimentary comment. Most answers noted the play's relations with Hamlet, and some were able to explore how Stoppard develops this as a source of interest for the informed audience/reader. Many candidates cited the play's "theatricality" as an interesting characteristic, simply noted by some while others explored the role of the Players in this context.
- (b) Some candidates did not recognise that at the start of the extract Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are simulating their reception at the English court, and wondered why Rosencrantz does not know who Hamlet is. Many answers responded to the question's reference to dramatic effect by discussing, for example, the business with the letter, the characters' different responses to their discovery, the nature of the dialogue, the incongruous umbrella, and the effect of Hamlet's blowing out the lantern. Many saw Guildenstern's discussion of death relating to a wider theme, but this sometimes led to an unproductive catalogue of other references.

Question 7

Derek Walcott: *Selected Poetry*

A text selected by very few Centres this season.

- (a) Most answers offered a review of Walcott's principal concerns without really addressing the opportunities of the question, though in most cases the material could have been made relevant fairly readily. Some, however, noting Walcott's particular poetic dedication ("... hoped it would mean something to declare/today I am your poet, yours ..." ('Homecoming: Anse La Raye'); "... someone must write your poems ..." ('Mass Man')), explored the various roles enacted in his poetry: as historian of colonialism and its legacies (e.g. 'Ruins of a Great House'; 'The Almond Trees'); as celebrant of landscape (e.g. 'Allegre'; 'Ebb'); as cultural/political commentator (e.g. 'Swamp', 'Hawk', 'Parades, Parades'); as exile (e.g. 'The Bright Field'; 'Homecoming: Anse La Raye'); as explorer of personal relationships and experience (e.g. 'A Careful Passion'; 'Veranda').
- (b) Examiners felt that some candidates attempting the question seemed to have no acquaintance with the set poem; few answers attempted the "critical appreciation" invited by the question, though many identified poems related by a common concern with the sea or with death, or by echoes of imagery or verse form or characteristically condensed diction.

Question 8

Evelyn Waugh: *Decline and Fall*

- (a) Generally, answers offered relevant, straightforward discussion of Paul Pennyfeather's journey of innocence, honesty, gullibility through the world in which he is consistently victimised, exploited, manipulated, scapegoated, at the hands of unscrupulous, corrupt and vicious figures of authority and power (e.g. Scone's senior dignitaries, Fagan, Margot) who escape punishment themselves. There was some interesting discussion of the nature of Paul's innocence, the varieties of viciousness he undergoes from individuals and the institutions they represent, and the tactics adopted by other characters (e.g. Grimes, Peter Pastmaster) in order to succeed, or at least to survive, in a vicious world. Some suggested that characters like Prendergast, Tangent, Chokey, prisoners and school children are also exploited or unjustly punished. Others argued that, as Paul benefits in the end by retaining his dignity and wisdom and realising his dream of education and ordination, he becomes a stronger person, and is, therefore, indirectly rewarded.
- (b) There was some fruitful discussion of the dynamic/static dialectic outlined by Silenus and referred to here. Not so many attempted part (b): most addressed the passage as a summary of Paul's life and therefore tended to be descriptive in approach. A few discussed the significance of retrospection in the passage, the cyclical structure of the novel and a sense of moral victory/poetic justice for Paul, insouciant as ever but less compliant with Peter, in the end.

Paper 9695/07

Comment and Appreciation

General comments

There was some very pleasing work this session, and little that was really poor; the great majority of candidates showed an ability not only to understand the passages or poem that they selected, but also some understanding – often a very good understanding – of how best to approach it in a properly critical manner. This report has in previous sessions noted how many candidates rely either upon simple narrative and paraphrase, or upon a mechanistic and often quite lifeless listing of literary devices; such work was relatively rare this time, and while there certainly were some answers that fell into one or both of the above kinds they were heavily outnumbered by those where real and properly focused critical exploration was undertaken. This is probably the first time in the life of this particular paper that it has been possible to be quite so positive, and it is the Examiners' fervent hope that future sessions will see the same trend. Some general concerns are still worth noting, however, before looking at each of the three questions.

The pressure of time is of course a factor in this paper as in any other, and Examiners are very much aware of this; however, while there is certainly no need at all to show formal evidence of planning, it is clear that many candidates would benefit from spending just a little longer in thinking and preparing an answer before settling down to write it. Too many wrote an often quite unnecessarily long and slow introduction, sometimes introducing personal or general thoughts of little immediate relevance to the task in hand; this sometimes took the form of an outline of the plot or theme(s) of the passage in question, and while this may understandably be a useful and helpful way of getting into the passage to do this briefly, some outlines were far too long – a paragraph or at most two should be more than ample as a kind of metaphorical throat-clearing on the candidate's part. In too many cases this kind of slow introduction – particularly in response to **Question 3**, which was usually the second to be answered – led to a somewhat rushed and not infrequently incomplete answer; a sharper and more disciplined opening would benefit many candidates.

Personal response and reaction to the passages are expected and welcomed, but these must emphatically be securely rooted in what is actually there, rather than in what the candidate imagines or possibly wishes lies behind its writing. **Question 3** was a good example of this, where many candidates related Tabitha's feelings of nostalgia and sadness to how they themselves have felt, or might feel, after a parent's death; the fact that Penelope Lively's writing could arouse so much sympathetic response was very gratifying, but too often it was related only slightly, and occasionally not at all, to Tabitha and her fictional experience. Similarly, candidates who know, or sometimes think they know, Singapore were occasionally tempted to introduce their own thoughts about the city, or indeed about Asian economics generally, rather than looking closely and precisely at what Lee says in his poem. It is essential that all critical writing is tightly focused, and does not wander off the subject – though it must be stressed again that most candidates did not allow themselves to stray in this way.

There was, happily, rather less reliance this session upon punctuation as a part of a writer's skill, and where it was mentioned it was occasionally quite sensibly and appropriately managed. It is, though, probably wise to advise candidates not to talk too much about the writer's use of commas, colons (especially when they believe them to be semi-colons), exclamation marks and so on; the temptation is too great to rely upon these relatively minor forms of expression and to avoid really critical thinking about the words themselves.

Finally, it is a good idea to discourage too much generalisation, and to encourage as much close and exact discussion as possible. It is not really very helpful to write that 'the diction of this passage is rough/coarse/smooth/gentle' or whatever the adjective might be, unless there are clear and exact illustrations of what is meant, together with some exploration of how such words create this feeling. Similarly, it is not helpful to say that 'the rhythm is generally smooth/quiet/uneasy', unless again it is proved to be so.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Rather surprisingly this was not tackled by very many candidates, though it was often done very well by those who did attempt it; presumably its length put some off, though in reality a higher proportion failed to complete the apparently shorter and easier **Question 3**, and virtually all who did **Question 1** completed their work on it.

There was of course a good deal of narrative, but rarely without any sense of what Rattigan does, and of how he creates the high level of tension and sympathy in the dialogue. There was generally not enough explicit reference to the fact that this is part of a play, or that there is a dramatist at work, but equally there were very few candidates indeed who failed to show at least an implicit grasp of the ways in which the writing affects a reader's or an audience's attention and emotion. Most noted the striking and dramatically very effective contrast between Ronnie and Sir Robert (who rather too often became Sir Ronnie!), using the stage directions and language to illustrate this; the ways in which Ronnie's manner changes from quiet and respectful, through uncertainty and confusion, to a final desperation and near-hysteria, were also well outlined, as was the consistently more demanding, authoritative and even aggressive actions and words of Sir Robert. Candidates' reactions to his final speech were remarkably various, ranging from a sudden awareness that throughout the scene he has in effect been putting on an act in order to test Ronnie's story, to a belief that he is being simply sarcastic, and that he fully believes that in reality Ronnie is indeed guilty, and to a quite substantial number who saw comedy in the sudden volte-face. Relatively few seemed aware that what he is really doing is testing Ronnie and his protestations of innocence, even at one point offering him a way out if he is indeed guilty, and deciding as a result that he is indeed entirely innocent of the charge against him. How candidates viewed this speech was in a sense unimportant, of course – what mattered was how they responded to its dramatic impact. Many candidates were also very aware of the silent Arthur in the background, and saw his two interjections as evidence of his growing anger at what is apparently happening to Ronnie; some, though not many, made thoughtful use of his mere presence throughout as a powerful dramatic device.

Mention has been made above of punctuation, and the dangers inherent in using this in critical appreciation. In the case of this extract, however, there is some quite significant punctuation, which does help our understanding – for example the times when Sir Robert interrupts Ronnie, where the dash at the end of a speech indicates this breaking in by the authoritative and growingly aggressive older man. And in a piece of drama, exclamation marks are important, in suggesting to an actor, or here to a reader, how something should be said.

Question 2

This was a very popular question, and elicited some excellent responses, sometimes quite unexpected but usually well argued. Most candidates saw clearly that Lee writes with at least some sense of sadness – partly at the dreary monotony of the existing city life that he is describing, but also at the future changes that he predicts in stanza 6 – and most too saw a great deal of the power and force of his writing, with a good deal of close and successfully analytical exploration. There were of course some who relied almost entirely upon simple paraphrase, but these were relatively few.

This report is not the place for another piece of critical appreciation – there is simply too much to say about such a rich poem – but Examiners would draw attention to a few points. First, it is not written in blank verse! Its freedom of rhythm, rhyme and stanza size and shape may perhaps point towards the poet's sense that city life is itself uneven and unpredictable, and many candidates drew attention to the poem's near-symmetry, with the longest stanza describing the busiest and most peopled part of the poem, and the shorter stanzas at the start and finish reflecting his most private and personal moments. Too many candidates, though, spent too long talking negatively here – the fact that there is no regularity of rhyme or rhythm does not really need to be explored or explained; it is just a fact. Many candidates saw and discussed the extended food metaphor as reflecting the monstrous appetite of the city, and the way it de-humanises people; there was ample exploration of stanza 3 and its descriptions of both rich and poor, leading into the faceless, characterless and indeed hardly alive people in stanza 4 who are 'disgorged' by the weary bus. One or two noted the unexpectedness of the 'pretty office girls' and some interesting ideas were proposed about the use of this adjective. Stanza 5 began to cause a few concerns, though most were happy to see it as suggestive of the temporary rest and peace offered to the weary workers at the end of the day; the word 'sea-green' caused some doubt, and perhaps Lee meant it be an uneasy, even slightly queasy, adjective.

Rather too many candidates either left out stanza 6 entirely, or read it as wholly positive, but a good number also saw the disquiet that is surely intended in the last two lines of the stanza – one form of imprisonment ('suburban holes') is to be replaced by another ('boxed up in ten-stories'), and the word 'occasionally' (separated by two significant commas) is surely intended sardonically? Stanza 7 was mentioned by most, but not all; it surely reflects what we have come to see of Lee's half-hopeful, half-fearful view of the future – will the new be any better than the old?

Two recurrent points about poetry: the poet uses stanzas, not paragraphs, and quotations must be as printed – the poet's line-divisions are not just random. And a very small point, but it led several candidates into some seriously wrong ideas – the question points out that Lee was born in 1946, so it is unlikely that he wrote the poem in that year!

Question 3

This prose extract led to some excellent answers, as well as to some that were little more than paraphrase. Most understood the picture that Lively creates, of a nearly-twenty-one-year-old Tabitha, on the verge of true adulthood and trying to come to terms both with her father's death and with her ambivalent feelings about him. There were moments in the extract that almost all candidates found difficult – for example, only a very small handful really appreciated the real point of paragraph 3 – and the opening lines puzzled many, but overall there were almost no answers that showed no real grasp at all. Even those who said that the passage shows Tabitha 'on a trip down memory lane' could see something of the theme; though the candidates who said that 'she was having a Proustian experience' were not necessarily any closer to what Lively is really saying.

The opening is certainly difficult – it is far clearer of course in its whole-novel context – but there were many very thoughtful and interesting responses. Tabitha's 'roaming' was seen by most as evidence of her uncertain and lonely state of mind, and the fact that the book has been seen before is perhaps suggestive that she has been drawn back to it almost against her will. The fact that the past is 'reassuringly unreachable' is a very odd phrase, but many made sense of it by suggesting that she did not actually want to go back to her childhood or beyond, despite being compelled to do so by the thoughts aroused by this book. Steven's distant voice was variously seen as that of her brother, a friend, or most commonly of her own father – her use of his name instead of the word 'father' providing evidence of her distant relationship with him. The change of narrative person here from the third to the second was tackled by almost all – Lively draws her readers more closely towards Tabitha, perhaps, in this way, or it may be, as very many suggested, that this is what Tabitha is actually writing, or even what Steven is 'saying' to her inside her thoughts. Whatever the reason, the distancing of the thoughts from Tabitha to 'you' is again suggestive of the young woman trying to avoid becoming too deeply emotional, and indeed to 'be sensible'. Much interesting comment was made about her relationship with her father, and the fact that he was so distant, and 'who was not often there, anyway' – many candidates wrote well on the impact of this last adverb.

The sudden irruption of shock in line 16 was well noted by most candidates; following the outlining of Tabitha's childhood and teenage years the unexpected and almost inassimilable death of her father is hard to comprehend, by both the reader and by Tabitha herself. Again, the effect of just one word was frequently noted by candidates – '... And then it happens'; the simple word 'it' carries huge weight here. Her feelings become more complex, less child-like, as she begins to feel for her mother as well as for herself, and the final sentence of paragraph 2 leads neatly into paragraph 3. Almost no candidate at all, curiously, saw this link – that paragraph 3 illustrates an experience Tabitha has when the simple and self-centred feeling of a child becomes much more complicated, and when her childish excitement suddenly turns into a kind of adult guilt. There were a few rather odd accounts of this passage, suggesting that Tabitha's father had been killed in a car accident when she was less than eight years old (ignoring the fact that she hated him when she was a teenager), or even more curiously that she was run over by her father's car.

The final paragraph was noted by most – though sadly not by all – as showing Tabitha consciously and deliberately breaking out of her sad inward-looking thoughts, and turning outwards to the real world, in which other people live, in which she has work to complete, and in which she will very soon be twenty-one, the age at which, as many candidates noted, one traditionally becomes an adult. There is no way to avoid 'the pervasive present'.

<p>Paper 9695/08 Coursework</p>

General comments

As has been the case in many recent years, this November's entry was small, but its success demonstrated very well the true value of Coursework. Candidates showed a good – often very good – knowledge and understanding of the texts they had studied, and wrote with some impressively confident critical skill and sensitivity. References to the texts were generally very apt and thoughtfully chosen, and suggested not merely some very good teaching but more importantly some very perceptive and confident awareness by the candidates of what each writer was doing, and how his/her effects were created.

Centres' administration this session was good in all respects, and candidates' work was helpfully annotated and commented on by the teaching staff concerned; this is enormously helpful to the Moderator, as showing exactly how and why a particular mark has been reached. There were in most instances few differences between the Centre's proposed marks and those of the Moderator, whose task is to establish that the Centre's rank-ordering of folders is correct, and that the marks submitted are in line with those of all other Centres and the agreed CIE standards. It was clear this session that teaching staff were very aware of these agreed standards, and that all work had been assessed carefully and appropriately.

The decision whether or not to enter candidates for Coursework is of course entirely a matter for each Centre rather than CIE, but the work seen by the Moderator each session, and perhaps particularly this time, suggests that this is a syllabus component that might usefully be considered by more Centres. The quality and confidence of so much writing that is seen each session is such that it must be the case that the candidates writing it have benefited hugely. It is likely, too, that the critical skills that such preparation must encourage will be carried over into the work undertaken in other components, so that candidates' confidence can lead to more success elsewhere. It would be very good indeed to see even more of the same next year!