

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

There was a wide variety in the responses which Examiners saw during this session. The top end of the mark range featured answers which demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the set texts and a sophisticated marshalling of argument, handling quotation and analysis with deft accuracy. However, there were candidates towards the lower end of the mark range who demonstrated sketchy and partial knowledge with little awareness of the demands of the questions. Most candidates know their texts well and the discriminator is how well they select from that knowledge and organise it to answer the specific question on the paper. The most successful candidates are those who clearly acknowledge the question on the paper and answer it fully, shaping their material in response to its stimulus. A feature of the success of such answers is also the secure textual reference used to support points – quotations from selected poems and precise references to episodes in novels and plays, backed up with quotation.

Candidates who deal only with the plot, characters and ideas of texts, showing little awareness of their literary construction, will not be successful in this syllabus. The passage-based (b) questions put a particular emphasis on appreciation of the author's language use and other techniques, meaning that summary and paraphrase has little value.

Question Specific Comments

Question 1 Sujata Bhatt: *Point No Point*

- (a) There were very few answers to this question, but the proposition in the title was both opposed and accepted, with candidates comparing colourful India-based poems such as 'The Peacock' and 'At the Marketplace' with more political poems such as 'Wine from Bordeaux' and 'Walking Across Brooklyn Bridge'.
- (b) 'Genealogy' was a popular poem. Though its title, sadly, was not often commented on, candidates understood the way the poem articulates the difference between the adult and the child's perception and traces a line of familial descent which goes beyond the birth and death of the individual. Stronger responses explored the way the form and language of the poem reflected the child's perception of birth and death, looking at the simple vocabulary and the use of italics to represent the child's direct speech. Successful candidates commented on the child's tone of certainty, with only one question, in her expression of her concern for family bonds. Less confident answers summarised the content and ignored language and form altogether.

Question 2 Songs of Ourselves

- (a) Candidates attempting this question were able to demonstrate knowledge of poems growing out of personal experience, although both poems were not always given equal weight. The ability to address the whole question and discuss the ways the poets made universal comments out of these experiences marked out the most successful candidates. The question offered a breadth of approaches and a very large range of poems was used by candidates, who wrote about the way poets reflected on matters such as love, death, nature and the vicissitudes of life. It was surprising to see how many candidates attempted this question without using any quotations at all, while others restricted their comments to the ideas and content of the poems, without addressing issues of poetic expression. The most successful answers matched content with expression, looking at the form of 'A Birthday', 'The Cockroach' and 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge', for example, or the language of 'Pied Beauty', 'Modern Love' or 'The City Planners'. Others focused on the ways that very personal perceptions are explored, in 'The Bay', 'Night Sweat' and 'Long Distance', for example.

- (b) This was by far the most popular question on the paper. Most answers were at least competent and noted a tension between the representation of urban city life and that of the countryside, choosing appropriate quotations to illustrate that duality. More sophisticated answers went further than that, looking closely not only at the ideas, but how they are expressed in the poem. Such answers found a more complex reading, with vocabulary and structure suggesting ambiguity. Some also showed a perceptive awareness of structure, alliteration, punctuation, rhyme and half rhyme and linked the effects of these techniques to their argument. Inevitably, these confident answers focused closely on the final couplet, which is more complex than the rest of the poem, while less certain candidates ignored this stanza. It was a surprise to Examiners how many candidates lacked some basic technical terminology with which to discuss poetry – many referred to ‘paragraphs’ rather than ‘stanzas’ or ‘verses’ for example.

Question 3 William Wordsworth: *Selected Poetry*

- (a) The question on solitude gave candidates plenty of scope in their choice of poems and this was a popular question. Most candidates who attempted this were aware of the importance of solitude and solitary figures to Wordsworth’s poetry and some were able to refer to some of his theories expressed in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*. Many answers offered detailed discussion of two poems based on solitary figures, such as ‘Lucy Gray’, ‘The Solitary Reaper’ and ‘Resolution and Independence’, noting the way the poet expresses his attraction towards such figures. On the other hand, there were some narrative answers and some candidates wrote about nature rather than solitude, and were not highly rewarded.
- (b) While there were good responses to this question, on the whole it was disappointingly answered. Most candidates were able to write about the content and theme of the extract from ‘The Prelude’, noting the importance of formative influences in the poet’s boyhood and the instructive role of nature. Candidates generally found it difficult, though, to comment on the ways Wordsworth expresses those ideas. The given passage was rich in opportunities for comment on language, imagery and versification, but these were tackled meaningfully by only the most confident candidates.

Question 4 Achebe: *Anthills of the Savannah*

- (a) *Anthills* continues to be a popular and successful text, encouraging engaged and thoughtful responses to questions. Here candidates noted that though Kangan is an independent state, many of its ruling elite are English educated and maintain some colonial injustices. Candidates naturally tended to focus on Sam and his regime as examples of corruption and abusers of power, citing particular references from the novel, including Ikem’s death and the treatment of Abazon. Knowledge was often impressively detailed and many candidates demonstrated a real appreciation of the novel. The most confident addressed the terms of the question more subtly: rather than merely agreeing, they pointed out that the legacy of colonial rule had been to cause the fragmentation and destruction of indigenous hierarchies, leading to moral chaos which enabled the rise of totalitarian leaders and corrupt state systems. These went on to argue that the novel shows that to gain true independence, Kangan must embrace African rather than European methods, and that this is Achebe’s main argument.
- (b) Nearly all candidates were able to put this passage securely within its context and many went on to note the irony of Chris’s death at the moment of his freedom and the fall of Sam. The discrimination in marking responses often lay between those candidates who restricted themselves to matters of plot and character and those who engaged with Achebe’s narrative method. These answers considered the placement of the passage within the novel’s structure and looked at the combination of narrative and dialogue. The blending of formal English and pidgin was often noted, demonstrating both Chris’s authority and his ability to communicate with all people. These points were linked to Achebe’s developing characterisation of Chris and the importance of him taking a stand at this point. Candidates also commented on the presentation of the onlookers and the girl herself as an indication of the state of Kangan. Interestingly, many candidates did not understand Chris’s ‘Last Grin’ comment.

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

- (a) Most candidates who answered this question found plenty of evidence to support the claim that the individual, Maggie in particular, was stifled by the social rules governing society at the time, and many drew on the fact that, as this can be seen as an autobiographical novel, it is clearly an important concern. A focus on Maggie was natural, but many candidates widened their focus and considered other characters including Tom, Philip Wakem, Mr and Mrs Tulliver and others as victims. Social expectations were recognised in areas of marriage, education, work and gender. Good knowledge was often shown, the most successful answers avoiding narrative summary by arguing their case with close, specific references.
- (b) Many candidates showed competence in discussing Tom and the education bought for him by his father. Some contextualised this and discussed too Maggie's thwarted desire for an education, despite greater aptitude. Comparatively few candidates, however, discussed Eliot's ironic style in the passage and avoided discussing the details of the writing at all, and therefore missed the opportunities and challenges of a passage-based question. There were, too, a number of misunderstandings. A surprising number of candidates expressed the belief, for example, that Tom really is lame.

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

- (a) Many candidates responded to this question with enthusiasm. The most successful answers focused on the effects of Mansfield's characterisation. Some candidates concentrated on the way in which the reader's responses to individual characters were manipulated through language and narrative viewpoint, while others pointed out that the effects Mansfield aimed to achieve were related to concerns important to her: class and the position of women in a patriarchal society. In the light of this, Herr Brechenmacher, the old man in *The Little Governess*, the woman at the store and the narrator of *A Married Man's Story* were popular choices of character. Some candidates, however, chose less obvious characters, presenting interesting arguments about Bertha in *Bliss*, the little governess herself and Frau Brechenmacher, seeing something dislikeable in their perceived complicity with their positions. Other candidates, too, challenged the question by presenting characters who are likeable in contrast to those who are not.
- (b) Candidates found plenty to say about the duplicitous old man and the naïve governess. The most confident candidates commented closely not only the language used by the old man and the governess but also on the significance of the imagery. Such answers recognised that Mansfield provides hints about the old man's interest in the governess, but that one needs to read for a second time before seeing them and thus the reader as well as the governess is initially deceived. The most successful answers examined the writing, down to individual word choice and punctuation, in great detail.

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Paper 9695/04

Drama

General Comments

Overall, most answers showed engagement with the texts and an ability to write about them with understanding of literary features. There were few scripts that showed less than basic knowledge, though those at the most basic level tended to be restricted to obvious matters of plot and character, often with little reference to the specific requirements of the question. At this level, too, the writing quite often came across as confused or not very fluent.

At the top end, there were some excellent answers that showed engagement with texts on many levels. A noticeable difficulty with many scripts in the middle is a lack of skill with using quotation effectively: often candidates quote too much (a word or two in a bracket will do) or having quoted, they then fail to show explicitly why this quotation backs up their point. Often, too, more could be done to plan writing effectively so that there is development in an argument.

As far as passage-based questions are concerned, there has been an improvement in the willingness of candidates to engage with the particular passage printed, rather than seeing it simply as a jumping off point for a discussion of the play as a whole. The best answers, even if they bring in evidence from elsewhere, continue to focus on the passage given. Candidates often omit to plan their points strategically, which means that they tend to go through the passage chronologically rather than dealing with how the whole passage creates and develops some aspect of the play's meaning. Passages are often printed with some of the stage directions, and this should provide candidates with the clue that they themselves are worthy of some discussion, even if the question does not require it.

Specific Questions

Question 1 ATHOL FUGARD: *The Township Plays*

- (a) Although not many candidates did this question, it was predominantly well-managed. Candidates could see that the issue is complex and the better ones queried the terms of the question by suggesting that dealing with 'survival and everyday life' is, in itself, a principled and possibly political stand, even if the women themselves never articulate it as such. There was much interesting discussion of the lot of women in the plays, often seeing them as victims of those around them, as well as of the larger society in which they live. Other candidates paid tribute to the independence and resilience of characters like Queeny.
- (b) This was a popular question. Candidates were able to see that this incident is a turning point in the action, that it sums up the predicament of both Sizwe and of Buntu in relation to the requirements of the state. Some answers failed to register the fundamental significance of the passbook within society. Candidates often failed to respond to both of the terms in the question ('identity and self-image) and thus did not really come to terms with the central surrender of self which Sizwe Buntu confronts at this point in the play ('Take this book and read it carefully, friend, and tell me what it says about me. Buntu, does that book tell you I'm a man').

Question 2 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Twelfth Night*

- (a) Discussions about Feste ranged, as one might imagine, from sketches of what he does to much more profound discussions of how he has a pivotal role in the action of the play because of his freedom to range from household to household, class to class, and his freedom to speak his mind. There were some very good responses that saw Feste in a rather negative light because of his treatment of Malvolio: he was often seen as someone unwilling to face up to responsibility, thus not

quite the worthy moral commentator that most perceive. Some candidates were determined to unload what they knew about fools in Shakespeare's drama, and this led to a number of generalised responses that demonstrated wide reading but little focus on this particular question. Background work is always important, but candidates need to be aware of the fact that it must support their text based arguments: a little of this goes a very long way.

- (b) This was a popular question, though some candidates found it hard to deal with the detail, and there was a strong tendency to assume that a character study of Malvolio would answer the question. There is, of course, much more to it than that. An audience is ambiguous towards Malvolio: we have sympathy for what has happened to him, but then at the same time we never liked him in the first place, and we ourselves conspired to enjoy much of his earlier embarrassing self-delusion. Moreover, we have to recognise here that the other characters are in a difficult position too, as they are forced to re-evaluate what has been going on and their own previous behaviour. Tellingly, Malvolio goes off before he can hear Olivia's guilt-laden 'He hath been most notoriously abus'd.' Few candidates responded to the Duke's 'pursue him' to suggest that he is not simply left alone, revenge-crazed, at the end. On the whole, though this question was predominantly well-done, candidates saw the scene as being too much about Malvolio, not enough about how an audience is trying to square the tone of this scene with the overall rejoicing and closure of the rest of the play's action.

Question 3 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Caesar*

- (a) Although candidates were confident about the values embodied by various characters in the play, such as loyalty, honour and justice, they were not quite so quick to pick up on the implications of the question. Rome is presented as having values, certainly, but the characters query and complicate them by showing their limitations. Having said that, there were many very good answers that focused on how Rome's explicit values as presented in the play are a good deal less potent than the implicit ones. As always, the discriminator at the top end came from the trigger word 'present'. It was not enough merely to list values: there had to be some sense of how the action of the play shapes our response. A few candidates saw the question as simply asking for an account of what Rome is like, giving air to discussions of slightly random listing of topics such as superstition (often rather over-done), the role of women, or the importance of the crowd.
- (b) This was one of the most popular questions on the paper. Candidates were able to see clearly how Brutus is receptive to Cassius, and most candidates were able to exemplify Cassius's techniques at work through flattery ('poor Brutus'; 'good Brutus'), peer pressure, his view of Caesar etc. Candidates who chose to work through the passage chronologically often made good points along the way but did not take a sufficiently strategic view of the workings of the whole.

Question 4 CHARLOTTE KEATLEY: *My Mother Said I Never Should*

- (a) A small number of answers here demonstrated that candidates had been interested by the question and were keen to explore both the drudgery and the positives of the lives presented in the action. There were a number of candidates who chose to argue that there are generational differences here and that the central characters could not be lumped together into a sweeping generalisation about all women's lives.
- (b) There were a few answers on this question. Candidates generally engaged well with the detail and could see that matters of costume, props and diction help to mark out differences of attitude between generations. In weaker candidates there was a tendency towards telling the story or contextualising the incident.

Question 5 ARTHUR MILLER: *A View from the Bridge*

- (a) Candidates seized onto the question about honour and reputation with enthusiasm. They were able to explore it in a wide variety of senses, though most discussions centred (obviously) on Eddie's betrayal of his own honour and reputation. There were good discussions of how the ending is pre-figured by the Bolzano story, and there were also able discussions of how the values of America and Italy come into sharp conflict during the play. At the lower end, some responses were rather list-like, giving a series of examples, rather than answers to a question about Miller's exploration of the issue. Some saw the 'bridge' role of Alfieri as central and were able to expand from that into a discussion of the whole issue. There was also some interesting focus on Marco's

sense of honour and his attention to defending Rodolfo. Most answers focused well on textual detail.

- (b) Rodolfo and Catherine's first appearance alone together provided lots to talk about. Candidates were able to look closely at how trust grows between the two and at how Catherine is gradually maturing into womanhood. Many were very aware of the ghostly presence of Eddie in the scene. Some candidates who took a chronological approach unfortunately also moved quite quickly into paraphrase. There was much to say about the stage directions, and many candidates took full advantage of the opportunity to comment on the increasing physical contact between the two and the intimacy of their language.

Question 6 OSCAR WILDE: The Importance of Being Earnest

- (a) Most candidates were able to see the eccentric, often casual, ways in which courtship and (particularly) marriage are treated here. There was often focus on the vacuousness of the two girls, on their romanticised view of the rituals of courtship. Others used the relationship between Lord and Lady Bracknell as a means of focusing on marriage as a matter of social or economic convenience. The best answers were able to concentrate on particular moments (Cecily's imagined engagements were popular) as a means of pinning down Wilde's treatment of the issue. There were a number of essays that were narrative based, showing little willingness to engage with the precise terms of the question.
- (b) Most candidates wrote with enthusiasm about this passage. Many were able to see Lady Bracknell's priorities with great clarity, and commented on her use of her book and her obsession with property and connection, comparing that with her complete failure to engage with the matter of whether Gwendolen and Jack might love each other, ('minor matters,' as Lady Bracknell would have them). They were also able to see that Lady Bracknell (often, and rather off-puttingly referred to as Bracknell in many answers) has some opinions that are both ludicrous and illogical, a tribute perhaps to her over-valuing of ignorance as 'a delicate exotic fruit.' Candidates also made much of the fact that this interview might more properly have been carried out by Gwendolen's father. Answers that digressed into the state of education in Victorian times or tried to explain the context of Lady Bracknell's opinions often moved away from specific, passage-based focus. Part of the method in which Wilde makes fun of Lady Bracknell is through the dead-pan seriousness with which Jack takes her enquiries, and more could have been made of this. It is important in drama texts that candidates recognise that it is not only what people do and say, but others' reaction to it that creates dramatic interest. At times there was a charming naivety in the view expressed by candidates that Lady Bracknell's concern with money is essentially trivial.

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Paper 9695/05

Shakespeare and other Pre Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

The overall standard this session was once again satisfactory with nearly all of the candidates achieving a sound performance. There were some candidates who were awarded full marks and only a very few who did not reach the minimum acceptable standard for this paper. There were only a few candidates who either failed to follow the rubric or were unable to complete two essays in the time available. This is an improvement on previous sessions but it is always disappointing to see any candidate whose result is damaged by such avoidable errors and Centres are once again reminded of the need to ensure that all candidates are clear on the precise demands of the paper and understand the need to divide the time available equally between the two essays.

The standard of the candidates' written English was generally commendable. Some candidates, of course, do have difficulties with expressing themselves. This was once again particularly noticeable when candidates less confident in English tackled the Chaucer text. On a more mundane level, Centres are once again asked to remind all candidates to indicate which question and option they are answering and where appropriate repeat these details on the front of their answer booklet. Such courtesies do assist the examination process.

There are some specific points arising from this session. The passage questions on some of the texts required a precise knowledge of the context for candidates to be able to answer fully. It was disappointing to note that a number of candidates were insecure in this knowledge – specific problems will be identified below in the comments on individual texts but as a general point candidates must have a thorough knowledge of the basics of the text, including the development of both plot and characters in appropriate cases. One example will clarify this point – in the passage from King Lear Goneril refers to Edmund as 'Gloucester', the title bestowed on him earlier in the play by Cornwall. However many candidates assumed she was referring to the Earl of Gloucester, Edmund's father who was blinded in an earlier scene. This led to candidates finding ingenious and inventive ways of explaining the blinded Earl's presence in the scene from which the passage was taken, all of them sadly inaccurate and inevitably limiting the overall response to some degree. Candidates with a more detailed knowledge of the text however were able to make many interesting points, for example, about the irony of this reference, given the identity of Edmund's as yet unknown conqueror and what it revealed about Goneril and Edmund. It is therefore essential that candidates are confident and accurate in their textual knowledge.

There were also still a number of candidates who began their essays with a 'potted biography' of the author, often leading into a summary of the text itself, before finally turning to the task in hand. This is an unproductive use of the candidate's valuable time and Centres should advise candidates to avoid this approach to the examination. Linked to this is the very important issue of very carefully reading the question before beginning to plan the response. Taking King Lear as an example again there were some candidates who appeared to have read the option (a) question as requiring a general essay on 'folly' rather than concentrating on the dramatic function of the Fool. This inevitably limited the success of the response. It cannot be overstressed to candidates how vital it is for them to read and reread the question and spend a few brief moments in preparing or planning their response before they put pen to paper. Many performances would have been improved in this current session by that simple action alone.

Comments on specific questions***Section A Shakespeare******King Lear***

This was the most popular text in this session and nearly all candidates showed at least a sound knowledge of the text and often some engagement with the issues it raises. There was a slight majority in favour of option (b) overall.

Option (a) was often well done, apart from those mentioned above who appeared to misread the task. Nearly all candidates had something to say about the Fool as a character and a pleasing number had a sound grasp of the idea of 'dramatic function'. Some were able to support their points with apposite quotation, especially when considering the Fool as important in revealing facets of other characters, principally Lear himself. Many saw the Fool as 'Lear's conscience' or 'adviser', whilst others saw his function as Shakespeare's voice keeping the audience aware of the truth amongst all of the disguise, madness and mayhem. Nearly all candidates explored the 'irony' of the wise Fool and the 'mad' King. He was often linked to Cordelia (a useful hook for exploring other opinions about the play) and Kent – the 'truthful trio' as one candidate put it. The Fool though of course unlike the other two gets away with his 'criticisms' of Lear, at least until he is apparently hanged. Good points were also made about his late entry into the play and his early exit - the former point catching out the unwary who thought he was there when Lear launched his ill-fated 'love test'. The temptation for weaker candidates was to summarise the points in the play when the Fool appears without any critical commentary or gloss offered - this responses were of limited success.

Option (b) engendered some excellent essays, showing a clear and incisive grasp of the context and what an audience might be expecting and feeling at this point. Many pointed out the action and the excitement of the physical confrontation - a battle of good and evil to some candidates - especially after not seeing the battle with France. The various strands of the plot were often well teased out, with Albany and Goneril's domestic troubles often receiving detailed attention. Most candidates thought Albany's strength was admirable, if a little too late for some. Many candidates explored the way Shakespeare leads up to Edgar's revelation and commented on his possibly unsympathetic words about his father - opinions were finely balanced on this point. Others wondered to whom Albany was referring with his 'Save him!' - Edmund, already under arrest, or Edgar perhaps through some unspecified action on Edmund's part. A surprising number were ready to see Edmund's later words as some kind of regret though most thought any audience would think he had simply got his just deserts. Weaker candidates often failed to identify the context precisely enough, which limited their commentary and many candidates were unsure of the chivalric code which underpins the opening exchanges and the fight.

Measure for Measure

Option (a) was the most popular choice - the responses were perhaps on the whole disappointing with relatively few considering the 'presentation' in sufficient detail. Most essays focused on Isabella who was on the whole not viewed sympathetically. Her apparent coldness to her brother and possible hypocritical readiness to offer up Mariana to Angelo's desires were the usual charges against her. Those who saw her as a construct, designed to bring out facets of the male characters did rather better though one candidate did hope 'for the Duke's future happiness she said no' to his proposal! Other women were usually discussed in passing, with some candidates linking their comments to more general points about the text - balance and 'seeing all sides' often the key ideas linking Isabella and Mistress Overdone. However some essays simply gave a potted summary of what the women characters did in the play and ignored the presentational aspect of the task and in some cases did not attempt to link the various summaries into a balanced argument at all.

Option (b) was the minority choice and generally not well done - most responses offered a summary of the events and characters without showing much understanding of the tone or how the 'lowlife' characters fit into the greater work. The 'proclamation' caused problems for some candidates but too many perhaps struggled with the meaning of the language to be able to offer a detailed commentary. It is important that candidates feel at home in the whole text if they are to tackle the passage questions successfully.

Section B**Persuasion: Austen**

This was the most popular **section B** text.

Option (a) was the minority choice but often well done, nearly every candidate knowing in reasonable detail Mrs Clay's story and most candidates also knowing Mrs Smith's too. Weaker candidates summarised these and their overall success often depended on how well they were able to link the two separate summaries in the final paragraphs of the essay. Better answers focused on the 'compare and contrast' element but also responded to the word 'role'. There was much to be said about Austen's artful construction of these two similarly middle-class but widowed ladies - key issues arising in most essays were how the Eliots revealed themselves in their responses to the women. Lady Russell's dislike of Mrs Clay and willingness to help Anne see Mrs Smith were identified as key points in the reader's positive reaction to her overall. Some candidates thought Mrs Clay a divorcee and very few remembered the two children with which she had returned to Mr Shepherd's house (perhaps like Austen herself since they are not again mentioned in the text).

Option (b) was a popular choice and produced some excellent responses, which explored Austen's narrative techniques and use of language in detail, offering intelligent commentaries on some key literary features. Less capable, but nonetheless, acceptable responses were limited to exploring how the characters are revealed here, particularly the as yet unknown Captain Wentworth, who received a mixed review over all. For some he was the obvious hero with all of the heroic attributes, whereas for others he was far too confident and glib to be trusted - candidates thus neatly aligning themselves with either Lady Russell or Anne. Weaker responses drifted into narrative summary of the passage and then the future Anne and Wentworth story, but nearly all candidates found relevant points and often showed a pleasing engagement with the text and Anne's situation. Few candidates though noticed that the key factor in Anne's decision was that it was for Wentworth's advantage she gives him up and how that would echo later in the book when William Walter Eliot is courting her.

The Nun's Priest's Prologue and Tale: Chaucer

Option (a) was well tackled by those candidates who could explore the 'sermon' element of the task as well as the 'follies and vanities' which most responses could identify in Chauntecleer though less securely in the fox. Few candidates were able to see how the priest is manipulating his audience through his humour and 'morals' but those who could explore this did well. Most responses though were an often competent summary of key events which illustrated how vain and foolish humans were.

Option (b) was a minority choice and not often well done. Most responses offered a summary of the passage with one or two brief comments on 'methods and concerns'. Those responses which did look closely at the language and tone and relate them to the rest of the text however often did very well.

David Copperfield: Dickens

Option (a) was not often seen. Candidates divided into those who knew the text well enough to explore the various stages of Copperfield's development through lessons at home to Dr Strong's and those who could only remember Steerforth and Mr Creakle. The 'presentation' was again a key discriminator with some candidates well able to see how Dickens's structure and narrative development grew from these early scenes in terms of plot, character and theme.

Option (b) was more popular but still a minority choice and often quite well handled. Most candidates realised the significance of this episode in the unmasking of Heep and also saw how the different strands of Copperfield's life were intertwining. Only a few candidates though were able to look in sufficient detail at the language, although some did notice how Heep's diction and tone changes during the passage. Many essays would have been improved by a closer attention to the detail of this passage and less focus on the background to Heep's unmasking however.

The Mayor of Casterbridge: Hardy

Option (a) was much less popular on this text. Most candidates could find relevant things to say about the town and the characters in it, with a relevant focus on the skimmington ride, the market and the inns. Better answers considered the metaphorical significance of specific locations and Hardy's concerns for the rural population and their landscape. Weaker responses focused only on the characters of the town, with a few seeing only Farfrae and Henchard as Casterbridge citizens.

Option (b) was very popular with nearly all candidates showing a good knowledge of the relationship of Elizabeth and Henchard here and elsewhere in the text, sometimes to the detriment of the 'critical appreciation'. Better answers looked closely at the language and what it revealed about Henchard's changing emotions for example and were sensitive to the narrative voice and how the reader's response is directed. Nearly all candidates had relevant and apt comments to make and the enthusiasm for the text was particularly pleasing.

Marvell selection

Option (a) responses were rare and their success depended on the choice of poems - those who discussed 'Bermudas' and 'The Garden' for example found many relevant and interesting things to say, whereas those who concentrated on 'To his coy mistress' were at a disadvantage. Better answers concentrated on the images of nature and their effect in the poem, whilst weaker ones often gave only a summary of the poem itself.

Option (b) was more popular and there were some excellent responses which explored in detail both meaning and form to great effect, teasing out nuances and shades of interpretation by careful analysis of language and rhythm. Other responses were less successful, often floundering in the meaning and not easily able to explore effects because of this. A very few responses appeared to be attempting to analyse this poem at sight nearly always with disastrous consequences.

Gulliver's Travels: Swift

Option (a) was not often seen and the quality of the response largely depended on how well the candidate knew the text and could select appropriate material to discuss. Candidates who had an understanding of Swift's humorous and satiric style did well though these were sadly quite rare. Many responses simply attempted to summarise sections of the text and were rewarded on how relevant the choice of section was to the task in hand.

Option (b) was not well done in the main as candidates appeared to struggle with the satiric tone and Swift's use of Gulliver as the narrator. Most candidates could respond to the King's comments and see some humour and satire in them but too often there was insufficient understanding of Swift's methods and concerns generally to support the analysis of this passage.

Tennyson: Selected poems

This was the least popular choice overall and it is difficult to draw general conclusions. Candidates who knew the text were able to find relevant examples of passion (or 'emotion' for some) but were less secure on poetic form. Option (b) was not well done and most candidates seemed to struggle with the symbolic and metaphorical meanings.

The Duchess of Malfi: Webster

Option (a) was the minority choice but often well tackled when candidates knew the text in sufficient detail to develop arguments around the meaning and effect of Act 5. Almost no-one agreed it was an anti-climax, seeing the salvation and revenges of Bosola as being equally important to the overall play as the Duchess herself.

Option (b) was popular and often very well done with many candidates exploring the dramatic intensity and irony unfolding before them. Some were also able to explore the tone and language to great effect, seeing for example in the Duchess's response to seeing Ferdinand a foreshadowing of her speeches at her death and also her naivety (or innocence for some) in how she is dealing with her brother. Nearly all candidates noted and could explore the lighter, domestic tone of the opening lines, contrasting them often to good effect with the sombre, threatening mood which Ferdinand engenders.

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Paper 9695/06

Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

The overall difficulty of the paper seemed comparable with previous years. We saw the whole range of achievement, with the best scripts being characterised by wide-ranging, perceptive, organised, personal responses, indicating confidence in the use of literary terminology, apt selection of significant supporting details and quotations from the texts, coupled with detailed analysis of the writing to discuss authorial form, intention and effects. Less accomplished scripts relied on narrative summary and generalised opinions to shape responses. It seemed that more able candidates opted for the (a) questions, which were fairly straightforward, shaped their responses to the terms of the questions and were able to produce a personal though literary response based on a close critical appreciation of writing. The (b) questions proved to be very accessible and popular, producing positive responses even from weaker candidates, who tended to write general essays with insufficient close reference and literary analysis of the extracts.

Candidates still need to be encouraged to use the key terms of the questions to structure their responses and to understand the subtle differences between such discriminating words as: *discuss the effects of the writing*; *how it relates*; *to what extent*; *treatment*; and *presentation*. This year there seemed to be greater evidence of wider critical reading and contextual understanding which in the main, usefully informed the students' own arguments though some candidates continue to struggle to apply ideas about *feminism*, *absurdity*, *nihilism* and *meaninglessness* to the texts. Occasionally candidates prefaced their answers with long biographical introductions which had been learnt off by heart, when their time would have been better spent analysing the question and setting an agenda for their answer. Candidates should be encouraged to engage more directly with personal ideas about how the writers' choices of form, structure and language shape meanings and warned not to treat characters as real and indulge in personal expressions of outrage at their behaviour. This was particularly evident in answers to Churchill and Pinter questions where weaker candidates seemed to think that "personal response" meant offering moral approval or disapproval.

The standard of expressive language in some cases was impressive, and usually adequate to convey ideas of varying complexity though there were a minority of low band scripts where linguistic limitations impeded the communication of literary understanding.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 MARGARET ATWOOD: Cat's Eye

This was a popular text with more candidates opting for the (b) question. The detail in candidates' responses confirmed their genuine engagement with the text and at all levels there was some appreciation of the narrative method.

- (a) Some candidates were able to use the context of the quotation as a useful way into the discussion, and sensitively explored the extent to which Elaine consciously made decisions throughout the text, often pointing out how hard she was on herself. Many struggled to address the quotation but provided wide-ranging, well informed answers on the characterisation of Elaine. Others interpreted the idea of "choices" very loosely and so found it difficult to maintain a focus on the question, or limited their argument to examples of "insensible" decisions.
- (b) The passage prompted some excellent responses on the symbolic method and significance of the cat's eye as being both clear and complex. There was some good analysis of the blend of adult and childhood perceptions in the passage, often focusing on the child's fascination with rules and conventions, relating this to the issue of conformity in Elaine's life as well as the precise descriptions of colour and the links to Elaine's art. More ambitious responses tackled Stephen's mysterious actions and Elaine's burial of her memories. The best answers achieved a balance of

detailed analysis of the effects of the writing with detailed references to the wider text and were prepared to discuss the effects of the choice of vocabulary and sentence structure in paragraph two and how this conveyed a childlike point of view. They were not afraid to discuss the ironies of the “Crown preserving jars” or the impact of “pleasurable terror”. Sound answers tended to focus well on the psychology of Elaine and pursued the symbolic significance in the wider text, without really looking at stylistic issues. Weaker answers restricted the discussion to fragmented accounts of incidents or paintings involving the marbles.

Question 2. SAMUEL BECKETT: *Endgame*

This was a popular text with candidates generally performing better on the (a) question than the extract.

- (a) This proved a less popular question, though good candidates offered well-structured, far-reaching arguments based on secure textual knowledge and well integrated understanding of contextual issues such as the Theatre of the Absurd and Existentialism. This year there was greater evidence of extensive critical reading on Beckett, not just confined to Martin Esslin, which informed ideas about “dramatic treatment” and strengthened the depth of the personal responses. The question also proved accessible for weaker candidates who showed good thematic understanding and were able to talk about the overall situation of the play, the repeated references to ending and the analogy of the chess game though the weakest merely catalogued references to “finishing”.
- (b) This was the more popular option but tended to be less well done. The best candidates put the scene into context and then focused on the extract in a linear way, commenting on a variety of dramatic effects and supporting these with reference to the whole play. The language at the beginning with Hamm’s tendency to self-dramatisation and the effect of ellipsis and patterning in Clov’s replies were noted, as well as the humour in the dialogue and action with the dog. Solid candidates were able to focus on the characters and produce predictable links with other parts of the play, often producing rather generalised essays with not enough focus on the dramatic effects. Weaker candidates struggled to balance theoretical ideas about absurdity with a sense of theatricality. The tendency to focus on the meaninglessness and futility of it all severely limits their response.

Question 3. CARYL CHURCHILL: *Top Girls*

This was a popular text which obviously engaged the candidates at all sorts of levels; the better candidates were able to deliver a literary response while others tended to focus on feminism and changing social attitudes. In both questions, weaker candidates displayed confusion about the social contexts of the historical/fictional characters and seemed to be under the misapprehension that Margaret Thatcher was a feminist. The (a) option was more popular with few doing well on (b)

- (a) More secure responses covered the mother/child relationships among both the contemporary and historical/fictional characters, with the best often focusing in detail on how the latter’s disclosures in the opening scene resonate or contrast with what we learn of Marlene and her family. Weaker answers were often a simple catalogue of characters with a lot of indignation and condemnation of Marlene and the other women, Nijo and Joan, Patient Griselda being criticised for making no effort to oppose her husband’s ridiculous demands.
- (b) The question required some recognition of the play as a construct and analysis of the nature of the dialogue which went beyond prepared material on the “overlapping” technique. Good candidates engaged with the subject of the characters’ discussion and discussed the contrast between the voluble, self-absorbed interventions of the characters with Marlene’s reticence about her own life and Win’s later advice to Louise to talk less. Some picked up on the irony of Marlene’s “I couldn’t have kept pretending for so long.” There was some intelligent discussion of how Churchill dramatises commonalities and sympathies among the characters in the passage, while stressing their very different cultural backgrounds. Not all candidates were aware of the difference between themes and dramatic effects, identifying thematic concerns and labelling them as dramatic effects. Weaker candidates tended to rehearse the life stories of each of the characters in the extract or paraphrase the passage. Some used it as a prompt to discuss the whole play with the selection of material and interpretations reliant on prepared material.

Question 4. T.S. ELIOT: *Prufrock and Other Observations, The Waste Land and The Hollow Men*

This was not a popular choice though some Centres with able candidates did very well. There were some impressive responses to both (a) and (b) questions with candidates offering assured, accurate interpretations of Eliot's poet set within a comprehensive understanding of relevant social and historical contexts. The (a) question proved more popular and tended to be more ably done.

- (a) The question generally prompted some well organised and knowledgeable discussion of *Prufrock* and some of the more dramatic monologues from *The Waste Land*. The best answers showed real engagement with the poetry, balancing a discussion of the theme with an appreciation of the poetic techniques. There was good use of apt quotation followed up with detailed analysis of the effects generated by choice of language and sentence structure. Weaker candidates struggled to generate a coherent discussion and tended to be assertive about the theme and unable to engage with poetic effect.
- (b) A few candidates were able to give an overview of the concerns of the poem and look at the ending in detail, grappling with interpretation of the "Shadow", the abstract nature of the language, the effect of the sentence structure and patterning, together with the echoes of nursery rhyme and Lord's Prayer. Some candidates were able to make sensible if rather brief comments on the extract and then make appropriate links to other poems. Weaker candidates attempted to paraphrase and struggled to demonstrate understanding of the extract and poem as a whole.

Question 5. LES MURRAY: from *Selected Poems*

While this is not a popular text, well prepared, able candidates are showing that they can produce detailed, critical appreciation of the relationship between the ordinary and extraordinary and the process of defamiliarisation in Murray's poetry.

- (a) This was a less popular option, often answered by better candidates who demonstrated secure contextual knowledge, and detailed personal engagement with themes such as the environment, identity and survival while at the same time showing an ability to analyse appropriately selected quotations. Weaker candidates attempted generalised accounts of the poems.
- (b) Those candidates who had studied the poem showed acute sensitivity to form, language and meaning, while offering some impressive readings of other poems in the collection. They focused on the rather heroic presentation of the fishermen, the sensuous detail in the language and the links they made with other poems often illustrated Murray's treatment of his subject matter and technique. Weaker candidates struggled to give a stanza by stanza paraphrase of the poem.

Question 6. R.K. Narayan: *The Guide*

This remained a popular text with candidates often able to show an impressive recall of narrative detail but struggling to address the questions. They opted in equal numbers for both questions but tended to do better on (a) than (b) because of a reluctance to look at the effects of the writing.

- (a) The majority of the candidates interpreted the question as a character description of Marco, though more sophisticated answers noted the relevance of the quotation and used Marco's role to highlight significant aspects of character and themes within the novel. The best answers explored the extent to which Narayan used Marco to raise issues about traditional and modern attitudes to marriage, work, and art and noted that our view of him is filtered through Raju's narration. In these cases, textual knowledge was thorough and effectively deployed to support personal responses. A few noted he was the source of comedy. Competent candidates recognised his role in the plot and that he was symbolically different from Rosie and Raju. Quite often his interventions were seen as the factors that prompted change in Raju and his elevation to the sainthood. Weaker candidates outlined Marco's role in the plot.
- (b) This passage was accessible to all candidates. Most engaged with the content, commenting on the context, Raju's bad behaviour and linking it with earlier and later episodes of self-deception on his part. In dealing with the wider text they tried to focus on the second part of the question, Raju's attitude to life. Weaker candidates summarised the plot of the whole novel, focused on prepared material like the importance of the railways as a symbol of modernisation or restricted their discussion to explaining how the situation was Raju's fault using narrative summary. This was another text where some candidates' personal response was limited to moral condemnation of

Raju's treatment of the boy, his mother and the fact he was living in sin with a married woman. Several of the better scripts considered Narayan's narrative method, were conscious of Raju's self-dramatisation and able to make more subtle comments on his character, on the emphasis on self and how while Raju's narration gives full force to his recriminations it also enables the listener, Velan, and the reader to see that he was wrong. However very few were able to look more closely at the effects of the language e.g. the sentence structure in paragraph two, the effect of the embedded direct speech, the choice of language with the alliteration lines 18-20. To gain the top marks, candidates are expected to demonstrate this level of literary analysis.

Question 7. HAROLD PINTER: *The Homecoming*

This was a popular text. Candidates engaged well with the subject matter, the more sophisticated having a good appreciation of its theatricality. The majority of the candidates opted for the extract. In the best answers extensive, relevant wider reading on drama e.g. Esslin and Billington was seamlessly integrated with the main arguments, informing the discussion of the play as a construct. It proved more difficult to make constructive use of Derrida and the theory of Deconstruction "which makes us realise the impact of being marginals in a conformist society." or ideas about nihilism. Weaker candidates who think the dialogue is "meaningless" because the situation is so unrealistic or absurd, struggled to engage with the extract.

- (a) This question appealed to better candidates who sensibly used their introductions to discuss the terms of the question and shape a response. Some were unsure about the idea of blurring, but explored the presentation of memories or suspicions of illusions and discussed the audience's uncertainties about what was happening. There was some perceptive discussion of invented or doubtful memories revealing the characters' fears, insecurities, wishes or the past as they wished it had been. Candidates were able to explore specific references to Max's illusions, Lennie's uncorroborated stories as a means of intimidation and the blurring of Jesse and Ruth's pasts.
- (b) This was a very welcoming passage and most candidates were able to take up the invitation to explore dramatic methods and effects. Most managed to discuss the cumulative effect of the different stages in the passage: Sam's disclosure and collapse, Teddy's departure, Max's monologue and the final tableau, placing them in the context of earlier events. The best answers were also informed by a sense of the bizarre comedy and noted the effect of the language in Max's reaction to Sam's collapse, Teddy's travel arrangements, and the effect of the pauses and silences at specific points in the scene, for example at Max's "It's been wonderful to see you"; Ruth's "Don't be a stranger." and in Max's final monologue. Many candidates relished the ironies and were able to bring out the pathos and poignancy of Max's situation. Weaker candidates sometimes struggled to understand the extract, thinking Sam had died or that the photo and hand shake meant that all was well between Max and Teddy and once again expressed moralistic personal opinions on the behaviour of the characters, rather than focusing on the dramatic effects of the extract as an ending to the play.

Question 8. VIRGINIA WOOLF: *Mrs Dalloway*

This has always been a popular text with candidates usually showing a clear grasp of the narrative method and structure as well as a personal, literary response and appreciation of the detail in the novel. There were some suspicions this year that candidates were relying on summaries of the book because they found it difficult to provide specific detailed references to the text and while they could recount taught material on the stream of consciousness technique, they were not very secure when discussing it in relation to the extract.

- (a) Responses ranged from narrative of what Clarissa remembers to sophisticated accounts of the techniques Woolf uses to convey Clarissa's experience of her memories. The best candidates offered highly informed, well organised, critical discussions which focused on the key terms *presentation*, *significance* and *memories*. They were able to show how very specific memories inform our understanding of Clarissa and our view of other characters while at the same time focusing on the way the shifts are managed, how the choice of language and sentence structure create tone and feeling. There was some good discussion of the different ways in which memories are problematic for Clarissa. Less secure answers tended to offer generalised discussion of the past and present, describing Clarissa's reasons for turning down Peter Walsh or her relationship with Sally. Others insisted on bringing in Septimus and his memories though the question simply did not call for them.

- (b) The most able candidates offered excellent analysis of the writing and were able to trace how Woolf interweaves Elizabeth's point of view with Miss Kilman's, previous conversations and impressions with present events and feelings. They examined the details of the description (as in the first paragraph) and suspected that just as Elizabeth viewed Miss Kilman with intuitive understanding and objectivity, Woolf's presentation of her allowed the reader to assess Elizabeth e.g. "They lived with everything they wanted – her mother had breakfast in bed every day....". Competent candidates engaged with the ideas in the extract exploring the contrast between Miss Kilman and Clarissa and Woolf's recurrent use of the handling of flowers as an indicator of character; the issue of class, social inequality and the theme of people attempting to convert others to their ideas. Weaker candidates were often confused over the narrative voice and wanted to see Elizabeth as preferring the company of Miss Kilman to that of her mother. Some thought they were having a lesbian relationship and that this was a replay of Clarissa and Sally. They offered fragmented narratives and material of tangential significance about the war or female education and employment.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/07

Comment and Appreciation

General comments

There was, as usual in this Paper, a very wide range of responses: many were sound and thoughtful, exploring the given passages or poem in some detail, with appropriate reference and quotation to support personal interpretation; a few were very good indeed, demonstrating both perceptive and sensitive understanding combined with confident appreciation of how each writer creates his/her impacts upon the reader; at the other end of the mark-range, quite a large number of less confident candidates allowed their responses to remain on a largely or even entirely narrative level, with little or no attempt to explore. Too many – especially but not exclusively on **Question 3** – began their answers without apparently having read the whole passage or poem, with the consequence that misunderstandings quickly became evident; candidates should be very strongly advised to read the whole piece very carefully and thoroughly, at least twice and perhaps more, before starting to write.

All three questions were tackled in roughly equal numbers, though **Question 2** and **Question 3** were a little more popular; there were no rubric errors, though a surprisingly large number of answers remained unfinished – and because this meant that the end of at least one piece was unexplored this led to some significant misinterpretation, which would almost certainly have been avoided if the piece as a whole had been read and absorbed first. The standard of candidates' written English and the clarity of their writing were both good this session.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was a relatively straightforward passage and task, and there were some thorough and proficient responses to it; many were seriously weakened, however, by a failure to treat it as a piece of drama, even in several instances remarking on the large amount of dialogue that Priestley uses in the 'novel' – this despite the introduction to the extract which makes it quite clear that this is an extract from a play. Failure to see it as drama meant that many answers ignored the many stage directions, all of which help us appreciate how Priestley wants us to see the characters and respond to them; it also meant that some of the most theatrical actions were left unmentioned or unexplored – Eric's sudden "guffaw" for example, Sheila and Gerald looking at each other towards the end, and the moment when Sheila "hastily" kisses Gerald, all particularly significant and revealing moments.

Most answers worked methodically through the passage, or through the characters, offering a personal opinion as to what they and their relationships were like; most candidates supported their ideas with quotation and/or reference to the passage, though too many treated the characters as if they are real people, with no reference at all to the fact that they are fictional creations of a named dramatist. Emphases varied, but on the whole Sheila and her father were given most time, with their obviously affectionate but never sentimental relationship being discussed by most; Mrs Birling was often fully explored, and her insistence on propriety and decorum was well examined; she was frequently seen as the strongest member of the family, despite her quiet reticence. Most candidates saw at least some of the underlying family tensions that begin to emerge, as well as the possibly more serious uncertainty in Sheila's mind about what Gerald did "all last summer", though her genuine love for him was clearly appreciated, and – for many candidates – her spirit of independence and even rebelliousness was well noted and frequently applauded.

Question 2

This was quite often the weaker answer in candidates' responses, but it also led to some very purposeful, thoughtfully informed and critically astute writing. Penelope Shuttle's poem is not quite as straightforward as some candidates said or implied, if only because the central idea of making rain pay tax is so obviously a

fantastical and impossible notion; some candidates failed entirely to see this impossibility, or in some cases decided to ignore it, and simply wrote instead about the poet's love for nature – this is certainly an essential part of the poem, but not its central thesis. One candidate grasped Penelope Shuttle's idea immediately and succinctly in this sentence – “*The poet takes us on a flight of fancy by imagining what people might tax the rain for if taxing the rain was possible*” – and followed this up with clear appreciation that although her love of rain is at the centre of the poem it is not what it is really about. Others, too, appreciated what they saw as the poet's attack on the greed of “many men and women” who would, if they could, tax everything and anything in order to raise money; many saw the poem as overtly political and an attack on what they called “the nameless ones”, “the bureaucrats”, “the sinister politicians”; the poem is, some said, an attack on the whole principle of taxation. One particularly sharp answer saw the poem as portraying “the poet's romantic worship of nature set against modern base materialism”. All these ideas, and more, scored in that they moved well beyond seeing the poem as merely a paean of praise, or in some cases a scathing attack, on what rain can do to humans. Too many also failed to see the contrast clearly drawn by the poet between her own views and those of “many men and women”, a surely very central and essential distinction. It is certainly quite a delicate and elusive poem, but if only because of the nonsensical impossibility of what it appears to be suggesting (“taxing the rain”) it was a pity that more candidates did not try to go beyond taking it almost entirely literally. Many rightly saw the poem as essentially light or humorous in tone, though few tried to explore *how* or even *why* this was the case; the best, however, noted a clear distinction between the poet's “whimsical tone and its serious message”.

There were many comments about the structure of the poem itself, not always convincingly demonstrated but simply asserted – its short-stanzas, for example, were representative of raindrops, and its many enjambements suggestive of continuing rainfall. “The free verse of the poem indicates the independence and variety of rain”, and “the fluctuating enjambement provides unpredictable movement that cannot be curtailed or controlled by the dead hand of humans” were two quite striking personal responses here. It was good to read comments about the *effects* of the writing, and good too that only a bare handful this session used the term “blank verse” when they meant “free verse”. Too many answers still listed technical devices – alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia and so on – with little or no attempt to suggest their effects upon a reader; such listing will never gain much reward, however full and detailed it is.

Question 3

Mention has been made above of the need to read the full passage before starting to write about it, and responses to Kate Chopin's story showed again and again how essential this is. Far too many candidates appeared for most, and occasionally all, of their answers to assume that Brentley Mallard was truly dead, despite the unarguable fact that he walks into the house at the end of the story, having been “far from the scene of accident”; those candidates who argued that his appearance at the end is merely a ghost, or even his own son, had clearly not looked carefully enough at what Chopin writes about the reactions of Josephine and Richards as well as of Louise herself.

There was, too, a lot of uncertainty regarding the reasons for Louise's death at the end – many took the doctor's kindly untruth at face value, entirely missing the undoubted fact that having very rapidly overcome her initial shock at the reported death of her husband, Louise Mallard is in fact elated at the fact that she is now free, and no longer burdened or tied down by marriage to a man she only half loved. Her joy is indeed “monstrous”, because of the guilt it brings with it, but of her sheer delight at being “Free, free, free!” there is absolutely no denial. The central parts of the passage, where Louise looks out of her window and sees evidence of “the new spring life”, are reflective of her growing awareness of her own new life and the new growth that it would bring – though ironically in the end that it could not bring. A few noted with perception that until this moment she is called Mrs Mallard, but once conscious of her new individuality she is called Louise. Some candidates argued that her joy was because of an acceptance of her own death and the relief it would bring, or of the joy that she would see her husband in heaven, but there is absolutely no support for such a view in the story itself. She dies of shock and grief, not now at her husband's death, but at the fact that he is not dead: her freedom and independence have lasted less than one hour, in dreadful ironic contrast to what she had thought “with a shudder . . . only yesterday”, that “life might be long”.

A few candidates found the ending of the story quite amusing; there is certainly a bitter or dark and ironic humour to it; a few found it moralistic – “do not count your chickens until the eggs are hatched”; in a sense, both views have some justification. Too many, though, either misread the ending or missed it out entirely, with consequent and significant misinterpretation of the story as a whole. Whatever their individual interpretations, however, the best answers – and there were some very good ones indeed on this question – made absolutely sure that their explorations of Chopin's writing and of her many images were carefully and convincingly related to the theme of *the complete story*; as with **Question 2**, the least successful answers simply identified images and devices, but did little or nothing with them.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/08</p>

<p>Coursework</p>

General comments

As has been the case in most recent sessions, there was some very pleasing work this November; it is clear that Centres who have submitted coursework before have become increasingly confident in the preparation of their candidates, and that those who are new, or relatively new, have considered the syllabus requirements and the marking criteria carefully and thoughtfully. All sampled folders demonstrated sound or good knowledge of the texts being studied and discussed, and in almost all cases there was also clear evidence that the demands of the marking criteria were understood and addressed by candidates. Some, it must be said, were rather more concerned to show simple knowledge, and did not fully get to grips with the need to explore their texts in close critical detail, but these were a minority. Centre annotation and summative comments were full and helpful, too, making it very clear to the Moderator why and how a mark had been reached – and in most cases such a mark was very close indeed to agreed standards.

Essays were in most cases well structured and fully illustrated with quotations and textual references – just once or twice there was perhaps *too much* quotation, which almost took over a properly critical argument – and the most confident and successful candidates also managed to incorporate and discuss some relevant critical material from published texts and Internet sites, demonstrating an ability to marshal material and to use it as a means of reaching a strong personal response; this was good. Such secondary material can help an argument, adding weight and critical authority; provided that it is *used* and not simply tacked on.

What *is* required for higher-band marks, however, are several things, not all of which were fully addressed by all candidates. For a secure Band 2 mark, for example (36-43 for the whole folder), candidates need to demonstrate “**secure knowledge**” – there were very few who failed to do this – combined with “**understanding of themes and characters**”; the latter proved no real problem for most, but themes were less well managed by many. It is essential for a mark in this band, or above, that a response goes beyond simple character study, and that it looks at ways in which a writer has created her/his fictional characters, and at how s/he fits them into the theme of the novel or play as a whole. Ways of doing this must include “**some awareness of literary qualities and contexts**”: close reading of the writer’s language, its words, phrases and images, is essential. Other features of the marking criteria for this Band 2 relate to the accuracy of a candidate’s writing and the confidence with which an answer is written and structured, and here there was much good practice; some candidates presented slightly uneven or disconnected essays, where paragraphs and ideas were not entirely cogently argued, but in the majority of cases there was little doubt as to the clarity and progression of ideas. The word “**contexts**” is used above, and most candidates did touch upon at least some elements of this: a context can be many things – for a play, for example, its theatrical nature is a very significant context, as may be the historical period in which it was written and staged; novels too should be read within two contexts, the period of the writing and publication, and perhaps too the different way in which we now read them in the 21st century (writing on a novel by Thomas Hardy, for example, some essays might have gained strength from at least some discussion of the different attitudes towards love, marriage and the different social roles of men and women which a late 19th century writer portrays); poetry has its own contexts, both social and historical, but also characteristics of poetry as a specific and different genre, a point closely allied to what was said earlier about close reading of the writer’s language and methods. Most candidates addressed at least some contextual matters; such address need not be extensive, but for a high mark it should be there. Most, too, addressed most of the remaining requirements of the marking criteria, though not always quite as fully or confidently as their marks suggested.

Most Centres ask candidates to tackle the same task on each text, which is absolutely fine, and provided that it is clear – as it was this November – that each response is the outcome of individual thinking and writing then good work can certainly ensue. Where teachers feel sufficiently confident in their candidates, however, it can often be helpful to allow and perhaps encourage them to select from a number of possible tasks set by teachers, or even to draft their own; provided that self-drafted tasks are monitored by the teachers concerned, and ideally sent in advance to CIE for comment and approval, this can lead to even more individual and person writing. It is of course more demanding of the teacher, but it can avoid at least some of

the “sameness” of approach and even structure that can often result when all candidates address identical tasks. As a compromise, some Centres ask candidates to follow the same question for one piece, but allow choice for the other; this may be a helpful initial way towards an even more individual set of folders. What is crucially and centrally important, though, is that teachers feel entirely secure and confident in whichever approach they choose to adopt; it is the outcome – the candidates’ finished work – that matters and that is assessed, not the approach leading to it.

The last two reports on coursework have mentioned the word-limit, so it was disappointing that again a number of candidates were allowed to breach this; the combined length of the two pieces within each folder *must not exceed 3000 words*. Centres must ensure that all folders adhere to this rule, otherwise work will be returned. It is essential that all candidates from all Centres work to exactly the same rules and within the same restrictions.

Overall, then, a very good set of folders; there was ample evidence of very good teaching and very good learning among them, and all concerned can be well pleased with their efforts.