

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 8694/03
Poetry and Prose

See Report 8695/09.

Paper 8694/04
Drama

General comments

On the whole, Examiners felt that the candidates who sat papers in this session were less confident with their material than in the summer. There was less assured and directed writing at the top of the range, and more candidates who relied on paraphrase and summary without focusing their answers on the questions set. While most candidates demonstrated that they had a working knowledge of their set texts, it must be remembered that this knowledge is only the foundation of the examination, which tests how candidates can select from and apply that knowledge in answer to specific questions in the paper. Reference to and quotation from texts is essential in the development of argument and in passage-based questions in particular, Examiners are looking for a very detailed examination of the extract on the question paper. Too many candidates used these as springboards for general discussion, or merely summarised the content of the passage.

In the open **(a)** questions, the successful candidates are able to construct a clear argument in response to the question, drawing on their knowledge of the text. They make specific reference to particular episodes which support their argument, with the occasional use of quotation to highlight key aspects. Such a candidate has a clear sense of direction and organisation, selecting only those areas of a text pertinent to the discussion.

In the passage-based **(b)** questions, successful candidates respond directly to the task set, basing their answer very closely on the printed extract, making links to the rest of the text when required by the question. They quote quite extensively from the extract, with commentary on dialogue construction and language, stage directions and dramatic form, guided by the requirements of the particular question.

Successful candidates do not rely on summary or paraphrase, and show an awareness of the set question. On this paper, candidates do need to think of the plays in dramatic terms, rather than purely as paper-based texts.

Candidates answered on the full range of texts, with *Death of a Salesman* and *Macbeth* being the most favoured plays.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

- (a)** Few candidates tackled this question. Those who did discussed the content of the scene in the garden, focusing on the childish discussions and the menstrual blood. The differences between the two girls were not always recognised, nor Angie's dependence on the younger girl. Very few candidates were able to relate these two girls to the older women in the play.

- (b) Candidates approaching this question commented on Griselda's character and Marlene's attitude to her; a few went beyond the extract to compare their attitude to giving up a child. There was little discussion of the relation of the attitudes represented in the extract to the feminist theme of the play. A number of candidates discussed the class distinctions of desserts, but did not comment on the women's varying attitudes to food, or to husbands. Only a few candidates grasped the opportunity to comment on the technique of having Marlene convey information to the audience by introducing the other guests to Griselda. Good answers included comment on the use of overlapping dialogue and compared its use here with its use in Act 3.

Question 2

Athol Fugard: *The Township Plays*

- (a) There were some good answers on this question, revealing close knowledge and an understanding of how the techniques used conveyed the concerns of the plays. There was a high level of personal response and engagement with the material, and several candidates were able to refer closely to and quote from the plays. There was often an appreciation of a challenge to the political state being mirrored by a challenge to theatrical tradition. *The Coat* and *The Island* were particularly well used.
- (b) Most candidates who answered this question commented fully on Willy's stance, the best answers exploring questions of manhood, individual and collective responsibility, integrity and black passivity in the face of oppression. A few candidates wrote general essays on Willy's role in the play, referring to the extract to support points made, which limited the detail of the consideration of the extract.

Question 3

Arthur Miller: *Death of a Salesman*

- (a) Though this text was again hugely popular, only a few answered this question. Most candidates concentrated on why the shifts of time occurred and what they revealed about the characters and their relationships, but few candidates really picked up on the word 'dramatising', and so missed opportunities to refer to the staging devices, the sound effects, the blending of scenes and so on.
- (b) This was the more popular option and elicited a strong personal response from candidates. A few candidates wrote general essays on Willy, drawing on the extract to support points, but the best answers focused on the passage and included comment on not only Willy's anger and Howard's dismissive attitude and language but also on the many ironies. Candidates often recognised the importance of Dave Singleman to Willy's dreams, and more alert candidates noted Singleman's own isolation and the contrast between his and Willy's funerals.

Question 4

William Shakespeare: *As You Like It*

- (a) Rather too many answers to this question produced simplistic summaries on what befalls the characters in Arden. More successful answers were more selective, often focusing on the changing relationships between Rosalind, Celia and Orlando; a handful commented on Shakespeare's exploration of homo-erotic themes through these characters.
- (b) Many candidates who chose this question provided an illustrated paraphrase of the extract. Little attention was paid to 'the ways the characters exchange views'; some candidates commented generally on the nature of the exchange, but appreciation of displays of wit, punning and so on was rare.

Question 5

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a) This question proved popular, but was not always answered well. Some candidates disagreed that the play might be considered political, so dismissed the idea and instead recounted the plot to show that the play was really about evil, appearance and reality, equivocation, the downfall of a tragic hero. While this may be a valid view, it is not a sensible approach to a question about the play's political dimension. Some candidates considered the politics external to the play, linking it with King James' position, but more successful answers focused on issues such as ambition, power, kingship, good and bad government.

- (b) Some candidates answering this question showed some surprising misunderstandings. The king referred to in the first line was sometimes taken to be Macbeth, while others, perceiving that it lay in the English king's power to dislodge Macbeth, ended up by saying that 'the Evil' was Macbeth. The second part of the extract after the entrance of Ross was handled more confidently. Better answers explored the contrast between the divinely appointed Edward and the usurper Macbeth, and the pointed contrast between England and Scotland, developed through the language of the scene.

Question 6

John Webster: *The Duchess of Malfi*

Too few candidates answered on *The Duchess of Malfi* for general comment on performance to be possible.


