

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 9695/03

Poetry, Prose and Drama

General comments

With a far greater number of candidates than last year, Examiners saw a range of approaches to questions, but again answers were dominated by Blake and Achebe. Although answers were offered on every text on the two papers, only *Great Expectations* saw appreciable numbers.

Again most candidates showed a good accurate knowledge of their texts. Very few candidates seemed unprepared for the exam. Knowledge of plot, character and theme was usually present, often to a sound standard; it was in their ability to select, illustrate and argue that candidates showed their level of achievement. The knowledge is essential, but alone it is not enough at this level; what counts is what candidates are able to do with that knowledge and how they use it to address the questions set on the examination paper.

Reference to specific episodes in a novel or play, or to specific ideas explored in poetry, are essential to develop arguments, and where candidates are writing about authorial technique, that reference needs support from some quotation from the text. As has been said in this Report in the past, Examiners do not expect abundant detailed quotation, but they do expect that answers will be supported by some clear reference to the text. A large number of answers in this session had no textual reference apart from passages of paraphrase.

It is therefore particularly important that candidates answering the passage-based option answer the questions, which inevitably ask them to look at the detail of the section printed on the paper. It is very disappointing to see candidates missing opportunities by answering questions which ask them to 'comment closely' or discuss 'methods' or 'presentation' without a single quotation from the printed excerpt.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) Some of the answers to this question showed impressive knowledge of Blake's philosophical background, and even made productive reference to other works by the poet. The premise of the question was generally agreed with wholeheartedly, though many candidates found it easier to argue that Blake disliked organised religion, with reference to poems usually taken from 'Songs of Experience', while they found the 'religious spirit' more difficult to illustrate. Those who did referred to Blake's belief in the immanence of God and to the Christian references in the poems. Interestingly, 'The Tyger' was frequently used to illustrate both sides of the argument, though with markedly more success on the 'religious spirit' side.
- (b) Discussion of 'Spring' often included reference to a harmony between humanity and nature, the innocence of children and the religious significance of the Lamb. Candidates were able to discuss elements of form, with the short lines, rhythm and refrain, and often compared these with other poems. Some commented further that in this poem, unlike some others, Night is not threatening, while others picked up some suggestions of Experience in this Innocence poem. Some candidates found a problem of balance here: some reference to other poems was needed in order to evaluate how far 'Spring' is characteristic. Some referred to no other poems and some discussed others so fully that they were unable to 'comment closely' on 'Spring'.

Question 2

Touched with Fire: ed. Hydes

- (a) Answers to this question made reference to 'Refugee Mother and Child', 'On My First Sonne', 'Digging' and 'Prayer Before Birth', while 'Mid-Term Break' was often also explored. While all the poems chosen were used appropriately, perhaps the most fruitful comparisons were between the first two, candidates often writing with sensitivity about the situations described in the poems and about the poets' use of language.
- (b) Answers on Wordsworth's 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge' varied widely, some candidates aware of the 19th century date, while others wrote about vehicle pollution. Some were aware of Wordsworth's reputation as a poet of nature, and this informed their answers, but some candidates who did not have this information wrote careful and responsive essays based on their own close reading of the poem. There were some very thoughtful pieces of writing on the language and tone of the poem, and while some saw the poem simply as a paean to London's beauty, others noted that the timing of the composition was crucial, and that the beauty existed only because 'that mighty heart' was 'lying still'.

Question 3

Sylvia Plath: *Ariel*

- (a) Candidates who answered this question chose a wide range of poems, the discriminator being how well they commented on the effects of the imagery they chose, and related these comments to the overall meaning of the poems. Many candidates showed a real responsive appreciation of Plath's poetry, and this question produced some of the most sensitive and detailed writing which Examiners saw in this session.
- (b) In their writing on 'Letter in November', candidates commented well on examples of language and imagery and were often able to make appropriate links with other poems, but not many candidates were able to give a convincing account of the poem as a whole in order to show what the language and imagery contributed to it. However, many candidates were able to show a comprehensive knowledge of Plath's poetry and its varied concerns.

Question 4

Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*

- (a) This text was again hugely popular, and answers were equally divided between the two questions. This question provoked many extremely thoughtful and personal essays; very few Centres seemed to have a 'party line', and the result was that candidates were clearly thinking through the issues for themselves. Responses and conclusions were varied, and nearly all the candidates who answered the question showed comprehensive knowledge through their range of reference. Sometimes the reference was close to paraphrase; the more confident candidates selected their reference very precisely to inform their argument, and often included snippets of quotation. Some candidates discussed the range of individual female roles in the novel, while others explored the balance of masculine and female principles in the novel as a whole.
- (b) There were many good answers on Ezeudu's funeral too. Some answers strayed into discussion of Okonkwo, which was not an ideal focus for this question. Better answers were fully aware of the significance of the episode, both in terms of the plot's development and in terms of the perception of the ceremony, commenting that the incoming white men would find frightening and incomprehensible what the reader recognises as a manifestation of a complex and spiritual culture. Few candidates examined the presentation explicitly, but many dealt with it implicitly in their discussion of the spirits and the reader's response.

Question 5

Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*

- (a) Rather too many of the answers to this question simply summarised Pip's rise and fall in London society. Better answers highlighted and examined key moments and were particularly aware of the context in which Pip makes his claim that his life has been 'blind and thankless'. Most of the answers showed a thorough knowledge of the novel, but techniques of selection and argument were sometimes found wanting.
- (b) The passage produced some good and detailed discussions, though many candidates did not fully acknowledge the instruction to 'comment closely' on the way the relationship is presented in the passage. Those candidates who looked carefully at the structure of dialogue, tone of voice and small accompanying actions did very well. A number of candidates discussed the prevalence of hyphens in the excerpt successfully, and some commented on the balance between the younger Pip presented in the passage and the elder Pip who is narrating.

Question 6

Doris Lessing: *Martha Quest*

- (a) Despite the pivotal role of Stella and Andrew Matthews in Martha's development, only a handful of candidates answered this question.
- (b) Nearly all candidates who had studied this text answered this question. These answers usually found plenty of detail in the passage to discuss, looking carefully at the language, imagery and juxtapositions in the extract. Martha's response in the passage was often linked with her attitudes presented elsewhere in the novel, showing a thorough knowledge of the text. Her reliance on her reading and her failure to act was well documented.

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

Candidates found this an accessible paper, and most were able to show good knowledge of the texts that they had studied. The most popular texts by far were *Macbeth*, *Death of a Salesman* and *Top Girls*, with only a tiny number of candidates engaging with Fugard's *Township Plays* or Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*.

It is worth commenting, that many of the candidates were not really willing to engage with the texts in dramatic terms. Obviously chances for seeing productions or videos of the texts are limited, but classroom discussion should ensure that candidates are aware of a play as something to be acted, where staging and production provide vital elements of meaning. Questions on the paper quite often talk about 'dramatic argument' (1 (b)) or staging, so these are elements that should be specifically considered. It is always difficult to persuade candidates to think carefully before beginning to write, for they feel that time is being lost, but they should be alerted to how carefully questions are worded to elicit a response; a general grasp of the general thrust of the question is often not enough to allow them access to the top end of the mark range.

Whilst candidates seemed quite comfortable with the 'a' questions, there was considerable uncertainty about how to write an appropriate essay based on a passage. The following may help. In passage-based answers, candidates should concentrate on the passage itself, not seeking to produce an overview of the play as a whole unless invited to do so. The thrust of any answer should be to work from the detail to the more general, not the other way round. Candidates should be prepared to think through the passages in dramatic terms, looking to examine how the dynamics of a scene are worked out. Often questions give the instruction to 'Comment closely....' Candidates are ill-advised not to take this prompt. References to other parts of the play should be used in moderation and only when they are specifically useful for backing up a point that is being made about the passage given. If invited to talk about audience response, candidates need to think hard in order not simply to provide a trite answer: honest analysis of the complexities of what is happening on stage is what is required, not simply a discussion of whether or not members of the audience would be on the edge of their seats at certain points.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) The question about locations in *Top Girls* was usually well answered, with most candidates aware of how Churchill is making points about the traditional role of women and how it is changing. Many were particularly articulate about the first scene, with its ironic use of the liberated women failing to notice the waitress. A number of candidates took the question to be an invitation to unload sociological thoughts about their own view of the changing role of women; this was neither requested nor rewarded.
- (b) Although there were some outstanding answers to this question, many candidates failed to engage with its detail. Yes, there are obvious contrasts between Marlene and Joyce's positions in life, but these are brought to life by the turn-taking in the scene, the interruptions, by them talking across each other, by the contrasting uses of language. The question asked about 'dramatic argument' and answers could not succeed without close engagement with the changing currents. Many candidates outlined the position of each of the women, but that was not really the nub of the question. For some, the temptation to talk about the play as a whole was too strong, and the answers they wrote simply came across as general essays on the play, unanchored in the detail.

Question 2

- (a) There were few responses to the question, though most were of a good standard. Some candidates took the opportunity to talk about the political situation that brought about Fugard's writing, and this often diverted them from the task at hand. Others were able to argue coherently and relevantly for the importance of theatre as a means of self-expression and criticism for those denied a voice in a repressive and unjust society. Good answers made use of specific references and particular moments to back up and reinforce their points, picking up on the word 'demonstrate' from the question. It would have been good to see more answers that focused on actions rather than merely the words.
- (b) The idea of loss of identity in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* had obviously captured the imaginations of many candidates, and they were able to write with enthusiasm and authority about this particular passage. Answers would have been stronger, on the whole, if they had talked more fully about the language of the piece, the backward and forward movement between Man and Buntu.

Question 3

- (a) In asking a question about the structure and staging of the play, candidates were given the opportunity to see how text is realised into performance, how the words are merely a part of the total experience. Most rose to the challenge, though there was a slight tendency for candidates to merely notice that the staging helped characterise Willy before simply moving on to a general character study essay. The best answers offered clear insights, looking carefully at general stage directions or at the use of music, lighting or flashbacks to evoke a mood, a relationship or an event from Willy's life. For some slightly weaker candidates there was a tendency to list effects without trying to make links. As always, the word 'dramatise' was a carefully chosen prompt that candidates were wise to think through before starting to write.
- (b) Most candidates were able to comment with some effectiveness on this scene, though there were quite a large number of answers that simply saw the passage as a means of conducting a discussion about the play as a whole. Candidates saw that there was a movement away from Linda and towards Ben and darkness here and responded well to the symbolic depth of the passage. Those who were able to engage with the way in which Linda's speech interrupts Willy's thoughts and the way in which lighting and music back up his increasing isolation, his final surrender to illusion, were able to reach the top of the mark scale with ease. Less good candidates tended to list effects without making connections. It was a rich passage with lots to say but surprisingly few had time to look in detail at the transition from the last scene to the funeral. Because the candidates knew the play well, they tended to assume that a first time audience would interpret all his remarks as leading up to suicide. That is not necessarily quite right. Candidates who were able to retain a sense of how an audience would feel puzzlement, intrigue and apprehension as the action unfolds were automatically dealing with 'the likely responses of an audience'.

Question 4

- (a) A significant number of candidates assumed that 'role play' meant the role assumed by the actor in the play and then went on to summarize the function of a range of characters in *As You Like It*. However, many saw straight to the central issue and wrote interestingly about the assumed roles that characters take on and how this enables them to behave in different ways from normal. Some candidates speculated interestingly about how far Jaques and Touchstone are putting on performances of comedy or melancholy. A number of candidates fell back on plot summary, or on pre-prepared material about court and country that was only occasionally relevant.
- (b) Answers here often fell back on narrative, with surprisingly few candidates willing to really engage with the stagecraft or the language of the extract: once again, the clue was in the question in the term 'dramatic contribution.' Better answers were able to dwell on the nature of Hymen, the elevation of ceremony and ritual as a means of resolution, and the sanctity of marriage as presented here. There were interesting comments on the combination of magic and human contrivance here, often related to the pastoral and mythological elements of the play.

Question 5

- (a) There were plenty of character studies of Lady Macbeth, the witches, Lady Macduff, with useful contrasts made between the three and much comment on who bore moral responsibility for Macbeth's downfall. Unfortunately, some candidates did not really deal with the subtlety of the question: the role of the women in the play is not the same thing as their contribution; the 'presentation' involves a close look at dramatic possibilities and the language in order to see how Shakespeare is shaping an audience's response.
- (b) The scene provided an interesting opportunity for candidates to look at a particular, highly dramatic moment. Some candidates chose to ignore the passage almost entirely, simply seeing the question as a way in to talking about dramatic moments. Others recognised the tension with the arrival of a third murderer; the quick, nervous exchanges; the contrast between the murderers' state of high anxiety and Banquo's simple but ironic 'It will rain tonight.' Many candidates were also able to dwell on the symbolic aspects of the passage, looking at dark and light and the ironic idea that the castle should have provided a place of safety. A number of candidates diverted themselves into a larger discussion of the role of Banquo and Fleance in the play as a whole, that was not really relevant, though it is obvious that one aspect of the scene's tension is an audience's recognition that the action here has merely sent the action of the play into another spiral of evil.

Question 6

- (a) Few candidates answered this question. Candidates examined the attitude of the brothers to their sister, drawing attention to their apparent lack of motive. Some simply gave accounts of what had happened to the Duchess, which was not what was required. As always, close examination of particular scenes or moments would have come in useful. There were some interesting responses that focussed on the end of the play – an obvious 'dramatic effect' of the Duchess' murder. One or two candidates looked carefully at Bosola's reaction to the murder, another potentially interesting way into the question.
- (b) Candidates were not always aware of the multiple layers of irony in this passage, such as the Cardinal's earlier comment that he must not be interrupted or rescued, even if he seems in danger. This is, of course, dramatically caught in the entrance of Pescara et al 'above,' talking against the Cardinal's increasingly plaintive cries. It was surprising that so many candidates took the extract so seriously, seemingly unaware that excess of horror is a trademark of this kind of drama. A lack of feeling is also significant: Ferdinand's first thought ('give me a fresh horse') shows his lack of concern for anyone other than himself, particularly when set against the Cardinal's appeal to blood and family: 'Help me, I am your brother,' which is heavily loaded with irony, bearing in mind how the two have treated their sister.

General comments

Examiners were very pleased with the full range of responses to the paper and to the wide choice of texts, revealing wide as well as careful and appreciative reading on the part of candidates in Centres. Knowledge of the texts was widespread but this knowledge was used judiciously: there were few scripts devoting pages to rehearsal of the plots of the texts, thankfully.

On the whole candidates tried to answer the questions asked and use their material relevantly. However there were occasions when focus was lost in favour of a general survey; this will never score as highly as the answer which directs relevant material to a discussion of the issue at hand. It is tempting to give detailed background when discussing, for example, a Shakespeare play, but usually the candidate who plunges straight into dealing directly with the terms of the question will score more highly by not wasting any time.

The essay options were often more successfully handled than the passages, for the simple reason that candidates did not discuss the language of the passages sufficiently. The extracts are printed on the exam paper precisely so that candidates can refer to them in detail and show that they can analyse the language, and the marks awarded are in direct proportion to the quality and quantity of close analysis undertaken. For higher marks, it is not sufficient to identify a metaphor or simile in a line – some attempt to discuss its effect is essential. Those who tried to explore why jealousy is a ‘monster’ as described by Iago came near to discovering why it mocks ‘the meat it feeds on’, a horribly apt image for what happens to Othello later in that play. This sort of discussion is rewarded well by Examiners, and is discussed in more detail in the individual question comments that follow.

Many candidates showed their ability to write lucidly and fluently, structuring their essays carefully: these often scored well. But candidates must beware of using language that is too colloquial and inappropriate for a literary essay: to call Marianne and Willoughby ‘an item’ for example, or Iago ‘a bit of a bastard’ may be fine in discussion but not for an essay!

Comments on specific questions

The Winter’s Tale

- (a) The play was not widely chosen, but there was a good range of work seen. Candidates grasped the idea of winter as a seasonal motif, especially as “a sad tale’s best for winter.” The idea of cold, the suspension of growth and development and the darkness and even disease of winter were all used to argue that the play’s title was appropriate. However, the best essays used the second half of the play to show that spring and summer do follow winter and allow the play to end on a regenerative note.
- (b) The passage was felt to be answered rather disappointingly, with candidates concentrating on Leontes and missing the eloquence and dignity of Hermione. The tone and rhythms of this moving speech were ignored by most candidates, including her final, regretful memory of her father, the Emperor of Russia and thus a much greater ruler than her husband, whom she imagines looking at her trial with sad pity for her plight. She is alone, and her situation is wretched, but not many candidates paid sufficient attention to this, preferring instead to give the background of Leontes’ jealousy prior to the scene.

Othello

The play was very popular, easily the most widely studied text on the paper, and inspiring many excellent answers.

- (a) Some candidates chose to accept Othello’s defence of himself at face value, arguing that he is a tragic hero who did love Desdemona, with Iago to blame for the events of the tragedy. However, it was pleasing to find a more critical approach at work in many answers, candidates finding the defence invalid, and referring widely to moments when he could have trusted his wife more and his Ancient less. Everyone accepted that he is jealous, but many challenged his worth as a lover. The best saw his pride as self-centred and supported their views with appropriate quotation.

- (b) This was even more popular as an option, and the best answers traced through the development of this dialogue, analysing and commenting suitably on the tone of the encounter. Many were alive to the subtleties and suggestions of Iago and the inner struggle of Othello beginning here. Even if not all answers used the text fully, all were alert to the growing confidence of Iago and Othello's descent into 'misery'.

Richard III

There were very few takers for the play, with only a handful of answers on each option.

- (a) Candidates enjoyed discussing Richard as villain, but had less to say about his part as king, often missing the opportunity to use the theatrical metaphor of the question to explore his role playing. Nonetheless, as always, this fascinating character revealed his power to attract candidates' response and enjoyment.
- (b) The passage is a rich one, in three distinct sections, though the second one – Richard's soliloquy – attracted the most comment. The murderers, with their chilling pragmatism, were well discussed by one or two: "We go to use our eyes and not our tongues."

Sense and Sensibility

This was another enormously popular option, often taken in combination with Othello: indeed some Examiners commented that the paper was really the Othello and Austen paper!

- (a) Equally popular with b), candidates here showed appreciation of the context of the novel and were able to discuss property, money and inheritance with confidence. However, the novel's other concerns were not forgotten, and successful challenges to the question's premise were raised. Many candidates seemed unsure when the novel was written, and Examiners were told variously that it was Elizabethan, Victorian, 17th Century and early 20th Century. This was not the only text about which candidates were doubtful as to the date of composition: Shakespeare's work is often described as from the Middle Ages or Victorian, and several candidates refer to the pre-twentieth century as if it were a period, e.g. "in the pre-twentieth century...."
- (b) Candidates wrote well about the relationship of the Dashwood sisters and showed appreciation of the sense/sensibility motif (the best never being too simplistic about the dichotomy). However, the language of the passage itself was sometimes not focused on sufficiently, with candidates missing the interplay of dialogue with description and the narrative focus on Elinor. There are also many words connected with emotional states – delight, impatience, calmness, anxiety, embarrassment and so on – worthy of comment. The best answers combined close analysis with good knowledge of the text as a whole.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

- (a) Only this option was chosen, by a very small number of candidates. The topic had clearly been well prepared and discussion of the novel as feminist was conducted sensibly with useful reference to the text.
- (b) Not taken

The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale

- (a) The importance of sin as a theme in the Tale was relished by many candidates and this was clearly the favourite option of the two. 'Radix malorum est cupiditas' was widely quoted, but the exploration of sin goes wider than this and those candidates who used the confessional sections of the Prologue as well as the Tale with its multi-sinful villains had plenty to write about. Some Centres were very knowledgeable indeed. Essays which only used the evidence of the printed text, however, seemed rather lame.
- (b) There were few answers here, and many relied on general comments about the Pardoner rather than a close analysis of his style and concerns.

A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse

Very few Centres attempted this text, but it is fair to say that they had prepared it well and enthusiastically. There were some exceptional answers which gained very high marks.

- (a) Only a handful of candidates attempted this essay, but they showed wide appreciation of Dickinson's main concerns.
- (b) More popular was 'The Soul has Bandaged moments', which was analysed with great success and in commendable detail by a number of very responsive candidates who had obviously appreciated the poem. This was excellent work.

Selected Poems of John Donne

A tiny number of candidates attempted the Donne questions, and they were not on the whole as successful as those who tackled the other poets on the paper. All candidates seemed to find the text very difficult.

- (a) The argument invited here was not discussed: instead the very small number of candidates wrote a summary of two or three poems without explicitly addressing the ideas of intellect and emotion.
- (b) The sonnet was discussed by a few more, who had a little to say about the religious poetry, but not much on the language of the sonnet. The sonnet form, for example, was not addressed.

Joseph Andrews

Not seen

Volpone

This was again a text taken by very few candidates.

- (a) The few candidates who attempted the first option discussed some of the greedy characters of the play, but there was no discussion of satire at all.
- (b) The speech was used as a springboard for a character sketch of Mosca, with little analysis of language.

Keats: Lyric Poems

Although few had studied Keats, their work was outstandingly good and Examiners were delighted to read and enjoy it. In both answers the extent of direct quotation was exceptional.

- (a) The paradoxical relationship between pleasure and pain which lies at the heart of much of Keats's poetry was well understood by those who attempted this question. It was particularly notable how many of those who wrote on this text knew it so well that they were able to quote extensively and accurately.
- (b) Equally impressive were the analyses of *To Autumn*, which candidates appreciated fully. In addition to some fine detailed criticism of the poem itself, there were also many full discussions of how characteristic the poem is of his methods and concerns generally. On the whole, candidates felt that the style and effects were characteristically Keatsian but that the subject matter was more mellow than usual.

General comments

The work of the majority of candidates was sound in terms of thorough and detailed knowledge. What was lacking was the ability to focus on specific aspects in questions and to go beyond generalised argument and coherent but undeveloped responses. The presence of prepared but often marginally relevant answers to the **(a)** questions was a regrettable feature of the work of many Centres. Examiners felt that some Centres should attend more closely to the requirements of the **(b)** questions where too many candidates failed to give the passages the close scrutiny required, favouring instead a general essay on the work as a whole. Nevertheless there was a significant presence of distinguished work and highly sophisticated analysis. This came from those candidates who combined secure knowledge with the ability to express an individual view incisively. It was pleasing to note that there were very few candidates who produced work which was totally inadequate. The quality of expression was generally at least adequate and often highly competent and many candidates conveyed an enthusiasm for the chosen texts in their answers.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Cat's Eye: Margaret Atwood

This question was well-answered in general. Candidates produced answers which were wide ranging, showing sound understanding and an ability to refer to significant details. In **(a)** an overview of the novel involving an understanding of Elaine's journey of self-discovery was the minimum requirement and many candidates were able to comment perceptively on the reversal of roles in their judgement of both Cordelia and Elaine. The passage question **(b)** required candidates to put the passage in the context of Elaine's adult relationships as well as her commentary on the 'present' time in Toronto and to comment on the detailed observational style as part of her personality. Better candidates were able to do this; weaker answers consisted of narrative summaries without wider reference.

Question 2

Waiting for Godot: Samuel Beckett

This was a very popular text and there were many competent and proficient answers with a handful of very good responses. However, too many candidates attempted to explain Existentialism and the theatre of the Absurd at length before tackling the questions. Many candidates wrote more on these ideas than they wrote on the issues posed by the questions. There was, sadly, evidence of prepared material on theoretical matters which was not well digested and often a hindrance to a closer attention to the text.

In **(a)** candidates were required to explain the ironic implications of the quotation and show that the themes were serious whilst recognising that the experience is not confined to the characters' responses but should include the experience of the audience. Few candidates were able to do this and not many focused on the range of comic devices used in the play. Many competent candidates limited themselves to a blanket denial of the fun element and reiterated the view that all was doom and gloom without any hope for mankind. In **(b)** candidates were required to explore the passage in detail and show how it reflected the play's wider issues such as communication, fate and choice and the importance of structure. Good answers linked general comments to evidence from the passage and the rest of the play. Weaker candidates either wrote general essays or limited themselves to the passage, albeit in a perfunctory way. Although better answered than **(a)** there was too much second-hand philosophy and little appreciation of dramatic qualities.

Question 3

T.S. Eliot: *Selected Poems*

This text presented many candidates with real difficulties. In **(a)** candidates were required to comment on the themes of the poems and indicate how the imagery worked to convey the poet's feelings about the modern world. Thus it was important to categorise the images within a framework of ideas and the poet's attitude to life. The best tried to do this but most found the articulation of themes and methods beyond them. For many candidates the question seemed to be an invitation to regurgitate prepared answers. Thus there were many general essays involving the poems which had been studied and which were forced into generalised assertions about 'decay' to the exclusion of the consideration of specific 'sordid' thus missing the opportunity to address the proposition of the question. In **(b)** candidates were expected to attempt close analysis of the passage and to link this with the poem as a whole. Some few candidates did this effectively but many simply attempted to describe the content - a real temptation with Eliot - rather than attempt analysis of Eliot's techniques in general. There were few answers which put the content of the passage into a coherent view of the poem as a whole.

Question 4

A Passage to India: E. M. Forster

In general there was a good response to this question. In **(a)** candidates were expected to put the relationship between Fielding and Aziz into the context of Anglo-Indian relationships and make comparisons with other relationships: Aziz and Mrs Moore, Adele and Ronnie. Good responses included these matters and some pointed to other significant issues in the novel: the effects of colonialism, religious diversity. Weaker responses had little detail to offer beyond an account of the beginning of the friendship or a purely narrative account of the outlines of the story. In **(b)** candidates were invited to expand from the particular incident into the nature of the relationship and what it showed about racial relations generally. Good candidates made connections between Aziz's impulsiveness and his later hastiness in suspecting Fielding and were able to link this with the break-up and later attempt to repair the friendship. Weaker candidates tended to paraphrase the passage without analysis or links to the novel as a whole.

Question 5

An Artist of the Floating World: Kazuo Ishiguro

This was very much a minority choice, attempted by very few Centres. In **(a)** candidates were expected to document the narrator's self-deception and the links with the broader issue of Japan's post war guilt. Good responses recognised this and some were aware of the device of the unreliable narrator. Many candidates lacked the depth of knowledge to address these issues convincingly. The passage alternative produced too much paraphrase and very little analysis.

Question 6

Selected Poems: Elizabeth Jennings

Not a popular choice of text. Question **(a)** required a discussion of the proposition in the context of a detailed knowledge of the chosen poems. The tendency, however, was to write accounts of the poems to show the love interest. Few candidates made any use of the quotation. In **(b)** the question required a close analysis of the poem in the context of Jennings's work. Good candidates were able to appreciate the viewpoint of an older person observing the young in their progress to adulthood and reminiscing on her own experience. Many candidates did not refer to any other poems.

Question 7

The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis: Wole Soyinka

Again a minority choice. In **(a)** candidates were required to address the proposition in the context of both plays. Better candidates were able to link charlatan religion with the corrupt political system. These candidates supported well-argued positions with extensive textual knowledge. Weaker candidates gave little indication that they had studied both texts and seemed unaware of the comedy. In **(b)** the requirement to link an appreciation of the theatrical aspect of the extract with an analysis of the way the climax is achieved eluded most candidates. Some candidates managed to give an account of the previous action but failed for the most part to examine the extract in dramatic terms.

Question 8

A Streetcar Named Desire: Tennessee Williams

Overwhelmingly the most popular choice with an equal split between **(a)** and **(b)**. In **(a)** candidates were required to attempt an analysis of 'victimisation' and to consider what it was that caused the victimisation of the individual characters and to what extent they collaborated in it. The question was generally answered well and produced some confident and well-informed answers. Good candidates were able to put Blanche's experience in the light of her previous history and to show an awareness of the degree to which she was responsible for what happened. Few candidates were able to explore the complexity of Stella's relationship with Stanley and weaker candidates offered a catch-all definition of victimisation which seemed to include the human condition as one of the problems. Candidates responded well to the requirement to link the passage **(b)** with future developments in the play and answers were generally thorough. Good answers ranged widely throughout the play relating the symbolism well to future events. The red meat provoked many candidates to discuss the issues of sex and brutality in some detail whilst others wrote persuasively in the appeal to the senses of the music and the charm of Elysian Fields. Most candidates were able to pinpoint the sources of future conflict and the significance of Stella's reactions and Blanche's entrance. Some candidates went too far in looking for connections with later events whilst weaker answers limited themselves to simplistic accounts of character aspects.

Further general comments

Examiners highlighted two major problems:

- The use of prepared material to cope with certain texts, e.g. Beckett and Eliot where ill-digested material on Existentialism, Theatre of the Absurd, Christian symbolism, post-war angst, positively hindered the communication of the direct personal response which the questions invite. This was particularly evident in the work of certain Centres where candidates used identical phraseology in sections of their essays.
- Many candidates found it difficult to cope with the text-based questions; even able candidates often did not seem to understand what was required of them. There is a clear need for Centres to address the problem by providing instruction and practice in looking at the way language affects meaning.

Paper 9695/07

Comment and Appreciation

General comments

The first entry of scripts for a new Syllabus is always an interesting time, and to see how candidates tackle new types of questions can be fascinating and instructive. Comment and Appreciation is of course a far from new concept, and the skills of writing critically are ones which all Advanced Level candidates should be prepared for and indeed practising throughout their course, and as they read and study all their set texts. To exercise these skills in a relatively short time, and when confronted by a previously unseen trio of literary pieces is a different matter, but the skills themselves, and the way they need to be used, should remain the same whatever the piece(s) being approached, however immediately unfamiliar and indeed "difficult" they may initially seem.

What was pleasing and interesting about this first sitting of Paper 9696/07 was that across the range of Centres and candidates all three questions were tackled, and often tackled well. **Question 1** was certainly the most popular, but **Questions 2** and **3** were answered in more or less equal numbers, and no single question appeared to give candidates greater difficulty than any other – there were excellent answers on all three, as well as poor ones on all three, though it must be said firmly that there were very considerably more good responses than bad ones.

Before looking at how candidates reacted to each question in turn, it may be helpful to suggest first one or two general points, and to suggest also a few ways in which some good answers could have become better ones. The Syllabus booklet for Literature in English requires candidates to “demonstrate by informed discussion and opinion an understanding of the ways in which meaning is expressed through a writer’s choice of form, structure and language”, a clear indication that considerably more is needed than simply an ability to paraphrase and/or explain what the candidate takes the piece to be about; s/he must go well beyond a mere surface presentation, and undertake a properly detailed and critical examination of language (including of course images, as well as more straightforward techniques such as alliteration), of form (such as the overall shape and organisation of a poem or dramatic extract) and of structure (including such things as rhyme, rhythm, dramatic/theatrical effects and so on). It was very clear that most candidates were aware of all these things, and many made great efforts, often with considerable success, to explore and explain how and to what effect the writers had used their particular methods; too many, though, remained on the surface, and did little more than simply state what they felt the piece to be about, or at best assert some opinions, without properly relating them to what was there on the page. The very best, of course saw how each image, simile, metaphor and so on could be related to the meaning and sense of the piece as a whole (this was perhaps particularly noticeable in **Question 1**, but there was much in **Questions 2** and **3** as well).

It is of course always good to read some especially personal or idiosyncratic responses, but these will only be really effective, or indeed acceptable, if closely and carefully related to what is in the given passage(s) rather than to what the candidate simply wishes to say (or indeed to what s/he wishes the writer had said!). A combination of the personal and the more formal will almost always achieve greatest success; a line-by-line analysis may well be perceptive and thoughtful, but it will not often go beyond the merely mechanical, and such an approach will not gain as much credit as the one which moves easily and fluently between the part and the whole, and at the same time indicates a fresh personal response to what is being discussed. This may all sound very idealistic and even unattainable, but it is a fact that many candidates can and did achieve it, and often very well.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

As noted above, this was the most popular question; “Marrysong” is a short poem, and many candidates responded well and confidently to the poem’s presentation of the man’s puzzlement about his wife’s changing moods; many used the word “mercurial” to describe the way in which she is portrayed. Most saw that the central metaphor was that of a journey, or at least of geographical exploration, though not many candidates managed to say that all the images drew on this central one, preferring instead to focus upon each individually. This Report is not the place to write a critical appreciation but it may be worth pointing to one or two aspects of the poem which all candidates could have mentioned, and which all the better ones did.

The title, first, produced many interesting thoughts, the contrast between the gentle beauty of the word “Marrysong” and the frustrations and pain in the poem itself being well noted; better answers pointed to the fact that in the end the speaker in the poem is, despite his worries and concerns, actually deeply in love with his wife, and that the word’s implications of beauty and lyricism are thus entirely just.

The delicate opening line attracted much comment, with some sensitive understanding of the unexpected but most effective placing of the comma and “quite”; “walled anger” attracted much good response, as did the contrast between “cool water” and “stones”. The caesura after “He charted” in line 7 was frequently noted and praised (a surprising number misread this and took it to be “chartered”, with some rather curious results). The brevity of the sentences in lines 7 – 8 was well addressed, and the final couplet, with its perhaps uncertain tone – resignation? acceptance? irritation? warmth? love? – was again well managed. Virtually all candidates noted the speaker’s growing tenderness and affection, and the best saw this reflected in the gentle, almost regular, blank verse style. Few spotted that the poem’s rhythm is – nearly – regular iambic, and that there is therefore a further delicacy in the contrasts between the speaker’s uncertainties and the confident control which he has of the verse (and by extension perhaps also of his emotions). Incidentally, distressingly few candidates seemed to know what blank verse actually is; it is not the same as free verse.

Question 2

Almost all who tackled this question saw its most prominent characteristics, and few candidates failed entirely to see what the relationship is between the two characters; most noted, however naively or implicitly, the ways in which Elizabeth Inchbald draws a picture of them gradually opening up their emotions, and the final stage direction in line 82 (“going up to him”) was seen by many as a prelude to a declaration of real love, and occasional disappointment that the scene ends on this dramatic point! The major weakness in this question was that relatively few candidates made clear their understanding of it as a piece of drama, and seemed to regard it simply as a somewhat oddly laid-out piece of prose. Many did see theatrical action, and made much of the more obviously romantic and (melo)dramatic speeches which Anhalt has between lines 24 and 47, and of Amelia’s soliloquy at the very opening of the extract, with Inchbald’s use of brief exclamations and heavy punctuation as means of creating a real sense of tense uncertainty in the girl (and in many answers the audience too). Most saw how Inchbald makes Amelia gradually take over the role of teacher as the extract develops, and several noted the ironic humour in this role change. Many candidates were able to discuss the changes in tone as Anhalt’s “big speeches” develop, and a few made something of the repeated flower and plant imagery which they contain, and of the echoes these have of Amelia’s opening speech (her auriculas, and Mr Anhalt’s apple tree are clearly significant).

Question 3

“The City Planners” produced perhaps the greatest range of responses, from the extremely perceptive and understanding to some in which the candidates seemed almost entirely unable to see what Atwood is saying. The fact that so many answers were well able to penetrate below its surface and see what lies beneath the apparently simple attack on suburban sprawl does suggest that it should have been accessible to rather more candidates, who might have done better to read the whole text more slowly and carefully than they appeared to have done before beginning to write – its concerns, whether simply about the likely eventual collapse of a suburban housing estate, or about corrupt town-hall officials, or about the ways in which nature will always defeat mankind, are not immediately apparent, but worth looking for.

Almost all saw, and noted, the free verse style of the poem, and the fact that each section is shorter than the previous one; there were many suggestions as to why Atwood wrote in this way, and the effects she thus creates, but not all candidates made any attempts, preferring simply to state it as a fact – a critical appreciation must go further. Similarly, most noted that the poem begins in August and ends in “snows”; this may possibly be literal – more than one candidate simply assumed that the houses will collapse in four month’s time – or it may be metaphorical, suggestive of the contrast between the apparently secure rigidity and uniformity of what the estate appears to be, and the unmanageable reality of nature (or indeed of man’s greed?) which is more like the “madness of snows”.

Quite a lot of candidates saw the poem as an attack upon local or even national politicians, whose planners try to impose a uniformity on all their people, a uniformity which cannot survive and which must be resisted; this is no doubt a valid reading on one level, but as with “Marrysong” the greater and often huge images do suggest a far deeper and broader meaning – particularly noticeable perhaps are the increasing flaws which are listed in section two, ending with the potentially poisonous hose-snake, and the frightening “Big Brother” stare of the wide windows. These are followed of course by cataclysmic images of houses collapsing – not literally, one suspects – into “the clay seas” (very few candidates tackled this phrase) “gradual as glaciers” – a vast image – “that right now nobody notices” – a suddenly almost bathetically domestic note at this point, though this is perhaps deliberately so, in keeping with the continuing contrasts drawn between the local and the universal. Too many candidates, incidentally, saw no difference between the words “sanities” (line 4) and “sanitary” (line 6), which led to some interestingly confused thoughts – there is no doubt a deliberate similarity and echo in the words, but they are certainly not synonymous.

A demanding poem, yes, but one that is full enough of rich and resonant images to give more than enough scope for all those candidates who wanted to tackle it at a more than superficial level.

A final point, which relates to both this question and **Question 1**: where candidates quote from the poem – and they most certainly should do so in their answers – it really is important that they quote exactly what is written, not just the correct words (and that is by no means always done) but at least as importantly with the correct line-breaks, as printed on the question paper. It is especially vital that this is done where candidates are discussing rhythm, rhyme, or line length, for example, but even where other points are being made it demonstrates a care, a maturity, and a seriousness of understanding which incorrect copying can only suggest is not present. Many candidates do copy correctly, and either use exactly the same layout as the poet does, or indicate a line-break by use of an oblique line (/), but far too many adopt an almost entirely cavalier approach, which can perhaps unfairly suggest a serious lack of understanding. Anything and everything which helps to convince the Examiner that you do understand, is bound to be helpful.

General comments

The general impression gained by the Principal Moderator, was that those candidates whose work was submitted had been very well prepared for the work, had read and understood their chosen texts with good and often quite sophisticated confidence, and were able to write cogent and sensibly illustrated arguments in response to some entirely appropriate tasks. In the same way, it was clear that Centres were fully aware of the requirements of the syllabus, and of the CIE marking criteria by which work is to be assessed – standards used by Centres were very close indeed to those expected by CIE, and little amendment was needed.

Work was submitted carefully and helpfully, and there was some thoroughly useful and supportive annotation in the body of candidates' work, together with summative comments on each folder, drawing attention to the overall strengths of the two pieces submitted, and explaining how and why the agreed mark had been reached; it would be valuable, however, for both Moderator and Centre alike, if these summative comments could in future be more explicitly related to the wording of the marking criteria, but even where this was not done it was nonetheless clear that Centres had the criteria in mind when making their assessments.

It might be helpful to quote a few tasks which were set by Centres, to suggest to Teachers the kind of work which has been used, and the kind of wording which has led to appropriately-focused responses from candidates; what is central to good Advanced Level work, is an ability to see beyond the immediate, and to understand – or at least to show an attempt at understanding – the kind of stylistic, poetic, or dramatic techniques which have helped to create the particular effects of a piece of literature. At Advanced Level, very little credit can be given to mere knowledge; for the fifth mark-band, for example (marks of 6-9 out of 25) candidates are expected to show knowledge of the text, but also to show an “ability to use it selectively to address the task”, and for a top-band mark candidates must show detailed knowledge of the text, together with “understanding of theme, characterisation, linguistic features and other textual issues, some awareness of literary conventions and contexts, techniques and genre characteristics, and the ability to address this knowledge and understanding with sustained relevance to the issues raised by the questions.” It is clear from these two extracts that it is a candidate's ability to analyse and use knowledge which matters, rather than the knowledge itself.

The words “genres” and “contexts” are used in the above, and a few words on these may be useful, as candidates will be expected to address them, even if only briefly. The question of genre is perhaps the simpler of the two: candidates often write about poetry or drama texts as if they are simply novels set out in a strange way, and make little or even no reference to the structure of a poem (rhyme, rhythm, line/stanza length and so on), and concentrate simply upon its ideas and contents, or they will forget that a play is intended to be seen and heard on stage or film, or even just in the theatre of the imagination. It is extremely important that candidates do take notice of, and discuss, the effects created by the particular nature of a poem, or of a dramatic text, and that they do not simply ignore these aspects of the genre.

The notion of context is more difficult, but can be relatively easy to understand and tackle if candidates allow themselves to regard context as (almost) any of the conditions under which a text was written, or under which it is read/seen. Such conditions may be the social, historical, or cultural conditions at the time of writing, or those at the time of reading, or of course both, with appropriate reference to the ways in which contemporary views and responses may vary. A writer's life may sometimes be of interest, though candidates must be careful not to confuse the writer and his/her fictional character(s), and must at the same time avoid simple biography, which may or may not be relevant and is certainly not literary in nature. Context may also include the varied and possibly wide range of responses that can exist to a text, and the fact that different readers may well have very different understandings. It will also of course overlap to some degree with the idea of genre – a play's context, for example, is the theatre, with a shared audience response, whereas a novel's is an armchair or a study desk, with almost certainly a private and individual response. All or some of these factors may be used by candidates in their discussion, both to increase the scope of their writing, and to avoid the concentration which can occur upon simple plot and character-study.

A few questions, then, which were used this session, and which led to successful essays; this list also suggests that even in a small entry there was a very wide range of texts, from the most traditional and canonical to the very modern and possibly unexpected:

'How effectively does Hornby's unusual narrative style develop and sustain reader interest in *High Fidelity*?'

'Larkin has been praised for his ability to combine colloquial thought, feeling and language with a formality of structure in his poetry. How does this ability contribute to the effectiveness of the poems in *The Whitsun Weddings*?'

'*Antony and Cleopatra* is about two middle-aged people – carnal, deceitful, often sad – “seeking in love a reality greater than themselves.” How far does this sum up the kind of love depicted by Shakespeare in the play?'

'Discuss the ways in which Friel explores ideas about language in *Translations*.'

““The horror! The horror!” How far, and in what ways, do Kurtz's last words sum up *Heart of Darkness*?'

'Marlow's encounter with Kurtz is at the *Heart of Darkness*; how does Conrad prepare the reader for it?'

'Explore the presentation of good and evil in *Dr Faustus*.'

'Explore the revelation of character in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*.'