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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

<p>Paper 9695/03 Poetry, Prose and Drama</p>
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General comments

Examiners in this session saw much very pleasing and accomplished writing from candidates able to blend precise textual reference within a secure answer to the set question. While the great majority of Centres had chosen to study Blake and Achebe, there were very good answers offered on all the texts on the paper. Candidates continue to write responsively on the poems in *Touched with Fire*, while there were strong answers on *North and South* and on **8695/09**, there was some sensitive writing on *The Glass Menagerie*.

One issue which is worth stressing again is the passage-based **(b)** question on each text. Such questions are designed to give candidates the opportunity to write closely about language and technique, so it is disappointing when candidates overlook an instruction to 'Comment in detail...' and instead write a general essay with little or no reference to the extract printed on the question paper. In this session, this was a particular concern with **Question 4 (b)**, as will be detailed below. It is interesting to note that while many candidates find the discussion of poetry comparatively difficult, the **(b)** questions on poetry tend to be answered with appropriate concentration on the language, imagery, form and structure of the poem on the question paper. Examiners are hoping that candidates will apply the same skills to the prose passages, and on **8695/09**, to the extracts from drama.

However, the session elicited much good work from an increasing candidature. In general, the knowledge of texts, the appreciation of the context in which the texts were written and in particular the personal response of candidates to their reading, gave Examiners much pleasure when marking the scripts.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a)** There was a good balance of answers between this question and the **(b)** option. The more successful answers achieved a clear focus on social institutions such as the church, the family and the government, and through these were able to discuss sexual and imaginative repression. While some less successful answers did not identify particular institutions, being as a result vague and unfocused, many candidates discussed the issues well and used a good range of poems as reference. Most choices came naturally from *Songs of Experience*, such as 'London', 'The Garden of Love' and 'The Chimney Sweeper'. Many answers used contextual knowledge effectively.
- (b)** Answers to this question were interestingly varied, as candidates took and argued quite different interpretations of the poem. Some candidates viewed 'Holy Thursday' as entirely ironic, a poem where Blake attacks poverty, hypocrisy and regimentation enforced by the beadle with fierce wands, to those who considered it to be a typical *Innocence* poem, where the sanctity of the beadle is indicated by the pure white of their wands. A significant number of answers chose a balanced view, seeing it as an 'innocent' poem with ambiguous suggestions of 'experience'. The most successful answers considered Blake's concerns in the light of the methods he uses to communicate them. The question required some reference to other poems in order to say 'how far it reflects' features of Blake's verse. Some candidates focused entirely on the set poem and missed this part of the question.

Question 2

ed. Hydes: *Touched with Fire*

- (a) There were a number of good and sensitive answers to this question. A number of poems were used by candidates, the favourites being 'Cold in the Earth' and 'The Voice'. Others referred to included 'Mountain Lion', 'Porpoises', 'Thistles', 'Rising Five', 'The Early Purges' and 'The Pond'. Perhaps because it appeared on last session's paper, 'Ozymandias' also appeared frequently. Not all the choices were well handled by candidates, but most managed to sustain some level of comparison. The most successful were those who compared not only the perspective on death in the poem, but also the poetic treatment of death. Some answers were detailed in their awareness of language and poetic form and several offered fresh personal approaches.
- (b) 'Telephone Conversation' was the more popular option, and drew many very committed and detailed responses. Candidates registered their shock at the treatment of the narrator, but recognised the humour combined with both resignation and disbelief. Some pointed out that the narrator's facility with language – vocabulary, punning, varied grammatical structures – was in marked contrast to the landlady's limited verbal range, marking him out as intelligent and educated. Others noted that while he is the victim of the landlady's stereotype, he is also guilty of stereotyping her, making judgements about her appearance and manner. There were good comments on the use of ellipsis and the use of capitals for the landlady's speech. Examiners found much to enjoy and reward in these answers. There were some answers which relied on a paraphrase of the narrative of the poem, without real engagement with the language or form.

Question 3

Sylvia Plath: *Ariel*

- (a) While there were comparatively few answers on Plath this session, the questions were usually answered reasonably well by those candidates who attempted them. Most candidates on this question chose effectively contrasting poems, often balancing a preoccupation with death with a celebration of new life, such as 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Morning Song', 'Daddy' and 'You're'. There was often an evident appreciation of Plath's language and imagery.
- (b) There were fewer answers on 'Poppies in July' and in general the question was less well done than (a). Comments were made on colour and language, but few answers looked at the form of the poem or made a great deal of its characteristic features shared with other poems in the collection. The most successful answers focused on the imagery of this poem and made clear cross-references to other poems in which flowers, blood, pain or desire for oblivion are evident.

Question 4

Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*

- (a) There were some excellent answers to this question from candidates who were able to make a number of secure references to the myths and legends which Achebe incorporates into the novel. Many answers, though, sidestepped the question and referred to customs and beliefs rather than myths or legends. Sometimes references to the customs and beliefs were linked to myth, and Examiners were as sympathetic to candidates' approaches as they could be within the terms of the question. However, some unsuccessful answers merely narrated Okonkwo's story because it revealed the importance of tradition in the life of the tribe.
- (b) Those answers to this question which looked at the extract in detail, considering it as an exemplification of the conflict between Ibo tradition and Christianity, then related this to the implications of the title of the novel, were very successful. It is often a feature of this report that comments are made about the importance of candidates writing closely about the passages in answering the (b) questions. It was disappointing, therefore, for Examiners to see so many answers to this question which made very little reference to the printed passage at all. General essays on the conflict, without close attention to the passage, could not be successful answers to the question set. A large proportion of candidates also showed errors in their reading of the passage, writing about the men at the stream whipping the *white* Christians, thus missing the essential conflict between the Ibo people. The successful answers were aware of this self-destructive conflict, noted the importance of the timing of the episode at Easter and were aware of Mr Kiaga's role. Some answers commented on the importance of the ceremonial bell-man announcing the exclusion of the Christian converts, Okoli's killing of the sacred python and his subsequent death.

Question 5

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

- (a) Answers on *North and South* generally demonstrated candidates' sound textual knowledge. While some candidates summarised the story of Frederick, better answers made perceptive comments about his role as foil to Margaret and to Thornton as well as his significance in various strands of the plot, such as Thornton's sighting of him at the station. Some recognised that his principled stand, which cost him his place in society, parallels that of his father.
- (b) Most candidates found Milton and Thornton clear focal points in this passage and managed to produce balanced answers dealing with both aspects. There were few answers which either paraphrased the passage or wrote general answers without reference to it. The most successful drew neat parallels between the changes in Milton and those in Thornton, illustrated with deft quotations from the extract.

Question 6

Doris Lessing: *Martha Quest*

- (a) Candidates answering this question usually had a clear idea of Martha before and after she leaves home for the city and used that knowledge effectively. The more successful answers showed a perceptive awareness of how Martha sacrifices her idealistic notions and is influenced by others once she reaches the city, threatening her individuality and her ideals.
- (b) Many candidates placed this passage into the wider context of Martha's relationship with her parents, and noted here her attempts to be more conciliatory while bristling at much of the discussion. Candidates noted the way she and her father are shown to clash in the passage, with the references to 'scornfully', 'resentment' and 'snapped'. While the irony of her parents both asking the same question about her marriage was noted by most candidates, surprisingly few were alert to the potential for humour for the reader.

Question 7

Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

- (a) There were too few answers to this question to make a useful comment.
- (b) Candidates showed themselves alert to the different style and vocabulary which Churchill gives to Marlene and Jeanine, often noting Marlene's decisiveness and interruptions in contrast to Jeanine's chatty, less confident dialogue. From this they were able to make appropriate points about Marlene's attitude to her client, exemplifying her egotistical approach to success and employment.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a) Many answers to this question restricted their range to Macbeth and Duncan, but more successful candidates widened the debate to include Banquo, Macduff, Malcolm and Donalbain. Most were able to discuss the overturning of Macbeth's initial 'service and loyalty', but answers were much more interesting which compared his response to the Witches with Banquo's. Some candidates also considered the English scenes, to show what kind of King received absolute 'loyalty and service'.
- (b) Answers to this question were often successful. Most showed some awareness of the irony and even the possibility for dark humour in Lennox's speech and the contrast with the more direct words of the Lord. The best answers focused clearly on the imagery and language of the extract and noticed the significance in the question of the phrase 'at this point in the play'. There were some answers which missed the irony altogether, taking Lennox's comments about Macbeth entirely at face value.

Question 9

Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a) Most candidates answering this question responded sensitively to Laura's collection of glass animals and referred with confidence to key episodes from the play. Such answers noted the parallels between the fragility of the animals and Laura, paying particular attention to the unicorn. Some less confident answers summarised the scenes where reference to the menagerie is made.
- (b) The most successful answers to this question paid close attention to both dialogue and stage directions, contrasting Amanda's last shout with her '*dignity and tragic beauty*'. Candidates noticed the way that Tom's disappearance from the family follows the path of his father and some commented on how his monologues shape and enclose the play. A few candidates commented effectively on the monologue and separate stage actions working in tandem at the close of the scene.

Paper 9695/04

Drama

General comments

Although the vast majority of candidates showed good knowledge of the texts studied, the Examiners felt that there was a real lack of detailed textual analysis in many scripts. A number of candidates lacked the sort of critical vocabulary that might be expected at this level and there was a general reluctance to deal with the literary and dramatic qualities of the texts. This can perhaps be best conveyed by saying that many candidates - and not merely those at the lower end of the mark range - call the texts 'novels', thus suggesting that they have not really been invited to think hard about genre or the nature of a play as something to be performed, something that works by dramatic means. Throughout the whole range of ability there is a real reluctance on the part of candidates to deal with the detail of the texts, the language and the dramatic effects. Often very good answers were undermined by a failure to substantiate claims by close reference to particular moments.

As usual, candidates at the bottom end often focused on telling the story, a strategy which is not highly rewarded. Similarly, candidates who choose to take a chronological approach, plodding through from beginning to end, often show that they are unable to select what is really relevant in order to shape an argument. The most frequent criticism of answers is that candidates are not really dealing with the particular demands of the question asked.

This reluctance to deal directly with the question is most marked in (b) answers, where candidates often move immediately away from the printed passage, making little subsequent reference to it. It is important that candidates recognise that these passage based questions are precisely that: they ask for clear focus on a short section which demonstrates through its precision that the candidate is capable of responsive analysis of language, dramatic tension, situation, tone. Of course wider reference is important, but it should not be the central focus of an answer. It should be noted, too, that little credit is given for large amounts of exposition in order to contextualise the given extract.

Having said all that, it is clear to Examiners that many candidates have learned a lot from their studies, with many of them showing clear delight in reading and in their understanding of complex texts. At the top end, there were some extremely stylish and impressive responses.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

- (a) A number of candidates tended to view the characters as real people or to respond in loosely sociological ways, looking at the rise of feminism in western society without really focusing on how Churchill is engaging with the issue in dramatic terms. Good answers were keen to engage with the way that the play is structured and with the way Churchill presents different generations of women and women from different cultures in order to give a perspective on the ways in which the characters might look at themselves.
- (b) The candidates who tackled this question showed a clear understanding of the pressures faced by both Jeanine and Marlene, particularly in relation to the changing world of women's work. It would have been good to see more answers that dealt precisely with Marlene's rather hard-nosed (and masculine) patronising of Jeanine and her enthusiasm to put down Jeanine's aspirations and hopes, conveyed best in Jeanine's timid 'Yes, all right' at the end of the extract or in her hesitancy in line 22.

Question 2

William Shakespeare: *As You Like It*

- (a) There were a wide variety of approaches to the question, with most candidates making contrasts between court and country or loving versus predatory partners. At the top end there were a few candidates who chose to look at the question in terms of contrasting registers of language, an approach that was particularly fertile. Sadly, some candidates took the question to be an invitation merely to summarise the action of the play.
- (b) This was a popular question but comparatively few of the candidates were able to offer close analysis of the language and dramatic situation at this particular moment. A number of candidates spent too long placing the extract in a context or giving an account of the relationship between the lovers. Answers that offered discussion of wordplay and exaggerated language and the complexity of feeling between the two scored highly. There were some interesting responses that placed the relationship between Orlando and Rosalind in the broader context of different varieties of love presented in the play.

Question 3

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a) The question on the supernatural proved popular, with most candidates able to give a clear account of the supernatural events in the play. Many candidates found it much more difficult to respond to the trigger word 'uses,' particularly in relation to how they might provide part (but only part) of Macbeth's motivation. In many cases, good answers were undermined by an unwillingness to focus on particular moments
- (b) The extract, the end of the play, produced a lot of paraphrase. Candidates were often comfortable simply reporting on how the action had lead to this particular point.

Once again, there was a trigger in the question in the word 'conclusion,' which suggests that there is some element of dramatic closure coming into play. Language and tone were little examined and therefore the mixture of nervous anticipation mixed with joyful relief was only occasionally noted. Many candidates, however, made intelligent links between the first scene of the play and its conclusion, drawing attention to the circularity of the drama. All in all, the majority of the candidates did not give the impression of having studied the passage in great detail. For them, once Macbeth was dead, the interest of the play died too. A closer look at the passage would have proved otherwise.

Question 4

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

- (a) There were a small number of responses. Most could deal with the humour of various moments and some of the more serious underlying themes. Fewer candidates were able to marry the two, demonstrating that serious issues can be dealt with by comic means.
- (b) The candidates were confident in showing the relationship between the two characters, and most were able to talk about other moments too. However, there was little real discussion in many answers about how this particular exchange might 'contribute to the play as a whole.' A few candidates were able to talk about the distinctively Irish idiom of this moment, about the tendency towards exaggeration and desire to over-dramatise a situation which suffuses the whole text.

Question 5

Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a) Many answers wrote about the text as a 'memory play' without really addressing the terms of the question. Most candidates made the point that Tom's presentation of incidents from the past showed partiality and bias, but few were able to support the contention with detailed evidence. References to Tom as a magician were frequently made, but few answers showed how his manipulation of staging devices such as lighting might have had an effect in shaping an audience's response. Similarly, references to Tom's hindsight tended to be general and poorly applied to the exact terms of the question. There were some interesting responses that focused on the internal contradictions in the play as a means of characterising Tom's attitudes.
- (b) A significant number of candidates took this question to be an invitation to write a character study of Amanda and her role in the play as a whole, rather than pinpointing the tensions conveyed so economically in the passage. There was much focus on the grimness of Laura's fate and Tom's petulance, but this could often have been better done by talking explicitly about mood - as suggested in the question. Sentimental illusion (and self-delusion) was often dwelt upon, as was Tom's cynicism, though some candidates limited their response by seeing simple sarcasm on Tom's part. Laura's timid fragility was often commented upon, as were her attempts to placate the others, but the ideas were usually stated rather than emerging from the detail. It was a shame that more candidates did not comment on the presence of the 'screen legend' as a plainly theatrical context for the scene.

Question 6

William Wycherley: *The Country Wife*

- (a)(b) There were only a very small number of answers on this text. In both (a) and (b) candidates were usually so glad to have made something of the plot that they felt retelling it was enough. In (a) there were clear points to be made about the treatment of women and the contrast between country and city life. In (b) ideas of deceit could have been readily exploited, as could the humorous and farcical aspects of the passage.

Paper 9695/05

Shakespeare and Other Pre Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

Examiners reported that the general standard of performance in this session was at least satisfactory, with few failing to reach an adequate level of performance and a reasonable proportion of candidates with marks in the top two bands. There were a very small number of rubric infringements, mostly candidates who offered two answers on the same text. Nearly all candidates had managed the allocated time well, with only a small minority apparently running out of time before they had completed the second essay. However it cannot be emphasised too often that the basic essentials of answering the right number of questions and spending an equal amount of time on each answer are an important factor in the candidate's final result.

Examiners have again reported that some candidates answering the passage questions do not give sufficient attention to the language and tone of the passage. The temptation to give too much background information must be avoided, if the candidate is to have sufficient time to explore the passage in the depth required at this level. A precise and accurate placing of the passage is always important, but too often a general narrative summary or broad character sketch is offered, which has limited value in a detailed critical appreciation. Some candidates do, of course, rise to the challenges offered by the passage questions and Examiners were delighted by some of the perceptive and thoughtful writing, particularly on *Othello* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

The essay options produced some excellent work – well organised, fluently expressed and focused on the task. Nearly all candidates showed at least a sound knowledge of the texts and the basics of plot and character. Most were able to shape this knowledge to the task in hand, though weaker candidates inclined inevitably to telling the story, especially if they offered a response on one of the novels. Candidates do need to be constantly reminded to focus on the precise wording of the question. All Examiners reported at least some candidates who seemed to lose direction in their answer, possibly as a result of not being entirely sure of where they were heading to start with. Candidates who are careful to select material aimed at the specifics of the task invariably do well.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Shakespeare: *The Winter's Tale*

This was a minority choice, but there were some sensitive responses to the passage **(b)** question. Some candidates did try to define 'tragic figure' in **(a)** and often produced satisfactory or better work as a result. There was a good deal of support for Leontes and some candidates thought Hermione unreasonable in keeping him waiting so long.

Weaker responses tended to give too much surrounding narrative in **(b)** answers and were too general in tackling option **(a)**.

Question 2

Shakespeare: *Othello*

This was the most popular text on the paper and the full range of performance was seen in respect of both options.

EITHER

(a) Nearly all candidates had something to say about Emilia. All were able to refer to her involvement in the loss of the handkerchief and in the final scene, but the best answers were able to explore her by the defining relationships with Iago, Desdemona and Othello. Others explored her as foil to Desdemona and Bianca and developed interesting arguments about dramatic functions and her role as wife to Iago and, through that, gender issues.

OR

(b) Examiners were excited and pleased by the high quality of some of the sensitive explorations of this moving scene. Many candidates showed wonderful perception in judging the tone and were fully alive to the dramatic action taking place. Some explored the powerful imagery in depth, a recipe for success, while others responded to the effect of the simplicity of Desdemona's 'Send for the man and ask him'. Weaker candidates often found interesting things to say, sometimes too polarised into 'good' and 'evil', but relevant and showing personal engagement.

Question 3

Shakespeare: *Much Ado About Nothing*

EITHER

- (a) Candidates had an impressive understanding of and sometimes little sympathy for Don Pedro. Nearly all answers were able to talk about how the brothers influenced the plot and other characters. Few rose to the challenge of 'atmosphere', but those who saw in Don John the essential element of 'conflict' and could explore the shades of tone colour in some of the scenes between Benedick and Don Pedro did very well.

OR

- (b) All candidates recognised this scene and could place it accurately. Very few had much sympathy for Claudio, but nearly all candidates could explore the effect of the audience knowing what was coming and how Shakespeare uses this to create suspense and irony. This inevitably led them into answering the question directly. Not all candidates however considered the remarks of Benedick and Hero, for example, and this was a limitation.

Section B

Question 4

Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*

This was the most popular choice in **Section B** and many Centres across the world offered this text and *Othello*.

EITHER

- (a) Examiners were pleased with the standard of work seen on this task. One 'danger' was seeing 'duty' simply as 'sense' and so on, but this was avoided by most candidates and there was a wealth of material offered as support for the interesting arguments presented. The better answers were able to bring out Austen's insistent moral patterns and provide adequate evidence. Weaker candidates were able to contrast sister with sister and suitor with suitor at the least and thus reach an acceptable standard.

OR

- (b) This too was a popular choice, though generally not as well done. The main reason for this was a desire to tell the surrounding narrative at the expense of a close exploration of the language. Those who responded to the humour and ironic tone did very well, but too few did. Much was made of Marianne's eventual marriage to Brandon, with a surprisingly high number of candidates seeing it as a loveless marriage of economic convenience. This sort of discussion too often distracted candidates from the passage in front of them and it was disappointing that so few candidates were able to see how sister and mother are in fact teasing a too serious Marianne.

Question 5

Chaucer: *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*

EITHER

- (a) Most candidates were able to distinguish sensibly between the Prologue and the Tale and those who offered arguments on how compelling and skilful the Prologue is invariably did better. It was disappointing that few felt confident enough to challenge the proposition in the question. Unfortunately there were some candidates who confused *The General Prologue* description of the Pardoner with the Prologue to the Tale itself. More damagingly others failed to place the 'sermon' preamble to the Tale itself. Most candidates did show a sound knowledge of the text and were able to support their view with appropriate references.

OR

- (b) Answers on the passage seemed to be better focussed than option (a) answers. Most candidates offered sensible comments on the depravity of the 'riotoures' and used their detailed textual knowledge well. Examiners were pleased to see a number of interesting interpretations of the Old Man: as Death, as God and as a Child of Mother Earth. Candidates however often failed to relate more widely as required by the question and the few who did invariably scored higher marks.

Question 6

Defoe: *Moll Flanders*

This was a minority choice with a fairly even spread between (a) and (b). Answers on this text too often fell into the trap of giving a narrative summary at the expense of a detailed exploration of the specifics of the question. Better answers on (a) did tackle the issue of Moll's choices and on (b) explored the issue of the narrative voice and concerns.

Question 7

Emily Dickinson *Selected Poems*

There were few answers on this text. Examiners were disappointed at the level of response, which often suggested little knowledge of the poems or author. Passage answers were frequently only a loose paraphrase and only one or two candidates were able to discuss satisfactorily the style and content of the poems.

Question 8

John Donne *Selected Poems*

EITHER

- (a) Examiners were pleased with the detailed knowledge of the poems, which this question elicited. Many candidates made commendable attempts to wrestle with the teasingly complex material, the focus often on the 'love' poems, though some did refer in detail to the 'religious' poems to telling effect. Weaker candidates were a little daunted by 'arts of argument and persuasion' but were still capable of finding relevant things to say, often supported with apt references to the poems.

OR

- (b) It was satisfying to see a number of candidates proficiently exploring the development of the thought and feeling in this poem and showing a sound grasp of the language and techniques at work. Weaker candidates did at times misread the poem: some saw it as rapturous praise of pure love, others as a celebration of the union of body and soul. Most however were able to find some telling links to other poems in the selection. Whichever option was chosen, nearly all candidates showed enthusiasm and personal enjoyment in the text.

Question 9

Eliot: *Middlemarch*

Understandably perhaps this was a minority choice and those candidates who offered this text showed a commendable knowledge of the basics of plot and character. Candidates who chose (a) fared better than those who chose the passage option, where answers too often gave too much background information at the expense of a detailed exploration of how Eliot's mastery of language and tone here reveals so much about Dorothea and Casaubon and their future together. Part (a) answers found many telling examples to show how important money is in the novel, with better candidates linking characters' attitudes to money to Eliot's wider narrative purposes.

Question 10

Jonson: *Volpone*

Examiners were delighted with the high quality of the responses to this text. Candidates responded with insight and at times positive relish to Jonson's mordant satire on human follies and crimes.

EITHER

- (a) There was a lively engagement with the terms of the question and a unanimous acceptance of the superiority in dramatic terms of the immoral characters. Some explored the entertainment value of Mosca and Volpone, while strong responses developed arguments around the dramatic techniques and effects used by Jonson to underpin the moral universe he has created.

OR

- (b) Accomplished candidates saw 'justice' in this passage as at best doubtful and at worst as self-seeking. Sensible answers were able to see the distinctions between the corrupt and uncorrupted and many candidates offered sound arguments on the distinctions between moral and poetic justice.

Question 11

Pope: *The Rape of the Lock*

This text was popular in this session and many candidates produced competent and at times thoughtful work.

EITHER

- (a) Despite occasional lapses into summary and biography, candidates were confident in discussing the mock-heroic and Pope's use of irony. Technical terms were often used but it has to be said not always understood, though many candidates soundly explored the various layers on which Pope is working.

OR

- (b) The passage was generally less successfully tackled. Some candidates were confused by details such as the four kings or the distinction between the sylphs and nymphs. The better responses engaged with the satire and could link much of the material to the wider poem. It was a pity however that more candidates did not appreciate the humour of the passage. Those who did inevitably scored very well.

Paper 9695/06

Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

Overall, the candidates' performance on the paper was comparable with previous years. Well prepared candidates were able to articulate ideas fluently, and to respond to both the texts studied and opportunities offered by the questions. On the whole, candidates knew their texts well enough and found plenty to write about. However, the principal elements of discrimination were ability to engage critically with the texts and readiness to relate textual knowledge and understanding to the terms of the question. Most candidates were more comfortable discussing thematic concerns than in analysing formal characteristics and effects, and even in answers to (b) type questions, relatively few candidates took the opportunity to consider stylistic features in their comments in any developed way. Where candidates did offer critical analysis of the (b) passage, a substantial proportion neglected the requirement of the question to consider how far 'methods and concerns' evident in the passage were 'characteristic' of the text as a whole; often features were asserted to be characteristic without evidence from elsewhere in the text. Teachers should remind candidates that they must consider the elements of any question carefully before beginning to write, and that (b) type answers must consider both 'effects of the writing' in the passage itself and its relations to the text as a whole.

Examiners have pointed out that the Centre's selection of texts for study may have a significant effect not only on the *kind* of answers written by candidates but also on their quality. This year, for example, a high proportion of candidates wrote answers on the two plays, *The Caretaker* and *Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead*. A benefit of working on two texts of the same genre is that, in the process of teaching and learning, the texts can be compared and contrasted to develop understanding of each; disappointingly, however, hardly a single candidate considered relations between the two plays, which were represented as indistinguishable in terms either of theatrical effect/convention or relation to context. The candidate who wrote the following was expressing in extreme form an approach very common across a whole range of Centres: '*The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter is an absurd play. It was written in the twentieth century as life was meaningless after World War Two ...*Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead* is an absurd play, Tom Stoppard in writing this play wanted to show us how life became meaningless after World War Two ...' As here, references to 'absurd' drama were rarely helpful to the candidate or the Examiner, and contextual citations were equally rarely appropriate (e.g. 'After World War Two, people lost faith and their only want was to die and many commit suicide because they were disillusioned'). Candidates who answered on Jennings and Walcott found themselves in difficulties dealing with two very different poets, each with particular problems of understanding and critical analysis. Centres may like to consider selecting texts of different genres to give their candidates variety of reading experience and personal challenge.

While work on contextual or theoretical approaches can be very fruitful, Centres and candidates should not lose sight of the specification's requirement that critical analysis of the text should be at the centre of study and of answers to questions - in response to a thematic or technical issue raised in an **(a)** type question or grounded in consideration of 'effects of the writing' of a selected passage in a **(b)** type question. In more cases than usual this year, there was a tendency for candidates to be tempted into employing theoretical approaches (e.g. identifying post-modern qualities of *Cat's Eye*) whose procedures had not been fully assimilated.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Margaret Atwood: *Cat's Eye*

- (a)** A proportion of candidates responded to this question at a very superficial level saying merely that Elaine's mother did not care sufficiently for her daughter; these seemed to struggle to find much material. Others, comparing Mrs Risley to other mothers in the novel, pointed out that her drawbacks as a mother were associated with her virtues (e.g. she is uncommunicative but also non-interfering) and that Elaine's feelings develop as time goes by: in her final judgement; Elaine's pride and admiration are shown in the painting dedicated to her mother. A few candidates were able to discuss the way our view of the relationship was a function of narrative point of view, recognising that, ironically, we might know more about her mother's feelings than Elaine seems to.
- (b)** As was often the case with **(b)** answers, many candidates used the passage as a springboard for introduction of a prepared list of themes; in the weakest answers these were *noted* rather than explored: e.g. it was not enough simply to note that 'BOYS and GIRLS shows the importance of gender in the novel' without any further elaboration. Good answers focused on the passage itself and were able to discuss the effects of language both in terms of imagery and syntax while illustrating concerns such as effects of the passage of time, Elaine's psychological bullying at the hands of Cordelia, reversal of situation as Elaine becomes the tormentor and survivor. Very few candidates noted the suggestions of wider cultural/political transformations (e.g. 'no King and Queen...').

Question 2

Kazuo Ishiguro: *An Artist of the Floating World*

- (a)** Answers divided between those that agreed with Setsuko's comment (arguing that Ono was not 'a traitor' and did not betray Japan, that his actions/words/paintings did no harm, and that painting is/was not all that important anyway), and those that disagreed with Setsuko (arguing that his propagandist paintings may have influenced Japanese politics/public opinion and that consequently he did have some responsibility for both historical and personal developments - e.g. the China campaign and Kuroda). Fuller answers acknowledged the uncertainty/unreliability associated with this issue (and almost everything else in the novel), noting Ono's propensity to overestimate his importance and to attribute sinister motives to apparently innocent behaviour. Some responded to the question by charting the stages of Ono's career as a painter, often with interesting discussion of the functions, nature and status of the different kinds of painting practices he is associated with.

- (b) Candidates who attended closely to the writing of the passage produced some really interesting analyses, noting the signs that Ono has come to some acceptance of change and readiness to 'move on', but that this does not mean for him that the past has been altogether abandoned: 'though they are 'incongruous' the trees are still there...symbolically, he is still sitting where he used to sit, but now he sees differently'. The symbolism of Mrs Kawakami's being replaced by an office building was noted in most answers and often related to wider processes of 'westernisation' or 'modernisation' for which the writing intimates some regret; the laughter of the young men was also registered as signifying 'continuity', but noted also that 'they laughed 'a little more boisterously' in the pleasure district in the old days'. A significant discriminator between answers to this question was the quality of discussion of the symbolic implications of the Bridge of Hesitation, here and in the novel as a whole.

Question 3

Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Among the few answers on this text there was some thoughtful discussion of Jennings's exploration of her personal experience of faith and doubt in her poetry, noting her 'envy of the priest's vocation and any security of belief' (e.g. in 'To a friend with a religious vocation') and her sense that poetry is itself a kind of devotional activity (e.g. in 'Lazarus', 'The Resurrection', 'World I have not made'), allowing access to knowledge/understanding not otherwise explicable: 'I speak from a depth I do not understand'.
- (b) There were some quite painful answers on this question, from candidates who seemed to be encountering the poem for the first time and offered reductive readings of this complex poem: e.g. as an overall summary, 'she seems to be missing her childhood...'. There were, conversely, some strenuous efforts to unravel the poem's exploration of relations between the frustrations and pleasures of childhood, between 'great feelings' and the mathematical, abstract order of the chess game. There was also some thoughtful discussion about the relationship between the 'persona' and her chess opponent: the layers of possible meanings of 'You seem the same ...' provoked some absorbing speculation. Some candidates were able to build knowledge of Jennings's personal life into their reading of the poem. Other poems fruitfully cited were 'Father to son', 'One flesh', 'About these things', 'Warning to parents'.

Question 4

Harold Pinter: *The Caretaker*

This was easily the most popular text on the paper this season.

- (a) The most frustrating answers on this text - and on *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, with which it was often paired - were those distracted into accounts of 'theatre of the absurd' which led them away from the text and the question. However, most acknowledged the fluctuations of mood and audience response - 'disturbing shifts' in the experience of the play - and noted that the presentation of the various 'power struggles' in the play is both comical and frightening: Mick's tormenting Davies with the vacuum cleaner was the scene most often adduced as illustrating the 'blending of comedy with horror'. Davies was seen as both comic (absurd pomposity of self-presentation) and horrifying ('back-stabbing' and ingratitude for Aston's generosity), often both at the same time; Mick as comic in his use of language in the two set piece speeches, and horrifying in his 'systematic intimidation of an old man'. A common approach - and sometimes dangerous because it shifted attention away from dramatic effect - was to validate the play's procedures by reference to human nature ('only natural to look for allies...makes us uncomfortable to recognise ourselves in the characters'). Comic effects were found in senseless actions, ridiculous conversations, miserable appearance, impossible dreams, absurd views, banal anecdotal accounts, the strange, cluttered setting, contradiction between words and actions; horror was provoked by self-absorbed characters unable to respect/maintain any bond, scenes of perversity, viciousness, aggression, violence, abuse, trauma, mood swings, betrayal, manipulation, victimisation, cruelty, isolation, disintegration, menacing behaviour, language used as a weapon for dominance. Many answers noted that the play begins with comic effects that decrease as the play modulates into a more sombre key, ending in a very disturbing conclusion. Weaker answers lacked the vocabulary to consider dramatic effects and discussed one aspect only or offered general accounts of the characters.

- (b) This was the most popular question on the whole paper. Most noted that this was a key passage in the play's revelation of character. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage, pointing out how awful Aston's treatment was, and how it illustrated the practices of an uncaring society. Other answers explored the dramatic effects of this episode and its contribution to development of the play's thematic concerns. Effects considered were: dramatic representation of Aston's isolation in his own concerns (characteristic of all three characters) since Davies is in a sense present but not active; surprise of Aston's sudden articulacy; cumulative effect of disclosure of victimisation/marginalisation; hesitations, repetitions and fractured sentence structure; later echoes of this moment in Davies's 'betrayal' of Aston's generosity when he complains to Mick about his brother and, later still, threatens Aston with return to the institution. Thematic concerns identified included: precarious/ambivalent/fragmented nature of the relationships; unpredictable outbursts of violence (in behaviour and/or language); abuse, betrayal (e.g. by doctors, mother, society and later Davies); problems of communication and validation (of information but also of the self); the significance of personal objectives - or 'dreams' (Aston's shed/Mick's 'palace'/Davies's trip to Sidcup to pick up his papers); significance of the room (microcosm of the world: e.g. secure, but also symbolic of life's disorderliness/entrapment/isolation).

Question 5

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

Not such a popular text this time; there were some well-informed responses.

- (a) Most candidates agreed with the question, carefully considering similarities and differences. Most argued that fundamentally Jero is the same in both plays morally and spiritually, with the same corrupt values, except possibly that he deteriorates as he becomes more powerful, ambitious, selfish, self-centred, gaining more material success/status (house, office, secretary, salvation army); in this respect, as some candidates noted the title *Jero's Metamorphosis*, is ironic. Levels of gullibility/manipulation of people are also similar in both plays, though the satire in *Metamorphosis* is sharper and more politically directed. Comments on methods included similar uses of humour to satirise false prophets and the narrative device that in each play at least one character sees through Jero's performance. Fullest answers moved confidently between the two plays, often referring to social context at the time of writing. Weaker answers neglected *Metamorphosis* or tended to give a limited character sketch of Jero.
- (b) Most candidates were able to consider the presentation of the two characters in Jero's grip: Ananias, another false prophet, greedy for money, power, status, influence, invariably compared to Jero himself in their mutual corruption, manipulation and deceit; Rebecca, gullible, vulnerable, frenzied in her blind faith, in the passage and throughout. Most commented on the comic effects in the passage through actions, language, and ironic inflections of biblical references, to show the absurdity of the situation although the underlying comment is serious. Some candidates considered Soyinka's satirical criticism of African culture and institutions. In some answers, the candidates' lack of critical vocabulary in analysing comedy was painfully exposed; discussion of satire and the theme of corruption was general and vague.

Question 6

Tom Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Another popular text, studied by nearly fifty percent of the candidates.

- (a) The best answers made use of the quotation to show how the Players shed light on the relationship between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and on such themes as destiny and free will, death. Some considered their contributions to the narrative drive of the play (e.g. the revelation of Claudius's guilt by their enactment of *The Murder of Gonzago*) and to dramatic effects (e.g. when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not recognise the premonition of their own destiny in the Players' performance, while the audience do). There was some discussion of their contribution to the play's effects of comedy and suspense (though one candidate wrote, oddly, that 'the Players have the role of decreasing suspense'). Many answers focused on their role in the plot of *Hamlet* (sometimes leading away from relevance to the question) and many also considered their contribution to the play's 'meta-theatrical' concerns: some of the discussion on this issue was interesting (e.g. they, like the play's central characters, are at the 'command' of Claudius, but also of the authors of the two versions of their 'script' - Shakespeare and Stoppard - and of any audience they happen to play to); in some answers attention to this issue led to excessive digression from relevant response to the question.

- (b) Some candidates found this passage difficult to respond to: with evidently little idea of the way this exchange might be comic, many simply used the passage to illustrate the thesis that the characters were stupid, boring and talked about nothing; in the weakest answers references to the rest of the text were confined to coin-tossing. More developed answers considered 'existential' issues as presented by the situation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: loss of any certainty of direction, time, place, identity, and capacity to communicate; also their rootless, helpless, purposeless, meaningless, pre-determined existence as puppets/victims in the hands of fate, other characters and playwrights. They were often compared to Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, though rarely with any developed view of correspondences and/or differences. Candidates who attended to the language of the passage found plenty to say: the 'dead leg' business which maintains both the play's concern with death and the perpetual problem of distinguishing between the characters ('even their legs get mixed up'); the pantomime effect of 'we're on a boat' after the heavy indicators in the stage directions; the verbal punning ('off course ...of course'); the reminders of the theatrical context ('Somebody might come in...In where? ... Out here ... In out here? ... On deck').

Question 7

Derek Walcott: *Selected Poetry*

Very few candidates answered on this text.

- (a) Candidates had problems with the word 'treatment' and tended to *describe* the landscape evoked in three poems. Better answers considered what the landscape might represent, but candidates were generally unable to look closely at what made the descriptions effective; lack of critical vocabulary and awareness of analytical procedures was very evident in most answers.
- (b) Most candidates, evidently lacking an overview of Walcott's work to provide a context, worked through the poem concentrating on particular images (e.g. relation between 'searing meteor' and 'damp match'), but without achieving any overall view of its concerns, meanings or effects.

Question 8

Evelyn Waugh: *Decline and Fall*

The next most popular choice after the two plays.

- (a) This question provoked answers that were unusually sharply differentiated, often depending on how far the candidate attended to the terms of the question, considering in what senses Grimes might be described as 'one of the immortals'. Almost all recognised the immediate reference to his survival capacity and periodic returns to the novel's action. Fuller answers explored ways in which the character embodies features and values of the larger world of the novel: e.g. complete lack of any moral concern; opportunism; insouciance ('I've been put on my feet more often than any living man'); class consciousness ('I'm a public school man. That means everything ... the social system never lets one down'). Relations between this character and Paul were also fruitfully considered in some answers, in terms of both differences (e.g. Grimes' social awareness and capacity for survival) and similarities (e.g. for Grimes, as well as for Paul, 'women are an enigma', and both habitually 'land in the soup'). Where candidates were reluctant to make use of the quotation, however, they struggled to find much material and produced very sketchy character descriptions.
- (b) This was the more popular option. The best answers showed how the passage foreshadows both the concerns of the novel as a whole (emphasis on class relationships, materialism, self-interest, frivolity, persecution of the vulnerable, lack of any sense of responsibility) and Waugh's characteristic methods in terms of characterisation, satirical/ironic effects ('Oh, please God, make them attack the Chapel') and the tone of the narrative voice ('What an evening that had been!'). Even among the best answers, the humour of the novel was often overlooked. Some answers did not refer to the passage at all but focused on what happened next to Paul. Other candidates focused entirely on the passage in a general way, commenting on the social criticism of the Bollinger club and the irresponsibility of Sniggs and Postlethwaite, but not considering the effectiveness of this introduction to the methods and concerns of the novel as a whole.

General comments

Following the comments made in the last report on this paper, it is good to note that more candidates this session seemed to be aware of the need to ensure that all the comments that they made on the set passages must take account of the ways in which the authors present their ideas; certainly there still were some – too many – who relied almost entirely upon a simple listing of techniques and devices, and more will be said about this later, but there was clear evidence that Centres had been teaching and encouraging candidates to move beyond this, and to look more closely and critically at the effects of all such devices. For it is these effects that matter; a writer will not – presumably – decide consciously that he or she will use alliteration or assonance a particular number of times just for their own sake, nor to ensure that there are sufficient metaphors or similes in a poem to satisfy an Examiner; what s/he will do is to find the best and most effective manner in which to convey a particular idea or happening, and if the adoption of a conventional device is thought to be the best then that is what will be done. A critic – or an examination candidate – will find the writing to be good, or perhaps not so good, and will look at ways in which it is written, in which the writer's feelings are expressed, and finally at how successfully, in the critic/candidate's view, they are expressed. There is no virtue in simply finding and listing examples of methods, unrelated to the contents being put forward; some candidates still did this, in some cases hardly touching on the actual meaning of the writing, but a much more encouraging number did seem very much aware that this was at best a dull and lifeless approach, and at worst a pointless one. At another extreme were those candidates – again few, but too many – who just paraphrased each passage/poem, sometimes with quite extensive quotation from it, but without any real critical response or discussion; these candidates may sometimes have shown that they understood the content of the writing, but little if anything more could be rewarded. Meaning and the method cannot be disentangled: they work inextricably together, and candidates must be encouraged to see them in this way.

A small point, but worth suggesting, is that too often candidates used the expression 'The writer is trying to say....' or perhaps 'The writer seems to be saying...'. It is perfectly understandable, of course, that under the pressure of a timed examination nobody wants to commit themselves too firmly, but it would actually please Examiners more if candidates showed that they had the courage to be positive, and say that 'The writer says...' or 'The writer does...'. Even if they are judged to be wrong, the fact that they have decided to make a firm and clear statement, instead of putting forward a hesitant and unsure suggestion, will make their work more likely to convince.

An even smaller point, but still one that reflects quite a substantial number of candidates, is the rather curious tendency to say something such as 'The writer uses diction in this paragraph ...', as if a writer uses anything else; even more curiously Examiners will read 'The writer's choice of words and diction here ...', as if the two terms are different – words and diction are, surely, exactly the same?

Comments on specific questions

All three questions were tackled by candidates; the third, Keith Douglas's poem, was marginally the least popular – a pity, as those who did write on it generally managed it well, and often very well indeed.

Question 1

The majority of candidates tackled these two prose passages, and in general addressed them with a good deal of critical confidence; all were clearly aware of the need to find and discuss similarities and differences between the two accounts of a very similar rainy day in Lincolnshire, and while there were some strikingly different approaches to this, there were few candidates who failed to see at least some significant comparisons. Curiously – though perhaps it took a certain amount of courage to do so in an examination – only a handful suggested that there might be some genuine connection between the two (the second, after all, was published just ten years after the first, and does bear some quite close likenesses to the first in its language and images); just one candidate alone proposed the idea that Braddon might have consciously copied Dickens, and this answer did in fact address the passage's similarities very interestingly and closely. One or two candidates noted too that the name 'Dedlock' might well have been chosen to reflect the dreary and depressive view of the rain taken by Dickens, an interesting and of course perfectly valid thought, particularly when developed by exploration of the dreary nature of much of the images later in the passage from *Bleak House*. A few also made comment on the apparent appropriateness of the novel's title, but this was not really relevant to discussion of a very small extract from it, and these candidates then found a problem with the title *John Marchmont's Legacy*.

Some candidates preferred the first passage, but a roughly equal number found the second more vigorous and appealing; which was chosen – if either – as the ‘better’ of the two was immaterial, though; what mattered was how they were explored and discussed. There is plenty of material, of course, perhaps more in the first with its repeatedly dismal and wet imagery and words, reinforced by the dulled sounds and visibility; the gloomy but delicate picture of the deer was noted by most, as was the rather more curious and maybe half-humorous idea of the muffled rifle shot. The closing sentence was used by virtually every candidate, whether simply to note the onomatopoeic effect of ‘drip, drip, drip’ or to comment on the sudden but appropriately ghostly nature and name of the ‘flagged pavement’; Braddon’s descriptions are perhaps rather flatter and less individual in nature, though the section describing the unhealthy nature of Marchmont Towers, and the ‘miasmas’ rising from the wood, was noted as having something of Dickens’s half-supernatural tone. The similarity in the situations of the two women, both sitting indoors and dreadingly watching the rain outside, was frequently mentioned, too, though few candidates seemed to prefer Dickens’s ‘lead-coloured view’, and ‘a view in Indian ink’ to Braddon’s much simpler final sentence. A surprisingly large number suggested that each passage was written as if from the viewpoint of the woman in question, though nothing in either passage really supports this – and of course Lady Dedlock is no longer in her ‘place’, having returned (in the first line) to her house in town.

As ever, there were candidates who simply paraphrased each passage – and indeed those few who appeared to be quite sincere in their belief that they were two poems – without addressing any of the effects created by the writers and their vocabulary; on the whole, though, this question was done quite successfully by the great majority who tackled it.

Question 2

Zulfikar Ghose’s poem produced a very wide range of answers, more so than the other two questions; a few candidates were clearly unable to see what the poem as a whole is about, and could thus make only a number of unconnected comments on his language and images, without relating them in any way to a bigger theme. It is certainly not an ‘easy’ poem, but it is by no means inaccessible, and the fact that many other candidates did see clearly enough – and in many cases very clearly indeed – what Ghose is expressing did suggest that it is a perfectly valid poem to set at this level, albeit quite challenging in some respects.

The speaker in the poem is flying over India, and through a range of images and thoughts he talks of his clear love for the country, but at the same time of how he is at least in part glad not to be physically in it, preferring the detached and literally distanced view that he has from the aeroplane; the final stanza comes as a real shock – ‘the flat earth is awful’ is a truly startling thing to read, even if one takes the last word to imply ‘awe-ful’ rather than simply ‘unpleasant’. And the final couplet surely suggests both cynicism and a deep sadness – ‘The jungle’s/beasts are unseen from here. From these heights/one can almost believe in human rights’; earlier in the poem there is a real sense of love and admiration for what India can and could be, even when – as in the third stanza for example – he is making us aware that there is much below the surface that is less attractive, and even venomous (‘the country’s dangerous cobra-glitter!’). His final rhyme, though, does add a bitter twist to round off the poem, though one feels that it is perhaps exasperation and despair as much as anger. Many candidates simply shied away from the ending, though those who did comment on it had some interesting and often quite sensitive responses.

This is not the place to explore or discuss the many images that he uses in the poem, though there are of course many, and their implications and resonances are very rich. Many candidates found a huge amount to talk about, and often talked about it very well and confidently, often seeing the poet’s dichotomous feelings and tones that were suggested in the previous paragraph. As ever, those candidates did best who tried to explore why he used certain words, rather than simply listing and/or paraphrasing.

Question 3

This was the least popular question, candidates perhaps having been put off initially by its curious title, and the apparently inexplicable nature of a stone eating ice-cream! Interestingly, though, those who did tackle it – and many did so – clearly found it far more accessible and appealing than it may have first appeared, and in general it produced some rather better answers than the previous question. Candidates often found its humour enjoyable, though they were equally able to see the underlying unpleasantness that it conveys about men – and arguably too about the woman – and were often very confident in exploring the impact and effects of the poem’s central and extended metaphor (men seen as fish, and the woman as a white stone). There is little doubt that Douglas is suggesting some fairly unpleasing things about the ways in which men can regard women: none of the ‘fish’ is attractive – even the least unpleasant, the ‘gallants’ in stanza 6, ‘pause so to nibble and tug’, neither word suggestive of respect or kindness towards the woman they are hoping to attract. The woman herself, whether a prostitute as some suggested or simply a single woman waiting vainly but still hopefully for ‘a rich man’ to collect her, is of course a more richly-drawn figure; many candidates

talked perceptively and well about her cool and perhaps deliberate seductiveness at the start, with her red lip and fingernails contrasting vividly with her white skin, and with the ice-cream itself that she sensuously 'slips-in'. She is, however, 'a white stone' – cold, hard, unfeeling. Until the end of the poem, that is, when the poet seems perhaps to suggest a sudden sympathy for her loneliness – she 'sits alone ... useless except to a collector'. She has no value as a person, only as a thing to be picked up and 'collected'.

It is not a wholly serious poem, and as said above many candidates did see humour in it, both in its central metaphor and in some of its details; this kind of response was of course in no way a requirement for a good mark, and those who saw it as entirely serious were not 'penalised' at all, provided always that their view was argued and supported from the text rather than just asserted. Similarly, those few who failed entirely to see that the poem is based upon two comparisons (the woman as a white stone, the men as fish) were not automatically marked down for this reason, so long as they justified whatever response they were making properly and thoughtfully; it has to be said, though, that those few who appeared genuinely to think that the poem is literally about a fish eating an ice-cream were not really giving their case much help.

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

There was a very small entry this autumn for the Coursework Paper, but it was evident from the work submitted that candidates had been well taught and prepared, and that they both knew their texts and understood how to approach them successfully.

The texts selected for study this session were entirely appropriate for Advanced Level work – it is obviously important that they should be of sufficient weight and difficulty to warrant close critical exploration, and they must be of at least the same sort of stature as those set for examination papers. There was no difficulty or concern with any selected this session.

Similarly, there was no concern about the tasks that were set; these should – and did – encourage candidates to demonstrate not just that they know and understand the contents of their texts, but more importantly that they can explore and discuss them in close and critical detail, with particular emphasis upon *how* the writers have expressed and created their ideas. The marking criteria, on which all assessment must be based, make very clear that these are central requirements; to reach even a lower band, candidates must make 'some reference to literary features of form and language' (marks 20 – 27), and for a high band the demand is severe – candidates need to show 'detailed knowledge of texts, understanding of them, characterisation, linguistic features . . . some awareness of literary conventions and contexts, techniques and genre characteristics . . .' (marks 44 – 50). This may sound daunting but it is very clear from reading work that was rightly placed in the top band that candidates are well able to write in a way that does fully address these requirements. And, of course, they are no different at all from what candidates are anyway taught, or from what they frequently demonstrate in other examination papers. Given the additional time and planning that can be allowed for Coursework, there should be little difficulty for most candidates to show that they can manage these demands; what is important, however, is that when assessing and marking work teachers also bear them very much in mind, and do not give over-generous marks to candidates who do not quite manage to fulfil what is needed for each band.

Annotation has been mentioned, and is very helpful to the Moderator, as well as to the candidates. Some Centres annotate very fully, with full and sometimes quite personal comments directed towards the candidates but with little or no reference to the marking criteria; this is not the most useful, however, in that while it certainly shows how the teachers have responded to the work it does not make clear to the Moderator (or to the candidate) where and how well s/he has addressed the marking criteria. Even if these are referred to later in a summative folder comment, they should be noted in the body of the writing as well. The most unhelpful essays, though, are those where there is no annotation at all; the Moderator may have no idea how or why a mark has been reached – and indeed may effectively be marking each essay independently, which is not the Moderator's role – and even worse is the possibility that what is being submitted is in fact a 'fair copy' of a piece that has been marked and corrected already. There was no suggestion anywhere in this session's work that this had happened, but it is worth saying that once a candidate's work has been handed in for marking by the teacher it must *not* be re-written.

Work this autumn was very pleasing, and the moderation exercise was an enjoyable experience; it would be good, though, to see even more work in future!