

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/03
Poetry and Prose

General comments

Candidates in this session overwhelmingly seemed well-prepared for the examination, showing good textual knowledge and an appreciation of the authors' techniques. There was much evident interest in, and enjoyment of, the set texts. Again, the majority wrote on Keats' poetry and Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*. There were, though, sizeable numbers who wrote on *Touched with Fire*, *The Mill on the Floss* and the Katherine Mansfield short stories. Paper 9 Drama answers were quite equally divided between *Julius Caesar* and *The Glass Menagerie*, with very few answers on *Serious Money*.

In some cases, it seemed that candidates considered textual knowledge enough for an answer. However, it is possible to show extensive knowledge and fail to fulfil the demands of a question. The most successful candidates make careful selections from their knowledge to answer the specific question on the paper. Such answers use reference and quotation to support points, and focus on authors and their techniques rather than characters and plot. It is worth reminding teachers and candidates here that candidates who have learned a number of quotations, which they can apply to questions, tend to construct successful answers. This is particularly a feature of poetry answers, where it is very difficult to write successfully about language and technique without quotations to exemplify the points being made.

Less successful answers often demonstrate knowledge, but without selectivity. Such candidates often approach answers from a narrative position and rely on contextual and biographical knowledge. In the passage-based questions, successful candidates analyse the language and form of the extract on the paper in considerable detail.

Question Specific Comments

1. John Keats: *Selected Poems*

(a) This question offered wide opportunities to candidates, but success in answering it did demand possession of a detailed knowledge of the poems, with quotations. The best answers revealed very close knowledge of the poems and focused not only on the richness of Keats' language and imagery, but crucially on their contribution to the effects of the chosen poems. Most candidates wrote about the Odes, but many demonstrated how Keats' language choices evoke tone, atmosphere and setting in the narrative poems. In some cases, however, candidates had difficulty in analysing Keats' technique in any depth. Others were unable either to quote, or to refer to specific details in the poems. Answers such as these tended to assert that Keats' poetry is rich in language and imagery without demonstrating their point with references to the poems themselves.

(b) Many candidates were able to contextualise the extract from *Endymion* and identify its place within the narrative, and went on to place its concerns with idealised love and its dangers within Keats' poetry. They discussed features of language and form, the references to Greek mythology and the pastoral setting. However, some candidates did not read the question closely enough and instead of commenting closely on the passage, worked through the extract listing what they recognised as characteristics of Keats' writing. Sometimes these were related to other poems, but the essential part of the passage-based questions is the primary focus on the passage itself. There were a large number of answers which said nothing about *Endymion* at all.

2. *Touched with Fire*: ed. Hydes

(a) Relatively few candidates answered this question. The success of those who did again depended in a large part on the level of detail in the knowledge of the chosen poems. Many wrote about the pain of loss, using 'The Voice', 'The Wild Swans at Coole' and 'Cold in the Earth', while 'Mariana', 'Solitude' and 'Little Boy Crying' were also popular. In some cases, candidates perhaps chose the poems they knew best, even if not readily appropriate to the question, resulting in a struggle to make a persuasive answer. The most successful answers here clearly looked at language and technique to see how the poets expressed their views of pain, and some candidates wrote sharp and penetrating comparisons.

(b) 'Rising Five' proved a popular choice, many candidates showing their appreciation of its warnings about looking too much to the future. While some candidates went through the poem systematically, occasionally offering no more than a synopsis, those who read the question carefully were able to comment on the development of the poet's concern with time, paying close attention to the structure of the verse. These candidates commented on the broken lines and noted the increase in the pace of the ideas towards the end of the poem.

3. Stevie Smith: *Selected Poems*

(a) There were few answers to this question. However, some were able to note Smith's use of colloquial vocabulary, bathos and jaunty rhythms in contrast with serious themes, used to give a very particular individual perspective on their subject matter.

(b) Again there were few answers, but a small number of candidates responded quite well to this question, showing an understanding of the poem and using apt references to support the argument. There was particularly interesting comment on the way Smith personifies the characters of the poem by description and the way they speak. God and the wind here provoked thoughtful discussion, and several candidates picked up the idea of 'fairy stories', looking at both God and Smith herself in that context.

4. George Eliot: *The Mill on the Floss*

(a) It would appear that the issue of the presentation of women in this question provoked strong feelings which led to many candidates writing eloquently on the feminist perspective. Strengths included clear references to Maggie's position as a clever girl diminished by those around her and compared unfavourably with Lucy, seen by society as the ideal of femininity. Candidates referred to an education wasted on Tom which would have benefited Maggie, and the constriction of her own desires by her brother and society's expectations. Many candidates showed how Eliot's presentation of the dull provincialism of St Ogg's exacerbated what was already the narrow-minded Victorian approach to women's place in society. Maggie is shown to be ill-suited to this, with her need for human love, compounded with her independent spirit and love of books. The disparity of society's treatment of Maggie and Stephen Guest was often a feature of the answers. For success in this answer, candidates needed detailed and precise references to the novel. Those who relied on generalities and plot summary did less well.

(b) There were some good responses to the passage, with a sensitive understanding of the complexity of the relationship between Maggie and Philip. The passage was generally seen in relation to the wider context of the novel — their first meeting, the family differences, and Tom's attitude. Less successful candidates wrote extensively on this context without analysing the passage in any detail. There were opportunities to examine the vocabulary and punctuation of the extract to show how Eliot develops theme and character. Some candidates commented on Eliot's portrayal of the power relations and on how Philip's dialogue demonstrates his understanding of Maggie's character, enabling him to undermine her resolve.

5. Katherine Mansfield: *The Garden Party and Other Stories*

(a) Comparatively few candidates attempted this question and some demonstrated confusion about the term 'narrative voice', which is central to the study of prose fiction. At the weaker end, candidates tended to rely on narrative and retold the plots of two stories without evident reference to Mansfield's choice of the voice in which the stories are told. However, some candidates had clearly considered the issue of narrative voice and wrote successfully, sometimes comparing the nature of the narrator, in, for example, *A Married Man's Story*, *Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding* and *The Woman at the Store*. Some candidates were able to show how the narrative voice sometimes closely reflects, but is separate from, the central character, such as in *Her First Ball*, while others were able to demonstrate how the narrative in several of the stories moves seamlessly between third person observation and the characters' internal thoughts, such as in *At the Bay*, *The Garden Party* and others.

(b) This was a very popular question. Many candidates commented on the deeply unappealing description of Mrs Kember but went on to comment on her paradoxical attractiveness in contrast with the small-mindedness of the society around her. A number of candidates used their knowledge of Mansfield's life and her growing boredom with the Bloomsbury set to comment both on the conventional life of the Bay and on Mrs Kember as an essentially empty woman. Several commentaries also focused on sexual identity, including comment on Beryl and Mr Kember. Many candidates were alert to Mansfield's methods of presentation, noting the tone of dialogue, the sense of irony and the interweaving of society's perspective into the narrative. A number of candidates had difficulty with this aspect of Mansfield's style, though, and consequently missed the ironies of the extract.

6. Ngugi: *A Grain of Wheat*

(a) Though the passage was the more popular of the questions on Ngugi, this question still attracted many answers. A number of candidates, though, did not read the question closely enough and missed the reference to 'the time of independence', concentrating their essays on the treatment of the Kenyan population by the whites during the time of colonial rule. Some other candidates provided character sketches of the prominent white characters in the novel. Neither of these approaches was a satisfactory way of answering the question. However, there were many alert and thoughtful answers, which did tackle the experience of whites at the time of independence, focusing on the uncertainty, fear, sadness and anger experienced by the whites, and their own sense of betrayal. Some argued that, for an author with such a clear political view, Ngugi is remarkably balanced in his portrayal of the white characters, while others argued that in spite of his attempts to appear unbiased, his portrayal succeeded in undermining them.

(b) This was a very popular question, and the most successful candidates were able to place the passage within its context, as another piece of the puzzle the reader is piecing together about Mugo. Successful candidates saw a new side to Mugo, contented and at one with nature in true Gikuyu fashion, and a contrast with chapter one, where Mugo's shamba work is a failure. Candidates also noted his isolation and detachment, and the irony of his perception of himself as a saviour when he becomes the betrayer. Some candidates argued that Mugo is presented as Judas, not Moses, but also that in a sense he does set his people free because he confesses and makes it possible to leave the things of the past behind. Those candidates who based their writing very closely on the passage were the most successful, making quick and judicious links with other parts of the novel. Less successful answers wrote general essays on Mugo without close reference to the extract on the paper.

7. Caryl Churchill: *Serious Money*

(a) and (b) Too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.

8. William Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar*

(a) This question was answered by a few candidates, who saw the female characters revealing the private side of Caesar and Brutus, where the play mainly deals with them in public. Some commented on the masculine world of the play, where women's strength and insights are undervalued. This characterisation was also linked in some cases to the language of the play, where tears, for example, are dismissed as 'womanish' and Caesar is described mockingly in his illness as like 'a sick girl'.

(b) There were some careful analyses of the passage, candidates paying attention to the stage directions indicating the pomp of Caesar's entrance, the behaviour of other characters around Caesar, and the dialogue of Caesar himself. The most successful answers saw the scene theatrically, as Shakespeare creates a visual impression of Caesar as well as one through dialogue. The drama of the Soothsayer's intervention and Caesar's response to it was noted, one or two candidates considering the different effects created by the timing of Caesar's dismissal of him.

9. Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

(a) Answers to this question showed understanding of the difficulty of Tom's situation, although they did not always concentrate on Williams' techniques.

Some candidates had difficulty in focusing on 'the end of the play' and many tended to forget that what is said in the play may not be reliable, since Tom clearly dislikes his mother and may not report correctly — part of Tom's own admission that it is 'a memory play'. For example, Williams notes that by the time he leaves 'we cannot hear the mother's speech, [and] her silliness is gone'. Williams' earlier signs that Tom would go, following his father's departure, were noted, as were the love he has for Laura and the guilt he will go on feeling.

(b) The passage question was the more popular choice. Less confident candidates only wrote about Amanda and a little about Laura, while more confident candidates commented on the effects of Tom's initial speech. The most successful candidates discussed the contribution made by the stage directions and screen legends. Williams' stage directions are always important, and make a particular contribution to this scene; they emphasise the 'astonishing' alteration to the room, the 'fragile, unearthly prettiness' of Laura, and Amada's 'devout and ritualistic' preparations, for example. Some candidates argued about whether Amanda is selfish or selfless, and noted both her support for her daughter as well as her diminishing comments.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/04

Drama

General comments

Most candidates found this paper straightforward and accessible and were able to tackle the questions with confidence, whatever their level of ability. For the most part texts were well known, though candidates are sometimes so keen to get on with writing that they fail to reflect fully enough on the implications of the question that they have been asked. Candidates need to remember that they have been invited to demonstrate their knowledge of the text in relation to a specific question: too often answers slide sideways into general appreciation or commentary on the text. At times, too, candidates mentally re-write or re-focus (whether unconsciously or consciously) a question and then answer their preferred version. With passage based questions, candidates often move too quickly to a general consideration of the play, without concentrating on the text given in anything like enough detail. It would be good to see candidates paying more attention to matters of staging, particularly when they are so obviously signalled in passage based questions.

Some centres have adopted the less well-known texts with enthusiasm and, because they are unfamiliar, with a freshness of approach. Most candidates, however, write either on Shakespeare or Williams.

A small number of centres obviously train candidates to write fairly formulaic opening paragraphs, often contextualising the play or talking about the writer's life. These are always irrelevant and gain candidates no marks. Candidates who try to connect a text with a writer's life (*The Glass Menagerie* is the current example) always dig themselves into holes. The syllabus asks that the texts should be treated as plays, as literary works, and consequently biographical matters are always peripheral and always distract candidates from the real nub of a question. Similarly, a feeling that historical background must be included can sabotage an answer by pulling focus away from the text as a literary artefact.

For a small number of candidates, time management was obviously an issue. Often they wrote at great length and with real quality on one text and then found they had only a few minutes left for a second response. Some other candidates plainly took the view that they should write as much as possible without ever really pausing to think about its relevance: these lengthy answers often get very low marks because candidates are only really telling the story or writing very generally. The best answers, undoubtedly, are succinct and textually argued with clear focus on the precise wording of a question.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1: Caryl Churchill *Serious Money*

- (a) There were a small number of responses to the question about Greville and his children. Candidates tended towards character study rather than discussion of relationships and their significance in the play as a whole.
- (b) Although there were some acute responses to the question about private and public lives, candidates tended to emphasise the most obvious aspects of the question such as ambition, greed and the importance of money. Better answers were able to engage with background issues such as Thatcherism and the Big Bang in the London Stock Market and the debasing effect that these had on human behaviour and morality. It was a shame that most of the candidates failed to comment on Greville's appearance at the end of the extract with its mixture of self-satisfied complacency ('Life's been very good to me' and its hint of moral unease ('I think I'll work for Oxfam')). More reference to the characters' verse speaking might have pointed up Churchill's satirical intent in the passage.

Question 2: William Shakespeare *The Comedy of Errors*

- (a) There were some excellent answers on the question about the contribution of the Dromios to the play. Many candidates were able to deal effectively with both the comic and the serious elements of their role and function. There were often sound discussions of their difference in character, and the difference in relationship that each has with his master. Some weaker answers fell into a narrative of how the Dromios had got to Ephesus in the first place. Many answers were able to widen the discussion by referring to the themes of the play such as bondage, marriage, trade, for example.
- (b) Answers to the passage based question often lacked really detailed reference to the text. There was a tendency to assert that the scene was comic rather than proving it through textual analysis. Not many were able to respond to the tone and imagery of the passage effectively. Better responses were able to catch the humour and the comic effects of wordplay. Sophisticated answers often included a discussion of Balthazar's role and significance in relation to the serious issues of marriage and reputation that run throughout the play. The best answers, of course, saw that serious issues (the threat of violent, concerns about trust) underscore a fundamentally farcical situation.

Question 3: William Shakespeare *Julius Caesar*

- (a) In general, this question was not as popular as the extract question and not quite as well done either. The quality of response varied from straightforward narrative on the role in the play as a whole to a discussion of his manipulation by Cassius and the conspirators. Some candidates chose to explore his motives for killing Caesar, often contrasting his oration with that of Antony. Better answers were able to offer a detailed and perceptive argument about nobility, Brutus' inner conflicts, and his naiveté. The best candidates were able to distinguish between nobility as a social rank and nobility as a moral virtue. Very few candidates engaged with the obvious point that Antony, speaking after he has conquered his opponent, is putting a very distinct interpretation upon events that is entirely political in its motivation.
- (b) The passage where Decius persuades Caesar to come to the Senate proved fertile for discussion. Candidates engaged well with Caesar's arrogance, self-deception, and his willingness to be flattered through Decius' cunning reinterpretation of Calphurnia's dream. Less good answers tended to place the passage in context, often by offering large amounts of narrative. More could have been made of how the scene is structured as it moves from the determination of Caesar's 'I will not come' to his closing 'Give me my robe, for I will go.'

Question 4: Charlotte Keatley *My Mother Said I Never Should*

- (a) Although this text is not widely studied yet, it is clear that candidates have taken to it with enthusiasm and appreciative understanding of how Keatley tries to convey the experience of women across three generations. In dealing with the 'Wasteground' scenes, candidates showed that they were comfortable with the non-realistic and non-linear aspects of the text.
- (b) There were only a small number of answers on the passage. Candidates were willing to engage with the language in a number of ways but were less happy about issues of dramatic effect (the photos being an obvious example). The temptation for some was to describe how Jackie and Rosie had got to this situation in the first place.

Question 5: Tennessee Williams *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a) The question on nostalgia as 'the first condition of the play' proved popular but challenging for many candidates. Many took nostalgia simply to refer to an obsession with the past. Better candidates were aware that nostalgia also has something to do with looking back fondly, rose coloured spectacles fully in place. The best candidates recognised that the whole of the play is a filtering of what really happened through not merely of Tom's memory but also of his emotional experience, and with his concomitant willingness to play up his role as victim of circumstance. At their best, candidates were able to see that many of the staging devices and much of the structure of the play distance an audience from simply accepting Tom's romanticised view of his past at face value. Other answers suggested, reasonably, that music, lighting and stage devices enhance ideas of nostalgia.

- (b) The scene where Tom returns from his night out provided fruitful ground for exploration by many candidates, though it would have been good to see more reference made to the abundance of stage directions in the extract that serve to characterise Tom, Laura and their condition. Responses showed different levels of understanding, ranging from paraphrase to expert exposition of issues of illusion and reality in the passage. Weaker answers often relied on generalisations about Tom and Laura's loving concern for each other with occasional links to the details of the passage. Basic answers saw Tom simplistically as caring for Laura and hostile to Amanda. The best answers, of course, also considered whether this passage was typical of the play.

Question 6: Richard Sheridan *The Rivals*

- (a) The focus of the essays on deception and intrigue was usually soundly discussed in relation to Jack Absolute, Mrs Malaprop and Lucy. However, candidates obviously found it difficult to deal with the sheer ridiculousness of some of their behaviour - the comedy of manners elements - that lend much to the play that goes beyond intrigue and deception simply as plot devices. A number of candidates took the words 'intrigue' and 'deception' to be synonymous; they aren't. Candidates often failed to notice that they were asked to consider the 'ways' in which intrigue and deception are significant, not merely list incidences.
- (b) Candidates were able to make clear contrasts between Lydia and Julia in the passage presented, often dwelling on Lydia's excessive commitment to the gestures and vocabulary of romantic love.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/05

Shakespeare and other Pre Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

Examiners report that the general standard this session was satisfactory. Nearly all candidates followed the rubric and there were very few examples of poor time management or lack of appropriate preparation. The standard of written English was high in the vast majority of cases and Examiners are always impressed by the skill candidates show in what for many is effectively a second language.

All of the texts were offered by at least a minority of candidates, though once again *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Emma* were the most popular texts with *Wuthering Heights* and the selection from Marvell's poems proving to be popular minority options. The option A and B questions on each text were generally answered to the same standard, though inevitably one of the options on any particular text often proved to be more popular than the other. More details of these choices are included in the question specific comments below. Examiners also felt that candidates generally fared rather better on their Shakespeare text than on the **Section B** text. No obvious reason for this springs to mind though perhaps Centres spend more time on the Shakespeare text. The important point for candidates is to remember that both texts carry equal weight on the mark scheme and spending too long on the 'favourite' text nearly always means an inferior mark on the second.

There are some points, which need to be highlighted once again. A number of candidates adopted the strategy of providing a potted biography of the author in question, followed by a broad summary of the text. This is not a useful way of beginning any essay at this level. The Examiner cannot give credit for it and it merely wastes valuable time, particularly where, as in the worst examples, the first 2 sides of a 4 or 5 side essay are taken up with this introduction. Centres must remind their candidates that credit can only be given for material which is relevant to the specific task in question.

One particular point will be of use to candidates attempting the option A question. Often this task will be based on a proposition or quotation, which the candidate is invited to discuss. On this paper there was, for example, a question on the role and characterisation of Nellie Dean in *Wuthering Heights*. The important point for candidates to remember about these questions is that the selection of material is vital to the success of the essay. Candidates trying this question too often tried to write down all they knew about Nellie so that the answer was unstructured and repetitive. One simple technique to improve performance would be for the candidate to make a few notes about the key points they wish to focus their essay on and then to select relevant examples from the text to support these points. Many Examiners have noted the absence of planning and shaping of material in the recent sessions and this is often one of the factors in a disappointing result. I shall refer to specific questions on this paper where such planning would have improved nearly every essay written.

Option B questions continue to be popular and Examiners are pleased to report that many candidates do have a suitable critical vocabulary with which to tackle a critical appreciation. There are two specific points Centres need to be aware of. Firstly passages are usually taken from a key point in the text and candidates should be able to place the passage precisely in its context. On this paper, for example, the passage from *Antony and Cleopatra* was the point at which Cleopatra learns of Antony's marriage to Octavia. Many candidates seemed unaware of the fact the audience already knows about this and therefore were unable to explore the various ironies at work or comment effectively on Shakespeare's dramatic construction. A close, detailed knowledge of the text is vital if the candidates are to place passages accurately and securely in their proper context.

Secondly some candidates are too quick to try and write down everything they can remember about the passage, rather than pausing to select and shape the material to ensure that all key points are discussed. Failing to do this means that sometimes important points are overlooked or not addressed because of a shortage of time. On this paper again, the end of the passage from *David Copperfield* was the entrance of Mr Micawber into the Heep household. This was either ignored because of a lack of time or awareness (the second point) or candidates who did discuss Mr Micawber were sometimes unaware that this was the first meeting of Heep and Micawber, a vital step in Dickens's plot and structure for the whole novel (the first point). It is not surprising that candidates who have a close and detailed knowledge of the text and place the passage in its correct context and organise their thoughts so that all of the passage is discussed invariably do very well.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Antony and Cleopatra

- (a) This was a popular choice and there was a wide range of responses and strategies to the proposition. This was a question where candidates could easily fall into the trap mentioned above if they did not plan their answers carefully and select relevant material. The three modes of power were explored discretely and in terms of their interconnections. Many good answers were able to link such general points to the fall of Antony and Cleopatra, noting her political acumen in manipulating Antony and by report his Roman governor predecessors. Antony's divided self was much discussed and Enobarbus often seen as a character who makes a political decision based on sound military principles but is unable emotionally to cope with the effects of his decision. Lepidus too as a weak political figure inspired much comment. The general consensus was that so far as Antony was concerned Cleopatra's emotional power was simply too much for him and overshadowed his military power and Caesar's political power, at least as far as the audience was concerned. Weaker answers tried to fit a given interpretation into the demands of the task. These included variously 'Rome versus Egypt', 'reason versus emotion' and 'love versus politics'. The success of these strategies was determined by the candidate's ability to select relevant material. The least successful essays were those that simply relied on plot or character summaries with little or no attempt to shape the material to the task. Finally it was perhaps surprising that very few candidates thought to challenge the proposition. Those that did and were able to give evidence to show that power was not the main issue often did very well indeed.
- (b) As I have already mentioned this question demanded a detailed knowledge of the text and a precise context, if candidates were to engage with all of Shakespeare's dramatic subtleties. Many candidates found much to say about Cleopatra, her sense of drama and for some the anxious, fearful woman beneath the act. The situation was well explored by better answers, some remembering that Cleopatra had no idea what had become of Antony in Rome at this point. Candidates who focused on the language invariably did well, exploring the layers of imagery and irony to reveal perhaps Shakespeare's most ambiguous and paradoxical female character. Many sympathised with the messenger's plight, but most appreciated the humour. Better answers remembered this was a play and commented interestingly on the action and Cleopatra's performance, sometimes adding a comment about what the messenger was about to suffer. 'Bluest veins' did invite a wide variation of interpretation – 'Is Cleopatra cold?' one candidate wondered. Nearly all candidates could find something relevant to say about Cleopatra, though the weakest answers listed everything about her or simply paraphrased the passage.

Question 2

Measure for Measure

- (a) This was the more popular answer on this text. There were some very astute responses anatomising the character and role of the Duke in distinctly unflattering terms. He was seen as very much a 'fantastical' character lurking in dark corners for no commendable reasons. Few saw him uncritically as benign with a touch of divinity, intervening to right the appalling wrongs committed by Angelo; rather as the author of the woes and setting up a vulnerable deputy to carry the can. Good answers explored the ambiguity, noting the various ways in which the Duke might be interpreted, though only a few wrestled with 'fantastical' to any effect. There was general disappointment with his 'solutions' and the forced marriages at the end. Weaker answers tended to focus on the narrative, but nearly all could find relevant comments at some point. This was an option (a) answer, which benefited from the careful selection of material mentioned in the general comments. Examiners were left regretting that relatively few had attempted this text.
- (b) A number of candidates tackled this question, of which the most successful were those who read the wording of the question carefully and focused on the audience responses and the drama unfolding before them. Clear contrasts between Angelo and Escalus were drawn by some candidates, but a disappointing minority were not sure if at this point the audience was already aware of Angelo's hypocrisy vis a vis Isabella. Many answers were quite detailed in considering the discussion between Angelo and Escalus, noting the 'kindness' of Angelo in providing Claudio with a confessor – or Shakespeare's dramatic construction at work for the more perceptive interpreters. However a surprising number ignored the entry of Elbow and what an audience might be lead into thinking about justice from that point on.

Section B

Question 3

Emma

- (a) This was a very popular choice and often well done, with many fluent and detailed answers noted. The best grounded their answers in Mr Knightley's downright opposition to this relationship, seeing his concerns as fully justified in the end. Emma's motives for adopting ('befriending' was not seen as appropriate in these answers) Harriet were seen as deeply flawed, her tone patronising throughout, her attempts to run Harriet's life potentially catastrophic. No truck here with talk of 'good intentions'. While Emma was seen as benefiting from this phase of her life since she could be said to have learnt from it, there was precious little for Harriet to be grateful for. Some perceptive answers distinguished between Emma's view and the author's view, commenting well on the tone and the language of this relationship, which we are told by Austen 'must sink'. Some answers remembered Emma's genuine late appreciation of Mr Martin. Below this level was much solid discussion of the course of the relationship, its accidents and near-accidents, followed by reflections that it turned out all right in the end. Examiners were surprised to find a number of inaccuracies in a sizeable minority of answers – Harriet's potential suitors from Emma's perspective including Mr Knightley and Mr Woodhouse, for example.
- (b) This was a minority choice. Some responses were limited by failing to give a precise context once again. Better answers saw the passage as permeated by Austen's characteristic irony, the fussing over social nuances as strikingly relevant today. Interestingly, many saw the repeated references to Miss Fairfax as part of Frank's duplicity throughout the novel, his motives in pressing the dance the desire to be with Jane Fairfax at any cost. There was also some astute comment on Mr Woodhouse's percipience in detecting Frank's flawed character at this comparatively early stage. Even Mr Knightley hadn't quite realised that yet. Those who weren't able to explore the irony still had plenty to say about the characters on show here, most at least noticing some of the humour – often through Mr Woodhouse. Others were outraged by the trivial life these 'upper class' people lead. Telling the surrounding narrative and thus spending too little time on the actual passage distracted weaker answers.

Question 4

Wuthering Heights

- (a) This was much more popular in this session. Nellie was variously seen as narrator, mother-figure, architect of much that happens and for some a rather malign influence, who never took to Heathcliff from the start. The best answers saw her as a key part of the construct and Bronte's narrative structures and acknowledged the debate as to Nellie's reliability as a narrator. From weaker candidates there was much narrative and descriptive writing, but most achieved at least basic adequacy. Again the ability to select relevant material was essential and too many piled example on example of Nellie as a surrogate mother for various Lintons and Earnshaws and consequently had too little time to consider other equally important issues.
- (b) Nearly all responses seemed to recognise Bronte's use of 'pathetic fallacy' if not the term itself. There were shrewd comments about Nellie's role here and how she helped to shape Cathy's responses. Some candidates looked at Bronte's style and her use of dialogue and description, noticing how the accuracy of Nellie's account leads to suspicions about its accuracy. Some perceptive candidates saw the links to Cathy's mother and her relationship with Nellie. Most were aware of the ill health of Cathy's father, but surprisingly few remembered that Cathy had been recently forbidden to see Linton. Nearly all noted Catherine's sadness, her thoughts about death and the sense of her future as a dreary one, leading on to general comment on the prevalence of doom and death in the novel as a whole. With weaker answers there were gestures towards the passage but rather too little close exploration of it and too much narrative about Nellie, Cathy and the novel in general.

Question 5

The Knight's Tale

- (a) This was still very much a minority choice, but candidates who had studied the text closely accepted this proposition with enthusiasm and Examiners reported some excellent work, seeing the 'love and loyalty' conflict not just in Palamon and Arcite, but also in all parts of the chivalric world, which Chaucer creates, including the gods above. Weaker answers inevitably concentrated on the story of the rivalry in love, but nearly all were at least adequate in the overall performance.
- (b) There were very few takers for this question but some at least noticed the narrator's intervention and the irony of Emily's secret prayer. Her lack of interest in either aspiring young knight was generally spotted, as was her role as a pawn in a game, prompting some approaches that focused on the subjugation of women in a patriarchal society. Inevitably in this context there was some comment of the 'things haven't changed that much' variety.

Question 6

David Copperfield

There were a number of responses to this text. Option (a) was popular though most candidates concentrated on Steerforth's character and had little to say on his role, which was a limiting factor. Perceptive answers linked his spoiled childhood to his later cruel and selfish treatment of women. Young David's immaturities in his admiration of Steerforth and Agnes's perception in seeing his malign influence were sensibly commented on. Option (b) was less popular, but many were able to see the combination of humorous and sinister description, which Dickens uses to develop our response to the Heeps. Sadly few recognised the importance of the entrance of Micawber to the structure of the novel as a whole, despite the prompt in the question.

Question 7

The Alchemist

This was very much a minority choice. Those who tackled (a) invariably accepted the proposition and found evidence of humour in almost every line of the play. More discriminating answers were able to see the different types of comedy employed by Jonson and a few answers explored the way he uses comedy to achieve his purposes. The (b) option was rarely seen and was quite poorly done, often limited to an inaccurate paraphrase.

Question 8

Marvell Selected Poems

This text was a significant minority choice and often very well done. Many answers were of a generally high quality. There were some sophisticated analyses of religious ideas and images in the poet's work and not only in that which is explicitly religious in its concern. Of course, both 'Dialogue' poems were explored in some depth, but so also were *The Fair Singer*, *The Definition of Love*, *To His Coy Mistress*, *The Coronet*, *The Nymph Complaining...*, *The Garden*, *On a Drop of Dew*, *Bermudas* and, not least perhaps, the poem provided on the paper. Candidates saw how Marvell's beliefs informed all his writing and were able to find interesting echoes in language and imagery to support their views from across the selection. Option (b) was less popular and generally not so well done, often because candidates were drawn into general discussion about Marvell's poems to the detriment of the close analysis of the poem in front of them. Those that did focus on the poem found much to admire in Marvell's language and musings, which were variously interpreted. Some answers were distracted by trying to develop the historical and biographical contexts and had too little time to explore the poem.

Question 9

Rossetti Selected Poems

This was not a popular choice but Examiners did report some good work, showing a close knowledge of the poems and some understanding of her themes and subjects. Most accepted the proposition, but some were able to discriminate the kind of love the poet was interested in. Option (b) was not often seen, but candidates did recognise the context and various interpretations were offered, from feminism to wistful dejection. The ability to explore Rossetti's language and imagery of course determined the success of whatever reading was offered.

Question 10

Gulliver's Travels

This was very much a minority choice. Candidates who tackled (a) did show a competent awareness of all four of the books. This was occasionally linked to a consideration of Swift's satirical intentions, though at times, particularly in the option (b) answers, Swift's created world was simply baffling and some candidates failed to grasp the distance between the author and the narrator.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/06
20TH Century Texts

General comments.

The degree of difficulty in the questions reflected the difficulty of the texts and was comparable with previous years. Few Centres seemed to have prepared the new texts on the syllabus: *Endgame*, Les Murray and *Mrs Dalloway* (Questions 2, 3, and 8), though with the exception of Murray, these questions produced a good range of answers. Candidates offering the (b) question on poetry texts struggled with the term “appreciation” and tended to deal with the writers solely in terms of theme and meaning. There was a similar reluctance to comment on the “effects of the writing” in the (b) questions on novels. On the other hand, candidates offering the (b) question on drama texts are beginning to show more competence and confidence in writing about dramatic effect and audience response.

The overall performance of candidates was similar to other years though there seemed to be fewer in the lowest bands because very few candidates showed a significant lack of knowledge of the texts or had serious problems in expressing themselves in English. There was less evidence of reliance on the experience of past papers, though some candidates had obviously learned opening paragraphs or biographical material on Rhys, Albee, Pinter and Narayan, which they were not always able to make relevant to the question. Generally speaking however, there was less evidence of extraneous critical theory being presented. There is however a tendency to reproduce quotations by writers, particularly Pinter and Beckett, without actually integrating them into the argument and commenting on their significance. Stronger candidates discussed the terms and implications of the questions in their introductions, selected and organised material effectively to structure a line of argument, and commented in detail on quotations to show how the writers created meaning and specific effects through choice of language and sentence structure. Weaker candidates tended to deal with questions on the basis of theme and character, used too much narrative summary, particularly when sketching in the context for the (b) questions on the novel and drama texts and produced shorter second answers.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Edward Albee: *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?* proved to be a popular text with candidates opting for (a) and (b) in equal numbers though (a) was more successful across the ability band.

- (a) Good answers to (a) showed how Albee uses Nick and Honey in the context of the American Dream, showing the contrast between their façade as the perfect, young, aspiring couple and the reality as it emerges in the course of the play; their function as a catalyst in furthering our understanding of George and Martha; their role as an audience and in the denouement. They structured their responses, comparing and contrasting the two relationships and identified specific moments of dramatic significance to evaluate the dramatic effect. Interestingly, even good candidates struggled to explore the significance of the contrast between Nick the biologist and George the historian. Weaker candidates tended to describe the characters, focussing on their contribution to “meaning” in a general way with little attempt at a discussion of the “dramatic effect.”

- (b) Good answers focused on the passage, understood the use of the soliloquy and picked up on Martha's capacity for self-dramatisation, looking in detail at her attitudes towards herself, her feelings for George and her father. By looking at precise words they examined her swift changes of mood, the emphasis on "abandoned", "crying", picking out words and details which showed linkage with our previous view of Martha and hints for change in the future. The thematic implications of "crazy" were mentioned, plus Nick's attitude to Honey, with some candidates commenting on Martha's sense of humour and audience response. Most good answers analysed the "ice box" image but few examined the word play of "up the spout" and her responses to Nick. Weaker candidates ignored the melodramatic nature of the extract, and did not comment on the dramatic effects, but used the passage as a prompt for summary of the whole play. They tended to take Nick too literally and presented Martha as mad or gave some very moralistic answers on the dangers of drink.

Question 2

Although only a few Centres chose Beckett the general quality of answers was good, often showing an impressively detailed knowledge of the play itself with just enough underpinning knowledge of the Theatre of the Absurd to provide a context and explanation of Beckett's methods and concerns.

- (a) Good candidates showed that they had deconstructed and responded to different aspects of the question. They were able to demonstrate how Beckett juxtaposes misery and humour. As one candidate put it: "Humour is not to alleviate horror and sadness but to emphasise the absurdity of the human condition." They were able to pinpoint key moments in the play when a character laughs at misery or the audience laughs at an absurd situation, using precise references. They were aware of Beckett's techniques: his use of joke (the tailor), of slapstick (Clov the clown and the ladder) with the flea powder episode, of pairing (Hamm cannot stand, Clov cannot sit) the use of the dustbins and the dog, verbal wit and irony. Weaker candidates had no trouble with "unhappiness" but struggled to analyse the comedy and the ambivalence of audience response.
- (b) This was the more popular choice, with most candidates understanding the mutually dependent, sadistic nature of the master/servant relationship between Hamm and Clov and the threat to end it by leaving. The question was often less well done because candidates did not analyse the passage in enough detail, struggled to articulate the dramatic effect, and ignored the humour. Many discussed the significance of withholding the kiss, the ambiguity of Clov's identification with the dog in "Then I'll leave you", the question of Clov being Hamm's son and Clov's appearance at the whistle. Good candidates moreover, used the passage to explore how characters are presented and the dramatic effects generated, focussing for example on the use of repetition of "Is it not time for my pain-killer?", the expectation generated by the reply and the thematic significance and impact on the audience of "There's no more pain killer." Good candidates also examined the whole of Hamm's monologue, looking at his capacity for self-dramatisation and the significance of very particular motifs and phrases, here and elsewhere in the play: the "Me to play" chess motif, the use of the handkerchief, the reiteration of the word "end", story telling, and the rat. Many noted the biblical echoes in the language but few were able to explain the subversive effect on the idea of "love", how this contributed to the "violence" in the stage directions and how an audience would respond. Still fewer were prepared to comment on the effects generated by the hesitation, pauses and the fragmented sentence structure at particular moments in Hamm's speech or the verbal opposition and witty compression in the exchanges between Clov and Hamm. Weaker candidates often used the passage as a trigger to trot out prepared answers on the fact that there was "no cure" for the human condition.

Question 3

Very few candidates chose to answer on Les Murray's *Selected Poems* with (b) proving to be the most popular option.

- (a) There were too few responses to the question to make a general comment on performance appropriate. A good candidate would have briefly put the theme of Murray's "love of the land" and its "spiritual value" into the context of Murray's concerns in order to express an opinion on its relative importance. The essay would then focus on some specific poems, exploring Murray's treatment of the theme, the selection and accumulation of detail, the way Murray exploits diction, imagery, sound, sentence structure, rhythm, form and structure to express his ideas.

- (b) Very few candidates considered the “ways” Murray explores the memories of childhood – the way memories are triggered and flow, the use of the senses, the shifting point of view of a four-year-old’s perception of the town, coal, family and the adult poet’s. Most candidates concentrated on trying to give a reading of the poem, to work out what was being described and what it meant using paraphrase. Disconcertingly there was little evidence of previous study or of an understanding that writing a “critical appreciation” means writing an analysis of how effectively Murray expresses himself using a range of stylistic features.

Question 4

The Guide was a very popular choice with most candidates showing a very detailed knowledge of the text. The majority of candidates opted for **Question (a)** though both questions elicited a good range of answers.

- (a) There were good opportunities for a variety of approaches from full accounts of Raju’s development at the level character and plot, to metaphysical discussions on the nature of sin or the Hindu philosophy of sainthood. Good candidates showed a critical understanding of Narayan’s narrative technique and had a range of detailed references and quotations available to explore the moral ambiguities, complexities and shades of grey in the key episodes: Raju as tourist guide, his relationship with Rosie and his mother, the forgery and prison, his assumption of the role of swami and the final fast, though the treatment of the latter was sometimes rather perfunctory. Few candidates had the courage to start with Raju’s ambivalence to the villagers and the fast and explore the issue of transcendence, though some were able to argue that just as Raju’s lack of any firm core of personal values makes it easy for him to drift into sin, it also allows him to mutate into the self-transcendence associated with saintliness. Weaker candidates relied on narrative summary, tended to be simplistic in their assessment of Raju, censorious of the sin of adultery and crime of forgery and assertive of transcendence at the end.
- (b) Most candidates showed a good understanding of the mutual self-interest in the relationship between Raju and Rosie, many of them noting significant details from the passage like Raju’s need to keep Rosie interested, his fear of losing her back to Marco, the rare but calculated honesty with which Raju confesses his ignorance of the dance, and the important comparison between Rosie’s passion for her art and Raju’s passion for Rosie. Good candidates, in using evidence from the passage to support their descriptions of the relationship also focused on the “effects of the writing,” commenting for example on how his detailed quotations of her explanations of technical terms like *pallavi*, the rhythm generated by the simple sentence structure of her speech, and her commanding “Move off that chair” demonstrate her passion for the dance, her development as a strong woman and Raju’s thrilled response. Some candidates noted the irony in “It is impossible for me to bear this burden of love you have cast on me.” Most were able to show the significance of the passage by making appropriate links forward, with some suggesting that the end of the extract foreshadowed Raju’s capacity for transcendence. Weaker candidates however, gave a summarised account of the relationship, were simplistic in their judgement of it or rhapsodic in their description of Raju’s and Rosie’s true love.

Question 5

The Caretaker was a very popular text and both options elicited answers across the range. There was some evidence of pre-prepared material, with candidates struggling to show a proper understanding of ideas on the Theatre of the Absurd which takes into account the comedy as well as the existential angst. However, many showed some awareness of Pinter’s techniques of silences, pauses, non sequiturs, repetitions, questions not answered and monologues and the best candidates were able to analyse the dramatic effects in terms of audience response as well as character or theme.

- (a) There was some perceptive writing on the signs, sources and consequences of the breakdown in communication in the play. The best answers meticulously related Pinter’s concern with communication to themes such as identity, isolation and illusion and looked at specific examples where meanings could be interpreted in different ways. In less ambitious answers these other themes were discussed separately, to show that communication was not Pinter’s only concern. Some showed awareness that the characters often communicated their feelings or motivations very well to the audience – in Mick’s aggressive brow-beating of Davies for example – and the difficulty sometimes lay in the interaction, a lack of awareness, a refusal to listen or respond.

- (b) The passage offered many opportunities to discuss how its dramatic effects involve resonances with earlier parts of the play: Aston still fiddling with the plug, Davies characteristically resorting to negotiation rather than apology, his attempts to find a way forward using the shed, the shoes, the papers at Sidcup and the hint that he too has perhaps been in a mental asylum. The change in Aston's behaviour attracted thoughtful comment as did the circular, unresolved nature of the ending though one saw the triumph of Aston and Mick as the victory of family over the outsider, "Anyway, that's my brother's bed" in the post-war era of fear and insecurity. The best candidates put the development of characters and themes into the framework of the Theatre of the Absurd, looked closely at the language of the passage, the negativity in Aston's responses which together with his body language suggests strength, the use of rhetorical questions and fragmentation in Davies speech at the end, and discussed the ambivalence of audience response to Davies. Weaker candidates tended to treat the characters as real, be rather literal and offer psychological analyses with much moral preaching on the evils of ingratitude and little sense of absurdity.

Question 6

Both questions on *The Wide Sargasso Sea* proved to be very popular options for candidates.

- (a) Most candidates could describe how Christophine acts as a support and mother figure to Antoinette. More developed responses tended also to see her self-reliance as providing an alternative model to Annette and Antoinette's dependence on men and to probe her significance as a representative of traditional beliefs and practices: the "other" so far as Rochester is concerned, but something integral to Antoinette's sense of her own identity. Degrees of competence lay in the depth of textual reference and the breadth of examination of each role. The strongest candidates were aware of the limitations of Christophine's power in relation to Rochester, knew the pivotal scene with him and her arguments in some detail and the reasons for her ultimate failure. Weaker candidates wrote very general accounts, often spending more time or having more detail available on Christophine's role in Antoinette's childhood.
- (b) There were some very good responses with even weaker candidates showing a general understanding of the contrast between the passage and the relationship as it would develop. They were keen to show how attitudes to the setting, Antoinette's beauty, the issue of England being "like a dream" and the symbolic use of the moth might "foreshadow" subsequent events. The key performance indicator here was whether in giving a sensitive reading of the extract, candidates could discuss the effects of the writing. For example most noted the presence of Amélie, but few commented on the effect of the single word sentence "Uselessly". The best answers discussed the effect of Rochester's language in presenting himself as well as the scene, noting the sensuous nature of the language in the descriptions of Antoinette's beauty, the scent of the flowers, the various descriptions of the candle light and the gentleness with which Rochester rescues the moth. The weakest candidates used the passage as a trigger to write an account of the relationship.

Question 7

This was a popular text and while there is a danger that some candidates tend to treat the poems as historical/sociological documents and limit their response to theme and a discussion of the issues of colonialism, slavery, cultural and personal identity, more candidates seem to be developing confidence in writing about the quality of Walcott's expression. Both options required discussion of **how** Walcott explores his subject matter.

- (a) Good candidates used the introduction to deconstruct the question and explain not just Walcott's historical and personal interest in the past but also to consider how he uses a concrete starting point like a building, a natural scene, an event or personal experience, to explore the themes and how his choice of language reveals his shifting attitudes and emotional responses to himself and the islands. Weaker candidates found it difficult to balance the historical and personal, often discussing ideas about slavery, alienation and corruption without reference to any poems in detail, or writing in a general way about Walcott's biography and his role as poet.

- (b) Most candidates understood the central theme of *Homecoming* and the feelings of rejection, alienation and anger experienced by the poet. The difference between the strong and weaker candidates was in their ability to analyse imagery, language and other poetic techniques to show how Walcott expresses his ideas and feelings and to follow his line of thought right through to the end. There were some very perceptive close readings of the poem. Though candidates found it difficult to comment on the classical references at the beginning most understood the implications of the “borrowed ancestors”, and many noted the images of battle death and decay on the beach, commented on the simile used to describe the children swarming, the biblical references, the effect of “trudge” and “the politician’s/ignorant, sweet smile,” often using these images to make thematic and stylistic parallels with other poems. Weaker candidates tended to identify the theme and comment on a few images without really being able to convince the Examiners that they understood the poem as a whole, or used the poem as a lift-off for a more general essay on Walcott’s ideas of himself as a poet or his attitudes to the islands.

Question 8

This proved to be an accessible text, the differentiating performance indicators for both options being the candidates’ ability to plan and organise their answers in response to the questions and to select appropriate references and quotations for close analysis.

- (a) Candidates knew that Clarissa approved of Smith’s action, quoting “Death was a defiance” and many understood his role as a contrast and link with her. The strongest candidates kept the focus on Smith, even while comparing Smith with Mrs Dalloway in terms of class, of being trapped in the past, of a confused search for meaning, and a love of nature and beauty but an ambivalence towards personal relationships. They looked at the nature of his suicide, the role he played in Woolf’s portrayal of the horrors of shell shock, the feelings of guilt at surviving, and anger at the medical approach to mental illness at the time. Weaker candidates wrote very generally, had some simplistic views on mental illness and sometimes switched the focus to write an essay on Mrs Dalloway.
- (b) Candidates tended to be more comfortable describing the picture of a false, superficial society governed by position and etiquette, than looking at the effects of the writing. Stronger candidates understood Clarissa’s need to be part of that society, her self-conscious awareness of her own behaviour, Peter’s disapproval and why she felt her party “mattered”. Candidates noted but were not really able to discuss the effect and significance of the extended description of Mrs Barnett’s role and manner in dealing with the ladies because there was a reluctance to look at the tone generated by the sentence structure and particular words such as “though very unassuming did shake hands”, “And they could not help feeling.....some little privilege in the matter of brush and comb was awarded them....” Few candidates were able to explore the style of writing as an indication of Clarissa’s state of mind, the strong language used for example, to suggest her turbulent feelings about herself, her party, Peter Walsh and Ellie Henderson. Some weaker candidates used narrative summary to explain the significance of the party and the relationship between Clarissa and Peter.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/07

Comment and Appreciation

General comments

There was some thoughtful and interesting work this session; candidates seemed generally to find all three questions very accessible, and there was considerably more attempt to adopt a properly critical approach to the passages and poems, and much less of the rather mechanical and uncritical listing of literary devices than has been the case in some recent sessions. Details follow below, but in broad terms candidates seemed considerably more confident in their approach to writing in all three genres, particularly the poetry and drama, and Examiners were often very struck by the freshness and individuality of their responses. There was an unusually equal balance between the questions, with none being significantly more popular than the others.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This extract from Anita Desai's short story clearly attracted many candidates and led to some thoughtful and quite strikingly fresh reactions. Responses to the two characters were interesting, too – many felt confident that David is the "scholar", perhaps because of his quieter and more introverted reactions to the journey's hardships (though it is he who notes the behaviour of the other travellers on the bus), while Pat must be the "gypsy", because of her free and uninhibited relief when the climate cools at the end of the extract. Such identification is of course not strictly necessary or relevant, but it did help some candidates to decide what sorts of temperaments were being drawn by Desai. Most spent a good deal of time, as she does, on the first paragraph, and in particular the vivid descriptions of the two main characters, contrasting with the more relaxed and carefree attitudes of the Indian travellers, especially the woman "jovially" throwing peanut shells into David's lap – the humour here, strikingly different from David and Pat's stunned silence, was noted by many. There is ample imagery both in this paragraph and in the later shorter ones, and candidates were able to spend a good deal of time, and often a good deal of critical insight, into Desai's creation of mood and character – for example in the fact that the rocks towards the end of the passage are described as "black rocks" by the resigned and exhausted David, and as "gleaming rocks" by the now revived Pat. Pat's awareness of the cool and colourful surroundings in the final paragraph were discussed or at least noted by most candidates, too.

There were of course some answers that relied too much upon simple paraphrase or narration, with little or occasionally no critical detail at all, but these were relatively few. There were some too that suggested that the main thrust of the passage was to draw a contrast between the developed world (the United States, where Pat and David live) and the developing world of India, as evidenced by the lively and relaxed local people compared with the withdrawn and inward feelings of both Americans. This may be part of Desai's intentions, but it is perhaps reading too much into the passage.

Question 2

There was some surprisingly good writing here – surprising, because poetry has often in past sessions led to some rather dull and impersonally mechanical responses; most answers this session, whatever else their weaknesses might have been, were neither dull nor mechanical. Perhaps because of the nature of the two poems, or hopefully because Centres and therefore candidates are becoming more confident in approaching unseen poems, there was a considerably greater sense of critical awareness, much less simple listing and/or identifying of poetic techniques for their own sake, and a good amount of often quite personal and thoughtfully argued response to the two writers. Meehan's poem was rightly seen by most as a quieter and more reflective poem than Cummings's – as one candidate put it, "*the first seems to be an appreciation whereas the second seems to be a celebration*", surely a nice and apt way to contrast them. Perhaps unexpectedly, because it is not an immediately "easy" poem, the reaction to Cummings was rather more vigorous and critically astute, with almost all candidates noting the sheer ebullience in his tone and in his celebration of God's power, and even those who spent time establishing that this is a sonnet often did so as a means of exploring how the poet used the confines of this poetic form as a way of controlling his otherwise uncontrollable excitement. Some phrases used by some candidates were truly insightful – the poem was described as "*a celebratory shout*", as "*a leap of mad exuberance*", using "*words that prance off the page*". Almost all commented upon the humility of the lower case "i" as compared with the upper case "You God", and there were some very perceptive comments on the bracketed sections. Incidentally, although a sonnet, these sections can justly be called stanzas, but not paragraphs.

Meehan's poem certainly also led to some sensitive appreciation, but perhaps because it is on the surface at least so much less joyful candidates' responses tended to be similarly subdued – though one did admit that there is a sense of "*controlled exuberance*" in it! Many answers found it ironic that the poet seems to *want* to believe but cannot, and noted her frequent use of words that have religious connotations, even in quite a number of cases seeing a link between "a promise" in line 8 and the biblical story of Noah and God's promise to him after the great flood. One or two were quite severely critical of the poem in comparison with the second; Meehan, it was said by one candidate "*takes refuge in cliché*" (a reference to "and thank my stars" in line 15), and even that the poem itself is "*disappointingly complacent*", a view thankfully not shared by most.

Question 3

Another well managed piece of writing, which clearly appealed to candidates on a variety of levels, often quite personal and coming perhaps from individual family circumstances, but more often from a simple human response to two people caught in a conflict of guilt, love and a wish for life to return to how it was and how they both want it to be. While not really part of a critical appreciation exercise, most suggested, or quite frequently firmly stated, a sense of personal sympathy with one of the characters – quite often Proctor himself, despite his having committed adultery, rather than Elizabeth, who was often seen as cold and unfeeling. Most candidates sensibly adopted a chronological approach to the extract, noting how the dialogue and stage directions lead to an understanding of what is happening below as well as on the surface. Proctor's hesitant entry was seen by most as the first indication of his insecurity, and his salting of the stew as a means of giving him a way to praise his wife's cooking – though a number interestingly took this as a sign of his deceitful nature as well, especially when he later tells Elizabeth how well seasoned the stew is, and perhaps even of proof that he could never be truly honest with her again; interestingly, too, a few candidates seriously suggested that at least one of the reasons for his unfaithfulness to Elizabeth was his dislike of her cooking skills, but this does seem to be placing an improbably heavy meaning on a simple action. The short and awkward conversation that ensues between the two was invariably noted, suggesting an uncertainty about how each is reacting, and an unwillingness to hurt further (Proctor) or to be hurt again (Elizabeth); as one candidate puts it, the extract is full of the "*fragmented attempts of each person to reach the other*". The slight humour of the rabbit's entry into the kitchen, and of the well-seasoned stew, was commented on by most, and again many saw Elizabeth's pain at having to kill and skin the rabbit as evidence of her soft and gentle nature (though a few did use this to suggest a hardness of character). The stage directions, particularly at the end of the extract, were well managed by most – a physical indication of the separation and difficulty faced by husband and wife, and of course the kiss which Elizabeth simply "receives" was noted by almost all candidates (though the "disappointment" is Proctor's, not hers). More confident candidates discussed the fact that this scene takes place in early spring – a metaphorical representation of the ending of the winter of the marriage, with hopes of new warmth and growth if Elizabeth can forgive her husband, with the flowers again being seen as suggestive of this new

growth. Perhaps the candidate who wrote that at the close "*a delicate peace is maintained*" is correct.

What was missing in very many answers, sadly, was any clear or explicit suggestion that there was a writer behind all these ideas. Miller was noticeably absent from very many answers, rather curiously in a way that Desai, Meehan and Cummings were not; perhaps the fact that drama creates "real" people makes candidates forget that they are still fictional creations? Whatever the cause, it really is important that the best answers must show an understanding that the writing has not just happened spontaneously- the characters in the play are not real and living persons. By focusing upon the stage directions, some candidates showed an implicit understanding of this, but few were as explicit as they should have been.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/08

Coursework

General comments

There was some very good work in this summer's submission of Coursework; it is increasingly clear that Centres have become confident in the approach that is expected of their candidates, and of the standards of the syllabus.

The syllabus allows almost complete freedom with regard to the choice of texts – the only stipulations remain that they must be from two different genres, they must be complete works, originally written in English, and not taken from any of the set text lists within the syllabus. Some examples are given below of texts and tasks that were used this summer, and it will be seen immediately that while there are certainly more “conventional” or canonical texts than not the range is nonetheless quite wide. A word will be said separately about poetry, but the overall picture is that Centres chose wisely and appropriately in almost every case.

Some Centres will ask each candidate to write on the same task, while others will offer a choice, or even perhaps ask candidates to define their own approach. Each method is completely acceptable, and will obviously depend upon the interests and skills of each individual teacher, together with the confidence of his or her candidates. What is most helpful, however, whatever the approach taken, is that candidates are encouraged to think personally and individually as far as possible, rather than allowing or encouraging them to follow too closely what they are taught as a group. Personal and thoughtfully argued response will always be rewarded, provided of course that it is sensibly presented and supported, while heavily taught responses may be less convincing because not so personally felt by their writers, and perhaps over-reliant upon ideas not wholly understood by the candidate(s) themselves.

This is certainly not to say that there should be no teaching in preparation for Coursework! Candidates will almost certainly want a lot of support and guidance, and to discuss their work as it is planned and drafted, and in almost every instance they will want, and indeed need, to have their teachers' reactions and advice. However, what is finally written and submitted is likely to be much more convincing and successful if it is what the candidate wants to say, rather than simply what he or she has been advised to say. The word “personal” appears in the marking criteria for the top two bands, and for the top band work should be “often *freshly* personal”.

Drafting has been mentioned, and it will be a very unusual candidate indeed who does not prepare more than one preliminary draft of his or her work: timed examination answers are by their nature first-draft responses, but Coursework offers every opportunity for planning, thinking, drafting, re-drafting, discussion, polishing, and finally the presentation of a “perfect” and carefully refined essay. Moderators must therefore expect very few actual errors in spelling and punctuation, and few in syntax – almost all Coursework now is word-processed, so spellchecking should be an essential part of the process, and because there is considerably more time to prepare work there should be a greater confidence and security in the structuring and development of arguments, combined with at least reasonably full quotation and/or textual reference, and perhaps also some reference to published critical material, properly footnoted and acknowledged.

Having said all this, however, it really is important that Moderators can be confident that what they see is not just a “fair copy” of work that has been marked and corrected by a teacher; discussion of work in progress should be general rather than specific, and certainly there should be no detailed teacher-input. Comments and annotations by teachers on the finally submitted essays should make this clear – a completely untouched Coursework essay will always make a Moderator wonder how much correcting has already been undertaken.

There should also be summative comments on the cover-sheet of each folder of work; such comments are most valuable when they relate clearly and explicitly to the marking criteria, so that the Moderator can see fully how and where marks have been awarded. Most Centres are very good at doing this, but there remain

a few where summative comments either do not exist or are too general and unspecific to be of real help to either the Moderator or the candidate.

Mention was made above of poetry. If a body of poems is used as a text, then there really does need to be clear evidence that the candidate has studied a substantial number, in line with the number set for study in other Papers in the syllabus. An essay making reference to only two or three may be very thoughtful, or critically perceptive, but if it is restricted to these few only it cannot really be seen as an essay on the work of the poet, but simply on just a handful of discrete poems. Candidates should make detailed use of perhaps four or five poems, but should also show at least brief or passing knowledge of another four or five, linking the “main” poems with the others as part of an overall argument.

It is always good, too, to see candidates writing about *how* a poem is written – and by that is meant going beyond simply paraphrase and general comment. Because poetry has its own genre-characteristics, it is particularly disappointing when a candidate fails entirely to even mention rhyme or rhythm, verse-form or line lengths, and the impact that these features have upon a reader’s understanding and response to what is written. It is the same in drama, of course, where candidates who discuss, however briefly, some aspects of writer’s theatrical techniques and their effects will almost invariably do better than those who see a play simply as a kind of strange novel!

Length of essays proved to be a surprisingly common concern this summer. The syllabus makes it clear that folders should be at least 2000 words, but no more than 3000; the former was never a problem, but more candidates than usual this session wrote beyond 3000 words, and this is not acceptable. In the same way that all candidates in a timed examination must end at the same time and have no extra leeway, so all doing Coursework must remain within the stipulated limit, otherwise inequality must arise. There really is no excuse for over-length, and where a candidate submits work to be marked within a Centre, the teacher(s) concerned should return it to him or her for pruning and editing before accepting it; if time does not allow for this, then some account should be taken of its over-length when marking, and a note made to this effect in the summative comment.

There have been criticisms in what is written above, but this Report must end with a reiteration of the praise that it opened with; work was good, standards were high, and Centre administration and marking were helpful. All concerned, candidates and teachers alike, must be thanked, genuinely and warmly, for a very good job, very well done.

Some texts and tasks used by candidate:

PROSE

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| <i>Dracula</i> | A particularly disturbing quality of the threat to the Victorian value system, presented in the novel, is “the perversion of matrimony and the challenge to procreation”. Discuss this comment on the novel. |
| <i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> | Show how Crane uses language to show the maturation of Henry’s character. |
| <i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i> | Explore how Spark portrays Miss Jean Brodie in the novel. |
| <i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> | How effective is this as a dystopian novel? |
| <i>Brighton Rock</i> | “Even though Ida Arnold is rarely present in <i>Brighton Rock</i> her character is central to the novel.” Discuss how, and with what effects, Greene uses this character. |

DRAMA

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| <i>The Crucible</i> | How does Miller dramatise the effects of oppression on the people of Salem? |
| <i>The Crucible</i> | Does Miller portray John Proctor as a hero or as a fool? |
| <i>Waiting for Godot</i> | “There is nothing theatrical about this play.” How far do you agree that <i>Waiting for Godot</i> has no merits as a piece of drama? |
| <i>Twelfth Night</i> | Explore the theme of disguise in the play. |

POETRY

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| <i>Confronting Love</i> | How is love presented in these modern Indian love poems? |
| <i>Poems of T S Eliot</i> | Explore the theme of “the quest” in Eliot’s poetry. |

Poems of T S Eliot

Poems of Robert Frost

Poems of Seamus Heaney

How are women portrayed in Eliot's poetry?

Discuss the importance of temptation and choice in Frost's poetry.

Discuss the ways in which Heaney writes about childhood.