

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 9695/03**  
**Poetry and Prose**

## General comments

On the whole, candidates in this session showed themselves well-prepared for the examination, demonstrating good textual knowledge and an appreciation of the authors' techniques, though there was in some cases an over-reliance on the biographical background of authors. This was particularly evident in answers on Keats' poetry, of which there was a great number. The other very popular text was Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, though Examiners also saw a large number of answers on *Touched with Fire*, *The Mill on the Floss* and the Katherine Mansfield short stories.

Biographical material often featured heavily in answers on Keats, but was also evident in answers on Mansfield, Ngugi and Shakespeare (Sonnet 116). A knowledge of the context of the writing can often be very valuable in developing a candidate's interpretation and can be fruitful in gaining insights and understanding. In answers to exam questions, however, such material needs to be used with care. It is successful when used to illustrate particular points or develop connections. It is not, however, a substitute for detailed textual knowledge, discussion of the set text, or an answer to the question set. In a worryingly large number of answers, candidates discussed author biographies at the expense of the texts themselves, which led to very partial address to the question.

Successful answers demonstrate knowledge of the text, and of context where appropriate, and select from that knowledge precisely to answer the specific question on the examination paper. In the passage-based questions, successful candidates analyse the language and form of the extract on the paper in considerable detail, using the question to guide their focus.

## Comments on specific questions

### 1. John Keats: *Selected Poems*

- (a) This was the main question where the use of biographical material was problematic, as many candidates showed a far better knowledge of the vicissitudes of Keats' life than they did of Keats' poetry. However, many candidates were able to make reference to Keats' life very productively, tracing his concerns through well-chosen poems, such as 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', 'To Melancholy', etc. Pleasingly, while candidates were able to illustrate Keats' presentation of sorrow, loss of love and the frailty of human existence in these poems, most were also able to offer some evaluation, noting that this is not a complete summary of Keats' work. The celebration of the season in 'To Autumn' and the union of the lovers on 'The Eve of St Agnes' were frequently cited to provide a contrast with misery and heartbreak.
- (b) 'On Seeing the Elgin Marbles' proved to be quite a challenging poem for candidates, some of whom chose it despite an apparent unfamiliarity with it. Successful answers focused clearly on the sense of mortality in the poem, beginning with the opening lines and examining the simile of the "sick eagle", comparing this with the grandeur of the Marbles which have survived, but are subject to, the ravages of "old time". Many candidates made interesting links with 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', while others connected the poem with Keats' ambition of artistic immortality, while a number were able to make perceptive comments on Keats' use of the sonnet form.

2. *Touched with Fire*: ed. Hydes

- (a) Candidates ranged very widely in their choices of poems for this question, though among the most frequently used were 'The Wild Swans at Coole', 'Ozymandias', 'The Early Purges', 'The Fallen Birdman' and 'The Pond'. In some cases, candidates were not fully successful because they seemed to be adapting pre-prepared answers roughly to fit the question. Successful candidates confidently thought again about their poems to consider explicitly how they communicated a sense of a 'particular moment'. In these answers, Examiners were often pleased to note that candidates were not only able to discuss language and imagery capably, but often were able to blend thoughtful comments on features of syntax and metre into their arguments, looking at how the poets were shaping the 'particular moment' for the reader. Some candidates managed to look at poems entirely afresh, creating thoughtful insights.
- (b) Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 116' was a popular choice and elicited some good responses. Even less confident candidates were often able to note the way Shakespeare uses the structure of the sonnet to develop his ideas about love. There was some misunderstanding ('wandering bark' was attributed to a dog by some candidates) but most saw an echo of the Christian marriage service in the language. The extended metaphor, half-rhymes, the imagery of exploration and the puns were noted. Most saw the last two lines as a challenge: one or two recognised the change of tone here, much more quizzical than the formality and seriousness of what had gone before.

3. Stevie Smith: *Selected Poems*

- (a) and (b) Too few answers were seen to make a general comment possible.

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

- (a) In a number of cases, answers here were narrative based, candidates being unable to progress beyond a basic summary of events in the novel to show that Tom and Maggie have a great deal of bad luck. More thoughtful answers looked more carefully at the phrase 'victims of circumstance' and examined what those circumstances are in the novel. They considered character, parentage, economics and social attitudes, showing how these factors are shown to affect the development of Tom and Maggie in the course of the novel. Education misapplied to Tom and society's treatment of Maggie after the Stephen Guest episode were frequently cited, and some candidates considered the question of the role of Fate. Some very good answers were able to give examples of omniscient narration which direct the reader's sympathies towards both Maggie and Tom, but very few candidates commented on Eliot's narrative interventions where questions of Fate, character and circumstance are raised.
- (b) Occasionally candidates saw this question as a general one about the sisters, writing about all of them with little reference to the passage. More confident answers focused clearly on the extract, noting not only the sisters' characteristic behaviour, but the humour of their presentation created by Eliot's descriptions, imagery and dialogue.

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

- (a) Candidates defined 'new situations or places' very widely, with some interesting results. Although some answers were limited to narrative summary, many candidates looked successfully at Mansfield's presentation of both character and situation. There were good answers which featured discussion of 'Her First Ball', 'The Little Governess', 'Millie' and 'The Woman at the Store' among others. Some very thoughtful responses showed how Mansfield's narrative often moves fluidly from description on the situation or place to the consciousness of the characters, making a direct connection between them.
- (b) This was a very popular question, attracting a wide range of answers. Even less confident candidates were able to show how the Brechenmachers differ, though the most successful answers discussed Mansfield's presentation of their attitudes towards each other and towards marriage explicitly, considering the social restrictions and expectations placed upon women. Many details in the passage were picked out for comment, such as Herr Brechenmacher's gesture of offering his wife 'one of the best pieces', compared to a man feeding his pet dog, the shocking suggestions of wedding night rape, the contrast between the Herr and the Frau conveyed in his striding and her stumbling, and interpretation of the 'white and forsaken lay the road ahead' as a metaphor of the Frau's life.

6. Ngugi: *A Grain of Wheat*

- (a) While weaker answers were dominated by narrative summary, many candidates recognised the enormous impact which detention has on Gikonyo in the novel. On the one hand, candidates noted the events which happen in his absence, notably Mumbi's child fathered by Karanja, but there was much discussion of the changes to Gikonyo's character, from confident idealism to disillusioned guilt. The importance of his betrayal of the oath and his estrangement from Mumbi were discussed by nearly all candidates, recognising how these issues fit into the novel's pattern of guilt and betrayal. Many candidates commented on the shift to capitalism, but also noted the image of the stool, which they recognised as a final image of hope for both the relationship between Mumbi and Gikonyo and for Kenya.
- (b) There were many strong answers to this passage-based question, and there were a number of responses to Karanja, ranging from outright condemnation to a degree of sympathy. Some argued for a love of Mumbi, while others noted the word 'wrench', suggesting aggressive acquisitiveness. His relationship with John Thompson was the focus of much of the comment, most candidates seeing him humiliated in his service, looking at the way he prepares his appearance and the reference to the 'watery lump' in his throat. Candidates often missed the context that Mwaura is deliberately attempting to lure Karanja to the Uhuru ceremony, but most were able to place Karanja himself within his developing characterisation in the novel.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 9695/04**

**Drama**

## General comments

As always, the Examiners saw a wide variety of work. At the top end there were scripts that were succinct, well-argued, full of insight and with a rich sense of personal engagement. Even with less good candidates there was usually evidence of a willingness to explore the detail of these texts, though of course that was not always successfully carried through. Candidates at the bottom end usually demonstrated some sense of having read the plays with interest and enjoyment. However, there was often a tendency towards paraphrase or simply telling the story amongst these scripts.

Of course, there are always the very short answers where candidates have little to say, but these are very much in the minority. Much more common are scripts which fill in a lot of background information about the writer without really engaging with the text. Others are very long, with candidates failing to realize that one element of success is to be able to select what is relevant and apposite about what they know. In (b) questions, candidates are often too quick to move away from the passage printed on the paper. At times, too, candidates, simply stick to a chronological going through that can tend towards paraphrase rather than the analysis that is required.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1: CARYL CHURCHILL: *Serious Money***

- (a) There were a few answers on this question. The best of them concentrated on the themes, backing up ideas with quotations and significant moments from the action. A number of candidates simply re-told the plot of the play.
- (b) The best answers were able to tackle both the values articulated in the passage and the way in which the lilting rhyming of the writing gives ironic distance. There was a temptation for some to go through the passage line by line, and this tended to produce stolid paraphrase or insight limited by a lack of overall view of what is going on.

### **Question 2: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Comedy of Errors***

- (a) Good answers on this question attempted to see how chance and coincidence help to create dramatic significance in the play and in many cases clear focus on dramatic methods and the effects gained from them (audience awareness of what the characters do not know, for example) helped to create coherence of approach. However, there were a significant number of scripts which failed to draw attention to these aspects of the text which would suggest that it had been studied as a representation of "real life". Less good candidates often simply listed coincidences or chance meetings, without really trying to link them together into significant patterns. A number of weaker answers focused on re-telling the story, often in extraordinary detail. These sorts of answers never gain high marks. Candidates writing about Shakespeare should be warned that background information, or just simple adulation of Shakespeare as a great writer, is never needed. It is best to get on with writing about specific detail from the set text.

- (b) The question asked about ‘dramatic significance’ and ‘effectiveness,’ and the best answers were able to deal convincingly with the various ways in which this scene twists and turns, both in terms of action and language, moving from Aegeon’s puzzled and anxious ‘Not know my voice!’ to his tremulous recognition of ‘If I dream not, thou art Aemilia.’ One or two candidates failed to place the passage at the end of the play. A significant number thought that they might usefully contextualize the passage by giving an account of the action that leads up to this moment. This was not necessary. As always with (b) questions, it is best to focus in detail on the passage presented, with occasional reference to evidence from elsewhere. There is always more than enough to say if candidates are willing to engage with details of language, situation and staging. As with (a), answers that engaged with the theatrical aspects of the text were comparatively rare.

**Question 3: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Caesar***

- (a) The question on the crowd in *Julius Caesar* proved popular. Most candidates showed that they were aware of how Shakespeare uses the crowd to show the fragility of power and the often dubious terms in which it is gained and maintained. Many chose to look at the crowd’s actions after the death of Caesar, pointing out how easily they are swayed by rhetoric. The best candidates were able to anchor their points firmly in the detail of the text. At times there were also engaging discussions about how the aristocratic plotters present self-interest under the guise of altruism.
- (b) Most candidates responded interestingly to the passage where Brutus has to decide whether or not to join the conspiracy. The best were able to link action and word as a means of seeing how Shakespeare conveys Brutus’s inner torment. There were excellent answers that focused on the domestic setting of the on Brutus’s language, especially his use of metaphor and symbol. In particular, candidates were often able to make sound points about how the letters provide the final push. Some candidates provided a fairly straightforward line-by-line commentary on the passage, though at times this was effective as the question did encourage them to review Brutus’s changing state of mind as a dynamic during the course of the scene. Many candidates could have paid much more attention to the detail of the passage, integrating quotation into their sentence structure in order to substantiate their insights.

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

- (a) Candidates and Centres have warmed to this play, and much of the work seen was interesting and highly engaged. One or two candidates, of course, failed to see that the ‘sofas’ mentioned in the question are themselves metaphorical, and there were one or two misguided discussions about how sofas would have made the stage management and acting of the play rather difficult. The vast majority saw, however, that Keatley’s remark gives a clue as to the psychological territory that the action inhabits. The possibility of speedy movement between realistic action, action across time, and dream space outside time was carefully analysed and discussed by many.
- (b) Most candidates showed a good understanding of the strategies of the extract presented. Many answers engaged with the props and with the register of language in order to characterize the different generations. There were some expert responses which took quite small examples and then related them to the rest of the action without losing sight of the focus on the extract which, in all (b) questions, is fundamental to success.

**Question 5: TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *The Glass Menagerie***

- (a) Although the question about the Wingfield’s escape from reality was not a ‘trick’ question, candidates needed to unpick some of the terminology in order to reach the top end of the mark scheme. Two little phrases were key discriminators: ‘ways and effects’ and ‘staging.’ It was not enough, therefore, to talk about the Wingfield’s longing for escape and the various strategies that the characters themselves employ. Instead, good answers needed to engage fully with things like the music, the structure of the play, Williams’s explicit instructions for the set. Most candidates were able to deal effectively with the more obvious examples such as the fire escape, but comparatively few were really able to engage with the strategies of the play rather than strategies of characters within the play.

- (b) This was probably the most popular question on the paper. Candidates were quick to see how one of the central relationships of the play is being laid out in front of an audience. However, many candidates failed to respond adequately to the terms of the question. Of course, the relationship needed to be studied, with its tiredness, its tempestuousness, the histrionics of Amanda, the sulkiness of Tom. However, the passage began a good while before the entrance of Amanda, and it was important to see the opening thirty-three lines, including the stage directions, as central to Williams' introducing of his characters. Many candidates saw this initially, but moved away too soon from the framing voice and action of the first half of the passage. Those who did discuss the opening often did so with great understanding and authority, though very few actually commented on the nature of the falseness of memory and, indeed, on Tom's plain determination to remember the past as he wants it to have happened in order to justify his subsequent behaviour.

**Question 6: RICHARD SHERIDAN: *The Rivals***

- (a) This question allowed candidates a wide range of possible answers, all equally valid. However, some candidates found it too easy to drift into generality about the play's humour or its exciting plot. The best answers engaged with the play's themes (its treatment of love, dishonesty or hypocrisy, perhaps) or with the delights of some of the characters and with their use of language. Most candidates had studied the play with appreciation and had a sound understanding of its qualities as a piece of drama to be presented on a stage.
- (b) As always, some candidates simply wanted to tell the story of the play or discuss the plot of the passage. A number moved away far too quickly from the passage towards a general discussion of the comedy of the whole play. Better answers engaged fully with the confusions of the scene, the revelation of the true identity of Delia, the delights of Mrs Malaprop's discomfiture.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 9695/05

Shakespeare and other Pre Twentieth Century Texts

## General comments

Once again the general standard this session was satisfactory. Very few candidates failed to follow the rubric and there were very few examples of poor time management or lack of appropriate preparation. Very few candidates were limited by the standard of their written English. This was often high and examiners are impressed by the skill candidates show in what for many is effectively a second language.

Nearly 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*, *Gulliver's Travels* and the selection from Marvell's poems proving to be popular minority choices. It is always worth repeating that both texts carry equal weight on the mark scheme and spending too long on the 'favourite' text nearly always means fewer marks on the second. Candidates would do well to remember this.

It is disappointing to have to highlight a particular issue once again. A number of candidates are still adopting 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.

In my last report (June 2006) I stressed the importance of giving a precise context for the passage in an option (b) answer. Examiners report that this aspect of the task has improved in this session. However an increasing number of candidates are offering a paraphrase of the passage as a part or, in the worst examples, the whole of their response. This does not add much to the answer, particularly when it is at the expense of a detailed exploration of the language and style. Some candidates, for example, dealing with the extract from *Gulliver's Travels* wrote at length about Whigs and Tories but failed to consider Swift's language at all. There is also the danger of simply writing down everything the candidate knows related to the passage or the author. Candidates do need a clear understanding of what a critical appreciation requires them to do and lots of practice in using the critical skills acquired.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

##### *Antony and Cleopatra*

- (a) There were many different approaches to this question. Good answers engaged enthusiastically and maturely with the key issues, tragedy and isolation. Some candidates thought the isolation of the lovers from the rest of the world and their duties was not in the least 'tragic' and their deaths therefore a 'blessed relief' from earthly distractions. Isolation was often interpreted as 'separation from each other' as well as from the world of politics and there was much material offered to support these arguments. A few candidates remembered that Antony is deserted by the gods and Enobarbus so that his isolation was more distressing than Cleopatra's for, as one candidate put it 'She never finds out what it is like to be lonely thanks to her women'. Developing this point there were those who did not think the pair isolated at all, surrounded as they are by followers and soldiers. For some candidates this was the tragedy – their love was all too public and Antony and Cleopatra were victims of the ancient equivalent of the tabloid press. Others noticed this public love meant that Cleopatra was always performing, until it was too late, whilst others mentioned that Antony deserted two wives and a fleet, so he could hardly complain if he was isolated. Weaker

candidates often slipped into well practised arguments about Rome/Egypt and politics/emotions, the success of these strategies depending on how well the candidate could shape the material to the task. Examiners were particularly impressed by the detailed knowledge of the text shown by nearly all candidates. The discriminating factor was how well that knowledge was directed at the task in hand.

- (b) It was very pleasing to note how many candidates were able to focus on the audience. Most were appalled by Caesar's cold, Roman calculation, often noticing how it was so unlike the warmth of Antony's almost Egyptian munificence to his deserting colleague, Enobarbus. Candidates who concentrated on the language found much to comment on – the military imperatives at the start often well contrasted to the anguished poetry of the doomed Enobarbus. Many candidates noticed Caesar's real-politik, signalled in his speeches on peace and the promising future for all citizens under the power of the one remaining ruler. Antony was often seen as the central figure in the extract, despite his absence from the stage. Good candidates saw this as a central part of Shakespeare's construction of Antony's tragedy – everyman's hero now doomed to a lonely ignominious end, but until then still the centre of attention. Nearly all candidates could give a precise context for the passage and were able to make relevant points on at least some of the issues. One curious misreading was that Caesar was instructing Agrippa to 'charge' Antony, thus signalling the start of the battle. This suggested these candidates were not familiar with the conventions of blank verse dramatic dialogue. Most however showed a detailed and precise understanding of the language and a clear grasp of the relevant conventions, such as the soliloquy.

## Question 2

### Measure for Measure

- (a) This text was more popular in this session. The question offered candidates plenty of scope to give their opinions about justice in Vienna and most rose admirably to the challenge. For many there was no justice at all and this could be blamed entirely on the weakness of the Duke himself. Angelo's hypocrisy, Isabella's duplicity and the Duke's failure to take command earlier were all well explored as contributing factors to the problem. Better candidates also noticed that measure for measure might not imply justice at all, but rather some sort of balance. Justice, some noted, was not merely a question of right and wrong. Many were outraged at the treatment of Lucio and, to a lesser extent, Barnadine and what of the poor Marianna, forced to sleep with and then marry the very man who had deserted her. The best answers saw how the idea of justice was fitted into Shakespeare's construction, in which the comedy of 'justicers' Elbow and Pompey, for example, was designed to shape our response and that after all in a comedy the only thing that really mattered was comic justice. Examiners were impressed by the engagement of so many of the candidates with the text and had the sense of countless animated discussions about the play's issues in classrooms everywhere.
- (b) This passage needed to be carefully placed in context if the candidates were to offer an accurate assessment of Angelo at this point in the play. Candidates who could do this were rewarded with a wealth of material to explore, whereas those who thought he had already offered the 'bargain' to Isabella inevitably struggled. Nearly all could see his hypocrisy and many were alive to the inner conflict his words betrayed. Those who explored his language found disturbing hints at sexual awakenings and perhaps, in his all too clear awareness of his sin, the beginnings of possible redemption. Good candidates often noticed the change in his tone when talking to Isabella, how he appears to be playing with her emotions and expectations. Some candidates spent too long talking about Angelo generally and offering prepared character studies, but those who took notice of 'at this point in the play' were often able to draw effective comparisons with the mustering blood man here and the 'congealed ice' Angelo of other parts of the play. Other candidates noticed the irony of Angelo's position, comparing it to his earlier conversation with Escalus on the distinction between temptation and sinning.



**Section B****Question 3****Emma**

- (a) This was a popular choice. Examiners were surprised to find once again a number of inaccuracies in a minority of answers, including, for example, that Emma herself had made the comment in the question to Harriet. There are still misunderstandings about the context for the novel, with some candidates offering opinions about 'Victorian' England, women's place in Victorian society and Emma's supposed aristocratic lifestyle (and the correspondingly low status of the Bates family). Many candidates did explore the centrality of this relationship in the structure of the novel, pointing out how it led to Emma's eventual maturing into a worthy partner for Knightley, who in turn was 'jolted by jealousy' into declaring himself. Weaker responses tended to summarise the story of the relationship, often in accurate detail. Those who explored the ironic layers and saw Austen's art in the development of character and theme, through this relationship, often did very well. Others saw Knightley and Frank as the opposite possibilities before Emma – in choosing Knightley she avoided becoming the Emma of Box hill in perpetuity.
- (b) This was also a popular choice. Candidates who failed to place the passage precisely or realise this was John Knightley and not brother George struggled to make much of this task. Many though were able to enjoy peeling away the many layers of irony and explored the language and dialogue with thoughtful and sometimes perceptive insight. Some candidates rather dubiously suggested Elton really is in love with Emma, but many pointed out what a delicious appetiser this passage is for the confrontation between Emma and Elton in the carriage. Emma's arrogance in dismissing Elton as a possible suitor for herself, her comments on his shortcomings and John Knightley's perspicacity were all explored in good detail by better candidates. Mr Woodhouse's self absorption was noted and linked to his daughter's own lack of self-awareness. Some candidates were confused by Knightley's 'slyness', seeing it as indicative of something suspicious in his character. Nearly all candidates did focus on the passage in detail and those who explored the language in detail often did very well.

**Question 4****Wuthering Heights**

- (a) This was again the minority choice on this text. Weaker responses tended to drift into narrative summaries, but many answers explored examples of Bronte's use of nature – the dogs were often referred to – and some were able to explain the effectiveness and perhaps less frequently the significance of these stylistic traits. Some candidates did discuss thoughtfully 'pathetic fallacy', linking the natural imagery to the way Bronte develops the reader's response to Heathcliff and Cathy, but also to Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Some essays explored the locations in the context of a nature and nurture debate, though relatively few seemed to know the text well enough to explore the 'natural imagery' in sufficient detail. There was inevitably much reference to the wildness and untamed quality of the moors and how that fitted into Bronte's overall construction. Candidates who could develop that idea into a detailed consideration of the way Bronte approaches characterisation in the novel often did well. Examiners did note how many candidates showed some enthusiasm and personal engagement with this text, with one examiner wondering if perhaps the extremes of mood and violent emotions on display appeal to the angst of youth.
- (b) Nearly all responses showed an awareness of the importance of this early scene in the novel. Most were able to explore the narrative voice here and link it to the rest of the text. Those who were aware of the Gothic and how Bronte was using its techniques here often did well, though there was some debate as to whether Lockwood is in fact dreaming the whole encounter with Catherine Linton or whether she really is a spectral presence in the entire novel. Many candidates were able to point out the significance of what is revealed about Heathcliff here, his genuine despair and longing for what has been taken from him. Others noticed how Bronte subtly uses Lockwood's own interest in the story behind what he has just witnessed as the bait to draw in her readers into the novel generally. More perceptive responses noted how Lockwood's reliability as a narrator is undermined by his misinterpretation of Heathcliff's 'cowardice' and sometimes were able to link it to Bronte's use of narrators in the wider text.

### Question 5

#### The Knight's Tale

- (a) This was still very much a minority choice, but candidates were able to discuss Theseus in some detail, with most offering a positive interpretation of his leadership, authority and chivalry. A few did see him as an earthly power whose effectiveness is constrained by the greater power of the gods above. Weaker responses were at least able to list points about his character or recite his part in the story with some accuracy. Those who did discuss his role and how Chaucer develops and explores Theseus in the context of the overall construction inevitably did well.
- (b) There were very few takers for this option and most answers offered a paraphrase of the events. Some responses though did manage to see Chaucer's use of poetic conventions in his descriptions of the principal players in the love triangle and in the use of 'May' as a symbol for all that is fresh and desirable in human existence.

### Question 6

#### David Copperfield

There were very few responses on this text in this session. Too many answers on (a) simply offered summaries of the various families in the novel, without any supporting critical comment and/or wrote at length about Dickens's own childhood and family. Option (b) was disappointingly rare with very few able to explore the way Dickens masterfully uses the childish narrator to reveal so much about his characters.

### Question 7

#### The Alchemist

This was a minority choice still but growing in popularity. Examiners were delighted to see some excellent responses on both options. Those who tackled (a) invariably had lots of relevant points to make on wealth, luxury and human vices in general. Greed was a prominent idea in many good answers. More discriminating answers were able to explore Jonson's language and compare the excess of Mammon's speeches to the language of alchemy and Puritans on display elsewhere. Mammon's relationships with Doll and Surly were well explored by some responses too. Option (b) was less popular but needless to say the hypocrisy of the Puritans was often noted and some candidates very capably explored the comedy and the wonderful temptation of Subtle in this scene.

### 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 excellent arguments offered which developed the point that Marvell is in fact sensual because he is spiritual and that his very poetic sensibility was where his attraction as an abstract thinker and poet lay. Candidates showed a detailed and perceptive knowledge of many of the poems. Option (b) was less well tackled overall – those candidates who had thought about and discussed this very demanding poem were able to offer sensitive and sophisticated readings. Others were less well prepared and struggled to make sense of the meaning. A few simply wrote about other poems in the selection, failing to notice this was not a requirement of the task.

### Question 9

#### Rossetti Selected Poems

This was not a popular choice this session, with very few candidates showing much ability to explore Rossetti's language and imagery or offering convincing arguments on her concerns and themes.

**Question 10**

**Gulliver's Travels**

This was a popular minority choice. Candidates who tackled (a) did show an awareness of all four of the books, though there were some different interpretations of what 'plain' might mean, ranging from dull to simple. Candidates who could link 'plainness' to Swift's satiric world often did well and those candidates who saw the distance between the author and the narrator were in a position to explore the text meaningfully. Option (b) was also well tackled by some candidates – the gap between Gulliver's expectations and the king's reactions was often noticed. The king was linked to the voice of Swift himself and there were some good analyses of the language of the passage too. Nearly all candidates could comment on Swift's use of relative size and link this to the episode in Lilliput. Those who saw the construction of a consistent and biting satire often did very well.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 9695/06

Twentieth Century Texts

## General comments

The paper offered opportunities for the complete range of candidates to show detailed knowledge of the texts. Examiners had some reservations about the quotation from the song in 1a and a concern that some of the extracts were so rich, so central to the text in terms of theme and characterisation, that thorough commentary would be very time-consuming and literary appreciation neglected. The best scripts were characterised by wide-ranging, perceptive, well structured, exciting responses, indicating a breadth of literary experience, personal engagement with the texts and careful consideration of the questions. It was generally felt that while the (b) questions proved to be the more popular options, candidates tended to achieve more highly on **Section (a)** questions. Candidates attempting **Section (b)** questions needed to be prepared for the technique of critical appreciation through close reading and the consideration of how the writers' manipulation of point of view, choice of language, use of specific detail, and variety of sentence structure generated effect. The best scripts frequently and effectively deployed such terms as "visual imagery", "motif", "symbolism", "juxtaposition", "tone", "irony", "stage business", though there was some misunderstanding and misapplication of "the stream of consciousness technique" and "ellipsis". Less accomplished scripts relied upon textual summary and rather simplistic observations on character or theme. Candidates need to be reminded perhaps that quotations have to be carefully selected and should always be accompanied by some analysis and suggestion of reader response.

While severely garbled essays are rare, the subtlety of some of the texts and implications of the questions proved to be less accessible to some candidates with English as a second language. The quality of expression sometimes compromised a candidate's ability to communicate complex ideas, though Examiners were more sympathetic to candidates who made a genuine effort to explore the questions than those who mechanically presented detailed knowledge in an indiscriminate way or rehashed answers to previous years' questions. The need for candidates to deconstruct questions and plan responses cannot be underestimated. Candidates who did this displayed independent, intuitive, informed discussions and produced coherent, critically assured answers. Few candidates completed only one question, though there is still the tendency for the second essay to be less fully developed. Few candidates wasted time in including lengthy, extraneous theoretical material or summarising their own essay by way of conclusion. Examiners were pleased to see that many more are learning to refer back to the question and end with some comment or judgement on it.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

***Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*** This was a popular choice of text. Candidates showed knowledge and understanding of the play in relation to the social and cultural background with some appreciation of dramatic methods and purposes, though many candidates tended to use the formula of making an assertion with a generalised textual reference rather than exploring specific dramatic incidents in any textual detail.

- (a) The best answers were able to use the words of the song to develop a coherent discussion of the way Albee presents marriage in the play as a whole, offering well balanced, comparative answers which referred to both couples. Many candidates explored "The American Dream" with varying degrees of understanding and were able to recognise that George and Martha's marriage is not as straightforward as it might appear and that Nick and Honey's relationship can be seen as the more barren of the two.. Some candidates misinterpreted the quotation and tried to link the "horse and carriage" idea to the partners in the relationships. Others tended to rely on the received notion of "illusion versus reality" without having the necessary detailed reference to action and dialogue to show an in-depth understanding of the concept or the characters.

- (b) Better candidates developed their analysis to include a discussion of the thematic issues raised by the extract and were also able to place Martha's behaviour and George's reactions within the concept of "Fun and Games". They pinpointed her allusions to Daddy and the repetition of *flop* with its multilayered connotations and resonances to other events in the play. They were also able to analyse the dramatic effect of George's position on stage, the audience response to his body language, the tone of his replies, the violence here and later in the text and the overlapping dialogue and song at the end. The best candidates juxtaposed the extract with the final Act, noting significant similarities in dialogue and ironic differences. Weaker answers tended to give a long summary of Martha's grievances against the weak George with little understanding of the different aspects of the relationship, ignored the presence of Nick and Honey, and gave lengthy lectures on the evils of alcohol. They tried to tie in the significance of the song in terms of "Who is afraid to live life without illusions" with Honey's need "to purge herself" without explaining what the illusions were and ignoring the fact that an audience would not necessarily be aware of the song's significance at this point in the play.

### Question 2 *Endgame*

This was quite a popular choice and generally the responses were good, giving able candidates challenging experiences, though weaker candidates were left with little to fall back on in terms of plot and character development. Theatre of the Absurd was generally well understood and referred to appropriately, though this did cause weaker candidates some problems. There was some well informed use of critical opinion with a much stronger sense of the play in performance than Examiners have seen in response to similar texts.

- (a) Good candidates understood the central point of the mutual dependence on each other, both for literal and more importantly emotional survival. Very good answers could back this up with good textual references and could discuss the implications of Hamm's need for a kiss for example. They had a proper awareness of Beckett's symbolic uses of the characters in his end of world scenario and of the chess game motif. Most paid some attention to the master/servant relationship but many had less to say about Clov's reasons for staying. The notion of "compassion" was not examined as closely as it might have been.
- (b) The best answers showed an understanding of Beckett's view of human nature in the context of the Theatre of the Absurd and looked at his techniques. Several candidates used tragic-comedy as a way in. Memory, tenderness, humour, desire, self-absorption, despair, deprivation and decay attracted comment with some candidates showing a good understanding of how Beckett deploys repetition and incongruity, slapstick and abrupt changes of mood to dramatise different permutations of thought and feeling. Comments on Nagg and Nell explored their different attitudes to their predicament and each other finding evidence of affection, exploring the meaning of Nell's remark that "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness" and Nell's acceptance of death. Weaker candidates found it hard to generate adequate discussion, castigated Hamm for his treatment of his parents or felt that this was another example of the difficulty of communication and the meaninglessness of life.

### Question 3 *Les Murray*

This was not a popular choice. There was some over-reliance on critics to the exclusion of personal response.

- (a) There was a tendency to respond to the question in a very generalised way, looking at the poems for evidence of the Australian identity and values, with little specific knowledge of *three* poems.
- (b) Rather more candidates attempted *The China Trees* and were often able to identify themes, meaning and relevant links to other poems very confidently, seeing the beauty and the danger in the natural world, life and death. Most candidates stressed were the strength of both the trees and the selector who planted them and the transition from the old to new ways, showing Murray's ambivalence towards modernisation. The best candidates were able to engage with poetic methods and show how Murray's choice of language, imagery, alliteration rhythm, sentence and stanza structure created meaning and effects.

**Question 4 *The Guide***

This was a very popular text with many candidates showing considerable textual knowledge but some difficulty in responding to the demands of the questions. There was a tendency in both options for candidates to draw on questions from previous papers.

- (a) This was tackled by fewer candidates, but those who did well explored the contrast and similarities in the urban and rural environments, covering cultural, religious, philosophical modern and traditional values via character and theme. The best candidates paid attention to the effects of the author's presentation, whereas weaker candidates failed to understand "urban" and "rural" or offered vague observations on the coming of the railways and the naivety of the villagers without much sense of the consequences for the character of Raju or the moral framework of the novel.
- (b) This was a demanding question but it did differentiate between good and weaker candidates. The good candidates understood that a detailed examination of Raju's actions and words was vital in order to see clues to his future development. They understood his ability to "con" clients in the Gaffur/car/customer incident. The best candidates showed a critical awareness of the narrative point of view, noting the authorial intention and nuances in the presentation of character and offering brief but pertinent allusions to the wider text. Weaker candidates tended to seize on "development" in the question and gave a narrative account of the whole text, or a narrative account of the passage with simplistic readings of the character as helpful and caring.

**Question 5 *The Caretaker*.**

This was the most popular text. There was evidence of background knowledge of the social context and genre though it was rarely applied specifically and constructively to textual details. Characters were discussed very much as if they were real people, even by candidates who also showed awareness of dramatic methods.

- (a) This was less popular than (b) but attempted by a significant number of candidates. Many had often prepared material on illusions, dreams, power and territory, all of which could be legitimately related to the question. The key was to make the links clear to present them with detailed reference to the play and not simply discard the terms of the question. Most managed to discuss survival and identity even if somewhat literally in terms of a job or identity papers, but few exploited dramatic possibilities implied by "struggle". Better candidates paid equal attention to all three characters referring to specific events and speeches in detail to develop their points, while weaker candidates tended to focus only on Davies and certainly ignored Mick, often offering evidence solely from the passage in (b).
- (b) This was a very popular choice and there were some impressive, stimulating dramatic appreciation where candidates expertly dealt with the effects of pause, non-sequiturs, sentence structure, and repetition while exploring ideas such as identity, self-absorption, authority, aspiration and communication in the extract and the wider text. Weaker candidates paraphrased the passage and offered some basic conclusions about the two characters, noticing the pauses and failure of the two to listen or respond to each other but dismissing this as proof of the failure of communication and the meaningless of life. In the discussion of identity and the importance of papers, there seemed to be a general misconception that as Pinter is Jewish, he had actually suffered as European Jews had and that Sidcup does not exist. Attempts to relate this extract to the rest of the play were limited.

**Question 6 *The Wide Sargasso Sea*.**

Both options proved to be popular. The majority of responses showed genuine interest and some excitement in discussing the text.

- (a) Some candidates took the two sides of the relationship to be its good and bad aspects or its initial and later phases. Stronger candidates understood the question to be about the different perspectives of Antoinette and her husband, their different cultural backgrounds, the effect of the Cosway letter and many saw that both deserved sympathy. The best explored why, that being so, it is with Antoinette that the reader ultimately identifies. They recognised Rhys's narrative achievement given that the relationship is mostly narrated by the husband. Weaker candidates dismissed Rochester as "bad", a man who married for money, slept with a servant and drove his wife mad, and often said little about Antoinette.

- (b) Most candidates understood the writer's purpose and narrative technique and showed themselves to be completely au fait with the concepts of foreshadowing. The best answers attempted to suggest how Rhys creates a sense of the child's perspective, the nightmarish quality of her account of the experience and the ironic juxtaposition of Mr Mason's prayer and the crowd's superstition. Many were able to make thematic links to other parts of the novel pursuing ideas such as betrayal, male dominance, obeah, and fire. However many candidates, found it challenging to construct a balanced coherent discussion of the significance of the passage *and* the effectiveness of the writing. Few were able to comment on the choice of language, the use of dialogue and dialect, the length of sentences and manipulation of sound and rhythm. Many treated the text as a jumping off point for a discussion of racism, often displaying some misconceptions as to whether Creoles were of mixed race, who the "Black Englishman" was and failing to appreciate that Antoinette's view is coloured by the threatening nature of the situation. Some candidates chose to pursue a single aspect such as Antoinette's dreams or the role of Christophine.

#### Question 7 Walcott.

Very few candidates offered this text .

- (a) The essay question gave candidates the opportunity to explore Walcott's experience of isolation and his presentation of it. The best answer selected useful poems like *The Castaway*, *Landfall* and *Homecoming* and tried to balance discussion with some appreciation of the poetry. Weaker answers tended to drift into a discussion of Walcott's own life and treated the poems in a very generalised way.
- (b) Given that this was a key poem in the collection, responses were disappointing with little evidence that candidates understood how to explore a theme with close reference to a particular poem or to analyse the effects of figurative language, the control and exploitation of sound and rhythm. Candidates struggled to extract meaning, or to articulate how Walcott feels about the colonial past. There was little attempt to widen the discussion to other poems,

#### Question 8 Mrs Dalloway

This was not a popular text but seemed to be offered by relatively able candidates. Both options elicited a fairly intelligent understanding of Woolf's methods and concerns, though there was much reliance on prepared material.

- (a) The best candidates rose to the challenge of the question by offering well organised, varied discussions which retained a constant focus on the paradoxes of the question. Specifically, they were able to synthesise critical evaluation (*How far*) with strong literary appreciation of style and authorial intention (*what effects*). Less secure answers systematically listed important and trivial events in the novel, struggling to understand the subtleties of the question and often used 8b as textual evidence.
- (b) There were some excellent analyses of method and concerns from the most able candidates; highly knowledgeable comments about authorial techniques, effectively commenting on, rather than merely describing , the effects of the stream of consciousness. Many commented on the presentation of Clarissa through Purvis to raise the issue of external appearances and the character's rich internal life; on the sensuous aspects of the writing; the use of time; and the accumulative effect of the descriptive detail, the lists and short sentences. Weaker candidates depended on fragmented narration and listed motifs and recurrent concerns.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 9695/07**

**Comment and Appreciation**

## General Comments

This session there were fewer answers that simply narrated or repeated what the passages or poem said, and relatively few that simply listed technical terms without making at least some attempt to evaluate their purpose and effects. There was overall a rather greater sense of purpose and confidence in the manner in which many candidates approached their work; there were more answers with a direct and purposeful start, evidence of clear general understanding by many candidates of the import of the passages; where weaknesses occurred, these were in the specific details analysed later in their arguments. This is not to say that answers overall were significantly better than usual – in fact, the general standard of understanding and of critical skill was possibly a little less secure – but Centres have clearly emphasised the need for candidates to focus very firmly and consistently upon what each writer is saying, and upon how he or she is saying it. More will be said of this below, but it is worth stressing that over-general comments are rarely likely to gain any credit – it is never helpful, for example to say simply that a piece of writing, or a particular phrase in it, is “effective” without at least trying to explore why it is so, or even what the effects are that it creates; in the same way, though possibly worse, candidates who said that the writing in a passage is “brilliant”, “wonderful”, “unique” are probably saying nothing of any real value unless these adjectives are developed and explored.

All three questions on the Paper were used, though 1 and 2 were marginally more popular, and certainly rather more successfully handled, especially 1.

Timing was rarely a problem, though some candidates did only one question, meaning of course that they penalised themselves very severely; most wrote at similar length on both of their chosen questions. None did all three this session.

It is always tough to write at length in a relatively short timed examination, and Examiners are of course sympathetic to this difficulty, but it must be pointed out that it is bound to help Examiners if candidates can write as clearly and legibly as possible; almost illegible handwriting does no favours to anybody.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1**

This was the second most popular question, often handled with considerable confidence; most candidates wrote about the two passages concurrently, a much more difficult and sophisticated approach than taking each one separately, but a far more useful and helpful way of comparing their writing and its impacts. Comments on the weather of course dominated the two beginnings, as not merely setting the scenes but, more importantly, reflecting what sort of mood and tone each passage is creating, and how this mirrors the feelings of each child – incidentally, several appeared to believe, without offering any evidence for this, that Hyacinth is significantly older than Jane, and even an adult coming to the house for work. Bronte’s weather is heavy, dull, grey, whereas Riley’s is sunny, though it is “watery afternoon sun”, sufficient to reveal the singularly unappealing nature of Hyacinth’s new home; pathetic fallacy is a term often over-used or indeed mis-used by candidates, but it was correct here. Most candidates noted the fact that Jane slept on her journey, perhaps suggestive of a resignation to her fate, and that unlike Hyacinth she appears to be accepting of her new surroundings, and even to find them “comfortable enough”; she is also able to “warm her numbed fingers over the blaze”, and the servant arrives with a light, unlike Auntie Susan whose appearance is hardly appealing, and who speaks “coldly”; the contrast here was frequently and sensitively noted. Surprisingly few candidates, however, commented on the irony of the names “Auntie” and “Uncle” – these suggest warmth and family, far removed from the feelings created here for poor Hyacinth, whose view of her new home is very much less accepting than Jane’s in passage A.



A number of answers spent some time talking of the different dates at which the passages were written, but rarely to say much beyond some fairly bland and unfocused comments about the language of both, or to note that while Jane arrived by coach (not by train), Hyacinth presumably came by car (line 6 implies this). Some asserted that Brontë's writing was more poetic, and used longer sentences than Riley's, but almost never were such assertions illustrated or discussed. Candidates who spent time on punctuation never made any truly helpful comments on how each writer actually uses it.

### Question 2

This was by far the most popular question, answered by the majority of candidates, and it did lead to some quite thoughtful answers, but also some strangely focused ones, largely because many candidates seemed unable or unwilling to take the poem at face value, and wanted it to mean more than it actually – and surely very clearly – says. Hull's voice in the poem (or perhaps Hull herself) is speaking at a mature age, suddenly finding that despite this she is able and willing to say and do things that she has never done before – she is finding a freedom and liberation from social convention and expectation, and can at last express herself in exactly the way she wants to, without being “bothered by such foolishness” as what people might say. Many candidates saw it, surely with some justification, as a poem using the traditional “Carpe Diem” theme. Very many, however, felt that the poem charts the speaker's progress from childhood to adulthood, even as a female version of the seven ages of man, and occasionally argued such a view with some consistency and conviction; Examiners of course accepted these views when argued well, but candidates taking this line were never as wholly secure or confident as those who saw it simply as an older woman's view of life “at my age”. And the handful who insisted that the speaker is a man found considerable difficulty in justifying lines 15 – 21; in similar ways, those who saw the poem as a purely political one, simply about the evils of apartheid, found it very hard to appreciate how the opening sections fitted in. Relatively few seemed confident enough to leave the poem exactly as it is, but those who did so were able to see some quite sensitive and occasionally tender moments, such as the speaker's new-found delight in the variety of natural beauty as expressed in lines 1 – 14; lines 15 – 21 are perhaps deliberately “shocking” (older women should not behave like rebellious teenagers!) but this surely is exactly her point – she wants, perhaps as a final chance in life, to do something shocking and conventionally inappropriate? In the same way, she wants to “leap up! speak up!” so that she can say and do many things that she has never dared to do before.

Whatever their interpretation, almost no candidate failed to mention at least something about the poem's structure, most seeing its lack of normal or formal structure as reflective of the freedom from conventional shackles that the speaker is expressing. It is of course written in free verse, and emphatically not blank verse. The fact that there is no consistent or indeed perhaps any normal rhythm was noted by some, as was the lack of rhyme (the rhyme scheme is certainly not, as one answer insisted, “a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i,j,k . . .”). However, it is not necessary, nor indeed particularly helpful in writing a critical commentary, to spend time on things that are not there.

### Question 3

This was the least popular question, and probably in general the least well handled, again because relatively few answers saw the passage simply as it is written, and tried to make it mean things that it does not; it is surely just a (relatively) simple description of an everyday experience – Stan Parker, travelling through the Australian outback, settles down for the night, lights a fire to ward off the cold, feeds his animals and himself, and goes to sleep. The effectiveness and power of the writing lies in the way that White creates atmosphere and character, rather than in any sort of allegorical or metaphorical writing. Parker may conceivably be running away from something, but there is absolutely no evidence for this in the passage; he may be an escaped convict (but if so would he not show more signs of fear or anxiety?) or he may be running from home or wife, or even be Ned Kelly himself (if this is the case why is he called Stan Parker?); there were some even more extreme interpretations, including suggestions that the passage is an allegory of the whole of the First World War, that the man was in reality in Austria rather than Australia because of the cold, or quite commonly that White is writing about man's self-centred and short-sighted determination to destroy the natural environment. Examiners took all of these interpretations seriously, and assessed answers according to how well and how closely they argued and justified the views, but there really is no need to try to read more into a piece of writing than there very clearly is – there are no “hidden messages” in a good piece of literature! The easiest and most successful interpretation is surely simply that he is travelling and needs to spend a night in the wild.

He strikes the tree because he wants wood chips to make his fire, and to ward off the cold; he likes the noise it makes because everything is so quiet and isolated around him. He is not cruel to his horse or dog, merely seeing them as animals rather than pets – he does feed them, albeit that he does also keep the dog, and himself, waiting for what may seem an unnecessarily long time. Finally he sits and dozes by his fire, and presumably sleeps – there is no evidence, and surely White would have made this clear if it was the case, that he burns to death at the end of the passage, and certainly not that he dies as a kind of natural or even divine punishment for destroying one or more trees.

There is ample opportunity in the passage for close critical reading and discussion: the second paragraph has some very striking description of cold and solitude; the last three sentences in the paragraph, short and tight in focus, add to the sense of quiet, lonely, isolation and simplicity of movement – because of the cold, no movement is wasted or unnecessary. The fourth paragraph shows a warming-up and relaxation of whatever caused the earlier slight tension – the fire “licked at and swallowed the loneliness” – and while waiting to be fed, the dog moves closer to the man, physically at least, in paragraph 5, as the warmth begins to work its effects, but another tension (hunger) takes over for a while, mirrored in the three extremely short paragraphs between lines 41 and 43. Paragraph 12 (lines 44 – 47) contains some useful and effective examples of alliteration (line 44) and onomatopoeia (lines 44 and 45), reflecting the quiet but now more homely sounds that the man is making as he settles down to prepare food. The penultimate paragraph again contains plenty of material, with the man’s “ugliness” in eating, and his “swilling” of his tea “almost to get it finished with”; the man is alone, almost animal-like himself, and certainly not wasting time in conforming to normal dining-room behaviour – his urgent need is to get the eating finished so that he and his animals can sleep, which is exactly what he does in line 58. The final line of the passage does perhaps appear slightly strange here, though of course in the novel itself it makes greater sense; here, however, its impact is suggestive of the fact that for the first 57 lines the man has been so absorbed in what he has been doing that his individuality has been of no importance whatsoever – he has not thought of himself in any way at all until his physical, animal, needs have been satisfied, when he can at last become an individual human being with a name.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Previous Reports have made this point, but it is worth repeating – Centres are becoming increasingly confident in how they set Coursework tasks, and in how they mark and comment on their candidates' work. There was ample evidence of this during the November session this year, when some very sound work was submitted for moderation. Some interesting new texts were used (John Ashbery's poetry, for example, and that of Wallace Stevens), as well as some old favourites (*The Great Gatsby*, *Heart of Darkness*, and Ted Hughes' poetry), and while a few adjustments to Centre's marks were recommended these were never significant, and although there was little reference to these in any Centre's annotations or comments it was clear that the demands of the Marking Criteria were generally being taken into account by teachers and indeed by candidates.

These Criteria are quite rightly very demanding for marks at the highest levels, and to achieve a mark above 40 a candidate must demonstrate a real sophistication in a number of ways: for example, the top band Criteria (44+) says that a candidate must, among other things, show "*detailed knowledge of texts, understanding of themes, characterisation, linguistic features and other textual issues, some awareness of literary conventions and contexts, techniques and genre characteristics, and the ability to address this knowledge . . . with sustained relevance to the issues raised by the questions.*" This is not an easy set of demands, and Centres must be very clear that they have all been met with considerable success in a folder before considering a top-band mark. Further, answers must be "*coherently structured, with logical progression and effectively linked paragraphs*"; this was generally the case with most essays submitted, though – particularly with poetry – there was an occasional tendency to look at a sequence of poems almost in isolation from each other, with insufficient attempt to link them cogently and consistently with the task in hand.

Most candidates in this session showed a confident knowledge and understanding of their two texts, often combined with an ability to look closely at a writer's styles and methods as well as at his/her ideas. Occasionally this did lead into essays that began to lose sight of the main thrust of the task that had been set, so that candidates seemed to write more about what they *wanted* to write than about what the set task was asking, but in general this was not a major problem, and where it did occur the Centre's marking usually reflected the concern.

Annotation was mostly quite helpful, though it is more useful to a Moderator if it relates to the Marking Criteria than if it is more general or simply praising (or criticising) the candidate. Summative comments, either at the end of each piece or on the cover-sheet, or indeed both, were usually valuable though often quite brief; these should again most usefully be related to the Criteria.

Over-length was as usual a rare concern, though it must be stressed that there is a maximum length imposed by the Syllabus; folders that look as if they are going to exceed 3000 words should not be accepted by the Centre – candidates should be warned and advised about this well in advance of writing – but if they are accepted then their over-length must be taken into account in the marks awarded. It is essential, in the interests of fairness to all candidates, that all candidates work to exactly the same criteria, and not to allow some to be more flexible than others in the way they interpret the Specification.

Overall, then, another pleasing and successful session, with interesting and thoughtful work from some interested and confident candidates.