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FOREWORD

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

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

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

There was a very wide range of responses to the Paper in this session. At the upper end, there were examples of individual, responsive and sophisticated writing about the texts and questions, while at the lower end of the mark range, some candidates seemed ill-prepared for the nature of the examination. There was an unusual number of rubric errors, while some candidates did not seem to have read the questions carefully.

Blake and Achebe were once again the most favoured authors, while *Macbeth* was the most popular drama text on Paper 9. On the whole, candidates showed a thorough knowledge of the texts they had studied. What discriminated between their answers was the ability to direct that knowledge towards the questions set. Careful selection, reference and coherent organisation of the argument are the keys to success on the Paper. Those candidates who made reference to specific areas of their texts to support their arguments, those who were able to incorporate words and phrases of quotation and those who were able to comment on the writers' style, were marked highly.

It is worth reminding Centres that the passage based questions give candidates the opportunity to discuss language and writing style closely. To take advantage of this opportunity, candidates must write about the passages in a focused and detailed way.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) Most candidates were able to say that the children in *Blake's* poems are often figures of innocence, though many of the answers were rather simplistic, merely showing that children feature in the poems. Better answers here developed from innocence to consider harmony with nature and identification with Christ, while noting the change of tone in the Experience poems to examine social and religious oppression. Even amongst the most confident answers, however, few candidates were able to comment on the style of the verse, with reference to the outward simplicity, children's songs and nursery rhyme patterns.
- (b) While some candidates offered a paraphrase of *The Echoing Green*, those who noted the instruction in the question to trace the development of ideas were much more successful. Better answers made explicit comparisons with other poems to evaluate how characteristic the poem is, while some were able to recognise the movement towards the world of experience in the final stanza, noting the change to "the darkening Green."

Question 2

ed. Hydes: *Touched with Fire*

- (a) The range of poems which candidates chose for this question was wide, sometimes suggesting that they were using poems with which they were familiar, rather than the most appropriate ones in the selection. However, Examiners marked whatever was offered, looking at the ways candidates applied their choices to the question. Some particularly successful choices were 'Diary of a Church Mouse', 'To His Coy Mistress', 'On My First Sonne' and 'Mid-Term Break'. Those candidates who focused on how the chosen voice affected the meaning of the poem and the reader's response, were answering the question directly and well.

- (b) There were some very good answers on 'Pain'. Many candidates showed a personal and lively response to the development of the ideas and the imagery in the poem. Some viewed it as a powerful description of a storm only, while others, noting the title, the personal address to the reader and the strength of the imagery in the final two stanzas, argued for a metaphoric reading, suggesting revolution or colonialism. Some candidates missed the instruction to compare the poem's techniques with those of another, while those who made the comparison ranged quite widely. Snake, for example, was often used to compare freedom of form, while the language and imagery was frequently compared with Refugee Mother and Child.

Question 3

Sylvia Plath: *Ariel*

- (a) There were not many answers on Plath, but often the essays showed enthusiasm and responsiveness. Some candidates seemed to relish the chance to write about the brighter side of Plath's poetry. The poems about children, particularly 'You're' and 'Balloons', were popular, while others referred to the vibrancy and challenge of poems such as 'Cut', 'Poppies in October' and 'Letter in November'.
- (b) 'Medusa' proved a challenging poem for many candidates. While some seemed confused, and may have been better served by (a), Examiners rewarded candidates who applied themselves carefully to the poem and explored its imagery. Some candidates considered alternative interpretations, and many were personal and responsive.

Question 4

Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*

- (a) It was a curious feature of the answers to this question that many candidates wrote about Okonkwo rather than the presentation of Christians and Christianity. Among the answers which did focus on what was asked for, some were partial, either arguing that the Christians brought redemption and great improvement to Ibo society, or that their influence was totally destructive of Ibo culture and offered no benefits. Such answers sidestepped Achebe's carefully detached observational narrative; better answers were balanced, aware of the upheaval and change in Ibo society, but also noting the Christians' acceptance of the Ibo outcasts, for example.
- (b) There were some responsive answers to the question on the presentation and significance of the spirit court. The stronger answers examined the physical descriptions of the spirits, the ritualised dialogue and the positions of the onlookers. The issue of significance was sometimes less well handled, but those who noted the organisation, respect and justice of the Ibo's judicial system did well, and some candidates made explicit comparisons between the egwugwu court and the court of the District Commissioner.

Question 5

Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*

- (a) Candidates' understanding of 'progress' varied, some interpreting it to mean a journey from one point to another, others as a passage towards improvement. Both approaches were equally valid, as candidates noted the changes in Pip following his visits to Satis House, his time in London, and finally on the return of Magwitch. To be fully successful, candidates needed to select references carefully to form an argument; weaker answers here relied on plot summary and paraphrase.
- (b) Most candidates were able to comment on Pip's disillusionment when he arrives in London, but surprisingly few were able to develop comments on Dickens' style in the passage, and thus his presentation of Pip's reactions, as required by the question.

Question 6

Doris Lessing: *Martha Quest*

- (a) There were very few answers on *Martha Quest*. Those who answered this question tended to write character studies of Martha's parents. Those who focused more successfully on the question of their roles in the novel made productive comments about the effect of their upbringing on Martha and her development, though few commented on their responses to her marriage towards the end of the novel
- (b) Better answers to the passage question commented on the homogeneity of the Dutch and Martha's detached judgemental view of them.

Paper 9695/04

Drama

General comments

The vast majority of candidates know their texts and are willing to engage with both text and question in interesting ways. However, it is noticeable in the (a) option for each question that there is a tendency for candidates to give general, impressionistic answers rather than using detail to make a case. In the (b) option candidates in the middle of the ability range are keener to paraphrase and summarise than offer critical commentary. More awareness and more explicit discussion of language would do much to raise many candidates' performances. In all questions, a closer awareness of dramatic techniques and effects would be helpful. All too often, characters in the plays were thought of as 'real', with candidates unwilling to consider the possibility of plays as carefully constructed artefacts. Some Centres might like to think about being more explicit with candidates about an appropriate register for an examination answer: good thoughts were often expressed inappropriately (Ferdinand is a 'perv'; Biff 'a pathetic loser') thus undermining interesting perception. Similarly, candidates should be discouraged from simply gushing about the text or writer. All too often, candidates at the lower end began by telling Examiners that the writer was 'brilliant' or 'well-reputed' and that the text was touching and wonderful. At this level, analysis is the key, and candidates would do well to get on with the substance of their answers as soon as possible.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

- (a) Candidates were not always comfortable with the precise detail required by the phrasing of this question. Therefore, instead of defining character as requested, there was a tendency to offer character studies. A few particular moments, well chosen, would have done the job much better than the character reviews typical of many answers. Candidates plainly found it difficult to see how character is revealed dramatically through language and action in a play.
- (b) Most candidates were able to discuss the differing attitudes of Marlene, Joyce and Angie, with the weaker answers focussing mainly on Angie's eagerness being compared to Marlene's defensiveness. Many candidates were fascinated by the family relationships revealed, though they found it difficult to place the discussions here in relation to the action of the rest of the play. More specific focus on the precise way in which Churchill attempts to convey real speech and thought in a difficult situation would have been welcome, particularly as the text gives such clear clues about how characters' talk overlaps in order to show us the urgency of their responses to each other.

Question 2

Athol Fugard: *The Township Plays*

- (a) There were few responses to this text, but most candidates showed a willingness to engage with the characters' struggle to survive. The best answers used a variety of characters and situations, often looking carefully at language or humour to illustrate the strength of the human spirit. Less successful answers offered more simplistic approaches, often simply listing, paraphrasing or simply offering character study.
- (b) Most of the answers to this question lacked really detailed engagement with the text. Candidates needed to be more aware of the clues in the question, picking up more readily on 'monologue' and 'significance.' The vocabulary, tone and tempo are carefully controlled here, and it is this that makes the speech so moving.

Question 3

Arthur Miller: *Death of a Salesman*

- (a) At the top end, there were some delightful answers, with candidates writing about stagecraft and staging to good effect. Many took the question's clue and used the description of the setting as a means of approaching the shifting time scheme of the play and the different perspectives that it offers. Strangely, virtually all candidates simply accepted that things were better for the Lomans when the boys were young, despite considerable textual evidence of Willy's self-deception even then. Lessons on the importance of the 'American dream' to the play had obviously been well learnt, but that meant that a number of candidates used the phrase as convenient shorthand in order to assert not demonstrate things about the play. The question was about the play as a whole, not merely Willy, and candidates needed to ensure that they did not get bogged down in simple character study.
- (b) There was a wide range of responses to the passage, with some merely paraphrasing whilst others were well aware of the sub-text behind the apparently mundane, inconsequential dialogue. Few, however, were willing to follow through the relationship between the two men in the play as a whole. Early on they are always competing with each other, apparently on fairly equal terms. By this stage, Willy knows how far the scales have tipped away from him. The awareness that the borrowing of money has become habitual, combined with the audience's knowledge of Willy's financial and work situation gives this scene a real poignancy.

Question 4

William Shakespeare: *As You Like It*

- (a) A number of candidates had plainly pre-prepared answers on the role of the Forest of Arden in the play. Sadly, these did not always reflect the complexity of the question asked. A list of the various functions of the forest is not the same as a response to its presentation, particularly if there is no attempt to deal closely with particular encounters in order to exemplify the dramatic. Only the best candidates were able to engage with the function of the forest in the imaginations of a range of characters or to demonstrate its transformational role for the central characters. A number of candidates dwelt lengthily on the parallel between the forest and Eden, and this often got in the way of a complex response. Some succumbed to merely contrasting court and forest, an approach which merely presented a small part of the forest's presentation.
- (b) Most candidates were able to talk about the general thrust of the passage, but only the most able really grappled with the detail. Few were willing to attempt the humour of the passage, Rosalind's quick wit, use of language, or the passage's dramatic significance. Amongst weaker candidates there was a great deal of paraphrase masquerading as critical comment.

Question 5

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a) A number of candidates took the question to mean the presentation of kings, rather than kingship as a philosophical idea. Whilst the contrast of *Macbeth* with Duncan and Edward certainly had relevance, there were few discussions of the particular moments in the play when characters actually reflect upon kingship. A small number of candidates had trouble in locating King Edward's role, with some speaking of him as another Scottish king, and others giving him an actual cameo role in the play. Candidates had often been taught about the divine right of kings and given some historical background, but this was only useful if fully rooted in textual exploration.
- (b) Many candidates showed real enjoyment of their exploration of the passage. Less successful attempts spent a long time putting the passage in context or simply went through it in a chronological way. Better answers were able to deal with the complexity of Banquo's feelings and the ironic ways in which every one is putting on a 'false face' in public to conceal their private fears. Once again, it would have been good to see more explicit reference to detail, to specific words and turns of phrase.

Question 6

John Webster: *The Duchess of Malfi*

- (a) There were few takers for this text. Those who tackled the essay often slightly misread the question, taking it to mean justice and corruption as opposed to the corruption of justice. Answers at the top end talked about poetic justice, legal justice or revenge, and many candidates were able to put together combinations of these three to come up with a sound response. Having said that, many answers could have been vastly improved by exact reference to specific scenes.
- (b) Candidates often wrote well about this passage, particularly when charting their own responses. However, there was little comment on the language or the dramatic, despite the inclusion of a rather gruesome stage direction on the Paper. Few were willing to delve deeply into the contradictions of Ferdinand's malignity or pick up Bosola's growing sense of disquiet at what is unfolding before him.

Paper 9695/05

Shakespeare and Other Pre-Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

Examiners reported a lively examination intake, with a significant number of excellent performances and a full range of responses to many questions, though there were no answers to *Joseph Andrews*. The overall impression was of variety and great enthusiasm for the works studied, from an ever-wider pool of well-prepared international candidates, which was very pleasing. There were few rubric infringements.

Particular favourites amongst the texts were *Othello*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*, though it was the latter that Examiners felt was least successful, being less well known and less well understood than other texts studied. There were many candidates who achieved a creditable mark for their first essay on, typically, *Othello*, but managed their *Chaucer* essay much less ably, often writing two whole sides less than the first and seeming much less confident in their approach. This was not the case with many of the Centres that had studied the Jane Austen novel, for example. The possible reasons for this will be explored in the detailed comments on each text. Candidates need to be reminded that each essay is worth the same marks and each text should have the same amount of time devoted to it, both in terms of preparation and time spent writing in the examination, if they are to score consistently. There were a significant number of unbalanced scripts.

The examination essay in this subject at this level demands a clear argument, tailored to the question asked and supported by close reference to the text itself. One or two Centres had clearly taught much critical theory about a text but their candidates had few primary textual resources to draw on to support these sophisticated points. When all the candidates in a Centre have the same rather abstract and general ideas and are similarly unable to elaborate or exemplify them, then the only conclusion must be that more time has been spent on theories about the text than on the text itself. It cannot be said too often that the first prerequisite for success is close familiarity with the work being studied, not in order to summarise the plot or the characters, but as basic knowledge from which different interpretations can develop. The average candidate who really knows the text well can usually do better than the gifted but lazy candidate who thinks it is possible to construct an essay from a few well-expressed generalities. Supporting detail, well chosen to illustrate the point being made, is a vital element in any literary essay. In the case of the passage questions, where the extract is printed in the Examination Paper, suitable analytical detail is the essence of a good answer, and the raw material is there in front of the candidate ready to be used to best effect.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

The Winter's Tale

This was the second most popular of the Shakespeare texts, though well below the overwhelming vote for *Othello*. On the whole, **(a)** was more popular than **(b)**, with many candidates able to write something about Polixenes' role in the play, though less on his significance.

- (a)** It was noticeable that the first half of the play was more widely drawn on for examples than the second and some candidates omitted his important interventions in the second half of the play. The debate with Perdita on nature and nurture is very important to the play and to the characterisation of Perdita: ultimately nothing revolutionary is being proposed in the play since Prince Florizel is going to marry a princess after all. It was a pity that this scene was not used more often, though, conversely, many candidates mentioned Polixenes' early reference to the innocence enjoyed by himself and Leontes when they were young and had not been corrupted by women. If there was a general fault here, it was the tendency to tell the story, an activity which is not highly rewarded in essays at this level.
- (b)** Fewer tackled **(b)** and those who did tended to concentrate on Autolycus's song and soliloquy and ignore the Clown talking anxiously to himself of his shopping list for the feast. Nonetheless there were some sound appreciations of Autolycus's unique contribution to the play's themes and atmosphere, much welcomed after the violent passions of the first part of the play.

Question 2

Othello

The text continues to soar in popularity right across the world; it is being examined widely in UK Centres at the moment too. Candidates respond fully and thoughtfully to the issues and characters of the play, in particular to Iago, whose villainy attracts much discussion. Both alternatives were very popular, though **(a)** had the edge.

- (a)** Most candidates agreed that the 'worst and the best' of human nature are a main concern of the play, but some argued that there are other main concerns, such as jealousy, hatred, racism, love and so on. Some essays offered only two character analyses: Iago representing the worst and Desdemona the best. More interesting were those arguments taking Othello as a complex character who moves from a state of goodness to pitiable weakness and evil as he becomes a murderer. These often saw Desdemona as less than perfect too. Many cited Cassio as an example of the best in human nature (even though, ironically, the printed passage in **(b)** shows his shallow attitude towards Bianca). All the many essays on this topic – the most popular in the whole Paper – showed engagement with the play and willingness to argue a case, which were very creditable. It had the unfortunate effect in some scripts of encouraging mis-timing, with an enthusiasm for *Othello* leaving too little time for the other essay. But these essays often represented candidates at their best in terms of personal involvement.

- (b) Alternative (b) was not so popular but there were still many who appreciated the passage and responded to it, giving details of what they thought the audience might be thinking and feeling as they watch the gulling of Othello. Some candidates had a very strong sense of theatre and were able to imagine clearly how the scene would work on stage, often pointing to the extraordinary luck of Iago, having Bianca arrive as he is spinning his web of deceit and confirming it with her words and actions, in particular with the handkerchief. As always, attention to detail was the key to a good answer.

Question 3

Richard III

Few Centres are now studying the play, but there were some very good answers, in particular to (b).

- (a) Essay alternative (a) was not as popular, though those who considered the ways in which uncertainty worked in the play often wrote well and interestingly, giving different definitions of what created an atmosphere of uncertainty, for example treachery and intrigue, warring factions and disloyalty.
- (b) However the passage (b) elicited some good answers, showing knowledge of the women characters in the play. The main fault in weaker answers was a tendency not to use the detail of the passage sufficiently, though the better responses did use the varying utterances of the Duchess, Anne and Queen Elizabeth effectively, not forgetting, as candidates so often do, the final speech of the extract.

Section B

Question 4

Sense and Sensibility

This text was second only to *Othello* in popularity and candidates showed their appreciation of the themes, social setting and characterisation of the novel.

- (a) Alternative (a) was the most popular, and most candidates had a clear idea of what sense and sensibility are, relating these qualities in the first instance to Elinor and Marianne. Occasionally there were confusions over the meaning, linking the words 'sensible' and 'sensibility', but on the whole the distinctive qualities were discussed using reasonable evidence from the novel. Simpler answers took the view that Elinor = sense and Marianne = sensibility and that sense was the better quality. More thoughtful responses reached the conclusion that both qualities were important and that each sister became a little more like the other in order to reach a happy equilibrium at the end of the novel. Other characters were also analysed to see where they belonged in the continuum between reason and emotion. One Centre wrote a great deal about eighteenth century Augustanism and Romanticism, but these concepts were never directed into the text itself, so they remained dryly historical, unsubstantiated by close critical analysis of the set work.
- (b) Alternative (b) was best answered by those who looked closely at the humorously ironic treatment of Lady Middleton's maternal doting and the generally satirical portrait of parents. The final paragraph of the passage, incidentally, offers an excellent example of the virtues of sensibility and the vices forced on sense by conventional manners: *Marianne was silent; it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel; and upon Elinor, therefore, the whole task of telling lies when politeness required it always fell.* Candidates evidently enjoyed the novel and wrote responsively on it; most essays showed knowledge of the text and used examples sensibly, with a few reaching full marks for their sensitivity and insight.

Question 5

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

There were very few answers on the novel.

- (a) This option encouraged some commentaries on the characterisation of Helen, though 'moralising' and 'tedious' were not fully addressed.

- (b) The passage (b) was better addressed, with some attempt to consider the dialogue between Helen and little Arthur in particular, showing with some success the exploration of the novel's main themes, which candidates do know but find difficulty exemplifying from the text.

Question 6

The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale

This text was very popular, yet it was clearly the one which some candidates had most difficulty with: there were more examples of short work, unfinished work and unprepared work on this text than anywhere else in the Paper. Candidates who wrote a perfectly sound essay on Shakespeare sometimes fell short here, which was a great pity. Leaving aside the excellent and good essays, of which there were, of course, a number, it seemed that some candidates found the language of the text difficult, or had little sympathy with the creation of the Pardoner as a character, created by Chaucer to narrate a moral Tale and to reveal himself through sermon and self-confession. Although this is a relatively short text by comparison with a Victorian novel, it is a sophisticated piece of narrative, ironic and ambiguous. For whatever reason, many candidates wrote more awkwardly about it, falling back on learned notes and generally performing with less confidence than on their other text. It is possible that more study time was devoted to Shakespeare, but each exam essay, it must be remembered, is worth the same number of marks in the final analysis.

- (a) Alternative (a) attracted many character sketches of the Pardoner, but those who tried to unpick the ambiguity of a character who attracts by his entertaining behaviour, yet repulses by his vicious greed, wrote well.
- (b) The passage question (b) was best answered by those who analysed the style of the passage rather than writing generally, drawing attention to digression, direct speech, description and self-conscious rhetorical flourishes.

Question 7

A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse

Although not very widely taken, this text had clearly been selected for study by enthusiasts, and the standard of answers was high, with some excellent work at the top end of the range. Perhaps because the poem in (b) is such a favourite, there were no answers to the (a) alternative.

- (b) Candidates examined closely the details of style that characterise Dickinson's poetry, the best combining close appreciation of this poem with awareness of the wider text. Examiners reported much sensitive and detailed work here.

Question 8

John Donne in The Metaphysical Poets

Few candidates had studied Donne and on the whole they found it a difficult text. Answers remained at a general level with few close references.

- (a) Option (a) offered the opportunity to write about the various love situations, as well as the sonnets addressed to Death or God and the obvious poem addressed to the sun. The last was the most popular of the poems chosen, but there was little attempt to discuss the 'various effects' achieved. One or two Centres had studied the poetry in real detail, resulting in a few sensitive answers full of insight, and these were highly praised by Examiners.
- (b) There were no substantial answers to (b).

Question 9

Joseph Andrews

There were too few responses to allow meaningful comment, though one Examiner had seen evidence that two candidates had enjoyed the novel and written with some appreciation of the humour in the passage question (b).

Question 10

Volpone

The play was quite popular, and candidates enjoyed writing on it.

- (a) The essay question (a) was the preferred option, with much concentration on Volpone's egoism, if not so much on his performance, despite the abundance of evidence in the play. For the most part, however, candidates identified key points on egoism and were able to discuss them, with better candidates appreciating the satire of Jonson's presentation.
- (b) There were very few answers to (b), and most understood the situation and had a clear idea of the characters, there was too little detailed analysis. In passage questions, detailed discussion of language and (as here) action will always score more highly.

Question 11

John Keats: Lyric Poems

Examiners were pleased to report that, in spite of only a small number of Centres offering Keats, the standard was often competent and sometimes very good. As with Dickinson, the impression was of enthusiasts enjoying this text.

- (a) Alternative (a) was, not surprisingly, less popular than the printed poem '*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*'. However there were candidates who took the abstract idea of beauty and discussed its manifestations in the work of Keats – not too difficult a task as it is a recurrent obsession for the poet! *Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty* was frequently quoted, though most candidates felt that it was by no means all that one knew or needed to know on earth.
- (b) Those candidates who chose (b) tried hard to discuss poetic qualities, with some success. Most knew the ballad form, and felt able to point out that it is not Keats's usual verse form, but that the descriptive qualities in the poem were highly characteristic.

Paper 9695/06

20th Century Texts

General comments

The work of the majority of candidates was sound with levels of achievement covering the whole range of bands. There was a scarcity of scripts of real distinction although there were some excellent individual responses and one or two Centres where the level of achievement was high. However there was a significant minority of candidates whose expression was poor in terms of basic grammar and whose response was consequently limited. Stronger candidates showed thorough and detailed knowledge of the texts with some evidence of literary appreciation. Once again what was lacking in the work of many candidates was the ability to focus on specific aspects in questions and to go beyond generalised argument and coherent but undeveloped responses. The presence of prepared but often marginally relevant answers to the (a) questions was again a regrettable feature of the work of many Centres. In these answers opening paragraphs often bore no relation to the question and quotations were often left without obvious points of reference. Candidates generally need more preparation in analysing titles and developing strategies to address ideas on the 'treatment' of themes. Centres should pay attention to the requirements of the (b) questions where once again too many candidates failed to give the passages the close scrutiny required, favouring instead a general essay on the work as a whole. Nevertheless there was some distinguished work and highly sophisticated analysis with evidence of strongly felt individual viewpoints. It was pleasing to note once again that there were very few candidates who produced work which was totally inadequate. The quality of expression was generally at least adequate and occasionally highly competent and many candidates engaged with the chosen texts with obvious enthusiasm.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Cat's Eye: Margaret Atwood

Both questions were generally well-answered showing genuine engagement with the text and the ability to comment on narrative structure and method. In **(a)** most candidates were able to discuss the experience of childhood with an awareness of its complexities, including in Elaine's case her unusual early life and the significant influences of Cordelia and her brother. Some candidates were content with an overly narrative approach however. In **(b)** more able candidates noted the tone of regret produced by Elaine's realisation that she would never experience the relationship achieved by the two old ladies. One or two candidates were aware of the sense of perspective through the description of the physical world. Very few were able to examine the passage as an effective conclusion. In **(a)** there was some evidence of prepared answers, lacking both spontaneity and an individual response. Weaker candidates were less able to link general comments with the specific demands of both questions.

Question 2

Waiting for Godot: Samuel Beckett

This text was approached much more constructively and much less abstractly this session. There was still some evidence, however, of paraphrase in **(b)** and narrative summary in **(a)**. The weakest candidates often depended on unprocessed quotation and many essays were generalised rehearsals of second hand information about the Theatre of the Absurd and Existentialism. In **(a)** many candidates wrote informatively about Lucky; better answers noted the importance of his symbolic input to the play, referring persuasively to the master - slave relationship, the philosophising and the limitations of language. Weaker candidates resorted to description and narrative without analysis. Few candidates made use of the quotation or included Lucky's contribution to the comedy. In **(b)** better candidates were able to refer to different types of humour: circus slapstick, humour based on language and the use of silence in comic situations. Many candidates found it difficult to discuss humour and merely paraphrased the passage or wrote in an unfocused way on the rest of the play. Few candidates were able to distinguish between audience reaction to set pieces and the integration of humour in the whole play.

Question 3

Selected Poems: T.S. Eliot

In **(a)** candidates were required to range widely across the poems, discussing the proposition by referring to significant figures and analysing the way they were presented. In **(b)** candidates were required to analyse the poem in the context of their reading of Eliot. Although some candidates displayed sound knowledge of the content of the major poems in **(a)** analysis tended to be thin and 'prisoners' was given the widest possible interpretation in the search for usable material. Many answers were generalised essays on the state of society. Most candidates were able to write adequate critical analyses in **(b)** but few were able to widen the discussion to other poems or to comment adequately on the use of techniques in general.

Question 4

A Passage to India: E. M. Forster

The response to this question was mixed. A minority of candidates engaged with issues of characterisation and narrative method and effects as required. Many candidates, however, resorted to mere narration of incidents without any overview of the novel or comment on literary method. Candidates seemed to find difficulty with the word 'presentation' in **(a)** and weaker candidates were content to describe Godbole's physical appearance and retell incidents he was involved in. More able candidates discussed both his character and significance in the plot within the context of his religious nature and beliefs. Answers to **(b)** were often disappointing in that many candidates failed to go beyond the assertion that the passage is a good ending to the novel without explaining why this is so. Better candidates traced the relationship without narrating and discussed the significance of the Temple section as a whole as well as focusing on the use of language, in particular the tone of the discussion between Aziz and Fielding and the use of irony. The strongest candidates addressed the use of symbolism in the last paragraph.

Question 5

An Artist of the Floating World: Kazuo Ishiguro

This was very much a minority choice, attempted by very few Centres. In **(a)** few candidates were able to deal with the issues implicit in the quotation because of serious weaknesses in textual understanding. Consequently the status of Ono as narrator was rarely put into any meaningful context. Similarly in **(b)** lack of understanding and textual knowledge hindered attempts to deal with 'characteristic' in terms of dialogue or situation.

Question 6

Selected Poems: Elizabeth Jennings

Not a popular choice of text. **(a)** required a discussion of the issue stated in the context of a detailed knowledge of the chosen poems. There was some evidence of relevant knowledge of the poems chosen but little poetic response. In **(b)** critical analysis demanded consideration, at least, of the effects of language in terms of giving a sense of immediacy to the use of imagery linking life and death. Few candidates were able to achieve this because of lack of familiarity with the poem and fewer still to widen the discussion to a consideration of other poems in the selection.

Question 7

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

Again, a minority choice. In **(a)** candidates were required to address the presentation of women in the context of both plays. Better candidates were able to demonstrate secure textual knowledge by considering several of the female characters but most were content to focus on Amope and Rebecca. Better answers made use of knowledge to make connections between texts within the context of Jero's problems with the 'Daughters of Discord.' Some candidates were able to analyse the dramatic and comic effects achieved. In **(b)** few candidates were able to analyse the structure of the passage, the language of the preacher and Chume or to explain the humour implicit in Jero's manipulation of his followers or the dramatic and comic effects of the scene.

Question 8

A Streetcar Named Desire: Tennessee Williams

Again overwhelmingly the most popular choice with an equal split between **(a)** and **(b)**. Both questions produced essays which were full and for the most part relevant and competently expressed although weaker candidates found difficulty in organising useful material. In **(a)** better candidates saw the relationship in terms of 'need' and stressed the 'last chance' element in it for both characters. Whilst analyses of the course of the relationship were well - informed candidates had difficulty in assessing its importance to the dramatic effect. The weakest candidates gave very general accounts of the relationship and tended to write about Blanche rather than Mitch. The best were able to show the impact on Stanley and to make comparisons with other relationships in the play. In **(b)** many candidates discussed some of the dramatic effects - the use of the Mexican woman, music and light but omitted a discussion of Blanche's language and the catalytic effect of the Mexican woman on Blanche as she relived her past and made the connection between death and desire. Better candidates were able to link their analysis to particular themes but few included any indication of their personal response and ideas about methods. Weaker candidates wrote generalised paraphrases of the passage or essays on Blanche.

Overall

Examiners emphasised the following problems:

Once again the use of prepared material to cope with certain texts e.g. Beckett and Eliot where second - hand material on Existentialism, Theatre of the Absurd, Christian symbolism, post -war angst, was a barrier to the communication of the direct personal response which the questions invite.

The text - based questions demand skills of analysis of methods and techniques of close critical examination of language. Centres should acknowledge the difficulty of these processes and provide candidates with practice in these areas. Too many candidates attempt these questions without an understanding of what is required of them.

General comments

While the entry this session was small, there was a good range of Centres, and some interesting and thoughtful work was offered on all three questions. Several general comments and suggestions must be made, but there is no doubt that overall there was considerable confidence among candidates about tackling unseen literature, and a fairly pleasing level of competence in adopting a formal and focused critical stance in so doing.

Critical appreciation is of course not an easy exercise: to be faced with an unseen piece of writing, and to be asked – in a quite frighteningly short time – to write thoughtfully, perceptively and analytically about it can be very daunting. Few candidates this autumn appeared to be overwhelmed, however, and fewer still were entirely unable to say anything of value – in fact, very few indeed found any of the three passages to be wholly beyond at least part of their grasp, and the huge majority were able to make good, often quite insightful and perceptive, comments on at least one of the two they chose, often combined with some interestingly personal responses. Most, too, were able to identify some at least of the stylistic techniques and devices used by the writers, though too few managed the combination of individual ideas and responses with the more formal critical exploration that marks the really good answer.

Most – quite wisely – began their answers to both their texts with a brief summary of what they contained, and what their theme(s) appeared to be. Provided that such an introduction is indeed brief this is a good way to start, allowing the candidate time and space to marshal his or her thoughts, and to find a suitable context in which to express them; the danger lies in allowing an introductory summary to become mere paraphrase, and too many answers were just this. **Question 2** proved the most susceptible to this approach, but the poems also attracted paraphrase-answers, and even where these were supported by quotation and illustration they did not allow enough scope for more formal critical examination and discussion. At the other extreme, of course, were answers that simply or primarily listed techniques, without aligning these with themes or ideas, and without any discussion of the effects created by the writer, or read by the candidate.

Many candidates allowed themselves rather too much time to write about their own personal interests or concerns, and about how the reading of these extracts will influence, or even simply reflect, these interests. It is of course good to see a personal reaction to a piece of literature – a clinical analysis without response can be entirely arid – but to treat the texts as if they were in some way intended as moral tracts, or lessons for the guidance of candidates, is to miss much of their point as creative literature.

Most candidates who used technical terms – and most attempted to do so – were familiar with most of the common ones, though it is important to stress yet again that no credit can be given to answers which simply identify and list, no matter how fully illustrated; what matters is the effect or impact of such techniques. This will be brought up again in relation to individual questions. There seems a slightly worrying looseness of understanding with regard to the terms ‘free verse’ and ‘blank verse’; in one sense it is unimportant, but when a candidate says categorically that Walcott’s poem *A Lesson for This Sunday* is written in free verse, it is a bit worrying, as it must surely become quite quickly clear that while there is some degree of fluidity in the lines the poem is in fact basically and almost consistently written in iambic pentameters (that is, because there is little rhyme, effectively blank verse); a very small handful of candidates noted this, but far too many were content to say categorically that there is no regular rhythm in the poem, and that therefore it is free verse. Incidentally, while the words are certainly not the easiest to spell, it remains very depressing how often ‘rhyme’ and ‘rhythm’ are confused and mis-spelt. The terms ‘stanza’ and ‘paragraph’ were also interchanged and misused with slightly worrying frequency – the occasional slip is entirely understandable and wholly forgivable, but consistently misusing them is not.

There was, too, a surprisingly frequent casualness about some phrasing, which led in turn to an uncertainty as to whether some candidates really did understand what they were saying. For example, many were happy to write that ‘the poet expresses his point here mainly through diction . . .’, or in several cases, ‘the writer uses words and diction here . . .’. There may have been some intended differentiation between the two terms, words and diction, but this was never clear. Similarly, to say (in relation to the Hayden poem) that the writer ‘uses words such as cracked, ached, blueblack, splintering, breaking . . .’ is not really helpful; the candidate is presumably drawing attention to the use of these specific words, so why the need to raise the assumption that there are others like them, and then not to say what they are?

Finally, in terms of loose writing, there was a surprisingly frequent use of the expressions 'Here the writer is trying to say that . . .', or 'the writer seems to be saying that . . .'. If the candidate is suggesting that the writer is unsuccessfully trying to say something, then s/he does need to explore why it is unsuccessful, or why what seems to be happening is not in fact what the final effect has become; if this is not explored, then the comment is not criticism, but just empty words – far better to say quite simply that 'The writer says . . .'.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Walcott: A Lesson for This Sunday

This was the least popular question, though it certainly produced some extremely interesting responses from the 40% of candidates who tackled it. The theme of the poem is suggested in the wording of the question, though many candidates wanted to see different ideas in the poem, sometimes quite confidently and sensibly. Most, though, were well able to identify the changing moods of the speaker as the poem moves from quiet relaxation and peace in stanza one, through the sudden interruption of noise and 'violence' in stanza two, to the concluding reflectiveness and resigned sadness of stanza three.

Most candidates took a rather more solemn line with the poem than Walcott himself may have done, seeing it – understandably, in view of its title, of course – as a poem with a fierce and highly religious 'message' (a word often used here). The poem's theme is indeed serious, and nobody saw it as otherwise, but the tone of the poem is surely not over-heavy? For example, the wording of lines 13 to 18 is deliberately ponderous and elevated – serious lepidopterists, the little surgeon, as a mantis prays, eviscerate, prodigies – with humorous intent? Walcott is not, it seems, condoning the children's actions in maiming the butterfly, but equally he is not suggesting that what they are doing is mortally and criminally sinful, rather the actions of normally inquisitive youngsters, who simply want to see what happens when they 'pin' the insect – Walcott is of course saddened by this, and by the thought that this is evidence of the 'heredity of cruelty', and evidence too that as we grow older we all grow inevitably into cruelty and pain, and finally meet death's 'scythe'. No candidate's work was marked down simply for this reason, of course, but there did seem a frequent wish to make the poem far more sombre and moralistic than it really is.

There was much good discussion of the images: many candidates saw the repetition of the grass image at the end, with its subtle change of tone, as evidence of the careful structure of the poem; the comparison between the girl and the butterfly, both yellow and frail creatures doomed by their existence, was frequently pointed to, as was the startlingly effective picture in line 27 ('the frocks of summer torn'); the occasional rhyme was noted – but only one candidate apparently saw the suddenly tight rhyme of the final stanza, which combines with an entirely regular iambic rhythm to close the poem in a quiet, resigned, but clearly conclusive manner.

Question 2

Kate Chopin: The Awakening

Some three-quarters of candidates tackled this extract, and often very well; there is ample material in it for good and detailed study, and there were some interesting and often very perceptive comments on the movement of the whole passage from calm apprehension, through exuberant enjoyment, to sudden over-confidence and terror, and ending in either relaxed safety or perhaps ashamed loneliness. Many answers did see something of this movement, and some made explicit comment on it, frequently relating this to the changing in length of paragraphs as the passage progresses.

There was a greater confidence in dealing with the opening few paragraphs, with almost all answers selecting a range of words and images to show how Chopin creates an atmosphere; there was less certainty about what the atmosphere actually is, and a lot of answers made no real attempt to define it at all, relying simply upon a somewhat unfocused listing of the various ways Chopin writes. Many noted – but again without relating this to any effect(s) – that several senses are appealed to; too often this was seen simply as evidence that 'Chopin can create a very vivid atmosphere', or that 'she must have had a similar experience herself', and not as many candidates as might have been expected saw the peacefulness of the scene as indicative of the way in which Edna was different from other people – they were relaxed and happy, and in small groups, while she was alone and fearful. The use of the 'serpent' simile in line 12 was quite often noted as illustrating Edna's fear, and of foreshadowing future pain, though perhaps too often with religious overtones which are not really evident anywhere else in the passage.

After the opening paragraphs, many candidates fell into paraphrase mode rather than critical; there is of course more in the passage than can be easily managed in a short time but it was nonetheless disappointing that relatively few did more than outline what happened to Edna while swimming. Many came back at the end, and commented on the effect of her husband's reaction – whether this was genuine care and affection, or patronising let-down is unimportant, provided that the argument is convincing; and when Edna walks away 'alone' it may be out of pride and satisfaction, or of course out of renewed shame and isolation because of her sense of failure – both views were seen and argued by candidates.

As with the Walcott poem, a surprising number of candidates saw a conscious moral message in the extract, often relating this to their own lives and experiences; there is no fault in this, except of course that there is no evidence anywhere in the passage that this is Chopin's intention, and candidates concerned to find morals or messages in a text might often be better advised to spend more time looking closely and analytically at what actually is written.

Question 3

Hayden and Lawrence: Those Winter Sundays and Piano

This was the most widely answered question, and perhaps surprisingly the writing on the first poem was almost invariably better than that on the second, perhaps because the concept of hymn-singing to a piano, in a 'cosy parlour', is so much more removed from 21st Century experience.

Most candidates chose to move frequently and often very easily between the two poems, though some took the easier option of dealing with each separately before attempting a comparison. There was a good deal of discussion about the structure of each poem, much of it slightly aimless – the fact that each has three stanzas, for example, is surely just chance rather than significant – though there was some excellent discussion of the value of rhyme in *Piano*, reflecting Lawrence's certainty and security, compared with the relative lack of it in *Those Winter Sundays*, reflecting Hayden's uncertainty and insecurity.

Almost without exception, candidates noted and commented upon the sharp and powerful images of Hayden's poem, though surprisingly few went further to talk of the effects that these created, beyond the fairly obvious sense that cold and hard physical labour were so evident in the opening stanza. Many noted the words 'the cold splintering, breaking', but found it hard to explain their effectiveness, combining the literal sounds of wood being splintered and broken for the fire with the metaphorical destruction of the cold in the house, though most candidates were able to see that the house was indeed cold and apparently unfeeling – 'the chronic angers of that house' seemed to touch a common and sensitive nerve in many answers. The repeated rhetorical question in line 13 was often discussed, though hardly any candidate seemed to fully understand the meaning of the final line, with many appearing to see it as Hayden referring to his current work literally in an office, which happens also to be cold and austere, thus reminding him of his childhood home; the idea of housework, however caring and loving, as 'an office', was almost universally missed. One or two candidates did notice that the poem has fourteen lines, and called it therefore a sonnet, but none of these went beyond this, and while many referred to 'free verse', hardly anybody saw the very tight control which Hayden exercises throughout in almost every way.

Perhaps because of time, or perhaps for the reason suggested above, Lawrence's poem was more often than not tackled more cursorily, though virtually every candidate saw the warmth here as real and intimate, unlike that not seen in *Those Winter Sundays*. Most saw the way that Lawrence was spurred into his memory by hearing a singer – though many did appear to believe that the singer in line one and his mother are the same person, which led some into difficulties of interpretation.

Most noted the considerable differences in tone and atmosphere between the two poems, and were able to quote quite fully to illustrate this, and as noted above Lawrence's use of rhyme and (apparently) regular rhythm was generally seen as evidence of the greater warmth and 'cosiness' that his poem creates. Many expressed a preference for this poem, but interestingly (and, it must be said, irrelevantly) on the grounds that they felt a closer empathy with Lawrence's longing for his mother and her comforts than they did for Hayden and his sadness; very few justified a preference on purely critical grounds.

There was ample opportunity with both poems for discussion of metaphor and simile, and most candidates took up this opportunity, but again relatively few discussed the effectiveness or otherwise of what they had identified, preferring to leave the devices simply identified. The same could have been true with the onomatopoeia in both poems, but curiously – and pleasingly – this was almost invariably discussed rather than just noted, often with some real insight.