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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.**

ENGLISH LITERATURE

Paper 0397/01

Poetry, Prose and Drama

General comments

Examiners noted an increased confidence in the way candidates approached the paper in this session. The great majority of candidates seemed well-prepared and have a good knowledge of their set texts. There were certainly examples where this was not the case, and some candidates struggled to demonstrate their knowledge, but by and large essays marshalled knowledge effectively. At the top end of the mark range, many candidates produced work of the highest standard. Their ability to write detailed, controlled, articulate answers in the time available was impressive.

Answers were again dominated by *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and *A Grain of Wheat*, though each text had been studied widely with the exception of Stevie Smith's *Selected Poems*.

As noted in the June report, it is clear that Centres are preparing candidates in the specific techniques for the questions with increasing success. Answers to the open (a) questions are effective when they are well shaped, constructing a clear argument, and supported by appropriate quotation and reference. The most confident answers to the passage (b) questions focus in considerable detail on the text printed on the examination paper, commenting on the effectiveness of the author's choices of form, language and imagery.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) With so many candidates choosing to answer this question, it provided Examiners with a very wide range of responses. While there were examples of what appeared to be pre-prepared essays, with little reference to the question, most candidates were able to choose appropriate poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* to illustrate their answers on Blake's concern with social injustice. Less successful candidates, however, tended to summarise the content of their chosen poems, explaining, for example, the difficulties of chimney sweeping, without paying much attention to Blake's presentation of the social concern in his poetry. Although some of these answers were well focused on social injustice and the social background to Blake's concerns, these issues took centre stage to the neglect of closer analysis. More successful answers demonstrated an awareness of the contextual issues, but focused on Blake's form, imagery and language in his poetry.
- (b) This was another popular choice. Candidates frequently noted that the opening of the set poem is reminiscent of the *Innocence* poems before it alters its tone and becomes much more characteristic of *Experience*. The best answers, through careful textual analysis, noted the way the language alters to signal these changes. Many candidates were able to demonstrate good knowledge of the whole text by referring in detail to other poems in support of their argument. At the lower end of the mark range, candidates struggled to progress beyond a paraphrase of the poem.

Question 2

Touched with Fire: ed. Hydes

- (a) This question elicited answers which referred to a wide range of poems, including *Ozymandias*, *The Wild Swans at Coole*, *Cold in the Earth*, *Rising Five*, *Tall Nettles* and *Thistles*. While in some cases the choice of poems was surprising, candidates were usually able to construct a justification of their selection. It was disappointing to see that candidates did not tackle highly relevant material in some of the longer poems in the selection, namely *Mariana* and *Tintern Abbey*. However, in most cases, candidates constructed valid arguments in comparing the treatment of the passing of time. Differentiation was achieved by the level of detail and awareness of poetic technique which candidates demonstrated.
- (b) Many candidates responded with enthusiasm to Heaney's poem, and there were few examples of dogged paraphrase. Many responded well to the prompt word 'language' in the question, commenting quite closely and pertinently on diction, and in doing so, were able to mark the development of the narrator's perspective through the poem. While very many candidates wrote well on the question, few candidates responded to the ambiguities in the poem. Most divided into two camps: those who thought Dan Taggart a cruel and domineering animal murderer and those who agreed that on "well-run farms" pests do "need to be kept down." A few candidates noted that the shift to polysyllabic diction in the final stanza creates unresolved ambiguities.

Question 3

Stevie Smith: *Selected Poems*

- (a)(b) There were too few answers on this text to make a useful general comment.

Question 4

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

- (a) There were some strong and well-informed answers on Mrs Thornton and Fanny, usually based on a good knowledge of the novel. Less confident candidates offered a study of the two women, describing their characters and relating some incidents in the novel which involve them. More confident candidates saw both women as pivotal in some way, presenting a contrast with each other and with other characters in the novel. Thus Fanny was often usefully compared with Edith and contrasted with Margaret, while Mrs Thornton was compared with Aunt Shaw and Mrs Thornton. The relationships between Mrs Hale and Frederick and Mrs Thornton and John were at the centre of some very interesting answers. Some very good answers were rooted in the text but also showed an awareness of social expectations for women at the time and the way Gaskell challenges them through the character of Margaret.
- (b) A number of candidates noted the words 'the condition of working people' in the question and concentrated their answers on working conditions seen in the novel. Better candidates noted the question's focus on the way these are presented, and in doing so were able to comment not only on the difficulty of a working life, whether in the north or the south, but also on Higgins' northern dialect presenting his plight in colloquial terms, compared with Margaret's more formal speech outlining the difficulties of the south. Many candidates noted this episode as a pivotal one in the novel, where Margaret is forced to reevaluate her own view of the south.

Question 5Doris Lessing: *Martha Quest*

- (a) This was the final appearance of this text on the paper, but it still attracted a healthy number of answers, which were, for the most part, well informed and appreciative of the novel. Some of the answers on the Cohen brothers were quite simple, noting their lending of books to Martha and their early presentation to her of a challenge to the prevalent racism. More confident answers went much further, noting Joss Cohen's role in particular, provoking Martha into intellectual thought and into higher aspirations, goading her into grasping her independence and leaving home, and helping her get a job in the city. Such answers then noted how Martha's development demonstrates her inability to live up to Joss's and her own expectations. Thus the influence of the Cohen brothers forms a background to the whole second half of the novel, even when the characters themselves are not present in the narrative.
- (b) While some weaker answers did not progress far beyond a paraphrase of the episode, many candidates seemed actively to enjoy comparing Lessing's presentation of the members of the Left Book Club and Martha's response to them, appreciating the humour of the extract. The author's technique of moving in and out of Martha's perceptions was frequently noted, allowing, for example, the reader to compare Martha's "But they are old" with the narrative voice's "They were, in fact, between thirty and forty". Martha's own self-consciousness was usually noted, while several candidates also considered wider issues. Some commented, for example, that the episode shows how Martha focuses on matters of appearance and fashion under the influence of Donovan, and abandons the social and political issues which led her to the Club under the influence of Joss. Others noted her fierce comments on babies, motherhood and married domesticity and compared these with her marriage to Douglas at the end of the novel.

Question 6Ngugi: *A Grain of Wheat*

- (a) This was by far the most popular text on the paper, and this the most popular question. It was rare to find a candidate who struggled with it, as a reasonable knowledge of plot and character would form the beginnings of an answer. At the lower end of the mark range, candidates were able to show examples of courage and betrayal in the actions of various characters. Better answers were able to show how, with nearly all the characters, these issues are interrelated, making easy judgements of characters very difficult. Many answers naturally focused on Mugo, but Mumbi, Kihika, Gikonyo, Karanja and Thompson often featured in wide-ranging answers.
- (b) At one end of the scale, some candidates seemed puzzled by this extract and were not clear that Thompson was reading his own notes. In these cases, even paraphrase became confused. On the other hand, there were many detailed and thoughtful answers which noted the colonial attitudes represented by the language in the notebook entries and compared the statements there with events described elsewhere in the novel. Such answers, for example, linked Thompson's note on African 'violence and savagery' with his own actions at Rira camp. Thompson's decline from idealism to disillusionment was frequently noted, and candidates often connected the form of the extract with comments on the narrative structure of the novel.

Question 7Caryl Churchill: *Serious Money*

- (a)(b) There were too few answers on this text to make a useful general comment.

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a) Most answers here were able to demonstrate the role of ambition in the play, usually concentrating on Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Answers attracting higher marks were those which took full account of the question's focus on the 'presentation of ambition'. These looked, for example, at the language of Lady Macbeth's speeches, the form of Macbeth's doubting soliloquies and contrasted these characters' response to the witches' prophecies with that of Banquo. A few answers examined the idea of ambition being an 'illness'.
- (b) There were a number of dogged summaries and paraphrases of the scene with the Apparitions, which were not successful answers. More confident candidates commented on the ambiguity of the Apparitions' statements, while connecting their words to later events in the drama, and in this way developing ideas about the significance of the episode. A number of answers were very aware of the dramatic potential of the scene, making interesting comments on the sounds of thunder which punctuate it and the appearance of the Apparitions, considering the likely audience response to 'an armed Head', 'a bloody Child' and so on.

Question 9

Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a) This question elicited some personal and lively answers. Most did agree that Laura evokes sympathy, though a number thought that she is dull and irritating. Better answers looked at her actions and speeches in some detail, considering their likely effect on an audience. Candidates often noted the symbolism of the glass menagerie itself as a device to win sympathy for Laura.
- (b) In answers to this question, candidates often recognised the problem the audience has in viewing Amanda through Tom's bias. Tom's speech received a lot of attention, though Ida Scott's evident dismissal of the phonecall was commented on less frequently. Few candidates made very much reference to the screen images and legends, which are part of Williams' theatrical ways of influencing an audience's perception of characters and events.