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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

A large cohort of candidates entered the examination this session, the majority showing thorough knowledge of their texts, often accompanied by engagement and enjoyment. Many Centres are clearly preparing their candidates very well, shown in their detailed knowledge of texts and often a good contextual knowledge as well. Those candidates who were able to select from their contextual knowledge, and use it precisely to inform their answers to the questions, wrote thoughtful and often sophisticated answers.

From such a large candidature, the majority wrote on Keats' poetry and Ngugi's: *A Grain of Wheat*. These two texts overwhelmed the others by some margin, but *Touched with Fire*, *North and South* and the short stories of Katherine Mansfield were also well represented. Paper 9 Drama answers were quite equally divided between *Macbeth* and *The Glass Menagerie*. There were very few answers on *Serious Money*.

While candidates' confidence in dealing with texts and questions seems to have improved over the years, the issues which divide the successful candidates from those who are less successful remain clear. Successful candidates select carefully from their knowledge to answer the question set, specifically and directly. They support points with reference and quotation, and write about the authors and their techniques rather than characters and plot. Those who are less successful use their knowledge and learning without selectivity, approach answers from a narrative position and use contextual knowledge in the place of textual knowledge. In the passage-based questions, successful candidates analyse the language and form of the extract on the paper in considerable detail.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

John Keats: *Selected Poems*

- (a) This was a very popular question and elicited very varied responses. At the top end of the mark range, candidates used the two quotations in the question to give a lead into appropriate poems and focused specifically on these choices. Usually they were contrasting choices, to indicate the range in Keats' verse, and they examined the language and form in which the views of human life are expressed. Often clear links were made to circumstances in Keats' own life which led him to consider the contrasting elements in human life as a whole. 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and 'Ode on Melancholy' were frequent and successful choices. In June, a number of candidates seemed to struggle with the narrative verse, so it was surprising that many candidates chose to focus on narrative verse for this question. While 'The Eve of St Agnes' in particular often worked well, many candidates who chose narrative poems struggled to make their choices relevant to the question and relied on paraphrase combined with Keats' biography. 'Negative capability' cropped up in many answers, but often without understanding, while 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' was quoted by very many candidates, but most often without clear relevance to the question.
- (b) Most candidates who attempted this question seemed confident in their knowledge of the poem, and those who paid attention to the question's requirement for attention to language and form were the more successful. The key part of this answer was to link the language and form to the development of the poem's ideas, so those candidates who matched technical knowledge with an overarching understanding of the whole poem did very well. In some cases, candidates relied on identification of poetic devices, with little evidence of an understanding of the poem. This lack of comprehension was apparent in a number of answers which demonstrated that candidates had not understood the progression of seasons in a temperate climate, which led to misunderstanding of what Autumn is and represents.

Question 2

Touched with Fire: ed. Hydes

- (a) This was the less popular of the two options, but many candidates selected appropriate poems and wrote well about poets' treatment of the past, memory, or both. 'Ozymandias', 'Cold in the Earth', 'The Wild Swans at Coole', 'The Early Purges', for example, were all widely-chosen poems. Candidates who choose the open essay question on the anthology tend to be quite confident in their ability to choose appropriate poems and recall them with some accuracy, resulting in fewer answers which are reliant on summary and paraphrase.
- (b) There were very many answers on 'Musee des Beaux Arts', which varied widely in quality. Many candidates seemed to be approaching the poem as an unseen text, rather than one they had prepared, and as some of its ideas are quite complex, a number of these candidates struggled. Candidates who were familiar with the central concepts of art galleries, 'Old Masters' and the Icarus myth had the basis for a successful answer. Some candidates appreciated the subtleties of Auden's casually irregular lines, unassertive rhymes and apparent untidiness as the poem's form imitates a wandering musing on paintings in a gallery. Others were very sensitive to particular images which Auden describes in the paintings, such as 'doggy life', the 'torturer's horse(s)... innocent behind' and 'the expensive delicate ship'.

Question 3

Stevie Smith: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) The majority of candidates on Smith chose this question and most made a reasonable attempt to interpret the poem, although there was a tendency to treat it at a very literal level. This meant seeing it as being about the life of one specific man, rather than the human condition in general. As a result, some candidates struggled to deal with lines such as 'I ran wild for centuries'. The most successful answers referred to religious imagery and the three stages reflected in the poem's structure. A number of candidates were unaware of the sex of Stevie Smith, which was surprising.

Question 4

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

- (a) There were many good answers on *North and South*, and many candidates felt confident with the contribution which Bessy makes to the novel. Especially pleasing to Examiners was that most candidates avoided a narrative approach and were able to select specific illuminating episodes to concentrate on Bessy's role, rather than just her character. Such candidates often showed an awareness of the significance of the character as a female representative of the working classes, and as a contributory factor in the development of Margaret. Comparisons were also made with Edith and Fanny Thornton, candidates focusing on Gaskell's portrayal of her fortitude, patience and religious conviction.
- (b) The choice of passage proved to be a helpful one for candidates. Because there was little physical action, it was difficult to lapse into narrative and this assisted candidates in focusing on aspects of presentation, such as Mr Hale's nervousness and Margaret's internal monologue. Wider textual knowledge was often impressively linked too, with most answers showing a clear understanding of the significance of decision to move in the lives of the family. Some weaker answers dealt with the passage very briefly before narrating the fortunes of the family in Milton Northern.

Question 5

Katherine Mansfield: *The Garden Party and Other Stories*

- (a) Candidates referred to a wide range of stories in answer to this question, 'Prelude', 'Bliss', 'Millie' and 'Frau Brechenmacher' being particularly favoured choices. The most successful candidates were able to comment on how Mansfield allows characters to reveal themselves through their thoughts and feelings, and how she uses imagery and symbolism. Some were able to point out that the stories reveal Mansfield's attitude to social divisions and her views on the position of women. Textual knowledge was nearly always very good, with few answers dependent on paraphrase.
- (b) Many candidates had a good knowledge of Laura's character as it is presented in the passage and at other key points in the story. Candidates approached the concept of the internal and external worlds of the character by comparing the presentation of Laura's internal thoughts with her external behaviour towards the workmen, an approach which was usually very successful. Many candidates showed good understanding of the social background against which these stories were written. Some saw Laura negotiating a class position with the workmen, while others suggested she is assuming the manners of being grown-up, to which the workmen respond tactfully and sympathetically. Again, either interpretation worked effectively.

Question 6

Ngugi: *A Grain of Wheat*

- (a) Most candidates had no difficulty in seeing Karanja as a traitor, but many candidates were more successful in arguing for a more balanced view of his role in the novel. Some of the most impressive answers were those in which candidates discussed the different roles of Karanja, for example, betrayer, rejected lover, servant of the white man and, ultimately, failure. Such essays recognised how Karanja the guitar-playing, witty, debater turns into a lonely, cruel, adulterer once he becomes the Europeans' servant. Some candidates noted that Karanja still has rain falling on him as he goes into exile, so that Ngugi seems to have pity on him despite his failings.
- (b) Though less confident candidates tended to paraphrase the passage, giving a general account of the characters concerned, there were many good answers which concentrated in detail on the language of the passage. There was a good sense of the context in which the passage was framed and a sympathetic commentary on the characters. Those candidates who noted that the reader at this point knows that Gikonyo's and Mumbi's marriage is in difficulty were particularly successful in contextualising the extract. There were several candidates, however, who misplaced the passage, assuming it takes place after Gikonyo's discovery of Mumbi's child by Karanja. Such a misunderstanding led these answers seriously astray. Many candidates appreciated the linguistic details of the passage and its tone of sensuality and sexuality. More confident candidates analysed the effects carefully, while less confident candidates asserted that 'the language shows that Gikonyo is excited'.

Question 7

Caryl Churchill: *Serious Money*

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

Question 8

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

- (a)** Candidates often showed a good knowledge of the play in answering this question, noting that illness and disease are widely-used metaphors within the text. Some candidates found it difficult to go beyond illness as a metaphor for ambition, but more confident candidates drew together a number of examples of the imagery, looking at the corruption of the state of Scotland and the imagery surrounding the King of England.
- (b)** Most candidates were aware of the context of this scene, as the forces opposed to Macbeth gather and the movement towards his end accelerates. Some candidates commented on the fact that this acceleration is voiced by relatively minor characters, and that their references to Siward, Donalbain, Malcolm, Macduff and 'the English pow'r' demonstrates the breadth of the movement against Macbeth. Others noted the references to Macbeth's behaviour, compared with what the audience has already seen. The most successful candidates were those who focused very clearly on the detail, noting, for example, the continuation of the play's clothing imagery.

Question 9

Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

- (a)** This question provided a real opportunity for candidates to develop their personal responses to character. Many candidates took this opportunity, showing good textual knowledge and presenting a thoughtful and balanced consideration of Amanda with helpful use of supporting evidence. Candidates were able to demonstrate what there is to 'laugh at' in Amanda's character, and many further suggested that she could have a frustrating and irritating effect on an audience, but thoughtful and detailed examinations of her role were also able to develop a consideration of the ways in which Williams attracts sympathy towards her character, recognising her struggles for the family, but also Williams' use of sound and lighting at key moments.
- (b)** There were some very lively responses to the extract from Scene 3, and a pleasing number of candidates paid careful attention to the stage directions as well as the dialogue, showing a developed understanding of the drama of the piece. While there were some examples of paraphrase, many candidates looked in real detail at the extract, noting the ways in which Williams indicates Tom's growing anger and frustration through the use of dialogue broken by pauses, emphasis through punctuation and italics, increasing sarcasm, lurid fantasy and personal insult. Many candidates commented effectively on the final long stage direction and the significance of the 'shattering glass'.