

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 0397/01 Poetry and Prose</p>

As usual, there were some individual, sophisticated answers this session. Candidates produced some precise, thoughtful and thought-provoking work, demonstrating detailed knowledge, mature understanding and appreciation of literary effects, expressed with cogency. It is very satisfying when questions on the paper stimulate such responses. Overall, candidates showed good knowledge – there were very few answers where the candidates did not seem to have carefully read or revised the texts. In some cases, though, this knowledge was restricted to plot, character and events, rather than writers' techniques, language or structure. This was sometimes evident even in response to the passage-based (b) questions, which focus on language use and style. On the other hand, it was sometimes evident that candidates were approaching these questions as 'unseen' material, particularly on poetry, as their lack of knowledge of terms and references in the extracts suggested a lack of study. Other candidates were able to blend skilfully a detailed analysis of the extract with an informed knowledge of wider concerns.

In a number of answers, Examiners saw a return of the first paragraph being dominated by a biography of the author, irrespective of the question. Such material earns no marks unless it is made directly relevant to the argument.

Question Specific Comments

1. Sujata Bhatt: *Point No Point*
 - (a) There were not many answers to this question, but good answers demonstrated a sensitive awareness of Bhatt's background and common concerns. The very best blended close textual analysis with insightful discussion of different cultural influences. However, some candidates included too much general discussion of biographical detail at the expense of the poetry and the question. 'Brunizem', '3 November 1984', 'Walking Across Brooklyn Bridge' and 'Skinnydipping in History' were particularly successfully used.
 - (b) Many more candidates chose to answer on 'The Doors Are Always Open' and responded to the noise, activity, colour and smell described in the poem. There were some very personal responses to the portrayal of the goat giving birth and the decapitated rooster, and many commented on the cycle of life and the belief that as one life ends another begins. The interdependency between humans and animals, and their similarities, were noted (the hens are mourning the death of the rooster), as was the openness of the society described. The best answers focused on the vibrancy of language and image and the frankness of the child's perspective.
2. *Songs of Ourselves*
 - (a) While the extracts from 'Long Distance' and 'Modern Love' were the most popular choices by candidates answering this question, others used 'The Spirit is too Blunt an Instrument' and 'The Man with Night Sweats' with success. In some cases, answers were restricted to narrative and paraphrase, but there were examples of sensitive appreciation of subject matter and the ways the poets explored the ideas.

- (b) Examiners saw more responses to this question than to any other single question on the paper and responses varied enormously. A number of candidates were frankly mystified by the poem and did not appear to have seen it before, while at the other end of the scale there was some detailed, scholarly analysis of Hopkins' many linguistic and rhythmic effects, placed into the contexts of the poem and his religious beliefs. Many candidates were able to employ critical vocabulary effectively, using terms such as alliteration, assonance, simile and metaphor, while others went further with curial sonnets, sprung rhythm, inscape and instress. However, just as effective was the discussion of candidates who did not know the precise critical terms, but nevertheless wrote about the effects of Hopkins' linguistic and rhythmic play and their own responses to it. There was some bright and enthusiastic appreciation of the shape and form of the poem, its development, imagery and language.
3. William Wordsworth: *Selected Poetry*
- (a) This question is central to Wordsworth's poetry, which made it surprising that comparatively few candidates answered it with confidence. Many seemed not to have read the question carefully and saw it as a question on children, rather than childhood experiences. Many discussed 'Lucy Gray', for example, without forming a clear response to the question. Better answers selected episodes from 'Tintern Abbey' and 'The Prelude' together with poems such as 'Nutting' and successfully showed how childhood experiences in the poetry are often of the natural world, and that Wordsworth suggests that these experiences help form the moral nature of the maturing individual. Few candidates, though, placed the question's initial quotation and few discussed the 'Ode' itself in their answer.
- (b) This was a popular question, though in many of the answers, Examiners were not convinced that the candidates knew the identity of Milton, or of his significance. One candidate wrote that he was a prominent figure in World War II. This, and a determination to show that the poem is characteristic of Wordsworth's nature poetry, hampered many of the answers. Some candidates were able to write about disillusionment and the French Revolution as it related to England, and some wrote well about the position Milton holds in English poetry. There are a number of techniques which 'London 1802' has in common with other poems, and some of these were correctly identified, but candidates who had the confidence to say that in many ways the poem is *uncharacteristic* of the rest of the poetry in the selection tended to write stronger answers. The question asked '*how far* you find it characteristic' – too many candidates just tried to illustrate that it was.
4. Achebe: *Anthills of the Savannah*
- (a) Many answers here showed a detailed knowledge of the novel and the most successful selected precisely from this knowledge to construct an argument in response to the question. Candidates who took this approach were able to illustrate the question's premise, with some variation as to whether the candidates felt that the balance weighed more heavily on the imperialists' or Africans' side. There was careful illustration of power and corruption and a continued political enslavement to the West, and many candidates noted Ikem's lecture. Strong answers suggested that Achebe seems to be arguing in the novel that the legacy of imperialism has to end – Sam, Ikem and Chris, products of Lord Lugard College and all that that implies, are dead by the end of the novel and Beatrice, with a truly Kangan heart, is the pointer to a possibly better future.
- (b) This was a popular question and stimulated many strong answers. The best looked closely at Achebe's language of description and at the dialogue, carefully noting the portrayal of the Attorney-General as a sycophant and of Sam as a leader who cunningly manipulates him. Such answers noted the physical positions of the men and the imagery used to describe them, with Achebe's finely judged ironic tone. Some candidates made links to the further presentation of politics and power in the novel as a whole, and some focused also on Chris, the subject of discussion in the extract. These connections were useful in developing a context for the answer.

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

- (a) This question gave candidates an opportunity to use their knowledge of the whole text, which meant that there was some reliance on narrative summary in weaker answers. A common discriminator was whether candidates discussed Brontë's characterisation and presentation of Jane, or whether they discussed Jane as a real person. However, there were some perceptive responses which selected particular episodes for comment and linked Jane's control of her destiny to her need to find a balance between the conflicting demands of passion and reason. Some strong answers drew on some contextual knowledge, exploring how Jane's socio-economic status affected her power and how her inheritance – and Rochester's blindness and subsequent relative powerlessness – gave her increased status. Others additionally provided a more critical understanding of the role of external factors (luck, chance, timing, gothic elements) which help to bring Jane closer to her destiny.
- (b) There were some straightforward accounts of this extract which amounted to little more than paraphrase and missed the irony of the narration. More successful answers were closely focused on the writing and noted that the reader's view is governed by Jane's narration. Such responses saw the mocking humour of the passage as well as the condemnation of Brocklehurst and many focused on the reaction of Miss Temple, importantly included, as one candidate noted, 'so we do not only see the event through the prejudiced eyes of a child.' Some answers moved beyond the passage to consider the portrayal of an inflexible and dogmatic religion and to question Victorian values, while others showed their awareness that Mr Brocklehurst's wife and daughters do not live by the same precepts as he pronounces in this passage.

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

- (a) There were fewer answers on Mansfield this session than Examiners have become accustomed to, but again the short stories stimulated much good writing. There were some general and quite narrative responses to this question, but candidates who focused on the wording were successful. Some carefully balanced an individual character with one in a relationship, and some were able to discriminate between different types of loneliness and isolation. Frau Brechenmacher was a popular choice, as was the woman at the store and Bertha from *Bliss*. The women in *At the Bay* and *Prelude* were considered, and the husband in *A Married Man's Story* was carefully discussed. The strongest answers drew a conclusion about Mansfield's view of the individuals' place within society and the success of relationships, while there were also a number of feminist readings.
- (b) The discriminator here was how carefully candidates read the question, as there were a number of answers which summarised the action of the excerpt but offered little more. More successful responses looked carefully at Mansfield's portrayal of Millie's attitude, as the question asked. These noted the way Mansfield marks Millie's shifts and changes in response to the boy's actions and words, and the resulting impression the reader gains of her loneliness and desperation, and the implied unhappiness with her own childlessness. Some of these answers developed very interestingly by including reference to Millie's change of heart at the end of the story.

7. Athol Fugard: *The Township Plays*

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

8. Arthur Miller: *A View from the Bridge*

- (a) Successful answers went beyond character study here, constructing arguments which included references to Rodolpho's roles as immigrant, entertainer, lover and disruptive outsider. Some argued, perceptively, that the dramatic impact of his character is so strong because an audience is likely to find him ambiguous and be uncertain whether his interest is in Catherine or a passport. In this way his significance is to be the catalyst to set free Eddie's hidden thoughts and desires. Strong answers were carefully referenced and were very alert to the likely responses of a theatre audience.
- (b) A very few candidates misunderstood Beatrice and portrayed her as a jealous, manipulative wife, trying to get rid of a rival. In better answers, there was pleasing attention to the wording of the question; the candidates took care to comment on Miller's handling of the discussion between Beatrice and Catherine, commenting on the tact and care evident in Beatrice's dialogue and the importance of the stage directions.

9. William Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar*

- (a) Less confident candidates tended to list examples of honour in the play with little discussion of the link with death. Stronger candidates engaged more fully with the implications of the question and, in particular, questioned the characters' understanding of honour. Brutus' idea of honour was often contrasted with Antony's funeral references to 'honourable men' and to the behaviour of the triumvirate in Act 4 scene 1.
- (b) Many candidates were able to give a clear account of the events of the scene, but more successful ones focused on the idea of 'dramatic effectiveness' in the question. Such answers considered the context of the battle, signalled within the extract by the 'alarums', and Brutus' pessimism contrasted by the affectionate loyalty of his comrades. Strong responses considered the staging, which isolates this small group and the action while the sound effects of battle are off stage, and contrasted the dignity of Brutus' death with the panic of 'Fly, fly, fly!' The timing of the entrance of Octavius and Antony was also noted.