

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 0397/01

Poetry, Prose and Drama

General comments

Examiners saw many lively and intelligent responses to texts and questions this session. Good learning was often blended with thoughtful individual interpretation to produce insightful essays. It was clear that many candidates were writing with enjoyment and enthusiasm. In an improvement from some previous sessions, there was less evidence of undirected context in answers. Where candidates did refer to context, particularly with Achebe and Wordsworth, the knowledge was usually used appropriately to illuminate the answer. It should go without saying that candidates should always take careful note of the question set. There were still some answers, though, where it was difficult to recognise which question was being attempted without the question number at the beginning of the essay. In most cases this was because the candidate began with one, or indeed several, general paragraphs of background which were not pertinent to the particular question. No marks are awarded to such paragraphs. While there were examples of detailed analyses of set poems in (b) responses, many of the prose answers lacked a close examination of the language, imagery or structure of the writing and instead gave accounts of the content of the set passage. Such answers never score highly; all (b) questions demand a close reading and analysis of the writing of the selected passage.

Question Specific Comments

Question 1. Sujata Bhatt: *Point No Point*

- (a) Too few answers to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were very few answers on Sujata Bhatt's poetry and most answering on this text chose this question. Unfortunately many of these answers were narrative in style and showed limited understanding of the poem's references to political events in India, or the personal connection between the narrator and people in India. Some recognised that in apparently avoiding the subject of massacres in a determination to think and write about other things ('I'll write/ poems about everything else'), the poem cannot in fact avoid the subject of violence ('Now instead of completing this poem/ I'm thinking of Amrit.')

Question 2. *Songs of Ourselves*

- (a) The topic of personal doubt and anguish allowed candidates quite a free rein in interpretation and subjects ranged from writer's block, the loss of love, death, war and illness among others. The extracts from 'Long Distance' and 'Modern Love' proved fruitful, as did 'The Woodspurge', 'The Man with Night Sweats', 'The Cockroach', 'Away Melancholy' and 'Continuum'. The most successful answers explored language, tone, imagery and their effects, rather than restricting themselves to a discussion of content. Such discussion demands detailed knowledge of the chosen poems and the ability to support the answer with quotation. Weaker answers relied on summary of the content of the poems and thus were unable to develop comments on the poets' treatment of the subject matter.
- (b) 'Morse' was a very popular option and was clearly relished by many candidates who appreciated its narrative, humour and auditory effects. Successful answers demonstrated how the structure creates the setting then develops the story; comments on the 'James Bond-style' opening of 'Tuckett. Bill Tuckett' were frequent. The answers went on to note the preponderance of hard-consonant rhymes and the references to dots and dashes to recreate the aural effect of the Morse code keys which are central to the narrative. Many candidates here were able to discuss poetic techniques and their effects with real confidence. A few answers went further to examine the use

Murray makes of puns in his description of the operation and some perceptive answers noted the conflicting moods of the final stanza – celebration of the successful operation tinged with regret at the passing of Morse code. There were also answers where the candidates showed themselves uncertain of the setting or events and relied on uncertain summary, which suggested that they were approaching the poem as an unseen text rather than as one they had previously studied.

Question 3. William Wordsworth: *Selected Poetry*

- (a) Since Wordsworth's 'spots of time' are such a central issue, this question was often disappointingly answered. It was apparent that many candidates lacked the detailed textual knowledge needed to produce a high-level answer. There were comparatively few who were able to identify particular moments recalled in the poems and who were able to quote to support their points. Those who were confident with such knowledge wrote well and purposefully, using particularly such poems as 'Tintern Abbey' and 'The Prelude'. Other candidates relied on general knowledge and a simpler understanding of the concept of key moments recollected in tranquillity, but this in some cases did help some candidates to produce a competent answer. There was, however, quite a large number of generalised and unspecific answers.
- (b) 'To the Cuckoo' was by far the more popular choice on Wordsworth. Here a little contextual information might have served candidates well, as several wrote about 'the magnificent song' of the 'beautiful' cuckoo, when the plain brown bird is, in fact, onomatopoeically named after its only call. Successful candidates used knowledge of Wordsworth and pantheism to inform their view of the poem, with a perceptive analysis of content, diction and tone. Some answers showed an appreciation of the subtle shift from the obvious joy of the opening stanzas to the more nostalgic, reflective mood of the later ones, while several expressed well the sense of mystery conveyed by the invisibility of the bird and the spiritual significance of its call.

Question 4. Achebe: *Anthills of the Savannah*

- (a) This was a popular question and candidates showed solid knowledge of the major relationships in the novel, with those between Sam, Chris and Ikem the most often discussed, alongside Beatrice. Stronger answers considered not only these examples of disintegrating relationships, but also those relationships which are actually strengthened by political events, such as that between Beatrice and Elewa, and Chris and his fellow travellers to Abazon. Some considered the hopeful ending of the novel carefully, suggesting that Elewa and Beatrice are presented as a sign that politics can bring people together for the common good. While weaker answers were limited to a listing of the relationships in a narrative fashion, they usually showed some knowledge of the novel.
- (b) There were some strong responses to this question. Some candidates compared Beatrice favourably with Sam, considering her modesty, frankness, lack of ambition, and desire to help, while looking at her role as one of the novel's narrators. However, many candidates wrote with confidence about Beatrice without paying sufficient regard to the question, which asked for close comment on the passage. Such candidates demonstrated good textual knowledge and knew much about the character of Beatrice, but their answers became general essays on character rather than an analytical consideration of the language and tone of the passage itself. They missed opportunities to examine the way Beatrice narrates here and ways her character is revealed by the modes of her narration.

Question 5. Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

- (a) Candidates recognised that Helen Burns is a minor, but important character who influences Jane Eyre at Lowood. They were able to show that she is a friend, a guide and a role-model to Jane. More successful candidates went beyond this, considering the role of books, education and religious faith and the influence Helen continues to have on Jane beyond the Lowood part of the novel. Some candidates considered different kinds of religion portrayed in the novel through Helen Burns, Mr Brocklehurst and St John Rivers, with Helen representing true Christianity and teaching Jane valuable lessons which she would apply later in the novel, for example when forgiving Rochester his deceit. These answers which considered Helen's role in the structure of the novel, rather than just her character, were markedly more successful.



- (b) This was a popular and fruitful question. While less confident candidates relied on narrative paraphrase with some comment on the characters, some looked very carefully at the writing, its dark gothic setting and ways it reveals the two characters. Some candidates detected the subtle shifts in attitude between the two characters apparent in the description and the dialogue, and the hints of a future relationship. Some pointed out the irony of Rochester's rejection of Jane's assistance in contrast to his total dependence on her at the end of the novel. This was a question where most candidates answered the question about the reader's first impression very clearly, often comparing it with later impressions gained by the reader as the novel develops.

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

- (a) A very popular question, this gave candidates clear opportunities to marshal their knowledge of stories and characters. *The Woman at the Store*, *Frau Brechenmacher* and *The Little Governess* were the most frequently cited stories, but *A Married Man's Story* and *Her First Ball* also featured frequently. From this range of stories it is clear that candidates interpreted the oppression of women in a variety of ways and some good answers made comparisons between these different forms of oppression. While many candidates subscribed to Millie's 'Men is all beasts' view, more alert answers showed an awareness that Mansfield often suggests that women bring oppression upon themselves by naïvety or acquiescence.
- (b) Many candidates wrote successfully on the interior monologue of this passage, picking up on the details of language and structure to support an exploration of the narrator's character as well as focusing successfully on the question. Some candidates successfully ranged beyond the passage, showing knowledge of both the story and the short stories as a whole, exploring how this is, in many ways, an uncharacteristic passage in Mansfield's work. Often candidates picked up subtle details in the writing which indicate the husband's separation from his family, and the dream sequence was particularly fruitful.

Question 7. Athol Fugard: *The Township Plays*

- (a) There were very few answers on this text, but those candidates who had studied it were able to show the effects of racial pressures on human relations. Textual knowledge was good on the whole. Most answers took the obvious line of commenting on the treatment of black people by white, while more thoughtful answers extended this discussion to a consideration of the effect on relationships between black characters. Some evaluated the statement in the question and reached the conclusion that some relationships are strengthened and some characters made more humanitarian because of their experiences of oppression, citing John and Winston in *The Island* and Johnny and Queeny in *Nongogo* as examples.
- (b) Answers tended to show knowledge of the text and candidates were able to comment on the concerns shown in the passage, notably anxiety about poverty, imprisonment and injustice. Though some candidates referred to the symbolic significance of the coat, very few made any sustained reference to Fugard's dramatic methods.

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

- (a) This question did not attract large numbers of answers, and from some of them it seemed as if candidates had not considered Beatrice as a character in her own right before. Several essays considered Eddie, Catherine and Rodolpho, with Beatrice only peripherally, which did not make satisfactory answers to the question. Some answers listed the problems Eddie has with Catherine following the arrival of the Italians and Eddie's confused sexual feelings about her. A few more confident candidates picked up the cue quotation and explored the complex feelings apparent between Beatrice and Eddie and the ways in which these are shown to develop during the course of the drama in response to Catherine and Rodolpho. Such answers looked at the play's sexual undercurrents and Miller's presentations of the ambiguities of Eddie's own sexual feelings.
- (b) Many candidates recognised the climactic nature of this extract and the ways Miller has prepared for it, from the inclusion of the phone box in the early stage directions to the first scene's discussion of Vinny Bolzano. Eddie's feigned innocence, followed by his aggressive confrontation of Beatrice and her subsequent realisation of his guilt were, on the whole, handled well by candidates. Marco's assault on Eddie allowed candidates to comment on the ethical codes of the community which have been established in the play. The best answers were evidently aware of the dramatic nature of the scene on stage, taking their cue from the question's reference to 'dialogue and



action'. Such answers examined the stage directions and noted the physical movements about the stage, the tone of the dialogue and Marco's attack on Eddie. This awareness of genre was, however, sadly rare.

Question 9. William Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar*

- (a) Candidates answering this question compared Brutus' idealistic motives for the assassination of Caesar with the less noble motives of Cassius and the others. Textual knowledge was usually good with some candidates focusing on the other conspirators' cynical manipulation of Brutus to ensure his participation. Some also looked at the degeneration of the conspiracy, with the arguments between Brutus and Cassius and the confusion which leads to defeat at Philippi.
- (b) Most candidates focused on the relationship of Brutus and Portia and Portia's view of herself as the dependable wife from a patrician background. This was usually successfully done, but candidates would have done better to include consideration of the dialogue and of physical theatre in the realisation of character, noting the implicit stage directions in 'Kneel not' and the revelation of the 'voluntary wound'. The most successful answers focused explicitly on the language and structure of the passage, discussing the mixture of insecurity, conveyed by repeated questioning, and authority, based on Portia's rights as a wife which her dialogue reveals. Some candidates commented on the genuine love between the two characters, which is shown in the tenderness of Brutus' brief contributions to the passage.

