

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/01  
Poetry and Prose

## General comments

Examiners were unanimous in their praise for candidate performance on Paper 1 in this first year of the new examination. Instructions about questions choice were correctly followed by all candidates and there was very little short work in either Section of the Paper. Questions were clearly understood and appreciated and there was much thoughtful individual work presented in well-structured arguments, closely supported by relevant examples, all well remembered by candidates in this closed book test. Useful critical comments were cited in appropriate places. Assessment Objectives were seamlessly addressed, so that the coherence of arguments and essay structures was maintained. Above all, there was a sense that the candidates had enjoyed their set texts and were, by and large, very familiar with them. Marks ranged from the more modest, but still worthy, achievement at the lower end to those who gained full marks for the eloquence and sophistication of their responses.

Not all the set texts available had been studied, as will be obvious from the detailed comments on specific questions below. The most popular overall were Chaucer, Eliot, Austen, Wharton and Woolf. In some cases one of the alternative questions was more popular than the other, but there was never any sense that candidates found a question unapproachable. There was perhaps a stronger sense of confidence in the Prose section, but this could simply have been because the Poetry questions were tackled first when candidates were 'warming up' or that this was the first exam of the session.

The suggestions for improvement which follow are offered in the light of the overwhelmingly positive impression reported by Examiners.

First of all, it is important that candidates address the question asked, not another one that they would like to have answered, perhaps a previous practice or mock exam. A careful approach to the terms of the question is vital before embarking on the writing of the essay, as it immediately becomes clear to Examiners when candidates are writing at a tangent from the set task. Preparation for a text-based paper, and especially perhaps one which is closed book, involves much hard work. All the more difficult then to read a question and have to acknowledge that some of what you have prepared is not strictly relevant to dealing with it. Problem areas of this kind are indicated below in the comments on specific questions which follow the general report.

The Assessment Objectives include a significant focus on the writer's use of form, structure and language to shape meaning, making it clear that essays should include analysis and close reference as part of their arguments. These may be well structured and cogent, but they need textual analysis and substantiation to develop and support the points made.

Finally, contextual awareness should, and usually does, underpin every essay on a specific text, but it must be well integrated and appropriate. A purely historical paragraph at the beginning is not usually the best way to start a literary essay; equally, biographical comment should be sparing if it is to convince. Attributing the whole meaning and effect of poems or novels to events in the writer's personal life is the stock-in-trade of literary biography; analysing the language, imagery or structure of a work in detail is the task of the literary critic. More is said of this below - in the section on Plath, for example.



**Comments on specific questions**

**Section A**

**Question 1**

- (a) **'The Wife's delight in revealing her intimate thoughts and feelings to others does not necessarily mean she understands herself.' Explore Chaucer's characterisation of the Wife in the *Prologue and Tale* in the light of this comment.**

Candidates responded with enthusiasm to the characterisation of the Wife, universally suggesting the complexity of her character and its apparent contradictions. Most responded thoughtfully to the question, considering carefully the truth or otherwise of the prompt quotation. Sometimes candidates offered a lengthy character commentary on the Wife with scant attention to the terms of the question, and however perceptively these were expressed, they could not score as highly as they would have done if their insights had been focused on the task. Some neglected to mention the Tale, concentrating on the Prologue, but then lost the opportunity to explore the relationship of the teller to her tale, which is equally revealing of her concerns.

- (b) **'Chaucer captures the tumbling freshness and vitality of popular speech.' Discuss the use of colloquial, everyday language and expression in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* in the light of this comment.**

Not as popular as (a), this was nonetheless a favourite with those who had the text at their fingertips, as it is one of those **Questions (3b)** is another) which succeeds by close reference and analysis. Candidates cited the Wife's homely expressions and contrasted them with her use of auctoritee and the more formal language of the Tale.

**Question 3**

- (a) **'*The Rape of the Lock* is ambiguous and complex in its use of eighteenth century conventions and commonplaces about gender.' In the light of this comment, discuss the poem's presentation of women's and men's behaviour.**

The poem was not studied by many candidates, but answers were exceptionally good: sharply perceptive, often eloquently expressed and with appropriate contextual awareness underpinning well focused literary essays. The wealth of textual support was particularly notable.

- (b) **By close analysis of two or three passages, consider Pope's descriptive methods and effects in *The Rape of the Lock*.**

Very few candidates attempted this questions, but, as in (a) their answers were perceptive and very well illustrated.

**Question 4**

- (a) **Discuss Browning's treatment of human and religious devotion in the *Selected Poems*. You should refer in your answer to at least three poems.**

- (b) **'Poems which are characteristically idealistic or enthusiastic in tone...' Referring to three poems, discuss how far you agree with this description of Browning's poetry.**

There were few answers on Browning, divided fairly evenly between the two alternatives. The main problem here seemed to lie in the choice of suitable poems. Examiners had the impression that some candidates had prepared three or four poems and were determined to use these, whatever the question. It is important to choose wisely and to have a range of potential examples, or there is a risk of a tangential, or at worst irrelevant, answer.

As with Plath, there may be a temptation to ascribe all Browning's poetic impulses to life events. However compelling the evidence for this, and however useful as a general contextual background, ultimately it is the words of the poems which stand ready to be analysed in terms of their themes, methods and literary effects.

### Question 5

- (a) **‘Although Eliot is often described as a poet of the city, he is equally a poet of the natural world.’ With close reference to at least two poems or sections of longer poems, consider how far you agree with this comment.**

Eliot was the most popular of the poets studied and this option was the most widely chosen. Candidates were very familiar with the poems and full of ideas about them, often using more than two poems or sections of longer poems for reference. Here, many concentrated upon the images of city life for which Eliot is famous, but pleasingly few neglected the second part of the prompt, providing evidence and analysis of natural images and sometimes moving into anthropological and philosophical concepts to broaden the argument. There were some strikingly sophisticated arguments here.

- (b) **‘I will show you fear in a handful of dust.’ Discuss the importance of fear as both theme and image in the *Selected Poems*. You should refer in your answer to two or three poems or sections of longer poems.**

Although fewer chose this option there were some thoughtful essays, and not only on ‘The Waste Land’. Candidates had no difficulty in discriminating between the theme or idea of fear and the imagery which embodies it, a question formulation which helps to emphasise analysis of language. Eliot’s fear of the feminine was widely discussed and some candidates considered effectively the fears which arise in social situations.

In both Eliot options, some candidates’ work suffered from lack of control of the available material: they had so many ideas and close references spilling out that it was sometimes difficult to contain them in a well – constructed essay. (In a rank order of faults this is probably one of the most forgivable, however)

### Question 6

- (a) **‘Bishop’s poetic encounters with the natural world are passionate and urgent as well as observant.’ Discuss the methods and effects of three of Bishop’s poems in the light of this statement.**

Only one Centre had chosen to study Bishop and the work was impressive. Answers were at pains to use contextual material in an appropriate way, referring to Bishop’s life and times as background, but devoting care to the analysis of the tone of her poems and her skills of observation. A wide range of poems was used to answer the question.

- (b) **In what ways and with what effects does Bishop use anecdotes and narratives to structure her work? You should make reference to at least three poems in your answer.**

Although there were fewer answers here, they were nonetheless equally balanced, showing close analysis and using a wide range of poems in support. There was never a sense that certain learned poems would be used whatever the question, which was very pleasing.

### Question 7

- (b) **‘Love is a shadow.  
How you lie and cry after it  
Listen: these are its hooves: it has gone off, like a horse.’ (*Elm*)  
In the light of this quotation, consider in what ways and with what effects love is explored in *Ariel*. You should refer to two or three poems in your answer.**

The life of Sylvia Plath was altogether too dominant in answers to this question (There were no answers to the (a) alternative.) Naturally some better answers were analytical and did consider the methods and effects of the poems. Many others, however, fell back on Plath’s tortured relationship with Ted Hughes, with her children, her parents and so on, without giving due weight to the words of the poems and their imagery. Plath’s language is complex, multi-layered and tonally disturbing: some candidates tried to argue that love of children makes it all turn out right in the end, so long as one considers the poems involving motherhood. These answers missed many of the darker, more

ambiguous effects. For this option there were also answers where certain prepared poems dominated whether they were suitable for the topic or not. More than one candidate wrote about *Daddy*, cheerfully admitting that it was really about hate and not love, something of an own goal if the analysis was taken no further. Others used the poem more skilfully to draw out the relevance of the prompt quotation.

## Section B

### Question 9

- (a) **How far do you think Defoe succeeded in making the reader of the novel ‘much more interested in the moral than the story’?**
- (b) **‘I had a most unbounded stock of vanity and pride, and but a very little stock of virtue.’ In the light of this comment, consider Moll’s portrayal of herself in *Moll Flanders*.**

Few candidates had studied Defoe, but there was a wide range of attainment here. The first alternative gives opportunities to discuss and illustrate the effectiveness of Defoe’s narrative art, thereby praising ‘story’ over ‘moral’, or vice versa, though the episodic nature of the novel needs careful handling. Option (b), with its focus on Moll’s character, was more popular and candidates impressed with the perception of their responses.

### Question 10

- (a) **‘She could do little more than listen patiently, soften every grievance, and excuse each to the other; give them all hints of the forbearance necessary between such near neighbours’ Consider Austen’s treatment of patience and self-restraint in the novel.**

Austen was unsurprisingly a very popular choice and there were many fine essays here. A small number of candidates in one Centre misread the question, thinking that Austen herself was showing patience and self-restraint, rather than exploring it as a theme, but other than this, answers were well focused, well prepared and perceptive. There was an understandable emphasis on Anne’s behaviour, but other characters were usefully discussed as contrasts. Contextual background was particularly well employed where candidates related the novel and its concerns to the literary period: a late Austen on the cusp between Augustanism and the rise of Romanticism.

- (b) **‘The atmosphere of the novel is autumnal and gently resigned...’ Referring to two or three episodes, discuss Austen’s creation of atmosphere in the novel.**

There were not many essays here, but they were of a high standard. Close textual references were used to illustrate the ‘autumnal’ atmosphere in the earlier part of the novel, but robust refutations of the appropriateness of the prompt quotation to the novel’s later atmosphere were convincingly presented. Once again, contextual material was skilfully and relevantly deployed.

### Question 11

- (a) **‘...above all, the great Floss along which they wandered with a sense of travel...’ In what ways, and with what effects, is the river Floss used in the novel?**
- (b) **How far do you see Philip as a tragic character in *The Mill on the Floss*?**

There were few answers on Eliot, but they had been very well prepared. Essays on the river Floss impressed by their close textual reference and range of ideas, whilst the characterisation of Philip was well appreciated, as was the concept of tragedy and its application to his characterisation.

### Question 12

- (a) **'...after looking at him one would have hazarded the guess that good nature, and an acuteness as extreme as it could be without verging on craft, formed the framework of his character.'** In the light of this comment, write an essay on Diggory Venn's role and significance in the novel.

Hardy's novel was a popular choice and the alternatives were equally subscribed. Here, discussion of Venn ranged from fairly simple characterisation through to more complex discussion of Venn's presentation within the novel, often relating to the prompt quotation and Hardy's role as omniscient narrator. Some candidates usefully considered the added section of the novel and the changes made to Venn's role. Once again, close reference was a discriminator.

- (b) **'Sexual politics and thwarted desire dominate the novel.'** How far do you agree?

Candidates were stronger on 'thwarted desire' than 'sexual politics', taking desire broadly to mean a character's heartfelt wish: desire to leave the Heath, for example. Discussion of Eustacia Vye dominated many answers and often unbalanced essay structures. Character sketches of Eustacia and comparisons with Thomasin were included often without reference to the task in hand. 'Sexual politics' was not always understood: in addition to the obvious male/female relationships, the manoeuvrings of Mrs Yeobright in relation to other female characters was usefully focused on in a few answers.

### Question 13

- (a) **How far do you agree that the novel's main concern is to 'explore the conflict between public and private life'?**

Wharton was enormously popular and the answers were often impressive. Candidates understood the novel's issues, engaged with its characters and were able to quote aptly in support of their arguments. Some argued cogently, after discussing the prompt quotation and its implications, that this was not the novel's main concern, offering other possibilities, often in eloquent final paragraphs. Understanding of the social and historical background was used appropriately, though a few candidates went too far in attributing parts of the novel to Wharton's own life.

- (b) **'The young man felt that his fate was sealed: for the rest of his life he would go up every evening between the cast iron railings of that greenish-yellow doorstep...'** How important is a sense of inevitability in the presentation of Newland Archer's development through the novel?

Only a little less popular than the perhaps more obvious **Question (a)**, there were some fine essays here, discussing Newland's characterisation in depth and considering the ideas of fate and inevitability, concepts which in novelistic terms could be destructive of reader response and involvement. Whatever their final verdicts, candidates argued strongly and often eloquently, using the text with skill.

### Question 14

- (a) **'The struggle to assert one's own individuality is the central concern of the novel.'** How far is this your view of the novel's central concern?

Few candidates had tackled Lawrence and answers were all on the **(a)** option. There was a range of answers, though most used the title to offer a contrast between male and female characters and their aspirations.

### Question 15

- (a) **Discuss the role of the animal clinic and its importance to the novel as a whole.**

Only one Centre had studied Coetzee and their answers were thoughtful and well supported. Many were very good. Their understanding of the contextual background was particularly impressive, and used appropriately in answers. Few chose this option, but they were able to discuss Coetzee's use of the animal clinic both narratively and symbolically, offering different but equally valid interpretations.

- (b) **'It is difficult to feel any sympathy for Lurie, particularly in the light of his treatment of women, his daughter included.' How far do you agree?**

This was, unsurprisingly, a very popular question. Answers ranged widely in their view of Lurie and sympathy for him, but used detail from the novel very successfully, relating it closely to the contextual background of South Africa. Many answers showed great insight and maturity, and were a pleasure to read.

### Question 16

- (a) **'Connections between Septimus and Clarissa proliferate as the novel unfolds'. Discuss the novelist's handling of the two characters in the light of this comment.**

One of the delights of this exam session was the enthusiastic and sensitive writing on Woolf. The novel was widely chosen and appreciated, with many exceptional essays at the top end. Option (a) was not as popular as (b), but there were still a number of thoughtful and well integrated accounts of the relationship between the two characters. The range and aptness of cross-connection and illustration were noted by Examiners.

- (b) **'A novel which portrays time as inescapable and oppressive...' How far do you agree with this view of the novel?**

Interestingly more candidates chose to write on the concept of time in the novel than on what could be considered a character-based question (option a) Examiners felt this had been very well-prepared and illustration was extensive. Many candidates made a careful distinction between the inescapability of time and its oppressiveness, which was pleasing. Prompt quotations are not always considered so precisely, but it did yield reward here. Some argued that the passage of time has its benefits too; there is more to the novel than the gloom of ageing and awareness of lost opportunity.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 9765/02

Drama

## General comments

This was the first session for this examination and there was a full range of attainment and much sophistication of response at the top end. Most candidates showed a strong sense of the plays as theatrical works, not just literary texts, and their knowledge and appreciation of them revealed excellent preparation. There were no answers on *As You Like It* and only a very small number on *Coriolanus*, so the Shakespeare section was divided fairly equally between *King Lear* and *The Tempest*. **Section B** produced about the same number of essays on Webster, Pinter and Friel, with fewer answers on Wycherley.

Centres should remind candidates that answering **one passage-based question is a syllabus requirement**. Whilst some Centres had clearly suggested to candidates the advisability of doing one passage and one essay question, many candidates decided to do two passage-based answers, which they are of course entitled to do. However, if they do so, it becomes doubly important that they answer these with careful attention to the terms of the question: in each case emphasis is placed on close reference to the extract printed in the exam paper. The skills of close appreciation of form, structure and language are required before launching into any further discussion of other parts of the play, (moving between part and whole, as the Assessment Objective describes it.) Some candidates barely discussed the passage, immediately making general comments on the play as a whole with scant reference to the printed extract. However perceptive these overviews were, if the requirement to read the passage closely was ignored, answers did not score as highly as they could have done. Those candidates who did what the question asked them to do were naturally at an advantage.

One of the Assessment Objectives refers to acknowledgement of others' interpretations and use of critical material was, by and large, well handled: brief, apt critical statements were well integrated into candidates' answers, and never unbalanced personal response or essay structure. However, Examiners did note the extraordinary popularity of certain critical works – see the comments on Pinter below!

Finally, as in Paper 1, contextual awareness should, and usually does, underpin every essay on a specific text, but it must be well integrated and appropriate. A purely historical paragraph at the beginning is not usually the best way to start a literary essay; some essays on *The Tempest*, for example, were tempted into lengthy opening paragraphs on King James and the contemporary theatre's potential for 'effects' at the time. Others incorporated such knowledge briefly and relevantly, never losing the coherence of the argument or the focus on the question.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

- (a) **What in your view is the significance of Aufidius to the play as a whole?**
- (b) **Discuss the significance of the following passage as a prelude to Coriolanus's first appearance in the play.**

A very small number of candidates answered on the play, but their work was thoughtful, well organised and clearly illustrated. Those answering the (b) option had clearly been well prepared to discuss the passage in detail.

### Question 3

- (a) **'I see it feelingly'. (Gloucester) Discuss the dramatic significance of different types of blindness in *King Lear*.**

This was the most popular of the essay questions on the paper, with as many candidates opting for this as the passage question on the play. As will be seen below, a passage-based alternative was the most popular option for all the other texts in both Sections of the paper. Here, candidates universally noted the blindness of both Lear and Gloucester towards their children, sometimes moving into areas of lack of judgement rather than blindness, but aware of the structural parallel. Literal and metaphorical blindness were noted by almost all candidates. If there was a common fault it was to write too generally on the play, and the most successful answers were those that used the wealth of references to sight and blindness in the play. Often a description of Act 1 Scene 1 and the 'love test' dominated the first pages of essays unnecessarily, but here many astute answers noted Goneril's 'dearer than eyesight' and Kent's injunctions to Lear to 'see better' and offering to be the 'true blank' of his eye, establishing the play's image pattern on this theme at the outset. Those who continued into Scene 2 with Gloucester's 'Let's see, let's see' and asking for his spectacles were a reminder that there really is no substitute for close knowledge of the text.

- (b) **With close reference to the language and dramatic action of the scene, discuss its significance to the play as a whole.**

Many good answers referred to this scene as the most moving in the play, but gave due weight to the significance of, amongst other things, Cordelia's respect for Lear's kingly status, Lear's self-awareness and remorse and the religious imagery, both verbal and visual. Many commented that the tone of the scene is bittersweet, as in its context at the end of the play, it is not nor it cannot come to good. Close attention to the passage, as required by the question, yielded much reward. Some candidates moved straight into a review of what has happened thus far and a projection of what is going to happen and barely seemed to be touched by the scene at all.

### Question 4

- (a) **To what extent do you see the island itself as having a dramatic role in the action of *The Tempest*?**

The great majority of candidates favoured the b) option, but there was a range of answers here. The best used the wealth of references in the text to the island itself, noting its importance as a piece of 'real estate' whose ownership is disputed, as well as its magical qualities. Caliban's lyrical speech was often, and rightly, quoted.

- (b) **With close reference to the text discuss the dramatic significance of this scene to an audience.**

This was the most popular of the passage questions on the paper. Many answers looked closely at the text, making points about the themes and characterisation of the play that can already be discerned from these lines: audience distaste for Antonio and Sebastian and sympathy for Gonzalo begin here; ideas about power and authority, about the elements, about magic, and so on. In spite of the apparently hopeless situation there are also gleams of wit which suggest a genre other than the tragic. However, some answers were led astray by over-lengthy historical statements about King James, his court and the technical potential of the Jacobean theatre. More successful were those which referred to different possible theatrical interpretations of the scene, if these were related to the presentation of the themes and characters here and in the rest of the play. Others barely acknowledged the scene and immediately launched into Prospero and why he was on the island, and whether he or Ariel was responsible for the tempest.



## Section B

### Question 5

- (a) **Discuss the presentation and dramatic significance of death and dying in *The White Devil*.**

This was a minority choice, most candidates choosing to write about Vittoria and Brachiano. However, the wealth of references to death and dying in the play made this a rich field and candidates found plenty to write on. Where verbal imagery and dramatic action were considered for their significance, as suggested by the question's wording, then answers scored highly.

- (b) **With close reference to the language and action of this extract, discuss Webster's depiction of the relationship between Vittoria and Brachiano, both here and elsewhere in the play.**

Not surprisingly, this was a very popular question. Answers ranged from the insightful and sophisticated to more modest judgements of this complex relationship. Once again, those which concentrated in detail on the extract itself, its imagery, tone and dramatic action, fared well. Some answers moved too quickly to what happens in other parts of the play, missing comment on such inviting lines as 'a stately and advanced whore'; 'Ware hawk, my lord'; 'the devil in crystal'; 'Woman to man/Is either a god or wolf'; 'Now for two whirlwinds' and Vittoria's last impassioned outburst. These words and images are the very stuff of drama, and cry out for discussion.

### Question 6

- (a) **How far and in what ways does Horner's role contribute to Wycherley's dramatisation of hypocrisy in the play?**

A few answers only here, and most of them had a clear idea of what contribution Horner makes to the play's dramatisation of hypocrisy. Examiners were impressed by the discussion and the textual support.

- (b) **With close reference to the language and action of the extract below, discuss Wycherley's use of farce in *The Country Wife*.**

This was the more popular option, but unfortunately most candidates did not seem to be aware of the meaning of 'farce'. Few answers referred specifically to the unlikely, extravagant, and improbable situations, physical absurdities, disguise and mistaken identity which are typical of the genre, though more discussed the verbal humour, sexual innuendo and word play which are also characteristic. This scene exemplifies the qualities of farce in the play particularly well, so answers did make many valid points implicitly.

### Question 7

- (a) **'Nothing is funnier than unhappiness.' To what extent and with what effect does Pinter create comedy from the uncertainty and unhappiness of his characters?**

Again, the passage question was more popular, though interestingly, both options produced rather similar responses. Examiners noted the ubiquity of critic Martin Esslin and his *Theatre of the Absurd* who featured in almost every answer on Pinter. 'Comedy of menace' was also widely quoted. Answers here made full use of reference to the two set plays, often ranging more widely into Pinter's other work, especially *The Caretaker* and *The Birthday Party*, and the works of Samuel Beckett, which was pleasing. As always, however, the best answers were characterised by close critical analysis to support the argument.

- (b) **With particular reference to the extract below, show how Pinter makes use of ordinary language and day-to-day events in order to create dramatic tension, both here and elsewhere in these plays.**

Answers easily slipped into more general mode here, analysing well Pinter's use of ordinary language and day-to-day events to create dramatic tension, but not focusing fully enough on the language of the printed extract. However, even these were prompted to discuss the Sands's 'perching' interchange! A few used the passage in great detail, analysing each twist and turn in the apparently desultory conversation, together with the characteristic pause in line 9. Once again, these answers scored highly.

#### Question 8

- (a) **'Although Kate seems to dominate the sisters, their relationship with her is deeply subversive.' How far would you agree with this view of the play?**

There were few answers here. Those candidates who preferred this option wrote clearly and sympathetically about the sisters, often choosing to disagree with the prompt quotation. Good knowledge and appreciation of the play were evident.

- (b) **With close reference to the extract below, show how this scene provides an effective dramatic conclusion to the play's action and themes.**

A very popular option, with, once again, close analyses of the passage doing well. Reference to the song, the hat, Marconi, the kites and Maggie's failure to remember the punch line of the joke featured in many of the more detailed answers. Most made reference to the structure of the play with the parallel speeches by Michael, the effects created in this memory play (often with useful cross-reference to *The Glass Menagerie*) and there was much sensitivity of response to the family's plight. A number of candidates referred to the dramatic effectiveness of productions they had seen and these enhanced their critical accounts of the scene and the play.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 9765/03**  
**Comment and Analysis**

## **General points noted by Examiners**

There was much confident, skilled and perceptive writing on all of the questions. At the upper end the achievement was remarkable.

All three questions produced work across the range of ability.

Almost all candidates responded to the compulsory question first. There were no rubric infringements.

Generally candidates divided their time well between questions. Some scripts contained an answer to **Question 1** that was longer than the second answer. In most cases this made little or no difference – indeed in some scripts the slightly shorter answer was better.

In a very small number of scripts the second answer was clearly unfinished. This might have been caused in one or two scripts by the length and detail of the plans.

**Questions 2 and 3** were equally popular as choices for the second answer.

Some scripts showed evidence of detailed planning; even where this was not visible the structure of answers was generally very good. There was much succinctly organised and cogent argument in which ambiguities or possible interpretations were analysed with great fluency.

Examiners commented on the personal nature of the writing. Every response was unique.

## **Comments on individual questions**

### **Question 1**

Some candidates wrote about these poems with impressive subtlety and insight. They appreciated tone and structure, wrote in detail about the development of ideas within the poems, considered the possibility of such things as self-delusion, enjoyed the effects of the last two lines in each poem, and accomplished all this with no apparent rush.

There was a good general understanding of the sonnet form (although a few answers appeared not to recognise the sonnet), and the more successful answers explained how the form helped shape the meaning. Other answers concentrated more on form than on meaning. Many candidates were able to read strategically and could outline a few salient points of comparison between the poems in their opening sentences, before spending the rest of their time on a detailed exploration. Others began with an examination of Drayton before moving on to the Shakespeare. Both approaches could be (and were) successful, but some answers spent too long on Drayton, which led to briefer work on Shakespeare and on the comparison called for in the question. Some scripts suggested an anxiety to cover every possible aspect of both poems, an approach that was unlikely to succeed in the time available.

Many candidates wrote well about the tone of both poems. Some struggled with the personification in the Drayton, not realising it was about the death of love, and some missed the effects of the final couplet. There was some good confident work on the Shakespeare sonnet, but less successful candidates tended to miss detail – the significance, for instance of ‘Give not a windy night a rainy morrow’. It is possible that the more successful candidates read each poem as a structure of sentences as well as a structure of lines.

There was plenty of accurate reading of the poems, but some candidates did not buttress their reading with analysis. Some of the detail was very well handled by candidates confident of their understanding. In some

scripts candidates picked out individual words for comment, even though they meant something quite different in the context from which they were taken. Words such as 'kiss', 'vows' and 'love' in the Drayton mean one thing when quoted in isolation, but something else when considered in context – 'kiss and part', 'cancel all our vows', 'former love'.

There was some good contextual reference in the answers to this question, usually kept within bounds so as to illuminate the answer rather than dominate it. Candidates generally realised that a little context goes a long way, provided it is properly placed within the argument.

### Question 2

This passage proved fertile ground for the analysis of the extended animal/horse metaphor, and the light this threw on the writer's approach and outlook. Some candidates seemed less aware of the intelligence that lay behind the writing, particularly in the second half of the extract where Kemble meditates on the revolutionary invention of the railway. This could in some cases have happened if candidates had taken a linear approach to the extract, and found themselves short of time for analysis of the later stages. Those who caught the contrast between the imaginative enthusiasm and the detailed scientific observation did well.

Successful candidates commented on the tone of well informed excitement that runs through the passage, and wrote appreciatively about how the idea of fairy tale, magic or myth was developed and conveyed. The best answers included consideration of human control of nature. Context was generally well handled, especially by those candidates who saw a further dimension in Kemble's asides (e.g. 'I hope you understand me') and the effects they have on her writing. Some answers argued, briefly and persuasively, that these asides placed the piece somewhere between an autobiography and a journal or a letter. A few candidates read these asides as proof of her lack of understanding.

Many candidates noted the length of the paragraph, but not all of them suggested that this might be typical of the age, and a few dismissed the passage as poor writing because the paragraph length "put the reader off".

There was some good contextual writing. Even those who knew little about the invention of the railway could see that it was revolutionary; others referred to the reconstruction of landscape as a feature of a new era.

### Question 3

There was a great deal of very good writing on this question that picked up the uneasy tone, the action, the effects of setting, and the stage directions. The dialogue produced some excellent commentary, particularly the choric effects of the voices off.

Some candidates, however, adopted a descriptive approach, concentrating on dramatic effectiveness and largely ignoring the dialogue. They tended to produce running commentaries on the scene, which sometimes became paraphrase or long character commentaries on Jake and Flora. Better answers analysed ways in which lighting, setting, off-stage voices, the characterisation of Flora and Jake, and the development of their relationship through speech and action served to create the drama. There was some effective work on Jake's sudden violence in the scene, and on Flora's responses to it, but some candidates glossed over this.

Some descriptive answers suggested that the candidates were trying to work out a puzzle, liner by liner, rather than reading and visualising the opening of a play. It was as if the candidates could not match the doll's house description of the house with the abrupt entry of Jake, the coal-oil and the explosion. Some limited their responses by failing to note the early entry of Jake with the oil, which affected the rest of the answer. Others wrote well on the presentation of Flora, sometimes ignoring other aspects. In a few answers the candidates wrote as if the extract was the entire play.

Many candidates strengthened their answers by brief and effective comment on the Deep South cotton country, or their understanding of the historical setting in 1945. There were also some very useful references to other works by Williams.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 9765/04  
Personal Investigation

## General comments

This first session of the Pre-U Personal Investigation was a very successful one in almost every way: it was abundantly clear to Examiners that Centres were clear about what the syllabus requires, and that the great majority of candidates were able to research and write with confident academic and critical clarity. The range of texts and of questions was large, with some choosing what might be called “conventional” authors and texts, while others chose some that were thoroughly original and individual; more will be said of this later. Administratively there were very few concerns, and almost every piece of work was correctly and helpfully put together, with the correct cover-sheet, word-count and bibliography attached; very few essays exceeded the upper word-limit, and equally few fell below the lower limit. All in all, Centres and candidates alike had worked very hard to prepare and present some very pleasing essays.

One of the biggest hurdles in preparing work, possibly even the biggest, is the initial selection of texts, and the degree to which Centres have the confidence in their candidates to allow a complete or even a partial freedom of choice; it was clear to Examiners that practice in this respect varied widely, with some groups having apparently been quite tightly taught and focused on a small number of texts which were common to all candidates in the Centre, while others had been allowed, or possibly encouraged to have, what appeared to be an absolutely free rein. Both approaches are perfectly legitimate, as is a range of possibilities that lie between these two extremes, and the choice must be the prerogative of each individual Centre, whose teachers know their candidates’ personal strengths and interests. To allow total freedom clearly carries some element of risk, and it is almost certainly wise for teaching staff to maintain a very close watch on what is chosen, but to encourage at least some element of independent choice does go a long way towards fulfilling what this component is designed to assess; to allow all candidates to use exactly the same texts is quite acceptable, but such an approach is arguably not in their very best interests. Examiners did notice some degree of similarity between essays in some Centres – not at all because of any suspicion of plagiarism or collusion between candidates, but because of how the teaching had been undertaken. The Pre-U Teacher Guide says the following on page 19:

*“a class may share a general area – a period, theme, author and texts – and conduct background work together before each candidate settles on an individual title.”*

It also says, however, that what is important is an “*emphasis on the individual area of interest and the individual title*”. A balance thus needs to be struck, and while CIE will be able to offer some advice when each candidate’s formal proposal is received it is crucial that Centres make decisions early and carefully about how much independent freedom of choice and of research they can allow.

The Syllabus is very specific about how many texts must be studied and used in the essay, and this was one area of slight concern this summer, in that a small but quite significant number of candidates did not fulfil this requirement, or in rather more instances only just touched upon it. The syllabus says this:

*“The essay must involve significant comparisons between two authors. At least two whole texts must be studied as principal texts for each author, with reference to at least two subsidiary texts as appropriate.”*

Two points need to be made here, one in relation to the words “*whole texts*”, and one to the point about subsidiary texts. Studying a novel or a play is not a problem, in that no candidate offered any suggestion that only a part of such had been read; poetry, however, was not always so secure. No Examiner can for obvious reasons expect every poem in a collection or anthology to be referred to – that would be an absurd expectation – but it is important that reference is made to enough poems (or indeed short stories if such is the case) to demonstrate to the Examiner that a substantial number have been studied. Candidates who focused upon just two or three poems often wrote with good and perceptive critical insight, but did not demonstrate that a “*whole text*” had been used; the prime focus may well and justly be upon just a handful,

but brief comparative reference must be made to several more. Clearly the actual number will depend upon the length and complexity of the poems used, and no Examiner will ever use a crudely arithmetical measure, but evidence must be offered to show that a candidate has read a complete collection or selection, rather than just a few isolated poems or stories.

The second point relates to subsidiary texts, and here there was some concern among Examiners; the syllabus, as quoted above, requires “*reference to at least two*”. The second part of this short phrase is unarguable – there must be at least two further texts, and while several candidates used more than two, a small but quite significant number used only one. This form of rubric infringement is of course self-penalising, in that however good the critical argument on the main texts may be – and it often was very good – there was automatically less evidence of wider reading than there should have been, and so the personal investigation itself was limited, and the mark awarded was necessarily lower than it might otherwise have been. The words “reference to” are of course slightly and deliberately imprecise; there is no requirement for subsidiary texts to take up any prescribed proportion of the essay, but nonetheless the expectation is that there should be sufficiently full reference to make it absolutely clear to Examiners that both or all have been properly studied.

Word limits have been mentioned, and while there were almost no significant infringements of these a few words may be helpful. Essays should be between 3000 and 3500 words, excluding all quotations, footnotes and bibliographies; work that exceeds this length will be penalised in the sense that anything that goes beyond 3500 words will not be read by the Examiner, and so the essay concerned will not have a proper conclusion. Work that falls short of 3000 words will be self-penalising, in that however concise and focused the writing may be, it is highly improbable that sufficient evidence will be presented that at least four texts have been fully studied.

Footnotes and bibliographies are required; candidates are expected to acknowledge all quotations and all references to secondary material, whether printed or electronic, and such acknowledgement should be done by means of footnotes on the appropriate page, together with a summative bibliography at the conclusion of the essay – and preferably on a new sheet of paper rather than simply “tacked on” to the final paragraph. Some very useful guidance on footnoting and bibliographies can be found on page 28 of the Pre-U Teacher Guide.

Once work is submitted, then how is it assessed? The simple answer is that all four Assessment Objectives, 1, 2, 3b and 4, are to be addressed by candidates, and that Examiners will use the Levels Descriptors published in the “Pre-U Specimen Papers and Mark Schemes” booklet and in the Pre-U Teacher Guide.

The first requirement (AO1) goes almost without saying, but it is clearly central: candidates must demonstrate a thoroughly confident and detailed knowledge of all their texts, supported by relevant references and quotations in support of their argument; this must be clear in structure and development, must use appropriate critical terminology, and must be correct in terms of its language and expression. For top Levels (5 and 6), responses to the texts and ideas will be not just thoughtful and personal – this will be needed for Level 4 – but also offer some fresh and original ideas, with clearly individual insight and perception, and with textual support “seamlessly interwoven” into the argument – easy to read, but quite demanding to achieve!

AO2 requires candidates to demonstrate an understanding of how form, structure and language shapes meaning; there will clearly be limited room within just 3500 words for closely critical exploration, but there must be enough of this on at least the main two texts for Examiners to see that a candidate can appreciate how each writer is working. And again for top Level marks, this needs to be “perceptive, assured, subtle”, and for Level 6 candidates must elucidate their debate “with tightly analysed evidence”. This requirement is worth stressing, for reasons that will be outlined below.

Candidates must demonstrate that they can link their four texts in thoughtful, appropriately critical ways (AO3b). How this is done is a matter for individuals to decide, but for more than a low Level in this respect it is not sufficient simply to write discretely about all four; comparisons, contrasts, connections of all sorts need to be introduced early in the work, and sustained throughout, so that at least the two main texts, and ideally the subsidiary texts as well, are kept together and in the reader’s mind at all times. Rather like a juggler’s clubs, where only one will be actually in his hand at any given moment but all will be visible and essential to what he is doing all the time, so all four texts should be quite clearly and explicitly forming part of the developing argument throughout the whole piece.

A further part of AO3b is the requirement to explore and engage with some alternative critical interpretations of the texts, and/or with some elements of critical and academic research relevant to the texts and question.

Most candidates responded with at least some confidence to this, but often without quite as much *discussion* of the critical views mentioned or quoted; it is not enough to simply quote them, or indeed to say that “some critics believe . . .” – there must be clear personal engagement with them as part of a developing thesis and argument. Alternative critical interpretations do not of course always have to be conventionally published ones: film or television adaptations of texts can be just as valid in this context, provided of course that the focus is upon ways in which a director or possibly an individual actor interprets the ideas and the words of the original; this is not a media studies syllabus, so the emphasis must not shift away from the language, but brief comparative reference to such interpretations may occasionally be helpful.

Contextual concerns finally (AO4): in most essays there was at least some recognition that contexts matter in any critical discussion, and that no text can be read entirely in isolation from its historical, cultural or social environment, or indeed without at least some understanding and appreciation of the writers’ own biographies. Two concerns arose here, however, both of which became relatively significant in Examiners’ minds.

Some essays managed to detach contextual material almost entirely from the texts themselves, suggesting that there was a kind of box-ticking in candidates’ minds; such material was often relevant and interesting in itself, but unless very explicitly linked to the texts, and made an essential part of an ongoing and developing argument, then it was of very limited value. Knowledge of a writer’s life may or may not be helpful – and if it has no clear bearing upon how we now view and read her or his writings then it is of no real significance in terms of the Personal Investigation. The same is true of contemporary social, cultural and literary contexts – unless explicitly married to the texts, these will carry little or possibly no weight in assessment terms.

Of possibly greater concern were several essays where contextual interests began almost to take over from an exploration of individual texts, and where candidates became so involved in wider and bigger literary concerns that the focus shifted too far. As noted above, AO2 requires evidence of an ability to explore “*the roles of form, structure and language in shaping meaning*”; to allow too much emphasis upon general and sometimes abstract or theoretical literary theory or literary movements can unbalance an essay.

A few concerns apart, then, this was a very pleasing and very encouraging first session; candidates have been well prepared, and showed an often striking level of sophistication and maturity in their writing and appreciation.