

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/01
Poetry and Prose

Key Messages

- Good essays are always relevant and well-focused, using apt material from the primary texts studied
- Close critical attention to form, structure and language will enhance every answer, whether Poetry or Prose
- A well-balanced essay suggests personal response and is never over-whelmed with an excess of critical material
- Biographical and autobiographical assertions are not generally conducive to sound literary explorations and judgements, so are best kept to a minimum

General Comments

There were no rubric infringements and little short work in this session. Few answers failed to reach the minimum standard required for a Pass grade and much work was of Distinction level, with some exceptional essays gaining full or nearly full marks for sophisticated responses of the highest quality. Fourteen of the sixteen set texts had been studied, with the exceptions of only Jennings and Murray. Donne, Keats, Larkin, Waugh and Woolf were all extremely popular.

The questions set in the examination paper are designed to test particular areas of the set texts and relevance to each question is a basic principle for all good essays, as is evident in the Level Descriptors in the Mark Scheme. Writing an 'all-purpose' essay which shows good knowledge and understanding of a text may reveal a candidate's general appreciation and capability but it will never gain the higher marks gained by the well-focused essay in which all material has been carefully chosen to illustrate and explore a specific question. Some poems in particular seem to be chosen mainly because they are well-known or well-liked by candidates rather than for their suitability. Selections of *On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer* for a discussion of Keats's female figures, or one of Donne's Holy Sonnets which has no reference to either bed or deathbed settings are cases in point.

The use of critical ideas, often lavishly quoted, was excessive this year; in some cases the individual voice of the candidate could barely be discerned. Often the critical ideas were extreme ones, attractive perhaps for their memorable phrasing or simplistic approach (the 'date rape' in *St Agnes Eve* is an example). Careful discrimination is required before parroting critical ideas as if they were known facts. There is no substitute for careful close reading and critical exegesis which the candidate, through her/his own exploration, finds satisfying and can use to support personal interpretation. Freudian readings were widespread this year, some of them defying close critical reading or common sense. It is not a requirement to give a digest of Marxist, feminist or Freudian points of view.

This syllabus is 'Literature in English' not Literary Biography. Too many essays spent too much time speculating about Keats's or Larkin's love life or Woolf's parents or Waugh's marriage. Study of the work not the life is highly recommended; discussion of imaginative, literary methods and effects will score more highly than reductive biographical and autobiographical conjecture.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A – Poetry

Question 1 *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*

- (a) The two Chaucer options were equally subscribed, though interestingly the Pardoner is not as popular as the Wife of Bath was. Essays were well informed about his character and attitudes, but less secure on the Tale, which in more unconvincing answers was all but ignored. Sometimes there was more substantial reference to the General Prologue than to the Tale. However, there were many sound responses considering the prompt comment, almost all concluding that the Pardoner is a 'fascinating' character and the Tale he tells is almost incidental to this. Some thoughtful answers recognised the complex qualities of the Tale. Essays showed a strong grounding in the Medieval context.
- (b) Candidates used the text well here to discuss the theme of 'greed', though 'Radix malorum est cupiditas' was often quoted as meaning 'money is the root of all evil' rather than 'the love of money is the root of all evil' which is not quite the same. However, greed was well appreciated to be a major theme in both Prologue and Tale and related successfully to the Medieval context.

Question 2 *John Donne: Selected Poems*

- (a) Candidates used a wider range of poems for discussion this year and essays were the better for it. Most chose this alternative and there were many fine, thoughtful analyses of Donne's work, ranging through the love poems and into the religious very effectively. Much scholarly work was seen. Occasionally Donne was berated, as was Keats, for 'never giving the woman a voice', an apparently 'critical' point judging by its widespread currency. It would perhaps be helpful to consider how many female poets ever give the male 'a voice', and indeed, why should they? A poem with, usually, one persona is not a novel, or a play.
- (b) Although less popular there were many lively answers here, often using close knowledge of the texts for suitable material. However, some poems chosen did not use the settings of either bed or deathbed and were not therefore explicitly relevant to the question.

Question 3 *John Milton: Shorter Poems*

- (a) Few candidates had studied Milton and most attempted the b) option. However, there was a range of answers here, the best being very well acquainted with suitable material for discussion of 'rural settings'. Surprisingly perhaps, *L'Allegro* appeared to be less well known than some of the other chosen poems.
- (b) Work here was universally knowledgeable and scholarly, with essays showing an impressive grasp of the Christian and Greek mythological backgrounds to the poems, using a range of suitable poems for discussion and illustration of the 'effects' created by Milton's characteristic blend. *Lycidas* and *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* were both discussed with force and subtlety.

Question 4 *John Keats: Selected Poems*

Keats was the mostly widely studied poet on the syllabus, but also the most limited by biographical digression of an unhelpful kind, particularly in answers to **Question 3(b)**. Candidates are advised to study the poems in detail and not the life, as there were frequent misreadings in answers at the lower end of the mark scale.

- (a) Less popular than b), the discussion of Keats's exploration of happiness nonetheless elicited some fine, thoughtful answers, using apt poems for illustration. Candidates wrote well on the ephemeral nature of joy and the paradoxical symbiosis of pleasure and pain, frequently quoting the Ode on *Melancholy*. Textual reference and analysis were good.
- (b) The question requires a discussion of 'female figures', not women, but this was often ignored in favour of a blow-by-blow account of Keats's success, or lack of it, with Fanny Brawne. Clearly *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St Agnes* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* were appropriate choices for a discussion centring on Keats's mythological or metaphorical explorations of the female, but many of the Odes (with the exception of *Autumn*) do not provide much relevant material, having a more

philosophical basis, though this aspect of Keats's work was regrettably ignored. Many answers relied upon material which was familiar rather than relevant. To claim the Nightingale is really a woman and to ignore the mention of Ruth amid the alien corn, for example, suggests a partial reading of that Ode. The shape of the Urn being curved provided material to assert the appearance of the womanly form too, with *Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty* taken to mean that female attractiveness is important. Keats was more a romantic than a Romantic in some essays, seemingly. Sexual readings of *La Belle Dame*, inspired by some rather extreme critical views, were often unconvincing. Sometimes a steed is only a horse.

Question 5 W H Auden: Selected Poems

- (a) Few candidates had studied Auden, but their work was committed and thoughtful. The tension between the individual and society was discussed intelligently and a good range of poems used. Occasionally essays were too much the 'all-purpose' general essay, without sufficient focus. At times poems were used which were not on the set list, which is only a problem if they take the place of one of the two or three set poems required.
- (b) Less popular, this title was nonetheless tackled with enthusiasm and a wide range of poems used in evidence. Essays could become too taken up with Auden's homosexuality: biographical accounts are never as convincing as close critical analysis of the poems.

Questions 6 (Jennings) and 7 (Murray) None seen

Question 8 Philip Larkin: Selected Poetry

Larkin's poetry was very popular and successfully tackled. Although some candidates did make simplistic remarks about his life and relationships, these were generally more controlled than the comments on Keats.

The two alternatives here were equally subscribed.

- (a) The quotation from *Aubade* doubtless prompted many candidates to offer a full critical discussion of the poem and this was very well done. Other directly appropriate poems included *Ambulances* and *The Explosion*. There are references to death in other poems, sometimes in a phrase or two, but not all the poems used were centrally on the subject. *The Old Fools* is not an exploration of death, but rather Larkin's response to the awful effects on some old people of dementia or loss of function, though death is finally mentioned. (The euphemistic 'elderly', widely used, seemed inappropriate for these characters. Have candidates forgotten their own spry grandparents?) Some candidates knew their Larkin so well that they were able to range effectively across all the poems where death is hinted at or referred to, as well as the more detailed discussion of apt whole poems. There were many excellent answers.
- (b) Here too there were many good answers, showing a strong appreciation of Larkin the observer. The best answers often came to the conclusion that although Larkin was an observer, he was also reflecting on his own life. *Mr Bleaney* was a popular and apt choice for discussion, as were *High Windows*, *The Whitsun Weddings* and *Dockery and Son*.

Section B – Prose

There were answers on every one of the prose texts on offer.

Question 9 Jonathan Swift: *Gulliver's Travels*

As last year, there were few answers on Swift but they were generally of a high standard, employing a wide range of material and showing insight into Swift's methods and concerns. If there was a fault it was to write too generally without sufficient close focus on the question wordings themselves.

- (a) Less popular than the b) option, all essays showed firm appreciation of Gulliver and often used more than two of the voyages for discussion. The question asks for discussion 'in the light of' the prompt critical comment, and this was not always explicit. The best essays were well directed to the question.
- (b) Although all candidates clearly understood the satirical methods of Swift and their effects, the idea that there is always something constructive in them was not always addressed explicitly. The

'darkest moments' of Swift's satire can easily be shown, but where essays worked to consider the more positive and constructive effects, essays were very good indeed.

Question 10 Jane Austen: *Emma*

- (a) This was a predictably popular text and of the alternatives, a) was the more widely attempted. Many answers focused solely on the character of Emma, though in fact there are many more examples of egotism in the novel, some of them treated by Austen with far less sympathy. There were lively responses on the merciless treatment of the Eltons, Mr Woodhouse and Frank Churchill as well as on the heroine herself, whose development through the course of the novel was often helpfully noted. The saintly, talented Jane Fairfax was often cited as a contrast to Emma (without always noting how boring she is by comparison!) Some candidates spent too long trying to introduce contextual material to prove that the stratified social system of the time created egotism by virtue of the arrogance inherent in class superiority, but this was not a particularly productive line of argument for study of individual characters in this novel.
- (b) Although fewer answered on this alternative, there were many excellent answers showing close knowledge and appreciation of the complex plotting of the novel (which the reader is not immediately aware of, as some answers asserted). The interplay of social events, leisure activities and Highbury gossip was very firmly grasped and analysed here to answer the question.

Question 11 Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

There were fewer answers on Gaskell this year, but some very thoughtful and analytical ones, showing fine appreciation of the novel.

- (a) Candidates showed a clear appreciation of the ambiguities of the ending of the novel. Essays often incorporated very suitable contextual material of a literary kind about the Victorian novel and expectations of gender roles within it, relating this to the more unconventional ending of Gaskell's novel. This was a very good set of essays on the whole.
- (b) Prejudice in the novel may be seen between characters, but also in attitudes towards locality (the north and south of the title for example) and class (the masters and the men). Many essays here tackled all these areas, with more limited responses choosing a few characters with which to work (Mrs Thornton's mother, for example). Close reference to the text was widespread, showing clear understanding of its concerns.

Question 12 Charles Dickens: *Bleak House*

There were fewer answers on Dickens this year, and all but two chose the b) alternative.

- (a) Too few to make general comment worthwhile.
- (b) Essays on Dickens's 'depiction of family life' used many examples of families and family groupings to suggest the stresses and difficulties of the nearest and not necessarily dearest of relations between characters. Evidently the novel was very well known, with 'the ways' discussed fully, though perhaps 'the effects' not quite so secure. The most successful answers revealed Dickens's use of the family as a paradigm of society and the great web of interconnections which bind and should bind the greatest and the least. Detailed comments on Dickens's own family life were usually irrelevant

Question 13 Virginia Woolf: *To the Lighthouse*

With *A Handful of Dust* this was the most widely studied novel this session. The best answers focused appreciatively on Woolf's literary methods and effects. Regrettably there were others more concerned to speculate about her life and to use the novel as mere biographical evidence, an arid route to interpretation of one of the great works of imaginative fiction. Nonetheless there was clearly great enthusiasm for the novel with many lively accounts.

- (a) This was a very popular question, often thoughtfully and fully illustrated. Lily's painting was discussed as a physical Modernist work of art, and linked with broader themes of the text such as transience/permanence and attitudes to gender. Fewer discussed 'atmosphere'. Occasional drift into general discussion of the Ramsays could be unhelpful to precise relevance.

- (b) Fewer answered this question but it was extremely well done, with a better than average focus on form, structure and language. The three sections, encompassing the swift passage of time in the central section and the more exploratory first and third sections, together with stream of consciousness narrative methods, were explored in many answers.

Question 14 Evelyn Waugh: *A Handful of Dust*

Leaving aside pointless speculation about Waugh's marriage, essays showed that the novel's methods and effects were well appreciated. Candidates were not short of illustrative material but the best essays formed this into cogent arguments to answer the question in each case.

- (a) Candidates tackled 'animals and animal imagery' with enormous enthusiasm, from the appropriate names of characters (Beaver, Rattery, the monkey woman etc.) through motifs such as the pig and the fox to actual animals such as the horse which have significant effects on the plot. The mechanical mice even made an appearance. A number noted that Tod, apart from meaning 'death' in German is also an old name for the fox. The relationship between civilised and more 'bestly' behaviour was explored with insight. This was a very lively and effective group of essays, with sophisticated work characterised by sharp control of the significance of chosen material and clever illustration.
- (b) There were many responses to this alternative showing a strong grasp of Waugh's social satire, based on the behaviour of the privileged class and those who aspire to it. Illustration and direct quotation were well chosen and apt in these arguments. However, the 'presentation in the novel of reputation and attitudes to it' suffered from a fairly common misunderstanding of the word 'reputation' – what people say about you, to put it simply. Some answers discussed what the writer thought of his characters or what the reader thinks of the characters, rather than the significance of talk, gossip and hearsay in the novel, which are central to Waugh's depiction of a shallow society.

Question 15 Katherine Mansfield: *Short Stories*

- (a) There were few answers on Mansfield, and all on this alternative. Candidates wrote clearly on the tensions of family life, almost all agreeing that there is little support to be found there. Illustrations from a good range of appropriate stories were used and explored. Mansfield's methods and concerns were evidently appreciated.
- (b) None seen.

Question 16 Kazuo Ishiguro: *The Remains of the Day*

- (a) There were very few takers for 'humour' in the novel. However, those who tackled it wrote with enthusiasm about a range of funny and ironic moments, mostly concerned with Stevens and his 'butlerspeak' and formal behaviour. Most answers took the view that it is a serious, even tragic, novel, but one enlivened with moments of humour which reveal Stevens's limitations.
- (b) By far the more popular alternative, the discussion of 'dignity' and what it means was inevitably centred on Stevens and his sense of self-worth. Better answers moved away from character sketches of Stevens and drew in other characters such as his father and Harry Smith, whose ideas about dignity expressed towards the end of the novel contrast so markedly with those in the butlers' handbook on which Stevens has built his professional role. It was generally agreed that Stevens' obsession with 'dignity' was entirely destructive of any meaningful relationship with Miss Kenton.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/02

Drama

Key Messages

- The best answers ensure that they convey a sense of how drama works on a stage.
- On passage-based questions, the best answers closely explore the passage throughout the response.

General comments

At all levels, candidates demonstrated their appreciation of the texts that they had read. Many had seen the plays on stage or watched videos and brought rich insights to the texts from particular performances. The best responses showed that candidates can bring their knowledge to bear on a question that is new, and that they can explore it by selecting relevant information in order to convey understanding in a structured and informative way. Less successful responses sometimes failed to take an overall view, or lacked the really detailed analysis of form, structure and language that is central to literary study at this level. At their best, essays were fluent and full of insight.

Some less successful answers found it difficult to maintain a balance between detailed focus and whole play reference in **(b)** questions. The important thing here is that the response must use the passage as the anchor point for discussion and keep it in mind throughout: good answers work from detail outwards, not vice versa.

On the whole, critics and contexts were subtly handled. However at times very general comments about wider critical approaches such as a Freudian reading, were too general to be of use. The argument needs to come from particular views expressed by particular critics, not simply a general awareness of possible approaches. The best essays gave specific references and engaged with particular arguments put forward by the critics. Critics are like streetlights in this sense: they should be used for illumination along the way, not merely to lean upon. Similarly, contexts can be unhelpful to candidates if they do not realise that context is only useful insofar as it emerges from the discussion. For some, contextualization took over from literary analysis, to the detriment of the essay as a whole. Candidates should be wary of citing contexts (Machiavelli is particularly misused in this way) that they have heard about but not come to terms with for themselves. Although wide reading is very much the stuff of this specification, candidates should also be wary about citing examples from other texts that may then lead to digression. The questions asked are about the particular texts studied, so a wider view of the writer's themes and concerns elsewhere (this is particularly true of responses on Shakespeare) may lead candidates away from the central focus of a question.

Centres should remind candidates that they **MUST** answer at least one passage-based question on this paper.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 William Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*

- (a) Candidates saw that this question is open to multiple interpretations, each perfectly valid. Some dealt with sexual immorality, others with political immorality or immoral self-interest. The best answers, of course, saw that the two are intermingled. Strong answers drew attention to particular moments when the issue is most painfully in focus (the last scene, for example). At times contexts of the times were very well done, though there was quite a lot of speculation about the moment at which the play was written, where connections to the English court were perhaps merely tendentious. Candidates who talked about particular productions were acutely aware that sexual

mores in particular change from age to age. Less satisfactory answers here did not pay quite enough attention to the word 'presentation' signalled in the question.

- (b) Responses here were always strongly aware of this as one of the central scenes where values clash. The vigour of the law as stated by Angelo was often examined through his uncompromising, slightly abstract vocabulary. Isabella's plea for mercy, admirably framed in religious terms, provided much material for comment, as did the ambiguity of her position as both sister and religious novice. Candidates who kept this central tension in mind were able to move out tellingly to other examples in the play in order to demonstrate that the civil law is often seen as an ass in the play, or that it conceals motives which are far from 'just'.

Question 2 William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*

- (a) In this question there was the opportunity to explore the claustrophobia of the Danish court. Many candidates were able also to remark on how the play's themes themselves are worked out through siting it in a place where public and private spaces are mixed, just as public and private lives are mixed. A number of responses noted that this may account for some of Hamlet's confusion about his precise role and status. Candidates often saw the castle as a metaphor for Hamlet's state of mind, an objective correlative, as he moves deeper and deeper into the private areas of the castle (his mother's closet) in the middle of the play. A number of responses saw the setting as symptomatic of the inward looking introversion of the Danish court which is so caught up in inner strife that the powers gathering outside the battlements are ignored, thus demonstrating that personal preoccupation has spilled over into a breakdown in good governance.
- (b) Answers on the closet scene were often very detailed, drawing attention to the various roles that Hamlet takes up in the scene as priest, petulant son, confessor, bully, for example. The ambiguity of Gertrude's responses to Hamlet was also well dealt with, and candidates were quick to point out that she is (as elsewhere in the play) hardly allowed to get a word in. Some saw this as her being always a victim of a patriarchal world. Some responses focused on Gertrude's seeming absent-mindedness about what is going to happen to Hamlet ("Alack, I had forgot") seeing this, interestingly, as a sign that Hamlet's destiny is less important to her than her own future. Answers which moved too speedily away from this particular scene (the question asked for it to be the central focus) tended not to be so highly rewarded.

Question 3 William Shakespeare: *Henry IV, Part 1*

- (a) Responses to this question ranged widely over the play. Some interpreted it in a narrow way and confined discussions to the various antagonisms present in the state. Others recognised that Hal is learning about politics, and that he does this through Falstaff as legitimately as through his father. Some answers concentrated on King Henry himself and on the way that he presents kingship in order to cement his hold on the throne. There were a number of responses that compared and contrasted Hal and Hotspur as political apprentices, or looked at generational differences. The best responses looked closely at specific moments in the text and paid close attention to how the various linguistic worlds of the play interrogate political posturing.
- (b) Falstaff's humour and his refusal to take the world of heroic bravado seriously provided a fine starting point for many candidates. They were able to see that his opinions act as a counterweight to the heroic stances taken elsewhere. Many responses also noted that Hal's tone with Falstaff is now more guarded than it was earlier in the play. Many responses also pointed out that Falstaff's self-promotion here is paralleled with Shakespeare's portrayal of other characters in the play and is simply more overt with him. Some of the best answers saw that Falstaff is far from being just the comic relief in the play: rather, his words and actions call into question many of the 'values' that are taken for granted elsewhere.

Question 4 Ben Jonson: *The Alchemist*

- (a) Responses to this question varied considerably. All of them were able to give a wide range of examples of greed, but only the best were able to fully respond to the idea of 'presentation.' Those that did were able to evoke specific moments or discuss the ways in which Jonson ranges across a range of different types of greed, not merely financial gain. The best responses often looked hard at the language of the play

- (b) Responses here showed a willingness to engage with the dramatic situation and the hypocrisy of the Anabaptists. More could have been done to contextualise the Anabaptists, without going too deeply into historical background. Better answers focused on the language, often drawing particular attention to the stupidity of Ananias and Tribulation who are being so openly mocked for their values by Subtle, through his choice of rather Catholic religious vocabulary ('the holy purse' and 'tincture' being just a couple of examples) for dealing with this Protestant sect. Subtle tailors his sales pitch for each of the 'gulls' in the play, and more could often have been said about this shaping of language to appeal to particular weaknesses. Not all candidates were able to make connections between this scene and other moments in the play involving them.

Question 5 Richard Brinsley Sheridan: *The Rivals*

- (a) There were many interesting responses to this question. Candidates quickly saw that there are few in the play who are not deceiving themselves in some way. Focus was often on Mrs Malaprop with her belief in her youthful self as Delia, or in her pride in her linguistic skills. Many responses focused on the lovers who want to live their lives as though hero and heroine of an 18th century romantic novel. The best responses were able to see self-deception as informing the plotting of the play and also creating much of its humour and satirical edge. Often self-deception was linked to a lack of self-knowledge, a significant theme in the play. Less satisfying answers sometime resorted to listing examples, without moving on to deal with their effects.
- (b) Most responses showed good knowledge and understanding of the passage and of how it fits into the play as a whole. More sophisticated responses were able to locate and analyse particular effects (the vocabulary of marketplace used for marriage, for example), and to see the hypocrisy of Sir Anthony. In responding to the instruction to look wider and see the passage's "significance for the play as a whole," parallels were often usefully made with Mrs Malaprop's relationship with Lydia. The dramatic irony of the situation was explored by all candidates, for we know that the 'angel' and the 'old wealthy hag' are one and the same. Many answers dwelt — rightly — on the ways in which Sheridan satirises arranged marriage as a means of dealing with contexts. The best responses also managed to convey a sense of stage business and that the scene is funny, both visually and in its excessive language that places so beautifully the passion of the father by placing it against the languor of Jack, who, as lover, should be the one who should be emotionally unrestrained.

Question 6 Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming*

- (a) This question provided a fertile starting point for candidates. They were able to see how the various characters use the past as a means of creating power over others, perhaps by recalling Jessie's days in the house. More sophisticated answers noted that as the past is only ever recounted and there is no corroborative evidence, much of the bravado may well be invented or exaggerated. Many answers contrasted the seeming excitements of the past with the dullness of the present. The past was always seen as a factor that has shaped, for good or for bad, the attitudes of the characters and their reactions to others. There was often useful discussion of critics or productions, and a number of candidates were able to place the action convincingly in relation to London gang life in the 1960s.
- (b) Responses were quick to make contrasts between the generations and to look closely at how the power relationship works itself out between these two, both here and elsewhere. There were useful discussions of matters of clothing and of the signs of Max's growing impotence within the family, though the stick as a phallic symbol, loved by some candidates, would perhaps be less obvious to an audience in the theatre. As always in close analysis of Pinter, discussions of pauses, imperatives, non-cooperative speech came to dominate, and there was often useful exposition of register and vocabulary. A range of points about uncertainty and threat were made. The better responses saw the relationship in more complex ways, with some concession given to the idea that these two are linked by a perverted affection, despite what they say. There was often useful reference to performance or to contexts, and critics' views, whilst taken into account, usually supported and furthered the answers, rather than simply being an end in themselves.

Question 7 Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

- (a) Candidates who chose this question showed a good grasp of the political background to the play, and often engaged with matters of theatricality by reference to Brecht. Links to the rest of the play were usually very coherent, and all candidates were able to see how Churchill sets up the

experience of women across a series of times and experiences. In order to contextualise the present day experience of women. The strongest answers looked carefully at the particular stories that the women here tell. One or two responses tellingly noted that the waitress is ignored or patronised (thus suggesting that it is a particular type of monied women who are liberated nowadays), and this led on to some interesting discussions of how values of mutual support and, indeed, homogeneity of female views and experiences are critically interrogated by the play's subsequent action.

- (b) Responses showed good understanding of the background to the play and of the contrasting values that are being explored through this discussion. The status of Margaret Thatcher as a figure of adulation or hatred and the emergence of the view that there is no such thing as society proved interesting starting points for a number of discussions, as did discussions of the re-imagining of the working class. The best responses dealt with the passage and the drama of the play, using contexts only as a means of support for what emerges so crisply from the action played out here. Although Churchill is often a highly polemical writer, candidates were able to see her skill in creating characters that embody the values they espouse, rather than simply being wooden, representative figures. Although Marlene dominates, it is significant that Joyce presents a more nuanced version of their childhood that, in turn, gives perspective on Marlene's blind spots and unwillingness to acknowledge the validity of others' views. Connections to elsewhere in the play did not always get fully explored, and they sometimes merely revolved around matters of plot.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/03

Comment and Analysis

Key messages

Some scripts contained answers that differed in length and thoroughness, which usually led to a difference in marks.

Many candidates produced a remarkable amount of focused writing in the time, and had clearly been well practised in answering questions against the clock.

Some answers showed that candidates were able to develop their understanding of the texts while writing. Other answers began with a perceptive overview that established the approach immediately, although this was in a few cases very long.

Question 2 was slightly more popular than **Question 3**; it was noticeable that the candidates in some Centres showed a marked preference for one or the other.

The clarity of expression ranged from very good to outstanding.

The best scripts focused on meticulous close analysis. Others hinted at similar perceptions but did not develop this.

Some candidates felt they had to give contextual comment in great detail, sometime with cursory reference to aspects of the texts; others, perhaps more confidently, gave brief and relevant references that advanced their argument.

A few scripts included answers to **Question 3** that did not pay much attention to dramatic methods and effectiveness.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

Most candidates had a good grasp of the themes and the feminist context and were able to express this with detailed analysis of language and structure. The differing statements on entrapment visible in the texts were a fruitful source of comparison, and many scripts showed an acute sensitivity to the ambivalence in the closing lines of A. Some candidates read the poetic voice in A as male, and discussed the possibilities this might raise in considering sexual equality.

There was much good writing on the contrasting viewpoints in the texts. Some candidates linked these contrasts to developments in the social context, sometimes at considerable length; others were able to make the point economically, spending more time on aspects of structure and language which mirrored the frustration and ambivalence in the texts.

Some scripts concentrated on tone and attitudes to family life, and there was some good work on differences between the two pieces, linked by an analysis of technique. In some cases aspects of the texts – e.g. the references to Edith in B – were ignored, and some candidates spent time giving the history and structure of the sonnet, much of which was of questionable relevance to the particularities of the sonnet set. Some candidates picked up the echo of Milton in the opening of A and contrasted it with modernity of the tone in the final lines. There was some good writing on the effects of narrative method in B, analysing the expression of anger, insult and frustration.

Question 2

There was some good detailed analysis of the language and structure of the poem. Many scripts (usually after the candidates had seen the satirical humour) wrote well about the apparent simplicity of form and language, which they contrasted with the wordy eulogies that often appeared on the memorials of the well-off.

Some saw the tone as an approach to the subject of death that raised the poem to a different level, something approaching good sense on one hand and theology on the other. The impression created by Prior seemed attractive to many candidates. There were many helpful references to the Enlightenment in answers where candidates saw approaches to life and death in this poem that contrasted with the more wholeheartedly religious beliefs of an earlier age.

The best work explained all these perceptions with an acute analysis of the form, structure and language of the poem, in particular the ‘thoroughly personal form of the impersonal’ as one candidate described Mat’s efforts to talk of himself.

It was clear that candidates of all abilities found this poem intriguing, and they showed a willingness to pursue statements that in some cases they found difficult. When they approached it via analysis of form they found their way in.

Question 3

Answers to this question usually (though not always) showed a good understanding of dramatic techniques – the setting tone, the tone of the dialogue and the context of social hierarchy. Some answers stressed that the dialogue in these opening lines would arouse the curiosity of the audience. The talk about Mr Affable Hawk and the activities described by the characters were seen as an effective opening. Some candidates noted that the servants are sitting at ease in their employer’s drawing room, and suggested that a moment of tense drama might occur should Mr Hawk return. The development of the three characters on stage (with their own hierarchy) was well analysed, and some candidates added to this the development of Mr Hawk’s character by the servants’ admiring account of him.

There was a clear sense of Victorian class divisions, reputations and the fiscal underpinning of class structures, leading to some useful contextual discussion, which in this question was rarely heavy-handed.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/04
Personal Investigation

Key Messages

The best essays:

- were individual and personal in respect of both texts and topic; Paper 4 is entitled “Personal Investigation”, and the adjective is important;
- had followed the advice offered by the Cambridge adviser in response to the candidates’ Outline Proposal Forms;
- considered in some detail the ways in which form, structure and language shape meaning, whichever the genre of each text;
- ensured that there was sufficient reference to, and quotation from, the two or more subsidiary texts as well as the two main ones;
- made thoughtful use of appropriate academic and/or critical research, and considered the effects of contexts upon how the texts are written and read.

General Comments

The Personal Investigation allowed many candidates to show very high levels of critical ability. Essays did less well when they did not fulfil the Syllabus requirements.

Key Assessment Objectives

The first requirement of the first assessment is that essays must respond appropriately and personally to all the selected texts in relation to the candidates’ chosen question.

Essays did less well when they:

- wrote about all four texts in equal proportions, thus making it quite hard to make the kind of closely detailed textual comparisons that are required;
- wrote almost exclusively on just two main texts, with no more than a few passing lines, often towards the end of their essays, on a third and fourth;
- did not mention a fourth or very occasionally even a third text at all.

Successful essays spent most time comparing their two main texts, but also made reference to two subsidiary texts to make it quite clear that these had been read and studied in full.

The Descriptors say that there must be “*an appropriate/thoughtful/personal*” response and weaker essays did not keep tightly enough to what their question actually asked.

The best work was truly personal, with a unique focus and an individual response.

The second assessment objective looks for evidence of closely critical skill, and for evidence that candidates can explore at least some of the effects of the form, the structure and above all the language used by their authors. The best essays made room for some moments where these three factors were considered and critically discussed. They went beyond general assertions, especially about form and structure, and explored short extracts, or perhaps complete poems, while at the same time suggesting ways in which these were in some way characteristic of the rest of the text(s). Such exploration was generally restricted to the two main texts, and this was absolutely in line with what is expected. One aspect of the third assessment objective is the ability to “*relate part of the text to the whole*”, and this was often a secure and critically astute way of addressing this idea.

Essays on drama texts did well when they considered at least some aspects of dialogue, stage action, interplay between characters, and – if relevant to the play – the authors’ uses of lighting or sound effects. A

play, it is worth stressing, is intended to be seen, heard, experienced, not just read – and of course an audience will not have the stage directions in front of them in the theatre.

The first and central requirement is comparison; in the words of the Syllabus itself, “*The essay must involve significant comparisons between two authors*”. Most candidates were clearly aware of this, and most essays did contain at least some element of comparison, but some did not make this as central as it should have been. The best essays presented sustained comparison throughout, certainly of the two main texts, with the subsidiaries being interspersed as and when appropriate; and of course the most critically effective comparisons looked well beyond the simple contents of the texts, to consider their differing, and similar, methods and techniques too. Less confident candidates sometimes wrote on each text separately, drawing them together from time to time, usually at the start and the end of their essays, though while this was not the most sophisticated way of making connections and contrasts it was often quite successful, and certainly acceptable.

Contextual factors were on the whole well addressed, though some less successful essays showed little or no evidence that any had been considered; such factors may be historical or cultural, or they may be purely literary, with appropriate reference to other writing of a similar period, or a similar type. Good essays always ensured that contextual material was *used* to illustrate or develop a candidate’s ideas or arguments, not just for its own sake.

Mention has been made above of length: essays should be between 3000 and 3500 words. The minimum length is to enable candidates to write in sufficient detail, bearing in mind that four texts are concerned, and the maximum length is to help candidates keep their writing concise and focused. Essays this summer were almost uniformly within these two limits, but those who strayed outside them – almost invariably going beyond 3500 – did less well, in that there was a tendency towards repetition, generalisation, over-reliance on narrative or description, and a lack of tight focus.

Outline Proposal Forms (OPFs)

Successful essays resulted when Proposals had been sent in on time, (as every year, by October 31)- allowing time for feedback and readjustment if necessary. Good work resulted when candidates had clearly outlined their task with some notes of how it would develop, and had followed the advice of the examiner when it was given.

Where essays had gone off topic, or not followed advice, they did less well.

As comparison of authors is at the heart of what the Syllabus requires, candidates performed best when the title made this explicit, either by using appropriate words in the questions themselves or by outlining their intentions in the additional notes on their proposal forms. Some proposals had to be returned for revision when there was no indication that comparison was planned, or very occasionally when candidates suggested writing comparisons that were far bigger and broader than could possibly be managed within 3500 words.

Texts

By far the most common genre was prose, and in this genre almost all were novels; poetry was relatively rare, and drama even more so; there is much to gain from having work from at least two genres, if only to enable and encourage a wider range of critical and contextual material, quite apart from lessening the occasionally almost unmanageable weight of four long novels. When poetry was used, essays which only focused on two or three poems did not score highly. A poetry text needs to be a whole text: that is, a published selection.

By far the majority of candidates this session had clearly thought carefully about how they were going to connect their four texts, and a common thread of theme, period, genre was evident and clarified in the OPF; there were a few, however, where it was quite hard to see any valid or easily workable linking, often when the two subsidiary texts were taken into account. Sometimes the notes on the OPF clarified this, and showed that candidates had thought carefully about what they were planning, but where there were no such notes, and/or where it appeared in the question itself that there was not a confident appreciation of how the texts were to be connected, the essays inevitably lacked cogency and cohesion.

Candidates did well when texts had been chosen with a view to the syllabus requirement to consider some wider literary and/or academic factors within which the texts have been studied.

Presentation

Most Centres, and most candidates, followed the Syllabus requirements exactly and professionally; most work was submitted by the deadline (this is always April 30), and most work was very neatly and efficiently presented, with the Pre-U cover-sheet and copies of the OPF attached. The cover-sheet contains not just essential candidate details and the word count, but candidate and teacher signatures, authenticating the work, and it needs to be attached to the essay.

Essays are required by the Specification to be between 3000 and 3500 words long. These limits are intended to help candidates ensure **(a)** that they say enough about all four texts, and at the same time **(b)** that they write with reasonable conciseness and focus and good essays stayed within these limits.

Competent work showed clear evidence that, whatever research had been undertaken, it was properly acknowledged, properly footnoted, together with a proper and detailed bibliography and where appropriate a webography. Almost all essays did include a bibliography, but where this consisted of just the four texts it was very clear that no wider reading or research had been undertaken. The most useful bibliographies were those that divided their references into two parts – works cited, and works read and/or considered when planning and preparing the work; the “works cited” section should really be no more than a reiteration of what has been acknowledged briefly in a candidate’s footnotes.

Good essays used footnotes to acknowledge sources- some weaker work used footnotes to try to add to the length of the essay. Quite apart from any possible breaching of the word limit, if a reader had to break off repeatedly to read a lengthy footnote, the natural flow of the essay and its argument were broken, and so the “*fluent concise expression*” required for Level 5, the “*effective organisation*” of Level 4, and certainly the “*succinctly organised*” writing of Level 6 were not properly achieved.

It is important to note that for 2016 onwards:

Outline Proposal Forms MUST be submitted by 31 October;

Texts set for Papers 1 or 2 may no longer be used at all in Paper 4, even in a subsidiary capacity.