

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9765/01 Poetry and Prose</p>

Key messages

- Good essays use formal, appropriate, formal critical register and are based upon the careful reading of questions, with judicious choice of suitable material from the primary texts under discussion.
- Good essays always focus upon the question asked. They combine quotation from, and direct reference to, the texts, with close analysis of form, structure and language to support their arguments. They maintain focus and relevance.
- Good essays keep secondary critical comments under control and do not allow them to dominate at the expense of personal exploration of the text.

General comments

Few answers failed to reach the minimum standard required for a Pass grade and much work was of Distinction level, with some exceptional essays showing sophisticated responses of the highest quality. Wordsworth and Heaney appeared for the first time on the component and were both very popular choices. Herbert, also new, had fewer takers but they were clearly enthusiastic about his poetry. *Jane Eyre* and *Cat's Eye* were popular new novels this year.

Successful essays always focused upon the question asked, sometimes defining terms to make quite clear their intended trajectories. Relevance is a basic principle in the Mark Scheme, even for the lower levels of attainment. Some essays had introductory paragraphs which bore no relation to the set question although they revealed a general appreciation of the work under discussion, and of these, not all managed to gain fully relevant focus as they progressed.

Answers on poetry must be supported by the choice of apt set poems for discussion of the topic, not poems which are merely well known or the candidate's favourite. Wordsworth's sonnet *Composed upon Westminster Bridge* and written in the present tense is not an insight into his childhood experiences. It is not the most convincing choice for a remembered experience, either. Wider reference to poems beyond the set ones is always welcome, but the main analysis should be focused on those which are set in the syllabus; there are no poems from Heaney's collection *Death of a Naturalist* on the set list because this has been extensively studied at (I)GCSE, so basing an essay on *Digging* and *Follower* is risky for this particular examination, though candidates may of course make wider reference to them during the course of an essay.

Reliance (even over-reliance) on critical quotations, particularly in the Poetry section of the paper, was sometimes high. In some essays there were more quotations from critics than quotations from the poems themselves. The emphasis on personal response and on the close analysis of form, structure and language was maintained in the best essays, however.

Many candidates were skilful at incorporating apt contextual material into their essays. The medieval church, Ireland, Romanticism, Victorian society and so on were all helpfully addressed. There were few 'bolted on' contextual paragraphs, though there were a number of essays on Heaney in particular which, while well expressed, devoted themselves to discussion of the political and social background without really considering the poems at all.

The best essays are written in an appropriately formal style for a literary essay at this level. Loose expressions should be avoided. (For example, there were quite a few who wrote *X's poetry is littered with...*; 'litter' with its scruffy, random connotations would seem a very inappropriate metaphor for a poet's careful choice of words.)

There were no rubric infringements and very little short work.

Comments on specific questions

Section A – Poetry

Question 1 GEOFFREY CHAUCER: *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*

There were many fine answers on Chaucer, showing strong appreciation of the Pardoner, his audience and the medieval context. Candidates were knowledgeable about the Church and incorporated their contextual knowledge skilfully. Awareness of different interpretations of the Tale was particularly strong this year. On the other hand, there were very few direct quotations from the original text.

- (a) Essays discussed the work as a performance piece for the Pardoner and the pilgrims as well as a poem read aloud to, or by, Chaucer's early audience. The language, humour, aural effects and shifts in mood were clearly considered. Some essays focused too much on the Pardoner as performer without sufficiently involving the 'sense of an audience' which the question calls for. Although not as popular as the (b) alternative, the quality of discussion was strong.
- (b) This evinced an interestingly varied range of responses. Chaucer's use of irony is widespread and ranges from the obvious relationship between the teller's immorality and his moral Tale to local ironic details within the text. Answers needed to be selective and carefully organised. Less convincing answers tended to claim 'this is ironic' without being entirely sure why it was so. The best answers wrote analytically about types of irony, using direct quotation selectively.

Question 2 GEORGE HERBERT: *Selected Poems*

- (a) New this year, Herbert was studied by relatively few candidates, but their work was lively and engaging. There were signs of careful thought about this question, which they often disagreed with and were forced to construct and defend their arguments, rather than offloading a set of prepared answers. They took issue with 'effortlessly' very effectively.
- (b) There were no answers to this question.

Question 3 JOHN MILTON: *Shorter Poems*

- (a) There were no answers to this question.
- (b) There were no answers to this question.

Question 4 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: *Selected Poems*

New this year, Wordsworth was the most popular of the pre-1900 poets studied. Essays ranged from general comments on Nature, some of them irrelevant, to extremely sensitive and detailed analyses of his poetry. General, digressive treatments of Romanticism were few; rather candidates successfully incorporated relevant reference into critical essay structures. Some strange claims for blank verse suggest that more work on versification and its effects might be helpful for candidates.

- (a) Wordsworth's poetic presentation of childhood was popular and in most cases suitable poems were chosen to discuss it. *The Prelude* was, understandably, a source of much material.
- (b) The opportunity to explore, for artistic purposes, the unreliability of experience remembered, was taken in many excellent answers, but there were also some weaker answers which were summaries of past experience which skimmed over the surface of the poems, never really engaging with them.

Question 5 W H AUDEN: *Selected Poems*

Auden's poetry had a wide take-up this year, though there was something of a tendency to write general 'all-purpose' essays. The tonal subtleties of the work were missed in some cases. There were, on the other hand, many fine Distinction level essays with subtle critical exegesis of challenging poems, such as *In Praise*

of *Limestone*. Both essay topics, equally popular, had terms in them which benefited from discussion in order to develop the answers helpfully.

- (a) 'Serious game' – Auden's own definition – was usefully investigated by many candidates. That Auden's poetry has serious themes was accepted, but the idea of the 'game' needed some exploration and illustration. Most concluded that it was his whimsical, playful style which best exemplified this strand of the quotation and there were many successful essays which used this strategy, often juxtaposing the serious theme with the playful style.
- (b) The best essays here considered the meaning of the *desert* – that wide, empty, arid place. Fewer used the idea of the *healing fountain*, though this could have helped in discussing Auden's *exploration*.

Question 6 ELIZABETH JENNINGS: *Selected Poems*

Essays on Jennings appeared for the first time, and there were some very fine responses to (b), the question which prompted much of the best of the poetry work seen on this paper. There was a balance of analytical overview with a persuasive appreciation of each poem as a self-contained unit.

- (a) The relatively few answers to this appreciated Jennings's alertness to sensory images, as suggested in the prompt quotation.
- (b) Most answers on Jennings were on the topic of suffering here. Many related the poems to Jennings's life, but this was handled very sensitively and with due attention to the details of the language of the poems themselves.

Question 7 LES MURRAY: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were no answers to this question.
- (b) There were no answers to this question.

Question 8 SEAMUS HEANEY: *Selected Poems*

This was the most popular poetry text on the paper overall. However, in many cases unsuitable poems were used, with a consequent lack of relevance to the questions asked. The dominance of accounts of 'the Troubles' in some answers detracted from analysis of the language of the poems themselves and in many essays there was far too much contextual comment.

- (a) The poems about the bog bodies are a well-known group, from which candidates could choose two or three, or range more widely across the others. Some candidates all but ignored the bog poems and just wrote on poems they knew well, often with scant relevance. It goes without saying that these answers do not meet the requirements for focus and relevance which are characteristic of most of the Grade Descriptors. The best answers employed close critical analysis of selected relevant poems, relating them to the juxtaposition of past and present.
- (b) Again, many of the less successful essays here stemmed from unsuitable poem choices. *Childhood experiences* is not the same as 'poetry about children'. But some of the chosen poems were not even that: *Limbo*, *The Wife's Tale* and *The Guttural Muse* are much more about adult experiences than those of childhood. It is really important for candidates to have a broad stock of poems from which to choose and to make appropriate choices for the question asked.

Section B – Prose

Question 9 HENRY FIELDING: *Joseph Andrews*

There were a relatively small number of answers on this text, new to the syllabus this year. They were of a high standard, employing a wide range of material and showing insight into Fielding's methods and concerns.

- (a) This was a minority choice, but the text was very well known and appreciated. Reference to literary and social context was used subtly and skilfully to illuminate answers.

- (b) Candidates offered interesting and often complex work of a high standard. Answers explored the moral dimension of the novel without necessarily tackling head on the question of whether it had, or indeed could have, a moral.

Question 10 JANE AUSTEN: *Emma*

- (a) Of the alternatives, (a) was the more widely attempted. Many answers focused solely on the character of Emma, though in fact there are examples of mistakes and misunderstandings made by the other characters in the novel. Some tried, often successfully, to show that mistakes and misunderstandings are not the same thing. The best answers addressed the novel's structure and explored the scope for the *reader* to make mistakes and misunderstand; excellent textual reference characterised these answers. As always with answers on the novel, there was a tendency in weaker answers to drift into narrative treatment.
- (b) Although fewer answered on this alternative, there were many excellent answers showing close knowledge and appreciation of the Box Hill episode and its significance in the novel's characterisation, structure and tone.

Question 11 ELIZABETH GASKELL: *North and South*

Fewer answers were seen on Gaskell this series, but there some very thoughtful and analytical ones, showing fine appreciation of the novel. Candidates had a strong sense of the novel's context though reference made to it was sometimes over-dominant in the balance of the essay's structure.

- (a) This was the minority choice, with candidates not entirely confident of the topic. Some answers leant very heavily on the characterisation of Margaret, rather than considering the further contribution of the Higgins family to other aspects of the novel.
- (b) There were many sound answers here, discussing the novel as one of reconciliation, of building bridges. On the whole, candidates agreed with the proposition in the prompt quotation, using for illustration the relationships between individual characters, between the masters and men and the North and the South.

Question 12 CHARLOTTE BRONTË: *Jane Eyre*

Examined for the first time on pre-U this year, the novel elicited many strong, knowledgeable and interesting answers. (Future candidates are advised to clarify the social situation and standing of governesses, since this was an area which seemed widely misunderstood.)

- (a) The different settings of the novel were well appreciated, but treatment of them tended to tail off, with Gateshead given a great deal of attention and Ferndean rather less: it is not simply Edenic. However, this may have been more a result of time management in the examination than lack of knowledge. The best answers looked at descriptive imagery as well as the stages of the bildungsroman.
- (b) This very popular question was sometimes rewritten to suit the essay that candidates had prepared on 'passion and religion', which was not always strictly relevant. Some inspection of what 'duty' meant was helpful. Some candidates were strangely unsympathetic to Jane in the early stages, suggesting that her duty was to behave at Gateshead and be meek and respectful. Duty to the self was often interestingly explored; it does not preclude passion per se, though it does preclude adultery. *I care for myself* was contrasted helpfully with St John's *A part of me you must become*.

Question 13 VIRGINIA WOOLF: *To the Lighthouse*

This was again very popular and thoughtfully discussed, with, by and large, excellent textual reference.

- (a) Most essays were on the topic of the Ramsays and most managed to avoid too much simplistic biographical assertion about Woolf's parents. At the top end there were many finely sensitive comments about the two, some even finding comparable rather than contrasting qualities in them. A demanding aspect of the question lay in its potential for concentration on only the first section of the novel, but this was largely avoided. The idea of what constituted 'domination' was often discussed more widely, with candidates suggesting that ultimately the dominant motifs were Lily and her painting, or that the passage of time and the course of history overrode all other concerns.

- (b) Fewer answered this question but the quality was high. Communication took various forms, verbal and non-verbal; apparent non-communication could occur simultaneously with understanding or even a kind of shared isolation. These ideas were all very well illustrated and related to the novelist's methods.

Question 14 MARGARET ATWOOD: *Cat's Eye*

New to the syllabus this year, the novel clearly engaged candidates fully and prompted much good work.

- (a) There were not many answers to this alternative. They were either outstandingly detailed and knowledgeable analyses of Elaine's paintings, or rather general accounts which were able to see the significance of the paintings only in loose terms.
- (b) This was a far more popular choice. Characterisation, structure, symbolism and psychological motifs were well observed. A tendency to tell the story was a feature of less accomplished work, but most essays could identify the complexity of childhood cruelty and its origins, as well as the ambiguities surrounding the narrator.

Question 15 Katherine Mansfield: *Short Stories*

There was a more significant take up of the stories this year, with some excellent work, as well as some which was less convincing, where the stories were not so well known.

- (a) The essay on the contrast between the calm surface of relationships and the turmoil beneath was the more popular option and candidates wrote well on most of the chosen stories. *Bliss* was not entirely known and appreciated in some answers, however, and was often more convincingly deployed in answers to (b)
- (b) This was well answered, with a range of symbols discussed in detail. Excellent textual knowledge underpinned some fine essays.

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

- (a) Most answers here were on 'failures of vision', with a predictable concentration on Stevens and his imperceptions. However, other characters were sometimes explored with interesting results. Candidates wrote sympathetically, but in less convincing answers general essays on Stevens and his attachment to dignity could blur the precise focus.
- (b) There were few responses to this question, but some were excellent. The historical background itself is not the question, but rather the ways in which it develops the novel's characterisation – a distinction which the few answers made the most of, with satisfying results.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/02
Drama

Key messages

- When tackling the **(b)** (passage) questions, candidates need to be aware that they must deal *in detail* with the language and dramatic devices of the passage presented.
- Contexts should inform an answer, not be the dominant means of access to the text.
- Good essays are thoughtfully and continuously supported through analysed close reference to particular moments in the text.
- Candidates should think hard about the precise terms of a question before beginning to write.

General comments

As always, all candidates, whatever their ability, showed that they had engaged with the texts as works of art. At the top end there was work of enormous sophistication, with candidates ranging fluently across a text whilst at the same time showing a firm understanding of context and of the various ways in which texts might be interpreted. Most candidates were also firmly aware of dramatic conventions and gave consideration to the text as something that might be performed, rather than merely read. Critics were, for the most part, used wisely, though there is a slight tendency amongst some candidates to make sweeping statements about what, for example, a Freudian or Marxist or feminist argument might be simply by assertion, and this should be avoided.

Candidates need to be wary about jumping at a question too quickly and then writing a response to the question they would like to have been asked, not the question that they *have* been asked. A further danger (or temptation) is to look at a question and fail to realise its full implications. For example, candidates who simply read Question 2a as involving discussion of revenge in *Hamlet* failed to notice (or only talked implicitly) about the ways in which the play both embodies and subverts the conventions of the genre. Similarly, the word 'presentation' in Question 1a was designed to provoke discussion that went beyond character study or discussion of the function of the female characters.

Comments on specific questions

William Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*

Question 1

- (a) All candidates — as might be expected — were fully aware of Isabella's role in the play. Some saw her as priggish and self-righteous, others as a victim of male needs and desires. What proved more elusive was to see how the various counterpoints in the play worked. This involved something rather more difficult than simple character study. Better answers, of course, saw the parallels of situation with both Mariana and Juliet, and there was much useful discussion of ways in which women are manipulated and played with during the course of the play. Juliet, for example, is the cause of much of the plot's genesis but is the silent woman, a stark contrast to Isabella's loquacity and a glaring reminder of the Viennese government's moralistic attempt to regulate sexuality and reproduction. Mistress Overdone was almost entirely ignored, though she of course asks the big question for all of the women in the play in the light of the new morality: 'What shall become of me?' She represents a certain type of independence too. The best answers saw that the various contrasts are there to illuminate the relationship between gender and power. They were also able

to explore the various ways in which the women express themselves, and this often led to interesting contrasts between Isabella's articulacy and Mariana's passivity. Very few responses focused in detail on Act 5, which is, of course, where the masculine assumptions about women as mere possessions to be disposed of at will are most palpably felt. There was much useful insight into how the play (and the role of women) might be interpreted in different ways by different ages. For many this opened up the central issue of *Measure for Measure* as a problem play.

- (b) There was much excellent work on this question. Less successful discussions often focused on the passage from line 16, without realising perhaps that everything that is said up to this point anchors an audience's reaction for what is to follow as it sets up the Duke's self-avowed weaknesses in order to announce Angelo as a counterweight. The vast majority of answers were confident about the relationship between the two at this moment, with some registering discomfort at Angelo's self-deprecation and seeing this as a clue about what is to follow. There was much discussion of the dominance of the Duke here (as might be expected) and his concern with 'government'. Weaker answers often moved away from the passage too quickly, rather than exploring the ways in which the issues are raised here in order to be further explored as the play proceeds. A variety of interpretations of both men were explored, and there was much useful evocation of critical discussions that have taken place about the Duke's irresponsibility or Angelo's weakness. Degrees of sympathy for both men varied enormously.

William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*

Question 2

- (a) The best responses to this question showed a wide-ranging understanding of the conventions of revenge drama, though very few candidates drew attention to Shakespeare's reminder to an audience of these conventions through the play within a play. Essays were often able to analyse in great detail how the language and action of determination, typical of revenge drama, gives way to something much more uncertain in *Hamlet*. Other responses approached the question by contrasting Hamlet with the men of action in the play. Less successful answers tended to think more about the inadequacy of Hamlet's revenge, without perhaps looking closely enough at genre. More limited work focused on Hamlet's character.
- (b) All candidates were fully aware of the significance of this scene. Some responses took the view that it is a turning point in the play — the moment when Hamlet commits himself fully to revenge. Others saw it as yet another example of 'words, words, words'. When a passage is printed on the question paper, it is important to recognise that all of it needs to be considered. In this case, some responses focused too readily on the second half, without giving full attention to what prompts Hamlet into his soliloquy. The best answers were fully aware of the significance of Hamlet's inaction being set against the heroic futility of the Norwegians who fight for land that 'hath in it no profit but the name'. A small number of candidates misread 'dull' to suggest that Hamlet is indifferent to, or even bored, by the situation he finds himself in. The finest answers were able to make links across the whole play and to the other soliloquies. There was often close work on Hamlet's choice of animal imagery, his obsessions, or his mixture of statements and questions.

William Shakespeare: *The Winter's Tale*

Question 3

- (a) Responses at all levels showed that the two worlds were well understood and that the summery world of Bohemia redeems the 'winter's tale' of Sicilia. The most sophisticated responses were able to see that things are not quite that straightforward or polarised: there is a dark streak in Bohemia (the relationship between Polixenes and Florizel epitomises it) that places the worlds in parallel, not in contrast. There were some interesting responses that focused on the presentation of kingship and patriarchy as a means of seeing comparison and contrast. A few candidates worked hard on Act 5 to show how the tension between the two is revisited and resolved. There was often useful discussion of contrasts between generations. Responses that explored the symbolism of the worlds or the differences of imagery ('Twinn'd lambs' becoming perhaps real lambs later) presented interesting and sophisticated insights into the question.
- (b) This was *not* an invitation to write a character study. Virtually all responses made this clear, and there were many astute reflections on the various ways in which Autolycus represents a different world and heralds a change of tone for the play. Less secure, on the whole, was the ability to deal

with the detail of the text. Stronger answers dealt fully with the song; weaker answers ignored it, thus failing to make the winter/summer connection through detailed reference to the passage. The question asked about 'here and elsewhere in the play', but only the best answers engaged with his discussion with the clown at the end of Act 4 and with their further, more difficult, meeting in Act 5, Scene 2.

Ben Jonson: *The Alchemist*

Question 4

- (a) Slightly restricted answers on this question simply took it to be an invitation to list different sorts of language and assert that they were funny or significant. More probing responses were able to analyse some of the alchemical gobbledegook that so fools Mammon or the astrological nonsense presented to Druggier and see that the gullers very consciously vary their lexis and style as they deal with their varied clientele. Other responses dealt with the language of deception that is used between Face, Subtle and Dol in order to demonstrate that there is no such thing as honour amongst thieves. The best answers reflected on how the language of the play, like its action, becomes increasingly uncontrolled and manic as the play moves towards its climax.
- (b) There was plenty to talk about in this passage, from its range of language to its significance as central to the play's denouement. A small number of candidates fixed on the words 'comedy' and 'comic effects' and rapidly moved away from the passage to more general essays. This was a shame, as so much of the play's technique is ripe for discussion in this extract. What was lacking here at times was consideration of *The Alchemist* as a farce, with the action gradually becoming more and more frenzied as the nature of the deception is revealed and the various victims realise what has been going on. Lovewit's role as commentator and straight man was somewhat underplayed too. The best answers, of course, saw all of this and more besides, with much discussion focused on the play's satire and how it presents the 'foolish vice of honesty.' There was much good use of contextual understanding in many responses, with candidates very aware that Jonson comes from a rather earthier school than Shakespeare.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan: *The Rivals*

Question 5

- (a) Responses were quick to locate the idea of sentimentality and excessive emotion in contextual terms, with Lydia's list of reading a useful starting point for discussing how she tries to overcome her boredom by creating herself as a romantic heroine. There was often much pointed discussion of the contrast between Julia and Lydia in order to focus on Sheridan's satirical take on these issues. Answers focused clearly on particular moments, for the most part, and discussions often extended far wider than the two girls. Mrs Malaprop was seen as equally (and more culpably) gullible of falling for sentiment and emotion. There were often useful discussions, too, of the way that the men fall into the stereotypical roles of romantic heroes, though with more farcical consequences than in the shabby little shockers that Lydia reads. All responses showed good awareness of how the text comes alive on the stage. Many candidates had seen the play and were able to use experience of those productions to set up critical discussions.
- (b) Contrasts between the two girls, both here and elsewhere in the play were clearly outlined in all responses. Lydia's capacity for self-dramatization and 'caprice' was fully explored, as was the girls' awareness that the destiny they are both trying to avoid is one of being a man's property, victim of a 'Smithfield bargain.' Both girls were often seen as victims. There was useful discussion of various ways in which sentimentalism is explored through their characterisation whilst at the same time being seen as a way in which women perhaps step outside their immediate circumstances to imagine different futures. Responses showed clear understanding of the conventions of this type of drama, though many candidates referred to the play as an example of 'Restoration drama' despite the fact that it was written over a hundred years later than the restoration. More acute responses to the creation of the play saw it as a 'laughing' comedy designed to subvert and satirize the conventions of sentimental comedy.

Samuel Beckett: *Waiting for Godot*

Question 6

- (a) Responses to this question were wide-ranging and often very searching. The various types of repetition – whether of action or language — were usually well analysed rather than simply being reported. There was much discussion of the ambiguity of the play and about whether repetition acts to reassure or to disconcert the characters and the audience. Top end answers were able to relate this to an overall view of the play as comedy, tragedy, or both. Some candidates had seen recent productions of the play and were keen to discuss various ways in which the interpretations they had seen were valid. Contexts of existential angst and the post war period were usually well judged and carefully stated. Discussions of contemporary reactions to the play were often apposite. There was a strong impression from many candidates that reading criticism of the play had been a pleasure, not a chore, and that it had deepened their understanding considerably.
- (b) All responses to this question confronted the issue of the ending's tone directly. There was sensible discussion of the structure and language of the extract (particularly the use of questions and silence), and this was always linked to a strong sense of what has gone before and the audience's strong sense of the ending's ambiguity. The best answers made much of the drama of the situation, or rather the lack of drama as the audience can imagine the action repeating itself to infinity. There was strong reaction to the hopelessness of the situation. Critics were usefully cited when relevant, and there was much discussion of the context of the play's genesis amidst the mixture of hope and despair of the post-war period. Some candidates saw the play as a quasi-religious text, an interpretation that led them to interesting and engaging discussions about the nature of faith and belief in stronger powers.

Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

Question 7

- (a) The term 'dramatic presentation' was central to this question. It was clearly understood by the majority of candidates who saw that the simple matter of various characters having different points of view is tempered by the contexts of time and place in which we see them. There was useful discussion of debates taking place over time in Act 1, with the various participants bringing their experiences of different cultures and eras to bear on the discussions about the role and treatment of women. There was also discussion of the other acts where the women are seen in diverse situations — work and home, casual and formal — that explore their feelings and experiences. The best answers saw that part of the nature of debate in the play is to suggest that Churchill can envision different types of feminism and that she satirises some of its more extreme manifestations. On the whole, contexts were soundly understood, though points about Thatcher's hegemony at the time were sometimes either crudely put or vastly over-stated.
- (b) Responses engaged readily with the issue of work as presented in the play. Discussions of the passage were able to locate Shona's insecurity and her transparent lying in order to make it in a male-dominated world. The best responses also explored Shona's inability to focus on the question she was asked in line 52 in a way that would appeal to an employer. There was useful discussion of verbal echoing as a means of co-operation. Discussions of the issue in the wider context of the play often focused on the women's definitions of success. The most sophisticated responses were fully aware of the ambiguous presentation of the world of work in the play and of Churchill's satirical intent at various moments.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9765/03 Comment and Analysis</p>

Key messages

- Good essays are always relevant to the task and well-focused.
- Mere contextual reference is not a substitute for literary analysis. The best answers integrate contextual comment successfully within the argument of an essay. Less successful answers often overweight contextual reference unduly and without relevance to the task in hand.
- Good responses to drama passages are alert to the material as drama (e.g. considering how a statement might work as part of an exchange on stage, and considering the perspective of an audience, not merely the 'reader').

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

In general, candidates were well-prepared for completing this and their other choice in examination conditions, and there was little evidence of short work. Most answers began with an overview that was then developed. Other responses were less secure at their beginning but still contained a developing and organised statement. Clarity of expression was usually good throughout.

Most candidates dealt well with aspects of form in relation to (A), Kipling's poem 'Gethsemane 1914-1918', and many did so too with the less formal structure of (B), Gurney's poem 'The Silent One'.

Some candidates, having identified the elements of ballad in (A) then sought to find humour in the poem, on the grounds that a ballad is light-hearted or amusing, although this was usually uneasily done as the content of the poem seemed at odds with this approach. Most found the structure of (B) more difficult to analyse, but many succeeded in making useful argument from tracing the breakdown of the early rhyme as the poem progressed, and seeing a unity in it.

Many candidates used the analysis of the word 'pass' in (A) as the basis of their answer, which enabled them to move on to the inevitability of death, as it is expressed in the poem, and then to the sense of inevitability expressed in (B). Others began equally successfully with the sense of inevitability in the story of Christ's prayers in Gethsemane. Another starting point was the reality of apparently ordinary events such as the encounter with the 'pretty lass' in (A) or the qualities of the polite conversation between the officer and the soldier in (B).

There was some good writing about the title of (B), 'The Silent One', who chattered so beguilingly before his self-sacrifice. Some candidates picked up the importance of the idea of Gethsemane in (A), starting with the title, and some saw the title in (B) as being grammatically part of the statement in the first line of the poem. Others saw the similarity of crucifixion in (A) and the posture of the dead man on the wire in (B), and some saw evidence of both poems as having been written from beyond death, though others presented this as an ambiguity rather than an established fact.

Many candidates saw the relationships between officers and men in both poems as a comment on social relationships in the time of the Great War, but some of the contextual comments stopped short of effective development in relation to the poets' writing, or sometimes became digressive. Some saw the picture of the officer in (A), sitting on a chair surrounded by his men lying on the grass, as a glimpse of privilege; others

saw it as a poignant last moment of peace before they all met death. Some were fascinated by the conversation between the soldier and his officer in (B), seeing it as a similar moment when all were equal before death, made more powerful by the content and tone of the soldier's statement to God.

Question 2

Many candidates began profitably by analysing the structure of the O'Connor passage's four paragraphs, commenting on the narrative point of view and the development of character. Some started their response by analysing the sentence near the end in which Mrs Hopewell's lack of bad qualities was seen as superfluous, given her capacity to exploit the weaknesses of others. This led to some perceptive reading and analysis.

There was some good writing on the description of Joy and her actions, including her apparently incongruous name and her capacity to indicate her views of other people by the names she gives them. Similarly, there was plenty of good writing about the implications of all the names, especially those of Mrs Freeman and Mrs Hopewell.

Some scripts showed a defensiveness about Mrs Freeman's fixed and limited qualities, expressed through the metaphor of a lumbering truck. It was as if context replaced critical analysis: that the candidates thought it wrong to talk of people like this, an approach which might possibly have prevented them being alert to some of the revelations that were to follow. Similarly, the title *Good Country People* was seen by some candidates as no more than a class-based comment, but others saw it as an ambiguity worth analysing.

There was some good work on the narrative method, especially in the third paragraph, where Mrs Hopewell's public statements about Mrs Freeman and her daughters are presented as an historical outline but with the tone of a present discourse.

Question 3

There were some very good responses to the passage from Sedley's *Mulberry Garden*. Candidates saw the scene as falling into two halves: in the first a good deal is learned about all four characters, and in the second this knowledge comes together with the entry of the men, and both theme and character are developed.

Less successful answers did not develop these interactions as fully as they might, and did not always seem to see the passage as drama. More successful answers came from candidates who read the passage as if they were in a theatre, imagining possible settings and movements and incorporating them in their response, analysing how statements could be seen differently or more fully as part of an exchange on stage. There was some amused surprise at the timelessness of the events and conversation in the passage.

The language and tone of the passage received some apt comment. Candidates often wrote well about the effects in the intimate conversation between Victoria and Olivia and in the more extravagantly-worded contributions of Estridge and Modish, which are given another level of meaning by what had happened before they arrived on stage. Similarly, many candidates wrote well about Olivia's adroit handling of Modish's attempts at seductive talk.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/04
Personal Investigation

Key messages

The best responses:

- 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 Cambridge Advisers in response to candidates’ Outline Proposal Forms;
- made the prime thrust of what was written a close and detailed comparison between the two main texts;
- ensured that there was sufficient reference to, and quotation from, the two or more subsidiary texts as well as the two main ones;
- considered in some detail the ways in which form, structure and language shape meaning, whichever the genre of each text;
- 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

Much of what was written in last year’s Report is echoed this year. This is not in any way to suggest that the work submitted was dull or repetitive, or that examiners were unable to see significant and fresh characteristics in what they were marking, but simply to reiterate that on the whole Centres, and by extension their candidates, have become increasingly confident and skilled in what they are doing in preparation for this part of the Pre-U Literature in English Syllabus. There was some truly outstanding work; there was much that was good or very good; there was plenty that was sound or satisfactory; there was almost none that could be described as unsatisfactory in any significant sense. In virtually all cases, candidates followed the required rubric, comparing their two main texts in close and critical detail, with some appropriate use of two or occasionally more subsidiary texts. There were enough slight deviations from this aspect of the Syllabus requirement to warrant further discussion later in this Report, but as before the great majority did what was needed.

Key assessment objectives

Those teachers who have read previous Reports will recognise much of what follows in this section, but it is deliberately repeated, as the points it makes are so important, and reflect some of the greatest strengths and occasional weaknesses of the 2016 entry.

Candidates must, in the words of the Level 3 descriptor, *advance an appropriate response to texts and topic*”; at Level 5 this becomes *a thoughtful, personal response to texts and topic*, but the general thrust is exactly the same: essays must respond appropriately and personally to all the selected texts in relation to the candidates’ chosen question.

Two points arise here, both central and crucial ones. First, the number of texts is very important. The Syllabus requires at least two main texts, and at least two subsidiary ones, and these must be clearly identified, initially on the Outline Proposal Form (OPF) submitted by candidates and subsequently in the question that is written on the cover-sheet, at the head of the work that is submitted, and of course addressed in the essay itself. This was not always the case this series: some candidates wrote about all four texts in more or less equal proportions, making it quite hard to make the kind of closely detailed textual comparisons that are required; some wrote almost exclusively on just the two main texts, with no more than a few passing lines, often towards the end of their essays, on a third and fourth. More seriously, a few – but a reasonably substantial few – did not mention a fourth or very occasionally even a third text at all, thus not

only failing to address the Syllabus requirement properly, but also making their essays significantly narrower in focus than they should have been. This is something that future candidates must be entirely clear about: the bulk of their essays must of course compare their two main texts, but there must also be sufficient reference to two subsidiary texts to make it quite clear that these have been read and studied in full. (A few used three or even four subsidiary texts, which is allowed by the Syllabus, but what did need to be kept firmly in mind is that even though they were subsidiary what was written about them needed to be reasonably substantial – two or three isolated sentences on either or both was never enough to show that they had been read fully and critically.)

The Level Descriptors say that there must be *an appropriate/thoughtful/personal* response, but there were some essays which did not keep tightly enough to what their question actually asked despite each question having been drafted by each candidate herself/himself, presumably to reflect a particular and personal interest in both texts and topic. Of course it often happens in the early stages of preparation that candidates will change their minds, but once an OPF has been submitted then it should not be the case that any major change is made. There may be a very occasional extreme case, where a candidate simply feels unable to continue on her or his planned path, and where a Centre may feel that a request for a change must be made to Cambridge, but these should be very rare indeed. It should certainly not be the case that Examiners are faced with essays whose questions are different from those submitted and approved, or even where texts themselves are different.

Paper 4 is called 'Personal Investigation' for a good reason, and the name has clear and significant implications. There are of course perfectly understandable logistical reasons in many Centres why some overlap will occur, especially with one or possibly both main texts, but where all candidates in a few Centres used exactly the same four texts, or at best perhaps four out of a common group of six or seven, then there was inevitably some considerable commonality of ideas about them, often perhaps to the detriment of real individuality. When, too, there was great similarity between questions, so that essays covered a lot of common ground, even to the extent of sharing quotations, then the sense of 'personal' was in danger of being lost. This was a less noticeable concern this series than last, though, and even where there was some inevitable overlapping of texts and ideas there were very few instances where candidates' work was not at least reasonably individual.

The second Assessment Objective looks for evidence of closely critical skill, to show that candidates can explore at least some of the effects of the form, the structure and above all the language used by their authors. As usual the best essays made room for some moments where these three factors were considered and critically discussed. (Teachers are reminded that quotations are not to be taken into account when totalling the overall number of words.) More must be expected than simply general assertions, especially about form and structure, and those candidates who 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) in question, inevitably and rightly received higher marks; 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 astute way of addressing it.

In cases where drama choices featured, those candidates who 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, again deservedly attracted reward because they saw and discussed some particular aspects of the structuring of the text. It is recognised that this is not a Theatre Studies examination, but a play, it is worth stressing, is intended to be seen, heard, experienced, not just read – and of course the members of the audience do not (usually) have the stage directions in front of them in the theatre.

The first and central requirement is comparison. As stated in the Syllabus, *The essay must involve significant comparisons between two authors*. Most candidates were clearly aware of this, and all essays did contain at least some element of comparison, though as in previous years some did not make this as central as it should have been. The best presented sustained comparison throughout, certainly of the two main texts, with the subsidiaries being interspersed as and when appropriate; and the most critically effective comparisons looked well beyond the simple contents of the texts to consider their 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. While this was certainly not the most sophisticated way of making connections and contrasts it was often quite successful, and certainly acceptable.

There is no *requirement* for discussion of different interpretations; the Level Descriptors state simply that there must be evidence of either this, or of appropriate academic research, or of both. Such academic research may well overlap with the consideration of contextual factors, but the essential thing is that there must be evidence that candidates have looked beyond the texts to consider at least some wider literary and/or academic factors within which they have been studied. This should significantly affect the initial choice of texts, in that some lend themselves much more readily to properly academic study and placement. It is not simply a question of choosing old or long-established texts with a history of critical attention; there is often much critical and/or academic discussion available in relation to contemporary publications or productions. Whatever research is undertaken, however, there must be properly footnoted acknowledgment of the source material, together with a proper and detailed bibliography, one which includes digital sources where used. Almost all essays did include a bibliography, but where this consisted of just the four texts it was usually because it seemed that no wider reading or research had been undertaken, and that this requirement of the Syllabus had thus been neglected. The most useful bibliographies were often 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.

Footnotes not be used as a way of circumventing the word limit. They should be restricted to indicating the source of a quotation or reference; if anything further needs to be said about a point being made, this should have been done in the body of the essay itself. Apart from any possible infringement of the upper word limit, when an Examiner had to break off repeatedly to read a lengthy footnote, the natural flow of the essay and its argument was 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 at risk of being compromised.

Contextual factors were in some respects easier to address, though some 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. The important thing is always to ensure that contextual material is *used*, to illustrate or develop a candidate's ideas or arguments, not just mentioned 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 series were almost uniformly within these two limits, but those who strayed outside them – almost invariably going beyond 3500 – were generally self-penalising, in that there was a tendency towards repetition, generalisation, over-reliance on narrative or description, or a lack of tight focus.

Outline proposal forms (OPFs)

In almost all cases these were clearly presented, mostly with brief but focused notes outlining how candidates saw their ideas developing. A few made no notes at all, which was not helpful. The vast majority of proposals were approved at first submission, sometimes with a minor proviso. Occasionally for a range of reasons a revised proposal was sought. A number of candidates did not re-submit as requested, and in several cases wrote essays on texts and/or questions that were markedly different from what was originally proposed; this was not always wise, in that sometimes the revised text grouping, or indeed the question itself, had not been subject to advance approval. In the majority of cases a copy, or copies, of the form was – as required – attached to the candidates' essay when this was submitted. Centres are reminded that this copy should be the one with the adviser's comments on it.

Most OPFs quite correctly listed at least four texts, clearly defining the two main and the two subsidiaries; a small number had to be returned for this to be clarified. Most proposed appropriate texts, though a few had to be revised because one or more texts were inappropriate – they were set for Papers 1 or 2, for example, or they were texts in translation, or they were simply too slight for the kind of close academic study and research that the Syllabus requires. Texts that had been used, or indeed that could have been used, for GCSE work really should not be being proposed, though brief reference to one as a fifth text may sometimes be helpful to an argument. The four texts should be of similar length and scope, of similar literary demand, and of similar academic standing, to texts set for Papers 1 and 2. They need not be 'canonical' texts, and indeed some of the most striking and individual essays were responses to unusual or unexpected texts, whether contemporary or older. Proposed texts that were secondary/critical in nature could not be approved; all four must be creative and literary, though other types of texts may of course be used for the purposes of appropriate academic research.

As comparison of authors is at the heart of what the syllabus requires, it was helpful when OPFs made it clear that this was what candidates were planning, 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 sensibly be managed within 3500 words.

Out of the three forms prose, poetry and drama, prose (almost always novels) continues to be overwhelmingly the most popular. Responses to poetry were relatively rare, and those to drama even more so. But there was often much to gain when an essay had texts from at least two forms, if only to enable and encourage a wider range of critical and contextual material, quite apart from lessening the occasionally almost unmanageable weight of discussing four long novels. When poetry was used, however, candidates quite correctly wrote about a published collection or selection, rather than a 'home-made' one, and showed that they had studied a substantial number of poems, not just two or three. The same was the case when a collection of short stories was used.

A brief word about text choice may be helpful here, though it is important to reiterate that this is a *personal* investigation. 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 or period or 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, some essays inevitably lacked cogency and cohesion. Careful planning and preparation are crucial, and do need to be begun well before mid-October.

Presentation

A properly completed candidate cover-sheet must be attached to each essay. There needs to be a word count, and there must be two signatures – the candidate's and a teacher's, authenticating the work. Similarly, OPFs (and if necessary revised OPFs) must be attached, so that examiners can see what lies behind the candidates' choices and questions. This is part of the Syllabus requirements (page 13).

Some candidates decided not to use the full title of any text, abbreviating them to initials only – for example *Great Expectations* became *GE*, *A Farewell to Arms* became *AFTA*, and so on. In some cases one word alone was used – thus *A Handful of Dust* became *Dust*, and *The Glass Menagerie* became *Glass*. This may seem a trivial cavil, and it is of course true that such abbreviations were not a serious obstacle to critical exploration or to Examiner understanding, but it is not something that one sees in academic critical writing, and should be discouraged. (Candidates might be reminded that it is often easier to use just the writer's surname rather than the whole text name.) It is also worth noting what the Syllabus says: “[*the Personal Investigation*] will require candidates to follow the conventions of academic writing.”

Essays *must* be securely tied together with treasury tags or stapled, so that pages do not go astray. Paperclips are not helpful in this respect, and it was particularly unhelpful when there was nothing at all keeping pages together.

Most Centres, and most candidates, followed the Syllabus requirements exactly and professionally; virtually all work was submitted by the deadline and most work was neatly and efficiently presented, with the Pre-U cover-sheet and OPF attached.