

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 and expressing cohesive arguments in appropriate critical idiom.
- Detailed critical attention to form, structure and language will enhance any answer, whether on Poetry or Prose.
- A well-balanced essay avoids relying on an excess of critical material at the expense of personal response. Biographical material is best kept to a minimum with strict relevance to the question set, if not avoided altogether.

General comments

There was a significant amount of response of a very order, some of it exceptional.

In the great majority of cases texts were well known and appreciated. Chaucer, Wordsworth, Auden and Heaney were the most popular of the poets. Austen and Brontë led the pre-1900 field amongst the novelists; Joyce, Woolf and Atwood the most popular for post-1900.

Critical essays demand appropriate critical style and coherent paragraphing. Casual slang or conversational phraseology seldom if ever accompanies work at the higher levels. The level descriptors highlight the importance of relevance in essays. The careful selection of material suitable to answer a specific question on a text is an essential skill. In the case of a poet's work, all the poems in the selection should be well known so that the best choices can be made for a particular task. Enthusiasm for particular poems or attachment to particular episodes in a novel may reflect the candidate's comfort zone, but sharp focus on the actual question asked entails careful choice, creating concision and appropriate emphasis, essential for higher grades. Close reading and understanding of poems is essential, too. There was sometimes evidence in poetry essays of offloading of unthinking acceptance of loose, unconvincing readings derived from secondary sources.

Although critical material was generally well-controlled this series, there was a tendency in some answers to run through different critical approaches trying to induce something about the text in hand ('From a Marxist point of view... From a Feminist point of view... From a Freudian point of view...'). This could lead to mechanical and sometimes tangential responses. Starting a response with a critical quotation was seldom the best approach. In some work it seemed that one or two critical quotations were considered essential in every paragraph, a strategy which could easily smother the personal response which is looked for in the assessment.

This syllabus is 'Literature in English' not 'Literary Biography'. Some answers devoted much time to speculating about Wordsworth's friendship with Coleridge, Woolf's parents, Auden's homosexuality, or Atwood's early life in ways that were not productive to answering the questions set. Study of the work, not the life, is what is being tested, and discussion of imaginative, literary methods and effects will always score more highly than reductive biographical conjecture.

There was very little short work in scripts on this paper this series.

Comments on specific questions

Section A – Poetry

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

- (a) Candidates focused on Januarie in the main, but there were also discerning comments on May, Damian and the Merchant himself. The standard of work was generally good, with close discussion of the issues and apt textual references.
- (b) When a question asks 'How far do you agree?' it is an invitation to consider the validity of the proposition, not an instruction to necessarily endorse it. Indeed, many answers challenged the proposition, or suggested ambiguities and ironies in Chaucer's presentation. Many answers showed careful discrimination, enabling a nuanced response. Weighing of evidence and use of textual support were particularly commendable here.

Question 2 GEORGE HERBERT: *Selected Poems*

- (a) While there were not many essays on Herbert, they were often of high quality. The apparent oxymoron of 'reverent familiarity' was resourcefully considered and illustrated, with candidates choosing appropriate poems to illustrate the complexities of Herbert's poetic treatment of his faith.
- (b) There were far too few answers to this question to make general comment appropriate.

Question 3 ALEXANDER POPE: *Selected Poems*

- (a) The relatively few essays submitted on Pope provided thoughtful and sensitive responses, using *Eloisa*, *the Unfortunate Lady* and *Mrs Teresa Blount* to great effect.
- (b) There were no answers to this question.

Question 4 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: *Selected Poems*

Less proficient answers leaned heavily on biographical detail, exploring poetic methods and effects sparingly or loosely. Clarity and precision were the hallmarks of better essays. Choice of poems was not always appropriate: the sonnet *On Westminster Bridge* is not perhaps the first choice for relevance to either (a) or (b) and essays using it sometimes incorporated some critical views which were not well supported by evidence from the poem.

- (a) Most answers concurred with the critical prompt quotation, though some argued sensibly that it is the 'external events' which lead to inner reflections. *The Prelude* was widely quoted, as were *Nutting* and *Tintern Abbey*.
- (b) Contemplation of Nature attracted a range of answers from the most highly sophisticated to the more modest, but almost all used *The Prelude* as well as *Nutting* with its references to Wordsworth's maturing sensibilities.

Question 5 W.H. AUDEN: *Selected Poems*

Answers ranged widely from some of the best seen on the paper to ones which struggled with meaning and tone. Some candidates tried to adopt a historical stance, but writing of Auden's early work, middle work and later work is bound to be 'broad brush' with only two or three poems for illustration, and this was not usually a successful strategy in the light of Auden's great output and long life. Candidates were sometimes too ready to rely on generalising comments about Auden's sexuality rather than close analysis of the poems themselves.

- (a) The phrase 'a sense of place' was not always understood and some candidates wrote all-purpose essays encompassing political situations, time and love, only parts of which were strictly relevant. How individuals connect to places is one's sense of place. For a poet, this may involve landscapes, seascapes and townscapes, as well as dreamscapes. *Look Stranger* was well used as was *In Praise of Limestone*. The political and social can be invoked if carefully justified and some candidates used *Refugee Blues* with its repeated 'there's no place for us', although they did not always quote from the poem to illustrate the places from which the poem's personae are turned away.
- (b) Many candidates turned the quotation round to argue that Auden makes the commonplace extraordinary. *Musée des Beaux Arts* was often discussed, together with *Horae Canonicae*, and there were many close and sensitive readings.

Question 6 ANNE STEVENSON: *Selected Poems*

There were no answers on this text.

Question 7 LES MURRAY: *Selected Poems*

There were no answers on this text.

Question 8 SEAMUS HEANEY: *Selected Poems*

Heaney was very popular and answers divided equally between the two options (a) and (b). Candidates were on the whole judicious about their use of contextual material and there were fewer lengthy digressions about 'the Troubles' this series. Some poems were rather loosely addressed. It cannot be too strongly stressed that close appreciation of the poems chosen in an essay at this level must be well known. *Act of Union* was widely quoted but not always fully understood or convincingly discussed. This is a nuanced poem of great subtlety, but often commentaries missed the tenderness and regret..

- (a) Candidates argued successfully that using nature in poems did not make Heaney a 'nature poet'. The consensus was that nature is only one aspect of Heaney's poetry. His animal poems were often quoted in relation to the subject of love and the bog poems were widely used and generally well handled.
- (b) 'Private lives and public concerns' attracted a wide range of answers, from the highly sophisticated to the more modest. *Limbo* was a popular choice, though often deserving of more subtle elucidation. *The Ministry of Fear* was well used.

Section B – Prose

Question 9 HENRY FIELDING: *Joseph Andrews*

Cambridge Pre-U
9765 Literature in English June 2017
Principal Examiner Report for Teachers

- (a)** Essays were enthusiastic, expert and well-illustrated. Not all answers agreed with the prompt quotation and argued for several 'individual' portrayals
- (b)** There were no answers on this question.

Question 10 JANE AUSTEN: *Emma*

Austen was very popular and candidates clearly knew the novel extremely well. Sometimes in responding to questions on prose texts, there is a risk that answers will easily slip into a narrative treatment, but this was not widespread. Candidates often incorporated discussion of Austen's free indirect style usefully.

- (a) Emma's blunders were well known and candidates wrote with discernment about those which had the potential for disaster. In a few cases there was undue emphasis on the Harriet Smith strand of the novel, ignoring the Frank/Jane plot and Miss Bates, for example. However, the potential for comedy was widely understood and well illustrated.
- (b) Although the (b) option was significantly less popular than (a), there were some outstanding answers exploring what is dramatic, such as the handling of dialogue, and noting the relative paucity of metaphors and other descriptive prose features in Austen's work.

Question 11 CHARLOTTE BRONTË: *Jane Eyre*

A large number of candidates wrote on this novel, showing their appreciation of its complexity, and incorporating apt contextual detail about the period in which it was written. There were a small number of candidates whose essays revealed that they did not know the novel in sufficient detail, making significant errors of fact.

- (a) Candidates were evidently well prepared to write about Bertha Mason and around three quarters of the answers were on this topic. Most addressed the idea that she was an alter ego of Jane, with parallel descriptions and traceable links. Essays also considered her as the representative of passion in contrast with Helen Burns; the 'madwoman in the attic'; as the colonial Other, and as a noteworthy contribution to the Gothicism of the novel. At times candidates treated Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* as if it had also been written by Brontë, discussing it for several paragraphs. Essays sometimes became too distracted by contemporary ideas about the Victorian patriarchy to attend sufficiently to the *presentation* demanded by the question, but on the whole, the standard was high and essays were enthusiastic and involved.
- (b) Although fewer tackled the theme of education, a full range of essays was seen. Candidates considered Jane's formal education as well as her 'moral' bildungsroman. Lowood School was sometimes too easily glossed over as simply suffering, neglecting the fact that Jane learns enough to become a teacher herself. Moreover, Mr Brocklehurst is a character that some candidates become a little obsessed by, spending pages on him and the curly-haired daughters, and describing him as a teacher when he is the 'benefactor', a rather different function. There was a tendency for the novel's final phases to be ignored or sketched in hastily.

Question 12 WILKIE COLLINS: *The Woman in White*

- (a) In general Candidates responded to this text with enthusiasm and appreciation. Less proficient answers offered a number of female character sketches, while others considered more carefully the 'different attitudes' presented by Collins. There were some 21st century gender fluidity arguments (at their crudest seeing Fosco as female and Marian as male) which were engaging, but usually failed to give the writing its due.
- (b) Although there far fewer responses to this, they were frequently resourceful and well-prepared.

Question 13 JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

- (a) Work was sound with generally orthodox responses. Some more sophisticated answers suggested that the disappointments *were* revelations, the latter not necessarily being positive experiences.
- (b) Nearly all essays used *Eveline* with one or two other stories to highlight the theme of entrapment, often focusing on the way in which settled habits or personality make it impossible to break free from a fixed and immovable way of life.

Question 14 VIRGINIA WOOLF: *To the Lighthouse*

Woolf remains a popular choice, continuing to inspire much excellent writing. However, a number of candidates spent undue time attempting to prove that *To the Lighthouse* is autobiographical, digressing from the tasks set because of a lack of concentration on the text itself.

- (a) Many candidates chose to consider the lighthouse as a symbol and there were some resourceful readings, from the obviously phallic and patriarchal to the source of light (and thus linked with Mrs Ramsay) and the idea of a destination set up in the first lines of the novel. Use of the text was usually exemplary here.
- (b) This alternative was in many ways more open to different emphases. Candidates clearly identified moments which they considered petty or trivial as well as intense experiences, considering them carefully in the light of the novel's structural features and Woolf's use of stream of consciousness techniques.

Question 15 MARGARET ATWOOD: *Cat's Eye*

- (a) There were far too few answers on this question to make general comment appropriate.
- (b) This prompted some very fine critical analyses. Candidates were mostly very well prepared for discussion of memory and its unreliability. The first person narrative allowed for discussion of Elaine's partial recall of events and emphases and there were some good analyses of form and structure, as well as characterisation. The use of symbolism in the paintings was well discussed, as was the cat's eye marble. Candidates knew the text well on the whole and used close reference to it to support their points. Where the text was not quite so well known, rather vague and general assertions resulted.

Question 16 HILARY MANTEL: *Beyond Black*

There were no answers on this text.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/02
Drama

Key messages

- Responses must deal with the plays as plays, not as mere articulations of a writer's political or personal views.
- Good essays are supported through analysed close reference to particular moments in the text.
- Discussions of particular productions can be an effective means of showing awareness of how different interpretations are possible.
- Candidates should be reminded that at least one of their answers must be to a passage based (b) question.

General comments

The ways in which the questions were answered were many and various, and at the highest level, there was often really fresh and original perception about the texts.

Candidates should be prepared to confront the text with the theatrical experience in mind. Particularly with **(b)** questions, the first and foremost discussion must be about the dramatic situation. Theoretical positions are all very well but they should not displace a candidate's personal appreciation of what is actually going on. Insights gained from critics are only useful insofar as they help illuminate a text and help candidates move their thinking forwards.

Whilst there can never be any rules about the length of an answer, it is clear that very short work – unless very pithy – is unlikely to score highly. The limitations of such work lie, of course, in the lack of developed argument, fully supported from the detail of the text. At the other extreme, some answers are self-penalising by being over-long. These answers are often characterised by repetition or by a failure to plan properly and show the 'effective organisation' that proficient responses (and above) need to demonstrate.

As always, the best candidates used backgrounds and contexts with great discretion. When adduced, contexts should always add something to the argument, not merely be bolted on out of a sense of obligation in order simply to be seen to address assessment objectives. Speculation about an author's life seldom adds anything to an answer. When dealing with large ideas, candidates need to be wary of asserting that at a certain period of history 'everyone' believed one particular thing, an unsustainable view.

In a number of instances on this paper, the **(b)** question passage contained stage directions. These are included because they are significant to the dramatic action, clues about the playwright's intentions. Responses that fail to engage with them sometimes sacrifice easy points that could be made about dramatic presentation. It is interesting to note that many good answers make relevant use of productions that they have seen as critiques of the play.

In **(b)** questions, candidates need to be aware that a line-by-line approach is rarely fruitful. However, these questions insist on the passage as the 'central focus of your answer,' so candidates need to keep coming back to the passage in front of them, even if they range widely across the text as a whole.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

William Shakespeare: *Othello*

- (a) Candidates found loyalty a rich area for exploration. Limited answers were able to catalogue examples of various types of loyalty – to state, to partner, to commander. The best of the responses saw that loyalty is often mistaken in the play and that an over active sense of loyalty is the central catch for many of the characters. A small number of candidates simply flipped the question and talked about Iago's disloyalty to his commander. More subtle answers were able to reflect on how Iago exploits loyalty for his own ends.
- (b) Candidates need to be very wary about starting from a 'position' rather than the text. In many cases, the desire to see Emilia as a proto-feminist moved candidate swiftly away from the thrust of the question – the 'dramatic presentation and significance' of Emilia. The best responses looked closely at the very human situation that Emilia finds herself at this point in the play as she struggles to re-arrange her view of the world to fit with the accumulating understanding of what has been going on. It is significant, for example, that there is quite a long section where Emilia doesn't actually speak but is presumably assimilating the situation. Emilia's own guilt (a cause perhaps of her emphatic 'O God! O heavenly God!') was hardly mentioned at all. There were some useful discussions of particular productions, a sensible means of showing awareness of how different interpretations are possible.

Question 2

William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*

- (a) In a play where the physical presence of death is so palpable, let alone its philosophical resonance throughout, there was no doubt that candidates would have lots to talk about. The challenge here was to select relevantly and find a focus. Some responses looked at the action, others at what is said. Both were relevant and led to interesting discussions. Responses that focus simply on action are often limited to plot. In this instance, all candidates were able to see that the staging of the various deaths ('casual slaughters;/Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause...') contribute to the play's overall significance. Other responses focused more on what is said and on Hamlet's preoccupations. There were some very fine discussions of the last act of the play, where tragedy turns to farce.
- (b) Answers at the lower end of the mark range simply took the passage as a means of discussing Hamlet's relationship with all the other characters present here. This meant that candidates found it hard to limit what they had to say. More astute responses started from the premise that this passage is typical of Hamlet's relationship with others because it shows him at his most manipulative, relishing his destructive behaviour with others. The best answers were able to look closely at the language of the passage, and there were a few responses that used the language of the play within the play as a means of demonstrating how Hamlet is not the simple revenger of the conventional revenge play.

Question 3

William Shakespeare: *The Winter's Tale*

- (a) Responses showed a wide understanding of the play. There were discussions of nature and nurture (with Perdita taken as the prime example, having been raised by simple country folk rather than her real parents) and of the ways in which the new generation promises redemption for the sins of its parents. Interesting parallels were often made between Leontes and Polixenes, with better answers able to see that Polixenes's behaviour and disowning of Florizel in Act 4 is, in some senses, a variation on what happens earlier in the play. The strongest answers paid particular attention to specific moments, with many answers making much of Perdita's encounter with Polixenes and her discussions of 'scions.'
- (b) This question elicited a wide range of responses. The best answers engaged fully with the language of the extract and with Leontes's increasingly wild language and syntactic breakdown. There was always a sense of the shift as Hermione and Polixenes leave the stage. Interestingly, however, the role of Camillo as the ignored voice of reason was often hardly mentioned. At times, some less successful answers ranged widely across the first half of the play, forgetting that the question asks for the passage to be the 'central focus.' Few considered Leontes's repentance in the play's last act.

Question 4

Ben Jonson: *The Alchemist*

- (a) Weaker answers gave an account of Surly's scepticism towards the conspirators and understood clearly that, for all their efforts with plottings and verbal tricks, the conspirators never really manage to deceive him. Better responses were quick to note that his antagonism and, indeed, his surliness, make him almost over-anxious and defensive in the face of those who try to swindle and deceive him. Throughout, he seems wary of the conspirators, and yet his desire to prove himself right actually reinforces an audience's delight in the possibilities of gulling. The best answers offered close analysis of particular moments in the play, focusing fully on both language and action.
- (b) All responses understood the dramatic situation at this point in the play, the moment where the farce begins to wind to its denouement because the conspirators have to deal with more than one victim at once, changing from moment to moment to keep all the plates in the air. The best answers conveyed the delight of the conspirators and the inventiveness of their plottings. Suitable links were made to other parts of the play in virtually all answers, and there was general acknowledgment of ways in which the conspirators pander to their victims' weaknesses. There was some acknowledgement too of the ways in which the comedy starts to turn much darker and more vicious at this point in the play.

Question 5

Aphra Behn: *The Rover*

- (a) Candidates responded to both Angellica's part in the plot of the play and her symbolic significance. There were many good points made about links between gender, money and accepted social roles in the play. Angellica's role was often contrasted – to good effect – with that of the two sisters. The best answers dealt fully with the final part of the question ('in the comic world of the play') and explored some of the ways in which Angellica's discovery of true love gives her a realism that can make for uncomfortable viewing at various moments in the play.

- (b) Some candidates brought rather a schematic agenda to bear on the question, concentrating their answers inflexibly on the topic of patriarchy. Better answers transcended this by dealing with the issue of Willmore's drunkenness and its degree, an issue sometimes explored by reference to particular performances. It is perfectly reasonable to see Florinda as a victim of male aggression, but that fails to take into account the fact that the action takes place during Carnival and that Florinda herself has transgressed by placing herself in a darkened garden where prostitutes ply their trade. In this sense, the issue is one of mistaken identity. Moreover, Willmore (the clue may lie in the name) enters the garden determined to sleep off the drink, not to commit rape. Having said that, once the scene gets going, Willmore's coercive language takes on a tone of wheedling threat that candidates rightly found distasteful. Some readings misunderstood the word 'pistoles' and failed to see that Willmore, having made his mistake, is offering payment, not violence, to Florinda.

Question 6

Samuel Beckett: *Waiting for Godot*

- (a) Candidates warmed to the question immediately. For the best candidates, the question gave access to both theme and dramatic techniques. These responses often responded closely to twentieth-century philosophical movements (Existentialism, for example) or to historic contextualising, but were able to transcend reliance on background material in order to demonstrate how the protagonists are simply caught in a world where nothing seems to have significance, where a lack of external motivation leads to complete inertia, with only words and silences to fill the gaps. Less flexible responses often got stuck with the contexts and pushed the 'dramatic treatment' of the question to the side. Having said that, all candidates demonstrated an engagement and involvement with the text and with its challenges. There were even some brave (and excellent) responses that made the case that the play, no matter how well produced, is in itself boring, thus placing the audience in the same position as Vladimir and Estragon.
- (b) The entrance of Pozzo and Lucky, of course, changes the dynamic of what is going on. Candidates were quick to point out that there are parallels between them and Vladimir and Estragon. But contrasts were also evoked too, with many responses looking at the rope and discussing matters of oppression and control. It is always encouraging to see responses that consider the stage directions and their implication for the interpretation of a scene. Many responses made comparisons with the parallel scene in the second act, a telling method for moving out into the play as a whole. Some candidates were too tempted by historical and philosophical contexts and produced answers that were agenda-driven, rather than responsive to the extract as a piece of drama.

Question 7

Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

- (a) Many responses picked up the quotation from Mrs Kidd and used it as a way in to talking about women in the world of work and the penalties that they might pay in terms of private life. The best answers were able to engage with the texture of the play in order to discuss ways in which the women in the play often display a spurious sisterhood which perhaps conceals deeper insecurities. There were some very interesting responses that focused on the simultaneous monologues in Act 1 in order to discuss self-obsession. Less satisfying answers tended to move through the play, cataloguing a series of examples. The best responses were deeply engaged with the drama of the play, showing a visceral understanding of how the issue is brought vividly to life in the theatre.
- (b) Answers at the lower end of the mark range often took the passage as a starting point rather than a focus, and simply wrote about women's attitudes towards men in the play as a whole. Better responses warmed to the word 'presentation' in the question and were able to discuss the rather more nuanced differences between the women in the passage given, and then develop that further by invoking examples from elsewhere in the play. The best responses were able to see that the women's responses here are being used by Churchill in order to demonstrate changing values and attitudes over time. There were some strong answers that placed the experience of contemporary 'real' women against the 'fictional' women of this scene.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

Question 1

- The best answers sustained comparisons between the two poems. Frequent, judicious use of comparative discourse markers helped to frame comparisons.
- The best essays engaged with the possible meanings of the poems – and explored the use of voice, setting, tone and a range of form, style and language features, while not neglecting thoughtful consideration of ‘the meaning(s)’ of each poem.
- Essays which balanced discussion reasonably equally between the two poems tended to be more successful than those that did not.
- Introductions which offered a telling, comparative overview or line of intended argument were often the most impressive.

Questions 2 and 3

- Analysis relevant to form/genre was helpful, e.g. a sharp sense of the effects of staging such as lighting, dramatic action, sound effects and proxemics added much to the quality of response to the drama extract, while an exploration of narrative point of view, character development and use of dialogue illuminated the prose extract.
- Contextual discussion which emerged organically from the extracts was far more effective than offloading of ‘prepared’ material – especially in introductions. Prefatory, contextual throat clearing tended to be less impressive and less useful for facilitating personal, perceptive responses.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

The pair of poems which explored finely nuanced relationships between lovers/husbands and wives offered much for detailed as well as individual insights. Given the poets’ exploration of symbols as well as teasingly complex use of voice, candidates were prompted to develop individual and original interpretations. Most candidates rose admirably to the challenge, and there were many sophisticated responses, which explored mature perceptions concerning the complexities of love and sexual relationships. Certainly, candidates’ ability to read with subtle discrimination and sensitivity was tested in the first question.

Some scripts neglected one or other poem, but most kept the two in careful balance, and noted striking differences and/or similarities. Discussion focusing on the contexts of modern life and modern relationships was useful, and there were also some telling thoughts on Romantic tropes, particularly for ‘True ways of knowing’. The willingness of candidates to engage with some of the profound and transcendent images from the first poem was a helpful discriminator for very good and sophisticated responses. Key contrasts and juxtapositions in ‘Husband to Wife: Party-Going’ were thoughtfully explored by the best candidates who explored the (rejuvenated) romance and ‘sincere role-playing’ of the titular couple in contrast to tawdry and banal ‘chirruping’ of the other ‘hosts and guests’.

Many candidates explored a range of form, style and language effects – with the emphasis on *effects*. Few simply listed techniques, although some did not do much to explore how and why stanzaic structure, rhythm, half-rhyme or enjambement (for example) might have been used by the poets.

Question 2

Successful candidates thoughtfully explored the dramatic qualities of the piece, noting how the staging intensified the isolation of the vulnerable female protagonist. Many candidates identified dark humour in the extract, perhaps more a reflection of the perceptions of a generation attuned to social media than any real addition to the noirish, thriller elements of the play, which were noted by several candidates.

Very good and sophisticated responses explored the use of the divided stage and the impact of the spotlight. Parenthetical directions were considered too, although Mrs Stevenson, touted as ‘a querulous, self-centered neurotic’, did not often enjoy much sympathy from candidates. The threat of foreigners was noted as well as much fruitful exploration of dramatic irony, on which much of the tension of the piece depends. The presumed involvement of Mrs Stevenson’s husband in the plot to kill her was explored by a few candidates. There was some very good discussion relating to the alienation of modern life and the isolation of the individual in the face of a welter of technology. Most candidates were able to visualise the extract as a dramatic work, and respond accordingly.

Question 3

The Burney extract offered much in the way of contextual comment on class tensions, as well as subtle humour. Candidates explored narrative point of view to good effect, and the tension and humour promoted through the immediacy of direct speech were also noted in good detail. Pathetic fallacy was invoked helpfully, and the pretensions of Mrs Duval and deployment of grammatical errors to reveal class and character were explored in some sophisticated responses. The behaviour of the footman also attracted much discussion.

Perhaps Evelina’s (possible) parapraxes could have been explored in more responses, and her character developed more fully. There was a good sense of contemporary society’s growing individualism in this extract, though some candidates tried to shoe-horn Victorian as opposed to late Georgian contexts into their responses. A telling feature was the recognition of humour and satirical elements throughout the piece as well as a range of social pretensions – such as the eagerness of the Brangtons to exploit members of the upper classes. Most answers were detailed and thoughtful, revealing careful and intelligent reading.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

| |
|---|
| <p>Paper 9765/04 Personal Investigation</p> |
|---|

Key Messages

Good essays

- were individual and personal in respect of both texts and topic;
- followed the advice offered by Cambridge Advisers in response to candidates' Outline Proposal Forms;
- began by briefly outlining the argument that was to follow, including ways in which each main and each subsidiary text would be used;
- made the prime focus 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 detail the ways in which form, structure and language shape meaning;
- 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 majority of essays were well prepared and well written. A good deal of interesting, perceptive and very frequently personal critical writing was submitted.

There were some unusual and often unexpected combinations of texts, and when these had been proposed in advance, and approved by Cambridge Advisers, they frequently prompted original and sometimes exciting essays. This is *not* to say that using canonical texts, in fairly routine groupings, could not lead to similarly good results – and there is no doubt whatsoever that such approaches were often equally good or very good – but the very best results this series tended to come from candidates whose text choices, text groupings, and above all their titles, were entirely individual. Paper 4 is entitled 'Personal Investigation', and the adjective is important. Encouraging such individuality inevitably gives rise to challenges for teachers, and some compromise may be necessary, but it is still worth ensuring that there is as much independence as possible behind candidates' work.

Most candidates followed the submission requirements exactly and professionally; virtually all work was submitted by the 30 April deadline and most work was neatly and efficiently presented, with the Pre-U cover-sheet and OPF attached.

Key Assessment Objectives

To achieve a Level 2 mark essays must ‘advance an appropriate...response to texts and topic, making reference to the texts to support key points’. To achieve a Level 5 mark a response must furthermore be ‘thoughtful, personal...with textual support, both general and detailed and possibly some original ideas’. ‘Original ideas’ for candidates at the age of seventeen or eighteen might sound an unreasonable expectation, but what is meant is not that Examiners are requiring for sophisticated critical perceptions that might be expected of undergraduates in the subject, but rather that what is written by each candidate will personally considered and formulated, and hence different from that written by others in the same Centre. Such responses will also, in line with the Level 5 band descriptors, be fluent and concise, well organised, and convey complex ideas, with competent use of critical terminology. This latter phrase does not mean – as a few candidates appeared to think – that reward will be given simply for parading knowledge of many often obscure terms, but rather that where it is helpful to employ conventional critical terms as a form of shorthand expression then critical terms should be used.

The second bullet point of the descriptors relates to candidates showing that they can explore critically and confidently the ways in which writers shape meaning by their use of structure, form and language (AO2). This skill was demonstrated by most candidates in one way or another, the most helpful perhaps being use of one or two brief extracts from each of the main texts, and perhaps one from a subsidiary text as comparison, with some closely detailed analysis of how it is written. The most confident candidates managed to integrate such analysis into their arguments in fluent and easy-seeming ways, while others felt it easier to isolate this particular skill; either way was of course entirely acceptable, provided that it was done. Language was usually the easiest of the three to manage, and there was much good and thoughtfully perceptive discussion of imagery as well as the actual words used and their impact on readers or audience. The last word in that sentence is important: in responses to drama relatively few candidates considered dramatic or theatrical aspects as well as verbal ones; a play is after all something that is shared, seen and heard by an audience, not just read silently by an individual. This is not a Drama syllabus of course. But while examiners did not wish to see speculative discussion of how a producer or actor might present what the dramatist wrote, it was always good to read thoughts that were based upon actual performances, whether live or recorded, to illustrate how, for example, simple stage directions and characters’ actions contribute to understanding and appreciation.

Comparison of the two main texts is at the heart of this component, and as was frequently made clear in Adviser comments on the original Outline Proposal Forms (OPFs) this must always be central to a Personal Investigation. Good answers used their opening paragraphs to introduce these texts briefly, in the light of the topic being discussed, and so made it clear from the start that comparison between the two would be the prime focus of what they were about to write. They may also have introduced their subsidiary texts, but a significant number of candidates seemed to make no distinction either here or in their essays as a whole that these were to be very firmly subsidiary. The Syllabus is very clear about this, yet quite a number did not appear to know exactly how to treat their four texts. There is no simple arithmetical formula, but the two major problems tended to be that too many candidates wrote either on all four texts more or less equally, or that they treated their subsidiaries in very small and even off-hand ways, even to the extent in a handful of cases of using only one, or even very occasionally none at all. There were even some candidates who made the main thrust of what they wrote a comparison between one main text and one subsidiary, even when their essays clearly identified each text as either one or the other. It is very important that Centres are clear and firm in their advice to candidates in this connection.

References to subsidiary texts need to be sufficiently detailed to make it clear that they have been read and studied as *wholes*, rather than just for suitable brief extracts, or just a handful of poems or short stories. Adviser comments on OPFs will have made this clear.

Comparison is central, and most candidates managed this to a greater or lesser degree, the most confident moving fluently between texts throughout their essays, and making it clear that when looking at individual moments or poems/stories that these were related in particular ways to the texts as wholes.

Different interpretations – actual or possible – were almost invariably introduced, often with great success. The Level descriptors make it clear that these, or evidence of other kinds of academic research, are required: Level 2 requires ‘occasional evidence of connections made between different interpretations’ while Level 5 requires ‘discussion ... of different interpretations of texts’. The word ‘discussion’ is important (Level 4 uses the word ‘comment’, and Level 6 ‘sharply focused analysis and discussion’): simply making reference to differing views or interpretations is of limited value. What scored highly was the ability to incorporate such views in a personally developing argument, whether agreeing or disagreeing with these alternative interpretations.

An alternative to this approach is that there should be evidence of other academic research; this will almost invariably be linked with the final bullet point relating to contexts, but any relevant research relating to one or more of the texts was always welcomed as showing a personal and individual involvement in what was being argued. Again, though, it was *how* such research was introduced that mattered: simple biographical facts were rarely (though not invariably) of little significance, but other factors such as consideration of contemporary literature, history or culture as it bore upon the texts in question was often of more value, provided that this knowledge was thoughtfully *used* and not just asserted or referred to.

Outline Proposal Forms (OPFs)

Every Centre entering candidates this series submitted OPFs, usually before the October 31st deadline; this is an important date, allowing Advisers time to read and comment upon candidates' ideas well before the end of the autumn term, to allow candidates, if necessary, to amend their suggestions before starting work on their essays. What Advisers say should always be taken seriously, and not seen as simply nit-picking or fussing; when they suggest a re-drafting of a question, for example, it will always be because the revised wording is more likely to lead to a better or more appropriate response.

When an Adviser says that a particular text is unacceptable (if it is in translation, for example, or if it is set for Paper 1 or 2) then this text *must not be used*, and must be replaced. If an OPF is returned as 'Not Approved' then a revised one must be submitted as soon as possible; if it is 'Approved with Proviso' it is not necessary to re-submit it, provided that the proviso is accepted and the appropriate change made. Any changes to 'Approved' proposals should however be submitted again, unless the changes are very minor: a switch of texts between main and subsidiary is usually fine, but any actual change of texts must be submitted for further approval.

Finally, the OPF, with Adviser comments (not the original un-commented one), must be attached to the essay when it is completed; and if appropriate, a re-submitted OPF should also be attached. This is made clear on the reverse of the OPF, so there should be no doubt about it, and again, almost all candidates followed this requirement this year.

Presentation of work

Most of what follows has been covered already in this and earlier Reports, but it will bear repeating.

A properly completed and signed candidate cover-sheet *must* be attached to each essay; a small handful of candidates did not do this. There needs to be a word count, or ideally two (one with all quotations included, and one without), and there must be two signatures – the candidate's and a teacher's – authenticating the work.

One small but important point, which may possibly relate to the word-count, was the unexpected frequency with which some candidates decided not to use the full titles of texts, 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*, or *The Glass Menagerie* became *Glass*. This may seem a trivial complaint, and it is of course true that such abbreviations were not a serious obstacle to critical exploration or to understanding, but it is not something that one sees in academic critical writing, and should therefore be discouraged. One aim of the Pre-U course is to prepare candidates for university work and it is worth noting that the Syllabus says that the Personal Investigation 'will require candidates to follow the conventions of academic writing'. (It might be worth pointing out to candidates that it is sometimes just as easy to use just the writer's surname rather than the work's title.)

Some candidates wrote too much, but far more wrote too little in their footnotes. Where reference was being made to a secondary source it is essential that the full title of the secondary text, or website, is clearly given, together with the author, and where appropriate a page reference as well.

There is no ruling about the point size of font, but it is helpful when work is in at least Point 10 or 11 font, and double-spaced. It is also helpful to paginate work. Essays *must* be securely tied together with treasury tags or stapled, so that pages do not go astray. Paper clips are not helpful in this respect, and it is unhelpful if there is nothing at all keeping pages together.