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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 9695/03 Poetry and Prose
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General comments

This examination session demonstrated that Centres and candidates are becoming better prepared for the demands of the paper. Most candidates wrote with some confidence about the content of their set texts and increasing numbers were able to comment on the style in which their texts are written. At the upper end of the mark range, Examiners saw some highly accomplished, sensitive and sophisticated writing. Blake again proved very popular, while Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, replacing Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* on the syllabus, promises to be studied just as widely. There were, however, very few answers on the poetry of Stevie Smith and on Caryl Churchill's *Serious Money*.

This report has, on a number of occasions, commented on the techniques of approaching the passage-based questions and in general candidates now seem better equipped to answer these appropriately, looking closely at the extract printed on the page and commenting in detail about the writer's techniques which are exemplified there. However, some candidates stuck to a chronological account of the given passage, which resulted in narrative summary; candidates should be reminded to select from the extract and comment on the writer's use of language and its effects. Equally, candidates tend to be much more successful in the open essay questions if they can support their answer with detailed reference and quotation.

One of the interests of an international examination is the range of world perspectives on the set texts and again many candidates were able to argue their personal interpretations of texts, often based on a helpful knowledge of historical, geographical or political contexts.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

William Blake: *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) All candidates who attempted this question chose appropriate poems to illustrate their view. The approaches varied between those candidates who made shorter references to a wide range of poems and those who based their arguments on a close reading of two specific poems. Both approaches could produce high marks. The range of knowledge demonstrated by the more confident candidates who drew a number of different poems into their discussion was often impressive, while the care taken by other candidates over a detailed discussion of two poems, extracting nuances and subtleties, was equally successful. In the best answers, candidates were able to illustrate that while it might be tempting to equate *Innocence* with childhood and *Experience* with adulthood, the poems themselves are too subtle to be so easily compartmentalised. Such answers pointed out that while the adult world is undoubtedly more experienced than the child's world, innocence is not necessarily the preserve of children in the poems, and Blake often shows children's lives to be blighted by the world of experience. Simpler answers illustrated children in *Innocence* poems and a life of hardship and corruption in the *Experience* poems.

- (b) Many candidates seemed to relish the opportunity to compare two poems in this question, rather than write only on one. A number of less successful answers referred only to the two set poems, when the question of how far they characterise the worlds of *Innocence* and *Experience* needs some reference to other poems. Conversely, there were also a number of answers which discussed *Innocence* and *Experience* rather generally, without looking in detail at the two poems on the question paper. The most successful answers looked in detail at *Infant Joy* and *Infant Sorrow*, examining their language and structure, and put them into the appropriate contexts. Many candidates found it much easier to discuss *Infant Sorrow*, and missed opportunities to explore the language and patterning in *Infant Joy*, and overlooked the sense of dialogue in the poem. Some took a very literal reading, commenting on the difficulty a two day old child would find in speaking.

Question 2

Touched with Fire: ed. Hydes

- (a) This was the less popular of the two options, but often elicited interesting writing from candidates. Successful answers referred to such poems as 'Corpus Christi Carol', 'Church Going', 'Easter Morning' and 'In Westminster Abbey'. Candidates compared the approach of the narrators towards religion or religious observance and made interesting points of contrast between doubting or hesitant faith and more committed belief. Overall, candidates were less confident in comparing the styles of the poems, discussing language and structure less than content.
- (b) 'The Voice' proved a popular question, answers ranging from those which included biographical information about Thomas Hardy to those who dealt with the poem entirely on its own merits. Many candidates responded sensitively to the language and patterns within the poem and noted the change in structure in the last stanza. Some candidates showed an alertness to the contrast between the insubstantiality of memory and a voice, compared with the clarity of the remembered image in 'the original air-blue gown'. Rhyme, particularly in stanza three, was often commented upon effectively. Some weaker answers gave an account of the content of the poem, explaining the actions of the narrator, but missed the question's focus on the 'sense of loss.'

Question 3

Stevie Smith: *Selected Poems*

- (a)(b) There were very few answers on Stevie Smith, though among those answers seen, it was notable that candidates seemed not to appreciate fully Smith's humour.

Question 4

Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South*

- (a) *North and South* has become a widely-studied text and answers were quite evenly divided between the two options. The difference Gaskell portrays in Margaret's attitudes in the final chapters compared with those she expresses at the beginning of the novel are crucial to the effect of the text, and this was appreciated by many candidates answering this question. Some reference to the opening of the novel is therefore important for this question, though some less successful answers took a narrative approach, charting Margaret's progress chronologically through the entire novel. More confident answers made specific connections between the descriptions of Margaret and her behaviour in the final chapters and the early chapters, focusing in particular on her recognition of London society's triviality and careless ease after her experiences in the North.
- (b) Gaskell's writing can be rather dense and many candidates find it difficult to deal with passage-based questions on *North and South* effectively. Many answers to this question referred to the extract only generally as an indicator of Thornton's and Margaret's attitude towards workers and their relationship with their employers. More confident candidates dealt in some detail with Margaret's parallel of the Nuremberg child and Thornton's careful explanation of his views of independence, showing how a polite formality characterises the language of the discussion, while the views expressed are deeply felt.

Question 5Doris Lessing: *Martha Quest*

- (a) An impressive number of answers to this question were able to make specific reference to particular episodes in the novel which demonstrate Lessing's depiction of the Sports Club set. Some answers put the behaviour of the young people firmly within the colonial context, using, for example, the demands for the waiter to dance as an indicative section. Some of these answers were knowledgeable and firmly structured, with references and quotations selected deftly to inform the argument. Candidates also often noted Martha's ambivalent relationship with the Sports Club set. Less confident answers described the behaviour of the Sports Club set generally, without the selection of examples.
- (b) The passage was the favoured question among those candidates answering on *Martha Quest*. Less confident candidates worked through the extract summarising the narrative, but more successful answers were able to recognise the elements within the passage which are formative in the creation of Martha's character. Her distance and avowed dislike of the older women was usually noted, as was her reliance on her reading to provide her with a framework for her thought. Candidates usually commented on the role of the Cohen brothers in providing her with books and linked this relationship with other racial concerns within the novel. The most successful answers to this question concentrated on Lessing's narrative style, noting the indulgent humour the narrative voice displays towards Martha, her concerns and her insecurities.

Question 6Ngugi: *A Grain of Wheat*

- (a) Ngugi's novel was, by some margin, the most popular prose text on the paper and answers were quite evenly divided between the two options. Some candidates limited their answers to this question to a consideration of Mugo's betrayal of Kihika and his confession at the Uhuru celebration. While this event certainly contributes to the 'sense of inevitable doom', such answers missed a great deal because of the narrowness of focus. On the other hand, some candidates were unable fully to separate their learning about the history of Kenya's independence from Ngugi's fictional account of it in the novel. Fuller and more successful answers considered Ngugi's presentation of the historical context, including both the black and white perspectives of Kenyan independence and the corruption which Ngugi shows is already apparent in the new black government.
- (b) There was some strong and committed writing in response to this question, which were often informed by a historical knowledge as well as a recognition of the features of the selected passage. The most successful answers were very observant of details within the passage, such as Thompson's position and actions within the room, his techniques for dealing with Mugo, the details of whipping and the eleven deaths. There were opportunities for comments on language, which indicates Thompson's dismissive attitude towards black people, and for comments on variations of style, which include Thompson's internal thoughts, the sharp interchange of dialogue in the interrogation and the detached journalistic information about the final beatings. Less confident candidates dealt with the narrative of the passage without comments on style; crucially, the words 'how effectively' in the question were sometimes ignored.

Paper 9695/04**Drama****General comments**

This paper is working well. At all levels of ability there is clear engagement with the texts, and it is encouraging to see that candidates are increasingly willing to engage with dramatic qualities. At the bottom end candidates are prone to either supplying lengthy plot summaries or including large amounts of extraneous background information. They need to be encouraged to attack the questions more directly and relevantly. As always there were a small number of candidates who were attempting to unload prefabricated answers with little attention to the question asked.

At the top end there were, as always, some superb responses, detailed, pithy and perceptive. On the whole, candidates seem to prefer the passage based questions, though they often find it difficult to strike a balance between a focus on the detail of the particular passage and showing an awareness of the text as a whole. If, to take *The Glass Menagerie* question (5 (b)) as an example, the candidates were asked for a discussion of an episode as a means of establishing a relationship between two characters, clearly they were also being invited to take a view about this relationship in the play as a whole: the episode may be entirely typical, or it may add new light. At all levels, candidates need to be instructed in how to read a question carefully in order to see its full implication.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Caryl Churchill: *Serious Money*

Unsurprisingly, as this is the first session for the play, there were only a limited number of responses. Candidates had plainly enjoyed the text, though they found it challenging. In (a) candidates were often able to respond interestingly to ideas of staging and structure, but they then found it difficult to relate this to character, particularly in relation to Churchill's conscious use of staging and structure as a means of creating an ironic awareness of the limitations of the characters' motives. (b) was often soundly done, though most candidates focused on the first half of the passage, thus missing out on Zac's neurotic nervousness in the second half. The invitation to talk about a developing dramatic argument in the play was largely ignored.

Question 2

William Shakespeare: *The Comedy of Errors*

Another new text. In (a), a number of candidates found it enough merely to re-tell the story without any close sense of how there are incidents (Dromio's beating, for example) that might have both serious and comic implications. Few were willing to entertain the thought that the play raises serious issues (marriage for example) by comic means. (b) was not, in general, well-handled. Some answered, soundly, that it was not an effective opening bearing in mind the amount of plot covered and the non-appearance of the main characters. The best candidates were able to draw attention to the scene as setting up a framework of values and to see the dramatic potential of the court setting. A small point for future sessions: many candidates got very bogged down in writing the full names of the characters but this is not necessary – a clear abbreviation (AofE AofS) will be perfectly comprehensible to Examiners.

Question 3

William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

As ever this was a popular choice. In (a) there was a tendency for candidates merely to list instances of betrayal or deceit. Telling answers were characterised by a willingness to consider the difference between self-deceit and the conscious betrayal of others, a willingness to engage with the psychological aspects of the issue. As always, candidates who engaged in detail by focusing on a couple of particular scenes or moments, tended to show the deepest appreciation of 'dramatization.' (b) was often well done, with candidates showing an awareness of the conflicting tensions in the scene. Many drew attention to the effects gained from the audience knowing more than the characters. Good answers were able to deal both with the frantic entrances and exits and the different varieties of language used, comparing Macbeth's rhetorical insincerity with the genuine shock felt by the others. Useful links were often made with the porter scene, which precedes this moment.

Question 4

J M Synge: *The Playboy of the Western World*

In (a), many of the answers simply listed plot points. However, there were some subtle and discriminating responses that looked at ideas of heroism in a wider literary and social context, whilst still keeping focus on textual specifics. A number of candidates made interesting contrasts between Shawn and Christy as a means of focusing an answer. Many answers on (b) offered little more than paraphrase, picking on the most obvious moments of action. Those who took a more critical stance, particularly by taking a view on the abruptness of the play's ending, tended to do very well indeed. As always, the clue was in the question in the expression 'how effectively....'

Question 5Tennessee Williams: *The Glass Menagerie*

The responses to (a) were often informed and interesting, though some candidates did focus on staging without making the link between this and the Wingfields' plight explicit. There were many sound essays on how staging effects help create the feeling that the action is filtered and mediated through Tom's memory. In general, candidates were less confident about how the play's structure contributes, though it plainly does. (b) was usually well-answered, though there were a number of candidates who saw the relationship between the two as that of an ideal All-American caring mother looking after disabled daughter, a view that can only be sustained in defiance of much of the passage. Some candidates gave character studies of the two and then failed to realise that the question was actually about the relationship between the two. It would have been good to see more candidates exploring the relationship between naturalism and symbolism in the passage, though most candidates did make some attempt to talk about the image of the park and the legend that appear. As noted above, candidates were also being invited to see how this initial encounter is confirmed or denied by the play's subsequent action.

Question 6William Wycherley: *The Country Wife*

There were a small number of responses to this text. In (a) candidates did not really discriminate between ideas of 'honour' and 'reputation' thus losing a distinction that is crucial to the play's humour and meaning. Candidates seemed reluctant to focus on particular moments. In (b) most candidates understood the significance of the china, but they found it difficult to follow through the passage making useful suggestions about how Wycherley is manipulating audience reactions through the to and fro of the dialogue. Detail was not well used to back up points in the majority of the answers.

Paper 9695/05**Shakespeare and other Pre Twentieth Century Texts****General comments**

The overall impression of the intake this session was pleasing. There were a number of excellent performances across a variety of texts. The full range of responses to many of the questions was seen and all texts were offered by at least one or two Centres. Examiners remarked favourably on the enthusiasm for the works studied by candidates across the full range of performance levels. Most candidates had a sound knowledge of the details of the texts and many showed insight into some of the more sophisticated critical concepts and a genuine appreciation of the literary conventions within which the authors were working. Weaker candidates did sometimes appear not to know the texts in sufficient detail. It cannot be emphasised too often that a thorough knowledge of the basics of plot and character, supported by apposite quotation, is the bedrock on which a candidate can develop interpretations shaped to the demands of the question set.

Othello and *Emma* were the most popular choices, though there were a number of Centres offering *The Rape of the Lock* in this session and Examiners were impressed by the evident enjoyment which candidates had got from studying this text. All of the Shakespeare texts attracted a number of candidates and excellent work on all three texts was reported. There was a general feeling that candidates do know the Shakespeare text in more depth than the chosen **Section B** text. This concentration on the Shakespeare text is in itself gratifying, but candidates do need to remember that both answers on this paper carry equal marks and that the same depth on knowledge is necessary for both of the texts.

Examiners did report that some Centres appeared to be encouraging candidates to begin their answers with a two or three paragraph biographical sketch of the author studied, typically Shakespeare or Austen, but not confined to these. These sketches were rarely shaped to the specific task in hand. These are not helpful to candidates, who are spending valuable exam time on unproductive work.

Examiners also noted that questions which directed candidates to consider the language, usually the **(b)** or passage option, were not always well answered, candidates appearing to be not so well prepared to discuss language as they were when discussing tone or meaning. The ability to respond to the language, the words chosen by the author, is a fundamental skill candidates are expected to have developed for this paper, alongside the other interpretative and responsive competences so many of the candidates demonstrate so ably. One other area for improvement noted by Examiners is the use of direct quotation from the text. Sometimes candidates do not seem to have at their fingertips the telling references which might complete the argument or support the opinion offered. This does limit the overall performance and candidates do need to be reminded of the importance of the brief and accurate direct quotation in the answers.

Finally it is pleasing to note that Examiners felt that there was a higher standard of written expression from the candidates and only a very small minority were disadvantaged by difficulties in their own writing. This is a testament to the commitment of the candidates and the Centres over a number of years and is to be applauded.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

William Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

A number of Centres offered this text, with most candidates opting for the **(a)** option on Enobarbus.

- (a)** This was generally very well done and clearly Enobarbus and his role in the play had been well discussed in class. The best candidates responded to the challenge of the question and saw him as far more than the voice of common sense, responding to the paradoxes and often supporting the opinions with telling references. Some candidates did fall into the trap of retelling parts of the narrative but even there in the majority of cases the narrative was relevantly chosen and shaped at least partly to the task.
- (b)** Tone and dramatic action in this passage were often well discussed, but this was one of the questions where candidates did not always give the language appropriate attention. Many were able to place the passage and those who remembered the imminent threat of Pompey often did very well. Lepidus was often discussed unsympathetically – ‘a wishy washy peacenik’ as one candidate thought him, but Antony and Caesar were often very shrewdly analysed by the careful candidate.

Question 2

William Shakespeare: *Othello*

This was the most popular choice in **Section A**. Candidates were evenly split between the two options.

- (a)** There were many excellent responses to this question. Candidates responded sensitively to Desdemona, even where they were not challenging the quotation offered and thought that on the whole she was ‘weak and colourless’. Persuasive arguments from a more ‘feminist’ viewpoint were mounted, defending her position in a patriarchal, militaristic world, but some candidates were puzzled by her passivity in the face of Othello’s growing violence and threatening behaviour. ‘Colourless’ was interpreted by a few candidates as meaning ‘white’ or ‘pale’ but this in itself did not cause problems for a supported interpretation of the racism in the play.
- (b)** The opening of the play had evidently been well discussed and many candidates were alive to the subtleties of dramatic structuring Shakespeare exhibits here. Many candidates also commented tellingly on the ironic undertones, Iago’s inherent malice and the uncomfortable relationship he shares with Roderigo in this passage. Very few were not able to discuss the passage in relation to the rest of the play to come. One or two were puzzled by the term ‘ancient’, however, suggesting that not all had read the play as closely as was hoped.

Question 3

William Shakespeare: *Much Ado About Nothing*

This was the minority choice for **Section A**, but there were still a number of Centres who tackled this text. (a) was much more popular than (b).

- (a) This was a topic which candidates had evidently prepared for and Examiners saw a number of perceptive and persuasive discussions of reputation, often linked to the idea of honour. Many concentrated on the areas of female reputation and sexual behaviour, some detecting double standards and a military code at work. These arguments were often well supported. Discerning candidates also saw the comic undertones of Dogberry's wish to be 'writ down an ass' as undermining the whole issue of reputation in the play. Nearly all answers showed a sound knowledge of the basics of the text in terms of plot and character and often success was closely linked to the ability to shape that knowledge to the demands of the task.
- (b) This was generally soundly tackled, most candidates alive to the ironic situation of Hero's 'heavy heart' and what the audience knows is in store for her. Some were able to explore the innuendo of Margaret's 'chattering' and a few considered the effect of the strangely subdued Beatrice on the audience's anxiety over what was to come. A disappointing number of candidates however did not seem to fully understand the basics of the dialogue here and that inevitably limited their performance.

Section B**Question 4**

Jane Austen: *Emma*

This was a very popular choice, with the majority opting for (a).

- (a) A surprising number of candidates supported the quotation and Examiners had to assume that Emma herself has not been a popular character. The full range of answers was seen on this question and many excellent answers which suggested that even if Emma herself was not liked the text had been thoroughly enjoyed. Perhaps too few candidates were alive to the positive side of Emma's character, her willingness to make amends and so on. The best candidates recognised how Austen's presentation of her heroine is carefully structured and crafted and even weaker candidates were able to detect the progress in Emma's character, even if this was sometimes solely attributed to the late flowering of her love for Mr Knightley.
- (b) Most candidates were able to recognise the significance of this passage and able to write about Austen's concerns elsewhere in the text. The methods however were less well explored and only the minority of candidates were able to explore the ironies and the humour present here and so typical of the book as a whole.

Question 5

Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Knight's Tale*

This was very much a minority choice in this session, with most opting for (a). Candidates did challenge the question proficiently at times, seeing the rivals as well differentiated in a number of ways. Nearly all answers on this question showed a sound knowledge of the text. However (b) answers were split between detailed explorations of the passage and the role of the gods from some candidates and a limited understanding of the passage which hardly rose beyond a not always accurate paraphrase.

Question 6

Daniel Defoe: *Moll Flanders*

Examiners reported this as the text which was least effectively tackled. It was very much a minority choice. (a) answers focused on Moll with often no or little reference to the second character required by the question. Paraphrase and summary were common here and in (b) for which there were very few takers. 'Narrative methods' was rarely addressed, candidates considering issues in isolation.

Question 7

Christina Rossetti: *Selected Poems*

There were only very few takers for this text, most of whom opted for **(b)**. Candidates were able to see some of the wistful, rather melancholic tone so typical of Rossetti here but there were also those who attempted a broad paraphrase of the poem without shaping it to the demands of the task.

Question 8

John Donne: *Selected Poems* (from *The Metaphysical Poets* ed. Gardner)

This was once again a popular choice, with candidates fairly evenly split between **(a)** and **(b)**.

- (a)** Some candidates rose to the challenge of this task and were able to recognise the 'voices' which Donne assumes in some of his poems, both as a type of lover and as a religious devotee. However other candidates were able only to point out that Donne 'says this' in one poem but 'says that' in another.
- (b)** Most candidates were able to offer some appropriate comments on this poem and to place it alongside Donne's other religious poems in the selection. Few however were able to offer a detailed critical appreciation which tackled language and meaning in depth. The demands of this text are great and Examiners sometimes wonder if the range of skills and critical understanding required to tackle it are always fully appreciated.

Question 9

George Eliot: *Middlemarch*

A minority choice but candidates who offered this text must be commended for the detailed knowledge of it they so often showed. **(a)** answers often included much detail about the Garths, sometimes shaped to the argument presented. **(b)** answers were rare and some candidates spent too long discussing the Lydgates generally at the expense of the detailed exploration of the passage which the question demanded.

Question 10

Ben Jonson: *The Alchemist*

There were very few answers on this text, but some candidates did rise to the challenge of **(a)** and considered the kind of humour which Jonson presents. **(b)** answers tended to be mostly paraphrase and few candidates seemed to grasp the humour inherent in the dramatic action of the passage.

Question 11

Alexander Pope: *The Rape of the Lock*

There were a number of Centres who tackled this text and Examiners reported the full range of performance, from excellent to very limited. Most candidates tackled the **(b)** option and some were exceptionally well prepared and showed a thorough knowledge of Pope's methods and effects, clearly at home in the mock heroic milieu. It was also pleasing to see how many candidates had enjoyed tackling this work. However the more limited responses from some candidates were a reminder of how demanding the text is and how much detailed work is required if candidates are to tackle it well, in terms of background understanding and wrestling with many nuances and references which the text incorporates.

Paper 9695/06
Twentieth Century Texts

General comments

A very good standard of use of English from most candidates. There were some understandable lapses into dialectal structures at times, though this did not affect communication. The biggest problem came from a small minority who seemed to have swallowed a thesaurus. Perhaps a word of warning that the best way to answer a question may often be the simplest.

Handwriting was mostly legible, syntax and spelling generally accurate, and even the apostrophe was used correctly in many instances. However, direct quotation was not used efficiently – it was often interspersed randomly into the discussion with no clear connection with what preceded or came after it.

In well organised answers the first paragraph often gave an outline of the agenda of the answer as a whole. Many answers, however, lacked coherent argument or focus and proceeded spasmodically, often returning to develop an issue referred to earlier.

Some answers were very assertive on methods and effect, without consideration of evidence – which may suggest that some time might usefully be devoted to teaching candidates how to use material, particularly for the **(b)** questions. Candidates need to be encouraged to think more about how they present their answers. Rather than listing features and commenting in a disjointed way, they should consider effects of the writing systematically and show how individual features or details contribute to the overall experience of the passage and the text. Very few candidates use phrases like “This is *effective* because ...” or “this is *significant* because ...”

The most frustrating answers – particularly on *The Caretaker* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, with which it was often paired – were those distracted into accounts of Theatre of the Absurd and other ‘contextual’ factors which led them away from the texts and the questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Jean Rhys: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Responses on this text, making its first appearance on the paper, suggested that candidates and teachers had enjoyed working on it. Most candidates knew the text well and could cite examples readily, though there was a strong tendency to rely on narrative as a way of dealing with the issues of the question and constructing an answer.

- (a)** This question was often answered very fully, sometimes at a length that compromised the candidate’s second question. Most candidates were able to identify various forms of “victimization” in Antoinette’s experience (domestic/cultural/economic/historical/psycho-logical/sexual/matrimonial/colonial); in weaker answers these were presented either in narrative sequence or as a list. Most candidates were able to suggest that other people (including her husband) are also victims in various ways. The best answers were able to show how her early childhood experience made her particularly vulnerable in later life. Some interesting answers considered parallels between the experiences of Antoinette and her mother. Few addressed the issue of presentation except to mention very briefly the narrative voice or the dreams, though some did suggest that Rochester’s assumption of narrative voice in the second part was an aspect of the victimisation process enacted in her marriage. Some answers disregarded the marriage, and therefore a significant proportion of the novel, altogether. Centres need to be warned about imposing a single idea on the text or question. Where some Centres had explored the novel’s representation of patriarchal society, this sometimes led to very simplistic arguments such as, “Antoinette was a victim of patriarchy since Annette cared more for Pierre because he was a boy”. Where political or cultural relations in a colonial system were considered there was some thoughtful discussion, though again sometimes tendentious moralising intruded.

- (b) There were some very perceptive and appreciative answers addressing features such as narrative voice, the significance of dreams, and the effects of symbolism (e.g. colours). Structural parallels/echoes (e.g. memories of the Coulbri estate/the destruction of the house by fire) were often thoughtfully explored. Antoinette's regaining the narrative, and a sense of her own identity through memory/dream, was explored as an aspect of the 'empowerment' that some candidates identified as a development at this moment, as the novel comes to an end.

Question 2

Kazuo Ishiguro: *An Artist of the Floating World*

Candidates seemed more comfortable with Ishiguro's novel this season, and to have developed ways of reading and discussing its oblique, hesitant methods of narration and thematic development.

- (a) Though the word 'integrity' caused problems for some, many candidates recognised the complexity of the novel's treatment, noting, for example, that it is possible to have integrity and still be wrong. Fuller answers showed a sophisticated understanding of Ono's ambivalent exploration of his own and Japan's past, exploring the complex, de-stabilising interaction of personal, domestic, artistic, political and historical factors in his experience. Some candidates found it difficult to find another character to discuss, and as a result discussion of the second choice often seemed like an afterthought or was interwoven in the general discussion of Ono.
- (b) While some discussions of this passage amounted to little more than paraphrase, others sensitively explored the methods and effects of Ono's manner and method of narration and what these suggested about how reliable he is likely to be in the novel as a whole. There was some perceptive discussion of symbolic and structural details (e.g. possible readings of the recurrent symbolism of the Bridge of Hesitation, some noting the symmetry of Ono's reflections in the novel's closing sequence). Most answers noted thematic concerns of the novel as a whole introduced in its opening (e.g. honour, status, wealth, arranged marriage, parent-child and teacher-pupil relationships, Japanese traditions and post-war experience). Some used the extract as a prompt for discussion of whole novel, with varying success. Few actually commented on the sentence structure and choice of words in the text.

Question 3

Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

This text was studied by very few small Centres.

- (a) proved difficult in that candidates who attempted it had hardly any poems at their disposal to refer to. On (b) there were some brave attempts to engage with the poem, but most were inclined to describe rather than analyse, or to pick out individual details for comment in a disjointed way. Almost all gave the impression of not having studied the poem. Very few could make meaningful links with other poems, mostly trying to use other poems that have appeared on earlier question papers, and these were very thin on detail. General advice would be that good answers never use quotations without adding a comment on some use of word or image so that the candidate can comment on the technique and effects of the writing.

Question 4

Harold Pinter: *The Caretaker*

This was easily the most popular text on the paper once again this season. Again, also, some answers were diverted from promising discussion of the play into undigested comment on Existentialism, Theatre of the Absurd and/or what was seen as the generally alienated and demoralised condition of the British population after the war (e.g. "English people lost all faith in values after the war and nobody cared for each other...").

- (a) The question's phrasing "How far ..." seemed to encourage candidates to evaluate the question itself and to consider carefully the issue of what, in the play's terms, *fantasy* is and whether the kinds of lives the characters are living relate to their dreams in a damaging way or not. Almost all candidates identified the papers in Sidcup, the penthouse and the shed, as pivotal issues and used these to explore differences between the characters' temperaments and circumstances. While most agreed with the question's lead quotation that these "fantasies" prevent the characters from "living their lives", some argued that in a sense the "fantasies" have become the sustaining elements of the characters' lives and identities, which would be meaningless and directionless without them.

- (b) Most candidates noted that the passage illustrates the play's concern with difficulties of communication, since this is one of the many occasions when one character's obsessive indulgence is completely ignored by the other it is ostensibly addressed to. Candidates noted the rhetorical effects of Davies's narrative, which is both comic and depressing, and considered ways in which character differences and relationships are developed here. Candidates need to consider how a writer chooses language and structures to give a character an individual idiom, a characteristic way of expressing himself. Very few could do this.

Question 5

Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

- (a) Candidates should be encouraged to consider the key terms of a question like this one in relation to the particular text, and to try to generate a balanced, coherent discussion. Some well-informed and well-organised answers considered ways in which the play's experience can be regarded as *comic* (e.g. arising from playful banter, situational, visual, 'black', 'absurd') and ways in which it would be appropriate to use the term *tragic*. Here most settled for non-technical readings (*tragic* = e.g. people who are unhappy/desperate/unfulfilled/mutually damaging) but some were able to consider the play in terms of classical tragedy, usually exploring the implications of the titles of the three Acts. Some argued that the play can be read as comment on the condition of American society, tragically in decline. The relation between the elements cited in the question was best explored in discussion of particular episodes (e.g. George pretending to shoot Martha with the umbrella gun, George telling Martha their son is dead, George re-telling the story of Nick's and Honey's marriage) to show how *comic* and *tragic* notions interact (as a candidate put it, "are two sides of the same coin").
- (b) Examiners have reported that in their allocations most candidates used the passage as a basis for a general essay on the play as a whole, with very few addressing the extract in any detail. Some answers dealt with character and relationships with insight and subtlety, exploring ways in which the passage inaugurates motifs which will resonate throughout the play (e.g. the ambivalent, dependent/aggressive quality of George and Martha's relationship; the 'son' as necessary but ultimately damaging illusion; Nick's and Honey's differing roles as audience/chorus). There were also some very poor answers which plodded through the passage sequentially, finding not very much to say about its relation to "the play as a whole".

Question 6

Tom Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Another popular text (often taken in conjunction with *The Caretaker*) and often similarly perceived to be representative of Theatre of the Absurd, Existentialism and postwar British consciousness, though these issues were very rarely helpfully explored.

- (a) Candidates who considered the terms of the question and structured answers around them found a good deal to say in response to this question, exploring aspects of confusion (e.g. personal identity/memory/motivation/situation/time/relationships) and ways in which this is humorously presented (e.g. verbal/visual/theatrical/slapstick). *Darkly* caused problems for some candidates, but most pointed to the play's and characters' pre-occupation with death as providing this quality. Some candidates were distracted into lengthy accounts of the action of *Hamlet*, but many were able to show how this play's relation with Shakespeare's drama contributes to the audience's experience of all three terms in the question.
- (b) Weak answers used the extract as a lift-off for a discussion on meaninglessness and, in an effort to provide a context, overloaded the answer with summaries of *Hamlet* or Existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd. Others used it to consider qualities of the two characters and their relationship. In fuller answers which attended closely to the effects of the writing candidates noted the characteristic circularity of the dialogue (brilliantly exemplified by the last nine lines of the extract), and the obsessive playing with words that detaches them from conventional meaning (e.g. "Stark raving sane"). There was some interesting discussion of the role, here and in the play as a whole, of the Player, whose laconic interjections comment on situation ("Who does, nowadays?"), keep the exchange moving ("Melancholy") and change its direction ("Why?"). Candidates pointed out that readers/members of the audience who are acquainted with Shakespeare's play experience moments like this very differently from those who are not.

Question 7

Derek Walcott: *Selected Poetry*

Though there were few answers on this text, Examiners have been impressed by candidates' readiness to engage with this complex poetry. Candidates in most Centres were well prepared and had a good deal of knowledge about literary context, biography and the poet's development, though sometimes this substituted for a direct response to the poetry.

- (a) The more popular of the options. Some answers concentrated on love for people, most often taking 'A Careful Passion' and 'Dark August' as exemplifying the complexity of Walcott's treatment of the theme. Others extended the range of reference and experience to love of the islands, their landscape, culture and people. Poetry and art also featured as objects of affection. Some candidates noted the pervasive sense of loss associated with the sensation of love in Walcott's work.
- (b) This was often well done. The best answers explored the poem's expression of Walcott's attitude to 'progress' and change, nature and the poetic imagination, and were able to refer to other poems on related themes. A few candidates were also able to focus on textual detail and the elaborate effects of Walcott's imagery. The weakest were trying to fit the poem into a view that Walcott's work is usually about slavery.

Question 8

Evelyn Waugh: *Decline and Fall*

Not so popular this season, but there was evidence of enjoyment and engagement, particularly with the novel's social satire.

- (a) This elicited the full range of responses – from very basic narrative and character description to a sophisticated awareness of Waugh's satirical methods (some of the novel's funniest moments involve Margot), the targets of his social criticism (e.g. moral degeneration/class differentiation and pretentiousness/exploitation of human resources/familial indifference/modernising impulse/sexual predation) and Margot's effect on Paul. Many answers were constructed around the narrator's instruction on how to pronounce Margot's surname. Weaker candidates found it difficult to stay focused and drifted into tangential material on other characters. Again, the material available could have been better developed if candidates had paid more attention to essay writing technique, making explicit the connection between ideas and commenting on the effect of specific details.
- (b) Some responses were alert to the ironies and humour in the extract, playing conventional wedding etiquette against the conditions of this highly unconventional "bigamous union". Candidates noted references to running jokes in this part of the novel such as Paul's inability to play the organ and the innuendo associated with Clutterbuck, and the narrator's cool ironic tone (e.g. Diana's "fire of reckless proportions"). As with other (b)-type questions, responses here suggested that more teaching attention might helpfully be given to developing candidates' confidence in handling critical/analytical procedures and terminology.

Paper 9695/07

Comment and Appreciation

General comments

There was a good entry for this paper again this session, and some interesting and thoughtful scripts; most candidates were clearly aware of what is required in writing a critical appreciation, and while there were several aspects of their answers that need to be addressed the general picture was a reasonably encouraging one, though perhaps a little less so than was the case a year ago. Centres have evidently encouraged their candidates to look very closely at the passages given, and although rather too many answers relied overmuch upon either simple paraphrase or a simple listing of technical devices the broad picture was that most candidates clearly wanted, and indeed tried, to relate each part of each passage to its

whole, and to talk about the effects these created. This was not always managed in the most efficient and organised manner; Examiners are very much aware of the difficulties and stresses created by a timed examination, but even allowing for this it did appear that many candidates simply wrote whatever came into their heads at any moment, without having spent at least a few minutes thinking, planning and perhaps preparing the most appropriately ordered way to respond. At another extreme there were some who had a very clear plan, almost a kind of mental template, which they used in each question, almost regardless of the type of writing they were looking at, so that their answers became very mechanical and soul-less. Personal and individual response is extremely important, and while marks will never be awarded simply for this unless it is clearly and tightly rooted in the passage under study, it is equally unlikely that high marks will accrue from a simple and routine listing of devices that can – or indeed sometimes cannot – be found. A nice and thoughtful balance must be attempted.

Mention of handwriting was made in last year's report, and it must be said that this year there was no script that was impossible, or even nearly impossible, to read; this may perhaps simply reflect a different set of candidates, but if it is a result of teachers telling candidates how essential it is to write clearly then such teachers must be warmly thanked!

Use of quotation and reference to the passage(s) under study is essential in this paper, and in general, candidates manage this well, though two or three basic points do need to be stressed:

- quotation marks are essential, and must be used for every quotation, whether of one word or twenty;
- in general, shorter quotations are better than longer ones – the purpose of this paper is not to test knowledge, but the ability to look and explore closely;
- quotations of a few words only can best be integrated into the sentence being written, but longer ones, of more than six or seven words perhaps, should be separated and written on a separate and indented line;
- when quoting from a poem, candidates must retain the lines as they are written by the poet – not to do so can imply a lack of awareness of meter and rhythm, and perhaps also of understanding.

As with most of the points made in this report, most candidates do conform perfectly well to critical convention, and no marks will ever be deducted simply because they are not followed, but doing so does greatly improve the presentation and fluency of answers.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Troubles

This was the most widely-answered question, and many candidates wrote on it with some skill and insight, looking not merely at what Farrell is describing, and at how he does so, but also at what he may be signifying and suggesting by some of his descriptions. Most candidates seemed aware that all is not quite as it seems in the so-called Majestic Hotel, and while there were some rather far-fetched and unsupported thoughts (the hotel is haunted, for example, damaged by war, or even filled with the murdered bodies of Miss Spencer and her family) there were relatively few who saw it simply as descriptive for its own sake.

There is surely little doubt that the word 'fiancée' in line 1 is enclosed with inverted commas for a good reason; the most popular view proposed by candidates was that because of the war and the Major's absence for some years his relationship, which may initially have been secure, is now less certain, and that he cannot be sure if Miss Spencer is still in fact his fiancée. This would certainly explain the overwhelming sense of uncertainty and nervousness that pervades the whole piece, from the perhaps symbolic door which separates the two 'lovers' and proves so hard to open. The statue of Venus was seen by very many candidates as reflecting Miss Spencer herself – attractive and physically appealing, perhaps, but possibly cold (marble) and certainly dusty (from long separation from the Major) – and the very vast emptiness and shabbiness of the hotel, which Farrell spends so long in creating, may also reflect the emptiness and desolation that the Major fears he may find. His nervousness, sitting with his case between his legs, and the half-comic image of the cloud of dust that sitting down creates, was again seen by many as suggestive.

There was much discussion of the elaborate 'sound-journey' created by the ringing of the reception bell, and then of the thunderous and potentially exploding noise made by the gong that he 'clouted' (some candidates commented on this particularly masculine and military word), either simply as a tour-de-force by Farrell or possibly again as a reflection of the Major's uncertainty about the state of the hotel and/or his potential marriage. The arrival of the unexpectedly 'plump, rose-cheeked' maid was seen by many as a moment when real humanity appeared to bring the Major back from his reverie, and also perhaps as one of a number of half-humorous moments in the piece. The Palm Court, where Miss Spencer is alleged to be, proved a bit of a problem for some candidates, but many again saw its over-ripe and slightly unpleasing nature as further evidence of the turmoil going on in the Major's mind – and his self-deprecating comment that 'she won't bite' was often noted.

The final brief sentence – 'But now, here he was' – was discussed by many candidates; the Major certainly is here, but is Miss Spencer? The mystery and puzzlement remain even after the final sentence is ended.

Having said all this, of course, it must also be added that while many candidates saw and discussed much of what has been suggested, many did not, and wrote about the passage as if it were simply a piece of straightforward description; while there is certainly a good deal to say if this line is taken, there is much which must also remain somewhat unsatisfactory – why, for example, is so much made of the size and dustiness of the Hotel? Candidates taking this approach found it hard to explain. And those – happily few – who simply paraphrased without commenting did not do themselves any favours; a paper called 'Comment and Appreciation' must include both of these skills.

Question 2

'Sonnet' and 'Song'

After **Question 1**, this was the second most popular question, often managed quite well and confidently. Candidates saw many similarities and some differences between the two poems, and better answers were able to draw on a lot of the images used by both poets to create their pictures and their moods.

A couple of relatively minor comments must be made first: the poems are called 'Sonnet' and 'Song', and not 'The Sonnet' or 'The Song'; the two poets are clearly female; and 'Sonnet' is most unlikely to have been written in the nineteenth century, given that the poet was only eight years old in 1900 – a remarkable number of candidates thought she did write then, despite saying that she was probably very elderly at the time!

Almost all made the point that the form of each poem is markedly different, and there were some interesting thoughts about how the two forms reflected the moods of each poem – the rather more sedate and controlled nature of 'Sonnet' contrasting with the slightly lighter and freer atmosphere of 'Song' – though Bishop's poem does not really end with the very positive and up-beat tone that quite a lot of candidates seemed to find in it.

There is neither time nor space here to discuss every aspect of the two poems, but it may be helpful to look at a few recurrent ideas put forward by significant numbers of candidates. The opening lines of 'Sonnet' are not a question – there is a very clear and unambiguous statement in line 2 ('I have forgotten'), stressed by its placing at the start of the line; it is of course still true that the alliteration of 'w' in line 1, and the nature of the three words concerned ('what, where, why') does imply a question, but it is really more of a reflection than actually looking for any simple answer. The ghosts of her lovers (and surely they are lovers, not children or family?) certainly create a haunted and tender mood, but not really one of fear or terror, as some suggested, and the picture of their tapping at her window does indeed suggest a physical as well as a metaphorical separation of past and present/youth and age. The tree that appears in the sestet – incidentally, many candidates noted the clear break in both structure and content after line 8 – is indeed a reflection of the isolation and loneliness felt by the speaker now that she is alone; there is a bleakness and silence about its leafless and birdless boughs. And the pathos and emptiness of the last two lines – not, it must be noted, a rhyming couplet – were well noted by very many.

The use of 'summer' in this closing line of 'Sonnet' was neatly used by many candidates as an introduction to 'Song', though there is no equivalent 'winter' here, except perhaps by implication. The opening line is stark and unambiguous, though many noted that the rhythm is nearly a jaunty one, unlike the sobriety of Millay's iambic pentameters. The image of the yacht (and while the spelling of the word is perhaps curious, to see so many writing 'yatch' was disappointing) dancing like Fred Astaire was picked up by very many as emblematic of gaiety and spontaneity, and the sudden and repeated 'is gone, is gone' was frequently mentioned as similar in tone if not style to the mood of 'Sonnet'. Very few, however, picked up on the sad word 'somewhere' in the same line – the speaker knows that her friends or lovers of the summer have gone, but where are they?

The second stanza – not, please, paragraph – opens with another brief and unambiguously sad statement, and the ‘bare’ sea is like the bare tree in ‘Sonnet’. Candidates sometimes found it hard to see the use of ‘weeds’ in line 2 of this stanza as emblematic of life and energy, but surely this is what they are – they are ‘fresh’ and ‘green’; the contrast then is with the ‘rusty-sided freighters’, suggestive surely of slow, dull, purely commercial necessities as opposed to relaxed and carefree fun. The final two lines were seen in a variety of ways, but surely the moon and stars, while arguably suggestive of romance and beauty, are used here to reflect the speaker’s loneliness and isolation, with only these objects to recall pleasure, and no human company. Many wanted to see this as a more optimistic ending than that of ‘Sonnet’, but while it may not have quite the same unending and crushing sense of finality it surely is similarly and perhaps equally sad and empty; at least, it must be nostalgic for what has passed?

Question 3

Doctor Faustus

This was the least popular question, though it was attempted by perhaps a third of all candidates, and it was generally the least well managed; to begin with, relatively few talked of the extract as drama, and surprisingly many seemed to think it was a poem, or in a handful of cases a piece of prose; and a large proportion of answers took a more moral or ethical approach than a critical one, and found themselves therefore writing at least as much about Faustus’s religious beliefs and attitudes, and indeed the candidates’ own, as about Marlowe’s writing. Many simply paraphrased and ‘translated’ the extract, making few if any comments along the way about how Marlowe’s writing creates the tension and unease felt by both Faustus himself and a watching audience/reader. True, it is a long extract, and it would not be reasonable to expect detailed discussion of every line, but too many scripts showed far too little evidence of any such discussion at all, except perhaps in terms of simple listing and illustrating of some of the literary devices used by the writer.

There is ample material here, from the fairly straightforward sense of time passing, noted by most candidates who moved beyond paraphrase, to the rather subtler, such as the way Faustus addresses himself in the opening lines as if trying to distance himself from the reality of what he has done, and what is happening to him (‘Ah, Faustus . . .’), and the relatively straightforward, such as the way in which his sentence-structure reflects his growing anxiety and terror, especially as the end draws inescapably close. His use of Latin, and his reference to Pythagoras, perhaps suggest the irony of such a learned man having allowed himself to be so completely taken in by Lucifer’s promises; and his repeated attempts to bargain with God, despite his ‘books’ certainly telling him that God is unbending, again suggest a man bent still on self-deception. Even his final words – ‘I’ll burn my books’ – on the face of things a fairly feeble way for the extract to end, surely echo, even as the devils come to take him away, an unwillingness to admit defeat, or to face the terrible truth.

Thunder and lightning, a striking clock, a man alone on the stage with so many vivid and powerful pieces of imagination, must surely be seen as having dramatic and theatrical impact? There will not always be a piece of drama in this paper, but where there is – and the question clearly indicates it as such – it really is essential for a high mark that it is treated as such, not as just another piece of prose or poetry.

Paper 9695/08

Coursework

General comments

An excellent set of folders this session; Centres and candidates alike were very good indeed in all that they did, and thus this report must start by thanking and congratulating all those concerned for making the Moderator’s work both straightforward and often truly enjoyable. Most Centres made assessments that were clearly based very closely upon the published Marking Criteria, and few changes were recommended to marks; it was clear that a lot of time and thought had gone into the preparation and writing of each essay submitted, and equally that teachers’ judgements were based upon a good deal of careful thinking and discussion. There were no significant causes for concern in any administrative matters, though Examiners would suggest that for everybody’s sake the most sensible way to send candidates’ work is really in simple card or plastic folders – anything more complex or cumbersome only adds to the weight of a package (and to the Moderator’s task!).

Texts studied were this year almost all from the traditional English Literature canon; this is not in any sense a criticism, just an observation, particularly as candidates' responses were overwhelmingly personal and individual, and showed few signs of having been over-taught. There were, too, some interesting and often demanding tasks, making quite considerable demands upon candidates to go well beyond a simple rehearsal of plot, content or character, and to explore critically something of the writers' skills and techniques, a demand that was almost invariably taken up with success. It may be of interest to all Centres, particularly perhaps those new to the syllabus, to note some of these tasks – the fact that none is mentioned for some texts is not, of course, to suggest that tasks on these were in any way poor. What always matters, as just suggested, is that all tasks should encourage and enable candidates to demonstrate the widest possible range of understanding and skills; they should if possible also allow for some discussion of the place of the text in a literary, cultural or historical context – something that many candidates achieved this session.

Texts used included:

- Margaret Atwood – *The Handmaid's Tale*
- William Golding – *Lord of the Flies*
- F Scott Fitzgerald – *The Great Gatsby*
- Emily Brontë – *Wuthering Heights*
- Charlotte Brontë – *Jane Eyre*
- Grahame Greene – *Brighton Rock*
- Nick Hornby – *High Fidelity*
- G B Shaw – *Pygmalion*
- Arthur Miller – *The Crucible*
- Alan Bennett – *Talking Heads*
- Samuel Beckett – *Endgame*
- Philip Larkin – selected poems
- Robert Frost – selected poems

It would be unfair to suggest which of these texts produced the best work, as there really was no unsatisfactory writing this session, but the following tasks certainly did lead to some very interesting and thoughtful answers:

- Discuss the use of religion and religious imagery in *Brighton Rock*.
- Discuss the theme of yearning in *The Great Gatsby*.
- Discuss the relationship between Hamm and Clov, and the extent to which it is a response to the meaninglessness of life as expressed in *Endgame*.
- How does Miller create and sustain tension in *The Crucible*?
- How does Shaw's characterisation in *Pygmalion* portray his view of contemporary society?
- 'This sense that all life is provisional and that its continuance should not be taken for granted is a central theme in Frost's poetry.' Discuss the significance of this comment in relation to the poetry of Frost that you have read.

Annotation of essays was something that varied widely; many Centres wrote a lot in the margins, often directing this to their candidates as well as to the Moderator. There can be no hard and fast rule here, but for all involved it really is helpful that there should be some pertinent marginal comment, drawing attention to especially successful moments – or perhaps to parts where something could be improved in the next piece of work done by the candidate (not, of course, to help with a re-drafting of the same piece). A piece of work with no annotation at all is not acceptable, as giving no evidence that it has been read and assessed. Summative comments at the end of a piece, and more especially on the cover-sheet, really should be quite full, however, and make clear reference to the skills – and perhaps the actual wording – of the Marking Criteria; it is in these final comments that the Moderator can see exactly how, and why, a mark has been reached.

A final word on the length of folders. The Syllabus booklet (page 10) stipulates that there should be no more than 3000 words; anything significantly beyond this should be noted by the Centre but not taken into account in making the final assessment, and a comment to this effect made on the cover-sheet. Candidates should be firmly encouraged to write succinctly and with exact focus, so that this limit – designed to encourage as much parity as possible between Centres – is adhered to.

Overall, then this was an especially good and pleasing session – well done to all concerned.