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LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Papers 0486/01 and 0486/04

Paper 1 (Open Books) and Paper 4 (Closed Books)

General comments

This year, there was work on all the texts offered, though as last year one or two were vastly popular and a few were met with only occasionally. It will surprise few to learn that in the former category were found those hardy annuals *Animal Farm* and *Romeo and Juliet*. *Touched with Fire* continues to be the poetry anthology that most Examiners meet in the scripts. However, across both papers there was enough work to make sensible judgement on the success or otherwise of the questions set and the quality of the responses they stimulated. As was the case last year, there was little evidence to suggest that any of the tasks presented well prepared candidates with especial problems.

As is usual, however, some differentiated more sharply than others. Once again, this often occurred in those tasks which required the candidate to engage with irony. More will be said about this later. However, the most dramatic example of sharp differentiation was to be found this year in empathic tasks, in **Question 27** for instance. This was often done superbly, not surprisingly since over the years candidates have shown how much Boxer affects them. However, just how dramatically revealing of a candidate's real knowledge of a text an empathic task can be was shown by the rather disturbing number of candidates who painted Boxer as a disenchanted animal who had finally seen the truth of the revolution. Little reward could be given to such a basic misunderstanding of Orwell's purpose. Similar totally inappropriate thoughts were at times attributed to Moses in **Question 21** and to Colin in **Question 36** which revealed with some clarity how these candidates had grasped little of their characteristics or of the writers' intentions in creating them.

However, most Examiners found much to praise in candidates' work as a whole. Many spoke of the lively engagement with the texts shown in many Centres, which speaks so well of the enthusiastic teaching the candidates had received. All the questions on this syllabus are designed to encourage candidates to think in the exam room rather than to regurgitate semi-prepared essays and the nature of the writing in many scripts showed that many were fully alive to the challenges posed. Indeed, Examiners new to the syllabus once again remarked on the freshness of the writing in so many Centres. It seemed commonly agreed that most candidates appeared at least aware of the importance of directly addressing the question and there were frequent examples of them showing considerable insight into the issues raised by the task. In addition, there was evidence that the weakest aspect of work in the past was being tackled. One refers to the lack of engagement with the detail of literary language and the ways in which writers achieve their effects. The work on poetry remains perhaps the most problematic area, not surprisingly given the linguistic background of many of the candidates. However, even here there was plenty of evidence of a desire to write about the linguistic detail of a poem instead of being content simply to paraphrase the poem's content.

Of course, there was a wide range of quality and most Examiners' reports carried a number of comments suggesting that things should have been better. As has been said many times before, it is always difficult to gauge how realistic it is to hope that critical comment can raise the performance of some. It may be that the work of these candidates does actually represent a standard which their ability does not allow them to improve upon. However, a report such as this can do no more than draw attention to failings which occur year after year in the hope that perhaps some annual small advance can be made.

The inability to read the question with sufficient care was a common failing which resulted in many candidates not receiving the reward their knowledge of the book might have warranted. Hence in **Question 26** candidates wrote a history of Napoleon's doings without really bringing out how Orwell's writing made him *hateful*. Some managed to write an answer to **Question 44** hardly looking at any of the older characters in the play, simply considering the wisdom of the lovers. Similarly in **Question 47** candidates often missed the importance of the word *fascinating*, simply writing out their character sketch of Viola. Poetry tasks were sometimes apparently selected because they featured the poem that the candidate wished to write about rather because the candidate could write upon it from the angle demanded by the question. Perhaps such responses are an indication of the limits of candidates' knowledge when faced with tasks which require not only general understanding but also evidence of thought and detailed personal

engagement with literary language and its effect. On another level, there were answers which made an Examiner wonder whether the text had been read with any understanding. There were, for instance, some quite extraordinary misunderstandings of poems like *To Autumn* and *One Flesh*. In addition, whilst it was pleasing to note that the majority of answers on poetry did try to engage with language to some degree, too often answers got no further than noting figures of speech and asserting that they were effective. For an Examiner to reward such observations the candidate must probe further and attempt to show *why* they make an effect upon the reader.

A personal engagement with detail was also often the defining difference in work on the passage-based questions. There are still many candidates who do not seem to see the importance of probing the extract in detail, preferring to use it simply as the peg upon which to hang their general views of the text. For instance, the material in answers to **Question 25** too often related to expounding on the later events in the fable at the expense of showing in detail how the moments in the passage pre-figured those events. Similarly, quite a few answers to **Question 40** were mainly contextual, possibly because the inferences and implications of the passage passed such candidates by.

The problems posed for some by the empathic tasks has already been touched upon. It was true that some candidates performed spectacularly better on these tasks than in their other answers but the converse was also true this year. It might be worth reminding candidates that this kind of task is every bit as demanding of detailed knowledge of the text as those tasks with a more traditional approach. Also, whilst it is extremely pleasing to note that Centres are now beginning to recognise this kind of task as providing a stimulus which can lift the performance of the candidate, a note of caution should be sounded for those candidates whose English is poor. Examiners are instructed to ignore the candidate's linguistic skills in assessment, provided, of course, meaning is communicated. However, empathic tasks do require of the candidate a convincing assumption of a literary character's voice and the highest grades can only be awarded to those who achieve this.

Finally, a few thoughts on irony. It must be admitted that irony – with humour – is going to present some difficulties to candidates with a limited range of English. However, it also has to be said that Examiners come across much work from such candidates which shows that it is quite possible for them to be very much aware how irony works. Hence, it has to be asked why so many could not engage with irony when, for instance, in **Question 25** there was so much ironic detail in the writing which could have been probed. The response to the tone of poems like *Diary of a Church Mouse* and *To His Coy Mistress* also showed some candidates to be quite innocent of the basic meanings in either poem because they had completely missed the ironic, satiric intent of the poets. Even more surprising were a number of candidates who had come away from studying *Absent Friends* without realising that Colin is the chief target for Ayckbourn's satire. Perhaps such responses have more to do with superficial study rather than any intrinsic difficulties candidates might have in responding to irony.

It is pleasing to report that rubric infringements continue to be fairly rare. However, it is still a significant problem in Paper 1 in a few Centres who clearly fail to drill their candidates sufficiently to fulfil the requirements of the rubric.

Most of the work on this syllabus reflects great credit upon the efforts of both candidates and teachers. There follow more detailed comments upon the candidates' responses to individual questions.

Comments on specific questions

Poetry

Questions 1-3

This was not a popular choice. The starred question and **Question 3** seemed to attract rather weak candidates who appeared very uncertain of the detail of the poems. There was better work on **Question 2** with some careful explication of the poems and occasionally some engaged comment in regard to what made the detail horrifying and shocking.

Questions 4-6

The responses to *Bogeyman* varied considerably. The candidates of some Centres were capable of making insightful comments about poetic detail and the various changing perspectives of the poem but others floundered and could not progress beyond making a few remarks about childhood fears. Of the three poems in **Question 5** *Snapshotland* was the most often chosen and evinced the best responses, though here as in the other poems the particular slant of the questions tended to be ignored. **Question 6** was the kind of task which continues to present difficulties. Most candidates did at least try to isolate rhythmic and aural features with occasional success but also usually did so with no reference to their point in the poem.

Questions 7-9

There was much work on *To Autumn* and some Examiners were very enthusiastic about the work they saw, commenting on the way many candidates traced the development of the poem and engaged with the detail of the word play. Other Examiners, however, found candidates offering a very limited range of details from the poem, sometimes noting that they hardly ventured beyond comments upon *mellow fruitfulness*. Others did little more than write about their appreciation of autumn and some had so little grasp of the poem and the concept of the seasons that they even managed to confuse Spring with Autumn. **Question 8** tended to be chosen by candidates who had something of interest to say about the poems chosen, though inevitably there were those who ignored the question and just plodded through the poem. There was some interesting work on the implications of *Snake*. *Dover Beach* and *Horses* seemed to pose a greater challenge but even here there was occasionally impressive work. Comments have already been made about the difficulties some candidates have with irony and **Question 9** illustrated this to some extent. However, that is not to say that all was wide of the target. Each poem brought forth a body of work which was very much aware of the central meanings of the poem and the way the poet's irony created them.

Prose

Questions 10-12

The greatest number of good answers on this selection came in response to **Question 11**. Perhaps this was hardly surprising since it was the obvious question on *The Secret Sharer*. However, it was encouraging to read so much probing of the complexities of the story. The starred task was at times competently tackled but sadly not very many showed much appreciation of Mansfield's humour. The answers to the empathic task on Trevor usually showed knowledge of the story but only a minority really caught his cold personality and voice. Some had misread the story to the extent of thinking that it was all about a personal vendetta against Mr Thomas.

Questions 13-15

A number of Examiners were pleased by the work on this text. The extract question, the least popular, seemed to pose the greatest problems for some, possibly because of its quite complex currents. However, there were some very good answers, as there were on Mrs Reed. Quite a few did their best to find something to say in her favour but not surprisingly all found it difficult to find much to like about her. The empathic task was often well done and some created a voice very much like Jane's with a clear grasp of why she would have been deeply unhappy with St John Rivers. The weaker candidates tended to ignore this aspect of the task.

Questions 16-18

Overall, the view of the work on this text seemed to be that, whilst there was some very good work and little that was really weak, most of it was competent rather than outstanding. Answers to **Questions 16** and **17** tended to narrate and paraphrase rather than probe Desai's words and their effect. The stranger's sarcasm, for instance, was only occasionally caught. The empathic task saw candidates usually understanding the likely responses of Mr Panwallah but only occasionally capturing the voice in which he might have couched them.

Questions 19-21

This was not a popular text. Quite a few Examiners saw no work on it. Those that did found candidates inclining towards **Question 20** and mostly answering in competent fashion. However, it would appear that, whilst most could find adequate reasons for the failures of Dick's ventures, only some could dig deep into his personality and the social pressures upon him. Indeed, in the other tasks there appeared to be only a basic understanding of the book. In the extract task only a few could really bring out what was peculiarly disturbing about Mary's liaison with Moses, about the latter's menace and about Tony's reaction to it all. Few attempted the empathic question and even fewer seemed to grasp Moses' character, quite often making him either consumed with remorse or some crusader against white racism and oppression rather than a man concerned about honour and revenge.

Questions 22-24

Again, this was not a popular text; many Examiners saw no work. However, those that did were generally complimentary. They noted that in the extract question, whilst the answers were usually at least competent, candidates tended to focus upon the relationship between Lukas and Nina at the expense of the hints about the former's strange affinity with the sea. The most frequently attempted task was the one on Fielia. This not surprisingly often brought forth impressively knowledgeable and engaged writing. Equally good seems to have been the assumptions of Barta. One Examiner wrote that in her years of examining she had not met more impressive empathic work.

Questions 25-27

In this the most popular of prose texts it was not surprising to note that all Examiners found a full range of work. For the most part Examiners were spared page upon page of writing on the Russian Revolution, though there were still pockets of that where candidates still refused to engage with the fable as literature and with Orwell as a writer. As has already been stated, the quality of the work on **Question 25** tended to hinge on the candidate's capacity to probe the ironies of the passage as evident in Orwell's writing. For the majority, though, there was too much a tendency to use the passage simply as a starting point for narration of events in the book. In **Question 26** most candidates could make some sensible comments about what made Napoleon undesirable but, of course, *hateful* required rather closer contact with the text than most seemed willing to make. As has been said, the empathic task did at times sharply differentiate between candidates. There was much impressive work but also some which showed the most palpable lack of detailed knowledge of the text.

Questions 28-30

Again quite a few Examiners saw no work on this text. Those who did reported in conflicting ways. Some Centres clearly showed considerable engagement in all three tasks with Ruth's predicament and sometimes wrote movingly. However, in most of the work candidates seem to have had difficulty in breaking free from simple narrative to arrive at insightful analysis.

Questions 31-33

There was some quite good work on the extract, though the task demanded close attention to the detail of the writing which it did not always receive. Most who attempted **Question 32** had something arguable to say. Responses ranged from a minority who thought that Allie gave his children some worthwhile experience (tending at times to ignore the thrust of Theroux's words) to those who thought him an unmitigated disaster as a father. Indeed, the weakness of too many answers from either side of the fence lay in the lack of detailed support for the argument from the text. Hence, the tone of Theroux's writing was rarely co-opted to nail a point. The empathic task was the least popular; perhaps Mr Haddy's thoughts were felt to be somewhat elusive.

Drama**Questions 34-36**

Not very many Centres offered this play, which in some ways was a pity since some of the work on the extract question showed how much candidates had relished its humour and satire. Some candidates also had a very good grasp of just how awful Colin is and just how his egocentric smugness spreads catastrophe around him. Unfortunately, he was catastrophic in another way since some candidates were so unaware of Aykbourn's satiric purposes as to deem him the hero of the play. A mis-reading of that proportion sadly left little opportunity for an Examiner to give much reward.

Questions 37-39

Examiners expressed general approval of the work on this play. They noted the way candidates were able to write lucidly about the issues raised by the extract and how many were engaged with the drama of this particular moment. If there was a weakness, it was that some spent too much time writing about the context before engaging with the detail of the passage. Similarly, whilst there was some penetrating work on **Question 38**, there was also a lot which had a general grasp of the role played by the parents but failed to move from generalities to specifics. There were some very good assumptions of Willie and also one or two who for reasons only known to themselves chose to write in Sam's voice.

Questions 40-42

Examiners offered conflicting views on the quality of work on this play. The majority, probably marking candidates who had a detailed rather than a general knowledge, thought that both in the extract question and **Question 41** there was much engagement with the drama. Some candidates really explored in depth the significance of Jim in the passage at this pivotal moment in the play whilst others explored the importance of Ann's personality and not simply her actions. Conversely, it was reported that many candidates used the passage as a coat peg upon which to hang a discursive survey of the play as a whole, whilst others in **Question 41** did no more than narrate the turn of events following Ann's arrival. In addition, most Examiners thought that the empathic task was not done particularly well, only a few candidates capturing the likely complexity and contradictory nature of Kate's thoughts. Too many were content to have her simply bemoaning her lot.

Questions 43-45

There was a great body of work on this play and hence Examiners met a wide variety of accomplishment. The consensus, though, seemed to be that the good outweighed the mediocre or poor. The extract question differentiated those who were able to pick their way through the dramatic detail of a passage from those who were only able to comment on the general situation. There were some really good candidates who captured the ebb and flow of the scene very well right down to Tybalt's final growl. There was some equally impressive work on **Question 44** but here there was often a strange choice of material. Some candidates contented themselves with exploring only one of the older characters in the light of the task, usually Friar Lawrence, and sometimes wrote a character sketch with little of the argument the question encouraged. It remains curious how some candidates have a touching faith in the Friar's wisdom and even that of the Nurse. Be that as it may, here there was at least a viewpoint which could be accepted. This was hardly the case when candidates decided to go beyond an occasional legitimate comparison with younger characters and simply wrote their essay on the wisdom or otherwise of Romeo and Juliet. There were a few equally cavalier candidates in the empathic question who decided they would rather write as Romeo. There were also a greater number who thought that a page of romantic gush was what was required to conjure up Juliet. However, an impressive number did precisely that, presenting often very movingly the girl's bewilderment, fears and doubts as well as her feelings of joy.

Questions 46-48

There seems to have been little weak work on this play but equally reading Examiners' comments led to the impression that this sparkling comedy often produced responses which were a trifle disappointing. One Examiner described the work as 'stodgy'. Hence, whilst candidates dealt efficiently enough with the misunderstandings of the extract, it was only infrequently that the amusement was conveyed. As has already been noted, candidates usually had a good knowledge of Viola's characteristics but seemed unwilling or unable to go the next step and engage with her fascination as a dramatic personality. There were, though, a few very lively impersonations of Sir Toby. It was just a pity that some of that life did not seem to permeate the work on the other tasks.

Questions 49-51

As last year, there were some surprisingly strong responses to this play. One calls it surprising because Wilde does present very particular problems, which at times in the past have been beyond the capacity of candidates to cope with. That is still true with some candidates but the majority seemed able to delineate the issues raised by the extract with some clarity and thought. **Question 50** was not quite so straightforward since this required at best some interpretation of what lies behind the wit. However, some did that well and produced a well researched argument. At the other end of the scale there were answers whose range was very limited. While some second language users were perhaps ill advised to attempt **Question 51**, there were a few who managed to capture Lord Goring's drollery very well indeed.

Paper 0486/02**Coursework****General comments**

Once again there was much pleasing work on display. There was perhaps a little more evidence this year that Centres were encouraging candidates to take seriously the intention of the component to encourage wider reading. Last year Centres were also asked to ensure that tasks encouraged candidates in their essays to meet all instead of some of the syllabus assessment objectives, particularly the one which for higher reward demands engagement with and analysis of literary language and its effect. It is pleasing to note that, with one exception, all the Centres seemed to have taken note of this guidance with the result that the External Moderator found little to complain about in relation to the tasks set. In addition, the teacher annotations on the essays and the majority of those on the student record card under *Teacher Comments* suggested that assessment was being made with the assessment criteria firmly in mind. The one exception was a Centre which accepted plot summaries and text notes as worthwhile IGCSE coursework. From the beginning of IGCSE the principle was established that candidates were expected to write whole essays and that little reward would be given to simple narrative. That remains as true now as it was then.

As regards the administration, that was usually satisfactory, sometimes better than that. Some Centres present the folders in a meticulous fashion. However, it has also to be reported that a minority of Centres still do not seem to see the importance of doing this work properly and how, if they do not, they could be endangering the futures of their candidates. What is an External Moderator to think of a Centre which filled in its own mark sheet rather than CIE's and then proceeded to give the wrong candidate numbers to a complete set? What is the External Moderator to think of another Centre where it was thought that the long term absence of a member of staff absolved the department from filling in the comment section on any of the student record cards in that teacher's set, and this despite the presumption that the department had assessed and moderated the folders? These are, fortunately, rare and extreme instances. By contrast, other Centres are very helpful. From reading the record cards of their candidates the External Moderator can see at once that proper moderation has taken place and that the folders have been assessed according to the assessment objectives. In such cases, possibly because the willingness to give full details is a consequence of a rigorous moderation, it is fairly unusual for the External Moderator to disagree with the marks given. Conversely, questions arise in the External Moderator's mind about moderation procedures when what passes for a commentary on the characteristics of work in a folder simply informs the Moderator that the candidate has been a model student, has loved reading and has worked hard. The component is examining the candidates' *work*, not their personalities.

As usual, all Centres will receive an individual report on their sample of coursework.

Paper 0486/03**Alternative to Coursework****General comments**

The Examiners were pleased with the wide range of responses to Carol Ann Duffy's poem and the strength and conviction with which they were developed. They ranged from deep moral censure or contempt to pity and empathy. The Examiners welcomed this variety. As long as the candidate was able to make a clear, strong case using the words of the poem as support, Examiners did not look for one definitive response to the thief's personality and actions and wished candidates to express their views with genuine honesty.

There were few misunderstandings. A significant minority of candidates did not understand the word 'thrill', and thought that the thief was actually concerned about the children's distress. The concept of 'joy-riding' was not always understood, but Examiners took less notice of this as the misunderstanding was based clearly on cultural differences. More serious was the confusion, for a few candidates, between the identity of the poet and the persona.

There were two aspects of candidates' work which especially led to differentiation. First was the complexity of response. Many candidates seized on one or two explicit statements by the thief, the favourites being, "Part of the thrill was knowing/that children would cry in the morning" and "Mostly I'm so bored I could eat myself" and built up an analysis of the thief's personality from this narrow information. Their answers may have seemed often reasonably convincing and fluent, but were essentially limited. Examiners were disappointed by the number of candidates who omitted any consideration of the fourth stanza, which invariably deepened any assessment of the thief's personality. Likewise, the third stanza, rich with nuances of expression and ambiguities, was a splendid source of material for all those who were brave enough to explore it. Indeed one Examiner commented on the way that many candidates seemed to get into their stride only as they progressed to these later stanzas.

The other aspect was the ability to explore the language of the poem. The response to the third bullet point varied hugely. There were far too many candidates who either ignored it completely or made a very sketchy comment on the slang used by the thief, ignoring the much more startling use of words earlier in the poem. There will be always an opportunity in this paper for candidates to comment on the way a writer uses words as this is the essence of this exercise in literary appreciation. It has been argued in past reports that candidates should not approach the examination with a preformed agenda of literary devices to be identified irrespective of the poem or prose to be discussed, but while the Examiners expressed their appreciation that this tendency was much reduced this year, they also were concerned that it was only a minority of candidates who fully understood how to explore the poetry of the answer. As one Examiner said, "Most candidates seemed to understand the need to refer to the text and to quote. Far fewer understood the nature of *exploring* the text in their answers." So, while Examiners did not, as a matter of course, receive a sterile, routine identification of similes, for example, neither did they read many comments on the fierce effect of the prevailing imagery of cold. While they did not find a routine listing of repetitions, neither did they come across very many candidates who commented on the aggression behind the repetition of the word "again" and its implications for an understanding of the persona. A number of candidates, however, did note and explore the effect of the symmetry of the questions introducing and concluding the poem.

Also there was little response to the sound of the poem. Examiners hoped that candidates would let the words of the poem sound in their heads – after all, the sound of words is an essential feature of *all* poetry. They hoped that, in this particular case, sounds like "slice of ice" would resonate, that candidates would be struck by the tone of the bald, short sentences and describe the effect of the syntax on them, that they might also speculate on the sound of "aah" or might explore the development of the emotional progress of the thief's monologue through the changing rhythms of the poetry.

Some candidates did much of this brilliantly. One suspects that these candidates had had a lot of practice, established over a number of years, in reading and discussing a wide range of poems, and gradually learnt, through this method, the nature of the poet's art. For those who had learnt the theory without having practice in applying it regularly, it was in the words of one Examiner, "as if they had studied car maintenance without the car in front of them and lacked the confidence or facility needed when the real thing turned up".

Finally, a few words about the handling of the bullet points in the question. Candidates might be advised to look at the wording of these very carefully. There was only one question in this paper: *Say what you think about the thief*. However, the directions following were not merely advisory; they were mandatory. (If they were advisory only there would have been some indication like "you *may* refer in your answer....".) One Examiner wrote, "The bullet points were often ignored: sometimes a chronological account of the poem was given; this generally worked quite well. A much less successful approach was to go through the poem with a given list of things to comment on e.g. intention, structure, mood etc. Candidates would be far better served if they used the bullet points given them as a help to get inside the poem. They should have faith in the question setter and realise he is on their side." While this is true, this does not mean that the bullet points need necessarily dictate the structure of the answer to the main question. Weaker or average candidates might well be advised to use them as a prop to aid the planning of their answer but stronger candidates might feel greater freedom if they were to take a more holistic approach. Such candidates might be advised to ensure that all the information that is being asked for *is* covered, but to be more independent in the *construction* of their response.