

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/31 Poetry and Prose</p>

Key messages

- Responses which rely on knowledge of the content of texts only are not successful.
- Successful responses focus on the writing of the texts and how the content is presented to the reader.
- Successful responses use specific references and quotations to support points in essays. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own material to answer the question.
- Successful essays develop a line of argument in response to the question, developing points to a conclusion.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.

General comments

There was much thoughtful work on Frost and Lahiri in particular this session, although the two Cambridge anthologies also remain popular options. Most candidates showed a reasonable grasp of the content and meaning of their chosen texts, while those who actively engaged with the ways in which they are written, looking closely at the effects of the writers' choices of language, imagery, form and structure, were notably more successful. At the upper end of the mark range, examiners read some coherent and persuasive arguments, supported by detailed and deft analysis of the writers' methods, evaluating the ways their works communicate to readers and audiences. Some less successful essays looked at textual detail abstracted from meaning; focusing on words, phrases or images taken out of their context in the text has little value.

Comments on specific questions

1 Robert Frost: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** There were not many responses to this question, but 'Home Burial' was the most frequently used poem, paired with others such as 'The Death of the Hired Man' and 'Mending Wall.' The most successful responses concentrated clearly on interactions of dialogue and exchanges of views where the tension is clear, with the lines of dialogue clearly indicating opposing perspectives. Here the strength of emotions indicated in the dialogue between husband and wife in 'Home Burial' provided particularly useful material. Some candidates interpreted 'speech' as the speaker or persona of the poem, which was usually a less successful approach to the question.
- (b)** Many responses featured comments on Frost's rural background and the focus on work in a number of his poems. The act of mowing was linked with this and a number of candidates found little further to say. However, for those who examined the poem really closely it proved a rewarding question and discussion often began with the sounds of the poem, focusing on the personification of the scythe, the 'whispering' created through language and sibilance and the dreamlike state created through the sound and the 'heat of the sun'. There were also comments about communication, with the reference to whispering and not speaking in the poem, combined with the casual, meditative and conversational tone of the poem created through questions, phrasing and caesuras. Several essays did not focus on the closing lines and therefore missed the key in l. 13, which equates the reality of physical labour with 'the sweetest dream'.

2 Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) A relatively low number of candidates answered on Jennings and the vast majority of them responded to the question on 'One Flesh.' Many readings of the poem, though, were unsubtle, focusing on 'Strangely apart' and ignoring the parallel 'yet strangely close together'. Some actually referred to the parents as 'hating' each other and resisting separation only of the sake of the child. More successful answers looked carefully at the language of separation through the poem – 'apart', 'separate', 'He', 'She' – and wrote sensitively about ways in which the poem depicts an elderly couple who have been through 'passion' and 'fire', but now face 'Chastity'. Perceptive candidates noted the tone of sympathy in the poem, as the couple hold 'Silence between them like a thread' while time's 'feather/Touch[es] them lightly'. These responses noted that the poem is the speaker's imagination and guesswork, full of musing and questions in the observation of the parents. This allowed some thoughtful focus on structure, noting the effects of the balanced phrases, the corrections and caesuras.

3 *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2*

- (a) This question offered candidates a good range of poems to choose from, and they usually chose well, with some pursuing disappointment in love while others considered disillusionment with society and the world we live in. Popular and successful choices were 'The Forsaken Wife', 'These Are The Times We Live In', 'The White House' and 'The Migrant'. On the whole, essays demonstrated an ability to select relevant material from the poems, with stronger responses moving beyond content and mood to include some effective exploration of language choices and poetic techniques. Candidates need to be wary of the temptation to write about structure and rhyme scheme, however, without a clear link to the question and the specific meaning of the poem; there were some very speculative assertions.
- (b) Successful answers to this question clearly engaged with the central theatrical metaphor and charted its development through the sonnet, noting the shift from octave to sestet with 'Then...'. Such work explored the use of measurements ('mile', 'span', 'inch', 'minute'), the personification of death and the ideas exploring the separation of body and soul. Less accomplished responses did not note the reference to 'language and form... develop ideas' in the question and were restricted to general summary and references to biographical, religious and historical context, which were not always accurate. It is very important for candidates to respond to the question set, and be able to develop a coherent reading of the selected poem.

4 Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) Despite the popularity of this text, there were not many responses to this question. While there were some knowledgeable responses, Examiners noted a paucity of direct reference and quotations to support points, which weakened otherwise strong answers. Some essays compared different homes in the novel, looking at, for example, the Gangulis' home, the house of Maxine's parents and Gogol and Moushumi's apartment, reflecting on ways in which décor and style reflects the occupants and their values. Others considered a more philosophical idea of home, considering where different characters feel at home, which of course is not always within their actual homes. Such answers often finally centred on Ashima and ways in which Lahiri demonstrates her growing ease with home being America and ends the novel balanced between her two homes, India and the USA.
- (b) Far more candidates opted for the key passage where Ashoke presents Gogol with the copy of his namesake's stories, and nearly all candidates recognised the significance of this moment in the novel. While a number of essays discussed this significance and the relationship between father and son in a general way, successful responses carefully considered Lahiri's writing in the passage and the effects of her presentation of this moment. Strong answers looked carefully at the way the writing describes Gogol's careless dismissal of his father's gift and Lahiri's use of details which illustrate his increasingly American identity. Strong responses were also attentive to the description of Ashoke and his clumsy personalisation of the gift, which highlights the significance of the moment. Candidates were often critical of Gogol for his ingratitude, but many would have benefited from greater attention to the description of Nikolai Gogol. Some, though, picked up on details such as the word 'supercilious' and suggested that Gogol is wrong to say there is 'no' link to his namesake, as that quality is clearly a feature of his own behaviour to his parents. This is an

example of where a really detailed reading brings greater rewards of understanding and appreciation.

5 Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) There were very few responses to *The House of Mirth*. In the small number of answers to this question, candidates were able to discuss Lily's character and offer views of how far they sympathised with her, but found it more challenging to answer the question of how Wharton's presentation of Lily shapes the reader's response.
- (b) Unusually with a novel, there were fewer responses to the passage question, with too few to make a general comment appropriate.

6 *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) It should be stated at the outset that there were examples of misinterpretation or misunderstanding of this question, as a number of candidates took 'old age' not to refer to the state of being elderly, but as 'old ages' – times gone by. This led to some unusual choices of stories, but examiners gave what credit they could according to how the question seemed to have been understood. Among the more successful responses, the favoured stories tended to be 'Secrets,' Grace's 'Journey,' 'Five-Twenty' and 'The Stoat', which clearly feature older characters. There was interesting discussion of how the letters reveal that Great Aunt Mary is defined by the loss of love in her youthful past in 'Secrets', while the old man's dissatisfaction with the contemporary world around him is expressed in Grace's use of focalised narration. Many candidates expressed their sympathy for Ella's position in 'Five-Twenty', while others sympathised with the son's jaundiced view of his father and Miss McCabe in 'The Stoat', assisted by the point of view of the narration and the metaphor in the story's title.
- (b) Responses to this question usually dealt well with the question of Ravi and his situation, and there was some genuinely personal engagement with his emotions at the end of the passage, as well as the way the other children treat him. There was some evident appreciation of Desai's presentation of Ravi's anguish, with her use of detail in the twilight and the melancholy chant. Candidates generally dealt well with the end of the passage, exploring the significance of the final game, and the description of Ravi lying on the ground. Although the selections from the passage were usually relevant, less confident candidates did not address the language choices and literary techniques as much as they might have done – content was clearly understood and used appropriately, but there was less on the literary features, such as the effect of specific choices of diction or Desai's powerful imagery in the passage.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/32
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

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- Successful responses use specific references and quotations to support points in essays. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own material to answer the question.
- Successful essays develop a line of argument in response to the question, developing points to a conclusion.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.

General comments

There was much thoughtful work on Frost and Lahiri in particular this session, although the two Cambridge anthologies also remain popular options. Most candidates showed a reasonable grasp of the content and meaning of their chosen texts, while those who actively engaged with the ways in which they are written, looking closely at the effects of the writers' choices of language, imagery, form and structure, were notably more successful. At the upper end of the mark range, examiners read some coherent and persuasive arguments, supported by detailed and deft analysis of the writers' methods, evaluating the ways their works communicate to readers and audiences. Some less successful essays looked at textual detail abstracted from meaning; focusing on words, phrases or images taken out of their context has little value.

Comments on specific questions

1 Robert Frost: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** Some responses to this question demonstrated the necessity of choosing material carefully, as answers featuring poems with neither clear characters nor speech were not successful. 'Birches' and 'The Road Not Taken' appeared frequently, but were not helpful for this question. Candidates enjoyed far greater success with 'The Ax-Helve', exploring the voice and character of Baptiste, overcoming the suspicion of the narrator; the distrust, sorrow and incomprehension between the couple in 'Home Burial'; the balance of care and impatience in the dialogue in 'The Death of the Hired Man'; or the casual nature of the minister's descriptions and information in 'The Black Cottage.' Strong answers looked at the language and structure of the speech, considering how voice suggests character; while less confident responses tended to rely on the narrative of the poems.
- (b)** 'There Are Roughly Zones' was a popular choice and answers benefited from a careful reading of the poem. Some less successful responses missed the subtleties in the poem and offered a narrative view that the human beings had simply killed the peach tree, missing the language of 'roughly' zones and 'no fixed line,' instead focusing exclusively on what 'must be obeyed'. Most noted the initial separation between 'indoors' and 'outside', the human and natural worlds, while many thoughtfully focused on 'this limitless trait in the hearts of men', as well as the choice of the word 'betrayed', suggesting that man feels nature is at fault rather than him. Interesting discussion of human ambition, and how it affects the natural world, was successful when closely linked to the poem, which has plenty of detail to consider. There were some interesting responses which examined Frost's use of rhetorical questions to consider the relationship between humanity and nature; the use of inner thoughts to show human arrogance when breaking nature's rules; the

irregularity of the rhyme scheme to suggest broken rules; and the use of enjambment and short sentences within lines to explain actions. Confident responses identified three clear sections of the poem, with the middle section being Frost's meditative consideration of the arrogance of human beings in dealing with nature.

2 Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) There were a very few answers to this question, with candidates using poems such as 'Absence', 'Song For A Departure' and 'Father To Son'. Most tended to take a narrative approach, identifying the element of suffering in each poem, and missing opportunities to examine the presentation of suffering.
- (b) While there were some exceptional answers to this question, discussing the poem's philosophical ideas, its voice and the role of the priest, many candidates struggled with its meaning and complexity. Jennings can be a challenging poet and this poem was best tackled by candidates who were confident in their understanding of its handling of religious ideas. Stronger responses identified the central concern with the transubstantiation of Christ into bread and wine and its role in Christian communion. They were also able to make the clear link between harvest and communion as an on-going cycle, with the persona's exploration of the strength of their faith. Such discussion was successful when supported by detailed textual references, considering Jennings' choices of language and the structure of the poem.

3 *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2*

- (a) This was a popular question, and relevant poems were usually chosen, 'The Forsaken Wife', 'Song', 'Sons, Departing' and 'On My First Daughter' being the most popular. There was some secure knowledge of the poems, with more confident candidates exploring different types of absence and different ways of dealing with it, looking at the hope Jonson gleans from his faith, for example, in contrast to the defiant anger of the forsaken wife, or the ambivalence between loss and acceptance of the sons' new opportunities in 'Sons, Departing.' While less successful answers focused more on the nature of the absence in a descriptive way, confident responses looked closely at ways in which the feeling of absence are conveyed in the poems, well supported with direct references and quotations.
- (b) Blake's 'To the Evening Star' was a very popular option, though assumptions and errors were frequent – the evening star was sometimes taken for the moon, for example, and many asserted that it was God, some even forgoing reference to a 'star' at all. The contradiction between that assertion and the star being addressed as an 'angel' was not noted. Similarly, some candidates stated that the poem was both a sonnet and free verse simultaneously. Less confident answers worked through a narrative account of the poem, not always accurately, with the reference to the 'wolf' and 'lion' often proving problematic. More successful responses started with the personification of 'angel' and considered how Blake presents the star as a protector and guide, looking at the gentle beauty of the imagery of night, augmented by sibilance. The 'wolf' and the 'lion' were seen as symbolic of the dangers apparent when the star declines; the 'flocks' which might be their victims need its lasting protection. The strongest answers linked these ideas closely with Blake's choices of language and imagery, and the way the poem is structured.

4 Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) Less successful responses tended to rely on narrative and focused almost exclusively on Gogol. Others selected a wider range of characters, but tended to list them and provide a summary of each. These were more successful, but competent answers used the question's instruction to consider 'ways in which' personal identity is explored and constructed an argument about Lahiri's narrative. Many answers focused on how personal identity is shaped by cultural identity and looked at the pairing of the characters of Gogol and Moushumi, often with reference to Maxine and Graham, who could not share nor fully understand Bengali culture. Others referred to the contrast Lahiri creates between Gogol and Sonia, with Gogol's sister much more at ease with her Americanness. There were also essays which looked at how places, and the travel between them, contribute to identity, and of course there was considerable discussion of Lahiri's focus on names in the novel. There was also some good work on Ashoke and Ashima, with Ashoke's identity shaped by Ghosh and the train crash, while Ashima, initially apparently passive, is shown to develop a stronger sense of her own identity as the novel progresses.

- (b) The passage was very popular, and while some answers were restricted to narrative summary with a few assertions, many responded well to the suggestions of Lahiri's writing, looking at the nostalgia of Ashima's snack, while a number of details and word choices indicate the physical endurance of her pregnancy. Other features of the text which were noted included Ashima's embarrassment in wearing the cotton gown; the incompetence of the nurse in trying to fold the sari; and Ashoke's exclusion from the preparations for birth – all of which point to a lack of understanding of cultural differences. Several candidates noted Ashoke's use of Bengali to speak to Ashima to reassure her. The immediacy of the passage through the use of the present tense was sometimes noted and there were some effective comments on how the language changes the mood at the end of the passage as Ashima loses all control over events as she is 'seated', 'pushed', 'whisked' and 'assigned'.

5 Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) While examiners saw quite a number of narrative essays listing female characters, many candidates responded well to the prompt quotation and discussed a range of the novel's women in terms of their relationship with Lily – her mother, her aunt, Judy Trenor, Gerty Farish, Carrie Fisher and Bertha Dorset. The latter character was considered by many to be the arch villain of the novel, mainly responsible for Lily's downfall. More thoughtful responses also considered female relationships which are not exploitative or characterised by jealousy. They discussed, for example, the importance of the genuine friendship Lily forms with Nettie Struther, while Gerty Farish is presented as a foil to other women throughout the novel and proves to be a good friend to the end. To avoid narrative, candidates should think about Wharton's use of pairings and contrasts between characters, her shaping of certain key events and the use of dialogue to indicate character.
- (b) Candidates who responded to this passage dealt with the relationship between Lily and Selden with some sensitivity. They were usually able to link it appropriately to the wider novel without losing sight of the passage, and there was some thoughtful consideration of some of the subtleties of Wharton's language: the folding away of the note as 'something made precious by the fact that she had held it'; the fact that 'he *had* loved her'; and the final sentence of the passage. Successful responses explored how Wharton presents Selden's dawning realisation of Lily's innocence and his self-recrimination which follows. In relating the extract to the whole novel, some candidates withdrew their sympathy for Selden, claiming that he remains a cynical observer of the society he frequents for too long and proves to be just as gullible in believing scandalous gossip as the rest. Some candidates commented on the amount of text in the passage focusing on bills, receipts and cheques, noting how this reflected the significance of money and the possession, or lack, of it in the novel as a whole.

6 *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) The question was a broad one and successful candidates focused it, usually on the presentation of unhappy or antagonistic human relationships. Using this angle, 'The Yellow Wall Paper', 'The Lemon Orchard', 'Secrets', 'The Stroat', 'Five-Twenty' and both 'Journey' stories were frequently used. Less successful answers relied on narration, describing events and the relationships, while more confident essays considered the shaping of stories and how relationships are developed or change, while others considered dialogue, structure or symbolism as appropriate to the choices of story. There was particularly strong work on Royal and Ella in 'Five-Twenty', looking at setting, clothing and dialogue, and the narrator and Great Aunt Mary in 'Secrets', looking at the structure, the device of the letters and the sense of desolation at the end.
- (b) Candidates who recognised and appreciated Waugh's satirical humour wrote with enthusiasm about this passage. They were, however, in the minority, as most essays took the extract at face value, condemning the oppression of the poor by the ruling class, commenting on people having to go 'to court' for building in Much Malcock, and taking Lady Peabury's 'sin' of 'reading a novel before luncheon' very seriously, seeing it as a sad reflection on her character. This naturally skewed the reading of the passage and limited appreciation of Waugh's writing and its effects. Stronger answers looked closely at ways in which Waugh presents the characters and their attitudes, identifying the satirical tone in the hyperbole in the opening paragraph, for example, with language such as 'hideous', 'obscene', 'horror' and 'plague.' Some precise answers noted that Metcalf's business-like language sets him apart from the other village residents socially, while others noted the selfishness and hypocrisy exhibited by the apex of that society, Lady Peabury, belittled even by her name.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/33
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

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General comments

There was much thoughtful work on Frost and Lahiri in particular, although the two Cambridge anthologies also remain popular options. Most candidates showed a reasonable grasp of the content and meaning of their chosen texts, while those who actively engaged with the ways in which they are written, looking closely at the effects of the writers' choices of language, imagery, form and structure, were notably more successful. At the upper end of the mark range, examiners read some coherent and persuasive arguments, supported by detailed and deft analysis of the writers' methods, evaluating the ways their works communicate to readers and audiences. Some less successful essays looked at textual detail abstracted from meaning; focusing on words, phrases or images taken out of their context has little value.

Comments on specific questions

1 Robert Frost: *Selected Poems*

- (a)** Success in this question relied on the appropriate choice of poems, with candidates opting for examples which did not feature 'conversations between people' naturally struggling to organise a coherent response. More successful attempts referred to such poems as 'Home Burial', the most popular choice, with 'The Death of the Hired Man' and 'The Ax-Helve'. Some of these answers relied on a narrative account of the poems and the conversations, while more confident responses paid attention to the question's focus on the 'effects' of the poems, and considered the subtextual pathos in 'Home Burial' and 'The Death of the Hired Man' and the ways in which the conversations manage conflict, while the nuances of the neighbourly relationship between the speaker of the poem and Baptiste were explored in 'The Ax-Helve'.
- (b)** There were a number of descriptive readings of this poem, seeing it as a work about meaningless drudgery which is dully resented by the speaker. Such essays missed the lightness of tone in the poem and the playfulness of some of the imagery. Candidates who were alert to Frost's imagery engaged well with the first stanza particularly, and tracked the progression of ideas through the poem to the conclusion that there is something of value in the mundane task after all. Such answers balanced the sense of childish delight in the 'balloons' and 'spoons' imagery with the sense of frustration and melancholy in the task's thanklessness, reflected in the repetition in the poem ('load and unload / Again and again', 'Next to nothing... Next to nothing'). There was some good discussion of humanity's relationship with the natural world, about the nature of physical work and about the potential for the poem symbolising the process of creating poetry – here there was some very fine, perceptive and detailed writing.

2 Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were few responses to this poem and very few among these who examined the significance of the Utrillo painting of the nun 'climbing up those steps', comparing the image with the difficulties faced by the patients on the way to full mental health – in many cases the reference to Utrillo was ignored and the nun taken to be a nurse in the hospital, despite the fact that she is said to be in 'Montmartre'. It was often the case that candidates seemed to be taking on a poem where they were not confident of their understanding. Some other answers were too concerned with Jennings's biography, rather than her poetry, but more confident responses considered the point of view in the poem, the extremity of the imagery, the idea of the shifting room and the view of the visitors. Some commented on the irony of it not being 'a time for lucid rhyming' despite the composition of the poem, noting the neat stanzas but also the half-rhymes in the attempt to control and organise the experience.

3 *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2*

- (a) 'Verses Written on her Death-bed' was the most popular choice for this question, with some candidates contrasting it with a loving relationship gone sour in 'The Forsaken Wife' or a lamenting parental relationship in 'On My First Daughter' or 'Sons, Departing'. As is usually the case with these questions, candidates who relied on narrative, or even speculative accounts of the relationships, were not successful in answering the question, while confident responses paid close attention to 'ways in which' the relationships are presented, considering point of view, tone, language, imagery and structure.
- (b) Sidney's 'To Sleep' attracted more responses, which at their best demonstrated careful analysis of the personification of both Sleep and Despair, as well as some engagement with the release from cares that sleep offers, not to mention its role as an 'indifferent judge'. The question of tribute was often also well addressed, with most candidates also making sense of the important last line and the reference to Stella. Ideas and imagery in the poem were, therefore, often well addressed. Very strong responses also engaged with the structure of the sonnet and how it is used to develop the poem's ideas. Less confident essays were less able to follow the progression of ideas, sometimes taking the reference to 'civil wars' literally and showing bafflement as to whom Stella might be. This was also an example of a poem where a number of candidates discussed word choices and images out of context, abstracted from their place in the developing meaning of the poem, and therefore often made crucial errors of understanding.

4 Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

- (a) The prompt quotation proved a good starting point for many candidates and answers which referred to it tended to be more successful as it helped them shape a response to the question. Many responses focused solely on Gogol; essays which teased out the relationship between Gogol and Nikhil, and to what extent Gogol gains anything meaningful from his name change, structured a thoughtful response. A few considered the irony of his choosing the name which he refuses on his arrival at primary school, while others discussed the significance of Gogol as a name bestowed by his father. Others made useful references to Ashoke, Ashima, Sonia and Moushumi, while there was also relevant consideration of American and Indian attitudes to naming, with reference to the light-hearted discussion of names at Donald and Astrid's dinner party, as a contrast to the 'sacred' quality of Bengali names.
- (b) Many candidates who responded to this question demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the wider text as well as a sensitive understanding of the incident detailed in the passage. A number of candidates wrote effectively about the ways in which Lahiri shows Ashima and Maxine developing a bond, and the role Maxine plays in putting Gogol's parents at ease and winning them over. Some candidates saw some humour in Ashoke's hand gesture and evidence of his general anxiety and 'fear of disaster', an established character trait linked back to the train accident. There was also good discussion of the ways Lahiri presents the passage from Gogol's point of view, and therefore contrasts his unease and critical impatience with Maxine's ease and friendliness. Many commented on the elaborate dining arrangements and the excessive amount of food, which Gogol finds embarrassing, but which candidates saw as a desire to please, though some suggested relief in Ashima's boxing-up of the food and Ashoke's encouragement for the couple to drive away before dark. Again, those essays which described the scene and characters' behaviour did not do well;

successful answers depended on careful discussion of the effects of the ways in which Lahiri presents these aspects of the passage.

5 Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

- (a) There were not many responses to this question and it was rare to see a balanced response that considered Lily and Selden equally within the relationship; most essays focused primarily on Lily. More successful essays picked up the cue quotation and looked at ways in which Wharton toys with the idea of love between Selden and Lily throughout the novel, from their first meeting at the railway station to the tragic ending. Such responses considered Selden's habitual detachment which holds him back and Lily's need for a wealthy husband; these recognised that Wharton sets the characters in the context of the restrictions put on them by their society. There were strong arguments about Selden and Lily being suited to love each other, but never being able to voice it, the cue quotation being the closest they get before the deathbed scene.
- (b) This extract elicited some strong responses from those who opted for it, with some careful observations of Wharton's indications of body language – Lily's sign to follow and Mrs Haffen's folded arms. There was also some well-aimed criticism of Lily, recognising that once away from the elite, her social graces no longer assure her of victory. There were also some suggestions of Wharton's own snobbery in the portrayal of Mrs Haffen, described as one 'of her kind', with ungrammatical speech and her 'dirty newspaper'. Narrative did not take candidates very far with this passage as the event within it is small, but the extract repaid careful and detailed examination of ways in which Wharton presents the two women and this moment of challenge. Strong answers were also able to bring in their wider knowledge of the novel, with references to Selden and Bertha Dorset and the role the letter plays later in the novel.

6 *Stories of Ourselves*

- (a) The two 'Journey' stories were obvious choices for this question, but 'The Lemon Orchard' was also widely used, while some candidates interpreted the idea of a journey metaphorically and used 'Secrets' and 'Games at Twilight' with some success. Successful answers required a confident communication of what journey was being considered and a clear focus on that, so that discussions of Grace's story which only wrote about Maori land right, were not successful responses to the question. Confident responses looked at the journeys as ones which created change, realisations or had significant destinations, and all the stories listed above gave candidates ample opportunity for fruitful exploration.
- (b) There were some very thoughtful responses to this passage, which recognised how the letters are pivotal to an understanding of the whole story. They traced the ways the writer shows the gradual change in tone of the letters, the frequent expressions of love, tender observations and fond memories being replaced by a literal and metaphorical numbing of John's feelings, anger and the conviction that the writer 'will be a different person' after the war – Brother Benignus, of course, although unknown at that point. There was also some careful observation of the indications of the young boy's growing fascination in the letters, the first one 'carefully' returned to its envelope, but later ones left while he 'opened another.' Some candidates examined the language of the letters and ways in which they graphically reveal the horrors of the First World War, while most recognised that the reading of the letters creates the rift between the boy and his Great Aunt Mary. Such essays considered how the very private nature of the letters, set against description of older Aunt Mary, explain why she is so absolutely enraged at the boy and so unforgiving. Some less confident responses did not recognise the significance of the letters to the story nor who the writer was and thus were unable to move much further than descriptive accounts of their content.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/41
Drama

Key messages

- Successful responses show strong awareness of genre and its implications.
- Frequent use of the author's name often demonstrates a willingness to think of the text as a made thing, thus focusing attention on technique as well as theme.
- If there is a prompt at the beginning of a question, responses need to engage directly with it as well as with the general issue raised.

General comments

Successful candidates show a clear awareness of the texts as plays. Weak answers do not display this awareness, and instead treat the people in the plays as though they are, in some way, real. At a slightly higher level, some candidates comment in detail about the significance of punctuation or capital letters, which has little bearing on the play's meaning and effects. Successful answers discuss what is on the page as something that might be seen in real time in a theatre. Similarly, when discussing stage directions (and bearing in mind that stage directions in Shakespeare are controversial), it is unhelpful to focus on linguistic points without then suggesting how they might be transformed into a theatrical experience.

One of the assessment objectives of the syllabus is 'understanding', and good responses show this through an ability to comment on form, structure and language. Encouraging candidates to refer to the writer's name may seem like trivial advice, but mention of a writer's name helps candidates to remember to comment on how the writer is consciously creating effects through technique.

One possible (a) question variant is the 'prompt', a statement about a character or a theme from a critic. These are not merely there to raise an issue. Rather, they need to be engaged with in some detail.

In responding to (b) questions, even if the question has implications for the play as a whole, the greatest part of the response must be to the language and action of the passage that is printed on the paper. As the passage is before the candidate, close knowledge of language and dramatic effect can be demonstrated from detail, so that is what candidates are expected to do. It follows, therefore, that they need a strategic view of the question and the passage, and that a line-by-line or paraphrasing approach is unlikely to score highly. Some candidates do not cover the whole passage. A response does not have to be comprehensive, but it should at least consider the passage as a dramatic 'arc' where everything is pertinent to the question asked.

Material about a writer's life is not relevant in this paper. The focus should be specifically on the text itself. Similarly, although it may be important for candidates to learn about the context of a text, answers which focus on contextual information not relevant to the question itself do not score highly. This was particularly noticeable in answers on *Twelfth Night* where discussions of the significance of the Twelfth Night festival in Elizabethan England were often adduced, despite the fact that there is no reference whatsoever to the festival in the play itself. Better answers that raised the issue suggested that reversals of expectations are central to the play — but that is simply true of the drama itself and does not need justifying through contextualisation. Successful answers avoid long contextual discussions and use the opportunity to engage with the text detail of the text.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Sweet Bird of Youth*

- (a) There was much discussion about both public and private aspiration and the various ways in which the characters' dreams are thwarted. Sound responses often worked by comparing and contrasting the central characters. There was, of course, much focus on Chance and Princess, though the Finley family featured too. The best responses were able to talk about the claustrophobia of the relationship between Chance and Princess, the moment-by-moment presentation of their combined sense of failure in relation to their enemies and their aspirations and, of course, time, the prime antagonist in the play. There was some finely detailed work from candidates who were able to demonstrate points from Williams's use of symbols such as the Cadillac or the constant references to clocks, mirrors and the moon.
- (b) Responses were usually clearly aware of how Boss stages himself and is keen to see himself as both messianic and a victim/martyr ('a man with a mission ... crucified'). Most answers were able to see that Boss and his son share some characteristics in common, though few drew attention to Williams's deliberate clue in the stage directions ('the two stags... face each other, panting'). The question asked for focus on the episode in particular, not a general essay about the pair, and the best responses were able to comment on precise details of the language, such as Boss's constant use of questions, his constant undermining of his son.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Twelfth Night*

- (a) This question asked specifically that candidates should engage with ideas about love as a kind of madness – in other words something that corrupts minds and behaviour. Many responses were able to detail the love triangle, but there was often a loss of specific focus on how the major characters act irrationally in the face of their feelings and public statements. In better responses there was often focus on Malvolio's mad behaviour, though some argued – with authority – that Malvolio's madness comes from pride, not love, in the first place. Responses that moved beyond plot to matters of motivation and self-delusion did well.
- (b) Candidates were usually able to describe what is going on at this point in the play. However, many struggled to make sense of the half-truths, confusions and obfuscations which are so central to the episode. Some responses commented soundly on the empty love phrases and emotions of Orsino's long speech. One of the key things about answering a (b) question is that the whole passage needs to be addressed. This implies a strategic, not line-by-line approach. With this question some answers which started at the beginning and worked through line by line had often run out of time by the moment where the second confusion ('Husband') begins its work.

Question 3

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry IV, Part 2*

- (a) There were only a small number of responses to this question. Most focused on the king and his relationship with his sons. More searching answers looked at the way that the illness of the king creates a vacuum at the centre of society, with the Lord Chief Justice trying to maintain law and order whilst Falstaff eagerly anticipates making his view of the world part of the new order once Hal inherits the throne.
- (b) Candidates were usually able to provide a character study, but the passage was often not used to full advantage. Some responses looked forward to Falstaff's ultimate downfall and the dismissal of his wit and this helped give perspective on Falstaff's boasting and also some sense of how Shakespeare is setting up dramatic irony at this point in the play. Some less successful responses failed to deal with the last section of the extract, the moment where the thematic tension between order and disorder starts to emerge. The last lines of the extract provided a good strategic opening for the best answers, which were able to comment fully on Falstaff's deafness to all that seems against his own best interests.

Question 4

BRIAN FRIEL: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) All candidates had a view about how Gar changes during the play, about how his excitement and sense of adventure about going to America is turning to nervous self-doubt by the end. The best answers were able to anchor all of this in Friel's dramatic methods, often by drawing attention to the dialogues that take place between the two Gars. Other sound answers worked through the business of flashbacks and his relationships with others as a means of showing how he has reached a turning point in his life. What the question emphatically did not ask was for a simple character study – candidates who ignored the word 'present' in the question did not score highly.
- (b) Candidates clearly understood the significance of this passage – one of the few moments where the audience gets a perspective on S.B. that is not filtered through his son's perceptions of him. There was often sensitive discussion of how this normally monosyllabic man becomes much more forthcoming when his son is not around. There was some sensible discussion of how Madge relates to S.B. at this moment of gloom and depression for both of them. S.B.'s constant need for Madge's reassurance provided interesting areas of discussion at times.

Question 5

WOLE SOYINKA: *Death and the King's Horseman*

- (a) Most answers were able to produce a sound body of evidence to back up their opinions. There were few complete agreements with Soyinka's original proposal, and many saw that the tension between the Yorubans and the British colonists is precisely what points up and focuses the central issues and concerns of the play. There were sensible discussions of the way that the British see Elesin's suicide as morally wrong, whilst Elesin's own culture points to his death as a legitimate, required, socially understood moral imperative. The best responses made detailed reference to particular moments in the play's dramatic action when the issue is at its most vivid; Olunde's encounter with Mrs Pilkings proved a popular basis for discussion. There were some really telling discussions that contrasted matters of dress, music, and 'social' occasions in order to explore the question. These responses demonstrated that the candidates had thought lengthily about the play as something that would be seen on stage.
- (b) Some less successful candidates took the question to be an invitation to talk about Iyaloja's contribution to the play as a whole. More astute responses dealt in detail with the passage itself by pointing out how she is the representative of the women, but also the mother to society, its moral voice, its connection to nature. The best responses were able to capture the way that her speech has a rhythm and authority and presents a moral view in terms of natural images.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/42
Drama

Key messages

- Successful responses show strong awareness of genre and its implications
- Frequent use of the author's name often demonstrates a willingness to think of the text as a made thing, thus focusing attention on technique as well as theme
- If there is a prompt at the beginning of a question, responses need to engage directly with it as well as with the general issue raised.

General comments

Successful candidates show a clear awareness of the texts as plays. Weak answers do not display this awareness, and instead treat the people in the plays as though they are, in some way, real. At a slightly higher level, some candidates comment in detail about the significance of punctuation or capital letters, which has little bearing on the play's meaning and effects. Successful answers discuss what is on the page as something that might be seen in real time in a theatre. Similarly, when discussing stage directions (and bearing in mind that stage directions in Shakespeare are controversial), it is unhelpful to focus on linguistic points without then suggesting how they might be transformed into a theatrical experience.

One of the assessment objectives of the syllabus is 'understanding,' and good responses show this through an ability to comment on form, structure and language. Encouraging candidates to refer to the writer's name may seem like trivial advice but mention of a writer's name helps candidates to remember to comment on how the writer is consciously creating effects through technique.

One possible (a) question variant is the 'prompt', a statement about a character or a theme from a critic. These are not merely there to raise an issue. Rather, they need to be engaged with in some detail.

In responding to (b) questions, even if the question has implications for the play as a whole, the greatest part of the response must be to the language and action of the passage that is printed on the paper. As the passage is before the candidate, close knowledge of language and dramatic effect can be demonstrated from detail, so that is what candidates are expected to do. It follows, therefore, that they need a strategic view of the question and the passage, and that a line-by-line or paraphrasing approach is unlikely to score highly. Some candidates do not cover the whole passage. A response does not have to be comprehensive, but it should at least consider the passage as a dramatic 'arc' where everything is pertinent to the question asked.

Material about a writer's life is not relevant in this paper. The focus should be specifically on the text itself. Similarly, although it may be important for candidates to learn about the context of a text, answers which focus on contextual information not relevant to the question itself do not score highly. This was particularly noticeable in answers on *Twelfth Night* where discussions of the significance of the Twelfth Night festival in Elizabethan England were often adduced, despite the fact that there is no reference whatsoever to the festival in the play itself. Better answers that raised the issue suggested that reversals of expectations are central to the play — but that is simply true of the drama itself and does not need justifying through contextualisation. Successful answers avoid long contextual discussions and use the opportunity to engage with the text detail of the text.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 – TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Sweet Bird of Youth*

- (a) Ambition, as most candidates, suggested, has many forms in the play in terms of personal lives or in terms of public lives as politicians or film stars. Some responses simply catalogued ambitions. Better responses, however, often compared and contrasted the central figures in order to see ambition as a corrupting force. There was much discussion of the different ways in which Princess and Chance confront their destinies at the end of the play. The best responses were able to deal clearly with particular moments in the text in order to support their arguments. These responses paid careful attention to the ways in which the staging and language of the play creates the issue. There were some interesting responses on ways in which Williams's play focuses on the effects of time, the un-doer of all ambition.
- (b) Most responses were able to give an outline of Princess's actions and emotions in the scene given. Better responses were able to look carefully at her self-dramatization as she turns to the audience and plainly and very self-consciously acts out her pain and self-doubt. Many answers saw that her reference to the big screen as a mirror provides the clue as to what is going on and to her self-obsession. There was also much focus on the ways in which she portrays herself through the imagery of wild animals. There was useful discussion, too, of the way in which her speech starts to falter during the extract in order to give it a feeling of spontaneity. When considering a drama text, it is always useful for candidates to think about how the other people on the stage are responding to what is going on with the main speaker. In this instance, Chance is being used to channel our response – a deliberate dramatic effect.

Question 2 – WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Twelfth Night*

- (a) Less successful answers simply discussed the plot of the play and the complexity of the love triangle in terms of events. Deeper responses were able to see that the actual process of falling in love, or of believing oneself to be in love, gives rise to psychological complexity, where, for example, Viola (as Cesario) is forced to argue a case that she fervently believes in personally on behalf of someone else. Similarly, Olivia believes herself to be immune from love until she encounters it but then seems unbothered by the fact that she has married the twin of the person she is in love with. The play is not simply to do with plot, and the manifestations of love are many and various. For example, Malvolio plainly believes himself to be in love (as does Orsino) but the motivation of both characters is not truly inspired by the genuine feeling itself.
- (b) This question prompted a wide variety of responses. More restricted responses tended to deal with the characters individually, and there was often much discussion (some of it irrelevant) about *Twelfth Night* as a festival where values of order and hierarchy are overthrown. The most successful responses discussed the detail of the extract given and the various ways in which Olivia struggles to control such disparate characters, each of whom brings a different world view to the encounter with Olivia. A small number of candidates thought that Olivia already knew about Cesario and had started to develop feelings for him.

Question 3 – WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry IV, Part 2*

- (a) Virtually all responses were able to catalogue Prince Hal's growing disaffection with Falstaff, and there was much useful, convincing discussion of Hal's dismissal of Falstaff in Act 5. Candidates found it harder, however, to discuss the fact that both of them talk about their feelings and relationship with the other without actually being very much in each other's presence. Much of their relationship is, therefore, conducted by proxy, by the Lord Chancellor representing Hal's views but then being ignored or patronised by Falstaff, who fails to see which way the wind is blowing. The best responses were able to see that the significance of the relationship lies in the way that it demonstrates to an audience that the prince has moved on from the carefree days of *Henry IV, Part 1*.

- (b) Most responses – rightly – focused on the duplicity of Prince John who so deftly abuses his ‘princely word’ in the extract. But the question asked about ‘effects’ too, so candidates who went on to discuss the ways in which the Archbishop and Hastings change both their language and behaviour were obviously responding to different and perhaps deeper levels of the question. As many noted, the proceeding is not ‘just and honourable,’ and, of course, the news of the royal army being still in a state of readiness just as the rebel army is stood down is a clear piece of political manipulation to the prince’s advantage. Some candidates responded to the passage by talking more widely about trickery and deceit in the play, something that the question did not require.

Question 4 – BRIAN FRIEL: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) Most responses dealt sensibly with the ways in which Gar’s last evening provides the opportunity for flashbacks in order to present Gar’s motivations for leaving. More sophisticated responses were able to work on Gar’s presentation of himself and his various self-delusions as presented in the flashbacks. There were also comments on the nostalgia that comes through from the flashbacks, with times past irredeemable. The best responses were able to place the themes of the play in relation to their dramatic realisation.
- (b) This scene was well understood by virtually all candidates. They were quick to comment on Private Gar’s contempt for his father and on Public Gar’s inarticulacy. There was usually commentary on the mutual, unsaid, affection between the two that comes across as taciturnity. A small number of candidates were able to comment on the comedy of the scene (‘removes his teeth, wraps them in a handkerchief’) as well as its plangent sense of longing. There were also some comments on the role of Madge as the impartial interpreter of the scene for the audience.

Question 5 – WOLE SOYINKA: *Death and the King’s Horseman*

- (a) Responses to this question were usually able to trace the moments where Iyaloja is present and discuss some of her interventions in the plot. Better responses pointed out that she is the representative of the women, but also the mother to society, its moral voice, its connection to nature. The best responses were able to capture the way that her speech has a rhythm and authority and presents a moral view in terms of natural images. Her dramatic interventions towards the end of the play often provided significant points for discussion.
- (b) The printed episode, the dramatic climax of the play, provided rich areas for discussion of both character and theme. The question invited candidates to think about the dramatic ‘arc’ of the scene as the Iyaloja and the Praise-Singer lament the inadequacies of Elesin. There was some useful commentary, too, on the continuing rising and falling of the dirge, the revelation of the corpse and then Elesin’s stillness as he confronts the enormity of what he has done.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/43
Drama

Key messages

- Successful responses show strong awareness of genre and its implications
- Frequent use of the author's name often demonstrates a willingness to think of the text as a made thing, thus focusing attention on technique as well as theme
- If there is a prompt at the beginning of a question, responses need to engage directly with it as well as with the general issue raised.

General comments

Successful candidates show a clear awareness of the texts as plays. Weak answers do not display this awareness, and instead treat the people in the plays as though they are, in some way, real. At a slightly higher level, some candidates comment in detail about the significance of punctuation or capital letters, which has little bearing on the play's meaning and effects. Successful answers discuss what is on the page as something that might be seen in real time in a theatre. Similarly, when discussing stage directions (and bearing in mind that stage directions in Shakespeare are controversial), it is unhelpful to focus on linguistic points without then suggesting how they might be transformed into a theatrical experience.

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Comments on specific questions

Question 1 – TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Sweet Bird of Youth*

- (a) The prompt notes that Princess describes herself as a monster, so the central issue for the response needed to be on whether she demonstrates such qualities, or whether her opinion is simply another piece of her perpetual self-dramatization. Better candidates saw this, of course, and immediately started work on her relationship with Chance and the various ways that she seeks to exploit him. The best responses suggested that the exploitation was not simply one way. Answers that focused clearly on specific moments and dealt explicitly with the Princess's language showed high levels of understanding and personal response.
- (b) All candidates had a good sense of Boss's character in general – they knew what he does in the play and how much he is self-centred (and self-satisfied). The issue here was one of how all this is evidenced in the passage. Many responses looked at the fact that Boss is first revealed 'standing in the centre.' There was also much discussion of how Boss dominates any conversation and is always quick to see himself as the one who is misjudged and 'hard done by'. The best responses offered some subtlety of interpretation, arguing that Boss does have some right to feel angered by what Chance has done.

Question 2 – WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Twelfth Night*

- (a) The centrality of Feste as a choric figure was widely understood and commented upon. His slightly off-beat creation of a melancholic undertone to the play was seen too, though oddly his songs were not often commented on. However, many responses spent a great deal of time focusing on the fool/clown in sixteenth century society (often with reference to the Twelfth Night festival) rather than on what he, himself, actually does in the play. The best responses had an ambiguous response to him, arguing that for all his impartiality and commentary, his willing and enthusiastic participation in the Malvolio plot shows a much darker side to him.
- (b) Most candidates were able to describe what is going on in the scene in terms of hidden feelings and things unsaid. It was less easy, however, to characterise the feelings of uncertainty, of the two circling each other in the second part of the extract, as Viola expresses the truth ('one heart, one bosom and one truth'), in a way that is incomprehensible to Olivia. The best responses focused on the language of the passage and on the various ways in which the two circle around each other, with neither able to say what they really mean. A small number of candidates failed to make it clear that Viola remains disguised at this point in the action.

Question 3 – WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry IV, Part 2*

- (a) Responses to this question ranged widely. Some focused on the obvious examples of kings, princes and rebels. More subtle responses often reflected that wrongdoing and corruption exist at all levels in the society, with Falstaff as the loveable but symbolic reflection of much that is wrong with England at this point. The best responses adduced detailed, particular moments from the play in order to back up arguments.
- (b) A small number of candidates saw the question as simply being one about Henry and his sons in general. However, if a passage based question is selected, then the passage must be the central focus. Most answers were able to comment on Henry's long speech and his feeling that his own rule needs to be replaced by something more authoritative, without a whiff of the 'indirect and crook'd way' by which Henry held the crown. As he says: 'To thee it shall descend with better quiet.' Responses were usually able to characterise Henry's fondness for his sons on a personal level, as well as to talk about the political implications of what he says. There was much sensible discussion of the advice that Henry gives to his son. A small number of responses ignored Henry's opening speech or glossed quickly over it, obviously imagining that the question only became relevant once the princes started to engage with their father.

Question 4 – BRIAN FRIEL: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

- (a) There was much interesting discussion of the various ways in which the taciturnity of S.B. is matched by his son's longing to be able to communicate with him. Better responses pointed out that Public Gar is, in fact, very much a younger version of his father, lacking in confidence, unsure of himself when dealing with others. The best answers focused on particular moments and were able to see that there is an unspoken link of unrequited affection between the two that makes their estrangement in the play all the more moving.
- (b) Virtually all candidates were able to give an account of Gar's increasing disillusionment with Ballybeg and his various disappointments. More subtle responses noted that the intensity of his protests suggest that he is fonder of it than he likes to make out. His various attempts to whistle 'Philadelphia, Here I Come' suggest that he is gradually losing confidence in his decision to leave Ireland and is trying to bolster his resolve. There was also sensible discussion about how the two Gars see things differently.

Question 5 – WOLE SOYINKA: *Death and the King's Horseman*

- (a) Responses to this question quickly saw that there is a central tension between the British who cannot really believe that anyone can be sincerely motivated by religious beliefs, and the Yorubans for whom religion is central to the survival of the tribe. Discussions often centred on Pilkings' view that Elesins pending death is a sacrificial suicide, as opposed to the very clear view, articulated by Olunde, the Praise-Singer and Iyaloja that Elesin's death should be treated as an honour. There was often useful discussion of the ways that the British see Yoruban religion as a matter of fancy dress. There were some sensible discussions too of the role of Joseph, who tries to interpret the Yoruban religion to the British through his recent conversion to Christianity.
- (b) The contrasting of two scenes as a focus of a question proved very popular. Candidates were able to make very clear distinctions between the worlds of the play. This comparison often pushed candidates towards interesting discussions of cultural differences as expressed through music and dance, with the energy of Yoruban culture clearly seen to be more engaging than the stifling formality and 'tawdry decadence' of the British. Much was made of Elesin's trance-like dance in comparison to the playing of Rule Britannia ('badly') in Scene 4. There was often strong and interesting reaction to the Pilkings's misuse of tribal costume as fancy dress. Candidates were always able to evaluate the energy of the Yoruban world as set against the complacent misunderstanding of cultural differences which so dominates the end of the extract.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/51
Shakespeare and other pre-20th
Century Texts

Key messages

- Candidates should take the time to plan their essays to avoid generalisation and irrelevancies.
- Candidates should show how their selected texts might be interpreted differently by different readers.

General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with nearly all candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were very few rubric errors in this session and also very few responses which showed evidence of mismanagement of time. The quality of expression was at least acceptable in nearly every case, although expressive weaknesses impeded communication at times.

There were responses to all of the questions set and answers on each question were seen at each level of attainment. Some texts remain very popular – *Measure for Measure*, *Great Expectations* and *The Franklin's Prologue and Tale* were the most popular in this session – with others remaining minority choices, particularly Marvell and Shelley, though the responses seen suggest these texts are very accessible to candidates at all ability levels.

Successful answers considered all of the question, taking the time to consider what relevant material to discuss and then planning their essay carefully before starting to compose their answer. This ensured that all of the material they wrote about was relevant to the task and addressed in a logical and structured way.

For success at A level it is necessary to explore different interpretations of the selected texts. These may be based on critical or academic opinions, or different types of readers, such as modern or contemporary to the selected text. Successful answers candidates showed understanding of how a text might be interpreted differently by different audiences or readers.

1 William Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*

This was the minority choice for Shakespeare this session with an even split between the two options.

- (a) Nearly all candidates had sufficient knowledge of the text to find relevant material on the topic of relationships between men and women. Weaker answers tended to give a narrative summary of the various couples in the play, with more successful responses at this level showing how different attitudes to the other sex revealed different character traits, for example, as one answer suggested, 'Mistress Overdone's clear understanding of the gulf between a Claudio and a Lucio'. Better answers saw how such relationships were linked to other important themes, such as morality, law and justice, with many good answers discussing the effects created by forced marriages, casual encounters and family fallings out. Very good answers explored how 'Shakespeare presents relationships as little more than a business arrangement', as one suggested, while others saw Isabella's pleading for Claudio as an exception to the rule which, in 'her abuse of Marianna, she also conformed to'. Some more sophisticated answers discussed how Shakespeare uses attitudes to relationships and the other sex to develop his plot through characterisation, citing Angelo's 'growth into self knowledge, from snow cold blood to giving his 'sensual race the rein' as the mainspring of the plot,' as one put it. Most successful were responses which saw relationships as a key element in the 'problems' of the play as a whole and were able to support the arguments with relevant quotation.

- (b) Most candidates had sufficient textual knowledge to recognise the context for this exchange. Weaker answers often paraphrased the ideas, but some were also able to explore the humour and the way Shakespeare uses this scene to develop his central concerns, such as law and justice and his presentation of others such as Angelo. Better answers saw the characters as symbolic, with Escalus generally a very popular man; as one candidate suggested: 'the most capable man in ruling Vienna is the one without power'. For others, he contrasted 'Angelo's asceticism and 'the Duke's left-wing liberalism, which have left the place a shambles'. His 'cautious mercy', and 'gently condescending tone' shows how he should be 'the stand-in Duke as he knows who to punish'. Pompey was also popular, with his 'natural human urges' his 'paternalistic mood' and his 'unapologetic and disingenuous tone' and his ability to 'switch from telling jokes to telling truths'. He is able to argue that 'the morality of an action is divorced from its legality' and Shakespeare uses Pompey's 'private and primal insolence to show the irresponsibility of natural desire'. Sophisticated answers noted how Escalus's approach to justice is at odds with Angelo's hope that Escalus will 'find good cause to whip them all.' Others explored the language and the use of prose to good effect, noting how Escalus is able to talk to these low-life characters in a way that the Duke and Angelo cannot, thus further developing the audience's response to the justice and morality of the wider text.

2 William Shakespeare: *Richard II*

This was a popular choice, with most opting for the (b) passage option.

- (a) The small number who tackled this question nearly always had a secure knowledge of the text and were able to select relevant material to discuss. Weaker answers tended to summarise their chosen material, with each courtier considered in turn, often with limited ability to connect the ideas into a structured argument. Better answers explored the court and courtiers as reflecting the king, often contrasting Richard's 'selfish, broken and bankrupt court' with 'Henry's politically efficient and well controlled court,' as one put it. Good answers focused on key passages, such as the pageantry of the trial-by-combat or the pathos of Richard on the beach telling 'sad tales' and often contrasted these to the treatment of the Bishop, York and Aumerle by Henry. Others considered the loyalty of the individual courtiers to the two kings as the key dramatic tool, Richard's gradual alienation of his courtiers and, for some, even his family, was often contrasted to Bolingbroke's 'deliberate and constant wooing of the courtiers and the common people'. Those who also considered 'Shakespeare's presentation,' as required by the question, and linked such discussions into a consideration of Shakespeare's dramatic choices such as language, imagery and action, often did well.
- (b) This was a popular choice and nearly every answer was able to provide a relevant context and identify the overall significance of the passage, as exposing the selfishness of Richard and the reasons for his downfall. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage or offer a general character study of Richard and, less securely, York. Better answers at this level explored the failings of Richard and the dilemma of his loyal courtier, York, often seeing Richard's commandeering of Gaunt's wealth as the start of the king's downfall. Good answers noted how York 'gives the audience a list of Richard's failings as a king,' as one suggested, 'though Richard's 'why, uncle' what's the matter' shows us how little he listens and how little he cares.' All of this was seen as foreshadowing Richard's inevitable doom, 'as this, the latest in a series of selfish and bad decisions, has given Bolingbroke the excuse he was looking for to return to England.' More sophisticated answers considered the language and imagery in detail, contrasting Northumberland's deference here with his rudeness later in the play, for example. Others noticed how 'Shakespeare presents the internal conflict between family loyalty and a courtier's duty through York's long speeches,' as one suggested, often analysing the echoes with Gaunt's earlier speeches. Those who linked such discussions to York's development later in the play and his eventual turning away from Richard often did very well.

3 Jane Austen: *Emma*

This was a minority choice in **Section B**, with an even split between the (a) and (b) questions.

- (a) Nearly every answer was able to find relevant material with which to address the question. Weaker answers tended to ignore the given quotation and often gave a very detailed summary of Emma and her relationships. Better answers at this level also saw that she becomes a more mature and self-aware character by the end, implicitly addressing the task. More successful answers focused on Emma's development, seeing the change in her attitudes to Harriet, Elton and Frank Churchill

as a fundamental tool used by Austen to signal Emma's growing maturity. Some answers suggested that as she adopted the views of Mr Knightley, so she became a true heroine. Successful answers also explored how Austen used other characters to reveal Emma's development, with some considering the contrasting comic and serious effects created in, for example, the Box Hill episode and Emma's relationship with Miss Bates, Frank Churchill and Mr Knightley. More sophisticated answers explored Austen's use of contrasting characters such as Harriet and Jane or Elton and Frank to bring out different aspects of Emma, though for some the most revealing relationship was between Emma and her father. His parental laxity was often seen as the 'main reason for Emma's headstrong and immature opinions and actions, which Knightley has to overcome,' as one put it, though for others 'through her devotion to and care for her father, Austen reveals the real Emma and why Knightley loves her'. Where such arguments were supported by detailed reference to and analysis of Austen's use of language and dialogue, the answers often did very well.

- (b) Most answers had sufficient knowledge to explore this passage relevantly, though some were unsure as to the precise context. Weaker answers tended to either paraphrase the passage or write a general summary of the characters and the relationships between Frank, Jane and Emma. Better answers at this level were able to see the significance of these exchanges to the development of these relationships, with many able to discuss, at least to some extent, the duplicity in Frank's character. Good answers developed such ideas by linking them to Austen's concerns in the wider novel, such as 'Emma's immaturity and naivety, so clearly exploited by Frank here for his own devious ends,' as one suggested. Other concerns such as morality, status, friendship and social behaviour were often considered in detail. Sophisticated answers also explored the effects of the writing, looking closely at language, Austen's use of dialogue and irony, with some noticing for example how Frank is not merely insinuating himself with Emma, but also 'telling Jane the trouble he went to, to choose the piano and showing her he still loves her by his reminder of the importance of that particular waltz'. Others noted how Emma 'and perhaps the reader' are taken in by Frank's games. Those responses which linked such ideas to the wider text, with appropriate quotation, often did very well.

4 Emily Bronte: *Wuthering Heights*

This was a popular **Section B** text, with very few choosing the (a) option and the majority choosing the option (b) passage.

- (a) All candidates had a sufficient knowledge of the text to find relevant material to discuss. More successful answers tended to select the material carefully in order to show how different effects were created by using the different narrators, though some were unable to move beyond paraphrase and summary. Better answers were able to link the different narrators to Bronte's methods of characterisation, often focussing on Heathcliff and Catherine. Good answers considered the limitations of using Nellie as first-person narrator, often discussing her 'unreliability', though only a few considered the effects of this on the reader. Such responses, which were able to support points with specific references to the text, often did very well.
- (b) Most answers were able to give an appropriate context to the passage, though a few confused the two Cathys with a consequent loss of relevance. Weaker answers summarised Cathy and Heathcliff's relationship, often in great detail, but with a loss of focus on the passage. Better answers, often remembering Cathy's current situation, were able to discuss relevantly what this passage added to a reader's understanding of the relationship, exploring the language and descriptions of their actions, to show the effects of Bronte's writing. Very good answers noted Nellie's role as the narrator, guiding the reader's response, with others exploring the effect of the revelation of Cathy's imminent death, though surprisingly few referred to her pregnancy. More sophisticated answers were able to consider language, tone and dialogue in detail, as well as the shifting narrative voice, often exploring how Bronte reveals 'the bitter/sweet passion of this relationship even at this point just before Cathy's death,' as one suggested. Such answers, which were able to link these points to the wider text with appropriate references, often did very well.

5 Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Franklin's Prologue and Tale*

- (a) Most candidates had at least a solid knowledge of the text and were able to choose relevant material to discuss. Weaker answers tended to retell the story of the marriage of Dorigen and Arveragus and the attempts of Aurelius to win Dorigen's love. Better answers considered how Chaucer 'presents Arveragus as a lover, not that different from Aurelius, until Dorigen agrees to marry him,' as one put it. Others discussed how this relationship changed after marriage, with the intention to be equal with some reservations variously seen as comic, ironic or Chaucer's attempt to undermine the courtly love tradition. Other answers contrasted the roles of Arveragus and Aurelius in their behaviours and in their attitudes to Dorigen to good effect, though there was a wide range of interpretations, with Arveragus, for example, seen as 'a typical, hypocritical male in his treatment of Dorigen before and after marriage' or as 'the true noble knight that Aurelius and perhaps the Franklin himself aspired to be'. Very good answers were able to explore the topic in the context of the overall marriage debate and to see the presentation of courtly love as a symbol of the complex attitudes to relationships in the Tale generally.
- (b) Most answers were able to give a solid context, though weaker answers were at times confused as to the precise placing of the passage. Some weaker responses tended to paraphrase the passage or to give a narrative summary of Aurelius's situation. Better answers saw the development of the plot, as Aurelius's confidence in the magician grew, with some noticing the unexpected threat at the end and others exploring the development of the characters. Good answers considered the role of the Franklin here, for example, his 'desire to seem learned and knowledgeable in the company of the pilgrims,' as one suggested. Answers which explored the narrative structures and Chaucer's use of the language of religion, magic and nature to create specific effects often did very well, particularly when such ideas were linked into the wider text with specific references. However very few answers were confident enough to tackle the verse form and the poetic structures of the passage. Those that did often did very well.

6 Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*

This was the most popular **section B** text in this session, with most learners choosing option (b).

- (a) Nearly every response had a sound knowledge of the text and was able to select relevant material. Weaker answers tended to give an often very detailed summary of the relationship, with some exploring the effect of the ambiguous ending. Better answers discussed how the various stages of the relationship were used by Dickens to develop the characters and the plot generally, noting that 'through their relationship, Pip and Estella are connected to every other character in the novel, sometimes directly as with Magwitch,' as one suggested. Good answers focused on how Dickens presents the changes in the relationship, with some very good responses alive to the skilful use of Pip as his own narrator. Others explored the contrasts Dickens creates between this relationship and that of Herbert and Clara for example, with some considering the effects of these contrasts. Sophisticated answers saw how the language and dialogue chosen by Dickens shapes the reader's response 'so that we expect a bad outcome to Pip's infatuation and are not disappointed', as one suggested. Other responses at this level considered what this relationship added to Dickens's general concerns around marriages and relationships or saw Pip's infatuation in a more metaphorical or even psychoanalytical light – 'Pip's lack of motherly love leading to his following the star he considered Estella to be,' as one put it. Such arguments did very well when supported by precise reference to the text and an awareness of different possible interpretations.
- (b) This was the most popular question in **Section B**. Nearly every candidate recognised the context of the passage and was alive to Dickens's control of the narrative in leading up to the revelation about Magwitch and Estella. Weaker answers tended to retell Magwitch's story, including Estella, with better answers at this level shaping their material to consider the significance of Magwitch and Estella to the wider plot. Better answers developed such ideas into considering what the effects of this revelation are in terms of the unfolding the plot and of Pip's relationship with Estella and Magwitch. Very good answers considered the change in the dynamic of Pip and Herbert's relationship, as well as in the reader's response to Magwitch, 'with Compeyson as the antagonist and Magwitch as the tragic figure, we are led into expecting Pip's complete devotion to his true 'fairy god mother', as one suggested. Some very good answers were able to analyse Dickens's use of language and dialogue here to create atmosphere and hint at the significance of what is to be revealed. Where such approaches were linked to the wider text by specific references, the results were often very good.

7 Andrew Marvell: *Selected Poems*

This was a minority text with very few takers for option (a), though option (b) was slightly more popular.

- (a) Nearly all candidates were able to find relevant poems to discuss, with weaker answers tending to offer summaries of the poems, and some lapsing into more general paraphrasing. Better candidates often agreed with the statement and chose a range of poems to cover a number of Marvell's characteristic concerns, with good answers exploring both religious and secular poems, including the Damon the Mower poems and the dialogue poems. Other responses disagreed with the statement and cited 'To His Coy Mistress' and 'The Coronet' as evidence. Candidates able to develop this discussion through consideration of Marvell's choices of poetic methods, especially when linked to awareness of the effects of those choices, often did very well.
- (b) There were few successful answers to this question. Some weaker answers seemed to struggle with the meaning of the poem, attempting a line-by-line paraphrase, with little reference to the poetic methods, the rest of the poem or the wider text. Better answers did have some knowledge of poem and text to share, though very few were able to discuss his methods and concerns with any confidence or conviction. Good answers tended to focus on the details of the imagery and the language and crucially explored the effects created by Marvell's various poetic strategies.

8 Percy Bysshe Shelley: *Selected Poems*

This was the second session for this text, and it was still very much a minority choice, with option (b) more popular.

- (a) There were very few answers to this question. All but a few answers had sufficient knowledge of the text to find some relevant points of discussion. Weaker answers often paraphrased the poems they had chosen to discuss, with the popular choices being 'Ode to the West Wind', 'Adonais' and 'Mont Blanc'. For these answers the symbols and symbolism were largely ignored and there were only the beginnings of an attempt to develop an argument. Better answers were able to use their chosen poems to address the topic and consider the variety of ways Shelley uses symbols to present his concerns. Some very good answers offered detailed analyses of Shelley's poetic methods, whilst at the same time, exploring his concerns and presenting a well-structured and developed argument. Such responses did very well.
- (b) This was not a popular choice overall, with few answers seen. Some weaker answers appeared to be responding as to an unseen poem, with a consequent lack of understanding or context. Better answers were able to discuss the extract in its context, though some answers did give too much attention to the historical and political context, with a consequent lack of attention to the detail of the extract. Good answers considered what this extract reveals about Shelley's poetic concerns in detail, relating them to the wider selection and his attitudes to politics and rulers generally. Where this was developed with detailed analysis of the poetic methods, such as language and verse form, and their effects, the answers often did well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/52
Shakespeare and other pre-20th
Century Texts

Key messages

- Candidates should take the time to plan their essays to avoid generalisation and irrelevancies.
- Candidates should show how their selected text might be interpreted differently by different readers.

General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with nearly all candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were very few rubric errors in this session and also very few responses which showed evidence of mismanagement of time. The quality of expression was at least acceptable in nearly every case, although expressive weaknesses impeded communication at times.

There were responses to all of the questions set and answers on each question were seen at each level of attainment. Some texts remain very popular – *Measure for Measure*, *Great Expectations* and *The Franklin's Prologue and Tale* were the most popular in this session – with others remaining minority choices, particularly Marvell and Shelley, though the responses seen suggest these texts are very accessible to candidates at all ability levels.

Successful answers considered all of the question, taking the time to consider what relevant material to discuss and then planning their essay carefully before starting to compose their answer. This ensured that all of the material they wrote about was relevant to the task and addressed in a logical and structured way.

For success at A level, it is necessary to explore different interpretations of the selected texts. These may be based on critical or academic opinions, or different types of readers, such as modern or contemporary to the selected text. Successful candidates showed understanding of how a text might be interpreted differently by different audiences or readers.

1 William Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*

This was the most popular text on the paper this session, with the majority opting for the **(b)** passage question.

- (a)** Nearly all candidates had a sufficient knowledge of the text to find relevant material on the topic of marriage. Weaker answers tended to give a narrative summary of the various couples in the play, with more successful responses showing how attitudes to marriage revealed different character traits. Better answers saw how marriage was linked to other important themes, such as law and justice, with many good answers discussing the effects on a range of audiences of the forced marriages of Angelo, Lucio and, potentially, Isabella. As one suggested, 'Where marriage was linked to the law, its purity was destroyed.' Very good answers explored how 'Shakespeare presents marriage by contrasting attitudes from the convent to the brothel', while others saw marriage as just another form of female commodification and in essence therefore another aspect of abuse, most clearly revealed in the contrived ending. Most successful were responses which developed such arguments into exploring why the play was a 'problem play' or whether it is a comedy at all.
- (b)** Nearly every answer was able to give a context to the passage and recognised that Shakespeare is contrasting the attitudes of Angelo and Escalus to the law. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage or offer general summaries of the plot and characters of the wider play.

Better answers discussed the contrast between mercy and justice, with some wondering why Escalus was not chosen as the Duke's deputy. Better answers at this level considered the change in tone with the entry of Pompey and the comic characters. 'The ones breaking the laws being more knowledgeable than the ones maintaining it,' as one suggested. Good answers saw the foreshadowing of Angelo's temptation and fall here, and there were some sophisticated explorations of irony and tone. The roles of Elbow and Pompey were often well explored as comic underminers of the main plot and a reminder to the audience that, 'this is after all still a comedy,' though for others Elbow is a symbol of the ineffectiveness of the law-makers, compared to the sharp and streetwise intelligence of Pompey. Very good answers also noted that there was scope for comic action in the entrance of the comic entourage into the middle of the sombre court scene. Some sophisticated answers were able to link this passage to the play's wider concerns of morality, justice and the law; where such arguments were supported with apposite quotation the answers did very well.

2 William Shakespeare: *Richard II*

The vast majority opted for the passage question, option (b).

- (a) Most candidates showed at least a solid knowledge of the text and were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase sections of the play where they identified symbols, such as the gardener scene, the smashing of the mirror episode or the passing over of the 'hollow crown'. Better answers linked the symbols to some aspects of the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke and occasionally the presentation of England. More sophisticated answers explored how Shakespeare uses symbols as a way of developing characterisation and his thematic concerns, such as kingship, leadership and rebellion. Very good answers also considered how the characters themselves are symbolic, notably Richard and Bolingbroke, who were variously seen as representing such ideas as tradition/change, old/new and different aspects of leadership and government. Such answers when supported by apposite reference to the text and other interpretations often did very well.
- (b) Most candidates had sufficient knowledge to put this passage in its context and also recognise its significance in terms of the announcement of Bolingbroke's 'invasion'. Some weaker answers were confused about the stance of the characters here, thinking them to be supporters of Richard, with a consequent misreading of the tone and effect of the passage. Other weaker answers tended to paraphrase the dialogue or drift away from the passage into narrative summary, often of the banishment of Bolingbroke and the death of Gaunt. Better answers explored how Shakespeare develops the characterisation of Richard through the negative descriptions, 'reminding the audience of Richard's growing list of failings as a king,' as one put it. Good answers were also alive to the language and the tone here, noting, for example, how Northumberland gradually leads up to 'the revelation of Bolingbroke's invasion. Expressed in positive terms, this is all the more significant after the doom and gloom surrounding Richard's rule'. Many answers at this level were able to analyse how 'Shakespeare is preparing the audience for the fall of Richard and the rise of Henry,' as one suggested. When such arguments were supported by detailed reference to the passage and appropriate links to the wider text, the answers did very well.

3 Jane Austen: *Emma*

This was a popular **Section B** text, with the majority opting for the (b) question.

- (a) Money and wealth were seen as important concerns in the text, with nearly all candidates able to discuss relevant examples and compare different characters' attitudes to them. Weaker answers tended to summarise relevant episodes, such as Elton's wooing of Emma and eventual marriage to Augusta Hawkins. Better answers at this level saw how characters are differentiated by Austen through their attitudes, noting, for example, how higher status families such as the Woodhouses and Knightleys 'rarely consider such things', whereas for 'the likes of Frank, Elton and the Westons it is much more important and shapes their behaviour,' as one learner suggested. Good answers linked such points to the novel's thematic concerns, such as status, social class and marriage, with many pointing out the irony of Emma's initial attitude to Robert Martin, who by the end is a 'good match for poor Harriet'. More detailed answers also considered the role of Jane and the Bates family as symbolic of 'how fragile lifestyles were, especially for women, in the Regency period,' as one suggested. More sophisticated answers focused on Austen's presentation of the attitudes, her use of narrative structuring, language and dialogue to reveal the contrasts between her characters,

for example. Such responses did very well, especially when supported by detailed references and apposite quotation.

- (b) Nearly every answer correctly placed this as the climax of the novel, when ‘Emma’s manipulations of Harriet finally come home to roost,’ as one suggested. Weaker answers tended to summarise the whole relationship between Harriet and Emma leading to this point, with better answers at this level shaping this material to explore how Harriet had fallen for Mr Knightley and the impact of this revelation on Emma’s own understanding. Good answers saw the development of Emma’s character, noting how Austen shapes the response through language, with many noting the effect of Emma’s (for some shocking) expostulation: ‘Oh God! That I had never seen her’. Very good answers often explored the detail of Austen’s writing in the passage, such as the narrative voice, narrative structures, the use of dashes and short phrases, the shifting tones and the language. Sophisticated responses also saw, for example, how ‘Harriet’s joyful and confident tone here is sharply contrasted to Emma’s own bitterness as the awful truth is revealed to her,’ as one put it. Others contrasted this episode to Emma’s heart-searching after the Box Hill episode to very good effect. There were many excellent answers revealing detailed knowledge and understanding of Austen’s methods of characterisation both here and in the wider text.

4 Emily Bronte: *Wuthering Heights*

This was the least popular choice of the three novels in **Section B**, with a fairly even split between the two options.

- (a) Most candidates were able to select relevant material through which to discuss this central relationship. Weaker answers tended to summarise the whole relationship, often in great detail, whilst ignoring the quotation and hence drifting into irrelevance. Some weaker answers also seemed to confuse the two Cathys in the novel, despite the supporting quotation, again with some consequent irrelevance. Better answers at this level were able to select and shape the material to answer the question, often expanding the quotation to include Cathy’s contrasting Heathcliff and Edgar and using that as a framework for their essay. Good answers saw the bitterness or conflict in Cathy’s description, with many developing arguments supporting the lack of delight and even the destructive nature of the relationship. Other good answers also explored how Bronte uses such metaphors and symbols as tools to reveal the ‘all consuming passion which these ill fated lovers share,’ as one learner suggested. Very good answers were also able to explore other methods used by Bronte in her presentation of the relationship, such as narrative voice and structures, language, tone and dialogue, often showing detailed understanding and knowledge of the text in developing their arguments.
- (b) Many answers were able to put this passage in its context, showing sound knowledge of the text. Weaker answers tended to summarise the events leading to Isabella’s letter or to give a detailed account of her relationship with Heathcliff, with consequent loss of focus on the passage itself. Better answers at this level considered what Isabella’s letter reveals about her changing attitudes, her marriage and Heathcliff, often appropriately linking such ideas to the wider text. Good answers tended to focus on Bronte’s methods here, exploring the language and tone in detail, with some answers exploring the shifting narrative structure here to good effect. More sophisticated responses saw how the use of the letter enables Bronte to provide a different perspective on Heathcliff, than that of Nellie Dean or Lockwood. Others noted that Bronte is contrasting Isabella’s direct narrative to Nellie’s indirect reporting, but also giving ‘factual support to Nellie’s opinions as well,’ as one suggested. Very good answers were able to link such arguments to Bronte’s concerns in the wider text, and, when supporting their points with apposite reference to the text alongside an analysis of the detail of the passage, often did very well.

5 Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Franklin’s Prologue and Tale*

This was a popular text on the paper, with most candidates choosing the passage option (b).

- (a) Most candidates had at least a solid knowledge of the text and were able to choose relevant material to discuss. Weaker answers tended to retell the story of the marriage of Dorigen and Arveragus and the attempts of Aurelius to win Dorigen’s love. Better answers considered how Chaucer ‘presents Arveragus as a lover, not that different from Aurelius, until Dorigen agrees to marry him,’ as one put it. Others discussed how this relationship changed after marriage, with the intention to be equal with some reservations variously seen as comic, ironic or Chaucer’s attempt to undermine the courtly love tradition. Good answers saw different kinds of love in the text; for

example, 'the passion of Dorigen for her absent husband is clearly contrasted to the courtly love complaints of Aurelius,' as one suggested. Other answers contrasted the love of Arveragus and Aurelius for Dorigen to good effect, though there was a wide range of interpretations with Arveragus, for example, seen as 'a typical, hypocritical male in his treatment of Dorigen before and after marriage' or as 'the true noble knight that Aurelius and perhaps the Franklin himself aspired to be'. Very good answers were able to explore the topic in the context of the overall marriage debate, with some excellent arguments on Chaucer's use of the courtly love traditions within the form of the Breton lay. Others saw the presentation of love as part of the complex attitudes to relationships in the Tale generally, whether familial, marital or simply commercial.

- (b) Most answers were able to give a solid context, though weaker answers were at times confused as to the precise placing of the passage. Some weaker responses tended to paraphrase the passage or to give a narrative summary of Aurelius's situation. Better answers saw the development of the plot, as Aurelius's confidence in the magician grew, with some noticing how the magical element was undermined by the Franklin's descriptions and others exploring the development of the characters. Good answers considered the role of the Franklin here, for example, his 'desire to seem learned and knowledgeable in the company of the pilgrims,' as one suggested. Answers which explored the narrative structures and Chaucer's use of the language of religion, magic and nature to create specific effects often did very well, particularly when such ideas were linked into the wider text with specific references. However, very few answers were confident enough to tackle the verse form and the poetic structures of the passage. Those that did so often did very well.

6 Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*

This was a popular text in this session, with candidates choosing both questions more or less equally.

- (a) Nearly every answer revealed a sound and often detailed knowledge of the text. Weaker answers tended to give a narrative summary of the various actual or intended marriages, often focussing on the characters. Better answers at this level were able to see the contrasts between Dickens's presentation of Joe and Mrs Joe and Joe's later marriage to Biddy. Some answers saw the more disturbing elements in Dickens's presentation of Magwitch and Molly and Estella and Drummle, with others developing this into a consideration of his concerns such as the idea of a true gentleman or the power of vengeful wives and fiancées. Good answers also explored marriage as a more abstract concept, discussing the effects of the contrasting descriptions of the relationships throughout the novel. 'Dickens saturates the novel with unsatisfying, constraining and ultimately destructive marriages and relationships,' as one suggested. Very good answers explored, often with well chosen detailed support, the methods used by Dickens to achieve his effects, with some excellent analysis of language, narrative structures and humour. Such answers invariably did very well.
- (b) This was a popular choice and nearly every candidate was able to identify the context and therefore the significance of the passage to the novel and particularly to the reader's understanding and response to Pip's relationship with Miss Havisham. Weaker answers often gave a narrative summary of this relationship throughout the book, with a consequent loss of focus on the details of the passage. Better answers at this level were able to see how the characters had changed since their first meeting and some saw this as a consequence of 'Pip's own maturity and the inevitable outcome of Miss Havisham's ill-considered meddling with both Pip and Estella,' as one put it. Good answers explored the narrative voice, noting how Dickens echoes previous meetings in his choice of language for Pip, as well as creating pathos in his descriptions of both Pip and Miss Havisham. Very good answers developed such arguments by exploring the effects of language and, for some, the dramatic action here, as well as the use of dialogue, repetition and descriptive details. Others were also alive to the development of the plot, with the secret help for Herbert and the marriage of Estella having significance in the novel's structure. Sophisticated answers analysed how all of these elements were tools in Dickens's characterisation of the relationship here and elsewhere in the novel, often showing excellent understanding and knowledge of the text as a whole.

7 Andrew Marvell: *Selected Poems*

This was a minority text with very few takers for option **(a)**, though option **(b)** was relatively popular.

- (a)** There were very few responses seen to this question. Most answers had sufficient knowledge of the text to address the task, with 'The Picture of Little T.C', 'Eyes and Tears' and 'To his Coy Mistress' the most popular choices. Weaker answers tended to summarise the poems without developing an argument. Better answers saw the range of ways Marvell presents beauty and at least considered different interpretations with some supporting references. Good answers were able to develop such discussions and consider his use of different methods, exploring the language and imagery in detail, with a very few answers finding relevant comments on Marvell's use of rhythm and verse form. Where answers considered the effects on the reader of his poetic choices, the results were often very good.
- (b)** Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem, with some unable to link it to the wider text, often approaching the poem as though it were an unseen. Better answers addressed some of the detail of the poem, exploring the presentation of the singer and the persona's to her, for example. Others saw this as at least in part a genuine expression of love, with some exploring the poetic methods used, such as verse form and diction, to reinforce this point of view. Few answers referred to other poems. 'To His Coy Mistress' was noted as a counterbalance to the arguments presented here, but few responses were able to develop an effective argument on the effects of Marvell's poetic strategies.

8 Percy Bysshe Shelley: *Selected Poems*

This was the second session for this text and it was the least popular **section B** text, with option **(a)** being slightly more popular.

- (a)** There were very few responses seen to this question. Most answers had some knowledge of the text and were able to discuss Shelley's presentation of joy and despair relevantly. Popular choices were 'Ozymandias', 'Stanzas Written in Dejection,' 'Invocation to Misery' and 'Autumn, a Dirge', though there was a wide range of poems considered, from 'Liberty' to 'An Invitation to Jane'. Weaker answers tended to summarise the poems, with little reference to the precise terms of the question or Shelley's presentation. Better answers were aware of both requirements and addressed them with appropriate support. Good answers often explored how Shelley presents 'joy and despair as two sides of the same coin'. Other answers discussed how, for Shelley, different aspects of human life were 'equally subject to these contrasting emotions, from love to art to politics,' as one put it. Where such arguments were supported with precise references to the poems, the answers often did very well.
- (b)** Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem, with some unable to link it to the wider text, often approaching the poem as though it were an unseen. Better answers addressed the detail of the poem, noting, for example, Shelley's detailed evocation of nature and its power and influence on humanity. Very good answers considered the form of the poem in detail and the effects Shelley creates by his choices of language and imagery, often linking this poem to the 'Mont Blanc' and 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', with precise references.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Key messages

- Candidates should take the time to plan their essays to avoid generalisation and irrelevancies.
- Candidates should show how their selected texts might be interpreted differently by different readers.

General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with nearly all candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were very few rubric errors in this session and also very few responses which showed evidence of mismanagement of time. The quality of expression was at least acceptable in nearly every case, although expressive weaknesses impeded communication at times.

There were responses to all of the questions set and answers on each question were seen at each level of attainment. Some texts remain very popular – *Measure for Measure*, *Great Expectations* and *The Franklin's Prologue and Tale* were the most popular in this session – with others remaining minority choices, particularly Marvell and Shelley, though the responses seen suggest these texts are very accessible to candidates at all ability levels.

Successful answers considered all of the question, taking the time to consider what relevant material to discuss and then planning their essay carefully before starting to compose their answer. This ensured that all of the material they wrote about was relevant to the task and addressed in a logical and structured way.

For success at A level it is necessary to explore different interpretations of the selected texts. These may be based on critical or academic opinions, or different types of readers, such as modern or contemporary to the selected text. Successful answers candidates showed understanding of how a text might be interpreted differently by different audiences or readers.

1 William Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure*

This was the minority choice for Shakespeare this session with an even split between the two options.

- (a) Nearly all candidates had sufficient knowledge of the text to find relevant material on the topic of relationships between men and women. Weaker answers tended to give a narrative summary of the various couples in the play, with more successful responses at this level showing how different attitudes to the other sex revealed different character traits, for example, as one answer suggested, 'Mistress Overdone's clear understanding of the gulf between a Claudio and a Lucio'. Better answers saw how such relationships were linked to other important themes, such as morality, law and justice, with many good answers discussing the effects created by forced marriages, casual encounters and family fallings out. Very good answers explored how 'Shakespeare presents relationships as little more than a business arrangement', as one suggested, while others saw Isabella's pleading for Claudio as an exception to the rule which, in 'her abuse of Marianna, she also conformed to'. Some more sophisticated answers discussed how Shakespeare uses attitudes to relationships and the other sex to develop his plot through characterisation, citing Angelo's 'growth into self knowledge, from snow cold blood to giving his 'sensual race the rein' as the mainspring of the plot,' as one put it. Most successful were responses which saw relationships as a key element in the 'problems' of the play as a whole and were able to support the arguments with relevant quotation.

- (b) Most candidates had sufficient textual knowledge to recognise the context for this exchange. Weaker answers often paraphrased the ideas, but some were also able to explore the humour and the way Shakespeare uses this scene to develop his central concerns, such as law and justice and his presentation of others such as Angelo. Better answers saw the characters as symbolic, with Escalus generally a very popular man; as one candidate suggested: 'the most capable man in ruling Vienna is the one without power'. For others, he contrasted 'Angelo's asceticism and 'the Duke's left-wing liberalism, which have left the place a shambles'. His 'cautious mercy', and 'gently condescending tone' shows how he should be 'the stand-in Duke as he knows who to punish'. Pompey was also popular, with his 'natural human urges' his 'paternalistic mood' and his 'unapologetic and disingenuous tone' and his ability to 'switch from telling jokes to telling truths'. He is able to argue that 'the morality of an action is divorced from its legality' and Shakespeare uses Pompey's 'private and primal insolence to show the irresponsibility of natural desire'. Sophisticated answers noted how Escalus's approach to justice is at odds with Angelo's hope that Escalus will 'find good cause to whip them all.' Others explored the language and the use of prose to good effect, noting how Escalus is able to talk to these low-life characters in a way that the Duke and Angelo cannot, thus further developing the audience's response to the justice and morality of the wider text.

2 William Shakespeare: *Richard II*

This was a popular choice, with most opting for the (b) passage option.

- (a) The small number who tackled this question nearly always had a secure knowledge of the text and were able to select relevant material to discuss. Weaker answers tended to summarise their chosen material, with each courtier considered in turn, often with limited ability to connect the ideas into a structured argument. Better answers explored the court and courtiers as reflecting the king, often contrasting Richard's 'selfish, broken and bankrupt court' with 'Henry's politically efficient and well controlled court,' as one put it. Good answers focused on key passages, such as the pageantry of the trial-by-combat or the pathos of Richard on the beach telling 'sad tales' and often contrasted these to the treatment of the Bishop, York and Aumerle by Henry. Others considered the loyalty of the individual courtiers to the two kings as the key dramatic tool, Richard's gradual alienation of his courtiers and, for some, even his family, was often contrasted to Bolingbroke's 'deliberate and constant wooing of the courtiers and the common people'. Those who also considered 'Shakespeare's presentation,' as required by the question, and linked such discussions into a consideration of Shakespeare's dramatic choices such as language, imagery and action, often did well.
- (b) This was a popular choice and nearly every answer was able to provide a relevant context and identify the overall significance of the passage, as exposing the selfishness of Richard and the reasons for his downfall. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage or offer a general character study of Richard and, less securely, York. Better answers at this level explored the failings of Richard and the dilemma of his loyal courtier, York, often seeing Richard's commandeering of Gaunt's wealth as the start of the king's downfall. Good answers noted how York 'gives the audience a list of Richard's failings as a king,' as one suggested, 'though Richard's 'why, uncle' what's the matter' shows us how little he listens and how little he cares.' All of this was seen as foreshadowing Richard's inevitable doom, 'as this, the latest in a series of selfish and bad decisions, has given Bolingbroke the excuse he was looking for to return to England.' More sophisticated answers considered the language and imagery in detail, contrasting Northumberland's deference here with his rudeness later in the play, for example. Others noticed how 'Shakespeare presents the internal conflict between family loyalty and a courtier's duty through York's long speeches,' as one suggested, often analysing the echoes with Gaunt's earlier speeches. Those who linked such discussions to York's development later in the play and his eventual turning away from Richard often did very well.

3 Jane Austen: *Emma*

This was a minority choice in **Section B**, with an even split between the (a) and (b) questions.

- (a) Nearly every answer was able to find relevant material with which to address the question. Weaker answers tended to ignore the given quotation and often gave a very detailed summary of Emma and her relationships. Better answers at this level also saw that she becomes a more mature and self-aware character by the end, implicitly addressing the task. More successful answers focused on Emma's development, seeing the change in her attitudes to Harriet, Elton and Frank Churchill

as a fundamental tool used by Austen to signal Emma's growing maturity. Some answers suggested that as she adopted the views of Mr Knightley, so she became a true heroine. Successful answers also explored how Austen used other characters to reveal Emma's development, with some considering the contrasting comic and serious effects created in, for example, the Box Hill episode and Emma's relationship with Miss Bates, Frank Churchill and Mr Knightley. More sophisticated answers explored Austen's use of contrasting characters such as Harriet and Jane or Elton and Frank to bring out different aspects of Emma, though for some the most revealing relationship was between Emma and her father. His parental laxity was often seen as the 'main reason for Emma's headstrong and immature opinions and actions, which Knightley has to overcome,' as one put it, though for others 'through her devotion to and care for her father, Austen reveals the real Emma and why Knightley loves her'. Where such arguments were supported by detailed reference to and analysis of Austen's use of language and dialogue, the answers often did very well.

- (b) Most answers had sufficient knowledge to explore this passage relevantly, though some were unsure as to the precise context. Weaker answers tended to either paraphrase the passage or write a general summary of the characters and the relationships between Frank, Jane and Emma. Better answers at this level were able to see the significance of these exchanges to the development of these relationships, with many able to discuss, at least to some extent, the duplicity in Frank's character. Good answers developed such ideas by linking them to Austen's concerns in the wider novel, such as 'Emma's immaturity and naivety, so clearly exploited by Frank here for his own devious ends,' as one suggested. Other concerns such as morality, status, friendship and social behaviour were often considered in detail. Sophisticated answers also explored the effects of the writing, looking closely at language, Austen's use of dialogue and irony, with some noticing for example how Frank is not merely insinuating himself with Emma, but also 'telling Jane the trouble he went to, to choose the piano and showing her he still loves her by his reminder of the importance of that particular waltz'. Others noted how Emma 'and perhaps the reader' are taken in by Frank's games. Those responses which linked such ideas to the wider text, with appropriate quotation, often did very well.

4 Emily Bronte: *Wuthering Heights*

This was a popular **Section B** text, with very few choosing the (a) option and the majority choosing the option (b) passage.

- (a) All candidates had a sufficient knowledge of the text to find relevant material to discuss. More successful answers tended to select the material carefully in order to show how different effects were created by using the different narrators, though some were unable to move beyond paraphrase and summary. Better answers were able to link the different narrators to Bronte's methods of characterisation, often focussing on Heathcliff and Catherine. Good answers considered the limitations of using Nellie as first-person narrator, often discussing her 'unreliability', though only a few considered the effects of this on the reader. Such responses, which were able to support points with specific references to the text, often did very well.
- (b) Most answers were able to give an appropriate context to the passage, though a few confused the two Cathys with a consequent loss of relevance. Weaker answers summarised Cathy and Heathcliff's relationship, often in great detail, but with a loss of focus on the passage. Better answers, often remembering Cathy's current situation, were able to discuss relevantly what this passage added to a reader's understanding of the relationship, exploring the language and descriptions of their actions, to show the effects of Bronte's writing. Very good answers noted Nellie's role as the narrator, guiding the reader's response, with others exploring the effect of the revelation of Cathy's imminent death, though surprisingly few referred to her pregnancy. More sophisticated answers were able to consider language, tone and dialogue in detail, as well as the shifting narrative voice, often exploring how Bronte reveals 'the bitter/sweet passion of this relationship even at this point just before Cathy's death,' as one suggested. Such answers, which were able to link these points to the wider text with appropriate references, often did very well.

5 Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Franklin's Prologue and Tale*

- (a) Most candidates had at least a solid knowledge of the text and were able to choose relevant material to discuss. Weaker answers tended to retell the story of the marriage of Dorigen and Arveragus and the attempts of Aurelius to win Dorigen's love. Better answers considered how Chaucer 'presents Arveragus as a lover, not that different from Aurelius, until Dorigen agrees to marry him,' as one put it. Others discussed how this relationship changed after marriage, with the intention to be equal with some reservations variously seen as comic, ironic or Chaucer's attempt to undermine the courtly love tradition. Other answers contrasted the roles of Arveragus and Aurelius in their behaviours and in their attitudes to Dorigen to good effect, though there was a wide range of interpretations, with Arveragus, for example, seen as 'a typical, hypocritical male in his treatment of Dorigen before and after marriage' or as 'the true noble knight that Aurelius and perhaps the Franklin himself aspired to be'. Very good answers were able to explore the topic in the context of the overall marriage debate and to see the presentation of courtly love as a symbol of the complex attitudes to relationships in the Tale generally.
- (b) Most answers were able to give a solid context, though weaker answers were at times confused as to the precise placing of the passage. Some weaker responses tended to paraphrase the passage or to give a narrative summary of Aurelius's situation. Better answers saw the development of the plot, as Aurelius's confidence in the magician grew, with some noticing the unexpected threat at the end and others exploring the development of the characters. Good answers considered the role of the Franklin here, for example, his 'desire to seem learned and knowledgeable in the company of the pilgrims,' as one suggested. Answers which explored the narrative structures and Chaucer's use of the language of religion, magic and nature to create specific effects often did very well, particularly when such ideas were linked into the wider text with specific references. However very few answers were confident enough to tackle the verse form and the poetic structures of the passage. Those that did often did very well.

6 Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*

This was the most popular **section B** text in this session, with most learners choosing option (b).

- (a) Nearly every response had a sound knowledge of the text and was able to select relevant material. Weaker answers tended to give an often very detailed summary of the relationship, with some exploring the effect of the ambiguous ending. Better answers discussed how the various stages of the relationship were used by Dickens to develop the characters and the plot generally, noting that 'through their relationship, Pip and Estella are connected to every other character in the novel, sometimes directly as with Magwitch,' as one suggested. Good answers focused on how Dickens presents the changes in the relationship, with some very good responses alive to the skilful use of Pip as his own narrator. Others explored the contrasts Dickens creates between this relationship and that of Herbert and Clara for example, with some considering the effects of these contrasts. Sophisticated answers saw how the language and dialogue chosen by Dickens shapes the reader's response 'so that we expect a bad outcome to Pip's infatuation and are not disappointed', as one suggested. Other responses at this level considered what this relationship added to Dickens's general concerns around marriages and relationships or saw Pip's infatuation in a more metaphorical or even psychoanalytical light – 'Pip's lack of motherly love leading to his following the star he considered Estella to be,' as one put it. Such arguments did very well when supported by precise reference to the text and an awareness of different possible interpretations.
- (b) This was the most popular question in **Section B**. Nearly every candidate recognised the context of the passage and was alive to Dickens's control of the narrative in leading up to the revelation about Magwitch and Estella. Weaker answers tended to retell Magwitch's story, including Estella, with better answers at this level shaping their material to consider the significance of Magwitch and Estella to the wider plot. Better answers developed such ideas into considering what the effects of this revelation are in terms of the unfolding the plot and of Pip's relationship with Estella and Magwitch. Very good answers considered the change in the dynamic of Pip and Herbert's relationship, as well as in the reader's response to Magwitch, 'with Compeyson as the antagonist and Magwitch as the tragic figure, we are led into expecting Pip's complete devotion to his true 'fairy god mother', as one suggested. Some very good answers were able to analyse Dickens's use of language and dialogue here to create atmosphere and hint at the significance of what is to be revealed. Where such approaches were linked to the wider text by specific references, the results were often very good.

7 Andrew Marvell: *Selected Poems*

This was a minority text with very few takers for option (a), though option (b) was slightly more popular.

- (a) Nearly all candidates were able to find relevant poems to discuss, with weaker answers tending to offer summaries of the poems, and some lapsing into more general paraphrasing. Better candidates often agreed with the statement and chose a range of poems to cover a number of Marvell's characteristic concerns, with good answers exploring both religious and secular poems, including the Damon the Mower poems and the dialogue poems. Other responses disagreed with the statement and cited 'To His Coy Mistress' and 'The Coronet' as evidence. Candidates able to develop this discussion through consideration of Marvell's choices of poetic methods, especially when linked to awareness of the effects of those choices, often did very well.
- (b) There were few successful answers to this question. Some weaker answers seemed to struggle with the meaning of the poem, attempting a line-by-line paraphrase, with little reference to the poetic methods, the rest of the poem or the wider text. Better answers did have some knowledge of poem and text to share, though very few were able to discuss his methods and concerns with any confidence or conviction. Good answers tended to focus on the details of the imagery and the language and crucially explored the effects created by Marvell's various poetic strategies.

8 Percy Bysshe Shelley: *Selected Poems*

This was the second session for this text, and it was still very much a minority choice, with option (b) more popular.

- (a) There were very few answers to this question. All but a few answers had sufficient knowledge of the text to find some relevant points of discussion. Weaker answers often paraphrased the poems they had chosen to discuss, with the popular choices being 'Ode to the West Wind', 'Adonais' and 'Mont Blanc'. For these answers the symbols and symbolism were largely ignored and there were only the beginnings of an attempt to develop an argument. Better answers were able to use their chosen poems to address the topic and consider the variety of ways Shelley uses symbols to present his concerns. Some very good answers offered detailed analyses of Shelley's poetic methods, whilst at the same time, exploring his concerns and presenting a well-structured and developed argument. Such responses did very well.
- (b) This was not a popular choice overall, with few answers seen. Some weaker answers appeared to be responding as to an unseen poem, with a consequent lack of understanding or context. Better answers were able to discuss the extract in its context, though some answers did give too much attention to the historical and political context, with a consequent lack of attention to the detail of the extract. Good answers considered what this extract reveals about Shelley's poetic concerns in detail, relating them to the wider selection and his attitudes to politics and rulers generally. Where this was developed with detailed analysis of the poetic methods, such as language and verse form, and their effects, the answers often did well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/61
1900 to the Present

Key messages

- Candidates must acquire a detailed knowledge of the texts and be able to quote from and make close reference to them to support their ideas.
- Knowledge of context is also often helpful in gaining an understanding of the text.
- Consideration of a writer's purposes and methods is important for successfully tackling a question.
- Candidates are expected to know what happens, the events or plot of a text, but will not be required to narrate these events.
- Writers' ways of expressing ideas, including metaphors, symbols, repeated motifs and the ways they are organised within a text need to be considered, especially as most questions include the words 'in what ways' or 'consider the ways'.
- Candidates should try to develop answers, making a range of different points rather than expressing and supporting the same idea in different ways.

General comments

The Assessment Objectives which cause most difficulty to candidates are AOs 2 and 5. Most candidates understand the need to acquire some knowledge of the text and the context in which it was written or understood. They can usually give some personal response with varying degrees of support and they can communicate with varying degrees of effectiveness. Demonstrating an understanding of how writers use form, structure and language to shape meaning (AO2) is more challenging and many candidates scarcely attempt to do this. Comments must be made on the effects produced by form, structure and language. Merely quoting or labelling metaphors, pointing out certain kinds of metre such as iambic pentameter, or noting the use of repetition is not sufficient if there is no analysis of the effects produced by these features.

Assessment Objective AO5 can be met in various ways, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Candidates might consider the following methods, for example: citing a relevant quotation from a critic; providing more than one of their own viewpoints; contextualising their analysis within a particular critical discourse, such as the Marxist, feminist, Freudian or postcolonial traditions. Whichever method or combination of methods the candidate chooses, they must contribute to the discussion and ideally form part of a persuasive argument.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

***Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche**

This is a very popular text with which many candidates find engaging. Perhaps because of its length some candidates find it difficult to demonstrate a command of detail. Essays could be improved by more substantial use of quotation and close reference to the text, typically in place of unproductive stretches of narrative.

- (a) This was less popular than the passage question but was done very well by some candidates. They demonstrated very good ability to meet AO5 by taking feminist and/or postcolonial approaches to their essays. They compared Obinze's relationships with Kosi and Ifemelu, arguing that he finally returns to Ifemelu because she is feisty, independent and opinionated whereas Kosi has all the attributes of the 'model' wife. She is a compliant housewife and mother with no strong opinions of her own. Another interesting approach was that the love story of Ifemelu and Kosi is a postcolonial take on the traditional romance between white princesses and handsome young princes. This was perhaps less convincing, but good support was offered from the text for both points of view. Weaker answers were often narrative in focus, and typically less well supported. They tended to assert that Ifemelu and Obinze are clearly meant for each other, with some comparison between their relationship and the ones they have with other partners. Some completely ignored Obinze's time in England.
- (b) Weaker responses tended to make general assertive comments about racial prejudice in America, sometimes leaving insufficient time to discuss the specifics of the blog post. Better answers analysed the effects of phrases such as 'an altar of disbelieving joy' and 'bathed in incandescent light'. They contrasted the elated atmosphere in the first section with the colder, more cynical tone of the blog post and Ifemelu's use of the 'white friend' as a mouthpiece for her own anger. They were able to contrast the elation felt in the first section with the undercurrent of jealousy often experienced by Ifemelu in the presence of Paula and Blaine. They also made connections between this blog and others where Ifemelu uses 'a friend of a friend' to voice strong opinions about racism in America and elsewhere.

Question 2

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga

This continues to be a popular text, with almost as many candidates attempting the essay as the passage question.

- (a) Most candidates demonstrated some detailed knowledge of the text but not all of them deployed their knowledge effectively. Strong responses argued that family relationships are a microcosm of society and used a Marxist approach to illustrate how the demise of Balram's parents embodies the class struggle and the enslavement of the proletariat beneath the avaricious bourgeoisie. Kusum was compared with the water buffalo and with the masters of Laxmangarh. Competent answers took into account Ashok's family as well as Balram's and considered the idea of the servant Balram being part of Ashok's family until he is expected to take the blame for Pinky Madam's accident. Balram's betrayal of his own family was also discussed. The idea of the rooster coop was connected to the family situation in the Darkness. Weaker responses tended to give a narrative outline of the plot, referring mainly to Balram's journey from the Darkness to the murder of Ashok with some reference to Kusum and other family members like Dharam.
- (b) Some very good responses explored the imagery and symbolism of the passage such as the lift and the stairs representing elevation/descent into crime, the lights of the mall representing money or an epiphany and the idea of Balram being 'under construction' just as the city is. Some focused on the mirror section where the tiger beneath the skin is apparent and where Balram is conversing with his alter ego or his conscience versus temptation. Some linked this scene to Balram's experience at the zoo. The significance of the closing sentences was discussed with the fruits seen as symbolic of temptation or the fruits of his projected crime. Weaker responses tended to remain at the surface of the text with little wider reference.

Question 3

The Rehearsal by Eleanor Catton

This text has increased in popularity. Candidates seem ready to consider it as a construct and are less likely to treat the characters as real, presumably because of its metafictional nature. Although there were some weak responses which demonstrated lack of detailed knowledge of the text, there were some effective answers, particularly on the passage-based option.

- (a) Victoria and Saladin's affair was seen as a topic for discussion and speculation with links to the theme of the power of imagination. We as readers are not presented with the 'facts' and do not see it from the perspective of the participants; the only possible witness to any of it is Bridget, who dies.

The affair was viewed as a sparking point for the emergence of Julia's character, especially in the counselling session, and for the characters of Isolde and the saxophone teacher. It was also linked to the concept of the victim with some doubt as to whether Victoria or Mr Saladin is the real victim. The idea of rehearsing and performance was also strongly connected to Stanley's play about them. The end of the novel, where Victoria wants to know more about Isolde's relationship with Julia, emphasises the aura of intrigue surrounding the affair and indicates the parallel structure. Stronger responses tended to be supported with effective analysis of quotations relating to imagination, performance and speculation.

- (b) There were some strong answers that dealt subtly with the intricacies of the passage. The saxophone teacher was seen as a heartless manipulator and voyeur, borne out by her dismissive reaction to the death of Bridget, with comment on the language used to describe the newspaper and her brief moment of soul-searching which 'nibbles' at her and is treated like the impulse to try on a new shirt. Some candidates discussed the overlapping of focus on spectators and performance where the teacher goes from being passive observer to the observed, from subject to object. Some links were made to other examples of performance in the novel such as the Theatre of Cruelty scene involving Stanley. Some focused on 'I imagine things when I watch people' and its wider significance. Less strong answers tended to consider the characterisation of the saxophone teacher with some links to the wider text and her relationships with candidates.

Question 4

The Road to Mecca and My Children! My Africa! by Athol Fugard

This text is now one of the most popular on the syllabus. There was some well deployed knowledge of context with specific reference to such events as the Township Riots and the Bantu Education Act as well as a more subtle understanding of Afrikaner culture in South Africa at the time these plays are set. Most attempts were on the passage question.

- (a) Strong responses were able to interweave material from the text with the wider context and were able to see how often the social and the political are interconnected in both plays. They were able to compare characters within and across the plays, discussing their social and political ideas. Thami's views were contrasted with Mr M's Confucian beliefs with some discussion of Marxism. The social struggle of Helen against Calvinist oppression in her community was linked to the story of Patience being evicted from her home when her husband died. Responses could have been improved with greater assessment of the writer's methods.
- (b) Most candidates were able to place the extract in context and could make some links to the wider text. They explored the relationship of Thami and Isabel here and earlier in the play, the more able candidates noting the change in power dynamics and the way Thami dominates the scene as he articulates the binary opinions of black/white communities as reflected in the you/we our/your opposition in his use of language. His use of imperatives ('Say it, Isabel') was also noted and some saw 'you carry a share of the blame' as directed more at the audience than at Isabel. Some commented on Isabel's fading wrath ('Help me') and the way Mr M has now become distanced in Thami's mind, as Anela Myalatya.

Question 5

Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller

This remains by far the most popular text, with most candidates attempting the passage option. There were some excellent answers to both options but some candidates confused the notion of disillusion with that of delusion, or tended to dismiss Willy as experiencing the effects of dementia. This leads to a lack of subtlety and does not give the impression of a considered response.

- (a) There were some sound responses to this question and some very good ones. Good answers tended to consider the *significance* of Charley, rather than just his character. Most candidates knew the text well and had a bank of close reference which they often used to compare Charley with Willy, typically viewing Charley as Miller's idea of a good capitalist or at least one who has achieved the American Dream. Charley and Willy were contrasted as fathers, in their values, and in the ways they have set about achieving the Dream. Willy's jealousy of Charley and his dismissive attitude to him and his son were reviewed, along with Charley's generosity in lending money and

offering Willy a job. Some saw Miller's purported anti-capitalist views as seeming to be contradicted by the portrayal of Charley.

- (b) Most candidates recognised this as a pivotal scene in the play and many could place it in context. Many could make connections between this scene and the wider text, giving details of the origins of Biff's stealing, for example. Strong candidates paid attention to the stage directions, discussing the significance of Willy's unwillingness to look Biff in the face and finding symbolism in their struggle on the stairs, seeing this as depicting their opposing views about how to get on in life. Biff's long speech about the things that matter to him, the moment of his epiphany, and his insistence on Willy listening ('Do you hear this?') were noted, along with the ominous references to death in this scene ('then hang yourself' and 'before something happens'). Willy's failure to learn anything from the confrontation was understood and many saw prolepsis here. Weak answers tended to give narrative accounts of the scene with some commentary and personal response.

Question 6

Selected Poetry of Derek Walcott

This remains a less common choice but is gaining ground in popularity. There is evidence of some careful study of context, with candidates showing awareness of Walcott's West Indian background and religious upbringing. However, some candidates seem determined to impose a reading on the poems which takes only these features into account, with little knowledge or consideration of other topics in Walcott's poetry, such as love and death.

- (a) Few candidates attempted this question, though it offered considerable scope to anyone with some knowledge of the poems, as well as an opportunity to use the context of colonialism and slavery which they had learned. 'Ruins of a Great House' proved a good choice to discuss the way Walcott is to some extent caught between past and present, not only in contemplating the decayed building but in confronting his own attitude to the past. For much of the poem there is a tone of anger and bitterness at 'the leprosy of Empire' reflected in the imagery of disease and decay, but the speaker of the poem undergoes a change of attitude, demonstrated in the shift of tone, acknowledging that some of the colonisers were also great poets and that Britain too had once been a colony of Rome. The common fellowship of all men, regardless of race or history implied in the reference to and quotation from John Donne is significant. Some recognised that the past could refer to Walcott's earlier life as well as his strong feelings about the history of his homeland and reminders of that history which continually confront him. Many poems are suitable for addressing this such as 'Nearing Forty' where the writer ponders on how he will reflect on his past as a writer as he grows older. Candidates need to understand the importance of quotation from the poems and analysis of the effects of language, form and structure.
- (b) Some candidates managed a coherent reading but those who were determined to impose the context of postcolonialism and the history of slavery on their interpretation of this poem produced very narrowly-focused, often unconvincing readings. Some paid attention to the biblical source of the poem and to the unusual depiction of God wiping (presumably tears from) his eyes. This does seem to be the jealous God of the Old Testament, though perhaps in a more human sense than in the biblical representation. Analysis of language and poetic features was necessary to attain at least Level 3 in this question.

Question 7

Selected Poems of W.B. Yeats

There is pleasing evidence of increasing familiarity with these poems and with the context in which they were written. However, some candidates become too caught up in relating the tribulations of Yeats in his relationship with Maud Gonne. It is often relevant to mention this when discussing a poem but it is important to move on to other aspects of context or of the poem itself.

- (a) Very few attempted this question. Some candidates tended to range across several poems, paying closer attention to two. This enabled them to review the various concerns of Yeats through his career. His love of nature was explored in such poems as 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' or 'The Wild Swans at Coole'. His interest in Ireland and its politics was noted in such poems as 'September 1913' or 'Easter 1916'. Other poems were selected to illustrate his unrequited love for Maud Gonne and his feelings about growing old. Weak responses tended to summarise the content of the

chosen poems and to shoehorn the poems they knew to fit the question with little comment on the writer's ways of expressing ideas.

- (b)** Most candidates could recognise some obvious features of this poem, such as paradox or oxymoron, and connect it with the pain Yeats had experienced during his life. They recognised Yeats's interest in the spiritual, as evidenced here; some saw it as an after-death experience, with the God imposing the punishment seen as a vengeful God. Some found it difficult to cope with the ambiguities of the poem and did not consider some of the possibilities of phrases such as 'riddled with light'. Less effective responses tended toward paraphrase, linked the whole poem to Maud Gonne and, beyond seeing it as characteristic, did not refer specifically to other poems.

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- Consideration of a writer's purposes and methods is important for successfully tackling a question.
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- Writers' ways of expressing ideas, including metaphors, symbols, repeated motifs and the ways they are organised within a text need to be considered, especially as most questions include the words 'in what ways' or 'consider the ways'.
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General comments

The Assessment Objectives which cause most difficulty to candidates are AOs 2 and 5. Most candidates understand the need to acquire some knowledge of the text and the context in which it was written or understood. They can usually give some personal response with varying degrees of support and they can communicate with varying degrees of effectiveness. Demonstrating an understanding of how writers use form, structure and language to shape meaning (AO2) is more challenging and many candidates scarcely attempt to do this. Comments must be made on the effects produced by form, structure and language. Merely quoting or labelling metaphors, pointing out certain kinds of metre such as iambic pentameter, or noting the use of repetition is not sufficient if there is no analysis of the effects produced by these features.

Assessment Objective AO5 can be met in various ways, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Candidates might consider the following methods, for example: citing a relevant quotation from a critic; providing more than one of their own viewpoints; contextualising their analysis within a particular critical discourse, such as the Marxist, feminist, Freudian or postcolonial traditions. Whichever method or combination of methods the candidate chooses, they must contribute to the discussion and ideally form part of a persuasive argument.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

***Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche**

- (a) Most candidates who attempted this question could identify hair as symbolic and significant in various ways. Weaker answers contained little specific reference and quotation and were often assertive. Better responses were able to locate specific references to hair: the hair salon where much of the novel is set; the pressure placed on the women to straighten their hair with the use of damaging chemicals; Aunt Uju and the need to look professional; the man in the supermarket who uses the phrase 'looking all jungle'; and the occasion when Ifemelu's mother cut off her 'crowning glory'. The best answers addressed the aspect of the question suggested by the phrase 'in what

way, and with what effects'. They explored hair in relation to Ifemelu's evolving identity and noted how the language of the blogs gives her a new, more confident voice as she is in contact with a virtual community of 'sisters' to commune with. There was appropriate comment on the context of white supremacy and the 'othering' of black hair but some candidates got stuck on this point and went on expressing the same idea with little further development of the argument.

- (b) Weaker responses tended to make general assertive comments about racial prejudice in America, sometimes leaving themselves insufficient time to discuss the specifics of the blog post. Better answers noted the insecurity and jealousy experienced by Ifemelu with regard to Paula and Blaine whose mutual memories are 'wrapped in their shared privacy' and contrasted this with the confident tone of the blog post. They were able to link Paula's parents' comments about Blaine with the issue of Obama's election and the many subtle shades of racism demonstrated in the blog. Wider reference to the text included connection of the signs of weakness in Ifemelu's relationship with Blaine with its later demise and comment on the lack of real political activism in Ifemelu in comparison with Blaine and Paula. The politics of food was noted by some who recognised the cultural difference between African Americans and Non-American Africans as symbolised by the different ways of frying chicken.

Question 2

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga

This continues to be a popular text, and almost as many candidates attempted the essay as the passage question.

- (a) Most candidates demonstrated some detailed knowledge of the text but not all of them deployed their knowledge effectively. Weaker responses tended to give a narrative outline of the plot, referring mainly to corruption and asserting that Balram starts out as an innocent character who is corrupted by his experience with Ashok's family. Other answers explored various examples of immorality and corruption in the novel but tended to produce a list rather than a shaped response. The best essays related the moral climate of Balram's environment to the ways in which Adiga employs language. The reference to the Light and the Dark might initially suggest that those living in the Light display higher standards of morality but, they argued, this is ironically not the case as Balram's experiences seem to indicate that the only way to progress and to become part of the Light is to behave immorally. Ashok was used by some to demonstrate that one could start off with good intentions, with references to his kindness to Balram and other virtuous behaviour, before going on to note how he soon succumbs to carrying bribes in the red bag and is complicit in the decision to allow Balram to take the blame for the hit-and-run incident. The lack of morality was seen to be reflected in the use of zoomorphism to give the effect that the world of the novel is like a jungle where the only law prevailing is to 'eat or be eaten'. Marxist ideas were linked to the progress of corruption from the top to the bottom of society (the trickle-down effect) while others discussed the treatment of women from a feminist aspect (prostitution, the marriage dowry system, the Stork's attitude to women). The irony of the Great Socialist and the statue of Gandhi were also mentioned along with Balram's decadent and cynical language. Some attempted to balance the argument by suggesting that Balram has some redeeming qualities: his care for Dharam, his intention to found a School; and the contrast between the Stork family's handling of Pinky Madam's car accident and Balram's corrupt but morally superior way of handling the accident involving his own employee.
- (b) Some candidates confined themselves to a commentary on the set passage without considering it as an ending to the novel, which would automatically necessitate consideration of the wider text. There was some sound analysis of Balram's use of language such as the inappropriately familiar register employed throughout towards President Jiabao and his recurring reference to himself as one who thinks of the future, as in *The First Night*. There was some misunderstanding of Balram's offer to let Jiabao in on the killing, which was not recognised as making huge profits, though the reference to killing does carry echoes of how Balram has arrived at his success. The symbolism of the chandelier (with its recurrent appearance throughout the text) and his other attributes of wealth were mentioned. Stronger responses analysed the significance of the banishment of 'corrupting' stories about God and Gandhi from his projected school and were able to relate this to Balram's critical attitude to religion, as displayed in the wider text. The culmination of the *White Tiger* image here was also noted, as was its significance alongside all the evidence that Balram's now totally corrupt lifestyle is dependent on the immunity from prosecution he gains through continuous bribery of the police. The political message of the novel was evidenced by the use of the quotation

that 'the rooster coop needs people like me', which makes the final message less personal and identifies Balram (albeit in his own estimation) as a heroic figure who has acted impersonally, especially as Mr Ashok is referred to as being 'weeded out' and his numerous virtues are acknowledged.

Question 3

The Rehearsal by Eleanor Catton

This text has increased in popularity. Candidates seem ready to consider it as a construct and are less likely to treat the characters as real, presumably because of its metafictional nature. Although there were some weak responses which demonstrated lack of detailed knowledge of the text, there were some pleasing answers on both the essay and the passage.

- (a) Most answers demonstrated understanding of the emphasis on performance and theatricality in this novel and strong responses showed understanding of the link between dramatic and musical performance, where in each case rehearsals are taking place. The music lessons were viewed as a performative space where the nature of power and performance are explored. The saxophone teacher's manipulative nature was shown in her treatment of Julia and Isolde. The vicarious pleasure experienced by the teacher was linked to her need to recreate her failed relationship with Patsy. The theatrical nature of the dialogue was detailed where the girls see the teacher as their audience, allowing them to rehearse their possible roles in life as well as their music. There was contrast between the malleability of the girls and the rigidity of adults symbolised by the vulcanised rubber of Isolde's mouthpiece compared with the metal mouthpiece of the teacher. The difficulty in distinguishing between the 'real' and the performed was commented on as both an irritating feature and one that releases the novel from the restraints of realism. Quotation and detailed reference to the text supported these arguments.
- (b) Weaker responses tended towards narrative commentary, describing the reactions of the candidates to the Head of Acting's talk and ignoring the imagined comments of Stanley's father in the final two paragraphs. Stronger responses showed an understanding of theatrical methodology, referring to both Stanislavski and the Theatre of Cruelty. They discussed whether the Head of Acting is really sharing an important emotional experience, the ways in which we are programmed to behave in certain ways in critical moments such as bereavement, and the observation that, in a way, we are all acting. The reluctance of the novel's 'candidates' to expose their deepest feelings was noted and links were made to other areas of the text such as the power of the group, linking to the clique of girls at Abbey Grange and Stanley's desire to find himself a role among his fellow candidates when all the best ones had already been appropriated. The sucking out of emotions and experience was linked to the saxophone teacher and to the relationship of Victoria and Mr Saladin. Strong responses identified the role of Stanley's father in contradicting everything the Institute of Drama stands for. Though he is not present, his views are projected through the imagination of Stanley. He is seen as a poor father and healer as his cynical views show his lack of empathy and concern with money. Stanley's imagined recreation of his father's views emphasises the widening gap in their relationship.

Question 4

The Road to Mecca and *My Children! My Africa!* by Athol Fugard

This text is now one of the most popular on the syllabus. There was some well deployed knowledge of context with specific reference to such events as the Township Riots and the Bantu Education Act as well as a more subtle understanding of Afrikaner culture in South Africa at the time these plays are set.

- (a) Weak responses were characterised by mainly narrative accounts of selected characters such as Miss Helen. Some missed the point that her self-expression lies in the creation of her Mecca but focused only on her wish to retain her independence in the face of the domineering nature of Marius. Some candidates seemed to interpret self-expression as simply being able to articulate one's ideas, which imposed limitations on their answers. Better answers shaped responses so that different forms of self-expression and fulfilment were considered, some concluding that Mr M's death is a form of both as he makes his point very clearly in sacrificing his life. Some thought that Thami is not expressing his own ideas but has been brainwashed by his organisation and can only parrot their ideas. Isabel was used by some to balance the argument as one who is allowed the freedom of self-expression and by the end understands the direction her life must take. The best

responses showed a good knowledge of context well incorporated into the argument. They discussed the difficulties of self-expression under the apartheid system, where even Mr M is teaching the literature of white oppression. Candidates also showed a good understanding of the context of *The Road to Mecca*, where the narrow-minded Calvinist society is repressive towards Miss Helen and her art as well as her situation as a non-church-going widow. Elsa's attempts to stand up against white oppression of her black students and her need to abort her child in a society with no sympathy for single women was also a feature of good answers.

- (b) This passage was often tackled well and provided scope for discussion of the nuanced relationship of Miss Helen and Elsa, evidenced by the pauses and stage directions such as 'She wants to say more but stops herself'. These were interpreted as indicative of both intimacy and secrets. Miss Helen having to think when she had last bathed was picked up as evidence of her weakness and self-neglect. The treatment of women in this repressive society was discussed with reference to Patience, Katrina and Elsa. The story told by Elsa was viewed as particularly poignant in its links to and contrast with her own situation where the simple endurance of Patience is perhaps a reproof to Elsa who has not had the courage to keep her child. Phrases like 'about my age' were selected to draw parallels between Elsa and Patience. Again, the treatment of women, particularly widows and black women, along with the lack of education provided for Patience who could barely speak English was relevantly considered. Attention was drawn to the heat and dust of the Karoo, which some thought was the name of the village.

Question 5

Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller

This remains by far the most popular text, with most candidates attempting the passage option. There were some excellent answers to both options but some candidates confused the notion of disillusion with that of delusion, or tended to dismiss Willy as experiencing the effects of dementia. This leads to a lack of subtlety and does not give the impression of a considered response.

- (a) Weak responses tended to consist of character descriptions of some of the men in the play or, in some cases, focused only on Willy, sometimes losing sight of the question in reviewing his problems and eventual tragedy. Many quoted the line that 'Willy fell only from an imagined height,' attributing this opinion to a vast range of different critics with little relevance to the question. More successful candidates contrasted the characterisation of Charley and Willy with some consideration of Ben, Bernard, Biff and Happy in relation to what Miller is conveying about the concept of manhood. The strongest answers included an analysis of how far these men are reflections of the American Dream or different versions of it. Some disturbingly saw Ben as the epitome of success and manhood, ignoring his advice to Biff never to fight fair with a stranger and the dubious source of his wealth. Some attention was given to the mercantile language of the play and to the way the men treat women. Consideration of Miller's own political and social views was helpful here.
- (b) Stronger responses showed a knowledge of the chronology of the play and noted how near to the end this scene of revelation comes, though the actual events have occurred years before. They were able to refer to other instances in the play when The Woman's laughter is heard, the way this scene explains the toxic relationship between Willy and Biff throughout the play and the contrast between scenes from Biff's earlier childhood, when he had clearly adored his father, and the present.

Some were able to refer closely to other scenes, such as Biff saying, 'Gee we were lonesome without you', while others tended to make assertions about the relationship. Most were able to comment on the significance of the stockings while not everyone referred to other moments in the play when Linda is mending hers and Willy is annoyed. They also considered stage directions such as Willy pushing The Woman, seeing this as symptomatic of his treatment of women in general and his desire to push this whole incident out of his life. Weaker responses tended to give a narrative commentary of the scene, often close to paraphrase with some personal reflection. They showed little knowledge of the play's structure and the significance of the timing of this scene. Some ignored The Woman and focused only on the actions of Biff and Willy in this scene, with little reference to the wider text.

Question 6

Selected Poetry of Derek Walcott

This remains a less common choice but is gaining ground in popularity. There is evidence of some careful study of context, with candidates showing awareness of Walcott's West Indian background and religious upbringing. However, some candidates seem determined to impose a reading on the poems which takes only these features into account, with little knowledge or consideration of other topics in Walcott's poetry, such as love and death.

- (a) Few candidates attempted this question, though it offered considerable scope to anyone with some knowledge of the poems. Some recognised that the past could refer to Walcott's earlier life as well as to the history of his homeland. 'Ruins of a Great House' proved a good choice to discuss Walcott's attitude to the history of slavery and colonialism, though few referred to the change of tone in the latter part of the poem where the speaker becomes less bitter and angry, realising that some of the colonisers were also great poets and that Britain too had once been a colony of Rome. The common fellowship of all men, regardless of race or history implied in the reference to and quotation from John Donne was also frequently missed. Candidates tended to be less confident in their choice of other poems to address this question though 'Nearing Forty' was chosen by some to show how the poet will reflect on his past as a writer as he grows older. Candidates need to understand the importance of quotation from the poems and analysis of the effects of language, form and structure.
- (b) Stronger answers discussed Walcott's evocation of a particular scene here and related it to its West Indian setting. The sense of family closeness and the characteristic use of a religious image, the lamp casting a benediction, were noted but few understood the significance of the old fish, the lure of death which features in other poems such as *The Walk*. Those who were determined to impose the context of postcolonialism and the history of slavery on their interpretation of this poem produced very narrowly-focused, often unconvincing readings. Analysis of language and poetic features was necessary to attain at least Level 3 in this question.

Question 7

Selected Poems of W.B. Yeats

There is evidence of increasing familiarity with these poems and with the context in which they were written. However, some candidates become too caught up in relating the tribulations of Yeats in his relationship with Maud Gonne. It is often relevant to mention this when discussing a poem but it is important to move on to other aspects of context or of the poem itself.

- (a) Very few attempted this question. Those who did tended to write about symbolism without paying much regard to individuals. Poems which would have been suitable for this topic include 'The Fisherman' or 'An Irish Airman Foresees his Death' (where the airman can be considered as symbolic of those Irishmen who took part in the First World War, especially as he is not named). The argument could have been balanced by exploring the many individual attributes of Major Robert Gregory celebrated in the poem to his memory. Weak responses tended to summarise the content of the chosen poems and to shoehorn the poems they knew to fit the question with little comment on the writer's ways of expressing ideas.
- (b) There were some very good responses to this poem with critical opinion seamlessly integrated and some sensitive response to Yeats's poetic methods. They made connections between Yeats, old age and the decline of poetic energy. They showed some understanding of the Irish context and there were some appropriate and intelligently noted references to Maud Gonne. Few candidates managed to make specific links to other poems in this section. They sometimes noted a feature which is characteristic of Yeats but they did not quote an example from another poem to support this claim.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/63
1900 to the Present

Key messages

- Candidates must acquire a detailed knowledge of the texts and be able to quote from and make close reference to them to support their ideas.
- Knowledge of context is also often helpful in gaining an understanding of the text.
- Consideration of a writer's purposes and methods is important for successfully tackling a question.
- Candidates are expected to know what happens, the events or plot of a text, but will not be required to narrate these events.
- Writers' ways of expressing ideas, including metaphors, symbols, repeated motifs and the ways they are organised within a text need to be considered, especially as most questions include the words 'in what ways' or 'consider the ways'.
- Candidates should try to develop answers, making a range of different points rather than expressing and supporting the same idea in different ways.

General comments

The Assessment Objectives which cause most difficulty to candidates are AOs 2 and 5. Most candidates understand the need to acquire some knowledge of the text and the context in which it was written or understood. They can usually give some personal response with varying degrees of support and they can communicate with varying degrees of effectiveness. Demonstrating an understanding of how writers use form, structure and language to shape meaning (AO2) is more challenging and many candidates scarcely attempt to do this. Comments must be made on the effects produced by form, structure and language. Merely quoting or labelling metaphors, pointing out certain kinds of metre such as iambic pentameter, or noting the use of repetition is not sufficient if there is no analysis of the effects produced by these features.

Assessment Objective AO5 can be met in various ways, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Candidates might consider the following methods, for example: citing a relevant quotation from a critic; providing more than one of their own viewpoints; contextualising their analysis within a particular critical discourse, such as the Marxist, feminist, Freudian or postcolonial traditions. Whichever method or combination of methods the candidate chooses, they must contribute to the discussion and ideally form part of a persuasive argument.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

***Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche**

This is a very popular text with which many candidates find engaging. Perhaps because of its length some candidates find it difficult to demonstrate a command of detail. Essays could be improved by more substantial use of quotation and close reference to the text, typically in place of unproductive stretches of narrative.

- (a) This was less popular than the passage question but was done very well by some candidates. They demonstrated very good ability to meet AO5 by taking feminist and/or postcolonial approaches to their essays. They compared Obinze's relationships with Kosi and Ifemelu, arguing that he finally returns to Ifemelu because she is feisty, independent and opinionated whereas Kosi has all the attributes of the 'model' wife. She is a compliant housewife and mother with no strong opinions of her own. Another interesting approach was that the love story of Ifemelu and Kosi is a postcolonial take on the traditional romance between white princesses and handsome young princes. This was perhaps less convincing, but good support was offered from the text for both points of view. Weaker answers were often narrative in focus, and typically less well supported. They tended to assert that Ifemelu and Obinze are clearly meant for each other, with some comparison between their relationship and the ones they have with other partners. Some completely ignored Obinze's time in England.
- (b) Weaker responses tended to make general assertive comments about racial prejudice in America, sometimes leaving insufficient time to discuss the specifics of the blog post. Better answers analysed the effects of phrases such as 'an altar of disbelieving joy' and 'bathed in incandescent light'. They contrasted the elated atmosphere in the first section with the colder, more cynical tone of the blog post and Ifemelu's use of the 'white friend' as a mouthpiece for her own anger. They were able to contrast the elation felt in the first section with the undercurrent of jealousy often experienced by Ifemelu in the presence of Paula and Blaine. They also made connections between this blog and others where Ifemelu uses 'a friend of a friend' to voice strong opinions about racism in America and elsewhere.

Question 2

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga

This continues to be a popular text, with almost as many candidates attempting the essay as the passage question.

- (a) Most candidates demonstrated some detailed knowledge of the text but not all of them deployed their knowledge effectively. Strong responses argued that family relationships are a microcosm of society and used a Marxist approach to illustrate how the demise of Balram's parents embodies the class struggle and the enslavement of the proletariat beneath the avaricious bourgeoisie. Kusum was compared with the water buffalo and with the masters of Laxmangarh. Competent answers took into account Ashok's family as well as Balram's and considered the idea of the servant Balram being part of Ashok's family until he is expected to take the blame for Pinky Madam's accident. Balram's betrayal of his own family was also discussed. The idea of the rooster coop was connected to the family situation in the Darkness. Weaker responses tended to give a narrative outline of the plot, referring mainly to Balram's journey from the Darkness to the murder of Ashok with some reference to Kusum and other family members like Dharam.
- (b) Some very good responses explored the imagery and symbolism of the passage such as the lift and the stairs representing elevation/descent into crime, the lights of the mall representing money or an epiphany and the idea of Balram being 'under construction' just as the city is. Some focused on the mirror section where the tiger beneath the skin is apparent and where Balram is conversing with his alter ego or his conscience versus temptation. Some linked this scene to Balram's experience at the zoo. The significance of the closing sentences was discussed with the fruits seen as symbolic of temptation or the fruits of his projected crime. Weaker responses tended to remain at the surface of the text with little wider reference.

Question 3

The Rehearsal by Eleanor Catton

This text has increased in popularity. Candidates seem ready to consider it as a construct and are less likely to treat the characters as real, presumably because of its metafictional nature. Although there were some weak responses which demonstrated lack of detailed knowledge of the text, there were some effective answers, particularly on the passage-based option.

- (a) Victoria and Saladin's affair was seen as a topic for discussion and speculation with links to the theme of the power of imagination. We as readers are not presented with the 'facts' and do not see it from the perspective of the participants; the only possible witness to any of it is Bridget, who dies.

The affair was viewed as a sparking point for the emergence of Julia's character, especially in the counselling session, and for the characters of Isolde and the saxophone teacher. It was also linked to the concept of the victim with some doubt as to whether Victoria or Mr Saladin is the real victim. The idea of rehearsing and performance was also strongly connected to Stanley's play about them. The end of the novel, where Victoria wants to know more about Isolde's relationship with Julia, emphasises the aura of intrigue surrounding the affair and indicates the parallel structure. Stronger responses tended to be supported with effective analysis of quotations relating to imagination, performance and speculation.

- (b) There were some strong answers that dealt subtly with the intricacies of the passage. The saxophone teacher was seen as a heartless manipulator and voyeur, borne out by her dismissive reaction to the death of Bridget, with comment on the language used to describe the newspaper and her brief moment of soul-searching which 'nibbles' at her and is treated like the impulse to try on a new shirt. Some candidates discussed the overlapping of focus on spectators and performance where the teacher goes from being passive observer to the observed, from subject to object. Some links were made to other examples of performance in the novel such as the Theatre of Cruelty scene involving Stanley. Some focused on 'I imagine things when I watch people' and its wider significance. Less strong answers tended to consider the characterisation of the saxophone teacher with some links to the wider text and her relationships with candidates.

Question 4

The Road to Mecca and My Children! My Africa! by Athol Fugard

This text is now one of the most popular on the syllabus. There was some well deployed knowledge of context with specific reference to such events as the Township Riots and the Bantu Education Act as well as a more subtle understanding of Afrikaner culture in South Africa at the time these plays are set. Most attempts were on the passage question.

- (a) Strong responses were able to interweave material from the text with the wider context and were able to see how often the social and the political are interconnected in both plays. They were able to compare characters within and across the plays, discussing their social and political ideas. Thami's views were contrasted with Mr M's Confucian beliefs with some discussion of Marxism. The social struggle of Helen against Calvinist oppression in her community was linked to the story of Patience being evicted from her home when her husband died. Responses could have been improved with greater assessment of the writer's methods.
- (b) Most candidates were able to place the extract in context and could make some links to the wider text. They explored the relationship of Thami and Isabel here and earlier in the play, the more able candidates noting the change in power dynamics and the way Thami dominates the scene as he articulates the binary opinions of black/white communities as reflected in the you/we our/your opposition in his use of language. His use of imperatives ('Say it, Isabel') was also noted and some saw 'you carry a share of the blame' as directed more at the audience than at Isabel. Some commented on Isabel's fading wrath ('Help me') and the way Mr M has now become distanced in Thami's mind, as Anela Myalatya.

Question 5

Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller

This remains by far the most popular text, with most candidates attempting the passage option. There were some excellent answers to both options but some candidates confused the notion of disillusion with that of delusion, or tended to dismiss Willy as experiencing the effects of dementia. This leads to a lack of subtlety and does not give the impression of a considered response.

- (a) There were some sound responses to this question and some very good ones. Good answers tended to consider the *significance* of Charley, rather than just his character. Most candidates knew the text well and had a bank of close reference which they often used to compare Charley with Willy, typically viewing Charley as Miller's idea of a good capitalist or at least one who has achieved the American Dream. Charley and Willy were contrasted as fathers, in their values, and in the ways they have set about achieving the Dream. Willy's jealousy of Charley and his dismissive attitude to him and his son were reviewed, along with Charley's generosity in lending money and

offering Willy a job. Some saw Miller's purported anti-capitalist views as seeming to be contradicted by the portrayal of Charley.

- (b) Most candidates recognised this as a pivotal scene in the play and many could place it in context. Many could make connections between this scene and the wider text, giving details of the origins of Biff's stealing, for example. Strong candidates paid attention to the stage directions, discussing the significance of Willy's unwillingness to look Biff in the face and finding symbolism in their struggle on the stairs, seeing this as depicting their opposing views about how to get on in life. Biff's long speech about the things that matter to him, the moment of his epiphany, and his insistence on Willy listening ('Do you hear this?') were noted, along with the ominous references to death in this scene ('then hang yourself' and 'before something happens'). Willy's failure to learn anything from the confrontation was understood and many saw prolepsis here. Weak answers tended to give narrative accounts of the scene with some commentary and personal response.

Question 6

Selected Poetry of Derek Walcott

This remains a less common choice but is gaining ground in popularity. There is evidence of some careful study of context, with candidates showing awareness of Walcott's West Indian background and religious upbringing. However, some candidates seem determined to impose a reading on the poems which takes only these features into account, with little knowledge or consideration of other topics in Walcott's poetry, such as love and death.

- (a) Few candidates attempted this question, though it offered considerable scope to anyone with some knowledge of the poems, as well as an opportunity to use the context of colonialism and slavery which they had learned. 'Ruins of a Great House' proved a good choice to discuss the way Walcott is to some extent caught between past and present, not only in contemplating the decayed building but in confronting his own attitude to the past. For much of the poem there is a tone of anger and bitterness at 'the leprosy of Empire' reflected in the imagery of disease and decay, but the speaker of the poem undergoes a change of attitude, demonstrated in the shift of tone, acknowledging that some of the colonisers were also great poets and that Britain too had once been a colony of Rome. The common fellowship of all men, regardless of race or history implied in the reference to and quotation from John Donne is significant. Some recognised that the past could refer to Walcott's earlier life as well as his strong feelings about the history of his homeland and reminders of that history which continually confront him. Many poems are suitable for addressing this such as 'Nearing Forty' where the writer ponders on how he will reflect on his past as a writer as he grows older. Candidates need to understand the importance of quotation from the poems and analysis of the effects of language, form and structure.
- (b) Some candidates managed a coherent reading but those who were determined to impose the context of postcolonialism and the history of slavery on their interpretation of this poem produced very narrowly-focused, often unconvincing readings. Some paid attention to the biblical source of the poem and to the unusual depiction of God wiping (presumably tears from) his eyes. This does seem to be the jealous God of the Old Testament, though perhaps in a more human sense than in the biblical representation. Analysis of language and poetic features was necessary to attain at least Level 3 in this question.

Question 7

Selected Poems of W.B. Yeats

There is pleasing evidence of increasing familiarity with these poems and with the context in which they were written. However, some candidates become too caught up in relating the tribulations of Yeats in his relationship with Maud Gonne. It is often relevant to mention this when discussing a poem but it is important to move on to other aspects of context or of the poem itself.

- (a) Very few attempted this question. Some candidates tended to range across several poems, paying closer attention to two. This enabled them to review the various concerns of Yeats through his career. His love of nature was explored in such poems as 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' or 'The Wild Swans at Coole'. His interest in Ireland and its politics was noted in such poems as 'September 1913' or 'Easter 1916'. Other poems were selected to illustrate his unrequited love for Maud Gonne and his feelings about growing old. Weak responses tended to summarise the content of the

chosen poems and to shoehorn the poems they knew to fit the question with little comment on the writer's ways of expressing ideas.

- (b)** Most candidates could recognise some obvious features of this poem, such as paradox or oxymoron, and connect it with the pain Yeats had experienced during his life. They recognised Yeats's interest in the spiritual, as evidenced here; some saw it as an after-death experience, with the God imposing the punishment seen as a vengeful God. Some found it difficult to cope with the ambiguities of the poem and did not consider some of the possibilities of phrases such as 'riddled with light'. Less effective responses tended toward paraphrase, linked the whole poem to Maud Gonne and, beyond seeing it as characteristic, did not refer specifically to other poems.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/71 Comment and Appreciation</p>

Key messages

Good answers typically:

- show that candidates have read and considered their chosen poems or passages as a whole before starting to write;
- focus upon the form, structure and language of the poems or passages and upon how these shape meaning, and do not rely upon narrative or paraphrase;
- discuss how literary devices and techniques are used by the writers;
- show personal responses to the ways in which the poems or passage are written, not simply to what is said;
- maintain a tight focus on the poems or passage throughout their response, and do not discuss other writers, other texts or other ideas.

General comments

There was some good work this session; most candidates appeared to have followed the guidance offered in the **Key messages** above as they appeared in last year's report, and there were no rubric errors, though a few scripts were clearly unfinished because of time pressure. The great majority addressed **Questions 1 and 3**, though relatively few made much of the fact that the passage in **Question 3** was a piece of drama, to be seen as well as read; **Question 2** was tackled by only a few candidates, but there were some thoughtful and interestingly personal responses to the two poems.

One significant concern did arise, however.. While most candidates approached their chosen passages in a properly critical way, and made some useful and often perceptive comments about how the writers concerned created meaning and effects, a large number chose a different and not always so successful approach, listing and illustrating specific thematic or literary features that they identified in an opening paragraph, followed by a sequence of often only loosely connected paragraphs illustrating how each feature appeared; sometimes this was purely factual, in some instances with illustrative quotations, rather than exploring the ways in which these features helped the reader or viewer to understand and respond to the writing. Such an approach was very rarely critically focused in the ways that bullet points 2 and 3 in the **Key messages** suggest; simply identifying themes, for example, often led to speculative and unsupported discussions about what the writers may perhaps have intended. Some less successful answers seemed determined that whatever the passages were clearly about the writers actually intended to convey political messages about poverty, physical and verbal abuse, marriage, class differences, gender, women's suffrage, for example. And simply listing a number of other literary devices – metaphors, similes, ellipses, alliteration, for example, and even the rather general term 'diction' – did not demonstrate any really confident critical appreciation of the sort that this Paper looks for.

There were relatively few responses that relied solely or largely upon narrative or paraphrase, but very often the most successful approach was when candidates worked through each passage or poem in a kind of chronological order, commenting on ways in which language and images, and in **Question 3** dramatic actions, contributed towards understanding and personal response. The most successful, in adopting this method, were often also able to see ways in which ideas presented in one or two moments in each passage could usefully be related to other moments – seeing the whole in the part.

Previous reports to centres have suggested that speculation about the significance of a novel's or play's title is rarely helpful when exploring just a short extract, and *The Apple* (**Question 3**) proved a good example of this. Several candidates wanted the title to have some significance: Ann was seen by some as a good apple, while others felt that Helen was a sour apple; others still wanted it to be a biblical reference to the apple that tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, but such an interpretation led to few convincing thoughts. Text titles are given in the question paper simply as a reference point as to the source of the passage, and it is very unlikely indeed that to try to explain them in some way will lead to anything critically valuable. An exception might be with a poem because this will be complete rather than an extract, but even here it is probably wiser to avoid all attempts to interpret a title.

The Instructions on the question paper cover sheet say that '**You are reminded of the need for good English and clear presentation in your answers**'. Examiners are of course fully aware that answers are written in a short time and under great pressure, but clarity and care in presentation is of paramount importance, even at the very end of a long response where the pressure of time is suddenly even more demanding; it is better if necessary to conclude with a few legible bullet points than to rush a few barely legible sentences. The phrase 'good English' is similarly important, and candidates do need to use conventionally formal diction rather than overly colloquial expressions: Peter and Elizabeth have children, for example, not 'kids'; Elizabeth is their mother, not their 'mom'; Peter is committing adultery, not 'playing away', and his name is Peter not 'Pete'.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 – *Workday*

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Many saw the opening few lines as deeply significant: Mary's life is indeed dark and cold, and her methodical, almost mindless, process of getting up, clearing her bedding and washing reflects the very subdued and oppressed nature of her role. Her care and perhaps affection for the children is shown by the writer to reinforce her underlying kindness and warmth, despite the cold climate – in every sense – in which she lives. Her almost total silence throughout the passage was noted and commented on by many as further material offered by the writer of Mary's nature and position in the household. Elizabeth was initially seen by almost every candidate as unkind at best, and truly evil at worst; her verbal assaults on Mary appear unforgivably callous, and while it was perhaps too extreme to regard her as a villain it is clear that the writer wants us to dislike her from the start.

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Question 3 – *The Apple*

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

<p>Paper 9695/72 Comment and Appreciation</p>

Key messages

Good answers typically:

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- focus upon the form, structure and language of the poems or passages and upon how these shape meaning, and do not rely upon narrative or paraphrase;
- discuss how literary devices and techniques are used by the writers;
- show personal responses to the ways in which the poems or passage are written, not simply to what is said;
- maintain a tight focus on the poems or passage throughout their response, and do not discuss other writers, other texts or other ideas.

General comments

There was some good work this session; most candidates appeared to have followed the guidance offered in the **Key messages** above as they appeared in last year's report, and there were no rubric errors, though a few scripts were clearly unfinished because of time pressure. The great majority addressed **Questions 1 and 3**, though relatively few made much of the fact that the passage in **Question 3** was a piece of drama, to be seen as well as read; **Question 2** was tackled by only a few candidates, but there were some thoughtful and interestingly personal responses to the two poems.

One significant concern did arise, however.. While most candidates approached their chosen passages in a properly critical way, and made some useful and often perceptive comments about how the writers concerned created meaning and effects, a large number chose a different and not always so successful approach, listing and illustrating specific thematic or literary features that they identified in an opening paragraph, followed by a sequence of often only loosely connected paragraphs illustrating how each feature appeared; sometimes this was purely factual, in some instances with illustrative quotations, rather than exploring the ways in which these features helped the reader or viewer to understand and respond to the writing. Such an approach was very rarely critically focused in the ways that bullet points 2 and 3 in the **Key messages** suggest; simply identifying themes, for example, often led to speculative and unsupported discussions about what the writers may perhaps have intended. Some less successful answers seemed determined that whatever the passages were clearly about the writers actually intended to convey political messages about poverty, physical and verbal abuse, marriage, class differences, gender, women's suffrage, for example. And simply listing a number of other literary devices – metaphors, similes, ellipses, alliteration, for example, and even the rather general term 'diction' – did not demonstrate any really confident critical appreciation of the sort that this Paper looks for.

There were relatively few responses that relied solely or largely upon narrative or paraphrase, but very often the most successful approach was when candidates worked through each passage or poem in a kind of chronological order, commenting on ways in which language and images, and in **Question 3** dramatic actions, contributed towards understanding and personal response. The most successful, in adopting this method, were often also able to see ways in which ideas presented in one or two moments in each passage could usefully be related to other moments – seeing the whole in the part.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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There were some unexpected comments on the time: several assumed that both sisters worked in a tailoring factory, and that Helen arrives very early to work (half past three in the morning, presumably?); several misread the word ‘early’ and commented on how late Helen was; and a number saw Ann’s remark as sarcastic, with however no supporting evidence for this. What most responses showed, however, was a clear appreciation of how the dramatist presents the sisters as radically different in lots of ways, but at the same time – in strikingly contrasting ways – as deeply fond of each other. Ann is perhaps irritatingly concerned for Helen’s health because she has come home so early, and insists upon making her a cup of tea; Helen, perhaps equally irritatingly, refuses to accept any concern because she is *as strong as a bullock* – no candidate at all commented on the next two words that Helen says, which seem to suggest that the dramatist wanted her to show some sympathy for the kind of gentle and traditionally feminine attitude that Ann shows.

Helen is earlier described as ‘*handsome*’, a word which many said is normally used of a male character; this in no way suggests that Helen is overly masculine in personality, and certainly not that she is homosexual,

but we are asked to see her as more outwardly different from her sister; her actions are physical: she throws herself into a chair, she jabs the pins in her hat and throws it across the room, she seizes Ann and pushes her into a chair, all actions that will be very striking in the theatre in comparison with Ann's quiet and retiring demeanour. We soon learn what it is that is annoying Helen so much: she is furious at the way Ann is being made use of by Norah (who may be another sister or just an acquaintance – we are not told); Ann is making a dress for Norah out of pure kindness, which Helen sees as folly, since despite being tired Norah is still not too tired to go to a party! And Helen is increasingly cross at the fact that their father has not been asked to help financially and that Ann has felt it necessary to pawn a small piece of jewellery. Helen's final speech in the passage, together with her very physical actions here, are again strikingly theatrical ones, both verbally and visually.

There is a great deal of a dramatic nature that can be discussed, and doing so led many candidates into very much better critical responses than those who saw the piece primarily as a political diatribe about women's independence and suffrage, about being dependent upon parental support, about women being forced into slave labour or being a governess (Ann and Helen are not governesses, of course). As in **Question 1**, candidates who wanted to see and illustrate particular thematic concerns almost invariably produced less good critical work than those who wanted to see the passage purely as a piece of writing, and ideally as a piece of theatre.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/08
Coursework

Key messages

Good folders will:

- address their two texts with clear, concise and consistent focus upon what the questions ask
- explore how each writer creates particular effects, discussing some of the literary or dramatic techniques used
- support comments with brief but apt textual quotations and references
- make some brief use of critical and/or contextual material to support arguments
- where practicable, write on individually selected and worded questions, to make responses as personal as possible
- ensure that the work submitted remains within the overall 3000 word limit. (Quotations do not count towards this total.)

General comments

Work submitted for moderation showed very clearly that centres and candidates alike were confidently aware of what the syllabus requires, and that preparation for the writing of responses had been careful and professional. Texts used were invariably suitably selected, and questions were well worded and in most cases appropriately chosen by each candidate; it is important, of course, that centres do their best to ensure that no candidate chooses a question that is too demanding for her or him, or equally one that is too easy. Texts and questions had in almost every case been approved in advance, though centres might bear in mind that the Advisers do not know each candidate and her or his particular strengths.

All folders were kept within the 3000 word-limit, and many indicated the number of words that had been used after each response; the most helpful were those which gave two word counts, one including quotations and one excluding quotations – it is the latter which matters. Once or twice it appeared that a response had been cut short by a candidate to avoid transgressing the limit, so that its arguments were not fully completed, but on the whole this was not a serious concern.

There was plenty of close critical exploration of each text, and relatively little reliance upon narrative or description, so that the second requirement of the Marking Criteria (U) was well addressed; this was most evident in responses to poetry and drama, but there were some thoughtfully detailed comments in relation to prose texts as well. Evidence that plays had been seen as well as read, whether in live theatrical performance or in recordings, was frequent, and many candidates showed a real understanding and appreciation of how an actor or director might add to an audience's reaction to what is said or to what takes place. Some candidates made reference to specific performances, adding authority to what was being argued.

Most candidates also quoted secondary critical material, so that the last of the Marking Criteria (O) was addressed. The most helpful and effective of such references became an integral part of an argument, rather than just an illustrative point; it is not necessary for candidates to disagree with what another critic has said, but if they do – and equally if they *agree* – it was good to see such a point being made. Most such references were appropriately footnoted, and also listed in bibliographies, further evidence of the care that had been taken by the vast majority.

Contextual factors (Marking Criteria K and U) were well used, but care does need to be taken to ensure that these do not become more important than focus on the texts themselves; and highly speculative thoughts, are best avoided, unless clear evidence is offered. But more general historical and cultural contexts were generally well managed, and when briefly and appropriately worded these added authority to arguments.

Personal response (Marking Criterion P) is very important, and where it is evident that a candidate has developed and argued independently and individually then it is likely that he or she may be more highly rewarded. There is of course no expectation that any candidate will present entirely new critical ideas, especially if a text has been well studied by others and by literary critics for many years, but as far as is reasonably possible it is essential that it should not appear within a group of folders that candidates are following heavily taught ideas and responses. Offering individual questions is one way of encouraging this, but even where all candidates in a centre addressed the same texts and questions there was a real sense this series that each one had thought carefully and personally about how to respond and write.

Marginal annotations by teachers were almost always full and helpful, with some useful summative comments on each response; where these were then related to the Marking Criteria it often meant that the marks offered were much closer to agreed standards.