

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/01
Poetry and Prose

Key Messages

- Precise focus on the question and careful structuring of appropriate material into a cogent argument characterised the best answers.
- Attention to form, structure and language, not just characterisation, is an important element in every well-supported analytical response.
- Apt and discriminating use of critical comments was a feature of good answers; excessive reliance on one opinionated critic sometimes unbalanced weaker responses.
- Biographical material about a writer is not usually the best basis for close analysis of the writer's work.

General Comments

Candidates impressed with their wide-ranging knowledge of their chosen texts, often quoting accurately and in detail to support their arguments. Almost all answers showed evidence of good preparation, and there was very little mis-timed work. This year's new texts - Donne, Keats, Larkin, Swift, Dickens and Waugh - were all popular and prompted essays which showed both appreciation and enjoyment. For the first time since the syllabus began, all sixteen set texts had been studied somewhere.

Writing a relevant answer involves careful consideration of the question and what it involves, as well as suitable choice of appropriate material to support an argument. The best answers always focused carefully on the terms of the question, offering a definition perhaps, or considering from the opening paragraph the kind of relevant trajectory which the argument might take. In order to score marks at the top end of the levels, the question needs to be tackled explicitly, head on, so that every paragraph maintains a concentrated attention on what is relevant. A tendency to slip into description or narrative characterised some weaker responses. Some less convincing essays became diffuse and implicit, losing the strong drive forward which the sharper responses evinced. Choosing the right material to discuss, particularly in the poetry section of the paper, is vital. The best answers always used absolutely apt material; the questions are always carefully framed to give plenty of suitable choice. It is not helpful when candidates appear to have studied a small number of poems which they use whatever the question. In answers on Plath, for example, some essays used material about marriage, rather than children and motherhood. These concepts may be related, but they are not the same. 'The ways in which women are presented' in Donne's poetry required careful discrimination, too – in some of the love poems they are barely presented at all – a point which some thoughtful essays made, of course.

Close attention to form, structure and language is always a feature of the best work. The genre will determine which of these is dominant: in the novel, comments on narrative methodology, structure and characterisation will probably lead the discussion, whilst in poetry, verse form, imagery and diction offer different opportunities for comment.

Critical views are a way of introducing alternative viewpoints and showing wider reading. The best work used critical quotations to enhance the argument and perhaps to clinch a point already made and illustrated in the essay. Good essays often extended the argument by disagreeing with the view expressed, or at least making some comment on it. Occasionally weaker answers showed a heavy dependence on one very hostile critic, particularly in work on Donne; extreme views are always welcome, but they need the context of careful textual support and thoughtful evaluation and, if possible, consideration of alternative views. Set texts at this level are chosen to be worthy of study and close critical exegesis.

The most successful essays incorporated suitable contextual material seamlessly, or discussed it with insight. Work on *Disgrace*, for example, was exemplary in its understanding and appreciation of the South African background, and in many cases was the better essay of the two presented. Knowledge about social

conditions in Victorian London informed essays on *Bleak House* very helpfully. Where contextual material can limit an essay and render its assertions almost valueless is in the matter of biographical material. An essay which can confidently state 'Larkin had no close relationships', or 'Waugh's wife was the reason for this novel', or 'Keats wrote this poem because his mother had died three years before', is avoiding the complex business of literary analysis, which has at heart close consideration of the concerns expressed in the words on the page. Some of us will be lucky enough to sit in the garden and hear a nightingale, or unlucky enough to lose a close family member; how many of us will have the genius to write the ode?

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1 *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*

Chaucer remains the most widely taken of the poets on the syllabus and there was a full range of responses on *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, with answers evenly divided between the two alternative questions. A feature common in weaker answers was to describe the marriages of the Wife. This material can of course be a relevant source of comment on both youth/age and irony, but a tendency to slip into narrative was a widespread cause of weaker answers. Nonetheless candidates knew the work well on the whole and wrote enthusiastically on it. Critical comments were used more discriminatingly than last year, suggesting that advice given in previous reports had been taken to heart.

- (a) The relationship between youth and age was seen as a feature of the Wife's presentation of herself, reflecting on the lost flower of her youth and on her life experience; but the age of her different husbands was also discussed. The loathly lady of the Tale was often seen as her alter ego and astute comment on the resolution of the Tale was often a feature of more successful answers.
- (b) Chaucer's use of irony prompted some excellent answers, exploring the Wife's assertions and behaviour and its effects. Less analytical answers tended to list examples of contradictions without exploring them as irony. Once again the Tale and its ironic ending proved a focus for subtle comment. Critical views were often quoted in support, usually with focus and aptness.

Question 2 *John Donne: Selected Poems*

Those answers which showed appreciation of Donne's intelligence, wit, passion and distinctive use of imagery and tone were usually effective. If this appreciation was combined with appropriate poem choices, then the basis of a good answer was assured. However, the stock of poem choices was very limited in some answers – some examples follow below - and candidates are advised to study closely more of the set poems so that they are able to make appropriate choices for whatever questions are asked. A broader range of critical views is also advised: many similar answers from one group of candidates repeated and quoted one critic's negative views of Donne, so that personal response and attention to the complexity of Donne's work were both severely compromised. One group of candidates had clearly studied Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress* as contextual background to the 'carpe diem' love poem and confidently attributed it to Donne.

- (a) The question asks for 'connections' between the love poetry and the religious poetry. Many answers found religious images or diction in the love poems and erotic images or diction in one religious poem but no other elements of style in common. Nearly every answer used Holy Sonnet XIV, *Batter my heart* and no other religious poem. Nearly every answer employed *The Flea*. The best answers made a thoughtful choice of poems and discussed other elements of style: the use of a dramatic first person persona, declamatory quality, tonal shifts and so on, drawing thoughtful conclusions about the subtlety and complexity of the poetry.
- (b) As suggested in the General Comments section, not all of the love poems 'present' women, so some were more suitable than others for answering this question. Those responses which used apt poems and knew them well enough to refer closely to their language and form were most successful. Occasionally answers made inaccurate contextual reference to Donne's readership, with comments such as 'the public would have been shocked', and so on. The poems were not published in the modern sense, and they were not written with 'the public' in mind.

Question 3: Alexander Pope: *The Rape of the Lock*

The poem has always been a minority choice, but one which has elicited many fine responses. Candidates almost all answered on alternative a) and wrote impressively detailed answers, showing strong grasp of the poem's contexts and its style. Appreciation of the literary contexts of the epic and mock heroic were understood and incorporated into the discussion.

Question 4: John Keats: *Selected Poems*

Not surprisingly Keats, new this year, was a very popular choice and there were many enthusiastic, thoughtful and detailed answers, with both alternatives equally popular. As suggested above, too much biographical explanation is unhelpful in answering the questions set, though brief reference to Keats' letters to make a point was often relevant. Contextual background to the Romantic poets and their pre-occupations was helpfully used. 'Negative Capability' was frequently alluded to, but not always entirely grasped.

- (a) Keats's presentation of dreams and visions was dealt with well on the whole, with the best answers able to pinpoint moments of dream-like or visionary quality and quote them, even while discussing in detail the more obvious poems like *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. The best answers tried to consider what the overall effect of the writing was, for example the relationship between real life and the dream-like state, or exploration of the imagination.
- (b) Many candidates answered this question and all had plenty of examples of sensations and sense imagery. Fewer considered what kinds of thoughts Keats explores in his poetry, and for some the thoughts were all extraneous ones from his life and relationships. But Keats is philosophical; his work interrogates concepts such as Beauty, Truth, Eternity and Art and the best answers considered his interest in these concepts and whether indeed there is a tension between sensations and thoughts of this nature. Some argued successfully that the thoughts explored in the poems derive from the sensations experienced and expressed.

Question 5: T.S. Eliot: *Selected Poems*

The great popularity of Eliot continues and, as in previous years, there was some excellent work showing considerable appreciation of his poetry, especially *The Waste Land*.

- (a) Many candidates accepted the challenge posed by this question and wrote convincing defences of *The Waste Land*. The large number of very good responses gave copious illustrations of the 'heap of broken images' arguing that together they cohere into a cogent criticism of a fractured society. This was an altogether impressive set of essays, thoughtful and mature.
- (b) A number of candidates chose instead to write on Eliot's use of symbolism in the *Selected Poems*. On the whole these essays were very well illustrated, but less successful ones tended towards a list of symbols with no unifying argument. The best work here focused on the various ways in which Eliot uses symbolism, using the details of the text to support the thrust of the argument. *Rhapsody on a windy night* and *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock* were both popular sources of exemplars.

Question 6: Elizabeth Bishop: *Selected Poetry*

Only a few candidates wrote on Bishop this year, but there were some excellent essays: perceptive, probing and eloquently expressed. Over the years, Bishop's work has elicited many fine responses. Here, candidates chose the b) option, writing on her exploration of 'the strangeness and mystery of life', using apt poems, analysing them in detail to support thoughtful and subtle arguments.

Question 7: Sylvia Plath: *Ariel*

There were on the whole fewer simplistic biographical 'explanations' for Plath's poetry in essays this session, and more attention to the language and imagery of the poems.

- (a) Plath has always attracted the full range of responses, and this year was no exception. The 'vision of disorder and violence' suggested in the question was considered by just fewer than half of those writing on the poet. The best answers acknowledged the violent nature of much of Plath's imagery as well as the hostile nature of the world, but the idea of disorder was sometimes applied to Plath's

own style, with less successful answers asserting that her work is chaotic and lacking in order. No one would deny the difficulty of some of Plath's complex imagery, but the most successful answers revealed the artistry inherent in each poem in the collection, analysing the imagery to suggest its effectiveness on a number of levels.

- (b) There are many poems in *Ariel* about motherhood and children, yet some answers dealt with the snares of marriage and domesticity, which do not necessarily involve either. The best answers were securely focused on the topic and provided extremely apt support directly from the text, ranging widely.

Question 8: *Philip Larkin: Selected Poetry*

New this year, Larkin's poetry was predictably attractive, with both question options equally popular. A notable feature of answers was the variety of poems chosen in both of the alternatives; candidates had thought carefully about what was most appropriate to their arguments and chose accordingly, with the result that essays suggested strong personal response, a feature of the higher mark bands. The best work was able to acknowledge the tentativeness and ambiguity of tone which characterises much of Larkin's work: the 'almost-instinct almost-true', for example.

- (a) Answers universally voted for 'enduring portraits', but many good essays suggested that these enduring portraits are in fact formed from what are initially snapshots, becoming more substantial explorations of 'the human condition' as the poems develop to their conclusions. There were many good, sensitive analyses here.
- (b) A wealth of different but entirely appropriate material was used in answers here, with the 'objects and images of everyday life' varying from, for example, the furnishings in Mr Bleaney's room to ambulances to the ordinary objects in 'Home is so sad.' Close knowledge of the language of the poems was often impressive in answers here. There were a small number of answers in which understanding of 'Mr Bleaney' was not quite secure: this is a rented room, so the objects are not those of Mr Bleaney, though the next tenant (the poem's persona) fears that he too, by living however briefly in this drab place, may share some of the characteristics of the previous tenant.

Question 9: *Jonathan Swift: Gulliver's Travels*

There were not many essays on Swift in this first session for the work, and answers were evenly divided between the two alternatives. *Gulliver's Travels*, unique in many ways, is not a novel and its structure is challenging therefore. The best essays made reference to all the journeys, but avoided generality by focusing on the question carefully and making close direct reference to the text throughout. It is acceptable to concentrate on a smaller number of journeys, two perhaps, but then more detail is required in support of the essay's argument. There were some essays which were entirely general surveys, sometimes summarising the whole work in Wikipedia style, and this is not the most successful approach to any prose work on the paper.

- (a) Essays took the view that Gulliver is satirised heavily and the best gave clear evidence to support their arguments, often considering different types of satire.
- (b) Gulliver's disgust for human physicality is perhaps most clearly focused on the second voyage, but by no means only there, and the best answers again made clear detailed reference to the text.

Question 10: *Jane Austen: Persuasion*

Austen's work remains an obvious source of pleasure for most candidates, with sound, well-detailed essays the norm.

- (a) This was a popular option and essays invariably dealt with the relationship between Anne and Wentworth. However, the past affects more than these two and there were some careful considerations of the rest of the Elliot family as well as Mrs Smith and Lady Russell. Some thoughtful essays referred to the atmosphere created by natural description of the seasons to enhance their arguments, not just relying on characterisation. A tendency to drift out of focus into consideration of marriage and the Navy was discernible in some less confident answers, and some weak responses lapsed into telling the story.

- (b) 'Conversation' was a less popular option but often chosen by those who had apt examples at their fingertips of both direct dialogue and what is overheard. There were many excellent essays here. Some thoughtful answers made the point ultimately that much of the really important communication was conveyed in letters, or wordless.

Question 11: George Eliot: *The Mill on the Floss*

This was the final year on the set text list for this novel, and there were very few takers, all opting for the theme of education. Work was generally sound and well-illustrated, often highlighting the disparity between the education of Maggie and the male characters.

Question 12: Charles Dickens: *Bleak House*

The length of the novel was no deterrent to the many excellent responses on Dickens. Close attention to textual details ranging across the novel characterised many answers and the standard was extremely high.

- (a) There were a very small number of answers to this option. Some concentrated on imagery, using very detailed textual support; others focused on the 'detective story' aspect of the novel. All were very well organised and thoughtful.
- (b) The more popular alternative, this question elicited many excellent responses, with a clear sense of the effect of the two different voices of Esther and the omniscient narrator. What was most impressive was the fine detail of illustration of the points made, with close analysis of form, structure and language – an altogether remarkable set of answers.

Question 13: Edith Wharton: *The Age of Innocence*

As this is the last year for the novel on the current syllabus, it was not as popular as in the past. Nonetheless there was a significant enough group of answers to comment upon; their enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, the novel evident. The two alternatives were equally popular.

- (a) The concept of 'innocence' was largely defined by considering characterisation, though more thoughtful answers widened the discussion to consider the social concerns suggested by the novel's title. May's 'innocence' formed the bedrock of many answers.
- (b) There were many thoughtful and well documented comments on the end of the novel, showing secure grasp of the text and an awareness of the different ways in which closure is achieved. Candidates were generally harsh in their judgements of Archer, seeing him as weak and passive, his final unwillingness to meet Ellen typical of the conventional spirit displayed throughout the novel. Many quoted the critical comment that he is pathetic rather than tragic. However, some more thoughtful answers were not quite so ready to consign him to the dustbin, and offered sympathetic analyses of his situation.

Question 14: Evelyn Waugh: *A Handful of Dust*

Waugh's novel, new this year, had a wide take-up. Candidates showed a fluent appreciation of its style and concerns, though essays occasionally drifted into narrative treatment, a danger to watch.

- (a) This was the more popular of the two alternatives and well-handled on the whole, with shrewd comments on the different settings and their resemblance to each other. Discriminating definitions of 'civilisation' and 'barbarism' often provided an introductory focus to the argument. Animal imagery was relevantly discussed, with useful examples.
- (b) 'Domestic life' was clearly attributed to the different settings, including Mr Todd's, and well detailed and discussed. As in answers to (a), textual support was full, accurate and supportive.

Question 15: J. M. Coetzee: *Disgrace*

Each year there have been more answers on the novel, and it has been extremely successful across the range of attainment. Candidates responded well to its concerns and wrote fully-engaged essays, with a strong, knowledgeable sense of the South African context. Weaker essays tended to use telling the story as an essay framework at times.

- (a) Although not the most popular choice, this essay topic was well discussed and very well-illustrated. Answers showed excellent knowledge of the literary references and related them to Lurie's life and concerns very appropriately. The obvious material at the beginning of the novel was used, but the end of the novel and the changes to the opera were also considered carefully to suggest Lurie's growth and change for the better as a human being.
- (b) This essay title elicited a wide range of strong, personally engaged responses. The best began by defining terms and making a clear distinction between what they saw as 'humiliation' (often conceived as a short-term, public affair) and the more serious 'disgrace', more serious because it entailed a fall from 'grace'. All characters were considered. On the whole answers argued that the title 'Disgrace' is better, though there were some lively arguments for 'Humiliation'.

Question 16: Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

There were not quite as many essays this session, there was nevertheless a strong and well-illustrated range of essays, showing sympathetic appreciation of the novel.

- (a) Candidates answered well on memory, with the best emphasising the novel's structure and narrative methods, not just the characters. There were many very good essays.
- (b) Good answers argued that the party is a structural device, providing a final focus for the characterisation and social comment expressed throughout the novel. The death of Septimus was often thoughtfully discussed. The best answers knew the final moments of the novel extremely well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/02

Drama

Key Messages

- Answers to passage based questions do well when they focus on the passage and make it the basis for a sustained discussion.
- Many of the best responses are remarkable for their succinctness and depth of sustained argument, rather than for their attempt to cover all possible points.

General comments

At the very top end, there was work on this paper that was superb in all respects. Personal insight was often adroitly mixed with support from critics and insight gained from contexts, and this allowed candidates to demonstrate full and complex understanding of the texts they had studied. At this level, quotations were often brief but used with telling effect, and candidates moved easily from the general to the particular. Less good responses showed this mix at a lower level, with points not as fully sustained, or quite so penetrating. However, even at the lower levels, it was clear that the candidates had responded to their texts with enthusiasm and a willingness to engage imaginatively. At the lower end, some scripts showed evidence of a lack of planning, and a want of ability to communicate insights coherently within a logical, developing structure.

A number of candidates made telling reference to productions of the plays that they had seen, either in the theatre or on DVD. At its best, discussion like this engages with a director or actor's interpretation of a particular moment in order to support or further a candidate's own points. At its worst, it can be simply name dropping without the developing of a relevant point. It is good to note, however, that candidates do seem to want to engage with these texts as works to be seen, rather than texts simply to be read.

It is noticeable that candidates are – for the most part – dealing more proficiently with contexts now. Less is simply bolted onto an answer; more is there because it supports or deepens an argument. Particularly with the Shakespeare plays, contexts were often more subtly used than in the past, with simplistic assertions about what everyone believed at a particular moment in history (about kings, or relationships between men and women) less common.

As last year, there were a very few rubric infringements. Candidates must remember to do at least ONE passage based question.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 William Shakespeare: *The Tempest*

- (a) Candidates ranged widely over the play, though the theme was mainly discussed in relation to either Prospero or Caliban. Discussions often focused on ways in which Prospero's forgiveness of others is demonstrated in the last scenes of the play, though only better candidates saw that he retains power to the end (and presumably upon his return to Milan) so that his forgiveness is not entirely based on kindness or altruism. Candidates who concentrated on Caliban often saw him as badly treated by his European master and thus entitled to his desire for revenge though the subplot. The word 'presentation' in the question suggested focus on specific, dramatic moments in the play, and some candidates did not achieve quite enough specific reference: their interest in the issue dominated instead. There is much in the play that speaks about forgiveness in quasi-religious terms, and many candidates were able to exploit this. There was often useful discussion about how the island is a blank slate, a social experiment, where the patterns of human behaviour can be seen at both their most base and their most noble. Critics were often evoked to

substantiate or corroborate arguments. The best candidates, of course, built on what they had read and pushed forward with their own insights though reference to critical materials. There was often useful discussion of contexts, often with reference to different readings of a play that might be seen as a parable for colonialism and its limitations.

- (b) A number of candidates became rather more involved in the ideas than the presentation when responding to this question. They were right to point out that hierarchy has been temporarily suspended, and many noted that after the first scene of reversal, where competence rather than rank comes to the fore, this scene exemplifies a philosophical turning point because words like 'commonwealth' (so loaded in terms of what happened to Charles I some years later) demonstrate a real debate taking place about the role of historic rank as opposed to dutiful, measured governance. Some candidates pointed out that Prospero himself is a symbol of the complacency of the old order. The best responses noted that Gonzalo's idealism peters out into Sebastian's interruption of '...he would be king on't' which perhaps demonstrates that the idea is potent but not quite capable of articulation at this particular moment in both the play and historical time. The teasing of Gonzalo by the others suggests, too, that there is nervous uncertainty about these ideas. Sebastian's critical view that their misfortune has taken place because his advice to Alonso ('you were kneel'd to and importuned otherwise') had been ignored also suggests a new relationship between the ruler and the ruled. A small number of candidates dealt well with the big issues but did not really explore the detail of the passage given.

Question 2 William Shakespeare: *King Lear*

- (a) All candidates were quick to respond that the Fool's part in the play goes far beyond that of merely a court jester. There were many skilled discussions of how he acts as an alter-ego for Lear, and of how he tells the truth when others can not. Some responses compared him to Cordelia because of his enthusiasm for frankness at the cost of his own advantage. The insight that it is possible to have the same actor play both parts was emphasised by a small number of candidates. The best responses looked in detail at specific moments in the play where the Fool's announcements or role reversals lead Lear on to self-knowledge and a crisis of identity. Discussion here often focused on the ambiguity of what he says and on his ability to stand outside the announced value systems prevalent at the time. In looking at this, candidates were able to examine some of the contexts of the play. There were some engaging discussions of links between the Fool's seemingly nonsensical statements and Lear's mad, incoherent rantings. Most candidates were able to range widely across the play and to bring knowledge of critics (or discussion of particular productions) to bear on the discussion in order to support varying interpretations.
- (b) A small number of candidates simply saw this as a question about the relationship between the three sisters and produced a general essay. Although there was a great deal of convincing and detailed work, it was noticeable that the complexity of the passage was often not fully examined. The question asked for close reference and thus the wider points needed to be brought back constantly to the detail of this particular moment. The hyperbolic vocabulary used by Goneril and Regan was, of course, clearly seen and contrasted with that of Cordelia, and many candidates drew attention to the implication that it is Cordelia who is being obtuse by refusing to play a game which has very clear and obvious rules and is, after all, nothing more than a game to start out with. There was much reference to the relationship between Goneril, Regan and Lear as a commercial matter, with references to metal and prizes. The irony of Goneril articulating her inarticulacy was also clearly discussed by many. However, many candidates failed to locate the pivotal turn of tone in the passage ('How, how Cordelia') and did not really make much of the soured atmosphere and the telling echoing passage at lines 58 and 59 – 'So young and so untender? / So young my lord and true') which mark out the beginning of Lear's descent to madness. Thus Lear's speech (lines 60-72) was often not fully analysed and the interjection of Kent, a crucial intervention from outside the family, was hardly mentioned at all. Some candidates remarked aptly that all of this is taking place before the assembled court; others seemed unaware of this, despite the crucial importance of this clashing of family and public values.

Question 3 William Shakespeare: *Henry IV, Part 1*

- (a) Candidates at all levels were able to make clear, relevant comments on the theme. What marked out the better responses was a willingness to engage in the language of the play and refer to particular moments. Henry IV's opening soliloquy often provided a starting point for discussions, with many candidates pointing out that Henry's uneasiness comes out of the nagging feeling that

he is a usurper and therefore has to manufacture a legitimacy for his rule which is currently being undermined by his son. Prince Hal's evasion of his responsibility (often contrasted with his early soliloquy) provided another focus, as did the eventual interview between Henry and Hal. Candidates were keen to point out that ideas about 'divine right' are interrogated by the play, and there was much useful discussion that separated out the person from the role. Some candidates chose to examine Henry's dealings with the rebels, and this often produced interesting discussions about his political skills, which turn out to be rather more important than arguments about kingship by right, an issue which Henry studiously avoids throughout.

- (b) The theme of honour runs through the whole play and is examined from a whole range of different perspectives. Faced with this richness of material, some candidates made only scant reference to the passage. Better answers were, of course, able to see how Falstaff's view of honour and reputation – dishonestly gained, if gained at all – stands in stark contrast to Hotspur's dying claim that he lost to the better man and thus dies nobly and to Hal's sincere regret that noble men have come to this, which is immediately shattered by Falstaff 'rising up.' More could perhaps have been made of the contrast of moods and of the drama of the passage. Responses often dealt ably with the wider play, and many made good use of contexts in order to illuminate the issue.

Question 4 John Webster: *The White Devil*

- (a) Although the question linked lust and desire in a way that would seem obviously to refer to sexual elements in the play, there were a number of answers which discussed a lust for promotion and desire as a synonym for ambition. A focus like this was, of course, perfectly acceptable, and these answers often dealt tellingly with central aspects of the play. Candidates who tackled the question in the more predictable way were, of course, spoilt for examples to choose from, and some found it hard to focus and select. Better answers looked closely at specific examples and particular moments, often linking the abstract ideas to matters of staging. There was much coherent discussion of the role of violence and melodrama as a consequence of the basic urge. The best answers were able to make particular points about the language of the play and some of its image patterns.
- (b) The slightly difficult and ambiguous presentation (sometimes seen as inconsistent by both candidates and critics) provided a clear focus for the candidates. In looking at the passage, candidates were able to point out Monticelso's moral stance, but better candidates also pointed out his extravagance of language which suggests that he is anything but a disinterested judge. There was much discussion – usually relevant – of Monticelso's significance as a religious figure, and this was often linked to discussion of contemporary distrust of the Catholic church, as articulated in this scene through Vittoria's interjections.

Question 5 William Wycherley: *The Country Wife*

- (a) There were a small number of responses to this question. A few candidates took it as an invitation to write about marriage, focusing on wives rather than on the broader issue of the comparison between town and country. Most responses showed close response to the detail of the text and were able to see that Mrs Pinchwife is not quite the simple country girl that her husband imagines. Thus the comparison of town and country turned out not to be quite as straightforward as might have seemed at first. There were clear discussions of contrasting values in the play, and better candidates were able to characterise and analyse Mrs Pinchwife's enthusiastic emulation of the society she sees around her. Responses often dealt convincingly with matters of context, particularly in terms of seeing some of the dramatic conventions typical of Restoration drama.
- (b) A small number of responses tended to deal with the whole play, rather than focusing on the particular attributes of the printed scene. Responses that looked at the detail were able to focus on matters of stagecraft such as the whispering and to note some of the exaggerated, farcical conventions that are so central to the stage business. The irony of Sir Jaspar's position and the irony of what he says (particularly with the word 'playfellow') was clearly analysed by virtually all candidates. There was also useful focus at times on the repeated use of the words 'honour' and 'reputation', and this often led to wider discussions of the dramatizing of these concepts elsewhere in the play. Most candidates moved from particulars to the wider play with ease, and there was often a strong sense of the play's humour. Conventions of Restoration drama were often usefully evoked.

Question 6 Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming*

- (a) The troubled family life displayed in the play provided candidates with much to discuss. They were quick to point out the absence of a mother figure and to examine the misguided misinterpreted attempts of Max to fill the gap in the household. Many saw only signs of disintegration and tension in the family; better candidates were able to examine particular moments in order to establish that this family stays together and coheres for precisely these reasons. The arrival of Ruth and the way that she moves round the family dynamic by forcing the sons to compete for her was often a central focus of responses, and there was much discussion of parallels between Ruth and Jessie. There was some discussion of the perversion of household duties and domestic rituals in order to create dramatic tension. The question asked about 'attitudes towards family,' not merely about the presentation of family, and it was only the better candidates who were able to see the nuance implied here, with various characters displaying anything from maudlin sentimentality to murderous intentions during the course of the play. There were some useful discussions about the breakdown of the traditional family in the period when the play is set. Candidates were often aware of different possible interpretations, depending on their sympathy for each of the characters. There was often close analysis of the final moments of the play, where Ruth sits enthroned ('relaxed').
- (b) Most responses to this question showed a good understanding of Lenny, both as he is presented here and elsewhere in the play. There was much focus on his varied language and register, together with his attempt to dominate Ruth, though many responses pointed out that Ruth's taciturnity is, in Pinter's terms, a sign of strength not weakness. There was also much discussion of his misguided attempts to impress with his fantasy about Venice, with many noticing that Ruth turns this on him later on in the play. There was much discussion, too, of the slightly salacious suggestiveness of the scene ('I've got my pajamas on'), and this was often allied to Lenny's more childish and polite 'Do you mind if I hold your hand' which places him somewhere between vulnerability and sex mania, depending on what view is held of the tone of the scene. Lenny's long monologue was often discussed in great detail and compared with other moments in the play. His accumulation of the mundane and the obscure was often expertly explored and seen as building up to the shock of 'I decided she was.' Most candidates stressed an atmosphere of nervous tension here. There was often sound discussion of 'the well-made play' that preceded Pinter as a means of discussing what is so disconcerting about Pinter's dramatic methods.

Question 7 Brian Friel: *Dancing at Lughnasa*

- (a) Responses to this question all saw the significance of the play's basic structure. Better candidates were also able to evoke ways in which memories of a time before the action of the play are also significant to the characters portrayed, often by referring to Father Jack's evocation of his youth in Ireland or his time in Uganda, or to the girls' nostalgic memories of the glory days of dances and potential boyfriends. The main thrust of most answers was on Michael's framing monologues. Discussion often centred round ways in which the action of the play is interrogated by the fact that the audience is told early on about the ultimate destiny of the family. The best candidates discussed ideas about memory as unreliable, using Michael's point that 'memory... owes nothing to fact' as a way into these more complex ideas. Some candidates also looked at the various ways in which the staging and lighting give an impression of the action as taking place through rose-coloured spectacles. A number of responses also speculated about whether memory in the play proves to be a corrupting influence on the Michael's subsequent life. There was often strong awareness of the specific moment of Irish history presented in the play, with much made of the nostalgia for an Ireland that was already changing as the young Michael starts to be aware of the world around him. There was some interesting discussion of the role of music in the play as a trigger for memories and the feeling of nostalgia.
- (b) Most responses showed clear awareness of the relationships and tensions between the sisters that are so starkly brought out in this scene. Rose was rightly seen as a focus of family anxieties both here and elsewhere. Many responses made much of the way in which Maggie takes charge at this moment and of how an audience becomes aware that the dominance of Kate elsewhere does not give her quite the consistent precedence in moments of crisis that an audience might have imagined. There was much careful discussion of Friel's stagecraft, particularly with reference to the presentation of Rose's entrance, and this was often connected to the various ways in which Friel gives each of the characters their own moments in the play where the audience becomes particularly aware of the pressures that they confront as individuals, rather than as one of the group. There was also much discussion of how Friel presents family disruption in the play as a whole, and of how it becomes resolved through domestic ritual and the familiar, as happens here

with Maggie's turning towards making the tea at the end of this passage. The best responses offered close, detailed analysis and ensured that when wider reference was needed, it was anchored to specific moments in the passage.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/03
Comment and Analysis

Key messages

Successful answers:

- identified an approach at the outset and developed that approach throughout the essay
- showed awareness from the start of the genre of the passage
- always used detailed textual reference to support the argument
- showed confident contextual knowledge and an ability to weave contextual comment economically into the argument
- showed evidence of effective time management.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Candidates were clear about the differences between the torments expressed by the personae; a few were less clear about the difference in genres, although some made their awareness known, at least by inference, as their answers developed. There was some good writing that drew a distinction between what was seen as an element of choice open to Faustus and the persona's lack of choice in **(B)**.

Many scripts contained some interesting analysis of dramatic effects in **(A)**, especially at the moment when Faustus is left alone and the bell rings, and went on to compare this with the effects of the stanza structure in **(B)**, with the last line of each stanza brutally underlining the hopeless condemnation of the persona. Many saw the account given in **(B)** as a picture of an already existing hell, and were therefore able to draw a helpful contrast between the two texts. There was much thoughtful work comparing Faustus's despairing judgement on himself at the end of **(A)** with the similar conclusion in the fourth stanza of **(B)**.

All candidates were careful to work on context in their responses to this question. Those whose contextual comments arose from within their analysis were usually more successful than those who introduced separate, more general, statements which they then applied to the texts. In some cases the general statements did not apply convincingly to the late 16th or mid-18th centuries. Many scripts contained useful comments on those elements of mediaeval morality drama that are visible in **(A)**, particularly the name 'Bad Angel'.

A few candidates developed their work on context to the point where they queried Faustus's words in the last three lines of **(A)**, arguing that he had chosen his fate because he would not have been condemned if he had repented. The fact that he did not repent suggested to these candidates that Marlowe's ideas about sin did not include repentance, and might have been a way of placing atheism before an audience in a way that would otherwise have been impossible. These candidates drew a comparison between this reading of **(A)** and the despair in **(B)**, where they saw evidence of belief in God but not of repentance and forgiveness.

The focus in almost all scripts was on careful and detailed comparison. Opening paragraphs almost always contained an outline of the candidate's understanding of the question and the extracts, and the structure of the argument was in most cases carefully organised, with the development made clear from one paragraph to the next.

Question 2

Candidates found much to write about in this passage, and dealt fluently with such things as the effects of the change of tense after the first paragraph, the literary and emotional force of heat and cold as they occur in the text, and the mist into which David disappears at the end of the passage. Others reflected on the account of the marriage given by Jenny, and on the difference between the emotion that racks her during the evening, followed by the exhausted calm seen the following morning. There was some good writing on the gradual change from clear narrative to the single word 'Coo-ee', which is itself gradually replaced by silence.

There was some comment on the fact that the children, apparently accompanying David to the station, disappear from the narrative after Jenny and David make their farewells to each other, and some candidates developed this point to suggest that the children, as they played in the snow, were not as aware of the possibilities that lay ahead, and that their departure from the narrative allowed for the despairing isolation that grips Jenny at the end.

There was no lack of contextual comment in the work on this question, although the best of it grew from the events of the passage rather than from external knowledge of such moments in war. This enabled contextual comment to be integrated into the argument and not to dominate it from the outside. Some commented on the significance of *Antony and Cleopatra* as both a love story and a tragedy. David's statements to Jenny about his poems and the account books were seen by some as evidence of the male dominance that might be found in such an age; others saw his thoughtful practicality as being an inhibited expression of his feelings, which are not given as freely as Jenny's.

The passage clearly gripped those who chose this question, and all of them found much to comment on.

Question 3

Candidates who chose this question found many readings in it. Some saw it as an expression of a mysterious 'otherness', some as the heartless treatment of an animal by unthinking humans. Either way the focus was on the observations of the persona (presumed on internal evidence to be a boy) and the ways in which they develop until the final pushing of the bolt at the end. Those who examined the "Blaze of darkness" took the former view, and looked closely at "Blackness is depth/ Beyond star" as well as at the basic details and the physicality of the bull's conditions within the barn. They saw the bull either as a creature from a vaster world with a greater understanding than the humans, or as the inhabitant of a lesser world unable to recognise anything different. There was good writing about "the ages and continents of his fathers" and "the weight of the sun and the moon" forced into an earthly existence, and many candidates found ways of expressing and analysing this collision.

Most candidates had no difficulty with the form, writing confidently about 'stanzas', including the brisk finality of the two-line stanza at the end.

Some saw the excitement of the opening, and the routine of the closing actions, as evidence of a mystery glimpsed but not understood by the poetic voice, and saw the boy, like the bull, as part of the mysterious subject of the poem.

Generally the work was well done at whatever level each candidate could reach

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key Messages

The best answers:

- were individual and personal in respect of both texts and topic; Paper 4 is called “Personal Investigation”, and the adjective is important;
- had followed the advice offered by CIE in response to the candidates’ Outline Proposal Forms;
- considered in some detail the ways in which form, structure and language shape meaning, whichever the genre of each text;
- ensured that there was sufficient reference to, and quotation from, the two or more subsidiary texts as well as the two main ones;
- made thoughtful use of appropriate academic and/or critical research, and considered the effects of contexts upon how the texts are written and read.

General Comments

There is no doubt that the general standard of work seen this year was good, often very good, and not infrequently sophisticated and scholarly; most candidates had clearly undertaken a great deal of careful reading, both of their chosen texts and of some background and critical material, and the most successful interwove discussion of these texts and materials in fluent and accurate writing, showing a confident grasp of what they had read, and responding with skill to the demands of their questions, at the same time demonstrating a firm appreciation of what the Syllabus and Assessment Objectives require. Above all, they also showed a real love of literature, and an enjoyment in writing about it.

Key Assessment Objectives

The first Assessment Objective requires that candidates demonstrate knowledge of their texts, and that they can write about them clearly, supporting what they say with appropriate textual reference and quotation; appropriate critical terminology should be used, and there must be evidence of carefully considered personal response to the texts and the topic.

There were many very good essays in which excellent textual knowledge was displayed, in a well-focused structure, with a developing argument that was clear at all times, and did not allow itself to lose sight of the topic being discussed; the Teachers Guide booklet (page 21) has a very useful short paragraph about constructing an essay, saying this: “Candidates should constantly ask themselves whether an Examiner would be able to deduce *from each and every paragraph of the essay* exactly what the task is that they are attempting.” This was achieved in most essays.

The expectation is that the two main texts will receive approximately equal time and consideration, with the subsidiary text receiving less space, but a similar balanced treatment. This was the case in most work, and in the very best the essay moved fluently and frequently between them. A minority of Candidates who used only one subsidiary text, or who wrote perhaps just a few sentences on each, did much less well.

The second assessment objective looks for discussion of the effects of structure, form and language, and how writers use these three factors in shaping their meanings, and their readers’ or audiences’ responses. Many good answers demonstrated candidates’ critical understanding, skill and expertise; confident exploration of a short extract, or perhaps of a single poem or short scene from a play, were used as illustrative of the wider general stylistic characteristics and effects of a text, and also fulfilled the requirement to see the whole in the part.

When drama texts were the focus it was a feature of less good answers that texts were treated as if they were simply another form of prose; this is certainly not a theatre studies examination, but if one or more of

the texts is a play, then Examiners do expect consideration of dramatic devices and impacts as well as just linguistic ones. Good answers paid attention to genre and form.

Assessment Objective 3 has a number of strands, all of which are looked for; the first and most important has already been touched on in relation to the ways in which an argument is constructed, and how texts are connected. The changing words of the Level Descriptors are particularly helpful here, moving from the simple “*some consideration, which may be narrowly conceived, to the presence of connections between the texts*” (Level 2), through the more demanding “*draws relevant comparisons/connections between the texts*” (Level 4) to the sophisticated “*makes illuminating comparisons between the texts*” (Level 6). In successful essays the texts – all four, not just the main two – were drawn together throughout the essay; candidates bringing them together immediately in their opening paragraphs, and in their conclusions, at the same time keeping them all in play throughout, rather than writing about each separately.

Also required by **AO3** is some consideration of other material that has been researched during the preparation for the Personal Investigation; this material is likely to include alternative critical views and interpretations, together with the outcome of other relevant academic research into and around the texts. In good answers other critical views were considered and engaged with, not just quoted or asserted. Good answers used critical opinions as a means of working towards their own individual judgements and responses, whereas weaker essays tended to simply quote them for their own sakes.

The fourth Assessment Objective looks for consideration of contextual factors, which may include literary, social, historical, cultural, material and information. Good essays considered ways in which these factors affected the writer, or indeed the reader if she or he is reading in a markedly different era. It is, in the word used by the Specification, the *significance* of such factors that matters, and good answers showed *consideration* or *discussion* of these rather than the simple awareness displayed by weaker responses; for higher Level marks, they were integrated into the whole ongoing argument that candidates are presenting, and not simply bolted on to the essay.

Essays are assessed and marked against a set of Level Descriptors; these are published in the Pre-U Teachers Guide, and some exemplar work is in the booklet “Example Candidate Responses”. Annotations made by Examiners will relate to these Descriptors, and illustrate how a mark has been reached.

Outline Proposals

Candidates who did well had followed the process of submitting an Outline Proposal Form (OPF) before starting work, and then took notice of any feedback from Cambridge and amended their proposal if necessary. Some candidates did much less well who had not followed the process or heeded comment.

Candidates are required to submit an individual outline proposal form (OPF) in October of the year before writing their essays, partly to clarify in their own minds exactly what they are planning, but also so that Cambridge Examiners can check and approve their suggested texts and questions. These OPFs do not form part of the assessment, but for the two reasons just given they are extremely important, and it is essential that Centres do make sure that they are completed fully and carefully, and that they are then submitted as early as is reasonable, and certainly before any draft writing is undertaken.

One of the checks that Cambridge make is that all the texts proposed are in syllabus terms legitimate, that they were originally written in English, that they are therefore not works in translation, that they are *literary* rather than critical texts, and that they do not appear in any of the set text lists for Papers 1 and 2.

Candidates who did well had a genuinely individual approach in terms of text and task. Centres where all candidates propose entirely different texts are understandably very rare, but a helpful compromise is perhaps for all to work to a similar topic, with one common text and the remainder self-selected, perhaps from a longer list offered by teachers. The best essays reflected a real individuality, and not just a variation on a narrow theme that is common to others in the Centre. Where all candidates used the same four texts, and where they all offered questions that – while worded slightly differently – were in effect requiring the same sort of ground and approach to be used, it was hard to see any real individuality of reading, of research or of writing and this affected the marks awarded.

A few further points need to be made about the OPF. The proposal must offer two main texts, by two different writers, and at least two subsidiary texts, which should ideally but not necessarily be by different authors from the main ones and from each other; a few candidates always propose more than two subsidiary texts, but while some very brief reference to the additional ones may be relevant and indeed helpful, it is

almost always wise not to go beyond a total of four texts, so that sufficient time can be spent on each of them. The question itself must contain the idea, if not the word, of *comparison*, in order to fulfil the syllabus requirement that “*the essay must involve significant comparisons between two authors*” (see page 10 of the Syllabus booklet). Candidates are also expected to list possible critical texts and/or websites that they will refer to, though of course these are likely to change as the work develops; the four texts themselves, however, should not change at all once the proposal is approved

CIE will also comment on the wording of the proposed question itself, and candidates are strongly advised to take note of what is said here; if a change to the wording is recommended, this will be done simply to help, and candidates who fail to accept such help may in the longer run be doing themselves a disservice.

Finally, but importantly, a copy of the approved OPF must be attached to the work itself when submitted to CIE, together if appropriate with a copy of any earlier one.

Presentation

Essays are required by the Specification to be between 3000 and 3500 words long. These limits are not simply arbitrary, but are intended to help candidates ensure **(a)** that they say enough about all four texts, and at the same time **(b)** that they write with reasonable conciseness and focus. What is important too is that each essay's cover sheet should, as indicated on it, note the total number of words used; this total does not include footnotes, bibliographies or quotations.

Footnotes must be reserved very firmly for acknowledging the source of a quotation or reference made in the body of the essay, or perhaps very occasionally for making a brief additional comment; they should not be used for writing extensive additional material which should have formed part of the main argument, and if this latter is the case then Examiners will have to take them into account when considering whether an essay is seriously over-long, and indeed whether such footnotes detract from the main thrust of the argument. All quotations from secondary sources must be properly acknowledged, but there is no need to make footnoted page references to every quotation from the main or subsidiary texts. Bibliographies – and where appropriate webographies – must of course be full and complete, and it is helpful if they can be in two parts: one part listing the sources that have been cited and/or quoted in the essay, and the second part listing publications and websites that have been consulted but not actually mentioned. There is no regulation house-style for bibliographies, but candidates should certainly indicate the title and writer of each text, together with publisher and date of publication, and the ISBN number where appropriate; website addresses should be given in full, together with the date on which they were last accessed.

Most Centres, and most candidates, followed the Syllabus requirements exactly and professionally; most work was submitted by the deadline (this is always April 30th), and most work was very neatly and efficiently presented, with the Pre-U cover-sheet and copies of the OPF attached.