

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/01
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- Writing a good essay under exam conditions demands absolute relevance to the question and careful structuring. There should be a focused line of argument, supported by close reference.
- Concentration on the writers' use of form, structure and language is fundamental to close analysis and any discussion of literary effects.
- If used, quotations from secondary critical sources should advance the argument presented.
- Contextual material should never act as an externally imposed straitjacket which limits the exploration of the question and its focus on literary methods and effects.

General comments

There were many impressive responses, with much compelling evidence of candidates' wide-ranging appreciation of their chosen texts. Texts new to the syllabus were generally taken up enthusiastically. There was little short work and very few answers which gave an impression of inadequate preparation.

The most successful essays maintained focus on the terms of the question, making their intentions clear from the outset. Some less convincing responses became digressive and implicit as they progressed. Choosing the right material to discuss is vital, with the best answers always using an absolutely apt selection. Attempting to cover many poems in an answer may lead to a broad but essentially shallow treatment, so that the essay never quite engages with what is most distinctive about a particular poem. Working through a series of poems and making one or two points on each is usually less effective than a close and thoughtful exegesis of fewer poems in detail, enhanced by brief wider reference. In answers on prose texts, candidates must be alert to the avoidance of mere narrative in answers; likewise, dependence on character discussion can be limiting.

Close attention to form, structure and language is always a feature of the best work. When these are carefully and analysed to focus support for the main argument the essay will be greatly enhanced. The form will determine which of these is dominant: in poetry, verse form, imagery and diction offer different opportunities for comment; in a novel or short story, comments on narrative methodology, structure and characterisation will probably be most relevant. Summary and narrative should never be a substitute for analysis.

Many very successful essays were able to show alternative viewpoints with little or no critical quotation. Some weaker essays used critics simply to express, rather than advance, their arguments. Forcing a critical quotation into each paragraph of the essay is not a recommended strategy.

Contextual material was used skilfully in the most successful essays to enhance literary perception. Where contextual material can limit an essay is in the matter of biographical material. Some candidates find it easier to discuss the life than the work, but the essay may well suffer as a result. Writing about sexism and racism, for example, as evidenced by events in an author's life may feel like (and indeed be) an appropriate personal response, but in the context of engaging with the syllabus's assessment objectives there is the danger that unless handled appropriately this can become a straitjacket which inhibits demonstrating insight into particular literary methods and effects.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

The Merchant's Tale attracted many sound and good essays on both question alternatives. In almost all cases, contextual material was skilfully and relevantly incorporated into arguments.

- (a) Discussion of the significance and effects of the garden scene included the narrative importance of the physical space, its metaphorical implications and its mythical importance, with reference to various contexts such as the Garden of Eden and *The Romaunt of the Rose*. These were explored with confidence and incorporated skilfully in most answers. There were a number of careful considerations of the genre implications of the fabliau and romance forms. The omission of Pluto and Proserpine in some essays was unhelpful to their argument, but most candidates considered the characterisation and ways in which sympathies for May and January may be reversed at this point.
- (b) Essays explored sight and blindness with reference to physical, psychological and moral effects. Characterisation came to the fore and there was an understandable focus on January, many finding his blindness both comic and disturbing. As in (a) the genre implication of the *Tale's* form were seen to contribute to the ambiguous tone. There were some useful examinations of the role of the Merchant as narrator and his own vision or lack of it.

Question 2

There were many exceptional answers to both alternatives on Hopkins.

- (a) Most answers here considered the relationship between the sensory and the spiritual as a fraught one which gives rise to extraordinary poetry. Many explored sensitively the way in which a profound sensory attraction may come into conflict with spiritual disciplines of suppression. Nonetheless, 'the world is charged with the grandeur of God', so some reconciliation is possible.
- (b) The 'sonnets of desolation' or the 'terrible sonnets' were well known and apt quotation enhanced all responses. Essays were notable for the unusually skilful way in which Hopkins's own life was sparingly negotiated in order to focus upon the literary qualities of the work.

Question 3

Milton's *Paradise Lost Books 1 and 2* was a popular set text choice, and prompted many exceptional essays. At the other end of the scale were some which suggested that the work had not been universally enjoyed; Johnson's comment that 'its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure' was quoted by a number.

- (a) Most essays weighed the evidence for sympathy with the devils very successfully, usually coming to the conclusion that, in spite of some feeling for them, one cannot wholly take their part. Some were focused wholly upon Satan, which could be effective, but extension into the activities and rhetoric of his companions in Hell was a fruitful line for the argument. Many answers incorporated literary, political, religious and classical contexts successfully. Close attention to the details of Milton's versification allowed complex, sophisticated arguments to be developed.
- (b) Less popular than (a), this question produced more variety of response. Good close attention to descriptive detail and consideration of the psychological effects of setting upon the devils characterised the better answers. Weaker answer tended to digress from the point, perhaps searching for known relevant material.

Question 4

Pope's poetry was chosen by a small number of candidates who wrote with understanding and appreciation of his work, using a range of apt supporting material. The (a) and (b) options were equally popular.

- (a) Candidates handled the relationship between *Essay on Man Epistle 2* and other poems with confidence and appropriate reference to form as well as theme.
- (b) A 'moral universe' was sometimes taken to invite a discussion of religious faith, but the best answers explored the question more broadly. Close attention to Pope's style was evident.

Question 5

Stevenson's poetry was greatly appreciated and essays ranged across the set poems appropriately, particularly in answers to the (a) option.

- (a) Not surprisingly, candidates argued robustly against the idea that Stevenson's poetry is 'bleak and fast-paced', producing a wide range of examples to counter this, as well as others to validate the claim. Excellent close appreciation was evident.
- (b) Stevenson's complex and nuanced view of sexual and romantic love was very well explored in essays here. The range of chosen poems was not broad, but essays probed the language and imagery very effectively. 'Love', with its Ferris wheel imagery, and the sonnet 'An Impenitent Ghost' appeared in almost every essay and were carefully analysed.

Question 6

Thomas's poetry was a popular choice, and there was a great range of attainment in evidence, with some very sensitive and subtle answers but also some very limited work. The biggest challenge for candidates appeared to be the use of Thomas's life as a context for discussing the poetry. Many poems were reduced to simple biography, with no sense of understanding or appreciating a poetic persona or voice. The chief problem was seeing biographical context as the means to 'explain' and 'pin down' each poem, relating every observation or image to Thomas's marriage or relationships or going to war. Appreciation of biographical context was not always accurate in any case. For example, in the June the poet remembers in 'Adlestrop' the platform being empty was not because of everyone being off fighting: the war had not started at that point. Many weaker essays made one or two points only on a handful of poems, with a few brief quotations. The most convincing essays engaged fully with the poems and appreciated their subtlety of effect.

- (a) The best answers considered Thomas's thoughtful and sometimes ambiguous or tentative approach to his subject matter, supported by close textual analysis. Themes of loss, grief, fear and memory were considered. It was not appropriate to ascribe 'uncertainty' simply to his decision whether or not to join up.
- (b) Almost all candidates chose to write about 'Old Man', but only the best engaged closely with the poem's complexities; others relied on some reductive biographical interpretation instead. Many candidates seemed concerned with whether Thomas could remember things or not, rather than with his poetic exploration of the workings of memory. There were, however, some subtle discussions on the struggle to access memories and the use of triggers such as questions or sensory images.

Question 7

Very few candidates answered on Wright's *Selected Poems*.

- (a) There were no answers to this question.
- (b) Candidates acknowledged that imagery of plant life and natural growth is a major stylistic feature of Wright's poetry, and their answers showed knowledge and appreciation of the poems chosen for discussion.

Section B

Question 8

- (a) Candidates had clearly been well prepared to write about the contrast of sense and sensibility; some seemed thrown by having to consider sincerity and hypocrisy. In some cases, the latter pairing was not considered at all, or quickly addressed in the final paragraph, making much of the essay tangential. Those who thought carefully about the question arrived at some interesting issues, such as that sincerity, not necessarily allied with sense or sensibility, could create personal difficulties, whilst being hypocritical had apparent merit in social situations at times, and might even be described as sensible. The best essays were thoughtful examinations of the novel, using a wide range of examples to support their arguments.
- (b) Not as popular as (a), this topic prompted some simple story telling and character sketch material. Austen's shifts of setting always underpin interesting developments of focus and these were ably exploited in the more accomplished responses.

Question 9

Relatively few candidates answered on *The Woman in White*.

- (a) This was the more popular of the two options. Good responses used genre as a means of exploring effects and meanings; less skilful answers plumped for more simple character discussion.
- (b) Context weighted heavily on even the best answers here and many answers spent far too long discussing nineteenth-century laws on marriage at the expense of considering Collins's methods as a writer.

Question 10

This was a popular text, but many focused too much on individual characters and not enough on the pervasive networks of provincial life explored by Eliot in the novel.

- (a) The influence of money in the novel is extremely significant. Candidates tended to choose individual characters to show how possession of money or lack of it affected their lives, without always extending their analysis further into the complex webs where the lives of others may be unwittingly affected. In many ways, the banker Bulstrode is the central character here, but he was given scant attention. The wills of Featherstone and Casaubon commanded much attention, with their concern for the expectations of inheritance and the unpleasant surprises which may ensue. Few mentioned Farebrother and his efforts to make ends meet. There were some interesting points on the need for sponsorship if science were to advance.
- (b) Candidates focused their attention on Dorothea and Lydgate and the way in which neither fulfils their potential as set out at the beginning of the novel. Other characters were also drawn into the discussion, with some success. The question was about frustrated *idealism* rather than idealists, and it would have been helpful to consider more closely the stultifying effect of the provincial community with its mores, conventions and expectations. Lydgate's idealism and forward thinking on matters medical was well explored and often contrasted with his traditional and rather naive views on women. However, in some essays there was a tendency to place Rosamond Vincy on an equal footing with her husband, usually out of a twenty-first century desire to make the wife's character more heroic and profound than presented by Eliot in this case. This could distort appreciation of Lydgate's situation. Rosamond's aims and desires are materialist ones, not born out of idealism. For that, one must turn to Dorothea.

Question 11 (a) and (b)

There were no responses to these questions.

Question 12

Dubliners was the most widely studied of all the set texts and candidates' knowledge and appreciation of a wide range of stories was appreciable. The default to the very familiar focus on 'paralysis' was evident, but not as pervasive as in the past. The first alternative, on Joyce's portrayal of young people, was the more widely attempted.

- (a) The best essays made insightful arguments which connected a range of stories, while giving weight to close analysis at times to point the argument. Weaker responses handled each chosen story separately, sometimes not linking them at all. The first stories in the collection were the most obvious to choose as examples, but some answers included 'The Dead', which was not always as easy to link into a cohesive argument. There were a number of surprisingly unsympathetic readings of 'Araby'. Joyce selected the point of view of an adolescent: this should not, in itself, be a matter for disparagement.
- (b) There were fewer answers on Joyce's 'presentation of death'. Most chose to write on the first and last stories in the collection, with perhaps one other. This selection allowed a cohesive overview of the collection as a whole and could be very effective. Death was considered as both a literal state and a psychological one – enter 'paralysis' once again, with some justification.

Question 13

- (a) There were no responses to this question.
- (b) A small number of very good responses to *Beyond Black* were seen here. Violence of various kinds was explored in some detail with the violence of memory's effect and durability very well considered. Some also saw humour in Mantel's presentation, and narrative methods were well explored.

Question 14

Candidates had clearly enjoyed *Brideshead Revisited*, but there was a tendency in some weaker answers to tell the story, always a danger in essays on a novel. Tracing what happens to Sebastian in particular was a common digression.

- (a) The best answers here used the framing device of the novel as a springboard to examine Charles's development through the narrative. Almost all essays argued with the prompt quotation's assertion about the ending being surprising, finding hints throughout of the possibility of conversion at the end. 'The twitch upon the thread' was much quoted. Candidates used the other characters as evidence for the pervasive influence of Catholicism, though there was surprisingly little attention paid to Lord Marchmain's deathbed scene.
- (b) Perhaps mindful of the dangers of drifting into the Arcadian voluptuousness of the first section of the novel, fewer candidates attempted this question. Often those who did it were unable to leave Sebastian alone and followed his progress through the novel and into obscurity without exploring what it indicated about 'the experience of being young'. The best answers were more systematic about youth and its pleasures. Champagne and strawberries found their way into many essays.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/02
Drama

Key messages

- Reference to critics or productions is only useful if it helps a candidate develop points in an answer.
- Context is important in literary study, but it needs to emerge from, and be helpful to, a candidate's arguments.
- Candidates should pay particular attention to engaging with the trigger words in a question ('presents,' 'dramatic effects' are examples) as these signal the path towards the highest marks.

General comments

Candidates engaged with the texts with a rigour and enthusiasm that was admirable. The strongest offered delightful work that was full of originality and insight. Moreover, they truly engaged with drama as a genre, and often had interesting things to say about audience reaction and the various ways in which staged action works its effects upon an audience. Many wrote with admirable fluency and showed a real ability to engage a reader's interest. Others appeared to know their texts less well and thus had less facility to range across the whole text making links between characters, themes and scenes.

With the (a) questions, sometimes candidates were too keen to get started on the process of writing, and not keen enough on reflecting hard enough on the trigger words that the questions provide for their guidance. Words such as 'dramatic' and 'presentation' crop up often in questions on drama texts, and they have a specific function to remind candidates that they are doing something more than talking about words on paper: this is a genre-based paper.

With the (b) questions, the imperative is to look closely at what is going on *at this particular moment*. It follows, therefore, that candidates must be prepared to go into detail and to back up what they say with particular, worked examples from the printed passage. Assertion will not do. Candidates are expected to go wider than the passage, but the best responses keep coming back to it to attack another angle of what is presented on the paper. Responses to (b) questions must not simply be general essays.

Candidates engaged with the contexts of their texts, though not all managed to do so with equal success. A crucial point is that contextual detail should be adduced when relevant to a candidate's argument. Offloading simple background material or author/work speculation does not play a part in this. In the same way, candidates need to be wary of asserting that everyone thought in the same way during a particular period.

Short-ish work (less than two sides) is unlikely to provide the level of detailed discussion that will reach the upper end of the mark scheme. Equally self-penalising is over-lengthy work: at the top end of the mark scheme there is an injunction to reward 'fluent concise expression' and the conveying of 'complex ideas succinctly organised'; terseness can be a star quality in an essay. A standard answer booklet is 12 pages long and candidates (even with large handwriting) might do well to pause before asking for a second one. Very long essays — unless of extremely high quality and originality — often fail to select the truly germane. And in throwing everything at the question that might be vaguely relevant candidates produce essays where the reader struggles to find 'effective organisation', which is a key requirement for proficient work.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) Candidates were very aware of suicide as a noble, Roman way to die and thus secure in their feeling that Cleopatra engages so fully in its trappings as a means of having her revenge on Caesar. On the whole they were less secure about Antony's botched suicide and its effect on an audience, where a notionally tragic hero is humiliatingly hoisted into the monument having failed to demonstrate his heroism, both because he wanted someone else to kill him and because having failed at that he then fails to die at his own hand. In other words, the vocabulary of the central characters suggests nobility and heroism, but what we actually see is a good deal more mundane and even at times comic. Some candidates mentioned the clown who brings the asp to Cleopatra, a pertinent way of raising the complexity of the tone of the end of the play. The complexity of response was, of course, widely seen by the stronger candidates who were also able to suggest that other suicides in the play (which are noble, even if by 'minor' characters) place Antony and Cleopatra's deaths in a less glorious light. Weaker work was character-centred; the best work was incisively focused on 'dramatic' features and 'presentation'.
- (b) Candidates chose a variety of different methods with which to tackle this passage. Some barely got further than Philo's language. Others brushed over this and read the question simply as concerned about the relationship between the protagonists, without really thinking fully about the question's nudge of 'presents'. Others found covering the entire extract meant that they couldn't reach out to the wider text. Candidates had much to say: 'Cleopatra is emotionally exploitative and purposefully confuses Antony'; she also 'has a powerful linguistic arsenal'. Much was made of her asides as device, with the dramatist seen as 'satirising his own attempts at presenting a female.' Cleopatra has 'manipulative instincts and language which often overwhelm Antony, who is living in a world of gluttony and illusion' and she has 'the more successful, dramatically pleasing, death' and, despite being situated as 'negative exoticism, her sexuality is the primary facet of her being'; she is 'constant and preserves her extravagance throughout, whereas Antony, torn between Rome and Egypt, is constantly changing'; Cleopatra is 'imbued with tactical ingenuity and eternal majesty'. Antony was generally seen in a negative light, and through the prism of Philo's stance. More strategic, less character-centred responses pointed out that 'the play opens with gossip' and explored the view of the couple as celebrities, 'objects for public consumption', 'collectively glorious'. Candidates were also aware that that 'despite being in Egypt, the Roman voice is heard', and indeed most candidates made much of the before/after contrast of Antony, weaker work seeing Philo's reading as self-evident, better work picking to pieces Antony's assimilation of Egyptian qualities whilst Cleopatra is the Roman voice of reason. The best answers often did the simplest thing. They noted that this is a play in which the central characters live a life in the public eye: they are constantly commented upon by others. But in living their lives in the public eye they are also keen to engage with image management, where they tell others how they wish to be seen. Here in miniature, this aspect of presentation gives access to the central techniques of the whole play.

Question 2

- (a) The strongest candidates were able to explore the presentation of unfulfilled love in *Twelfth Night* in a number of different ways. At the top end, there was engagement with the business of disguise, of lovers having to maintain a role and thus conceal their true feelings for others. Some answers could have done with more detail of specific moments such as Viola's exchanges with Orsino in Act 2, Scene 4 ('she never told her love...') or Olivia's longing for Cesario in Act 3, Scene 1. Some candidates attempted to sort out the ambiguities of the marriages at the end of the play, pointing out that Olivia's love for Cesario remains unfulfilled — she merely marries someone who looks like Cesario without truly knowing him — as is Orsino's love for Cesario which is only possible because the focus of his love becomes a woman and is therefore legitimated, without the awkward issue of Orsino's attraction to Viola as a boy ever being resolved. A number of candidates wanted to make much of the regard that Antonio feels for Sebastian and in doing so over-played what can legitimately be inferred from the text. There were some useful discussions of Malvolio's love for Olivia, though few pointed out that his regard for her is based on ideas of wealth and status, not on true love.

- (b) Candidates were able to see how Malvolio is a much-disliked figure in the play and how others long to bring him down. However, the tone of the extract often eluded candidates who were plainly uncomfortable with the fact that Feste is behaving in a cruel and sadistic torture of Malvolio that is far from the jokey teasing (the letter) of earlier in the play. Less responsive responses often moved speedily towards linking Malvolio with Puritanism, which gave an opportunity for much unloading of contextual material, not all of it relevant to the task. Better responses were able to see Malvolio as a dampening influence because of his personality, snobbishness and love of status, not his notional religious beliefs. Oddly, very few engaged with his ultimate fate, his intervention at the end that sours the festive mood of the last scene. None of the responses engaged with Feste's song, a relevant postscript to the extract, which might provide some evidence for a dislike of Malvolio's religion.

Question 3

- (a) Many candidates took this question to be about the extent to which Othello is manipulated by Iago. There was often fine work on the progress of Othello from noble Moor to raging madman. Many candidates saw, too, that Iago works on the insecurities that Othello has within him. There was often fine discussion of the way that he speaks. Many essays also focused on his relationship with Desdemona and the insecurities that are created through neither of them knowing each other very well. In other words, the candidates dealt with the presentation of Othello in the play. But there was a quotation attached, and examiners rightly expected that the best candidates (and of course they did) would interrogate Othello's view of himself and his actions during the course of the response. When Othello talks about being 'wrought' and 'perplexed' he is not on his own on the stage: he is therefore not making a neutral observation, but rather explaining his behaviour to others, with the aim of exonerating himself and blaming external forces. Earlier in the speech, Othello asks that the events should be reported in a specific way ('Then must you speak....') which he is trying to dictate: they are 'unlucky deeds'; despite his denials, he was 'easily jealous'. Candidates who took the time to think through the full implications of the question were able to respond with great assurance to its full complexity. Candidates lower on the mark scale sometimes took the question to be predominantly one of character study, something that the word 'presentation' in the question should have alerted them against.
- (b) Candidates were able to see how Iago tailors what he says to the weaknesses of his victims by appealing to Roderigo's sense of injustice and impotence. Roderigo 'is a man weakened by his love for Desdemona, a perfect victim to use as practice for Iago's advanced manipulation'; he is also 'easily convinced to Iago's world view' and a 'passive listener', whereas Iago is 'able to manipulate not only words, but people', a 'skilled manipulator of events' and 'textually dominant'. Shakespeare uses the scene 'to consolidate what is happening for the audience' and presents Iago's skill as a manipulator 'as improvised, not fully formed' here; Iago's talents are boundless, he 'proposes effective action, rather than defeat', he 'frames Roderigo's ideas as ridiculous by aligning them with flora and fauna' and, 'by challenging Roderigo's manly pride by saying "come on man" he is inciting Roderigo to defend it'. 'Iago's obvious enjoyment in the game of manipulation is key to his skill and success as he tells Roderigo what he wants to hear' and, in terms of language, Roderigo has 'single-line lamentations' and 'simple questions rather than Iago's more complex and richly metaphorical language'. After all, 'Iago is able to debase virtue' with his garden imagery as a way to 'simplify a rather complex area of debate, free will, with friendly concern and advice'. And, of course, candidates were keen to move outside the passage and demonstrate how what is here in miniature runs through Iago's relationship with other characters throughout the play.

Section B

- (a) There was much discussion of *The Rover* in its context and of the re-emergence of 'cavalier' figures. In terms of the 'English abroad', more could perhaps have been made of the long dramatic tradition of presenting them as brash, drunken, over-confident, boorish, self-centred and culturally myopic. The centre of the question was the word 'satirise', and most responses were able to see how Behn exaggerates in order to poke fun at the complacency and naivety of the English when confronted with the manipulative Italians. The best answers were, of course, also able to make the case that the English are not presented amorphously: once separated out, their bluster becomes a good deal less confident, their emotions more real. Many responses looked at the presentation of sexual attitudes amongst the English, thus opening out the discussion to a wider view of satire as dealing with more than simply making fun of people for its own sake. Responses at the lower end

of the mark scale did not really show understanding of the word 'satirise' or of techniques traditionally associated with it.

- (b) All candidates were well-aware of the ambiguous way in which love is treated in the play, with sex, as a commercial enterprise, being compromised in this episode by the emergence of real feelings of attraction, something which is anathema to Angellica and Moretta's 'project.' There was much discussion of the imagery in the passage, particularly in relation to commerce, with Moretta's view of Willmore as a 'pirate beggar' often usefully explored. There was often useful focus on aspects of the staging: the function of the 'asides' proved a fertile area for discussion. The best candidates were able to move outwards from the passage to examine Behn's presentation of sexual politics in the play as a whole and, in particular, the relationship between sex and money as the central focus. There was some useful discussion of the ways that the women in particular articulate their views of the opposite sex throughout the play.

Question 5

- (a) All candidates understood the issue and were able to provide a plethora of examples of how the love of money drives out morality and common sense in *Volpone*. Responses saw clearly how Volpone and Mosca's techniques are designed to play upon their victims' weaknesses. There was much focus on the pair's use of language and their elevated, exaggerated lexis. The best answers were able to focus too on the various ways in which Jonson makes it clear that he has nothing but contempt for these parasites. There was some focus on how Jonson manages to maintain our sympathy for Volpone and Mosca because of the sheer extravagance and panache of their plans to fool others. There was often useful background material on Jonson as a writer of 'city' comedies.
- (b) Virtually all responses looked closely at the vocabulary of the passage and saw that it is suffused with religious reference and imagery. There was also much discussion about Volpone's tendency towards hyperbole. There are clear signals too about Volpone's view of human nature which give clues about his future behaviour. More could perhaps have been made of the hint ('your poor observer') that Mosca's obsequiousness and flattery will eventually be turned on Volpone himself. Few responses noted the dramatic potential of the bed, an obvious prop and, for that matter, an obvious symbol. Very few responses drew attention to the fact that Volpone is consciously shaping his performance here, as he does throughout the play.

Question 6

- (a) The presentation of dullness in *The Birthday Party* was approached well by virtually all candidates. They were able to invoke the ordinariness of the boarding house, the triviality of the dialogue, the lack of events, by referring closely to aspects of the text. However, they found it harder to approach the dramatic effects, the various ways in which the disruptions to the dullness, at times seemingly trivial, serve to unhinge the central characters. Thus, the dullness of everyday life puts into stark relief the hidden threats that so dominate the play. The best responses were able to offer clear examples and to suggest that, like the Titanic's iceberg where the real threat is underwater, the dullness of everyday life is a means of concealing or ignoring the existential threat that lies beneath the surface of existence, even discounting the arrival of the disruption caused by Goldberg and McCann. Candidates were fully aware of the context of the play, though some made rather too much of it as a metaphor for the cold war.
- (b) Responses attacked the question in a variety of ways — all equally valid: 'the relationship is hollow', 'threatened by miscommunication', 'resists interpretation', 'is both humorous and disturbing' and 'fundamentally inappropriate'. Thus, Stanley 'resists the limitations placed upon him by social expectations' and his 'attempt at self-exile and seclusion from a past life unknown to the audience is about to catch up with him in the form of the agents', those 'two gentlemen who suffuse the passage and cause its impending catastrophe'. Stanley's 'animalistic violence shatters the playful atmosphere Meg has created' and his 'obvious urgency to know the two men is painfully hindered by Meg's unreliable memory'. In terms of Meg, Stanley 'exploits her adoration and takes on the role of rebellious teenager' and he is 'normally the one to resist the conventionalised meaningless exchanges which characterise the Theatre of the Absurd and Meg's household'. Meg, by contrast 'offers trivial reassurances that do nothing to quench Stanley's numbness' and in her 'disembodied passivity' she uses 'circular logic and redundant, phatic details' whilst her 'infantilizing is complicated by the sexual undertone', all of which shows her 'naturalistic response to Stanley's anxiety and her ignorance of the perilous situation he is in'. Ultimately, the relationship is 'entirely non-viable', as Pinter 'suggests that communication without engagement is a tragedy', evident in

their language, in the 'stichomythia of their conversation, which Meg drags out through her unreliability as a provider of knowledge'. The drum 're-establishes Stanley's vocation as a failure' and ultimately, 'we may not understand their connection, but we understand its necessity'. The best answers, of course, attached all this to detail of language and staging. Less secure responses were able to see what was going on without being able to locate the effects specifically.

Question 7

- (a) Most responses were confident about the various different attitudes that there are in *Our Country's Good* towards crime and punishment, and they were able to give examples of contrasting, articulated points of view. Better responses looked closely at 'dramatic exploration' by talking about how Wertebaker evokes sympathy for the criminals and the officers who try to change them. There were some useful references to particular performances which provided material for discussion on how far Wertebaker transcends simple polemic. The best candidates wondered if the apparent message of redemption is actually realised in dramatic terms, with discussions of Brechtian techniques often used to support the case. Some responses focused rather too much on historical background at the expense of exploring what is actually going on in the play.
- (b) There was much careful exploration of the subtlety of this scene, with candidates noting how language and relationships are fluid during the course of the rehearsals. The arrival of the officers (which causes the convicts to 'slink away') led to comments on how drama may improve appearances but does not change reality. Many students became rather bogged down in the 1980s context of the play and on what Wertebaker says she was trying to do, rather than focusing on what happens during the action of the play itself. References to the other rehearsal scenes were usually well handled, though there was a slight tendency to move too far away from the printed extract and write a general essay, rather than focusing on this particular moment. A small number of candidates made the provocative point that the final performance is withheld by Wertebaker, a symbol of the disparity between artistic intention and real life. In leaving things in mid-air, we never find out whether Ross's prophecy ('The play will bring down calamity on this colony') is fulfilled.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

- Fluent, accurate writing employing a controlled and precise critical vocabulary makes for clear-sighted and impressive analysis of unseen extracts.
- Careful reading of the unseen extracts coupled with a careful selection of the most useful material/key points from across the extract/s leads to searching, coherent discussion: key moments from each extract are explored in appropriate detail; 'difficult' phrases/sentences are tackled and explored.
- Essay structure is important. A firm grasp of each extract is immediately signalled in an introduction offering an overview of the extract/s. Analyses which range across the extract/s in a 'non-linear' fashion more often than not complete a holistic response to the extract/s and do not appear to run out of time.
- The most impressive responses to unseen analysis are able to draw on an extensive hinterland of reading, often making unusual, apposite connections with other writing from a range of time periods.
- A tentative approach works well. Claiming a definitive meaning often shuts down more thoughtful, sensitive analysis.

Two points worth repeating from last year's report:

- Consideration of generic features is very useful when exploring the extract/s, and often helps to unlock meaning e.g. the staging of a drama piece; character development and narrative perspective in a prose extract; the use of rhyme, rhythm, enjambement etc. in a poem.
- Good essays keep tight control of contextual material, which is best used as a springboard into the significance of stylistic choices and artistry, as opposed to a straitjacket into which a consideration of the text is strapped.

General comments

Most responses were suitably detailed and offered thoughtful engagement with the extracts. Much work was of a very high level, with many responses exploring subtle and original perceptions. The accuracy of literary analysis was high, and the use of apt, illuminating and precise terminology was very helpfully employed by candidates to unlock subtle meanings, to explore the nuances and complexities of the extracts.

Several candidates began their essays with rather lengthy, rehearsed contextual material. As noted in previous reports, a little context goes a long way. Socio-historical asides do not replace sensitive, detailed engagement with the complexities of the texts. However, the ability to understand and explore a text within the framework of literary genre or movement and with telling, brief reference to social, political or historical considerations does help to signal strong analysis. Often, references to other texts proved very useful too.

Analysis of generic features in each of extracts helped candidates to develop more searching and illuminating essays. More candidates might have reflected on the differences in genre for the comparative question in order to help introduce their discussion or to help develop their exploration of form, structure and language.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Most answers began with an effective, comparative overview, which established the key areas on which the essay was to focus. To a greater or lesser degree, candidates linked the texts through journeys undertaken, or through attitudes towards London and its surrounds.

Most candidates explored the impact of the first person perspective, noting a sense of immediacy, although few discussed the more biographical sense of the prose. (A minority mistook the Carlyle for a poem, and literally interpreted '(W)hen I first got into the air' as the beginnings of a flight.) The sense of a flâneur in the Carlyle was an impressive way to unlock the meanderings and musings of the narrator, whereas the more poetic effusions of 'His Returne to London' were linked usefully to Renaissance and Restoration contexts.

Several candidates did not spot the regular AABB rhyme – with telling off-rhyme – although many did discuss the form and structure of the poem, contrasting the shifting rhythms and pace of the poem to similar FSL (form, structure and language) elements of the Carlyle, with some well-focused analysis of varying sentence structures.

The beginnings of both texts were helpfully contrasted and the symbolism of 'East' and 'West' as well as the juxtaposition of 'drooping', 'spring' and 'pregnant' in the Herrick as opposed to 'the feeling of a *finished* man' were skilfully compared. Perhaps more candidates could have discussed being a '*finished* man – finished in more than one sense', although many did debate the repetition of 'wondrous' and to what extent the narrator might be sincere or ironic. The more religious lexis and elevated tone of the Herrick were explored and the implications of being a 'free-born Roman' were discussed. Fewer evaluated the final lines of the poem, just as many missed the more practical reasons why Carlyle might have left his watch and purse at home, but taken a 'good stick in (his) hand'. The paradox of Carlyle's 'So I wandered full of thoughts, or of things I could not think' tended to be side-stepped by most candidates, and the more funereal sense at the end of the Herrick poem was mostly left unexplored.

Relatively few answers resorted to mere 'feature spotting' – simply picking out a range of FSL techniques. Most did explore the texts in sustained comparisons, within a clear structure and supported by telling analysis of (often, genre-specific) FSL techniques. A few ignored the poetic aspects of 'His Returne to London' completely. The focused intensity of the single-paragraph prose piece and the 20-line stanza usually drew intelligent comment.

Most candidates wrote well over three sides, employing well-balanced, coherent comparisons.

Question 2

Many candidates found much to explore in the Edward Bulwer Lytton extract from *Money*. The piece offered numerous dramatic features to consider, and there was much very focused analysis on the role of the chorus, the possible significance of proxemics and structural repetitions and ironies. The aptronymical sense of several of the characters as well as features of the dialogue and staging were considered in detail, and many links were made to fixations with class and social position, notions of propriety, and themes such as pecuniary and selfish motives versus more altruistic behaviour. Dickens was often invoked to good effect.

Most candidates were alert to the satirical humour of the piece and Sir John's (predicable) comeuppance. Fewer candidates seemed to get to the end of the extract (perhaps a pitfall of a more 'linear' approach) and more analysis might have focused on Evelyn's character and his words to Clara – and the fact that '*her* voice alone (was) silent.' The final words (Evelyn's provocative 'Lend me £10 for my old nurse!') and concluding action might also have been more thoroughly considered.

On the whole, the extract produced many proficient, very good and sophisticated responses.

Question 3

The extract from *Bliss* by Katherine Mansfield attracted detailed and careful consideration of narrative methods – specifically the use of free indirect discourse. Candidates explored its use sensitively, focusing on how Bertha Young's fluctuating perceptions gained powerful expression. There were many telling links to a range of contexts – both to a modern sense of 'make it new', with the destabilising narrative perspective, as well as literary links to Bertha Mason, and nods to Dickens given the (possibly ironic) aptronym 'Bertha Young'. Woolf's narrative/characterisation 'tunnelling' method was also referenced, and there was some discussion of possible stream of consciousness techniques.

There was less secure consideration of 'something divine' – the more transcendent aspects of Bertha's experience. Although the key image of the 'bright piece of that late afternoon' which was 'suddenly swallowed' before burning in her bosom and 'sending out a little shower of sparks into every particle' deserved and received a lot of attention, candidates were less secure on linking such psychological/emotional/spiritual experience to the 'bliss' signalled by the title. The body as a 'rare, rare

fiddle' was analysed securely in the main, and there was much careful discussion of Bertha Young reacting against conservative norms. The sensory excesses and significance of the fruit linked to the dining-room carpet were less cogently analysed – and many candidates focused mostly on the first half of the passage. Marxist readings were occasionally employed to explore the tensions between the upper-class mistress and the dominant Nanny, and female roles in conservative patriarchal society were referenced frequently. On the whole, the text drew much individual and nuanced analysis, offering the strongest candidates much to consider.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9765/04
Personal Investigation

Key messages

Good essays

- were developed from personally chosen texts and topics, individually researched;
- followed the advice of Cambridge Advisers on Outline Proposal Forms;
- presented, in the opening paragraph, a succinct summary of topic, texts and their contexts of writing;
- developed a clearly structured, well-controlled and accurately written argument that compared the primary texts and made sufficient reference to subsidiary texts;
- developed interpretations through genre-aware textual analysis of aspects of language, form and structure;
- considered alternative interpretations, using appropriate academic and/or critical research and showed awareness of the contexts in which texts were written and have been read.

General comments

Much very good work was submitted and the overall standards of close reading and interpretation, of research and critical writing were high and sometimes very high indeed. A 'Personal Investigation' allows for the possibility of each candidate's enjoying the freedom to think and explore in an individual way, not pre-determined by rigorously imposed and taught interpretation but discovering meaning and connections between different authors through personal response to the texts and personal exploration of critical views. Such individual and personal thought and feeling were evident in many of the better and best essays submitted. They were clearly argued and paragraphed, well expressed, accurately typed, had been carefully proofread and the footnotes and bibliographies were appropriately set out. However, whilst many candidates were able to offer a personal response to texts or topic that developed out of the teaching of the classroom but was not confined by it, some seemed to be restricted by a limited choice of taught texts or approaches, leading to similarities of argument and interpretation and a lack of real personal engagement.

The syllabus states, 'The Personal Investigation must be entirely the candidate's own work' and 'once writing begins, the candidate must complete the process without further assistance.' It follows that the preliminary stages of thinking and planning, prior to the writing of the essay, are all important. This is where teachers and Cambridge advisers may encourage and assist in the formation and clarification of title questions and in the discussion of how an argument may be developed. The presentation of an Outline Proposal Form (OPF) is a crucial part of this process and better essays have often been preceded by carefully worded statements of intent on an OPF. The syllabus asks that these outlines 'describing the proposed area of study, title and, where appropriate, list of source material to be consulted' be not longer than 500 words. Advisers have been presented with far longer statements and some that are so short as to be meaningless. Neither of these extreme approaches is helpful, but well-formed statements of intent, endorsed by the adviser – as almost all of them are – should give candidates some encouragement and confidence in embarking on what may be the first long essay in their academic career. Of course, there will be changes of idea and different emphases may emerge as the essay develops, and Examiners do not in any way assess the OPF, but the process of its submission should be a positive stage in the development of individual ideas rather than regarded as merely an administrative chore.

Most candidates developed essays under appropriate titles but these title questions heading the essay should be very carefully considered and constructed. They should contain the titles and authors of the texts that are to be discussed and they should also focus on the essentially comparative nature of the essay. A simple and acceptable formula would be something like: 'Compare the presentation of x in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* with further reference to Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* and a selection of poems by Emily Dickinson.' (These four texts are frequently used but are

assembled in this example quite arbitrarily.) The comparative approach needs to be made clear and the word 'presentation' here implies that the essay will be, above all, literary: it will be concerned with the ways form, structure and language are used to create meaning. Where Cambridge advisers suggest changes to proposed titles, it is often to include or to make more explicit either the comparative or the literary nature of the essay. Themes or topics which encourage literary focus are much more helpful than those with a sociological, political, cultural or philosophical emphasis and focus. A more appropriate focus is prompted by consideration of some aspect of language, form or structure, such as 'narrative form' or 'symbolism'.

Mostly effective pairings of texts were used. There were some very familiar choices, such as *The Great Gatsby* paired with *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with *Brave New World* or other dystopian novels, as well as many less familiar and often very creative pairings, all of which allowed for common ground to be explored coherently. Choice of texts from different genres often allows for fruitful comparison of very different literary effects, and better essays responded to the dramatic or theatrical effects of plays as well as to poetic or narrative effects. Sometimes selecting all four texts from the same genre, for example choosing different combinations of poems by Keats, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, gave less opportunity for this sort of differentiation.

Opening paragraphs are important for stating the topic, introducing the texts, often in their contexts of writing and with dates of publication, and outlining how the argument will unfold. This was often done well, sometimes very well, a ready and close engagement with the texts already becoming evident. Better essays limited the scope of the opening paragraph, outlining an approach succinctly. Less satisfactory essays elaborated the topic overmuch at the start of the essay but most turned easily towards a central comparative argument developed in a thoughtful, often personal way, with originality shown through an individual choice of quotation and some appreciative analysis of the effects of language or form. Better essays also presented a comparative approach in the first few paragraphs of the essay. In these cases, both the main texts were in mind from the start and their comparison remained as the central argument throughout. Less satisfactory essays might treat one text for some pages before turning to the second text.

Most candidates discussed subsidiary texts appropriately and some used them very well to amplify or explore aspects of the central comparison. In a few cases, all four texts were present in relatively equal balance: this is a poor strategy and encourages confused hopping from one text to another so that the central comparison of the essay is weakened or even ignored. A more common but equally unsatisfactory approach was to defer any mention of the subsidiary texts until late in the essay: the tendency then was to introduce them unconvincingly as yet another example of the topic under discussion or to treat the subsidiary texts very cursorily, offering little evidence that they had been read. But, in general, essays presented a positive and appropriate use of the subsidiary texts as a means of extending or clarifying points made in relation to the main texts.

Most essays were clearly written and organised though some would have benefited from more careful proofreading. Many better essays used technical terms as a way of defining particular literary effects and integrated them naturally and easily into the analysis, rather than introducing them for mere display. The use of abbreviations for titles of texts (e.g. referring to *The Great Gatsby* as *TGG*) should be discouraged as being inappropriate in the context of a formal piece of writing. Other academic conventions were generally appropriately used. Footnotes recording references to secondary sources and bibliographies revealed an often impressive range of reading and awareness of critical commentary. Weaker essays sometimes used footnotes less helpfully, simply citing the titles of chosen texts without giving details of pages or lines referenced. There was also, in a few essays, a tendency to ascribe ideas to a literary critic without actually quoting or clearly referencing the critic's words. However, far fewer essays were composed as patchworks of quotations from critics, as if candidates did not have the capacity to express ideas in their own words or merely developed arguments to illustrate points made by critics. Indeed, most candidates presented alternative views, showing very clear engagement with wider critical reading. Some less satisfactory essays relied overmuch on unreliable online sources but many moved beyond merely quoting the views of critics to lively assessment of differing views and statement of personal judgement.

Other forms of academic research were generally well managed with a high proportion of essays exploring a range of contextual influences on their selected texts. Though weaker essays included such material assertively and without cogent evidence, or relied on bland generalisation, on for example the 'American Dream', more confident essays presented considered and critically discussed biographical ideas, historical material and aspects of cultural context. Many essays put plays effectively into their theatrical contexts and referred to particular productions. The more specific the contextual material, the less likelihood that the essay will proceed to generalised assertions about 'Jacobean beliefs' or 'patriarchal oppression' or 'Victorian morality'.

Finally, three points about administration:

- (1) Each essay should be prefaced with a copy of the OPF with adviser's comments and, most importantly, the required cover sheet, which the candidate has signed to assert that the essay is all her or his own work and the teacher has signed to the same effect.
- (2) Essays must be securely tied together with treasury tags or stapled. Paperclips are inadequate and wallets, folders or files should not be used.
- (3) Essays should be double spaced and use a reasonably sized font.